



Transport & Mobility Forum - Cork

Submission to the

Cycling Network Plan for the Cork Metropolitan Area

January 2015

The Transport & Mobility Forum (Cork) is a group of key organisations (see appendix 1) and interests in the Cork region who have a common interest in Transport and mobility. We promote policies and actions in favor of sustainable travel and advocate for environmentally-orientated transport and accessibility strategies.

General Observations:

We welcome the Cycling Network Plan for the Cork Metropolitan Area – being prepared by Cork City and County Councils – as it offers an opportunity for key improvements which will create more user friendly routes for cyclists and integrate with other modes of travel to allow easier connectivity for people living in both the city centre and the suburbs.

Although the Cycle Network Plan will primarily touch the field of transportation planning, other sectors like public health and the urban environment will largely benefit from improved cycling facilities and eventually more people using bicycles. This cross-discipline aspect also mirrors the diversity of member organisations in the Transport and Mobility Forum.

Types of Infrastructure

Types of cycling infrastructure are very diverse. Typical features are on-street cycle lanes, segregated cycle paths and tracks, greenways shared with pedestrians, etc.

But infrastructure for cyclists must also be seen in a broader sense. It must include quiet residential streets, that don't need any specific physical infrastructure on the ground for being part of a continuous route from A to B, as motor traffic volumes will be very low. Ideally, such residential streets also have features of traffic calming.

A speed limit of 30km/h in such streets would make them an even better place for cycling, as the speed difference between motorised and un-motorised vehicles is a crucial factor for the safety and comfort for cycling.

Cycling infrastructure in Cork should cater for all groups of cyclists. People on bicycles have a broad range of training, skills, experience and confidence levels. A safe and comfortable environment with little or slow car traffic will be ideal for people who have lower levels of confidence and experience on two wheels. These might be young cyclists (school age), the elderly or people who have not been

cycling for years. This group will have the highest potential of bringing more people on bicycles on the road in significant numbers. An infrastructure that provides a safe environment also for the youngest and the elderly (“8-80 city”) is a safe one.

Hence, a cycle network should not be planned only with people in mind who already cycle on a regular basis, but also those who do not cycle yet, but would love to start.

A cycle network must be coherent, with routes continuously signposted along the way, even if there might not be any specific cycling infrastructure in place as yet.

The network must be comfortable to use and easy to understand. Routes should be as direct as possible, but also safe and comfortable. Again, the various types of cyclists must be kept in mind here. The shortest route might not always be the most comfortable. In Cork with its hilly topography, the avoidance of steep gradients also plays a vital role.

While the shortest route might be along a busy main road with a steep hill, some cyclists will prefer a more comfortable route that is slightly longer, but goes along quiet residential streets and avoids major climbs. Both goals must be carefully weighed against one another.

Experiences with the existing cycle network

While Cork City and County Council have put much effort in the upgrade of cycling infrastructure in recent years, the infrastructure is still far from being a coherent cycle network. Far too often, cycle lanes or paths end abruptly after a short distance. There are too many gaps and the multitude of forms and quality of cycle lanes sometimes does not make it easy to get around on a bike, particularly for untrained cycling “novices”.

A lack of maintenance leaves many cycle lanes in a deplorable condition, and a certain reluctance to enforce the parking ban on cycle lanes makes cyclists feel like second class road users. The absence of defined routes and subsequent signposting leaves a cyclist with little knowledge of the local neighbourhood stuck in the maze of suburban cul-de-sacs or inner-city one-way streets.

The amount of car traffic, speed levels and inadequate junction design far too often shows the car dominated planning philosophies of recent times.

Opportunities for possible route upgrades

A coherent cycle network must consist of various routes. What is a “route”? It is not a bit of cycle lane that goes e.g. along a main road for 500 metres. A cycle route should provide a continuous recommended itinerary across the city from point A to B (e.g. “Bishopstown – UCC – City Centre – Mahon”), that leads the cyclist through town in a safe and convenient way, using various types of infrastructure features along the way. These routes must be signposted and ideally carry names or numbers. Even if there are gaps in dedicated infrastructure (as this can only be realised on a phased basis), signposted routes can start early in the process.

