

A Response to the consultation on -

Draft Accessible Transport Strategy
Regional Transportation Strategy for
Northern Ireland 2002-2012

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1. What do we think of the analysis of the key issues?

We would have liked to have included in the analysis more of the issues that had been raised in the initial consultation, so that there would have been greater recognition of gender issues related to accessibility of public transport . While we realise that the strategy is concerned specifically with older people and people with disabilities, we feel that wider issues of accessibility related to the general population as well as issues more directly relevant to women could have been considered. For example, although the lack of sufficient space for wheelchair users was mentioned, there was no mention of the difficulties faced by parents with buggies in accessing public transport.

Para 3.2.4 acknowledges that the numbers of women between the ages of 60-69 holding driving licences has increased to 54%, but fails to comment that this still means that almost half of the women in that age group do not have the capacity to drive themselves and are therefore reliant on others or on public transport. There is no mention of the unfair treatment of women 60-64, who do not get concessionary fares, other than a proposed review of the operation of the Concessionary Fare Scheme within the next three years (4.16.5). We would have welcomed a more robust statement on the importance of its extension. As was mentioned in the initial consultation, 'poverty is an accessibility issue' and women who are retired are often on low incomes due to inadequate pension provision. In addition, as women perform the majority of caring tasks in society, including both child and elder care, their lack of access to a car has a disproportionate effect upon themselves and upon those in their care.

2. Do we think the 'Vision' and 'Strategic Objectives' reflect the key issues?

The Vision statement is confined to 'older people and people with disabilities'. While we recognise that older people and people with disabilities have specific needs in relation to public transport accessibility, including a gendered perspective within the vision would have had an impact on the action plan derived from the Vision. The EQIA recognises that 'public transport services are currently used by a greater proportion of females than males' (p.20), and this recognition should have been incorporated within the vision. In keeping with the spirit of Section 75 we would have welcomed an extension of the Vision to include all those with dependents, which would include those with responsibilities for elder and child care and the care of many with disabilities. The majority of such carers are women, for whom access to public transport can often be difficult.

3. Is the action plan right?

We welcome the proposals contained in the action plan, but with the proviso that proposals also specifically consider the needs of those caring for the young. We do not believe it is sufficient to argue that there will be a 'trickle down' effect, ultimately also befitting other users. For example, Policy P7 Ref 18 calls for proposals for new bus and rail stations to 'demonstrate how these are meeting the needs of older people and people with disabilities.' Surely a joined-up approach would be cost-effective, requiring the needs of all users with access issues to be considered?

We would also argue strongly that urgent consideration should be given to the introduction of a small, neighbourhood bus service that would cut across the city

rather than being confined to arterial routes out of the city centre. This works well in cities such as Bristol, which has a 'Dart' service to complement the regular large bus service and its availability in terms of time is similar to that of the ordinary bus. We are unsure if that is what the new 'Metro' network will consist of and urge that attention be given to this.

Appendix 1

WSN Member groups

Al-Nisa Women's Group
Ardoyne Women's Group
Ashton Centre
ATLAS (Lisburn)
Ballybeen Women's Centre
Ballymurphy Women's Centre
Belfast Travellers Education & Development Group
Brook (Belfast)
Citywide Women's Consortium
Derry Women's Centre
East Belfast Community Education Centre & Walkway Women's Group
Falls Women's Centre
Footprints Women's Centre
Greenway Women's Centre
Lenadoon Women's Group
Lesbian Advocacy Service Initiative
Northern Ireland Women's European Platform
Parenting Forum NI
Shankill Women's Centre
South Tyrone Empowerment Programme (STEP)
Strabane & Lifford Women's Group
Windsor Women's Centre
Women's Information Group
Women into Politics
Women's News
Women's Resource Development Agency
Women's Tec