

Cyclist.ie – the Irish Cycling Advocacy
Network
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Mr. Shane Ross, TD
Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport
Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport
44 Kildare Street
Dublin 2

Thursday 16 June 2016

Cyclist.ie – the Irish Cycling Advocacy Network - Seeks a Meeting with Minister Ross

Dear Minister Ross,

I wish to congratulate you on your appointment to the position of Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport.

I am writing to you on behalf of Cyclist.ie – the Irish Cycling Advocacy Network. Cyclist.ie is the overarching federation of cycling advocacy groups on the island of Ireland and it is the member for Ireland of the European Cyclists' Federation (www.ecf.com). It represents the ordinary person that uses (or indeed would like to use) the bicycle as a means of commuting (to work, school, college) and for other transportation/utility trips (shopping, to cultural / sporting destinations etc.). Our vision is that cycling is a normal part of everyday life in Ireland and a healthy activity that is available to everyone from 8 to 80 years. We champion everyday cycling – dressing for the destination on our bicycle journeys - just like our Dutch and Danish colleagues! We have also recently formed a strategic partnership with Cycling Ireland, the national governing body for the sport of cycling in Ireland so as to strengthen the voice of cyclists in Ireland.

To cut straight to the chase, we would very much like to meet you to articulate our concerns in regard to the direction that current Irish transport policy and practice is taking us as directed by your department over the past few years – and to outline the priority issues that we think need to be addressed if we are to recreate a strong cycling culture in Ireland.

Our over-riding concern (in regard to the previous government) is that there has been almost no leadership whatsoever shown in regard to prioritising transport investment on interventions that we will enable a strong cycling culture to be re-established in Ireland. No previous minister has addressed the public about how we can't go on increasing our transport emissions and that regulation will be necessary sooner rather than later. We are actually very fortunate to have a strong National Cycle Policy Framework published by the (then) Department of Transport in 2009 – strong in the sense that it maps out the wide array of interventions (urban design, traffic engineering / traffic management, regulatory, enforcement, educational / promotional dimensions etc.) needed to help regenerate cycling – *but the structures and funding required for the steady implementation of the policy framework were never put in place*. In essence, there was never (up until now!?) the strong political will to make cycling a transport priority. Relatedly, we are concerned that the Smarter Travel Division in DTTAS is far too lowly in status – too few staff and too small a budget for promotion.

If there is one argument that captures the importance of everyday cycling for us (and there are many!), it is that investing in cycling creates the highest return on investment than for any other type of transport spending. Almost all of the studies report economic benefits which are highly significant, with benefit to cost ratios averaging 13:1 (UK and non-UK). In comparison (UK) government guidance on the evaluation of major transportation projects indicates that a 'medium' value-for-money project will have a BCR of between 1.5 and 2.0, and a 'high' value-for money project a BCR of at least 2.5 Investing in cycling provides a strong public health dividend, represents an excellent use of scarce urban public space (both for moving and parked bicycles) and it is for these reasons that more progressive cities (including now London and Paris, not just the 'classic' examples of Amsterdam and Copenhagen etc.!) are dedicating a serious slice (up to 10%) of their transport budgets to cycling. It makes economic sense!

Some of our Irish cities have made moderate progress in nurturing everyday cycling over the last decade when, for example, safer (30km/h) urban speed limits have been introduced and public bike schemes launched – but, for the most part, cycling is receiving the proverbial crumbs at the table when it comes to transport spend. You will be aware, no doubt, that just €100M of the €10B allocated to transport in the Capital Spending Plan 2016-2021 is earmarked for 'active travel' (essentially walking and cycling). Furthermore, there is no

National Cycling Officer or properly resourced Cycling Team within your Department and only one or two Local Authorities in Ireland have full time Cycling Officers (most notably Dublin City Council).

In summary, we are extremely concerned with the lack of political will at a National level to emulate what is normal in many Northern European countries as regards investing in cycling so that it can be commonplace for children to cycle to school and for streets not to be dominated by (ever larger SUV type) motor vehicles. We need to remember here that mobility is changing the world over, with the aim that it becomes aligned with creating liveable cities and a healthy public, while based on non-fossil energy resources and being consistent with COP21 imperatives for transport greenhouse gas mitigation.

We are optimistic that, as an independent thinking Minister, you will provide strong leadership to take us in the direction of a more sustainable future and one in which everyone from 8 to 80 can feel safe on Irish roads and while travelling around Irish cities on bicycles!

I look forward to hearing from you soon with a view to meeting to discuss the above issues.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Damien Ó Tuama

National Cycling Coordinator, Cyclist.ie – the Irish Cycling Advocacy Network
Vice-President, European Cyclists' Federation