



Committee for Regional Development

# OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Inquiry into the Better Use of Public and  
Community Sector Funds for the Delivery of  
Bus Transport in Northern Ireland: IMTAC  
Briefing

23 January 2013

# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

## Committee for Regional Development

### Inquiry into the Better Use of Public and Community Sector Funds for the Delivery of Bus Transport in Northern Ireland: IMTAC Briefing

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#### **Members present for all or part of the proceedings:**

Mr Jimmy Spratt (Chairperson)  
Mr Seán Lynch (Deputy Chairperson)  
Mr John Dallat  
Mr Stewart Dickson  
Mrs Dolores Kelly  
Mr Ian McCrea  
Mr David McNarry  
Mr Cathal Ó hOisín

#### **Witnesses:**

Mr Bert Bailie	Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee
Ms June Best	Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee
Mr Michael Lorimer	Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee
Mr David McDonald	Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee

**The Chairperson:** I welcome representatives from the Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee (IMTAC): David McDonald, Michael Lorimer, Bert Bailie and June Best. You are all very welcome. My name is Jimmy Spratt, and I am the Committee Chairman. To facilitate June, I will ask members to introduce themselves.

**Mr McNarry:** I am David McNarry MLA.

**Mr Dallat:** I am John Dallat.

**Mr Ó hOisín:** I am Cathal Ó hOisín MLA.

**Mr Lynch:** I am Seán Lynch, the Deputy Chair of the Committee.

**Ms June Best (Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee):** Thank you.

**The Chairperson:** You are all very welcome to the Committee. The Committee has some other members, but because a number of other Committees meet in the afternoon, some members double up. For some members, it is a case of trying to juggle in the air whatever balls they can.

You are very welcome to the Committee. You have about 10 minutes to make a presentation, after which you should leave yourself open for questions. So, I will hand over to Bert Bailie to start.

**Mr Bert Bailie (Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee):** Good afternoon, Chairman and members. Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to your inquiry. Our evidence highlights the link between transport and social exclusion. Decades of designing provision around car access has been a major contributor to the decline in public transport. People without access to a car or who are unable to drive rely very much on public transport for access to key services. The scattered population and the range of needs that exist mean that there is demand for appropriate, accessible transport to be dispersed over a very wide geographical area. Conventional public transport does not meet that demand; so many people rely on expensive and limited door-to-door services.

IMTAC has argued for the development of a more integrated and flexible public transport that links people to key services locally and to wider travel opportunities through accessible public transport. Key to that, we believe, is a holistic approach to local transport planning that contributes to the effective application of public funds.

David and June will give an urban and a rural perspective respectively. Michael will then outline some examples of good practice, and I will summarise with a couple of conclusions.

**The Chairperson:** I will just say for June's benefit that Ian McCrea MLA has joined the Committee.

**Ms Best:** Thank you.

**Mr David McDonald (Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee):** I want to highlight that social exclusion is as much an issue in the urban environment as it is in the rural environment, particularly in the smaller estates and the areas off the main routes. If you happen to have either a walking difficulty, are blind, have some difficulty with a wheelchair, have a learning difficulty or are an older person, it is not always easy to get to the bus stops that the main bus routes use.

Services such as the Door-2-Door scheme do not necessarily fill the gap and are not exactly the same as a regular scheduled bus service. A scheduled bus service goes along a regular route, and people know when it is coming past. If it is a good day and you want to go out, you can, and if it is a bad day, you can stay in and do your own thing. If you are not feeling too well, it does not matter. For example, some people with MS may on occasion not feel well and cannot always pick the days that they will go out. So, booking the Door-2-Door service four weeks in advance and hoping that you get it is not the ideal situation for many disabled people. The vehicles are not always accessible, so there might be a range of issues with the availability and scheduling of the Door-2-Door service.

Trying to maximise the number of people using public buses and public trains is the best option. I differentiate between accessible buses and accessible services. There is a lot of talk about "accessible services", but when people use that term, in reality they mean accessible buses. An accessible bus is a bus that you can physically get on. An accessible service is a service that you can get to or that can get to you. If we had the buses, including the smaller buses, working more efficiently and travelling down the small side streets picking up more people, especially during the day outside working hours, it would free up other services such as Door-2-Door to allow them to pick up the people who really need to be picked up.

**Ms Best:** Disabled and older people's demand for transport is obviously more dispersed in the rural areas. Many areas have no train services, and the only option is the local bus services. However, the frequency of bus services varies. Usually, there are morning, school and work services, as well as an afternoon return service. If you are lucky enough to live in an amenity near the airport, there will be many more frequent services. Therefore, services are very much area dependent.

