

**Social
Democrats**

Transport

Accessible, Sustainable, Efficient

For the Future
It Starts Here

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Contents

Key Points	1
Introduction.....	2
Public Transport.....	4
Rural Transport.....	7
Road Transport	8
Active Travel	9
Aviation	10
Maritime Travel	11
Accessibility	13

Key Points

In Government, the Social Democrats will:

- Adhere to the Hierarchy of Road Users, when developing transport policy.
- Create a new National Transport Policing Unit to police mainland rail services, DART and Bus services and stations.
- Ringfence a minimum of 15 per cent of the total transport capital budget for the development of walking and cycling infrastructure all over Ireland.
- Continue to improve the affordability of public transport fares. We will introduce a €1 fare, valid at off-peak times, to incentivise public transport use and help deal with capacity constraints.
- Treat public transport as a public good, opposing the increased privatisation of services.
- Commit to developing major National Development Plan transport projects, including MetroLink, and DART expansions (including DART Underground), and the Cork Commuter Rail project, as well as light rail projects in other cities.
- Double funding to Local Link to increase availability, provide further local and circular routes servicing towns and villages, and ensure the fleet is in line with climate commitments.
- Support the findings of the All Island Rail Review, including the development of the Western Rail Corridor.
- Begin moving towards a proper 24-hour public transport system.
- Establish directly elected mayors in our major cities who will take responsibility for transport planning, with consideration given to overall catchment areas and not just the mayor's specific jurisdiction.
- Pursue the decarbonisation of transport through a significant modal shift from private car use to public transport and active travel.
- Support the principle that 'the polluter pays', and implement environmentally motivated fiscal measures according to the respective negative externalities of different transport modes.

Introduction

One of the starkest differences between Ireland and other European countries is our poor public transport system. Under successive Irish Governments, one abandoned or delayed public transport plan has followed another. Transport policy has focussed on moving cars, not moving people.

The failure of successive Governments to properly plan, fund and deliver public transport programmes means that each of us live daily with the consequences. We have little rural public transport of which to speak. Our capital city is one of the most congested in the world, and many of our other towns and cities are not much better.

The result is that we have created severe urban sprawl with poorly planned car-dependent communities. Our rail network is sparse. Cycling is not safe. Pedestrians are only rarely considered. Air pollution is unacceptably high. We continue to incentivise the most environmentally damaging forms of transport and leave people with very few options to reduce their carbon footprint.

The objective of this document is to outline our strategic priorities over the next decade on the allocation of state funding, taxation and regulation. It offers guidance on the Party's investment priorities for delivery across the main transport modes, taking account of the National Development Plan, the Greater Dublin Area Transport Strategy, and other regional strategies like the Galway Transport Strategy and the Cork Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy 2040.

The policy is informed by the core tradition of social democracy; ensuring that our national resources and collective efforts are marshalled to the benefit of society as a whole rather than the individual.

Our transport system plays a vital role in the economy as a driver and facilitator of trade, commerce and tourism, and we will ensure that policies will safeguard the cost-effective, efficient and competitive movement of goods and people to protect our position as an open economy which is heavily reliant on international trade and tourism.

Expansion of our transport infrastructure should be planned and balanced in line with our goals of becoming a climate neutral economy by 2050. Transport policy will play a crucial role in the successful delivery of a better more sustainable

future for all our citizens. The transport sector was the source of around 19 per cent of the country's emissions in 2022 is also a major driver of energy demand.

In Government, we will balance the competing demands of decarbonisation against the delivery of an efficient, effective and safe transport system which facilitates the movement of goods and people. Transport policy and planning cannot be viewed in isolation. A more sustainable transport ecosystem must be articulated in conjunction with energy policy and land use planning.

Our Policy is grounded on three core pillars:

- Climate Transformer – Public Transport as a key part of the transition to a carbon-neutral society.
- Social Transformer – Public Transport as a Universal Basic Service; a public good delivered as a public service, rather than something to be privatised and run for profit.
- Economic Driver – Public Transport as a pillar to enhance our national and international infrastructure and capacity.

We will also adequately resource state and semi-state agencies and local authorities who have responsibilities for governance, planning and environmental protection to monitor compliance among transport providers and operators in the public and private sector.

We also acknowledge the need to support the implementation of the broad priorities for transport in the National Development Plan Investment Areas that are in-keeping with a more sustainable and accessible Transport system: Compact Growth, Enhanced Regional Accessibility, Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities, Sustainable Mobility, A Strong Economy, supported by Enterprise, Innovation and Skills, and High Quality International Connectivity.

Public Transport

A more sustainable transport system for Ireland must mean an increase in public transport use, combined with a decoupling of our high dependency on cars. This will be central to Ireland's transition to a climate neutral economy by 2050, not to mention central to improving the liveability of our towns and cities, and the country more broadly.

