Limerick Chamber Submission on TUS Moylish to City Active Travel Scheme

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Limerick Chamber
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Introduction

Limerick Chamber would like to thank Limerick City and County Council (LCCC) for the opportunity to submit our views on the Part 8 - TUS Moylish to City Active Travel Scheme - Public Consultation.

Active travel will play a key role in achieving more sustainable ways of travelling, potentially helping relieve the congestion in this area through encouraging a modal shift but also adding to the health outcomes of residents. This proposed active travel way on a key access point into Limerick City is a welcome development. It is important that the standards are set high so that future projects, which will no doubt be rolled out from other key access points into Limerick City, will have a high-quality example to follow. Linking the TUS Moylish campus to Limerick City, along with the surrounding residential areas of Moyross, Cratloe Road, Caherdavin, Ballynanty, Mayorstone, Belfield and Thomondgate is another positive step in promoting active and sustainable transport methods across Limerick and will help to create cohesion and accessibility between one of Limerick's major third level campuses and the city centre through safe travel means. It should also help to create an active travel way between TUS and the University of Limerick's City Centre Campus.

Limerick Chamber fully supports the Part 8 - TUS Moylish to City Active Travel Scheme initiative. The recently revised Limerick Shannon Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy (LSMATS) draft gives Limerick and the greater Limerick Shannon Metropolitan Area (LSMA) the opportunity to achieve a more sustainable way of commuting, whether that be for work, school or social purposes. This scheme will help play a key role in achieving the necessary modal shift in type of travel by people. As well as feedback from our own members, Limerick Chamber received feedback from our own transport forum, which we also consulted on our recent submission on the revised LSMATS draft. Limerick Chamber congratulates LCCC on this scheme and looks forward to seeing it progress over the coming months and will offer support where possible.

Our submission, which takes into account Limerick Chamber member feedback, looks at national and international examples of best practice, as well as including recommendations to best support the proposed active travel scheme.

National / International Context

While the push for more sustainable and active methods of travel and transport are welcomed, it is important to look at successful initiatives already present nationally and internationally to understand what works, what approach is most appropriate for this active travel scheme and where such initiatives can expand and develop further going forward to continue the momentum that active travel will gain from such projects.

Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown (DLRCC):

In a national context, DLRCC are also conducting a Part 8 report for their own Active Travel Scheme. DLRCC have delivered a number of high-quality active travel infrastructure projects in recent years, reallocating space away from private car usage to cyclists, pedestrians and other users. In the summer of 2020, the council installed its "coastal mobility route" from Blackrock to Sandycove, where long sections of a one-way traffic system were introduced to accommodate the new cycle lane. Both the swift delivery time and the ambition shown in the reallocation of private vehicle space in favour of active and sustainable transport modes are things that should look to be replicated. Their focus on promoting a modal shift from private vehicles to more sustainable modes of transport including walking, cycling and public transport is the type of ambition that could be replicated in Mid-West focused active travel projects - like the TUS Moylish to Limerick City Active Travel scheme.

Cambridge, England:

Dutch roundabouts cater for the safety of both cyclists and pedestrians consisting of parallel crossings (cycle and pedestrian zebra crossings), allowing for a safer crossing. The system works by requiring approaching cars to give way to pedestrians waiting to cross and bicycles already making their way around the outer red ring of the cycle path. This piece of infrastructure both allows for safer access to active travel, while also reducing the speed at which private cars can operate. The idea stems from the Netherlands, but an example of an implementation of the roundabout elsewhere can be found in Cambridge. This is one the first of these roundabouts to be delivered outside of the Netherlands. With cycling being much more common in the Netherlands, lessons can be learned regarding what aspects may need to be adjusted for a city with a much smaller modal share of cyclists such as Limerick.

Scotland:

Cities who have a strong presence of active travel often can highlight their progress due to the implementation of monitors. This can be seen in cities such as Manchester, Zagreb, Copenhagen and across a range of cities in Scotland. These counters visually show one's contribution to the shift towards active travel while providing key data on the increase of cycling traffic. In 2020, Scotland introduced nine cycle counters along various active travel paths as part of its plans to increase all commuter journeys in the capital made by bicycle by 15%. The total counters across Scotland now total 60, with the available information being able to highlight the improvements in the average number of people cycling per day. For example, during the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, the average number of people cycling per day in Bathgate grew by 51% for the second half of March in 2020 versus the same time period in 2019. While these figures are skewed due to the spike in cycling over Covid-19 lockdowns, it still highlights the ability and use of these counters.

