

Discussion Paper  
Improving Connectivity and  
Mobility in Belfast

**Client: Belfast City Council**

30 June 2008

# Discussion Paper Improving Connectivity and Mobility in Belfast

## Issue 1

**Client:** Belfast City Council

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Status:

First Issue

Issue no:

v1

Date:

30 June 2008

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## Table of Contents

<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2. Study approach</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3. Challenges</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>4. Existing initiatives</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>5. Recommendations</b>	<b>8</b>
5.1 Developing new shared spaces and destinations	12
5.2 Promoting uniqueness and complementarities of destinations	12
5.3 Public transport – new shared spaces	13
5.4 Consideration of new routes	14
5.5 Higher levels of investment in public transport	16
5.6 Black cabs – expanding coverage and improving regulation	16
5.7 Recognising the ‘Place’ value of the streets	17
5.8 Promoting arterial streets as shared spaces	19
5.9 Private sector contributions to shared spaces	21
5.10 Developing an approach to improving cycling provision	23
5.11 Developing an approach to improving pedestrian connectivity	23
5.12 Organising more shared events	24
5.13 Encouraging mobility through travel planning	27
5.14 Monitoring and evaluation	28
5.15 Changing perceptions	28
<b>6. Conclusions</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Appendix 1. List of the documents considered in this study</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Appendix 2. List of stakeholders that took part in the interviews</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Appendix 3. List of recommendations</b>	<b>34</b>

## 1. Introduction

This Discussion Paper is a result of a two months study, commissioned by the Belfast City Council in April 2008. The aim of the study was to explore the issues of connectivity and mobility in Belfast, in the context of reducing sectarian tensions, and to provide initial suggestions on the opportunities that could be considered to help resolve some of these issues. This study contributes to a wider Conflict Transformation Project that is currently being undertaken by the Belfast City Council, along with a range of partners.

The study specifically focussed on the aim of creating a shared future, as outlined in the Belfast Good Relations Plan 2007.

This Plan was developed in the context of 'A Shared Future' which outlined the Government's vision for the future of Northern Ireland to be 'a peaceful, inclusive, prosperous, stable and fair society firmly founded on the achievement of reconciliation, tolerance, and mutual trust and the protection and vindication of human rights for all'. This policy is currently under review so as to align it with the Northern Ireland Programme for Government 2008-2011. The Programme for Government sets out a vision for a shared and better future and seeks to embed this work as a cross cutting theme in all work of regional and local government.

This study primarily considers the contributions that transportation, mobility and connectivity can play in meeting these objectives, in conjunction with local and strategic regeneration initiatives.

Through discussions with the stakeholders in Belfast that are either directly or indirectly associated with public spaces, regeneration or transport/mobility provision, it is clear that many of the challenges still prevail, from strategic issues of policy and delivery functions, to infrastructure provision and demand management.

Belfast is currently undergoing a massive transformation, moving away from the traditional industrial and factory employment-types to a more diverse and dynamic, knowledge and service-based economy. However, there remain physical and psychological obstacles in the city, based around predominantly radial routes and with sectarian territoriality issues and local physical segregation. The transportation system, including better connected local networks, needs to respond to these new pressures, by contributing to addressing economic and social challenges.

This study provides initial thinking on how transport and regeneration can play a role in helping to resolve these challenges, moving Belfast closer to becoming a shared city with shared resources and facilities.

The recommendations in this discussion paper are built upon:

- A high level review of key policies, strategies, projects and policy directions across a number of bodies and agencies in Belfast
- A series of stakeholder discussions, gathering views and suggestions
- Development of concepts by the study team, in discussions with stakeholders

The list of the documents reviewed and stakeholders interviewed are provided in Appendices 1 and 2.

The study team is grateful to the stakeholders that took part in the discussions, for their time and valuable contributions to this study. We would also like to acknowledge the inputs of those who attended the Round Table discussion forum on 12<sup>th</sup> June, and those who submitted written comments.

This paper has been put together to aid discussions and start inter-agency dialogue on how the resolution of issues of connectivity and segregation can be catalysed through transport and regeneration-related initiatives. It is important to highlight that it has not been the aim of this paper to fully explore the concepts put forward, but instead to stimulate new thinking and to provide an opportunity for early stakeholder engagement and input.

*Please note that the authors recognise the great amount of work that has gone into resolving connectivity and mobility issues in Belfast, especially in the last decade. Therefore, due to the limited duration and scope of this study it will be inevitable that some of the concepts put forward may go over old ground or not be suitable due to the local sensitivities.*

## 2. Study approach

The approach to the study included the following:

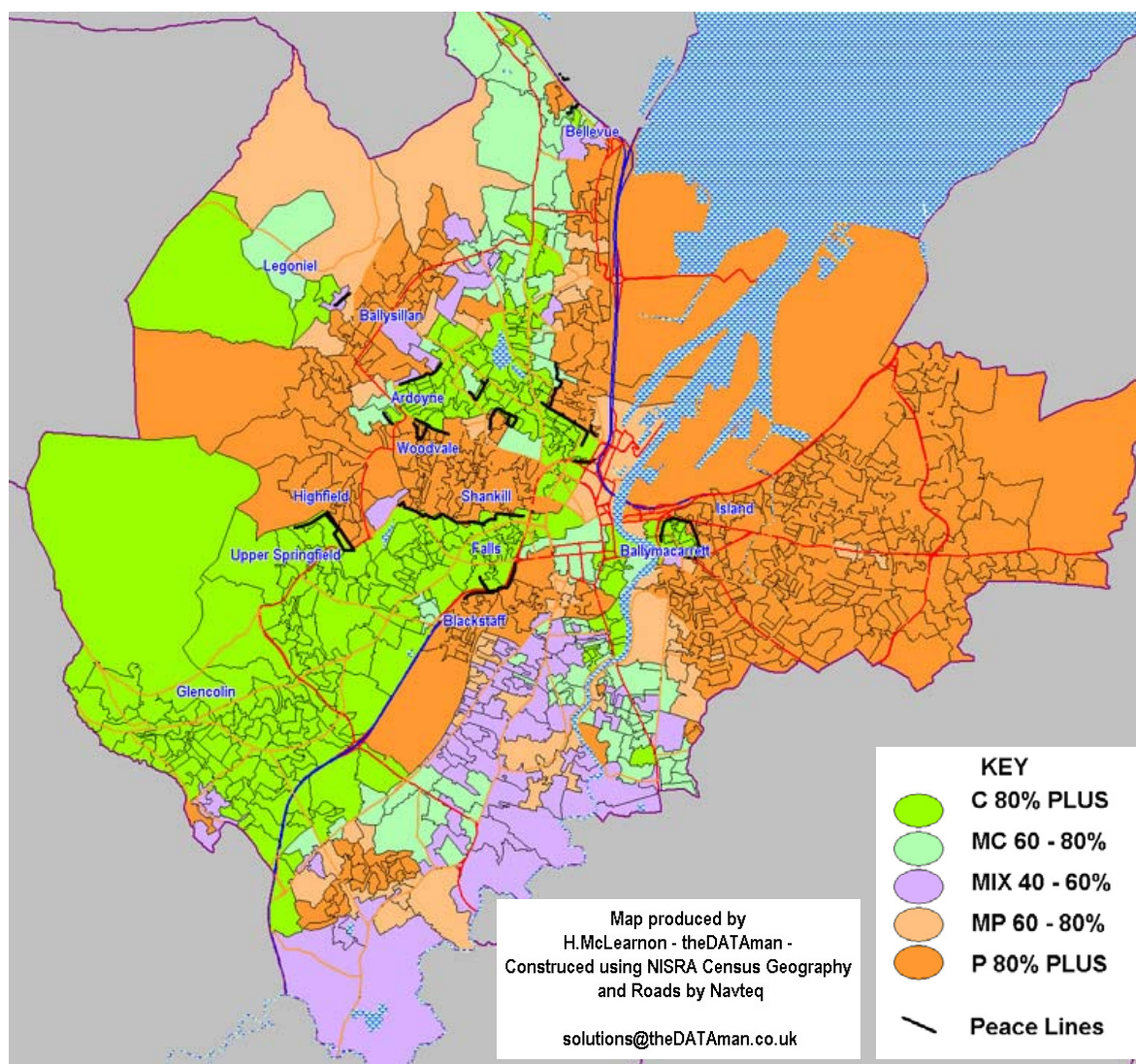
- Briefings to expand on the study specification, with later discussions of the initial findings with the client, Belfast City Council
- A high level review of key policies, strategies, projects and policy directions across a number of bodies and agencies in Belfast (list provided in Appendix 1). The list of the documents was initially drawn up by the Belfast City Council, and then added to during the course of the stakeholder interviews
- A series of stakeholder discussions (list provided in Appendix 2). The aim of the discussions was to draw out a combined appreciation of mobility and connectivity problems in Belfast, and to discuss some possible projects and initiatives that could aid the resolution of these problems. The list of stakeholders was initially drawn up by Belfast City Council, and then added to, following further suggestions by the stakeholders
- Development of some strategic concepts, with a view to bringing in new ideas and perspectives drawing on the wider experience of the study team
- A Round Table discussion on the 12<sup>th</sup> June, to get initial feedback from stakeholders on a draft version of this paper. The points raised by participants have been addressed in this version of the document

