

# **CORK CYCLING CAMPAIGN**

## **Response to Public Consultation on the *Draft Local Area Plans for East Cork***

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The Cork Cycling Campaign is a voluntary group dedicated to promoting utility and recreational cycling in Cork City and County. Founded in 1999, the Campaign advocates for improved conditions for Cork's cyclists and strives for recognition and promotion of cycling as a serious form of transport. It is the Campaign's view that cycling, as an everyday form of transport, is of inestimable benefit to Cork: it is rapid and efficient, it contributes to a higher quality urban environment, and it improves the health and quality of life of its inhabitants. As a sustainable mode of travel, cycling has a central role to play in mitigation of climate change by helping society transition to low energy transport solutions. The Cork Cycling Campaign are part of cyclist.ie, the Irish Cycling Advocacy Network, and the European Cyclists Federation (ECF).

We welcome the opportunity to present our comments on the draft LAPs for the County. Our comments focus mainly on issues affecting cycling and walking, but we also consider other aspects of transport solutions and spatial planning, especially how the plans can support greater adoption of more sustainable transport modes. This also includes consideration of how housing development influences moving towards more sustainable transport solutions. We note that well-designed schemes for non-motorised transport benefit other road users through reduced traffic volumes and thus through shorter travel times. There are also important societal benefits through improved public health arising from higher level of physical activity.

## 2. GENERAL COMMENTS

We recognise that the LAP is set in the political, economic, and societal context of a national housing crisis (a crisis that is particularly acute in the Cork Metropolitan area), and that the LAP seeks to address this housing shortage. Historically, the spatial development patterns in the Cork City Metropolitan Area has situated residential areas remotely from major retail centres in the city, and from places of employment in and around the city. Transport in the metro relies heavily on private vehicles to travel to work and to shop, generally with low vehicle occupancy ratios. This development pattern is highly unsustainable. Our primary criticism of the LAP is that it perpetuates high car dependency by continuing the spatial development patterns of the past. This is inconsistent with the County Development Plan and its stated core principles of sustainability, social inclusion, quality of design and climate change adaptation.

Nevertheless, we also recognise that sustainable development in the metro is not readily reconciled with demands for increased housing and with further commercial and industrial development. Our response below, including both the general principles we think the County should adopt, as well as with specific comments on particular areas, seeks to modify and improve the LAPs so as to promote more sustainable development.

The LAPs have several strong points and the design principles, as articulated in the document and in the County Development Plan, are sound. In particular:

1. We commend the significant attention given to sustainable (that is, non-motorised transport modes) in all the areas covered and welcome the proposals to develop and extend walking and cycling paths.
2. We commend proposals to introduce robust traffic calming measures in the areas covered in the LAPs. We strongly endorse a 30 km/h speed limit in residential areas, around schools, and in commercial centres. Raised, signalised pedestrian crossings have been enormously successful in fostering a vibrant town centre in Ballincollig that is also a pedestrian- and cyclist-friendly environment. Similar traffic calming measures would benefit other locations in the LAP.
3. We support the development of stronger local commercial centres, and sustainable travel modes to these local centres. Indeed, attractive local amenities and commercial centres would promote shorter trips and make walking and cycling both feasible and attractive.
4. We are pleased that the LAPs make numerous references to the 2016 Cycle Network Plan, which serves as an important template for developing a coherent, safe, and comfortable cycle network.

