



Northern Ireland
Assembly

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: Translink
Briefing

23 January 2013

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Bus Transport in Northern Ireland: Translink Briefing

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Jimmy Spratt (Chairperson)
Mr Seán Lynch (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Stewart Dickson
Mrs Dolores Kelly
Mr Ian McCrea
Mr David McNarry

Witnesses:

Mr Bernard Clarke	Translink
Ms Michelle Rafferty	Translink
Mr Ciarán Rogan	Translink

The Chairperson: I welcome officials from Translink: Ciarán Rogan, Michelle Rafferty and Bernard Clarke. You are all very welcome to the Committee. You have about 10 minutes to make a presentation, and then leave yourself open to questions.

Mr Ciarán Rogan (Translink): Thank you, Chairman. I am joined by Bernard Clarke, who is our research and technical support manager. He has a broad overview of community and rural transport in the organisation. I am also joined by Michelle Rafferty, who is our project manager for rural transport. She is the face-to-face, day-to-day point of liaison with community transport. I am very grateful for the invitation. We provided a submission to the inquiry, and also a copy of a presentation that I made to an open session that was hosted by the Committee — last August, I think it was. We are not going to go through those page by page; we will just pick up on a few salient points.

It was very interesting today and over the past number of weeks to listen in on the evidence provided by other organisations that are involved in community transport. What is coming across very loud and clear is that the key to effective community transport and transport for rural areas is partnership. It is very positive, from our point of view, to hear quite a few of the organisations — most recently the Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee (IMTAC) today — talking about the very positive engagement that they have with Translink in that broad area.

Translink's scheduled service — the public transport network — is one part of the overall community transport mix, along with the likes of shared services, flexible services, demand-responsive services, Dial-a-Ride, Door-2-Door, and the education and health transport operations. The task, as Michael Lorimer from IMTAC pointed out a number of times, should be to see how best connections can be made with the scheduled services network of Translink. That is principally from the point of view of value for money and effectiveness, because the public transport network clearly provides the

coverage and reach to all parts of Northern Ireland. From a value-for-money point of view, it is clearly significantly cheaper to transport people on scheduled services than to provide bespoke services on an almost individual location basis. As was pointed out, significant amounts of money have been spent on investing in the public transport services that we have to make them fully accessible for wheelchair users, for example. We should look to exploit that level of accessibility where possible.

Generally, it is fair to say that, as the Committee recognised previously and as research clearly shows, the level of coverage, scope and geographical reach of rural services in Northern Ireland is significantly higher than equivalent areas in GB and the Republic of Ireland. That is a benefit that should be leveraged and optimised as far as possible.

The presentation that I gave more broadly last August talked not just about the scheduled services that we have and the need to access those services, but about some of the co-operation that exists beyond feeding into scheduled services. Those fall into three broad areas. First, we co-operate very closely in terms of fleet. We provide to community transport groups, which run minibuses, engineering services and maintaining that fleet for them. That co-operation has been in place for the past 12 years, and there is a fleet of 41 vehicles funded by the rural transport fund, operated by the community transport groups, which we basically maintain. Those were originally procured on behalf of the Department for Regional Development (DRD) by us.

Secondly, we have been working increasingly closely in the broad area of information, including, where possible, community transport partnership services broadly within the remit of, for example, our public transport maps. Where we provide information, we seek, as far as possible, to have community transport included in the information, even to the point where, for example, late last year, we had a visit from community transport personnel to our contact centre so that they could be made more aware of the services that we offer to make it easier for them to provide information about and linkages to the scheduled services network.

Lastly, I will not dwell on it, but the example of the service from Enniskillen to Altnagelvin Hospital was put together in partnership between us and local community transport groups. As you heard, it is a scheduled service. We assist it by producing material, and we rely on community transport and the health authorities to put out the information on when appointments are being made and, as far as possible, to schedule appointments. That is really the way that the thing should work.

