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Opening Statement to the Joint Committee on Climate Action

By the Secretary General, Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport

Thursday, 4 October 2018

Ireland faces a considerable task to achieve our national policy ambition of transition to a climate resilient, low carbon society by 2050. You have heard much evidence on the extent to which combating climate change is a significant national challenge. Climate measures and policies chosen today will have consequences for Ireland for decades to come.

This represents an especially significant challenge for the transport sector, both in Ireland and elsewhere, needing to develop approaches to both reducing emissions and adapting to the impacts of climate change.

Ireland's rising population, our welcome return to economic growth, more people in employment and more goods being transported bring with them an increased number of vehicles on our roads and a rise in the number of kilometres driven. Ireland's economy and society are busy and on the move, presenting the transport sector with various challenges, foremost among them being the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in an expanding sector without impeding social progress or economic recovery.

Transport is not an end in itself. It is a means for access to jobs, markets, education, health services, cultural interaction and a whole range of other services and amenities that contribute to healthy and fulfilling lives.

However, the EPA inventories show a 6% growth in overall non-ETS emissions in 2016. Transport emissions grew by 4%. The progress made in reducing transport emissions by 25% between 2007 and 2012 is being eroded by significant transport demand growth, growth which, unfortunately, is not yet all being met in the most efficient ways.

Transport emissions are only 6% below the key 2005 benchmark level. Furthermore, EPA projections indicate that, without intervention, transport emissions could rise between 2020 and 2035, not fall, arising from a growing population, improving economy and rising employment - along with a traditional settlement pattern that engenders and is now underpinned by private car use.

With 20% of Irish emissions, and as the third largest emitting sector, transport will have to play its part in the national decarbonisation undertaking, requiring a step-change in how we travel, how we do business and the types of fuels and technologies we employ. These transport challenges are not unique to Ireland, they are similarly being faced by our EU and OECD partners.

The transport decarbonisation pathway must begin with sustained investment in public transport and active travel to improve the quality and capacity of our networks and, where feasible, encourage a shift away from private car use. In parallel, we must reduce our reliance on fossil fuels and secure an early and sustainable transition to zero and low emission vehicles. Until these measures can produce meaningful results, Irish vehicle owners and users must have the most efficient vehicles and use them in the most carbon friendly ways. This requires working with many actors on a series of complementary policy measures requiring a cross governmental approach.

The National Climate Change Mitigation Plan, which the Government agreed in 2017, represents the critical first step in communicating the longer term national climate vision. Its role is to set out both the challenges to meeting Ireland's emission reductions targets and chart a clear and quantified path towards the long-term objective of transition to a low-carbon, and climate resilient economy by 2050.

The Plan sets out 24 transport mitigation measures, with 29 associated actions. They are wide-ranging and focus mainly on three themes; modal shift particularly to public transport in urban areas; the transition to alternatively fuelled vehicles; and targeted behavioural change.

Of course, the mitigation measures outlined in a 2017 Plan cannot provide a complete roadmap to achieve full decarbonisation by 2050, but instead realistically represent where Ireland is now and how it can progress towards the ultimate goal of decarbonisation. The Plan is a living document, continually being updated as research, policy and innovations generate additional cost-effective mitigation options. Over the period to 2050, the National Mitigation Plan will be supported by a series of complementary Government policies and strategies that will support its decarbonisation objectives.

Project Ireland 2040 is one such initiative, having a pivotal role in clearly establishing a national commitment to the right spatial planning and the capital investment needed to support projected population and employment growth in a sustainable manner.

Through Project Ireland 2040, Government is looking to reconcile mobility needs with climate obligations – committing to integrating land use and spatial planning to encourage

fewer and shorter journeys and support public transport, walking and cycling as real alternatives to the private car.

Investment in public and sustainable transport

Settlement patterns strongly influence how people travel; the provision of sustainable transport options is only realistic when populations are located close to where people work, go to school, shop and socialise.

Continued investment in public and sustainable transport is a cornerstone of the Government's transport sector mitigation response. Encouraging public transport use is central to national efforts to combat climate change, air pollution and other negative environmental and social impacts. Public transport needs to provide a realistic and sustainable alternative, where feasible, to reduce the dominance of the private car.

Government is committed to meeting increasing travel demand through more public transport capacity and supporting cycling and walking and the policy has seen some success. In Dublin alone, over two-thirds of all journeys in to the city centre are now made on foot, by bicycle, or by public transport representing an increase of over 10% in the last six years.

In Budget 2018, the process of investing wisely to increase capacity and enhance the range of alternatives to the car was stepped up. *Project Ireland 2040* will further build upon this investment. 'Linking people and places' announced investment of €8.6 billion specifically for public transport. From Metrolink to BusConnects, Luas expansion to cycle lanes, the groundwork is being laid for an integrated, diverse, transport future. The aim is to link more people to more places, while improving quality of life, easing congestion in our cities and doing our part in delivering a low carbon society.

