



**Report on Glider Site Visit with Passengers with a Disability or  
Reduced Mobility**

**January 2019**

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## **1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report details the findings of a site visit to use the new Glider public transport service in November 2018 with a group of passengers with a disability or reduced mobility. The Glider service was introduced in September 2018 and this visit allowed passengers to experience a journey on board the vehicles.
- 1.2 The Consumer Council arranged the visit in partnership with Translink and participants came from a range of organisations that represent people with a disability or reduced mobility. Participants met at Dundonald Park and Ride, used the ticket machine, boarding the vehicle and travelling to the city centre. The Department for Infrastructure (DfI) then hosted the group in its office for a short feedback session on the journey. Participants made comments throughout the visit and provided suggestions on how the service could be improved.
- 1.3 The groups were positive about the new service. The main suggestions focused around passenger education, the ticket machine, on-board the vehicle and signage.
- 1.4 The findings of the visit will be shared with Translink and DfI, and the Consumer Council will continue to work with Translink to progress the suggestions made.
- 1.5 We would like to extend our thanks to Translink and DfI for hosting the visit, and to all the participants who shared their experiences and views on the day.

## **2. INTRODUCTION**

- 2.1 On 3 September 2018 Translink began operation of the new 'Glider' service. The Glider provides direct cross-city services between the east and west of the city and link into Titanic Quarter. The services run at 7-8 minute intervals throughout the day, with early morning and late evening services operating at a frequency of around 20 minutes.
- 2.2 The services replace most of the Metro services that were already operating along Glider routes. Designated Metro feeder routes operate in areas to bring passengers to interchange points at Dundonald Park and Ride and Colin Connect to allow passengers to change onto the Glider to continue their journey. Tickets must be purchased before boarding the Glider and can be purchased on feeder services or at Glider halts.
- 2.3 The vehicles are 18 metre articulated buses with a capacity of 105 people. They have three sets of double doors with a ramp access on request at the front door of the vehicle. There is a mix of standing and seating areas on-board, with a designated wheelchair space, space for prams and priority seating close to the front of the vehicle for those with reduced mobility or who are assistance dog users. All Glider vehicles have on-board audio visual next stop and destination announcements.

- 2.4 In developing the Glider service Translink and DfI engaged with a wide number of organisations that represent passengers with disabilities or reduced mobility to shape the services provided and to familiarise passengers with the new service.
- 2.5 The Consumer Council is the statutory passenger representative for public transport services in Northern Ireland. We investigate complaints about public buses and trains, and carry out research into passengers' views of public transport.
- 2.6 We also represent air and sea passengers travelling to and from Northern Ireland. The Consumer Council has worked with the Northern Ireland airports, ferry companies and port operators to review the assistance to passengers with a disability or reduced mobility.
- 2.7 The Consumer Council, in partnership with Translink, arranged for a site visit with a group of passengers with a disability or reduced mobility to use the Glider and provide feedback. The group was mixed with Glider users and those who had never been on the service before. Participants were given the opportunity to express their views and make suggestions on how the service could better meet passengers' needs.
- 2.8 The objectives of the visit were:
- To gain a better understanding of the assistance available to passengers using the Glider services;
  - To become more aware of the specific issues experienced by passengers using these services; and
  - To identify possible changes that could further assist passengers using Glider services.
- 2.9 The intended outcome of this exercise is to work with Translink to ensure services meet passengers' needs.
- 2.10 Overall, there was a lot of lively discussion throughout the day with observations and suggestions on what could be improved. Some participants noted that the visit gave them the confidence to use the Glider again.
- 2.11 The Consumer Council would like to thank Translink for facilitating the visit and the DfI for hosting the group in its offices. We would also like to thank those participants who joined us on a particularly wet November morning.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

- 3.1 The Consumer Council arranged a group visit with Translink on Wednesday 7 November 2018 to use the new Glider service. Eight participants took part representing Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee (IMTAC), Guide Dogs NI, Age Sector Platform, Orchardville Society, Prosthetics Users Forum and MS Society. A representative from Alzheimer's Society who was unable to make it on the day provided comments by email.
- 3.2 The Consumer Council and Translink staff guided the group beginning at the Dundonald Park and Ride facility. The group then split in two taking two separate Gliders into the city centre. Staff from The Consumer Council took notes at the visit and recorded the suggestions that were made by the group. The visit ended at DfI's offices where a short feedback session was held allowing participants to discuss any issues not captured during the journey.

