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Dear Sirs

**Written response by the Chartered Institution of Highways & Transportation – Northern Ireland Branch to the Consultation on Belfast on the Move Sustainable Transport Enabling Measures Proposals**

CIHT (NI Branch) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the consultation. We are grateful for the additional time granted to us to make this response and hope that our comments will be of assistance.

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The Chartered Institution of Highways and Transportation (CIHT) is a learned society concerned specifically with the planning, design, construction, maintenance and operation of land-based transport systems and infrastructure. It serves the transport profession for the benefit of society and its members.

With over 12,000 members, working across a wide range of disciplines, CIHT aims to promote the exchange of knowledge, improve policy formulation, stimulate debate on transportation issues, recognise individual competence and encourage best practice in the industry.

## **2.0 BELFAST ON THE MOVE SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT ENABLING MEASURES PROPOSALS**

The RDS, RTS, BMAP and BMTP set out clear and strong policies for Belfast as the main urban centre for the region. The region and Belfast has suffered over the years from underinvestment in transport infrastructure and services. In particular Belfast's transportation services and infrastructure have not developed in line with similar regional cities throughout the UK and further afield. Cities such as Leeds and Nottingham have benefited significantly from investment in transportation infrastructure.

CIHT strongly supports the proposals for ongoing investment in the development of sustainable transport proposals, policies and infrastructure in Belfast. We are also supportive of proposals for enhanced public transport and improvements to the public realm in central Belfast.

We note that the estimated cost for implementation of the Sustainable Transport Enabling Measures is in the order of £5million. At this time of economic cutbacks we have concerns that the proposed STEM works and subsequent phases of the project will be implemented piecemeal and over such a long period that Belfast City Centre will suffer an unacceptable degree of disruption affecting its ongoing commercial activity. Consequently our first recommendation is that finance must be allocated for the total STEM package and ring-fenced to ensure that the works are completed expeditiously.

While accepting the principal of the proposals, members of CIHT expressed a number of comments some of which are about the detail which we appreciate may not yet have been fully addressed. These are summarised as:

- The Sustainable Transport Enabling Measures are only one element of a larger plan. Members expressed concerns that it is difficult to comment on one element of a plan without having a complete overview of all elements including the delivery programme eg for enhanced public transport services.
- It is essential for the credibility of the total package, that it is delivered in a co-ordinated manner eg Hope Street two-way must be available before bus lanes are introduced on May Street / Donegall Sq South / Howard Street. There are also concerns regarding adequate future provision for circulatory/through traffic when Rapid Transit Enabling Measures are implemented. The efficient operation of the traffic system is ultimately dependant on the completion of the City Centre Ring ie Bankmore Street, and effective traffic management to minimise traffic delays and congestion around the complete Ring including the river crossings where Rapid Transit and other public transport will be given priority.
- Longer term proposals shown for Rapid Transit are welcome. CIHT has previously raised concerns when commenting on BRT proposals that the Southern Approaches which was identified as one of three key routes in

BMTP appears to have dropped right off the horizon. There is concern that quality public transport routes to the north and south are not even considered in long term plans/options referred to in the Consultation. On basis of equality of opportunity and access to quality public transport we believe that there has to be acknowledgement that rapid transit services to the north and the south of the city will be in the longer term scheme of things.

- Concerns have also been expressed that there is no Rapid Transit halt planned close to the Europa/ Gt Victoria Street Transport Hub. With modern Integrated Traffic Management Systems there is no reason that priority cannot be given to rapid transit vehicles leaving a halt on the south side of Howard Street near Great Victoria Street to cross the junction into the priority lane on Fisherwick Place.
- Wider bus lanes are being provided on the key east-west routes – will this additional width be sufficient to allow BRT vehicles and Metro buses to pass each other at stops/halts without having to move out into general traffic lanes, potentially causing additional delays?
- The additional segregation of cycle movements into dedicated cycle lanes is welcomed as is the additional width of bus lanes which should provide an increased safety zone for cyclists. However there may be safety issues when cyclists and BRT vehicles or buses are passing stationary transport vehicles at halts/stops.
- Currently cycling is not permitted in the pedestrian areas. It is unclear from the consultation leaflet how cyclists will proceed through the pedestrian/restricted access areas and this should be further clarified and consulted on before any proposals are implemented. Cycling in pedestrian areas may be a hazard for vulnerable groups eg those with disabilities, older people, those with dependants etc.
- It is unclear from the small scale plans whether the lay-bys on the two key east-west routes have been created by reducing operational carriageway widths or by reducing footway widths. If the latter then there must be concerns for the image of a pedestrian friendly city.
- Provision of new controlled crossing points is welcomed - will the pedestrian strategy provide for shorter crossing distances and longer crossing times?
- After introduction of new bus lanes and stops, the management of available kerb space will be very important. Effective enforcement of parking and operational traffic lanes will be essential. As overall parking provision is being reduced in the central area it will be important to ensure that the appropriate use of spaces is enforced. The provision of 40 additional dedicated disabled parking spaces is welcomed. However Blue Badge holders had access to normal Pay & Display spaces as well as up to 3 hours parking on waiting restrictions. Overall the proposals appear to significantly reduce the

opportunity for blue badge holders to park legally and hence have access to city centre facilities. Further detail on how parking, servicing and access restrictions will operate is necessary to indicate how they will work.

- Many disabled people rely on special transport and being set down and collected near the premises they have need to access. Will they be able to access (to be set down/picked up) into the restricted access area of Castle Street, High Street and Donegall Place?
- If cars are to be prevented or discouraged from entering the City Centre what provision is being made to enhance public transport access from the North and South of the City not to be served by rapid transport.
- What arrangements are being made for taxi operation? Taxis have become and are likely to remain a significant element of public transport. Will 'permitted taxis' be allowed to use bus lanes in the city centre? Will permitted taxis be able to pickup or set down in bus lanes? Will private taxis be able to enter and stop in bus lanes to set down or to collect pre-booked passengers?
- From the detail on the consultation leaflet it is not clear if the Western Gyratory links along Durham St/College St N/ Grosvenor Rd are one-way or two-way. If one-way is there an access issue for emergency vehicles travelling to the city centre from the RVH?
- Proposals need significant change in public attitudes – the provision of improved transport services and infrastructure must be accompanied by a focused 'hearts and minds' campaign.

I trust you find these comments useful. If it would be helpful, members of CIHT NI Branch are available to meet with the project team to discuss the comments and issues raised.

Yours sincerely



**J P Heyburn**

Honorary Secretary on behalf of  
CIHT – Northern Ireland Branch