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# Cyclist.ie – The Irish Cycling Advocacy Network – submission to ‘The Citizens’ Assembly’ on Climate-Change Mitigation

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*“But at this place, at this moment of time, all mankind is us, whether we like it or not. Let us make the most of it, before it is too late!” [Vladimir in ‘Waiting for Godot’: Samuel Beckett]*

## **Ireland and its laggardly response to impending global disaster**

The latest evidence to confirm that the world is warming comes this week from the American Meteorological Society in its report: ‘State of the Climate in 2016’.<sup>1</sup> *“Major greenhouse gas concentrations, including carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), methane, and nitrous oxide, rose to new record high values during 2016. The global annual average atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> concentration was 402.9 parts per million (ppm), which surpassed 400 ppm for the first time in the modern atmospheric measurement record”.*

An alien landing in Ireland would find it easy to discover that we had successive governments that presided over ever increasing greenhouse gas emissions from the EU non-traded sectors such as transport and agriculture, in particular. This despite knowledge about the global disaster facing humankind with a rapidly warming climate and weak national climate-change mitigation policies that still reference further studies to be undertaken, hoping for technological ‘fixes’ that can’t

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/news/reporting-state-climate-2016>

happen even in the near-term and using weak-words such as ‘we will consider’, rather than setting out concrete measures for mitigation in transport and agriculture accompanied by action lines and funding streams.

A political system that is mired in amoral localism is unable and unwilling to face the hard political decisions that will have to be made **today**, not tomorrow, about urgent climate-change mitigation policies and measures that will have to be implemented to meet our EU and international obligations. The ‘Citizens’ Assembly’ will have to bring reality and ‘nerve’ to the political system to enable deep and unpopular changes to be implemented. The water- and bin-charges fiasco will be mere trifles compared to what is needed to deal with climate-change. The changes require a life-style discommoding that may prove unpalatable to many.

In relation to mitigation of transport emissions it will be essential to realign current and capital investment to achieve the goals of the 2009 Smarter Travel Policy (and supporting document, the National Cycle Policy Framework (2009)<sup>2</sup>, increasing the share of transport investment that goes to walking, cycling and ‘clean’ public transport. And having a political cadre capable of explaining to the citizenry why we have to make abrupt changes to our way of life and livelihoods.

There is an urgent need for the Government to focus on decarbonising Ireland’s transport sector. Transport is the only sector to have increased its share of emissions since 1990. In fact, emissions have doubled since 1990 to one fifth of Ireland’s total. Actual total transport emissions rose 4% in 2015 and are continuing to rise quickly. A measure of this inexorable and so far uncorrected rise in emissions can be gauged from the Census 2016 data revealing that:

*“The overall number of people commuting to work increased from 1.70 million in 2011 to 1.88 million in 2016, an increase of 10.7 per cent. The number of people driving to work increased by 85,180 to 1,152,631 and was the largest increase of all categories. Car passengers increased by a smaller amount to 77,335 in 2016 from 69,164 in 2011”.*<sup>3</sup>

The interesting fact to emerge from Census 2016 is that 81% of total commuting trips in the morning were for a journey time of up to 30 min. Many of those distances lend themselves to a walking or cycling modal-shift. A 5 km urban morning commuting trip can be made easily by bicycle in 20 min. We note that in The Netherlands, for example, that 26% of all trips in the Netherlands are made by bicycle<sup>4</sup> - while in Ireland approx. 2.5% of trips have the bicycle as the main mode of transport<sup>5</sup>.

In 2009, the Government adopted ‘Smarter Travel’<sup>6</sup> as national policy. The policy included the following targets to be met by 2020:

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.smartertravel.ie/content/national-cycle-policy>

<sup>3</sup> Census, 2016:

[http://cso.ie/en/media/csoie/newsevents/documents/census2016summaryresultspart2/Chapter\\_8\\_Travel\\_patterns\\_and\\_car\\_ownership.pdf](http://cso.ie/en/media/csoie/newsevents/documents/census2016summaryresultspart2/Chapter_8_Travel_patterns_and_car_ownership.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=glossaries.en.cycling-some-cycling-statistics>

<sup>5</sup> Census 2016.

<sup>6</sup> ‘Smarter Travel – A Sustainable Transport Future (2009)’

[http://www.smartertravel.ie/sites/default/files/uploads/2012\\_12\\_27\\_Smarter\\_Travel\\_english\\_PN\\_WEB%5B1%5D\\_0.pdf](http://www.smartertravel.ie/sites/default/files/uploads/2012_12_27_Smarter_Travel_english_PN_WEB%5B1%5D_0.pdf)

- The transport sector making a meaningful contribution to Ireland's EU climate change commitments by reducing greenhouse gas emissions;
- 500,000 more people taking alternative means to commute to work so that the total share of commuting by car drops from 65% to 45%;
- Walking, cycling and public transport rising to 55% of total commuter journeys to work;
- The total kilometres travelled by car not increasing significantly from 2009 levels.

