



Commissioner for **Older People**
for Northern Ireland

4 February 2014

FAO Mr George Kearns
Department for Regional Development
Transport Policy
Strategy and Legislation Division
3rd Floor
Clarence Court
10-18 Adelaide Street
Belfast
BT2 8GB

Dear Mr Kearns

Re: Public Passenger Transport (Service Agreements and Service Permits) Regulations (Northern Ireland 2014) Consultation:

The Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland (COPNI) has been established to promote awareness of issues relating to older people and be an authoritative champion for them.

The Commissioner welcomes the opportunity to respond to the proposed Public Passenger Transport (Service Agreements and Service Permits) Regulations (Northern Ireland 2014).

The Commissioner welcomes the policy intent of the regulations to facilitate other providers running services on the network by instituting a common set of standards and procedures that they have to abide by. She understands this may create opportunities for new and different services to become part of the transport network.

Public transport is of great value to older people. Usage of public transport increases greatly with age. It is vitally important for giving older people the freedom to connect with others and access services. Studies have shown the sense of freedom travel engenders is worthwhile in itself. It encourages a more active lifestyle, and reduces exclusion from friends, family, shops and services. Older people in rural areas without access to private transport have a particular need for non-private transport to access services, but are reliant on sometimes irregular or inadequate public transport services.

For this reason the Commissioner welcomes legislation that will allow greater flexibility and capacity in the transport network.

But the Commissioner also recognises that these powers will not by themselves create this capacity. There need to be additional steps taken to support the work of SME's or volunteer organisations operating in rural areas who provide transport to older people. They offer great potential to enable older people in rural areas to gain access to more services if supported.

If you would like to discuss any of these points in further detail, please do not hesitate to contact the Commissioner's Policy Team:

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Yours sincerely

Evelyn Hoy
Chief Executive