

Decarbonising Transport : offering more choice to drive behavioural change

A submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action (JOCCA)

An Taisce Climate Committee
21 January, 2019

Background

The Third Report of the Citizens Assembly has three recommendations focusing on transport and over the course of its hearings JOCCA covered one particularly well, the one on the transition to electric vehicles (EVs). The remaining two recommendations on public transport and cycling did receive some mention during the many public sessions. We feel they both merit more attention so here we outline some measures that could further progress them.

Modal shift needs to be mandated not just encouraged

Given the failure of transport policies to date, modal shift needs to be mandated not just encouraged. That means limiting car privileges and air pollution, especially in commuting, as a matter of policy. We no longer have time to mess around. When appearing at JOCCA Prof. Brian ÓGallachoir (MaREI) acknowledged that the most cost effective measure to rapidly decarbonise transport is modal switching. So if the Government is genuinely committed to cost-effective action, it must clearly and urgently prioritise this.

Lifestyle change alone can have a comparable and earlier effect on transport carbon and air quality emissions than a transition to EVs with no lifestyle change. A recent study¹ has shown that both strategies have limits to meeting legislated carbon budgets, which may only be achieved with a combined strategy of radical change in travel patterns, mode and vehicle choice, vehicle occupancy and on-road driving behaviour with high electrification and phasing out of conventional petrol and diesel road vehicles. The new- found urgency of 'cleaning up our act' since the Paris Agreement and Dieselgate scandal suggests that we cannot just wait for the 'technology fix'.

¹ [Lifestyle, efficiency and limits: modelling transport energy and emissions using a socio-technical approach \(Brand 2018\)](#)

To achieve the goals of the existing [Smarter Travel Policy](#) an urgent and ambitious realignment of transport investment that goes to walking, cycling and clean public transport is required. As well as reducing emissions, redirecting existing funding will create benefits for public health, cleaner air, and improved public spaces. Current funding of walking and cycling is around 2% of overall transport budget. Even with proposals from Ireland 2040 it's estimated to be around only 5%.

To have significant impact here in encouraging behavioral change the 20% share of transport funding for walking and cycling recommended by the [UN Environment Programme](#) would go a long way to this progression. There is considerable [information](#) available on the environmental, economic, health and societal benefits of cycling and much greater investment in high-quality cycle paths is needed throughout Ireland.

The [need for greater investment](#) is also evidenced by the decisions of Irish commuters - the number of people using sustainable modes of transport (such as bus, train, Luas, walking and cycling) to travel into Dublin city centre is increasing year on year, and now accounts for [70%](#) of all journeys.

Accelerating away from fossil fuel dependence

The proposed timeframe in Ireland Project 2040 is too long as total emissions must go down every year, starting now. The government needs to recognise that substantial and sustained emissions reduction really is an imperative, and that further delays only make the transition more challenging, and more expensive.

Total transport carbon fuel use must, as a priority, start going down fast, every year, without fail. This needs to be the most important strategic policy objective of the Department of Transport. Then plan policies that achieve it, without fail, in line with the Paris Agreement.

Prioritise the lowest emissions technology that is available and suitable

The BusConnects plan promises to fully transition to a so-called "low emissions" fleet by 2030, with half of the fleet transitioning by 2023. Given the infrequency of large public capital investments such as this and the urgent necessity of climate action, the BusConnects fleet acquisition process must prioritise the very lowest emissions technology that is available and technically suitable - even if this involves greater initial capital cost.

Electric buses (battery, fuel cell or trolley) offer many additional benefits compared to their fossil counterparts. They have superior image and comfort, avoid stranded assets from investing in carbon-gas infrastructure, minimise local air and noise pollution, can use entirely locally produced (renewable) energy and ensure energy security by displacing oil consumption. [The bottom line is clear, the earlier Irish cities transition 100% to an electrified zero emission bus fleet, the better.](#)