

# DÁIL ÉIREANN

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## AN COMHCHOISTE UM IOMPAR AGUS LÍONRAÍ CUMARSÁIDE

## JOINT COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS NETWORKS

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*Dé Máirt, 27 Aibreán 2021*

*Tuesday, 27 April 2021*

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Tháinig an Comhchoiste le chéile ag 12.30 p.m.

The Joint Committee met at 12.30 p.m.

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Comhaltaí a bhí i láthair/Members present:

Teachtaí Dála/Deputies	Seanadóirí/Senators
Joe Carey,	Jerry Buttimer,
Cathal Crowe,	Gerard P. Craughwell,
Steven Matthews,	Timmy Dooley.
James O'Connor,	
Darren O'Rourke,	
Ruairí Ó Murchú,	
Duncan Smith.	

Teachta/Deputy Kieran O'Donnell sa Chathaoir/in the Chair.

## General Scheme of the Road Traffic (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2019: Discussion

**Chairman:** No apologies have been received. I apologise to our witnesses and to our members for the delay. There were technical hitches. I believe we are blaming it on Microsoft Teams worldwide. Doing things online is great but, like everything else, there are human frailties involved in it. The purpose of today's meeting is to undertake pre-legislative scrutiny of the Road Traffic (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2019. On behalf of the committee, I welcome to the meeting, from the National Transport Authority, NTA, Ms Anne Graham, chief executive, and Mr. Hugh Creegan, director of transport and planning investment and deputy chief executive. From Transport Infrastructure Ireland, TII, I welcome Mr. Peter Walsh, chief executive, Mr. Pat Maher, director of networks management, and Dr. Suzanne Meade, senior engineer in TII's safety section. They are all most welcome and I thank them for agreeing to participate in this meeting at such short notice in these unusual Covid times.

All witnesses are again reminded of the long-standing parliamentary practice that they should not criticise or make charges against any person or entity by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable or otherwise engage in speech that might be regarded as damaging to the good name of the person or entity. Therefore, if witnesses' statements are potentially defamatory in relation to an identifiable person or entity, they will be directed to discontinue their remarks. It is imperative that witnesses comply with any such direction.

For witnesses attending remotely from outside of the Leinster House campus, there are some limitations to parliamentary privilege and, as such, they may not benefit from the same level of immunity from legal proceedings as a witness physically present does. Witnesses participating in this committee session from a jurisdiction outside the State are advised that they should also be mindful of their domestic law and how it may apply to evidence they give.

Members are again reminded of the long-standing parliamentary practice to the effect that they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person outside the Houses or an official either by name or in such a way as to make him or her identifiable. I remind members of the constitutional requirement that members must be physically present within the confines of the place where Parliament has chosen to sit, namely, Leinster House or the Convention Centre Dublin, in order to participate in public meetings. With regret, I will not permit a member to participate where they do not adhere to this constitutional requirement to be physically within the precincts. Therefore, any member who attempts to participate from outside the precincts will be asked to leave the meeting. In this regard, I ask any members participating via Microsoft Teams to confirm that they are on the grounds of the Leinster House campus prior to making their contributions to the meeting.

I now ask Ms Anne Graham to make her opening statement. She has five minutes and I again thank her for agreeing to appear at such short notice.

**Ms Anne Graham:** I thank the Chairperson and members of the committee for the invitation to attend this meeting. I understand the committee wishes to focus upon the Road Traffic (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2019 and, in particular, the potential legislative provision for the use of e-scooters. To assist me in dealing with the committee's subsequent questions, I am joined by Hugh Creegan, deputy CEO with the authority.

The authority recognises that e-scooters and e-bikes can contribute to the increased use of sustainable transport and provide an alternative to the private car mode. However, these new

forms of transport do give rise to new issues that require careful consideration in developing an appropriate legislative framework. Some of the issues that are relevant to those considerations include the quality of road surfaces, given the small wheel diameter of e-scooters and the more significant implications of road surface defects for e-scooters than for other vehicles; minimum age requirements for the use of e-scooters on public roads; whether certain safety equipment such as helmets should be mandatory or discretionary; the speed limitations that should apply to such vehicles; whether e-scooters should be required to use cycle tracks instead of the main carriageway where such cycle tracks are provided; and the types of roads and specific traffic lanes that e-scooters should be permitted to use.

Many of these issues involve balancing competing demands and seeking to achieve the optimal equilibrium in respect of those demands. This is particularly so when road space is constrained and perfect solutions such as separate facilities for e-scooters are simply not feasible. However, in carefully addressing the relevant considerations, an appropriate legislative framework can be put in place to support the operation of this new form of micro-mobility. That concludes my introductory statement. I trust that I can answer any queries that arise.

**Chairman:** I thank Ms Graham for being so concise. I now call on Mr. Walsh to make his opening statement. I thank him for coming at such short notice as well. He has five minutes.

**Mr. Peter Walsh:** I should just clarify that I am not within the precincts of Leinster House. I thank the Chairman and members of the committee for the invitation to attend today. I am joined by my colleagues, Pat Maher, director of network management, and Dr. Suzanne Meade of TII's road safety section.

I understand that the committee is undertaking pre-legislative scrutiny of the general scheme of the Road Traffic (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2019. The section of the general scheme specific to TII is in Part 6, which relates to making provision for variable speed limits. I will first describe the work that TII is undertaking in this area and I will then go on to set out what is required in the Bill to support this work.

Since 2014, TII has been developing, and is currently constructing, a project on the M50 referred to as enhanced motorway operation service, eMOS. This project will allow for the availability of lanes and the applicable speed limits of relevant stretches of roads to be controlled in a dynamic way. This system of motorway control will improve safety and efficiency and reduce environmental impacts of traffic. We think of this as dynamic traffic management.

The eMOS system is needed to address the increasing numbers of collisions and levels of congestion on the M50. In 2019, M50 operations crews attended 1,161 incidents, which represents an average of 22 incidents each week of the year. The M50 is congested. In 2019, an average of 350,000 trips were undertaken on the M50 each day. This represents an increase of 40% on 2011 figures. The objective of eMOS is to improve safety for both road users and the people who respond to collisions and other incidents on the M50. This improvement in safety will be achieved by establishing speed limits that are appropriate to the traffic and weather conditions and by closing lanes when required. This level of control will also contribute to a reduction of carbon and particulate matter emissions through the elimination of "stop-start" driving.

The eMOS project has a budget of €80 million and a benefit-to-cost ratio of 2.8:1. The business case for the project has been reviewed and in accordance with the public spending code and has received ministerial approval.

Implementing eMOS involves the installation of 380 dynamic lane control signs on 98 gantries over 38 km of the M50. Fibreoptic cabling, connecting to roadside weather stations and traffic sensors, will transmit information to computers at the TII's motorway control centre. These computers will continuously run algorithms to determine the appropriate speed required to achieve the safest and most efficient operating conditions for those 350,000 trips undertaken on the M50 every day.

This dynamic speed limit and lane control system is used on motorways in the UK, in continental Europe and in North America on the approaches to major cities. The M25 around London, the M6-M40-M42 Birmingham box and the motorways of the Netherlands are good examples. These systems are reliable and have provided significant improvements to the safety and emissions performance of those roads.

Work on construction of the required infrastructure has been ongoing, almost entirely at night, for the past two years. Work on this project relates to critical transport infrastructure. TII personnel and contractors have worked continuously throughout the Covid-19 restrictions. I will take this opportunity to acknowledge their work and, in particular, to thank the foreign specialist workers who have observed all quarantine restrictions and, as a consequence, have been away from their families for periods longer than initially planned for. The work of construction and installation has progressed well and the system will be capable of going live by October of this year.

In the context of the Bill, what is required to support this work? The setting of speed limits is a reserve function of local authorities. The M50 motorway passes through the administrative areas of the four Dublin local authorities. It is not feasible to seek the approval of each local authority to dynamically set and revise speed limit zones in response to rapidly changing traffic or weather conditions. TII is not a road authority for this purpose and does not have powers to set speed limits on national roads. The Bill must provide TII with those powers. The Bill must also provide it with the ability to close lanes when needed.

