

## Walking for transport in Ireland: Policy recommendations from a nationally representative study

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## Background

The Climate Action Plan outlines targets to reduce transport sector emissions by 50% between 2018 and 2030. Reducing car use and growing active transport are key components of this plan and Ireland's corresponding National Sustainable Mobility Policy. These aims are primarily reflected in two policy approaches: mitigating the need to travel by car and improving the accessibility of active and public transport modes relative to the car. With respect to walking, compact urban development is presented as a primary means of improving proximity to everyday destinations, where walking can substitute driving. The '15-minute city' planning concept captures this approach<sup>1</sup>. In addition, developing an expanded network of protected, direct, and attractive walking networks across urban roads and streets is proposed. This can enhance local walkability, thereby fostering modal shift toward active transport<sup>2</sup>. **The recommendations in this policy brief are derived from a peer-reviewed study examining the factors that influence walking for transport in Ireland at both a national level and disaggregated by gender and region<sup>3</sup>.**

### Summary of Recommended Policy Actions

The following actions can support higher levels of walking for transport in Ireland:

1. Design neighbourhoods, towns and cities that maximise proximity to everyday destinations.
2. Focus on improving the walkability of key non-residential destinations of everyday travel such as workplaces, schools, and supermarkets.
3. Improve natural shelter, built shelter, and road and footpath drainage to enable women's walking trips in wet conditions.
4. Enhance the public lighting and passive surveillance of walking networks to enable women's walking trips in dark evening conditions.

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<sup>1</sup> Dublin City Council, 2022. *Dublin City Development Plan 2022-2028*. <https://www.dublincity.ie/residential/planning/strategic-planning/dublin-city-development-plan/development-plan-2022-2028>

<sup>2</sup> Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2019. *Design manual for urban roads and streets*. <https://www.roadguidelines.ie/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Design-Manual-for-Urban-Streets-Version-1.1-2019-High-Res.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Egan, R., Lavin, C., Julienne, H., 2026. *Walking for transport in Ireland: An analysis of nationally representative trip data*. 187, 104264. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tranpol.2026.104264>

## This study

We explored how socio-demographic, household, trip, weather, and psychological variables influenced walking behaviour relative to non-walking modes for transport trips under 5 km in Ireland. We additionally explored how the influence of these variables on walking trips might vary by gender and region (i.e., Dublin/Outside Dublin). As some degree of walking trips may be for recreational purposes rather than 'essential' everyday tasks, we examined 'utility walking' – or walking for transport – in Ireland. Our focus on utility trips therefore excludes walking trips taken for 'social/leisure/sporting activity'. To pursue this aim, we analysed nationally representative data capturing travel behaviour from Ireland's Behavioural Energy and Travel Tracker (BETT)<sup>4</sup>. Overall, we analysed 7,798 trips gathered over twelve months from January to December 2023.

## Policy recommendations

### 1. Design neighbourhoods, towns and cities that maximise proximity to everyday destinations

As expected, we found that utility walking in Ireland was negatively associated with car ownership and trip distance and was positively associated with apartment living. These findings clearly support national and local policy and design guidance that advocates for compact urban development, mixed land-use, multi-functional streets, the prioritisation of dense and permeable active mobility networks, and increasing reliance on sustainable modes of transport<sup>2</sup>. In the below images, we provide examples of urban design that enables proximity to everyday destinations as a walker.



Figure 2.11: A Livable Walkable Neighbourhood.

