



CONSUMERS' VIEWS CONCERNING TRANSLINK TIMETABLING INFORMATION

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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.

Background

The Consumer Council has a statutory role to represent all passengers travelling to, from and within Northern Ireland. This includes users of public transport.

In 2013 the Consumer Council conducted research¹ which asked over 500 public transport users a range of questions in relation to public transport passenger information. A significant finding from the research was that many respondents were not using the various sources of public transport passenger information.

Therefore, the Consumer Council conducted further research between late 2013 and early 2014 to identify the key issues for public transport users and potential users concerning the accessibility of timetable information for Translink services.

Research Objectives

Four sources of Translink timetable information were tested by consumers; these were:

- Translink's online journey planner;
- Translink's online timetables;
- Translink's telephone contact centre; and
- Translink's hard copy timetables.

In conducting the research the Consumer Council's key objectives were:

- To identify which elements of each information source consumers rated positively; and
- To identify the improvements that could be made to each information source.

¹ <http://www.consumercouncil.org.uk/publications/?id=1048>

Methodology

The research was conducted using focus groups comprising consumers that were regular users of Translink services; consumers that were infrequent users of Translink services; and consumers that were non-users of Translink services. Three groups were conducted, two groups of eight consumers and one group of seven consumers.

Of the groups comprising eight consumers, one group included consumers that live in the Belfast City Council area and the other comprised consumers that lived within a five to ten mile radius of Belfast.

In addition, the following criteria were adhered to:

- A minimum of three male or female participants per group;
- All participants were frequent (at least once a week) internet users;
- All participants were in employment (full or part-time); and
- In group two – at least three participants were infrequent public transport users (used public transport several times a month) and at least three respondents were public transport non-users (used public transport less than once every six months).

The group of seven participants comprised five women, and two men with a disability that impacts on their everyday life. Participants had either a physical or sensory disability. The findings from this focus group are presented on page 16 of this report.

Each participant was asked to conduct a series of pre-task exercises in advance of attending the group discussion. The pre-tasks involved the participants planning journeys to their place of work for their usual start time and to their nearest acute hospital for a 2pm weekday appointment using three timetable information sources:

- Translink's online journey planner;
- Translink's online timetables; and
- Translink's telephone centre.

In the focus groups the participants were required to plan the two journeys a final time using hard copy timetables.

Key Findings

Online Journey Planner

On the whole, participants considered Translink's journey planner to be accessible and easy to use. This view was consistent amongst participants regardless of the frequency with which they used Translink services. Participants were positive about the journey planner on the basis that it combined a variety of Translink services, because it included a street map and because it was available to download and use with a smart phone.

The journey planner was particularly helpful for participants that were less familiar with the route of the journey being planned, or public transport generally. In the main it was regarded as customer focused with an accessible layout and as being suitable for all services examined (Metro, Ulsterbus and Northern Ireland Railways [NIR]). Participants explained that the information provided concerning the amount of walking involved in each journey was also helpful.

Participants' criticisms of the journey planner focused on the fact that fare information was not included. Some participants did find fare information for Metro services via the 'fares' tab on the website but information was unavailable for Ulsterbus fares. A number of participants also found difficulty in identifying the start and end point of their journey with other respondents complaining that too much information was provided through the inclusion of too many options.

A number of participants from the focus group comprising people with a disability explained that they found the journey planner difficult to use. Some of the participants from this group explained that they would not be confident planning a journey using this tool, and noted that they would experience difficulty in connecting between services because of their mobility impairment.

Online timetables

Overall, online timetables were not viewed positively by participants, especially by those less familiar with a particular route. Complaints were raised concerning an inability to find certain bus stops, particularly with reference to the pre-task requiring participants to plan a journey to their nearest acute hospital.

Many participants found the font small and difficult to read. Participants thought the layout was confusing and raised concerns that the information contained in the timetables may be out of date and not take account of road works or the impact caused by school holidays for example. In addition, participants were critical of the lack of interactivity and the inability to filter information. Participants considered this was expected from any modern website. Furthermore, the PDF format was criticised for being slow to download and participants highlighted that users would need to already have Adobe software in place to use the online timetables.