### 3. Challenges

Despite the significant progress that has been made over the last decade in overcoming segregation within the city, there still remains the evidence of segregation that bears high economic and social costs for the City of Belfast. Numerous studies have been carried out to explore the impacts of segregation and some of these are listed in Appendix 1. For example, we have noted the high economic costs associated with segmented communities and the limited labour market catchment areas. Figure 1 below illustrates the spatial segregation of communities and the Peace Lines in Belfast.

**Figure 1.** Community Segregation and Peace Lines in Belfast  
(Based on 2001 Census Output Area)

Source: 'The implications of providing services in a divided city', Deloitte



Though it is not the remit of this study to further the understanding of the problems and issues of segregation facing the city, a summary of the key points is provided below, in order to define the starting point for the development of solutions.

The key problems inhibiting the achievement of a shared future include:

- High levels of unemployment and deprivation. For some of the communities in Belfast, poor access to job opportunities prevails. This is exacerbated by low car ownership, low travel horizons and fear of travelling in/through some parts of the city (due to a perception of personal security problems)
- Poor public transport connections between some parts of the city, with the need to interchange in the city centre in order to undertake most cross city journeys by bus
- Physical and psychological barriers at the interfaces between the gated/segregated communities, making travel around parts of the city difficult and resulting in people avoiding using the nearest services if they are associated with the 'other' community
- Territorial "ownership" perceptions, freezing current land use patterns and making the creation of shared spaces more difficult
- Few truly "shared" spaces in the city, therefore a perceived lack of non-sectarian "destinations"

At the same time, any recommended new transport measures will need to contribute to meeting a range of other policy objectives, including:

- Environmental and sustainability targets, such as CO<sub>2</sub> reductions
- Reductions in road traffic accidents
- Reductions in peak hour congestion

In addition, there are a number of institutional constraints, that may exist to a greater or lesser extent that can inhibit the timely implementation of new policy measures including:

- Dispersion of powers for the provision of basic services
- Complicated partnership arrangements in the planning and delivery of transportation services
- Bus provision delivered as a stand-alone service that must meet cost recovery requirements
- A focus on the movement or 'link' functions of roads, with less attention to their 'place' functions as urban streets.
- Lack of consensus amongst government workers on the nature of the issues (i.e. no agreed common factual definition of the problems)

## 4. Existing initiatives

We recognise that there are already a number of initiatives under development in Belfast, to address some of the problems identified in this paper. In particular:

- At a strategic level, the draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP) study, including:
  - The designation of major new employment and mixed use development sites, in the Titanic quarter and in the west of the city
  - The cross city rapid transit system
  - The development of a city-wide cycling network
- At a more local level:
  - Regeneration proposals, e.g. on the Crumlin Road
  - The 'arterial roads' initiative, to improve the physical appearance of the frontages and streetscape along the main radial routes
  - A review of pedestrian links across the Westlink, etc

However, as far as we are aware, in most cases these policy measures have not been designed specifically to meet social objectives, or to contribute directly to the Shared Futures agenda.

In the next section, we put forward recommendations for addressing the challenges set out in section 3 as a series of concepts, building where possible on these existing initiatives.

Some of the concepts put forward may go over old ground, proposing projects or initiatives that may have been trialled and abandoned in the past. The evolution of political and social perceptions and the general environment in Belfast has a big impact on the degree of uptake and success of any initiatives. It therefore may be useful to consider again some of the old concepts under changing circumstances.

## 5. Recommendations

The complexity of the underlying problems outlined in section 3 present major challenges in identifying effective solutions. The social and political environment in Northern Ireland requires that proposals should be implemented in a measured and incremental manner. Small advances in several areas, leading to positive shifts of perceptions and small changes in behaviour, will collectively lead to solid, cumulative gains over time. This is key to the approach recommended here.

**The principal concept underlying the recommendations put forward in this document is to start expanding the number and range of the city's shared spaces. This will provide more areas which people can safely travel to and through, thereby expanding their travel horizons and encouraging inter-community and inter-racial tolerance; it will also help to bring wealth into deprived communities. The expansion of shared spaces has the potential to be the catalyst for unravelling some of the long standing issues confronting Belfast, and is therefore at the heart of the recommendations in this document, underlying a range of new potential projects and initiatives.**

The Northern Island Life and Times survey (NILT) has highlighted the extent to which people would value the creation of more neutral and shared spaces. In particular, results from the 2006 survey show that:

- 95% of people think that their workplace should be a neutral space; only 4% disagree
- 96% of people think that their 'local shops or garage where you might buy bread or milk should be a neutral space'; only 2% disagree
- 96% of people agree that 'the shops where you and your family do your main weekly shopping and the area around the shops be a neutral space'; only 2% disagree

In addition, research reported in Shirlow and Murtagh (2006, Chapter 6) shows that:

- In segregated workplace sites, there were relatively few employees from the minority community; they tended to be middle class and travel long distances to work from non-segregated communities
- Conversely, at workplaces that were regarded as non-segregated, employees were equally represented from both communities, across all occupational groups and employees were much more likely to be drawn from highly segregated communities

This illustrates the important role of non-segregated sites in attracting people out of segregated communities to gain employment – and this principle may well apply to other activities too.

While the political background and causes of the problems are unique to Belfast and Northern Ireland, similar problems of segregation and deprivation due to other causes may be found in cities worldwide. Therefore, the study team were able to draw on their international experience, to suggest a number of concepts that have been considered and applied elsewhere.

There are six main high-level components to the ‘shared space’ strategy that underpin our more specific recommendations:

