

Transport Infrastructure Ireland One-Year Post Opening Evaluation

**N59 Maigh Cuilinn
Bypass Impact Evaluation**

Assessing the Impacts of the N59 Bypass of Maigh Cuilinn

Introduction

This report marks the third in a series of evaluations to understand the impacts of TII-funded schemes on the towns and communities that they bypass. It looks in this instance at the impacts of the N59 Bypass on the town of Maigh Cuilinn, in Co. Galway.

TII is responsible for the delivery and management of a safe and efficient National Roads network. In its forward planning role, the focus of TII is on delivery of the National Roads projects from the National Development Plan. TII-funded projects often feature town bypasses, which can have significant impacts on local communities, influencing travel behaviour, safety and the environment.

Traditionally, Post-Project Reviews for TII-funded projects have been carried out to understand whether the expected benefits have been achieved. In compliance with the Government Value for Money assessment requirements, such reviews have often focused on the benefits of the new road using traditional traffic engineering metrics, such as travel time, traffic volumes or collision numbers.

With the adoption in 2022 of the National Sustainability Mobility Policy and the Town Centre First Policy, TII is aware of the many opportunities that town bypasses can provide in support of such plans, beyond typical traffic engineering metrics. Furthermore, the objectives of TII-funded schemes have broadened in recent years, with an emphasis on multi-modal projects that can facilitate active travel and public transport.

As such, with technical support from AECOM, TII is carrying out a series of studies to obtain a comprehensive, evidence-based understanding of the impacts of TII-funded

schemes on bypassed towns and villages. These studies consider a wide range of areas, including motorised and active modes, local economy, accessibility and social inclusion, safety and the local environment.

Since 2022, TII, AECOM and Interactions Research have carried out baseline studies in six towns bypassed by TII-funded National Roads schemes, namely Macroom, Westport, Maigh Cuilinn, Baile Bhúirne / Baile Mhic Íre, Listowel and Adare. The baseline studies collected data on noise and air quality, travel modes, impacts on local business, impacts on congestion, town dereliction, road safety and other variables. These studies include desktop research, on-street surveys, traffic counts, noise monitoring and air quality monitoring. Focus groups with residents and local businesses were also carried out prior to and following the opening of the bypass, to gain a greater depth of understanding of local experiences and impacts.

The N59 Maigh Cuilinn Bypass officially opened on 11 December 2023. Galway County Council was the lead authority and sponsoring agency for the project, which was funded by TII. Figure 1 shows the location of the bypass in relation to the town. TII and AECOM, supported by Galway County Council, collected data across a broad range of indicators before the opening and repeated this in October 2024. Additional data was also collected in 2025, to account for seasonal variations and provide a more accurate picture of active travel patterns.

This report presents the highlights of the findings from the study.



Figure 1 N59 Maigh Cuilinn Bypass

High-Level Survey Findings

The high-level survey findings are set out in this section. Figure 2 shows the four survey sites from the study, which were strategically positioned throughout the centre of Maigh Cuilinn. Located in the Gaeltacht region of County Galway, the town now functions largely as a satellite community of Galway City, with many residents travelling there for work, education, and services. Its population has expanded considerably in recent years, increasing by 33.7% between 2016 and 2022 to reach 2,279 residents.

Each site was selected to capture a different aspect of movement within the town. Sites 1 and 4, both situated on the Clifden Road (previously the N59), run parallel to the bypass and therefore record the majority of through-traffic passing along the main corridor. In

contrast, Sites 2 and 3 provide insight into more localised activity. Movements at Site 2 on Church Road are likely influenced by trips to nearby schools and the GAA facilities, while Site 3 on Mountain Road reflects travel associated with new residential areas and destinations such as the new Lidl supermarket.

Traffic counts and walking/cycling counts were carried out three times. The first set took place before the bypass opened, from 22 to 28 May 2023. The second set was completed one year after opening, from 18 to 24 May 2024. A third round was then undertaken from 12 to 18 May 2025 to get results in weather conditions similar to 2023.



Figure 2 Count Locations

Reduced Traffic Volumes

Traffic volumes in Maigh Cuilinn reduced following the opening of the bypass. At Site 1, for example, light vehicle¹ volumes fell by 64% and 70% on average on weekdays and weekends, respectively.

81% reduction in average weekday Heavy Vehicle Traffic.

At that same site, a reduction in weekday heavy vehicle traffic of 81% was observed, going from 455 down to 86 heavy vehicles per day. This is particularly important from a safety perspective, enabling a safer environment for active travel. As HGVs produce more emissions and noise relative to cars, this reduction is particularly welcome, as it provides a more pleasant town centre.