I would also like to point out that, in many rural areas, there are no weekend or evening services. That, again, leads to social exclusion. However, the most frequent difficulty and dilemma for many disabled and older people is how they can get from their home to a local bus or train service in an appropriate and accessible vehicle. For example, a conventional bus service is a mile and a half down through the village in my area and the train is 3·8 miles away from me. How are disabled and older people accessing such conventional services independently? They are reliant on taxis — that is one option. However, taxis are not always available in rural areas. For example, drivers do not want to come from seven miles away to take a disabled person on a relatively short journey to conventional transport. Many rural taxi drivers are individuals who rely on contract work. In my case, the local taxi drivers rely on airport and school runs, and the vehicles may not be fully accessible to wheelchair users.

Another alternative service in extensive rural areas is the rural Dial-a-Ride. Those services, I am sorry to say, are often inflexible and overstretched. From a passenger perspective, misunderstanding, confusion and frustration are often caused by not being able to travel to where you would like as a result of imposed and restrictive area boundaries. For example, if someone is a member of one company and lives in a small village, they cannot travel within another company's area to visit relatives who are only a few miles down the road. Similar examples exist between boundaries of Door-2-Door and rural Dial-a-Ride. A young blind lady wanted to travel from Ballymena to Broughshane but was told that she could go only to Cargin. So, she opted to go for a taxi. Those are the practicalities and realities.

There are other transport services, such as those in the health and education sectors, that operate separately from other transport services in rural areas. Those include, for example, non-emergency transport to and from hospital and that to and from day care and training facilities. School buses are evident in rural areas, and the community could employ them during the day when local schools are not using them. Privately owned or hire buses are also in evidence where there are commercial enterprises or privately owned businesses.

In a predominantly rural Northern Ireland, our communities make little distinction between towns and their rural hinterlands. However, two separate alternative services have emerged: one for the town and one for the country. An opportunity to review and audit the current transport services is required so that a more holistic look can be taken at how to best meet the demand for flexible and appropriate transport in rural areas. The nature of the solution will be different from area to area as population densities and demand differ across the North.

I have first-hand experience of trying to organise my life around available and accessible transport. Just one bad or negative experience could knock someone's confidence for ever, which could mean that they will not even try to travel independently. A joined-up and common-sense approach is now required.

**Mr Michael Lorimer (Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee):** Part of the work that we have done over the past year is to look at examples of flexible transport in regions of the South of Ireland and Great Britain. We published a paper last year called 'Flexible Future', which looked at examples of what we call "demand-responsive transport" from GB and Ireland. We highlighted a number of successful examples of demand-responsive transport services, including Lincolnshire Interconnect. Lincoln is an extremely rural part of England. There was a concentration there on developing high-quality public transport corridors with flexible services operating between them and bringing people to those frequent corridors. The flexible services will also bring people into their local market town, where they can access a whole range of other services. The key difference between those types of services and those that we operate is that they are public transport-type services; you do not need to be a member or meet certain eligibility criteria. Also key is the fact that you can phone those services and book them up to an hour before travel. So, from a passenger's point of view, they are much more flexible than our current service.

The second example is Cango in Hampshire, which operates around some of the larger towns, such as Andover in Hampshire, and services the rural hinterland. That service runs to an almost semi-scheduled timetable: people can phone up, and the bus will meet them at a pre-arranged point. If they cannot get to that point, the bus will go to their door. The bus will service the supermarket, the train station and the hospital in the town, so it gets people access to key services. Part of that service has been to integrate home-to-school transport.

The third example is Clare Accessible Transport in the South of Ireland. It provides a range of timetabled flexible bus services into the urban centres. It has very successfully integrated some contracts with the health service. For instance, as part of the bus service, it transports people into day care provision.

The final example that we highlighted is urban: Local Link in Greater Manchester. Similar to Belfast, Manchester has very good transport corridors in and out of the city centre. However, a lot of areas in between are very poorly served by public transport. Local Link is a localised door-to-door transport service that gives everybody in the community an opportunity to access local community services, such as health centres, libraries, etc. It also links people to the very good transport corridors that run along the outside of those areas.

That is a brief summary of some of the good practice elsewhere that we have highlighted.