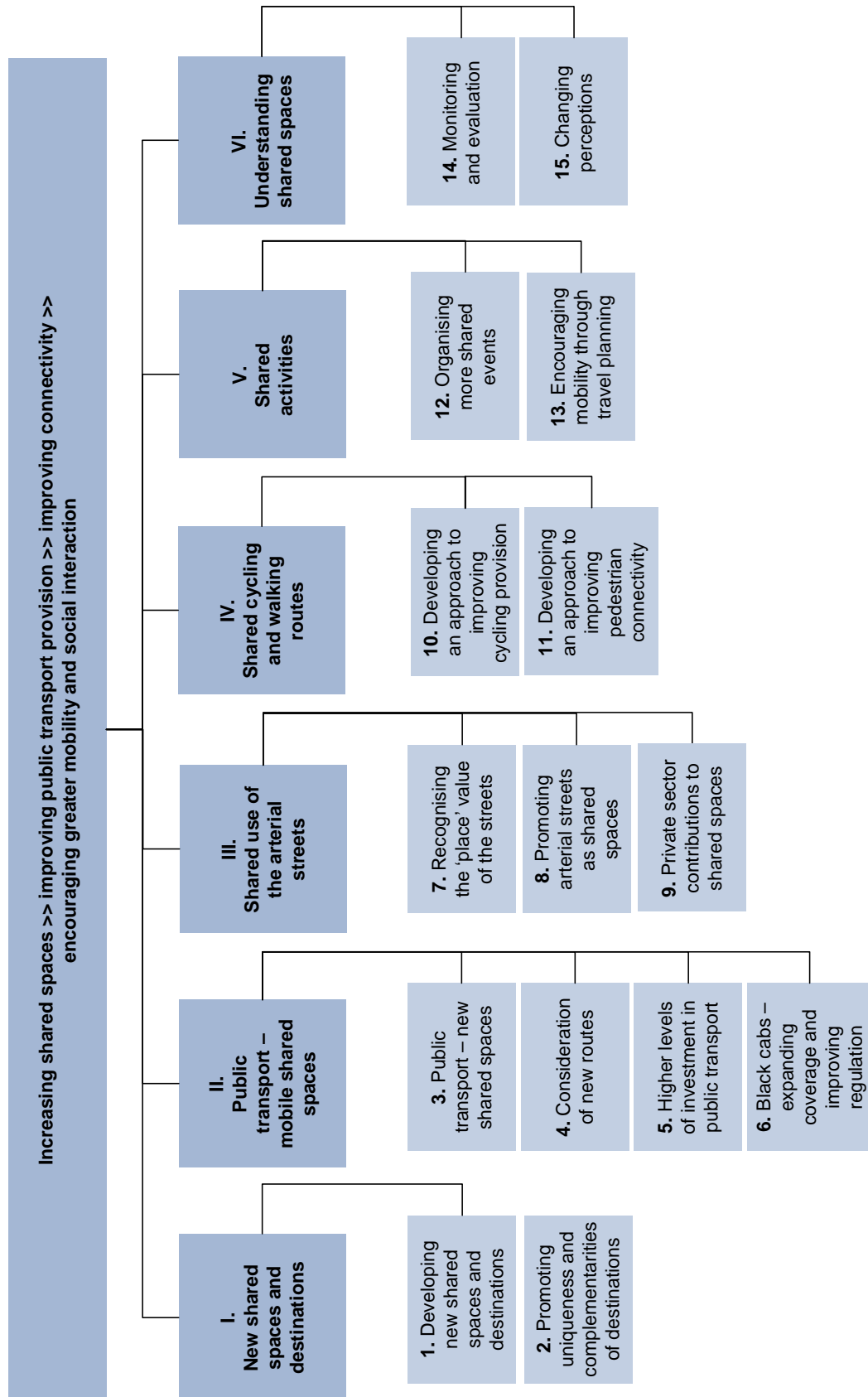
- I. Ensure that all major new development sites are developed and managed as shared spaces, made accessible to all communities. In turn, work must be done to ensure that new sites are accepted by all communities and that they contain suitable employment opportunities and attractions that will draw people from across the city.
- II. Provide appropriate cross-city and orbital public transport routes from deprived residential areas to these major shared space attractors, and gain widespread acceptance that public transport vehicles and route infrastructure are shared spaces. Also develop the black taxis as a regulated, niche market.
- III. Improve local employment opportunities and services in deprived areas, by transforming arterial streets into shared spaces with jointly used facilities, thereby increasing customer catchment areas and growing local employment.
- IV. Improve local cycle and pedestrian routes, to enhance access to these facilities on the arterial streets, as well as improving connectivity between adjoining neighbourhoods and communities.
- V. Increase the number of cultural and sporting events that are run, to encourage greater use of all parts of the city by its residents and visitors, drawing them across the city to unique, high quality events.
- VI. Develop a common definition/framework and evidence base on space use and perceptions among the different communities and ethnic groups, and devise targeted information campaigns.

The diagram overleaf provides a flowchart summary of these six components and lists some of the more detailed ideas that follow from them, grouped under 15 initiatives. These are then explained in further detail in the rest of this section.

These more specific ideas illustrate just some of the ways in which the high-level components might be implemented. We recognise that some of these ideas are more likely to be practical, at least in the short term, than others –

and that discussions among the stakeholders could well lead to new ideas for ways of operationalising and implementing this broad shared space strategy.

### Flowchart summary of recommendations



## I. New shared spaces and destinations

There are currently few destinations in Belfast that are seen as being truly shared by all communities. These include the city centre, the Odyssey, Queen's University and some of the hospitals and restaurants in the south of the city.

### 5.1 Developing new shared spaces and destinations

Shared spaces provide attractive destinations of common purpose and use and are therefore key to overcoming the problems of segregation in Belfast. Shared employment sites provide an opportunity to attract the most talented staff from across the region, and to enable communities to start working together in a supportive environment. Major shared service, retail and entertainment sites can provide the whole community with top quality, cost effective provision. An increase in shared spaces will in itself increase mobility around the city, leading to more natural mixing of the communities. Shared spaces are drivers for community cohesion.

There is still an unsatisfied need for state-of-the art shared spaces and attractive destinations. Consideration should be given to increasing those at every opportunity. On one scale there is a need for state-of-the-art, inspirational facilities, like the Odyssey. Those should be encouraged through private developer incentives and partnerships. But there are also opportunities to develop public-land destinations, such as the hills and the waterways. This may require a more pro-active marketing campaign to encourage more use of the hills by all population groups, by developing walking trails, providing better information and staging events to entice first-time users. Overall, greater emphasis on natural assets and resources can act as points of community cohesion serving as new types of shared, non contentious destinations.

#### 5.1.1 Develop more shared destinations. Consider placing greater emphasis on natural resources as major attractors, like the hills and waterways

### 5.2 Promoting uniqueness and complementarities of destinations

One of the outcomes of segregation in Belfast is the provision of duplicate services and facilities to meet the needs and requirements of each community. There is often a perception of facilities and services being located in the territory of one group, leading to lack of use by others. This duplication bears a high cost to Northern Ireland, prevents cross-community sharing and dialogue, and has an added disbenefit of downgrading the unique characteristics of each destination.

There is scope to start promoting the wider use of the City's facilities and services. Possible approaches may include steps to:

- Promote the uniqueness of local neighbourhoods and destination points, through the media and leaflets

- Promote a notion of 'one city' with a wide range of complementary services and facilities, spread across the city
- Review the permeability of the neighbourhoods surrounding destination points and assess their connectivity and network legibility
- Devise a realistic programme to improve the connectivity and permeability of key destination points, in an agreed order of priority
- Demonstrate that the savings made by avoiding duplication of service provision will enable much higher quality facilities to be provided
- Develop a transparent policy to agree on how any future requests for the provision of services will be addressed. This should include a comprehensive cross-community dialogue

### 5.2.1 Promote uniqueness and complementarity of destinations

## II. Public transport – mobile shared spaces

Recently conducted mental mapping studies, that looked at how some communities cognitively perceive their environment, found them to have very limited spatial maps, greatly limiting their access to employment and educational opportunities. It is widely believed by most stakeholders that large parts of the public transport network – by responding to commercial pressures to meet current patterns of demand – exacerbate this situation. Rather than cutting across the communities and linking different parts of the city, the network tends to reproduce and reinforce patterns of segregation, in line with current perceptions of territoriality.

We believe that, through modifications to the existing services, public transport can play a major role in helping to change perceptions, enlarge travel horizons, and shape new travel and social patterns in Belfast.

### 5.3 Public transport – new shared spaces

During the years of violence and troubles, the Belfast bus system was the target of attacks that led to widespread destruction of buses, and some injuries and fatalities. This was partly due to the bus services being associated with a particular community.

Since then, things have improved dramatically, with greatly reduced attacks on buses and increases in patronage. Translink have made considerable efforts to recruit drivers from both communities, and have worked hard to position the bus service as a service for all. There is still, however, a reluctance to use buses, for a number of reasons. Some of these relate to the ease of car use in the city, and the availability of alternatives such as black cabs and private hire cars. But for many people, there are still concerns about perceived personal safety (as evidenced from the provision of community-

specific bus stops), coupled with limited knowledge of what the city has to offer and how it can be accessed.

