



Chapter 2 Policy Context and Need for the Proposed Development

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2. POLICY CONTEXT AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

2.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out the need for the proposed West Clare Railway Greenway Section 1 from Kilrush to Kilkee, hereafter referred to as “the proposed development”. This chapter provides an overview of the existing environment including the current lack of active travel facilities and untapped local and tourism potential between the towns of Kilkee and Kilrush and sets out the planning and development policy context under which the proposed development is being progressed. The objectives of the proposed development are also identified in this chapter, which have formed the basis of the design development.

The report structure is detailed below:

- **Background and Project History:**
Overview of the location surrounding the proposed development, brief highlighting of planning/policy relevance, and the needs of the local community.
- **Policy Context:**
Detail of policy guiding the development of proposed project, describing its alignment with Local, Regional, National, EU, and International Goals and Objectives.
- **Project Need and Strategic Fit:**
Outlining the numerous benefits that will be made available to the local community by pursuing this project, and on a larger scale the strategic significance regarding the location and link this project provides in national and international plans and routes.
- **West Clare Railway Greenway Section 1 Objectives:**
Highlighting the key goals in the development of this project.

2.2 Background and Project History

The towns of Kilkee and Kilrush in West Clare are situated along the Wild Atlantic Way, in a region of profound natural beauty. The N67 is a high-traffic, high-speed national road which runs from Tarbert, Co. Kerry (via the Tarbert – Kilimer Ferry), to Galway city, connecting the two towns of Kilrush and Kilkee along its way. The abandoned West Clare Railway corridor runs near adjacent to the N67, with agricultural land separating the route of the original rail line and the N67 National Road. A number of sites already attract tourists to the West Clare area, such as the Burren National Park, the Cliffs of Moher, Lahinch and Kilkee. The N67 is the only national road creating a link between these coastal points of interest in the West Clare region, highlighting its importance as a vital amenity for both the local population and tourists alike.

The West Clare Railway opened on the 2nd of July 1887, connecting Ennis and Kilrush. This steam-driven rail service served as a vital transport link for people in the area until 1948, when road improvements led to more efficient means of transport than the three-hour journey from Ennis to Kilrush. The steam engines were replaced by diesel-engine trains, and by 1955 the West Clare Railway was the only diesel run, narrow gauge railway in Ireland and Britain. The railway remained open until 1961, when it eventually closed after years of running at a loss. A number of structures were built as part of the railway, including the Ennis station house, bridges, banks and piers, many of which are still present today. Given the history behind it and the significance of the remaining structures, the West Clare Railway is deemed a cultural heritage feature. Among the aims of the proposed development is to promote a new

sustainable tourism visitor attraction using the original West Clare Railway corridor, where practicable, by 2030.

The National Planning Framework (NPF) First Revision and the Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways highlight the importance of greenways, and the opportunities associated with them through the following:

National Policy Objective 34 of the National Planning Framework (NPF) First Revision:

“Continue to facilitate tourism development and in particular the Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways, and a Blueways and Peatways Strategy, which prioritises:

- *A coordinated approach to the sustainable management of outdoor recreation sites;*
- *Projects on the basis of their environmental sustainability, achieving maximum impact and connectivity at national and regional level while ensuring their development is compliant with the National Biodiversity Action Plan, the national climate change objective and requirements for environmental assessments”.*

Core **objectives** of the Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways (two of which are stated below):

- Greenways that provide a substantially segregated off-road experience linking places of interest, recreation and leisure in areas with beautiful scenery of different types with plenty to see and do; and
- Greenways that provide opportunities for the development of local businesses and economies.

The development of Section 1 of the West Clare Railway Greenway also aligns with the National Development Plan (NDP) 2021-2030 which recognises the importance of active travel and balanced regional development.

Clare County Council (CCC), in association with Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), is working to develop a greenway which, where possible, follows the disused West Clare Railway line and will provide commuters and leisure cyclists, pedestrians and impaired mobility users with an attractive recreational trail linking the town of Kilkee to Kilrush, via the village of Moyasta. The proposed development, if approved, will be the first greenway to be developed in County Clare and will link to other sections of the proposed West Clare Railway Greenway, subject to approval.

2.3 Policy Context

2.3.1 Overview

The need for the proposed development is supported at international, EU, national, regional and local level. The policy hierarchy and some of the relevant policy documents are listed in Table 2-1. This chapter presents the broader strategic and policy context underpinning the proposed development.

The project aims to implement facilities for active travel and tourism between Kilkee and Kilrush in the form of pedestrian and cycling facilities, substantially segregated from the existing road network. This will provide a safe and scenic travel option for non-vehicular travel and will be particularly well-suited to users who may have additional needs such as parents with young children or people with impaired mobility.