We support the principles outlined in the National Development Plan 2021-2030 and its commitment to transition to a low-carbon, climate-resilient society through encouraging a significant modal shift from private car use to public transport and active travel.

Public transport is a public good. The Social Democrats aim to keep it that way. In Government we will oppose attempts to further privatise the public transport system. We will also insist on high-standard services from all operators. Public bus routes can only be sustained if they provide a reliable service that people can depend on.

We are also keen to see a vast improvement in accessibility for older people and disabled people (see Page 14).

Local Link is vital for rural Ireland but also for the overall sustainability of our public transport system. It helps alleviate rural and urban isolation, particularly for older members of our communities who may no longer be able to drive themselves.

Current funding is completely insufficient to develop a strong and reliable Local Link network. The Social Democrats would immediately double funding for Rural Link and seek to improve this over time.

As a guiding principle, in government we will recognise the broader economic and societal benefits of a well-funded, reliable and regular public transport system in areas such as climate action, rural connectivity, tackling rural deprivation, and supporting the labour market and working parents.

In Government we will commit to the necessary investment in public transport infrastructure, networks, systems and services to facilitate the transition we need to see.

In Government, the Social Democrats will:

- Continue to improve the affordability of public transport fares. We will introduce a €1 fare, valid at off-peak times, to incentivise public transport use and help deal with capacity constraints.
- Fund the expansion of the '90 Minute Fare' (increasing the time limit to 120 minutes) and rolling it out for cities away from the capital.
- Treat public transport as a public good, opposing the increased privatisation of services.
- Double funding to Local Link to increase availability, provide further local and circular routes servicing towns and villages, and ensure the fleet is in line with climate commitments.
- Commit to developing major National Development Plan transport projects, including MetroLink, and DART expansions (including DART Underground), and the Cork Commuter Rail project, as well as light rail projects in other cities.
- Acknowledge the huge population growth in Dublin's commuter belt has not been matched by sufficient investment in rail and bus services, change that, including by expanding the DART Sout West project to Newbridge and expanding DART West to Enfield.
- Continue the rollout of Bus Connects in Cork, Dublin, Galway, Limerick and Waterford.

We support the improvements envisaged by Bus Connects. Notwithstanding this, there are numerous issues that must be worked through with local communities.

- Re-examine current plans for MetroLink, including commissioning an independent study on continuing the line to southwest Dublin.
- Support the findings of the All Island Rail Review, including the development of the Western Rail Corridor.
- Invest in our rail infrastructure to increase maximum speeds on rail lines, particularly between our main cities.
- Ring-fence funding for the purchase of new buses to expand capacity on Ireland's public transport network, and invest in the transition to a low- or zero-emission public bus fleet.
- Begin moving towards a proper 24-hour public transport system.

- Provide funding for additional Mobility Hub pilots in addition to those four already being rolled out in Dublin, Galway, Sligo and Donegal.
- Create a new National Transport Policing Unit to police mainland rail services, Luas, DART and Bus services and stations.
- Support the upgrade of the cross-border Enterprise rail service, to include the introduction of an hourly service, a reduction in journey time, and ultimately the electrification of the Belfast/Dublin line.
- Continue to invest in Public Service Obligation (PSO) funding for Public Transport with support for discounted fares.

Rural Transport

The lack of an accessible, reliable and integrated rural transport system is one of the key challenges facing people living in rural areas. People rely heavily on private cars to avail of employment opportunities and public services like healthcare and education, as well as recreational activities.

The failure of successive governments to properly plan, fund and deliver a public transport programme that takes into account the realities of life in rural communities means we have little rural public transport of which to speak. The situation has a particular impact on people on low incomes, those with a disability, or the elderly, who may not have access to a car and therefore depend on public transport.

Offering real connectivity to rural Ireland requires innovative, locally-driven approaches. Local Link is welcome, and is vital to rural communities. It supports independence for our elderly, helps reduce traffic and travel time for parents, and encourages people to shop locally, but does not have sufficient reach or ambition. Current funding is completely insufficient.

In Government, the Social Democrats will:

- Double funding for Local Link over the course of a Government term.
- Invest to make public transport fares more affordable.
- Support the findings of the All Island Rail Review, including the development of the Western Rail Corridor.
- Fund the return and upgrade of bus-stops on rural routes, and invest in bus-tracking software to improve user interface and accessibility.
- Develop a subsidised Local Area Hackney Scheme in designated areas of rural Ireland which are too small or remote to support a full-time taxi or hackney service.
- Make school transport completely free, as part of our policy around fully free education, and build a comprehensive School Transport Scheme.