One of the concepts that will assist in addressing these issues and encourage increased travel horizons is to actively campaign to develop the notion of Belfast buses as mobile shared spaces for the whole community (“everybody’s bus”), providing safe passage from one part of the city to another. This notion would need to extend to the bus stops and waiting areas themselves – linked to the development of arterial streets as shared spaces, discussed later (section 5.8).

Much of the groundwork has already been done by Translink, for example by the recent re-branding of the bus fleet and their regular discussions with both communities and the Police Service of Northern Ireland. What is proposed here is to build on these positive experiences and take some additional steps that are actively and widely communicated:

- Gain high level support for the initiative from both communities
- Seek and communicate endorsement by senior figures/personalities respected by both communities
- Provide improved high security on buses with live CCTV feeds and higher police presence
- Secure representatives from each community to visibly ride buses
- Expand the role of buses to act as mobile ‘information hubs’ for events, locations, destinations and facilities along the routes and more widely across the city. This will encourage people to view their buses as information exchange points, building a stronger community spirit and awareness
- Improve information throughout the journey, to inform and reassure passengers including information about the location of the next stop and the end destination
- Put in place an active information/communication campaign to promote the role of buses, to embed the notion of buses as shared mobile spaces, to advise of ridership and safety statistics and the many benefits of using public transport (from environmental to financial)

### 5.3.1 Develop the notion of buses as mobile shared spaces and information points

This concept will promote Belfast as the “city on the move”, with buses as its mobile shared units and information exchange hubs.

## 5.4 Consideration of new routes

Currently most of the city buses in Belfast converge on City Hall in the city centre. There are many practical and commercial reasons for this, including:

better efficiency of service provision, limiting the knock-on effects of delays on route, the constraints of the radial arterial network and the focus of the city centre as providing the predominant passenger destination.

However, there are also some disadvantages, particularly from a social policy perspective including: bus routes perceived to be following the sectarian segmentation of the city and exacerbating segregation; routes easily identifiable with specific communities; a lack of orbital routes, discouraging cross community contacts; and, the need to pay twice when interchanging in the city centre.

It is understood that in the past there have been trials of alternative through-routes and orbital routes that did not prove to be viable in economic terms and were thus abandoned. However, there exists an overwhelming stakeholder consensus that there is a need for cross-city and orbital routes, to promote new travel and social patterns, enhance city cohesion and improve mobility. This has been recognised in the mass transit proposals, which incorporate cross city routes. It is also likely that cross-centre working will need to be reinstated in the future for operational reasons, if city centre pedestrian proposals go ahead. This will provide a good opportunity to select through routes that address social as well as operational objectives.

This leads to an argument that there needs to be a thorough investigation of public transport use, looking both at current and socially suppressed demand – covering all modes of transport, as well as future demand associated with new developments. Currently bus transport is regarded primarily as a commercial operation that is demand led. Encouraging new cross community patterns of mobility will require the provision of some new services that are unlikely to be commercially viable in the short to medium term, but with large social and economic benefits long-term. This would require both a change in Translink's operating brief and a source of financial subsidy, linked to achieving social policy objectives.

#### 5.4.1 Investigate potential public transport demand and consider orbital and cross-city routes

As part of a study of the relationship between bus services and segregation, we recommend considering the feasibility of the proposals below:

- Developing additional routes to new and emerging shared space destinations
- Changing (where possible) bus routes to traverse the different communities rather than move along the boundaries
- Changing (where possible) bus routes to travel to a shared space as a destination point – this will limit association of the service with either of the communities

Translink already operates a limited network of 'Easibus' services, and we recommend consideration of what role this type of network could play in linking local communities with shared facilities and spaces in suburban areas.

It is fully recognised that some of these suggestions will not be as economically efficient as the routes already in place. However, this should be balanced against the economic and social costs of segregation to the City of Belfast. Transport has an enormous capacity to help in changing perceptions, facilitate community cohesion and capacity building, which may have higher financial benefits to the economy overall. This is explored further below.

5.4.2 Carry out a study of the relationship between bus services, patterns of segregation and potential demand, and consider the best means of addressing the issues

## 5.5 Higher levels of investment in public transport

Currently Metro bus services in Belfast are broadly self-sufficient in financial terms, by covering operating costs through the fare box. It is understood that there are some routes and services that are provided to meet social rather than market demand, but those are isolated cases.

There is a common understanding emerging in other Western cities that public transportation provides a number of indirect benefits (lower emissions, health benefits of walking to/from stops/stations, social interaction, reduction in congestion, improved mobility and therefore economy, reduced deprivation, etc.) that are not captured directly through fares. This has led to policies of regular subsidisation of public transportation systems in other cities.

To recognise the potential of public transport to stimulate the economy and meet economic and social objectives, a study is warranted to look at current levels of investment and indirect benefits and impacts. It is expected that the wider economic and social benefits will warrant higher subsidies for carefully targeted public transport services, enabling better and more frequent services to be provided at a lower price to the consumer.

5.5.1 Carry out a study of the direct and indirect economic and social benefits of public transport provision, to identify the case for higher subsidies in conjunction with modified service patterns

Discussions with stakeholders brought to light a consensus on the need to re-think public transport provision and the associated funding system in Belfast.

## 5.6 Black cabs – expanding coverage and improving regulation

Black cabs are a unique phenomenon in Belfast, springing up from the years of civil unrest, when bus services were withdrawn from certain routes due to buses becoming targets for violent attacks. It is understood that now the black cabs provide an alternative to buses on some corridors, with similar

fares but with a degree of penetration into the residential streets in the housing areas. They also provide reassurance to those who feel less secure in travelling into the city centre.

Black cabs have been a successful community enterprise over many years, providing local employment and are now strongly culturally embedded in the city fabric. In addition to their transportation function, they are becoming a tourist attraction – which helps to expose local people to new ideas and sources of income.

Though black cabs have led to some abstraction of patronage from the parallel bus services, they also offer some financial and accessibility advantages to the communities they serve, and replicate a means of transport very popular in many cities in the developing world.

It would not be acceptable to the local communities to curtail these services, and we recommend that they be developed in a way that offers a complementary service to the city buses. This might involve their replication in other parts of the city, such as in East Belfast and as a cross-community social enterprise in North Belfast. There is also a case for increasing regulation of vehicle type and condition, in order to reduce air pollution and increase passenger safety. We understand that environmental issues are currently under investigation.

We therefore recommend that efforts be made to work with the black cab associations to:

- Ensure safe vehicle conditions
- Regularise fares and routes
- Consider developing similar social enterprises in other parts of the city
- Encourage the further development of tourist “black cabs historic tours”, taking visitors to some of the culturally shared sites – to take a broader cultural and historical focus and develop an agreed narrative which reflects the complexity of city’s history as well as its future

#### 5.6.1 Improve the operation and regulation of black cabs

It is possible in the long term that, with enhancement of the bus services, the role of the black cabs will naturally focus on their tourist function, and on offering more door-to-door late night services.

### III. Shared use of the arterial streets

#### 5.7 Recognising the ‘Place’ value of the streets

For the last fifty years, urban street planning and design in the UK and several other European countries have been led by traffic engineers who have given

priority to the needs of motor vehicles. This has resulted in street environments that are unattractive for people on foot, whether travelling along the street or using the street as a destination for economic or social activities, and hence has resulted in less attractive business locations.

Attitudes to the street environment are now changing in the Great Britain, with the publication of the 'Manual for Streets' by the Department for Transport (2007), focussing on new urban residential streets, and the development of 'Link and Place: A Guide to Street Planning and Design' (Jones, Boujenko and Marshall, 2007), drawing on work with Transport for London, which provides a comprehensive approach dealing with all types of urban streets. Both documents stress the need to consider each street in its wider urban context, as both a movement channel forming part of the road network (i.e. a Link) and as Place in its own right. Design solutions should be influenced by both Link and Place user needs, and solutions will vary according to the balance of significance of these two functions at any location.

