

**Social
Democrats**

Safer Cycling

For Healthier, Greener Communities

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Introduction

Successive Irish governments have focussed on **moving cars, rather than people** as their transport policy. This has led to our capital city being one of the most congested in the world and many other towns and cities not faring much better.

We have severe urban sprawl with poorly planned car-dependent communities, and little or no consideration of other modes of transport, in particular cycling which is just not safe in too many places.

Ireland is **far behind much of Europe in terms of cycling infrastructure and approach**. The Social Democrats recognise that cycling is a major transport area that can contribute hugely to society. Whilst there has been a recent Government effort to improve active travel infrastructure, progress has been slow and has not been sufficiently ambitious.

The benefits of cycling are enormous. **And everyone, cyclist or not, gains**. With more cycling, we get:

- Less pollution and less congestion.
- Healthier lifestyles and a more active population.
- Better mobility and quicker commuting times.
- Safer streets and more liveable neighbourhoods.
- The possibility of 15 Minute Cities and Communities that residents want to stay and spend time in.

Cycling saves time, saves money, and saves lives.

With all these benefits, it remains a **mystery why official Ireland has been so slow to promote cycling** or indeed to catch up with the very significant public demand for safer cycling routes. A prime example of lack of prioritisation is the Liffey Cycle route, where a segregated route was originally planned to be in place by 2017 and won't be finished until this year (2024).

The Social Democrats are determined to change this.

Already, our representatives across the country have been championing the cause of cycling, from our work in support of the **Baldoyle to Portmarnock Cycleway** in Dublin to the **Naas Greenway** in Kildare to the **Cycle Bus Initiative**

in Galway and Active Travel Routes in Dun Laoghaire. We want to build on this work and put cycling right at the heart of what public bodies do.

If we are to take cycling to the next level, then we need to accept that something has to give. The current way of thinking is just not sustainable.

Cities like Copenhagen and Amsterdam see a huge number of daily journeys made by bicycle. This did not happen by accident or due to cultural differences. Copenhagen, for example, was choked with car traffic until the 1970s when deliberate policy decisions were made to prioritise cycling. We're not reinventing the (bicycle) wheel here – we want to follow Copenhagen's leadership.

The objective of this Social Democrats policy is to capture all of the benefits of cycling by investing far more time, money and public attention in cycling.

We want to make cycling a realistic alternative to the car and encourage more people to take up cycling as a normal part of their everyday lives. The Social Democrats are committed to achieving a target of 30 per cent cycling for commuting traffic in Urban areas.

To do this, we want to significantly raise the share of funding cycling gets and to change the way in which we approach road design, cycling safety, enforcement of road traffic law and much more besides. Our 12 Point Plan for Cycling includes:

- Increased Funding for Cycling
- Proper Segregation, for Safer Cycling
- Improved Cycling Infrastructure
- More Cycling Greenways
- Urban Bike Schemes
- Safer School Trips
- Better Enforcement
- Revision of Cycling Incentive Schemes

Our 12 Point Plan for Cycling

Increased Funding for Cycling

We are committed to **maintaining the recent increase of cycling funding to 10 per cent** of the Land Transport Budget and **in the medium term, increasing funding so that 15 per cent of the Transport Capital Budget is spent on cycling and walking.**

Both current and capital funding are critical to the expansion of cycling.

Proper Segregation for Safe Cycling

The first priority of extra funding for cycling should be the **implementation of the Cycle Connects Network** and the GDA Cycle Network Plan so that cyclists are as safe as possible.

We are committed to planning for sustained improvements in the years ahead so that **everyone can feel safe when cycling.**

As a general rule, if the cycle network does not **adhere to the Hierarchy of Road Users**, then it fails to meet the required standard.

In the interim and where cycle lanes can't be segregated, we favour the **programming of traffic lights so that cyclists can get a head start.**

We would examine the possible **reduction of local road speeds to 30kph**, a speed which greatly reduces the chance of fatality in an incident compared to, for example, 60kph.

We favour greater use of segregated contra flow cycle lanes.

Improved Cycling Infrastructure

We will invest in bicycle **parking infrastructure, particularly at transport hubs.**

We will increase **the bike storage capacity on our public transport rolling stock** as it is updated, to ensure that cyclists can bring bikes on buses and trains to facilitate more bike commuting from suburbs and across the country. Where possible, the costs to such commuters for this service should be minimised or removed completely.

We will increase funding for the **maintenance of cycle lanes** at a local level.

We will improve road designs so that roundabouts are less hazardous, so that hostile junctions are redesigned and manhole covers, drains and other potential hazards are appropriately positioned.

We will ensure that all road upgrades and new roads comply with best practice road safety standards and the Hierarchy of Road Users is respected.

