

Empowering Women to Cycle

Workshop 2 report summary

Introduction

Workshop 2 which formed part of the wider research project “Empowering Women to Cycle” was conducted by Sustrans on behalf of Transport Infrastructure Ireland. Workshop 2 was held online in February 2024 - its purpose was to allow stakeholders previously engaged in the research to sense-check and comment on findings produced to date, prior to the final research report being generated. In particular participants were asked to reflect on the causal loop diagram created in Workshop 1, which most had been involved in creating in September 2023. Participants were also asked to consider the themes being presented in the final report and their own ideas and desires for the planned National Cycle Network.

Invite and participants

There were 15 participants in Workshop 1 in September 2024 representing a wide range of women from across Ireland who had a personal and/or professional interest in the topic of women cycling in Ireland. This same group of women was invited to attend Workshop 2 along with some others who had previously shown an interest but been unable to attend Workshop 1. A doodle poll was set up to identify a suitable date which 12 participants responded to (not including TII and Sustrans representatives).

The workshop was facilitated by Sustrans through Teams. A copy of the causal loop diagram created in Workshop 1 was shared with the participants prior to the meeting for their information/revision.

Seven participants took part in the Workshop 2 along with four team members from TII and Sustrans. Three others confirmed attending but were unable to make it on the day. These participants represented a range of age groups, various locations across Ireland, and a mix of representatives from; charities which promote cycling, academics researching related topics,

those with a professional interest, and some involved in cycling campaigns. All but one of the participants in Workshop 2 had attended Workshop 1 (not including Sustrans and TII representatives). In addition to those attending, the recording and resources from the workshop were shared with everyone in the invited group, and feedback encouraged via email or a shared whiteboard. Feedback was received from one additional participant after listening to the recording.

Workshop content

The workshop was 1.5 hours in duration and was facilitated through Teams with participants being emailed a link to the meeting along with pre-reading materials. Spotlight sessions of 5 minutes were offered to those attending to showcase their own projects relating to the topic. Three invitees responded positively to presenting their own projects (unfortunately on the day one presenter was unable to attend).

Introductions and recap of research phases and findings

The workshop began with a round of introductions followed by a presentation of the research study aims, phases and key findings including; the literature review, the survey, and the ethnographic study.

Spotlight session 1

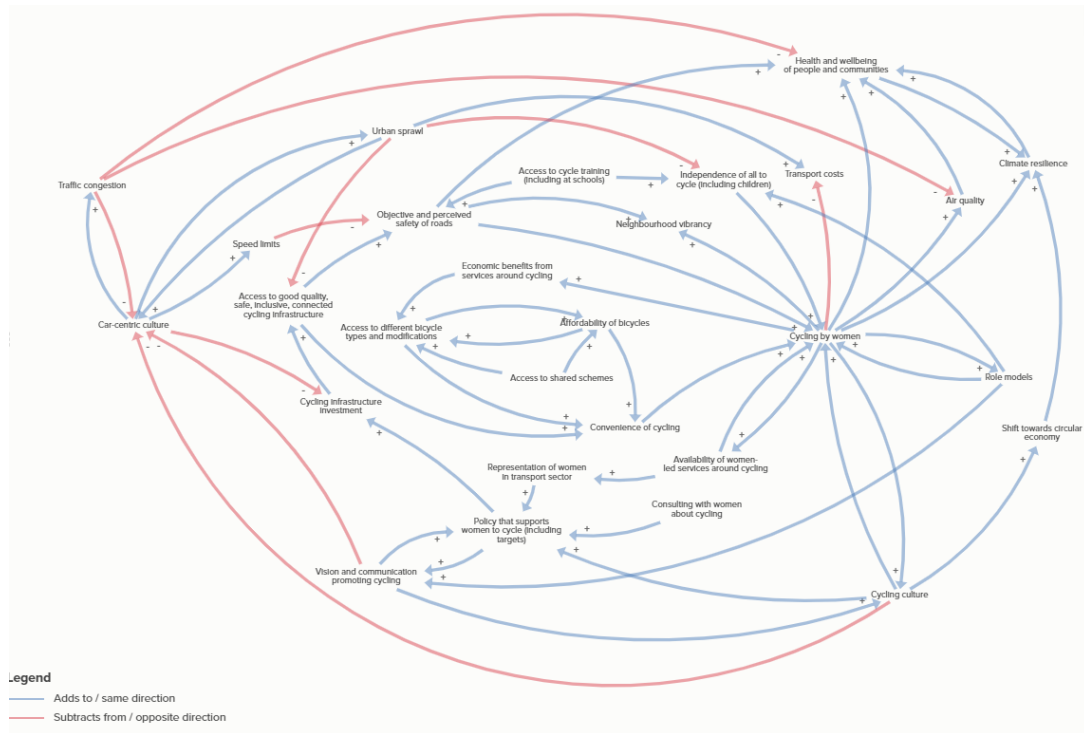
The first spotlight session was presented by Louise Foley, University of Limerick, on their ISCycle e-bike project <https://www.iscycle.ie/about.html>

