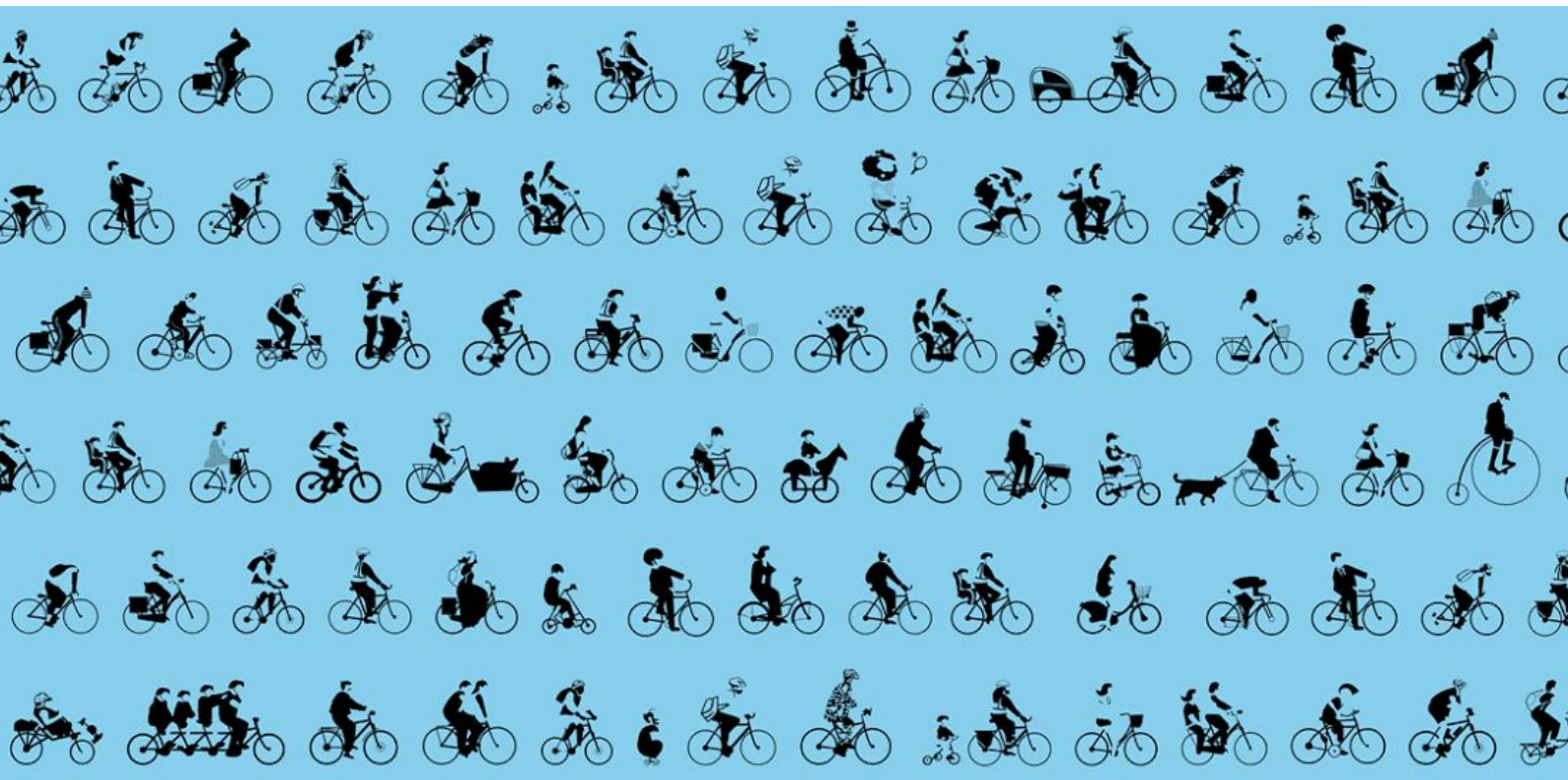


THE ROLE OF THE IRISH POLICE THE HEALTH & SAFETY OF PEOPLE WHO WANT TO CYCLE



Submission on the Future of Policing from the Dublin Cycling Campaign, an independent, voluntary cycling advocacy group that has been working to improve conditions for cycling since 1993, and is a voice for tens of thousands of people who want to cycle in Dublin.



