



## **MAYNOOTH CYCLING CAMPAIGN NOTES – May 2017**



### **Compulsory Hi Viz for Cyclists and Pedestrians**

At the recent annual conference of the Association of Garda Sergeants and Inspectors, there was debate on a motion for high visibility clothing to be made compulsory for pedestrians and cyclists. Although the actual vote did not include pedestrians (as it was considered unenforceable), the motion gave rise to a frenzy of discussion in the media about cyclists and hi viz. As vulnerable road users, many cyclists choose to wear hi viz but hi viz has no magical powers to protect and was found in the UK courts to contribute to a fatality in low sun conditions. Furthermore, in countries with the greatest number of cyclists, responsibility for safety is placed on those who pose the greatest risk ie on people who drive rather than on people who cycle.

### **Minimum Passing Distance Law**

Of greater importance to cyclists is the Minimum Passing Distance Law proposed by Ciaran Cannon and Regina Doherty. The law proposes a 1.5m minimum passing distance for vehicles travelling at speeds greater than 50kph and 1m for speeds of 50kph or less. It is similar to legislation in several other countries including France, Belgium, Portugal and Australia, as well as several US states and provinces in Canada. Here in Kildare we are acutely aware of the effects of the risks of cycling with the death of Tonya McEvoy at Rathcoffey in February while on a club run. Although the two TDs are members of the government party, the law is being introduced as a private members bill so we would urge all North Kildare TDs to support it and hopefully it will be passed by the Dáil before the summer recess.

### **The Barrow Motorway**

Last night I dreamt of a motorway beside the Barrow greenway..... and it's wasn't a nightmare. Just imagine it - two lanes of traffic in one direction, two lanes of traffic in the opposite direction, a central reservation and two verges one on either side. Right, now imagine it again, this time without any traffic and with no traffic lanes. Then imagine it without a central reservation and with a verge on only one side. Finally imagine the motorway with the remaining verge reduced in width. Wouldn't that be an amazing sight from Kildare all the way to St. Mullins?

It is important that it is a motorway verge. There are grass verges on many roads and in many housing estates but those are ordinary verges. They are only about 1m wide and the grass is (generally) cut by the householder. No for the Barrow we are talking about a motorway verge and what is special about them? Well for starters they are a lot wider and the grass isn't normally cut except close to the road. Secondly, people don't stop and spend time on motorway verges so they are not disturbed by human beings. When motorways were first planned in the UK in the 1950s, it was all about transport and moving people and goods. Road engineers were not concerned with the environment or biodiversity so nobody foresaw that motorway verges would become important

linear pathways across the countryside for flora and fauna. Admittedly, motorways are not so good for animals which travel at ground level but the 'motorway' along the Barrow wouldn't have that problem as animals would only have to deal with people on bikes or walkers and not thundering HGVs and cars.

Why did Waterways Ireland not think of this when they were planning their Blueway? Well one reason is that they do not own the adjoining land and therein lies the problem. Waterways Ireland does not have funds to purchase adjoining lands for a project which in itself may or may not get planning permission. We don't do long term planning in Ireland as the housing crisis and water quality problems attest so the idea of purchasing or investing in something intangible like biodiversity is alien to us. The government launched its public consultation on the National Biodiversity Action Plan 2017- 2021 earlier this year. I doubt though that they will be recommending a motorway along the Barrow (even without the bad bits) but what's the harm in dreaming?

## **Politicians and Cycling**

While announcements of the setting up of the Kildare Cycle Forum have again proved to be premature, there was better news in the Dáil where the All Party Cycling group was set up as a non-party forum for TDs and senators with an interest in cycling. Maynooth Cycling Campaign wishes it well and hopes that it will prove to be as successful as the All Party Parliamentary Cycling Group at Westminster. Hopefully too some of the TDs for North Kildare will consider joining!

*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.*