The power of TII to provide, manage and operate the eMOS system needs to be clear. A legislative framework that allows the system to be deployed and enforced in a practical and effective manner is required. The legislation must reflect the dynamic nature of the system. Speed limits will be set by the motorway control centre based on the outputs from the system, which will take into account a wide range of factors, including the computer analysis of weather and traffic conditions. The motorway control centre staff must also be empowered to restrict the availability of traffic lanes through the use of red X and lane divert arrows displayed on over-lane digital signage. This is required to improve the safety of road users, emergency services personnel and road workers.

This system will only be as good as the enforcement relating to it. TII recommends that the approach reflected elsewhere in the Road Traffic Acts regarding the correctness of equipment should be applied in respect of this system. There should be a presumption, capable of being rebutted in court, that the system is working correctly in the context of a prosecution.

The conclusion of the committee's work in the context of the pre-legislative scrutiny relating to this Bill will go a long way towards providing the legislative framework required to allow this project to deliver the benefits that it is capable of. I invite all members who might be interested in seeing how the system is intended to operate to view a demonstration of the system if that would be of assistance to their considerations of this important legislation. I am happy to attempt to answer any questions that the committee may have. If my colleagues or I cannot

provide a comprehensive answer today, I will provide a response as soon as practicable.

**Deputy Cathal Crowe:** I am here in Leinster House. The Chairman spotted me coming in the gate earlier. I cycled today. We were on the same train so we were making good use of our national transport infrastructure.

**Chairman:** I took a taxi from Heuston Station while the Deputy travelled by bicycle. He arrived ahead of me so we will give him that contest this morning.

**Deputy Cathal Crowe:** We might come in on a tandem bike next week or, maybe, e-scooters.

This is a good discussion. We spent many months talking about road haulage but the reality is that over the past 18 months, e-scooters have become an increasing feature on our roads. The first time I saw one was probably about two years ago in Dublin. It was a head-turner and a novelty factor but suddenly they are everywhere. Another form of transport, if we can call it that, is probably less official than the e-scooter. Hoverboards are being used by teenagers and young people quite a lot. They may not be as formal in terms of a mode of transport but they are certainly being used by some children going from friends' houses to the local shop or even to school. They should not be omitted from our discussions.

I read the briefing note. It is quite interesting how this is being regulated in different countries. The first thing we need to look at is some kind of age limit. In some continental European countries, a person must be 14 to 16 years of age to operate an e-scooter. They are great. We have seen people be able to travel independently of their parents in and around their communities. However, there are hazards associated with them. A person needs to be a certain age to have the level of responsibility necessary to take these vehicles out on the open road or cross busy intersections. Anything that brings about regulation in that regard is good.

Something that falls under different road usage is sulky racing. This is a big feature throughout Ireland. We are being told that section 47 of the Roads Act 1993 regulates the use of carriage driving and horse racing on open roads yet the reality is that throughout the country, including my constituency, every so often, four or five pick-up vans or jeeps barricade a motorway going four or five vehicles wide, set up a racecourse in front of all the traffic, hold all the traffic behind them and have lucrative and heavily betted on races on these motorways. A message needs to be sent. This is something this committee needs to do a bit of work on. Deputy Mattie McGrath tried to bring in tighter legislation on this two years ago. It is another abuse of our roads that this committee needs to look at.

I have followed the issue of dynamic speed limits with interest. I hope I am being accurate but a major flaw in our speed limit system is the fact that local authorities get to review speed limits every five years. This is a source of significant frustration for communities and the politicians who represent them. It needs to be somewhat more fluid. As politicians, we are continuously lobbied by schools or housing estates that are located in areas which, for one reason or another, have become unsafe and they want the speed limit lowered but that has to be agreed by council engineers and An Garda Síochána. The window relating to carrying out review in that regard is every five years.

We were informed recently that Fáilte Ireland has a hugely impressive plan for Lough Dearg, with funding of more than €70 million for enhancements. Fáilte Ireland stated that by means of co-operation with the NTA, there would be an enhanced Local Link bus route around

the shores of Lough Derg taking in the Clare and Tipperary sides with a stop in Portumna in Galway. Could Ms Graham provide an update on that?

We have been discussing motorway safety. One major road safety hazard on motorways that I know of - other representatives from Clare might want to speak about - is the N18 junction exit for Barefield. Motorist travel on a motorway at 120 km per hour, with some even exceeding that speed, and suddenly they must come off it at a 60° angle and onto the off-ramp for the Barefield exit. It is so sharp. Cars have lost control there. This also needs to be in the mix. Yes, we should be talking about dynamic speed limits and enhanced speed regulation coming into Dublin, which is the biggest arterial route in the country, but we also need a focus on that junction.

**Chairman:** Which person does the Deputy wish to answer questions first?

**Deputy Cathal Crowe:** I rambled on a bit but could Ms Graham respond concerning the Lough Derg initiative and could Mr. Walsh tell me whether exits from motorways are under review? He may not know the specific one.

**Ms Anne Graham:** I am not aware of the detail of the proposal referred to by the Deputy but I will check it. We do not have the funding this year to provide any additional services. If we are in a position to fund that service, it would be next year at the earliest because our budget is fully devoted to just keeping current services going. I will check it out and send the Deputy a more direct response.

**Deputy Cathal Crowe:** Does Ms Graham believe sulky racing is provided for legislatively? Does it concern the NTA? Perhaps I should ask whether it concerns TII.

**Ms Anne Graham:** It is more a matter for TII.

**Deputy Cathal Crowe:** Does it concern TII that this still happens in 21st century Ireland - horses being whipped and run down roads and all the traffic on a motorway being held up so that this medieval chariot race involving sulkies can take place?

**Mr. Peter Walsh:** It does concern me and it is not a use of motorways that TII would condone. Enforcement is another issue. I am not sure what I can usefully say today other than TII does not condone the racing of horses on motorways.

In terms of the junction functionality and the safety of the N18 at Barefield, I cannot comment on the specifics of it but I can undertake to come back to the Deputy. Certainly our safety section reviews the circumstances of any accidents on the network and if there are engineering measures that can be undertaken to improve matters, we will undertake them.

In terms of developing design standards over time, we have sections of motorway in the network that were designed to a particular standard at one time, and those standards may have moved on since. If there is a need to review the layout at certain junctures, we will undertake to do it. I can come back to the Deputy directly on this point, if that is satisfactory. I do not have the information to hand.

**Deputy Cathal Crowe:** I thank Mr. Walsh and Ms Graham for their replies. The e-scooter issue is very specific to the technology that is now available. We had hoverboards come into play three or four years ago and there could be some newfangled product coming out in the next year or two. We may need to ensure the legislation is less prescriptive and more future-proofed



in terms of meeting the requirements in respect of low-powered, double-axis linear vehicles. It needs to be more encompassing of what the next product might be.

**Deputy Joe Carey:** I confirm that I am in Leinster House.

I thank the witnesses for their presentations on the road traffic (miscellaneous provisions) Bill 2019. Has Ms Graham given any thought to what recommendation she might make on an age limit for the use of e-scooters and e-bikes? Is the NTA looking into what is being done on age limits in other European jurisdictions and globally? Obviously, people need to be of a responsible age to be using these types of vehicles. Has the NTA done any review of what the speed limit should be for electric vehicles in general? They are very low to the ground and concerns have been raised regarding the impact of the quality of road conditions. If a user were to hit a bump travelling at a particular speed, he or she could end up in great difficulty. Injury or possibly even the loss of life might arise from using the vehicle irresponsibly. What are the witnesses' views in this regard?

We see people using these vehicles on a regular basis on the streets of Dublin. Their use is not strictly confined to cycle lanes. Would the witnesses recommend that these devices be used only in cycle lanes, or should they be permitted on open roads? Should they be limited, for example, to a particular classification of roads in urban areas?

I thank Mr. Wash for his presentation. I welcome his practical suggestion that TFI would invite the members of the committee to look at the eMOS system. It seems we are only catching up with other European jurisdictions in implementing this type of technology. It seems to be very complex. What type of driver education does TFI intend to introduce around what looks like a fundamental and dramatic change in how the M50 will be used? High-tech, cutting-edge technology will be employed to deliver the new system, with speed limits changing based on volumes of traffic, weather and so on. For someone who travels to Dublin occasionally but not on a regular basis, it could be a real culture shock to find that parts of the M50 have a limit of 100 km per hour or 80 km per hour instead of 120 km per hour. What level of educational awareness campaigning do the witnesses envisage taking place as part of this change?

