

MAYNOOTH ACTION STRATEGY

BIKE TO THE FUTURE
A Cycling Strategy for Maynooth

FOREWORD

Maynooth Action Strategy is a partnership umbrella group with a steering group composed of representatives from the four major commercial, educational and community organisations in the town: Maynooth Community Council, Maynooth Chamber of Commerce, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, and Saint Patrick's College, Maynooth. It has as an objective the creation and implementation of a development strategy for Maynooth incorporating social, economic, recreational and infrastructural aspects. The vision that *Maynooth Action Strategy* has for improving the quality of life in the town was incorporated in a strategic blueprint entitled *Maynooth: choosing a future*, which was published two years ago. This blueprint was acted upon by the identification of specific projects, through a series of public workshops, which was outlined in the document *Maynooth: the next steps*. These project actions are now either at the implementation stage or have been implemented.

In Autumn 2001, *Maynooth Action Strategy* held a public meeting, which resulted in the institution of four sub-committees, including a Planning and Development committee. This committee has transportation within its remit and one of the suggestions that followed from the public meeting was a "Safe Routes To School" project. This document outlines *Maynooth Action Strategy's* vision for this project.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Safe Routes to School is a government-funded programme to encourage cycling and walking because of concerns about the increasing use of cars. These concerns are based on safety, health, environmental and sustainability grounds. Safe Routes To School looks at entire routes from home to school, identifies areas of high risk and develops proposals to minimise the risk of an accident.

Safe Routes To School in Maynooth was originally proposed as a measure to lessen traffic congestion in the town, particularly during the morning peak but the study evolved to the wider issue of why the overall level of cycling is currently less than 2 %. The study looked at the existing cycling infrastructure. It examined cycling by young people to school, after-school and weekend activities. In contrast to other journeys, which were centred on young people, the level of cycling to religious services was also considered, as such journeys remain very much family based. The low level of cycling within the community in general was also reflected in the universities and lack of support by political parties for national networks serve to further weaken an already weak culture of cycling.

Bike to the Future is a strategy, which seeks to build on Safe Routes To School, to promote cycling within the wider Community of Maynooth. It recommends actions by Maynooth Action Strategy and by Kildare County Council. The foundation stone of that strategy is the inclusion of Maynooth as the first choice of Kildare County Council in the next Safe Routes To School Programme.

INTRODUCTION

- There are many different indices that can be used to define a community - how that community views itself and is viewed by others. One such index is modal split, which measures how people travel about – by car, by foot or other means. Of particular interest and concern is the modal split for “short” journeys on account of the increasing use of the private car for distances that people would have walked or cycled some twenty years ago. These concerns are on safety, health, environmental and sustainability grounds.
- This document began as a response to increasing traffic congestion, and particularly in considering a “Safe Routes to School in Maynooth” as a means of reducing the congestion caused by ever increasing numbers of school going children being driven to and from school. It evolved from that into the consideration of factors that result in the current low levels of cycling.
- Part 1 of this report discusses existing level of cycling facilities in the Community of Maynooth. Part 2 examines “Safe Routes To School” and other school / cycling related issues. Part 2 also briefly examines the role of walking in a “Safe Routes To School” project. Part 3 of this document sets out a number of proposals and recommendations, which *Maynooth Action Strategy* consider to be the most appropriate way forward for this project.

PART 1 THE COMMUNITY OF MAYNOOTH AND CYCLING

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The first part of this document examines the current use of cycles as a mode of transport in Maynooth - to/from schools, sports and in the wider community. It looks at facilities that promote and more importantly militate against cycling and refers to developments by cycling groups that may impact on Maynooth.

2. Infrastructure

- 2.1 In Maynooth, there are three isolated sections of off-road cycle route - that is where cyclists are separate from motorised traffic: first, on the Straffan Road, a section 1.30 km (0.80mls) in length was constructed between the Royal Canal and the N4 interchange; a second section, 0.45 km (0.27 mls) in length, was constructed along the Main Street between Parson Street and the Old Dunboyne Road; third a relatively short section has just been completed opposite Parsons Hall.
- 2.2 Usage of the cycle tracks varies. While cyclists are often to be observed on the Straffan Road section, discontinuity with the Main Street cycle track discourages many younger cyclists.
- 2.3 The Main Street cycle tracks are rarely used. At the junction of Main Street and Straffan Road, the track is discontinuous on the north side and the width available is reduced due to a commemoration stone for the opening of the Maynooth-Kilcock By-Pass. Cyclists may aim for the cycle track at the start of the next section but a gully and drainage channel have been constructed in the middle of where the cycle track should be. Furthermore, the gully does not drain properly in wet weather. Cyclists traveling towards the Tesco Shopping Centre and who choose to use the cycle track have to give way twice – once in crossing the Dunboyne Road and again in joining the main traffic flow travelling towards Leixlip. Although only completed a few years ago and not generally subjected to motorised traffic, the markings are almost entirely worn away in parts. Furthermore, there is little contrast in colour between the cycle track and the footpath proper with the result that pedestrians wander across the tracks.
- 2.4 With regard to the Parsons Hall cycle track, at the inbound southern end, it is unlikely that the cycle track will be often used, as there is no provision for cyclists to gain access and as they would then have to give way to cars entering and exiting the estate. Outbound cyclists, who in the absence of a cycle track were travelling on road and who wish to enter Parsons Hall, are also likely to avoid the track, for by remaining on road they have equal status

with traffic travelling in the same direction and have only one traffic lane to cross.