Limerick Chamber Recommendations

Limerick Chamber warmly welcomes the proposed active travel scheme, however, there are some details in the proposed plans that are important to ensuring a successful project and promoting the ambitions of the LSMATS.

Limerick Chamber recommends including an options analysis in any future active travel schemes / projects going forward. Ensuring transparency and efficiency around the preferred route for the projects will help clarify the decision-making process for the public. This was something that was carried out as part of the Part 8 Active Travel Scheme for the Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council (DLRCC) and was well received.

The proposed plan will be a key primary cycle and pedestrian access point into the city for Limerick City North. It is important that the highest standards are set to promote a modal shift to more active and sustainable methods of travel, in line with the objective identified in the revised LSMATS draft.

An area that Limerick Chamber has concerns over is the connectivity of the proposed cycle route to the city centre. If people are to be encouraged to engage in more forms of active and sustainable modes of transport such as cycling, then people need to have the option to complete a full journey to work, school, home or social activities without the inconvenience of the route ending prematurely and subsequently having to join motorised traffic. This cycle route must

Provide continuous cycling infrastructure from the starting point at TUS Moylish to the city centre. Not doing so will undermine its ability to deliver on its objectives and the objectives of LSMATS and won't add to the accessibility of Limerick City Centre. This particular area of concern comes into play at the entrance to Belfield Court and continues for the remainder of the route to the city centre i.e. Belfield Court, Belfield Gardens (and intersection with the Ennis Road) and Sarsfield Bridge / Street.

Bicycle Recommondations

This active travel scheme presents the opportunity to deliver a high-quality piece of active travel infrastructure in tandem with other sustainable transport options. To ensure the progress of any achieved momentum in the modal shift to these types of travel, any plans should be set in a way in which future active transport schemes can be linked together with relative ease. Creating a convenient form of active travel rather than separated and sectioned off routes will help entice people to engage with these types of travel and use them for regular and daily activities such as work, school and sport / social events.

The option to introduce bi-directional cycle lanes should also be investigated for this active travel scheme. The level of efficiency that this system for cyclists and other forms of active and sustainable travel users could provide may be beneficial along this route. This option can sometimes provide safer options for road crossings and overtaking along the path. For example, a scenario where a faster e-scooter user is travelling behind a cyclist in a single lane route could potentially be quite dangerous should they try to overtake them. Limerick Chamber recommends investigating the efficiency of the proposed cycle route, keeping alternative options which may be more beneficial and safer for users in mind.

Across the scheme, differentiating the colour of cycle lanes from the main road should also be considered. Not only will it add to the area in terms of vibrancy and colour but will create a separation away from the main road to prevent vehicles using it for parking / set down areas. This will visually separate drivers and cyclists, highlighting where they should be on the road. While paint won't be the sole factor in preventing accidents, drivers may consciously drive at a safer distance to bicycles when there is a segregated, painted route rather than when sharing the main road. It can also help pedestrians differentiate between the 2 paths and help deter them from walking on the cycle route and avoiding accidental collisions. It is also important with painted routes that they provide the appropriate traction required by bicycles and are a non-slip surface.

The proposed plans also include a development in the Belfield area. The revitalisation effect that the proposed active travel scheme will have on this area is much welcomed, with improvements to the road surface and the overall vibrancy of the place expected. However, a concern that Limerick Chamber has is the delivery of adequate infrastructure along this route for active travel. While the planned developments along Belfield Court and Gardens section of the active travel route are welcomed, the details of the infrastructure on this lane are of concern.

Fig 1.1 highlights that no separate space for bicycles is to be provided along the Belfield route, showing how congested it would be for cyclists to use this route in tandem with vehicles. In a situation whereby 2 cars are travelling in opposite directions, it does not allow separate space for cyclists. Furthermore, it could lead to dangerous overtakes by motorised vehicles if cars were to be parked on footpaths.

Fig 1.1

Ensuring the safety of cyclists and pedestrians is an essential aspect of this scheme, the compact nature of this road highlighted in the photo may not be as safe for cyclists as some alternatives might be.

Fig 1.1 shows the compact nature of the road which is subject to 2-way traffic, with this road often used as a 'rat run' by commuters to avoid heavy traffic congestion at peak hours. It is understandable that the introduction of cycle lanes or cycle tracks are difficult in this area given the nature of the road and the space available. However, there are some potential options which could be investigated to allow for a re-allocation of space.