To take the example of Bus Connects, investment in the project being planned could deliver an increase in services of up to 27% and journey time savings of up to 50% making capacity available and the switch to bus easier, in addition to cleaner, lower emitting buses.

Budget 2018 committed over €100m over 4 years to multi-annual cycling and walking programmes. Further significant investment planned under BusConnects, in Dublin, could deliver 200km plus of cycle tracks/lanes and pedestrian facilities.

The decisive shift away from carbon-intensive transport will be further underpinned by electrifying more of the rail network and committing to stop buying diesel-only urban buses. By 2023, 500 buses should be converted to low-emission vehicles. Although public transport accounts for less than 5% of Ireland's overall transport emissions, we recognise that leadership from our public transport area in improving fuel efficiency and climate impact is important.

The NDP commits that, from July 2019 onwards, we will no longer buy diesel-only buses for the urban public bus fleet. Work is underway on preparing for implementation of this.

A Green Public Transport Fund was established to support the uptake of low carbon, energy efficient technologies within the public transport sector. The fund is supporting the piloting and uptake of energy-efficient and alternative fuel technologies for PSO operators within the bus fleet and SPSV sector, and will be used to bridge the price differential between such technologies and conventionally fuelled vehicles.

We will begin an up-to-date and comprehensive set of vehicle trials later this year to help further inform purchasing decisions for new buses over the coming years. We will test, on Dublin and Cork bus routes, a range of technologies including full electric, diesel-electric

hybrids, and compressed natural gas. The trials will consider CO_2 emissions, air quality impacts, and contribution potential towards renewable energy targets as well as fuelling and infrastructure costs.

Transition to alternative fuels

Reducing our reliance on fossil fuels and securing an early transition to zero- and low-emission vehicles is integral to our transport mitigation efforts, and offers one of the most cost effective and feasible pathways to meeting our carbon mitigation and air pollution objectives. This is particularly important outside urban areas where dependence on private cars is strongest and where public transport systems and active travel offer less potential for effectively addressing travel needs.

Fossil fuel use has become deeply embedded into our driving culture; we are almost entirely dependent on imported oil. Of the total vehicle fleet, over 45% of vehicles use petrol while nearly 54% operate on diesel, meaning less than 1% of vehicles are alternatively fuelled at present. Reducing our reliance on fossil fuels and switching to greener alternatives will be essential if we are to successfully decarbonise the sector but the profile of our current fleet reflects the scale of change required.

Project 2040 earmarks investments to support the transition to zero emission capable cars - underpinning a target of half a million EVs on Irish roads by 2030. The groundwork for this ambitious target was laid in Ireland's *National Policy Framework on Alternative Fuels Infrastructure for Transport* published in 2017. It represented an important step in communicating the longer term national vision for decarbonising transport by 2050 – and

set out our ambition that by 2030 all new cars and vans sold in Ireland will be zero-emissions capable.

Colleagues in the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment are working to ensure that access to refuelling or recharging infrastructure does not act as a barrier to the take-up of alternatively fuelled vehicles. The Framework sets minimum levels of provision of refuelling infrastructure and common technical standards to permit interoperability. All this provides a supportive, enabling environment for suppliers and consumers and increased confidence and reassurance in our national commitment to the emerging alternative fuel/technology market.

The Task Force on Low Emitting Vehicles, established on foot of a Programme for Partnership Government commitment, is considering in a thorough, pragmatic and targeted manner the range of measures and options available to Government to accelerate the deployment of low carbon technologies, especially EVs. The taskforce is jointly chaired by my Department and the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment and its membership includes the key relevant Government Departments and bodies.

Its work was divided into two phases with the first phase focusing on EVs and its second phase now focusing on other alternative fuels. We consider that the Taskforce is working effectively to assemble and consider the many factors influencing the scale and rate of transition to low emitting vehicles.

An attractive array of incentives has been put in place to encourage motorists to make the switch to electric. And this is supported by an extensive recharging network in which we are again investing in upgrading and expanding. The pace of take-up is accelerating rapidly with

more EVs sold in the first four months of 2018 than in all of 2017. July and August saw the highest monthly sales ever in EVs in Ireland. The emissions reduction dividends from the switch to EVs will take time to accrue but the pathway is now being clearly established.

This is the most climate significant transformation in transport - replacing conventionally fossil fuelled vehicles on the roads. The initial investment required in alternative technologies and supporting infrastructure is admittedly costly but can help Ireland to adapt more quickly to this inevitable transition away from conventional fuels. Encouraging alternative fuels and technologies also actively sets Ireland on the right longer-term path towards full decarbonisation and cleaner air.

Furthermore, these changes also provide us with many opportunities for additional benefits to our overall health and living standards. New technologies and new fuels offer great potential and reasons to be optimistic.

