

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.