Participants were of the view that online timetables seemed to cater for the needs of passengers who knew their route in advance and wanted to find all the times of alternative services available to them. This was considered particularly relevant for train users.

Some of the participants from the focus group comprising people with a disability explained that they would find it very difficult to plan connecting journeys using the online timetables. It was also highlighted that the online timetables did not contain any information concerning whether the services in question were accessible for wheelchair users or people with a mobility impairment.

Overall, online timetables were not perceived as being customer focused by frequent users, infrequent users and non-users of Translink services. Most participants could perceive little need for the online timetables and they were considered by some as “an old fashioned journey planner”.

Translink contact centre

Generally, participants were positive about their experiences of planning journeys using the Translink contact centre as a source of information. Less frequent and non-users of public transport in particular benefited as contact centre staff were able to respond to information requests.

Most participants had a good experience and found the staff to be quick, helpful and knowledgeable. In addition, there was an added value element as contact centre staff were able to provide information on road closures and traffic jams. Using the contact centre was regarded as the fastest means of accessing the required timetable information and it also provided reassurance for participants who were less familiar with the public transport network.

However, participants' experiences were not universally positive and a few individuals (both users and non-users of public transport) encountered a less

than acceptable service. Some participants experienced long delays before their calls were answered, and one participant explained that a staff member hung up on them before they had accessed the information they needed. One participant felt that contact centre staff were less knowledgeable regarding journeys outside of the Belfast area.

The contact centre was considered suitable for all passengers and in particular for older, less frequent and less IT literate individuals. However, there were some complaints concerning the operating times of the contact centre. Respondents were of the opinion that the contact centre should be open during all times that Translink services operate.

On the whole, participants from the focus group comprising people with a disability found the contact centre to be very useful and explained that staff were helpful. It was explained, however, that more information could be provided concerning fares, and information about where to make service connections could be improved.

Overall the contact centre was regarded as customer focused, with the staff providing information that was not available either online or in hard copy. It was regarded as a personalised service providing up to date information concerning all modes of public transport.

Hard copy timetables

Participants who used the Metro service generally found hard copy timetables satisfactory. They particularly liked the maps, which were considered clear and informative. The size of the timetables also made them suitable to carry around.

However, infrequent and non-users and passengers attempting to plan journeys that differed from their routine journeys (particularly when using services other than Metro) had a very different experience. Many participants complained that the timetables were hard to read and difficult to understand. They also complained that not all stops on bus lines were included in the timetables and that this caused confusion. In addition, participants were unsure about how to access timetable information for services outside of their residential area, for example, how they would access hard copy timetable information to plan a journey to Dungannon if they lived in Lisburn.

Overall participants considered hard copy timetables to be targeted at frequent users particularly of Metro and NIR services. For these users the timetables were considered to be customer focused. However, less frequent

users and users of Ulsterbus services suggested there were issues that needed to be addressed to ensure the information could be easily understood; for example participants suggested including timetable information for all bus stops on each route.

On the whole, the participants from the group comprising people with a disability felt that the printed timetables were easier to use than the online timetables and for a number of participants, large print hard copy timetables were the preferred source of timetable information. The participants explained, however, that it would be difficult to use printed timetables to plan a journey which required the passenger to make connections between services.

Translink's Response

Translink welcomes the findings of this research as they largely reflect our understanding of how each of the different information sources are used and the benefit of offering a range of options to suit differing passenger needs, abilities and preferences. The research also highlights some of the limitations experienced by passengers and supports Translink's future development plans.

It is worth noting that over 10,000 online timetables are downloaded daily, providing a viable and extremely popular means of information for existing users. On average around 30,000 queries each day are processed through the various journey planner interfaces (including around 2,000 queries per day through the contact centre). An increasing number of customers are using the Translink app with over 85,000 app downloads to date.