Belfast, like most other Western cities, displays evidence of the 50's and 60's road traffic engineering solutions that predominantly focussed on the needs of cars, in places strengthened by the need to contain civil unrest in some parts of the city. Unlike most other Western cities however, Belfast currently experiences low (but growing) congestion problems and still caters well for motorised traffic. It is perceived overwhelmingly by the stakeholders we interviewed, that the needs of cyclists, pedestrians and the street as a destination have been overlooked. This links to growing concerns about the need to make travel more sustainable. Furthermore, the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan 2015 (BMTP) states that 'existing levels of congestion will become significantly worse over time...'. Mechanisms are therefore required to take into account the broader needs of street users and street destinations that can encourage mode shift to more sustainable transport modes.

Currently, the BMAP (and the Urban Design Study appendix) and BMTP are the key documents that provide guidance on the development of the streets in Belfast, but they appear to have disjointed philosophies about the appropriate function of urban streets. The BMAP Urban Design Study clearly states its vision for streets and public realm predominantly in terms of their Place function, to be one of 'high quality places for people to enjoy'. As one of the six concepts of how the structure of Belfast can be consolidated, it proposes to 'Develop guidance for the arterial routes' and to 'Develop an understanding of the various character areas in the city'. The Urban Design Study provides a list of key development recommendations for the arterial routes.

BMTP, on the other hand, focuses predominantly on roads as Links – as corridors for public and vehicular transport. It provides a hierarchy of roads in terms of their Link function, without recognising a complementary hierarchy of Place needs.

'Roads' commonly focus on carriageways, whilst 'streets' actively consider all land between frontages, including the carriageway and footway. Thus there seems to be a disconnect in the understanding of how transport requirements can be balanced with the wider street requirements as destinations. To resolve this issue, there needs to be more engagement between the organisations responsible for transport and for planning functions in Belfast, to bring together the planning and design of the movement (Link) and destination (Place) functions of streets.

#### 5.7.1 Enhance the BMTP to consider broader 'streets' requirements, as Places as well as Links, not 'roads' alone

Transport for London has carried out trials over the last two years that have developed a street hierarchy, covering both Place and Link functions, for the 580 km network of arterial routes under its ownership in London, basing design solutions on an appropriate balancing of these two functions on each street segment. The experience from this work suggests that, unless the Place dimension is explicitly considered and discussed amongst the stakeholders, there is no mechanism to balance these competing requirements and consider the streets in their wider urban context.

#### 5.7.2 Develop a two-dimensional hierarchy of streets in Belfast, linking BMTP's Link-based road hierarchy and BMAP's recommendations for the Place aspects of arterial routes

### 5.8 Promoting arterial streets as shared spaces

Arterial streets used to be major service spines and served as district high streets with a wide range of local shops and services. With the rise of the car and the increase in social segregation, many of the Belfast arterial routes became primarily transport corridors, with their role as destinations having diminished. This has reduced local employment opportunities, and the traffic severance effects now exacerbate segregation issues; in some places arterials serve as boundary lines and act to separate communities.

Reversal of this trend will provide a unique opportunity to increase local shared spaces - which in this paper is put forward as the key catalyst for improving connectivity – thereby increasing local employment, and starting the process of bringing neighbouring communities together. Arterial streets have a potential of becoming the areas of sharing, bringing together the two main communities and the newer communities, rather than acting as boundaries that push them apart. This will reinforce the notion of public transport services and associated bus stops as shared spaces. Over time, it could also help to reduce tensions during the marching season, if there was less territoriality associated with the arterial streets along which many marches take place.

To achieve this, work will need to be done to enhance the attractiveness of arterial streets and to promote them as safe spaces for the whole community – thereby increasing the customer base for local businesses and community services. This will involve improving their state and the bordering public realm, by providing higher quality street lighting, paving, seating, etc., by attracting more activity and businesses and by organising more community events on arterial streets as part of a community cohesion and capacity building process (see also section 5.12). It will also require that new facilities, intended for both communities, be located along such routes.

The steps of transforming arterial streets and reversing the historic trend will require a series of actions that may include the following:

- 5.8.1 Define the 'Place' function of arterial streets with local communities, building on the place-making proposals in BMAP in greater detail
- 5.8.2 Review BMAP alongside BMTP, to develop a comprehensive classification of street functions and appropriate mechanisms for encouraging investment and businesses to return to arterial streets
- 5.8.3 Upgrade the physical environment, including public realm and street furniture enhancements, better street lighting and security features, and traffic calming measures
- 5.8.4 Locate new facilities within existing service areas along arterial streets
- 5.8.5 Organise community events or neighbourhood festivals on arterials that will attract a wide range of public groups

Further consideration may need to be given to the statutory mechanisms of how development and investment can be encouraged on the arterial streets. Currently, a Masterplan can only be produced as part of a new development, and is limited to the land owned by the developer. BMAP provides only a high-level guidance for place-making opportunities, and responsibilities for place-making are split between the Department for Social Development, Department of the Environment, Department for Regional Development and Belfast City Council, without a clear definition of roles. There needs to be a united vision/strategy for each of the main arterial streets in Belfast, prepared with community involvement, that will reflect the longer-term movement needs (in the context of more sustainable and inclusive travel patterns), alongside the vision for each street as an economic and social Place. Thought should be given to the appropriate mechanisms for developing this vision and the appropriate involvement of the parties listed above and the private sector.

5.8.6 Consider setting in place a mechanism for developing a vision/strategy for arterial streets, to guide transport and planning authorities and developers in transforming the arterials into shared spaces

5.8.7 Develop a vision/strategy for each arterial street, building on the BMTF and BMAP requirements

This process should begin with show case corridors along the arterial streets that lie on the boundary between the two communities, or pass through different communities (as in North Belfast). Once the initiative has been shown to produce real benefits to local communities, it could then be rolled out to other arterials that are more firmly located within one or other community. The show case corridors would promote the arterials as places of shared space, by providing upgraded facilities for both communities, thereby enlarging the customer base, increasing local employment and starting the process of bringing the communities back together, at a local level.

### **5.9 Private sector contributions to shared spaces**

It has emerged from discussions with some of the stakeholders that potential opportunities for obtaining income from developers through the planning system, to fund additional infrastructure or service provision, are not being fully explored and exploited. This requires negotiation with developers for the provision or improvement of infrastructure works as part of a planning agreement. Current practices occasionally obtain contributions to mitigate the impacts of developments on traffic, but do not go wider than that.

A planning agreement is generally tied to the granting of planning permission and is an agreement made between a developer and a government department facilitating, regulating or restricting the development or use of the land. Provisions within a planning agreement may be of a financial nature, including the payment of sum/s (or the carrying out of works to an agreed specification) either as a one-off, or periodically, or for an indefinite period of time.

It is noted that the Government's 1998 Planning Policy Statement 1 makes clear that "Planning agreements can apply to land, roads or buildings other than those covered by the planning permission, provided there is a direct relationship between the two". This is important, as often the facilitation or mitigation of the impacts of a proposal falls outside the development. In fact, PPS 1 further states that a "developer will be expected to pay for, or contribute to the cost of, infrastructure that would not have been necessary but for the development". Clearly this may include road or other transport improvements. In all cases, any payment must be fairly and directly related to the benefit a development will receive from any infrastructure works.

Further planning and legal advice should be sought on this matter but an opportunity, where reasonable, does appear to exist that has not been

explored fully to contribute to the physical improvement of the public realm on the arterial streets.

5.9.1 Review the planning powers and their application, to fully exploit opportunities for investment in transportation and mobility, and public realm, associated with proposed developments on arterial streets

#### IV. Shared cycling and walking routes

##### **Cycling**

Belfast provides a unique opportunity to enhance dramatically levels of cycling in the city, due to:

- Low levels of traffic congestion
- Sufficient road infrastructure to provide dedicated, on-street cycle facilities
- The possibility to enhance cycling along the waterfront

Since cycling speeds are much higher than walking speeds, cycling has the potential to open up larger areas of the city to residents and visitors, and is much less constrained in spatial coverage than public transport services. Furthermore, users are likely to feel safer cycling in unfamiliar residential areas than when travelling through them on foot.

