

Public Document Pack

**Democratic Services Section
Legal and Civic Services Department
Belfast City Council
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**Belfast
City Council**

7th September, 2026

MEETING OF THE CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Dear Alderman/Councillor,

As previously notified to you, I enclose a copy of the report for the following item to be considered at the meeting to be held on Wednesday, 9th September, 2026 at 5.15 pm.

Yours faithfully,

John Walsh

Chief Executive

AGENDA:

4. Strategic and Operational Issues

- (b) Translink Consultation on Fare and Services Changes - Council Response
(Pages 1 - 14)

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Subject:	Translink Consultation on Fare and Services Changes - Council Response
Date:	09 September 2026
Reporting Officer:	Damien Martin, Strategic Director of Place and Economy
Contact Officer:	Jamie Uprichard, Business Research and Development Manager

Restricted Reports											
Is this report restricted?	Yes	No	X								
Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted. Insert number 1. Information relating to any individual 2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual 3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information) 4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter 5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained 6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction 7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime											
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted? <table> <tr> <td>After Committee Decision</td> <td>☐</td> </tr> <tr> <td>After Council Decision</td> <td>☐</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Sometime in the future</td> <td>☐</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Never</td> <td>☐</td> </tr> </table>				After Committee Decision	☐	After Council Decision	☐	Sometime in the future	☐	Never	☐
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Call-in			
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes	X	No

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to seek Members' approval for the Council's response to Translink's consultation on fare and services changes.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to: • Notes the details of each policy which Translink anticipate may have significant implications in relation to one or more of the nine Section 75 categories.; and

	• Approve the draft consultation responses (Appendices A and B) for submission to Translink.
3.0	Main report
3.1	At its last meeting on 26 August 2025, the committee agreed for a report to be submitted to its next meeting, outlining a draft Council response to Translink's public consultation on potential changes to services and fares.
3.2	Public transport is currently facing significant financial pressures. As a result of reductions in funding in real terms, Translink must consider options to ensure the long-term sustainability of the network. They are therefore conducting this consultation as part of their draft Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA). Under their statutory duties contained within Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company (NITHCo), trading as Translink, gave an undertaking to carry out an equality impact assessment (EQIA) on each policy where screening had indicated that there may be significant implications in relation to one or more of the nine Section 75 categories. There are two such policies which may have an impact set out in sections 3.3 and 3.4 below.
3.3	<u>Consultation on Bus and Rail Evening Service Adjustments</u> Based on the draft budget, Translink is currently projecting a material loss in the current financial year, which would leave the organisation in an unsustainable financial position. As such, it is necessary to explore the potential for changes to service frequency in the absence of a viable budget allocation to address the growing cost base and funding challenges Translink face. On Mondays to Wednesdays the removal of last departures on the rail network and later departures across the bus network (circa from 10pm) could create necessary cost reduction for the organisation. This approach reflects observed usage patterns, where early-week late evening services carry significantly lower patronage, while demand later in the week remains stronger. The intention is to better align service provision with demand while maintaining connectivity at the times it is most needed. No substitution services will be provided for the withdrawn services. No connecting bus or rail services would support the arrival of the last Enterprise service from Dublin. This service currently leaves Dublin at 2050hrs and arrives at 2258hrs. The policy intention is to mitigate the challenge to sustainability for the network and does not target any geographic area but affects all routes. The only exceptional services not removed would be the 212 Belfast-L/Derry, X1, X2, X3, X4, 300 Airport and 600 Airport services, given that these are operating with significant demand and revenue.
3.4	<u>Consultation on an amendment to Translink Commercial Discounted Fares and Purchase of Singles Only Onboard NIR Services</u> Translink's fares need to remain commercially viable, ensuring public transport remains attractive and affordable, but also generating revenue in the current high inflationary environment to remain sustainable and operate as a going concern. As such a change to promotional fares and removal/reduction of certain discounts is necessary to address the growing cost base and funding challenges Translink face. Translink continue to work closely with the Department for Infrastructure to champion greater investment in public transport, recognising its fundamental role in supporting social inclusion, economic participation and a greener future. In the context of ongoing budget uncertainty, there is a clear need to plan