It is interesting to hear from Seán that there is a degree of scepticism in some areas as to whether it is actually happening and whether all the parties are delivering, but it is a model that is worth pursuing because it really is dipping the toe in the water in trying to integrate our own scheduled services with things such as appointments for hospitals and health services, etc. That is increasingly the way to go, and we fully endorse the idea that we, as a transport service, and the likes of the education authorities and the health authority, should work more closely. We welcome what is happening in the Dungannon area by way of a pilot to take that further.

At this stage, I will hand over to Bernard and Michelle. Bernard will take you through some of the high-level statistics in respect of rural transport, and Michelle will give you a flavour of how we work day to day.

Mr Bernard Clarke (Translink): Thanks. Originally, I was going to take you through some high-level statistics, but having listened to the previous submission and having read the Hansard reports, I think that we should dwell on certain elements that Translink brings to the table.

Translink's role in rural transport is one of many functions, and Michelle is our project manager in that. We have a contract with the Department to administer £1 million of funding and deliver services, and they have evolved over the years. Typically, close to 40 services are supported under that, and, currently, their ridership is about 168,000. Michelle will develop the day-to-day contact and the outreach that we can do and have been doing and various schemes, but I come to the table to give you an insight into what Translink's strengths are. We administer the mainstream public transport networks. In the context of rural transport, we have a skeleton network, which we provided you with a copy of as an annex to our submission, and which is widely publicised. That highlights the links to community transport in areas that, up to recently, changed, and they reduced the number and the areas of operation had changed. That gives you an insight into the collaboration that has started to be done.

As a public transport operator, we are good at trying to schedule, in the best possible and most efficient way, to meet passenger demand as we know it. That does not say that we have all the

answers to all the questions. We continuously do market research. Even within the rural transport funded programme, we are very active, and we can give you an insight into some of the findings we are getting on the 294, what is good and bad about it, and maybe we can develop the comments that were made about the local knowledge of that service.

We like to think of Translink as a company that can be radical and innovative when it is allowed. That may bring a gasp from members but we have, within the planning context, agitated for and got changes. The biggest bugbear of my life is trying to retrofit solutions, and an awful lot of conversation to date has been about travel needs for hospital appointments. The problem has really been the land-use planning that has been done to date and the involvement of and taking on board advice from the public transport operator as to how best to service that new location, be it Antrim or the south-west.

It is only relatively recently, and I give credit where credit is due, that the new acute hospital in Enniskillen has enshrined in its planning permission support for public transport services. That means that that location is accessible, and, hopefully, that will develop. There are plenty of locations, be they hospitals, new education campuses or the Belfast Metropolitan College, or even the relocation of Jordanstown, where the silo mentality that was identified comes to bear. People who have a sole interest in only certain specifics of a project do not stray into transport needs. That is one of the great difficulties we have.

I should like to hand over to Michelle, who will give you an insight into the day-to-day linkages we have on the community transport fund. We will be only too happy to take questions afterwards.

Ms Michelle Rafferty (Translink): The funding allocated to Translink under the rural transport fund is governed by terms and conditions contained in a financial memorandum between Translink and DRD. The current financial memorandum covers the three-year period from April 2012. That agreement stipulates reporting arrangements, with which we are fully compliant. They include the monthly breakdown of expenditure, comprehensive quarterly performance reports showing passenger numbers and revenue attributable to routes, and a number of other key performance indicators, including subsidies per trip.

On a day-to-day basis, in conjunction with our overall sustainability objectives, we are engaged in an ongoing programme of fieldwork. From May last year, we talked to approximately 500 passengers directly on a one-to-one basis on board the vehicles and listened to their views on how the services meet their needs. Overall, the feedback so far has been very positive in how the services provide a lifeline for many people living in rural areas.

Where possible within the resources we have, we have responded to some requests for changes to the service in timing and frequencies, etc. On a day-to-day basis, as Ciarán mentioned, we work closely on a practical level with the community transport organisations, including the maintenance and administration of their fleet of minibuses and the provision of fuel facilities at our Ulsterbus depots.

