

Opening Statement to the Joint Committee on Transport and Communications on Sustainable Mobility Policy

By the Secretary General, Department of Transport

Wednesday, 13th October 2021

Thank you, Chairman and members of the committee, for this opportunity to discuss sustainable mobility policy. I am joined today by my colleagues Garret Doocey who is leading on the development of our new Sustainable Mobility Policy, as well as Andrew Ebrill, Principal Officer, National Roads, Greenways & Active Travel Division and Dominic Mullaney, Principal Advisor, Regional and Local Roads, all of whom have been providing input into our new policy framework.

As we all know, we need to transit to a low-carbon, climate resilient society. The *Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021* commits us to a 51% reduction in our overall greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and to achieving net zero emissions no later than 2050. In 2018 transport related emissions accounted for 20% of our national total, second only to agriculture. It's clear that the Irish transport sector faces significant challenges regarding the need to both reduce emissions and adapt to the impacts of climate change. In short, we require a fundamental change in the nature of Irish transport.

Fundamental to that change will be increasing the numbers of people using sustainable modes of transport – be that walking, cycling or public transport.

And to achieve that increase we need to put in place the right policy framework.

So that's the core purpose of the new sustainable mobility policy. It will replace the existing policy framework known as *Smarter Travel*, which was published in 2009, and provide a new 10-year policy framework for active travel and public transport.

The policy review has been underway for some time, with a very successful stakeholder engagement event held at the beginning of the public consultation process and over 250 submissions received last year from a wide variety of people and organisations. Since then the Department has reviewed all of those submissions, published a full report of the consultation process, engaged further with stakeholders and we are now finalising the revised policy.

The primary focus of our new policy will be to cater for daily travel needs in a more sustainable manner. We intend to achieve this by making sustainable modes the smartest and most attractive choice. Active travel and public transport are not only the most environmentally friendly options but also the most socially inclusive and economically accessible. Both are a key part of a just transition to meeting our climate goals. Fairness demands that they should have priority.

The new policy will have two parts –

- Firstly, a 10-year policy statement which will set out the vision for the future of sustainable mobility in Ireland and
- Secondly, a 5-year action plan to deliver that policy statement.

The draft policy statement itself is centred around three guiding principles.

The first principle – ***Safe and Green Mobility*** – will set out an ambitious and comprehensive set of actions for the decarbonisation of public transport. These actions will be aligned with the forthcoming *Climate Action Plan* and will position us to meet our transport emission targets. However, it will not be enough to decarbonise public transport fleets. We also need to increase the capacity and range of public transport services to meet the projected travel demand set out in *Project Ireland 2040*. As this Committee knows from its own work, these transport needs are not uniform across the country and tailored solutions will be needed for both urban and rural areas.

Funding for active travel initiatives in both urban and rural Ireland together with improved and expanded public transport services across the country are needed to reduce car dependency. Projects like *BusConnects* in the cities and *Connecting Ireland* in rural Ireland will provide viable alternatives to the private car. These will be implemented alongside a range of behavioural change measures to encourage more people to make a sustainable option their preferred mode of transport.

I would also emphasise that safety is an important part of our policy. Ireland ranks second among EU member states for road safety. But we can't take that for granted. We need to maintain and improve our existing transport assets while also providing a safe space for everyone including pedestrians and cyclists. Safety is an essential requirement for modal shift. Unless we prioritise it, unless we resource it, modal shift won't happen.

The second principle – ***People Focused Mobility*** – looks at how we can make sustainable mobility options accessible to everyone. While a key priority under this principle is ensuring accessibility for people with reduced mobility, we shouldn't forget that accessibility also extends to social inclusion. Universally accessible, affordable, and reliable transport makes a big difference to our quality of life. If we focus on the needs of those who are most vulnerable, we can improve the experience for everyone.

This principle will also examine how we can better engage with stakeholders. The Department is committed to working closely with all our stakeholders as we seek to deliver the new policy.

Our final principle – ***Better Integrated Mobility*** – looks at better integrating transport and land-use planning, as well as examining smart transport solutions. We want to create neighbourhoods where every day amenities can be reached easily by foot or bike. We want to ensure such neighbourhoods are connected and develop in areas where public transport services are available to link them to larger towns and cities. But integration isn't just about land-use, it's also about innovative services that support quick and easy transfers between different transport modes. Importantly, legislation and regulation will need to safely integrate emerging technologies like e-scooters within the transport network.

Clearly we need to put these principles into practice and to do that we've developed ten high-level goals that set out our 10-year framework. Within that, fits our 5-year action plan. We will then revisit this action plan midway through the policy to measure how we are delivering on our goals. That will allow us to take stock, to update actions, and to add new ones if

necessary. In other words, this action plan will keep our feet to the fire and hold the Department to account for the successful delivery of the policy.

While I should emphasise that the draft policy framework remains subject to Ministerial and Government approval, the publication of the finalised policy is planned before the end of the year. However, publication is only the beginning. Achieving the necessary shift to sustainable mobility will require both individual and collective effort. We will continue to work with our stakeholders, at national, regional, and local levels as we carry out these actions and to support others in our collective efforts to deliver the policy's outcomes. Together we can create the necessary changes in the transport sector to reduce our climate impact.

Chairman and committee members, I hope my remarks have given you a useful overview of our work to date and I look forward to our discussion.