



Macra na Feirme



THE GREEN ROUTE:

A Future for Rural Transport

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Macra na Feirme Rural Transport Policy

The following document has been prepared by the Rural Infrastructure Working Group of the Rural Youth Committee.

Policy Proposal Summary

Reducing Rural Ireland Dependence on Private Car Use

- a. Increased the availability of 'Work from Home' opportunities through the roll-out of Rural Broadband.
- b. Increased flexibility around work and options to avoid commuting through targeted Business reliefs.
- c. The provision of free travel on all public transport for under 25s.
- d. Development of EV charging infrastructure in close proximity to public transport services.

Bus Transport Investment

- a. An increase in the allocated budget for public transport to €19.5 Billion representing a 2:1 split with private road use.
- b. An increase of €5 million to the provision of Local Link Service.
- c. Investment to return and upgrade bus stops along rural routes including investment in modernisation and bus tracking for user interface.
- d. State subsidises student bus tickets by 50% to make public buses a more attractive incentive rather than the private car.

Train Transport

- a. Carrying out a feasibility study into completing the M3 Parkway Extension including Climate Impact Assessment.
- b. Investment in Phase 2 and 3 of the Western Rail Corridor.
- c. Carrying out a feasibility study into High-Speed Rail between Cork and Dublin, in line with the assessment of High-Speed Rail between Dublin and Belfast.
- d. Investment supports for businesses utilising rail freight.
- e. Projects which provide alternatives for domestic flights should be prioritised.
- f. Irish Government support moves at EU level to introduce a carbon tax.
- g. Increase investment in the facilities, and infrastructure in major ports to encourage low carbon travel.
- h. Increase budget for Fáilte Ireland to promote holidaying at home.

Reducing Private Car Dependence in Commuting

Proposals

Macra na Feirme proposes:

- a. Increase the availability of 'Work from Home' opportunities through the acceleration roll-out of the Rural Broadband Plan
- b. Increased flexibility around work and options to avoid commuting through targeted business reliefs.
- c. The provision of free travel on all public transport for under 25s
- d. Development of EV charging infrastructure in close proximity to public transport services.

Introduction

Rural Ireland remains heavily dependent on the use of private cars for transport and to access basic necessities. Census 2016 showed 91% of households in rural areas owned at least one car; highlighting the over-reliance on cars for people living outside of Dublin (CSO, 2017). Numerous proposals have been discussed to solve this issue, ranging from feasible to unrealistic.

With the forced move towards remote working caused by the global Covid-19 pandemic the possibility of new opportunities to live in rural Ireland while working for companies based in our urban centres. While Covid-19 has triggered a form of 'Work from Home' it has a number of drawbacks not normally seen with remote work, including low availability of child care and lack of social interaction. In the post Covid-19 era remote working could play a significant role in revolutionising work in and commuting from rural Ireland. These proposals are covered in greater detail in Macra na Feirme's vision for remote work '*Rural Online: The Future of Work in Rural Ireland*'.

In discussions around the rural transport challenges, however, a distinction must be drawn between those living in rural Ireland who are commuting to major population centres for employment and those who work in rural Ireland.

Much of the climate contribution from rural dependence on private car use originates with those commuting longer journeys. These commuters represent a particular challenge of infrastructure and availability of alternatives rather than personal preference. These alternatives and the need for investment in them are covered in more detail further on in the document.

A number of significant changes will be needed to give the flexibility needed to improve the quality of life for rural dwellers by breaking the dependence on personal car use. This isn't to force a change but rather to provide the opportunities to make significant savings and provide appropriate alternatives. Breaking dependence on car use, particularly amongst the younger age cohorts so as to change

behaviour and increase the willingness to use public transport is key. To this end it is essential to increase the attractiveness of public transport to under 25 years olds. By estimates provided below free travel for under 25s would provide a significant saving in Public expenditure in the region of €8.5 million taking into account the current carbon prices.

Car ownership however will continue to be a feature of rural life. To reduce the emissions associated with non-commuting in rural Ireland the investment in rural charging network to accelerate the uptake of electric vehicles (EV) must be prioritised.

Justification

Transport remains one of the highest sources of emissions with the vast majority of these emissions resulting from private car journeys, in between 2014-2019 transport emissions have been relatively stable at an average of 11.6 Mt CO₂eq produced (EPA, 2021). Breaking the dependence upon private car use and ownership is a challenge many governments have faced. In the case of private car use, many rural young Irish people are forced into expensive ownership by necessity due to poor availability and the cost of public transport. To address this and seek to overcome the cycle of car ownership which many rural young people are locked into early in their careers Macra na Feirme proposes a period of free travel up to the age of 25 when many young people are under economic pressure to afford education costs or beginning in their careers and earn low wages.