We also collaborate quite closely with other Departments where it is appropriate to do so, recently pursuing opportunities with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development under its rural poverty and social isolation framework to see where there are opportunities for collaboration. We worked quite closely with the health trust and Easilink Community Transport in the development of a pilot service from Enniskillen to Altnagelvin. Other departmental groups that we work with include the Department for Social Development on its masterplans, etc. Anywhere we can see there is an avenue to increase and boost numbers on public transport, we will engage with those people.

Mr Rogan: We have now completed our submission and are happy to take questions, Chairman.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much. Maybe I can start with a couple of questions. I note that beyond 2015, the bus transport infrastructure and costs may be cross-cutting. Do you accept that that integration may potentially lead to significant efficiencies, including a reduction in the level of subsidy paid to Translink, in due course? The second thing hits very much on what Michelle said just a few minutes ago. During the process of this inquiry and previously, the Committee has received a number of calls for Translink to be more transparent in respect of its costs, some of which appear to be hidden. You always hide behind the banner of "commercial in confidence", which seems to be a pretty regular phrase that you use, particularly when you are asked questions in relation to costs. Indeed, your presentation today does not touch on costs. Once again, you have given us in your introduction, the Translink documents on the number of passengers, customer satisfaction and all the rest of it that you trot out at any of these briefings that you give us. Michelle has just said that there are papers that go

to the Department on a regular basis on costs and all the rest of it. Why are those costs not transparent and open, here, to everyone, including this Committee? I ask you to provide the Committee with those papers because I think that every public representative should be able to see them. In fact, I think that the cost per passenger should be transparent to the public and that there should be none of this hiding behind commercial banners of "in confidence".

Now that we have flushed out that there is a regular document that goes to the Department, I do not see any reason why the Committee cannot have access to it. After all, Translink is largely being provided with subsidy from the public purse. I am sure, Ciarán, that you are pleased that you are getting quite a pile of new buses as a result of Sammy Wilson's announcement the other day.

Mr Rogan: Yes.

The Chairperson: Again, you have consistently been very lucky. I think that this is the third or fourth time in the monitoring rounds. That is good; the Committee welcomes that and we are very pleased to see it because we want to see the fleet improved, given the number of buses there are and the number of miles that they have done. Buses need to be replaced on a regular basis. I hope that the figures you have given us on the average age of buses will be coming down in the not-too-distant future.

Mr Rogan: The average may not come down because we have to buy 120 or 130 buses each year, just in order to stand still with regard to the bus/age fleet.

The Chairperson: At least we are getting there. The other thing was that during your presentation, Ciarán, you mentioned the servicing of the 41 vehicles for the scheme. I assume that that is not done at no cost and that the Department pays you a subsidy that you have not mentioned. You do not service them out of the goodness of your heart.

Mr Rogan: That is subject to part of the contract, part of the financial memorandum agreed with the Department. That is done on a day brief.

The Chairperson: So, maybe you can let us know what the cost is, what charges are made to the Department or to whoever for those service charges. That would be helpful as well.

Mr Rogan: OK. I will take your questions in order. You made an initial reference to integration of infrastructure costs and infrastructure funding. Where does that come from?

The Chairperson: Beyond 2015, the bus transport infrastructure and costs might be cross-cutting.

The Committee Clerk: That came from your presentation.

The Chairperson: I knew that I had seen it someplace, but I see so many documents.

Mr B Clarke: While Ciarán finds his alleged contribution, firstly, on openness and transparency, we provide the facts and figures on rural transport funded services to the Department. If I look behind me, I can ask them whether those figures are given direct to you or whether they have to go through the Department.

The Chairperson: Well, I am asking you a direct question as a matter of an inquiry. It is something that we have asked you before. You have hidden behind the banner of "commercial in confidence".

Mr B Clarke: With respect, I am talking about rural transport funded services. This is the £1 million that is administered through a contract. Our contract is with the Department, so I am duty-bound to —

The Chairperson: So, it is in confidence with the Department.