There are several important weaknesses to the LAPs, however, which include:

1. The LAP contains few specific transport plans that would reduce high levels of vehicle dependence and usage. Notably:
  - a. Improved public transportation is suggested as an option in many of these areas, but the council has no effective control over the provision and level of service of private operators. The LAP needs to develop measures and programmes to improve public transportation and promote car pooling in order to reduce vehicular traffic and travel times in the metro.
  - b. Besides the possibility of increased ferry crossings as Passage West, there is little consideration of alternative transport options. For example, a harbour water taxi could serve major residential, industrial, and commercial areas and help to reduce the high volumes of traffic moving around the harbour area. This could also serve as an excellent tourist amenity, e.g., to Cobh and Spike Island. The nationally unique setting of the metro harbor should be exploited to the benefit of the broader metro area.
  - c. The possibility of mixed mode transportation (e.g., ferry/bike at Passage West, or bus/bike e.g., at Shannonpark transport terminus) is not seriously planned for or considered in the LAP.
2. The extent and coherence of the cycle network is unclear in many places:
  - a. Many paths in the plan are described as "amenity walkways" or with similar terms, and it is unclear whether these also intend use by cyclists. This should be clarified in the LAPs. We suggest that these be termed "foot and cycle path" or "walk and cycleways" to indicate shared nature and purpose of the paths throughout the document. All such paths should be constructed with explicit consideration of the needs of different users in mind.
  - b. There are several instances where pathways are implicitly regarded largely as recreational facilities, and their value for mode shift to sustainable transport solutions is not identified. This is evidenced in cases where the pathway is longer than is necessary (e.g., following a northward loop along the river on the Ballincollig River Lee path) and excludes obvious direct connections — this suits recreational users, but deters use for commuting and mode-shift. We emphasise that mode shift means walking or cycling to carry out an activity instead of driving. Walking and cycling for recreational purposes does not fit into this category.
3. Little consideration is given to cycling facilities, esp. bicycle locking facilities in commercial centres and at transport hubs (cf. County Development Plan,

10.2.16). These should be secure, conveniently located, and covered, and should be an explicit requirement for all major destination points.

4. The housing types proposed for residential areas in the LAP are largely Medium A and Medium B density housing:
  - a. Lower density housing is much less sustainable than higher density housing, both in the direct impacts of energy and land use, and in indirect impacts of supporting viable local commercial services and transport amenities.
  - b. Although the LAPs speak favourably of diversity of housing offerings, in reality the housing density presents drearily uniform offerings of the type of housing that is already common within the county. This does little to address the varied needs of different demographics and diverse household finances. For example, many younger households (whether single people and couples) have little need of a swathe of grass, but more interest in a low cost, low energy apartment with sufficient storage space.

### 3. MAJOR RECOMMENDATIONS

The Cork Cycling Campaign has several major recommendations to enable this LAP, as well as for subsequent development plans, achieve the CDP's stated objectives of sustainability, social inclusion, and climate change adaptation. We strongly recommend that the County Council adopts the following recommendations as policies and design standards. These changes provide an important series of direct and indirect measures that will help to promote the switch to more sustainable travel, reduce traffic congestion, and make Cork metro a more attractive, competitive, and livable location.

**RECOMMENDATION 1:** *Introduce a default 30 km/h speed limit in all residential areas, around schools, and in town centres*

The Department of Transport Tourism & Sport's Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (DMURS) recommends that where cyclists and pedestrians are present in large numbers lower speed limits should be applied. It also recommends lower speed limits where vehicle movement priorities are low, such as on local streets. Following the introduction of the 30 km/h speed limit in Dublin (and likely in Galway and Offaly), we strongly recommend adoption of a default 30 km/h speed limit in all residential areas, around schools, and in town centres throughout Cork County.

The case for the default 30 km/h speed limit is strong:

- a) **SAFETY:** 30 km/h is fundamentally safer than 50 km/h for pedestrians, cyclists and other vulnerable road users. It is well established that lower impact speeds result in fewer and less severe injuries. Wherever 30 km/h has been introduced as the default speed limit, safety figures have improved, and there are fewer collisions and injuries.
- b) **SOCIAL BENEFITS:** Lower vehicle speeds make the urban space a nicer place to live. There is less noise & pollution. Acceleration to high speeds produces much more noise and air pollution (both particulate matter, nitrogen oxides, and carbon dioxide emissions) than the acceleration from stop to 30 km/h. On residential roads and shopping streets, people simply don't want to be exposed to the noise, fumes and dangers from higher speed traffic. Higher speeds can discourage pedestrians and cyclists and encourage the use of larger and heavier cars. This has wider implications for society in impairing social interaction on the street (causing isolation), effects on the balance of trade (from the import of vehicles and fuels), health issues from lack of exercise and exposure to pollution, and lack of passive supervision, allowing crime to go undetected. The objective of any

safety measures should be more than to reduce the number of casualties, but also to empower vulnerable road users, especially children, disabled, and older people, so that they can be an active part of and avail of all of the facilities in their community and not be intimidated by traffic.