Therefore, encouraging cycling is seen as a prime opportunity that is currently being underutilised, not only to meet mobility and social objectives, but also to address other policy objectives such as increasing physical activity levels and reducing car use. It is noted however, that cycling currently receives very low levels of investment, that cycling infrastructure is generally of a poor standard and that there is no visible level of commitment to cycling from the delivering bodies. It is understood that little progress has been made so far towards meeting the BMTP target of quadrupling the number of trips by cycle (from 2000 figures) by the end of 2015.

##### **Walking**

With the Quality Walking Routes initiative having provided excellent walking links in the city centre, and stimulated footfall and economic activity, a good start has been made in catering for pedestrian needs in an important part of the city. However, a number of issues remain in other areas which would benefit from being addressed, which include the following:

- Poor pedestrian connections across motorways such as the Westlink
- Poor pedestrian accessibility to and across the arterial streets
- Interface walls and barriers that restrict movement
- Psychological barriers to crossing physical or perceived boundaries

By providing incentives for pedestrians to access shared spaces, greater numbers of pedestrians on the streets will, in turn, improve the perceptions of personal security that with time will further increase mobility.

### **5.10 Developing an approach to improving cycling provision**

Many initiatives can be taken to improve the conditions for cycling, and to start moving closer to the delivery of the cycling targets, including:

- Review the Northern Ireland Cycling Strategy 2000
- Re-establish a cycling forum group to guide and influence developments
- Review the level of investment in cycling (the current 'requirement' for walking and cycling investment is stated as 6% of the overall funding)
- Define cycling standards and a design approach (there is a lack of consensus about the design standards for cycling in Belfast)
- As a priority, develop a cycling route along the waterfronts
- Carry out a perception study of the reasons preventing people from cycling
- Carry out a cycling campaign to promote cycling
- Consider subsidised cycling training to encourage new users
- Further promote work-place subsidies to purchase bikes for employees
- Put in place an annual monitoring of cycling uptake and usage
- Plan and implement cycling networks
- Consider unique opportunities to extend and connect cycling routes (e.g. with the Connswater Community Greenway)
- Plan and implement traffic calming, where necessary, to improve cycling safety
- Organise a high-profile cycling event to promote and encourage cycling (e.g. 'Tour de Belfast')

#### **5.10.1 Develop a strategy and implementation plan for cycling provision**

Due to the availability of extensive physical space on the main road networks in the city, Belfast has a unique opportunity to develop a significant cycle network and cycling community, contributing to meeting health and sustainability objectives while dealing with segregation issues.

### **5.11 Developing an approach to improving pedestrian connectivity**

'Early wins' in encouraging walking are to create and enhance local pedestrian connections to the shared spaces (including bus stops and railway stations) and to encourage the use of arterial streets as shared spaces. This will involve:

- Breaking up the city centre collar by considering new pedestrian links across the barriers to reaching the city centre (e.g. as in Birmingham), and improving conditions on the existing routes into the city centre. Note that work by Department for Regional Development is already underway to improve pedestrian links across the Westlink
- Considering increasing the number of access points across interface communities and increase the time periods when those are opened
- Improving infrastructure to encourage walking, such as improved footways, safer crossing facilities, better CCTV, lighting and walking signage

#### 5.11.1 Develop a strategy and implementation plan for improving pedestrian connectivity and encouraging higher levels of activity

### V. Shared activities

Events that attract people across all of the communities lead participants to move beyond their current areas of activity and broaden their perceptions, creating a concept of participation, belonging and wider opportunities.

In addition, mobility can be encouraged through the provision of better information, both about travel alternatives (e.g. cycling maps and customised bus timetables) and about the shops and services that are available in different parts of the city. This may be accompanied by marketing activities, designed to improve the image of modes and reassure people about their safety or social status.

#### 5.12 Organising more shared events

There is still an un-exhausted need for more community events that can place an emphasis on greater cross community participation.

##### 5.12.1 Further develop a programme of events that are open and accessible to all, building on the success of events such as Halloween, Continental Markets etc

Below are some suggestions for non-contentious events that have proved to be highly successful in other cities, or that are likely to have a specific potential if organised in Belfast. Some are likely to attract additional tourists, bringing in extra income to different parts of the city and providing more reassurance of personal security to the city's different communities.

#### **Sporting events**

There is a long-lived popularity of sporting events in Belfast. This can be developed further to bring in opportunities of wider and even national/international participation. Some possible examples include:

- 'Tour de Belfast' – a cycling race to follow a cross-community route traversing Belfast. This event will open up (through television coverage and attendance) different parts of Belfast
- Boating race – based on a competition of self-constructed boats. There is a possibility of building on some of the small scale events that currently take place
- Alternative sporting or curiosity events – boxing, greyhound racing, pigeons. This will appeal to NI's heritage and interests

### Family events

In Adelaide, Australia, one of the most successful events of the year is a **Christmas Pageant**. It involves a long procession of floats prepared by businesses and other communities, dressed as Christmas or fairy tale characters or themes. The procession culminates with Santa Claus entering the town on his sleigh.

This event can be linked with the switching on of the Christmas lights in Belfast and the Christmas markets. The advantage of the Christmas Pageant is that the procession's route can be planned along arterial route(s) into the city, thus encouraging visits to the parts of Belfast not frequently visited before. Also, the process of preparing the floats and planning the procession (by businesses, community groups, local bands, etc), and exposing people to information about the participating businesses and services will widen the horizons and interests of those attending.

The Adelaide Christmas Pageant



Another event in Adelaide that may be suitable in Belfast is the '**Northern Lights**', a projection of images on the walls of buildings. The event is very popular with high numbers of families attending.

It can be developed in many different ways:

- To bring people to a specific street, where a series of buildings may be lit up. This will bring people to locations not previously visited
- As a competition between sites of choosing the best projections

The Adelaide 'Northern Lights' event



### Heritage events

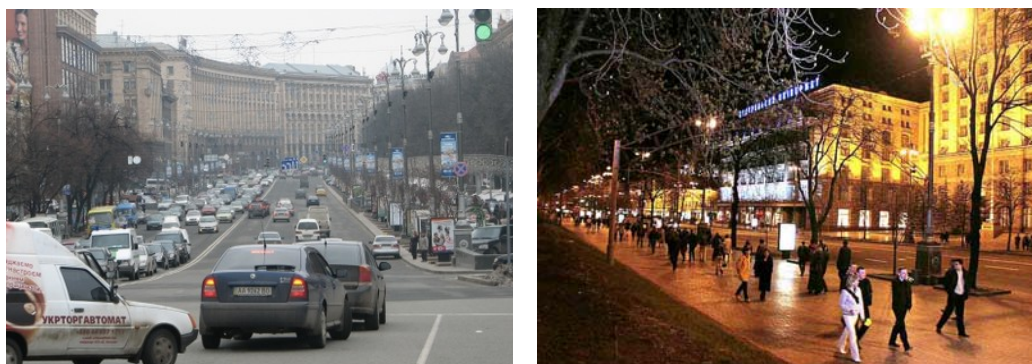
One example of a successful heritage event is the annual London **Open Doors** event, that opens many heritage buildings in London to the public. This already happens in Belfast, but consideration should be given to building on and extending what is currently taking place. There is an opportunity to put on a free bus service linking some of the heritage destinations – this will provide an added bonus of encouraging bus use and taking people to the parts of Belfast they would not normally feel comfortable visiting.

'**Heritage trail**' type competition may be considered for schools. It can take competing teams through the various parts of the city, solving clues and getting to a final destination. If a serious prize is provided, backed by local media coverage, then the event has a potential to raise the profile of the sites of heritage value across the city.

### Car-free days

The temporary closing of streets to traffic has become a familiar sight in some cities, promoting streets as major destinations. London's Oxford Street car free day, supported by street activities and entertainment, has been an enormous success in London, attracting high numbers of visitors. In Kiev, Ukraine, the main street, Kreshchatik, closes to traffic from 10:00 to 22:00 on weekends and public holidays. A similar approach can be considered in Belfast.

