



Transport & Mobility Forum

Cork City Council

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Cork County Council

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Transport and Mobility Forum, Cork

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An open Letter to Cork City and County Councils

Safer Streets – The Urgent Need to Provide Space for Social Distancing and Active Travel during COVID 19 Restrictions

Dear Lord Mayor, County Mayor, Cork City and County Chief Executives,

The Transport and Mobility Forum, Cork (TMF) is a representative group of organisations that share a common interest in better and more sustainable travel*. The TMF fully supports travel measures and policies that increase sustainable modes of travel. **Sustainable and Active Travel** reduces congestion on roads, improves air quality, supports a low carbon economy, reduces noise pollution and improves public health. These are major goals of multiple policies of national and local government.

The TMF, along with all signatories to this letter¹, call on Cork City and County Councils to urgently follow WHO advice² by providing more space for pedestrians and people who cycle in the city and county towns, in centres and neighbourhoods. More space is needed to facilitate social distancing and active travel during COVID 19 restrictions. Facilitating walking and cycling is now emerging not only as best practice worldwide, but also among the most effective steps in protecting public health while restoring economic vitality. An April 2020 IPSOS survey³ investigating the impact of COVID restrictions on recreational walking in Ireland, for instance, found an increase in the uptake of recreational walking from 65% pre-lockdown to 78% (of adult population) during lockdown. This increase in walkers highlights the need to adapt our environment to accommodate them safely.



Transport & Mobility Forum

The resilience of a community is measured by its response to an emergency. The comprehensive and broad ranging signatory organisations, appeal to you to prioritise the following three steps to ensure our resilience in these unprecedented times:

- 1) **Safer Streets:** To urgently implement temporary changes to the layout of streets and reallocate road space in favour of walking and cycling to ensure that social distancing measures can be safely adhered to.
- 2) **Inclusive Decision-Making and input from stakeholders:** To restore democratic and inclusive mechanisms of decision making (specifically SPC committees, council motions and deliberation) so that elected representatives are fully involved in decisions and are able to represent their constituents. Stakeholders and community groups also have a wide range of perspectives and experience. These groups should be consulted in developing effective plans that serve the whole community, and especially its most vulnerable members.
- 3) **Lasting Legacy:** To grasp this once-in-a-generation opportunity to trial new ways of moving around and sharing the public realm. As we experience this current shutdown, people have become more aware that prioritising vehicles and motor traffic has many negative consequences. Let us create a new normal that prioritises sustainability and quality of life. We have the chance to emerge from this catastrophe stronger and more resilient, and to create a healthier, more equitable, and more competitive Cork in which current and future generations can thrive.

This group warmly **welcomes Cork City Council's proposals** in its discussion paper published on the 5th May ⁴. We strongly support the principles and list of phase 1 measures. We would like to stress the importance of rolling out the next steps post-haste and **urge Cork County Council to publish similar measures.**

Several appeals have already been made by various organisations including Cork Chamber of Commerce⁵, Cork Healthy Cities⁶, the Association for Health Promotion Ireland (AHPI)⁷, Irish Pedestrian Network (IPN) and Cyclist.ie⁸. We reiterate those appeals.

We call on the City and County Councils:

- To allocate more street space for pedestrians along busy streets and where high levels of walking cause difficulties in practicing social distancing in the city and county towns
- To adopt a similar approach to Dublin City Council's BETA collaboration with DIT which allows local residents and interested groups to give input into and be included in the decision-making process and implementation of COVID measures
- To enforce a strict no-parking approach on pavements and cycle lanes, which directly increases the risks of traffic accidents with vulnerable road users and of disease transmission
- To ensure safe access for all, including older adults, people with mixed abilities and parents with small children and buggies, to the shared public realm, green spaces and community recreation spaces
- To implement pop-up cycle parking in the city and county town centres and neighbourhoods
- To support initiatives to promote more and safer cycling (free bike repair and servicing, online safe cycling lessons). This is especially important given the revealed weaknesses of public

Transport & Mobility Forum

transport and because a significant proportion of households, especially in the city, do not own cars.