Mr B Clarke: My answer is that we are the client, it is the customer, and it can dictate to us what it wants.

The Chairperson: So, it dictates to you not to divulge it.

Mr B Clarke: No, I did not say that. If I turn round, I might get —

The Chairperson: You are being asked a direct question.

Mr Rogan: I think, in the past, we have published, or the Department has published, rural transport statistics that would cover a large part of that.

Mr B Clarke: The last publication was around 2005. The Department was to produce an annual report. We produced the figures, and have done so since.

The Chairperson: All those figures should be clear, transparent and open, given the degree of public money that is poured into Translink on a year-to-year basis. We have asked you again, and I am happy with what you have told us, which is that your customer is the Department. We will be asking the Department again for those papers and those figures, and I am sure that the officials who are sitting at the back will hear that loud and clear. We need to know the figures to satisfy ourselves just exactly what the cost is.

Ciarán, in relation to the first question, it was in part 2 of the document. Did you get it?

Mr Rogan: That really refers to the references that were made by IMTAC in getting the Departments to do a degree of transport planning in tandem and to integrate on transport services, and we wholeheartedly support that.

The Chairperson: You would totally welcome that.

Mr Rogan: It is the objective of the pilot that is under way in the Dungannon area, and we are fully engaged in that.

The Chairperson: Even if that meant reducing the subsidy to Translink? If it was a more efficient service for the public?

Mr Rogan: If it produced a more efficient service, it would be very welcome. The efficiency of our service is benchmarked regularly, both for these services and for services generally, and they are demonstrated to be more efficient. The point of view I would take is that if it releases more money, it allows us to provide more transport services, as opposed to necessarily being a cost-cutting exercise.

The Chairperson: I think that it was David from IMTAC who, very sensibly, mentioned the fact that people could be brought to the main transport corridors. I understand that there is no point in running an empty bus on some of the more rural routes and all the rest of it. You have good experience of having had to do that in the past. It seems crazy that some of the other buses — for instance, school buses or the health buses, and all the rest of it — could not be used. You probably heard me refer earlier to the conference in London, where very substantial savings have been made by using and co-ordinating some of those modes of transport. They seem to have got out of the — and I am not including Translink in the silo mentality. That is an issue with the Departments. However, that sort of thinking needs to take place to get the savings that may well be used, because we are looking at rapid transit and all sorts of schemes.

Mr Rogan: We fully endorse that. We regularly make the point that, for example, in County Fermanagh, the education boards have a bigger bus fleet than we have. The point has been made about the high cost of transport in the health service. Only a certain amount of that has to be by ambulance — acute services. A lot of it could be done by public transport. Therefore, any attempt to integrate what we do with other transport operations, be that with the health service or with education, has our full backing.

The Chairperson: You are obviously happy to have a conversation about that, and you would find that conversation helpful.

Mr B Clarke: A reference was made to the mid-Ulster or Dungannon/Cookstown initiative. Translink is collaborating on that. Hopefully, that will be a blueprint, and it will be rolled out in other areas.

The Chairperson: Thank you for that.

Mr Lynch: Thank you for your presentation. Have you reviewed the Enniskillen/Altnagelvin pilot project, which, I think, runs until March? Have you done a review? Michelle, there has been a process of integration of a number of the community transport providers. Has that process concluded? If it has, what have been the benefits and advantages?

Ms Rafferty: I think that that process is almost concluded. I think that the partnerships have been streamlined from 14 operational areas to seven. As a result of that process, it will probably make it easier for us to strategically link in with key personnel in the planning of routes at a local level. It will also give us an opportunity to look at the boundaries and the geographical urban and rural definitions of where community transport provides services. What we probably need to move towards is getting a better grasp on the — although we may know the operating area for a community transport partnership, they do not have fixed or semi-fixed routes, so it is difficult sometimes to find out where there are opportunities for people to transfer on to the main public transport network. Obviously, community transport, as you know, is not eligible to pick up members of the general public. Hopefully, that process will make it easier to engage.

Mr Lynch: Have you done any review of how successful the Enniskillen pilot was?