At the local Council level, we will ensure that **Cycle Connects and the GDA Cycle Network plan are prioritised as part of each local authority's development plan process.**

We will further ensure that cycling is a central provision in each Local Area Plan, Strategic Development Zone and Master Development plan for individual sites. It is our aim to increase transport connectivity between modes of transport by funding more Bike and Ride facilities adjacent to large towns and cities.

Cycling Greenways

We welcome the publication and roll out of the *Code of Best - Practice National and Regional Greenways*.

We are committed to **investing heavily in additional greenways and cycling routes** to further promote **cycling as a family-friendly pursuit** and as a means of encouraging people of all ages and abilities to get on their bikes and make cycling a way of life.

This should also **help boost tourism and local economies** in the areas where Greenways are built. We are delighted to see the success of some existing routes – however, we believe existing greenways could be better marketed than at present, and better route information on issues such as gradient, rest points, unsegregated sections etc could boost participation even further.

We must challenge the culture of objections to such developments, particularly where these objections appear to emanate from a desire for personal convenience, the continuation of car-centric culture, or financial gain.

Cycling Incentive Schemes

We want to **make the Bike to Work Scheme more inclusive** with a complementary grant scheme focusing on those outside the workforce, with specific supports for people with disabilities to adapt bikes to their use.

We will improve the Bike to Work Scheme rate to €1,500 and look to expand this scheme to **better support electric and cargo bikes**.

We will also review the scheme to examine how it could support the self-employed and those not currently in the tax net.

We believe the definition of ‘eligible equipment’ under the Bike to Work Scheme should be expanded to include child seats and trailers designed to safely carry children.

At local level, we would aim to create a bike library in each local authority, lending ebikes and cargo bikes for up to one month. This could be managed as part of Active Travel teams in county and city councils.

Urban Bike Schemes

We will **connect the numerous urban bike schemes** and bring them under the umbrella of the NTA and expand the scheme in as many large urban areas as is feasible.

We are not satisfied that the current management of existing schemes is maximising usage in certain areas and we believe that usage could be improved with enhanced maintenance and better locations reflective of where people are more likely to use them.

We would also like to see the docked bicycle schemes expanded to include eBikes, to greater incentive use within the community.

Safer School Trips

Every child should have a **safe route to school**.

We will continue to promote cycling as the **optimum mode of transport for children travelling to school**.

We acknowledge the good work of the Safe Routes to Schools (SRTS) Programme in relation to active travel and we will seek to build on this.

We will work to provide safe walking and cycling paths around every school in the country, so that those children who choose to walk, scoot or cycle to school can do so safely.

We will continue to support the **cycle bus initiative**, such as the highly successful **Galway Cycle Bus**, and seek to emulate it right across the country. Funding should be prioritised for community initiatives such as those that promote active travel to schools.

We will adopt a **new national strategy on the weight of school bags** to further encourage young children to cycle to school.

Better Enforcement

We will strongly advocate for the **proper enforcement of new laws that protect cyclists**, including dangerous overtaking.

We will examine other laws that might be necessary and expand the range of urban areas covered by 30km/h speed limits.

We will set aside funding for proper Garda enforcement as it applies to cyclists – especially the issues of illegal parking in cycle lanes, the ongoing high rates of bike theft, and indeed the issue of dangerous cycling itself.

We will **create an online platform for cyclists to report and upload footage** for An Garda Síochána of dangerous behaviour, intimidation or incidents from bicycle and helmet mounted cameras.

Local Cycling Officers

We will ensure that each local Council is covered by at least one cycling officer to help promote, educate and progress cycling initiatives at local level.

Our Councillors will also lobby so that the filling of any vacancies of pedestrian and cycling officers are prioritised within the Council's recruitment process.

Cycling Governance

We will ensure that there is a **fully resourced unit within the Department of Transport dedicated solely to cycling**, and that it acts as a champion and guardian of cycling interests.

The current Sustainable Transport Unit is too small and does not have enough clout within the Department. We will appoint a **National Cycling Officer** to lead this unit and ensure that there is full transparency on how much public money is actually spent on cycling.

Cycling Training

We will expand **cycling training for primary and secondary school children** and ensure that cycling safety forms a larger part of driver training.

We will create a free-to-access online **National Cycle Training platform** with guidance, advice, educational videos and animations so that all students and teachers can access safe-cycling information.

Data Collection and Cycling Audits

We will expand data collection on cycling nationwide.

This will include live traffic volume monitors on major arterial roads, bike-share usage, and reported incidents.

This will help ascertain trends and inform policy on safety issues for cyclists in relation to cars, buses, trams, pedestrians, drains, manhole covers, lack of lights and lack of visibility.

The **quality of cycling provision should be audited annually** by each local Council with details of trends in fatalities, injuries and particular blackspots, such as tramlines or certain junctions, reported on.

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