



**Putting people first – Report on the Imtac Pedestrian
Workshop held on 5th February 2020**

(May 2020)

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About Imtac

The Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee (Imtac) is a committee of disabled people and older people as well as others including key transport professionals. Its role is to advise Government and others in Northern Ireland on issues that affect the mobility of older people and disabled people.

The aim of Imtac is to ensure that disabled people and older people have the same opportunities as everyone else to travel when and where they want.

Imtac receives support from the Department for Infrastructure (herein after referred to as the Department).

About this report

On the 5th February 2020 Imtac hosted a Pedestrian's Workshop at Girdwood Community Hub in Belfast. The focus of the workshop was to look at common barriers that make pedestrian journeys difficult for older people, disabled people and the public generally. These issues included pavement parking and clutter on footways including advertising boards (A Boards).

The workshop was attended by over 50 people including disabled people, older people, carers, representatives from local and central Government, PSNI and town centre management. Demand for the workshop was so high that registration was closed over a week before the event took place, emphasising the impact of the issues discussed on people's lives. Imtac would like to thank all who contributed in the event including the speakers and participants in panel discussions.

This report summarises the workshop, detailing its format and the issues raised. It includes a review and commentary on issues raised at the workshop and a number of recommendations based on those discussions. Since the workshop, society has felt the full impact of the COVID-19 crisis. Many of the issues discussed at the workshop have a direct relevance to the difficult choices society must make in responding to and living with COVID-19 for the foreseeable future, particularly safety and social / physical distancing required in the pedestrian environment. It would be

remiss for this report not to reflect the development of the “new normal” in its analysis and recommendations.

Workshop format

The workshop began with introductory comments from the Imtac Chairperson Bert Bailie and member Diane Marks.

The keynote speaker at the workshop was David Hunter, a campaigner for amongst others the Living Streets Edinburgh Branch. David gave the audience an overview of positive developments in Scotland in respect of pavement parking and clutter.

This was followed by a panel question and answer session. The panel included David Hunter, Paul King (Department for Infrastructure Roads), Inspector Rosie Leech (PSNI) and Anna Slevin (Department for Communities Belfast Regeneration Directorate).

The final part of the workshop involved roundtable discussions, followed by feedback and closing remarks from the Imtac Chairperson. Each table was asked to spend around 40 minutes discussing the following topics:

- What other current issues are there around pavement parking/A boards that haven't already been picked up in our discussions?
- What are your solutions for the problems created by A Boards and pavement parking?
- What needs to be done to make change happen?
- What is likely to prevent change happening?
- What else needs to be tackled to make pedestrians journeys easier?

Overview of issues discussed

Keynote speaker – David Hunter

David briefed the audience about the background to pavement parking legislation¹ recently passed in Scotland. Whilst the passage of legislation is an important step forward David indicated a number of weaknesses and loopholes relating to loading and unloading, all day parking on pavements in residential areas and how and who will enforce the legislation. The legislation in Scotland has also made parking across dropped kerbs an enforceable offence.

Moving on David highlighted the collective and concerted campaign required to convince Edinburgh Council to pilot an A Board ban. Introduced in 2017 the Council decided to make it permanent in 2019². It is being well enforced and businesses have by and large accepted its introduction. David highlighted how some businesses have started to use old-fashioned wall mounted adverts above their frontages.

David concluded by stressing the important of persistence, working in partnership and obtaining cross party political support. He also stressed that there were many other clutter related issues to deal with. Finally, following a walk around Belfast prior to the workshop, David concluded, “our [Belfast’s] A Boards are bigger than their [Edinburgh’s] A Boards”.

Panel question & answer session

The Imtac Chairperson asked the panel to introduce themselves and invited questions from the audience. Questions from the audience related to:

- Concerns around enforcement of parking on dropped kerbs.
- Clarification of the legal position regarding pavement parking.

¹ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2019/17/enacted>

² <https://democracy.edinburgh.gov.uk/documents/s11593/7.1%20-%20Citywide%20Ban%20on%20A%20boards%20with%20apps.pdf>

- Circumstances in which the police will enforce pavement parking.
- Limited or lack of response from the police when pavement parking has been reported.
- Damage created to footways and tactile paving by vehicles mounting the pavement.
- The benefits of using bollards to prevent vehicles mounting the pavements.
- The legality or otherwise of powered wheelchair users travelling on the carriageway when forced off footways by vehicles parked on pavements.

A number of specific examples were cited (the road to Moira train station and streets around Ravenhill during matches) to highlight the impact of pavement parking on individuals and communities.

The responses from the panel reflected the vagaries of the legal position around obstructions of the footway and judgements used when making decisions about what is enforced and what is not, a lack of clarity in terms of who is responsible for enforcement and a lack of resource to carry out enforcement.

Roundtable discussions

There was a significant amount of detailed feedback recorded at each table. However a number of clear issues and themes emerged from the feedback. In summary these were:

- A strong feeling that pedestrians face too many barriers.
- Strong support for a change in culture towards one that genuinely prioritises pedestrian journeys.
- Strong support for legislation to tackle pavement parking (recognising this would not solve the problem on its own).

- Strong support for a zero tolerance approach to A Boards and other unauthorized street clutter.
- Strong support for making parking across dropped kerbs enforceable.
- Support protecting dropped kerbs and associated tactile paving by using bollards.
- Recognition that enforcement needs to be resourced.
- Support for more education and awareness raising with the public and businesses.
- Clear desire for statutory agencies to work more closely together with clear lines of responsibility

Many other issues were raised highlighting difficulties encountered as pedestrians. These included:

- Obstructions created by pavement cafes and shop displays.
- The poor condition of some footways.
- The lack of safe and accessible pedestrian crossing opportunities in many locations.
- Accessibility difficulties created as a result of street works.