The need for the proposed development is identified and supported in a number of planning policy documents as set out in sections below. Key planning objectives which are set out in policy include:

European Cycling Strategy 2017

The proposed development aligns with local and regional policy adaptations introduced with the European Cycling Strategy 2017 – Recommendations for Delivering Green Growth and an Effective Mobility System in 2030. Key aims of this strategy include: the development and maintenance of safe cycle routes; an emphasis on the segregation of cyclists and vehicular traffic; and to halve serious injury and fatality rates of cyclists.

National Planning Framework

Project Ireland 2040 is the Government's overarching policy for spatial planning and development in Ireland to 2040 and consists of two major policy documents, namely *the National Planning Framework to 2040 First Revision* and the *National Development Plan 2021-2030*. The National Planning Framework (NPF) presents a broad national-level policy to guide strategic planning and development across Ireland. The NPF is based on ten 'National Strategic Outcomes' (NSO), which defines the shared national goals of the NPF. The proposed development closely aligns with several of the NSOs:

- NSO 1 Compact Growth
- NSO 3 Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities
- NSO 4 Sustainable Mobility
- NSO 7 Enhanced Amenity and Heritage
- NSO 10 Access to Quality Childcare, Education, and Health Services

The Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029

The Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029 outlines the strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of the functional area of Clare County Council over a 6-year period. The County Development Plan has defined walking and cycling objectives to be implemented under several headings, including "Tourism", "Sustainable Communities" and "Physical Infrastructure, Environment and Energy". The proposed greenway complies with many of the objectives of the County Development Plan, most notably objectives CDP 9.8, CDP 9.26, CPD 10.11 and CPD 11.5 which highlight the need for sustainable tourism developments and active travel developments, including to the West Clare Railway Greenway. Further detail including reference to these objectives is provided in Section 2.3.6.1 below.

The County Development Plan includes the West Clare Municipal District Settlement Plans (Volume 3d), which outline zoning details and objectives for all towns and villages in County Clare, excluding Shannon. The objectives for Kilkee, Kilrush and Moyasta include the development of the West Clare Railway Greenway as a tourist attraction and reinforcement of connectivity between the three areas. Further detail including reference to relevant objectives is provided in Section 2.3.6.1

A more detailed review of the planning policy context can be consulted in sections 2.3.2 to 2.3.6 of this chapter below.

Table 2-1 Relevant Polices related to the Proposed Development

Policy Level	Document
International Policy	United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
European Policy	EU Cycling Strategy (2017-2030)
	European Green Deal
	EU Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy 2020
	EuroVelo: The European Cycle Route Network
	EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030
National Policy	National Planning Framework First Revision, April 2025
	National Development Plan 2021-2030
	Vision Zero – The Road Safety Strategy 2021-2030
	National Sustainable Mobility Policy and Action Plan 2026–2030
	Moving Together – A Collaborative Approach to Systems Change in Transport (2026-2030)
	Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways 2018
	Tourism Policy Framework 2025-2030
	'A New Era for Irish Tourism' National Tourism Policy Statement 2025-2030
	National Investment Framework for Transport in Ireland (NIFTI)
	Climate Action Plan 2025
	National Cycle Network Plan 2023
	Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021-2025
	National Physical Activity Framework 2024-2040 and the National Physical Activity Action Plan 2024-2029
	CycleConnects: Ireland's Cycle Network (Draft Version)
Regional Policy	Southern Region Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (S-RSES)
Local Policy	Clare County Development Plan (2023-2029) (Interim Version)
	Clare Climate Action Plan 2024-2029
	County Clare Tourism Strategy 2030
	The Clare County Biodiversity Action Plan 2025–2031

2.3.2 International Policy Context

2.3.2.1 United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

In 2015, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly developed the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This included the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – a suite of 17 broad global goals and 169 sub-targets conceived as a “*blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all*” by 2030 (UN, 2019). They form part of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Together with the other UN Member States, Ireland has been a signatory to the SDGs since 2015, and as such, state planning and development policy has been informed by these goals.

Plate 2-1 presents the 17 SDGs. Three of these are of relevance to the proposed development:

- Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
- Goal 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
- Goal 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

* Acknowledging that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is the primary international, intergovernmental forum for negotiating the global response to climate change.

By developing active travel options and providing a zero-carbon transport option, the proposed development will contribute to SDG No. 3 and No. 13. The substantial segregation of the greenway from vehicular traffic promotes it as a safe and accessible option to a wide demographic, aligning with SDG No. 11.