The Dublin Cycling Campaign is a member of Cyclist.ie, the umbrella organisation for cycling advocacy in Ireland, which is a member of the ECF, the European Cyclists Federation.

Context: As the Dublin Cycling Campaign, we believe that cycling should be recognised as mass transportation with considerable benefits for Irish society. In Dublin, for example, more people travel to work and education by bike than by the Dart and Luas combined. The cost of traffic congestion in Dublin last year was €350 million, and is forecast by the National Transport Authority to rise considerably^[1]. Cardiovascular disease remains the most common cause of death in Ireland; physical activity like cycling has been proven to reduce risk of heart disease as well as cancer, and is recognised as having a positive effect on managing conditions like depression and Parkinson's^[2].

The number of people cycling has doubled to more than 95,000 every day in Dublin alone^[3]. Showing that the way people are using the streets and roads in their communities is changing rapidly.

However, the risks for people who cycle their own bicycles or ones from bike-share schemes are considerable. 15 people who cycled have died on Irish roads last year, all of them in collisions with motorised vehicles; this tragic and unnecessary figure was an increase by 50% on 2016. Recent figures^[4] show that between 1,300 and 1,400 people who cycle have to go to hospital due to injuries every year.

One of the most frequent reasons given by people who don't cycle frequently, or at all, is safety: a fear of injury or death. In a very recent poll on The Journal^[5] of over 10,000 people who answered the question 'Do you feel safe cycling on Irish roads?' only 1,065 stated that they felt safe. More than 4,500 respondents said that they do not feel safe but cycle nonetheless.

An Garda Síochána's 2016-2018 Strategy states:

'The preservation of life is a key priority for An Garda Síochána. Keeping our roads safe helps protect lives and reduce serious injuries.'

As Dublin Cycling Campaign, we are concerned that An Garda Síochána is falling short of its own stated strategy.

The Dublin Cycling Campaign has a number of areas of specific concern that we wish to address through this submission:

COMMUNITY SAFETY

An Garda Síochána's 2016-2018 Strategy states:

'Working with and being a part of the community is one of our major strengths as a police service. We want to build on that to continue to protect and support communities through committed and active collaboration.'

Our organisation believes that officers engage differently with people who cycle and people who drive a car. Priority is frequently given to car drivers, to the detriment of those who cycle. As an organisation which represents the interests of people who cycle, we hear evidence of a consistent lack of commitment amongst An Garda Síochána officers to upholding the rights of all road users; this is a major concern for us as an organisation.

Bike theft is another key aspect of community protection; the number of bicycles stolen in Dublin in 2017 has been estimated as about 13,000*, with only 1 in 3 of these being reported to Gardai. Less than 1% of bike thefts result in a conviction. 16% of people who have had their bicycle stolen do not replace them, with a further 26% reducing the amount they cycle following bicycle theft**. This is to the detriment of their health and the city in reducing congestion. While it is acknowledged that reducing bike theft needs a 3 pronged approach from 1. Bike owners (using higher quality locks), 2. City authorities (installing more secure bike parking on street and in high density bike parks & ensuring secure bike parking is included in all new apartment and housing complexes), the 3rd prong of the strategy, is on the Gardai side, with more targeted actions to reduce organised bike theft needed.

*Based on underreporting from CSO Crime & Victimisation Study 2014/15.

**Dublin Cycling Campaign research 2014

ACCOUNTABILITY

We believe that An Garda Síochána needs to improve accountability as regards their protection of people cycling and to develop officers' leadership and management capacity in order to engage comprehensively and professionally with the safety concerns of people who cycle. We have come across numerous instances of ignorance of the rules of the road amongst members of the force^[6]. A first step towards accountability of An Garda Síochána for people's safety would be for officers to be better informed about relevant laws. A further step would be for An Garda Síochána to publish figures on violations of laws which affect people who cycle.

EQUALITY

We believe that the culture and ethos of An Garda Síochána has some room for improvement as regards the principle of equality, we are concerned that not all road users are treated equally. We call for the practice of prioritising the needs of people who drive to come to an end; this two tier system of policing endangers people who cycle. An Garda Síochána has responsibility for facilitating the ‘free flow of traffic’^[7] and yet time after time our findings indicate that the flow of cars is given priority over the safety of people who cycle.