Ms Rafferty: We monitor the statistics. At this stage, as you said, we are about six months into a pilot service that started in September. We will have a review meeting with all the key stakeholders, and we will look at the lessons learnt to date, including, obviously, your feedback today. It is disappointing to hear that not everyone who has an appointment is getting a timetable with their appointment letter. We will certainly follow up on that. We have produced the printed material, but we rely heavily on community transport to spread word of mouth and get its members to use the service for hospital appointments.

Mr Rogan: Do you have an indication of the sorts of numbers?

Mr B Clarke: We have. With any new scheme or service, there is always a very slow take-up. Our rule of thumb in the past for services that are supported through development gain was that you are talking about a period of three to five years before you will know whether it is going towards commercial or the level of subsidy that it will require.

Ms Rafferty: The memorandum for the rural transport fund (RTF) services specifies a minimum period of 26 weeks to allow for an adequate assessment of service performance.

The Chairperson: It is important, if there has been an agreement, to send out a schedule with each appointment letter. That is not happening, but that is not your fault. If you are going to follow it up, we are going to follow it up with a letter to the Department, and the Health Committee as well.

Ms Rafferty: We supplied the health trust with a quantity of the leaflets. We are in contact with it regarding stock levels. My understanding was that the trust operated a partial booking system in which patients were sent an appointment letter that asked them to phone up to schedule an appointment, at which point they could ask for an appointment that suited the bus time.

Mr B Clarke: We picked up in some of the surveys that were undertaken how people learnt about the service. We thought that there was a difficulty. As Michelle said, we contacted the trust about stock levels and reminded it. I do not know how old or recent your information is, but, hopefully, there is a recovery plan.

Mr Lynch: The co-ordination of the times of appointments is very important. You had people driving the whole way to Derry for 7.30 am or 8.00 am appointments, which is just not realistic.

The Chairperson: If you follow it up, we will certainly do that as well.

Mrs D Kelly: Thank you for your presentation. How does Translink define "rural"?

Ms Rafferty: The definition that we currently use for "rural", which is outlined in the financial memorandum, is a non-door-to-door operating area. That would be the urban door-to-door services,

so it is probably comparable with the rural Dial-a-Lift service. Previously, it was a population of fewer than 10,000 people.

Mrs D Kelly: It has recently been brought to my attention by a constituent that, on routes of equal distance in urban areas under the Metro service and the same distance in a rural transport system, the fare is three times the cost. He raised that as an inequality in the provision of transport.

Mr Rogan: You should give us the specific information, because the entire fare side is one of my responsibilities. We do a lot of work to equate Metro fare levels with Ulsterbus. The lowest three fares in Ulsterbus are like for like with Metro. If there is an anomaly, please bring us the detail of it and we will get it sorted.

Mrs D Kelly: I will do that.

In relation to the rural transport family, if you like, I live in a very rural area. It is my experience and that of my neighbours that if the schools are closed, there is no transport. That is, by and large, the experience of many people, particularly in villages with fewer than 2,000 inhabitants and in some of the dispersed or settled community areas. I would think of that as being very rural, rather than the concept of a population of 10,000.

Chair, in the past, you may have heard me raise issues about transport providers. People are very willing and want to serve the community. However, over the years, what I have seen happen is that people provided a service, the funding closed for that particular type of service, and another pot of funding opened up. They evolved the service, but did not really evolve it. My gripe is that, in some rural areas, operators are getting money to deliver services in the type of community that I live in, but actually do not deliver to that community, or very few people know about them. It is very rare that you would see some of the rural transport operators or, indeed, the Door-2-Door service in the area that I live in. That is largely because people do not know about them. In some cases, people have to use cars. Obviously, with the increase in fuel costs, it is getting more expensive for people to be able to do that. With regard to ongoing surveys and analysis of patterns, how up to date is transport in actually drilling down into a needs assessment of people in those hard-to-reach areas, as they might be called?