Summary - Barriers to cycling examined before the study included – long distances, too much to transport, traveling with children etc. Reports from other countries (Sweden as example) indicated that e-bikes can increase cycling activity. Outcomes of this study focus on, travel behaviours, travel habits and physical activity levels. The study provides 8-12 week loans of various types of e-bike including cargo, foldable, commuter, etc., to men and women. Initial results show a positive result with participants reporting increases in cycling frequency, distances travelled by bike, and the e-bike being more useful than anticipated before the loan. About 60% of people entering the study so far have been women.

Recap of the output from workshop 1

A recap of the causal loop diagram was then presented:

Figure 1: Causal Loop diagram created in workshop 1



Things we discovered (Recap from workshop1):

- It's complicated! – **many variables** influence women cycling (or not)
- **Infrastructure** is just one part of a big puzzle.
- It was good to see these variables mapped in a **non-linear way** and see how they are **interrelated**
- We saw that increases in **safety, convenience, and independence** to cycle (by all), could increase women cycling
- We saw how increases in cycling by women could increase **neighbourhood vibrancy**, and have a positive effect on **health and wellbeing**, and the **environment**
- We saw cycling by women has reinforcing feedback loops with availability of **women-led services, cycling culture, and female role models** increasing each other
- We saw how an increase in **women in the transport sector** and **consulting with women** could lead **policy** focusing on women cycling and **increased investment** in cycling infrastructure
- We talked about **car culture** and how it increases **speed/volume** of traffic, **urban sprawl**, and traffic **congestion** (leading to pollution) which has a negative effect on women cycling.
- We also talked about the sometimes-negative image of cycling and the lack of visibility of a positive **cycling culture**.
- We decided it was good to talk!

Workshop questions and discussion topics

The workshop questions were then introduced along with the emerging research themes to be presented in our final reporting.

Topic one – the Loop Diagram and conclusions

1. Sense-check the loop diagram – is there anything that you would add or change about it?
2. Do the three emerging thematic areas of Infrastructure, Personal and Cultural elements influencing women’s cycling habits cover your understanding of the issues illustrated by the diagram?

Infrastructure	Personal	Cultural
Route Safety <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Segregated from traffic• Lighting• Maintenance• Junction priority Quality routes <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Connectivity• Barrier removal• Cycle storage• Integrated public transport• Bike hire schemes	Personal safety Health and wellbeing Skills and confidence Appearance Life changes Cost Time	Caregiving Car culture vs cycle culture Image of ‘the cyclist’ Policy and governance

Topic two – the National Cycling Network

1. What in your opinion/experience would be the best way to engage with women around NCN route development?
2. What is the most important outcome that the NCN should deliver for you?

Feedback channels

Participants were invited to feedback throughout the discussion session either verbally, or in writing in the Teams chat function. Most feedback was verbal and captured by the Sustrans facilitators on a whiteboard (visible but not editable by all) and note taking. Participants and

others who had been unable to attend were also invited to feedback after the workshop via email or a shared whiteboard (on Jamboard) – Feedback was received from one further participant after listening to the workshop recording.