- c) SUSTAINABILITY: The experience elsewhere has been that the introduction of 30 km/h urban speed limits leads to an increase in the number of people walking and cycling -- that is, to sustainable travel. Lower vehicle speeds result in greater fuel efficiency (high fuel consumption is associated with stop-start traffic, not slow traffic). Reduced acceleration also means improved fuel economy and lower vehicle maintenance costs. The reduced fuel consumption from lower speed limits can also help to contribute to the reduction in emissions that is required to help us meet transport greenhouse gas emission targets.
- d) PUBLIC HEALTH: (1) By increasing the number of people walking or cycling, the 30 km/h speed limit leads to healthier lives. (2) Air pollution currently kills more than 1,000 per year in Ireland, primarily through asthma, cancers and other pulmonary illnesses. Vehicle emissions are a major contributor to air pollution and these emissions increase with vehicle speed and acceleration.
- e) 30 IS THE NEW STANDARD: Throughout Europe, 30 km/h is fast becoming the default urban speed limit for cities, towns and villages. In some cities, speed limits as low as 10 km/h are in place in 'home zones'. In the UK, where 20 mph is the equivalent of our 30 km/h, the "20's Plenty for Us" Campaign (<http://www.20's Plenty>) has been actively campaigning for reduced speed limits in urban locations. There are now over 15 million people in the UK living in 20 mph (30 km/h) areas. This includes many large cities and boroughs of London. 20's Plenty has many background research papers, showing the benefits of 20 mph areas at <http://www.20splenty.org/briefings>

**RECOMMENDATION 2: *Implement traffic calming measures that favour pedestrians and cyclists***

As part of the range of measures needed to improve safety and livability of urban environments through reduced traffic speeds (CDP Objective TM2-2 (b)), we suggest installation of physical barriers, such as raised platforms for pedestrian & cyclist crossings, in traffic calming areas. These are particularly important around schools, in retail centres, and (where appropriate) in residential estates. Physical barriers are much more effective than speed limit signs in reducing

vehicle speeds. Raised crossings are especially important in providing schoolchildren with a safe roadway environment, and in encouraging parents to allow age-appropriate independence for their children's school commute. This would have important benefits by reducing the traffic congestion arising from school drop-offs and pick-ups. Paradoxically, slower speeds therefore result in shorter travel times in vehicles.

Raised crossings have been successfully used in Ballincollig town centre, which is a more vibrant commercial and community centre because it is pedestrian and cyclist friendly. This approach could serve as a valuable model for the rest of the county.

A related consideration is that isolated, signalised pedestrian and toucan crossings should change signal quickly. We recommend that the traffic signal, for on-coming vehicular traffic, change from green to amber within 3 seconds. This approach is standard in other jurisdictions, whereas 40 to 60 seconds is common at many crossings across the county. Long signal delays at isolated crossings have no immediate benefit for motorised traffic, but do impede sustainable modes of travel. As a result, they indirectly contribute to slower motorised traffic owing to higher vehicle numbers on the road. Long delays in signal changes also compromise the usefulness of (and therefore the taxpayer investment in) such crossings. The lack of attention given to the needs of pedestrians and cyclists conveys an implicit (if unintentional) message of the low status afforded those not in motor vehicles. This applies particularly to children and the elderly, and violates the principle of social inclusion outlined in the CDP.

