



Galway Cycling Campaign

<http://www.galwaycycling.org/>

Submission on How the State can make Ireland a leader in tackling climate change

August 2017

Summary

Reducing private car use and increasing walking, cycling and public transport use is an obvious way of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Ireland is also in the lucky position of having historically had a strong cycling culture that can still be tapped into. The challenge in Ireland is not getting people to walk or cycle but the systematic creation by the state of a built environment that is hostile to walking and cycling.

This hostile environment is a product of the Irish state's overwhelming focus on promoting and facilitating travel by private car. When discussing cycling or walking the facilities found in the Netherlands, Denmark and Germany attract much focus. This is in part a distraction. These European systems are possible because a decision was made to use land for a purpose other than facilitating cars. The facilities work, in part, because they are part of a system designed to restrict traffic growth and to remove inappropriate motor traffic from places where it is not suitable. In Ireland the opposite approach is seen where nationally the apparent goal of state actors is to promote and even impose private car use to the greatest extent possible. The Irish state has adopted best practice in the form of the National Cycle Policy Framework. The problems faced by cycling and walking derive mainly from car-promotion. Properly functioning cycling and walking facilities are not possible if they are being designed and constructed by engineers whose goal is to promote cars. The problems cannot be solved unless there is leadership prepared to challenge unrestricted car-use.

Rather than overload the citizens assembly with all the different ways that cycling and walking can be enabled we pick out several key strategic policy areas. These require fundamental change and will be controversial but must be addressed if we are to reduce reliance on private cars for travel. It is in these areas that strong leadership from the citizens assembly could create a better Ireland for all citizens. Most of the main submission is derived from previous submissions.

Key recommendations

- The state must recognise that roads have a range of functions and that it is not appropriate to permit through traffic on all roads.
- The ongoing motorway program has been a transport disaster for the state. The state needs to abandon the current motorway program and revert to the approach set out in the 1998 roads needs study - based on upgrading existing links and constructing a system of town and village bypasses.

- Removal of financial incentives to promote cars from Irish Local Authorities and a system of parking levies to protect town centres.
- A national program is needed to address the problems caused by cul-de-sac based housing estates.
- Delivery of the National Cycle Policy Framework

Introduction

Ireland has historically has a robust cycling culture. The “High Nellie” bike is widely used as an icon of rural and small town Ireland. Although the daily use of bicycles has fallen considerably, Irish people have a proven ability to get back on their bikes if the right conditions can be created. Census data showing low numbers of people cycling to work or school do not show the whole picture. For instance according to CSO Travel surveys more Irish people cycle than use Rail, Dart or Luas combined. This should be considered against the vast inequality of funding the rail gets compared with cycling. In 2007, a Department of Health funded study estimated that 28% of Irish adults had cycled in the previous year.¹ The success of the Dublin bikeshare scheme shows the vast untapped potential for cycling in Ireland.

The reason cycling is struggling in Ireland is not mainly down to an image problem or lack of familiarity. What has happened is that state actors have worked systematically to create conditions that were hostile to walking and cycling. The apparent purpose of those state actors was to promote car-use regardless of the wider consequences. In our view it is not possible to discuss promoting walking or cycling in Ireland without confronting and challenging the state’s overwhelming focus on promoting car travel over other modes. Challenging and reversing the promotion of cars over other forms of transport will also be necessary if Ireland is to be taken seriously on climate change. The state has already produced a keystone document, the *National Cycle Policy Framework* (2009), this sets out a credible and achievable system whereby the state could restore cycling (and walking) in Ireland. The NCPF was a landmark document but little has happened on the ground. Rather than restate the NCPF we feel the best approach is to address some of the institutional obstacles that are blocking its implementation. (We give a summary of the main solutions at the end). Pressure of time means we can only give a flavour of the issues.

The issue of through-traffic in towns and the great Irish motorway mistake.

Outside observers of the Netherlands, Denmark or Germany often tend to focus on the obvious cycle facilities. This can miss the big picture which is how their towns got the space for walking and cycling. In the Netherlands and elsewhere planners go to great lengths to “unravel” traffic so the arterial through-traffic is separated from local traffic. Roads are deemed to have a range of potential functions besides just catering for cars. Local roads have different functions than arterial roads and are managed accordingly. It is especially important to keep HGVs away from roads used by cyclists and walkers particularly children.

In most European cities with high cycling levels, a key feature is active motorised traffic removal and reduction programmes. Even in the neighbouring UK, Cambridge, Oxford and York are distinguished from other cities by the fact that they have long had policies in place to limit traffic growth.

