



Western Development Commission (WDC) Response to the Transport Infrastructure Ireland Consultation on National Roads 2040

Introduction

The Western Development Commission (WDC) is a statutory body with a remit to promote and encourage economic and social development in the Western Region (counties Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Mayo, Galway, Roscommon, and Clare). The WDC operates under the aegis of the Department of Rural and Community Development. The WDC works in co-operation with national, regional and local bodies involved in western development to ensure that the Western Region maximises its full development potential.

The WDC regards the provision of quality transport as essential to underpin the economic and social activity and development of the region. Likewise, the WDC recognises the importance of the low carbon transition, and we understand the need for change in the pattern and modes of travel in our Region. Indeed, this was a key part of our recent analysis¹ of what is needed for a low carbon transition in our region and other rural areas.

The Western Region (the seven counties under the WDC remit) is very rural. Using the CSO definition 64.7% in of the population live outside of towns of 1,500 or more. Using the definition in [Ireland 2040 the National Planning Framework](#), 80% of people in Western Region live outside of towns of 10,000. Thus, WDC work has a particular focus on the needs of, and opportunities for, more rural and peripheral areas and is particularly interested in improvements in rural accessibility. The WDC welcomes the opportunity to submit its views to Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) consultation on National Roads 2040 (NR 2040).

National Roads 2040

The Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) National Roads 2040 is an important transport strategy which, when implemented will increase connectivity, including for people living outside our major cities and towns. The WDC welcomes this strategy and the commitment to 'Enhanced Regional and Rural Connectivity' as a key element of NR2040.

We would like to compliment TII on the comprehensive analysis undertaken to better understand the national road network and the detailed analysis of the National Primary and the National Secondary routes. For the National Primary network, the maps provided give interesting insights into the areas where improvements are required to achieve the NDP commitment of an average speed of 90kph between cities and key urban centres. They clearly show lack of faster road options in the northwest where many of the corridors require intervention to support the NDP/NIFTI 90kph target. It would be useful if more detailed information on the current average speeds on the different national roads were made publicly available. Average speed is an important indicator of connectivity. In future, it would be helpful if regular, clear updates were provided on this and other regional metrics so that progress towards meeting these commitments can easily be monitored.

In addition, while we are aware that the TII must make decisions based on the NIFTI intervention hierarchy, the balance of priorities between achieving this and the NDP commitments and NSO of regional and rural connectivity is unclear in NR2040. The upgrade of national roads in the west and northwest should be a priority.

We welcome the increased focus on the National Secondary route and the analysis of the Lifeline, Collector and Arterial routes. Again, many of these are key routes in our region and have been subject to underfunding in the past. The recognition of the important role of 'Lifeline' routes and the need to understand their importance separately from the traffic volume they carry, is a very

¹ <https://westerndevelopment.ie/insights/making-the-transition-to-a-low-carbon-society-in-the-western-region-2/>



significant development. The focus on the roles of Arterial roads and measurement of those roads which are subject to increased demand for movement of good and people is also welcome. They are essential to the economic development of the region. Much of the rest of the National Secondary route network is important for linking smaller, but regionally significant centres. National secondary routes also provide key North South corridors particularly through the centre of Ireland. While not necessarily carrying high volumes of traffic they are critical transport corridors.

The TII analysis shows that a significant proportion of personal trips across the National and Regional road network are of less than 15 mins in duration. As noted in NR2040, these can be associated with higher emission levels and thus development of options for active travel adjacent to the national road network would be very welcome. It must be recognised, however, that a 15 minute trip on an uncongested national road, may be up to 25km in distance and so active travel options may be more limited. Nonetheless they should be explored; e bikes might play a role. We strongly agree that it is very important to provide safe options for active travel on our national road network. Many of the national routes are particularly dangerous for pedestrians and cyclists, our most vulnerable road users. The issue of active travel and severance is not just important in urban areas. Most of the national road network runs through rural areas and these roads often form real barriers to active travel particularly in the vicinity of smaller towns and villages, being particularly difficult or dangerous in these areas with vehicle speeds at their highest.

Alongside making roads safer for active travel we welcome the recognition of importance of integrated mobility and necessity of improving road design and integration to improve and enhance different mode options. Improving integration and design of mode interchanges design is very important for those accessing cities. Many people need to travel from rural areas to large urban centres by car but they do not necessarily need or wish to drive in the city. Recognising this and providing parking near train stations or other public transport, where routes coincide, allows travellers to change modes and could contribute to a reduction in congestion in urban centres.

We also welcome the recognition of the importance of customer needs and choices in different contexts and how these should be taken account of in design and in improvements to the road network. Safe, inclusive and sustainable infrastructure supporting healthy and low carbon choices is vital, even in rural areas where distances are longer and these choices currently less popular.

We welcome the forward looking NR2040 strategy and its recognition of different expectations of the national roads network and different travel behaviours which are developing and the move towards vehicles being increasingly electrically powered and more journeys to be undertaken by public transport and active travel. Taking account of these trends but also meeting current and shorter term needs is essential.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the WDC welcomes the draft National Roads 2040 and the analysis that highlights the particular issues with national roads in regions such as the west and northwest. We look forward to this National Roads strategy moving to its implementation stage and improved connectivity with in and from our Region. Again, we emphasize the necessity of prioritising development and improvement of the national road network in the west and north west.

The WDC is pleased to make this submission to the consultation on National Roads 2040. If there are any queries concerning this submission, please contact me.

Dr Helen McHenry
Policy Analyst, Western Development Commission
helenmchenry@wdc.ie