

Translink ‘Better Connected’ Strategy

Response from the Commissioner for Older People for
Northern Ireland

August 2021

The Commissioner for Older People NI is an independent voice and champion for older people with legal duties and powers defined by the Commissioner for Older People Act (Northern Ireland) 2011. This is a statutory role, at arms-length of government which takes an active role in safeguarding and promoting the interests of older people in Northern Ireland.

I am writing in response to Translink's recent consultation on its new strategy: 'Better Connected'. COPNI welcomes Translink's new strategy and fully supports the goals and principles set out in the strategy. COPNI also would also welcome more specific details on improvements on accessibility and specific initiatives to improve the uptake and usage of public transport by older persons.

COPNI welcomes the strategy's focus on "Connecting Communities". Loneliness and social isolation of older people is a growing source of concern for COPNI. All age groups are affected by this issue which can have a severe impact on health and wellbeing, with older persons being some of the worst affected.

A recent report from the NI Campaign to End Loneliness in 2020 has shown that:

- Chronic loneliness affects 1 in 20 people in Northern Ireland or approximately 80,000 people.
- 1 in 3 people in Northern Ireland are 'more often lonely' which equates to more than 500,000 people.
- People experiencing loneliness are 40% more likely to have more than 12 GP appointments per year if living alone.
- Have a 20% increased risk of admission to residential or nursing care. ¹

The report also concluded that access to public and private transport has an important part to play in helping to alleviate many of the factors contributing to loneliness and isolation. This is of particular importance during the current Covid-19 pandemic as society deals with the ongoing recovery from this.

1. <https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/wp-content/uploads/Loneliness-in-Northern-Ireland-A-Call-to-action.pdf>

COPNI is pleased to note that according to the most recent report by the Department of Infrastructure's (DoI) that there is an 80% uptake of smart passes for 2019/20 in those over

60.² COPNI would like to see further initiatives to improve public transport uptake and access. Despite the encouraging figures for smart pass uptake, the most recent Travel Survey for Northern Ireland for 2019, showed that only 3% of men and 4% of women aged over 60 used public transport as their main mode of transport.³ COPNI is committed to reducing loneliness and isolation and see Translink as a key stakeholder in attempting to address this very important issue and we see scope for potential future collaboration on this issue.

Concerning Consumer Focus and Complaints, COPNI would like to see a greater degree of transparency in complaint numbers and complaint details and detailed plans on how Translink plans to address these.

At present complaint numbers are not published by Translink. In its previous strategy 'Get on Board' for 2016-2021, Translink advised that it aimed to reduce the number of complaints to fewer than 15 per 100,000 journeys.⁴ COPNI would like to see Translink's strategy to include specific targets to reduce complaints as well as information on how it has performed against these goals.

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to respond to this consultation and look forward to your response. If you would like to discuss any of the points raised or have any further queries please contact me or our Policy Team via Patricia Maskey on 02890 890 893 or by email patricia.maskey@copni.org.

Yours sincerely,



Chief Executive

2. <https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/system/files/publications/infrastructure/ni-transport-statistics-2019-2020.pdf>

3. <https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/system/files/publications/infrastructure/tsni-in-depth-report-2017-2019.pdf>

4. <https://trn-prd-cdn-01.azureedge.net/mediacontainer/medialibraries/translink/publications-and-documents/get%20on%20board%20strategy/get-on-board-strategy-2020.pdf>