Since this research was conducted Translink has added rail fares to the contact centre journey planner interface, and is due to release the fares functionality in the next version of the internet journey planner and app imminently. Going forward, Translink is in the process of reviewing bus fares information for inclusion in the journey planner.

Other recent improvements include availability of information about accessible services and work is due to commence in 2015 to develop the network data to include information about accessibility of station/interchange infrastructure.

Additional timetable options have also been developed for online use offering passengers a range of stop specific, service specific or personal timetables. Timetables are dynamic (created on the fly) which ensures they are always current and information is consistent across outputs.

New projects being started will provide improved customer information in stations and real time information within the journey planner and online/on mobile/app. This will include easy to use 'next bus/train' functionality for all customer versions.

The operating hours of the contact centre are kept under regular review and Translink will continue to do this.

Research Findings

Online journey planner

Along with the Translink contact centre the online journey planner was regarded by participants as being the most customer friendly method of accessing timetable information.

All participants, regardless of the frequency of their public transport use, suggested the journey planner was relatively straightforward to use, even for passengers who are less IT literate. Participants considered the journey planner to be inclusive of the needs of passengers as it provided different options including the various modes of transport and enabled users to select routes with the least walking between stops to meet the needs of wheelchair users and people who are unable to walk long distances.

Participants recognised that the journey planner could also be downloaded to a smart phone so it was suitable for planning journeys 'on the go'. However, its main usage was perceived to be for planning journeys in advance.

Participants were of the opinion that the level of detail included in the journey planner was sufficient, as it provided information on where the relevant stop was and where to walk to if passengers were required to change services. The inclusion of the map was welcomed as it provided clear information concerning the walking route to the next stop.

Participants were critical of the fact that there was no fare information contained in the journey planner. Some participants did notice the 'fares' tab at the top of the web page and as a result could find some fares for Metro services but no participants were able to access fares for Ulsterbus services.

Concerns were also expressed as to the accuracy of walking times and the pace used to calculate these times (Translink has advised that industry standards are used.) This would suggest that the participants were not aware of the walking speed options under the *more journey preferences* tab. Some participants also complained of too much information being included in relation to the number of journey options provided.

Some participants also expressed a difficulty in understanding the journey planner and this mainly related to not knowing whether they should input their

address or the nearest station or stop as the starting point for their journey. The same participants were also unsure about what they should input as the end point of the journey.

"It took time for me to find starting points on journey nearest my needs".

(Frequent user of public transport)

On the whole, however, the journey planner was considered to be straightforward to use and designed with passengers in mind. Eleven of the sixteen participants explained it was easy to find the information they required, well laid out, and very detailed.

"The website layout was fairly straightforward and all I had to do was click on Journey Planner and put in my route and it all came up. Everything was easy to find and well laid out".

(Infrequent user of public transport)

Online timetables

Many respondents found Translink's online timetables difficult to use and it was the least preferred option for finding out information on service times amongst all participants. In particular, the type and size of the font used was considered too small and difficult to read.

The online timetables were considered difficult to use for individuals who use public transport less frequently and for participants seeking information on routes they were less familiar with. It was widely considered that to make use of the online timetables the user required an existing level of knowledge of the route. Only five participants considered it easy to find the information they required while the majority of participants experienced difficulty, mainly in relation to finding specific routes and stops on those routes.

“Doesn’t show all bus stops so it's difficult to know where to get off”.

(Frequent user of public transport)

“It takes you to know which one [service] you need. I would go to the journey planner to get that information”.

(Frequent user of public transport)

Some participants found it difficult to understand which stop they would need to use as not all stops were included in the timetable and information was not available in relation to the cost of the journey. In addition, some participants suggested that the timetables would be unable to take account of changes to journey times caused by roadworks or the impact on traffic flow as a result of school holidays.

“To obtain fares information required using additional screens”.

(Infrequent user of public transport)

Participants explained that they expected some level of interactivity that would enable users to filter timetables by the week day or weekend, time of day and route. In the absence of these options the online timetables were regarded as cumbersome and difficult to understand.

