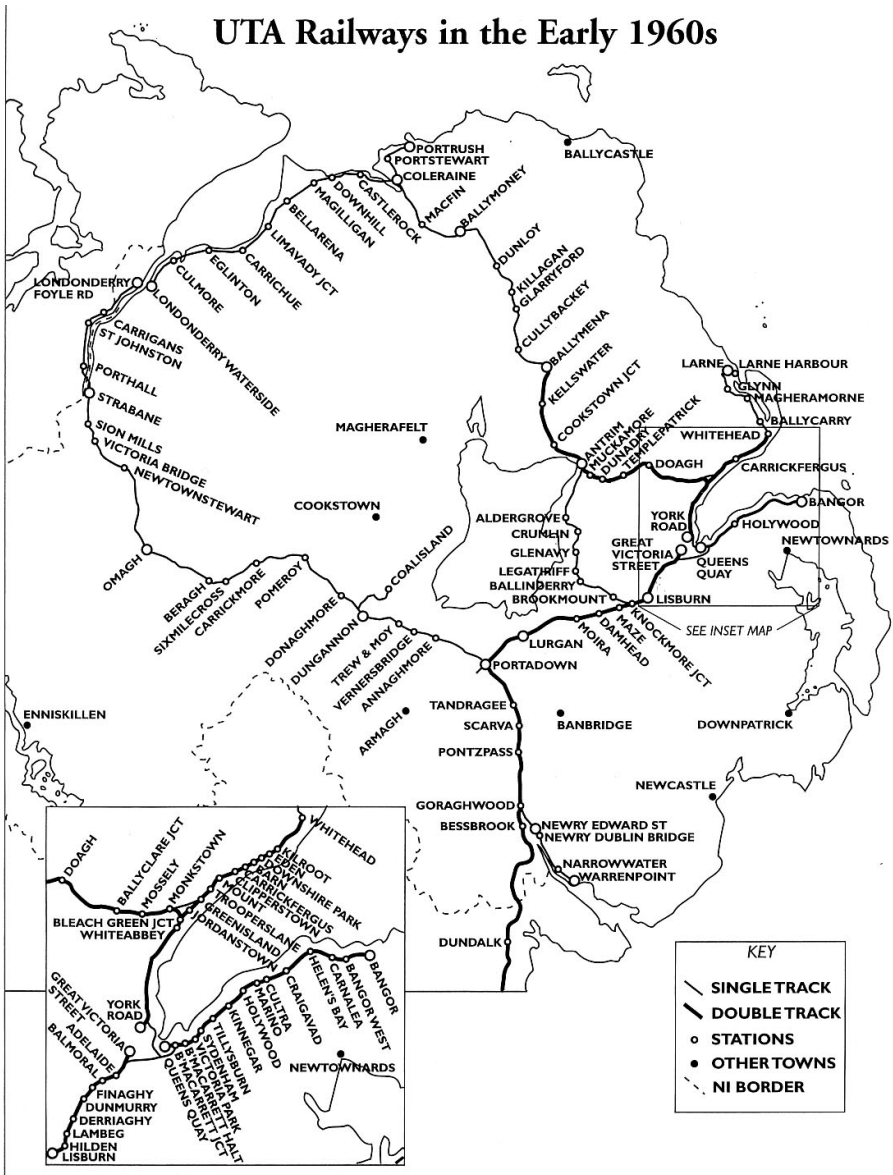


# ARE WE THERE YET? TRANSPORT AND TRAVEL

## Introduction

Transport is a crucial component of everyday life in Northern Ireland. It facilitates business, commerce, social and cultural activity and impacts on every aspect of society. On average each person in Northern Ireland now travels 6,100 miles per year. This equates to approximately 300 hours per year or 50 minutes per day. However, the way in which we travel has changed significantly. In the first half of the twentieth century, towns and rural areas across Northern Ireland were linked by a comprehensive rail network with major towns and other strategic areas additionally serviced by electrified trams. Prior to the 1950s the Northern Ireland rail network covered approximately 900 miles and extended north to south and east to west see figure 1 below. Much of the rail network closed during the 1950s and 60s, declining to around 200 miles today. Coinciding with this there has been a rapid increase in car ownership, growing by 400% since the 1960s. The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) Road Accident statistics show that in Northern Ireland in 2007/08 there were 6,321 injury road traffic collisions, an increase of 12.6% on the previous year and during 2008 there were 106 deaths, 4 less than the previous year.

Figure 1: Showing UTA Lines Ulster Rail Network in the 1960's



Source: McLamorn Sinclair, I (2002) UTA Lines Ulster Rail Network in the 1960s, Colourpoints Books Map kindly provided by Mr Wallace McNaul.