Plate 2-1 Sustainable Development Goals

2.3.3 European Policy Context

2.3.3.1 EU Cycling Strategy (2017-2030)

The EU Cycling Strategy – Recommendations for Delivering Green Growth and an Effective Mobility System in 2030 - consolidates a systematic review of all policies related to cycling, reviewing the current state of cycling in the European Union and provides a cycling implementation plan including proposed policy changes addressed to the European level, complemented by proposed policy changes to the national and regional/local level policy also. In achieving a shift in mobility culture, the strategy requires EU cities to convince policymakers to support cycling; encourage people to cycle more; and to facilitate the cooperation amongst road users for safer cycling.

The strategy includes four core objectives for the timeframe of the document:

- Grow cycle use by 50% at an average across the EU.
- Halve rates for killed and seriously injured cyclists (per km cycled)
- Invest €3 billion in cycling in the period 2021-2027, and €6 billion from 2028-2034
- At a qualitative level, it is strongly advised that cycling is treated as an equal partner in the mobility system.

The proposed development will encourage modal shift away from private vehicles towards active travel modes such as cycling. Additionally, the proposed development will provide a substantially segregated facility for cyclists and a safe cycle route to towns, healthcare, educational and healthcare facilities which will support the strategy's objectives of improving the safety for cyclists. The provision of the proposed West Clare Railway Greenway will support and contribute towards achieving the above European, regional and local recommendations, while additionally contributing to the four European-wide core objectives, within the designated timeframe.

2.3.3.2 European Green Deal

The European Green Deal addresses the task of transforming the European economy from a holistic perspective whereby essential facets of modern life, such as reliable and efficient infrastructure, must be made more climate friendly. Transport in the EU contributes roughly 5% to the EU GDP and currently, transport emissions represent around 25% of the EU's total greenhouse gas emissions. While being critical, transport must adapt to become far more efficient in its resource use as per the 2030 climate & energy framework.

The EU aims to reduce transport related emissions by 90% from 1990 levels by the year 2050. An intermediate target of a 55% reduction by the year 2030 was also set. The Green Deal notes that achieving sustainable transport means putting users first and providing them with more affordable and accessible, healthier and cleaner alternatives to their current mobility habits.

The proposed development supports the aims of the European Green Deal as it will provide pedestrian and cycling infrastructure which connects towns and villages in County Clare, and promotes the use of sustainable modes of transport and the reduction of transport related greenhouse gas emissions.

2.3.3.3 EU Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy 2020

The European Commission presented its 'Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy' in 2020 which lays the foundation for how the EU transport system can achieve its green and digital transformation while becoming more resilient to future crises. It is a target of the European Green Deal to reduce transport-related greenhouse gas emissions by 90% by 2050. In order to meet this target, the European Commission adopted this Strategy to ensure that the EU transport sector is fit for a clean, digital, and modern economy. To achieve this, the Strategy recognises the need to make transport more sustainable by "Making interurban and urban mobility healthy and sustainable - for instance by doubling high-speed rail traffic and developing extra cycling infrastructure over the next 10 years."

Additionally, as part of the Strategy, the European Commission commits to "Make mobility fair and just for all – for instance by making the new mobility affordable and accessible in all regions and for all passengers including those with reduced mobility and making the sector more attractive for workers." The proposed development supports the EU Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy by providing a sustainable alternative to private car journeys and providing a connection to towns and villages along the way such as Kilkee, Moyasta, and Kilrush with the provision of walking and cycling infrastructure for users of all ages and abilities.

2.3.3.4 EuroVelo: The European Cycle Route Network

EuroVelo is the European cycle route network comprising 17 long-distance cycle routes across Europe, with multiple interconnections throughout Europe. The routes are aimed at both long-distance cyclists as well as local people making daily cycle journeys. The EuroVelo 1 – Atlantic Coast Route is a transcontinental cycling route that connects Norway, the United Kingdom, Ireland, France, Spain, and Portugal. The Irish segment of the route passes through eleven counties, including County Clare. There are a number of greenways in Ireland that form or will

form part of the EuroVelo 1 – Atlantic Coast Route, including the proposed development between Kilkee and Kilrush, subject to approval.

As a route of international significance, it is therefore important to also be mindful of EuroVelo design principles and standards when selecting and designing a route for the proposed West Clare Railway Greenway. The West Clare Railway Greenway will provide a safer alternative to the current Euro Velo 'Atlantic Coast Route' between Kilrush and Lisdeen, which includes a section of the route shared with the N67 between Moyasta and the turn off onto the L2016 near Lisdeen. The proposed greenway intersects the EuroVelo route at Moyasta and again just north of Blackweir Bridge where it crosses the L2016 road at Garraun. From here, users will be able to exit the greenway and continue south along the EuroVelo route crossing Blackweir Bridge and continuing further south along the Loop Head Peninsula before continuing onto Kilkee. In addition, the proposed greenway can also serve as a shortcut for users who may not wish to follow the EuroVelo 1 route around the Loop Head peninsula, where users would instead continue along the greenway at Garraun for a shorter route to or from Kilkee. Figure 6.3 in Volume 3 of the EIA shows the interaction of the proposed development with the existing EuroVelo route between Kilrush and Kilkee.