- To ensure public bike share schemes can continue to be used safely by implementing an appropriate hygiene regime and usage guidelines at docking stations
- To reduce vehicular speeds and implement traffic calming measures in city and town centres to increase safety for active travel modes and facilitate walking / cycling
- To reduce wait times at crossings for pedestrians and thereby reduce the number of people waiting to cross.
- Automating pedestrian crossings (or signage directing elbow pressing) so people do not have to manually press signal buttons
- To favour a 'Tactical Urbanism' approach of temporary, low-cost measures such as planters, greenery and paint instead of 'engineering solutions' such as cones, yellow lines and road signs.
- To install pop-up cycle lanes along transport corridors, similar to what Dublin and other leading cities are doing. This is vital to give people more transport options, provide realistic alternatives to the reduced capacity of public transport, and boost economic activity.
- To install Park&Ride and Park&Stride locations along busy routes into the city centre and around county towns. These will reduce the number of cars entering, driving around and parking in these busy destinations, thereby supporting the above measures.
- To ensure street lighting is regularly maintained to ensure busy paths are appropriately illuminated albeit using lights that are within the optimal LED blue light range for biodiversity.

Such measures are important to make retail centres and neighbourhoods more attractive and to instil confidence about the future. Encouraging evidence from numerous cities worldwide is that measures making city and town streets walkable and cyclable leads to enhanced and revitalised retail centres and towns. In Cork, pre-COVID, measures such as the pop-up seating in Douglas street, have not only been widely appreciated and applauded, but have enhanced the street character. Likewise, the pedestrianisation of Oliver Plunkett in Cork City centre made it one of Ireland's most vibrant and busy streets, despite reservations from some groups at the time.

As well as creating safer streets, these measures would help foster more sustainable and active travel into the future. Doing so would help us attain our carbon and air quality targets, and Sustainable Development Goals namely SDG 11 'Sustainable Cities and Communities'. The transport sector is responsible for about 25% of global carbon dioxide emissions⁹.

We request a response from you addressing the suggestions and questions raised in this letter.



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The TMF would like to offer our support and expertise going forward in implementing the above measures. We're all in this together, so let's tackle this together and turn a public health crisis into an opportunity to create more vibrant commercial centres, more pleasant neighbourhoods, and a better, healthier society.

Should you require any clarifications, please email me at tmfcork@gmail.com.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Stephan Koch".

Stephan Koch (Chair)
Transport and Mobility Forum

Note: *The comments within this letter are solely the view of the Transport and Mobility Forum (TMF) as a whole and not the opinion or view of any individual partner of the TMF.*

*) A full list of partners in the Transport and Mobility Forum can be found at <https://transportandmobilityforum.com/partners/>

Footnotes

1. List of signatory organisations and groups to this letter:

Anois.org
Age Friendly Forum
Blackrock Clean-up Group
CIT
Climate and Health Alliance
Cork Chamber of Commerce
Cork Community Bikes
Cork Cycling Campaign
Cork Cycling Festival
Cork Environmental Forum
Cork Healthy Cities
Cork Sports Partnership
CUH
Cyclist.ie, the Irish Cycling Advocacy Network
Doctors for the Environment
Deutsche Börse Clearstream
Enterprise Holdings
Gas Networks Ireland
Green Schools Travel
HSE Health Promotion and Improvement Unit
Irish Pedestrian Network
Local Link Cork
Love 30 Campaign
SECAD
The Cork Walking Forum
The Secretariat of Cork City PPN
UCC Commuter Plan
UCC Green Campus
Waterloo Renewal Group

2. Cork City Council, Proposals for Cork City – Discussion Paper on COVID 19 Recovery Pathway (5th May 2020)

https://drive.google.com/file/d/10SHhIS_3imBruP5-digQqGM-jS4QYm-/view

3. Sport Ireland and IPSOS MRBI Report April 2020: Impact of Covid-19 Restrictions on Sport and Recreational Walking

<https://www.sportireland.ie/sites/default/files/media/document/2020-04/impact-of-covid-19-restrictions-on-sport-and-recreational-walking.pdf>

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4. WHO Guidelines- 'Moving around during the COVID-19 outbreak'