Spotlight session 2 –

The second spotlight session was presented by Sarah Hegarty from An Taisce on their ‘And She Cycles’ campaign.

The #andshecycle ambassador programme is aimed at empowering teenage girls to cycle to school. The programme examines the barriers and provides solutions through peer led groups, and training days focusing on communication, upskilling and advocacy. The participants are also offered experiences, like visiting the velodrome, creating social connections which boost confidence. Awards and celebrations are held at the end of each year.

Notes from the feedback from participants during the workshop session

Question 1 - Sense-check the loop diagram – is there anything that you would add or change about it?

- Bike hubs for repairs (social enterprises) – getting a puncture can set back bike use – the inconvenience of getting it repaired.
- Sociability aspect of repair shops and learning repairs as a small group
- More women in the repair/bike mechanics services would help with approachability for other women cyclists
- Bike repair stations – more and knowing where they are. Maintenance and protection from the elements
- Bike training as corporate responsibility (done routinely like fire safety training)
- Bike libraries for women to try bikes before committing to the expense of it – where to store it etc.
- Bespoke opportunities for women – loaning service that is tailored for women’s apprehensions around cycling for the first time or taking up cycling again etc. Address specific fears with appropriate bikes, advice and training.
- Need more of this i.e. training, Bike Hubs & mobile bike repairs – bike hubs (social enterprise) that provide women specific training for maintenance, etc.
- Local authorities – more cycle training opportunities for women. Demand outstrips supply for women into cycle training sessions.
- Thebikehub.ie – mobile repair service and teaching repairs and skills.
- A directory of resources. Hubs in accessible and convenient places.

- Getting the story out there - how can we communicate this more widely.
- More positive media around women cycling and positive imaging of cycling in general. People don't necessarily want to feel like the pioneer.

Question two – Do the three emerging thematic areas of Infrastructure, Personal and Cultural elements influencing women's cycling habits cover your understanding of the issues illustrated by the diagram?

- It's good to show that the loop diagram and (themes) list show that problem isn't a simple picture and doesn't just include infrastructure.
- Does policy and governance don't sit well in the cultural heading – should this have its own category.
- Comments on safety and importance of lane width etc. (comment from older rider emphasizing the lack of security particularly impactful for older riders)
- New cycle design guidance is good but old infrastructure doesn't meet the new guidance.
- Standard 1.5 minimum for bike lanes to fit non-standard bikes. Some new lanes don't meet this standard either as they don't take into account drainage insets and 'bumpers' – hard for adapted bikes to navigate
- Car culture vs cycle culture – these things will have to co-exist in the future. Passing laws are the bare minimum – etiquette needs to happen – educate drivers.
- Normalising cycling – oddity of it would put some people off.

Question three - What in your opinion/experience would be the best way to engage with women around NCN route development?

- Survey women about their day – how do they travel/navigate their day. Don't make cycling a barrier to this.
- Consult at design stage. Combine NCN development with co-design and placemaking, so it is not just about the infrastructure but also making places more pleasant etc.
- Workshop with local community – at the beginning, before putting design in place. Use local knowledge to find preferred travel desire lines.
- Cocreate the design – add ins like street design and landscaping will add value to community
- Reminder that it's interurban – longer distances especially in the west where towns are further apart. Other attractors are needed to get people onto the NCN in those areas.
- Removal of barriers – kissing gates. Not just on the NCN but on access routes to it - blocking access from residential areas to the greenways in some places

- Connections to greenways – need to be visible so people know how to access the NCN

Question 4 – What is the most important outcome that the NCN should deliver for you?

- That 50% of users are women
- Consultation with specialized bike user groups – routes accessible to all
- Focus on the female teenage user – risk aversion and social anxiety sets in at that age and is carried into adulthood.
- Bike hubs and hire centers are not targeted to teenagers, more like cargo bikes for kids etc. – they (teenagers) would be role models (bicycle hero) but access is an issue without buying.
- Mums and adult riders also need to be focused on. This would normalise the cycling to others including teenagers.
- Development of a cycling culture.
- Make sure it connects to town centers. Publicize safe connecting streets (backstreets and contraflow/one-way streets) as connectors to the NCN.