Upon completion, the West Clare Railway Greenway will form a highly attractive network of pedestrian and cycle-based infrastructure that will benefit the county and the Western region of Ireland generally, for both local users and from overseas visitors.

2.3.3.5 EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030

The EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 is an ambitious and long-term plan to protect nature and reverse the degradation of ecosystems. The Strategy contains over 100 specific actions and commitments across various policy areas and aims to put Europe's biodiversity on a path to recovery by 2030. A main aim of this Strategy is to stop and reverse the loss of green spaces by promoting the systematic integration of healthy ecosystems, green infrastructure, and nature-based solutions into all forms of urban planning. The key commitments outlined for 2030 are highlighted below:

- Legally protect a minimum of 30% of the EU's land area and 30% of the EU's Sea area and integrate ecological corridors, as part of a true Trans-European Nature Network.
- Strictly protect at least a third of the EU's protected areas, including all remaining EU primary and old-growth forests.
- Effectively manage all protected areas, defining clear conservation objectives and measures, and monitoring them appropriately.

The provision of a greenway will enhance the management and restoration of protected areas by providing opportunities for monitoring, conservation, education and recreation activities in or close to these ecological sites, raising awareness and engagement from the public and stakeholders on the value and importance of biodiversity and ecosystems. The greenway will also support the transition to a green economy by promoting sustainable tourism, recreation, transport and practices in the region.

2.3.4 National Policy Context

2.3.4.1 National Planning Framework

The National Planning Framework (NPF) 2040 sets the overarching spatial strategy for the next twenty years, as part of Project Ireland 2040. The NPF, initially published in 2018, has undergone its first revision in accordance with planning legislation as the government is required to revise or replace the NPF every six years.

NPF First Revision highlights the need to address the national population growth from the 2022 Census and reflect the changes that have been made to Government policy since the NPF's initial publication in 2018. The key drivers for the first revision are as follows:

- Climate Transition – addressing sectoral emission targets and Climate Action Plan 2023.
- Population Demographics – planning for uncertainty.
- Regional Balance – the reality of regional ambition and the challenge of transitioning from 'business as usual'.
- Digitalisation – Impacts on work, retail, commuting and regions.
- Investment and Prioritisation – Timing and Prioritisation.

The First Revision maintains the original NPF's focus for a more balanced distribution of growth across Ireland and the commitment of a 50% city-based target for future population and employment growth that focuses on the existing five cities and their suburbs. The main changes outlined in the first Revision are summarised as follows:

- National Population Growth Target has increased from 5.7 million to 6.1 million by 2040.
- Northern and Western Region: approximately 150,000 additional people between 2022 and 2040 (c. 210,000 additional people over 2016-2040) i.e. a population of just over 1 million.
- Annual housing output to increase from 30,000-35,000 per annum up to 2027 to 50,000 per annum from 2027 to 2040.
- Emphasis to deliver Transport Orientated Development (TOD), with a focus on largescale brownfield and greenfield sites, particularly along high-capacity rail corridors and transport hubs in Ireland's five cities, suburbs and metropolitan towns.

The NPF is based on ten 'National Strategic Outcomes' (NSO), which are an expression of the shared national goals or benefits the NPF aims to strive towards and are outlined in Plate 2-2 below.

The proposed development closely aligns with several of the NSO's such as:

- NSO 1 Compact Growth
- NSO 3 Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities
- NSO 4 Sustainable Mobility
- NSO 7 Enhanced Amenity and Heritage
- NSO 10 Access to Quality Childcare, Education, and Health Services

The proposed development is in alignment with these principles as the objectives of the project take into account the need for connectivity between the main settlements of Kilrush and Kilkee and will reduce private car dependency by connecting people to educational facilities, jobs, and services with high-quality, attractive active travel facilities.

The proposed development will potentially boost local communities by encouraging 'slow' tourism. As with previous major Greenway developments, the local economies will be strengthened by attracting increased levels of visitor spending and encouraging both investment and business formation within the area.

The proposed development will create a safe, convenient walking and cycling link between local communities. This provides connectivity between the communities of Kilrush and Kilkee, encourages a modal shift from private cars to sustainable and active modes of transportation, and provides the opportunity to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The proposed development will also create an attractive user experience and an accessible amenity for both locals and visitors to get active in nature and to encourage increased levels of physical activity, while also enhancing access to the historical and cultural sites of significance along the route.