Image 1.<sup>5</sup>



Image 2.<sup>6</sup>

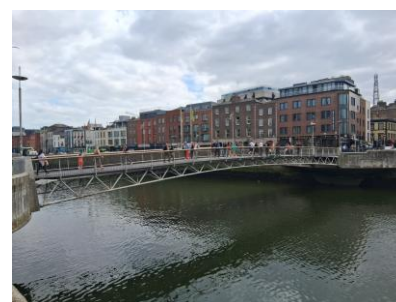


Image 3.<sup>7</sup>

### 2. Improve the walkability of non-residential destinations

Our analyses revealed that walking trips in Dublin were more versatile than walking trips outside of Dublin, which were associated primarily with social visits, male gender, and younger age. The greater versatility of walking trips in Dublin may be enabled by the county's relatively compact and connected arrangement of everyday destinations such as workplaces, shops and schools compared to counties outside of Dublin. In these other counties, walking networks may be more suited for trips within one's local neighbourhood (e.g., for social visits) but less favourable for travel to other destinations (e.g., workplaces). As Dublin has a much higher share of walking for utility trips under 5 km (39 %) than the combined areas outside of Dublin (29%), it may be viewed as a positive model for urban regions in Ireland with similar goals to advance a '15-min city' ideal<sup>1</sup>. On this basis, our study supports efforts to advance x-

<sup>4</sup> SEAI, 2025. *Behavioural Energy and Travel Tracker 2023 Dataset*. <https://www.seai.ie/data-and-insights/behavioural-insights/publications/bett-dataset>

<sup>5</sup> A walkable neighbourhood example in the Cork City Development Plan, where multiple everyday destinations are located within a walking range of 800 metres. p.38, Cork City Council, 2022. *Cork City Development Plan 2022 – 2028: Volume 1 Written Statement*.

<sup>6</sup> An example of a "filtered permeability link" for walkers in Adamstown, Co. Dublin, where accessibility is enabled for walking but not driving. p.58, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2019. *Design manual for urban roads and streets*.

<sup>7</sup> The Millenium Bridge, Dublin, provides a direct walking route across the River Liffey, improving walking proximity to a range of destinations. Photo: Robert Egan.

minute city planning measures that centre walkability to key non-residential destinations of everyday travel, such as workplaces, schools, and supermarkets to increase total walking trips.



**Image 4.**<sup>8</sup>



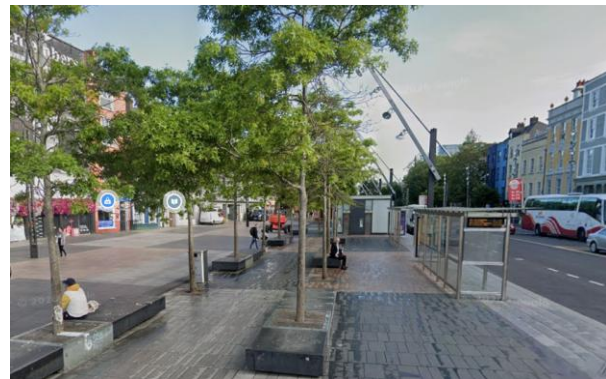
**Image 5.**<sup>9</sup>

### 3. Improve the shelter and drainage of walking networks

Women were less likely to walk for a utility trip under 5 km in very wet rain conditions<sup>10</sup>. No association was found between rainfall and men's walking trips. The gendered effects of rain may be explained in part by the demands imposed by feminine norms of appearance, which have been observed in the study of everyday cycling in other contexts<sup>11</sup>, and women's higher levels of walking with children than men. To improve the accessibility of utility walking for women in conditions of heavy rain – especially for child-related trips – local and national authorities can strive to supply ample natural (e.g., street trees<sup>12</sup>) and/or constructed (e.g., covered bus stops, shop fronts) shelters along walking routes. In addition, effective and well-maintained urban drainage systems<sup>13,14</sup> may help to prevent the puddling and flooding of walking networks and adjacent road networks.



**Image 6.**<sup>15</sup>



**Image 7.**<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Fully pedestrianised Parliament Street, Dublin. Photo: Robert Egan.

<sup>9</sup> Filtered permeability on Ferguson Road, Dublin, located beside a library, park, and primary school. Photo: Google Maps.

<sup>10</sup> 10 mm+ of rain within a four-hour trip time band.