Bremen was one of the first cities to use traffic cells (sometimes called Auto-restricted zones). The Swedish city of Gothenburg has adopted a similar system. The Dutch city of Groningen removed motorways from the city centre and implemented a system of four zones that cannot be crossed by private

motor-traffic, which must use the ring road instead. Cyclists and other traffic pass freely between the zones, and cycling now accounts for at least 50% of trips.²

To quote a US Federal Highway Administration case study³.

Traffic chaos during the 1969 Christmas season was, apparently, the inspiration for the city of Gothenburg in Sweden to restrain traffic for the economic survival of the city. The downtown area of the city was divided into five "cells" and cars were prevented from crossing the boundaries between these cells. Instead, to move from one to another drivers have to return to an inner ring-road and circle around to the entrance to the next cell. Public transport vehicles, bicycles and pedestrians are allowed to cross the cell boundaries.

In addition to the traffic cells, public transport was improved, parking spaces were reduced and made more expensive and an extensive public information system was put in place. The combination of measures worked well [...] The Dutch city of Groningen introduced a similar traffic circulation plan in 1977 and achieved a 44 percent reduction in the number of cars and vans in the central area in the first year. Bus travel rose 12 percent and bicycling and walking increased substantially.

In the 1970s the Dutch city of Delft began restricting private car traffic from crossing the city centre.

1970's: Necessary repairs on two bridges in the middle of the city center were an opportunity to get rid of most of the motorized through traffic. In some parts of the historic center (about 1,000m wide and 1,500 long) a system of loops was introduced, meaning that cars entering from one side have to leave on the same side of the city center. An exception is made for the local buses. Nowadays it hard to imagine how many cars used to force themselves through narrow streets and tight corners.⁴

The Irish National Cycle Policy Framework lists such measures as one of its key objectives in restoring cyclist access to Irish towns.

2.3 Through Traffic

We will support local authorities in removing through-traffic from urban centres and school routes through, amongst other measures, the provision of a national programme of ring-roads and town / village by-passes. As these are built, other measures to make the town centre more bicycle friendly should be introduced: environmental traffic cells, bridge / road closures, removal of spare lanes at signalised junctions, dismantling of one-way street systems, removal / modifications of roundabouts etc.

A key point is that what is needed is not merely traffic-reduction but the removal of through-traffic (eg traffic that is passing through rather than having business in the area.) In order for towns and villages to remove through-traffic there must be an alternative route available. This means that if Ireland is to increase walking or cycling there is a need for a national program of complete town ring roads. In fact at one time this was national policy. The following is an extract from the 1998 Irish Roads Needs Study. It recommended a concentration on town bypasses.

Current roads policy in Ireland, therefore, aims at an overall balance, focuses on key economic corridors, supports an adequate dispersal of economic development and seeks to bypass congested towns and villages. It concentrates on:-

- *Upgrading and realigning existing roads, rather than building unnecessary new roads.*
- *Bypasses to relieve congestion.*
- *Minimising the construction of new roads and motorways.*

The Roads Programme will continue to target bottlenecks which represent inefficiencies in the infrastructural system. Increasing urban congestion can have a negative social and environmental impact on communities, requiring diversion of the major traffic away from such areas, where practicable. The adverse impacts of roads infrastructure (and road traffic) on wildlife and biodiversity will be reduced through appropriate design (tunnels and crossing points for wildlife) and conservation of the archaeological heritage.

If Ireland had followed this policy we would have had a good basis on which to promote walking, cycling and public transport in our towns. Instead what happened was a motorway programme that was adopted against best advice both then and now. We could have constructed a balanced roads network based on town and village bypasses and upgrading existing links. Instead successive governments have followed a practice of diverting scarce resources into building new motorways. This has been an enormous mistake. The absence of the needed ring roads infrastructure means that traffic trying to reach main roads and motorways must still travel through our town and village centres.

Instead of spending roads budgets for the wider benefit of society, the state arguably pandered to ego projects for the car and roads lobbies. The result has been the wholesale reinforcement of car dependency. Traffic trying to reach the motorways still drives straight through the centre of intervening towns and villages thereby imposing avoidable danger and forcing local residents into cars for their own safety and that of their children. There is a direct conflict between a policy of pushing arterial traffic into our town centres and then claiming to want to use the same road space as a resource for cycling and walking.

If Ireland wants to be taken seriously on climate change then there is a need to set aside the motorway programme as an expensive mistake and go back to the more enlightened policies of the 1990s. The state cannot credibly claim to be delivering on the National Cycle Policy Framework without a programme of ring road construction. Irish local authorities are also left with downgraded "N" roads that they still have to maintain but don't have the needed resources.