## Policy and Investment

The Northern Ireland Assembly has responsibility for all aspects of transport with the exception of Air and Sea (ferry) which are reserved responsibilities. Although the UK White Paper on Transport<sup>1</sup> provides a broad vision, devolution allows for all the countries of the UK to develop local policies. Other UK and international policies also have a bearing. For example, under the Kyoto Protocol, the UK is committed to cutting six greenhouse gases by 2012 and it has a domestic goal of 20% reduction in carbon dioxide emissions by 2010.<sup>2</sup> EU transport policy up to 2010 focuses on sustainable developments and road safety<sup>3</sup> and a recent review of progress in relation to the 2010 goals calls for stronger action to tackle congestion, pollution and road accidents.<sup>4</sup>

The Northern Ireland Regional Transportation Strategy (2002-2012) forms the basis of government transport policy.<sup>5</sup> The vision as set out in the strategy is to:

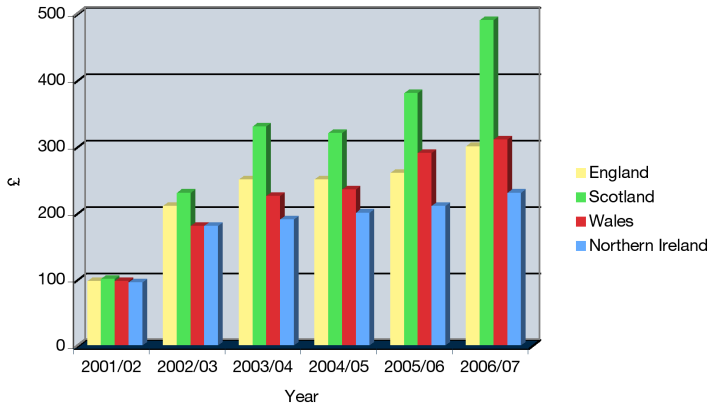
*“....have a modern, sustainable, safe transportation system which benefits society, the economy and the environment and which actively contributes to social inclusion and everyone’s quality of life.”*

There has been less investment in transport in Northern Ireland than in the rest of the UK and the legacy of such under-investment is acknowledged by government. The Regional Transportation Strategy for Northern Ireland notes that in terms of its rural nature, Northern Ireland is considered most comparable with Scotland. However, as the tables below show, in terms of both current and capital expenditure, and with regard to expenditure per head, spending in Northern Ireland lags quite significantly behind Scotland.

Treasury estimates show that the capital expenditure on transport in Northern Ireland increased by 63.2% between 2001/02 and 2006/07. In Scotland, the percentage increase was more than four times that at 261%. In terms of current expenditure between these years, Northern Ireland spending increased by 45.3%, while spending in Scotland increased by 86.59%.

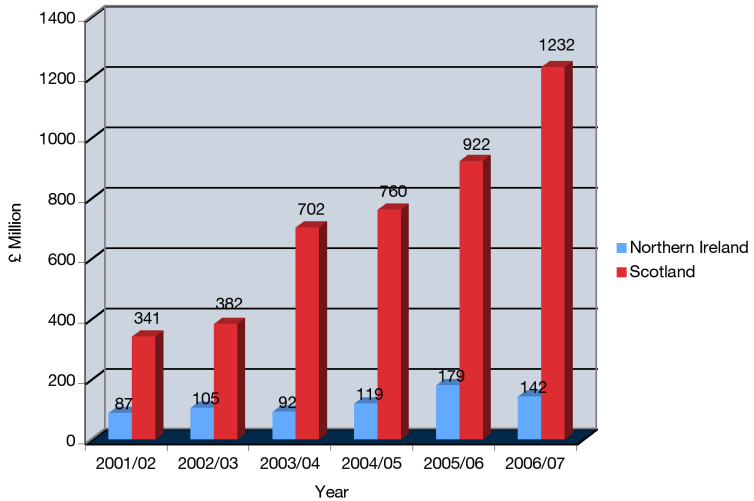
# Are We There Yet? Transport and Travel

**Figure 2: Expenditure per head on Transport (£ per head)**



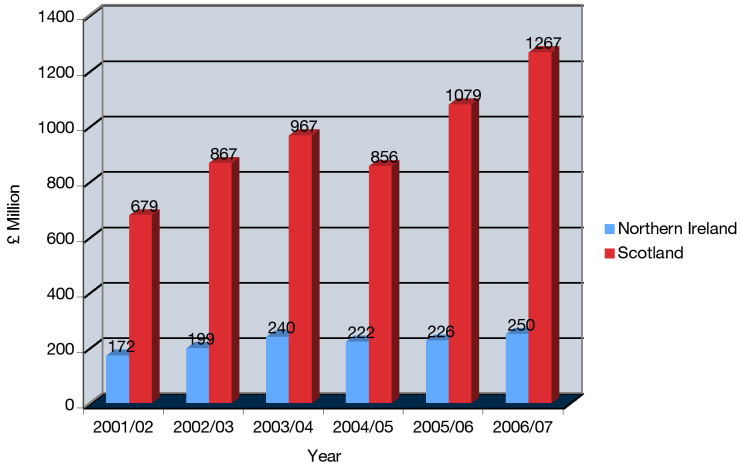
Source: Treasury Public Expenditure Statistical Analysis 2008

