



PLANET – The Partnerships Network

Submission to

2020 Vision – Sustainable Travel and Transport

May 2008

PLANET – The Partnerships Network is the representative organisation of the thirty-eight Area-based Partnership companies, who from 2008, under the Department of Community and Rural Affairs Cohesion Process, will have country-wide coverage (after merging with Community Partnerships and LEADER Companies).

The Network comprises eighteen Partnership Companies based in Rural areas, nine based in towns and cities outside of Dublin (urban Partnerships), and eleven within the Dublin area.

Based on this broad geographical spread, and with almost one third of these companies having more than fifteen years experience, and many over ten years in their own areas, we welcome this opportunity to voice and contribute our local and national knowledge to this consultation process.

From the outset, PLANET accepts the assertion of the “*2020 Vision*” document that current trends for travel and transport are unsustainable, given the expected population increases, increased levels of car ownership, and the continued dependence on the use of the car – particularly in rural areas. We also recognise the impact of increased congestion on the quality of life of people, and particularly those trying to get to and from work, and also accept the impact this will have on the economic competitiveness of this country as road freight is delayed by traffic congestion. The increased reliance on transport to go about our day-to-day tasks also, of course, leads to greater greenhouse gas emissions, thus having profound negative impacts on the environment and the quality of health of our citizens.

We welcome the vision that by 2020 there will be a considerable shift to public transport, cycling and walking; a significant reduction in congestion; a reduction in transport emissions; an enhancement of Ireland’s competitiveness, and a completely changed public attitude.

However, it is our belief that these outcomes can only be achieved by significant investment through a range of methods, relevant to the different scenarios that we now experience – a rapidly expanding capital city, explosions of population, and consequently houses, commercial and industrial parks in urban and commuter counties around the capital, and the provision of services to rural areas, some of which are particularly isolated.

These goals and desired outcomes also need to be clearly outlined, quantified, and actions assigned in any subsequent Government documentation pertaining to sustainable travel and transport.

ISSUES FOR PARTNERSHIP AREAS:

As mentioned, differing issues apply to the differing areas (Dublin, Urban, and Rural), however, on the whole, the availability of adequate, accessible, affordable transport actively effects the ability of those supported by Partnership Companies to access the range of services available to them.

- From an enterprise and employment perspective, transport is vital to those seeking / in employment – to be able to go to job interviews or to their jobs.
- From a Community Development perspective, transport is vital to allow communities to interact, meet, and socialise.
- From an Education and Training perspective, transport is vital to allow people to access or re-access education and training opportunities and for children to get to and from school.
- And an accessible transport network is the life-blood of all communities, and dictates how they go about their day-to-day activities - shopping, socialising, and living.

This is why it is vital that this vision for sustainable travel and transport must cater for the needs of all communities, age-groups, and sectors.

Section 3: Planning and Transport

For **urban areas**¹ we note that the creation of ‘compact cities’ has been recommended. These ‘compact cities’ integrate employment, community services, retail facilities and public transport. We also take this to include areas of Greater Dublin such as Blanchardstown, Ballymun, Carrickmines, etc. etc.

We urge that equal care be given in the creation of these ‘compact cities’ to the provision of all services simultaneously, rather than in a piecemeal way, with the creation of large housing estates, and supporting roadways, and then at a point in the future by the schools, community services, health services, retail outlets etc.

¹ Urban meaning Dublin and the towns and cities covered by Urban Partnerships

It is important for the creation of new communities that all services are provided concurrently, and that the 'social' elements are not ignored or neglected.

This requires comprehensive sustainable planning regulations both for the development of new sites, and also the improvement of existing housing and enterprise developments. We also hope that the Dublin Transport Authority will indeed ensure a better integration of planning and transport services within the Dublin area, and their need to link with local area plans should ensure a 'joined-up approach' to development.

In all urban areas, public transport and 'Park and Ride' facilities should be integral during the planning of any development, and the ability to walk or cycle within these areas should be of priority.

In **rural areas**, the availability of transport is a vital lifeline to the survival and development of these areas. The National Spatial Strategy aims to promote development in designated hubs and gateways outside of Dublin, and the ability of people and goods to move 'in and get out' of these gateways and hubs will encourage people to remain, work, and trade in those places closest to them.