	responsibly to ensure the network can continue to operate as sustainably as possible and as such, the below changes have been proposed. The proposed fare changes are detailed below: • Reduction of yLink discount from 50% to 33%. • Removal of Off-Peak Day Return fares on Bus and Rail (Adult and Child). • Increase to Promotional Fare Types: ○ Family and Friends (£24 to £26) ○ Metro Family Ticket (£10 to £12) ○ Bus Rambler (£10 to £12) ○ Sunday Day Tracker (Rail) (£10 to £12) <u>Onboard Ticket Purchase on NI Railways:</u> The introduction of Ticket Vending Machines (TVMs) and Platform Validators through the Translink Future Ticketing System (TFTS) Programme represents a step change in how customers purchase and validate tickets across the rail network. With TVMs installed at all stations and halts, the primary point of sale shifts off-train, positioning conductors principally as revenue protection and customer support staff rather than ticket sellers. Customers will continue to be actively encouraged to purchase tickets prior to travel using one of the following channels: • TVMs • Platform Validators (smartcards) • mLink and other eCommerce channels Key elements of this proposal are: • Customers who board without a valid ticket will be able to purchase Single tickets only onboard • Where a return journey is required, a further Single may be purchased on the return service • All other ticket types (Returns, period passes and discount products) must be purchased off-train • The policy applies network wide and is aligned with the availability of TVMs at every station This approach maintains access to travel while making pre-purchase clearly more advantageous and convenient. In circumstances where customers are unable to purchase a ticket prior to boarding due to accessibility issues, ticket vending machine unavailability, or lack of digital payment options, conductor discretion will apply. This will ensure that passengers are not unfairly disadvantaged and aligns with established practice in similar ticketing policy changes. Both proposals relate to adjustments to existing commercial fare products and sales channels and do not alter statutory concessionary entitlements or eligibility criteria. The policy would be operational and pricing-related in nature rather than a change to access.
3.5	The consultation is focussed on the equality implications of each policy and consists of six short questions as follows: 1) Are there any data needs or issues in relation to any of the Section 75 equality categories that have not been identified in Section 4 of the EQIA consultation document? 2) If yes, please provide details

	3) Are there any adverse impacts in relation to any of the Section 75 equality groups that have not been identified in section 5 of the EQIA Consultation document? 4) If yes, please provide details. 5) Please state what action you think could be taken to reduce or eliminate any adverse impacts? 6) Are there any other comments you would like to make in regard to the consultation process generally? Each survey questionnaire is hosted on DfI's Citizen Space platform and the deadline for responses is 30 September. It is proposed that subject to the committee's decision, a draft response will be submitted, subject to council ratification on 01 October 2026.
3.6	A draft response to each survey is attached at appendix A and B and summarised below. • The Council recognises the significant financial pressures facing public transport in Northern Ireland arising from rising costs and reductions in funding in real terms. However, the Council strongly opposes cuts to services and reductions in discounts that would disproportionately impact workers, students, older people, young people, those on lower incomes, and other Section 75 groups who rely on affordable and accessible public transport. • Public transport is essential to the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of Belfast. To thrive, cities must have transportation systems which allow the maximum volume of people to travel, whilst doing the least possible harm to the environment and bringing health benefits for all. • Reliable services enable people to access employment, education, healthcare, leisure and social opportunities. They support the city's night-time economy, reduce congestion and emissions, and promote social inclusion. Any reduction in service levels or affordability risks reversing hard-won progress and creating a downward spiral in which fewer services lead to falling passenger numbers, which in turn is used to justify further cuts. • The Council has long advocated for improved late-night public transport. In 2022, the Council passed a motion calling on Translink to expand night-time services; this was subsequently integrated into the Belfast Agenda Action Plans. The Council part-funded a successful pilot extended service at weekends (building on earlier seasonal Christmas pilots). The year-long pilot that commenced in late 2025, co-funded by Belfast City Council and the Northern Ireland Executive, has demonstrated clear demand and benefit: significant passenger numbers on late Metro and Ulsterbus services, support for hospitality and retail businesses and their staff, safer journeys home (particularly important for reducing risks of violence against women and girls), and contribution to a vibrant, sustainable night-time economy • Any proposal to remove late-evening departures represent a clear step backwards. The success of the weekend pilot shows that extended services stimulate use rather than merely serving existing demand. Ending or further restricting evening and late services would make public transport less viable for shift workers, hospitality staff, students, theatre- and event-goers, and visitors. Passenger numbers would fall, undermining the case for retaining the services at all and damaging Belfast's attractiveness as a thriving 24-hour city.