Figures showed that there were 1.6 million individuals under the age of 25 in 2019 (Clark, 2020), however, those under the age of 14 are unlikely to take significant journeys without parental supervision on longer journeys and so would not incur significant costs and may in fact encourage more paying individuals to take family journeys on public transport. Many in the 14-25 category received student rate meaning this would not be a loss of full fares. The existing Free Travel Scheme provided to those over 66 is provided to 948,000 individuals at a cost of €100 per person. To provide a similar level of cover to those under 25 would result in an estimated cost of €60.5 million.

If this were to reduce the amount by as little as 10% and encourage a culture of public transport usage in place of car ownership the saving in terms of emissions would be 1.7 Mt in CO₂eq. It is estimated that by 2030 the price of a tonne of carbon may cost Ireland €55/t (Carbon Tracker, 2018) on EU ETS markets. This could save Ireland annually €93,500,000 by 2030, at current prices of €20-30/ton reducing private travel amounts by 10% would represent a saving of €34 and €51million.

Currently, there are 1,100 public charge points available across Ireland (ESB, 2021). Macra na Feirme believe a 10% increase in the number of public charge points is essential in order to meet government targets for EV uptake. In a recent AA Insurance survey, Irish buyers are still more likely to buy a diesel-

engine car than any other type, with only 7% of those 8,000 surveyed said they would consider buying an electric car in 2020 (AA Car Insurance, 2020). Some potential buyers of electric vehicles cite range anxiety as a factor for not purchasing an electric vehicle. In order to overcome this problem, an increase in the number of public charge points that are available around the country is essential, giving the public the confidence that should they need to recharge there are plenty of locations to do so.

Buses

Proposals

Macra na Feirme proposes:

- a. An increase in the allocated budget for public transport to €19.5 Billion representing a 2:1 split with private road use.
- b. An increase of €5 million to the provision of Local Link Service
- c. Investment to return and upgrade bus stops along rural routes including investment in modernisation and bus tracking for user interface (accessibility).
- d. State subsidises student bus tickets by 50% to make public buses a more attractive incentive rather than the private car

Introduction

In Ireland as a whole, just over 37% of the population live in rural areas, that is, outside towns with a population of over 1,500 (CSO, 2017). Recent legislative changes, including the outlawing of unaccompanied learner drivers and lowering the drink driving limit, has had a disproportionately greater impact in rural Ireland. This is caused not due to the legislation itself, but the relative lack of investment in public transport and infrastructure, particularly in public buses. Such underinvestment has had an excessively detrimental effect on younger drivers. In response to these impacts the Macra na Feirme Rural Transport Sub-committee recently undertook a survey of members, seeking their views on access to public transport in rural Ireland.

- 86% of members surveyed felt it was not viable for them to use public transport as an alternative to a private car.
- 64% of members surveyed said that they were very likely or likely to use public transport services if they were available in their area.
- 60% of members surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that access to public transport impacted their ability to engage in social activities.
- 50% of members surveyed felt dissatisfied or strongly dissatisfied with access to public transport in their area.

The rising costs of motor insurance and the possibility of a criminal conviction for unaccompanied learner drivers is further exasperated by a lack of public buses in rural areas which would replace the private car. Such increases in punitive measures and lack of public investment have created a feeling of anti-rural bias among many rural communities. This anger and sense of isolation has been expressed by many members of Macra na Feirme and has found expression in the results of the survey above. Macra na Feirme thus proposes key opportunities to invest in public bus transport to create opportunities to tackle rural isolation and encourage rural youth to use public bus transport, which would mean less private car use and a lowering of carbon emissions. Increasing the provision of Local

Link Service to €25 million would cost the exchequer €3.9 million, while Macra na Feirme estimates the investment to return and upgrade to bus stops along rural routes would cost approximately €1 million.

Justification

Macra na Feirme notes that within the framework of the National Development Plan, there is a planned €20.6 billion allocated to land transport infrastructure up until 2027. However, just €8.6 billion has been allocated for public transport (Ryan, E, 2019) . Macra na Feirme proposes that this budget needs to be split on a 2:1 ratio in favour of public transport. Macra na Feirme is well aware of the need for the lowering of carbon emissions nationally, which is why the State needs to invest far more in public buses in rural areas. This increase would take more private cars off the road, increase return to the Exchequer and lower Ireland's already significant output of greenhouse gases, which is leading to significant costs to the State in the form of tax credits paid to the European Union.

Macra na Feirme notes the positive feedback and success of the Local Link bus system. Many young people in rural communities have found this service a lifeline for commuting, accessing services and social involvement. While the budget for this program has been raised from €12.2 million in 2016 to approximately €21 million in 2019, the number of passengers using the service has risen by more than 580,000 since 2010, representing a rise of 25% 2010-2018. Now servicing more than 2 million people Macra na Feirme believes this service is providing value for money and proposing a further increase of €5 million yearly to build upon the success of Local Links in rural communities. Challenges remain in tendering and procurement and this continued investment would help to change perceptions of a rural/urban divide when it comes to public transport.

