

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.