



DSD - Access and Mobility Study for Belfast City Centre

Disability Action's Response September 2009

Any enquiry concerning this document should be made to
Monica Wilson
Chief Executive
Disability Action
Portside Business Park
189 Airport Road West
Belfast
BT3 9ED

Tel: 028 90 297880 Fax 028 90 297881
Textphone: 028 90 297882
Website: www.disabilityaction.org
Email: hq@disabilityaction.org

INTRODUCTION

- 1 Disability Action is a pioneering Northern Ireland charity working with and for people with disabilities. We work with our members to provide information, training, transport, awareness programmes and representation for people regardless of their disability; whether that is physical, mental, sensory, hidden or learning disability.
- 2 21% (369,390) of adults and 6% (105,540) of children in Northern Ireland has a disability and the incidence is higher here than in the rest of the United Kingdom. Over one quarter of all families here are affected
- 3 As a campaigning body, we work to bring about positive change to the social, economic and cultural life of people with disabilities and consequently our entire community. In pursuit of our aims we serve 45,000 people each year.
- 4 Our network of services is provided via our Headquarters in Belfast and in three regional offices in Carrickfergus, Derry and Dungannon.
- 5 For ease of reference this response will follow as far as possible the layout of the Study report including general commentary and specific commentary notably relating to the key issues and recommendations. We will also include page numbers where possible.

GENERAL COMMENTARY

- 6 Disability Action welcomes the long anticipated Access and Mobility Study Consultation Draft but we are disappointed that the Study does not progress matters in relation to future access to and mobility within Belfast city centre.
- 7 This “Study” falls short of the Access and Mobility Strategy Disability Action requested and which was first agreed as urgent almost two years ago. Whilst the Study is a reasonably comprehensive summary of the situation in Belfast at present, it does not address the impact of the current and planned works on accessibility nor does it set objectives to ensure that the current levels of accessibility are maintained or built upon.

- 8 The Study has failed to tap into the most obvious source of knowledge and experience in terms of access and mobility that is disabled people themselves. The promised involvement of the disability sector in the Study did not extend beyond the workshop event held in August 2008 and whilst the Study reports the themes of that workshop it does not attempt to address the issues raised.
- 9 Furthermore the delay in the release of the Study means that certain of its elements are now out of date, for example Blue Badge Parking enforcement has been in place for over a year but the Study continues to misquote abuse of the Blue Badge as a reason to reduce vehicular access.
- 10 Disability Action remains concerned that work continues on the ground and planning for future projects continues without the guidance that an Access and Mobility Strategy would have provided. The recommendations within this report do little more than suggest that the relevant government departments consider adhering to statutory minimum technical standards and how they might consult with the disability sector.
- 11 The Study states its intent is “to provide an understanding of the accessibility and mobility issues faced in central Belfast by people with disabilities and to explore the examples of how initiatives introduced in other cities, and the application of best practice, can tackle these issues” – but the language is about compromise and balance between users notably cyclists and public transport.
- 12 It is evident from the outset that the desired outcome is the control/removal of vehicles from the city centre, the Study states as much on page 5, but whilst there is mention of the impact this may have upon walking distances there is little real, demonstrable understanding of what that will actually mean to disabled people.
- 13 Furthermore the value of the Study is called into question when it does not advise what the future plans for Belfast are and makes no effort to shape their impact on access and mobility. For example the Study should guide the introduction of Rapid Transit to ensure its accessibility and to minimise the potential negative impact upon the accessibility of the streetscape – it does neither but suggests that access and mobility will have to fit around the Rapid Transit proposals.

- 14 The Study repeatedly refers to consultations held with disabled people and organisations representing disabled people, it is not clear from the content of this report, notably the recommendations, that the views of those disabled people were heard.

