



Department for

Infrastructure

An Roinn

Bonneagair

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**From the office of the Minister for Infrastructure
Nichola Mallon MLA**

Mr. Jim Hanna
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Your reference: JH/JT
Our reference: CORR-2644-2020
Date: 12th October 2020

Dear Mr. Hanna;

Active and Sustainable Travel for Healthcare Workers and Patients

Thank you for your correspondence dated 24 September 2020 outlining Belfast City Council's support for four initiatives to ensure that both healthcare workers and patients can avail of active and sustainable travel alternatives. I am responding on behalf of Nichola Mallon, Minister for Infrastructure to the first three. I understand that you have also written to Minister Swann, and as the fourth is the responsibility of the Department of Health, he will be responding on that particular issue.

Minister Mallon is committed to finding sustainable ways to connect our citizens and communities to jobs and opportunities, particularly as we recover from the impact of COVID-19.

During the pandemic, Minister Mallon announced free travel for healthcare workers which is in place until further notice. Additionally, Translink has put in place wide-ranging safety measures across its fleet and stations to ensure the safety of all of its passengers. These include protective screens on all buses; the roll out of social distancing measures and signage; enhanced cleaning and sanitisation of buses, trains and facilities; and amended bus and rail timetables to ensure that sufficient capacity is provided ahead of demand in order to assist social distancing. Translink continues to offer wider safety and travel advice for passengers, including the need for good hand hygiene, using contactless payments, travelling off-peak and respecting social distancing. You will also be aware that, since 10 July 2020, face coverings have been mandatory on all Translink services.

The Minister continues to work with Translink to adjust service provision to meet social distancing requirements alongside customer demand. In addition, the Department for Infrastructure continues to develop its active travel measures to encourage people to walk, cycle or use public transport for journeys where possible.

You will also be aware that the Department for Infrastructure provides for a wide range of concessionary fares such as: free travel for everyone aged over 60; those who are blind or in receipt of a war disablement pension and half fare travel for those registered as partially sighted; along with a number of other groups notably people in receipt of the mobility component of Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence Payment (PIP). As such, this scheme enables many of our citizens to access social and economic opportunities.

All of these concessions and special measure are in place to support both key healthcare workers and patients during the current pandemic. However, they all come at a cost, and Translink is currently operating with a severe funding deficit. Minister Mallon will continue to bid for additional budget to bridge Translink's funding gap to protect our existing public transport network and to expand it.

I trust that you will find this information helpful

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K McFerran', written in a cursive style.

KATHRYN MCFERRAN
Private Secretary to the Minister