<sup>11</sup> Steinbach, R., et al., 2011. *Cycling and the city: a case study of how gendered, ethnic and class identities can shape healthy transport choices*. Soc. Sci. Med. 72 (7), 1123–1130. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2011.01.033>

<sup>12</sup> p.71, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2019. *Design manual for urban roads and streets*.

<sup>13</sup> p.84, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2019. *Design manual for urban roads and streets*.

<sup>14</sup> National Transport Authority, 2024. *Infrastructure Equality Guidance*. [https://www.nationaltransport.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Infrastructure-Equality-Guidance\\_Final.pdf](https://www.nationaltransport.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Infrastructure-Equality-Guidance_Final.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> Footway trees on Annesley Bridge Road, Dublin. Photo: Robert Egan.

<sup>16</sup> Footway trees and bus stop shelter on Grand Parade, Cork Photo: Google Maps.

#### 4. Improve public lighting and passive surveillance of walking networks

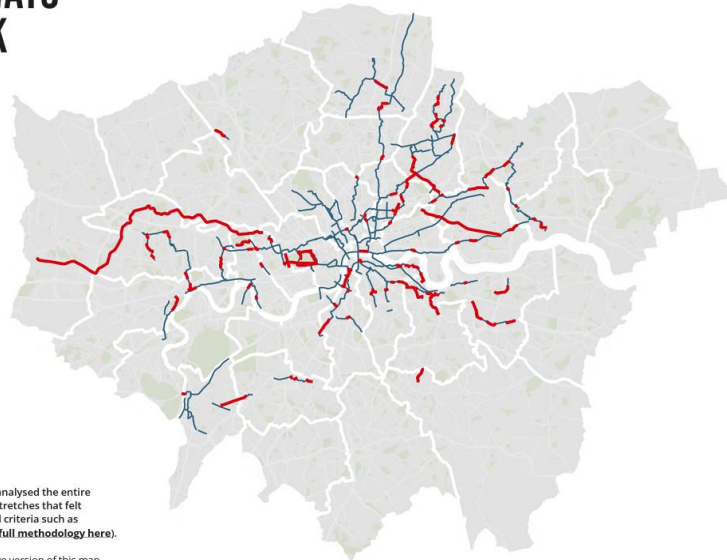
Women were less likely to walk for a utility trip under 5 km during dark evenings. No association was found between trip darkness and men's walking trips. This may be indicative of the well-documented personal safety risks and fears of walking or cycling in public space experienced by women, especially during darker hours<sup>17</sup>. To support walking during darker evenings, relevant authorities could identify and rectify potential gaps in the coverage of public lighting and passive surveillance across the walking network<sup>14,18</sup>, while ensuring that feasible routes exist as an alternative to light-sensitive and isolated areas, such as public parks.

### TFL CYCLEWAYS AFTER DARK

#### KEY

Socially safe after dark

Socially unsafe after dark



LCC Women's Network volunteers analysed the entire TfL Cycleway network, identifying stretches that felt 'socially unsafe' after dark. We used criteria such as poorly lit, overgrown, isolated (see [full methodology here](#)).

See the [LCC website](#) for an interactive version of this map

**Image 8.<sup>18</sup>**

<sup>17</sup> Transport Infrastructure Ireland, 2020. *Travelling in a woman's shoes: understanding women's travel needs in Ireland to inform the future of sustainable transport policy and design*. [https://www.tii.ie/media/1k5lh2je/tii-travelling-in-a-womans-shoes-report\\_issue.pdf](https://www.tii.ie/media/1k5lh2je/tii-travelling-in-a-womans-shoes-report_issue.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> A mapping of the social safety of London's cycling network. London Cycling Campaign, 2025. *Women's Freedom After Dark. Are TfL's Cycleways Safe for Everyone, 24/7? A Report by the LCC Women's Network*. <https://lcc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Womens-Freedom-After-Dark-Report-by-LCC-Womens-Network.pdf>