Chapter 4: Moving People

It is vital to appreciate that without a first-rate travel and transportation system, the ability of people to move from car usage to public transport cannot happen. It appears to be the case that with an increased awareness of the impact of the varying types of transport on our environment, that people are now more amenable to making changes to their usage of transport and lifestyles to 'protect the environment', however, we reiterate again, that this can only be encouraged and developed in parallel with the development of a satisfactory transportation and travel system.

Public transport will become a viable option for all when it becomes frequent and fast, readily available and accessible, attractive to use and an integrated system linking all forms of transport - bus, rail and car (through the ready availability of park and ride services.)

We would urge Government and all other agencies involved to increase the public awareness of tax incentives for monthly and annual bus, train and *Luas* tickets both for employees and employers.

Bus Transport

For ***Dublin*** we agree with the recommendations for the improvement of bus services by the

- Development of additional park and ride facilities at carefully chosen locations
- Introduction of an integrated ticketing system with real-time passenger information.
- Continued development and improvement of QBC's in the Greater Dublin Area, and with priority Green Routes in other urban areas.
- Ongoing improvement of the quality, reliability and efficiency of the bus fleet both in Dublin and also at National level.
- Continued substantial investment in new fleets and maintenance of the existing fleet.

However, we would urge, linked to identifiable targets and outcomes that the above actions be implemented as a matter of priority under any National Action Plan.

As mentioned, transport is vital to the survival of ***Rural*** Ireland.

We note from the *2020 Vision* document that by and large, definite proposals for the support of the travel and transport needs of Ireland are not comprehensively addressed.

Firstly, we call for a substantial discussion on the needs for rural communities. Without an adequate road and transport system, people are left with little option but to drive to work, school, leisure activities, shopping, etc. In essence rural life revolves around car usage, and this is by necessity, and not purely for luxury purposes.

Partnership Companies have welcomed and supported the establishment of the Rural Transport Initiative (RTI). The purpose of the RTI was and is to promote and support the development of innovative community based public transport projects in rural areas; to improve utilisation of existing transport assets; to encourage innovative approaches to meet recognised local needs, including those of the disabled and mobility impaired; and to contribute to the development of rural public transport policy.

The RTI has offered a successful service that has proven itself to be flexible to the needs of its users, (often offering door-to-door transport for the passengers), and used by some of the most marginalised by the lack of access to transport in rural areas – women, the elderly, disabled, people on low incomes and young people. Ongoing community consultation and feedback from passengers allows the services to be more targeted and innovative, and has resulted in increasing access to education, employment and training opportunities.

Research also shows that weekly mid-morning services are the trips most frequently provided, with Friday being the most popular day for travel, particularly amongst the elderly – reflecting the age-old tradition of shopping on a Friday. Evening services are also proving very successful – clearly illustrating the need for readily available extended transport services at a local level within rural communities.

Not only is this a transport service, but it also provides a vital social service to those experiencing isolation and loneliness, those who enjoy the social interaction afforded to them by somebody they know, or just a helping hand with their shopping to their door. It harks back to the days when communities and neighbours supported, and ‘looked out’ for each other.

We urge the continued support and expansion of the Rural Transport Initiative, to continue to develop innovative local responses to transport needs, and to continue to fund the ongoing provision of inter-city national bus services on a frequent and regular basis.

School Bus Transport

For both rural and urban areas, the increased use of public transport for schools would significantly reduce the amount of cars on the roads at specific times of each day. The improvements to traffic congestion levels, and transport emissions, particularly in Dublin, during school breaks are recognised by all. The availability of adequate school transportation would cut down on these short distance journeys. Walking and cycling to school should also be supported and encouraged through education and initiatives.

Physical improvements in the vicinity of schools such as traffic calming, low speed zones, cycle lanes and safe crossings should also be provided.

Rail Transport

Similar to bus transport, the provision of adequate, reliable, integrated, and clean, appealing rail services will encourage their increased use.

In Dublin, the availability of the *Luas* network has proved a phenomenal achievement, so much so that it is in danger of becoming a victim of its own success, particularly during rush-hour periods. Its overuse highlights the desire of people to use public transport for the convenience it provides. Therefore, it is vital that the *Luas* service continues to be extended, and also the provision of more park and ride facilities, which are also proving particularly popular for avoiding city centre congestion, parking charges, etc. etc.

The rail network in Southern Ireland is also predominately confined to the eastern seaboard and the midlands.