Kreshchatik (Kiev, Ukraine) during weekdays (with traffic) and on weekends (without traffic)



### Neighbourhood tours

Neighbourhood tours can be organised at significant times during the year, appropriate to the various communities. The tours can combine visits to a number of local sites and points of interest. Outdoor food festivals, offering samples of local food and produce, can add an extra interest to the event (e.g. the successful German market in Birmingham). The organised tours will encourage people to travel to different areas of city, sampling local cultural, retail and restaurant experiences. The tours will promote the value and uniqueness of the local neighbourhoods and, by attracting participation, will add to the local economy. A similar model is employed in Chicago.

### 5.13 Encouraging mobility through travel planning

In the last decade many cities have turned to travel demand management techniques to influence travel behaviour, to reduce traffic congestion and pollution, increase physical activity and promote more sustainable travel choices. Travel Plans are now common throughout the UK and are particularly developed for new or large places of employment, in schools and at hospitals.

It is understood that Workplace travel plans are relatively common in Belfast, but there may be scope for extending the initiative to education and health establishments. In addition, we recommend that a pilot study be conducted in a residential area, to raise local awareness of travel alternatives and of the availability of city-level and local shops and services. Such methods have been widely applied in Australia and are currently being piloted in England, by Transport for London in Sutton and in the Department for Transport's 'Sustainable Towns' initiative.

The aim of such a pilot study would be not only to consider alternative travel and destination choices, but also to investigate the physical and psychological barriers and obstacles that prevent people from considering leisure and other facilities that they have not accessed in the past.

5.13.1 Carry out a pilot residential travel plan exercise in Belfast to encourage the use of alternative modes and shared spaces, and to investigate the potential impact in influencing travel perceptions and behaviour

## VI. Understanding Shared Spaces

### 5.14 Monitoring and evaluation

Our discussions have revealed a high degree of variability in understanding of the problems of mobility, connectivity, transport provision and use amongst the various stakeholders we interviewed. The facts about the patterns of use of streets and public spaces remain largely undefined, often with anecdotal evidence presented to back up different arguments.

With fragmented powers and responsibilities for the provision of transportation services and street infrastructure, it will be beneficial to create a common data base and a point of reference that will bring together existing information about:

- Use of shared spaces and streets
- Transport use and travel patterns
- User perceptions of the various urban spaces

There is also a need to develop a common framework for defining and understanding the nature of the range of shared spaces in the city. This will help to build on the successes achieved and expand areas of common use.

5.14.1 Create a common database for information and statistics on travel patterns, the use of shared spaces and perceptions of urban spaces

To develop a better understanding of current travel behaviour and community perceptions associated with the use of shared spaces, it will be beneficial to carry out sample surveys of attitudes and behaviour. This should include an understanding of the backgrounds of those accessing shared spaces and the main reasons preventing others from using these spaces. This information will greatly assist the understanding of the readiness of different communities in Belfast to embrace future initiatives that are under consideration.

5.14.2 Monitor and report on travel patterns, attitudes and the use of shared spaces

### 5.15 Changing perceptions

Encouraging new movement and social patterns hinges on changing perceptions, which can be assisted through better communication. Psychological barriers to mobility are often founded in perceived fears that may not be based on facts. Negative past experiences often skew current

perceptions of reality and are propagated through communities ('bad news travels'). We often remember and recall the negative experiences far more than the positive ones.

These negative perceptions can be countered by providing information about the high degree of personal security now experienced in Belfast, and the extent of cross community activities. This information can be channelled through council leaflets, via local community/leisure centres, on public transport, etc.

It should form part of the wider programme of measures, which make people aware of what is being done and the successes that are being achieved.

5.15.1 Devise information campaigns to disseminate positive information about the safe use of public spaces and transport modes, linked to new initiatives that are being introduced

## 6. Conclusions

The City of Belfast has undergone a major economic transformation in recent decades, bringing diversification of the economy and prosperity to a growing middle class. However, the inner city areas with more socially deprived and segregated populations have only benefited from this prosperity to a limited extent, and continue to suffer from high unemployment and low education levels. These problems have been exacerbated by the sectarian divisions between the residential areas, resulting in low travel horizons and poor access to certain types of goods and services.

Previous studies have emphasised this lack of mobility and poor connectivity between residential communities and to employment sites, as major factors inhibiting the economic and social development of these communities and their inclusion within the wider Belfast economy and society. This study contributes to a wider Conflict Transformation Project being undertaken by Belfast City Council, and is intended to provide a mobility/connectivity dimension to the other work that has been completed.

The principal proposal uniting the recommendations put forward in this document is to build on the concept of shared spaces in the city, by expanding the number and range of such spaces. This will provide more areas where people can travel to and through, expanding work and education opportunities, and their horizons in general, and encouraging inter-community and inter-racial tolerance, thereby bringing greater wealth into these deprived communities. The expansion of the shared spaces has the potential to be the catalyst for unravelling some of the long lasting issues confronting Belfast, and is therefore at the heart of the recommendations in this document.

There are six main high-level components to the 'shared space' strategy that underpin our fifteen more specific recommendations:

- I. Ensure that all major new development sites are developed and managed as shared spaces, made accessible to all communities. In turn, work must be done to ensure that new sites are accepted by all communities and that they contain suitable employment opportunities and attractions that will draw people from across the city.
- II. Provide appropriate cross-city and orbital public transport routes from deprived residential areas to these major shared space attractors, and gain widespread acceptance that public transport vehicles and route infrastructure are shared spaces. Also develop the black taxis as a regulated, niche market.
- III. Improve local employment opportunities and services in deprived areas, by transforming arterial streets into shared spaces with jointly used

facilities, thereby increasing customer catchment areas and growing local employment.

- IV. Improve local cycle and pedestrian routes, to enhance access to these facilities on the arterial streets, as well as improving connectivity between adjoining neighbourhoods and communities.
- V. Increase the number of cultural and sporting events that are run, to encourage greater use of all parts of the city by its residents and visitors, drawing them across the city to unique, high quality events.
- VI. Develop a common definition/framework and evidence base on space use and perceptions among the different communities and ethnic groups, and devise targeted information campaigns.

We recognise that much is already being done in the areas of transport and regeneration by the wide range of agencies with interests and responsibilities for aspects of Belfast city management and investment, and this can be built on in a constructive way. However, many of the current initiatives do not give explicit consideration to the Programme for Government's vision of a shared and better future, and certainly are not set up or co-ordinated to deliver such social objectives. So, some initiatives will need to be expanded, modified, or complemented, if these objectives are to be met.

The status of this report is as a discussion paper. We have briefly set out our understanding and diagnosis of the problems, and have proposed a broad, six part strategy for addressing many of them. We recognise that, with the limited resources available to carry out this study, it has not been possible to review all existing initiatives, nor to develop our ideas beyond the concept stage. It is likely that some ideas will prove to be more practical than others – and we would encourage the reader to see them as examples of how the high-level shared space strategy could be delivered on the ground, rather than a set of precise solutions. We hope that some readers will be encouraged to come up with better ways of implementing the strategy.

While we have focussed on issues relating to mobility and connectivity from a social perspective, it is evident that many of the ideas promoted here will contribute to meeting other transport policy objectives (e.g. road safety, CO<sub>2</sub> reduction, congestion relief) and resonate strongly with the concerns of other sectors, such as planning, regeneration, environment, public health, employment, education, sport and policing. So we recommend the widest possible engagement of public and private agencies, in shaping and delivering these proposals.

We would like to thank all those who have contributed their time and observations to this study, and hope that it will stimulate initiatives and further thinking which will reduce the isolation of Belfast communities and help them to enjoy the fruits of a shared future.