None of these targets is being met. However, an increased transport budget is not required to achieve these goals. **The Government must act to rebalance existing funding from roads and prioritise investment in walking, cycling and clean public transport, with many benefits for public health, better air quality and improved public spaces, as well as cutting emissions.** In line with the recommendations of the 2016 UNEP report, Ireland should be allocating 20% of its transport capital budget to walking and cycling<sup>7</sup> - as opposed to approximately 1% as per the existing capital spending plan<sup>8</sup>. As a minimum 10% of our capital spending on transport should be allocated to cycling (as per the graphic below).

The then Taoiseach, Brian Cowen, TD, stated in the Introduction to the Policy: *“But in delivering the Policy, we are seeking not only to improve our economic competitiveness, but also to have a healthier population and a better quality of life”*.

Our population in 2017 is arguably less healthy with 25% of our children already overweight/obese due to a sedentary lifestyle – hardly any children walk/cycle to school anymore with only 135,544 doing so in 2016: the car continues to be the dominant means of transport for this group with 327,039 children (6 out of 10) being driven to school in 2016<sup>9</sup>.

Clearly one of the lifestyle changes to be made is to increase the proportion cycling or walking to school in an attempt to end the school-run by car.

The State should also commit in the new national planning framework to facilitating low-carbon mobility, particularly by requiring (as a licensing condition) fully integrated transport networks across public and private sectors, offering seamless connectivity to passengers and with buses/coaches and trains/trams fitted out to carry bicycles to encourage multi-modal trips to and from workplaces.

Residential areas need to be made ‘permeable’ (with retro-fitting as required) to walking/cycling without having to take hundreds of additional metres to reach a road. Planning conditions need to be made tougher on this issue.

If children are to cycle or walk to school in increasing numbers it is essential that the Department of Education & Skills review its policy on creating new schools on Greenfield sites (lower purchase prices for lands/properties there) at the margins of urban areas. These are invariably located on

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.unep.org/newscentre/urgent-investment-needed-walking-and-cycling-infrastructure-save-millions-lives-and-combat-climate>

<sup>8</sup> [www.per.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/Capital-Plan.pdf](http://www.per.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/Capital-Plan.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> Census, 2016

national primary and secondary routes with high speed limits and no segregated safe cycling infrastructure to allow walking/cycling access.

Our children have a human right not to grow up in an obesogenic and unhealthy environment.

## Conclusion

The then Minister for Transport, Noel Dempsey, TD, in introducing the ‘Smarter Travel’ policy declared that:

*“Because of the extensive consultation and public response, it can truly be said that this is the people’s policy “to change our unsustainable habits in the travel and transport area”. If we all accept it and make a serious effort to translate the vision into reality we will succeed in enhancing communities, improving our environment, making our economy more efficient and competitive and significantly adding to the quality of life of all our citizens”.*

It serves as a timely reminder that you, the folks making up this ‘Assembly’, have a role to play in delivering the political system a riposte that it has been wasting time since 2009 in getting on with the decarbonisation of our transport system. It has been ‘hot-air’ to date!

ENDS

**FOR EVERYDAY CYCLING  
TO BE A NORMAL PART OF LIFE  
FOR ALL AGES AND ABILITIES ...**

**ALLOCATE AT LEAST 10% OF TRANSPORT FUNDING TO CYCLING.**

**IMPLEMENT THE NATIONAL CYCLE POLICY FRAMEWORK (2009) IN FULL.**

**#COP21 IS A GAME CHANGER - WE NEED RADICAL REDUCTIONS IN CO<sub>2</sub> EMISSIONS!**

- Achieve at least 10% of all journeys by bike by 2020
- Appoint a National Cycling Officer in the Dept of Transport
- Make 30km/h the default urban speed limit
- Introduce a legally enforced 1.5-metre gap for overtaking cyclists
- Provide for contra-flow cycling on one-way streets
- Retrofit the top 50 most dangerous junctions in Ireland
- Fund high quality cycle infrastructure
- Upskill An Garda Síochána to understand cycling and address dangerous driving
- Provide cycle training in all primary and secondary schools

PRODUCED BY: **DUBLIN CYCLING CAMPAIGN**

IN ASSOCIATION WITH: **cyclist.ie** **An Taisce**  
Cycling Policy Network The National Trust for Ireland

***A summary of the priority interventions that need to be funded in order to re-establish cycling as a normal part of everyday life – and hence to start reducing carbon emissions from transport.***