Mr Rogan: You are talking about deep rural areas. What you have said actually echoes to a degree what Michael from IMTAC said. It is difficult for us to comment on services that are provided by community transport operators. It is they who provide the services. As you said, it seems as though, if people know about it and use it, it obviously works for them. If they do not do that, it does not work for them. That is something that they have to address.

From our point of view, when we are providing scheduled services to rural areas, as I said at the outset, the level of rural provision that we have in Northern Ireland is much higher than is the case in the Republic or GB. Statistically, that has been shown time and again. It is of little consolation if you live in so deep a rural area that you do not have service provision. That is why, if there is a gap, the emphasis should be to link into scheduled services that are there and are regular. That is the gap that we are trying to address at present.

Bernard mentioned the census, for example. When things like census information emerge, or travel statistics come from DRD, we do a fairly deep analysis to ensure that there are no gaps in the scheduled services that we provide. We also rely very heavily on our local network of district managers throughout the entire Northern Ireland network and keep in very close contact with local councils, stakeholders and community and rural groups, aside from what Michelle is doing at central level, to see whether there are gaps that we can plug. However, first and foremost, we are there to run scheduled services as far as possible with the funding that we have.

Mrs D Kelly: Michelle talked about £1 million funding up to 40 services. What are those services?

Ms Rafferty: The services are spread throughout various geographic regions of Northern Ireland. It is very difficult to cluster them. Some of them are mid-morning services. Some of them are evening enhancements.

Mrs D Kelly: They are bus routes. That is really what you are saying: there will be up to 40 bus routes.

Ms Rafferty: Yes. Just to clarify that, around 90% of that £1 million is allocated to the provision of front line routes and services. We do our own in-house marketing, so the remainder is spent on that and research. Because we are using Translink, we also benefit from economies of scale and from using our own in-house desktop publishing department for printed material, our service-delivery managers to actually oversee service delivery on the ground, and so on.

Mr Rogan: What is the model for selecting a service to be supported under the rural transport fund?

Mr B Clarke: Perhaps, I will take that. What you are hinting at is a gap in the market where a community can identify needs, pass that information on, and then solutions are found for it. I would like to think that our service-delivery managers are well known in the locality, involved in lots of communities and are approachable. I know that they get requests, which they consider. I also know that they get requests that they feel that they cannot satisfy involving community transport in a particular area. The art of the possible is, unfortunately, what Translink must work within. We provide vital-artery mainstream public-transport networks. How people get to the network is probably the crunch issue. We have been heartened by what has happened in certain rural areas. For example, park-and-ride was mentioned, and we have been agitating for that for a long time. That is starting to tick up because people appreciate the time savings in certain areas, and certainly the savings in fuel costs that can be realised. It is a bit of a patchwork quilt. The Committee could maybe take that forward and address it.

Ms Rafferty: It is quite difficult to be scientific about how or why you start a particular route because, in some cases, we have piloted services that we thought, on paper, probably would not work well but they did, and vice versa. It is very difficult to quantify precisely.

Mr Rogan: Individual routes can come from customers, communities, stakeholders or our own people who think that it is a good idea and push those routes. Wherever they come from, routes go through an evaluation process if the funding is there. However, we welcome any additional information or suggestions from this inquiry that improves the means by which we get that information and can test things. That is aside from the funding question.

The Chairperson: It might be helpful if you send a copy of the current routes to the Committee Clerk so that it can be distributed to members. That might answer some of your questions, Dolores.

Mrs D Kelly: I was involved with June Best in a community group, and we got Ulsterbus to run services on a couple of Friday nights to the swimming pool in Lurgan, which is about seven miles away for some people. About 60 youngsters went on that trip, just to the swimming pool. That service depended on a community group running it.

Mr McNarry: You are very welcome. I want to pursue the idea that we will have openness and transparency. Your written submission states that the average bus age is 6.4 years for Ulsterbus and 7.1 years for Metro. What is the average disposable value of those buses?

Mr Rogan: When they reach the end of their life, zero. They tend to depreciate to no value. If we do sell them, they tend to be sold for scrap.