“Before the bypass, people working in Galway had to leave home at about 6:45 in the morning just to get there for 9:00 because of the traffic and congestion in the village. Since the bypass opened, that pressure has eased a lot, and it’s been a really positive change for commuters.”

By contrast, volumes on Church Road (L1313) and Mountain Road (L1320) were broadly stable or showed localised changes, reflecting local traffic rather than through-traffic. The opening of a new Lidl store in February 2025 on Mountain Road (~100 spaces) is a new trip attractor that affected 2025 patterns on Sites 2 and 3.

Improved Journey Times and Accessibility

Residents and focus group participants noted that the bypass has eased congestion and improved journey times, particularly for those commuting to Galway City and those travelling through the village. Visitors also reported greater ease of car travel within

¹ Light vehicles are motorbikes, cars or vans.

Maigh Cuilinn, which suggests improved accessibility for personal and regional trips.

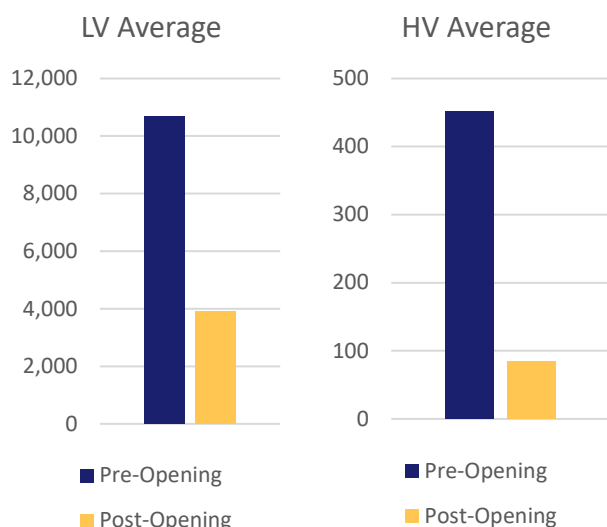


Figure 3 LV and HV Weekday Average, Pre-Opening and Post-Opening Traffic Levels

Reduced Noise Levels

Noise monitoring was carried out as part of the evaluation. This monitoring took place from 24 to 31 May 2023 prior to the bypass opening and again from 22 to 29 May 2024 following its opening.

It showed that noise levels halved in the town centre areas, on average, since the opening of the bypass. There were reductions across all time periods (morning, evening and night). These reductions were to the magnitude of at least 3 decibels. The maximum average reduction recorded in Maigh Cuilinn was of 5 decibels, for the nighttime period.

"It used to be very hard if I didn't have headphones, to be able to walk it without them, because the level of noise. But..., because there's less traffic, it's not as loud, it's more peaceful to walk."

This is a very important, positive impact, as reducing noise is associated with tangible public health benefits, including decreased risk of noise-induced stress and less sleep disturbance. Lower ambient noise levels can also contribute to improved cognitive function, particularly in children, and enhance the overall acoustic environment, thereby supporting greater residential amenities and community wellbeing.

This reduction is a clear benefit linked to the bypass project, which has promoted rerouting of through-traffic outside the town centre, therefore reducing the level of ambient noise produced by vehicles.

"Absolutely, I noticed less noise pollution now, because I would live on the Old Main Road inside the village boundary and way quieter, it used to be noisy until 5am"

Air Quality

Air monitoring was also carried out as part of the study, with one sensor placed on Clifden Road (the old N59) and another on Church Road. Data was collected before the bypass opened, from 12 October to 10 December 2023, and after it opened, from 11 December 2023 to 3 April 2024.

While particulate matter was low before the opening of the bypass, notable reductions were observed at Church Road. Reductions of 17.3% in PM₁₀ and 5.3% in PM_{2.5} were observed.²

With regards to NO₂ data, the study team used the TII Roads Emissions Model (REM) to triangulate likely road-contribution changes, using matched traffic data. There was an estimated decrease in daily mean concentrations of nitrogen dioxide on Clifden Road of 44%.

Overall, air quality in Maigh Cuilinn was high and remains high, with pollutant

² (PM₁₀ 23.7→19.6 µg/m³, p=0.037; PM_{2.5} 9.5→9.0 µg/m³, p=0.046). At Clifden Road, PM levels remained largely unchanged.

concentrations well within EPA and international guideline values.