SPECIFIC COMMENTARY

Emerging Proposals

- 15 The Study suggests some of the potential future changes under consideration for the city centre. Figure 1.2 summarises these suggestions as:
- An extension of the pedestrian priority area to include Donegall Place, Wellington Place, Chichester Street and Donegall Square North, East and West.
 - The introduction of Rapid Transit routes along the Wellington Place – Chichester Street and Howard Street – May Street axis.
 - “Access Streets” to the north of the pedestrian priority area to include North Street, Donegall Street and Waring Street; and to the south as Brunswick, Upper Queen Street, Amelia Street, Hamilton Street, Linenhall Street Adelaide Street.
 - Adelaide and Bedford Streets and the High Street-Castle Street axis are described as Public Transport Routes.
- 16 It does not explain what is meant by “access street” or if other vehicles are to be allowed to share the public transport routes?
- 17 The Study does not include any analysis of the potential impacts upon access and mobility for disabled people of these “aspirations”, therefore the identification of key issues is not future-proofed.

Policy and Guidance

- 18 The Study sets out certain policy and guidance but fails to demonstrate how these should impact upon the plans or proposals. Three examples of this lack of application are given below

- 19 The Disability Discrimination (NI) Order 2006 aims to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and increase their participation in society. The redevelopment of Belfast City Centre is an opportunity for the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Department for Social Development, the Department for Regional Development and Belfast City Council to create a physical demonstration of their commitment to equality for all. The topography of the city centre is almost flat and the area is of a manageable size to enable the creation of an accessible city which would embrace these “disability duties” but the Study makes no attempt to do so.
- 20 The Study describes some of the aims of the Accessible Transport Strategy and the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan but fails to say anything as to how these will influence the proposals for the city centre. Furthermore it describes the recommendations of the General Consumer Council that sufficient access and parking for disabled drivers be provided and monitored but later in the document suggests proposal which would result in the opposite.
- 21 This Access and Mobility Study should have set out clearly recommended measures to create an exemplary city in terms of access and mobility for people with disabilities.

Review of Recent City Centre Studies

- 22 The Access and Mobility Study should analyse the access and mobility implications of the various proposals for the city centre, i.e. the Streets Ahead project, the Belfast City Centre Traffic Management Project, and the Rapid Transit project, but makes no attempt to do so.
- 23 The Study fails to set out what these proposals entail never mind review or apply any analysis to them. In fact the opposite is suggested by the implication that the access and mobility needs should fit around the proposals suggested in each project rather than the other way around.

Consultation

- 24 Disability Action has previously responded to the draft report of the Access and Mobility Workshop held on August 28th 2008. Notably our response concluded that this single event should be

considered as a first step toward improved consultation and not as the whole process.

- 25 The Study failed to engage further with disabled people or disability organisations and fails to identify the need for future engagements. This failure to consult with those who have experience of access and mobility in Belfast has resulted in a flawed Study which fails to demonstrate any understanding of the issues and presents no real solutions.
- 26 There should be ongoing and involved consultation with the disability sector in all aspects of the future studies and proposals notably Streets Ahead, the update to the Disabled Parking and Movement Study, the Belfast City Centre Traffic Management Project and the Rapid Transit project.

Case Studies

- 27 We welcome the Study's examination of good practice examples. The report quotes case studies from other UK cities as examples of good practice that could be used in Belfast; however it quotes services in isolation and has not investigated the views of disabled people on the actual success of these provisions on the ground.
- 28 Disability Action in compiling this response has contacted the local Access Group and Access Officers in each of the areas quoted to get a user perspective on the effectiveness of the projects used in the Study.
- 29 This initial survey has led us to question the accuracy of some of the information provided and suggests that the case studies do not demonstrate the actual situation experienced disabled by disabled people in these cities. For example:
- 30 The Leicester case study was considered by the Local Access Group to be "pretty misleading and inaccurate". Our contacts felt that: the expanded pedestrian area has significantly increased walking distances as has the relocation of the public transport routes; cyclists permitted in the pedestrian area are a major concern; the vehicle access restriction has not applied to those with pre-existing parking provision in the controlled area which is confusing and dangerous for disabled people and has in effect created a shared surface; and the additional free blue badge

parking mostly replaced that which had been displaced from the pedestrian zone and was always free.