The issue of local authority funding and car promotion

It is futile to discuss cycling facilities in an environment where local authorities generate cash flow from using the same road space for car parking. In our analysis parking income gives Irish local authorities a direct financial incentive to encourage private motor traffic and discourage alternative modes of travel. The existence of such incentives offers an obvious explanation for actions that otherwise defy rational explanation - such as building cycle facilities that systematically remove priority from cyclists to give it to cars. This prioritisation of car-travel is often achieved directly or indirectly by the deprioritisation, active obstruction and endangerment of active travel modes such as cycling and walking. Even where walking or cycling facilities are provided they are often engineered in a manner that represents the management

of the target users for the benefit of motor traffic. In our view such incentives must be directly challenged and reversed if Ireland is to have any hope of reducing transport emissions. If not then funds directed to "smarter travel" projects will continue to be used for the opposite purpose.

Please see attached discussion document.

- Addicted to cars; the role of car parking revenue for Irish local authorities and implications for state policy. (Pre-Budget 2016 discussion document)

The issue of car based town planning – cul-de-sacs

In the Netherlands and elsewhere planners work to ensure that cyclists and walkers have access to a network of routes away from roads. In Ireland we have the opposite practice, in some parts of Galway, cul-de-sac based estates or even deliberate road closures have made walking and cycling awkward and inconvenient. It is likely that this issue will be found in other towns and cities.

Restoring cyclist and pedestrian access to parts of the city, particularly for school travel, will require measures to restore or create permeability for walking and cycling. Measures will include knocking down walls between housing estates, providing wheeling ramps and steps, providing pedestrian and cyclist access from housing estates to local roads by the shortest possible route. In some locations, particularly Knocknacarra, it may be necessary to buy adjacent properties and demolish them in order to construct the type of secondary roads network found in Dutch and German cities. It is unlikely that political leadership will be forthcoming

The illustration below shows two Galway houses "A" and "B" in Knocknacarra. Both houses are within 230m of the nearest retail park. Because of the way the area has been planned by Galway City council somebody from house "B" must travel nearly 700m to get to the nearest access to the retail park. Somebody from house "A" must travel 2.1km by the southern route and 2.3km by the northern route. This is state imposed car-dependency in action. If Ireland is serious about tackling climate change, investment and leadership is needed to undo decades of state imposed car dependency.

