



The Consumer Council

INTEGRATED TRANSPORT PILOT PROJECT

**TRAVEL PATTERNS AND TRANSPORT NEEDS IN THE
DUNGANNON AND COOKSTOWN AREA**

August 2014

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Executive summary

During November 2013 and February 2014 the Consumer Council conducted research to examine the attitudes towards public transport, and experiences of using public transport, amongst people living in the Dungannon and Cookstown area. The research was undertaken as part of the Department for Regional Development (DRD) Integrated Transport Pilot Project, and the research methodology comprised focus groups and an on-street questionnaire. The research findings will inform the development of the Integrated Transport Pilot Project, and will assist the development of future local transport plans elsewhere in Northern Ireland.

The research identified that the private car was the preferred mode of transport for the majority of people living in the Dungannon and Cookstown area. Convenience was the main reason for using the car, particularly given the largely rural nature of the project area. However, for many older people with a senior smart pass, the availability of free public transport has benefitted them significantly, and for the majority of young people in further education, the cost of driving was prohibitive and public transport was their primary means of travel.

Although two thirds of questionnaire survey respondents explained they used public transport, only 23 per cent used it at least once a week. The main reasons given for using public transport were for shopping and social occasions with few people using public transport to commute to work. It was also highlighted that the lack of services later in evenings had an impact on potential use.

The research has identified a gap in terms of residents' knowledge of public transport services and highlights the need for Translink to address this issue. Many people living in the area lacked knowledge of public transport routes and service timetables. It was highlighted that Translink should communicate the benefits of public transport more effectively to non-users, and there is a need for greater promotion of town services to encourage uptake.

Despite the limited use of public transport reported, perceptions of services were positive with seven in ten respondents to the questionnaire survey satisfied with services, and only one in ten voicing dissatisfaction. However, where improvements in services are required, the research highlights reliability and value for money as the key priorities for Dungannon and Cookstown residents.

Value for money is an area where Translink can potentially deliver improvements by raising awareness of best value ticketing options, as awareness of how to obtain best value tickets was low, particularly amongst young people in further education. Increased frequency of services was also suggested as an area for improvement; however, it was acknowledged that in rural areas, the volume of passengers would limit the frequency with which services could operate. Residents also suggested shelters with the bus tracker system should be provided at all bus stops and the customer service provided by drivers should improve.

While highlighting the important role public transport plays in the lives of many people, the research has identified a number of potential areas where Translink could improve if its services are to play a more significant role in the transport decisions of consumers in the Dungannon and Cookstown area and other similar locations elsewhere in Northern Ireland.

Introduction

The General Consumer Council for Northern Ireland (the Consumer Council) is an independent consumer organisation, working to bring about change to benefit Northern Ireland (NI) consumers. Our aim is to *'make the consumer voice heard and make it count'*.

We have a statutory remit to promote and safeguard the interests of consumers and have specific functions in relation to energy, water, transport, food, and postal services. These include considering consumer complaints and enquiries, carrying out research, and educating and informing consumers.

To enable the Consumer Council to effectively represent the views of public transport users the Consumer Council undertook research to examine the travel behaviour of consumers in the Cookstown and Dungannon areas. The research was undertaken as part of the Integrated Transport Pilot Project to provide information concerning:

- The travel patterns of and types of journeys undertaken by people living in Dungannon and Cookstown;
- Whether Dungannon and Cookstown residents would like to undertake a greater proportion of their journeys using public transport;
- How public transport could be better developed to meet the needs of people living in Dungannon and Cookstown; and
- How people wish to be engaged in future planning of public transport services.

The research findings will inform the development of the Integrated Transport Pilot Project, and will assist transport stakeholders in developing future local transport plans elsewhere in Northern Ireland.

Methodology

To deliver the research objectives a combination of focus groups and on-street interviews were used. It is important to recognise that due to the limited resources available for this research the results of the on-street survey should be considered as illustrative of consumers' views rather than directly representative of the population in the Dungannon and Cookstown area.

Focus Groups

Focus groups were conducted to examine the views of various audiences and eight participants were recruited for each group. Two focus groups were held in Cookstown and two were held in Dungannon. The following four groups of participants were involved:

- People in full-time education;
- Older people;
- People in full-time employment; and
- The general public.

In addition the following criteria were applied:

- A minimum of three male or female participants per group;
- At least two frequent, two infrequent (use several times a month), and two non users (use less than once every 6 months) of public transport per group; and
- At least three participants from each town per group.

