

Joint Committee on Transport Meeting of the Committee with Transport Infrastructure Ireland on Wednesday, 12 November 2025

Subject: Active Travel/Greenways

Opening Statement

Lorcan O'Connor, Chief Executive Transport Infrastructure Ireland

Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today, to discuss TII's role in delivering active travel and greenway projects. I am joined by my colleagues Geraldine Fitzpatrick, TII's Head of Roads and Greenways Capital Programme and Mary Flynn, Regional Manager.

TII's role in delivering transport infrastructure is set out in the duties and functions assigned to TII through legislation. The National Roads Authority (NRA), operating as Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) since 2015, was established under the Roads Act 1993. It is the general duty of TII to secure the provision of a safe and efficient network of national roads having regard to the needs of all users. Under the Infrastructure Guidelines, TII is the Approving Authority for national road projects and works in partnership with Local Authorities, which are the road authorities for all roads, including national roads.

In 2015 the NRA was merged with the Railway Procurement Agency (RPA) and the Roads Act was amended to include the function to secure the provision of, or to provide such metro and light railway infrastructure as may be determined by the Minister or, in the Greater Dublin Area, by the NTA. Under the Infrastructure Guidelines, TII is the Sponsoring Agency and the NTA is the Approving Authority for metro and light railway projects.

In 2021, TII received written Direction from the Minister for Transport assigning TII as the Approving Authority for Regional and National Greenways.

"Accordingly, for the purposes of Section 32(2) of the Roads Act, 1993 and Section 17(2) of the Roads Act 2015, I agree that TII takes responsibility for managing the delivery of the relevant Greenway programme as and from 20th September 2021, including as "Approving Authority" under the Public Spending Code, in a similar fashion to national roads"

To deliver national road projects and greenway projects, TII operates in close partnership with Local Authorities through a regional management structure and engages on a regular basis to monitor delivery programmes and track expenditure. TII funds eleven National Roads Offices located around the country which are populated by Local Authority staff. Once annual grant allocations for roads and greenway projects are notified to TII by the Department of Transport, TII provides project specific annual allocations to each Local Authority. The grant allocations are then paid to the local authorities, over the course of the year, to reimburse costs incurred in the delivery of those projects.

Unlike TII's remit for National roads where TII has a legal remit set out in law our remit in relation to Greenways is as directed by the Minister and extends to that of Approving Authority. The delivery of the Greenway's is the responsibility of the Local Authorities. The Greenways are proposed, designed and

delivered by the Local Authorities as the Sponsoring Agencies. TII does not own the Greenway asset or have responsibility for its maintenance

National and Regional Greenways

The earlier greenways, primarily delivered by the Local Authorities were seen as a tourism product with significant potential to attract overseas visitors, for local communities in terms of economic benefits, and for all users as an amenity for physical activity and a contributor to health and wellbeing. Examples of such Greenways are The Great Western Greenway in Mayo, The Old Rail Trail in Westmeath and The Waterford Greenway.

In **July 2018** the Department of Transport Tourism and Sport published the “**Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways**”.

“The objective of this Strategy is to assist in the strategic development of nationally and regionally significant Greenways in appropriate locations constructed to an appropriate standard to deliver a quality experience for all Greenways users. It also aims to increase the number and geographical spread of Greenways of scale and quality around the country over the next 10 years with a consequent significant increase in the number of people using Greenways as a visitor experience and as a recreational amenity”. Keys aspects of the Strategy include;

- National Greenways are defined as greater than 100km, Regional Greenways greater than 20km
- Greenways funded under the Strategy are required to be **Strategic, Scenic, Sustainable, substantially Segregated**, shared use and offer lots to **See and do**. (Five S Criterion).
- Set's out the consultation process and standards required.
- Stated that Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) will devise a Code of Best Practise for Greenways, this will be developed by a working group comprising the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, Department of Rural and Community Development, a Rural Recreation Officer and representatives of the landowner groups.
- The Strategy recognises that despite everyone's best efforts, there may be instances where a voluntary agreement cannot be reached and an economically feasible alternative route that meets the requirements of Greenway users in terms of gradient and access to scenery and things to see and do does not exist. In such circumstances and when efforts to arrive at a mutually agreeable solution have been exhausted, the purchase of the land using the available legal mechanisms may need to be considered.

Following the establishment of a working group and engagement by the parties supported by an independent chair in **December 2021**, the **Code of Best Practice for National & Regional Greenways** (the Code) was agreed and published. The working group consisted of - Irish Farmers Association (IFA), Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers Association (ICMSA), Irish Cattle & Sheep Farmers Association (ICSA), Department of Rural and Community Development, Sports Ireland, Failte Ireland, Department of Transport, Representatives of the Local Authorities and TII.