- 31 Another example is the Swansea “Pavements for People Policy”, which is not dissimilar to the BCCM Memorandum of Understanding. It was considered as “a big wash out” by the local disability groups. The street photographed in the report is Wine Street and is apparently closed to vehicular access from Wednesday to Saturday which has “made it a place that old people and disabled people don’t want to come to”.
- 32 The Edinburgh taxi training initiative has introduced training for black taxi drivers, wheelchair accessible vehicles and a complaints procedure with disciplinary action; however our contacts felt that there remained issues about whether cab drivers would actually stop to lift a disabled passenger and felt that there should be an education programme to back the scheme up.
- 33 Our contacts in Bristol felt that the heads-up maps were good in that they gave the reader a clear understanding of where they were at in relation to the map and that they were well located at bus stops etc; however they were disappointed that the audible element of the scheme was never implemented. The i+ points were not considered as accessible as they are touch screen and only provide visible information and that the height of the units was also not accessible.

KEY ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this section where possible we will quote from the Study report the issues (I) and recommendations (R) as set out in the Study in advance of our assessment of each. Disability Action’s recommendations are located at the end of each sub section and are in **bold**

Consultation

The Study says:

I - Lack of co-ordination between government departments and disability groups.

R – Government departments should consider therefore, how they can engage with disability groups at as early a stage as practicable, and in a

consistent manner, in order to ensure their views are considered prior to the submission of a planning application for a scheme.

R – We also recommend that in relation to any access and mobility issues or opportunities for major schemes in the city centre, disability groups such as IMTAC or Disability Action, should contact the relevant department to encourage that any high level issues are given appropriate consideration.

34 The Study notes a “palpable viewpoint” from the disability groups that their input has been given unsatisfactory consideration by the government departments. However the recommendations set to overcome such a situation seem to suggest that disability organisations should pursue government departments while the government departments “should consider” how they can engage with disability groups. This is hardly a demonstration of a positive attitude toward the disability sector or of an understanding of their frustrations to date. (P47 and 48).

35 **Disability Action recommends that a Consultative Forum is established as a matter of urgency to formalise consultation methodology and practices. This forum should consist of the DRD, DSD, and any other relevant government department, Belfast City Council, and disability organisations. The Forum should meet at least quarterly or as required to assist in making decisions regarding any matters which may impact upon access and mobility in the city centre.**

Parking

The Study says:

I - Further reductions in disabled parking provision in central locations due to pedestrianisation proposals may decrease car-based access options for disabled users.

R – Given this available capacity it is considered that more should be done to encourage the use of well located off street spaces which have adequate available capacity to accommodate disabled parking.

R – It is suggested that the development of any traffic management projects in the city centre should take account of the need to accommodate parking for those with disabilities.

- 36 The Study compares parking provision in Belfast to other similar UK cities and suggests that parking availability is “very generous”. This is based upon a measurement of both on-street and off-street parking provision. The suggestions seems to be that parking provision should be reduced in line with these other places but this does not take account of the higher prevalence of disability in Northern Ireland when compared to the UK or Europe, and therefore the need for better provision rather than as-good-as or lesser provision. (p17)
- 37 The recommendation that more should be done to encourage the use of off-street parking provision does not take account of the costs that would be incurred by disabled people. Disabled people as a group are amongst the poorest in Northern Ireland with 70% living on or about the poverty line. Those of working age are twice as likely to have no qualifications and are up to four times more likely to be unemployed. An initial survey of the parking locations suggested (Table 5.3 p19) revealed that prices vary from £1.40 per hour to £2.50 per hour, with 78% costing over £1.80 per hour or part thereof. Given that the current on-street parking opportunities are free of charge, this change will have a significant adverse impact upon disabled people which will require mitigation.
- 38 Also while mention is made of the accessibility of the suggested parking locations, this assumption does not recognise that at best only 5% of that off-street parking is likely to be accessible and therefore available to disabled users. In addition, it does not take account of the travel distance from the suggested parking locations, which again demonstrates a lack of understanding of access and mobility issues. A disabled person would not park in the Dublin Road, or at the Waterfront, Laynon place, or Donegall Quay to access the city centre because of the walking distances. Furthermore multi-storey parking is not available to some disabled people using adapted vehicles due to head height and bay-width restrictions. (p19 & 49)
- 39 That there is no parking strategy for Belfast, and this Study only suggests” that future provision take account of the need to accommodate parking for disabled people, is indicative of the

significant lack of understanding amongst government departments of the needs of disabled people in terms of access and mobility. (p51)

