

Active Travel  
COALITION



## Press statement on BusConnects Proposals

Embargoed until 2023- August 23<sup>rd</sup> 11am.

### Health Groups Call for Political Leadership on BusConnects, Not Scaremongering

BusConnects projects at risk of delays in Cork and Dublin.

An alliance of health, medical, environmental and sustainable transport advocates have joined forces to call for urgent implementation of BusConnects, the Government's plan to improve public transport and reduce carbon emissions in Ireland's major urban centres.

Members of the alliance include the Irish Heart Foundation, the Irish College of General Practitioners, Irish Doctors for the Environment, Royal College of Physicians, the Irish Pedestrian Network and Cyclist.ie, the national cycling advocacy network.

**Dr. Sean Owens of the Irish College of General Practitioners** said, "BusConnects will provide more reliable, punctual bus services, better footpath and crossing facilities for pedestrians, and joined-up bike lanes

across Dublin and other cities. Regular physical activity has been found to be one of the most sustainable ways of improving health. Designing a transport system that builds in some level of exercise, whether that be a 10 min walk at either end of a bus journey or a cycle to work or school, is the easiest way of achieving this. Active travel projects will have significant public health benefits and we need our public representatives to stand up and support them.”

At recent public meetings in Cork and Dublin, political support for BusConnects was lukewarm at best. Projects are at risk of being delayed or watered down unnecessarily. It is vital that public representatives give their full backing to these projects so that their many health, environmental and public realm benefits can be realised as quickly as possible.

Members of the Active Travel Coalition, established in 2021, share the goal of enabling people of all ages to have healthier choices in transport. Active travel is defined as any functional transport that involves physical exercise, such as walking or cycling, and includes the use of public transport.

BusConnects is a Government-led initiative to reorganise bus routes in five main cities and construct continuous bus lanes, connected cycle lanes and enhanced footpaths and crossings for pedestrians.

**Roisin Breen from the HSE’s Strategy and Research group** added that “Supporting healthy behaviours from childhood through to healthy ageing is a key pillar of the HSE Healthy Ireland Plan for 2023-27<sup>1</sup>. The plan calls for a shift towards a culture that places greater emphasis and value on prevention and keeping people well.

One of the key focus areas in the plan is on active living. BusConnects helps facilitate active living which will keep people healthier longer.

In addition The HSE Climate Action Strategy 2023-2050 includes action to enable transition to low carbon and active travel alternatives for people working in, visiting and using our services.”

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<sup>1</sup> [Healthy Ireland - HSE.ie](https://www.hse.ie/eng/ourwork/healthyireland/healthyirelandplan2023-27/)

Buses are the backbone of our public transport so supporting an expanded and more effective bus system makes sense. In Dublin for example, buses carry more passengers than car, rail or Luas. Major rail projects take many years just to obtain planning permission, and cost many times what a bus lane would.

“Ireland has a transport problem, but more specifically a car problem”, said **Dr. Colm Byrne, consultant geriatrician and member of Irish Doctors for the Environment**. “We rank only behind Cyprus as the most car-dependent country in the EU, with 76 per cent of people using a car as their daily transport, with even very short journeys done by car.”

According to **Mark Murphy, advocacy officer with the Irish Heart Foundation**, “30 minutes of moderate intensity activity, such as walking or cycling, five days a week, reduces your risk of developing heart disease and stroke, and contributes to overall improved levels of health”.

Cycling has immense pent-up demand, according to the Coalition, and cycle traffic would be greatly increased by BusConnects. “In Dublin, for example, roughly 25% of adults cycle one or more days per week. There is a further 21% who would cycle if they felt safer. The #1 reason given by people for not cycling is fear of sharing road space with motor traffic<sup>2</sup>. With safe segregated cycling infrastructure therefore, we could almost double the numbers of adults cycling in Dublin. This is to not even consider the potential for growth in schoolkids cycling to school. Cycling can be an option for almost everyone if we design for it correctly. Segregated bike lanes will be delivered alongside the improved bus routes as part of BusConnects,” said **David Timoney of Cyclist.ie**.

Air pollution improvements, reduced congestion and addressing our carbon reduction commitments were cited by the Coalition as ‘co-benefits’ that improved bus, pedestrian and cycling facilities would bring. However the Coalition pointed out some issues with the plans. “We’re aware of weaknesses in the designs, and we do acknowledge that the loss of private garden space and the inconvenience of losing habitual car park spaces are difficult for those affected,” said Timoney, “but we are convinced that BusConnects will bring such major benefits to the public good – improvements in peoples’ cardiovascular and

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<sup>2</sup> [Walking and Cycling Index 2021 - National Transport](#)

respiratory health, even their sense of general wellbeing – that any losses will be far outweighed by the gains”.

## **Ends**

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