UNDERSTANDING THE NEEDS OF VULNERABLE ROAD USERS

An Garda Síochána’s message ‘*Share the Road*’, with an emphasis that ‘*everyone has an equal responsibility*’, is concerning, as this message does not reflect the needs of vulnerable road users; we believe that those who represent the greatest danger on our roads should bear the most responsibility for harm reduction; a focus on the responsibility of people who cycle to wear personal protective equipment appears to diminish the responsibility of people who drive, to protect vulnerable road users.

SUPPORTING CYCLING AND IMPROVED QUALITY OF LIFE

An Garda Síochána has committed, in its Strategy, to:

‘promoting an inter-agency approach to problem solving and improving the overall quality of life.’

The Gardai need to make a much stronger commitment to protect people who cycle and ensure that cycling becomes a safe, healthy transport option for all. Cycling should not engender fear in those using it as a mode of transport. Everyone from ages 8 to 80, and of all abilities, should be able to ride along the streets and roads of their communities; this needs to be the guiding principle of roads policing. It is worth remembering that for some people with mobility issues and disabilities, cycling is the most convenient way to get around, and may even be their only way of getting out and maintaining an independent life.^[8]

KEEP PEOPLE WHO CYCLE SAFE FROM ABUSE

The Dublin Cycling Campaign is concerned about stories from our members of intimidation and harassment by people who drive. We have had a number of reports of intimidation — verbal and physical — by people who drive. We believe that the personal safety of people who walk or cycle should be paramount, and that everyone should be able to move around the city free from intimidation. A particular concern for the campaign is the alarming reports from women who cycle who are targeted for verbal abuse and intimidation. The leadership of An Garda Síochána is key in ensuring that those who practice such intimidating behaviour are pursued and prosecuted.

UPHOLDING LAWS THAT PROTECT PEOPLE WHO CYCLE

It is critical that An Garda Síochána upholds traffic calming laws on speeding and ensures that the 30 km/h speed limits in certain urban and suburban areas are upheld. The benefits of lower speed limits include a reduced risk of people walking and cycling being killed or injured, a reduction in air and noise pollution and a reduction in obesity. The advantages, as witnessed in other countries, include a reduction by 50% in road crashes (Switzerland), a reduction of 50% in children killed or severely injured (London), and an increase in children (35%) allowed to play on the road (Edinburgh).

Recommendations: The Dublin Cycling Campaign calls for An Garda Síochána to enforce current road traffic legislation which protects vulnerable road users.

This requires consistent, routine and proactive policing of people who drive — from speeding, driving under the influence, driving while being distracted, breaking traffic signals, parking in cycle lanes, parking on footpaths, encroaching bike-boxes by stopping beyond Advanced Stop Lines (ASLs), dangerous overtaking (too close and fast), to driving with L plates without an accompanying licensed driver, and driving without due care and attention. Speeding in urban areas (both 50km/h and 30km/h) is a key concern as this is a significant barrier to encouraging more active travel.

The Gardai must commit to enforcing the 30km/h speed limit in areas where it applies to ensure that these zones are safe for vulnerable road users such as people who cycle and walk as well as children and older people.

RESOURCES

Additional Garda time needs to be allocated to policing our roads. Reports from April 2017 that the Roads Policing Unit was to be slimmed down to 600 members (from a peak of 1,200 in the Garda Traffic Corps) are of concern to us. We believe the potential for additional use of technology (see below) does not fully negate the requirement for at least some additional Garda manpower for roads policing, given the extremely high level of non-compliance with traffic laws which exists currently in Ireland and the ways in which this endangers vulnerable road users.

TECHNOLOGY

The Dublin Cycling Campaign wishes to see improvements in the efficiency of enforcement through increased application of technology. We believe this suggestion is relevant to the Commission Terms of Reference which refers to

‘information systems appropriate to the needs of a modern police force.’

The introduction of fixed speed cameras on a widespread basis could hugely improve speeding enforcement without relying solely on Garda manpower. Similarly, we understand that it is already planned to expand the use of Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) cameras in police cars and we suggest that in addition to planned uses which have already been reported, these cameras should be extensively used to automatically ticket a range of other offences which endanger vulnerable road users, including parking in cycle lanes.

While we have provided just two examples above, we hope that the Commission will consider recommending that a detailed review of best practice internationally with regard to the use of technology and automation in roads policing in order to increase overall enforcement.