The Code

- Provides information on the planning, design, and construction of Greenways.
- Gives an overview of the stages and supports relevant to consultation.
- Requires the initial consideration of state lands.
- A Project Agronomist to be appointed from constraints stage
- Independent Agronomist and property advisors available to individual landowners
- Provides for a **Voluntary Land Acquisition Process** and the payment of **greenway sustainability payment** effective from Jan 2022.
- The Code to be reviewed bi-annually initially and then annually.

The Sustainability payments agreed under the code is paid in 2 stages.

- Early Sign on Payment –applies where a Voluntary Land Acquisition Agreement (VLAA) is agreed before the planning authority makes its decision and payable following execution of the VLAA.
- Cooperation Payment – Payable when the Greenway is opened.

If the VLAA is not signed when planning approval is achieved, engagement will continue for a further 12 months before notice to treat is served.

Regarding compulsory purchase orders, the Code also outlines that the preferred mechanism to acquire land is by way of voluntary agreements; however, compulsory purchase mechanisms are allowed for, albeit as a last resort to ensure the delivery of a continuous route.

The code set out an agreed collaborative approach for delivering National and Regional Greenways, aimed at achieving a balanced outcome for landowners, local communities, stakeholders and users. It is incumbent on the parties that agreed this code to implement it in the progression and delivery of the Greenways programme.

TII's Role as Greenways Approving Authority

- Allocates funding annually and payment of funding on a regular basis in accordance with “The Chargeability of Funding to Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) grants” September 2024.
- Provides Guidance and Standards on Appraisal, planning, and design.
- Promotes the implementation of the code.
- Engages with and oversees Greenway delivery through the Regional Management structure.

Active Travel and National Cycling Network Plan

TII's remit under the Roads Act is to provide a safe and efficient roads network for all road users as such TII therefore have always had a role in the provision of active travel facilities as part of the national road network, and this role continues.

In Q2 2021, TII were asked by Department of Transport(DoT) to prepare, on their behalf, a plan for a national cycle network (NCN). Following extensive public and stakeholder consultation the Plan was approved by the Government in December 2023 and published by the Minister for Transport in January 2024. The NCN Plan proposed circa 3,500km of cycle network connecting main population, transport, tourism and employment/education hubs and proposes making use of existing and proposed cycling infrastructure whenever possible.

In mid-2024, TII were tasked by DoT with fulfilling the role of Programme Management Office (PMO) for the implementation of the NCN Plan. In carrying out this role, TII are coordinating with the DoT, the NTA and local authorities to identify and prioritise projects for delivery under the NCN

Other Relevant Government Policies

The following is a list of key Government policy documents that support the development of greenways.

- Programme for Government 2025
- National Development Plan 2021 - 2030
- National Sustainable Mobility Policy 2022
- Strategy for the Future Development of Regional and National Greenways 2018
- Climate Action Plan 2025
- National Outdoor Recreation Strategy 2023 to 2027.

Greenway Delivery and Challenges.

186km of Greenways have been opened for public use since TII became the Approving Authority in 2021. TII is funding over 90 sections of Greenway at various stages of delivery, 88% of which are at planning and design. The average funding available to the programme is in the order of €60m annually.

Greenways have been shown to offer substantial economic benefits both in Ireland and internationally, including increased tourism and local business growth. Failte Ireland "Greenway Visitor Experience and Interpretation Toolkit" states "The experience is Waterford, Westmeath and Mayo has been extremely positive with transformative effects on small businesses and towns along and adjacent to the Greenways".

The challenges facing all public infrastructure projects also impact greenways delivery. There are many factors contributing to this; for example, policy changes, updated standards, legal challenges, and access problems all contribute to lengthened project timelines, increased costs, and significant demands on resources.

The extent of existing linear State-owned features (such as canals and disused railways) is limited and much of this potential already realised. In addition, it may not be possible to use state lands in certain areas due to operational constraints required to manage Coillte forests and/or Bord na Mona bogs. It is anticipated that most future greenways will require the acquisition of private land parcels. Given the level of investment the State requires assurances that a greenway route will remain open and available to the public on an ongoing basis.

Conclusion

As stated in the Greenway strategy "Greenways are for everyone and are used by pedestrians, wheelchair users, children in buggies as well as people on all types of bicycles. Greenways funded under this Strategy should meet the requirements of all users". They provide a safe segregated facility for locals and visitors and support the transition to more sustainable transport modes.

TII as the Approving Authority for Greenways provides funding and support to Local Authorities in the delivery of Greenways and Active travel facilities in line with Government policy as set out in the strategy. TII also promotes delivery in accordance with the Code of best practice as the agreed engagement and delivery mechanism.