If busy main roads shall be avoided, signposting becomes even more vital as the suburban road network can be very confusing with its many cul-de-sacs. Providing short cuts for un-motorised traffic (cycling and walking) in suburban neighbourhoods can be an enormous advantage for cycling in Cork suburbs. An increased permeability of suburban neighbourhoods is crucial in this context.

One prime example for a lack of permeability that results in long detours and forces cyclists onto the busy, uncomfortable main arterial road – even for short trips to the next retail centre – is the west of Ballincollig.

Concrete suggestions for route improvements:

Blackrock railway line Greenway

The old railway line provides an excellent connection from the furthest suburbs into Cork City Centre, and is car free for a large part of the way (Passage West – Mahon – *Blackrock railway Line* – Marina – City Centre). One crucial improvement needed is between Pairc Ui Caoimh and City Hall.

A genuine cycle track along the river bank would be ideal, while cycle lanes along Centre Park Road or Monahan Road (old railway alignment is still in place at northern edge of the street) would be alternatives.

Access to the greenway shall be improved at Skehard Road and Blackrock Road. A new access point (ramp) at the Mahon business park (City Gate et.al.) would have a tremendous effect on the accessibility of this employment hot-spot by bicycle. One of Corks highest concentration of jobs and retail (Mahon Point / Mahon retail park) outside the City Centre would be directly on Corks first “cycling highway”.

Further to the City Centre, a short stretch (30m) of contraflow lane is needed at Hibernian Buildings to access the roundabout eastbound (Monahan Rd / Centre Park Rd). The route would continue west via the footbridge across the South Link Rd and lead into South Terrace or Anglesea St.

Sullivan’s Quay: Closing the gap between Nano-Nagle and Parliament Bridges with and extension of the contra-flow lane would allow cyclists further eastbound travel via Fr Mathew and Morrison’s Quays (RTE, Schools of Commerce, Music and Architecture, via footbridge), by avoiding busy South Mall.

A cross-town route to connect Douglas Rd to Barrack St / UCC areas through residential streets goes along Windmill St, Quaker Rd and Tower St. Contraflow cycling should therfor be allowed in Windmill St and Quake Rd, with supportive new parking arrangements and ideally a 30km/h speed limit.

As Douglas Road will not attract large numbers of untrained cyclists (even with its cycle lanes), an alternative route through neighbouring residential streets should be offered. The possibilities of opening cul-de-sacs and providing short-cut links (better permeability) should be investigated.

One route should connect UCC, CUH, CIT and Bishopstown, that avoids busy and uncomfortable Wilton Rd, Bishopstown Road or Model Farm Road. In the west of CUH, residential streets already today provide a good alternative. Melbourn Avenue, with its transit barrier for car traffic and a 30km/h limit is an existing good example. Further routing towards the future Cork Science and Innovation Park (CSAIP, Currahene) should go through the housing estates north of Currahene Rd, to avoid the busy Currahene Road and its steep hill.

For further travel towards Victoria Cross (with County Hall), the CUH campus and the adjacent GAA pitches form a barrier that today forces cyclists onto the Wilton Roundabout. A passage through CUH grounds (public right of way needed), or along its western boundary would link up to Bishopstown Avenue and Farranrea Park / Road to Victoria Cross.

The area around Victoria Cross is a busy bottleneck for all traffic from the West and intimidating for cyclists. Specific cycling infrastructure is needed here, either on the roadway or as a detour (Kingsley Hotel to Wellington Bridge) to join Mardyke Walk (as an alternative to Western Road).

The gap in the Currahene River greenway at Model Farm Road shall be closed to complete the scenic route between the Lee Fields and Bishopstown / CIT / future CSAIP. A direct access from the greenway to CIT / Leasure World / Rossa Ave shall be provided.

Cycle route connections from Cork to the satellite towns shall be improved. Towards Little Island / Middleton, the Tivoli and Dunkettle roundabout areas are unsuitable for cyclists with no alternative provided today. Carrigaline, Glanmire and Blarney are important commuter towns with no adequate cycling link to Cork. Ringaskiddy has a high concentration of employment with very little alternatives to the car commute today.

Ballincollig would be in ideal cycling distance to County Hall, CUH or UCC, but the Green Route has gaps, e.g. at the roundabout at the eastern end of Ballincollig, and the signalled junction by the Anglers Rest. Speeding cars along the Carrigrohane (straight) Road do not contribute to comfortable cycling, so the current speed limit of 100km/h should be re-addressed.