“There is too much information that you don’t need”.

(Infrequent or non user of public transport)

Given the online timetables are provided in a PDF format, participants noted that some people would need to download the compatible software to enable the information to be displayed.

Some participants searching for information regarding NIR services found it difficult to identify the express services and the lack of information concerning fares was again highlighted by participants.

While frequent users did regard the online timetables as helpful, infrequent users and participants that were unfamiliar with the journey they were planning found the information to be of limited use.

“Yes it is useful, but if one didn't know about bus routes and services they would not know where to start”.

(Frequent user of public transport)

Telephone contact centre

The contact centre was widely regarded as a very easy, customer focused source of information and suitable for accessing information concerning all modes of public transport. The majority of respondents reported excellent service with information provided quickly.

“The person was very helpful and pulled up the information very quickly. They had a courteous manner and provided additional information concerning delays and fare promotions”.

(Frequent user of public transport)

“The staff member was helpful in clearly stating my options and making sure as it was a trip to hospital, if walking would be ok”.

(Infrequent user of public transport)

Participants reported instances of contact centre staff providing information concerning alternatives for some journeys that respondents had not been aware of, such as using the Belfast to Ballymena Ulsterbus service to get to Antrim hospital and alternative journey time options. This service provided reassurance and particularly benefitted participants that were unfamiliar with the route or with using public transport generally.

Participants commented on the helpful attitude of staff, explaining that the staff often finished the call with *'Is there anything else I can do?'* adding to the perception of the service being very customer focused. Participants also explained they benefitted from staff being able to provide the exact price for the journey being planned.

"The man that answered the phone was polite, efficient and knowledgeable - definitely the easiest way to access Translink!"

(Non-user of public transport)

A few individuals however explained that they had experienced poor customer service when using the telephone contact centre:

- One participant explained they had to repeat their journey requirements twice and then the operator hung up without providing any information.
- One participant was on hold for 15 minutes before talking to an operator.
- One participant explained their conversation lasted nearly 20 minutes as they were put on hold several times after their call was answered. Although the journey information was eventually forthcoming, the participant suggested that the initial lack of knowledge and information was due to the journey being outside the Greater Belfast area.

"I had to wait on hold for 10-15 minutes to talk to an operator".

(Non-user of public transport)

“The girls I spoke to found it hard to find information on the 75A bus service (from Craigavon train station to hospital)”.

(Non-user of public transport)

In addition, a number of participants expressed the view that the contact centre opening times should mirror the operating hours of Translink services. It was suggested that this would benefit passengers when they are out and unable to access the internet to check service times.

Hard copy timetables

For many participants especially those who were less frequent users of public transport or who lived outside the Metro service area, hard copy timetables were considered to be a difficult means of finding information.

“The information was there, I just found it a little hard to find in the book”.

(Infrequent user of public transport)

Some of the older respondents explained they were unable to read the timetables without glasses and some couldn't complete the journey planning exercise in the focus group for this reason.

Frequent users of public transport and those conducting journeys within the Metro area found the exercise more straightforward. These participants explained it was easy to understand and find the information required. Many participants also explained that they considered the inclusion of maps in the Metro and Ulsterbus timetables to be helpful.

“The straightforward layout of the timetable makes information easy to find. The timetables are also colour coded for different routes which makes things easier”.

(Frequent user of public transport)

Participants found the Metro timetables to be easily identifiable by route number and by colour. However, even passengers that were familiar with the Metro service found calculating the journey time difficult.

'You have to work out the length of the journey'.

(Frequent user of public transport)

When planning journeys on less familiar routes and routes outside the Metro area participants found using the hard copy timetables more difficult.

Participants suggested that all the bus stops were not marked for Ulsterbus services and this led to confusion when planning journeys.

'It looks like the buses might just drive past the hospital'.

(Infrequent or non-user of public transport)

Some participants complained that they would need several timetables to plan their journey. Participants also commented that the only pricing information available was for Smartcard fares and the majority couldn't find any other information on fares. This caused some confusion amongst less frequent public transport users.