The Chairman might ask the witnesses to respond to those questions.

**Chairman:** In answering Deputy Carey's very good questions, will the witnesses indicate whether they have made submissions regarding the pre-legislative scrutiny of the Bill to the Department of Transport, particularly in respect of the use of e-scooters, scramblers and quad bikes? I would like to know whether any such submissions have been made and, if so, what was in those submissions.

**Mr. Peter Walsh:** In terms of submissions, we provided an advice note to the Department, which we included with our opening statement and other material that was submitted to the committee yesterday. That advice note is also available on our website. It mostly looks at what the practice is internationally. The author of the report, Dr. Suzanne Meade, is with me here today and I will defer to her on any specific questions relating to it.

We have been engaging with the Road Safety Authority, RSA, for the past couple of months on the introduction of the eMOS dynamic traffic management system. The authority is very good at conducting campaigns of public awareness around road safety and proper driver behaviour. We will be working in close collaboration with it to roll out a campaign. We need to be sure about when that campaign will go into operation and that it does not happen too far in

advance. At the moment, we are looking at May or June to start a media campaign around what the new signs will mean and how people should behave when they are activated. We hope the information will be clear to all road users.

Did Deputy Carey have another question?

**Deputy Joe Carey:** I asked about arrangements for the committee to look at the eMOS system in detail. My remaining questions were for the witnesses from the NTA.

**Mr. Peter Walsh:** I mentioned that to the chairman of our board this morning and he advised me to make sure everybody knows that arrangements relating to Covid-19 would be paramount in arranging any visit to a centre. We may be able to do it remotely in some way. We have traffic control-----

**Chairman:** May I suggest that we wait to see what happens with the Government announcement on Thursday? It might bring some illumination as to when we can physically go out and see in person what is happening. There is only so much one can do on Zoom.

**Deputy Joe Carey:** Will Ms Graham respond to the questions I put to her?

**Ms Anne Graham:** Yes. I will ask my colleague, Mr. Creegan, to assist me in doing so. The NTA made observations to the Department of Transport, particularly in regard to e-scooters, at the Department's request. They were just observations from our point of view. We suggested that the age limit should be approximately 16 years of age for the use of e-scooters on a public road. We also suggested the types of roads that should be considered for their permissible use. Mr. Creegan will provide some details in this regard.

**Mr. Hugh Creegan:** On the speed limit, international practice seems to be to put it somewhere between 16 km per hour and 25 km per hour. The pitching of the limit is linked to age limit and where the vehicles are used. The three issues are linked together. If the vehicles are only being used on cycle tracks, for instance, and are limited to use by older persons, one can go to a higher speed limit. Somewhere between 16 km per hour and 25 km per hour seems to be common, with 20 km per hour being a possibility that falls in the middle. That is the range that is happening internationally.

In terms of where the vehicles can safely be used, we are very comfortable that they can be used safely on cycle tracks if a speed limit is in place. They can also be safely used on low-speed roads, particularly local roads with a speed limit of 30 km per hour, which is where they are more likely to be driven. It gets more difficult after that as to whether one wishes to add roads to it and what particular lanes of the roads these vehicles should and can use. There is no perfect answer there; it is a question of discussion and debate as to what is done beyond cycle tracks and local roads with 30 km/h to make it a coherent offering for people.

**Deputy Joe Carey:** Has the NTA given any consideration been given to the use of hoverboards and Segways and that type of vehicle on public thoroughfares? They are similar enough to e-scooters and e-bikes.

**Ms Anne Graham:** It is not a matter for us to set the description; that would be for the Department. Its proposed description in the legislation will cover as many forms of that mobility as possible. The Deputy will see that in the description it brings forward, the term being used is "personal powered transport". As to whether that includes hoverboards, he will have to wait and the description used by the Department.



**Deputy Darren O'Rourke:** I will start with Mr. Walsh on the eMOS system. What assessment has taken place on the benefits of this system? From his opening statement and a brief look at these types of system, they claim improvements and can point to improvements around capacity, journey times, and emissions.

On safety, I notice the stocktake report from March 2020 in Britain. Our equivalent committee in Westminster is undertaking a review of smart motorway systems. There are particular concerns regarding all-lane running or hard-shoulder running. Will that be incorporated into the M50 system?

Picking up on Deputy Carey's point regarding information, reports in Britain and elsewhere refer to the need for clarity, for consistency across the system, and for people to be aware so that we do not end up in a situation, as seemed to be in Britain, where 20 years after introducing the technology, it has to be seriously examined.

**Mr. Peter Walsh:** On the benefits of the system, we produced a full business case, which is where the 2.8 benefit to cost ratio comes from. It takes in a lot of factors. The easiest way to illustrate it is that currently, during congested conditions, a trip from the M1 to the M11 in uncongested conditions takes 22 to 24 minutes. In congested conditions it can take in excess of 70 minutes, three times as long. An awful lot of stop-start driving is occurring. It has been demonstrated on many road networks that if we can achieve continuous driving at an appropriate speed, many benefits can be gained, including a reduction in accidents because there are not the varying speeds across all the road users and there is a much better result in air quality in both carbon emissions and particulate matter. We have curves on the performance of internal combustion engines. At higher speeds, the curve is relatively flat, a minor change in operating speed at 100 km/h has very little difference for particulate matter or carbon emissions but at lower speeds, when going from below 10 km/h or 20 km/h, it is a much steeper curve. There will be benefits from that. If the committee wishes to see the business case, we can provide it. It enumerates all these things.

On the concerns from the UK committee and smart motorways, it is a different issue. As the Deputy points out, it is the all-lane running and the dangers to two road users in the event of them having a breakdown. We are not introducing all-lane running. We are conscious of the safety concern.

We agree about information and clarity. We are doing our best working with the RSA and An Garda Síochána, which has also been involved. It will be a pretty comprehensive education programme, I hope. I hope that answers the question.

**Deputy Darren O'Rourke:** I thank Mr. Walsh; it does. Giving people advance notice if this is the road we are going down and TII's own preparations to ensure that every contingency is in place to try to have it implemented as smoothly as possible and that people are aware of what we are getting into in order that they have consistency is an important consideration in its introduction.

I will move on to Ms Graham and Mr. Creegan. I return to e-scooters. I am looking at the documents we received from the RSA and the Department. It seems that an e-scooter with a saddle will not be covered. That seems like an unnecessary anomaly that will cause a difficulty straight away. More significant is the question of what roads are appropriate. I understand that the proposals are for cycle lanes and bus lanes only. Do Ms Graham and Mr. Creegan have an opinion on road conditions and how they should be considered? I am conscious that some of

our bus lanes, in particular, have large potholes or drains that may be a hazard. Is that a consideration?

I think Mr. Creegan said that he thought within areas with a speed limit of 30 km/h would be an appropriate restriction. There are many roads in urban settings that do not have cycle or bus lanes. Is it appropriate to have them there too? It seems, under the current proposals, that would not be provided for.

**Ms Anne Graham:** I am not sure about e-scooters with saddles. Again, that comes into the description of whether it is a bike or power bike. That is something to be looked at in more detail when the legislation comes forward. As Mr. Creegan indicated, we have considered the appropriate roads to be used. We believe that a case could be made for e-scooters to be used on low-speed local roads up to 30 km/h, not just to confine them to cycle lanes and bus lanes. We have made the point that road condition is something to be considered, not just for e-scooters but also cyclists who tend to cycle on the edge of the road where there is the potential for gullies and the like. That is why in a move to provide better infrastructure for cyclists, it could also provide better infrastructure for e-scooters. Our preference would be, where possible, that where there is a cycle track alongside a bus lane, that the bus lane would be reserved for buses only and the cycle lane is for cyclists and e-scooters, if they are provided for in the legislation.

**Deputy Darren O'Rourke:** Has the NTA made a recommendation on personal helmets and protective equipment?

**Ms Anne Graham:** We have said that the wearing of helmets should be considered.

**Deputy Darren O'Rourke:** The NTA has not recommended that it be mandatory.

**Ms Anne Graham:** We have said that it should be considered, given the speed associated with e-scooters and the vulnerability of persons on a road with them.