**Mr Bailie:** Chairman, you will recognise from my colleagues' remarks that many people have problems connecting with public transport. IMTAC believes that flexible transport solutions can deliver better outcomes in and between urban and rural areas. Unless there is more use of demand-responsive services, expenditure cuts will mean that it will become even more difficult for many disabled people, older people and others to access essential services. The opportunity should be taken, when reforming public transport, to better use all transport resources. We need to use specialist transport planning and procurement expertise to achieve deliverable, efficient services with input from key stakeholders and users. Solutions can be found only if all stakeholders with an interest in transport work together. A key recommendation of our report 'Flexible Futures', which was published in 2012 and which I think you have copies of, is that government should establish a multi-agency demand-responsive transport forum. That forum should be charged with identifying opportunities to develop more demand-responsive transport as part of the overall mix of transport services that are required throughout Northern Ireland.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the inquiry. We are happy to answer any questions that you may have.

**The Chairperson:** OK. Thank you very much, Bert. I thank your colleagues who took part in the presentation; it is very helpful to the inquiry. I will maybe start off with a couple of questions. Do you believe that the subregional transport plan (SRTP) is an appropriate strategic plan, or do we need a new and dynamic local transport plan? You state that a certain level of subsidy is acceptable in the demand for responsive transport. What, in your view, is that figure in Northern Ireland, given the context in which we find ourselves at present?

**Mr Bailie:** The SRTP was the outworking of the regional transportation strategy. It deals with issues at a local level but it does not deal with the integration and best use of all the flexible transport at that level. One of our concerns is that many agencies run transport and, in many ways, duplicate need in areas. Education, health, public transport and all the responsive services are run independently. In many cases, however, they run empty. On occasion, even normal, scheduled public transport services run empty on certain links. Flexibility could be built in to those services by people coming together and planning together. The subregional transport plan sought to bring together transport planning for the regional development budget area; it does not deal with transport solutions that are applied outside the Committee for Regional Development's remit.

**The Chairperson:** Michael mentioned a number of areas. We attended a conference in London at which there were a number of local authorities that, through tying-in with the public transport system, made very substantial savings to the public purse and better use of the money that was available from that for buses, both for health and education. Indeed, as you know, the taxi structure in Northern Ireland also plays a major role, particularly in the field of education. I assume that some of the examples that you mentioned, Michael, show substantial savings for local authorities.

**Mr Lorimer:** You asked about the level of subsidy. Certainly, benchmarking, which we have done on the cost of the demand-responsive transports that we currently operate, show that they are extremely high here. When we are talking about a cost of £20 a trip, that is extremely high, particularly for an urban scheme such as Door-2-Door. If you look at somewhere such as the West Midlands, for example, you see that the cost is around £7 a trip on their door-to-door services. The cost of some services, however, such as Cango in Hampshire, has been low as £4 to £5 a passenger trip. You can then compare that with our rural subsidy of around £19 a passenger trip.

**The Chairperson:** Why do you think that it is so high here?

**Mr Lorimer:** The model that we use is the least flexible and most inefficient way to provide that service. The only restriction on the use of the service is the geographical area, and some of the areas that we are talking about are large. Providing what is called a "many-to-many" service is the most expensive way of meeting the demand.

In England, more efficient ways of capturing demand have been looked at. All rural areas are not the same, and people who live close to main towns — June, for instance, lives close to Moira — have much shorter distances to go to access services than people who live in remote areas of Fermanagh or the Sperrins, for example.

**The Chairperson:** There must also be areas in England that are remote for services.

**Mr Lorimer:** There certainly are. As I said, we are not saying that these types of services are the answer for every rural area of Northern Ireland. However, at the minute, we have a one-size-fits-all solution that does not recognise the differences and does not try to meet the demand. Again, the demand in different areas is more dispersed. We are trying to argue that there are more effective and efficient ways to meet that demand.

**Mr McDonald:** Can I come in at this point?

**The Chairperson:** I will bring you in in a second, David. I want to continue on from that last point. Do you think that our present transport system creates some of the inefficiencies?

**Mr Lorimer:** I would argue that we have a good core public transport network. Our big challenge is how we effectively link people to that core network. We have spent hundreds of millions of pounds making public transport more accessible and easier for people to get on and off. As David said, the big issue is how we link people to those services. We all know that the public purse is extremely tight, so we need to think innovatively about how we can reduce the cost of linking people.

**Mr McDonald:** We have developed door-to-door and rural transport, and door-to-door transport is literally door to door. For example, if you are travelling from Bangor to Comber in my region, you go the whole distance. The nearest bus stop to me is half a mile away and up a steep hill. If you have a walking difficulty, a Zimmer frame or a push wheelchair, it is difficult to get to the bus stop. It would be much more efficient if the door-to-door service could take you to the bus stop and then be freed up to go and pick someone else up to take them to another bus stop or to the town centre. The trouble is that we have a model that takes people from A to B rather than to interim areas.