<https://who.canto.global/v/coronavirus/s/MFSQ0?viewIndex=1>

5. Cork Chamber of Commerce Press Release- 22nd April 2020 'Prioritising car-free and green spaces to increase the liveability of our urban spaces'

<https://chamber.corkchamber.ie/news/details/press-release-prioritising-car-free-and-green-spaces-to-increase-the-liveability-of-our-urban-spaces>

6. Cork Healthy Cities - Moving Around during COVID-19

The case for Active travel –

Active travel also has the potential to deliver health, environmental and economic benefits. The liveability of city has never been more important. A liveable city promotes health and social cohesion, both now and after this pandemic passes. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic more people are using local streets and public open spaces.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, modern European cities have observed reduced car traffic with more people (including children) cycling and walking. Walkable environments with footpaths and cycle lanes provide supportive and safe spaces for both recreational physical activity and for getting to places such as local shops and supermarkets, offices and workplaces without unnecessary exposure to other people.

In new technical guidance on mobility during the COVID-19 outbreak, The World Health Organisation (WHO) has recommended cycling and walking for both social distancing and in meeting minimum requirements for daily physical activity. These information sheets provide WHO advice on "[Moving around during the COVID-19 outbreak](#)"

Reduced car traffic and industrial emissions undoubtedly improves air. In 2018, the [World Health Organisation declared air quality was the "new smoking"](#) as it increases respiratory problems and cardiovascular disease. The transport sector also contributes [about 25% of global carbon dioxide emissions](#).

Homes, schools and care facilities located within 300 metres of major roads are more exposed to air pollution and risk of disease. Those risks are likely to have decreased during the COVID-19 crisis.

It is well established that rising levels of physical inactivity can contribute to serious health problems. Encouraging active travel is a promising way of meeting this challenge. Physical activity includes all forms of active recreation, sports participation, cycling and walking, as well as activities you do at work and around the home and garden. During the COVID-19 pandemic, when so many of us are very restricted in our movements, it is even more important for people of all ages and abilities to be as active as possible.

Regular physical activity benefits both physical and mental health.



Transport & Mobility Forum

- Reduces high blood pressure, help manage weight and reduce the risk of heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, and various cancers.
- Improves bone and muscle strength and increases balance, flexibility and fitness. For older people, activities that improve balance help to prevent falls and injuries.
- For children, regular physical activity helps support healthy growth and development and reduce the risk of disease in later life, and through regular activity, children can develop fundamental movement skills and build social relationships.
- Improves mental health and can reduce the risk of depression, cognitive decline and delay the onset of dementia - and improve overall feelings of wellbeing.

At the moment, many of us are living and shopping locally and enjoying the co-benefits of a “slow walkable city”: less traffic, more active modes of transport, better air quality and less noise.

Other European Cities

There is a global trend over the past month of cities taking advantage of less congested streets to reallocate road space—particularly to cyclists—with temporary pop-up bike lanes often appearing overnight.

- **Paris** has unveiled plans to install up to 650 kilometres of temporary and permanent bicycle lanes, with the first expected to be ready by 11 May—when coronavirus (COVID-19) lockdown requirements are due to be eased in the French capital. The €300 million investment accelerates Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo’s Plan Vélo scheme, which aims to make every street in the city cycle-friendly by 2024.
- **Berlin** has temporarily widened a number of bike lanes in the Kreuzberg district to comply with the 1.5 metre social-distancing guidelines—using removable tape and mobile signs to mark the roads. German states have widely encouraged the use of bicycles in spite of the current restrictions, with health minister Jens Spahn and the German Cyclists Association recommending cycling as the safest option for taking necessary trips.
- **Milan’s Strade Aperte** (Open Streets) plan to reallocate 35 kilometres of city centre road space for temporary cycle lanes, create new and widened pavements, designate streets as a priority for pedestrians and cyclists and impose a speed limit of 30 kilometres per hour.
- **Vancouver** has banned cars from Stanley Park to prioritise cyclists and pedestrians;
- **Denver** is introducing pop-up cycling and walking lanes on Avenues 16th and 11th; and
- **Bogotá** is creating almost 120 kilometres of new bike routes across the city.