**Deputy Darren O'Rourke:** That is fair enough.

**Chairman:** We will move to Deputy Ó Murchú.

**Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú:** Is it not a Fine Gael slot?

**Chairman:** My apologies. I thank the Deputy.

**Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú:** My decency and integrity required it.

**Chairman:** Every time. I call Senator Buttimer.

**Senator Jerry Buttimer:** How do I follow that?

**Chairman:** Say "Thank you".

**Senator Jerry Buttimer:** I thank Deputy Ó Murchú.

I welcome the witnesses. Will the NTA be involved in the management of the shared e-scooter scheme, which will be similar to the public bike scheme in our major cities, or will it be left to local authorities because the NTA is too busy to be a part of it?

**Ms Anne Graham:** Which body is appropriate for the management of a shared e-scooter scheme is a matter for the Department and the legislation.

**Senator Jerry Buttimer:** Does the NTA have a view as to what organisation should be the principal body?

**Ms Anne Graham:** We have no particular view. We could do it, as could local authorities. It would be appropriate for either.

**Senator Jerry Buttimer:** Regarding safety, there were 30 collisions last year involving e-scooters. Am I correct that a view is being expressed that the user of an e-scooter should not have insurance? If so, how would that work if there was a collision? What are the views of Mr. Walsh or Ms Graham on whether there should be insurance?

**Ms Anne Graham:** We have no view on that matter. It is related to road safety in particular and we have not presented any view on it.

**Senator Jerry Buttimer:** But if it is a matter of road safety, surely there should be some guidance on insurance. For example, I must have either third party, fire and theft or comprehensive insurance for my car. What would happen if I hit an e-scooter or an e-scooter hit me?

**Ms Anne Graham:** It is not an area that we necessarily get involved in in terms of our powers. We would not present an opinion on it.

**Senator Jerry Buttimer:** That is fair enough. I thank Ms Graham for her presentation. She mentioned the issue of road surface quality. Will there be significant implications for those who use e-scooters, given that there is not a uniform quality of road surface?

**Ms Anne Graham:** There could be. In some locations, the quality of a road might not be appropriate for such vehicles. We are pointing out that there could be associated issues that need to be taken into account when considering in what areas of the public domain e-scooters should be used.

**Senator Jerry Buttimer:** According to page 3 of the substantial document we received from Dr. Meade, TII recommends that e-mobility vehicles should not be permitted to use bus lanes or tram lines due to their speed and the mass differentials. Why should they not be able to use bus lanes when cyclists can? Footpaths may become the favourite place to go. The document also referred to how an American study had found that there had been many accidents and injuries. Has Ms Graham or Mr. Walsh any comment to make on this matter?

**Ms Anne Graham:** If Mr. Walsh would like to answer first, I will follow.

**Mr. Peter Walsh:** I will refer this to Dr. Meade.

**Senator Jerry Buttimer:** Before she answers, I wish to thank her for her presentation. It was a good paper. I apologise, as I did not realise she was on the call.

**Dr. Suzanne Meade:** No problem, and I thank the Senator.

I will take the first point. As Ms Graham pointed out, we would not take a view on the issue of insurance, but we have noted in our review what has happened in other jurisdictions. Some countries have required the user at purchase point to get insurance and register the vehicle. That could be considered.

The point about the use of bus lanes referred in particular to areas where trams would circulate. E-scooters have very small wheels. While some cyclists may get caught in tram lines

when crossing at a particular angle, it is much more likely that an e-scooter's smaller wheels will get caught. That is a particular risk to this new form of transport.

**Senator Jerry Buttimer:** We do not have tram lines in Cork. Does Dr. Meade envisage there being any difficulty with e-scooters using a bus lane in Cork? We do not have a Luas at the moment, although I hope we will in time.

**Dr. Suzanne Meade:** With bus lanes, it was more of a recommendation. It would have to be decided on a case-by-case basis. Due to the head time between buses, some bus lanes are extremely busy and one would have to question whether there was enough room to cater for cyclists or e-scooters in the first place. It is a question of examining the infrastructure and determining whether there is enough space and whether the bus service is so frequent that it would be problematic.

**Ms Anne Graham:** I will pick up on that point. Something we are considering in terms of BusConnects is that, where possible, and certainly on the major routes into this city and major bus lanes, cyclists be removed from bus lanes by providing segregated cycling facilities. It is not just about safety, but also about ensuring the efficiency of the bus system. In some locations, a bus can only travel at the speed of the cyclist it is behind because there is not enough space for them to operate side by side. The same would apply if e-scooters were allowed onto bus lanes. Where there is a facility for cycling alongside bus lanes, in particular the busiest ones, we believe that e-scooters should not be permitted in those lanes.

**Senator Jerry Buttimer:** If I can, I would like to return to the evidence summary in Dr. Meade's work on e-scooter vulnerability at the end of the meeting. My time is nearly up and I would like to make another comment, but that is important work and she deserves great praise for it.

There are concerns about eMOS in light of the variable speed limits. I understand the need for this system in bad weather and I endorse that. Given the proximity of some junctions on the M50 to one another, how will this system work? Will this increase congestion? When one is travelling along the M8 and M7 and coming up to Naas, the speed limit drops to 100 km/h when one reaches the ball at Naas, although there are no plans for a variable speed limit at that point. In the context of the proximity of junctions and congestion, how will that work out? I will ask one more question at the end, if I may.

**Chairman:** The Senator may ask it very quickly. I am conscious that others wish to speak.

**Senator Jerry Buttimer:** I will come back in again if I can.

**Chairman:** The Senator may ask his question now.

**Senator Jerry Buttimer:** I thank the Chairman but I will not take time from Mr. Walsh.

**Chairman:** Okay. We will now move on-----

**Senator Jerry Buttimer:** May I just get a reply to those questions?

**Mr. Peter Walsh:** I am happy to respond, if the Chairman would like.

**Chairman:** I am sorry, I misinterpreted.

**Mr. Peter Walsh:** The eMOS system will not add to congestion, but reduce it, because it

will create a smoother flow. That is the easiest way of looking at it. The purpose of analysing flows is to enable continuous smooth flow. That is what will determine the appropriate speed limit to be applied at a particular time. The Senator is absolutely right that the proximity of junctions on the M50 contributes to those circumstances we are trying to dynamically control. One of the things we have seen recently is that, when traffic volumes on the M50 dropped due to the Covid restrictions, there was a disproportionate drop in the number of accidents on the motorway. This is proof positive that, as congestion levels rise, there is a disproportionate rise in the number of accidents and incidents on the motorway. We need to deal with this. The causes are the volumes of traffic and the weaving required because of the close proximity of junctions on that particular stretch of road. I hope that answers the Senator's question. It is not our intention at the moment to roll this system out to other sections of the network. It is an expensive system and it would be more difficult to justify in a business case in respect of other sections. There are no plans for that at the moment but this Bill, if approved and enacted, would allow for it in due course.

**Chairman:** The Senator may come in at the end with his other question. I will try Deputy O'Connor to see if we can hear him.

**Deputy James O'Connor:** Can the Chairman hear me?

**Chairman:** Yes, the Deputy is coming in fine now.

**Deputy James O'Connor:** I apologise, there was a problem with my computer.

**Chairman:** That is no problem. The Deputy has seven minutes.

**Deputy James O'Connor:** I apologise to the witnesses and the committee. I have a couple of questions, following on from the information given, particularly that given by Mr. Walsh. This variable speed limit proposal is very interesting. There would be both positive and negative consequences to it. This is being implemented on the M50 and will probably end up operating on the M1 and in Cork on the N40 in Senator Buttimer's constituency and on the N25 in my own. These are highly congested motorways and dual carriageways on which this technology will probably eventually become commonplace. Is it a two-way street in the sense that the limit on different sections of roads such as the M50, which will be empty at 11 p.m. or 12 midnight, might be increased from 80 km/h up to 100 km/h or from 100 km/h to 120 km/h at those times, given that it is a motorway grade road?