We would continue to urge for the reopening of the Western Rail corridor to provide a viable transportation system for both people and goods between the towns and cities of the North West, West and South West.

Car Usage

As mentioned above, for some people, and particularly those in rural communities, the use of a car is the only means to go about day-to-day life. In this event, it would be more beneficial to offer people an incentive to reduce their car usage, rather than 'the stick approach' of introducing levies or congestion charges, carbon taxes, etc. etc.

- Initiatives for car pooling, car clubs, and car sharing should be promoted, facilitated and incentivised.
- The promotion and education of the benefits (both financially and environmentally) of 'eco-driving' should continue to be illustrated at national and local level.
- Tourism throughout Ireland also depends on car usage, and although mentioned only briefly in this consultation document, in the way of cycle tourism, initiatives to develop this area, or promote accessible tourist destinations should be examined.

Cycling and Walking

The health benefits of cycling and walking are apparent – counteracting sedentary lifestyles, promoting good health, and ultimately reducing the risks of obesity and chronic diseases. However, a number of issues need to be addressed for to make cycling and walking viable alternatives for people.

- A need to make streets safer for walkers and cyclists.
- A need to address the public perception towards cyclists and cycling through education and enforcement of rules of the roads for all road users – including cyclists.
- For employers to support the use of bicycles through company bicycle schemes, and for insurance companies to provide insurance for cyclists.
- The continued development of dedicated cycle lanes that are safe and in a good state of repair.
- Cycling lessons should be considered for children of primary school age – similar to learning the 'Safe Cross Code'.

It is indeed reassuring to note the Dublin Transportation Office study findings that suggest that 21% of car commuters would consider cycling to work if they were supported to do so through dedicated cycle lanes, reduced traffic, improved road surfaces, reduction in heavy vehicle volumes and reduced traffic speeds.

Chapter 5: Moving Goods

In the absence of an adequate rail network, the reliance on the road network for the transportation of goods around Ireland and to facilitate import and export will remain the principle mode of transport of goods.

It is vital to maximise, support, develop, and incentivise the use of the rail network, as fuel consumption and CO2 emissions by road freight continues to rise. This in turn leads to increased congestion around urban areas, by Heavy Goods Vehicles and Light Duty Vehicles.

These HGV's are also a cause of concern to rural communities where smaller country roads are now frequently occupied by vehicles where the road structure is incapable of carrying their width, weight or speed.

However, in the interim, overall efficiency in road freight transportation should be improved in consultation with all relevant organisations and representative groups.

Chapter 6: Additional Measures to Achieve the Vision

- From both an alleviation of congestion and quality of life perspective, the promotion of flexible working and workplace travel plans would prove beneficial to employees and employers. However, this can only be achieved if it is a viable option for both. Therefore, an 'awareness campaign' of the benefits of such arrangements might prove beneficial to encourage employers to become involved in any such initiatives.
- Employers, where possible should be incentivised to put onsite measures in place to make bus, rail, cycling and walking a safer and more attractive option for their employees, such as secure cycle parking, shower facilities, shuttle busses to nearby rail or bus services, flexible working time so as to avail of public transport, but not at rush-hour times.
- Mandatory and fiscal measures should only be applied when people can realistically avail of alternatives, and at present, these are not sufficiently available, particularly in rural communities.
- Regulatory measures should also be considered, and these could include congestion charges.
- We of course welcome the tax incentives to encourage the purchase of cleaner and more energy efficient vehicles, where such incentives have the potential to increase the fuel efficiency of vehicles and reward good purchasing behaviour.
- We would stress that in any discussion on road pricing that recognition be taken of the fact that car usage is vital for rural communities to go about their day-to-day business, and that all efforts be made to introduce adequate and appropriate transportation services before the introduction of road pricing.
- We would also welcome any subsidisation of transport, either direct or indirect.

- The increased use of biofuels, or other sustainable environmentally friendly fuel sources by private car users, and through pilot projects by public transport providers, the haulage industry and the taxi fleet are to be welcomed, and should be mainstreamed at the earliest possible opportunity.

In conclusion, PLANET welcomes this consultation process on sustainable travel and transport, however, we do feel that there is a:

- Need for a stronger rural focus
- Need for clear, identifiable and quantifiable targets and outcomes, with clear timescales.
- Need to ensure that the provision of transport services are not only to create “commuter belts” but to support viable, vibrant communities where the holistic needs – social, economic, health and education - of those living there are catered for.