As a WHO Healthy City with a commitment to public health and health promotion Cork City Council with a transport responsibility, is ideally placed to implement interventions and infrastructure to promote cycling and walking in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Transport & Mobility Forum

7. Association for Health Promotion Ireland (AHPI)- Suggested Template Letter

<https://ahpi.ie/>

Dear ,

I am writing to you in regard to the urgent need to re-allocate space for people walking and cycling during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As movement restrictions for the public continue, and motor vehicle numbers dwindle (to a fraction of pre-pandemic levels on major urban roads and streets), Council YYYY has an opportunity to improve conditions further and reallocate road space:

- (i) to make social distancing easier for those walking or cycling to shops or essential work*
- (ii) to make walking and cycling safer for those who are exercising within their 2km zone, especially those with prams or wheelchairs*
- (iii) to trial road measures on a practical basis, some of which may be useful after the pandemic including for public health reasons.*

These types of measures have been already rolled out elsewhere, such as:

- Germany: Berlin has added temporary marked bike lanes, directly replacing car lanes*
- Hungary: Budapest is rolling out a network of temporary bike lanes in the city centre*
- Canada: Vancouver has turned well-trafficked roads into one way streets, setting aside a temporary extra lane for walking and cycling. Calgary has taken a similar approach (video). Winnipeg has fully closed several central and suburban streets to through traffic with cones, signs and bollards (all temporary), creating spaces for exercise (source).*
- Mexico: Mexico City has started an "emergency bike lane" network*
- USA: Washington DC has seen unofficial "pandemic pavement" widenings, with cities such as New York using cones to make lanes for walking*
- UK: Hackney Council has rolled out filtering measures to slow/reduce traffic in residential areas*

Over sixty towns and cities worldwide have taken such measures. For more examples and sources of information, see: <https://ecf.com/civCRM/mailling/view?id=4013>

Measures such as the above could be taken in the local authority area of YYYY, including:

- 1. Cones to widen footpaths in town/village centres or outside lines of shops / areas with queues (such as on streets XXXX)*
- 2. Temporary use of cones, bollards and planters to stop through-traffic in housing estates, and make roads safe for play/exercise (such as in XXX or YYY housing estates in town XXXX)*
- 3. Repurposing of full vehicle lanes to cycle lanes (such as XXXXXXXX)*
- 4. Temporary pedestrianisation of roads (such as XXXX)*
- 5. Signs indicating enhanced walking and cycling priority at junctions, reducing the risk of transmission via crossing buttons.*

Transport & Mobility Forum

6. Re-configuring / re-programming pedestrian signal crossings so that the pedestrian phase occurs as part of the standard cycle, instead of having to be called by manually pressing the button. Additionally, the waiting time for pedestrians should be far shorter given the relatively fewer vehicle numbers on the road.

Our understanding is that such measures could be implemented with the permission of An Garda Síochána on a temporary basis in response to the pandemic. Relatedly, we are seeking further enforcement of traffic laws from the Gardaí around close-overtaking of people on bikes and around keeping within speed limits.

These suggestions have emerged from contacts with local people who have particular concerns as they seek to make their essential trips or take exercise within 2km of their homes. As social distancing seems likely to continue for several months, such measures could ease these difficulties and frustrations greatly, while also providing a safer environment for people to enjoy.

We fully understand that Council XXXX faces huge pressures and financial uncertainty. The first priority though must be safety of the public and staff of Council XXXX.

I would like to stress that this COVID-19 crisis offers a unique opportunity to trial low or zero-cost methods that could dramatically improve the public realm for those who live in the towns and villages of XXX County.

Yours sincerely,

XXXXXXXXXX

8. Irish Pedestrian Network (IPN) and Cyclist.ie Safer Streets Press Release, April 2020

<https://cyclist.ie/2020/04/coronavirus-change-our-streets-make-safer-streets-for-all/>

9. The Lancet Journal Series: Urban Design, Transport and Health Published: September 23, 2016

<https://www.thelancet.com/series/urban-design>