Active Travel

Data from the study on pedestrian and cyclist movements present a mixed picture. Surveys of residents were carried out as part of the study, with data indicating a shift in some local behaviours. There is evidence of an increase in the number of Maigh Cuilinn residents walking to the village for their shopping or leisure activities. 40% of locals responded that they walk into the town centre, following the opening of the bypass, compared to 30% prior to its opening.³

However, the survey responses did not indicate that there was a significant increase in the number of children walking to school, and none of the Maigh Cuilinn parents surveyed following the bypass opening (n=74) reported that their children cycle to school. The bypass impact evaluations in Macroom and Baile Bhúirne likewise found that, despite the removal of traffic from the town centres, there was no evidence of an increase in the number of children cycling to school. The active travel counts also did not indicate any notable shift in active travel patterns. This provides further evidence that, while the removal of traffic is helpful, the provision of safe, segregated cycling infrastructure is needed to achieve a shift to cycling for school commutes.

“There’s definitely more walking in the Maigh Cuilinn prom. It was very loud, and now it’s quietened down a bit, but there’s always people walking on that prom, for sure.”

Public Perception Changes

Public opinion and perceptions were measured as part of the study, through surveys and focus groups, to understand

people’s perceptions of the bypass and how it had changed the area.

The resident survey was carried out in May 2023 and again in October 2024, while a survey of local business was carried out in August 2023 and repeated in October 2024.

Improved Perception of Maigh Cuilinn

There has been a notable improvement in public perceptions of Maigh Cuilinn as a destination, observed after the bypass has opened.

It was found that residents and visitors alike viewed the impact of the bypass as positive. 78% of surveyed residents believed that the bypass has positively impacted the town, while 6% believed it to have negatively impacted the town.

Residents Survey: How do you think the new road has impacted the town of Maigh Cuilinn? (n=172)

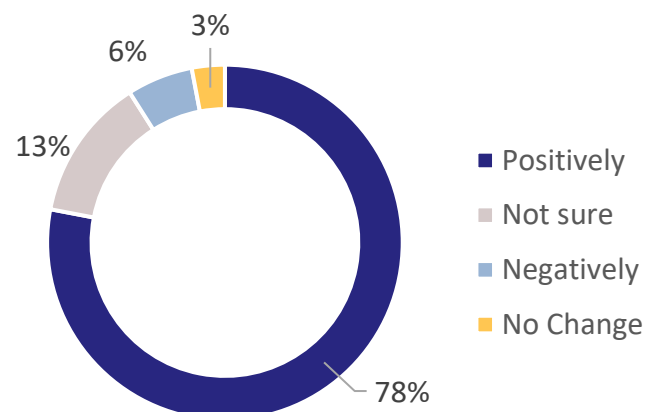


Figure 4 Residents Survey

Visitors reported that they visit Maigh Cuilinn more often following the opening of the bypass, with a more pleasant experience visiting the town.

³ The reduction is significant, p-value = 0.0332

Visitors Survey: How do you think the new road has impacted the town of Maigh Cuilinn? (n=79)

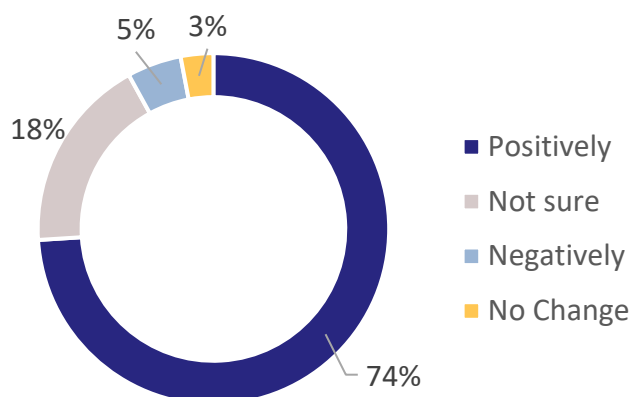


Figure 5 Visitors Survey

Perception of Active Travel

Residents and visitors noted that the bypass has helped reduce overall traffic volumes, and they also recognised the value of the Knockferry Active Travel Scheme delivered alongside it. Some expressed that, while the Knockferry scheme is an important enhancement for the area, there remains a desire to further strengthen walking and cycling provisions within the village centre itself.

Perceptions of walking facilities, such as footpaths and pedestrian crossings, improved significantly. 74% of residents rated them as good or very good in 2024 compared to 42% in 2023.

Perceptions of cycling facilities also improved slightly, but satisfaction remains low. Focus group feedback indicates strong demand for more active travel improvements to take advantage of the opportunities created by the reduction in traffic.

Local Business Perceptions

The evaluation team surveyed 18 local business representatives, to understand the impacts of the bypass on local business in Maigh Cuilinn.