Mr McNarry: So they are driven right down to the ground.

Mr Rogan: I am not sure that I would characterise it as them being driven into the ground, but they are certainly taken to a level where they are of no commercial benefit for us.

The Chairperson: They are clapped out, David.

Mr McNarry: A bit like me at times, and it is only five past three. I was very pleased to hear IMTAC say earlier how it meets you regularly. That is very good. However, I got the clear impression from community transport representatives that you do not often sit down together to discuss provisions, linkages and joined-up routes. Is that the case?

Mr Rogan: I would not characterise it like that. Some of the community transport groups were very positive about our relationship. Michelle is the point of contact with all the community transport groups.

Mr McNarry: What about Community Transport Northern Ireland?

Mr Rogan: Yes; the overarching organisation and the individual groups.

Ms Rafferty: I represent Translink on Community Transport's committee but, as well as that, at a local level, there is some engagement on routes. When we start a new route, especially with RTF services, there is consultation, although it may not be formalised.

Mr McNarry: That is very interesting because I got the clear impression from listening to the previous group's deputation that that was not happening, that it was a problem and that it was contributing to the lack of joined-up thinking and that we were not approaching some of IMTAC's suggestions. Are you saying that that is not the case?

Ms Rafferty: There is consultation on the RTF routes.

Mr McNarry: Do you sit down to plan, collaborate or co-operate and say that it would be better, for example, if Translink took over a service from a certain point? If there is something that you cannot do, do you suggest that it does that to meet people's needs? Do you sit down and talk about that? Do you come up with joint plans?

Mr B Clarke: We could give examples of case studies in Downpatrick and the Down area. The 294 route is a collaboration. I can also tell you that Kellie Armstrong was with us in the past six months and that we sat down and had a wide-ranging discussion.

The Chairperson: In fairness, David, some of the community groups made very positive comments about their communication with Translink —

Mr McNarry: Yes, I know; I am not criticising them.

The Chairperson: However, some of them said that when you take off services — maybe non-profitable rural services — there is no consultation whatsoever. They felt that there could be more consultation with them on some of those issues or that some other arrangement could be made. They felt that you tend to take services off because they were not profitable, and that the public are told that a service will not exist from next Monday or whatever.

Mr B Clarke: From memory, I think that that was one example from Strabane.

The Chairperson: I cannot recollect where it was.

Mr B Clarke: We read that and automatically went into search mode. We understand that that was something like 12 years ago. That was quite a long time ago and does not reflect the current situation.

Mr McNarry: Maybe we will have another look at the Hansard report. I am going from recollection.

The Chairperson: Certainly, there were one or two areas. However, there were some issues.

Mr Rogan: When we alter a service, we try to delegate as far as possible to local level. The onus will be on a local manager. We very deliberately have a federated local management structure to stay in touch with schools, councillors, etc. The onus is on individual managers to consult as far as possible with local stakeholders. Councillors and schools tend to be the lead groups and we particularly try to avoid any schoolkids being disadvantaged. Community transport groups would also be part of that consultation.

If there are specific instances where we have dropped the ball, we will take a look at those. However, by its nature, consultation has to be local and tailored as opposed to being driven from the centre.

Mr McNarry: Maybe you would provide us with a list of meetings that you have had with community groups and networks over the past six months so that it is on record.

Mr Rogan: OK.

Mr McNarry: That would be helpful. Thank you.

Mr Lynch: Ciarán, in your presentation you mentioned that the Department of Education has more buses in Fermanagh than you. Without any statistics, I can see that with my own eyes. Why is that?

Mr Rogan: Throughout Northern Ireland, we bring 65,000 kids to and from school every day. How many do the education and library boards take?

Mr B Clarke: I have to pass on that. I would need to look it up.