Plate 2-2 Project Ireland 2040 'National Strategic Outcomes'

National Policy Objectives

The NPF also includes 'National Policy Objectives', which provide a more specific statement of the types of actions or investment that is necessary to achieve the NSOs, five of which are particularly relevant to the proposed development.

- **NPO 34** – *“Continue to facilitate tourism development and in particular the Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways, and a Blueways and Peatways Strategy, which prioritises:*
 - *A coordinated approach to the sustainable management of outdoor recreation sites;*
 - *Projects on the basis of their environmental sustainability, achieving maximum impact and connectivity at national and regional level while ensuring their development is compliant with the National Biodiversity Action Plan, the national climate change objective and requirements for environmental assessments.”.*
- **NPO 36** – *“Support the objectives of public health policy including Healthy Ireland Framework and the National Physical Activity Plan, through integrating such policies, where appropriate and at the applicable scale, with planning policy”.*
- **NPO 37** – *“Ensure the integration of safe and convenient alternatives to the car into the design of our communities, by prioritising walking and cycling accessibility to both*

existing and proposed developments and integrating physical activity facilities for all ages”.

- **NPO 69** – *“Reduce our carbon footprint by integrating climate action into the planning system in support of national targets for climate policy mitigation and adaptation objectives, as well as targets for greenhouse gas emissions reductions as expressed in the most recently adopted carbon budgets”.*
- **NPO 93** – *“Improve air quality and help prevent people being exposed to unacceptable levels of pollution in our urban and rural areas through integrated land use and spatial planning that supports public transport walking and cycling as more favourable modes of transport to the private car, the promotion of energy efficient buildings and homes, heating systems with zero local emissions, green infrastructure planning and innovative design solutions”.*

Through the identification of more sustainable modes of travel, the proposed development is fully aligned with the National Planning Framework, with specific reference to the National Strategic Outcomes and National Policy Objectives outlined above.

2.3.4.2 National Development Plan 2021-2030

The updated National Development Plan (NDP) 2021 – 2030, is a ten-year strategy identifying priorities for public capital investment across all sectors, including Transport. The total investment is estimated at €165 Billion over the next decade. The NDP has been designed to support the 10 National Strategic Outcomes in the National Planning Framework (NPF). The NDP outlines the governments investment into active travel infrastructure and introduces the new ‘National Active Travel Programme’ which will receive €360 million annually between 2021-2025.

The National Active Travel Programme aims to provide enhanced regional connection between towns and villages through the provision of active travel infrastructure for walking and cycling. Active travel infrastructure has also been designated as a ‘Strategic Investment Priority’ under Objective 3 Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities and National Strategic Objective 4 – Sustainable Mobility.

The proposed development is consistent with the strategic investment priorities of the National Development Plan as it will provide active travel infrastructure, connecting Kilkee, Moyasta and Kilrush and the surrounding rural settlements, and providing a sustainable transport alternative to private car use.

In July 2025, the Programme for Government set out a review of the National Development Plan (NDP). The review identified that €102.4 Billion has been allocated to Departments for the 2026-2030 period.

The proposed development is consistent with the strategic investment priorities of the National Development Plan as it will provide active travel infrastructure, connecting villages and towns in the West Clare area, and providing sustainable transport alternatives to private car use.

2.3.4.3 Vision Zero – The Road Safety Strategy 2021-2030

Vision Zero is an overarching, international, long-term goal which aims at eliminating deaths and serious injuries in road traffic collisions, with the focus of achieving not less but zero deaths and serious injuries. The Irish Government’s Road Safety Strategy 2021-2030, published by the Road Safety Authority (RSA), sets targets to be achieved in terms of road safety in Ireland as well as policies to achieve these targets. Guiding this strategy is Vision Zero, Ireland’s long-term goal of achieving zero road deaths or serious injuries by 2050 using a Safe Systems Approach.

This plan sets out seven Safe System priority intervention areas for action to achieve ambitious targets for 2030 and 2050. One investment area for priority is safe and healthy modes of travel. This investment area acknowledges that there is a substantial difference in fatal and serious injury risks across different modes of travel. It involves promoting these safer modes of travel, such as bus and train, and providing safer environments for healthier modes, such as walking and cycling.

The proposed development aligns with Vision Zero's safe and healthy modes of travel actions as it will provide a substantially segregated walking and cycling facility for those of all ages and abilities to use, prioritising safety, and encouraging a healthier mode of travel. The West Clare Railway Greenway project objectives align with Vision Zero's high impact actions by providing additional walking and cycling infrastructure, prioritising the safety of individuals, and encouraging a shift to active travel modes of transport.

