

## **TRANSPORT**

### **1. *Introduction***

The transport needs of older people in Northern Ireland vary greatly depending on their socio-economic grouping, where they live and the provision of and access to the public transport network. Data on car ownership by age is not currently collected by the Department of Regional Development, however information from the 1999 Northern Ireland Life and Times survey indicated that 48% of those aged over 65 did not own or have access to a car. [1]

Age Concern predictions in Great Britain are that this situation will change radically in the near future. [2] A significant reason for the estimated future increase in the numbers of cars on the road is the increase in the number of women holding driving licences who will be of pensionable age. Current government predictions are that the number of licence holders who are aged over 70 will double by 2015. There is no reason to believe that the position in Northern Ireland will be significantly different.

However the ability to walk and have easy access to public transport will continue to be a major issue for many older people who cannot afford a car or who are no longer able to drive. Age Concern Northern Ireland's research for 'Agenda

for the Age – The Road Ahead for Older People in Northern Ireland’ [3] showed clearly that available, affordable and accessible public transport is what members of the older community in Northern Ireland require most from a transportation strategy. The research also indicated an almost universal degree of dissatisfaction with public transport on all three counts.

## **2. Policy Statement**

Adequate, affordable and appropriate transport should be available to help prevent isolation and to ensure that older people can participate fully in society.

## **3. Key Facts and Information**

- “Northern Ireland has suffered from decades of under-investment in roads and public transport. There is unfavourable comparison to levels of transportation investment per capita in England, Scotland and Wales”. [4]
- Older drivers are more likely to be involved in collisions in complex traffic scenarios and multiple-vehicle collisions at intersections. [5]
- Forty-eight per cent of households without a car in Northern Ireland are pensioners households.
- Older drivers are discriminated against. However there is no evidence that older drivers pose any particular high risk to other road users.
- Older people living in rural and more isolated areas experience particular problems and difficulties in terms of accessibility and availability of public transport.

## **4. The Issues**

### **4.1 Addressing age discrimination, stereotyping and ageist attitudes.**

There is discrimination against older drivers. Drivers over

the age of 70 are required to renew their licence every three years. At each renewal they are asked questions about their state of health and eyesight.

However all drivers, of any age, are legally required to notify the Driver and Vehicle Testing Agency of any health condition which might affect their fitness to drive. Age Concern Northern Ireland believes that it is discriminatory that drivers should be specifically required to renew their licence every three years simply because they have reached the age of 70.

It is also becoming increasingly difficult for drivers over the age of 70 to be able to hire a car. Investigation into this problem by Age Concern indicates that it is the insurers, rather than the car hire companies, who are discriminating against older drivers.

Older drivers also suffer from stereotyping and ageist attitudes in the media. They are often portrayed as a hazard to younger drivers and in the occurrence of a fatal accident involving an older driver reporting will usually raise the question whether there should be an upper age limit for drivers. There is no evidence that older drivers pose any particularly high risk to other road users. It is in fact drivers aged 17 to 24 years who have the highest number of accidents.

#### 4.2 *Safety*

Although older pedestrians are below average in the likelihood of being involved in road accidents, they have an above average possibility of being killed. If the number of road accident fatalities is to be reduced there is an urgent need to improve safety for older pedestrians. Age Concern Northern Ireland advocates a number of measures. These include:

- Providing new or improving pedestrian crossings, footbridges, pedestrian refuge islands, etc.
- Reducing vehicle speed through the use of speed cameras, traffic calming schemes, pedestrian crossings and reducing the speed limits in recognised 'black spots'.

- Securing adequate street lighting, maintenance of pavements (especially in winter weather) to reduce falls and fear of falls.

We believe these and other measures would encourage older people to walk more and reduce dependence on the car or public transport as an alternative for short journeys.

We know also that crime and the fear of crime also inhibits older people in walking, particularly at night, and in using public transport. We believe that this should be addressed through the proposed Northern Ireland Community Strategy for Older People.

The Northern Ireland Road Safety Strategy 2002 – 2012 makes the point that collision rates do not increase dramatically with age, however, older drivers are more likely to be involved in complex traffic scenarios. Age Concern Northern Ireland would support the view that there is a need to develop appropriate measures to enhance the safety of older drivers in Northern Ireland.

#### 4.3 *Social Exclusion and Transport*

Age Concern Northern Ireland believes that good transport policy must recognise and address the issues which inhibit older people from playing a full and active part in society, and should help to bring about greater social inclusion. These include issues around accessibility, affordability and availability.

- **Accessibility:**

Age Concern Northern Ireland is aware of studies which the DOE roads Service has undertaken with Translink and Sustrans around public transport hubs with the aim of ‘appraising infrastructure options to improve access to public transport’ (Regional Transport Programme 2002 – 2003). [6] We welcome these initiatives but will continue to press for the needs of older people to be targeted to enhance accessibility to vehicles, infrastructure and services.

- **Affordability:**

Price will always be a determining factor for the use of transport. Car ownership is directly linked with income. Hence poorer pensioners will be reliant of public transport and affordability will continue to be a major barrier for those older people who do not qualify for concessionary fares. The introduction of free fares on public transport for those aged 65 and over has been most welcome. Age Concern Northern Ireland believes, however, that it is inequitable that women pensioners aged 60-64 cannot obtain a free bus pass. We will continue to lobby for the introduction of free travel throughout Northern Ireland for all those of pensionable age.

