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The Liberties,
Dublin 8.

An Taoiseach Leo Varadkar, T.D.,
Department of the Taoiseach,
Government Buildings,
Merrion Street Upper,
Dublin 2.

9th April 2019

Active Travel, Health and Climate Action Plan

The optimal way to meet the objectives of *Get Ireland Active* is to incorporate active travel measures into the forthcoming Climate Action Plan.

An Open Letter to An Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar and Ministers Shane Ross (Transport), Richard Bruton (Climate Change), Simon Harris (Health) and Minister of State Catherine Byrne (Health)

Dear Taoiseach,

As you are aware your Government is mandated by the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015 to produce a series of Climate Mitigation Plans with the aim of achieving the national objective of transition to a competitive, low carbon, climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by 2050. A new Climate

Action plan is due to be published shortly. Serendipitously *The National Physical Activity Plan 2016 Get Ireland Active* is also due for review this year.

Cyclist.ie, the Irish Cycling Advocacy Network, together with the Irish Heart Foundation, the Irish Cancer Society, Diabetes Ireland, Irish Doctors for the Environment, the Association for Health Promotion Ireland and the Irish Pedestrian Network is writing to request that your Government ensures **that concrete measures to facilitate active travel will form an integral part of the Climate Action Plan.** The Government now has a golden opportunity for joined-up action. By growing active travel, you can support climate action by reducing transport emissions and at the same time help to achieve the objectives of *The National Physical Activity Plan* and the *National Cycling Policy Framework (NCPF) (2009)* that sets a target of 10% of commuting trips made by bicycle by 2020.

We are aware that the Climate Action Plan is the responsibility of the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, the transport aspects will be overseen by the Minister for Transport and the health aspects by the Minister for Health.

However, the Climate Action Plan will be a whole of Government one and, as a **qualified medical doctor, and a former Minister for both Health and Transport,** you, Taoiseach, are in a unique position to appreciate the links between active transport, physical activity and health. You will be aware that the Department of Transport along with the Department of Health is co-responsible for *The National Physical Activity Plan, Get Ireland Active*. The Plan was jointly published and launched by both Departments and is overseen by an inter-departmental working group.

Get Ireland Active lists 5 guiding principles for its work, the first of which is: ***Creating increased opportunities for people to be active in ways which fit in to everyday lives and which suits individual needs, circumstances and interests.***

Action Area 4 of the Plan, *Environment*, states: ***Promoting walking and cycling as modes of travel has benefits for air quality and reducing CO₂ emissions, it***

reduces traffic congestion and noise pollution and can make better use of land.

Action Area 4 lists 5 actions (Numbers 31 to 35) around the built environment which would enable physical activity. These include walking and cycling strategies, cycle routes and footpaths and the planning, development and design of towns and cities.

However, despite the clear awareness shown in the *The National Physical Activity Plan, Get Ireland Active*, of the link between physical activity and the built environment, the Annual Transition Statement 2018 provided in accordance with the *National Mitigation Plan* does not acknowledge that walking and cycling are valid means of transport related climate action.

Some progress has been made in the 3-year period since the launch of The National Physical Activity Plan. Local authorities provide recreational infrastructure such as walking trails and outdoor gyms and Local Sports Partnerships offer varied and inclusive classes and courses. However, these activities are an “**extra**”, something to be fitted in as an **add-on** to our everyday lives rather than being an integral part of it.

On the other hand, active travel measures offer people the opportunity to integrate physical activity into their day-to-day lives by walking or cycling to work, school, college, to shopping and social activities. The role of everyday active travel in helping to improve the overall health of society has been well documented and in fact research has progressed to such an extent that the World Health Organisation (WHO) has developed a practical tool to assess the health and economic benefits of active travel projects. This tool is known as the [Health Economic Assessment Tool](#) (HEAT). It is widely used throughout Europe but has not as yet been used publicly here in Ireland in the assessment of projects. In general, active travel based projects give a much higher rate of return on investment than other transport projects, as the health benefits can be very large. The present Bus Connects project, which has major cycle route additions, is a prime example of where it should and could be used effectively.