- 2.5 Kildare County Council periodically cleans the cycle tracks on the Straffan Road and Main Street with a road sweeper. It is assumed that the Council will also take in charge the section of cycle track on Rathcoffey Road but it is not known if regular cleaning is proposed.

3. Cycle Parking

- 3.1 The only cycle parking facilities in Maynooth are provided at the universities and railway station. On Main Street, there are some “Sheffield” type cycle stands immediately beside public seats but, on account of their location, it is assumed that they form part of the seat, although sometimes used for cycle parking.
- 3.2 At the railway station, covered parking for 38 cycles has recently been provided in line with government policy to integrate different modes of transport. However, in general, less than half the parking spaces are occupied with an additional one or two cycles chained to nearby railings.
- 3.3 In the centre of the town, the most common location for leaving cycles is at the side of the Garda Station at the junction of Leinster Street and Main Street. Spot checks revealed that up to 13 cycles have been locked to the railings during the week and weekend. Although some of the cycles may belong to students attending lectures in the university during the week, this would not hold true for those cycle owners who park there at the weekend.
- 3.4 At the three main shopping centres, despite significant development work being carried out on each within the last few years, no facilities have been provided for cyclists. By comparison, approximate 440 spaces have been provided for cars (this figure includes only part of the car park shared between Glenroyal Shopping Centre and Glenroyal Hotel, and excludes the nearby Council car park). It has been estimated that the value of a car parking space ranges from €20 to €1900 per annum (£250 to £1,500) depending on location. Even assuming a value at the lower end of the scale, the promotion of cycling would clearly make financial sense.

4. School and Promotion of Cycling

- 4.1 There are four schools in Maynooth and a questionnaire was sent to each in order to ascertain their attitudes to cycling.

4.2 Maynooth Post Primary School

- 4.2.1 Maynooth Post Primary School is located on the Moyglare Road, close to the junction with the Galway Road. There are 735 students, of whom it is estimated that between two thirds and three quarters live in Maynooth. The main modes of transport are walking, car and private bus.
- 4.2.2 While the exact number of cyclists varies, it is estimated not to exceed 18 students or 2.5% of the total student body. As there is no area designated for parking cycles, most cycles are left in the vicinity of the tennis court or against walls. There is no cycling culture in the school and no rules on cycling or cycling behaviour. Also, when wearing kilts, female students tend not to cycle, especially at second level. There is limited space for cars within the school boundaries with the result that students who travel to school by car are generally dropped in one of three locations (i) on the Old Galway Road, (ii) on the Moyglare Road or (iii) at the lay-by in front of the Parish Hall. It was also noted that there at least eight motorcycles parked at the school.

4.3 Maynooth Boys National School

- 4.3.1 The Maynooth Boys National School is also located on the Moyglare Road between the Post Primary School and the Parish Hall. The principal modes of transport are walking, car and private bus. An adjoining schoolyard also acts as a car park for parents dropping off and waiting to pick up pupils. In front of the schoolyard, there is a lay-by, which is reserved for the parking of buses.
- 4.3.2 There are a total of 450 pupils. On 21 December 2001, one hundred and thirty five cars were recorded entering the car park playground between 9:10 and 9:30 hrs for a starting time of 9:30 hrs. This excludes cars that dropped pupils off prior to 9:10 hrs, after 9:30 hrs and cars that dropped pupils off away from the car park. Assuming an average of 1.5 pupils per car, this would indicate that a minimum of 44% of students travel by car although the true figure may be significantly higher⁸. Approximately 8 or less than 2% cycle. There is no cycling culture in the school and no policy on cycling or cycling behaviour. However, the school does have a cycle shed and, although it contains no cycle stands, the shed is in a separate location from the schoolyard/car park which is advantageous from a safety point of view.

4.4 Presentation Convent

4.4.1 The Presentation Convent is located at the east end of Main Street. The main modes of transport are again walking, car and private bus. The school has a car park which parents can use for dropping off or picking up pupils. If the car park is congested, cars stop either on the Dunboyne Road, Main Street or Leixlip Road. The issue of bus parking has arisen in recent times, as due to the proposed development at the entrance to Carton Walk buses will no longer be permitted to park there.

4.4.2 There are a total of 487 pupils, of whom few cycle. There is no cycling culture in the school and, again, no policy on cycling or cycling behaviour. Again, girls who wear pinafores tend not to cycle.

