

Public Transport Reform Consultation

Who is consulting?	The Department for Regional Development [DRD]
Purpose of Consultation	<p>To outline proposals for the reform of public transport: services by rail, bus, coach where passengers pay a fare, either in advance or at the time of travel.</p> <p>The two main objectives of this reform are to improve customer service and value for money by introducing performance-based contracts and to set up a new departmental public transport agency.</p>
Vision and Overall Objectives	The provision of a customer focused, high quality integrated public transport system, which is sustainable, provides good value for money, enhances competitiveness, helps sustain economic growth, promotes regional development and contributes to equality and social inclusion.
Anticipated Benefits	<p>Improved focus on customers' travel needs with introduction of integrated local transport plans linked to community planning.</p> <p>Performance based contracts that would include reliability, punctuality and good customer service.</p> <p>Improved integration of timetables and ticketing between different transport modes and different providers.</p> <p>Introduction of single call centre to provide passengers with access to information about all public transport providers</p> <p>Regulation of fares to ensure increases are kept to a minimum.</p> <p>Access to bus stations and shared facilities for private operators.</p> <p>Joined up government in relation to investment, planning and decision making.</p>

<p>Establishment of a new public transport agency</p>	<p>This would be established within DRD with responsibility for: public transport regulation, planning and policy implementation; working with others including local councils to develop local transport plans; specifying public transport requirements; securing those requirements through awarding performance-based contracts awarded either to Translink or in some circumstances, subject to open competition; monitoring and evaluation of performance; the granting and enforcement of innovative service permits where gaps in provision have been identified; designation of bus/rail stations as shared facilities; provide public funding subsidies.</p> <p>Setting up this agency will separate the specification of service requirements from operational delivery.</p>
<p>Introduction of a contracting regime for the delivery of public transport services</p>	<p>The move towards a performance based contracting regime with Translink and other operators. The new agency will have the powers to enforce the conditions associated with the contracts.</p>
<p>Continuation of a regulated public transport system</p>	<p>Translink would remain the lead provider of public transport services, although there will continue to be opportunity for contracted services and innovative service permits to provide additional support, within a a regulated framework.</p> <p>There is no intention to privatise Translink.</p>
<p>Consumer representation</p>	<p>A statutory requirement should be introduced for both the Consumer Council and the new public transport agency to establish a formal relationship of engagement and information exchange.</p>
<p>Consultation responses</p>	<p>Consultation ends on 5th February 2010.</p> <p>Responses to: Department for Regional Development Public Transport Reform Team, Room 101, Clarence Court 10-18 Adelaide Street, Belfast BT2 8GB Email: PublicTransportReform@drdni.gov.uk www.drdni.gov.uk</p>

A Commissioner for Older People in Northern Ireland

Consultation Document & Draft Bill¹

Who is consulting?	The Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister in Stormont.
Purpose of Consultation	To identify what a Commissioner for Older People will be able to do. These proposals include:
Rationale for an Older People's Commissioner	Having an Older People's Commissioner with effective powers will prioritise older people's issues. It will protect and ensure all older people have a better quality of life. It is an essential step to prepare us for an aging population.
Age	The Commissioner will assist people aged 60 and over with discretion to act at 50+ in cases of exceptional need or special circumstances.
Extent of Powers	The Commissioner powers should cover all substantial areas including employment, goods, facilities and services where these affect older people.
Communication, outreach and engagement	The Commissioner must ensure that older people are aware of the existence and functions of his or her office, and must be required to seek the opinion of older people. The Commissioner must ensure that older people's right and interests are taken into account by decision makers in the planning, delivery and review of services.
Research and advocacy	The Commissioner may produce research, compile information and issue best practice guidance in relation to interests of older people. The Commissioner may make representations or recommendations to any body or person about any matter concerning the interests of older people.
Review	The Commissioner must keep under review the adequacy and effectiveness of the law and practice relating to the interests of older people.