Macra na Feirme notes CIÉ's goal of Service for All, aspiring to provide public transport access across Ireland. Such a goal needs to be targeted, appropriate investment to be realistic. Macra na Feirme proposes that the State subsidize student bus tickets by 50% to make public buses a more attractive incentive rather than the private car. Such a move would take more cars off the road and correspondingly reduce Ireland's carbon footprint. During 2018, there was an increase of 67 new buses and coaches into the fleet (CIÉ, 2020). In light of previous investments, it is vital that this increase in stock is continued and spread across all routes so that rural users receive the benefits of this investment.

CIÉ recorded a profit of €2.3 million on 31st December 2010 (CIÉ, 2020). While any profit is welcome, the state public transport services are driven by the need to provide Irish society with, among other infrastructures, access to public buses. Rural bus routes need to be protected and not be analysed as successful on a profit-based model.

Trains

Proposals

Macra na Feirme proposes:

- a. Carrying out a feasibility study into completing the M3 Parkway Extension including Climate Impact Assessment
- b. Investment in Phase 2 and 3 of the Western Rail Corridor
- c. Carrying out a feasibility study into High-Speed Rail between Cork and Dublin, in line with the assessment of High-Speed Rail between Dublin and Belfast
- d. Investment supports for businesses utilising rail freight.

Introduction

As laid in the 2020 Programme for Government, a commitment was made to expand the rail network in the next five years. We believe the following projects should be given top priority regarding rail expansion: M3 Parkway extension, Western Rail Corridor and High-Speed line Dublin / Cork. Commuter time would be lowered with increased connectivity between towns and cities.

While services currently benefit other growth areas in the Dublin commuter belt, large populations in Monaghan, Cavan and areas of Meath are ignored in terms of provision of service. Counties such as Donegal would benefit greatly from faster and more direct public transport than currently provided by bus service and less carbon-intensive modes than domestic air travel, however these would require coordination between Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland authorities such as in the case of high speed rail between Belfast and Dublin.

Ireland remains one of the lowest rates in the EU when considering passenger-km modal share at only 2.9% when compared to the EU average of 17.2% (Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, 2019). This is in no small part due to the lack of infrastructure investment and availability of service. Out of the western European Member States, Ireland has annually only nine passenger journeys per capita in 2018 compared with countries such as Denmark and the UK which has 35.5 and 38 journeys respectively (Eurostat, 2019). While we have seen total growth in those using the Iarnród Éireann and other rail services of 24.7% from 2010 to 2018, the number of passengers per capita has grown by only 18% (NTA Bus and Rail Statistics, 2019). This is primarily due to the lack of service of key areas of Ireland which have experienced population growth such as Cavan and Meath.

While services currently benefit other growth areas in the Dublin commuter belt, large populations in Monaghan, Cavan, areas of Meath are ignored in terms of provision of service. Counties such as Donegal which would benefit greatly from faster and more direct public transport than currently

provided by bus service and less carbon-intensive modes than domestic air travel have also been ignored.

Justification

M3 Parkway extension

Navan is one of the largest commuter towns in Ireland and its population rose by 5.7% between 2011 and 2016 (CSO, 2017). Out of 19,950 commuters per day, only 46 (0.002%) of them use the train while 13,004 (65%) use either a car or van in their daily commute. From the 19,950 commuters in Navan 5,521 (27%) reported that they had to leave home before 7.30 am each morning. (Census 2016).

Phase 1 of the Dublin to Navan railway line from Dublin to Dunshaughlin was opened in September 2010. Currently, there are over 25 trains per day operating on this route. The proposed phase 2 of the project has been deferred ever since. Phase 2 of the project is 34km and would connect Navan town, Kilmessan, Dunshaughlin to Dublin and there is a proposal for another station north of Navan town which would open the line up to more possible commuters. Phase 2 was due to be completed by 2015 under the framework for Transport 21.

Macra na Feirme call on the government to make the expansion of the M3 parkway railway line to Navan a top priority. Navan has recently been designated as a rent pressure zone and has been identified as one of the fastest growing town in Ireland over successive census. It is desperately in need of a rail connection to Dublin city. A rail link would not only benefit Navan but would also benefit surrounding towns and the entire counties of Meath, Cavan and Louth by bringing increased connectivity to Dublin city.

Macra na Feirme maintains that the Navan Corridor Study, conducted in 2015, was fundamentally flawed as it did not consider at any point in the document the carbon saving desperately needed in reducing commuter traffic to within the M50. Nor was consideration given to the impact of greater than 3,600 vehicles journeys within the M50.

