**Local Transport Plans: An integrative approach to local plan making**

David Clements[1]

1,2 National Transport Authority, Ireland  
david.clements@nationaltransport.ie

**Abstract.**

Over the past number of years, Ireland’s National Transport Authority (the “NTA”) have been funding and overseeing the preparation of Local Transport Plans (LTPs) across the country. Such plans are prepared for regional growth centres and key towns identified in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies, as well as other settlements identified by local authorities, and are based on the Area Based Transport Assessment (ABTA) guidance that was previously prepared by the NTA and Transport Infrastructure Ireland.

In overseeing this programme, the NTA have been to the forefront of transport planning in Ireland at the local level and as such have developed a unique insight into local plan making and the relationship between national, regional and local policy. This paper summarises the approach the NTA has taken to the preparation of these plans, the key issues which have emerged, and the challenges of achieving modal shift across Ireland and the associated objective to reduce emissions from transport.

**Keywords:** Transport Policy, Sustainable Development, Strategic Planning, Active Travel, Public Transport, Placemaking.

1. Introduction
   1. Definition of a Local Transport Plan (LTP)

LTPs represent the application of national, regional and metropolitan transport policies and objectives at the level of the individual settlement. They can be undertaken for towns of varying scales and suburban areas of larger conurbations.

The precise content of an individual LTP is dependent on a number of factors. These include the scale of the settlement; the potential for investment in sustainable transport; and the extent to which transport planning in the location may be influenced by individual major schemes or issues.

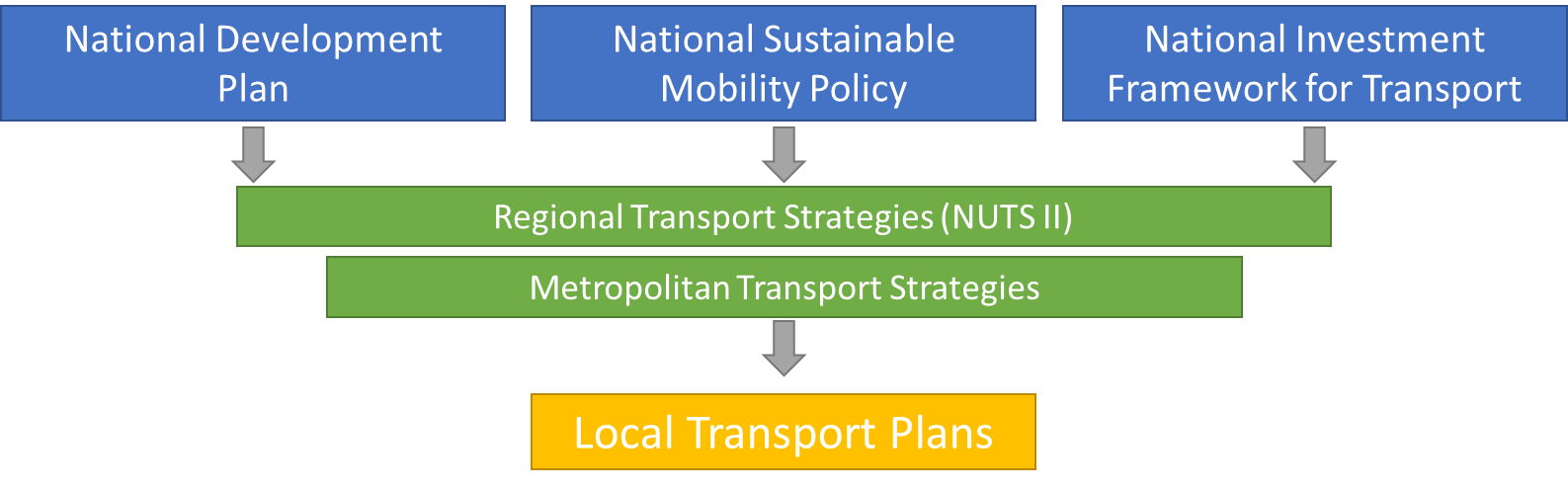
In general, the LTP will comprise a clearly prioritised framework for investment in transport, with a focus on sustainable modes, for a settlement over a 12-20 year timeframe.

* 1. International Context

The NTA Local Transport Plan programme could be viewed in the context of the Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan (SUMP) approach [1]. The 8 principles of the SUMP are applied in the making of LTPs, in particular the requirements of the functional urban areas and cooperation across institutional boundaries. In general, however, LTPs are prepared for towns with forecast populations of up to 50,000, rather than for Irish cities or Metropolitan Areas, for which Regional or Metropolitan Area Transport Strategies are prepared.