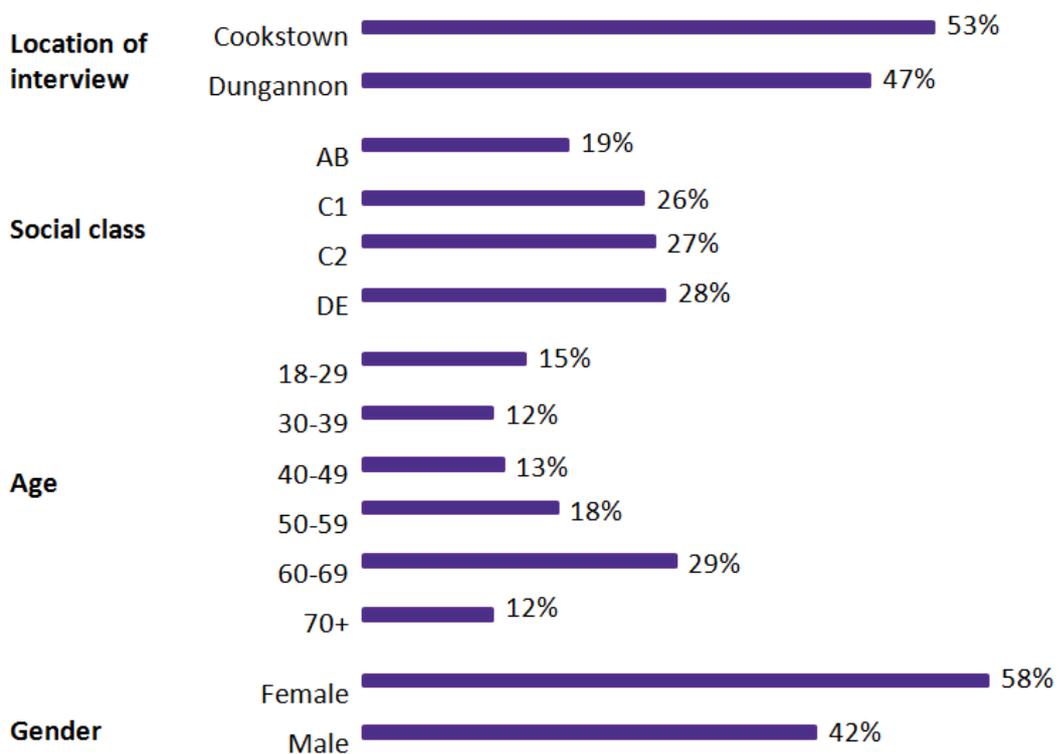
Following completion of the four focus groups it was identified there were particular issues concerning the transport needs of young people in full time education that required further examination. Therefore, an additional two focus groups were conducted as phase two of the research project to engage with young people who attend the South West College in Dungannon. Both of these focus groups were held in Dungannon. The findings of these focus groups are presented in a separate section of the Research Findings chapter beginning on page 20.

On-street questionnaire survey

A short questionnaire was developed to examine the travel behaviour and attitudes to public transport of people living in the Cookstown and Dungannon areas.

The interviews were conducted for three days in Cookstown and for three days in Dungannon, across both weekdays and week-ends. Respondents were approached on a random basis and therefore the results should be considered a snapshot of public opinion rather than directly representative of the population in the Dungannon and Cookstown area. The fieldwork spanned 8th to 15th November 2013 and 218 interviews were completed. A breakdown of the respondent classification is detailed in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1 – Questionnaire survey respondent classification



Research findings

Travel Patterns and Types of Journey

For most participants the majority of journeys undertaken were by car. For many who lived far from public transport routes, travel by car was considered the only realistic option.

“I take the car because I’m rural and have to drive to get the bus” (older person)

The focus group research highlighted that working, shopping, transporting children, and visiting friends and relatives made up the majority of journeys.

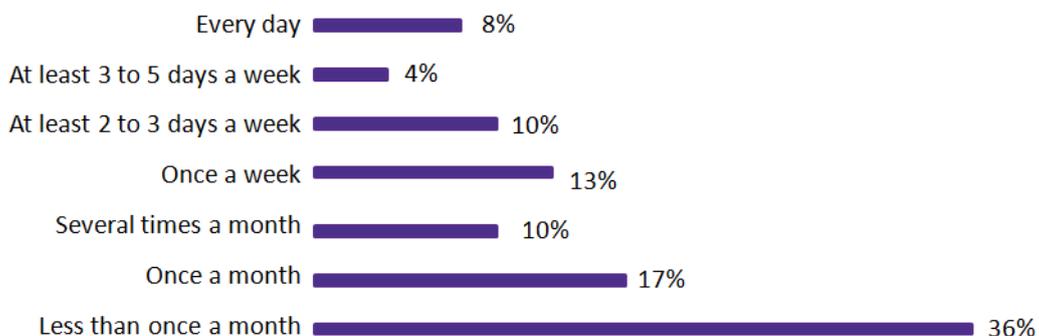
Convenience was cited as the main reason why the private car is used for the majority of journeys with a range of issues identified as to why public transport was considered to be less favourable for the majority of journeys.¹

Frequency of public transport use and reasons for use

It is interesting to note that people aged over 60 years old, who can avail of free public transport using either a 60 Plus SmartPass or a Senior SmartPass, were the most likely to travel by public transport. Next most likely to travel using public transport are people aged 18 – 29.

Figure 2 – Frequency of public transport use

(Base – all those who use public transport N = 143)



¹ These issues are explored in more detail in the *Factors which discourage public transport use* section of the report.

Table 1 – Does respondent ever use public transport

(Base – all respondents N = 218)

	All	Gender		Age						Social Class			
		Male	Female	18 - 29	30 - 39	40 - 49	50 - 59	60 - 69	70+	AB	C1	C2	DE
Total number	218	92	126	32	27	28	40	64	27	41	57	58	62
Yes	66%	67%	64%	66%	59%	50%	53%	75%	85%	56%	68%	66%	69%
No	34%	33%	36%	34%	41%	50%	47%	25%	15%	44%	32%	34%	31%

The young people who participated in the focus group research conducted with students in further education highlighted that many people in this age group are heavily dependent on public transport due to the prohibitive cost of running a car². Therefore it appears that public transport appeals most where it is free or where there is a financial barrier to travelling by private car.

Translink should consider initiatives to further promote awareness of the potential cost savings of travelling by public transport to people who usually travel by car. This work should focus particularly on people aged between 40 and 60, the age group where people are least likely to travel by public transport.

