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## *Transport Choices*

**Translink, Northern Ireland's main provider of integrated bus and rail services has made significant changes over the last 5 years resulting in sustained increases in passenger numbers in line with the Government's Regional Transportation Strategy (RTS) 2002-2012. There are now nearly 80 million journeys a year - three and a half million more than last year - beating Government targets three years early.**

The success follows sustained investment in the local bus and rail networks including buses, trains, track and passenger facilities and ongoing changes and improvements to services that passengers have liked. The company is now looking forward to further

investment of £182 million for projects including new trains and new buses as confirmed in the Northern Ireland Budget 2008/09- 2010/11.

This is good news for Northern Ireland. Translink's bus and rail services have shown real growth in passenger numbers across the board - 20% on Metro since 2005, over 20% on Goldline since 2004 and 40% on N I Railways since 2002. More investment will build on this success and help lock in growth.

What will passengers see from this investment:

- Purchase around 200 new buses to continue to modernise the fleet, improve accessibility and expand services.
- Purchase 20 new trains to replace 13 older trains and provide extra capacity and more growth.
- Track life extension works between Ballymena and Coleraine for faster, smoother and more comfortable journeys.

- The commencement of a major track relay project between Coleraine and Derry.
- Track improvement works on the railway line between Knockmore and Lurgan for faster, smoother and more comfortable journeys.
- The extension of the Concessionary Fares Scheme to introduce free travel on public transport in Northern Ireland to all those aged 60 years and over (excluding all Ireland or cross border travel).

### **Next Steps**

#### **New Buses**

The 200 new buses will be delivered over the next three years, meaning more comfortable journeys for passengers and easier access for all.

Older Ulsterbus vehicles will principally be replaced with single deck vehicles and the expansion of Metro will continue with approximately 56 double decker vehicles.



These new vehicles will also contribute to achieving RTS targets for fleet age and accessibility.

### Rail Services

The rail projects are large and complex programmes. Translink have already started to procure the new trains with the first one due to arrive for testing by 2011. The new trains will replace existing rolling stock and improve service and capacity, supported by infrastructure works to be carried out between now and 2013. A new train maintenance / cleaning facility at Translink's Adelaide site in Belfast is planned during 2008/2009 – 2010/11.

### Promoting Sustainable Transport

As evidence of the rising cost of living emerges almost on a daily basis. Latest figures show essential household bills have risen 27% – some £2000 – since last year. Spiralling motoring costs are also a big concern; local fuel prices are up nearly 25% on last year and the overall cost of running a car has outpaced inflation by three times since 2003.

Translink has said that consumers who want to make changes to save money, should look at the bus or train as a great value choice when the overall costs of motoring and parking are taken into account. They encourage the public to use their range of multi-journey bus and rail tickets and promotional offers to make the big savings and of course those aged 65+ and from October this year 60+ travel completely free. In the current economic climate, it can make a real difference to the amount of cash left in the pocket. Of course, public transport also offers the extra rewards of being more relaxing with no parking hassles and no stress from dealing with congestion.

As congestion continues to increase year on year it is a real issue for everyone particularly in Belfast. Survey findings carried out by the Department for Regional Development have found that commuters who travel in and out of work in Belfast by car spend, on average, the equivalent of a full working day behind the wheel every week.

This is costing the NI economy millions every year. More priority for buses and



their passengers means faster journeys and less traffic – even those who have to use cars are better off. Half a million people a week are now enjoying the benefits of travelling by Metro - this means around 38,000 fewer cars on Belfast roads every week. However, while 32% of people travelling into Belfast on the main roads are currently carried by Metro services, buses still account for only 2% of traffic.

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Translink are working with Roads Service to deliver bus priority throughout the city as quickly as they can. Good examples of this are on the Antrim Road

and the M1 bus lane. Other successful initiatives have been the park and ride sites at Black's Road and Sprucefield.

Better commuting choices than the car also adds up to a lifestyle change. Many people complain that life is too busy and they struggle with the work/ life balance. A good place to start is the commute to work. Walking to the bus or train station can be part of a healthy routine and travelling by bus or train can give the commuter some free quality time back rather than driving in busy traffic.

Public transport is set to benefit from further investments and improvements, which is great news and will mean a healthier, more sustainable and efficient city. Much has already been achieved - customer satisfaction at its highest level in over 14 years, NI Railways are now one of the highest performing rail companies in the British Isles in terms of punctuality and reliability, new passenger facilities have been delivered and customers are enjoying modern new buses. Clearly, the unique Northern Ireland public transport arrangements have been a real success. However, partnership is key if this track record of success is to be built up with everyone playing a part to make public transport the best choice for sustainable development and modern living.

## *Translink Moving Forward*



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**The unique public transport arrangements in Northern Ireland allow integration to be placed at the heart of Translink operations. This means more buses and trains connecting; clear branding, common information sources and well-organised interchanges including park and ride.**

**T**he numbers of people travelling by bus and rail have been rising consistently. In the last four years rail passengers have increased by 28% while bus passengers increased by 7.3%. In addition customer satisfaction is high with the best scores in 14 years.