Door-to-door and rural transport were always meant to link with the major hubs. It has not come out like that, which is part of the problem. That is partly why it is difficult to get it. Door-to-door transport also tends to carry one person rather than a group of people. There should really be a small minibus service that goes round picking people up and linking them to the major hubs. That is what we are talking about. We should link individual houses to larger areas so that people can travel further, whether into a town or to a major bus area. For example, people could be dropped off at park-and-ride facilities to pick up the bus. So, we need to look at such areas and get ourselves together.

Transport for the health service and the education sector have similar issues. You can only use a health service vehicle to take you to a hospital. Ironically, you cannot take a door-to-door service to a hospital unless you are visiting. So, two vehicles could be travelling to the same place at the same time.

I cannot get on buses with my wheelchair, and I rely on door-to-door transport. If I cannot get door-to-door transport, I have to use a taxi. So, I am very limited with when and where I can get to places, although I can use the train.

We need to get our heads together on this, and if we did, we would make big savings. An absolute fortune has been spent making buses accessible. We should maximise that by making sure that we can get people to those vehicles and enable them to use them properly.

**Mr Lynch:** Thank you for your presentation. As someone who comes from rural Fermanagh, I understand that rural transport and how you link with services are big issues. We do not even have a really good core transport system, and in some parts, you see a bus only once or twice a day.

June, you spoke about holistic solutions. What would be the benefit of such solutions? What obstacles exist here, and how can they be overcome?

**Ms Best:** We want a joined-up service that allows you to get from point A, which is your house, to a service that will be provided. I am going to give away my age here, but the old bus service allowed you to hail a bus as it was going past. I know that there are restrictions on times and that we are working to timetables, but it would be useful even if we could access services by hailing buses. For example, I know of a disabled lady who lives on the A1 just two and half miles outside Banbridge. A local service passes her door, but she is totally blind, has a guide dog and if she wants to access that service, she has to walk along that dangerous road to a bus stop. She lives on the road, and if there were some way of communicating so that the bus driver knew that she was there, she could hail a

bus. That would provide a solution rather than her having to go to a bus stop. She cannot get a bus home, as she would have to cross the four-lane busy A1 main road that has the islands in the middle. She cannot do that, so she has to go by taxi.

There are also restrictions, in that the hours of operation for rural transport make it very exclusive to so many people. If they want to do something educationally, for leisure or whatever in the evening, they cannot because, unless they get expensive taxis, there is no transport.

So, there are many problems. That is why I suggested that everyone sit down and look holistically at what the services are and at how we can join them up. That would be a much more common-sense approach.

**Mr Lynch:** Do you think that some of the models from County Clare and Manchester that Michael outlined could be models of good practice here?

**Ms Best:** I think so. Anything is worth a try.

As a farmer's wife and a mother, I have been involved in trying to access transport at a community level for many years. My children have been unable to take part in extra-curricular activities after school, etc, because I cannot drive and farming is priority number one. There are all sorts of difficulties, and I think that those models would be worth looking at. I have looked at the situation in Yorkshire, and I know that about 15 or 16 years ago, Post Office buses brought people to rural areas for care facilities, and so forth. There are so many models out there that must be beneficial.

**Mr Lorimer:** I think that the key to this is local transport planning. You will be aware that the regional development strategy has set a framework for development. So, we know that certain settlements will have certain services and that, as you move through, the larger settlements will have more services. People have to travel, and we know that, but it is about how we plan transport to allow people to travel.

In GB, the local transport planning model and the principle of accessibility planning are used. That is not about people getting on and off buses but about how we plan. You could map the access to services in Fermanagh — we have mapped it — and use colour-coding to mark in bright red those people who live in the remotest parts of Fermanagh. We could do that across Northern Ireland. There are lots of data that we could use to plan transport more effectively. Again, it has to involve all the agencies and health and education. This is all transport need. It needs to be dealt with at a more local level than we are dealing with it at the minute.

**The Chairperson:** On the back of that, who or what is preventing the joined-up approach to transport services in Northern Ireland? I want you to be quite frank, because that is important for the inquiry. Do not feel that you cannot name the Department, Translink or anybody else. This is what we need to get to. We need to get the system co-ordinated and to get to some of the best practice models that you referred to. So, now is your chance.