Road Transport

The Social Democrats are committed to a national roads network that facilitates a high degree of connectivity, with a particular focus on enabling our regional cities to become centres of appropriate scale and ensuring their growth is compact and sustainable.

Road transport and private car usage carry the most significant per person carbon footprint within the transport sector. Integral to meeting Ireland's obligation to achieve an emissions reduction of 51 per cent by 2030 will be a reduction in road transport emissions, which currently account for 70 per cent of total transport emissions.

Our Transport policy will balance the competing demands decarbonisation and delivering an efficient, effective and safe road transport system for cars, goods vehicles and buses.

In Government, the Social Democrats will:

- Support the TII's Project BRUCE (Better Road User Charging Evaluation) to help inform a future direction for road user charging, operation and maintenance.
- Support TII's National Roads 2040 (NR2040) actions targeted to facilitate prioritisation of public transport, walking, cycling and goods vehicles.
This includes the advancement of 'new transport and road technologies' aimed at incentivising and promoting quicker, easier and lower-carbon travel alternatives to fossil-fuelled vehicles.
- Support town planning changes, road pricing and congestion charges to advance the transition to zero/low emission engines and fuels for road transport users such as private cars, taxis, bus operators, commercial vehicles, heavy goods vehicles and work vehicles.
- Support local planning authorities to charge higher parking charges for larger engine cars and SUVs, taking account of the negative externalities such as road and pavement wear and tear, accidents and congestion.
- Expand Park & Ride facilities, enabling travellers to switch to sustainable modes, and review Vehicle Registration Tax (VRT) with a view to promoting smaller greener vehicles.
- Invest in average speed cameras, bus lane cameras, and red light cameras.

Active Travel

Encouraging active travel has multiple social benefits, including less traffic congestion, a healthier society, cleaner air and lower emissions levels, and more liveable neighbourhoods. We want to pursue the decarbonisation of transport through a significant modal shift towards public transport and active travel.

Ireland is far behind much of Europe in terms of cycling infrastructure and policy. Whilst there has been a recent Government effort to improve active travel infrastructure, progress has been slow and has not been sufficiently ambitious.

In Government, the Social Democrats will:

- Ringfence a minimum of 15 per cent of the total transport capital budget for the development of walking and cycling infrastructure all over Ireland, including networks within towns, and also in more rural areas of the country.
- Support the National Cycle Network plan which commits to 3,500km of safe bike corridors, connecting 2.8 million people in cities and towns, by 2040.
- Support the National Development Plan-proposed investment over the next five years which will target over 700km of improved walking and cycling infrastructure delivered across our five largest cities.
- Ensure every child has a safe route to walk/cycle to school.

We will support continued investment in the Safe Routes to School Programme which seeks to create safe walking and cycling routes within communities, to alleviate congestion at school gates and to increase the number of students who walk, scoot or cycle to school.

- Continue to support the cycle bus initiative, such as the highly successful Galway Cycle Bus, and seek to emulate it right across the country.

However, we acknowledge such initiatives would not be needed if proper cycling infrastructure was in place, and will work towards their obsolescence.

- Provide funding for the maintenance by Local Authorities of infrastructure delivered through Active Travel allocations.
- Ensure public realm design prioritises pedestrians, including by prioritising more accessible crossings, and ensuring pedestrian crossings give sufficient time for those using mobility aids to get across.

Much more information on our policies on Cycling can be found in our Cycling policy document.

Aviation

Ireland is a leading player in global aviation, and our aviation infrastructure plays a critical role in the Irish economy.

Aviation is a major driver of emissions growth, with emissions accounting for over 20 per cent of all transport emissions by transport mode in 2021, second only to road transport. Emissions at altitude are understood to have a greater effect on climate change than those at ground level.

With air traffic continuing to grow and with no practical alternative to kerosene-fuelled jet engines currently on the horizon, aviation emissions are set to continue to grow as well. As other sectors reduce emissions, aviation will become responsible for a larger proportion of emissions.

There are a number of Irish and European policies in place, offering the aviation sector a uniquely preferential tax environment, effectively subsidising the sector. This is a paradigm that needs to be challenged. We need to re-balance the demand for low-cost air travel against the damaging effects on the environment by ensuring that the pricing of actions which harm the environment reflects the cost of the resultant remediation.

In Government, the Social Democrats will:

- Ensure all new planning applications for expanded or new aviation infrastructure comply with Ireland's climate targets.
- Aim to foster a more diverse spread of air traffic into the country, with a focus on utilising unused capacity at regional airports, including Shannon, Cork, Waterford, and Ireland West.
- Lobby the EU Parliament to reverse the VAT exemption on airline tickets.
- Lobby the EU Parliament to reverse the tax exemption on aviation kerosene (AVTUR).

