

# A Sustainable Mobility Index for Rural Towns in Ireland's Western Region

The Western Development Commission (WDC) has developed a Sustainable Mobility Index, for 35 rural towns in its seven county Western Region, to improve our knowledge of town residents' current mobility needs and how they align with developing policy.

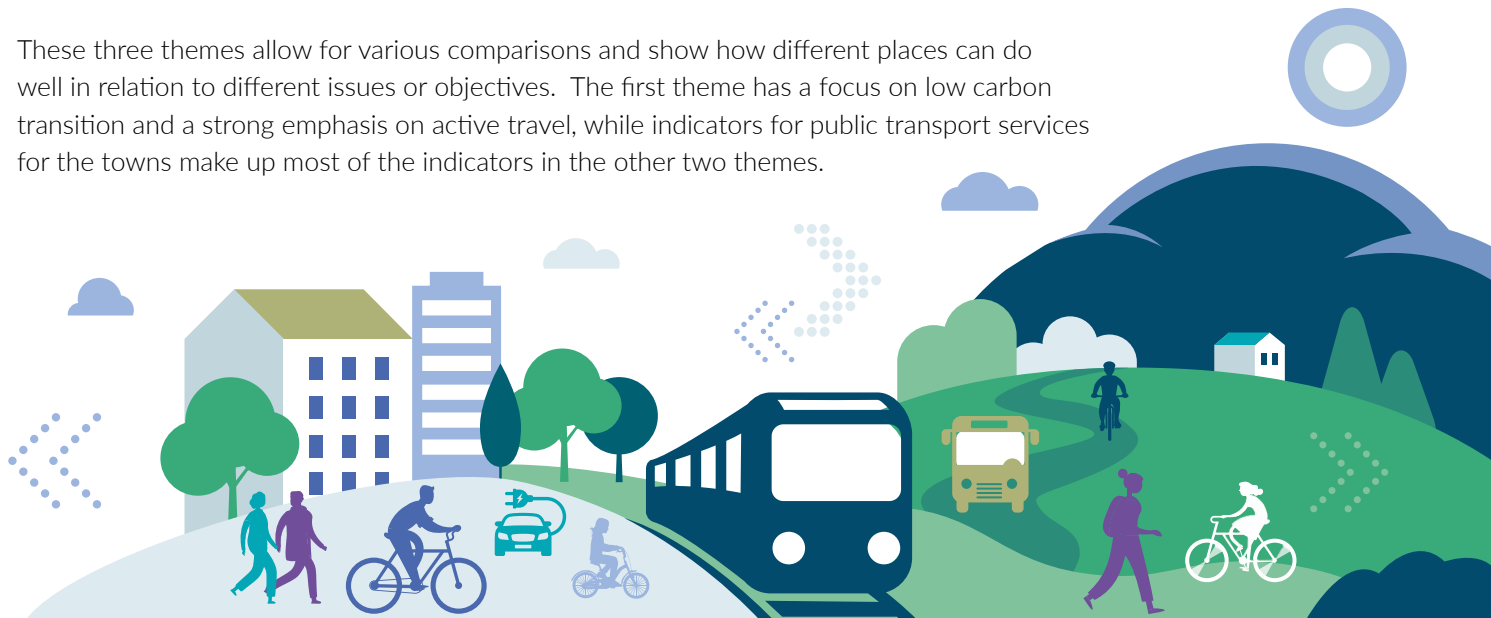
## Why a Sustainable Mobility Index?

Better understanding of active modes and public transport in a rural context is an overall objective of this Sustainable Mobility Index. This reflects the shift in transport policy to more sustainable travel, with a particular focus on public transport and active travel (cycling and walking) and the necessity of reducing carbon emissions from personal transport.