Overall, attitudes varied on the usefulness of hard copy timetables. Participants who were frequent users found the process reasonably straightforward, those less familiar with public transport had a less than positive opinion regarding the experience, complaining of inability to find prices and of difficulty in locating the required service information.

"The timetables are difficult to quickly use to obtain a journey plan for an unfamiliar route".

(Infrequent user of public transport)

"Just a page of the fares would be great".

(Infrequent user of public transport)

The views of passengers with a disability

Online Journey Planner

Only two of the participants in the focus group comprising people with a disability had used the Translink journey planner prior to undertaking the journey planner pre-task. While none of the participants experienced difficulty in accessing the journey planner, the participants reported varied experiences of using the tool with some finding it accessible and easy to use whilst others found it very difficult to use. One of the participants who encountered difficulties when using the journey planner explained that her journey to hospital would require her to connect with Metro services, however, she explained the journey planner gave information on services to access the city centre but did not provide information concerning how to travel on to the Royal Victoria Hospital.

"It took me longer trying to use the journey planner, than it actually takes me to drive to the hospital".

(Focus group participant)

When asked if they could find fare prices when using the journey planner the majority of participants explained that they were unable to do so. One participant who did find fares information explained that while she was able to access information for a single Metro fare, there was no information concerning whether a return fare was available. Participants explained that the journey planner would be improved by the inclusion of fares information.

One participant explained that while she found the journey planner to be straightforward to access and use, she would be unable to use the public transport services available to travel to work for her normal start time. The participant explained that the journey which would take her 25 minutes if travelling by car would take 2 hours and 20 minutes according to the journey

planner due to the indirect nature of the route and the need for connecting services. Another participant explained that while she was able to use the journey planner to plan her journey to her nearest hospital, the length of time it would take to make the journey compared to travelling by car made the public transport option unrealistic.

Another participant explained that while he also found the journey planner simple to use, its suggested option was not particularly practical. He explained that the journey planner suggested travelling by Metro and then connecting to an Ulsterbus service for a relatively short distance whereas it would be simpler in practice to walk to the final destination after disembarking the Metro service rather than taking the Ulsterbus. He also explained that he knew that if he walked a short distance from his home he would be able to access a Metro service that would take him directly to his intended hospital destination but that the journey planner did not present this as an option.

Participants explained that they felt confident that the information provided by the journey planner is accurate. However, one participant explained that she planned the same journey using the web version of the journey planner using a tablet computer and the mobile application on a Smartphone and the different platforms provided different information in terms of the 'preferred option' suggested.

One participant explained that while she had no difficulty in using the journey planner, she would find it too difficult to change buses and so she would be unable to make the journey using public transport.

One participant who lives in Bangor explained that the journey planner directed her to take an Ulsterbus to the Hollywood Road and then connect to a Metro service to access the Ulster Hospital. She explained however, that there is a service that operates from Bangor direct to the Ulster hospital but that the journey planner did not suggest this as an option².

One of the participants explained that the journey planned on the journey planner would have left her with a 23 minute walk from Great Victoria Street Train Station to the Royal Victoria Hospital which she explained was approximately the amount of time it would take to drive from her home to the

² Further research following the focus group highlighted that the service in question, the Ulsterbus 6B, departs once a day on weekdays from Bangor Bus Station at 8:15am and therefore did not appear on the journey planner for the pre-task scenario of an appointment at the Ulster Hospital at 2pm.

hospital. She also explained that the services planned would have required her to arrive more than one hour and thirty minutes before her hospital appointment.

Some participants explained they would be very confident to follow the instruction of the journey planner while others explained that they would not be confident if they had to make a connecting journey. One participant explained she would not have any confidence in the suggested journey option to travel to her nearest hospital. One participant also noted that the journey planner would be very difficult to use for an individual unfamiliar with the area they were travelling to.

“I'd actually wipe it out and start again, I just think there's far too much information in too many pokey places, you have to poke around to find it”.