**Mr Bailie:** To be blunt, the main budget holders in transport provision are the health boards and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS); the education and library boards and the various Departments that deal with education; and the Department for Regional Development (DRD), which holds the public transport fund. Among them, they are running a lot of separate services. They have lots of different fleets of vehicles, and at many stages throughout the day, some fleets are sitting unused while others are fully occupied and overdemanded.

The people who provide and control the budgets have to get their heads together to decide how they share and make good use of those combined budgets. There is a range of providers of transport services — the community transport sector and the public transport sector — and there is perhaps a need for more co-operation between them. That is why we see a forum brought together for those people to discuss and have the opportunity to develop further the concept and application of flexible transport.

**The Chairperson:** I hope that the eyes and ears sitting behind you from the Department for Regional Development heard what you just said and will report back, because we will certainly be including it in the report.

**Mr Lorimer:** I have worked in this sector for quite a while, and there is a silo mentality where Departments protect their own budgets. If Departments are meeting their own objectives, they are happy. Getting co-operation between Departments is hugely difficult.

I sat on the review of health service transport, and at one meeting, we had on the agenda how education and health might work more closely together. It came to the discussion, and the officials from the Department of Education opened their files, said that they could perhaps look at more procurement, shut their files, and the chair of the group said, "OK, we have covered that. Job done." I looked around and thought that the Audit Office had directed them to do that, and the sum total of the co-operation was that we could perhaps look at the shared procurement of vehicles.

How do you break down those invisible walls between Departments for the greater good? For instance, we know how much the health service spends on transport. How much of that could be saved if people used public transport options to access hospitals? We know that there are big barriers to people doing that, but it is not impossible. We were dealing with a situation 10 years ago when people had huge difficulties getting on and off buses. We do not have those difficulties any more, so there is the potential for more people to use conventional means to access hospitals.

We get a lot of complaints about health service transport being inflexible. People are picked up first thing in the morning and spend all day going to a hospital appointment. There are better solutions for people out there, but there need to be discussions between Departments, and honest discussions.

**The Chairperson:** You hit the nail on the head in two words: "silo mentality". That is the bottom line. It has been a recurring theme from others who gave evidence.

**Mr McNarry:** You are very welcome. I believe that there is a trend coming across for the joined-up use of vehicles. I think that that will be highlighted in the Committee's report. You bring to the Committee an insight that I find extremely helpful. I just need you to clear up one thing for me: are rights issues covered or involved in your needs?

**Mr Bailie:** Sorry, can you clarify what you mean by "rights issues"? Are you talking about equality or the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)?

**Mr McNarry:** Do you feel that your rights are not being addressed? Do you feel that you have rights and that those rights are not being addressed? You did not actually say that anywhere in your presentation, so I do not want to put words into your mouth.

**Mr McDonald:** I feel that needs are not being addressed, which feeds into rights. From a disabled or older person's point of view — an older person who has difficulty getting about — there is a lack of understanding of what the real needs of that person might be.

I will give you an example as a wheelchair user. I cannot use a public bus because public buses do not secure wheelchairs unless you are facing forwards. That is part of the DDA. It is about getting on and off buses quickly, but I cannot hold on, as I have no strength in my arms or hands. Therefore, I cannot sit on a bus and hold on to the handrail, which is what you are meant to do. Therefore, I cannot use a bus. At the same time, I cannot readily get Door-2-Door help, because many people who could use a bus, if the bus went along their street or got closer to them, do not. The Door-2-Door service is overused in that respect.

There is a lack of understanding of people's needs and the complexity of those needs. We are stereotyping a lot of the time, where people just see a disabled person as a disabled person or a wheelchair user as a wheelchair user. There is not an understanding of variation and of each individual's differences and impairment-related needs. That feeds into a lack of rights being fulfilled. I have a right to travel, but I do not find that right being enhanced by government. I am using a public taxi.

**Mr McNarry:** I take all that on board. I am glad that you have said it on the record. You make a call for more demand-responsive transport (DRT) in your presentation. The two points following that are these: do any of the service providers meet with you regularly to discuss this, and what is the feedback? Which do you think is in the best position to provide the services? Is it community transport, Translink or private companies?

**Mr McDonald:** The services meet with IMTAC regularly. They sit as observers with IMTAC, and so do the Community Transport Association and civil servants from the Door-2-Door unit. They are hearing a lot of what is being said. I think, because of the silo mentality —

**Mr McNarry:** When you say that they are hearing, David, do you think that they are listening?

**Mr McDonald:** Because of the silo mentality, they work within their own remit, and that is where the difficulty lies. They are not working across each other's remit, and that is why we suggest that we need to get a group together that involves everybody so that we can open this out and find the best solutions.