Levels of public transport use were low when compared to the overall number of journeys made. The on-street survey suggested that two-thirds of all respondents used public transport. However, only 8 per cent of those users travelled by public transport on a daily basis, 35 per cent travelled on a weekly basis and 36 per cent used public transport less than once a month.

Discussions highlighted that for many of those who used public transport, the reasons for doing so broadly fell into three categories: the individual was travelling to socialise and wanted to drink alcohol, the participant didn't want to drive to Belfast, and the cost of parking in Belfast was prohibitively expensive.

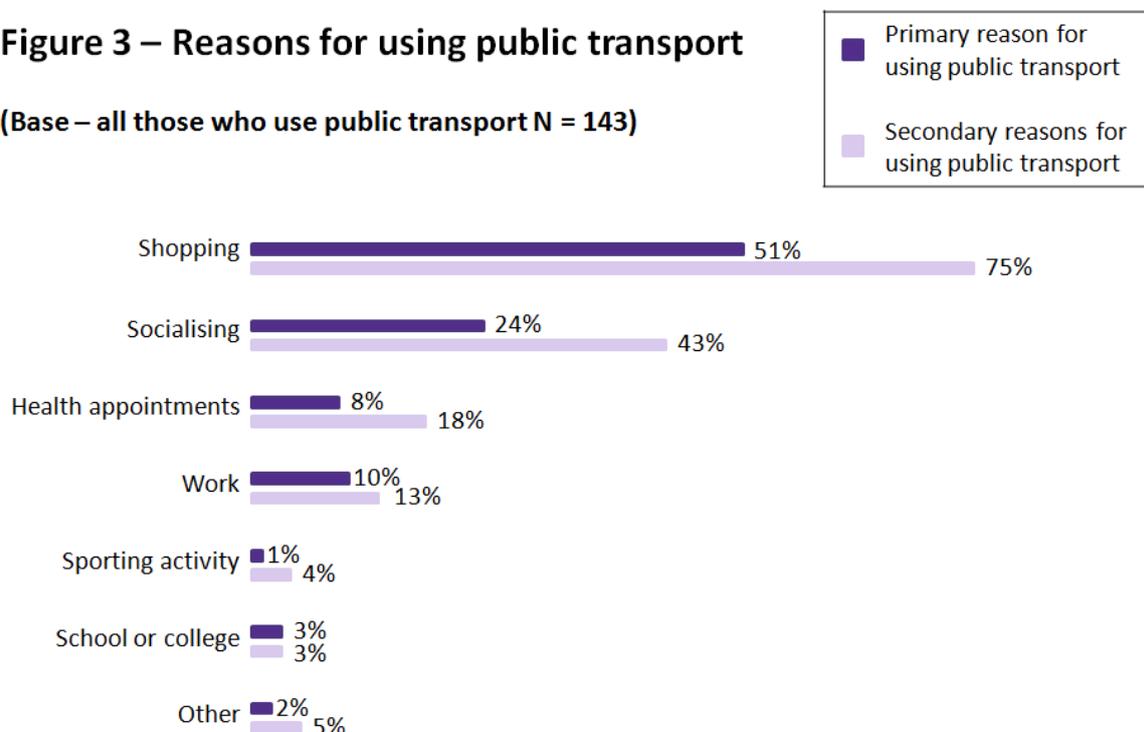
"I'd take the bus for shopping, especially if I'm going to Belfast" (younger person)

² This issue is examined in greater detail on page 21.

“If I was going somewhere I’d be taking drink I’d take the bus because I wouldn’t take the risk” (younger person)

Figure 3 – Reasons for using public transport

(Base – all those who use public transport N = 143)



The questionnaire survey largely supported the finding of the focus groups, indicating that while the main reasons for using public transport were to go shopping (51 per cent) or to travel for social occasions (24 per cent), comparatively few public transport users use public transport to travel to work, with only one in ten citing travelling to work as their main reason for using public transport.

In light of this Translink should review the extent to which its services meet the needs of commuters. The focus groups highlighted that very few people travelled more than 10-15 miles on a daily basis (excluding travel undertaken as part of a job), and therefore in reviewing the usefulness of its services for travel to work, Translink should pay particular attention to journeys within a ten mile radius of Dungannon and of Cookstown.

For the majority of participants, public transport use mainly focused on Ulsterbus services as Cookstown and Dungannon are both significant distances from the nearest train station at Portadown.

Figure 4 – Modes of public transport used

(Base – all those who use public transport N = 143)



This is supported by the findings from the on-street survey. Only 34 per cent of all public transport users used NIR services whereas 86 per cent used Translink bus services.

Using the train required the participant to drive to Portadown Railway Station to get the train. For journeys to Belfast many participants believed that if they had to drive as far as Portadown in the car they might as well continue down the motorway to Belfast.

A number of respondents explained they had travelled to Dublin by train, boarding in Portadown and reported positive experiences. They explained that the train enabled them to relax and prepare themselves for their time in Dublin.

The group of students that participated in phase one of the research used public transport more frequently than other participants. Public transport journeys were mainly made by bus to travel to and from school or college. However, for many of the participants, the infrequency of the bus service prohibited them staying for after school activities. To ensure students are not limited in the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities, the Integrated Pilot Project should give consideration to how scheduling of public transport services could better meet the needs of young people in further education.