(Focus group participant)

“If it explained the zones better, the inner zone, the city zone, well where do those begin? If they were mapped out, things explained in a very, very simple easy to use manner, that's what I would go for”.

(Focus group participant)

Online timetables

Three of the participants explained that they had used the online timetable function of the Translink website prior to completing the pre-task.

One participant reported a negative experience of using the online timetables and explained that she found it very difficult to access the information she needed to plan her journey.

Another participant explained that had she not first used the journey planner to plan her journey to work, she would not have known which online

timetables to access to plan the shortest journey to work as the shortest journey by public transport differed from the shortest route by car.

“For the online timetables you need to know your journey, you need to know your connections, whereas the journey planner does that for you, so which would I use? The journey planner”.

(Focus group participant)

On the whole, participants explained that they would not be confident using the online timetables to plan journeys where a connection was required. Participants also felt the information could be presented more clearly and would prefer that the timetables did not combine presenting the time of each service with information explaining services operate ‘at X minutes past the hour’.

All of the participants said that they did not see any information concerning whether the services were accessible for people with a mobility impairment. One participant explained that she would need to travel to the bus stop using a mobility scooter but that no information was available on the online timetables explaining whether the services were accessible for a person using a wheelchair or mobility scooter.

One participant explained that when using public transport there is no information provided concerning the location of stops. The participant gave the example of a tourist travelling to Stormont, explaining that it would be difficult for the passenger to know the correct stop to disembark at.

Few participants said they were able to find fare information when using the online timetables, although some participants explained they found information directing them to call the contact centre to access this information. One participant who phoned the contact centre for this information explained that she called at 10:30am and the call handler was unable to immediately access the information. The participant explained the staff member arranged to call her back but did not call until 3:15pm.

She explained that the call handler provided her with two different fares but was unsure which one was correct. One passenger explained that when

planning his journey he was able to access fare information online for the Metro leg of his journey but not for the connecting Ulsterbus service which he found frustrating.

Contact Centre

Only one participant had used the Translink contact centre prior to completing the pre-task exercise.

On the whole participants found the contact centre to be very useful and explained that staff were helpful. A participant who has a hearing impairment advised that he found the contact centre staff member he dealt with to be helpful when he explained he has a hearing impairment and needed her to speak clearly. He explained, however, that while he found the member of staff helpful on the occasion of the pre-task exercise, on other occasions he has found the contact centre staff to be less so.

“Both calls were answered quickly which isn't always the case when you contact a call centre”.

(Focus group participant)

One participant explained however that further information could have been provided concerning fares and multi journey ticket options and it was highlighted that the fares information given to one participant when using the contact centre was different from the fares information he accessed online. Another participant explained that some of the information provided by the contact centre staff member could have been confusing for a person unfamiliar with Belfast.

One participant explained that she couldn't access the contact centre because by the time she had returned home from work it had closed.

All of the participants reported that no information was provided by contact centre staff regarding whether or not services were accessible without requesting this information.

When participants were asked which information source they would choose if they had to plan a journey for the following day they were fairly equally divided over using the journey planner and the contact centre. Two participants said they would use the online timetables, but only if they were planning a short journey with no connections.

Hard copy timetables

During the focus group the participants were provided with hard copy timetables and asked to plan a journey from their home to Belfast city centre arriving at 10am on a weekday. On the whole the participants were very positive in their views concerning the hard copy timetables. All of the Metro timetables were provided in large print format and the participants that used these were very positive when assessing their usefulness.

One participant that was planning her journey by train explained that she found the NIR timetables to be easier to use than the Metro and Ulsterbus timetables as the NIR timetable included less information. The participant noted, however, that the train station nearest her home is not accessible for wheelchair users or people with young children in a buggy because the platform is accessed via stairs.

"I would use this, I wouldn't bother going online again for all the frustrations that I suffered, this [large print paper timetable] is first class".