### **4. FINDINGS**

- 4.1 The following section provides a summary of the key discussion points that were recorded with corresponding suggestions.

#### *Dundonald Park and Ride*

- 4.2 The building provides a good waiting area for passengers which is staffed during opening hours. The participants commented that it was positive that there was a designated space for a wheelchair user that sits in line with the seating.
- 4.3 Toilet facilities are available but the group noted that signage on the door to the corridor access for the toilets does not indicate that there is an accessible toilet available. It was also highlighted that the door was not automatic meaning that some passengers would have difficulties in accessing the corridor.
- 4.4 On the day of the visit there had been particularly heavy rain. One participant, who was a wheelchair user and had arrived at the Park and Ride by taxi, highlighted that a large puddle had gathered at the drop kerb. The participant explained that this was an issue for them as the puddle was deep and they had to move across the puddle to access the building.

#### **Suggestions**

- Update the signage on the door to the toilets from the waiting area to indicate that an accessible toilet is available;
- Consider making the door to the toilet corridor automatic; and
- Examine the drainage to ensure water pooling does not affect access to the drop kerb.

#### *Ticket Machine*

- 4.5 A Translink staff member showed the group how to operate the ticket machine and demonstrated how to purchase a ticket. One participant commented the machine did not

have audio for all the screens and therefore was not fully accessible for those people with a visual impairment. Another participant explained that audio was useful for passengers with a learning disability. It was also noted that there was a lack of large font on the machines. It was felt that there was not enough information or instructions available on using the ticket machine.

4.6 Participants discussed that those travelling with a disability concessionary pass would be able to use their pass to travel free of charge on the Glider and therefore they would not have to use the ticket machine. However, it was noted that not everyone with a disability has a valid pass that allows free travel.

4.7 There was a detailed discussion in relation to printing of tickets and receipts when paying by card. One participant outlined an experience they had where a previous passenger had left a receipt in the tray in the machine and they had lifted it by a mistake thinking it was their ticket. The ticket and receipt looks almost identical so the passenger did not realise the mistake. The participant then boarded the Glider and along the journey was stopped by a Customer Revenue Protection Officer. As they could only produce a receipt, and not a ticket, a penalty fare was issued. The situation was extremely stressful and upsetting. The participant stated that following the incident Translink spoke with them and was commended for being very helpful, however the participant would rather the incident had not happened in the first instance. The group reviewed the ticket and receipt, and agreed it was difficult to differentiate between the two.

### **Suggestions**

- Look at the possibility of extending audio instructions through the whole ticket purchasing process;
- Investigate the availability of a large font option for the ticket machines;
- Carry out further work with disability and older peoples' organisations to educate users of the service; and
- Examine if there is way to better differentiate between a receipt and a ticket. One suggestion was to use different coloured paper. Another option discussed was to make it an 'opt-in' feature to print a receipt rather than automatically printing it. A further suggestion that the ticket and receipt is combined into one.

### *Feeder Service*

4.8 The site visit did not include travel on feeder services that connect passengers from the surrounding areas to the Glider. However, there were some issues raised about waiting times and the frequency of these services.

### **Suggestion**

- Keep under review the timetable of the feeder services to ensure connectivity with the Glider.

### *Vehicle access*

- 4.9 One participant recounted a scenario where a couple using the service had not realised that they needed to push the button for the Glider to stop. The system was explained to them by other passengers, but it was felt that there was a lack of instructions on board and around the halts explaining how to use the service.
- 4.10 A ramp deploys at the front door of the vehicle to allow boarding. Those participants that used it believed that the gradient of the ramp was good and easy to use.
- 4.11 One participant talked about a previous experience where they had been using the designated wheelchair space and had pressed the button to alert the driver that they wished to disembark at a stop and needed the ramp. However, the Glider did not stop and the passenger had to wait for the next halt meaning that they had to travel further to their destination. Translink explained that when the button is pressed in the wheelchair space, there is a double bell and a light to alert the driver that ramp the needs to be deployed. It was unclear what had happened in this instance.
- 4.12 It should be noted that since the site visit Translink, in partnership with the DfI and IMTAC, has launched its 'Access to Glide' guide which provides advice to older passengers or passengers with a disability on using the new Glider service<sup>1</sup>.