Figure 6 Knockferry Active Travel Scheme

They were asked whether their business had experienced any changes in customer numbers after the bypass opened in 2024. Figure 7 shows that ten of the business surveyed reported no change in customer numbers, while three reported a big increase and two reported a large decrease.

Business Owner Perception of Customer Turnover (n=18, 2024)

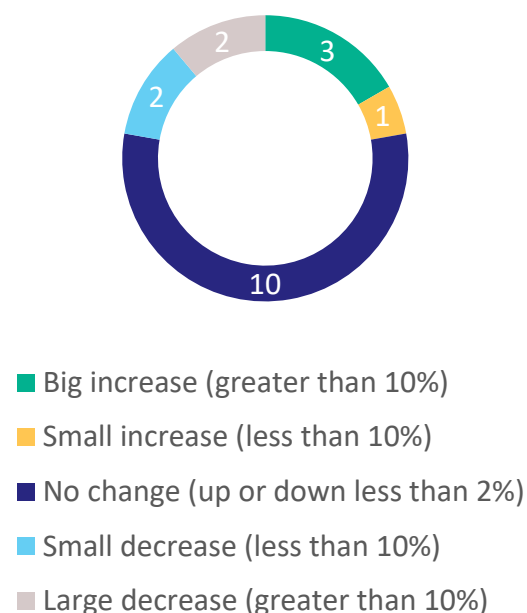


Figure 7 Local Business Customer Turnover in Maigh Cuilinn Post Bypass

Business owners were asked in a focus group discussion what they thought were the main reasons their business had experienced improved or disimproved trading in 2024. One cited examples such as improved

accessibility to the village for locals and better access to parking within the village.

Respondents who felt their business was impacted negatively cited examples such as less people passing businesses and stopping to shop due to the bypass.

It is important to note that a Lidl supermarket opened in Maigh Cuilinn in February 2025, and respondents highlighted the impacts this may also have on local businesses.

Further Focus Group Insights

The focus groups provided several insights which are outlined in the following sections, in terms of how they would like the opportunities provided by the bypass and the removal of traffic to be maximised.

The focus group feedback indicated a desire for additional crossing points within the town, and traffic calming to slow traffic. They also expressed a desire for continuous pathways, and more new cycle lanes.

They believe this could further optimise the benefits of the bypass, providing pedestrians and cyclists with a greater sense of safety as they cross the road or cycle along the village.

From the focus group discussion with local business representatives, it was clear that they supported the bypass. However, some felt that the bypass has taken away customers who were just passing through Maigh Cuilinn. They raised the potential for better signage for the town, highlighting the benefits of stopping to shop or use services.

Land-Use Changes and Their Impact

One significant factor influencing the interpretation of post-bypass data in Maigh Cuilinn is the change in local land use following the opening of the bypass. In February 2025, a new Lidl supermarket opened on Mountain Road near An Fuarán, introducing a large car park with approximately 100 spaces. This development has altered pedestrian desire lines and traffic patterns within the village, drawing activity away from the traditional town centre near Church Road and Clifden Road. The Lidl site

has become a major trip attractor, which likely explains some of the mixed trends in pedestrian counts and local traffic movements. These changes highlight the importance of considering new developments when evaluating bypass impacts, as they can significantly influence travel behaviour and local economic activity.

Conclusion

Maigh Cuilinn is one of six towns included in TII bypass impact evaluation series, which aims to understand how bypasses affect local communities and inform future projects.

The findings for Maigh Cuilinn demonstrate clear and significant benefits. Traffic volumes through the town have fallen sharply, including an 81% reduction in weekday HGV traffic, creating a safer and more pleasant environment. Noise levels halved, with reductions of up to 5 decibels, improving public health and quality of life. Air quality remained consistently good, with particulate matter well within recommended limits. These improvements, combined with shorter journey times and easier access to Galway, have enhanced the overall attractiveness of Maigh Cuilinn as a place to live, work and visit.

Public perception reflects these positive changes. Residents and visitors reported feeling safer and rated walking facilities more positively, with satisfaction rising from 42% in 2023 to 74% in 2024. Businesses also noted improved accessibility and parking, and some reported increased trade. The bypass has clearly delivered on its core objectives of reducing congestion and improving quality of life.

The evaluation also highlights that more can be done to maximise benefits of bypass schemes and in particular to encourage more active travel. To meet Climate Action Plan targets for reducing vehicle kilometres travelled, future bypass schemes should integrate active travel and public realm improvements in the towns they bypass from the outset – ensuring projects deliver not only safer and shorter journeys but also safer crossings, better footpaths and cycling facilities.