Everybody who comes up to Leinster House from the south of the country will know, and others listening today will also know from travelling to matches or going to Dublin or elsewhere in the country via the N7 whether for business or pleasure, that the section of the road beyond Naas and up towards Citywest has a speed limit of 100 km/h rather than 120 km/h. Some people who work in transport whom I have asked have told me that the reason for this is that this section is not technically motorway. My response to this is that the limit on the N25 in Cork between Carrigtwohill and Dunkettle, which is a national road and a dual carriageway, is 120 km/h. I will put that question to Mr. Walsh first. Is it a two-way street or is this just another way of slowing cars down and reducing speed limits, which obviously reduces the efficiency of the national road network and which could damage the economy with regard to people driving small goods vehicles and so on?

**Mr. Peter Walsh:** I am glad the Deputy raised this question because it illustrates a misconception as to what we are implementing. The system only imposes a lowered speed limit when



congestion or weather conditions require it. At all other times, the default speed limit will apply - 100 km/h, 120 km/h or whatever the current design speed or speed limit on that road is. Reduced speed limits will not be introduced at times when the congestion or weather conditions do not require them. I hope that is clear.

**Deputy James O'Connor:** In response to that, I do not believe it is a bad suggestion. It definitely might be worth looking at. Last week, I had the pleasure of meeting many taxi drivers from around the country. Many members of the committee were on that call. One particular concern for many of them were the new changes to speed limits in Dublin. This is of great concern to them because, obviously, when one is a taxi driver or operating a hackney service, time is of the essence. If we are to install this multimillion euro software to control speed limits, we should consider increasing the limit from 100 km/h to 120 km/h in a safe manner at night on roads that are capable of allowing for such a speed limit, which is the same limit as prevails across the entire national motorway network with the exception of the M50 and the N7, which is classified as a national road. That is a suggestion I would like to put forward. It would be wise to consider it now while work is ongoing. I will finish with Mr. Walsh on that point.

It is great to have Ms Graham here again. I know there is a lot going on in the NTA at the minute with regard to sustainable travel. I thank her for meeting me recently. With regard to the changes coming down the line in respect of e-scooters, we have all been contacted by people who work in this industry and hope to get involved in e-scooters from an economic standpoint. I have a concern with regard to road safety. As the CEO of the NTA, is Ms Graham confident that the RSA's current curriculum for new drivers coming on to the road in Ireland is at the standard required to ensure the safety of people operating e-scooters, or propelled vehicles as I believe they are currently described by the Department of Transport? Does it need to be changed to reflect these coming changes? I will give my own perspective in the time I have. Compared to many on this call, it is only recently that I secured my full licence. We have to do an awful lot more to teach drivers how to share the road with people who are cycling or using e-scooters. The number of people utilising sustainable travel is booming. I refer to cycling and the use of other devices. From my recollection, there was very little on the driver training curriculum at the time I was doing my driving test with regard to sharing roads, particularly in densely populated urban areas.

**Ms Anne Graham:** I thank the Deputy for the question. I am not familiar enough with the driver curriculum to answer because it has been many years since I did my own driving test. It is certainly something we will consider, in conjunction with the RSA. It would be more appropriate for the authority to respond on that question. If the Deputy has identified a gap, we will certainly have a look at it and engage with the authority on the education of car drivers about more vulnerable road users. We will check that out.

**Deputy James O'Connor:** Ms Graham hit the nail on the head. For many people, it has been many years and, in some cases, decades since they got their licence. I wonder where we are heading with that. Is it something that is putting people in danger unnecessarily? There is definitely work for the Department of Transport to do in this regard. There is also work for the semi-State bodies, including the NTA, TII or the RSA, if its staff are listening in today, to do with regard to improving driver safety to protect cyclists and people using e-scooters. I do not want a situation where people are unnecessarily killed or injured because of a lack of education and awareness. Much debate goes on in areas on whether people should wear helmets. Above all, we need to try to prevent a situation whereby people put vulnerable road users - that was the term used - in unnecessary danger. That certainly needs to follow on from this and I hope it

would be welcomed by people who are lobbying for cycling and e-scooters.

**Chairman:** We will now move to the magnanimous Deputy Ó Murchú. You have seven minutes, Deputy, and we might even give you eight after your gesture.

**Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú:** I appreciate it, a Chathaoirligh. People can see the collegiality with which the committee operates.

I will start with Mr. Peter Walsh. On some level with eMOS there is probably an element of being won over in the sense of a variable speed limit. There is not much point in asking the TII representatives whether this will be reviewed in the sense that this will be on the basis of minute by minute and hour by hour. This will be reviewed on every timeline from the point of view of producing best results in real time. We have all been on the M50 when it has been in free flow and when it has been a car park. Obviously, if there were applicability to other serious parts of infrastructure in future, it is something that will come and that needs to be welcomed.

There is an element of this that relates to the providers. The TII representatives mentioned algorithms that will be operated for best-case scenarios. There might even be some artificial intelligence and learning so that what works one day is improved for the next day. I am seeking an answer in respect of providers and whether they have been tried and tested in doing work like this previously. I am keen to ensure we get the best bang for our buck. There have been various difficulties at times with State procurement of IT systems and we should try to avoid that.

The TII representatives might have to reply to me in writing in answer to another question. It has nothing to do with this topic and I apologise for that. The issue was brought up to me by National Broadband Ireland, NBI, and Eir. It relates to TII and local authorities when they deal with infrastructure. One example is when there is a plan put in place for poles. Then, site investigation forces a change and there is a requirement for a new road opening licence. That can involve a delay of between two to eight weeks at times. Obviously, that can be significant. Could this be streamlined to a degree? At this stage I would like to think that even the Department of Transport has had communication with TII on the matter. I am talking about where planning permission is signed off in the end. It is simply that we do not need necessary works being held up, especially as regards the roll-out of broadband and communication systems. If I have time, I will go to Ms Graham with another question.

**Mr. Peter Walsh:** The Deputy asked about the experience of the providers and their track record in delivery. I will defer to Mr. Pat Maher, our director of network management. Mr. Maher has been looking after that project for several years and will address that question.

The Deputy also asked about the national broadband initiative and road opening licences. Mr. Maher might be able to address that in part as well because it is something we were dealing with recently. If necessary we will come back in writing with further elaboration. I will hand over to him.

**Mr. Pat Maher:** I wish to confirm that I am not on the precincts of Leinster House.

The first question from the Deputy related to the IT systems. The main IT system that drives variable speed limits and lane control has been procured. We ran a competition last year. The tenderers involved were all highly experienced people and included service providers and software developers and operators across Europe and North America. I am satisfied that their expertise and competency in this matter is well-proven. Mr. Walsh outlined the approach earlier. This technology and the application of these systems are used widely in the developed world.

The people who are doing this work for us as we speak are active not only in Ireland but in other areas with this technology. I hope that answers the question from the Deputy.

The second point related to the NBI roll-out, etc. TII is not directly responsible for road opening licences. We are part of the process involving the road management office, RMO, which was the office set up by the Department of Transport to deal with road opening licences generally. I am aware that there have been certain issues in respect of changes and consequential delays due to the process involved in issuing updated approvals. My understanding is that, insofar as this affected a particular section of national road, the matter was resolved expeditiously. I understand that the people in the RMO who operate what is called the MapRoad Roadworks Licensing system are aware of this. I cannot speak on behalf of the people in NBI but I know that, having spoken with them, we resolved the particular issue that arose in respect of national roads. We are happy to stay in contact on this. We have an input into the process. I assure the committee we are aware of the need to avoid any undue delays in the process of the roll-out of broadband.

**Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú:** I really appreciate that. We probably should communicate with all stakeholders on this to ensure the matter is actually resolved or getting resolved. I appreciate what Mr. Maher said in respect of stakeholders and the two bodies I referenced. I note he has signed off in respect of how the systems are tried and tested or at least in respect of the people who have produced them. That is most welcome.

Ms Graham has put down the questions we all have on what type of e-scooter system we are going to have. She has given an indication on what she sees; it is probably as far as she can go. At this stage a study has been made of best-case scenarios across Europe on what has worked and what has not. We will all have to take that into account as the legislation goes on.

