

Chapter 9. Transport strategy

The designation of Sligo Town as a Regional Growth Centre in the NPF/RSES emphasises the importance of strong transport links to urban centres in the Northern and Western Region, along the Atlantic Economic Corridor, beyond regional and national boundaries.

Sligo Town is the convergence point of strategic transport corridors, connecting to Dublin, Galway and Letterkenny/Derry. Five national roads and a network of regional and local roads facilitate private and public transport, which is also supported by the rail link to Dublin.

The national roads M-4/N-4 (Dublin to Sligo), the N-17 (Galway to Sligo), the N-15 (Sligo to Donegal) and the N-16 (Sligo to Northern Ireland) form part of the EU's TEN-T¹ Comprehensive Network (outside the Core Road Network, which links Dublin only to Belfast, Cork and Limerick).

The peripheral location of County Sligo in the north-west of Ireland requires strengthening of the transportation network, in the interest of increasing the economic competitiveness and vitality of the county. At the same time, the overall priority in national and regional transport policy is to facilitate a shift towards sustainable modes of *travel* – public transport, walking and cycling, thus decreasing the reliance on private cars.

It is the Council's aim to support the provision and maintenance of an effective, sustainable and accessible transport system, integrated with land-use planning. This development plan provides the local framework for investment in transport infrastructure to ensure economic growth, expanded employment opportunities, reduced commuting times, more sustainable communities and enhanced quality of life through improved connectivity within and between the settlements.

9.1 National transport policy

Ireland's national transport policy in Ireland is focused on the efficient movement of people and goods, and ensuring increased accessibility to all passengers using the transport network. The aim is to enhance competitiveness, economic growth, regional development and social cohesion.

The government also seeks to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve air quality by promoting sustainable mobility options such as active travel and public transport.

The **National Sustainable Mobility Policy** sets out a framework to 2030 for active travel (walking and cycling) and public transport to support Ireland's overall requirement to achieve a 51% reduction in transport emissions by 2030. The policy aims to deliver at least 500,000 additional daily active travel and public transport journeys by 2030, and a 10% reduction in the number of kilometres driven by cars powered by fossil fuels.

The policy is aligned with the NPF/Project Ireland 2040 and with the National Development Plan, which set out strategic objectives and investment priorities for transport infrastructure and services.

The Department of Transport and the National Transport Authority are responsible for implementation, in collaboration with other stakeholders such as local authorities, transport operators and users.

¹ The TEN-T or Trans-European Transport Network Policy addresses the implementation and development of a Europe-wide network of railway lines, roads, inland waterways, maritime shipping routes, ports, airports and railroad terminals. In general, TEN-T projects are mostly funded by national or state governments. In a proposal issued by the European Commission in 2022, there are increased standards for the Core road network (by 2030), including the use of latest technologies, low-noise road surfaces and ensuring that alternative fuels infrastructure is deployed. For the Comprehensive Network (by 2050) there are specific requirements for the design, building or upgrading of roads.

9.1.1 Provisions of the National Planning Framework

NSO 4 “Sustainable mobility” is one of the ten National Strategic Outcomes envisaged by the NPF. This involves progressive electrification of mobility systems through “new technologies such as electric vehicles and introduction of electric and hybrid traction systems for public transport fleets”.

Public transport and active travel modes (walking and cycling) are also a prerequisite to the achievement of “Compact Growth” – the first of the ten NSOs.

NSO 2 requires enhanced connectivity between “centres of population of scale”, including stronger public transport links between “cities and large growth towns in Ireland and Northern Ireland with improved services and reliable journey times”.

In relation to “Accessibility to the North-West”, NSO 2 provides for the upgrading of northern sections of the national road N-4 and for the progressive development of the Atlantic Economic Corridor from Galway northwards by upgrading sections of the national roads N-17 and N-15.

9.1.2 National Development Plan 2021-2030 (NDP)

Project Ireland 2040 includes not just the NPF, but also the National Development Plan (revised in 2021), which sets out a ten-year investment strategy to underpin key Government priorities.

The overall level of investment in transport infrastructure has been significantly increased in the revised NDP. Funding of transport projects identified in the NDP must align with the Government’s commitment on new public transport and new roads, the NIFTI framework (see subsection 9.1.3 below) and the requirements of the national Climate Action Plan.

Considerable investment is envisaged for active travel and public transport, which are prioritised over private transport. The budget for national roads must consider the balance of maintenance, optimisation and improvement of existing road stock before decisions can be approved for new projects.