- The Council urges Translink and the Department for Infrastructure to protect and, where possible, extend late-night and evening services rather than cut them. The Late Night Service pilot's positive outcomes should be built upon, not undermined.
- Service reductions and fare changes (including the proposed reduction of the yLink discount for 16–23-year-olds from 50% to 33%, and changes affecting family tickets) would hit hardest those least able to absorb higher costs or reduced connectivity:
 - Workers (especially shift and hospitality workers) depend on evening and late services to get to and from employment. Cuts would force reliance on more expensive taxis or private cars, or simply prevent people from taking jobs.
 - Students already face high living costs. Higher travel costs and reduced evening services create additional barriers to education, part-time work and social participation.
 - Older people rely on public transport for independence, social connection, access to services and reducing isolation. Any diminution of the network risks increasing loneliness and pressure on health and social care.
 - Young people, people with disabilities, carers and those in more peripheral or less affluent parts of the city would face compounded disadvantages under Section 75 equality considerations.
- The Council is particularly concerned that reduced services and higher effective fares will lead to modal shift away from public transport, increasing car use, congestion and emissions, contrary to the city's climate and sustainable transport objectives.
- In 2020, the Net-Zero Carbon Roadmap for Belfast highlighted that transport was responsible for 21% of the city's carbon emissions. As the regional capital and central hub of most journeys into and out of Northern Ireland (by land, sea or air), Belfast has a central role to play as an exemplar of active and sustainable transport. To that end, community planning partners included the following target within the Belfast Agenda target: 70 public transport journeys per person per year attained by 2030.
- The Council believes that noting financial necessity is insufficient if the result is reduced equality of opportunity and greater social exclusion. Alternatives such as targeted funding, phased implementation, or protection of key corridors and late services should be explored thoroughly before any cuts proceed.

In summary, the Council is against cuts to services that will damage public transport provision for workers, students, older people and the wider community. The Council's investment in and advocacy for late-night services, together with the proven success of the weekend pilot, make the current proposals feel like a significant step backwards. Cutting services risks a self-reinforcing decline in transport journeys that ultimately justifies further reductions. At a time when the city centre's nighttime-economy footfall is increasing year-on-year, the Council recommends that late-evening and late-night services are protected and, where possible, expanded rather than reduced. We remain committed to working with Translink and other stakeholders to deliver a high-quality, inclusive and sustainable public transport network that serves the needs of the city's residents, workers, students and visitors. We look forward to the outcome of these consultations and to constructive engagement on next steps.

3.5	<u>Financial & Resource Implications</u> There are no financial implications for the council attached to the recommendation included within this report.
3.6	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u> Equality, good relations or rural needs implications have been identified within the consultation response, notably a potential impact for young people.
4.0	Appendices – Documents attached
	Appendix A: Belfast City Council Consultation response to Bus and Rail Evening Service Adjustments Appendix B: Belfast City Council Consultation response to an amendment to Translink Commercial Discounted Fares and Purchase of Singles Only Onboard NIR Services

Translink Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) on service alterations

Data needs or issues

1. Are there any data needs or issues in relation to any of the Section 75 equality categories that have not been identified in Section 4 of the EQIA consultation document?

Yes

2. If yes, please provide details in the box below:

Additional data and local evidence are required on the differential impact of removing late-evening and late-night services (particularly Monday–Wednesday last departures and connections for the final Enterprise service). Research and data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and related analyses of the Labour Force Survey report that men are more likely to work during the evening and night-time hours and therefore may be impacted by the removal of the evening services.

It would be useful to understand the breakdown of journeys by “Free SmartPasses” and “Half Fare SmartPasses” to determine what insights (if any) can be drawn from the data regarding implications for people with disabilities. Furthermore, not all people with disabilities qualify for free SmartPasses or half-fare concessions and therefore the true impact is unknown.

Any adverse impacts?

3. Are there any adverse impacts in relation to any of the Section 75 equality groups that have not been identified in section 5 of the EQIA Consultation document?

Yes

4. If yes, please provide details in the box below:

Men are more likely to work during the evening and night-time hours and therefore may be impacted by the removal of last departures on the rail network and later departures across the bus network.

In addition to equality implications, the policy proposals risk adversely impacting those with no access to a private car or van and who depend on public transport to access employment opportunities. There is therefore a potential to increase economic inequalities within the city of Belfast. This undermines inclusive growth by limiting access to jobs for those most reliant on public transport and thereby widening economic disparities.

Action to reduce or eliminate any adverse impacts

5. Please state what action you think could be taken to reduce or eliminate any adverse impacts?

- Protect and retain (and where possible expand) late-night services, building on its proven success.
- Prioritise retention of key connecting services (including for the final Enterprise arrival).
- Explore alternative funding or efficiency measures before cutting services that serve equality groups.
- Commit to ongoing monitoring and reporting of passenger numbers, equality data and night-time economy impacts, with a clear review point before any permanent reductions.
- Continue collaborative funding models (with other NI Executive departments) that have already delivered positive outcomes.