So, although these changes should be adopted in the LAP, we particularly encourage the county to adopt standard guidelines that all such crossings initiate signal changes within 3 seconds, and ensure that all crossings in the county meet this criterion. This simple change is a low cost measure that would have a significant impact on the switch to sustainable travel and would help meet the CDP objectives TM2-2(d) that "development in urban areas, towns and villages is well located, permeable and prioritises walking, cycling"

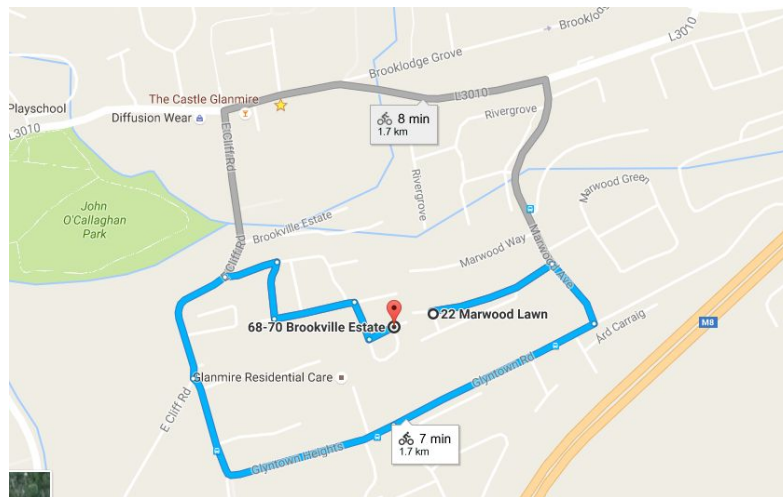
**RECOMMENDATION 3:** *Require permeability for non-motorised traffic in new residential estates, and retrofit older housing estates to increase permeability*

Planning guidelines for residential housing estates should require permeability between estates and greater connectivity for cyclists and walkers throughout the urban centre. We would like to see this requirement stated explicitly in the LAP. Insisting on permeability and connectivity in estate design and around town

centres would be consistent with the principles and objectives of the CDP (10.2.16 and objective TM2-2(c)). New estates should reserve potential connection points around the estate periphery for future connections. In existing estates, we strongly encourage the council to remove the artificial barriers that are a strong disincentive to walking and cycling by forcing people to use high speed, high volume, and longer routes to get to their destination.

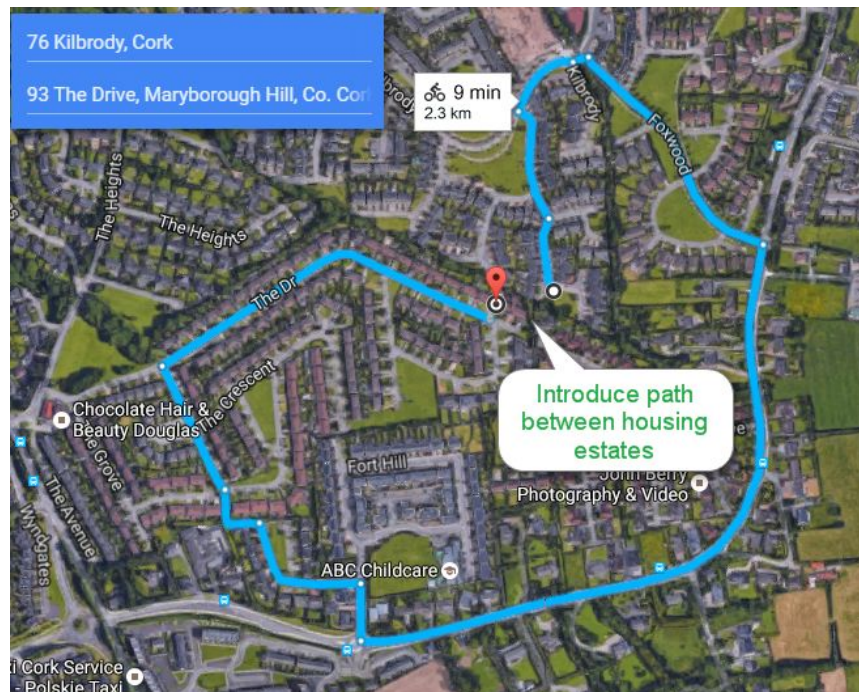
Lack of permeability distorts travel distances and skews decisions about transport mode towards driving (see examples below). There is often scope to reduce travel distances between adjacent housing estates. These should be identified and prioritised: in most cases, they require little effort and cost, and would be highly effective in promoting non-motorised transport. They would be particularly effective in reducing car dependence for older children travelling to secondary school, to the benefit of the children, their parents, and other road users alike.