Making the existing fleet less emitting

Meanwhile, we are not ignoring the sizeable existing vehicle fleet and the key role played by efficiencies, ecodriving and increased biofuel use in delivering sustained transport emissions reductions. We continue to work hard at EU level, pushing strongly for better EU vehicle efficiency standards for cars, vans and heavy duty vehicles. This regulatory approach has yielded important efficiencies in the cars and vans sector already. Setting the next phase of targets for cars and vans and setting new targets for heavy duty vehicles will be a key component of Irish success in reducing vehicle emissions in the short to medium term, as our status as technology takers remains unchanged.

Biofuels have also played a significant role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions from transport. The Biofuels Obligation Scheme (BOS) comes under the aegis of our colleague Department, the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment. First introduced in 2010, the Scheme requires suppliers of road transport fuel to ensure that biofuels represent a certain percentage of their national annual fuel sales. The level of obligation has been increased a number of times since the introduction and it is the declared intention to continue to increase it further on a phased basis to 2020. This will not only yield significant transport emissions dividends but also bring us very close to the 2020 target for renewable energy in transport.

Climate adaptation

As well as the measures to reduce transport emissions in line with EU and international obligations, there is also the challenge of building climate resilience within the transport sector. Even if greenhouse gas emissions were to completely stop from today, global climate change would continue for many decades as a result of past emissions.

This poses two challenges, the task of ensuring continued services and maintaining infrastructure for roads, rail, aviation, ports and buses, and the need to protect new assets by ensuring that today's design specifications will adequately address tomorrow's infrastructure needs. The first transport sectoral Climate Change Adaptation Plan was published in December 2016, "*Developing Resilience to Climate Change in the Irish Transport Sector"*. The Plan outlines climate research and analysis to guide our journey in 'future-proofing' our vital road, rail, aviation, ports and bus services and infrastructure.

Building on this considerable knowledge base, work has started on our statutory Adaptation Plan for transport. The next step, in conjunction with other key infrastructure sectors, is the identification of critical national transport infrastructure - road, rail, airports and ports. Important work has been underway across the sector including detailed risk assessments of critical road and rail infrastructure developed by key transport stakeholders. In particular I would note TII's *Strategy for Adapting to Climate Change on Ireland's Light Rail and National Road Network* (2017) and Irish Rail's ongoing work developing the *Coastal Railway Vulnerability Index*. The Department continues to support our 'front-line actors' - transport agencies and local authorities – to identify potential vulnerabilities within their operations and to consider how these can be addressed.

Adaptive capacity to climate change is also being considered as part of ongoing work on *Planning Land Use and Transport – Outlook 2040* (PLUTO), which is updating the existing framework for transport investment published in 2015. Its work is considering how best adaptation requirements and measures should be reflected in the estimation of steady-state maintenance costs.

The challenge of rising demand

This Committee has heard much evidence on the extent to which combating climate change is a significant national challenge. What is clear is that climate measures and policies implemented today will have consequences for Ireland for decades to come.

EPA projections for our 2030 prospects are sobering. Strong levels of investment for new emissions-efficient public transport capacity have been secured; investment in cycling and walking is being ramped up; efficiency standards in vehicles are improving every year; the

range of incentives to encourage the EV transition has been convincingly developed and the proportion of biofuels in petrol and diesel is increasing.

All these efforts are currently being cancelled out by rising demand. Each transport trip now is less emitting than ever before. Nonetheless emissions are rising. But then every year demand for trips to work, education, shopping, leisure and social interaction rise as population and employment grows. And goods transport in support of exports, increased construction activity and higher agricultural output grows. So the development of policy responses for transport needs to continue and go even further.

Decarbonising transport by 2050 will require a transformation, expected mainly to be achieved through the promotion, deployment and uptake of new technologies and alternative fuels. Alongside technology development, more and better lower carbon public transport, more use of active travel modes, a reduction in the need to travel and shorter journey distances must also play a role.

Every sector needs to identify new measures and intensify those already yielding results and that analysis needs to start right away. The focus must be on early, co-ordinated action. Ireland's response must involve a whole of Government approach, be comprehensive and be quickly identified.

Collectively, these actions will move us towards achieving the long-term vision of a low carbon society. It will not be easy and it will require a fundamental societal transformation but with the substantial investment identified, and through the focus given by Project Ireland 2040 we can expect to see changes in the transport sector as it steps up its efforts to reduce its climate impact.

Achieving the necessary transport emissions mitigation will require individual consciousness and action by us all. It also requires continued close co-operation between my Department and other key Departments across the areas of transport taxation, fuel policy, investment policy, air quality and spatial planning. My Department will continue to work closely with all the various actors and their various policy drivers as we seek to secure significant, sustainable national emission savings and ultimately a largely decarbonised economy and society.