I am going to jump ahead to a question that had come up last week when we were dealing with Bus Éireann and Iarnród Éireann and even prior to that. It relates to looking at ticketing from a certain point of view, especially in respect of Bus Éireann and Iarnród Éireann, that would suit the new remote working scenarios. People may only be commuting for two days out of five and so on. At times, rail tickets can be highly expensive. I am keen to deal with that issue. The organisations say they have engaged with the NTA but we have not yet seen any solution or a roadmap in respect of this. I would appreciate if I could get an update on the matter from Ms Graham.

**Ms Anne Graham:** I think the committee wrote to the NTA and we have forwarded a response on that matter, but I am happy to cover it in brief today.

**Chairman:** Yes, we would appreciate it for the public record.

**Ms Anne Graham:** I will set out the position for the record. We are also aware that perhaps a change in travel patterns might result post-Covid. We are open to being able to provide a more flexible ticket. There are three main issues. One is that a technology change will be required. It will have to be developed significantly to provide a particular type of ticket. The idea is to provide something other than the structured monthly and annual tickets. The idea is a replacement for those given that people may only be travelling for two or three days per week rather than the full five days. They will not get value out of their monthly or annual tickets in the new environment. Technology development has to take place.

The other issue is that the monthlies and annuals are Tax saver schemes so they are actually

tax benefits and there is a requirement to change the legislation to allow for a tax benefit for a different form of salary sacrifice. We have engaged with the Department of Transport on how and whether that could be brought forward as a change in taxation and in the finance Bill later this year.

They are the two main issues. I am trying to think of the third because I do not have the response in front of me, but there is a lead-in time in trying to deliver a solution for travellers between the technology and the change in legislation required such that it is unlikely we would have that solution in place this year. We would, however, like to have some solution for travellers for next year.

**Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú:** Do I have any time left?

**Chairman:** A very small amount.

**Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú:** I appreciate Ms Graham's answer. I have also just received the NTA's correspondence, which I appreciate. She has given a general timeline so will probably not go beyond that.

I will go back to Mr. Walsh. He will probably have to reply to me in writing on this. I will raise two very localised issues, one of which is the N52 Ardee bypass. There were issues with it when it went for consultation. I think it may even be with the local authority at this point. Could he give an update on timelines for the project? There is also the N2. A number of topographical surveys and such need to occur, but when can we foresee the works being done?

**Mr. Peter Walsh:** I am happy to provide an update on those projects directly to the Deputy.

**Chairman:** We will try to find time at the end if members want to come back in.

**Deputy Duncan Smith:** I thank my colleagues for facilitating me to jump up a little in the queue of speakers. I really appreciate it. It is great we are down to the nitty-gritty of pre-legislative scrutiny on the issue of e-scooters. An awful lot of work has been done on this, and we cannot lose sight of that or fail to recognise work that was done by the previous transport committee. Members of the previous committee such as Noel Rock did an awful lot of work on this to get it to where we are today. To what extent has the proliferation of e-scooters as we see them taken the NTA and TII by surprise over the past year, particularly the past few months? It seems, as Deputy Cathal Crowe mentioned in his initial contribution, that they are everywhere now and have really become part of the transport infrastructure in the big cities, at least, but I presume everywhere else. I am excited by them. I am excited by anything that could deliver solutions for that last kilometre or first kilometre of a journey or commuting journey. Has the NTA looked at studies on modal shift here? We need to get people out of their cars and to reduce gridlock. Air quality in Dublin and our other cities is really poor. Are e-scooters the solution to this and, if so, to what extent? If we are to meet our emissions targets of 7% annually for the coming years, Ireland's towns, cities and villages will look very different. Are e-scooters a part of that look, in the witnesses' view? Has the NTA conducted a detailed analysis of this in other territories, and has it reviewed this in the context of its deliberations? Has any analysis been conducted as to what this would mean for vulnerable pedestrians such as people with disabilities and people who are visually impaired? I met recently with Labour Disability, which has issues with the BusConnects designs and how some of the buses stop, and then there is a cycle lane and a pathway and the challenges that throws up. Where do e-scooters fit in there? It may sound like I am getting parochial, but on big projects, be it BusConnects or MetroLink,

which is coming down the tracks, to what extent have e-scooters impacted the planning and the production of the railway orders that are coming up? I would be interested in the witnesses' thoughts on that. It may not be written in the railway orders but surely there must be some kind of consideration of how these will impact these major projects.

**Chairman:** Deputy Smith, whom do you wish to-----

**Deputy Duncan Smith:** Ms Graham first, if possible.

**Ms Anne Graham:** I will start. No, certainly the NTA has not been taken by surprise, given that we have seen the use of e-scooters throughout Europe and in other jurisdictions and the fact that there is scooter sharing in many cities throughout Europe as well. It is therefore not surprising they are available in Ireland. The Covid situation has probably accelerated this a little in terms of personal travel more than travel on mass transit. I will defer to my colleague, Mr. Creegan. I am not aware of any modal shift analysis that has been done on e-scooters, but we recognise their mobility. They are now part of sustainable mobility within our cities and towns. It is really about how we make provision for that for the future in the most appropriate way from the point of view of road safety, etc. Yes, we have to look at the impact on vulnerable pedestrians in particular. It is a matter of looking at where it is appropriate for them to be used. Are footpaths or shared facilities appropriate, given the fact that there are vulnerable pedestrians in those locations? That certainly should be considered as part of the legislative scrutiny. I will defer to my colleague. As far as I am aware, e-scooters have not impacted the production of the large projects, railway or MetroLink, but Mr. Creegan might be able to confirm that.

**Mr. Hugh Creegan:** We have not done any research on mode transfer onto e-scooters. As the committee will be aware, they are a relatively new mode. It may be a little early to draw conclusions. We are aware that people have looked at this in different jurisdictions. Nothing jumps out at me as a definitive figure that could be relied on to say, "This is what you will get".

As for the major projects, we are aware of e-scooters but they do not change the planning process or the overall scheme designs for those projects. We will consider and accommodate them but they do not make a big change to infrastructure provision-----

**Mr. Peter Walsh:** I do not have an awful lot to add to what Ms Graham and Mr. Creegan said. Regarding MetroLink, we have included in the business case a mapping of areas beyond the range of pedestrian users of the system, so we have included maps that would indicate what would happen if someone came by bicycle. That could be interpreted as coming by e-scooter as well. We see an e-scooter as a vehicle or device that folds up and is carried onto MetroLink. We are not addressing the parking of them as part of the project or anything of that nature. We see it as expanding the scope of the projects and potentially creating more value in respect of the MetroLink project, but we have not relied on it in the calculation of benefits in the business case or anything of that nature.

As for research, Dr. Meade might be able to help, but I am not aware of any.

**Dr. Suzanne Meade:** I thank Mr. Walsh. I do not have too much to add beyond what Mr. Creegan, Ms Graham and Mr. Walsh have contributed. As Mr. Walsh alluded to, e-scooters increase the range people are willing to travel by another mode. Therefore, they have the potential to be more attractive to replace single car trips, which is to be encouraged. The other thing to mention is that this is an opportunity and if we are getting a new mode of transport to use cycle lanes, we will possibly have to consider that. I refer to increased volume in those circum-



stances, a new use for them and their facilitation. Another thing has come from the introduction of these facilities, particularly shared type use. Approximately three companies would like to enter the market in Ireland. That is the question of the uses in pedestrianised areas and on footpaths. For older users in particular the vehicle, not only when travelling but when parked, can create a hazard. That is something that potentially should be looked at to avoid that safety hazard and to accommodate it.

**Deputy Duncan Smith:** I thank the witnesses for their responses. Some of the companies mentioned are providing solutions in terms of how e-scooters would be parked and so on, which are worthy of consideration. I have to leave now to attend another meeting but I am happy I had the opportunity today to engage with the witnesses. There are exciting possibilities and opportunities in terms of e-scooters and other forms of active travel that will help in meeting our emissions targets and major infrastructural projects such as MetroLink. We can all pull in the same direction.

**Chairman:** I have a couple of questions for the witnesses, but I would first like to thank Mr. Walsh for the invitation to the committee to view the eMOS system. In the next week or two, post the lifting of some of the level 5 restrictions, the clerk will engage with him to set up a date for that visit. It would make sense for the committee to do that.

