

Belfast City Council response to Translink on the Equality Impact Assessment for the Transport Hub and Associated Masterplan

Background

Translink has opened a period of public consultation on an Equality Impact Assessment for the Transport Hub and Associated Masterplan. An extension to the consultation period was agreed to allow for approval of our response at Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 20 August 2021, with the response then to be submitted subject to Council approval in September 2021.

Introduction

Belfast City Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Equality Impact Assessment for the Transport Hub and Associated Masterplan. It should be noted that the Council's City Growth and Regeneration Committee is scheduled to receive a presentation on the Transport Hub/Weavers Cross development in August 2021 which will also provide an opportunity for discussion on the development.

We have given due consideration to this EQIA given the synergies between the aims of the Transport Hub and Associated Masterplan, and its potential to contribute to the ongoing transformation of Belfast. Comments were sought from across the council for inclusion in the response and we welcome any opportunity for further dialogue on any of the areas noted.

Contributing to the Belfast Agenda

As noted in the EQIA, the Transport Hub, is a key transport-led regeneration project that will contribute to Belfast's community plan (the Belfast Agenda) ambitions and vision for the city in 2035 that *Belfast will be a city re-imagined and resurgent. A great place to live and work for everyone. Beautiful, well-connected and culturally vibrant, it will be a sustainable city shared and loved by all its citizens, free from the legacy of conflict.* As a key city infrastructure development it will contribute to our shared city outcome that by 2035:

- Belfast is vibrant, attractive, connected and environmentally sustainable city.

The Transport Hub is also identified as a transformational intervention for the city centre in the Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy (BCCRIS) which recognises the pivotal role of the city centre for the success of the city and for the region. This sets out the Council's ambition for the continuing growth and regeneration of the city core and its

surrounding area up to 2030 and has been adopted by the Department for Communities as the policy framework for the city centre.

BCCRIS identifies the South Centre of the city centre as the primary focus for Belfast's office sector, at the centre of NI's knowledge economy and an essential driver of the region's economic growth. The Transport Hub and associated masterplan will be a major improvement in convenience and connectivity as well as promoting sustainable and active travel, catering for over 14 million passengers per year; the impact of its reach will extend well beyond Belfast city centre. However, it is more than a multi-modal transport facility, the development will redefine a key gateway to the city centre as well as offering significant regeneration potential.

The Transport Hub will also have a key role in contributing to the Bolder Vision for Belfast, a shared vision with commitment to further collaboration from Belfast City Council, Department for Communities and Department for Infrastructure. As a key gateway to the city for employment, social-life and tourism the Transport Hub will contribute to the Bolder Vision's key principles of prioritising integrated walking, cycling and public transport as well as providing inclusive, shared spaces and improving access for all communities to the city centre.

Serving our communities

Inclusion and accessibility need to be at the centre of the Transport Hub for its success, and travel to and from the hub. We welcome recognition of the ongoing need to take cognisance of the diverse needs of those who may choose to use the hub. Given demographic changes and as the Covid-19 recovery is felt in the tourism industry and the broader economy, it is likely that there will be increasing diversity in needs as the development progresses and is operational. We note the mitigating measures that have been prioritised along with the ongoing engagement with stakeholders such as IMTAC. We would also encourage engagement with stakeholders from all of the Section 75 protected characteristics groups.

The Council has received several representations from local business and residents' groups in relation to the development of the Transport Hub/Weavers Cross. We would therefore emphasise the importance of ongoing, meaningful community engagement as the Transport Hub and associated masterplan progresses to ensure that the economic and connectivity benefits of this development are felt by local communities and businesses.

As referenced in the EQIA, the establishment of a Community Committee and the commitment of the dedicated community engagement manager for the Belfast Transport Hub since 2017 are welcomed, given the significance of this development. These are vital resources in recognising the needs and maintaining dialogue with all communities of interest; particularly

in catalysing the regeneration in the surrounding areas and maximising the benefits for the local communities.

The partnership working to date between the Community Engagement Manager, Belfast City Council and the contractor has resulted in a bespoke 'Belfast Transport Hub Construction Employment Academy' to offer employment opportunities for local people, who had been out of employment. 24.9% of the working age population in Belfast are employment deprived (compared to a regional figure of 20.6%) and 38.1% of the working age adults have no or low levels of qualification (compared to 35.6% regionally)¹ and The Transport Hub has highlighted the role that flagship developments in the city centre can play in delivering on inclusive growth and social value commitments through measures such as this. While not specifically identified as a Section 75 group, the cumulative impact of multiple sources of disadvantage – low incomes, benefit dependency, low skills levels and qualifications – are likely to combine together to impact on an individual's opportunity and capacity to participate in employability programmes. The impact of Covid-19 has also served to accelerate the inequalities in society emphasising the need for an inclusive and sustainable recovery.