- **Availability:**

The provision of transport in rural areas is a matter of great concern to Age Concern Northern Ireland and the people we represent. Free transport is of little use to older people living in remote rural areas or a distance from public transport routes. The closure of village shops, Post Offices and banks, the distances to travel for medical and hospital appointments all impact on the social inclusion and the health and well-being of older people. It is our belief that increased provision of transport in rural areas is crucial in addressing these problems. Transport should go to the places people want to go to. We have noted the intention to increase spending through the Rural Transport Fund from £106 m in 2001 – 2002 to £107 m in 2002 – 2003 and the continued support for the sixteen Rural Community Transport Partnerships. We believe that much more investment is required to meet rural transport needs and that community transport for older people should be free at the point of delivery. We will continue to press the Departments for Regional Development and Agriculture on these issues.

## 5. **Current Public Policy**

- *The Programme for Government:*  
The Northern Ireland Executive Programme for Government 2001 established transportation as an essential element of the Government's plans for the future of Northern Ireland and was again confirmed as one of the five priority areas in the 2002 programme. The Programme for Government states "We want to develop an effective, safe and reliable road network and a quality public transport system that can benefit society, provide real transportation choice for those living in both rural and urban communities and help us grow our economy in a sustainable way". [7]
  
- *Regional Transportation Strategy for Northern Ireland 2002 – 2012.* [8]  
The Department for Regional Development sets out a vision for a "modern, sustainable, safe transportation system which benefits society, economy and the environment and which actively contributes to social inclusion and everyone's quality of life". It lays down a strategic framework for the planning, funding and delivery of transportation in Northern Ireland over the ten year period. The strategy acknowledges the sustained under-investment in roads and public transport in Northern Ireland over past decades. It assumes a total investment of £3,500 million of which £1370 million is additional to current levels of transportation spend. It is recognised however that the outcomes for transportation will be determined in the budgetary process, taking account of the financial needs of other departments.  
  
Delivery of the Regional Transport Strategy will be progressed through three transport plans:
  - the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan
  - the Regional Strategic Transport Plan
  - the Sub-Regional Transport Plan
  
- *Northern Ireland Road Safety Strategy 2002 – 2012* [9]  
The Strategy seeks to promote an integrated approach to the planning, co-ordination and delivery of government's

safety activities. It is aimed at achieving casualty reduction over the next decade and sets out immediate short term and long term targets and action measures for government departments and the Police Service of Northern Ireland to bring about this reduction.

- *Wider Transportation Policy*  
The transportation context in which the Northern Ireland Regional Transportation Strategy has been developed reflects themes in recent UK and European Policies. Moves towards greater integration between transport and other government policies; greater integration between transport modes; a shift in emphasis away from the car towards more sustainable modes such as walking, cycling and public transport.

The main relevant policy and strategic documents include:

- the European Commission's White Paper on Transport. [10] This sets out the Commission's policy guidelines on transport until 2010 in the context of an enlarged European Union;
- the Great Britain 'Transport 2010 – The Ten Year Plan. [11] This commits the Government to a spend of £180 billion on transport over a ten year period to develop road and rail building and maintenance and local transport plans, which include improved facilities for buses, cyclists and pedestrians;
- the Republic of Ireland's National Development Plan 2000 – 2006. [12] This seeks to increase transport spending on roads and public transport and to redress the deficit on transportation funding by a planned investment of more than 6.7 billion euros on national roads and over 3.1 billion euros to improve public transport over the period of the plan.

## **6. *What Age Concern Northern Ireland is doing.***

- Lobbying and pressure from Age Concern Northern Ireland was instrumental in influencing the Northern Ireland Assembly to introduce free travel for those over 65. We will, through our contact with Ministers and MLAs, continue to press for this for everyone of pensionable age.

- We have lobbied and supported local groups in their efforts to have road safety measures e.g. pedestrian crossings introduced in recognised 'black spots'.
- We have and will continue to pursue the accessibility needs of older people using public transport through out membership of the Translink Disability Focus Group.
- We represent the needs of older people through membership of the Northern Ireland Walking Forum.
- We have and will continue to counteract stereotyping and ageist attitudes in the media towards the older driver.
- We will wherever possible pursue transport issues which impact on the community safety of older people through community safety initiatives and our intergenerational work.

## REFERENCES/INFORMATION SOURCES

- [1] Source: Older people: A Statistical Picture Annex B: OFM DFM Equality Directorate Research Branch.
- [2] Age Concern England: Policy Unit, Policy Position Paper: Transport
- [3] Agenda for the Age – The Road Ahead for Older People in Northern Ireland – Age Concern Northern Ireland 2000
- [4] Shaping our Future, Regional Transportation Strategy for Northern Ireland 2002 - 2012. Department for Regional Development 2002
- [5] Northern Ireland Road Safety Strategy 2002 – 2012, Department of the Environment 2002
- [6] Shaping our Future, Regional Transport Programme 2002 – 2003, Department for Regional Development
- [7] Northern Ireland Executive Programme for Government 2002
- [8] Shaping our Future, Regional Transportation Strategy for Northern Ireland 2002 – 2012, Department for Regional Development 2002
- [9] Northern Ireland Road Safety Strategy 2002 – 2012, Department of the Environment 2002
- [10] European Transport Policy 2010: Time to Decide, European Commission White Paper September 2001
- [11] Transport 2010, The Ten Year Plan, DETR July 2000
- [12] Ireland National Development Plan 2000 – 2006, Dublin Stationery Office November 1999.