Since 2018 (year of publication of NPF and initial NDP), a number of important national road projects have been completed. The **N4 Collooney to Castlebaldwin improvement scheme** in County Sligo, which opened in August 2021, has significantly enhanced accessibility to the North-West.

The **N17 Knock to Collooney scheme**, which was part of the initial NDP, has been retained following the 2021 review and will be subject to further approvals.

9.1.3 National Investment Framework for Transport in Ireland (NIFTI)

The policy document **National Investment Framework for Transport in Ireland** (NIFTI) published by the Department of Transport (DoT) in 2021, recognises the interdependence of transport and spatial planning and supports investment that will help realise compact growth and enhance connectivity.

In line with the Government’s commitment to reduce GHG emissions, NIFTI prioritises sustainable environmentally transport modes. It emphasises “*the development of cycle networks throughout the country, the delivery of major new public transport, the widespread deployment of low-emission vehicles, and improving sustainable mobility outside our towns and cities*”.

9.1.4 National Sustainable Mobility Policy

The DoT's 2022 **National Sustainable Mobility Policy** sets out a strategic framework to 2030 for active travel (walking and cycling) and public transport journeys to help Ireland meet its climate obligations. It is accompanied by an action plan to 2025 which contains actions to improve and expand sustainable mobility options across the country by providing safe, green, accessible and efficient alternatives to car journeys. The Policy targets the delivery of at least 500,000 additional daily active travel and public transport journeys and a 10% reduction in kilometres driven by fossil fuelled cars by 2030.

This Policy supports better integration of land use and transport planning through a transport-orientated housing development approach, in order to reduce car dependency. It indicates that *“local transport plans for the regional growth centres and key towns will allow for local implementation of national and regional level land use and transport policies. These plans will be prepared based on the Area Based Transport Assessment Guidance produced by the NTA and TII”*.

9.1.5 National Roads 2040

The **National Roads 2040** (NR2040), published in April 2023, is TII's long-term strategy for planning, operating, and maintaining the National Roads Network (NRN), supporting the delivery of *Project Ireland 2040* (NPF) objectives. NR2040 was prepared to ensure that the operational and functional needs of national roads are fully aligned with the NPF and with DoT's NIFTI.

NR2040 outlines commitments to address challenges such as population growth, decarbonisation, biodiversity, climate adaptation, safety, and congestion. It envisions a transport system focused on safety, innovation, accessibility and mobility of people, goods and services.

The NR2040 investment priorities, aligned with the four NIFTI investment priorities, are as follows:

- decarbonisation - encompassing integrated mobility; electric vehicle charging; and active travel;
- protection and renewal – including road safety, resilience and climate adaptation;
- Mobility of people and goods in urban areas – catering for the needs of all users of national roads;
- Enhanced regional and rural connectivity – maintaining and improving inter-urban, regional and international road links.

Active Travel commitments

TII is committed to delivering more on active travel modes in all its projects, such as improving the safety of National Roads for active travel users and reducing the severance caused by some National Roads in urban areas. TII will collaborate with other stakeholders to implement the **National Cycle Network** plan (see below) to cater for more active trips and expand the **Greenway network** nationwide (see below), on behalf of the Department of Transport. Provision of safe, high quality and active travel infrastructure will encourage modal shift and result in reductions in carbon emissions.

The development of these programmes is coordinated with partner and stakeholder organisations – such as local authorities and the NTA – who are advancing local, county, and urban cycle and pedestrian networks.

National and Regional Greenways

In 2018, the (then) Department of Tourism, Transport and Sport published a **Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways**, aimed assisting in the *“strategic development of*

nationally and regionally significant Greenways in appropriate locations constructed to an appropriate standard". While such greenways are seen primarily as a tourism product with potential to attract foreign visitors, they can benefit all users from local communities as an amenity and through their links with other cycling and walking infrastructure.

National Cycle Network

In summer 2022, TII published for consultation a proposal to create a National Cycle Network (NCN) aiming to link towns, cities and destinations across Ireland with a safe, connected and inviting cycle network. The NCN has been designed to integrate with and complement other cycle infrastructure and networks – both existing and planned. After identifying and confirming the corridors through public consultation, the NCN will be delivered via a series of rolling, five-year phases by local authorities. The first implementation phase will run from 2023-2025. Subsequent phases will run every five years – starting in 2026-2030.

9.2 Transport policy at regional level

The “**Growth Ambition 3**” (Chapter 6) of the RSES focuses on connectivity, with the national roads network seen as a critical enabler in facilitating an island-wide sustainable transport system. Regional connectivity depends on the efficiency, capacity and safety of the national, regional and local road network.