2.3.4.4 National Sustainable Mobility Policy and Action Plan 2026–2030

The National Sustainable Mobility Policy was first published in April 2022, its vision being to “connect people and places with sustainable mobility that is safe, green, accessible, and efficient.” The Policy outlines a strategic framework to 2030 for active travel and public transport to support Ireland's overall requirement to achieve a 51% reduction in carbon emissions by the end of this decade. This policy aims to deliver at least 500,000 additional daily active travel and public transport journeys. The policy sets out several goals, including:

“Goal 4 aims to expand the capacity and availability of sustainable mobility in a regional and rural context. This will be done through the delivery of improved active travel infrastructure, the expansion of regional bus and rail services and local bus networks, and improved connectivity between different transport modes.”

It is acknowledged within this policy document that, “greenways have an important role, both in terms of their economic contribution to communities in attracting tourism and leisure activity, but also their potential to enable active travel within local communities as part of the overall cycle network within settlements.” The policy document is guided by three key principles, namely, Safe and Green Mobility, People Focused Mobility and Better Integrated Mobility, each of which are underpinned by ten high-level goals.

The policy is underpinned by the National Sustainable Mobility Policy Action Plan, the second of which was published in March 2026 covering the period 2026–2030. This plan builds on the progress made under the first Action Plan (2022-2025), which sets out the goals and a series of actions to achieve each one, including goal 4 as discussed above to expand availability of sustainable mobility in regional and rural areas.

While the first action plan was closely aligned with the objectives of the Climate Action Plan 2021 (CAP21), this second action plan for the period 2026–2030 reflects the sector-specific emissions reduction targets introduced in 2023, which envisages a halving of transport emissions by 2030 compared with 2018. The new Plan will monitor performance relative to revised sustainable mobility performance indicators as set out in the Climate Action Plan 2023 (CAP23) which includes a 50% increase in daily active travel journeys.

The proposed development supports the above policy and Plan and a number of its goals as it will provide an active travel link between the towns and villages of Kilrush, Moyasta, and Kilkee, with the aim of providing a safe, sustainable facility to improve integration and access between these towns and villages and encourage the uptake of active travel within the community.

2.3.4.5 Moving Together – A Collaborative Approach to Systems Change in Transport (2026-2030)

The Moving Together Strategy is a government framework for working collaboratively across government, the economy and communities to create a more balanced, and equitable transport system. It is one of two key policy documents involved in the effort to reduce vehicle kilometres travelled by reducing transport demand, as outlined in this Strategy, and by increasing the opportunities for shifting to more sustainable journeys as outlined in the Sustainable Mobility Policy (see above).

The high-level Strategy includes a suite of 32 recommendations, the implementation of which is heavily reliant on the concurrent delivery of feasible and affordable alternatives to the private car, and an environment that makes it easier for people to choose healthier, more efficient and less polluting journeys. One of the ways this will be achieved is through ongoing investment in active travel infrastructure including greenways.

The proposed development supports the Moving Together Strategy through the delivery of greenway infrastructure, encouraging active travel and contributing to a modal shift through the provision of a safe and affordable alternative to private car use.

2.3.4.6 Strategy for Future Development of National and Regional Greenways 2018

The Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways was published by the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (DTTAS, now the Department of Transport) in July 2018. This Strategy defines a Greenway as a *“recreational or pedestrian corridor exclusively for non-motorised journeys, developed in an integrated manner which enhances both the environment and quality of life of the surrounding area.”*

For the purposes of this Strategy, the development of ‘Greenway’ relates to the development of Greenways of scale i.e. for new development or extensions of existing Greenway that are more than 20km or shorter where it is proposed to join several existing Greenways to form a longer, more strategic route.

The Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways identifies the benefits that can arise from further development of Greenways in Ireland such as rural development, supporting the local and overseas tourism sector. Greenways are also recognised as serving as attractive amenities, benefiting the users in terms of physical activity and contributing to health and well-being. The strategy contains five main objectives as shown in Plate 2-3 which were developed for the purposes of creating strategic Greenways in Ireland. The objectives are as follows:

1. *“A Strategic Greenway network of national and regional routes, with a number of high-capacity flagship routes that can be extended and/or link with local Greenways and other cycling and walking infrastructure”;* (p.6)
2. *“Greenways of scale and appropriate standard that have significant potential to deliver an increase in activity tourism to Ireland and are regularly used by overseas visitors, domestic visitors and locals thereby contributing to a healthier society through increased physical activity;”* (p.6)
3. *“Greenways that provide a substantially segregated off-road experience linking places of interest, recreation, and leisure in areas with beautiful scenery of different types with plenty to see and do”;* and (p.6)
4. *“Greenways that provide opportunities for the development of local businesses and economies,”* and (p.6)
5. *“Greenways that are developed with all relevant stakeholders in line with an agreed code of practice.”* (p.6)