Cycle parking:

Apart from riding a bicycle, secure parking facilities for the bike is equally important to a functioning cycle network. While the situation has improved in recent years with the provision of many bicycle stands around the city, these are mostly designed for short-term parking e.g. shopping.

Secure and convenient bicycle parking needs to be provided for employees at their workplaces. While large employers, the same applies for schools, should be encouraged to provide bike parking for their workforce, many small shops and offices particularly in the city centre will not be in the position to do so on their premises. Collective solutions will be needed in this case.

Secure bicycle parking at public transport nodes would enable a multi-modal combination of *green* travel e.g. "bike+ride". In the suburbs and satellite towns, this would multiply the catchment area of public transport. As this would be long-term parking, the security aspect will be essential again. A serviced "bicycle station", e.g. at the Cork bus station or Kent Station, would allow longer distance bus / train commuters to continue their trip by bike within the city.

The lack of adequate residential bike parking / storage facilities is one big obstacle for cycling in Cork, especially for city centre / inner city residents. Also a bicycle needs its "home" at home - safe, secure and dry. As in many houses there simply would be no room for a bicycle, or even two, the option of on-street bike parking facilities must be investigated. Lockable mini bike-sheds would be one solution (tested in London and Dublin). They would provide room for up to eight bicycles on the footprint of one car space, or a similarly shaped bit of land that is often available even in inner city neighbourhoods.

Cycling can only pick up in larger numbers if people have a safe home for their two-wheeler (other than the kitchen or the narrow hallway), where it is not threatened by theft, vandalism or premature rust.

Finally, an important factor for providing a high quality cycle network is enforcement and maintenance. The availability of cycle lanes to their dedicated users needs to be enforced, as far too often cycle lanes and tracks, particularly in the city centre, are being abused as car parks or loading bays. Far too often this urges cyclists to deviate into the general traffic lane and unnecessarily puts them in a dangerous position. The investment of considerable amounts of money would get ridiculed. And good infrastructure needs to be properly maintained. Cyclists are much more sensitive to potholes and stuck drain gullies than motorists. While the latter would be a substantial nuisance, the former can be a severe danger for bike users.

Conclusion

Cycling is a transport system in its own right. It can only function to its full potential if all elements (riding infrastructure, parking, user demographics, multi-modal combination, availability: public bike schemes) are addressed in a balanced way.

While cycling can primarily be seen as a part of transport planning, bicycle use in substantial numbers will also have a tremendous benefit to public health and will improve environmental conditions in the city, better air quality, more space, less noise. It will contribute to the reduction of CO2 emissions and thus contribute to tackle climate change. With its far lower cost compared to car ownership, it can also have positive effects on social inclusion. Local businesses can benefit from new customers, as cyclists are far more likely to stop on the way than car drivers. This will keep the city centre, neighbourhoods and town centres vital and vibrant with greater social cohesion.

As Cork is officially WHO “Healthy City” and has ambitions to become a “Green Capital of Europe”, the investment in a high quality comprehensive cycle network is a consequent step in the right direction.

The various positive benefits of cycling to transport conditions, health, environment and social inclusion are mirrored in the diversity of partners in the Transport and Mobility Forum, who pursue a cross-sectorial approach for improving sustainable travel options in Cork City and County. In this sense, the Transport and Mobility Forum is very supportive of the plans for a comprehensive Cycle Network in the Cork Metropolitan Area.

06/02/2015

Contact:

For the **Transport and Mobility Forum**, Cork

Cork Environmental Forum
c/o Bernie Connolly
Mount Carmel
Kilcolman
Enniskeane, Co. Cork

bernadette@cef.ie

083 / 146 8064



Transport & Mobility Forum, Cork

- ✚ Cork City Council
- ✚ Cork County Council
- ✚ University College Cork
- ✚ Southern Regional Assembly
- ✚ HSE
- ✚ Bus Éireann
- ✚ Irish Rail
- ✚ Cork Environmental Forum
- ✚ Apple (Private Sector)
- ✚ An Taisce, Green Schools Programme
- ✚ Cork Cycling Campaign
- ✚ SECAD
- ✚ Starwood Hotels (Private Sector)