- 40 **Disability Action recommends that a comprehensive audit be undertaken of all the current parking opportunities in Belfast City Centre in terms of their accessibility, cost and location, which should feed into any future changes to parking provision e.g. the traffic management plan. The DRD and DSD need to recognise that disabled people need on-street parking provision close to the central area and within the proposed pedestrian priority area. The Consultative Forum should assist Roads Service to identify potential accessible parking opportunities in this area.**

Pedestrianisation

The Study says:

R – The aspirations and functions of a Special Access Scheme should be considered within the proposals relevant to Belfast City Centre, with special access potentially being afforded to persons with severe mobility impairments within key restricted access areas. The practical implementation needs to be considered by the relevant government departments.

- 41 This Study presumes the future pedestrianisation of Donegall Place in advance of an Equality Impact Assessment of such a proposal and despite the findings of a Public Inquiry at the Planning Appeals Commission in 1999 which identified the need for Blue Badge parking in the central area of the city.
- 42 The Study suggests consideration of a Special Access Scheme to enable access for those with severe mobility impairments to key restricted access areas. This proposed scheme is no different to the White Permit (pedestrian area access permit) schemes which have already been shown not to work in Carrickfergus and Coleraine.
- 43 **Disability Action believe that only the provision of adequate accessible parking provision for Blue badge holders close to the central area can ensure access to the city centre for disabled people. We are willing to work with the relevant**

Departments to look at such a proposal but advise caution as to how the design, implementation and management of such a scheme could be accommodated without creating a shared surface on the ground and a hierarchy of disability provision.

Shopmobility

The Study says:

I - Threat to the service which existing shopmobility centres can provide and how these centres can be practically integrated into the mobility hub concept

R – It is recommended that the existing Shopmobility facilities are promoted as part of any future mobility hubs providing better access for people with disabilities to the whole of the city centre. In addition Shopmobility should work closely with the relevant government authority to establish where further Shopmobility facilities could be made available (perhaps remotely) in line with other proposed mobility hubs at least remotely.

R – We recommend that Shopmobility Belfast receive some assistance to better market these facilities to the various disabled groups to ensure all potential users are more aware of the service.

- 44 Shopmobility schemes are not the sole solution to accessibility and mobility but they are an important link in the chain of provision and should be readily available as an option to disabled people. The Study (p21) recognises that Shopmobility may be under threat notably due to funding concerns but makes no recommendation as to how this should be addressed.
- 45 Shopmobility services will be key to the success or failure of the notional “mobility hubs” therefore the funding and sustainability of services should be an integral element of an access and mobility strategy/study/report.
- 46 **The Consultative Forum should consider and assist in planning how Shopmobility services can be funded, marketed, where they should be located and how they can be integrated with the Mobility Hubs and other services i.e.**

door-to-door, accessible taxis, public transport, accessible parking etc.

Door-to-Door Services

The Study says:

I - There is a current lack of integration between door-to-door service and other services such as shopmobility, and a concern that the future proposals in the city centre may impact on the penetration of the existing door to door service.

R – A clear opportunity exists also to combine this research into the concept of providing a series of Mobility Hubs around the city centre area and promoting better access for all.

R – It is recommended that a more strategic approach to community transport is considered, with support afforded to door-to-door service providers within the community. This should consider how future access restrictions in the city centre can be mitigated against to minimise any impact on the penetration of existing service.

47 The Study suggests better integration between door-to-door services, shopmobility and the notional “mobility hubs” and recommends a more “strategic approach”. Disability Action will welcome a strategic analysis of how public and community transport, and door to door services can be integrated. **We recommend that such an analysis include accessible taxis and shopmobility services and addresses how these services can have access to the heart of the city centre.**

Abuse of the Blue Badge Scheme

The Study says:

R – It is recommended that marketing of the current concentrated effort/potential future ‘crackdown’ on the misuse of disabled parking bays, should be carried out with the use of an advertising campaign.