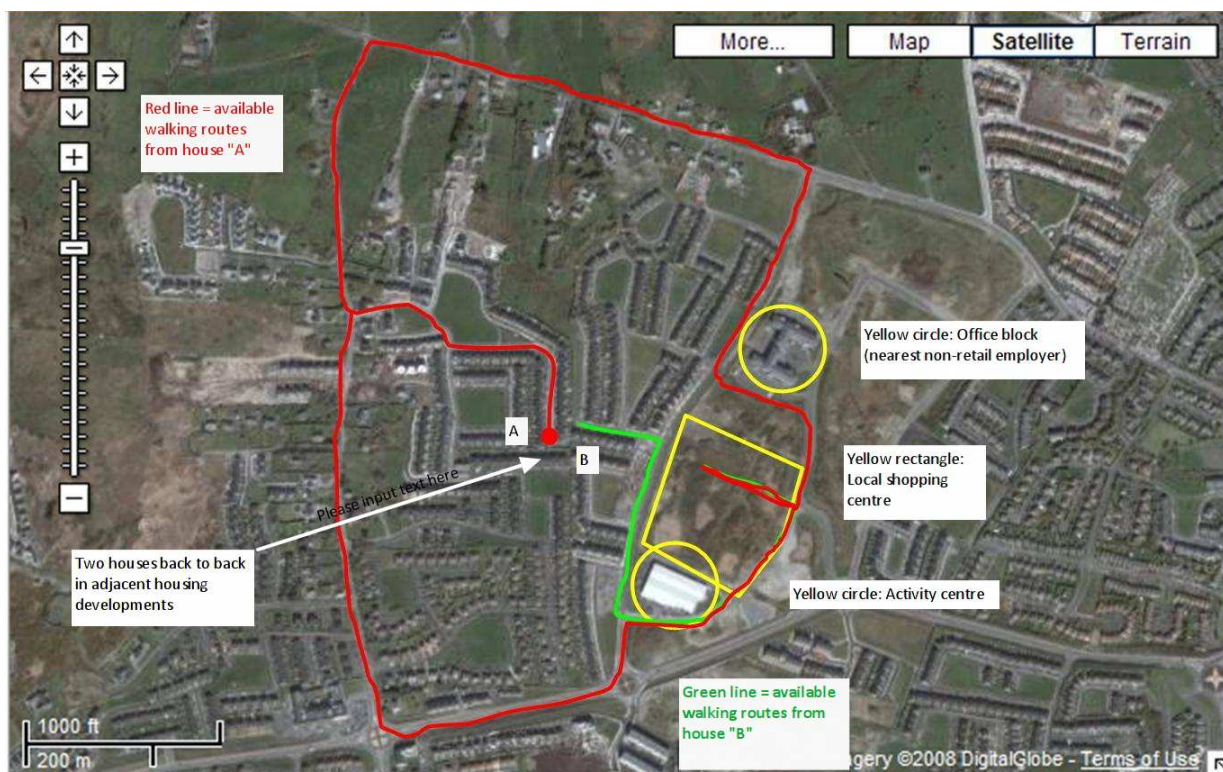


Figure: This satellite photo of Knocknacarra from Google maps shows the routes forced on people from two neighbouring houses (red and green) when walking or cycling to local shops, businesses, and leisure facilities (yellow shapes). Because of "impermeable" car-centred planning, people on the red route have a much longer journey to go the same distance and, regardless of age, must use main roads for much of their journey.

Delivery of the National Cycle Policy Framework

We restate below the Hierarchy of Solutions from the National Cycle Policy Framework

Hierarchy of Solutions – Irish National Cycle Policy Framework 2009

A new approach to the design of urban roads in which the car does not dominate is required. There must be a greater focus on the "Hierarchy of Solutions" (as was developed in The Netherlands originally and explained in the 1996 UK Cycling Friendly Infrastructure document).

This is summarized as follows here:

(1) Traffic reduction

Can traffic levels be reduced, particularly heavy goods vehicles (HGVs)? Measures could include restricting the movements of HGVs from local roads, building by-passes to divert through-traffic, and environmental road closures to discourage through-traffic.

(2) Traffic calming

Can speed be reduced and driver behaviour modified? Here the emphasis must also be on enforcement (whether through increased use of speed cameras or other technologies). The concept of “traffic calming” should also be broadened to include physical measures to revise the perceived design speeds of roads, and other measures, such as the removal of one-way street systems. Multi-lane one-way street systems require cyclists to take detours rather than direct routes. They can also be daunting for cyclists since, if one intends to take a right hand turn at a junction, then one is required to weave across several lanes of (often fast-moving) traffic.

(3) Junction treatment and traffic management

This includes:

- urban traffic control systems designed to recognise cyclists and give them priority;
- contra-flow cycle lanes on one-way streets / making two-way streets for cyclists;
- exemptions to cyclists from certain banned turns and access restrictions;
- combined bus/cycle priority measures - and building upon the successful examples already developed in Irish cities (and learning from examples of QBC/cycle designs in which the route is not perceived to be cycle-friendly).
- on-street parking restrictions;
- advanced stop lines for cyclists at traffic signals - as has already been done in some cities around the country;
- by-passes for cyclists at traffic signals;
- signalising roundabouts, changing priorities at junctions so as to make cycle friendly;
- advanced transport telematics: designing new systems to benefit cyclists.

(4) Redistribution of the carriageway

Can the carriageway be redistributed? Such as by marking wide kerb lanes or shared bus/cycle lanes?

(5) Cycle lanes and cycle tracks

In addition, having considered and, where possible, implemented all of the above, what cycle tracks or cycle lanes (if any) are necessary in order to make a route cycling-friendly?

(6) Cycleways (public roads for the exclusive use of cyclists and pedestrians) What opportunities exist to create traffic-free routes linking, for example, residential areas to important destinations? These might include links between (previously unconnected) residential areas using parks, canal and river-side routes, e.g South Dublin County Council plan for cycling in parks. It can be seen from the above that in making provision for cyclists in the urban environment, it is often less about providing dedicated cycling facilities and more about wider traffic interventions that benefits all of the more vulnerable road users, not just cyclists

¹ SLÁN 2007 Survey of Lifestyle, Attitudes AND Nutrition in Ireland Main Report, DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND CHILDREN, 2008

² Kluper, G. (1997) Transport Planning in Groningen, Holland Bicycle Fixation. Available at: <http://www.bicyclefixation.com/groningen.htm> (Accessed: 27 January 2007).

³ Case Study No. 19 Traffic Calming, Auto-Restricted Zones and Other Traffic Management Techniques-Their Effects on Bicycling and Pedestrians Publication No. FHWA-PD-93-028 Federal Highway Administration 1994

⁴ Schepel, S. (2005) Woonerf Revisited: Delft as an example. Childstreet 2005 conference, Delft 2005. Available at: <http://www.urban.nl/childstreet2005/downloads/StevenSchepel-CF..pdf> (Accessed 21 January 2007).