Potential Option A: One-way Design

An alternative option to reduce traffic congestion would be to make this road one way. This will help create a more attractive environment for walking, cycling and community while maintaining accessibility for local inhabitants, deliveries and emergency services for the Belfield area. The reduction in traffic flow can also create a safer environment for cyclists, pedestrians, and other forms of active and sustainable travel. It would allow one lane of the existing road to be reallocated to a bi-directional cycle lane – an example of this is outlined in fig 1.2. However, with this design it is important to note, that residents will need access to their driveways which would involve vehicles crossing into the cycle lanes therefore safety and appropriate signage and rights of way would be paramount to success.

Fig 1.2

Potential Option B: Filtered Permeability

Another option to consider in this area could be the introduction of filtered permeability along this section of the route. This system could be beneficial as it might negate the need for segregated cycle lanes as traffic numbers would be limited to local residents, and speeds limits are more likely to be observed. This has worked well in other parts of Limerick.

Moylish Roundabout

The current roundabout outside the Moylish TUS campus is a hotspot for traffic congestion at peak hours, while also not currently having adequate cycling infrastructure. Within the current plans, if a cyclist wants to exit TUS and travel down Brookfield Avenue, they have the option of joining the roundabout with vehicles or dismount at the zebra crossing and continue that way. This junction is quite busy at peak hours and needs to be planned for in order to offset the traffic congestion and safety concerns. In this instance, Limerick Chamber would like to see a Dutch-style roundabout with priority implemented to account for cyclists and traffic flow in one. An example of this style roundabout implemented successfully can be seen in Cambridge, England which gives priority to cyclists and pedestrians and makes for a much safer means of travel.

Bus Recommondations

Given the seasonality of Ireland's climate, ensuring the delivery of bus infrastructure will be important in bridging the gap between weather appropriate transport other than via private vehicle during days of poor weather. The current bus route serves the TUS Moylish campus, several residential areas in the vicinity and the city centre. To that end, we welcome the inclusion of sheltered bus stops and would welcome the expansion of this to all bus stops where feasible. Furthermore, it might be appropriate to include safe bicycle storage at some bus stops where people might split their journey between active and public transit.

One area which could potentially help improve traffic flow along this route is the increased provision of appropriately sized bus stops. The current route has bus stops which allow buses to pull in and out of the way of traffic passing from on the side going from TUS into the city. However, the opposite side of the route does not have the same facilities. This can often lead to increased traffic congestion along this route. Going forward, space for buses to pull in and traffic flow to continue past should be taken into consideration.

Fig 1.3 highlights where there is no space for traffic flow to continue on High Road along the Limerick City to TUS Moylish route. The current bus stop does not have the space for buses to pull in and out of the way of traffic approaching from behind. However, we note the limited space to work with in this regard.

Fig 1.1

An example of a traffic efficient bus stop is shown outside TUS Moylish in fig 1.4. These should be implemented along both sides of the active travel route to reduce a build-up of congestion while buses stop, allowing traffic to flow past.

Fig 1.2

Consideration should also be given to incorporating other residential areas along the route that may benefit from the upgrade to the current bus route. Allocating bus stops within walking distance of many residential spaces could potentially grow the catchment of people using the bus as a means of daily travel. Reviewing the location of bus stops along this route could therefore be beneficial. The current bus stops also range from close proximity to one another, to longer stretches before the next available bus stops. While it is understandable that there are factors that affect the ability of implementing bus stops in certain spaces, Limerick Chamber recommends that consideration be given to identifying spaces where the bus stops could capture a greater residential population along the proposed active travel route perhaps through reallocation of existing stops.

Furthermore, we would also ask that introducing bus permeability to the TUS Moylish Campus be investigated. As the campus grows in footprint size and student numbers there is likely scope that a bus stop could be placed inside the campus.

Saftey & Appearance

Prioritising safety in this active travel scheme can give Limerick a strong chance of encouraging active and sustainable transport as an appropriate transport alternative to private cars. Adequate lighting along cycle paths and at bus stops is an essential part of ensuring a safe and accessible route for this scheme. If Limerick is to promote all-day active and sustainable travel, then people using the route should feel comfortable using the route at all hours of the day.