48 The Study again refers to the perceived abuse/misuse of the Blue Badge as a reason to reduce the amount of Blue Badge parking in the city centre but does not take account of the impact of

measures in place for over a year to specifically target such abuse. This may be as a result of the delay in the release of the Study but one would have expected an analysis of the impact of the measures now in place in tackling the perceived abuse of the Blue Badge Scheme.

- 49 **Disability Action recommends that resources are applied to an effective enforcement campaign in conjunction with the Consultative Forum and all the relevant bodies notably the Roads Service and PSNI.**

Mobility Hubs

- 50 The Study makes much of the notion of 'Mobility Hubs' first suggested in the Belfast Streets Ahead Masterplan. Disability Action welcomes the concept of a series of 'hubs' which would include accessible toilet facilities, accessible parking provision, accessible bus and rail facilities, shopmobility facilities, wayfinder signage and mapping information, accessible pedestrian facilities and drop-off and pick-up facilities.

- 51 However the Study does not suggest how these hubs would be established, staffed, funded or sustained. If these hubs are to be key to the future accessibility of Belfast City Centre they must be sustainable.

The Consultative Forum should consider and plan the introduction of Mobility Hubs across the city centre.

Eco-bus

The Study says:

I – Limited opportunities to introduce an Ecobus system in the city centre due to lack of detailed research into costs, routes and mobility hub locations.

R – It is recommended that further assessment of the potential to introduce Eco-Bus services in conjunction with Mobility Hubs is carried out for the city. This should include further work on the practicalities for potential routes, the required funding and operational features of the service.

- 53 The Study revisits the idea of an ‘Eco-Bus’ first raised in the Streets Ahead Masterplan and which would follow a route around the pedestrianised areas of the city centre potentially linking into the notional “Mobility Hubs”.
- 54 Disability Action will welcome further exploration of this idea but we also express concern as to how a vehicle can be integrated into pedestrianised areas without creating potential hazards for blind and partially sighted and deaf and hard of hearing people in particular.
- 55 **Disability Action recommends that firm proposals are drawn together as to how an eco-bus could contribute to improved accessibility in the city centre. These should be compiled for consideration as soon as possible.**

Public Transport Provision

The Study says:

I - Lack of disability awareness displayed by some bus drivers when dealing with disabled customers. Also poor communication with disabled users when informing customers of changes to services.

R – As this is not yet fully rolled out we recommend that Translink ensure that the disability awareness training is carried out as soon as possible and that this fully incorporates the changes to the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA).

- 56 The Study does not include much information regarding access by public transport to the city centre beyond comments gleaned from the Access and Mobility Workshop and a recommendation relating to driver training.
- 57 Whilst we welcome the encouragement to provide staff training we need information on the proposed future locations of bus stops in and around the city centre. The location of bus drop off and pick up points are key to the accessibility of bus services to disabled people notably people with visual impairments who rely on public transport for mobility.

- 58 **Disability Action recommends that the options regarding how public transport services are to be made available in the city centre are made public immediately. The Consultative Forum should be consulted on all future public transport proposals and developments in the city centre.**
- 59 **The provision of park and ride facilities should be reviewed to maximise access for disabled people and access into the city centre.**
- 60 **The Consultative Forum should be consulted on all proposals relating to the introduction of a Rapid Transit scheme to ensure that the service is accessible and does not impinge upon the accessibility of the streetscape.**

Taxi Provision

The Study says:

I - Lack of disability awareness displayed by some taxi drivers when dealing with disabled customers. Also poor standard waiting facilities at some taxi ranks.

R – We recommend that the DOE Road Transport Licensing Branch adopt an approach similar to that established in Edinburgh which introduces a training programme as part of the taxi licensing requirements in order to ensure a higher standard of service can be achieved and provided to disabled users.

- 61 As for access by public transport the Study does not tell us where accessible taxis will pick up/drop off/rank, if accessible taxis cannot get into the city centre their services are not accessible to disabled people. Whilst we welcome the recommendation in relation to training it will apply to public hire vehicles only.
- 62 **The Consultative Forum should be consulted on the future provision and design of taxi facilities and services in the city centre.**

Desire Lines

The Study says:

I - Key pedestrian routes between the main public transport interchanges in the city and the city centre core area are not fully accessible for disabled users.