I would like to touch briefly on a few areas. Senator Buttimer referenced Dr. Meade's analysis on e-scooters. We are scrutinising legislation which is effectively a road traffic Bill and yet a substantial proportion of it is around e-scooters and scramblers. The committee has written to the Department of Transport inquiring as to the timeframe for implementation of this legislation because there are elements of it that are being held up owing to the requirement for pre-legislative scrutiny of the e-scooter provisions.

There is clearly an urgency around legislating for e-scooters, e-bikes and quad bikes in terms of safety. In that context, I refer again to Dr. Meade's analysis. In Dublin, in particular, there has been a huge increase in the number of people cycling, which I have noted while sitting in traffic in a taxi on route to catch a train home, and I am surprised more cyclists are not seriously injured on the roads in Dublin. Dr. Meade makes a telling observation, namely, that she believes e-mobility should not be permitted to use bus or tram lanes and yet cyclists are allowed to use them. How does one reconcile that? I would have thought bus and tram lanes are as dangerous for cyclists as they are for those on e-scooters. We need to have a discussion around how we make roads safer for cyclists, pedestrians and vehicles. There is a massive roll-out of cycling infrastructure, which I welcome, but I am concerned about safety. I am concerned that many of the cycleways are very narrow. I am concerned also about cyclists using bus lanes, although I accept the need for people to be able to get where they are going.

My first question is to Dr. Meade. Is there a body of work to be done on a safety code around driver and cyclist interaction? How does she reconcile people on e-bikes not being permitted to use bus lanes when cyclists can do so? I would welcome a response from Dr. Meade on those two questions.

**Dr. Suzanne Meade:** On the question regarding safety around these users in particular, in the report mentioned by the Chairman, we refer to a safe systems approach. In road safety, we would look at everything, not just the infrastructure. A very pertinent point was made by Deputy O'Connor about education. It is not only about infrastructure and the vehicle someone will be using, be that an electric bike and so on, it is about driver education. I will answer the Chairman's question in general rather than be specific. The safe systems approach would

examine every element, including other users, infrastructure and whether we are providing enough segregated infrastructure for the number of people that are using it.

On how one reconciles the use of bus lanes by cyclists and not e-vehicle users, in my response to Senator Buttimer earlier, I said that, perhaps, a case-by-case response is needed. In some cases, bus lanes are very infrequently used, while in other cases they are very frequently used. Perhaps in light of the comments made and the sheer frequency of buses, they are also not suitable for cyclists. My next point goes back to the point made by Deputy O'Connor that this is a relatively new piece of the transport infrastructure environment here. The question is whether drivers have caught up to it. E-mobility is a relatively new addition to our road space, so the awareness of other roads users is very important. Other countries would take education on board. In that regard, I refer to Dutch Reach. For the benefit of those who do not know what that is, it is about drivers opening a car door with their left hand such that they have to turn their head and check for cyclists.

**Chairman:** I would like to expand on that issue with Mr. Walsh and Ms Graham. Have TII and the NTA done a body of work around the fast and exponential roll-out of cycle lanes, which is to be welcomed? How can we build a sustainable model that respects the cyclist and the driver? The creation of cycle lanes in areas that are exceptionally busy has created chaos for traffic. In some cases, it is clear that an additional lane is required at particular junctions, but that has not happened to date. Cycle lanes are welcome but how do we expand on this roll-out on a sustainable basis? This issue falls within the remit of the NTA in terms of cities and urban settings. I ask Ms Graham to outline what body of work the NTA has done to ensure we have a model that builds the infrastructure for cyclists as opposed to taking over existing lanes. In that regard, I refer to the issue that arose in Limerick city recently, with which Ms Graham is probably familiar. In terms of a sustainable model, is the NTA doing a body of work around that?

**Ms Anne Graham:** It is not a body of work as such, but we have a cycle design manual. We try to develop the cycling infrastructure in accordance with the manual, which is currently under review to take account of the current circumstances. There could be e-scooters and powered bikes on that infrastructure as well and that has to be taken into account in a design manual. Our focus is on providing the safest infrastructure that we can in a particular location. It also depends on the speed limits on a road because the higher the speed limit, the more one is inclined to get-----

**Chairman:** My time is limited. My question is more specific. The NTA is rolling out cycle lanes, which, as I said, are to be welcomed. In some cases, that roll-out is by means of reducing existing traffic lanes from two to one. Is that a sustainable model? I would like an answer to that specific question.

**Ms Anne Graham:** We believe it is. When a traffic lane is removed, that impacts on car traffic movement. If we are thinking about where we are going in terms of trying to reduce our reliance on the car and moving to more sustainable transport modes, then the more people one has travelling by sustainable transport, whether it is cycling, walking or public transport, that will be more sustainable and it will reduce our carbon emissions. Yes, it is a appropriate to look-----

**Chairman:** Is it a defined policy of the NTA to reduce the number of car lanes and replace them with bus lanes?

**Ms Anne Graham:** It depends on where we are talking about and what movements are

being made on a particular road. What we are trying to provide is a very efficient and higher level of bus priority for our bus system, so that requires dedicated priority infrastructure. It is really about rethinking our road space and providing for the best, and most sustainable, use of road space.

**Chairman:** I know but this is a hugely important issue.

**Ms Anne Graham:** Let me use the illustrative example of BusConnects in Dublin.

**Chairman:** No, I want an answer. Is it an NTA policy?

**Ms Anne Graham:** It is a policy of the NTA to provide for sustainable transport.

**Chairman:** No. We, as politicians, deal with this matter on the ground. Let us say we have two lanes of traffic in a very busy area and one lane is converted into a cycle lane rather than building an additional cycle lane. Is it NTA policy to actively look to get people to cycle rather than drive?

**Ms Anne Graham:** As the NTA is set up to encourage sustainable transport use, then of course it is a policy of ours to ensure more people use sustainable modes, whether walking, cycling or public transport, rather than the car mode. Yes, it is part of our remit to be able to do that and to provide the infrastructure in our cities, in particular in Dublin, to be able to deliver that. If there is a requirement on a particular road where it is difficult to get a priority for bus as well as include a car lane and a cycle lane, then of course we would look at the widening of that road to ensure one gets the appropriate infrastructure. That is what I was trying to illustrate in terms of BusConnects as that is where we have widened roads but where one is talking about quite large volumes of cyclists and bus travel as well as large volumes of car traffic. It depends on the location but our ultimate goal is to encourage more use of and to provide for more sustainable transport use in towns and cities.

**Chairman:** I have questions on regional and local areas. The NTA is revising the Limerick Shannon metropolitan area transport strategy, LSMATS, and will offer it for public consultation again. I am very keen on the strategy. Ms Graham has mentioned sustainability. Let us say there is a huge backlog of traffic because one of the lanes has been removed, which means my constituents cannot get to work on time. I want to see more infrastructure for cyclists rather than a policy of removing lanes. That is the context of my questions.

**Ms Anne Graham:** I understand.

**Chairman:** I have a slightly different view of sustainability. I believe that we should have a system that allows people to have a work-life balance, yet promotes cycling at all times. When does the NTA anticipate the draft LSMATS will be offered for public consultation in Limerick?

**Ms Anne Graham:** I anticipate the strategy will again be offered for public consultation towards the end of May or early June.

**Chairman:** For how long?

**Ms Anne Graham:** I think it is four weeks.

**Chairman:** Great. Does the strategy include, as we discussed previously, consideration being given to using the existing rail network in Limerick? Will it also include a link to a spur to Shannon Airport?

**Ms Anne Graham:** Both of those options are being considered as part of the proposed draft strategy, yes.

**Chairman:** I ask Mr. Walsh of TII to give us an update on the M20 project.

**Mr. Peter Walsh:** I will come back to the Chairman with a more detailed response. Limerick City and County Council will select the preferred option and bring it to the public in June or July. That is the timeline that I remember from the last update but I might come back to the Chairman with more details.

I wish to avail of the opportunity to correct something because I may have given the incorrect impression earlier to Deputy O'Connor when he asked about changing the speed limit at night on the M50 to 120 km/h. I did not mean to imply that we would look at speed limits beyond the designed speed limit for the road. When we went to three lanes on the majority of the M50, the design speed limit was 100 km/h. What we would be introducing in terms of dynamic traffic management would be lower speed limits depending on congestion or weather conditions or a combination of both. When not required, we would revert to the design speed limit or the design speed, which happens to be the limit as currently imposed on the M50. I hope that I did not give the impression that we would be looking at things in a new thinking way.