4.5 Gaelscoil Ui Fhiach

4.5.1 Gaelscoil Ui Fhiach moved to a permanent site on the Celbridge Road some twelve months ago and has 120 pupils - 51 boys and 69 girls. The main modes of transport are walking, car and private bus. An adjoining schoolyard functions as a bus park and a car park for parents dropping off and waiting to pick up pupils. The area reserved for buses, which is adjacent to the building entrance, is often used by parents for stopping or parking cars, despite adequate spaces elsewhere.

4.5.2 On the morning of 20 December 2001, sixty-one cars were recorded entering the car park, which excludes cars carrying pupils arriving late. Again, assuming an occupancy rate of 1.5 pupils per car, this is equivalent to 75% travelling by car. As a recently formed school that has been located in a variety of premises over the last few years, there has been no opportunity for a cycling culture to develop. In the winter months, there are no cyclists, while in summer approximately three pupils regularly cycle. Although there is no written policy on cycling, girls do have the option of trousers, as part of their uniform.

4.5.3 In moving the Gaelscoil, there was no requirement by the Department of Education (and hence no funding) for the provision of cycling facilities such as parking or consideration of how cyclists might enter and leave the school grounds.

4.6 Compared to the 2% level of cycling in Maynooth schools, Kesgrave High School in Suffolk has one of the highest levels in the United Kingdom at 60%.

5. Outdoor Sports & Other Activities

- 5.1 The main organisations engaged in outdoor sports in Maynooth are the G.A.A. and Maynooth Soccer Club. They have grounds on the Moyglare Road and Rathcoffey Road respectively, both of which are easily within the cycling capability of a typical young person.
- 5.2 The G.A.A. grounds have a surfaced car park and a hard standing area for additional vehicles. On Saturday mornings, especially when one training session is finished and another is about to begin, the car park is congested with some cars trying to enter and other reversing in order to exit. There are no facilities for cyclists.
- 5.3 The soccer grounds have only been acquired comparatively recently and although a hard standing area has been provided for cars, again there are no facilities for cyclists.
- 5.4 There is no Community Centre in Maynooth at present. Most indoor activities such as music, drama, dance, sports take place in the schools, the Parish Hall, the Band Hall, the M.A.D.E. Centre or the Glenroyal Leisure Complex. The mode of travel for (immediately) after school activities, such as badminton or dancing, follows the same pattern as for travel to school. In relation to other activities that take place at the weekend or in the evenings such as drama, sports, music, the majority travel by private car with the exception of a few pedestrians and fewer cyclists. Again, in view of school going habits, this is hardly surprising.
- 5.5 It should be pointed out that some activities, such as music where instruments also have to be transported, do not readily lend themselves to cycling. Other activities, such as band practice, take place in the evenings when darkness increases the risk of accidents to children and the fear of accidents by parents.

6. Religious Services

- 6.1 Aside from work and school journeys, one of the biggest movements of people and one that continues throughout the whole year is travel to weekend religious services. While some of the congregation travel from outside the town, for the majority the travel only involves a distance less than 2.4km (1.5mls).
- 6.2 Attendances at Catholic Church services on the Moyglare Road are principally by car. When a service is in progress, in addition to the large number of cars in the nearby car park/school yard, parked cars stretch out along the Kilcock and Moyglare Roads. Cars are also parked either in part or totally on the footpath adjoining the bus lay-by, a practice that discourages and is a risk to

pedestrians. Apart from those travelling by car, a relatively small number walk while the numbers cycling is typically 1-2%. It is assumed that the situation is similar for Church of Ireland services on the Parson Street, with a majority of the congregation again choosing to drive.

- 6.3 Undoubtedly, there are some for whom cycling to religious services is not an option. However, it is equally true that there are many who are more than capable of walking or cycling but who, at present, choose to use their car.

7. Universities

- 7.1 Student cyclists are a characteristic of universities in many historic towns and cities. In the case of Maynooth, however, despite being historic, the number of third-level student cyclists is relatively small.
- 7.2 St. Patrick's College and the National University of Ireland – Maynooth have an approximate student population of 550 and 5173 respectively, of whom it is estimated that 50% reside in Maynooth. An increasing number of students drive to university with the result that now there is a shortage of car parking facilities, despite the provision of a significant number of spaces.
- 7.3 In the older part of the campus mainly associated with St. Patrick's College, there are a number of extensive areas available for car parking. In contrast, cycle parking is limited in number, poorly located and old fashioned in design. Parking is limited in number – there are only spaces for 76 cycles beside the main entrance to the university and a further 10 outside Rhetoric House. As proximity to destination is the principal factor influencing the parking of cycles, the location of the cycle stands beside the main entrance, while secure, is too remote from the main buildings. The design is old fashioned in that the frame of the cycle cannot readily be locked to the cycle rack and the frames are open to the weather despite students being on campus for much of the day.
- 7.4 In the newer part of the campus associated with the National University of Ireland, in addition to the main car parks on the eastern and western sides of the campus, almost all buildings have an adjacent car park although cycle parking is often omitted. Cycle stands are provided for approximately 280 bicycles. However, it was also noted that the most common design was the same as for St. Patrick's College and that a number of the racks were not fixed to the ground although there were predrilled holes in the feet. Furthermore, in one location, more than six students had chosen to park their cycles under the building overhang in preference to using a nearby cycle stand. It must be acknowledged, however, that most of the stands were well located - close to the building entrance.