“I get one of the school buses into school, but if you stay late for anything then you have to get a lift because there’s only one bus” (younger person)

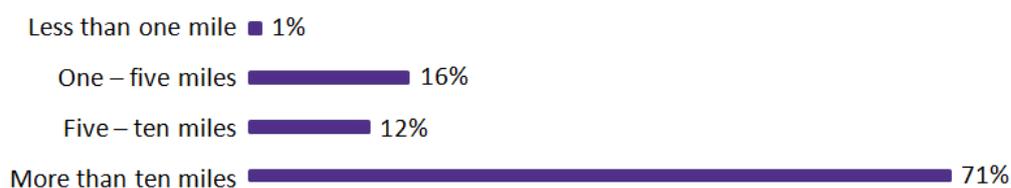
The focus group research identified that there was limited awareness of Ulsterbus town services amongst participants. The on-street survey further

highlighted a lack of local use with only 17 per cent of public transport users undertaking journeys of less than five miles. The majority of journeys made by public transport are more than ten miles.

“I don’t know anything about where to get the bus or any town service” (older person)

Figure 5 – Distance of average journey made using public transport

(Base – all those who use public transport N = 143)



Given most participants reported using public transport for shopping and socialising and 71 per cent of journeys are greater than 10 miles, it is reasonable to assume that most public transport use is on longer distance interurban services to other towns and cities, rather than on local town services. To improve awareness of Ulsterbus town services Translink should consider further promotion of the services to ensure potential passengers have knowledge of routes and understand how to access timetables.

Factors which discourage public transport use

The most significant factor in discouraging public transport use is the ease of access to private cars. Participants highlighted the flexibility which driving affords them. They emphasised the benefits that come from being in control of their own journey and explained that travelling by public transport entailed relinquishing this control.

“If you’re driving you’re your own boss and you can come back when you want to” (older person)

Another factor which served to discourage public transport use is that many participants had never formed a pattern of use. Given the participants in

question had always had access to a car, they had never thought about using public transport. Some mentioned that they lived close to a bus stop but had never used the bus service and were unaware of the route followed by the service. The high levels of private car use in comparison to public transport use are consistent with the findings of the DRD Travel Survey for Northern Ireland 2011 – 2013 which indicates that on average 81 per cent of journeys are made either as a car driver or passenger, and 7 per cent of journeys are made using Translink services.

“I’m just not used to taking the bus, I’m used to the car” (younger person)

“No idea if there is a local service around Dungannon or Cookstown” (older person)

Many of the participants did not live near a bus route, which necessitated driving to the closest bus stop. Some mentioned that the closest bus stop to them did not have a shelter and when they arrived they had no way of knowing what time the next bus was coming. Some had experienced buses coming earlier than scheduled and leaving before the scheduled time. To address these issues participants suggested bus shelters should be at each bus stop and a bus tracker system should be adopted for all Translink bus services.

“I don’t use the bus because it’s not handy for me. I have to drive three miles to the nearest bus stop” (older person)

“Bus shelters are much nicer, especially when it’s raining. If you had to stand in the rain for 15 minutes it would put you off” (younger person)

There were concerns raised about infrequent scheduling of services in mid-morning and mid-afternoon and the lack of a night-time bus service. It was noted that the infrequency of services made travel by car a necessity and many participants stated the lack of services late in the evening necessitated the use of taxis which were regarded as expensive. In light of these findings Translink should review the scheduling of its services and it may be beneficial to undertake additional research with consumers to identify when they would

benefit most from the introduction of additional services and what factors would most encourage them to make the shift from the private car

Participants in all the focus groups recalled having difficulties accessing information from the Translink website³. Others recalled arriving at bus stops with timetables attached only to discover they were out of date. Experiencing difficulties in accessing up to date timetable information will serve to discourage use of public transport and therefore Translink should ensure that timetable information is provided at all bus stops and is maintained to ensure it is in usable condition.

“Say I was looking for a bus to Omagh from Cookstown. It (Translink website) showed me this bus but it said something about a school bus and then came up about its not running and being a school holiday. There is too much stuff going on, too much information” (older person)

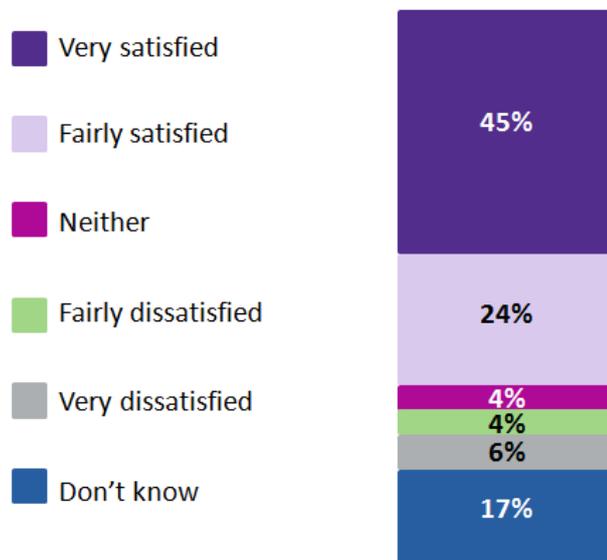
Perceptions of public transport

Despite limited use of public transport by respondents, perceptions of public transport were positive. The on-street survey findings indicated 69 per cent of respondents were satisfied with services, with only 10 per cent of respondents voicing dissatisfaction.

³ Consumers’ views concerning the accessibility of Translink timetable information are examined in detail in the Consumer Council report *Consumers’ Views Concerning Translink Timetabling Information* (Autumn 2014).