* 1. Irish Policy Context

LTPs sit at the bottom of the hierarchy of transport plans and programmes in Ireland and, as such, from the perspective of local communities, comprise the most detailed and perhaps, most tangible expression of transport policy, other than individual transport schemes. Figure 1 illustrates this hierarchy:



**Fig. 1.** Transport Planning Hierarchy in Ireland

1. The Legacy Challenge
   1. Existing Development Patterns

### Ireland has a challenging settlement and population distribution pattern for the provision of efficient, effective and sustainable transport. While it ranks 7th in the EU for percentage of population living in rural areas, at 36% [2], this statistic masks the extent to which this population is also dispersed. In 2022, 20% of all dwellings granted permission was in the form of one-off housing, equating to 40% of all applications for houses.

### In addition to the dispersal of population into rural areas, there has also been significant growth in the form of edge-of-town suburban development across towns in Ireland, in particular in Leinster, which throughout the period known as the “Celtic Tiger” became the commuter belt for the Dublin Metropolitan Area [3]. Vast swathes of suburban development were appended onto towns of all sizes up to 100km from workplaces in the capital.

Allied to this, at the settlement level, retail moved to the edges in the form of out-of-town developments, and commonly, new schools were developed on peripheral greenfield sites. In some cases, central schools were closed and consolidated into single strategic campuses away from the existing population centres.

The combination of these land use trends, and their perseverance into the era of climate change and post-Covid behavioural change, has presented serious challenges for the fostering of sustainable transport culture in Irish towns. Car-dependency has been locked-in via settlement patterns and urban forms which do not support public transport, walking or cycling.

* 1. Functional Urban Areas of Settlements

Allied to the population distribution challenge is the associated extension of the functional urban areas of Irish settlements into the hinterland. While this phenomenon is not unusual, it is the proportion of the population which is rural and dispersed and their associated impact on the urban fabric of settlements due to their need to drive and park within the urban area which provides a distinct challenge for sustainable transport.

* 1. Transport Networks within Towns

In general, Irish towns are characterised by a small number of major routes, many of them with strategic national functions; broad commercial main streets; collections of narrower side streets; back lanes; suburban housing estates; and peripheral employment zones.

This format presents a number of challenges as follows. The strategic routes tend to be single carriageway with limited potential for the introduction of public transport priority or high-quality segregated cycle tracks. The main streets tend to be similar but with the added constraint of the perceived need for on-street parking to serve retail and other services. The narrower side streets can often accommodate an enhanced public realm, including fully pedestrianised areas, but only do so by significantly reducing circulation options for all modes to one-way streets etc.

As such, the potential for improving the sustainable transport offer in many Irish towns is limited without radical interventions in the traffic circulation regimes to accommodate roadspace reallocation.

* 1. Car Dependency and Political Will

The above factors have combined to create a high level of car dependency across major urban areas in Ireland. This car dependency has fostered a very car-centric culture which manifests itself by creating a challenging environment for the progress of sustainable transport schemes which, by definition, are required to reduce the amount of roadspace dedicated to the car. Through the local democratic process, this has placed another significant barrier to the implementation of LTPs.

1. Approach to Local Transport Plans
   1. Relationship to Local Area Plan

The NTA has encouraged local authorities to undertake Local Transport Plans concurrently, and as a formal element of, their statutory Local Area Plans (LAP). The latter comprise the land use plans for the settlements and the iteration and cooperation between the two is fundamental to the success of the non-statutory LTP. It is regarded as essential, that the key objectives and policies of the LTP are included in the LAP.

* 1. Establishing Context

In line with steps 2 and 3 of the SUMP guidance, the establishment of the baseline or context is a vital first step in the making of an LTP. This consists, generally, of the following tasks:

* Review of existing local transport planning context;
* SWOT analysis of settlement /study area or similar;
* Establish the objectives of the plan; and
* Determine forecast demand for travel for horizon year;

These tasks may require close consultation with various departments within the local authorities in order to gain a clear understanding of planning, public realm, heritage, etc. considerations, and will require consultation with the NTA, Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) and transport operators.

A key element of the SWOT analysis is the use of the NTA’s Accessibility to Opportunities and Services (ATOS) connectivity tool to identify locations where pedestrian and cyclist accessibility may be sub-optimal. In larger settlements / study areas, the Public Transport Accessibility Tool (PTAL) may also be appropriate to use.