Mr Rogan: As far as I know, they probably take more than us. To a greater or lesser extent, the education and library boards have built up bespoke transport operations. Depending on the education and library boards in question, and particularly as we move to the Education and Skills Authority, there will be an opportunity to integrate and make efficiencies where possible. That is one of the things that are core to the Dungannon and mid-Ulster issue. It is about integrating and getting our transport infrastructure and the education and library board's transport infrastructure to work more closely together to drive down costs.

Mr I McCrea: Surely the legislation that the Department of the Environment (DOE) is bringing through on licensing, permits, and what not, will have a major detrimental effect on how community transport provision is rolled out. Do you have an opinion on the proposed changes? Will you have input to that process? Have you had any discussions with the community transport associations about that?

Mr B Clarke: We are represented on the Bus Operators Forum, which has taken the views from all forms of operators on the pros and cons of the proposed changes. The last time that we were involved in that forum was before Christmas when, yet again, there seemed to be a change of heart on 10B permits and the restrictions that might impact on community transport. I do not know where that has moved to now; I have not seen the papers. I think that the next meeting of the forum is scheduled for February. The papers for that will be coming out soon.

It is a moveable feast. Maybe the representations that have been made have meant that the DOE has had a change of heart. Maybe not. Time will tell.

Ms Rafferty: Community transport provides a vital door-to-door service. We want that to continue and to maximise the opportunity for interchange between their services and the main public transport network. If they use volunteers, that also adds a vital social aspect.

The Chairperson: It is quite apparent that you have been following the evidence given to the Committee very closely. You will have heard that the community transport people feel that DOE's proposals to move licences to a commercial basis will have a dramatic effect on their operation. Do you have any views on that? Have you presented those views or do you intend to present them to DOE?

Mr B Clarke: We gave our views on the implications for Translink in our response to the consultation document. That was about six months ago. We have not received a revised document to review or feed into. If you are asking for a personal opinion, I would reiterate what Michelle has said. Community transport plays a vital role, and any restrictions of a licensing regime need to be well thought through. I do not see an automatic replacement.

Mr Rogan: I think that it is fair to say that we work closely with the community transport sector, and see it as a very valuable partner that contributes to overall mobility. That is what we are about.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much for your presentation —

Mr Rogan: Chair, in the previous submissions, reference was made to bus stops at Moyle hospital. We do have bus stops at Moyle hospital and run several services —

The Chairperson: Which hospital?

Mr Lynch: The Causeway Hospital.

The Chairperson: Is there an actual bus stop at it?

Mr B Clarke: There are two.

Ms Rafferty: There is a shelter —

Mr B Clarke: They were on TV on Monday night.

The Chairperson: I think the issue was that the buses —

Mr I McCrea: The community transport buses could not —

Mr Rogan: Not every service goes into the hospital.

The Chairperson: If they are travelling from Moyle, people had to get off at the hospital and then get to Coleraine bus station.

Mr B Clarke: The more frequent service is provided by the town service, which goes from the hub — the bus centre — to the hospital.

The Chairperson: I understand that buses maybe come down the other side of a dual carriageway and have to do a sort of U-turn.

Mr Rogan: Looking at the list, there are two types of service that go to the hospital. The 218 direct service from Coleraine to Belfast services the hospital, and we also have a service from Coleraine town. Funnily enough, we had the same conversation about why we could not take the 212 Derry to Belfast express service through Antrim Area Hospital. Quite often, if a service passes directly by a hospital, we will take it in if there is no huge time disbenefit. If a service does not go directly near a hospital quite often, the best option will be to filter to local town services, which are much more frequent. I suspect that that was the —

The Chairperson: I do not think that the criticism was directed towards Translink, but to planning. Those who gave evidence felt that, in planning any new hospital, there should be consultation with the transport companies and everybody else to make sure that they are facilitated. The new hospital in Fermanagh has that.

Mr Lynch: Yes. Bernard, I think that you mentioned that there was good planning and co-ordination there.

The Chairperson: The criticism was on that element. It was not considered to be Translink's fault. That clarifies it: there are bus stops at the hospital.

Thank you very much for your presentation. I am sure that we will talk again soon; if not on this subject, on another. Thank you all.