- 63 The Study has identified the key desire lines from the major transport hubs, i.e. the Europa, Laganside and Central Stations, and presumably has identified the access barriers along these routes, however it fails to make any recommendations in respect of these routes for example a programme of access improvements. Also the Study does not note the desire lines from the Metro service drop off/pick up points, either current or future.
- 64 **Disability Action recommends the creation of quality accessible walking routes with clear wayfinding information from the major transport hubs, stations and stops, drop-off and pick-up points and the Mobility Hubs.**

Street Clutter and Café Culture

The Study says:

I - The quantity, positioning and dimensions of street clutter and café furniture in pedestrian areas are creating unsafe obstacles for disabled users travelling around the city.

R – It is also recommended that Belfast City Council consider the approach adopted by Swansea City Council who regulate outdoor café seating areas through licensing in order to ensure the safety of pedestrians and to maintain access to services.

- 65 The Study recognises the impact of street furniture and other moveable obstructions on the footpath for disabled people, notably A boards and café furniture. This is an increasing problem in and around the city centre especially since the introduction of the smoking ban and Disability Action will welcome measures to control the location of such obstacles and the access routes around them. We participated in the compilation of both the BCCM Memorandum of Understanding and DCAN 11 but are not

aware that either has been published and therefore they are not in use, we would welcome their release as a matter of urgency.

- 66 We also draw attention to a moving obstruction which is bicycles which are not parked consistently from day to day. We understand that the Streets Ahead project will introduce formal cycle racks in the city centre and will welcome involvement in their design and location.
- 67 Disability Action welcomed the “Belfast City Centre Public Realm Design Codes” created as part of the Streets Ahead project however we are disappointed that the impact on the ground does not reflect the expected degree of colour contrast both on the ground to demark the “footway clear-zones” and safe places to walk and on the furniture itself which fails to contrast to a significant degree. **Disability Action recommends that remedial action be taken to ensure that street furniture achieves the required contrast.**
- 68 **The streetscape should be subject to regular audits and powers of enforcement enacted; this should be reported to the Consultative Forum at least quarterly.**

Crossing Points

The Study says:

I - The existing crossing facilities in the city centre are in some instances unavailable, poorly designed or poorly maintained, and as such hinder the safe and convenient access around the city for disabled users.

R –It is recommended that adherence to the appropriate design standards for inclusive mobility is thoroughly monitored to help ensure that appropriate provisions such as dropped kerbs and tactile paving are installed to assist disabled users. It is recommended therefore that specific locations where improvements are required are brought up to the appropriate design standards.

- 69 Disability Action welcome the identification of sub-standard crossing points and trust that the results of the audit of existing facilities undertaken as part of this study in 2008 have since been used to guide a programme of improvement works.

- 70 **Remedial action should be taken immediately to correct substandard or missing dropped kerbs and tactile warning surfaces. This should be tied into the provision of quality accessible walking corridors.**

Surfacing

The Study says:

I - The choice of surfacing used in pedestrian areas can pose a safety risk for disabled users.

R – It is recommended therefore that specific locations where improvements are required are brought up to the appropriate design standards.

- 71 The Streets Ahead project will undoubtedly improve the surface finish of the pavements across the city centre and the Masterplan included some good ideas in respect of the use of contrast bands to delineate safe places to walk away from street furniture or vehicles during servicing hours. It is disappointing that the degree of contrast required to achieve this intention has not been achieved on the ground, the materials chosen only provide a sufficient degree of contrast on wet days. Although wet days are in abundance in Northern Ireland it is not appropriate that blind and partially sighted people only feel safe in the rain. **We understand that there is a solution available in the form of a resin which can be applied to the surface and urge that this be undertaken as a matter of urgency. We also recommend that second or third party re-instatement is policed to ensure that materials are replaced to the same standard.**
- 72 In consultation disability groups had urged the inclusion of tactile and other way-finding clues in the streetscape. **Disability Action would welcome the opportunity to consider options for this with the design team and other disability groups notably the RNIB and Guidedogs.**
- 73 Disability Action has repeatedly expressed concern in respect of the choice of drain cover to be used throughout the city centre which we consider to be dangerous. We understand that the drain cover used is BSI kitemark approved and are currently pursuing

the matter with the British Standards Institute however we feel that both the DSD and DRD should also pursue this matter rather than accepting a product which is clearly unsafe. **The drain covers should be reassessed as a matter of urgency.**

Signage

The Study says:

I – Current signage provision within the city centre can be unhelpful or misleading for disabled users.