- 7.5 For National University of Ireland campus residents, cycle parking was provided at one set of apartments. At the second set of apartments close to the Moyglare Road, cycle parking was also provided but it was only accessible either by going over a grassed area or using a walkway where two prominent signs indicated that cycling was prohibited.

8. Commuter Cycling

- 8.1 As a small town, the number of adults who live and cycle to work in Maynooth is relatively small with not much scope for expansion. Of greater relevance and potential are the numbers who either are employed in Intel or will be employed in the Maynooth Business Park.
- 8.2 Although Intel is located in Leixlip, it draws its employees from a wide hinterland including Maynooth. The company is in the process of developing a mobility plan that will establish a benchmark for mode of travel against which targets will be set and achievements measured.
- 8.3 Maynooth Business Park received planning permission in 2000 and is currently under construction. As part of its application to Kildare County Council, an Environmental Impact Assessment was lodged, which considered the impact of transport. As an advanced building project, outfitting details will be specified when individual tenants are secured. In view of its distance from the railway station, it is to be hoped that an enlightened approach to mobility will be adopted especially as ample capacity has been provided to accommodate facilities such as cycle parking within the site.

9. Leisure Cycling

- 9.1 There are two main groups of leisure (or recreational) cyclists. The first is made up of individual cyclists who meet informally at regular intervals to cycle. Their level of fitness is much higher than the population at large and they are not reliant on infrastructure or facilities about the town but their presence on the roads around Maynooth reinforce the view of cycling as a “normal” activity.
- 9.2 The second group of leisure cyclists view cycling as a family orientated pastime and their ambitions are more modest. Outside of the morning and evening rush “hours”, most of the roads radiating out from Maynooth are relatively quiet but the roads linking these radial routes form a ring that is practically traffic free at off-peak times.
- 9.3 Maynooth and its hinterland have much to offer visitors who come for a day trip. In addition to the attractions in the town itself such as St.Patrick’s

College and Maynooth Castle, there are several more either on or relatively close including Castletown House, Taghadoo Church and Round Tower, Carton House, Connolly Folly, Larch Hill House and Straffan Butterfly Farm. These are all within a few miles of Maynooth and accessible to most cyclists.

- 9.4 While Iarnród Eireann provides a rail service from Dublin to Maynooth that has recently been upgraded, the transport of cycles is restricted.
- 9.5 In a European context, the European Cycling Federation has proposed a “EuroVelo”, a European wide network of cycle routes from north to south – from the Baltic to the Mediterranean – and from east to west - from Moscow to Galway. Some sections, such as the Kingfisher Route in the cross-border counties, have already been constructed. Other parts are at the design or construction stage. It had been proposed to locate a section through Kildare en route to Galway although it not been possible to ascertain its exact position. Some cycling groups are also in the process of developing cross-county routes using lightly trafficked roads.

10. Royal Canal

- 10.1 One of the attractive features of Maynooth is the Royal Canal, which runs close to the centre of the town. However, unlike elsewhere, no shops, bars or restaurants open onto it - only the harbour area connects the canal to the town and its use by townspeople is largely limited to the area between Bond Bridge and New Mullan Bridge where a hard surface on the canal bank allows use by pedestrians and cyclists throughout the year.
- 10.2 In 1995, the Royal Canal Corridor Study was published. While seen as a model for canals in general, it set out a framework for the development of the Royal Canal from Kilcock to the River Liffey. Although reputed to be a comprehensive document, there was a complete absence of positive proposals in relation to cycling.
- 10.3 In a consultative document “The Future of Irish Waterways” (1999) commissioned by the Heritage Council, a further strategy for the management and development of canals was set out. Although the report highlighted the need to make better use of the canals by catering for walkers and cyclists, the role of cyclists was qualified by need to avoid conflicts between competing users. Since then, as there have been no any actions or proposals on cycling, the opening up of canals to cyclists is, at best, a low priority.
- 10.4 Since April 2000, a North-South Implementation Body for inland waterways, Waterways Ireland, has taken over the responsibility for the Royal Canal. It has confirmed its opposition to surfaced cycle paths along canals in rural settings. This is in stark contrast to other European countries, where

underutilised or disused canals have been revitalised by the construction of paths for walkers and cyclists.