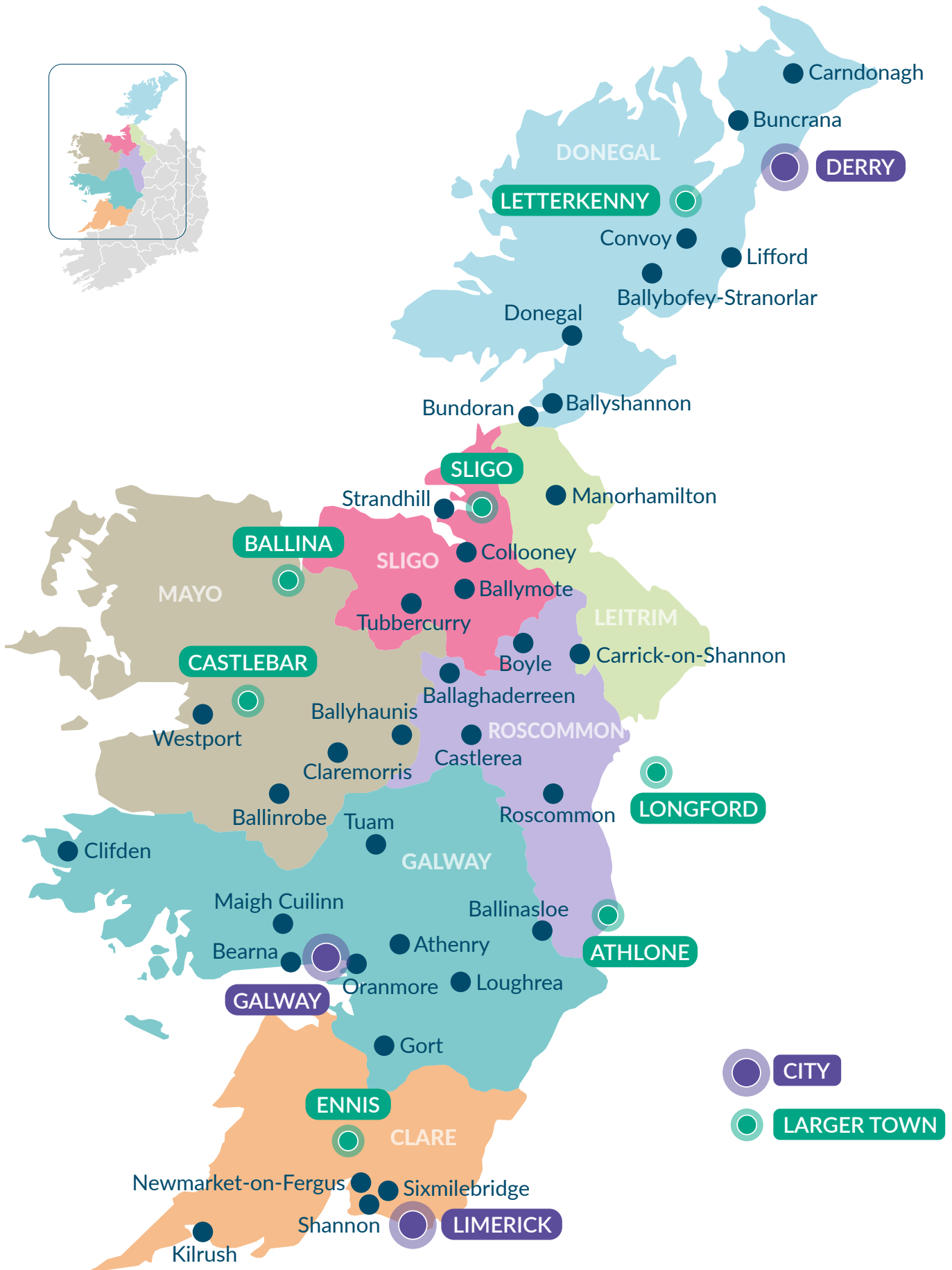
The WDC Sustainable Mobility Index (SMI 2022) is made up of 30 indicators covering different modes, infrastructures and services for people in the 35 towns. It sets a baseline for current mobility options, services, and infrastructure and, as it will be repeated over the coming years, will in future, show what has developed, what has been achieved and what will need to change. To provide better insights and comparisons the Index is broken down into three sub-indexes (each with 10 indicators) reflecting key areas for which good mobility is essential:

- 1** Readiness for the Low Carbon Transition (LCT)
- 2** Access to Services and Social Facilities (S&S)
- 3** Access to Employment and Economic Opportunities (E&E)

These three themes allow for various comparisons and show how different places can do well in relation to different issues or objectives. The first theme has a focus on low carbon transition and a strong emphasis on active travel, while indicators for public transport services for the towns make up most of the indicators in the other two themes.