Strategic road projects that must be delivered in order to give effect to NSO 2 are specified in RPOs 6.6 to 6.10. The following projects are relevant to Sligo Town and County:

- N4 Collooney to Castlebaldwin (RPO 6.6 - Completed in 2021)
- N-17 Knock to Collooney (RPO 6.7)
- N-15 Sligo to Bundoran, N-16 Sligo to Blacklion and N-59 upgrade (RPO 6.8)
- Garavogue Bridge and Approach Roads Scheme (RPO 6.9)
- The East-West Road, Dundalk to Sligo via Enniskillen (RPO 6.10)

In relation to **rail connectivity**, the RSES seeks the “*commencement and completion of the review of the Western Rail Corridor project as a priority for passenger and freight transport*” (RPO 6.11)².

RPOs 6.13 to 6.17 support the extension and improvement (including electrification) of the railway to and from Sligo.

Bus transport, both urban and rural, **walking and cycling** are promoted and supported in the RSES, as are permeability of town centres and new development areas for such modes of transport. The deployment of **electric vehicle charging infrastructure** is promoted by RPO 6.34³.

The **RPO 6.27**, supporting the preparation of **Local Transport Plans** for specified towns, is of particular relevance to Sligo – refer to Section 9.3.2 below.

² The Draft All-Island Strategic Rail Review was published on 25 July 2023. The Western Rail Corridor was considered as part of an option to connect Athenry to Derry via Sligo, but not included in the final recommendations.

³ The Implementation Plan associated with the Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Strategy 2022-2025 (published on 25 July 2023) identifies Regional Assemblies and Local Authorities as key stakeholders in the delivery of such infrastructure.

9.3 Transport and mobility at local level

In accordance with the above national and regional policy requirements, it is the aim of Sligo County Council to strengthen the County's strategic transport links and to provide and maintain a high-quality transport network throughout the County.

The Council will also support the creation of a pedestrian-friendly and cyclist-friendly environment within and between the County's settlements, with a good provision of public transport, reduced congestion and attractive town and village centres which are not dominated by car.

Integrated mobility will be promoted through the provision of park-and-ride facilities at appropriate locations in Sligo Town and in other settlements located along road and rail links.

Active travel will be supported by extending and improving the cycle route network in the County, in accordance with the National Cycle Network Plan and Local Transport Plan (LTP) for the Sligo Regional Growth Centre Strategic Plan area.

9.3.1 Active travel strategy

Sligo County Council's **active travel strategy** involves providing a combination of cycling and walking infrastructure linking the outlying population centres to the main centres of employment. Since 2021, the Council has been receiving funding for cycling and walking infrastructure from the national Active Travel Investment Programme.

In 2023, under the national Active Travel Investment Grants, County Sligo received an allocation of €3 million for walking and cycling infrastructure. This is intended to fund the development of cycle lanes and widened footpaths, new walking and cycling bridges, and new pedestrian crossings in the County.

The **Sligo Local Transport Plan** (see below) will provide a basis for transport strategies and interventions that will cover the 6-year period of the CDP 2024-2030. Most of the interventions identified within the LTP will target Sligo Town and its Environs.

9.3.2 Sligo Local Transport Plan

In 2022, Sligo County Council commissioned specialist consultants Jacobs Engineering Ireland Ltd. to prepare a Local Transport Plan (LTP) through the Area Based Transport Assessment (ABTA) process in conjunction with the review of the Sligo County Development Plan and preparation of a new CDP.

The requirement for a Local Transport Plan is set out in the NWRA's Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES), as indicated in Section 9.2 above. The area subject to ABTA largely coincides with the Sligo RGC Strategic Plan Area identified in the RSES. The LTP Study Area was extended to include the Satellite Villages of Collooney and Coolaney.

Chapter 3 of the Draft LTP, informed by the Baseline Assessment Report (Stage 1 of the ABTA), indicates that there is a strong reliance on the private car, due to the rural nature of the study area outside Sligo Town.

In Sligo Town, despite recent improvements (e.g. completion of the Western Distributor Road, introduction of new cycle routes and public realm interventions in the town centre), there are unresolved, long-standing issues with the pedestrian environment and sustainable transport connectivity with the rest of the Study Area.