**Mr McNarry:** Have you ever brought all these service providers together in front of you?

**Mr McDonald:** We have worked to get people talking, but it is like what Michael said about closing the book. People will come and listen to us and then go away and get back into their own box. That is what we need to try to kick through. We need to try to get people to understand that there is a general benefit to everybody here if we get people working and talking together. We might actually help the entire community start to move around much more freely.

**Mr McNarry:** That would be a good thing.

**Mr Lorimer:** When it comes to engagement, we have a very good professional relationship with Translink. We have done some good work with Translink before on vehicle design, particularly innovative vehicle design for rural buses, and things such as information. We do not always agree with what Translink does, but there is that engagement.

When you talk about rights, there are rights out there. DDA means, for instance, that whenever we spend money on buses or trains, we cannot buy ones that do not meet accessibility standards. Stations have been improved. However, there are no rights that say that you can expect a bus service to go past or quite close to your door twice a week. There is nothing in rights legislation that will enshrine a quality level of service. When the previous Committee looked at the Transport Bill, we asked it whether it would push for accessibility to be put into that legislation. It is amazing that, when we asked for that, we were talking about accessibility in the sense of being able to access services.

**Mr McNarry:** Do you think you were successful with the previous Committee?

**Mr Lorimer:** It secured that, but, again, the perception among the officials who drafted the legislation was that we were pushing for buses that people could get on to. They did not understand the concept that what we were actually pushing for were services that people could access, and that public transport reform should look at people being able to access services and having a decent level of access to those services.

**The Chairperson:** OK. Cathal Ó hOisín has to leave, and I want to bring him in first, David. If you need to come in again, I will bring you back in.

For the benefit of June, I should say that Dolores Kelly MLA has joined us at the table.

**Mr Ó hOisín:** Thanks, Chair, and thanks, everybody, for your presentation. I think that we are agreed that there is, generally speaking, a good core network. Someone more cynical might say that that reflects the more profitable routes that are there — from A to B, not those diverting to C or D, or wherever else.

Further to Mr McNarry's question, there is a proposal out there for a pilot scheme for the delivery of some sort of co-ordinated system in the Dungannon/Cookstown area. I have yet to get much detail on that. I do not know how it will work between Translink and the community transport sector. That will be interesting to see. It will also come on the back of the proposed local government reforms, which will have a transport remit. That will be particularly important in rural constituencies.

We have a mishmash and duplication. Everybody is agreed on that. It is about how we can best implement the delivery of the service right across those less accessible areas, whether they be urban or rural. Is the community transport network the best way of doing that in line with the likes of Translink or private providers? We had a great presentation last week from North Coast Community

Transport, particularly in reference to its volunteer drivers, who are used by the disabled sector and rural users. Do we have some sort of grasp of how a new network or new relationship between the various bodies might work?

**Mr Bailie:** I may rely on Michael to supplement my response. We recognise that, as you say, there is a raft of different models out there that meet a number of needs but not every need. It is essential that we look at what is best from those and at adjusting the rules that apply to all those things. That means that the organisations, the government bodies and the licensing authorities that are responsible for allowing those services to take place come together with the users and those delivering to discuss what changes need to be made to the system. That is where we see the potential being for a forum that allows the debate to take place between those multiple agencies to seek to widen good practice across the whole area for the benefit of everyone.

**Mr Lorimer:** I will touch on the rural community partnerships and the services that they provide, as well as the Door-2-Door service. I would say that it is a Marmite service. Some people love it and think that it is the best thing since sliced bread, while other people do not. We get a lot of feedback. It depends on whether you can get the service. When we looked at research into that type of service, which has been operating for 30 years in some areas, we found that it settles down into patterns of usage very quickly. The same people use it week in, week out, and those people are delighted with the service. It is the people who cannot break into the service who find it very frustrating.

There is little doubt that that kind of area-wide, door-to-door service will still be needed, particularly in remote rural areas — for instance, the more remote areas of Fermanagh — but, according to what we have looked at, there are better ways to meet that need than what we are currently doing. It may well be that community transport operators are best placed to operate it, but I will give you an example of a service in the New Forest, which is a taxi-share service. The local authority took away the bus service and put on a taxi in its place. Depending on who wants to use it, that taxi runs into the local town on the day. If three people are using it, it will pick up those three people. If nobody is using it, it does not run and does not cost the local authority a penny. There are different ways to do it, and the trouble with the current system is that it is a one-size-fits-all solution.

