

1. Martin Diskin
2. Graham Doyle
3. Larry Kelly, Private Secretary

Re: National Cycle Network (NCN) 2014-2016 Funding Recommendation

Background

1. An NCN funding call was announced in August 2013 to provide approximately €6.5 million to local authorities under a second round of funding associated with the multi-annual National Cycle Network Programme for the years 2014 to 2016. While investment to date has delivered a broad range of cycling infrastructure projects, indications are that off-road cycle greenways provide the greatest return given their appeal to a broader range of cyclist.

In inviting authorities to submit proposals, the Department advised local authorities that priority would be given to high-quality, off-road greenway routes which have the potential to be world class trip attractors in their own right. Accordingly, the following selection criteria were devised and included in the funding call:

- a. High quality, off-road greenway routes that have the potential to be world class trip attractors (length of route a factor).
- b. Potential demand (as a tourism and day trip attraction and, where feasible, as a transport corridor for local use) and potential impacts on local economy (e.g. job creation). Evidenced based assessment to be provided.
- c. Alignment with overall concept (e.g. quality of route, safety of route).
- d. Deliverability of the route in proposed timescale (e.g. no land ownership or major environmental issues).
- e. Total costs and costs per kilometre taking into account route type, and the commitment from local authority including potential co-funding.
- f. Alignment with other transport, tourism and sports programmes/locations, for example, linkages to visitor attractions and centres, and other cycling and transport infrastructure should be demonstrated.
- g. Route promotion and monitoring plans, and planned route management structure.

Assessment of Applications

2. 38 applications were submitted from 28 authorities (**Appendix 1**). An assessment panel was established comprising the following representation which brought together the required experience across a range of relevant policy areas for the necessary evaluation of the proposals received:

Denise Keoghan, Assistant Principal, Sustainable Transport Division
Aoife O'Grady, Sustainability Advisor, Economic & Financial Evaluation Unit
Doug Corrie, Project Manager, National Trails Office, Irish Sports Council
Yvonne Jackson, Experience Development, Fáilte Ireland
Mary Stack, Experience Development, Fáilte Ireland
Robert Parkinson, Transport Planner, National Transport Authority

Phase 1 of Assessment Process

A scoring matrix was developed to objectively assess and shortlist projects relative to the aforementioned criteria. 10 proposals were shortlisted in December 2013.

In addition to the above, the three applications received from Kildare, Meath and Westmeath County Councils all scored high relative to the scoring criteria as each would deliver sections of the Galway to Dublin Greenway (a priority of Government). However, these projects would offer little return on investment if delivered in isolation and would only merit selection if funded together to deliver 78 km of the Galway to Dublin Greenway. This option would cost €7.548m and would absorb more than the funding available under this phase of the NCN Programme.

Phase 2 of Assessment Process

The Assessment Team advised that in order to fully appraise the shortlisted projects, site visits would need to be undertaken. A schedule of visits was prepared and site visits began on 22 January.

In addition to the above 10 shortlisted projects, Minister Kelly asked the team to visit four additional locations in respect of five additional projects in Waterford, Westmeath, South Tipperary and Clare. Minister Varadkar requested the team to visit a project in Roscommon. All visits were completed by 10 March (a list of all visits is attached in **Appendix 2**). Reports of findings from all site visits were compiled and considered by the Assessment Team on 12 March and the outcomes of the final assessment are set out under.

Recommendations for Funding

3. Further to the above assessment process, the team recommend that funding be provided to the following projects:

Kerry County Council

Glenbeigh to Cahirciveen (Phases 2 and 3): Cost - €3,458,281

Galway County Council

Galway City to Moycullen: Cost - €2,486,893

These projects have the potential to offer the greatest return on investment. The greenway proposed by Kerry County Council along the old Great Southern railway line will open up the outstanding natural beauty of the coastline between Glenbeigh and Cahirciveen offering an exceptional and unique visitor attraction in the South West. The project proposed by Galway County Council will not only provide an excellent alternative for people commuting from Moycullen but it will also unlock the potential of the magnificent Connemara Greenway proposal (for which Galway Co Co has planning permission) by providing a section of the link from Galway City to the start of the Connemara Greenway at Oughterard.

*Despite the overwhelming merits of the above, there are some concerns in relation to costings and deliverability and the team would recommend that such issues be addressed through specific terms and conditions attaching to the allocation at the very least. **The team would also recommend that an independent cost appraisal be***

undertaken prior to any funding being drawn down. This appraisal could be undertaken by an agency of the Department that would have experience in quantity surveying and delivery of large engineering projects such as the NRA.

The total cost of the above is **€5,945,174**. Experience from previous cycling infrastructure projects would indicate that local authorities tend to underestimate the cost of developing this type of infrastructure and therefore to ensure that these projects are delivered in their entirety and to the standard required by the end user, the remainder of the funding (€554,826) could be held back as a contingency should issues arise. Alternatively, this could also be used to part fund high value projects listed below.

Further Outcomes

4. The Assessment Team have categorised the remainder of the *visited projects* under the following three headings: High Value, Reasonable and Challenging Propositions.

High Quality

Fingal County Council – Broadmeadow Way: Cost - €4,000,000

Sligo County Council – Part of SLNCR: Cost - €2,125,348

Leitrim County Council – Part of SLNCR: Cost - €6,800,000

Waterford County Council – Clonea to Durrow: Cost - €897,739

Wicklow County Council – Blessington Greenway: Cost – €3,135,162

The above were considered to be high value propositions although some concerns do exist in relation to costings, deliverability, viability and legal issues. If funding were to be provided to any of the above, there would need to be specific terms and conditions attaching to the allocation to address any outstanding issues of concern. It should be noted that the Fingal County Council project cannot be developed on a phased basis and local authority is seeking the full €4 million.

The Sligo Leitrim and Northern Counties Railway (SLNCR) projects, if funded, could have the potential to leverage funding from EU Structural Funds as the proposed route along the old railway line terminates in Enniskillen. However, any such funding would not increase funding for the NCN Programme as the co-funding element would accrue to the Exchequer directly.

Good Quality

Mayo County Council – Monasteries of the Moy

Galway County Council – Clifden to Letterfrack

Laois County Council – Barrow Way (not including spur to Portlaoise)

Westmeath County Council – Mullingar Greenway

Clare County Council - West Clare Railway Greenway

The above were considered to have potential in more specific ways (i.e. for local usage or as a specific amenity) but were not considered to be trip attractors in their own right.

Challenging

Cork County Council – Cork Harbour Greenway

Kerry Council Council – Glenbeigh to Cahirciveen (Phase 1 Cahirciveen to Reenard Pt)

Waterford County Council – Bilberry to Kilmeaden

Roscommon County Council – Lough Kee (3 cycle routes)

South Tipperary – Clonmel to Carrick-on-Suir

It was considered that the above had significant challenges, especially in relation to safety and deliverability. These would need to be overcome before funding could be provided.

Projects Not Visited

5. In relation to the remainder of the projects not visited, it should be recognised that, from an assessment of the applications alone, many of the projects indicated strong potential as future cycling propositions if further developed. While not meeting the criteria as closely as some of the aforementioned, many did have strengths from the perspective of providing good local cycling amenities.

Ministerial Approval

6. The Minister is asked to consider the attached and to identify those projects that should receive funding under the NCN Funding Programme 2014 to 2016. The Minister is also asked to consider the recommendation of the Assessment Team to seek independent cost appraisal of any projects selected for funding under the Programme.

Denise Keogh
Sustainable Transport Division
14 March 2014