



**Briefing on Translink Fare Increase  
Committee for Regional Development  
4 March 2015**

## **1. Introduction**

1.1 The Consumer Council welcomes the opportunity to provide evidence to the Committee in respect of the Translink fares increase that took place with effect from 16 February 2015. As the passenger representative for Northern Ireland (NI) we are committed to a public transport system that is accessible, affordable and designed to meet the needs of NI consumers.

## **2. Background**

2.1 The Consumer Council is involved in the annual corporate planning process that reviews the level of fares for public transport. An agreed protocol covering the Consumer Council's involvement has been in place for a number of years. The purpose of the protocol is to enable the Consumer Council to give the Minister its view on the needs of consumers before any final decision on fare increases is made.

2.2 Correspondence from the Department in 2010 sets out the steps to be taken as part of the process:

- DRD scrutinises Translink's financial position and report their view to the Minister.
- DRD then meets with Consumer Council to provide information about Translink's financial position and any underpinning information that the Consumer Council requires.
- After due consideration, the Consumer Council makes its views known to DRD.
- DRD reports the Consumer Council's position to the Minister; the Minister reaches a conclusion on the headline figures for any fare increases.
- Translink engages with the Consumer Council, setting out its proposals for translating the headline figures into individual fares (this could include proposals for holding some fares at existing levels).

- Following discussions with the Consumer Council, and consideration of its views and alternative suggestions, Translink will finalise its detailed fares.

2.3 This agreed process was not followed for the most recent fares increase. The Consumer Council was notified on 11 December 2014 that the decision had been made to increase fares. It was also notified that the decision was to be made public that day. At this stage there had been no prior engagement with the Consumer Council about the increase.

### **3. Developments after the announcement**

3.1 The Consumer Council met with DRD and Translink on 16 December 2014. At this meeting DRD outlined the financial factors influencing the reason for the fares increase.

3.2 On 23 December 2014 a paper was shared by Translink that outlined the fare increases across the various services and ticket types.

3.3 On 19 January 2015 the Consumer Council met with the Minister for Regional Development. The meeting was positive and we welcome the Department's commitment to operating the protocol in future years.

### **4. Questions raised by the Consumer Council**

#### DRD

4.1 At the meeting with DRD and Translink on 16 December 2014, the Consumer Council was provided with a briefing paper from DRD that included reference to a planning assumption that DRD's funding for public transport in 2014-15 would be cut significantly, depending on the outcome of the January 2015 Monitoring Round.

4.2 The Consumer Council sought clarity from DRD on a number of issues including:

- When would the outcome of the January monitoring round be known and why was the decision on the fare increase taken before the outcome of the Monitoring Round was known?
- Would DRD fund anticipated pressures in relation to concessionary fares and other assumptions made in the briefing paper?
- Have any recommendations emerged from the Performance Efficiency Delivery Unit (PEDU) review and the Transport Advisory Service (TAS) efficiency report? If so, have they been accepted by the Department and were they reflected in the fare increase proposals from Translink?

4.3 The Consumer Council has not received a response to these questions to date.

#### Translink

4.4 Having reviewed the briefing paper provided by Translink on 23 December 2014 on the impact of the individual fare increase, the Consumer Council sought clarity on a range of issues including:

- What was the anticipated fall in passenger numbers as a result of the fare increases and the predicted loss in revenue?

*This information was not provided.*

- How many passengers would be impacted by above average fare increases?

*Translink responded that the number of passengers potentially affected by higher than average fare increases is estimated at:*

- **20 per cent** of Ulsterbus passengers
- **45 per cent** of Metro passengers
- **34 per cent** of NI Railway passengers

- How many passengers currently use the better value 'smart fares'.

*Translink responded with information to show that **30 per cent** of fare paying passengers use smart fares averaged out across the three services.*

## **5. Next Steps**

- 5.1 The Consumer Council welcomes the commitment from DRD to adhere to the protocol in future years. We are committed to working together to ensure a fair and transparent process is followed when setting the levels of fares passenger are expected to pay. However, we would like answers to our outstanding questions.
- 5.2 The Consumer Council is also committed to continue its work to promote best value fares and calls on Translink to ensure that the onus is not left on the passenger to find out what the best ticket is for their journey. In the run up to the implementation of the fare increase the Consumer Council called on Translink to provide clear information on the actual level of increases, and to give a commitment to proactively inform passengers of – and help them switch to – the best value fares. The Consumer Council believes it should be everybody's job in Translink to ensure that passengers are given the best value ticket for their journey.

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**The Consumer Council**

# ***Making the consumer voice heard and making it count***

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