**Mr Dallat:** You are very welcome. I listened very carefully to you, and there is loads of information that you can give us. I was daydreaming, and I do not want to compare people with parcels, but 20 years ago, if I sent a parcel from Kilrea to Belfast, it could have taken three or four days. Today, with new technology, barcoding, and so on, every single item can be personalised, and those providing the service know exactly what they are doing. How important is that in any system, given that there was agreement?

**Mr Lorimer:** The technology is there, and that is what has enabled the services in GB to be developed. We now have technology that allows people to book up to an hour before they want to travel. At the minute, people in Northern Ireland have to book three or four weeks in advance for some of the services. We have GPS technology and can track everything. The technology is there, but there is a lack of awareness of how best we can use it.

**Mr Dallat:** I am glad to hear that because I believe it to be a key element. If the technology is there and can be applied, we can address many of the issues raised, particularly by June, who impressed me when she spoke of the sense of isolation that people experience, not just in rural areas — we always associate isolation and poverty of that kind with rural people — but in urban and suburban areas. I would like to think that, whatever system evolves, if I wanted to send somebody from Bellarena to Belfast, with the use of technology, it could be done without a difficulty.

**Mr Lorimer:** The dispatch is key. Your dispatch centre manages the demand in the system, and the technology enables that dispatch. In the old days, people used whiteboards to do that, but everyone now uses software to generate trips for people.

**Mr Dallat:** I have a final remark. If we can send somebody to the moon, we should surely be able —

**The Chairperson:** I was going to say that we were getting very parochial, but we are getting very far away now. [Laughter.]

**Mr McNarry:** There is no snow on the moon, John.

**Mr Dallat:** I am not sure whether we can send someone from Dungiven to Derry. Presumably we can.

**Mr McDonald:** I am thinking about the realities of what you are saying. When taxi companies send a taxi out to a call, they do a couple of things. First, when the taxi arrives, the driver sends a text to say that the taxi is at the front door or will phone if the person does not have mobile phone. Equally, once the taxi drops its passenger off at the destination, that is relayed to the taxi company's dispatch centre, which then knows to task the taxi to someone nearby next. That saves on mileage, petrol, and so on. I do not see why buses, Door-2-Door and public transport information cannot do that. If somebody phones up at an hour's notice and asks to be picked up, that person's details, such as whether he or she is a wheelchair user, blind or whatever, should be on file. The dispatcher will know who is nearby and who to send so that you can get the vehicle within the hour. It can be the same with a bus. If you are slightly off the road in a rural, or even urban, area and you can divert that bus for the sake of a couple of minutes to pick somebody up by connecting with the bus driver, that would be extremely useful. The woman who is blind could go out to her door and get the bus to stop. We need to work on that to allow people to use mainstream public transport as much as possible and to link into the non-mainstream side when they need to.

**Mr Dallat:** That is very useful. Thank you very much.

**The Chairperson:** For June's benefit, Stewart Dickson MLA has joined us. I will bring David McNarry back in. David, I apologise. I brought Cathal in because he had to leave, and I did not realise that you were not finished.

**Mr McNarry:** I want to tie up a loose end. Do you think that the forum idea is capable of producing the logistics required for linkage to core services? In other words, someone needs to say that it is doable. I have heard you saying all that you have said. Someone needs to produce some logistics that are real rather than expectations. I am saying that it may sound like a good idea, but how do we do it? Therefore, what are the logistics? What is the linkage? It becomes so very local.

**Mr Bailie:** Michael, with reference to our paper —

**Mr Lorimer:** If members get a chance to look at our paper, they will see that it contains a section called "Lessons from the development of DRT services" from elsewhere, in which we list a number of things. The first is the most important: a change in culture. That is a change in culture in the agencies involved and the transport providers. Everything that we looked states that transport providers are immensely conservative. If we rely on transport providers to provide innovative services, they are not going to happen. The second is partnership-working. Those services do not work unless you have that. Other important issues are understanding local need and a requirement for government to instigate change.

Everything from GB suggests that this is not an easy, straightforward process. It will require a huge amount of will and commitment from the various agencies involved. However, the alternative is that we sit on our hands and let the situation get worse. We know that the spending situation can only get worse.

**Mr McNarry:** I would like to help to do something to solve this. I am looking at it from the point of view of logistics, because people living in A believe that if they are taken from A to point B, it is easier for them to get to where they really want to go, which is C. It is just the logistics of all that. Is it doable in reality? I hear what you say about taxis. That is a very interesting concept. I know, as you probably do, about some of the failures that there are with taxis for schools and in getting disabled children to schools, and so forth. Is there some work to which you can point us, or do you think that someone needs to do some work? Can the forum do that work?