¹ Based on Age Sector Policy Position Briefing Paper

Investigation and casework powers	The Commissioner will have additional powers of review, complaint and formal investigation in relations to organisations known as relevant authorities. These will include government departments, district councils and other public, private and voluntary bodies.
Assistance with complaints	The Commissioner may provide assistance, including financial assistance, to an older people making a complaint to a relevant authority.
Consultation Responses	Consultation ends on 7 January 2010. Responses can be submitted to: Commissioner for Older People Legislation Team Equality, Rights and Social Need Division Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister Block E, Castle Buildings Stormont Estate Belfast BT4 3BR Email: olderpeoplescommissioner@ofmdfni.gov.uk www.ofmdfni.gov.uk/index/equality/age/older-peoples-commissioner.htm

The Future for Housing in Northern Ireland

A Key Issues Paper from the Independent Commission

<p>Who is consulting?</p>	<p>The Independent Commission on the Future for Housing in NI was established earlier this year. Its objectives are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To address the key challenges and opportunities associated with the delivery of housing in Northern Ireland; 2. To provide a space for housing professionals to contribute their knowledge, skills and ideas to the Commission's outcomes. 3. To publish a report containing specific recommendations on strategic direction for housing and a roadmap for a way forward. <p>The Commission is chaired by Lord Richard Best and is facilitated by the Chartered Institute of Housing.</p>
<p>Purpose of Consultation</p>	<p>To stimulate debate on the key issues, which the Commission believes, require resolution and to ask for views on the most significant issues which the Commission should focus on in its last months of work.</p> <p>The key issues as set out are:</p>
<p>Vision – An Effective Housing System by 2020</p>	<p>This envisages, for example, a dramatic reduction in homelessness; a narrowing of the gap between supply of existing housing and housing demand; high quality and affordable homes; decrease in fuel poverty, more support for those at risk of losing homes; flexible housing options to respond to changing circumstances.</p>
<p>Long Term Strategy for Housing in Northern Ireland</p>	<p>This strategy could make use of all public resources and powers of departments, public agencies and bodies and of partnerships with the private and voluntary sectors.</p>
<p>Establishing A Communities Unit</p>	<p>This could pull together the main government players and ensure joined up government at a central and local government level.</p>
<p>Developing an Oversight Framework</p>	<p>Under consideration are regulation of private and social housing sector, inspection, redress/Ombudsman services and tenure neutral housing advice and information</p>
<p>Northern Ireland Home Insulation Programme</p>	<p>This programme would seek to enhance housing stock, tackle fuel poverty, increase energy efficiency and develop new green industries.</p>

Reducing segregation and promoting community cohesion	The role of key players such as the development and construction industry, and housing associations in playing a wider role in community cohesion and community development.
Strengthening the role of residents	Providers and residents have urged a more proactive role for residents in the decisions taken on their housing and community space.
Offering a range of housing options	Trends in demand and supply and demographic projects will result in need for a range of housing options such as 'Home Buy' scheme, part ownership, intermediate renting. Also under consideration is whether there is merit to suspension of the House Sales Scheme.
New forms of investment and resource for housing	This includes exploring a role for the Housing Finance Corporation, use of bond finance, options around Tax Increment Finance and institutional investment.
Role of housing associations	Housing associations could develop their role into broader areas such as regeneration and sustainability – what would this look like in practice?
Meeting the demand for private rented accommodation	Could an increasingly well managed private rented sector with high standards play a significant part in providing more long term and secure housing in the future?
Flexible tenure	Is there potential for the development of a flexible tenure model that allows the housing outcomes for individuals to change with their circumstances?
Role of the strategic housing authority	This explores an enhanced role for a regional housing authority focusing particularly on enabling and driving development.
Consultations Responses	<p>Consultation ends on 31 December 2009.</p> <p>Written submissions to be sent to:</p> <p>Grainia Long, Chartered Institute of Housing Northern Ireland, Carnmoney House, Edgewater Office Park, Belfast BT3 9JQ</p> <p>Email: grainia.long@cih.org</p> <p>http://www.cih.org/your_location/ni/index.php?menu27nav=visible</p>

Consumer Focus Post

Consultation on Annual Plan 2010-2011

Who is consulting?	Consumer Focus Post seeks to represent the Consumer interest in all Mail and Post office issues in Northern Ireland. It works closely with the NI Consumer Council.
Purpose of Consultation	<p>To seek views on the 2010-2011 annual plan: what could be improved; what could be dropped; what's missing; what should be prioritised?</p> <p>The consultation focuses on Consumer Focus Post's contribution to the UK wider programme and its NI programme.</p>
UK Wider Programme	
1. Ongoing work on the Universal Service Obligation [USO]	Royal Mail has an obligation to deliver mail to every UK address every working day at an affordable and uniform price. The USO is a vital service linking all areas, and communities across the UK and of particular importance to those who most vulnerable and disadvantaged. The USO is under challenge due to the challenges facing Royal Mail and the decreasing volume of letters.
2. A Fair Postal Service Outside the USO	This work focuses on the delivery surcharges by couriers and online/mail-order retailers, which is a particular issue for people in NI when ordering a product from Great Britain. This also focuses on raising consumer knowledge and awareness with regards opting out of junk mail.
3. A Strong Post Office Network	Consumer Focus Post has a statutory role in monitoring coverage and reasonable accessibility to the post office network. It will focus on: Discharging that role effectively; Responding to complaints re public consultation on day-to-day changes in the network; Track the impact on recent network changes such as the outreach services and other new business models; Develop an advocacy programme to government on enhancing new products and services such as the Post Office Card Account and the ideas around a Postbank.
4. Information for Consumers	A web-based resource is being developed for consumers and advice agencies.