Figure 6 – Satisfaction / dissatisfaction with public transport services in the Dungannon and Cookstown area

(Base – all respondents N = 218)



There was acknowledgement in the group discussions that there had been significant improvements in public transport services over the past 10 years with buses and trains considered clean and warm by participants.

High levels of car use despite relatively high levels of satisfaction concerning public transport services further supports the notion that car use has become the default transport option for many consumers and that further work is required by the Northern Ireland Executive and key transport stakeholders if the Executive is to achieve its aim of a modal shift from the private car to public transport.

“It's a lot better than it used to be... they are now warm and comfortable, a vast improvement in the last ten years” (older person)

Frequent public transport users provided examples of organising appointments around bus schedules, with instances of medical appointments arranged to coincide with timetables given.

“If I have a hospital appointment or dentist appointment I moulded everything around the bus timetable. I've done that all my life, especially when I was rearing my children” (older person)

The general consensus among focus group participants was that public transport services were largely used by students and older people.

The expense of running a car resulted in younger people using buses on a regular basis. Going to and coming from college were the main times public transport was used. Getting home from nights out normally required the use of taxis due to the lack of a night time bus service.

“It’s suited for pupils, kids going to school and students.” (younger person)

Participants discussed having to share a bus in the mornings with children going to school. In such circumstances the participants were dissatisfied with overcrowding on the buses. The infrequent schedule of bus services meant that participants had to travel on these buses, despite concerns about safety due to having to stand.

“It’s aimed at older people with a bus pass and students going to tech” (younger person)

A number of older participants who had a senior smart pass explained how free public transport had benefitted them significantly and helped them to enjoy their retirement. The senior smart pass enabled some participants to travel more than they otherwise would and also benefited some older people who were able to drive but preferred not to because of their age.

“My mother and father now use the bus more than anything since they got their bus passes. There’s a bus stop close to them and I’ve seen them take it into town. My father is 75 and wouldn’t drive in town now so he feels more confident taking the bus” (younger person)

The on-street survey indicated that older people were more likely to use public transport with 17 per cent being daily users compared to an average of 8 per cent amongst all respondents.

Participant priorities concerning public transport

Overall, the general consensus was that reliability and punctuality of services were the top priorities for participants. Participants were resolute in explaining that if services are not reliable and punctual then they are not worth paying for.

“Reliability is the most important. If you go out and you know when the bus is meant to be coming then that’s what’s most important to you. A lot of people go to Antrim hospital on the bus so you need to make sure you’re there on time to make your appointment” (younger person)

Value for money was identified as an important factor for many participants. Citing the example of a return journey from Dungannon to Belfast participants explained that if an individual was travelling on their own, travelling by bus represented value for money because the individual saved on fuel, vehicle wear and tear and the cost of car parking. However, if a group of two or more travelled on the bus the fare increased whereas the cost of driving remained unchanged meaning that public transport no longer represented value for money.

“If it’s not cheaper than running your car then you won’t be using it”. (older person)

“It’s expensive, its £16 from Dungannon to Belfast. If you go as a family with two kids you could be thinking £40 or more” (older person)

To encourage people to use public transport more often, participants suggested introducing a reward in the form of a free journey once a specified number of journeys had been taken.

Participants expressed dissatisfaction with the fact that a return ticket could only be used on the day of issue. Participants were all aware of '10 journey tickets' and suggested that Translink should offer 2 journey tickets. This would mean that if a passenger didn't use the return leg of a ticket on the day of purchase they could use it the next day.

Participants believed this would encourage greater usage of public transport. This issue should be considered by Translink in the review of ticketing it is currently undertaking.

Comfort and cleanliness of services were important factors for all participants. These were the two areas where participants perceived the biggest positive change in public transport in the past 10 years. Participants expressed satisfaction with the standard of comfort and cleanliness on Northern Ireland Railway services, however, some examples were given where the cleanliness of buses required improvement.

“The trains are lovely. The newer ones are good” (younger person)

Changes that would encourage public transport use

The on-street survey indicated that 70 per cent of respondents would like to use public transport more often, whereas 26 per cent would not like to. There was little variation across age groups, social classes or gender with regards to whether or not respondents would like to use public transport more frequently.

People aged 30-39, and 70 and older were most likely to want to use public transport more, with 74 per cent of these groups saying they would like to. The age group 50-59 is second lowest in its desire to use public transport more, with 68 per cent of this group stating they would like to use public transport more frequently. This is also the age group which is second least likely to currently use public transport with 53 per cent of this group stating they never use public transport.

Shopping was the activity which participants would most like to use public transport more often for, with 68 per cent stating they would like to use public transport more often for this purpose. 37 per cent of participants would like to use public transport more often for socialising and 15 per cent would like to use public transport more often to commute to work.

It was noted in all of the focus groups that the poor customer service provided by some drivers was an issue that needed to be addressed by Translink. While the majority of drivers were perceived as courteous and professional, there were instances recounted when the attitudes of drivers fell below acceptable levels.

“I can’t read the timetables half the time. If you ask the bus driver they won’t be very helpful” (older person)

“The courteousness of the driver is also very important. It can make your journey much better” (older person)

The participants stressed the importance of Translink effectively advertising its services to highlight the benefits of public transport use. It was noted that easier availability of timetable and fare information would provide more people with the information they need to make use of public transport. When asked how they would like to be informed if Translink intended to make changes to public transport provision in their area, 63 per cent of respondents to the on-street survey explained they would like to be informed by a flier through the mail and 43 per cent believed a notice should be published in the local press. These preferences should be considered by Translink when undertaking promotional work to raise awareness of its services in future.