One comment captured the positive mood of the audience perfectly, highlighting “the ability of society to adapt to changes that clearly have a public benefit and address what should be viewed anti social behaviour”. As examples participants referred to making the wearing seatbelts compulsory, tackling drink driving and the introduction of the plastic bag levy.

Review of the workshop

The views expressed during the Workshop may be considered to fall into the following key messages:-

Pedestrian journeys are recognised as an essential part of accessible and inclusive transport system. Almost every journey made involves walking or wheeling and any barriers in the pedestrian environment will make these journeys difficult or impossible for older people, disabled people and others.

Barriers that make pedestrian journeys difficult are complex and can include, for example, a lack of infrastructure or poor quality infrastructure that fails to meet even minimum standards of accessibility and usability. The Pedestrian Workshop purposely didn't focus on these issues but rather focused on barriers to pedestrian journeys created by the behaviour and activities of others.

In the simplest possible terms the clear message emerging from the workshop is that as a society we have clear choice about how we prioritise people and their journeys:

- Do we prioritise people living in communities such as those close to Belfast City Centre or do we prioritise commuters travelling into Belfast to work each day, parking and obstructing the footways?
- Do we prioritise people using busy footways in our towns and cities or do we give priority to deliberate placement of obstructions which narrow these footways?
- Do we prioritise safe and accessible crossings provided for pedestrians or do we prioritise parking opportunities for vehicles?

The workshop discussions indicated there is strong support for the argument that currently as a society we often choose not to give priority to pedestrian journeys. This was reflected in statements about the lived day-to-day experiences of disabled people, older people and others. It is also reflected in limited resources and enforcement powers available to agencies involved in tackling these issues. For Imtac, the clearest message coming from the workshop is that society needs to urgently rethink its values and priorities in relation to pedestrian journeys.

Recommendations from the workshop

In responding to the issues discussed at the workshop and taking into account the current situation with COVID-19 Imtac has six main recommendations for Government in Northern Ireland. Imtac is available to discuss all aspects of this report and willing to participate in initiatives to take forward and deliver the outcomes that are clearly desired and supported by a large sector of our society.

Recommendation 1 – Make the default position in Northern Ireland that pavement parking is illegal.

Imtac recognises that the design of our streets and the nature of our travel patterns mean that a complete ban on all pavement parking is currently unrealistic. However we should send out a clear message through legislation that as a society it is something that we should be working towards eradicating. Learning lessons from Scotland, bringing forward legislation that makes pavement parking illegal as the default position, whilst permitting exemptions in certain circumstances, is the starting point to this process.

Recommendation 2 – Increase enforcement of pavement parking during COVID-19 to protect pedestrians

It is essential that pedestrian routes are kept safe and clear during the COVID-19 crisis to enable people to social / physical distance. In the absence of clear legislation, existing enforcement powers should be used to tackle pavement parking particularly around key routes used by pedestrians for essential journeys.

Recommendation 3 – Take steps to make all dropped kerbs enforceable

Infrastructure such as dropped kerbs is an essential component of an accessible and inclusive pedestrian environment. When vehicles obstruct dropped kerbs they are rendered useless and create a major inconvenience / barrier to people who need to use them. Where existing dropped kerbs are covered by traffic orders or waiting restrictions that can be enforced that should be done now. However in the longer term Imtac recommends that Northern

Ireland follows Scotland and legislates to ensure that parking across all dropped kerbs can be enforced in the future.

Recommendation 4 – Introduce an immediate prohibition of unnecessary pavement clutter

Given it is essential that pedestrian routes are kept safe and clear during the COVID-19 crisis to allow safe social / physical distancing the Committee recommends that an immediate prohibition of unnecessary pavement clutter be introduced. This should include shop displays, A Boards and pavement cafes. Whilst Imtac is sympathetic to the plight of many businesses, it is clear that the wider public will expect the pedestrian environment to be made a safe and accessible place before they have the confidence to return and use shops, cafés and restaurants.

The Committee further recommends that plans be drawn up to make the prohibition of footway shop displays and A Boards in Northern Ireland permanent, along the same lines as Edinburgh, even after the current COVID-19 situation has passed.

Recommendation 5 – Review and revise the current regulation of Pavement Café Licensing

Imtac has been highlighting its concerns³ for some considerable time around the light touch regulation of pavement cafes in Northern Ireland. COVID-19 has changed wider public perceptions and everyone including disabled people and older people are likely to avoid locations where social / physical distancing is inadequate. The COVID-19 situation has demonstrated the importance of having wide, unobstructed footways. Current guidance⁴ allows premises to leave as little as 1m unobstructed footway for pedestrians. The Committee believes this is unacceptable and recommends that new guidance be developed that properly protects pedestrians whilst permitting safe and appropriate café culture.

³ <https://www.imtac.org.uk/publications/evaluating-impact-introduction-pavement-cafe-licensing-mobility-disabled-people-and>

⁴ <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/communities/guidelines-licensing-pavement-cafes.pdf>

Recommendation 6 – Ensure resources are made available for enforcement

A key part in the change in culture that Imtac believes people wish to achieve is ensuring that any legislative and regulatory changes can be adequately enforced. It is essential that prior to introduction, resources are identified to ensure enforcement can be effective. One example of how this could be achieved is extending the remit of current decriminalised parking enforcement to cover pavement and dropped kerb parking offences.

Next steps

This is not the first time that Imtac has called for a change of culture but although there has been some progress this has been limited. The COVID-19 crisis and the requirement for social / physical distancing in particular has emphasised the importance and need for footways and crossings free of obstructions. Imtac would make the appeal that if just one good thing is to emerge from the current tragic circumstances, it is the reprioritisation of our streets to work for everyone.