11. Political Support

- 11.1 Politicians throughout Western Europe seek to increase the numbers of people cycling in order to decrease reliance on the private car and to increase levels of fitness and general protection of the environment.
- 11.2 However, there are mixed messages coming from successive governments. On the one hand, the Department of Environment and Department of Health are supportive of cycling. On the other hand, the positions of the Department of Education and Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and The Islands (to which Waterways Ireland are answerable) are, at best, neutral on the issue.

12. Kildare County Council

- 12.1 Enquiries were made to Kildare County Council on the role of the Road Safety Officer. While the Council is concerned with road safety in general, it does not encourage cycling in schools.
- 12.2 With regard to traffic management in Maynooth, although largely ignored, all traffic is prohibited from turning into Pound Lane from the Dunboyne Road and Moyglare Roads. As cycle traffic does not cause the same congestion as two-way vehicular traffic, the rationale for this prohibition applying to cyclists is difficult to comprehend.
- 12.3 Approximately two thirds of the deaths in the Dublin region involving cyclists also involved HGVs as the driver is unable to see the side of his trailer when carrying out a left hand turning movement. Despite the construction of the Maynooth-Kilcock Motorway, a significant amount of heavy goods vehicles (HGVs) still pass through the centre of the town en route to other destinations.
- 12.4 Leinster Street is designated as the location of a cycle track and route for pedestrians accessing the town. It is also the most important route to the town centre for train passengers. Despite this, the County Council has encouraged developers to construct vehicular entrances onto Leinster Street rather than on Parson Street.
- 12.5 At the junction of several laneways and Main Street, there is a standard triangular “Yield” sign with an additional sign that reads “Pedestrians, Drivers” which gives rise to concerns on a number of grounds. The information is ambiguous – do pedestrians and drivers yield or does the cyclist yield to them? Regardless of which is correct, this sign is found not only at the junction of public roads but also at private entrances. Furthermore, the effect

of the proliferation of signs is the deterioration of the general visual streetscape.

- 12.6 With regard to the Parsons Hall cycle tracks, there are no signs indicating the start and finish of the cycle tracks. Also, just before a road junction, the road markings “End” are misleading as the cycle track continues on the other side of the junction.

13. Accidents

- 13.1 The growth in numbers of children travelling to school by car has largely arisen due to parental concerns about the risk of accidents and personal security. With traffic levels rising sharply over the last decade and accident levels in Ireland above the European norm, the concerns of parents are warranted. However, Safe Routes to School were first introduced not to reduce traffic congestion but to address safety concerns. Therefore, any strategy must address not only the health, but also the safety, of our children.
- 13.2 Accident rates for pedestrians and cyclists are likely to be low but this is a reflection more of the low frequency of cycling and walking than on good driving habits or observance of speed limits. In fact, concerns about speeding on the Moyglare Road are such that Kildare County Council proposes to introduce traffic calming in the short term.
- 13.3 One further point in relation to safety and avoidance of accidents concerns the number of cyclists. At present, as the number of cyclists is relatively low and most are off-road, vehicle drivers do not readily take cyclists into consideration while driving. If the number of cyclists rise significantly, many are likely to cycle on road, which will not make drivers more tolerant, (in fact they are likely to make some drivers more intolerant), but their presence will, at least, be more visible and considered part of “normal” traffic.

14. Irish Cycling

- 14.1 In the past, Irish Cycling (formerly the Federation of Irish Cycling) was primarily concerned with competitive cycling. Within the last few years, however, they have carried out a detailed study of the strength and weaknesses of their organisation and developed a strategy document that sets out their aims and aspirations for the future. They seek to represent cyclists in the wider sense– competitive, leisure, mountain biking as well as interest in cycling related matters such as cycle training, cycle routes etc.
- 14.2 As many of the goals appear to be common to both Irish Cycling and Maynooth Action Strategy, co-operation between the two organisations would be to mutual benefit.

15. Traffic Management

- 15.1 Traffic management is indirectly relevant to cycling in that the management of motorised traffic will have an impact on other forms of transportation.
- 15.2 When traffic queues build up to a critical level, cars begin to divert and “rat run” through roads and streets that are not designed as a relief. In practice, congestion is worse in Maynooth than that apparent in the centre of the town as cars use the “ring roads” to avoid the centre of the Maynooth at peak times.
- 15.3 In the past, protection by the local authority/ Gardaí of “quiet country roads” from rat running traffic was not practical unless roads were permanently closed. Now, technology such as programmable barriers are available which will allow the local authority to more effectively manage traffic and in the future, the Community of Maynooth will have more options in deciding on how traffic is managed.