**The Chairperson:** David, I think that there are good models across the water, and, in fact, some of them have been mentioned. The silo mentality that you talked about, Michael, is certainly something that needs to be looked at. Even from our short visit to that conference in London, I can see that immense savings are to be made for the public purse in education and health transport and all those other bits and pieces of transport. David suggested that some of the systems that are currently in operation in Northern Ireland should bring people to the main routes on which Translink provides a service so that we can get more of them using the public transport system. Last week, when we were discussing health and the rural transport structure, you heard that there is not even a bus stop for people to use public transport to get to the Causeway Hospital. The bus actually goes past the

hospital to the bus station, where people have to disembark and get on another bus to get to the hospital. There is no bus stop, as they pass the hospital, to allow them to go in. It is a no-brainer that the bus should go in there on its way.

**Mr McNarry:** That is why hearing from groups such as this is of immense value to me. That is one of the great benefits of Committees, as far as I am concerned.

The question arises that if we have heard this in the past 15 minutes and previously in our inquiry, what on earth is the Department, with its silo mentality, doing that it is not hearing it, too?

**The Chairperson:** In fairness to DRD, it is not just that Department. A lot of Departments need to be dealt with. It is about getting a joined-up approach. You say that you want to do something. The Committee wants to do something. I hope that that will be one of the outcomes of the report. We have heard the message loud and clear, as we have done from other examples that we are looking at.

Next week, DHSSPS, the Department of Education and our Department will be before the Committee. There will be an opportunity to raise some of those issues with the various Departments. We have certainly got the message loud and clear.

**Mr Lynch:** I want to raise something that I forgot to raise when I got the opportunity earlier. The Department has initiated a pilot scheme between Enniskillen and Altnagelvin hospitals that brings together a number of the players that you suggest for integrated transport. Have you looked at that pilot scheme? I have gathered my own initial views on it, but what is your view?

**Mr Lorimer:** I am aware of the scheme, but we were not involved in any discussions around it. I would direct members to our report, in which we highlight some of the pilots that were run in the past. One thing that we find shocking is that none had gone through any proper evaluation process. Schemes may have been pulled because numbers were not good enough, but we need to find out why numbers were not good enough. If we are investing money in innovative services and they do not work, we need to find out why. Similarly, with the service for Enniskillen, we need to ask whether there is going to be a proper evaluation of the service. We need to learn lessons each time we try something like that in a rural area; otherwise, we do not know what works and what does not.

**Mr Lynch:** My initial information is that there are very few people on the bus. Those who are being given appointments are not being made aware of the bus times. There is no co-ordination. That is the initial view that I am hearing.

**The Chairperson:** In fairness to Translink, it understood that. For each appointment that went out, notification went to each patient about the bus service from Enniskillen to Altnagelvin.

**Mr Lorimer:** May I make a comment on that specific service? There is a frequent bus service, once you get to the Omagh corridor. Rather than duplicating services that are already there, perhaps it is about linking people. My understanding is that people had to go to Ballygawley and sit in the freezing cold to link with bus services at the Ballygawley roundabout. Rather than duplicate other services, ways of linking people to the A5 corridor could perhaps have been looked at. We looked at one example, which was a demand-responsive service that ran between Newcastle and Belfast for a number of years. The bus would go off the corridor and around some of the villages. I travel that route every day by bus. It is a very frequent bus corridor. There are probably three to four buses an hour running to Belfast along that corridor. Why were we putting another service on that route linking people to Belfast, instead of linking people who live off the corridor to the existing services? It just did not seem to make sense. Again, however, that was not evaluated, and we do not have any record of why it did not work.

**Mrs D Kelly:** Apologies for my late arrival. If you have already covered this, I will pick it up later from the Hansard report. The review of public administration means that local councils will be given a remit for local transport needs. What discussions have you had with the Department or the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA)? Are you optimistic about that as an opportunity?

**Mr Bailie:** We have not discussed that specifically with either the Department or NILGA. We anticipate that council associations will sit down and discuss transport needs with all the appropriate stakeholders before they take over full responsibility for that.

**Mr Lorimer:** From our engagement with the public transport reform people, we identified that as an opportunity to look at local transport planning. There is a big opportunity to look at that and to introduce more local transport planning. We have highlighted that to the Department. There seems to be a "we don't know whether we're going to do local transport planning or not" sort of element within the Department.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you for your presentation. It was very helpful to the Committee. I am sure that we will talk again in the future.