**Example 1.** A journey from Marwood Lawn to Brookville Estate, which are less than 100 m apart, is a 1.7 km journey by road.

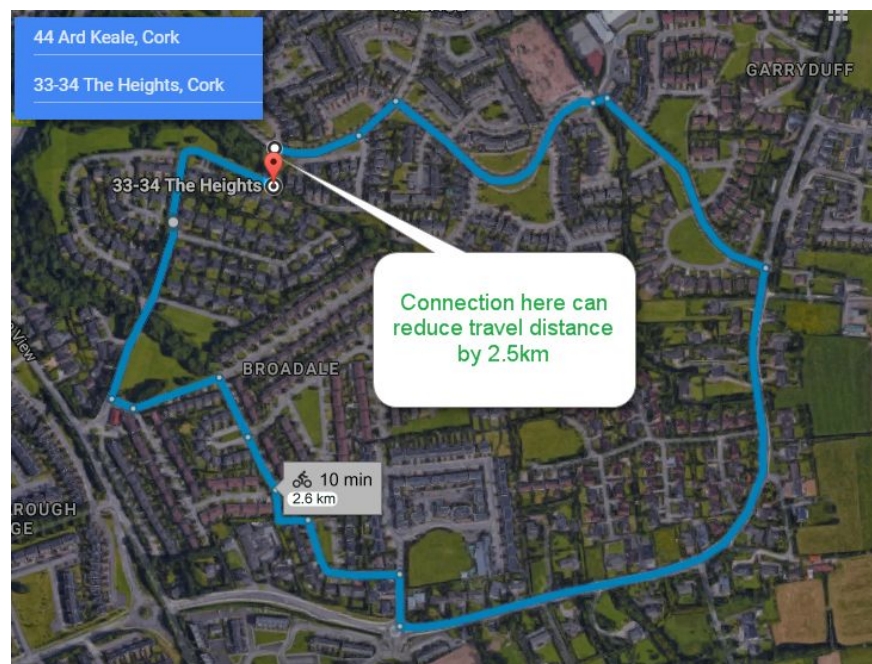




**Example 2.** A journey from Kilbrody to adjacent Maryborough Hill could be 100 m but is 2.3 km.



**Example 3.** A journey from Ard Keale to neighbouring estate, The Heights, could be 100 m but is 2.6 km.



**RECOMMENDATION 4:** *Accelerate the roll-out of major cycling routes and coherent local cycling networks*

We strongly recommend that the Ballincollig-Cork City-Cobh Greenway (as identified in the Cycle Network Plan (2016)) be treated as the major cycling artery through the Cork Metro area and be developed as a priority. This route has the potential to be a coherent, inter- and trans-urban route of 20-30 km that is a major recreational and commuter asset for the metropolitan area. It would combine functional destinations to cultural, employment, retail, and educational centres, with recreational destinations in the harbour, river, valley, and city. As it traverses the most beautiful parts of the Lee valley, harbour, and city, it would act as an important and unique tourist offering, allowing visitors to explore the region with a feeling of safety and comfort.

In addition to the above signature cycling and walking route, the county should systematically review the coherence and utility of the cycle network and pedestrian facilities, particularly around schools, major employment centres, and retail areas. These measures are important to be consistent with CDP (10.2.16) and Objectives (TM2-2(a,c,d)).