Any other comments

6. Are there any other comments you would like to make in regard to the consultation process generally?

The Council recognises the significant financial pressures facing public transport in Northern Ireland arising from rising costs and reductions in funding in real terms. However, the Council strongly opposes cuts to services and reductions in discounts that would disproportionately impact workers, students, older people, young people, those on lower incomes, and other Section 75 groups who rely on affordable and accessible public transport.

Public transport is essential to the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of Belfast. To thrive, cities must have transportation systems which allow the maximum volume of people to travel, whilst doing the least possible harm to the environment and bringing health benefits for all.

Reliable services enable people to access employment, education, healthcare, leisure and social opportunities. They support the city's night-time economy, reduce congestion and emissions, and promote social inclusion. Any reduction in service levels or affordability risks reversing hard-won progress and creating a downward spiral in which fewer services lead to falling passenger numbers, which in turn is used to justify further cuts.

The Council has long advocated for improved late-night public transport. In 2022, the Council passed a motion calling on Translink to expand night-time services; this was subsequently integrated into the Belfast Agenda Action Plans. The Council part-funded a successful pilot extended service at weekends (building on earlier seasonal Christmas pilots). The year-long pilot that commenced in late 2025, co-funded by Belfast City Council and the Northern Ireland Executive, has demonstrated clear demand and benefit: significant passenger numbers on late Metro and Ulsterbus services, support for hospitality and retail

businesses and their staff, safer journeys home (particularly important for reducing risks of violence against women and girls), and contribution to a vibrant, sustainable night-time economy

Any proposal to remove late-evening departures represent a clear step backwards. The success of the weekend pilot shows that extended services stimulate use rather than merely serving existing demand. Ending or further restricting evening and late services would make public transport less viable for shift workers, hospitality staff, students, theatre and event-goers, and visitors. Passenger numbers would fall, undermining the case for retaining the services at all and damaging Belfast's attractiveness as a thriving 24-hour city.

The Council urges Translink and the Department for Infrastructure to protect and, where possible, extend late-night and evening services rather than cut them. The Late Night Service pilot's positive outcomes should be built upon, not undermined.

Service reductions would hit hardest those least able to absorb higher costs or reduced connectivity, including:

- Workers (especially shift and hospitality workers) depend on evening and late services to get to and from employment. Cuts would force reliance on more expensive taxis or private cars, or simply prevent people from taking jobs.
- Students already face high living costs. Reduced evening services create additional barriers to education, part-time work and social participation.
- Older people rely on public transport for independence, social connection, access to services and reducing isolation. Any decrease of the network risks increasing loneliness and pressure on health and social care.
- Young people, people with disabilities, carers and those in more peripheral or less affluent parts of the city would face compounded disadvantages under Section 75 equality considerations.

The Council is particularly concerned that reduced services will lead to modal shift away from public transport, increasing car use, congestion and emissions, contrary to the city's climate and sustainable transport objectives. In 2020, the Net-Zero Carbon Roadmap for Belfast highlighted that transport was responsible for 21% of the city's carbon emissions. As the regional capital and central hub of most journeys into and out of Northern Ireland (by land, sea or air), Belfast has a central role to play as an exemplar of active and sustainable transport. To that end, community planning partners included the following target within the Belfast Agenda target: 70 public transport journeys per person per year attained by 2030.

The Council believes that noting financial necessity is insufficient if the result is reduced equality of opportunity and greater social exclusion. Alternatives such as targeted funding, phased implementation, or protection of key corridors and late services should be explored thoroughly before any cuts proceed.

In summary, the Council is against cuts to services that will damage public transport provision for workers, students, older people and the wider community. The Council's investment in and advocacy for late-night services, together with the proven success of the

weekend pilot, make the current proposals feel like a significant step backwards. Cutting services risks a self-reinforcing decline in transport journeys that ultimately justifies further reductions. At a time when the city centre's nighttime-economy footfall is increasing year-on-year, the Council recommends that late-evening and late-night services are protected and, where possible, expanded rather than reduced. We remain committed to working with Translink and other stakeholders to deliver a high-quality, inclusive and sustainable public transport network that serves the needs of the city's residents, workers, students and visitors. We look forward to the outcome of these consultations and to constructive engagement on next steps.

Translink Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) on service alterations

Data needs or issues

1. Are there any data needs or issues in relation to any of the Section 75 equality categories that have not been identified in Section 4 of the EQIA consultation document?

Yes

2. If yes, please provide details in the box below:

Additional data and local evidence are required on the differential impact of reducing discounts or increasing fares. It would be useful to understand the forecasted additional revenue proposed by the policy proposals. This would require additional data and evidence on the equality characteristics of those passengers who avail of the off-peak day return fares.