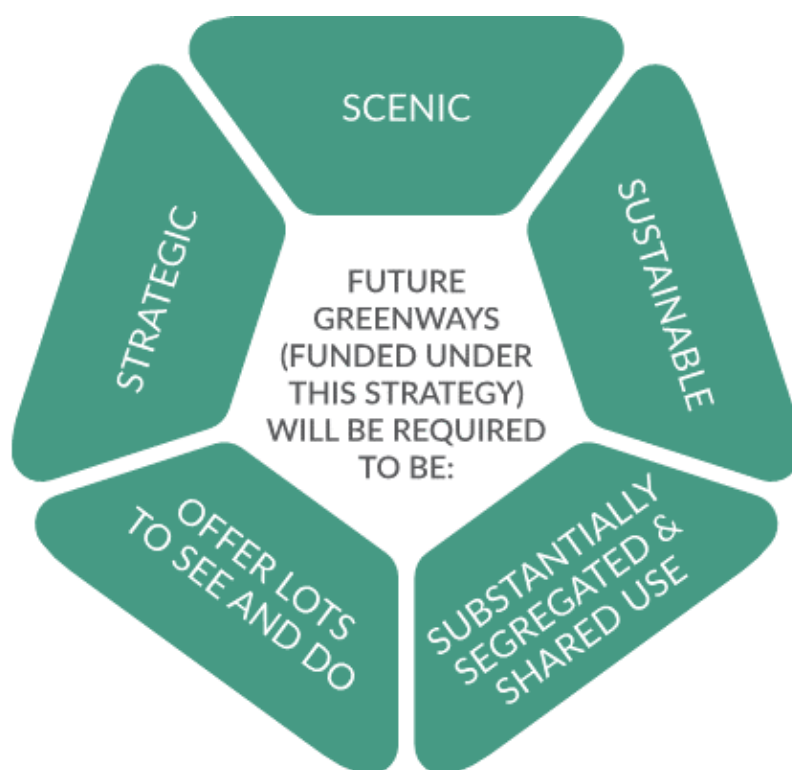


Plate 2-3 Five main objectives of the Greenway Strategy. Source: Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways, July 2018

There are 2 key supplementary guidelines supporting the Greenway strategy by providing recommendations on how to develop a Greenway that is economically efficient, interactive, and inclusive of everyone. These guidelines are summarised below.

Greenways and Cycle Routes Ancillary Infrastructure Guidelines

Ancillary infrastructure can be defined as *“those controlled features that provide added value to the Route and enhance the user’s practical and emotional experience.”*

There are three types of ancillary infrastructure set out in the guidelines:

- a) Route furniture including storage, rest and shelter areas and trailheads;
- b) Directional and interpretative signage; and
- c) Pocket facilities (self-contained infrastructure elements) which can include cycle pump tracks and play areas.

These guidelines provide detailed descriptions of how to maximise the use of ancillary infrastructure by choosing the appropriate positioning of the feature, considering the surrounding environment, and the needs of the users.

Great Outdoors: A Guide for Accessibility

The aim of the Guide for Accessibility is to provide developers with appropriate guidelines relating to design and provision of on-site support to create a more accessible environment and thus, significantly increase opportunity for people with disabilities to take part. Census 2016 reports that 13.5% of the population or 643,131 persons have a disability.

Section 4 of the guidelines relates to ‘Trails, Greenways & Public Parks’ and includes recommended design criteria for accessibility on trails (including greenways) which should be designed “to avoid hazards and allow all users a safe opportunity to enjoy variable terrain while visiting various outdoor environments”.

The proposed development will be developed in line with the Strategy for Future Development of National and Regional Greenways 2018. The preliminary design of the Greenway has taken into account the recommendations of the above guidelines 'A Guide for Accessibility'.

2.3.4.7 Tourism Policy Framework 2025-2030

The first national tourism policy "People, Place and Policy: Growing Tourism to 2025" was published in 2015 and focused on maximising the economic contribution of tourism. The Policy included support of a range of investments to enhance the visitor experience, including the development of greenways.

By 2018 revenue from overseas visitors already exceeded the 2025 target of €5 billion (excluding fares) and revised targets were announced. These included the aim of growing revenue from overseas tourists to €6.5 billion in real terms, increasing employment in the tourism sector to 310,000 and achieving 11.6 million tourists visiting annually.

The Tourism Policy Framework 2025-2030 has been prepared with regard to the NPF and associated NDP 2021–2030. Tourism features prominently in the NPF and this Policy Framework is designed to ensure alignment with the principles and policies set out therein.

The Policy Framework aims to ensure that Ireland has a thriving tourism sector through to 2030, with sustainability at its core. One of the ways this will be achieved is through the continued development of infrastructure such as greenways and active travel routes.