**RECOMMENDATION 5:** *Promote the switch to sustainable transport options with a long-term marketing and information campaign*

Cycling, in particular, should be vigorously promoted with a sustained, long-term marketing & informational campaign. Such a campaign is an indispensable part of encouraging people to cycle rather than drive. Considering the large financial investment in cycling infrastructure over the last decade, deliberate measures to encourage the take up of cycling is needed to justify this use of taxpayer money. Accordingly, the city & county should take the lead on this and establish a budget for promoting cycling and sustainable travel. The cost and effort of such promotion would be much smaller than that required for developing and maintaining the cycle network. We also recommend commissioning a cycling app for the Cork metro area to facilitate and encourage increased use of the cycle network.

#### RECOMMENDATION 6: *Favour higher over lower density housing*

Higher population densities are better suited to sustainable transport and living. They provide enough people within an area to support reliable and convenient public transport and neighbourhood retail amenities. Central locations should be used (such as over-shop residential use) to maximise the vibrancy of town centres and accessibility to services. Ballincollig town centre is a good example of this approach (although, owing to the financial crisis, it was only partly completed). The planning and design of roads within housing schemes should facilitate pedestrians and cyclists and minimise, as far as possible, the need to use private cars. The relevant planning and transport authorities should be consulted to ensure that any necessary provision is made in the layout of the scheme for bus routes and bus stops at locations that are convenient for pedestrian access. The layout of pedestrian routes should facilitate access to those services; and the layout of the road network should be conducive to effective traffic control and traffic calming and adequate provision should be made for cycle paths, pedestrian routes and natural walkways in the overall design. This approach favours informal surveillance by putting “eyes on the street”, i.e. making buildings face the public realm, minimising exposed blank facades and walls, and maximising front door entrances.<sup>1</sup>

#### RECOMMENDATION 7: *Develop a convenient, efficient, and affordable public transport system for the metro, and take other measures to increase vehicle occupancy.*

An implicit part of achieving the objectives of the CDP is a move toward sustainable travel, which necessarily means lower vehicle usage. Public transport has a key part to play in this transition, but the standards of service of public transport in the county are inadequate, even in larger towns. Where route frequency and service improves, however, people are willing to avail more of public transport: 2016 saw a 7% increase in bus trips in Cork in 2016 on the back of improved schedules and more frequent services. So the Council need to engage strongly with Bus Eireann to ensure high quality public transport in the metro and the rest of the county.<sup>2</sup>

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<http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/migrated-files/en/Publications/DevelopmentandHousing/Housing/FileDownload%2C1979%2Cen.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Cork Examiner, January 2017.

A key objective of the Local Area Plans Guidelines for Planning Authorities states “Encourage smarter travel patterns through more compact, less sprawling, and better structured urban areas and facilitating more sustainable and healthier travel habits such as walking, cycling, and the use of public transport”<sup>3</sup> We think that public transport is not considered in detail in the LAPs, and there are no firm measures taken that will improve this situation. We strongly endorse the proposed review of public transport in the metro and recommend that the council develop a strategic vision of the role of a high standard public transport system, and take firm steps towards achieving this vision.

In addition to the role of public transport, we also recommend that the county consider ways to encourage people to use their cars more efficiently -- that is, with higher occupancy. Obvious targets include promoting lift sharing for taking children to and from school (again, reduced traffic congestion is an important side benefit here) the school run, as well as car pooling for people commuting to work. The county should consider measures that favour vehicles with high occupancy over those with low occupancy, and investigate the practices of other urban centres in this regard. It is important to note that, unlike public transport, these other measures to increase vehicle occupancy rates are potentially under the control of the council.

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<sup>3</sup> Chapter 5.1 -

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/migrated-files/en/Publications/DevelopmentandHousing/Planning/FileDownload,33557,en.pdf>

#### **4. COMMENTS ON SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF THE LAP**

[This is where your details on the specific areas is going!]