### **Suggestions**

- Consider additional signage/information around halts and interchanges;
- Carry out further work with disability and older people organisations to educate users of the Glider service; and
- Consider signage/information on-board advising passengers to press the button when they require the vehicle to stop at halts.

### *On board the vehicle*

- 4.13 There remains concern that the passenger cannot interact with the driver, specifically among those that represent consumers with dementia. Having the driver remind passengers when it was their stop was helpful passengers with dementia. Another passenger who had difficulty with alerting the driver for the ramp to be deployed noted that it was difficult to communicate with the driver if there was an issue and assistance was required.
- 4.14 There is one available space for a wheelchair user and it was discussed the difficulty that this causes if two wheelchair users wish to travel together on public transport. There is a safety bar to pull down once a wheelchair user is in the space. If a user also had poor mobility in the upper body then it would be difficult to deploy this bar and it is difficult to alert the driver.

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<sup>1</sup> Translink 'Access to Glide' booklet - <https://www.translink.co.uk/accessibility/translink-access-guide/>

- 4.15 In middle section of the vehicle, where the front and back of the vehicle joins, there is a circular platform which rotates during travel. A prosthetic user explained that the movement of the platform could alter the foot position of the prosthetic which would be a safety concern.
- 4.16 It was identified that there was narrow access between the front and back section of the Glider. This can make it difficult to reach seats or disembark during busy periods.
- 4.17 There is a designated area marked as priority seating. This provides good room for assistance dog users meaning that the dog does not block the aisle. Some participants felt that the seating in this area was too low while others spoke of the high step to gain access to some seating areas towards the back of the vehicle. It was suggested that further signage could be used asking passengers to consider leaving access to lower seats for passengers with reduced mobility.

### **Suggestions**

- Carry out further work with disability and older people organisations to educate users of the Glider service, including the promotion of the new 'Access to Glide' guide;
- Consider how passengers could be assisted in deploying the safety bar when using the wheelchair space;
- Investigate the possibility of a public information sign advising of the movement of the circular platform; and
- Further signage could be used asking passengers to consider leaving access to lower seats for passengers with reduced mobility.

#### *On board announcements*

- 4.18 There were audio announcements in advance of each of the Glider stops. When the Glider stopped at the halt there was an announcement 'Next stop...' announcing the following stop and it was felt that this could be confusing. Participants commented that at times the audio is difficult to hear.

### **Suggestions**

- Investigate the possibility of also announcing the stop on arrival at the halt; and
- Review the sound level of announcements to see if this can be improved especially during busy periods.

#### *Glider stops*

- 4.19 A participant explained that there was a Glider Halt at Short Strand and then a Metro stop for the 4 and 6 services. This has caused confusion for some passengers and left people waiting at the wrong stops.

## **Suggestions**

- Assess the positioning and signage around the Short Strand Glider stop and Metro stop to ensure that passenger information is clear; and
- Carry out work with disability and older people's organisations to educate users especially around times of service changes;

### *General comments*

- 4.20 Participants were positive about the new services and some stated that after the visit they will use the Glider again. One participant explained that they have switched from using taxis at night time to using the Glider.
- 4.21 Others commented that the space on the Glider is good compared to other modes of transport and there are plenty of handrails on board. However, it was noted that while the frequency is good, it can be frustrating at peak times when vehicles are at capacity and may not stop.
- 4.22 One participant noted that the signage could be improved for passengers with a visual impairment.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS**

- 5.1 In general passengers were positive about using the new Glider service, with some having already switched to using the service from other modes of transport and others stating that they will use it again following the visit.
- 5.2 Prior to the launch of the Glider service Translink carried out a programme of community engagement with a wide range of organisations. At the site visit it was suggested that further work needed to be done with disability and older people's organisations to educate passengers and help them navigate the new system. Since the site visit Translink has launched the 'Access to Glide' information guide and promotion of this could form the basis of further engagement.
- 5.3 Other suggestions focused on the ticket machine, audio announcements, on board the vehicle and overall signage.

## **6. NEXT STEPS**

- 6.1 The comments made by participants will be presented to Translink. The Consumer Council will work with Translink to support it as it implements the changes to ensure that services continue to meet passengers' needs.

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