Any adverse impacts?

3. Are there any adverse impacts in relation to any of the Section 75 equality groups that have not been identified in section 5 of the EQIA Consultation document?

Yes

4. If yes, please provide details in the box below: -

Reduced affordability will hinder access to employment (especially hospitality and shift work), education, healthcare, cultural events and social networks. This increases social isolation, particularly for older people, students and those living in neighbourhoods (outside of Belfast City Centre). It also undermines good relations by limiting opportunities for people from different communities to share public spaces and events in the evening.

In addition to equality implications, the policy proposals risk adversely impacting those from lower socio-economic groups with no access to a private car or van and who depend on public transport to access employment opportunities. There is therefore a potential to increase economic inequalities within the city of Belfast. This undermines inclusive growth by limiting access to jobs for those most reliant on public transport and thereby widening economic disparities.

Action to reduce or eliminate any adverse impacts

5. Please state what action you think could be taken to reduce or eliminate any adverse impacts?

- Maintain the current 50% yLink discount and existing family/ promotional fares to protect affordability for young people and families.

- Explore alternative funding or efficiency measures before cutting services that serve equality groups.
- Commit to ongoing monitoring and reporting of passenger numbers, equality data and night-time economy impacts, with a clear review point before any permanent reductions.
- Continue collaborative funding models (with other NI Executive departments) that have already delivered positive outcomes.

Any other comments

6. Are there any other comments you would like to make in regard to the consultation process generally?

The Council recognises the significant financial pressures facing public transport in Northern Ireland arising from rising costs and reductions in funding in real terms. However, the Council strongly opposes reductions in discounts that would disproportionately impact workers, students, older people, young people, those on lower incomes, and other Section 75 groups who rely on affordable and accessible public transport.

Public transport is essential to the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of Belfast. To thrive, cities must have transportation systems which allow the maximum volume of people to travel, whilst doing the least possible harm to the environment and bringing health benefits for all.

Reliable services enable people to access employment, education, healthcare, leisure and social opportunities. They support the city's night-time economy, reduce congestion and emissions, and promote social inclusion. Any impact on affordability risks reversing hard-won progress and creating a downward spiral in which fewer services lead to falling passenger numbers, which in turn is used to justify further cuts.

Fare changes (including the proposed reduction of the yLink discount for 16–23-year-olds from 50% to 33%, and changes affecting family tickets) would hit hardest those least able to absorb higher costs or reduced connectivity, including:

- Workers (especially shift and hospitality workers) depend on evening and late services to get to and from employment. Cuts would force reliance on more expensive taxis or private cars or simply prevent people from taking jobs.
- Students already face high living costs. Higher travel costs create additional barriers to education, part-time work and social participation.
- Older people rely on public transport for independence, social connection, access to services and reducing isolation. Any fare rises risks increasing loneliness and pressure on health and social care.
- Young people, people with disabilities, carers and those in more peripheral or less affluent parts of the city would face compounded disadvantages under Section 75 equality considerations.

The Council is particularly concerned that higher effective fares will lead to modal shift away from public transport, increasing car use, congestion and emissions, contrary to the city's climate and sustainable transport objectives.

In 2020, the Net-Zero Carbon Roadmap for Belfast highlighted that transport was responsible for 21% of the city's carbon emissions. As the regional capital and central hub of most journeys into and out of Northern Ireland (by land, sea or air), Belfast has a central role to play as an exemplar of active and sustainable transport. To that end, community planning partners included the following target within the Belfast Agenda target: 70 public transport journeys per person per year attained by 2030.

The Council believes that noting financial necessity is insufficient if the result is reduced equality of opportunity and greater social exclusion. Alternatives such as targeted funding, phased implementation, or protection of key corridors and late services should be explored thoroughly before any cuts proceed.

In summary, the Council is against cuts to services that will damage public transport provision for workers, students, older people and the wider community. The Council's investment in and advocacy for late-night services, together with the proven success of the weekend pilot, make the current proposals feel like a significant step backwards. Cutting services risks a self-reinforcing decline in transport journeys that ultimately justifies further reductions. At a time when the city centre's nighttime-economy footfall is increasing year-on-year, the Council recommends that late-evening and late-night services are protected and, where possible, expanded rather than reduced. We remain committed to working with Translink and other stakeholders to deliver a high-quality, inclusive and sustainable public transport network that serves the needs of the city's residents, workers, students and visitors. We look forward to the outcome of these consultations and to constructive engagement on next steps.

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