R – It is recommended that the introduction of this equipment (REACT) is positioned in close consultation with disabled groups especially the RNIB and that their usage and performance is closely monitored for effectiveness.

R- It is also recommended that the DSD and Belfast City Council consider the introduction of heads ups signage and mapping and the incorporation of i+ touch screen systems at key locations so that users can easily identify and plan routes to key destinations. The current system which is in operation in Bristol should be closely reviewed. The potential to incorporate such systems at the potential Mobility Hub locations should also be given consideration.

- 74 Disability Action welcomes the commitment from the DSD to install wayfinder signage units. We will be happy to work with the Department and their designers toward the most appropriate and future-proof system to use and to investigate other low-tech solutions which may improve wayfinding.
- 75 We also welcome the recommendation in respect of improved signage and encourage the relevant Departments to consult with disabled people in advance of installation of any scheme, from our investigations of the case studies quoted in this Study it is our understanding that the i+ touch screen system referred to is not accessible.
- 76 **The Consultative Forum should consider the application of other emerging technology to a wayfinding signage programme throughout the city centre, tied into the provision**

of quality accessible walking routes and appropriate to all users.

Cyclists

The Study says:

I - The use of pedestrianised areas by cyclists can impact on the confidence of disabled users when navigating around the city centre.

- 77 The disability organisations involved in the consultations which have taken place to date in respect of the Street Ahead project have repeatedly stressed that it is not acceptable that pedestrians and cyclists share the same route and urged that the project demand that cyclist dismount in pedestrian areas. While the Study recognises our recommendation it does not make any recommendations in respect of cyclists.
- 78 Disability Action note with dismay that cyclists are to get a Cycling Strategy whilst disabled people have only been given a Study.
- 79 **There should be a zero-tolerance policy on cycling in pedestrian areas; signage should be erected at all entrance points stating that cyclists will dismount.**

Disabled Access Toilets

The Study says:

R – It is recommended therefore that Belfast City Council, in conjunction with the relevant government bodies responsible for the various major proposals planned for the city centre, seek to identify suitable locations for the introduction of new accessible toilet facilities. These should be considered in line with the potential introduction of mobility hubs at key locations in the city centre.

- 80 Disability Action strongly promotes the application of this recommendation in consultation with the disability sector; **we also encourage the Departments to provide a number of “changing places” facilities in the city centre.** These are larger facilities which include the provision of a hoist and adult changing bench.

- 81 **Accessible public toilet facilities should be evenly distributed across the city centre. The Consultative Forum should be involved in decisions about toilet provision in the city centre.**

CONCLUSION

- 82 This long awaited Access and Mobility Study has not moved discussions forward from the initial discussions summarised as an “Access and Mobility Summary Paper” produced by EDAW in August 2007 and used to focus the meeting at which it was agreed that there was an urgent need for an Access and Mobility Strategy also in August 2007.
- 83 The Study contains 23 recommendations that do not address the issues identified or the impact of the current or planned works upon accessibility.
- 84 The Study makes no attempt to place responsibility for action on any of the responsible Departments or to set objectives to ensure that the current levels of accessibility are maintained or built upon.
- 85 The Streets Ahead literature alludes to the vision of Belfast as “a place you and everyone else can easily get to”; the outcome will have the opposite effect.
- 86 Disabled people and their organizations have expressed their frustrations at the manner in which their views and lived experience has been ignored by the Departments. This cannot be allowed to continue and immediate action needs to be agreed by all parties to address this unacceptable situation which will result in the exclusion of people with significant disabilities from our capital city.