



Subject:	Public Transport Arrangements for Christmas 2016
Date:	12 October 2016
Reporting Officer:	Nigel Grimshaw, Director City & Neighbourhood Services Department
Contact Officer:	Siobhan Toland, Assistant Director, City & Neighbourhood Services Department

Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	To brief members on the offer to work in collaboration with Translink and the Department for Infrastructures on their proposed public transport arrangements for Christmas 2016 offered as an alternative to Belfast City Council free off street parking.
1.2	Members to consider the recommendation to agree proposals to incentivise public transport, as an alternative to free Council car parking, which will reduce congestion and make it easier for everyone, including those that wish to use their car, to visit the City over the Christmas shopping period. It is anticipated the proposals provide a better way to encourage shoppers and to boost local trade and subsequently increase footfall in the city.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to agree: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• That the Council works in collaboration with Translink and DfI to support the attractive Christmas transport proposals which will support greater choice for shoppers and tourists and have a positive impact in increasing footfall into the city as an alternative to Council offering free car parking and;• That the opening hours for Smithfield car park be extended this year and in future years, to cover the Christmas late night shopping period with the set tariff applying.

	All other car parks, including Bankmore Street to be available for use at all times.
3.0	Main report
	Background
3.1	Members will recall in the run up to Christmas 2015 the Council, in an effort to encourage visitors, suspended charging in its off street car parks all day Saturday and after 6.00 pm on week days from 27th November until 2nd January inclusive.
3.2	Over the same period the Council also made the Ormeau Avenue staff car park available for public parking, free of charge and extended the opening hours in Bankmore Street and Smithfield car parks on Sundays from 1.00 pm until 6.00 pm.
3.3	Translink recently wrote to the Council raising concerns that offering free parking pre Christmas in 2015 had a significantly detrimental impact on the reliability and punctuality of their service and a knock on effect on traffic flow and therefore congestion in the city.
3.4	Translink and officials from the Department of Infrastructure consider that incentivising public transport as an alternative to free car parking will reduce congestion and make it easier for everyone, including those that wish to use their car, to visit the City over the Christmas shopping period.
3.5	Furthermore Translink believe the offer of free parking in Council car parks resulted in cars queuing for the limited spaces or driving around looking for free spaces all of which increased congestion and may have deterred people from coming into the City to shop.
3.6	Translink reported that pre Christmas 2015: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over 2000 journeys did not operate due to disruptions, • Only 84% of services were on time, significantly lower than previous years and their target of 99.2% • A 28% increase in consumer complaints linked to operating conditions • 62% fewer passengers on the bespoke Saturday park and ride compared to previous year.
3.7	Translink estimate the cost of providing extra resources to compensate for the additional running time to be in the region of £250K as well as lost fare box revenue.

3.8	<p>Translink and colleagues in DfI are of the view that the level of disruption last Christmas was similar to that experienced in 2011, notably the last time DRD offered free parking and confirm the Department subsequently concluded free Christmas parking led to increased congestion and parking safety issues. Through their review of Christmas travel arrangements in recent years, Translink have concluded additional measures such as providing and promoting more park and ride services and discounted fares in 2013 and 2014 provided a better way to encourage shoppers and to boost local trade and subsequently increase footfall in the city.</p>
3.9	<p><u>Key Issues</u></p> <p>The evidence presented by Translink and endorsed by officials from the Department of Infrastructure indicates that any offer of free car parking by the Council is likely to be counterproductive. It is likely to increase congestion and journey times deterring car users and bus users from visiting the City.</p>
3.10	<p>The Council controls less than 7 percent of public parking in the City Centre and due to their location and cheap tariffs many of its city centre parks are usually fully occupied and with high numbers of commuters. It is likely that removing charges will encourage more commuters to bring their car to work and park all day. Therefore it is likely offering free car parking will reduce further the actual number of spaces available to shoppers.</p>
3.11	<p>It is anticipated that the majority of Christmas shoppers attracted by an offer of free Council parking will not be able to locate a free car parking space. Subsequently they will be disappointed and encouraged to queue for free spaces or move between car parks looking for non charged spaces and this will increase congestion. Ultimately the vast majority of visitors, irrespective of any offer of free Council parking, will have to pay for parking on street or in commercially operated sites at rates that are higher than those charged in Council car parks.</p>
3.12	<p>Translink and officials from the Department of Infrastructure consider that incentivising public transport as an alternative to free car parking will reduce congestion and make it easier for everyone, including those that wish to use their car, to visit the City over the Christmas shopping period. Council officers have met with officials from Translink and the Department for Infrastructure to develop seasonal public transport proposals for Belfast in 2016, to be offered as an alternative to free parking which will encourage more people visit the City over the Christmas period.</p>

<p>3.13</p> <p>3.14</p> <p>3.15</p> <p>3.16</p> <p>3.17</p> <p>3.18</p>	<p>Subsequently Translink and Dfl have proposed a range of attractive and additional measures for Councils consideration as alternatives to offering fee car parking as detailed in Appendix 2.</p> <p>These include Translink offering:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced metro fare of £2.50 return after 9:30 am representing a saving of up to £2 on single cash fares; • 1/3 off all NI Rail and Ulsterbus routes after 9:30 am; • Extended Park and Ride opening hours to cover late night opening plus 30mins; • Park and Ride services every 30 mins; <p>Dfl propose over the period:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To cease all non emergency road works over period on key routes into Belfast; • To extend traffic control centre hours of operation; • To extend the opening hours of park and rides to facilitate extended bus services. <p>Currently all BCC car parks with the exception of Bankmore Street and Smithfield are open and available for use at all times. Bankmore Street and Smithfield are closed and secured after 6pm with the exception of Smithfield operating late on a Thursday night to accommodate late night shopping. These arrangements were inherited from transport NI and officers cannot see any reason why Bankmore Street should not be left open at night. Members are asked to agree to the opening of Bankmore Street car park at night.</p> <p>Smithfield car park is an integral part of the market building and for security reasons is locked at night. Members are asked to agree that the opening hours for Smithfield car park be extended during the Christmas late night shopping period with the set tariff applying.</p>
<p>3.19</p>	<p>If these proposals are agreed Dfl and Translink will collaborate with Council on communication plans, messaging and press releases and to link into the Visit Belfast</p>

	<p>promotional campaign.</p> <p><u>Finance and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>3.20 It is estimated that extending the opening hours of Smithfield Market car park this Christmas could generate an additional income of up to £5k.</p> <p>3.21 <u>Equality and Good Relations Issues</u></p> <p>There are no foreseeable equality or good relations issues.</p>
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
4.1	<p>Appendix 1 - Letter from Translink (9th August 2016) regarding Christmas 2016 Transport Management Arrangements.</p> <p>Appendix 2 - Christmas transport proposals.</p>