



**Chambers
Ireland**
Advancing business together



CycleConnects: Ireland's Cycle Network Consultation

Submission by Chambers Ireland

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Introduction

Chambers Ireland has pledged since 2019 to advocate for and support the advancement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Sustainability is at the heart of our work, and we use the Goals as a framework to identify policy priorities and communicate our recommendations. Our particular focus is on five of the goals encompassing decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11), advancements in gender equality (SDG 5), viable industries, innovation, and infrastructure (SDG 9) and progress in climate action (SDG 13). Many of these goals have a connection to active travel and cycling infrastructure. As an organisation, we have advocated on numerous occasions for improved, safer methods of public transport that connect our communities and provide them with safer alternatives to transport modes powered by non-renewables.

Cycling should be a core part of Ireland's transport infrastructure. We have in the past highlighted the quality-of-life benefits, the economic competitiveness benefits, and the environmental benefits which active travel can bring coupled with better-connected public transport.¹ Our member Chambers are also united in the vision of an Ireland where localities are transformed to become more person-focused, and getting the active transport infrastructure right is fundamental to that. As a truly regional and national organisation, our deep sense of place is fundamental to the identity of each regional Chamber. They understand both the national and regional importance of inter-urban connectivity, and how the intra-urban transport environment impacts upon their local economy. This is especially relevant to our commitment to, and support for sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11), and viable industries, innovation, and infrastructure (SDG 9).

The CycleConnects network should be front and centre of our national plans to decarbonise transport, which is relevant to our commitment to climate action (SDG 13). Cycling represents a zero-carbon, active transport option that dedicates far less space to low-volume private vehicles. The principle means of reducing congestion is to have more people using modes of transport that do not suffer from congestion and ensuring that people who use private vehicles that are prone to causing congestion don't transmit that congestion to mass transport options. For this reason, we welcome the serious consideration of a national plan which aims to facilitate the transition to carbon-neutral forms of public transport.

¹ [Chambers-Ireland-submission-to-the-Department-of-Transport-on-the-National-Investment-Framework-for-Transport-in-Ireland.pdf](#)

Breaking the reliance on cars through active travel

Improved public transport is key to connecting our communities. Chambers Ireland sees great ambition within the plans to connect our urban areas outside the Greater Dublin Area (GDA), and help those areas grow into living communities. At a high level, we fully acknowledge that the proposals are conducive to physical health benefits, will help reduce our dependence on fossil fuels and mitigate our climate impacts. Per the report on why a cycle network is needed in Ireland, it is clear that Ireland is highly dependent on the use of private cars and the statistic stated in the report that three out of four journeys are made by car substantiates this fact. This trend must change if Ireland is going to attain its climate targets of 51% cut in economy-wide emissions by 2030.²

We welcome the plans, particularly when there is a need more than ever to shift our reliance away from car-centric travel. The most recent available data from the Central Statistics Office showed that journeys by car accounted for 73.7% of all journeys, walking accounted for 13.5% of all journeys made and 4.8% were by bus.³ In the same year, 69.9% of journeys were likely to be by car as a driver, for journeys of 15 minutes or less. Startlingly, 29% of journeys outside of Dublin in 2019 were less than 2km in duration.⁴ Considering the present climate crisis and rising congestion figures in our urban areas,⁵ this represents a need to shift our dependence away from cars. However, it will be difficult to abate transport-related emissions in the absence of a mode of transport that is an alternative to using a car.

While private vehicles predominate as the most frequently used mode of transport, the second most frequently used mode of transport is walking. Of those who walk and cycle 80% of those trips are up to 30 minutes in duration. This creates an ideal upper bound of the walking neighbourhood with a radius of 3km, and a cycling neighbourhood of radius 8km. It is critical, therefore, to acknowledge the connection between cycling infrastructure and pedestrian infrastructure, and that a holistic approach to active travel is emphasised within the plans.

We need to come to look at active travel in a holistic way. As the data from the Walking and Cycling Index 2021 shows,⁶ 95% of all Dublin Metropolitan Area residents walk and 25% cycle at least once a week. Though this is focused on Dublin, the data can be used in the context of the cities and urban areas stipulated in the CycleConnects proposals. Just as we have inadequate cycling infrastructure, we also have inadequate walking infrastructure. The reprioritisation of active transport is a response to the efforts made to mitigate the congestion associated with private vehicles. This is particularly iniquitous in urban areas, where private vehicle trips are a minority of total trips made, but where urban residents suffer the greatest degree of atmospheric and

² <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/dab6d-government-announces-sectoral-emissions-ceilings-setting-ireland-on-a-pathway-to-turn-the-tide-on-climate-change/#:~:text=%E2%80%9CToday%20the%20government%20has%20agreed,under%20Climate%20Action%20Plan%202021.>

³ <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-nts/nationaltravelsurvey2019/howwetravelled/>

⁴ [National Travel Survey 2019 - CSO - Central Statistics Office](#)

⁵ [https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/munster/arid-](https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/munster/arid-40995341.html#:~:text=In%202021%2C%20Cork%20was%20ranked,congested%20conditions%2C%22%20TomTom%20said.)

