



MAYNOOTH CYCLING CAMPAIGN NOTES – April 2017



200th Anniversary of the Bicycle

The year 2017 marks the 200th anniversary of the invention by Baron Karl von Drais of what is generally regarded as the first bicycle - the Laufmaschine ("Running machine"). It was also known as a velocipede or draisienne (in French) or as a hobby or dandy horse (in English).



Karl von Drais was born on April 29, 1785 in Karlsruhe, capital of Baden, Germany. His father was Baron von Drais and although the family was not rich, it was highly influential, his godfather being the Grand Duke of Baden. He went to school in Karlsruhe where he studied forestry and later enrolled at the University of Heidelberg where he studied Mathematics, Physics and Architecture. In 1811, he went to Mannheim in order to concentrate on inventions. At that time, Europe was suffering from a series of poor harvests, a situation which was worsened by an Indonesian volcanic eruption in 1815. As a result ash in the atmosphere affected the climate across the entire world and Europe saw snow all summer long. The starvation and death of horses following the crop failure encouraged von Drais to focus on a replacement means of transport.

On his first reported ride from Mannheim on June 12, 1817, he covered about 10 km in less than an hour. The Laufmaschine had no pedals and was powered by the feet with the rider balancing the machine to keep upright. Constructed almost entirely of wood, it weighed 22 kg, had brass bushings within the wheel bearings, iron shod wheels and a rear-wheel brake. He patented his design in 1818 and it was the first commercially successful two-wheeled, steerable, human-propelled machine. It was initially manufactured in Germany and France and several thousand copies were built and used, primarily in Europe and in North America.

It soon became apparent that roads were so rutted by carriages that it was difficult to balance the Laufmaschine so riders took to the footpaths which gave rise to an outcry from pedestrians (some

things never change!). Consequently, authorities in Germany, Great Britain, the United States, and even Calcutta banned their use which caused their popularity to fade. Due to later political upheaval in Germany, von Drais lost all his money and died in poverty in 1851. Nevertheless, the Laufmaschine deserves to be celebrated this year on the 200th anniversary of its invention as it was the forerunner of the modern day bicycle which has given great pleasure to countless people.

National Mitigation Plan

It has been revealed that Ireland is one of only two EU member states that has failed to meet EU emissions and renewable energy targets after the government conceded that it was set to fall well short of required progress. A 2014 report by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform estimated that missing greenhouse gas emissions targets could cost Ireland €90 million while missing the 2020 renewable energy could cost between €140 million and €600 million.

The Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment is currently consulting the public on its draft National Mitigation Plan which contains measures aimed at addressing these failures. However, despite looming EU fines lip service is paid to the need to increase cycling and other sustainable modes of transport.

Kildare County Development Plan 2017-2023

Kildare County Council has released its new Development Plan on 1st March. From first glances, it looks very much like a curate's egg - partly good and partly bad. While the chapter on *Movement and Transport* refers to 'sustainability' and 'promoting walking and cycling', what stands out are nearly two and a half pages of roads identified for improvements and priority road and bridge projects whereas the only cycling/walking schemes are projects that have been on the books for a number of years. Put beside Kildare's Capital Programme and the absence of any intention to provide safe cycling routes to schools such as on the Celbridge Road, it suggests continuing congestion and a continuing token commitment to cycling.

Maynooth Cycling Campaign is a non-party political cycling advocacy group. Further information on meetings and activities is available on our website.

We are affiliated to Cyclist.ie, the Irish Cyclist Advocacy Network and through it to the European Cycling Federation.