**Chairman:** Has the TII considered the type of structure necessary to accommodate cyclists and pedestrians, but more particularly cyclists, on the routes that are under its area of control? Will the TII build additional areas for cyclists? What is the model that it will use?

**Mr. Peter Walsh:** To clarify, the TII does not create policy but delivers it. We do not have a policy in this regard but we have a duty to deliver a safe and efficient network of national roads. The safety and efficiency of the roads are our focus.

There is a common understanding that we are going to have more active travel or cyclists on the network, so we are working with the Department of Transport to come up with a common approach. The Department is considering the introduction of greyways and speed limits. It is fine to have cyclists and motorists in the same shared space but beyond which we need a degree of separation and that will vary depending on whether the speed limit is 60 km/h, 80 km/h or 100 km/h. In conjunction, we have discussed with the Department the possibility of developing a national cycle network, and we will work with the NTA on that as well, to create a strategic framework and shape a national cycle network so that each local authority and roads authority, when developing projects, as a sponsoring agency, could be guided by the framework and work to deliver the entire network as opposed to disconnected pieces. That work is ongoing and under consideration as part of the review of the national development plan. We will see what level of support the framework will have coming out of the NDP.

**Senator Jerry Buttimer:** In the context of the implementation of the Cork metropolitan area transport strategy, can I ask about the Cork area community rail project? Has a date been set for establishing the implementation office?

Can the witnesses comment on the shared e-scooters system, parking, and as Deputy Duncan Smith referenced earlier, the last mile problem area? I thank Dr. Meade for her presentation regarding e-scooter vulnerability. I would like to have a further conversation about that presentation at a private meeting. I thank our witnesses for today.

**Ms Anne Graham:** The Senator asked about the Cork metropolitan area transport strategy. I think what we said previously to him was that we were considering the set-up of an implemen-

tation office. I do not think we had actually confirmed that we were setting one up.

**Senator Jerry Buttimer:** I thought there was a recommendation that there would be a Cork implementation office agreed to.

**Ms Anne Graham:** Not that I am aware of. What I have said is that we are considering that as part of the implementation. Currently, we have only one office based in Dublin. However, we had considered, and we are considering, whether we need to put in place an office for the implementation of the CMATS.

We are moving forward on all strands with the different agencies, and this includes Bus-Connects Cork. Irish Rail is moving forward on the rail projects to deliver the early parts of CMATS.

**Senator Jerry Buttimer:** What does consideration of a Cork implementation office mean? I contend that we need an implementation office for the strategy.

**Ms Anne Graham:** I have to consider whether it is appropriate to put an office in place and what staffing would be put in place for it. We are obliged to consider whether we are in a position to fund the position of an office as well as what appropriate staffing would be for such an office. That obviously has implications for our budgets. It would have to be considered and we would have to see whether we are in a position to provide it, but I cannot give any guarantees that we will do so. We are very much aware that there have been calls from Senator Buttimer, Deputies and Cork Chamber of Commerce to provide an office in Cork. However, it is still under consideration.

**Chairman:** Do any other members wish to raise a question?

**Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú:** I wish to put a question to the NTA officials. Deputy O'Connor spoke earlier. Several of us went to a meeting with taxi drivers that was organised by the three main groups. They have issues with the fact that they have missed out on several supports. Their main request is Government support to deal with the ten-year rule and its regulation. One issue that came up in the meeting was the scrappage scheme for a taxi driver who is going electric. The contention of the groups was that it was not fit for purpose. The contention is also that in large parts of Dublin and especially outside Dublin we do not have the infrastructure to facilitate electric cars, especially an increased number of electric cars. That infrastructure would be vital for taxi drivers. Has there been much interest in the scheme? I know that it is applied by the NTA. Do the officials have a view on it? Is Ms Graham free to give that view?

**Ms Anne Graham:** It is a Department of Transport scheme that we administer on behalf of the Department. I am trying to think of the figures. I believe we have at least 200 applications for the scheme to date. It is in and around that order but I can get an exact or more appropriate figure for the committee. I do not really want to comment on the scheme as it is a scheme of the Department, but we are seeing applications coming through from taxi drivers.

**Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú:** That is positive. I would appreciate if Ms Graham comes back to me with an exact figure. It was the contention of several of the groups that it was not necessarily fit for purpose. Like many schemes that are introduced, it will need to be looked at and improved anyway.

I have another question for Mr. Walsh. He referred to building cycle networks. There needs to be an element of common sense in respect of some of our towns. We are not starting where



we would like. One example is Dundalk. Cycle lanes were introduced at one stage that created major logistical difficulties in the sense that fire engines were unable to get around corners and so on. There were some improvements of Clanbrassil Street and further on into the St. Nicholas Quarter and so on. No cycle lane was introduced there on the basis that a shared space would make more sense. It is down to logistics. A more common-sense framework needs to be designed beyond that.

We are talking about trying to deal with some of the issues in rural Ireland with regard to connectivity and so on. Have something been considered? What about facilitating the likes of Bus Éireann from a point of view of something that is almost hybrid compared to the systems we have? We need fixed-time services but we also need services that can deal with fluctuating demand. This is somewhat similar to what Mr. Walsh is trying to introduce in respect of speeds and requirements on the motorway. It is a system that can deliver on the basis of need.

**Ms Anne Graham:** I might respond first by speaking on rural Ireland. As the Deputy may know, we are working on Connecting Ireland, which is about improving the connections between our towns and rural parts of Ireland. We will be going out for public consultation on an improved network of services later on this year.

Services are currently operated by the Local Link offices on our behalf. There is a combination of fixed schedule services as well as demand responsive services. These were primarily set up to provide services to isolated rural areas where the demand is lowest. It ensures that there is a connection at certain times of the day. It can be a door-to-door service to bring older vulnerable users into their local towns. It is a model we have in operation with our Local Link services.

I imagine the model the Deputy is thinking of is more urban-based. There may not be demand for a scheduled service in an urban area and I think he is talking about the potential of looking at a demand responsive service mixed with a scheduled service. That is something we would like to pilot if we were in a position to do so. It would probably start in Dublin, where there are potential gaps, although we do not see many gaps in our proposed BusConnects network. There is the possibility that areas could be better served by a demand responsive service. It requires subsidisation. It is simply that we have not been in a position to pilot this in the past two years given where we are with funding. However, it is definitely something we would like to pilot in future.

**Chairman:** Can I thank both witnesses-----

**Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú:** Does Mr. Walsh have any comment?

**Mr. Peter Walsh:** We largely deal with the inter-urban road network. The metropolitan and urban areas are areas where the NTA has more design interest. I would like to think that in our designs generally we bring a common-sense approach, but safety has to be uppermost.

I will go back on some points from earlier. We were talking about the need for education of other road users. There is a significant role for the RSA and I am keen to acknowledge that. We work with the authority in educating road users.

I will take the opportunity of having the microphone again to correct a date I gave to you earlier, Chairman. I received a text message while we were talking to say that the M20 is more likely to be in September.

**Chairman:** Up-to-date news is what we want. I had asked for an update on the M20. TII will be going out with the next phase of public consultation with the route in September. Is that correct?

**Mr. Peter Walsh:** It is an engagement with the public. The level of consultation on a preferred route, once it is identified, is something that I do not wish to be too definitive about at the moment, but we will provide the committee with a full update. The Chairman had pointed to specific elements of information about the different options he wanted to be brought into the public domain next time around. Limerick City and County Council took that on board. I do not have enough information about what exactly the interaction with the public will be, but it looks like it will be September when it happens.

**Chairman:** Clearly, there will be interaction with the public.

**Mr. Peter Walsh:** There will be, yes.

**Chairman:** I thank Ms Graham, Mr. Walsh and their colleagues for attending today and engaging with the committee.

The meeting is adjourned. The next joint meeting, which will be a private virtual meeting, will be at 4 p.m.

The joint committee adjourned at 2.30 p.m. *sine die*.