To date limited progress has been made in the area of everyday active travel because of the failure to prioritise investment in high-quality safe infrastructure for walking and cycling, failure to set up a dedicated National Cycling Office in the Department of Transport and failure to invest in safety for people walking and cycling. In essence, failure to implement a fundamental re-ordering of the hierarchy of urban transport so as to prioritise pedestrians, cyclists and public transport, in that order, as recommended in the Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (DMURS).

In addition, there have been inordinate delays in delivering on major cycling and walking infrastructure projects such as the Greater Dublin Cycle Network and similar networks in our other large cities and towns.

The Government has acknowledged that Ireland is failing to meet its emissions targets and has pledged that its new plan will be more ambitious.

Enabling walking and cycling can, and should, play a major part in realising this ambition while at the same time meeting our physical activity targets. It is evident from the data provided by the Annual Healthy Ireland Surveys that, as a nation, we are not meeting the current adult recommended minimum target of 150 minutes of physical activity per week. Successive Healthy Surveys asked questions regarding the levels of physical activity. Their findings from 2015-17 should be a matter of huge concern to Government as there is overwhelming evidence that lack of physical activity is a contributory cause in a host of debilitating chronic illnesses, including heart-disease, stroke, some cancers and diabetes. The bodies supporting this letter have made the following statements:

The Irish Heart Foundation

Regular physical activity is key to achieving a healthy life, whether you are a patient or not. Higher levels of sedentary behaviour are associated with 147 per cent increase in the risk of heart disease and stroke while Ireland's child obesity crisis means eight-year olds are showing the signs of heart disease previously only shown in middle age. Active living, through integrating physical activity into daily routines, and active travel are instrumental to redressing increasing rates of chronic disease in the community

and positively influencing health inequalities. Policy intervention to increase active travel presents a major opportunity to make the healthy choice the easy choice whilst simultaneously improving the environment. By merging active travel measures with climate targets, there is considerable scope to replace car journeys with walking and cycling to bring about a range of benefits for health and climate change.

Diabetes Ireland

Diabetes Ireland encourages regular physical activity to reduce the risk of developing prediabetes or Type 2 diabetes and to more effectively manage diagnosed diabetes. Obesity is the greatest risk factor for Type 2 diabetes and cycling has the potential to minimise weight gain in the first place and even contribute to weight loss where necessary.

The Irish Cancer Society

- *Physical activity reduces your cancer risk.*
- *There is clear evidence to tell us that physical activity and exercise can reduce your risk of breast, bowel and womb cancer. It may also help prevent lung cancer.*
- *Polluted air is linked to lung cancer. Some pollution is caused by car emissions. In 2013, outdoor air pollution was identified as a cause of cancer by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC). Decreasing reliance on cars could help increase the quality of the air and therefore reduce cancer risk.*
- *And physical activity does not just reduce your risk of cancer. There are many other benefits and it is one of the most important things you can do for your health.*

Irish Doctors for the Environment (IDE)

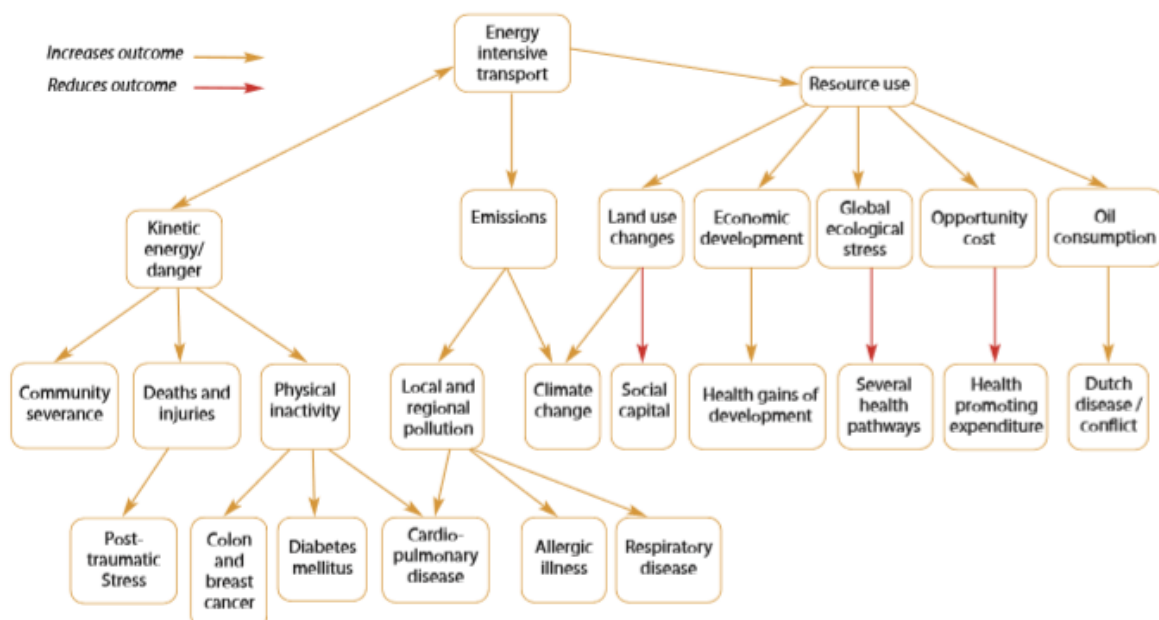
Our organization believe it is in society's best interests in protecting our future by promoting active travel and its co-benefits to both the environment and health.