Northern Ireland Programme	
5. Improving Mail Services for NI Consumers	<p>Publish and promote research findings on the quality of the mail service between NI and ROI and on the performance of the First Class Mail service between NI and GB.</p> <p>Repeat and develop the Annual Mail Service Consumer Satisfaction and Benchmarking Survey.</p> <p>Provide briefing sessions to NI Advice Agencies on Mail complaints procedures.</p> <p>Explore level of consumer discontent with wrongly delivered mail.</p> <p>Investigate Consumer perceptions and experiences of delivery offices.</p>
6. Maintaining and Developing a Stable Post Office Network in NI	<p>Publicize and promote research findings into the impact of Outreach Services in the NI Network.</p> <p>Assess how Local Councils use and support the Post Office Network and might actively promote its use in the new Council structures.</p> <p>Explore possible relationship between the Credit Union Movement and the NI Post Office Network.</p> <p>Encourage the provision of Free-to-Use ATMS in Post Offices in rural areas</p> <p>Carry out mystery shopping exercise to assess consumer experience of the PO Branch Network.</p> <p>Carry out annual benchmarking Consumer Satisfaction survey in relation to the PO branch network.</p>
Consultation Responses	<p>Consultation ends on 9 February 2010</p> <p>Responses to:</p> <p>-post@consumerfocus.org.uk</p> <p>-Consumer Focus Post, Elizabeth House, Hollywood Road, Belfast BT4 1NY</p> <p>www.consumerfocus.org.uk/northern-ireland/</p>

Everyone's Involved

Sustainable Development Strategy Consultation

Who is consulting?	The Office of the First and Deputy First Minister.
Purpose of Consultation	To consult on a new Sustainable Development Strategy which underpins the vision of the Programme for Government and which ensures that the principles of sustainability reach into all activities of Government and that all are involved in achieving the Strategy's objectives.
Vision Statement	"A peaceful, fair, prosperous and sustainable society"
Guiding Principles	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Living within environmental limits2. Ensuring a strong, healthy, just and equal society3. Achieving a sustainable economy4. Promoting good governance5. Using sound science responsibly6. Promoting opportunity and innovation
Working with others and joined up government	The draft strategy recognizes that it cannot work in isolation from other NI strategies and programmes and from other regions and countries.
Key challenges	<p>A number of key strategies are outlined:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mainstreaming within the NICS and skilling up public sector employees;• The engagement of the wider public sector including district councils, government owned companies and arms length bodies;• The ongoing lack of implementation of the Statutory Duty to promote sustainable development;• Working in partnership with the community and voluntary sectors;• Encouraging private sector innovation to deliver sustainable development benefits.

Strategic Objectives	<p>Five priority areas for action are identified:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Building a dynamic, innovative and responsible economy. 2. Strengthening society to ensure tolerance and inclusion. 3. Sustainable long term investment in key infrastructure. 4. Ensuring responsible use and protection of natural resources. 5. Ensuring reliable, affordable and sustainable energy provision and reducing carbon footprint.
Implementation Plan	<p>The document states that an implementation plan will be published in 2009, which will set out how the strategic objectives will be achieved up to March 2011.</p>
Consultation Responses	<p>Consultation Deadline is 12 January 2010</p> <p>Responses to:</p> <p><i>Sustainable Development Unit</i> <i>A5.07</i> <i>Castle Buildings</i> <i>Stormont Estate</i> <i>Belfast BT4 3SR</i></p> <p>Telephone 028 90528378 or e-mail your comments to everyones.involved@ofmdfmni.gov.uk</p> <p>http://www.ofmdfmni.gov.uk/index/economic-policy/economic-policy-sustainable-development/sustainable-development-strategy-public-consultation.htm</p>