At the end of this stage, the plan team should be in a position whereby they clearly understand what they are planning for and can then consider what potential measures could address the weaknesses uncovered in this stage, and meet the objectives for the plan.

* 1. Developing Measures and the Draft Plan

Based on the established context, the plan team will then develop the planned transport networks for each mode, ensuring that the key trips generators and attractors are connected by sustainable modes. From these networks, and in an iterative manner, potential measures can be identified. These are generally set out according to transport mode and, depending on the scope of the plan, may contain specific land use measures for assessment as part of the associated and concurrent LAP-making process.

The potential measures are assessed against the objectives of the plan, qualitatively and quantitatively, using transport modelling tools if necessary, and a draft preferred local transport plan is prepared.

* 1. Iteration and Finalisation

In advance of publication of the draft LTP, the NTA will seek to ensure that the associated draft LAP provides for its implementation both by including its policies and objectives and by proposing a land use pattern which supports sustainable transport.

In most cases, the consultation on the draft LTP is undertaken alongside the statutory LAP, with the associated Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment requirements.

1. Key Deliverables
   1. Networks for each mode

The critical outputs for each LTP are the networks for each transport mode identified during the plan preparation, and from which the potential measures are defined. The following principles apply for each:

* Walking – all of the major trip generators and attractors in the study area should be connected by safe and convenient pedestrian facilities, including crossings;
* Cycling – similar to walking, but with consideration for interactions with the public transport network and traffic in order to determine the most appropriate routeings for cycle trips;
* Public transport – focussed on the centre with high-quality stops and facilities. In settlements with existing or proposed dedicated town bus services, the objectives of the NTA in relation to their introduction or expansion will be accounted for;
* Traffic – In line with the road user hierarchy, private car traffic circulation will be determined once the plan team is satisfied that safe and convenient networks for walking, cycling and public transport have been set down.
  1. Priority Investment Areas

When illustrating the transport networks by mode, the prioritisation of individual schemes or areas of investment is required. In the past, there has been a tendency to measures success in terms of kilometres of infrastructure delivered. While this remains a key metric, it can be inappropriately applied and can result in less effective, less central, easier routes being delivered. An example of this would be a cycle track on a ring road which does not serve any cycling demand to schools or the town centre.

As such, it is essential that the LTP prioritises investment in infrastructure with a clear path set out to meeting the key transport demands by sustainable modes. A “centre-first” approach is generally appropriate here.

* 1. Travel to Schools

Schools are a major source of trip demand in towns and, due to their peak-time nature, contribute significantly to congestion. As such, LTPs require to clearly identify how travel to school by sustainable modes is being catered for and how front-of-school environments will be managed in the study area to facilitate movement by pedestrians and cyclists.

1. Guidance Available
   1. Area Based Transport Assessment Updated

The NTA and TII published a suite of guidance documents in 2018 under the “Area-Based Transport Assessment” (ABTA) label for use in the delivery of Local Transport Plans. These guidance documents are being re-examined with a view to their updating in light of the experience gained to date by the NTA, local authorities and industry practitioners during the making of the initial tranche of LTPs.

1. Main Lessons Learned to Date

The lessons learned, according to which the ABTA guidance will be updated, can be summarised as follows:

* The need for comprehensive iteration between the LTP and LAP;
* The need to only use transport modelling where required;
* The need for early stakeholder engagement;
* The advantage of high-quality presentation of materials; and
* The prioritisation of measures.

The NTA is currently managing 32 LTPs as part of the programme. By the end of 2024, it is anticipated that all of the Regional Growth Centres and Key Towns will have undertaken an LTP and will have a clear framework for promoting and facilitating sustainable transport infrastructure and services, and a clear path for achieving the required reduction in emissions from transport.

References

1. Rupprecht Consult (ed), Guidelines for Developing and Implementing a Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan, Second Edition, European Platform on Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans, Cologne (2019)
2. The Global Economy website - [www.theglobaleconomy.com/rankings/rural\_population\_percent/European-union/](http://www.theglobaleconomy.com/rankings/rural_population_percent/European-union/), last access 25/09/23
3. Pope, C., Major growth in urban sprawl around Dublin, The Irish Times webpage, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/major-growth-in-urban-sprawl-around-dublin-1.977210> (2004), last accessed 25/09/23