The tax-free status of aviation fuel effectively acts as a subsidy for the aviation industry, and should therefore be fully factored into economic analysis of the costs and impacts of the industry. Currently, the imposition of tax or excise duty by the Irish Government would be contrary to EU law.

- Support the construction of MetroLink proposal, which will reduce the 7,000+ daily car journeys towards Dublin Airport.

Maritime Travel

The maritime sector holds a key role within the economy as an important gateway for the movement of freight between Ireland and its trading partners. In addition to its role as an international gateway for imports and exports, the maritime sector is also an important facilitator of people travelling to and from Ireland.

We believe that the continuance of a thriving shipping sector, needs to be underpinned by the sustainable development of our ports and the reduction of pollution to air and sea caused by shipping.

Compared to other economic sectors, shipping is currently one of the most unregulated sources of pollution. Shipping fuel emits large quantities of sulphur and other pollutants, as well as greenhouse gases.

The characteristics of the shipping sector, global operations in trade, registration of ships in different countries — sometimes even in countries other than the owner company's country — and the fact that marine fuel can be bunkered in any location in the world makes environmental and other legislation a challenge. Like aviation, shipping is also subsidised as shipping fuel is exempt from taxation in EU Member States.

The philosophy of the European Green Deal is based on the idea that the polluter pays. Embedded in the Deal is a statement that “the price of transport must reflect the impact it has on the environment and on health. Fossil-fuel subsidies should end and, in the context of the revision of the Energy Taxation Directive, the Commission will look closely at the current tax exemptions including for aviation and maritime fuels and at how best to close any loopholes”.

Studies demonstrate that despite the existing regulatory framework to prevent marine litter from ships, discharges into the sea continue to occur. The cruise industry has long been under pressure to reduce environmental impacts ranging from waste disposal to air pollution, as well as high emissions.

As well as having limited capacity and expertise in monitoring and measuring pollution surface and marine pollutants, the resources and investment have not yet been allocated to the task. In other words, the Irish and EU legislation pertaining to the environmental health of rivers, lakes, groundwater and transitional (estuarine) and coastal waters are not being policed.

In Government, the Social Democrats will:

- Support planned infrastructural investment at Dublin Port to increase capacity.
This will be subject to the implementation of measures which mitigate any negative environmental impacts which do not comply with climate targets.
- Commit to the upkeep and maintenance of the Dublin Tunnel (originally known as the Port Tunnel) to facilitate the movement of goods vehicles between Dublin Port and the national road network and to facilitate access to the City Centre for public transport service vehicles, whilst also facilitating the 'strategic' movement of goods to and from Dublin City Centre, subject to appropriate vehicle size and time restrictions.
- Support the creation of a shuttle bus between Dublin Port and The Point Depot to facilitate the annual 1.7 million passengers using the port.
- Seek to phase out fossil-fuel subsidies and lobby for a revision of the Energy Taxation Directive, which exempts aviation and maritime fuel from tax.
- Work to make discarding of waste, fuel, and sewage directly into the ocean unlawful in Irish Territorial waters.
- Provide financial support to extend port reception facilities for waste and grey water from onboard toilets from merchant ships visiting Irish ports.
- Investigate grants for measures that help reduce loads of phosphorus and nitrogen to address the eutrophication of our Irish ports and coast and investigate financial support for projects that would achieve fast results, e.g. oxygenation of seabeds, reduction of sprat stocks.
- Resource the EPA with sufficient legislative and financial powers to monitor and enforce compliance with international and national shipping, and water quality environmental regulations.
- Resource The Marine Survey Office to enforce International Maritime Organisation (IMO) regulations.

Accessibility

It is critical that public transport policy is inclusive and takes account of the needs of different groups.

However, we have not always been good at it. For example, reviews of Bus Connects where it has been rolled out have been mixed, with it often leaving older people and those with mobility constraints without a service they can use. The system needs to be disability proofed, with improvements on the currently limited wheelchair space.

Policymakers should focus on the continued mainstreaming of public transport and the accessibility of each transport network to achieve a more inclusive and efficient transport policy for the whole of the population.

In Government, the Social Democrats will:

- Ensure the requirements of those with additional needs are to the fore when planning and implementing transport changes.
- Mandate consultation with Disabled Persons' Organisations (DPOs) at all stages of the development of transport strategies and new transport projects, whether led nationally or locally.
- Work to ensure the Design Manual of Urban and Rural Spaces (DMURS) is in line with the UNCRPD.

The DMURS document is the foremost reference piece for developers of urban and rural spaces and transport systems but it does need the contemporary application of the UNCRPD to ensure it is fully inclusive for planners and people from the very initial stages of the planning process.

- Invest in public transport to ensure it is more accessible for people with disabilities.

We will work to ensure that the purchase of inaccessible fleets (most problematic in relation to buses and coaches) is halted.

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