The Road Safety Audit accompanying this project highlighted that there have been c. 34 accidents between 2005 – 2016, including c. 3 that involved bicycles. One of the collisions, involving a cyclist, resulted in a serious injury (the only major incident recorded). Ensuring the safety of cyclists, and indeed other road users, must be a priority for this active travel scheme. This includes the likes of appropriate segregation away from vehicles, adequate width of cycle lanes at all times, and correct levels of traction along the route to avoid slippery surfaces in wet conditions or if the track is used frequently and the wearing of the path becomes an issue.

The revised LSMATS draft shows the potential Limerick has in terms of achieving active travel as a regular day-to-day activity. This route should seek to meet the highest possible standards to strongly encourage active and sustainable travel. Limerick Chamber recommends that the width of the cycle lanes on this route should be kept as wide as possible, avoiding any reduction in width which could lead to safety concerns.

Given that this is one of many active travel schemes for key entry into Limerick City, this route should set the standard in terms of creating the safest possible route for cyclists and pedestrians. The route has the potential to capture a high level of usage by schools, residential areas and those travelling into the city for work along this route. Ensuring that the cycle lanes are of appropriate width and safe for cyclists to use even at peak hours is essential in this regard.

To encourage the usage of this route, emphasis should also be placed on the placemaking aspect of the route. Aligning the proposed route with flora, trees and appropriate signage can play a key role in the revitalisation of this area. The plans regarding the biodiversity aspect of the project are much welcomed and will play an important part in encouraging people to use this route more frequently and reduce the use of private cars. The available photos accompanying the details of the strategy have this type of placemaking included in some sections of the route. Limerick Chamber recommends that LCCC be as ambitious as possible when planning the placemaking aspect of this active travel route, especially regarding the inclusion of more trees.

Given that this active travel scheme involves the reallocation of space from vehicles to active and sustainable travel, this will subsequently result in the reduction in the availability of parking spaces along this route. Limerick Chamber welcome this reallocation of private car space to active travel. However, we also recommend that alternative arrangements be made for residents where possible with specific emphasis on those that require a vehicle. Ensuring that the route remains safe for users must be a priority, and therefore the enforcement of people parking illegally must be consistent and frequent to keep this route safe for all users, especially cyclists, pedestrians and other users. Setting a high level of accountability from the start to prevent vehicles parking on this route will help both keep the route clear and safe for users as well as avoid it becoming a common occurrence for vehicles to pull in and park on this route.

The noted condition of some sections of the walking infrastructure and the need for upgrades in the Belfield area in the Road Safety Audit is welcomed. Safety must be prioritised in this active travel scheme for all users. Limerick Chamber recommends that works to address the condition of these footpaths also be carried out under this scheme.

Monitoring

An area that Limerick Chamber would like to see an increased focused on is the monitoring of the proposed active travel route. While there was some insightful information provided about the levels of motorised vehicles on this route in the provided documents, there was a lack of detail to implement monitoring of the active travel side of the project. In order to fully understand the progress Limerick seeks to achieve through the objectives identified in the revised LSMATS draft, the performance of active travel routes such as the TUS Moylish to Limerick City Active travel route needs to be monitored. The introduction of bicycle counters in Scotland as mentioned in the national and international context has shown how positive both monitoring bicycle usage and showing the people how they are contributing to active and sustainable travel can be.

Continued monitoring of motorised vehicle usage and number of people travelling via bus on this route will further help assess if there really is a shift towards these more sustainable modes of transport. Further to this, given the ambitions to reduce the use of private cars along this route, air quality is another aspect that could be monitored. Given the presence of dense residential areas and the high levels of children with asthma in Limerick, monitoring air quality will further highlight the positive impact that a shift away from private car usage can have. Limerick Chamber therefore recommends that information on traffic flow, vehicle usage and cycle counters as well as air quality be monitored for this project and for all future active travel routes leading into the city centre.

Conclusion

Limerick Chamber welcomes the opportunity to be able to provide input into the Part 8 TUS Moylish to City Active Travel Scheme public consultation, with many of our members being located within the vicinity of this route. Our submission takes into consideration feedback from our members who will no doubt benefit from this scheme. It is encouraging to see LCCC show such ambition in active and sustainable transport, an area which will become much more relevant off the back of the recent revised LSMATS draft. We commend the hard work undertaken by LCCC and other organisations in delivering these active travel plans. The delivery of schemes and infrastructure along key access points into Limerick City will certainly be a positive in promoting active and sustainable practices of travel as well as making the city more attractive, vibrant and in line with European counterparts.

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