Conclusions workshop 2

Question 1 - Sense-check the loop diagram – is there anything that you would add or change about it?

The review of the causal loop diagram did not elicit any desire for changes to the original structure from the participant group. Comments were made that the loop diagram is useful to illustrate the complexity of the problem (empowering women to cycle) and that infrastructure should be delivered with a range of other interventions and services to be successful.

Comments in this section of the discussion largely related to what those additional services could look like and included consideration of women lead repair and training services. Bike hubs were also a popular idea, where bespoke programmes for women and teenage girls could be delivered which focus on ride training, maintenance (supply and training), and bike libraries and loans. In terms of training, it was felt that employers and local authorities could supply more training opportunities for all as a matter of course – normalizing cycling in the local area and to employment. Communication and visibility of cycle services through a directory (an online information area pointing to route information, resources and services available) was suggested. Communication around cycling more generally was discussed including the need to create positive messaging around cycling – particularly by the media which is often negative in its view of cycling.

Question two – Do the three emerging thematic areas of Infrastructure, Personal and Cultural elements influencing women’s cycling habits cover your understanding of the issues illustrated by the diagram?

The three thematic areas were largely agreed to capture the scope of the research results. Some felt that Policy and Governance had a unique role to play and didn’t necessarily sit well in the ‘cultural’ theme. Discussions in this section again centered around some of the details around infrastructure and safety with a focus on the need for 1.5-meter-wide cycle lanes as suggested in cycle design guidance. It was noted that older infrastructure does not meet this 1.5m requirement and that some newer infrastructure is also insufficient in this area when you consider drainage insets and other infrastructure fixtures (e.g. plastic lane dividers) in the cycle route making them hard to navigate for adapted cycles in particular. The element of car culture vs. cycle culture was also discussed with it being noted that these two cultures will have to co-exist in the future and driver and cycle etiquette needs more public awareness and training.

Question three - What in your opinion/experience would be the best way to engage with women around NCN route development?

When asked to consider how women could be engaged on the development of the NCN, surveys, consultation (before design and construction) and co-design were suggested. It was suggested that women should be surveyed on the way they travel daily so that cycling can fit into that pattern and not inhibit it. Consultation before design or implementation was a strong recommendation with a need to include all users, and adapted cycle users in particular. It was felt that local knowledge of routes and desire lines should be drawn on when planning routes. The opportunity to work with the local community to codesign a route would not only have the advantage of plugging into local knowledge but also offer opportunities to create pleasant public spaces around the NCN, therefore adding value for the community. There was a reminder that the NCN is planned as an interurban route and therefore (particularly in areas where towns might be farther apart) there would be a need to create attractions along the route to encourage people/women on to it.

Question 4 – What is the most important outcome that the NCN should deliver for you?

The participants answer to, “*What is the most important outcome that the NCN should deliver for you?*” included seeing 50% of users on the NCN being women. It was felt that the NCN needs to be accessible, connected, and inclusive for all user types, including those using adapted cycles. The NCN should be used to engage with teenage girls and mothers, to normalise the image of cycling for all women, and grow cycle culture in Ireland.

Feedback received after the workshop:

Feedback from Bernadette Croke Martin via email after the workshop provided some interesting additional insights into cycle storage and security concerns and the issue of carrying and storing personal items when commuting by cycle as a deterrent to travelling to work by that means. She has given us permission to use these quotes (anonymised) in the final report:

I actually think the whole issue of bike security and fear of bike theft, especially given the cost of a bicycle, is a deterrent for all kinds of cycling... if I wanted to go in and do some errands around town, I'm just not likely to bring my bike because I'm afraid it won't be there when I come back.

I find the idea of packing up for a whole day at work, and then after work activities, would be a kind of a deterrent to commuting by bike. So, I think if employers made space available such as large lockers, or something, that might attract more people to cycle to work.
