



Association for Real Change (NI)

Response to the DRD Accessible Transport Strategy 2025

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ARC NI
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Association for Real Change, Northern Ireland (ARC NI) is an umbrella body, representing 36 providers of learning disability services. Members include statutory, voluntary and private organisations, all of whom are commissioned to provide a range of services to the learning disability population.

ARC NI facilitates a number of Advocacy groups called “Telling it Like it is’ (TILII), consisting of men and women with a learning disability. Three groups are based in the community and two are hospital based.

Our response therefore primarily focuses on how proposed action relates to people with a learning disability.

Theme 1: Enhancing the accessibility of the public transport network

Transport for people with learning disabilities is of vital importance. Good transport links open up access to services and activities within their local community. Good transport services also help people with learning disabilities to live more independently, giving them greater control over their lives; this is especially the case for those living in rural areas. However, there are several barriers that currently prevent people with learning disabilities from using mainstream public transport.

ARC NI welcomes this as a theme of critical importance and acknowledges the consolidation of investment which has the potential of identifying gaps of provision based on need across transport type. ARC NI also welcomes additional research being carried out but advocates strongly that to enable this strategy consolidation of existing investment may be insufficient to address real change. ***ARC NI recommends that all SMART action plans that are subsequently developed are costed to ensure appropriate budgets are in place.***

Theme 2: Improving the accessibility of the wider transport network

The NIO report in 2015¹ which considered effective transport in the north of Ireland acknowledged that whilst roads will remain the predominant feature of the transportation infrastructure, a key characteristic of the future transportation system is the need for ‘A modern and innovative public transport system’. The report continued by stating ‘the new innovative system should provide an alternative to the car, which is integrated, efficient and affordable and provides access to services and facilities for those with disabilities and those in rural areas’.

Recognising that we all aspire to this being achieved we must find innovative ways to find the funding to ensure the wider transport network can be modernised, provided with supportive technology and made accessible and inclusive for all.

¹ Northern Ireland Audit Office (2015): ‘DRD: the effectiveness of public transport in Northern Ireland’

Theme 3: Enhancing the customer experience

ARC agrees that it is important to deliver high quality disability awareness/equality training to all staff involved in the provision of transport services. ARC NI would welcome this as a collaborative approach engaging with service users to design, deliver and evaluate staff training. It is also important to make sure that the training is delivered proactively and explicitly promotes positive attitudes to disabled people, alongside an understanding that it is barriers of attitude, environment and organisation, which can discriminate or disadvantage people with disabilities. This is 'disability equality training', which incorporates disability awareness, because it focuses on ensuring that non-disabled people are aware of how disabled people lead their lives.

TILII, an advocacy group of individuals with learning disabilities deliver induction training to Health and Social Care Staff and ***ARC NI recommends DRD consider utilising TILII's experience and knowledge to staff involved in the provision of transport services.***

ARC NI also values the critical role independent travel training can play in enabling individuals and welcomes this being acknowledged as a capacity building opportunity. ***ARC NI recommends DRD collaborates in the promotion of such opportunities.***

As an umbrella organisation whose members provide services to people with learning disabilities, ***ARC NI recommends DRD collaborates with ARC NI when developing the mentoring programme.***

Concessionary fares should continue as this enables those on a limited budget to continue to travel, using public transport. ***This could be further enhanced by collaborating with Taxi providers and ARC NI requests this be considered.***

Theme 4: Enhancing the accessibility of information

A major barrier for people with learning disabilities is accessible travel information as it is often presented in a way that is hard for many people with learning disabilities to understand. ***ARC NI advocates the need for easy read information to be available and suggests DRD seek the support of ARC NI to consider the most effective way to enable this.***

ARC NI is aware of and welcomed the trial of audio-visual information on one of the city bus routes. Whilst funding has not enabled the roll out of this initiative to date, the consolidation of investment may be an opportunity to reconsider. ***ARC NI advocates the application of audio-visual information being rolled out across the north of Ireland.***

Translink has also produced an 'Access Guide' which sets out current service levels for disabled people and those older people who may find using transport difficult. Whilst the information contained within this is helpful, the resource is not well advertised. None of the TILII representatives had knowledge of the resource, not

least an understanding of how to access it. ***ARC NI advocates the need to promote useful resources.***

