



West Belfast Taxi Association
Comhaltas Tacsaithe Iarthar
Bhéal Feirste

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Belfast City Centre Regeneration Directorate
Department for Social Development
Lesley House
2nd Floor
25-27 Wellington Place
Belfast
BT1 6GD

West Side Regeneration District Draft Regeneration Plan

Dear Sir/Madam

Please find attached the response from the West Belfast Taxi Association in relation to the draft concept master plan.

Yours Faithfully

Stephen Long
General Manager
West Belfast Taxi Association



The West Belfast Taxi Association's current service provision provides multi occupancy stage carriage transport to seven routes in West Belfast and one route in North Belfast from its facilities which operate from 7.00 a.m. to 12.00 midnight Monday to Saturday and from 12.00 midday Sunday to 10.00 p.m. Sunday evening. Services are available on the seven routes in West Belfast from as early as 5.00 a.m. Monday to Saturday and 7.00 a.m. on Sunday prior to the opening of our complex facilities.

The services provided by the West Belfast Taxi Association have been operating within the Castle Street/King Street area from 1970 and provides both a gateway to and from the city centre. A survey conducted in 2001, prior to the construction of the building we operate our services from, reflected an annual usage in excess of 6 million passengers with approximately 3.6 million passengers ending or commencing the journeys in the Castle Street/King Street area. This is as a result of the seven routes in West Belfast and one route operated to North Belfast. Translink also provide public transport to the West and North of the city but what is recognised by both Translink and the West Belfast Taxi Association is the need for both modes of transport. This is very much to do with the density of population in the West of the city. Those who reside in the West of the city class Castle Street to Lagmore as being West Belfast. Unfortunately this falls into two council areas the Belfast City Council and Lisburn City Council respectively.

The concept master plan does take into consideration the footfall through the South West Quarter area but we are of the opinion that it does neither address the approach to the Castle Street area, unlike the approach from east Belfast to the city centre, or cater for pedestrians coming into and from the city centre in that particular area. The area highlighted in the concept plan in relation to connectivity from Millfield to Castle Street does not consider the volume of passengers utilising the services of the West Belfast Taxi Association. We also consider that the consultation process failed to ascertain vital information that could be provided by the West Belfast Taxi Association.

The West Belfast Taxi Association would suggest that the initial traffic management coming into the area is addressed. This in relation to the volume of traffic and the continual advertising of car parking facilities within the city centre thus increasing traffic coming into the city centre. We are all, more than ever conscious, of our carbon footprint and environmental impact of vehicle usage. Most other city centres cater more for the pedestrian with an emphasis on people utilising public transport to access the city centre through a variety of modes of transport and one way vehicular accessibility. In addition to this the creation of residential areas within the city centre should be taken on board.

It is clearly evident that the use of Queen Street and Castle Street for vehicular access is detrimental to the freedom of movement of people. The introduction of pedestrian areas, street cafes, additional retail outlets and other public places would enhance the area both for those coming into the city centre and those who historically do not shop in the South West Quarter area or for that matter visit the area. The creation of pedestrian areas would help connect the city centre. This would further lead to a further proposal that Donegall Place is also made a pedestrian only area in view of the creation of a "New Street" in the concept plan. This aims to create connectivity throughout the city centre. There is in many instances a parochial approach to shopping in the city centre with many shoppers staying local and loyal to the many family orientated retail businesses within the Castle Street area.

Public transport can continue to operate with existing services provided by Translink from the Wellington Place, City Hall, Chichester Street and by the West Belfast Taxi Association from King Street without encroaching on the city centre pedestrian and retail facilities.

Tourism is ever increasing. Unfortunately the concept plan fails to recognise the amount of tourists that the West Belfast Taxi Association caters for. In conjunction with our main core provision of service the West Belfast Taxi Association offer a diverse range of tours. Tours can be made unique for any individual tourist's demands. (See wbta.net).

Since May 2007 the West Belfast Taxi Association has provided tours for over 16,000 tourists. These range from political tours to landmark tours both within Belfast and throughout the North of Ireland. The biggest single tour undertaken so far was providing 200 American tourists with transport to tour the city from the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum.

The West Belfast Taxi Association is also currently, in conjunction with Belfast City Centre Management, looking at the development of night link services. This is due to the fact that Translink have withdrawn the night time service provision. It is envisaged that the service provision would cater for North, South, East and West Belfast. The West Belfast Taxi Association is also currently undertaking research and development in utilising an electric vehicle for its provision of service. This vehicle has zero emissions.

The land banking issue of derelict buildings also needs to be further addressed. There is little or no point developing a concept plan when those who own property which lies derelict impacts on those who wish to create vibrancy to an area that for too long has been overlooked by a variety of statutory agencies.

The West Belfast Taxi Association is keen to share all relevant information with consultants and statutory agencies. It would also consider partnership arrangements with other public transport providers for the greater good of the city.

Attached is the current road traffic infrastructure from the west of the city on its approach and in and around the Castle Street/ King Street area. Also attached is a proposal to alleviate the problems with vehicular traffic on the approach to Castle Street. Current ongoing private developments of a hotel and apartments make the upper part of King Street temporarily inaccessible to vehicular traffic turning right from coming right from College Avenue.