IMPROVED PROVISION FOR PUBLIC TO SUBMIT EVIDENCE OF VIOLATIONS

Other police forces accept evidence of photos and video of dangerous, anti-social and illegal behaviour submitted by citizens. Police forces in the UK are increasingly starting to make this process easier and remove the requirement to visit a police station. For example, ‘Operation Snap’ in Wales^[9] is a collaboration between four police forces where anyone with a camera can submit evidence through a simple online portal. This aims to act as a preventative measure to improve driver behaviour, as drivers may be aware that they are being recorded. The portal has reduced the time taken for members of the public to make a complaint, and also reduces the amount of time required by the police force to investigate each individual complaint, as detailed information is already available. We recommend the introduction of a similar portal in Ireland.

SOCIAL MEDIA AS A TOOL FOR OUTREACH

The use of social media also has potential in terms of reporting common locations for traffic violations. However we see little evidence of the administrators of the @GardaTraffic An Garda Síochána Twitter account responding to these reports. Some Twitter users have been blocked by the official An Garda Síochána Twitter accounts, making them unable to report violations. We would like to see An Garda Síochána facilitating open, informed, respectful and transparent interactions with people on Twitter.

KNOWLEDGE OF THE LAW

We urgently call for all members of the force to be properly informed about road traffic legislation so we don't have to witness misconceptions and errors in An Garda Síochána's understanding of laws which affect people who cycle.

FOCUS ON PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

The Dublin Cycling campaign is concerned about a focus by An Garda Síochána on personal protective equipment for people cycling; this is not mandatory. We believe that it should not be the only focus on any publicity campaign regarding the safety of people who cycle. The following diagram drawing from the hierarchy of health and safety policies in the workplace is useful in outlining this principle^[10].

Priority	Health & Safety in work	Action	Health & Safety on our streets
1 st	Elimination	Physically remove the hazard	Remove/reduce motor vehicles
2 nd	Substitution	Replace the hazard	Public transport & more bikes
3 rd	Engineering controls	Isolate people from the hazard	Protected bike infra & traffic calming
4 th	Administrative controls	Change the way people work	Laws to limit car mobility
last	PPE	Protect the worker with personal protective equipment	PPE

GUARDS NEED TO GET CYCLING TOO

We recommend training in cycling skills in traffic to be made compulsory for all An Garda Síochána members in order for them to experience what it's like to cycle in cities and rural zones, to increase empathy with people cycling, and to create opportunities for An Garda Síochána to demonstrate leadership as people who cycle.

PROTECT PEOPLE FROM INTIMIDATION AND ASSAULT

Leadership from An Garda Síochána is essential in protecting those people who cycle who are being subjected to intimidation, verbal harassment or assault.

LEARN FROM COUNTRIES WHERE CYCLING IS A HEALTHY, SAFE OPTION

Countries such as The Netherlands and Denmark see much greater diversity of people cycling, from the very young to the very old; with a more even spread of people who cycle across gender and mobility. The West Midlands Police Traffic Unit^[11] is a leading light in progressive Road Harm Reduction practices, with a variety of operations including 'OpClosePass'^[12]

As a campaign which represents the interests of a wide variety of people who cycle, we are available to continue our discussions with the An Garda Síochána as regards safety on Irish roads. We support the development of learning and information sharing which draws on lessons learnt abroad and allows for a greater number of people to get cycling in safety on Irish roads.

The Dublin Cycling Campaign as a member of Cyclist.ie is grateful to be given the opportunity to contribute to the work of the Commission of Future Policing. We would be happy to continue the discussion with face to face meetings, workshops, phone calls or correspondence by email. The independent voluntary organisation has been lobbying for improved conditions for people who want to cycle for 25 years.

OUR VISION FOR DUBLIN IS A VIBRANT, LIVEABLE CITY WHERE EVERYBODY CAN SAFELY ENJOY EVERYDAY WALKING AND CYCLING

WWW.DUBLINCYCLING.IE

THAT CYCLING IS A NORMAL PART OF TRANSPORT AND EVERYDAY LIFE IN IRELAND

WWW.CYCLIST.IE

MORE PEOPLE CYCLING, MORE OFTEN

WWW.ECF.COM



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- [2a] <https://irishheart.ie/our-mission/our-policies/heart-disease-irelands-no-1-killer/>
- [2b] <http://www.bbc.com/news/health-39641122>
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- [12] <http://www.cyclist.co.uk/news/3490/cyclists-killed-or-seriously-hurt-down-by-one-fifth-thanks-to-west-midlands-close-pass>