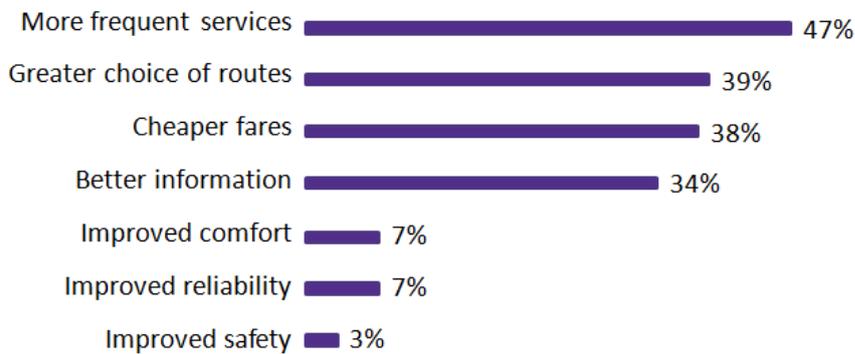
“If someone wants to sell you something they have to sell it. If they want more people on their buses they have to sell it. They could offer you a service you didn’t know existed” (older person)

The findings of the on-street survey indicate that increased frequency of services is considered by nearly half (47 per cent) of respondents as the factor that would be most likely to encourage them to use public transport more often. While focus group participants explained they would benefit from an increase in the frequency of bus services it was recognised, however, that in a rural setting there are limitations to the frequency with which services can operate.

The other factors considered to be most significant in encouraging more use of public transport are cheaper fares which 38 per cent of respondents believe would encourage them to use public transport more and provision of better information about routes and fares would encourage 34 per cent of respondents to use public transport more. Of all the factors that would encourage more frequent use of public transport cited by consumers, improving the provision of information would appear to have the least cost implications for the company and Translink should prioritise work in this area.

Figure 7 – Factors that would encourage more frequent use of public transport

(Base – all respondents N = 218)



Passenger involvement in transport service planning

When asked whether or not they would be willing to be involved in a public forum with the function of informing development of public transport provision in the future many focus group participants expressed scepticism concerning the usefulness of such an exercise. On the whole, the participants who stated they would like to be involved were either young people or parents of young children.

In 2012 the Consumer Council published its report *Enabling Effective Consumer Engagement in Public Transport Planning*. Based on engagement with consumers the report recommended that when developing Local Transport Plans, in order to enable consumers to effectively contribute to the process DRD should:

- Improve awareness of consultations and opportunities to contribute to transport planning amongst the public;
- Ensure language is clear and accessible and that documents are a manageable size;
- Employ a variety of engagement methods to allow for a broad range of consumers to contribute;
- Make greater use of existing networks and groups; and
- Provide clear and timely feedback to those who participate.

The Consumer Council encourages DRD to consider these recommendations when designing processes for involving consumers in transport service planning in the future.

When questioned regarding the best way of involving members of the public in service planning participants explained that a discussion group would be the most effective way of accessing public views on service proposals. Participants were not in favour of examining views through the format of public meetings.

The views of young people who use public transport to access South West Regional College Dungannon Campus

The initial phase of focus group research identified that young people in education used public transport more frequently than other participants, but for many of the young people, the infrequency of the bus services prohibited them staying for after school activities. In light of this finding, an additional two focus groups were held on 25 February 2014 comprising young people who use public transport to access the South West College Dungannon campus to examine the extent to which public transport meets the transport needs of young people accessing further education.

Travel behaviour

All of the participants that attended South West College used public transport at least once a week and all travelled on Ulsterbus interurban services, none used Ulsterbus Dungannon town services. The majority of participants explained they only use public transport to travel to and from college. While some participants use public transport for other journeys, in particular to travel to Belfast, for many, public transport was considered for other journeys only if there was no other option.

Reasons for using public transport

When asked why they use public transport the participants provided several reasons. Participants explained that using the bus was less expensive than driving and the majority of participants considered bus fares to be reasonably priced. One participant highlighted that a particular benefit of public transport was that in icy conditions they felt safer travelling by bus than driving their car.

A significant factor in motivating participants to travel by bus was that only a minority of participants were drivers. Many participants explained that the cost of buying, running, and insuring a car was prohibitive.

This is an interesting finding which contrasts with previous Consumer Council research which found that young people, particularly in rural areas intend to pass their driving test as soon as possible⁴. It should be noted, however, that given these focus groups did not include the views of young people in full time employment this finding is not considered to be representative of the views of all young people living in rural areas.

In contrast, it was noted that many of the participants did not have a driving license and were not intending to take their driving test because they could not afford to pay for driving lessons. It was also explained by a number of participants that even if they did get their driving license, they would continue to travel by bus as it is cheaper than driving.

“you’ve to think of the price of the car which can be £1,000 for something decent, and the insurance, and then the petrol money, it’s just handier getting the bus”.

None of the participants lived close enough to college to walk there and no participants cycle as a means of transport.

“I only cycled once to class and back – never again”.

Problems with public transport

Participants raised a number of issues which they disliked about using public transport. A number of participants noted that they didn’t like travelling by bus as the buses were often cold and that condensation was a problem, particularly in winter and in mornings. Participants also explained that some bus drivers could provide better customer service, particularly with regards to the manner in which they engage with passengers.

“say you gave them the money and you say thanks and they just give you a big dirty look”.