Active travel (including walking, cycling and public transport) provides us with a great opportunity to tackle Ireland’s growing public health issue of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and obesity, a growing area of concern as 11% of premature deaths in Ireland result from the 4 main NCDs (stroke, ischaemic heart disease, chronic obstructive lung disease and diabetes) as predicted by WHO in 2014. As an association of Irish Non-consultant Hospital Doctors (NCHD) at IDE, we have included active travel as one of our motions put forth to the Irish Medical Organisation in support of increased investment in cycling and walking to 20% of the transport budget, in line with achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 3, 7, 11 and 13 on air quality benefits, climate change mitigation alongside the co-benefits of active travel outlined above.

Association for Health Promotion Ireland (AHPI)

In 2011 the Institute of Public Health in Ireland looked at the issue of active travel and health in its report *Active travel - healthy lives*. The report describes the many health benefits of active travel and reproduces a table from “The Lancet” illustrating the health risks of car travel - see Figure 1.

Figure 1: Health risks associated with car travel [20].



We urge you, therefore, Taoiseach to pledge that active travel targets will be embedded in the Health and Transport sections of the forthcoming Climate Action Plan and link clearly into the ‘All of Government’ approach being developed.

It is crucial that the Departments of Climate Action, Transport and Health work together so that the “**Revolution**” promised by the Minister for Communications Climate Action and Environment will result in active travel becoming a realistic and safe way for citizens to engage in vital everyday healthy physical activity while at the same time reducing their transport emissions.

Yours sincerely,



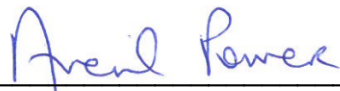
Colm Ryder

Chairperson: Cyclist.ie (Tel: 087 237 6130)



Tim Collins

CEO: Irish Heart Foundation



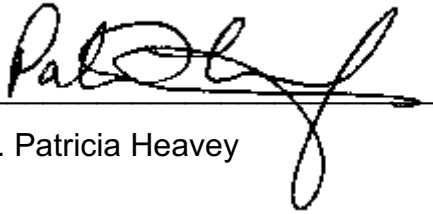
Averil Power

CE Irish Cancer Society



Kieran O' Leary

CEO Diabetes Ireland



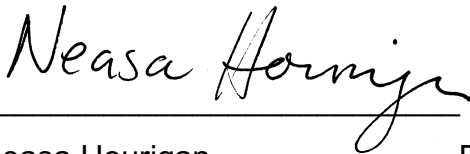
Dr. Patricia Heavey

Chair Association for Health Promotion Ireland



Aoife Kirk

Co-founder: Irish Doctors for the Environment



Neasa Hourigan

Founder: Irish Pedestrian Network



Donal O'Shea

Professor Donal O'Shea HSE Clinical Lead
Obesity, Honorary President Cyclist.ie

Appendix 1

Healthy Ireland and CSO data showing necessity and feasibility of enabling active travel

Exercise Deficit indicated by Healthy Ireland Surveys: Many people already integrate exercise into their daily lives but the results from Healthy Ireland's Annual Surveys indicate that as a nation we do not meet physical activity guidelines i.e. a minimum of 150 minutes a week for adults.