**Figure 3: Capital Expenditure on Transport (£ million)**



Source: Treasury Public Expenditure Statistical Analysis 2008

**Figure 4: Current Expenditure on Transport (£ million)**



Source: Treasury Public Expenditure Statistical Analysis 2008

In terms of transport expenditure per head of population, between 2001/02 and 2006/07 spending in Northern Ireland increased by 151.1%. In Scotland the increase was more than double this at 348.6%.

Investment in public transport in Northern Ireland is the lowest in the UK and is also considerably behind European levels. Spending has been, and continues to be, heavily weighted towards road services/improvements. In 2002 a consultation paper on public transport included discussion on increasing the private sector involvement in public transport.<sup>6</sup> However, there has been insufficient detail on how this would be achieved or discussion about the extent to which it is a viable option.

The Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland<sup>7</sup> has allocated £612 million for investment in the road network up to 2011 and £195 million for public transport. Over the ten years of the Investment strategy (up to 2018) the ratio is 81% of spending on roads against 19% on public transport.<sup>8</sup> This ratio of road to public transport spending differs from that which was put forward in the Regional Transportation Strategy (2002-2012), where 35% of spending was to be allocated to public transport.

## Trends in Transport Use

### Private Vehicle

Northern Ireland is a strongly car dependent society and the number of licensed vehicles in Northern Ireland increased by 66% between 1992 and 2006. The car is the dominant mode of transport for all journeys over one mile. Children under 16 make 61% of their journeys as car passengers.<sup>9</sup>

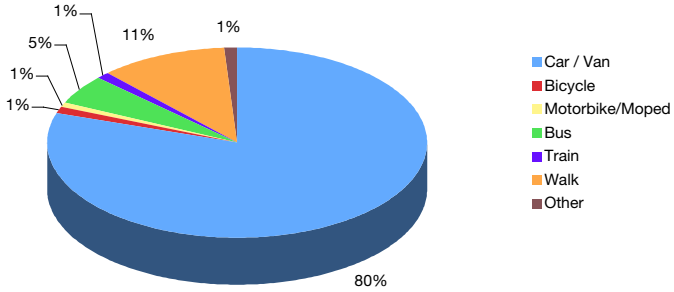
While there has been a steady growth in car ownership rates since the mid 1990s, the high car ownership rate masks a significant minority of households which do not have access to a car. Slightly over a quarter (26%) of households in Northern Ireland do not have access to a car while 30% of households in Northern Ireland have access to two or more cars. However, only 14% of Belfast households have access to two or more cars, compared to 34% of households in the East and 31% in the West. In comparison to the whole of Northern Ireland, fewer households in Derry-Londonderry and Belfast have access to a car, 38% and 29% respectively.<sup>10</sup>

Access to a car is related to household income. Data from the Family Resource Survey 2003/04 shows that 70% of working age adults in the lowest income quintile live in a household where there is a car compared to 98% in the top income quintile. Over half of lone parent families and two-thirds of single pensioners do not have a car. Slightly over 20% of households in rural areas do not have a car. This is particularly noteworthy given the lack of easy access to public transport in many of these areas. Gender and age differences in terms of driving licence holders was also evident. Full car driving licences were held by 80% of men compared to 61% of women. Only 28% of women over 70 hold driving licences compared to 70% of men.<sup>11</sup>

Travel to work comparisons show that Northern Ireland has many more people travelling to work by car or van with 83.7% of people travelling this way compared to the UK average of 70.6%. Belfast has a lower proportion of working households with at least one person driving to work (59%). Figure 5 details the travel to work methods in Northern Ireland for 2005-2007. The figures show that few people in Northern Ireland travel to work by bus, rail or walking. The number of people travelling to work by car has increased by almost 4% since 2002.

# Are We There Yet? Transport and Travel

**Figure 5: Method of Travel to Work (2005-2007)**



Source: Travel Survey for Northern Ireland (2005-2007) Dept Regional Development

As can be seen from Table 1 below, outside of Belfast over 80% of people travel to work by car or van. In all areas use of bus, train and bicycle is low.