⁴ Transport matters (2011) the Consumer Council.

A participant noted that when using services which are also used by school children, the behaviour of the school children could be difficult and had the potential to make the journey unpleasant. It was explained by another participant that the route he frequently travels on is indirect and it therefore takes a long time to travel by bus in comparison to travelling by car.

Frequency of services

Participants explained that for certain routes, bus services operate fairly frequently. The example was given for services operating between Coalisland and Dungannon which participants explained depart up to every 30 minutes during the day. Participants noted, however, that this level of frequency was not mirrored on other services and one participant explained she was only able to avail of two services daily to travel to college. Participants were in agreement that they would benefit from increased frequency of services on many routes, suggesting that services that depart every 60 minutes would be an acceptable level of frequency.

I live out in the middle of the country and I think there's maybe two buses all day, 8am and 6pm and that doesn't suit".

Participants also explained that if it was not feasible for Translink to operate services more frequently throughout the day, an increased frequency of services during afternoon and evening times would be of greatest benefit to enable students to return from college or socialise in the evenings. This issue will be examined in further detail in research to be conducted in 2014/15 examining the travel behaviour of young people attending SWC Dungannon campus.

"If you need to stay late or anything like that you have to get somebody else to come and get you"

The infrequent provision of services was noted as a factor which limited the ability of students to participate in extracurricular activities after college.

While none of the participants attended evening classes as part of their studies it was explained that because the final bus for each route departs at approximately 6pm, students attending evening classes would be unable to use public transport to travel home.

It should be noted that none of the participants that took part in the second of the two focus groups were able to travel home by bus as the second group did not finish until approximately 7pm.

The participants explained that it is not possible to use public transport for socialising in the evening and most relied on taxis if going for a night out. Participants also explained that they rely heavily on friends and family for lifts.

A number of participants explained that they structure their education around the availability of public transport and spend time in the library studying while waiting for their bus as their classes often finish a significant amount of time before the next bus is available.

“if you finish at 2pm, the bus is at 2pm but you have to walk up the town to get it and then if you finish at 2pm you can’t get it, you have to wait to 3:30pm until the next bus”.

Ticket preferences

A number of participants explained they purchase single journey tickets to travel to college as they hope to travel home by getting a lift from a friend. The outcome, however, is that often the students would travel home on a second single ticket because they were unable to get a lift, costing them more than if they had purchased a return ticket in the morning. It was also explained that some students bought single tickets in case they missed the only available return service and then had to get a lift.

While a number of the participants had a bus pass for free travel because they live more than three miles from college no participants were aware of the smartlink ticketing option, and only one participant was aware of the yLink option. Therefore the students that pay for their travel are unable to avail of the best price ticket options as they are not in possession of the relevant information.

No participants could recall any awareness raising work undertaken by Translink at South West College. When asked what would be the most effective way for Translink to reach students with information concerning service and ticket options a large number of participants explained they would not take information fliers being handed out by Translink staff in communal areas of the college and many would not approach a member of staff at an information stand.

The majority of participants were of the opinion that the best way to engage with students would be for a member of Translink staff to provide information talks in classroom settings. Information posters displayed in college and on buses were also suggested as possible options for raising students' awareness of ticketing options and service information.

To address the lack of awareness of Translink services amongst young people attending SWC Dungannon campus, Translink should conduct outreach activities at the campus and should take consideration of the opinions outlined above concerning the most effective way to engage with students. Translink should also consider similar outreach information events at other further education colleges elsewhere in Northern Ireland.

“They'd need to go round the classes for us to listen to them”.

Experiences of using public transport outside the Dungannon / Cookstown area

When asked if they had any experiences of using public transport in places other than the Dunagannon / Cookstown area, a number of participants explained they used Goldline services to travel to Belfast and Metro services in Belfast. When asked what features of these services they thought were better than the Ulsterbus services they used in Dungannon they explained that the greater frequency of Metro services is something they preferred. Other participants had used public transport services in England and explained that the customer service they received on these services was better than on Translink services.

Participants explained, however, that improving the frequency of services is their top priority. Only where services operate as frequently as once an hour would participants prioritise the improvement of vehicles over increases in frequency of services.

Awareness of how to make a complaint

While a number of participants explained they had encountered poor service which they considered would warrant making a complaint, no participants had ever made a complaint. The most common reason for wanting to make a complaint was bus drivers failing to stop for passengers waiting at bus stops or bus drivers failing to stop to let passengers off at the desired stop.

Reasons given for failure to make a complaint included apathy and a lack of knowledge of how to make a complaint. Only a small number of participants indicated they would be confident to make a complaint.

One participant explained that if she experienced poor service in future she would make a complaint at the bus station or by telephone and one participant said he was aware that passengers could make a complaint via the complaints section of the Translink website. Participants explained they would benefit from Translink providing information regarding how to make a complaint when delivering information talks to students. When conducting outreach at SWC and other further education colleges, Translink should aim to raise awareness of how to make a complaint if poor service is experienced.

Summary

This research was conducted to help inform the Integrated Public Transport Pilot Project currently in operation in the Dungannon and Cookstown areas. The information collected will serve to inform the provision of public transport services in the Dungannon and Cookstown areas and will help inform the development of local transport plans elsewhere in Northern Ireland. The purpose of the pilot project is to consider the opportunities for a more joined up approach to the delivery of publically funded passenger transport services with a view to improving efficiency and delivering better travel options for the passenger.