LTP guiding principles

The Draft LTP establishes **six principles** to guide future transport development at local level. These are presented in Chapter 5 of the document:

- Support the Climate Action Plan through reducing emissions from the car, enhancing Active Travel and Electric Vehicle provision to promote modal shift.
- Support the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy by providing a permeable Sligo Town Centre for walking, cycling and the mobility impaired.
- Ensure that the Study Area is flexible against the projected population growth and residential developments by providing safe, convenient alternatives to the private car, without inhibiting arterial connections.
- Ensure the needs and requirements of the elderly and mobility impaired are supported through a more accessible transport system within the Study Area.
- Develop robust measures to secure funding in line with the National Investment Framework for Transport in Ireland.
- Improve social inclusion and wellbeing by promoting Active Travel linked to a ‘sense of place’ within the Study Area.

LTP Objectives

Five objectives have been derived from the above principles. Under each objective, there is a set of measures required for its implementation. It must be emphasised that, in the context of emerging transport trends and modes, the measures indicated are a minimum and that potential additional new measures can be considered where appropriate. The objectives are as follows:

1. Increase public transport patronage by promoting the convenience and attractiveness of bus, rail and park-and-ride facilities.
2. Enhance integration between existing and proposed land uses and transport.
3. Enhance accessibility of Sligo Town Centre for rural communities.
4. Develop an enhanced pedestrian network focusing on improving permeability and creating a ‘sense of place’ within Sligo Town.
5. Improve the cycle network throughout the Study Area.

LTP-proposed measures

Chapter 6 of the Draft LTP outlines detailed measures and specific proposals for improving the transport networks, separately for each mode, i.e. walking, cycling, public transport and private vehicles (road network).

Chapter 29 of this Development plan (Transport Infrastructure) includes details on the cycling network connecting Sligo Town to the surrounding villages and rural areas. The specific proposals which are relevant to the settlements located outside Sligo Town have been taken into consideration and integrated as objectives into the respective village plans, where applicable.

Given that the majority of the measures and proposals relate to Sligo Town, the most significant will be included as objectives in the forthcoming Sligo and Environs Local Area Plan. This will ensure that there will be further opportunities to refine the proposals through public consultation on the LAP.

Transport – strategic policies

It is the policy of Sligo County Council to:

- SP-TRA-1** Strengthen the strategic transport links providing regional, national and international connectivity, in accordance with the NSO 2 of the NPF and the RSES Transport Investment Priorities.
- SP-TRA-2** Support the creation of an integrated and sustainable transport system, in particular with regard to accessibility and choice of transport, with a quality bus and rail service, alongside the promotion of cycle and pedestrian facilities.
- SP-TRA-3** Encourage the shift from car use to sustainable modes of transport such as cycling and walking.
- SP-TRA-4** Reduce the demand for travel by integrating land use with transport planning, ensuring that new development takes place in a compact form at locations with the highest levels of accessibility for public transport and active travel (walking and cycling).
- SP-TRA-5** Plan for the future traffic and transportation needs in Sligo and ensure that new development does not compromise the expansion of rail, road and cycling corridors in the County. Proposed road realignment/improvement lines, road corridors and national cycle route corridors shall be preserved free from development that would prejudice the implementation of the schemes.

Transport – strategic objectives

It is an objective of Sligo County Council to:

- SO-TRA-1** Implement the relevant national transportation policies set out in the **National Investment Framework for Transport in Ireland (NIFTI)** and **National Sustainable Mobility Policy**, in partnership with funding agencies.
- SO-TRA-2** Progress the development of the **Atlantic Economic Corridor** through County Sligo by upgrading sections of the national roads N-17 and N-15, in conjunction with the TII.
- SO-TRA-3** Extend and improve the cycle network in the County in accordance with the **National Cycle Network** plan.

Transport – strategic objectives

- SO-TRA-4** Implement a programme of measures to support active travel in the county with the support of funding from the **Active Travel Investment Programme** of the NTA.
- SO-TRA-5** Implement the principles and objectives of the **Local Transport Plan** for the Sligo Regional Growth Centre by:
- A.** Promoting the convenience and attractiveness of bus, rail and park-and-ride facilities.
 - B.** Enhancing integration between existing and proposed land-uses and the transport network.
 - C.** Improving accessibility to Sligo Town from the settlements located in the LTP Study Area.
 - D.** Developing an enhanced pedestrian network, improving permeability and creating a 'sense of place' within Sligo Town.
 - E.** Extending and enhancing the cycle network throughout the LTP Study Area.
- SO-TRA-6** Facilitate the roll-out of charging infrastructure for electric vehicles, in line with the NDP Strategic Investment Priority for Transport target of nearly one million electric vehicles on the road by 2030, and with the Implementation Plan associated with the Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Strategy 2022-2025 (and subsequent reviews).