- The 2015 Survey stated that two thirds of respondents were not getting enough exercise.
- In 2016 the survey revealed that the most common change that people would like to make is to be more physically active (40 %).
- The most common reason for not participating in more activity was being too busy (43%).
- 64% of respondents were aware of the recommendation to engage in physical activity for a minimum of 150 minutes a week. However, only 32% engaged in enough physical activity.

The 2017 Healthy Ireland Survey found that

- Only 37% of those travelling between one and three kilometres were using an active form of travel,
- Only 19% of those travelling between three and five kilometres did so in an active way.

The CSO National Travel Survey for 2016 shows

- 74% of journeys nationally being made by car
- 26% of all journeys nationally were less than 2 km, and
- 57% were 8 km or less.

Appendix 2

Measures to enable active travel

Enabling walking and cycling will require a fundamental rethink of how road space is allocated. The changes that are needed to enable cycling for all ages have already been covered in Cyclist.ie's Budget Submission 2019 and in meetings with Department of Transport Tourism & Sport (DTTaS) and the National Transport Authority (NTA). They include -

- **Provision of High-Quality Segregated Infrastructure in cities, towns and villages**
- Adherence to the Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets as minimum standard
- Bike Parking at Transport Hubs/Public Buildings/Major Events
- Appointment of National Cycling Officer in DTTaS at senior level to drive increased cycling
- Appointment of Cycling Officers to Local Authorities
- National junctions audit
- Integration of cycling with public transport so as to encourage multi-modal travel
- Maintenance budget for cycling infrastructure
- Free access to cycle training in all primary and secondary schools
- Training also to be made widely available to adults including Third Level students
- Cycle safety must become a core part of the driving test, particularly for HGV and Public Service Vehicle drivers
- All taxi drivers to undergo European Certificate of Professional Competence (CPC) standard certification
- An upskilling of An Garda Síochána so that the Traffic Corps (TC) better understands cycling
- Introduction of cycle friendly legislative initiatives to promote growth of cycling, including contra-flow cycling, left turn at red lights, and joint use of pedestrian crossings
- Resourcing and training of Garda in cycle related legislation and increased enforcement to support safer cycling
- Increasing the monetary fines for FCNs for vehicle infringements of cycling related incidences such as parking illegally in cycle tracks, or dangerous overtaking.

Appendix 3

Publications referenced

Transport sections of the following Publications re National Mitigation Plan -

<https://www.dccae.gov.ie/en-ie/climate-action/publications/Documents/15/Annual%20Transition%20Statement%202018%20Final%20031218%20w%20Cover.pdf>

<https://www.dccae.gov.ie/en-ie/climate-action/publications/Documents/15/Update%20Report%20on%20National%20Mitigation%20Plan%20Actions%20Final%20031218.pdf>

<https://www.dccae.gov.ie/en-ie/climate-action/publications/Documents/15/Update%20Report%20on%20the%20National%20Mitigation%20Plan%20Measures%20Final%20031218.pdf>

<https://www.dccae.gov.ie/en-ie/climate-action/publications/Documents/15/Update%20Report%20on%20Sectoral%20Adaptation%20Plans%20Final%20031218.pdf>

National Physical Activity Plan

<http://www.dttas.ie/press-releases/2016/ireland%E2%80%99s-first-ever-national-physical-activity-plan-launched-govt>

<http://www.dttas.ie/sites/default/files/press-releases/get-ireland-active-national-physical-activity-plan.pdf>

Healthy Ireland Surveys

<http://www.healthyireland.ie/accessibility/healthy-ireland-survey/>

<https://www.publichealth.ie/files/file/Active%20travel/Active%20travel%20-%20healthy%20lives.pdf>

Health Research/Promotion:

<https://irishheart.ie/your-health/ways-to-live-better/be-active/>
<https://www.cancer.ie/reduce-your-risk/healthy-lifestyle/be-active/physical-activity-and-cancer#sthash.4G9HA1fK.dpbs>

<https://www.diabetes.ie/living-with-diabetes/are-you-at-risk/>