## Appendix 1. List of the documents considered in this study

Title	Sponsor/Author	Year
A Shared Future and Racial Equality Strategy Good Relations Indicators Baseline Report	Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency	
A Shared Future: Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland	Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister	2005
Belfast City Council Corporate Plan 2007-2008	Belfast City Council	2007
Belfast City Masterplan	Belfast City Council Colin Buchanan	2004
Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan - Design Study	Urban Initiatives	2004
Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan 2015	Department for Regional Development	2004
Belfast: Segregation, Violence and the City	Shirlow and Murtagh	2006
Building a Better Future - Programme for Government 2008-2011	Northern Ireland Executive	
Crumlin Road Gaol & Girdwood Barracks Draft Masterplan	BDP	2007
Draft North West Quarter Masterplan (Part One) Key Regeneration Principles and Concept Plan	GVA Grimley	2005
Gasworks Travel to Work Study - Survey Results	Belfast City Council & Roads Service	2005
Good Practice in Local Area Planning in the Context of Promoting Good Relations	Community Technical Aid Bradley and Murtagh	2007
Good Relations Plan, BCC	Belfast City Council	2007
Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs): Subject Plan for Belfast City Council Area 2015	The Planning Service Department of the Environment	2006
Interface Issues: An Annotated Bibliography	Institute for Conflict Research Bell	2007
Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland 2008- 2018	Northern Ireland Executive	
Mapping segregation on Belfast NIHE Estates	Shuttleworth & Lloyd	
Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey 2006	Northern Ireland Life and Times	2006
Public Space for a Shared Belfast	Belfast City Council Gaffkin, McEldowney, Rafferty and Sterrett	2008
Regional Transportation Strategy for Northern Ireland 2002-2012	Department for Regional Development	2002
Renewing the Routes Programme Tour Information	Belfast City Council	
Research into the financial cost of the Northern Ireland divide	Deloitte	2007
Shaping Our Future Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland 2025	Department for Regional Development	2001
Spatial segregation and labour market process in Belfast	Murtagh and Shirlow	2007
The Implications of Providing Services in a Divided City	Deloitte	2008
Transport Policy	Belfast City Council	
Young People, Job Search and Local Markets: the Example of Belfast	Green, Shuttleworth and Lavery	2004

## Appendix 2. List of stakeholders that took part in the interviews

	Stakeholder	Position	Organisation
1	Kyle M Alexander	Strategic Advisor	Strategic Investment Board
2	Dr Brendan Murtagh	Reader, School of Planning Architecture and Civil Engineering	Queen's University Belfast
3	Keith Sutherland	Planning and Transport Manager	Urban Development Development Department Belfast City Council
	Anne Doherty	Planning and Transport Officer	Urban Development Development Department Belfast City Council
4	Claire Conroy	Research Co-Ordinator Conflict Transformation Project	Belfast City Council
	Caroline Wilson	Project Manager Conflict Transformation Project	Belfast City Council
5	Duncan Morrow	Chief Executive	Community Relations Council
6	Superintendent Nigel Grimshaw	Superintendent	Community Safety, North and West Belfast Police Service Northern Ireland
7	Mike Morrissey		CU2 Project, Queens
8	Marie-Thérèse McGivern	Director of Development	Belfast City Council
9	Gerry Millar	Director of Improvement	Core Improvement Team Belfast City Council
10	Tom Smith	City Safe Officer	Belfast City Centre Management
11	Tim Losty	Head of North Belfast Community Action Unit	Department for Social Development
12	Chris O'Halloran	Director	Belfast Interface Project
13	Anne Lockwood	Senior Planner	Belfast Metropolitan Area Team (BMAP) Department of the Environment
14	Colin Jack		Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister
	Ken Fraser	Head of Racial Equality Unit	Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister
	Pauline Donnan		Equality Directorate Research Branch Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister
	Jane Corderoy		Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister
15	John Cummins	Belfast Divisional Planning Manager	The Planning Service Department of the Environment
16	Paul Priestly	Permanent Secretary - Department for Regional Development	Department for Regional Development
17	Steven Patterson	Director for Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland	Sustrans
18	Billy Gilpin	Central Area Manager	Translink

## Appendix 3. List of recommendations

(with section numbers and page references)

<b>5.1</b>	<b>Developing new shared spaces and destinations</b>	<b>12</b>
5.1.1	Develop more shared destinations. Consider placing greater emphasis on natural resources as major attractors, like the hills and waterways	12
<b>5.2</b>	<b>Promoting uniqueness and complementarities of destinations</b>	<b>12</b>
5.2.1	Promote uniqueness and complementarity of destinations	13
<b>5.3</b>	<b>Public transport – new shared spaces</b>	<b>13</b>
5.3.1	Develop the notion of buses as mobile shared spaces and information points	14
<b>5.4</b>	<b>Consideration of new routes</b>	<b>14</b>
5.4.1	Investigate potential public transport demand and consider orbital and cross-city routes	15
5.4.2	Carry out a study of the relationship between bus services, patterns of segregation and potential demand, and consider the best means of addressing the issues	16
<b>5.5</b>	<b>Higher levels of investment in public transport</b>	<b>16</b>
5.5.1	Carry out a study of the direct and indirect economic and social benefits of public transport provision, to identify the case for higher subsidies in conjunction with modified service patterns	16
<b>5.6</b>	<b>Black cabs – expanding coverage and improving regulation</b>	<b>16</b>
5.6.1	Improve the operation and regulation of black cabs	17
<b>5.7</b>	<b>Recognising the ‘Place’ value of the streets</b>	<b>17</b>
5.7.1	Enhance the BMTP to consider broader ‘streets’ requirements, as Places as well as Links, not ‘roads’ alone	19
5.7.2	Develop a two-dimensional hierarchy of streets in Belfast, linking BMTP’s Link-based road hierarchy and BMAP’s recommendations for the Place aspects of arterial routes	19

<b>5.8 Promoting arterial streets as shared spaces</b>	<b>19</b>
5.8.1 Define the 'Place' function of arterial streets with local communities, building on the place-making proposals in BMAP in greater detail	20
5.8.2 Review BMAP alongside BMTP, to develop a comprehensive classification of street functions and appropriate mechanisms for encouraging investment and businesses to return to arterial streets	20
5.8.3 Upgrade the physical environment, including public realm and street furniture enhancements, better street lighting and security features, and traffic calming measures	20
5.8.4 Locate new facilities within existing service areas along arterial streets	20
5.8.5 Organise community events or neighbourhood festivals on arterials that will attract a wide range of public groups	20
5.8.6 Consider setting in place a mechanism for developing a vision/strategy for arterial streets, to guide transport and planning authorities and developers in transforming the arterials into shared spaces	21
5.8.7 Develop a vision/strategy for each arterial street, building on the BMTP and BMAP requirements	21
<b>5.9 Private sector contributions to shared spaces</b>	<b>21</b>
5.9.1 Review the planning powers and their application, to fully exploit opportunities for investment in transportation and mobility, and public realm, associated with proposed developments on arterial streets	22
<b>5.10 Developing an approach to improving cycling provision</b>	<b>23</b>
5.10.1 Develop a strategy and implementation plan for cycling provision	23
<b>5.11 Developing an approach to improving pedestrian connectivity</b>	<b>23</b>
5.11.1 Develop a strategy and implementation plan for improving pedestrian connectivity and encouraging higher levels of activity	24
<b>5.12 Organising more shared events</b>	<b>24</b>
5.12.1 Further develop a programme of events that are open and accessible to all, building on the success of events such as Halloween, Continental Markets etc	24

---

<b>5.13 Encouraging mobility through travel planning</b>	<b>27</b>
5.13.1 Carry out a pilot residential travel plan exercise in Belfast to encourage the use of alternative modes and shared spaces, and to investigate the potential impact in influencing travel perceptions and behaviour	28
<b>5.14 Monitoring and evaluation</b>	<b>28</b>
5.14.1 Create a common database for information and statistics on travel patterns, the use of shared spaces and perceptions of urban spaces	28
5.14.2 Monitor and report on travel patterns, attitudes and the use of shared spaces	28
<b>5.15 Changing perceptions</b>	<b>28</b>
5.15.1 Devise information campaigns to disseminate positive information about the safe use of public spaces and transport modes, linked to new initiatives that are being introduced	29