**Table 1: Method of Travel to Work by Area (2005-2007)**

Method of Travel to Work	Proportion of People (%) Belfast	Proportion of People (%) East	Proportion of People (%) West
Car/van	59	82	82
Bicycle	3	1	0
Motorbike/moped	0	1	0
Bus	12	5	3
Train	0	1	0
Walk	21	8	11
Other	5	1	3
All	100	100	100

Source: Dept Regional Development Travel Survey for Northern Ireland (2005-2007)

### Rail Travel

For a number of years policy on the rail network was in a state of flux with criticism that non investment in parts of the railway network, particularly in the north west amounted to closure by stealth. Much of the stock was of a very poor standard and fare increases were high in relation to the cost of car travel. Between 1995/96 and 2000/01 rail usage fell by 9%.

The 2002 Regional Transportation Strategy set a target of 60% increase in rail passengers by 2012, although there was insufficient detail on how this was to be achieved. The 2001-2004 Task Force Report on the railway network resulted in the Assembly allocating £103 million for additional stock, which seems to have had an impact on increasing the passenger numbers. There has been a 34% increase in rail passenger numbers between 2001/02 and 2006/07. This includes a 16.7% increase in the passenger numbers on the Derry-Londonderry line between 2005/06 and 2006/07, possibly attributable to the introduction of new trains<sup>12</sup> (Department for Regional Development, 2007). However, as figure 5 and table 1 above show, the number of people using trains to travel to work is low in comparison to other methods of transport.

### Bus Travel

The bus service is more extensive than the rail network but several problems exist including limited availability of services, especially outside Belfast and in rural areas, poor evening provision outside of the greater Belfast area and lack of access for people with mobility problems (41% of buses are currently categorised as accessible). The Northern Ireland Executive Programme for Government (2008) includes the target that all Metro and Ulsterbus coaches will be 100% accessible by 2012.

Declining use between 1995/96 and 2000/01 led to a reduction in routes and fare increases. Travel Survey statistics for 2005-07 show that 5% of workers travel to work by bus (see table 1 above). Inevitably bus travel times have been affected by road congestion. At peak times journeys between Belfast and Derry-Londonderry take over two and a half hours by bus.

### Access to Public Transport

Consideration of accessibility issues includes geographical access and physical access. Few households in Northern Ireland live close to a train station. Sixty one per cent of people live forty four minutes or more walking distance to their nearest train station; 69% live within six minutes walk of a bus stop. Demographic changes means that older people will comprise a greater proportion of the population and many will be dependant on public transport, for example the relatively low number of women over 70 with driving licences as discussed above - though this may be a generation effect and the proportion of current 50 year olds with a driving licence will be higher. Northern Ireland has a higher number of people with a

disability than elsewhere in the UK, yet as outlined above currently less than half of the buses in Northern Ireland are accessible. While the new trains are accessible, the old trains are not. For those who are not able to own a car or who have mobility problems lack of access to decent and affordable public transport is a significant cause of disadvantage with a knock on effect in terms of access to employment, services and social activities.<sup>13</sup>

### Public Attitudes

The public's opinion clearly needs to be considered. Data from the 1999 Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey<sup>14</sup> shows that when asked what would encourage people to reduce their own use of the car the two main factors were cutting public transport fares in half and a 'doubling of petrol prices in the next ten years.' Fifty eight percent of people felt that these factors would reduce their car use. Other highly rated causes included improving the reliability of public transport and charging for entry by car into towns/cities. There was strong support for the need to improve public transport with 32% of respondents stating that they would be prepared to pay a penny more in income tax to finance improvements in public transport.

### Key Policy Challenges

While the Programme for Government cites the objective of promoting an increase in the usage of public transport and identifies action to do this, including taking forward a feasibility study on a rapid transit system for Belfast and progressing work on the rail track by 2011, these measures are over a long term, and will be contingent on budgetary allocation and constraints. It is unlikely that any of the measures aimed at reducing car usage will be effective until alternatives are in place.

To date the main response within Northern Ireland to congestion problems has been to build new roads and improve existing ones. Critics argue that this is a very short term solution given the past and anticipated future increase in car ownership. The Sub-Regional Transport Plan (2015)<sup>15</sup> acknowledges the difficulties facing people living in rural areas who do not have access to a car. There has been limited policy support to date for more provision for cyclists and concerns about road safety and this has not been reflected in the financial allocation to road and public transport. Public/private transport ratios raise issues with regard to road safety targets, environmental targets and the health priorities.

Due to the lack of affordable public transport car ownership is essential for many families and the lack of access to a car can result in social and economic disadvantage in terms of accessing education, work and social activities. The inadequate provision of public transport also poses a challenge for other areas of social policy such as meeting the needs of people who are required to travel outside of their immediate locality for work, and financial implications including the costs associated with the high number of injury road traffic collisions.

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- <sup>9</sup> Department for Regional Development (2007) Northern Ireland Transport Statistics. Belfast: DRD
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