[40995341.html#:~:text=In%202021%2C%20Cork%20was%20ranked,congested%20conditions%2C%22%20TomTom%20said.](https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/munster/arid-40995341.html#:~:text=In%202021%2C%20Cork%20was%20ranked,congested%20conditions%2C%22%20TomTom%20said.)

⁶ https://www.nationaltransport.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/220504-WACI22_DublinMetropolitanArea_v35_DIGITAL_v2.pdf

noise pollution arising from private vehicles which are driven through their areas by people transiting through their neighbourhoods.

Our urban areas, in particular Galway, Cork, Waterford, Limerick and the National Development Plan growth towns should have a cycle network in place which works with adequate public transport modes to mitigate the use of private cars. Cycling infrastructure will be key to this transition, and will be especially important if we are to realise the benefits of fifteen-minute cities and ten-minute towns.

We previously highlighted that shared bicycle schemes, quiet routes and pedestrian-permeable streets all expand the area which is accessible in cities within fifteen minutes.⁷ There is ample reason to believe this would also be beneficial for our towns as highlighted by the Southern Regional Assembly in its report in 2020 on Carlow, Ennis, and Tralee.⁸ Connectivity is essential to both initiatives. It entails identifying the walking and cycling catchment to different services in each urban area, and connecting areas which are currently deprived of services. For example, connections will need to be made between residential estates by providing paths between cul-de-sacs, in addition to providing walk/cycle bridges across rivers to connect areas that are deprived of services. In conjunction with this, bus services will need to be improved by increasing their frequency and widening the public transport catchment through additional bus stops and new bus services. However, per the report infrastructure interventions alone will not necessarily result in improved sustainable mobility; almost all Irish towns are within a 10-minute cycle to services, yet available census data indicates that roughly 1% of those working or studying in each town commute by bike.

As our population increases (estimated by the CSO to grow to 6.7 million by 2051),⁹ so too will the strain on transport infrastructure within our urban areas, especially as Ireland is becoming ever-more urbanised. It is therefore pivotal we learn from the lamentable example of Dublin as a car-centric city with long commutes (the fifth-longest in Europe, as of 2020).¹⁰ This must be considered for the urban areas mentioned in the plans. Part of the solution should be that within neighbourhoods, the number of active travel-only intersections should be maximised through the clustering of people-friendly streets together. These fifteen-minute, and ten-minute neighbourhoods should then be surrounded with access points to public and private transport options on peripheral roads.

Benefits of active travel

There are numerous social and economic benefits to the promotion of active travel and it is critical that better cycling infrastructure is in place so those benefits are realised.

⁷ [Chambers-Ireland-submission-to-the-Department-of-Transport-on-the-National-Investment-Framework-for-Transport-in-Ireland.pdf](#)

⁸ https://www.southernassembly.ie/uploads/general-files/ARUP_-_10_Minute_Towns_-_No_Appendices.pdf

⁹ <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-plfp/populationandlabourforceprojections2017-2051/populationprojectionsresults/>

¹⁰ <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/policy-brief/2020/what-makes-capital-cities-the-best-places-to-live>

For this reason, we fully support the prioritisation of safety for cyclists in addition to the singling-out of areas with a relatively high population when drawing up the plans.

As a business organisation with a focus on sustainability, we are pleased to see that health benefits, climate change impacts, equality, economic benefits, and tourism are listed as core reasons why a wider cycle network is needed in Ireland. Many of these are interlinked for obvious reasons. Along with obvious climate-related benefits, there are health benefits to be realised from cycling uptake (such as decreased rates of diabetes, obesity and health complications) which by extension will place less stress on our health infrastructure.

Similarly, we agree with the statement that financial gains on the back of investment in cycling infrastructure come in the form of reduced car-related expenditure and increased tourism revenue. Pivotal to accruing these benefits is an infrastructure that not only facilitates the network on paper but encourages cycling by making it a practical transport option for our communities.

There is also the business case for more active travel and cycling in particular constitutes an important aspect of this. Footfall should not be underestimated; research from University College London shows that cyclists and pedestrians spend more money locally, shop more frequently, and over a month will spend more money in their local shops (up to 40%) than their peers in a car.¹¹ We view this as pivotal to the town centre first strategy and the national development plan densification targets. This is particularly relevant considering that roughly two-thirds of the Irish population are living in urban areas, and about 1.5million people are living in towns around the country.¹²

Making cycling infrastructure inclusive

Alongside the climate, economic, tourism and health impacts, we are pleased to see the inclusion of equality and equity in the report. This aligns well with the commitment to gender equality (SDG 5) throughout our work. This is especially relevant considering that the data provided shows that globally, women often use car-centric travel is often driven by caregiving factors, lack of public transport, safety concerns when walking and cycling, and a lack of cycling infrastructure.