(Focus group participant)

On the whole, the participants felt that printed timetables were easier to use than the online timetables. The participants explained, however that it would be difficult to plan a journey using printed timetables which required the passenger to make connections between services.

“You'd have to know your journey, again, like I was saying with the online timetable, I would be ok if I knew where I was going to use another connection but if I didn't know somewhere new to me, I would use the journey planner”.

(Focus group participant)

Conclusions

On the whole the focus group participants were impressed with the Translink online journey planner and the contact centre but considered the online and hard copy timetables to be of limited use.

The comments made by the majority of focus group participants indicate that the online journey planner appears to be performing well. It was regarded as modern and customer focused, and suitable for most public transport users as it requires only limited IT literacy to operate. However, a number of participants from the focus group comprising people with a disability found the journey planner to be cumbersome and inaccurate and suggested the information source required significant revision to ensure it is accessible for all passengers.

The contact centre was generally regarded as customer focused and an accessible and useful source for finding service time information. It was regarded as the preferred source of timetable information by many participants, especially those on the go and those who need reassurance when planning their journey.

In comparison to the largely positive reviews of the journey planner and the contact centre, the online timetables were perceived as dated and limited by their lack of user interactivity. The online timetables were regarded as having limited usefulness and the general perception was that they were on the whole primarily for passengers who regularly travelled on a particular service and were familiar with the route but needed information regarding service times.

Hard copy timetables were considered limited in their usefulness by the majority of participants, although a number of participants from the focus group comprising people with a disability cited the large print hard copy timetables as their preferred source of information. In addition to people with a visual impairment the primary audience for hard copy timetables was considered to be frequent users of public transport, especially NIR and Metro users.

The ability to get accurate, easy to use information is the first step in being able to use public transport. The findings of this research build on the

Consumer Council research published in 2013³ which found that passengers used a range of information sources. Therefore accurate information on services, particularly where services are cancelled or delayed, is required across all mediums to keep passengers informed.

It is therefore clear from the research the Consumer Council has conducted in this area that public transport passenger information is largely accessible and useable for the majority of passengers. Most information services are viewed as customer focused and enable passengers to plan journeys. Issues arise, however, when it is necessary to use more than one mode of transport to complete a journey and the limited provision of information about fares is also an issue that needs to be addressed.

In the Consumer Council's 2013 research report the availability of real time information about services was cited as important, along with information through alternative means such as SMS text messaging. The usage of social media sites for passenger information purposes was identified as being low which will impact on many passengers' ability to access information outside of the Translink contact centre opening hours, an issue that was also highlighted in the focus groups. Therefore the provision of Translink's passenger information must develop to respond to the needs of passengers.

³ The Consumer Council *Consumer Views on Encouraging Modal Shift and Improving Public Transport Passenger Information* (2013).

Recommendations

- Translink should review the availability and accessibility of fares information across all sources of passenger information.
- All key stops on routes (such as hospitals) should be highlighted across all sources of passenger timetable information.
- A review of contact centre opening times should be considered. Flexible and increased opening times should be an option during periods of delays and disruption.
- All timetable information should include details of whether services are accessible for people with a mobility impairment.
- Large print timetables should be available alongside standard hard copy timetables in bus and rail stations.
- Translink should review the accessibility of timetable information at bus stops and bus stop timetables should be reviewed periodically to ensure they are up to date⁴.
- Translink should review the content and presentation of online and hard copy timetables. Consideration should be given to the following points:
 - 1) Amend online timetables to enable users to filter by day of travel and time of day.
 - 2) An indication of which routes are temporarily changed or subject to road works would benefit the journey planner and online timetables.

⁴ This issue was identified in the Consumer Council report *Integrated Transport Pilot Project: Travel Patterns and Transport Needs in Dungannon And Cookstown Area* (2014) and given its relevance in relation to passengers' information needs the recommendation has been included in this report.

- 3) The *link to all stops timetable* on online timetables should be made more prominent.

- 4) An index in Metro timetables detailing the pages dedicated to weekdays and weekends and outward and return journeys would be beneficial.