Given the clear need for climate action and commitment laid out that all projects should be considered in light of the governmental Climate Action Plan.

Western Rail Corridor

The section of the Western Rail Corridor from Galway to Limerick is the fastest-growing railway line on the rail network with 91,000 passengers using the service in Q1 of 2019, up from 74,000 in the same period in 2018 (Fleet Transport, 2020). This growth demonstrates the urgent need for further investment to build upon that success by completing phases 2 & 3, to Tuam and Claremorris, of the

project. The benefits of this expansion to the whole Mayo/Galway region would have a significant impact for commuters and tourism. These regions have suffered greatly from youth emigration as a result of slower expansion of the rail network.

The expansion of the WRC to Claremorris would revolutionise rail connectivity in Mayo especially, for the first time in half a century you would be able to get a train to Galway from Westport, Castlebar and Ballina without unnecessary travel to Athlone. Under the government transport programme 'Transport 21' Phase 2 Athenry to Tuam was due to be opened in 2011 and Phase 3 Tuam to Claremorris was due to be opened in 2014. Macra na Feirme now call on the government to renew their commitment to the WRC in Transport 21 and to begin work on both phases of the project immediately.

The line from Ballina to Waterford Port is one of the busiest freight lines on the network. Rerouting trains via the Western Rail corridor would significantly reduce the pressure on this junction. Each train can operate with up to 600 tonnes of freight. 9,000 road journeys saved by Iarnród Éireann freight business each year (Iarnród Éireann, 2021). Thus, reducing the cost of transporting goods and also the environmental impact is drastically reduced.

High-speed Rail Feasibility

A key component to the uptake of rail service is the speed and duration of travel times. Shorter travel times give the rail network a significant advantage over the more flexible but far slower modes of bus transport. To this end, Macra na Feirme welcomes the decision to carry out a feasibility study on the potential for a high-speed rail link connecting Dublin to Belfast.

Macra na Feirme proposes the need to carry out a similar feasibility study on the potential to upgrade the Dublin to Cork line. At only 20 minutes shorter than the Belfast-Dublin line the potential for a high-speed train would offer major potential for business opportunities and beneficial employments for servicing our two largest cities.

Air and Sea Travel

Proposals

Macra na Feirme proposes:

- a. Projects which provide alternatives for domestic flights should be prioritised Irish Government support moves at the EU level to introduce a carbon tax.
- b. Increase investment in the facilities, and infrastructure in major ports to encourage low carbon travel.
- c. Increase budget for Fáilte Ireland to promote holidaying at home.

Introduction

The desire to travel, especially amongst the younger generation, has never been greater. Travel is seen not only as a luxury but equally as an expected part of the life experience for those in the developed world. However, increasingly the green credentials have become a focus for many of this generation.

It is important to both make low carbon alternatives more affordable and desirable addressing the real carbon cost of air travel. The proposals in this section focus to encourage behaviour change through increased alternative along with the exemptions which have resulted in air travel unlike other industries avoiding contributing to climate action measures.

In addition, international tourism is a significant economic driver, and this sector must be protected. The specific requirements posed by Ireland's location makes alternatives to air travel more expensive and require significant infrastructure. However, the area of 'green tourism' has significantly increased with more travellers considering the carbon footprint of their journeys. Investment may be best suited to the 3.48 million UK visitors to Ireland each year in 2018 (Fáilte Ireland, 2019).

Justification

While Ireland's island nature results in a dependence on air and sea travel, the emissions associated with these forms of travel must be considered. Under the current international standards international aviation, which is the majority of Ireland's aviation emissions, is not reported as part of national inventory. However, EPA figures identify that international aviation as resulting in 22% of carbon dioxide transport emissions equivalent to 0.64t CO₂ per capita ranking the fifth highest in the EU (EPA, 2020). Current approaches have been to offset either through commercial approaches by passengers or through the Emission Trading Systems (ETS) however these offsets are coming under increasing scrutiny with aviation expected to reduce total emissions in order to reach 2050 targets.

Conclusion

Significant investment is needed in the train and bus network with many infrastructure projects requiring a long repayment timeframe. However, given the need for rapid decarbonisation of the transport sector to meet the ambitious Climate Action Plan and the EU targets this investment is needed immediately.

Much of the work which must be carried out in terms of investment in the public transport network has been a direct result of prior political decisions to remove or restrict investment from key areas. This failure has led to a deficit that now must be overcome in a fast and politically challenging way. Macra na Feirme believe the challenge is something the government must face up to now before it is too late. Future generations will thank us for the work carried out now. We believe Ireland can be a world leader in reducing our carbon footprint and being an example to other countries.

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