This research project has captured a snapshot of consumers' views with regard to current travel habits and views on public transport that should be considered when evaluating the emerging findings of the Integrated Public Transport Pilot Project.

Key Points

Purpose of Journey

35 per cent of respondents to the on street survey used public transport at least once a week. 51 per cent of respondents who reported using public transport cite the main reason for use is shopping.

70 per cent of respondents to the on street survey indicated that they would like to use public transport more often.

- 68 per cent would like to use public transport more for shopping.
- 37 per cent would like to use public transport more for socialising.
- 15 per cent would like to use it more for commuting to work.

Consideration should be given to how well public transport passenger services link the main population areas to the main shopping and entertainment areas locally and further afield.

Translink should consider undertaking further initiatives to promote awareness of the potential cost savings of travelling by public transport to people who usually travel by car.

The focus groups that contained students reported higher levels of public transport use than the other groups. The infrequency of bus services was cited

as a factor that prohibited greater use. Similar views were also given to the Committee for Regional Development at the Committee meeting held at Loughry College in Cookstown in December 2013.

Consideration should be given to reviewing how well public transport passenger services link in with key travel periods at local education facilities and the proximity of available halts.

Travel Patterns

The on street survey identified that 71 per cent of those who use public transport stated their average journey was more than 10 miles. In contrast, there was a view from the focus groups that the majority of travel during the week is contained within a 10-15 mile radius with journeys further afield undertaken at the weekends.

The ease of access to the private car was cited as the most significant factor discouraging greater use of public transport, as has been the case in previous Consumer Council research. However, the issue of developing a pattern of use is an interesting finding from the research.

A number of focus group participants expressed the view that they had always access to a car and therefore never developed a pattern of travel using public transport. These consumers have never had to consider public transport as an alternative or have never had an appropriate alternative to consider. There is a clear distinction between this group of consumers and the younger consumers in full time education for many of whom driving is not an option because it is considered prohibitively expensive.

Given that there is a large number of respondents who expressed a willingness to use public transport more consideration should be given to developing a travel needs analysis to identify key travel patterns. This exercise would need to identify the reason for travel, the method and route chosen, the time of travel, the frequency of travel for this purpose on this route and, if possible, the estimated cost. This information could then be cross referenced against current and potential routes and frequency of public transport passenger services, with a view to identifying gaps that could realistically be addressed.

Improvements in Public Transport

Perceptions of public transport were largely positive and there was a general acknowledgement in focus groups of significant improvements to public

transport over the last 10 years. This research does, however, give views on some areas participants feel could be improved.

Passenger Information

Focus group participants noted the importance of clear passenger information on timetables and fares. A number of comments were made in relation to difficulties using the Translink website to obtain information and out of date timetable information at bus stops. Of particular significance is the fact that only one participant of the focus groups involving young people in full time education at South West College had heard of Smartlink and yLink ticketing options.

Given the importance of timetable information at bus stops, particularly in rural areas when this may be the only information available, it is essential that the accessibility of timetable information is reviewed. Bus stop timetables should be reviewed periodically to ensure they are up to date.

Further promotion of Translink services should be undertaken to ensure potential passengers have knowledge of routes and understand how to access timetables. Translink should take consideration of consumers' preference to have information provided via mail shots and the local press.

Translink should improve its awareness raising work with young people to increase knowledge of services, best value ticket options, and how to make a complaint if poor service is received.

Frequency, Routes and Value for Money

When asked what elements would encourage greater use of public transport participants cited increased frequency, greater choice of routes, cheaper fares and better information as the main factors.

A key objective of the Integrated Public Transport Pilot Project is to identify the potential for delivering publically funded transport services in a more efficient manner, including health and education related transport services.

Part of this consideration should be the assessment of opening up existing services primarily used for education and health purposes. Opening these services, subject to the relevant licensing considerations, could lead to an increased availability of routes and potentially increased frequency of existing routes served by more than one service.

A travel needs analysis would identify when and where people currently travel. This information would then allow for an analysis of current services and the potential for increased frequency and new routes, either via the development of new services or the opening of existing, restricted services to the general public.

Value for Money

Cheaper fares was cited by respondents to the on-street survey as being a key factor to encourage greater use of public transport and the issue of value for money was discussed in greater detail at the focus groups. There was a view that travelling alone by car can be more expensive than travelling by public transport. However, if more than one person is travelling the cost of car travel is static but public transport travel costs increase.

The idea of introducing a reward in the form of 'free journeys' and introducing return tickets that do not have to be used on the same day were put forward by focus group participants.

Translink is currently reviewing the ticket options it offers and is conducting research to examine the views of passengers regarding the type of ticket options they want. **This information, when available, will be useful for the stakeholders of the pilot group when considering the public transport needs of local consumers.**

Conclusion

This research study has outlined the key actions that should be considered in the context of the Integrated Public Transport Pilot Project. Of particular significance is the need to convince non-users and infrequent users of the benefits of public transport if they are to be encouraged to use public transport as an alternative to travelling by private car. There is also a need to ensure public transport better caters for those who are largely or entirely dependent on public transport for their travel needs.

In order to encourage consumers to change their travel behaviour the public transport services available must address the factors that are of most importance to them. The consumers that participated in this research study have identified the convenience, frequency and value for money of services, and the availability of routes as the factors that matter most in informing their choices regarding whether or not to travel by public transport.

A travel needs analysis is required to identify when, where and why people travel. It will then be the role of transport providers and stakeholders to develop and promote services that encourage consumers to reconsider how they travel.



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