16. Planning

- 16.1 Maynooth is located in one of the transport corridors identified for growth in the transport strategy for the Greater Dublin area. It is adjacent to the N4 Maynooth-Kilcock motorway and possesses a recently upgraded rail link.
- 16.2 Kildare County Council is currently in the process of finalising Amendments to the Maynooth Development Plan 2001 as required under Planning Acts. It is proposing to rezone for development a number of parcels of agricultural land mainly to the east and south west of the town
- 16.3 The main projects for which planning applications will be lodged or for which planning permission has already been granted are as follows:
 - An application for planning permission has recently been lodged with the Council in respect of the site of Kavanagh’s Mill. A mixture of commercial and residential units is proposed.
 - In the vicinity of Leinster Street, a number of key sites are likely to come up for development within the next few years, which will have a bearing on the centre of Maynooth for generations to come.
 - Planning permission has already been granted for lands to the north of the town for residential purposes.
- 16.4 All the above will benefit from a strategy to promote cycling.

PART 2 “SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL” AND SCHOOLS

17. Introduction

- 17.1 Over the last twenty years, as more children have been driven to school, it has become increasingly dangerous for children to walk or cycle with the result that more and more children are driven to school. This circle MUST be broken.
- 17.2 “Safe Routes To School” is a government-funded programme, the objective of which is to increase the proportion of school going children who walk or cycle to school and to decrease the numbers travelling by car.
- 17.3 Within a Safe Route To Schools project, walking and cycling are both equally valid. However, cycling should be considered more important on account of its potential replacement for the car over longer distances.

18. Essential Elements of Safe Routes To School

- 18.1 The essential elements of a “Safe Routes To School” project are as follows:
- Baseline survey of existing modes of transport
 - Summary of the schools transport and road safety problems
 - Consultation between school authorities and parents and pupils
 - Proposed initiatives with objectives and targets
 - Programme for implementation
- 18.2 Road safety problems include the identification of gaps in infrastructure and areas along the main routes to school where children have an increased risk of an accident.

19. History Of Safe Routes to School

- 19.1 Safe Routes To School was initiated some twenty years ago in the city of Odense in Denmark because of concerns about the level of accidents involving school children. Before the project, there were 14.3 accidents per year but after twenty years, there were only 2.7 accidents, a reduction of 82%. This was mainly due to a reduction in vehicle speed, which had the secondary effect of accidents being less severe when they did occur and was achieved at the same time as numbers walking and cycling increased. Today, only 21% of children are driven by car, 14% take the bus and 65% walk / cycle to school. It is their aim to have 100% on foot or bike in the future.
- 19.2 Safe Routes to School has spread to several countries including the United Kingdom, France, Slovakia, Germany, Belgium, Austria, Netherlands, New Zealand and Australia. In the United States, in 1999, the state of California

launched a \$20 million Safe Routes To School programme, which was nearly seven times oversubscribed.

- 19.3 In Ireland, pilot Safe Routes to School projects have been funded by the Dublin Transportation Office and organised through the local authorities including Kildare County Council. One such project is currently underway in Newbridge.
- 19.4 Maynooth lends itself to cycling on account of its size, as the travel time between any two points is less than 15-20 minutes, even for young children. Obviously, shorter distances will be cycled in proportionally shorter periods. In heavily trafficked streets, a bicycle is often faster and travel time more predictable than in a car, a fact that should not be overlooked in an age when people are under pressure of time.

20. Why Support Safe Routes To School?

20.1 Reduction in Accidents

- 20.1.1 The first reason for supporting Safe Routes To School is a reduction in accidents. The improvement in Odense has been highlighted above. In the United Kingdom, which introduced Safe Routes To School in the mid-1990s, a cyclist is more likely to be killed there than in the Netherlands, Denmark or Sweden, despite higher levels of car ownership. Also, in the United Kingdom, the cyclist casualty rate per distance travelled is also more than ten times higher than in the Netherlands and British child pedestrian rates are the second worst in Europe. In Ireland, Safe Routes To School is only in its infancy.

20.2 Health

- 20.2.1 The second reason concerns the health of our children. The newly published *Government Health Strategy* confirms that the level of obesity in children is increasing and puts this down to a more sedentary lifestyle with children being less active than previous generations. It also stresses the importance of daily exercise to children, and parents, by encouraging children to walk or cycle, will help to ensure the long term health of our children.

20.3 Environment

- 20.3.1 There are concerns in Europe about rising levels of carbon dioxide. While carbon dioxide emissions across the European community rose by 2 per cent between 1985 and 1997, the contribution by the transport sector grew by 43 per cent. The large increase in car ownership in Ireland and the increased usage of cars is a contributing factor.

20.3.2 The additional traffic generated by school runs is well known to all road users. More children walking or cycling rather than travelling by car will reduce traffic congestion. However, whether this is a short or long-term gain will depend on the growth of traffic.

20.4 Sustainability

20.4.1 The principles of sustainability, which have been adopted by Irish government and local authorities, have been endorsed as the basis for future planning and growth. This commitment was set out in a document “Sustainable Development – A Strategy for Ireland” in which transport planning, a reduction in the growth in demand for transport and alternatives to the car are stressed. The European Union is also concerned with sustainable development and has made it one of the three goals of the European Spatial Development Perspective.