Theme 5: Working in collaboration with partners and stakeholders

ARC agrees that to improve and promote the accessibility of the transport network, a range of critical partners need to collaborate including the providers of transport services and policy makers. ARC NI welcomes DRD pledging their continued involvement of people with a learning disability in striving for improvement of design and delivery of transport services. The TILII advocacy group of men and women would like to be a part of this service user engagement and have requested this in their response below. ***ARC NI requests a response to their offer of support.***

Finally ARC NI supports the idea of a mystery shopper to carry out evaluation in recognition of the added value this non-biased research can offer. ***ARC NI strongly advocates that people with learning disabilities could offer this service, as mystery shoppers and recommends DRD consider the employment of people with learning disabilities in such a role.***



TILII ADVOCACY GROUP RESPONSE TO DRD's ASSESSIBLE TRANSPORT STRATEGY 2025



ARC NI facilitates Advocacy Groups of Men and Women with a learning disability to speak out on issues that are important to them. The groups are called 'Telling it like it is' (TILII) they consist of three community groups and two patients councils from a hospital.



TILII were pleased to be asked to give feedback on this consultation because they felt that they were the people who should have a voice, as they were the people living their life everyday with a learning disability, and being able to travel to different places was very important to them.



A lot of the TILII members travel independently but said they do experience problems and welcomed the chance to help improve transport so everyone could have a safe journey and get to where they wanted to go.



Assessible Transport Strategy

Concessionary Fares:

One member said he thought that people with learning disabilities should get all public transport for free, but the majority disagreed and were happy with the concessionary fares. They said "the reduced cost of transport was very important to them as it saved them money and they hoped this would continue". However, some of the members commented that they use a taxi because of mobility issues, or because they cannot follow timetables. Some also did not feel they had the skills to travel alone. They said using a taxi to get around is important to them as it allows them to be independent, so they would like you to consider introducing concessionary fares for this type of transport.



Accessible Transport:

The TILII members said the transport had improved because some of the buses were now lowering down or had ramps to make it easier for people in wheelchairs to get on the bus. Also some of the TILII members are in their senior years and have associated mobility problems and it is easier for them to get on the bus when it is closer to the pavement or with a ramp. The members that used trains said that this had also improved and there were ramps to help you get onto the carriage.



The biggest problem they identified was timetables and routes because they were difficult to understand and needed to be in easier to understand format.



The TILII members have a diverse range of experiences on public transport. They range from good, with some saying they had very helpful bus, train and taxi drivers, to poor experiences from staff being rude to them, having no patience when they are trying to get on the transport, or when they are getting out their pass or finding the money for their fare. TILII suggested training for all the staff on public transport and said the training TILII offered to staff would help them to understand the issues they face.



Theme 1: Enhancing the accessibility of the public transport network

This was important to make transport easier to use no matter whether you had a learning disability, physical disability or you were blind or deaf. They hoped the accessible transport strategy would be a success so everyone could enjoy public transport and get to the places they needed to go.



Theme 2: Improving the accessibility of the wider transport network

TILII said it sounded good, but they were not sure what it would mean.



Theme 3: Enhancing the customer experience

Every TILII member agreed that technology was a great idea to help, but that some people found technology difficult to use. A couple of the senior members said they did not use the Internet and did not own mobile phones or computers themselves.



The TILLI members said it was really important to make sure public transport was better for everyone. They thought the best way to do this was to make sure service users were engaged throughout the whole process. They should be involved in making the decisions, testing the technology and checking the progress to ensure traveling on public transport was actually improving and becoming user friendly.



All of the TILLI groups said that it was a good idea to provide independent travel training to help people who were not able to travel on public transport by themselves. It would help them learn the skills they need and build their confidence.



Theme 4: Enhancing the accessibility of information

All of the TILLI groups thought this was one of the most important things, as this was one of the biggest barriers to them using public transport. They said easy read timetables should be available for all public transport. Some members could read the timetables but said they were far too small and should be in bigger print. They were pleased that Belfast had introduced some talking buses but suggested that there should be audio and visual recordings announcing the times and routes, including sign language on all public transport. Some members suggested coloured routes might help to make it easier to know where to get on and off the transport.



Theme 5: Working with other groups

TILLI members welcome the idea of you working with other organisations that help run the transport services. The more people working together the more people there are to share ideas. This gives everyone more chance of making public transport better for everyone, including the elderly and people with disabilities. TILLI would like to lend their support and offer their expertise and requests the opportunity of joining the User Engagement Group. **TILLI would welcome a response to this request.**



For reading our response