In addition, the perception of cycling as unsafe for children, and that pensioners are discouraged from cycling are reasons why the CycleConnects network must be safe and inclusive for all in our communities. Regarding encouraging children to cycle, we re-emphasise the point made in previous years¹³ as to how children in Finland¹⁴ have high rates of active transport, and that this falls off at a much slower rate than we see

¹¹ <https://content.tfl.gov.uk/healthy-streets-a-business-view.pdf>

¹² <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-urli/urbanandrurallifeinireland2019/introduction/>

¹³ [Chambers-Ireland-Sustainable-Mobility-Consultation.pdf](#)

¹⁴ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/figure/10.3402/ijch.v75.33319>

in Scotland,¹⁵ and that their active travel rates in winter exceed (by a factor of 3 to 5) the typical rates of active transport in Ireland. We should consider that what are existing empirical upper limits to active travel are consequences of both our infrastructural environment and culture. Accordingly, if we are successful in our transition to a people-friendly transport environment, then distance will become less of a hurdle to active transit.

Drawing on best practices in Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands in designing an accessible network should be encouraged, especially to replace trips that are less than 5km in distance.

Infrastructural design and encouraging cycling as a transport option

Paramount to the uptake of active travel like cycling, and therefore the success of the CycleConnects plan, will be the safety of its routes. This is substantiated by the fact that, in an Irish context, safer cycling routes was by a distance the most common factor cited (31.7%), followed by better health (20.5%) and more cycling-specific routes (17.3%).¹⁶

Extending transport beyond roads, we should look to all transport infrastructure; be it roadway, footpaths, cycleways, intersections to ensure the safety of all users. Broadened footpaths with integrated cycleways and raised intersection points do not only benefit people who are cycling; they also benefit those with mobility problems, the elderly, parents with infants, and the local economy.

Per the examination of best international practices regarding cycling infrastructure, we agree that segregated cycle routes should be encouraged where possible. Notwithstanding the key design differences between Danish, Dutch and Irish roads – in particular regarding hedgerows - we view segregated cycling lanes as a critical aspect of the cycle network and should be implemented where possible. Segregation is key to providing safety to cyclists and encourages cycling as a viable option for those taking short journeys, thereby helping to integrate cycling into their daily life.

Where segregation is not possible, we agree with the statement that driver and cyclist education is pivotal to sharing non-segregated interurban links. In this regard, driver behaviour will require special attention; available research from the Transport Research Laboratory (TRL) in the UK has shown that driver behaviour is solely responsible for a considerable number (60% - 75% of all cases) of accidents with cyclists on roads.¹⁷

¹⁵ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/5668486_Active_commuting_to_school_How_far_is_too_far

¹⁶ [Cycling - CSO - Central Statistics Office](#)

¹⁷ https://trl.co.uk/uploads/trl/documents/PPR445_new.pdf

Plans within the National Cycle Network

Chambers Ireland supports the plans stipulated in the National Cycle Network. Creating cycle routes to transport hubs, centres of education, centres of employment, leisure and tourist destinations will aid the transition to cycling as a practicable alternative to vehicular-centric travel. We are also pleased to acknowledge that cooperation with the Strategic Plan for Greenways in Northern Ireland is included in the plans. This will create a core cycle network for the island of Ireland which connects cross-border communities and helps realise our potential as a destination for cycling; regardless of whether this is cycling for leisure, commuting or for touristic reasons.

We support the Vision and the three key principles, which aim to improve mobility safety, provide people-focused mobility and integrate mobility. Regarding Greenways, the “Five S” criteria outlined in the Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways 2018 seem reasonable and well-guided. However, it is our view that while having scenic routes is an undoubted attraction, it should not be an overriding reason for rejecting proposed Greenways, particularly where the relevant communities lack any transport alternative to car-driven transport. Greenways play an important role in providing rural areas with a viable alternative to vehicular transport, not least in accessing the nearest urban area but in linking areas of smaller populations also. This means its value is not lost if the route itself is not scenic.

Chambers Ireland agrees with the proposals laid down in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES). However, implementation is key to ensuring Ireland transforms its transport infrastructure and meets the aims of Project Ireland 2040. Additionally, we agree that rural areas which are at risk of social exclusion will be left behind if the plan is not implemented adequately, particularly in the context of the Northern and Western Regional Assembly. In line with our previous point, making cycling accessible and therefore making the transition to cycling in such areas will only be possible if it is safe and practicable. Developing the Greenway network in such regions and implementing the Local Transport Plans for the Galway Metropolitan Area, Regional Growth Centres and Key Towns will be critical to transitioning towards sustainable travel in the Northern and Western Regional Assembly.