20.5 Empowerment

20.5.1 Empowering school children to travel without parents or guardians increases their self-reliance and self-confidence. There is also an inherent feeling that school children are missing out on something that (most) parents remembered as joyful when they were young and part of growing up. Groups of children travelling together also gives them an opportunity to socialise with their friends and discuss the happenings of the day, which is less feasible when travelling in a car with a parent.

20.5.2 Empowering young people to travel by themselves may also have the effect of a significant time saving for a parent. Alternatively, a parent cycling with a child may result in an improved level of fitness for the parent as well as the child.

20.6 Educational

20.6.1 A survey of some 107 teachers in the United Kingdom found that 87% thought that walking to school gave children the chance to wake up before they reached the classroom, 93% thought that it made them more aware of road safety issues and 60% thought that it helped them to settle down in the classroom. While the survey was only in relation to walking, similar benefits would result from increased cycling.

21. Platform For Change

21.1 In November 2001, the Dublin Transportation Office published the final report of the “*Platform for Change, Strategy 2001-2016*”, which sets out the overall

transport strategy for the next fifteen years in the Greater Dublin area including Maynooth.

- 21.2 As school runs affects traffic congestion particularly in the morning period, the *Platform for Change* addresses the issue and the following extract is taken from the section on Safe Routes To School.

“A Safe Routes To School (SRTS) programme will deal with children’s journeys to and from school. The key objective is to promote health and safety as well as a move towards sustainable transport. Pilot SRTS projects will be completed in 2002. These will include the production of guidance documents for teachers, parents and pupils. In addition, a survey will be conducted across all schools, to set a baseline to monitor progress under the programme. The SRTS programme is envisaged to become part of general school management.”

- 21.3 Details of funding are not mentioned but the whole purpose of the document was to consider where to concentrate investment. Based on the experiences in Ireland and elsewhere, there are two possible approaches. One is that the local authority selects locations in which to focus initiatives. The second option requires schools to develop travel plans and to concentrate resources (or at least to concentrate resources initially) on those schools that demonstrate most commitment to the objectives of the programme.

- 21.4 In addition to Safe Routes To School, *Platform for Change* also deals with the promotion of cycling, provision of adequate cycle parking facilities and the provision of tourist and recreational cycling facilities.

- 21.5 In relation to cycling targets, the following extract is taken from the section on cycle mode:

“The overall objective is to increase the proportion of short trips (up to 6km) made by bicycle to 30% by 2016. Trips to places of education and commuting trips up to 10km in length will be particularly targeted as suitable for cycling.”

- 21.6 The conclusion is that those communities, which take on board the vision contained in *Platform for Change*, will receive financial assistance if they can demonstrate their commitment to the objectives.

22. School Travel Plans

- 22.1 In the United Kingdom, a second strategy to encourage walking and cycling to school is a requirement for schools to produce “School Travel Plans”. Its components are similar to a Safe Routes To School project but in contrast to

Safe Routes To School where transport professionals develop the project, the school authorities in consultation with parents and pupils draw up a School Travel Plan. Some of the proposed initiatives will be under the control of the school authorities and will be paid for out of school resources. Others, such as changes to the layout of roads, will be a matter for the local authority. However, the local authority will often not have the finance to carry out all measures proposed within its administrative area and so the school plan is used as a basis for comparing different schools and their commitment.

- 22.2 In the United Kingdom, Transport 2000 produced a guidance document on the production of school travel plans. The guide also briefly described a number of travel plans varying in size from 4 to 50 pages. It is likely to be the model for an Irish equivalent, produced under the *Platform for Change*.

23. Travel Survey

- 23.1 The travel survey is a baseline measurement of existing travel patterns against which changes in mode of transport or “modal switch” can be measured. The travel survey normally takes the form of a questionnaire that is completed by each pupil, with the results entered into a computer where the data can be readily analysed.
- 23.2 In the United Kingdom, Young TransNet is particularly interested in using the Internet to encourage research into the inequalities of transport opportunities for children and young people. The Young TransNet website allows participation in an on-line travel survey in which the participants, in addition to recording existing travel information, choose options on how to promote the non-use of private vehicles. Young TransNet also welcomes participation from outside the United Kingdom and their database includes information from other European countries such as Slovakia so that it is possible for one community to compare their results with similar communities across Europe.
- 23.3 In Ireland, for the pilot Safe Routes To School projects, a paper questionnaire was distributed. *Platform for Change* refers to a baseline survey of all schools but gives no indication of what form this might take but it is likely that the form will depend on the individual school. One option, which could be considered, would be an online survey in Maynooth as the ownership level of home computers is estimated at 60%.

24. Weight of Books

- 24.1 Concern has been expressed at the possible damage to the growth/posture of school children due to the weight of books, especially at second level. This also influences decisions on the mode of transport as it is a further inducement

for pupils to be driven to school rather than walk or cycle. However, this issue can be addressed by initiatives under Safe Routes To School.