# Towns in the Sustainable Mobility Index 2022



## What does the Sustainable Mobility Index show?

SMI 2022 gives useful insights into mobility in rural towns in the Western Region and it provides a starting point for examining many wider questions about mobility in these towns and provides a wealth of detail on patterns of travel and the current availability of services<sup>1</sup> and facilities.

The Mobility Index scores show a wide range among the 35 towns, but no town was found to be significantly better or worse than the rest. Four of the top five towns are from different counties, while the five lowest scoring are also from four different counties. The lowest scoring tended to be among the most remote towns, but not all remote towns scored poorly.

Interestingly, the largest towns did not score best in all areas, likewise the wealthiest towns tended to show less public transport use and had higher car ownership. There was a strong locational influence on scores, but this was not just about proximity to larger towns and cities. Three of the best scoring towns are key service centres for a large hinterland or are local centres of employment. Towns score well not just because of their location, but also because of investments made, and effective planning and good public transport provision.

Greater investment in town mobility such as better cycling facilities, better interconnection of modes and improved townscapes and planning for walkability, all of which have recently had increases in funding should, in time, reduce the gaps between the best and the worst performing. Any increase in walking and cycling to work and education, or greater use of public transport for these journeys, will be measured in future SMIs and improvements will be clearly visible.

SMI 2022 is intended to be simple, practical tool for assessing mobility in the Western Region. The method and findings of this Index have broader applicability, across Ireland and in rural towns elsewhere. The concept, and many of the elements of its construction, are transferrable to other regions and could be used to improve our understanding of issues, the commonalities of problems, solutions and to guide future investment. The rankings and commentary in this report are designed to help those providing transport, engaged in transport policy and in town development to determine what needs to be done and identify good practices.

