

The Member for Ireland of:



Shane Ross, TD,
Minister for Transport,
Leeson Lane,
Dublin 2.

Re: Protest Cycle to Minister's Office on Monday 3 October 2016

Dear Minister Ross,

Everyday cyclists are fed up with this government's apparent general lack of interest in promoting modal-shift away from car use for commuting to and from work, college and school. The bicycle is getting the hind tit.

Only in Ireland does the school-run by car feature as the dominant travel mode for getting children to school in urban areas, as witnessed by intense traffic congestion in the morning rush hour. The NTA/CSO National Household Travel Survey of 2014 shows that approx. 50% of trips into Dublin City by commuters are for journey distances of less than 5 km (distances easily undertaken by bike in 20 minutes or less). The question has to be asked why do so many commuters choose the car to make such short trips in mostly single-occupancy cars?

It seems to us that the National Cycling Policy Framework (NCPF) of 2009 has all but been set-aside or down-graded by your Department. Your department still has no National Cycling Coordinator in post - that was one of the actions in the NCPF (Objective #17.1). The promised National Advisory Forum has still not been established (Policy #17.2). The Smarter Travel Division is not properly resourced for the task it has to perform in decarbonising the Irish transport system. An Taoiseach came back from Paris and COP21 last December promising that Ireland would play its part in climate-change mitigation. As you know transport contributes massively to our national greenhouse gas emissions but there is scant evidence that any serious actions to decarbonise everyday travel is underway on the scale required to meet international commitments.

Nine cyclists have died on Irish roads so far this year. Each one of those was entirely avoidable. That was the total for 2015. Cyclists don't throw themselves at motorised vehicles with a death-wish. We know from EU road safety research findings that it is driver error that is mostly responsible for the bulk of fatalities/serious injuries suffered by cyclists, particularly at junctions.

My colleagues and I read the international road safety research literature and I am a member of The European Cyclists' Federation to which Cyclist.ie is the member for Ireland. I am a member of its road safety research group. I attend at Coroners' Court inquests into cyclists' fatalities so I do hear the evidence as to the likely cause of the fatality.

Donna Fox cut down last month by a left-turning HGV on Seville Place was the latest fatality. Two schoolboys died while cycling to school along rural roads (Louth & Offaly) in the first week of the new school year. Due to the high national incidence of childhood obesity/overweight we must get children back to cycling and walking to school. Census 2011 revealed that only approx. 6,183 primary school children cycled to school; in 1986 the figure was 23,600. The reason that so few are permitted by parents to cycle to school is our road authority traffic management regimes are by-and-large hostile to cycling. This is why we demand a greater application of 30 km/h speed zones in residential areas and at the approaches to all schools coupled with a higher intensity speed limit enforcement effort by An Garda.

Cyclist.ie appointed Prof. Donal O'Shea (SVUH & RCPI Policy Group on Obesity) as its first Hon. President last April in recognition of the role that cycling can play in getting young children active in their environment so as to avoid overweight/obesity. Our children have a human right not to grow up in an obesogenic environment due to cycling-hostile traffic management.

There seems to be no policy response to these serial fatalities. Policy #2.4 of the NCPF undertakes to further restrict HGV movements across the land. For instance, why are HGVs permitted to enter all urban areas across the country when the operators know full well that the driver's view from the cab is severely constrained due to the presence of extensive blind-zones? The EU truck manufacturers have refused to redesign the cabs of these trucks arguing that they are not designed to be used in congested urban areas where cyclists and pedestrians abound. They see them as suitable only for inter-urban trips via motorway systems. The Health and Safety Authority (HSA) is silent on this real and present danger presented to cyclists by the unfettered access by HGVs to urban areas.

The NCPF promised us a critical review of all road traffic collisions between motorised vehicles and cyclists (Policy #19.3/19.4). Although the Road Safety Authority (RSA) has compiled raw data there is a lack of analysis of the causes of those impacts. How can policy responses be made without that analysis being undertaken and placed into the public realm? Furthermore, there is a troubling and unacceptable mismatch between hospital Emergency Department admission of seriously injured cyclists to a hospital bed and the road-side collision data recorded by An Garda. Approx. 90% of serious injuries are not recorded by An Garda! The NCPF promised to set this right (Policy #19.3). How can we make road safety policy to better protect cyclist when the proper data is missing?

The issue of the paltry funding available for cycling promotion and cycling infrastructure projects is at the heart of the problem. On the government capital programme 2016-21, cycling *and walking* are allocated approx. 1% of the total transport spend (i.e. €100M of €10B). Other EU countries are striving to attain a 10% spend for cycling alone. We call for a realignment of budget within your department away from roads towards active travel measures. Less road schemes and more cycling infrastructure is required. You don't have to fight for more funds for transport, just rebalance what you have.

This funding shortfall, exacerbated by a pause of funding into 2017 recently announced by the National Transport Authority (NTA), does not suggest a department intent on promotion of active travel. The premier Euro Velo route #2 from Dublin to Galway lies stalled by farmer opposition west of the Shannon.

On behalf of the cycling advocacy community, we wish to sit down with you as soon as possible to discuss the above points. I refer also at this point to the letter from my colleague, Dr. Damien Ó Tuama, National Cycling Coordinator with Cyclist.ie, dated 17th June 2016 (copy attached) seeking a meeting with you. We have also made a detailed submission to

your cabinet colleague, Minister Michael Noonan, on the upcoming budget, which addresses some of these issues in relation to investment. I attach a copy for ease of reference.

I plead with you to leave a legacy as minister for transport that shifts us decisively away from our love affair with the car and towards the active travel modes. Along with your colleagues, the Ministers for Health and Education, you could start by trying to limit the health damage being caused to our school children by ending the school run by car. You will need to say something in public about this and then make sure that road authorities follow through with appropriate traffic management changes. The Road Safety Authority and An Garda will have to be on-side for this to happen as well. *Laissez-faire won't work.*

Yours sincerely,

Mike McKillen
Executive Committee member;
Cyclist.ie Chairperson 2008-16;
Dublin Cycling Campaign Chairperson, 2008-'10

p.s.

Up until Friday 30 Sept. your Department's web-site still showed Paschal Donohoe as the incumbent Minister and cycling (active travel) doesn't even feature on the list of Ministerial priorities! This gives you some reason for our frustration. Your name was added belatedly only in response to our highlighting of the issue on social media!

<http://www.dttas.ie/corporate/english/minister-and-department-priorities>