25. Helmets

- 25.1 While every parent wishes to reduce the risk of injury to their child, the wearing or non-wearing of helmets is a contentious issue with firmly held beliefs on both sides. In the United Kingdom, many school authorities insist on the wearing of helmets as school policy but the level of cycling is generally much less than in countries such as Holland and Denmark where there is no insistence on helmets but where the culture of cycling is strong. As teenagers, in particular, view the wearing of a helmet as “uncool”, making it a requirement may result in them being put off cycling.

PART 3 THE WAY AHEAD**26. The Way Ahead**

- 26.1 Through this document, Maynooth Action Strategy lobbies for inclusion in the next Safe Routes To School Programme, as inclusion will ensure funding for the provision of additional cycling (and pedestrian) facilities. This is the key to the promotion of cycling, and is the foundation stone on which the other elements depend. If funding is not provided, the strategy collapses.
- 26.2 Reference has already been made to the discontinuities in the existing cycle track. It is proposed that part of the solution, to be confirmed by Safe Routes To School, will be a safe route between Straffan Road and Main Street cycle tracks (distance 200m) and between Main Street and the Moyglare Road schools (distance 300m).
- 26.3 The most optimistic timetabling of events would see a decision on the Safe Routes to School programme before the end of March 2002 in order to allow the travel survey, formulation of proposals, public consultation, detailed design and construction within the following fifteen months. The attitude of the schools to the development of school plans in general and, in particular, the willingness to carry out a travel survey, while not critical, could speed up the delivery of this strategy.
- 26.4 Maynooth Action Strategy also proposes that a more broadly based Steering Committee be set up by to drive the development and implementation of the strategy. The Steering Committee would develop proposals, discuss with various groups within Maynooth how the *Bike to the Future* strategy might be promoted within their organisation and aggregate reports on the level of cycling.
- 26.5 It is recommended that Steering Committee carry out the following tasks:
- Seek co-operation with Irish Cycling for the promotion of cycling in Maynooth.
 - Seek the support of organisations engaged in indoor and outside activities for “*Bike to the Future*”.
 - Inform the Community of Maynooth of the ongoing development of the cycling strategy using the Maynooth Action Strategy web site.
 - Promote recreational cycling routes and use the Maynooth Action Strategy web site to publicise them.
 - Develop a proposal for funding from local industry to encourage cycling among adults.

- Develop a cycle related proposal for the promotion of tourism.
- Consider the development of travel plans with the schools and universities in Maynooth.
- Seek the installation of cycle parking at the three main shopping centres in Maynooth.
- Develop further proposals to promote cycling.

27. Kildare County Council

27.1 It is recommended that Kildare County Council carry out the following tasks:

- Submit “*Bike to the Future*” to the Dublin Transportation Office with the proposal of Maynooth as the first choice of the Council for funding in the next Safe Route to School programme.
- Include in the Safe Routes to School brief a consideration of the problems accessing commercial premises in the town centre.
- Install a cycle rack at the junction of Leinster Street and Main Street and cycle stands elsewhere along Main Street.
- Maintain the markings and review the signage on Main Street.
- Ensure the completion of the existing Parsons Hall cycle track in accordance with current standards.
- Reverse the prohibition on cyclists turning into Pound Lane from Moyglare Road and Dunboyne Road.
- Ban heavy goods vehicles using Maynooth as an access route from the motorway to the Dunboyne Road after the opening of the Celbridge Interchange.
- Provide cycling related/safe routes to school publications in Maynooth Branch Library.
- (Elected Members) Endorse *Bike to the Future* strategy.
- (Elected Members) Support EuroVelo and other cross county route.

- (Elected Members) Review the Council's endorsement of Waterway Ireland's strategy on canals.
- (Elected Members) Endorse the nomination of Maynooth as the first choice of Kildare County Council in the next Safe Route to School programme.

CONCLUSION

- Since work commenced on this document, two policies have been published which set out government thinking on health and transportation– the Health Strategy and the final report of the *Platform for Change*. The Health Strategy expresses concern about the future health of our children if present lifestyles continue. The *Platform for Change* restates that traffic congestion will not be solved by the funding of new roads, but by a modal switch, where practical, from the private car to sustainable modes of transport. Both reinforce the view of an enhanced role for cycling in the future.
- In every town and village throughout Ireland, complaints about traffic and traffic congestion are to be heard. Cycling is not a panacea for all the traffic problems of Maynooth but, by addressing it at all levels of the community, a strategy that has not been tried elsewhere in Ireland, Maynooth could become a role model for other communities. The Tánaiste memorably quoted “Boston or Berlin” in relation to economic policy but the two cities also reflect the differences in transport policy. Boston is noted as a city, which, in the past at least, has done little to encourage cycling. Berlin, on the other hand, is noteworthy for encouraging the integration of cycling and train travel. Every day, when we leave our homes, we make a choice, usually automatically, in relation to transportation. In the future, when we leave our homes, our choice between “Boston” representing the car and “Berlin” representing the cycle will hopefully be deliberate.