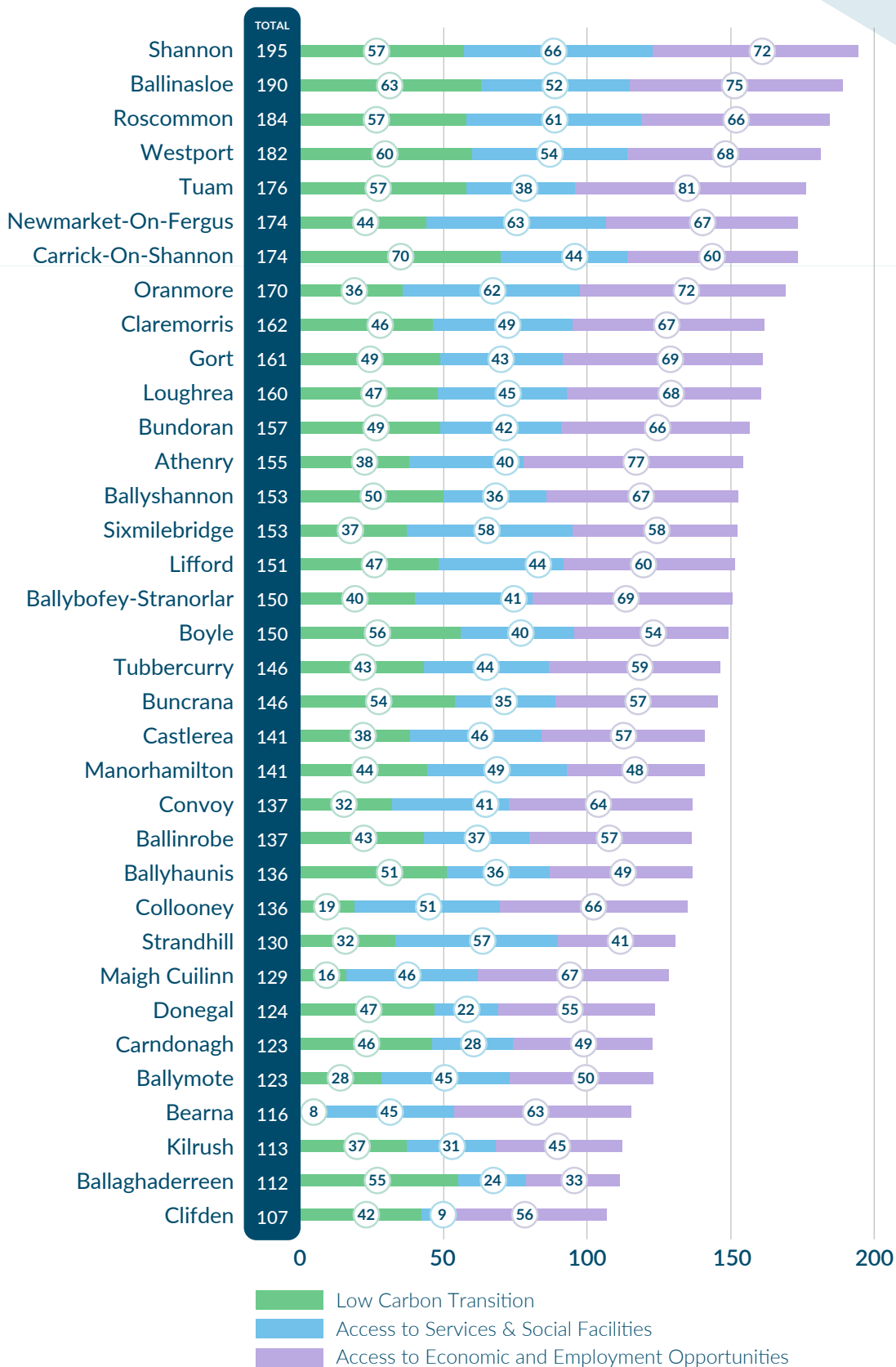
The Index will be updated in 2024, taking account of the full results of the most recent Census of Population (conducted in April 2022), and other data will be updated alongside that. We will then be able to examine changes.

### What we recommend

1. The National Transport Authority's Connecting Ireland is working to improve public transport throughout Ireland but further enhancement of public transport services is needed in many towns providing more connections to the larger centres and key services at convenient times.
2. There are considerable differences in public transport fares between rural towns and the larger service centres. This is partly a function of the distance to be travelled but is also affected by different types of public transport provision. Public transport fares should be equitable. Addressing this should be a priority and would also incentivise greater public transport use.
3. There are some active travel improvements which could bring immediate benefits to the town and to increasing sustainable mobility. These include more and better cycle parking and improved walkability through better timing of crossings and more enforcement of parking regulations to keep footpaths clear.
4. We need better, more reliable and replicable data on many aspects of sustainable mobility, including on cycling parking, and cycle routes and lanes, within towns. Simple, consistent measures of walkability would provide information about areas where improvements can quickly be made.
5. Sustainable mobility services and options for people with disabilities appear to be scant but there is little available data measuring this. Good data is necessary to plan better services and monitor their implementation.
6. To understand more about how to encourage a switch to more sustainable travel patterns, we need further work on perceptions of available sustainable mobility options for rural dwellers.

<sup>1</sup> At the time of data collection.

# Scores in the WDC Sustainable Mobility Index 2022



**Want to know more?**  
 SMI 2022 provides us with a starting point for examining many wider questions about mobility and rural towns. This report presents a baseline snapshot of sustainable mobility in our rural towns. Further analysis and recommendations will be published in future, along with case studies of good practice in the towns.

**If you want to learn more about the development of the WDC's SMI 2022 for Rural Towns, please see our full report [here](#).**