



## Testimony to Joint Committee on Transport, Tourism and Sport

19<sup>th</sup> June 2019

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### Opening Statement

Chairperson, members of the Committee, thank you for the invitation to present our research on “Advancing the Low-Carbon Transition in Irish Transport”, which was commissioned by the National Economic and Social Council. For my statement, I wish to focus on the potential solutions uncovered by the research.

Building on the diagnosis of the transport sector as outlined by Dr. Torney, our research identifies recommendations and poses questions for stakeholders who wish to strengthen low-carbon transition in Irish transport. These align with our three key research themes.

First, **acknowledging complexities in the transport sector**, transport governance ought to be built upon the following principles:

- We need to **adopt a collaborative, adaptive and reflexive approach to policy making**. This requires input from a diverse range of public, private and civil society actors whose voices are not sufficiently heard. Stakeholder engagement is essential to enhance transparency, legitimacy and trust in decision-making, and generate better outcomes.
- We should **support bottom-up approaches to low-carbon transport**. This approach takes into account geographical and technical variations and the rural-urban divide that results in different transport solutions and investment required in different areas.
- We ought to **understand transport as a social practice** to promote positive behaviour change. This means that we consider the socio-cultural, technical and governance forces that shape our mobility choices. Designing

and implementing appropriate combinations of these interventions will ensure that we have the right incentives, options and new social norms to make low-carbon transport easy to choose.

Second, **challenging institutional priorities** that to date have not included a strong focus on low-carbon transition, we propose the following recommendations:

- **Transport policy making should be aligned with international sustainable mobility** thinking that promotes an ‘Avoid, Shift, Improve’ (ASI) framework for both passenger and freight transport. For the systemic change required, this would more clearly emphasise a hierarchy that focuses on reducing journeys in the first place, through better land-use planning, for example. Second, it aims to achieve modal shift, for instance, to public transport, walking and cycling in passenger transport and to rail and alternative “last mile delivery” options in freight. Finally, the ASI framework focuses on improving vehicle efficiencies, for example, through using alternative fuels, electrification or enhancing engine efficiencies.
- **Government needs to provide low-carbon direction.** This will signal a new pathway to investors, consumers and citizens. This includes leadership from the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport but should also be underpinned by a whole-of-government approach to climate action.
- The **mandates of transport governance actors should be revised** to include a statutory commitment to prioritise low-carbon development. More detailed carbon accounting, and a heavier weight assigned to this, could feature in project appraisals to inform decisions about transport investments.
- **The public sector should lead by example.** This could include not just central government but also, for example, local authorities switching fleets to electrified alternatives. The civil service should give greater priority to low-carbon transition in their hiring, promotion and travel schemes.

Third, and finally, **changing who shapes transport outcomes**, our research identifies a variety of institutional remedies that can help to advance the low carbon transition:

- **Focused taskforces** could combine insights from public, private, academic and civil society actors around specific transport challenges. This could build upon the success of the Low Emission Vehicle Taskforce that provided a structured forum and brought together key actors to unblock policy action for electric vehicle incentivisation.
- **Multi-modal transport hubs** that connect transport options hold promise for decarbonising Irish passenger transport, along with enhanced (re)distribution hubs to decarbonise freight. Public-private partnerships may

help to progress such low-carbon hubs, combining funding and expertise for change.

- **Forums for peer learning** can enable villages, towns and cities across Ireland to learn from each other to scale up innovative low carbon transport solutions. A variety of settlement sizes could learn from one another's experimental approaches, while recognising important differences across the transport landscape.
- **Deliberative forums for stakeholder and citizen participation** could enhance transparency and moderate the impact of lobbying by special interests. Public information offices could be established, along with structured citizen assemblies for deliberation and engagement.
- **Research infrastructure for transport policymaking** that supports more diverse and inclusive transport research is needed, as well as channels of communication and absorptive capacity for more evidence-based policy making. This includes the potential for intermediary institutions for enhanced knowledge exchange between academia and government, and participatory backcasting approaches to create implementable transition frameworks.

None of these solutions by themselves are a silver bullet, but together they can provide a governance framework that adequately addresses the climate crisis.

We need to tackle Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions head on. The recent declaration of a "climate emergency" by the Dáil made international headlines, but it will be meaningless if not backed up by concrete action. Transport would be a good place to start. Thank you.