The first Employment Academy in 2020 saw 101 people signing up through 6 sign-up events, including two dedicated sign-up events in Sandy Row and Grosvenor Rd to promote access to employment for the adjoining communities. Of those who met the criteria, 16 participants were selected for the Belfast Transport Hub Construction Employment Academy, which resulted in 9 job outcomes relating to the Enabling Works.

Plans for the Construction Employment Academies for the Main Works are already in place with Social Value job opportunities due to come online from January 2022.

This commitment to inclusive growth and social value of the Transport Hub has been recognised through the achievement of two National Social Value Awards in 2021 for its delivery, in partnership with Belfast City Council and the contractor, working with the local community.

We welcome the continued engagement and commitment of the Transport Hub to inclusive growth and the development of the Inclusive Growth city charter.

Good relations

We welcome cognisance of the historical status of the site of the Boyne Bridge within the project and that it will continue to be afforded due and proportionate regard through ongoing engagement with the local community. The aim of such engagement is to ensure that good

¹ NISRA (2018) NI Multiple Deprivation Measure 2017

relations are maintained and enhanced, this is key to the diversity of our city as outlined in our Good Relations Strategy, agreed by all the political parties on Council in September 2019.

While much of the current focus is on the construction phase, it may be worth considering at this stage, the ultimate potential of the new Transport Hub and Wider Masterplan to be a new Shared Space for people from all backgrounds. The Good Relations Strategy details shared space principles and how they fit with the strategic vision for the city. When we use the term Shared Space we are describing space that is welcoming, accessible, good quality and safe.

- Welcoming
 - Shared Space should be welcoming, where people feel safe to visit and to take part in activity within that space, increasing an overall sense of shared experience and community
 - Activities within the public spaces will respect diversity and promote inclusion

- Accessible
 - There will be equality of opportunity afforded to all those using public spaces and accessing goods, facilities and services
 - In a Shared City, public expressions of identity will be respected and respectful
 - Shared Spaces should reflect the values of diversity and inclusion

- Good quality
 - Shared Space should be good quality, with attractive, high quality services and well-designed buildings and spaces

- Safe
 - • Shared Space should be safe for all

We welcome the stated purpose of the purpose of the Masterplan as being: 'to create an accessible, safe, comfortable and attractive environment for the Hub's customers, visitors and employees alike that is functional and practical to operate, cost-effective to maintain, commercially attractive, efficient and sustainable'. There is also potential for the project to contribute to an additional outcome of our Good Relations Strategy, focused on shared services. Through this aim we will:

- Focus on inclusion and social innovation
- Improve our use of data and evidence-based planning
- Evidence and articulate where division exacerbate social and economic issues

- Co-design and co-create new solutions to challenging issues
- Promote integrated planning
- Encourage projects that build the capacity of organisations and communities to be confident to access services throughout the city
- Encourage attitudinal and behavioural change.

Use of datasets in EQIA Appendix 3

We welcome Translink's research and the inclusion of supporting datasets within the EQIA. One such dataset presented is contained in Appendix 3 of the draft EQIA which outlines Data on Residents of Belfast. This is an *extract from the Belfast Local Government Plan Topic Paper 17: Population, 2017*. It should be noted that this topic paper is a supporting document in relation to the Belfast Local Development Plan *draft Plan Strategy 2035*.

The *draft Plan Strategy* is still in draft form and we are currently awaiting the Planning Appeals Commission's report following the Independent Examination earlier this year. It is therefore potentially subject to modification, adoption or withdrawal once the final report is. The policies in the *draft Plan Strategy* cannot be used until such time as the Plan is adopted. It is therefore possible that the Weavers Cross proposal will be considered under the current planning policy framework. We trust that as a public authority, Translink is however willing to commit to the proposals identified within Appendix 3 without necessarily being planning policy driven.

Therefore, we would ask for the following changes:

- a. Removal of the reference to "In land use planning terms" at para 4.3, as this relates to the *draft Plan Strategy* and is not current land use planning policy. We would suggest the revised paragraph should read as follows:

'The principle of promoting equality of opportunity and good relations between people' must be a key objective behind the plan and will be a central theme of the sustainability assessment. This means ensuring everyone benefits from quality housing, employment, and access to public services and recreation facilities. These themes will be addressed in more detail in later papers. However, this paper begins the process of identifying issues and needs facing different groups within the area over and above the general population, so that these can be considered at every stage of the plan making process. If an aim of the plan is also to help build a cohesive society then it must also be recognised that this can only be achieved by "sharing space" and "accessing opportunities".'

- b. Removal of the reference to “that planning provides” at para 4.4, as this relates to the *draft* Plan Strategy and is not current land use planning policy. We would suggest the revised paragraph should read as follows:

‘The age structure of a population has obvious implications for planning. A growing young population will impact on the demand for and provision of childcare facilities, nursery, primary and secondary schools. A growing working age population would necessitate adequate housing especially for those entering the housing market and employment opportunities. For a growing elderly population, adequate services and housing to meet their specific needs must also be considered.’

The Council reiterates its broad welcome for the proposals set out in respect of the Transport Hub and asks that the contents of this response are considered going forward.