Many of the targets set out in The Regional Transportation Strategy 2002-2012 and the Belfast Metropolitan Plan 2005-2015 are already being met demonstrating the benefits of sustained investment in quality public transport.

### **Customer Focus**

Translink, has adopted a strong customer focus to ensure that more people use bus and train as the easy and better option.

Catherine Mason, Group Chief Executive of Northern Ireland Transport and Holding Company and Translink explains, "People have a choice whether to use our services. To make sure more people choose to travel with us, we do all we can to get it right for our customers".

"This means services that match where people want to travel to at the times that suit them, services that are attractive, easy to use and easy to find out about. We must also keep people informed about new services and changes and when things do not go as planned. It means buses and trains and stations that are clean, modern and pleasant to use and people who deliver the service who are professional, friendly and helpful".

New developments in the last year, which were particularly popular with customers, were:

- A new rail timetable from Ballymena and Antrim to Belfast with more services at peak hours; a new park & ride at Ballymena is already full and the new trains are a great success
- New Ulsterbus town services were introduced across the network along with better rural links as part of a rolling programme rejuvenating the entire network

Metro Bus at Albert Dock



- The Goldline 200 express coach service between Belfast and Dublin Airport/City Centre now runs hourly '24/7' delivering 20% growth over the last year
- A new hourly bus service (109a) links Lisburn to Belfast International Airport (BIA) and Antrim
- The Airport Express 300 service from Belfast to BIA runs through the night and every 10 minutes at peak hour and the 600 service to George Best Belfast City Airport runs every 20 minutes through the day
- The Bustrak real time information system at Metro bus stops which 'counts down' the time until the arrival of the next bus is rolling out across Belfast

## Quality

Translink have also been investing in vehicles and facilities in order to give current customers the service they expect and to attract even more people to use bus and rail.

Over the last year 305 new buses were delivered on time and on budget – these included school buses, double deck buses for Metro and fully accessible coaches for Goldline (a first in Europe). The average age of Translink's bus fleet has now been reduced because of these new buses. Belfast now has one of the youngest urban bus fleets in GB or Ireland and the Ulsterbus fleet is 7.6 years old on average. With the purchase of new buses for school services Translink have ended the use of the '3 for 2' rule where three children (under 14) shared a single seat. By September 2008 all standing will be eliminated on dedicated school services.

Translink have also started building a new rail station at Newry, and a new bus centre at Lisburn is also now complete. All stations and halts on the rail network are being improved with new signage, lighting, seats, platform surfaces, shelters and ramps or lifts where possible

On the Enterprise cross border rail service Translink has a new catering supplier and the food is being received very well. While the company is doing all they can to make this current service as good as possible, they continue working

with Irish Rail to introduce a timetable with a departure to Dublin and back every hour.

Translink has highlighted, a key challenge going forward is the level of congestion. Catherine explained, "A particular problem in keeping our bus services to time has been the increased congestion in Belfast, partially due to the construction work on the M1 and Westlink. This has meant that the average speed of buses (and all traffic) has dropped.

While 32% of people travelling into Belfast on main roads are carried by Metro, buses account for only 2% traffic. We continue to make a case for more priority for buses and their passengers and are working with road service to deliver this. Good examples are the Antrim Road and the M1 bus lane. Faster public transport works for everyone by helping to reduce congestion – it means healthier, more sustainable and efficient living."

## Translink –The Way Forward

Public transport in Northern Ireland has a track record of success delivering real improvements in bus and rail services for passengers – more frequency, better punctuality, accessibility and comfort. Partnership is key to delivering even better services and everyone has a role to play if we are to continue this success.

Following confirmation of the Northern Ireland Budget 2008/09- 2010/11 by the Assembly, further investment of £182 Million is to be invested in public transport with £137 million for rail projects and £45million for new buses.

This funding will see the purchase of 20 new trains to replace 13 older trains used on the Larne line and provide more capacity and frequency across the network in line with the growing numbers choosing the train as the best option.

Catherine Mason said that the first of the new trains would be delivered in 2011 with the last train fully commissioned during 2013. "The process to purchase the trains is already underway with the invitation to tender documentation released in June 2008 in line with the procurement timescales. Tenders are due back in the autumn with contracts due to

Couple arrive at Belfast



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be signed next spring 2009".

Essential engineering work on the Londonderry line north of Ballymena is currently ongoing to repair 'wet spots', these are weak areas in the ballast. In addition, there are five miles of track to be re-layed between Ballymena and Ballymoney and this is planned for autumn this year to late summer 2009. This work will allow an increase in the speed of trains and provide a smoother ride for passengers.

The funding for buses will see up to 200 new fully accessible buses added to the fleet bringing improved quality and easier access for all.

"This investment presents an exciting opportunity for Translink to play its key role in the development of Northern Ireland. Excellent public transport is the right choice for the community, for the environment and for sustainable development and a better quality of life for everyone", finished Catherine.