The West Clare Railway Greenway will enable the exploration of County Clare's cultural heritage and landscapes along the route, making it attractive to tourists visiting the area. The requirement for bike hire, food and accommodation will boost the local economies in Kilrush and Kilkee, along with smaller settlements in the area, contributing to increases in overseas tourism revenue in the coming years.

2.3.4.8 'A New Era for Irish Tourism' National Tourism Policy Statement 2025-2030

The Programme for Government 2025 included a commitment to "develop a new national tourism policy to 2030 setting out a vision to grow visitor and employment numbers in the sector across Ireland". Following the transfer of functions to the Minister and Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment, the National Tourism Policy Statement – A New Era for Irish Tourism was published in December 2025.

Many of the policy objectives set out in the Tourism Policy Framework 2025-2030 are adopted in this policy statement to ensure a sustainable tourism sector, along with new tourism specific commitments. The policy statement highlights that greenways (along with blueways and walking trails) have already brought a "*transformative shift*" to tourism in many less-developed regions, with a continued commitment to progress the development of infrastructure such as greenways. Policy Objective 3.4.1 includes for a "*renewed focus on solutions to link key tourist attractions, including ... Blue Flag beaches on the coast with towns and villages*".

The proposed development will link key tourist attractions in the area including blue flag beaches in both Kilkee along the coast, and Kilrush at the marina, as well as cycling and walking trails popular with tourists and locals alike. The proposed development will also have potential positive impacts on local tourism related businesses in Kilrush and Kilkee.

2.3.4.9 National Investment Framework for Transport in Ireland

National Investment Framework for Transport in Ireland (NIFTI) published by the Department of Transport will ensure that future investment in the transport network will support the delivery of the ten National Strategic Outcomes (NSOs) of the National Planning Framework. Future transport investment and sectoral strategies e.g. NTA City Strategies and Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies, will be required to align with this framework.

The framework acknowledges that to achieve decarbonisation of the transport sector, investment will be required to promote sustainable modes of transport and states it will support “investment in public transport, walking and cycling to encourage modal shift away from the private car”. The framework sets out a modal hierarchy for investment in transport in Ireland, which is as follows:

- (1) Active Travel
- (2) Public Transport
- (3) Private Vehicles

NIFTI also sets out a hierarchy of intervention types to ensure that investment is proportionate to the problem identified. The NIFTI Intervention Hierarchy sets out four high-level categories of investment:

- (1) Maintain
- (2) Optimise
- (3) Improve
- (4) New

The investment framework also highlights some key issues with transport in Ireland, including:

“The transport sector is a significant contributor to air pollution in Ireland. It is the primary source of nitrogen oxide emissions, with passenger cars and heavy goods vehicles the most significant emitters,”

“Transport currently accounts for approximately 18% of Ireland’s greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions”.

The proposed development will address the above key issues and support both the modal and intervention hierarchies outlined in this framework. By investing in walking and cycling infrastructure, the proposed development has the potential to encourage a modal shift from the private car to more sustainable modes of transportation such as walking and cycling in accordance with the modal hierarchy. The proposed development also supports the intervention hierarchy by providing a safe and sustainable transport corridor for NMUs and by improving the accessibility and connectivity between rural communities using sustainable modes of transport. The proposed development involves the re-use of existing infrastructure (in this case the former railway corridor) for a significant portion of its length, a significant element of the optimisation hierarchy of the NIFTI.

2.3.4.10 Climate Action Plan 2025

The Climate Action Plan 2025 (CAP25) is the third statutory annual update to Ireland’s Climate Action Plan which sets up a roadmap of specific actions and targets to be achieved across various sectors, including, but not limited to, electricity, transport, and the built environment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Ireland has committed to halve national emissions by 2030 (compared to 2018 levels) and achieve climate neutrality no later than 2050, as outlined in the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021. This plan is required to be reviewed and updated annually to ensure accountability and the completion of targets.

Under the Climate Act 2021, Ireland’s national climate objective requires the State to pursue and achieve, by no later than the end of the year 2050, the transition to a climate-resilient, biodiversity rich, environmentally sustainable, and climate-neutral economy. CAP25 is designed to build upon CAP24, with the aim of refocusing efforts and freeing up resources that will facilitate a higher rate of delivery.

In relation to the transport sector, a number of key targets were identified in CAP23 which have been applied to CAP24 and CAP25. Targets to reduce the sectoral emissions in transport are set out in CAP25, namely:

- 20% reduction in total vehicle kilometres travelled relative to business-as-usual
- 50% reduction in fuel usage
- 50% increase in daily active travel journeys.
- Significant increases to sustainable transport trips and modal share.
- Fleet electrification and biofuels are expected to provide the greatest share of emissions abatement in the medium term.

An Avoid-Shift-Improve framework for transport sustainability was introduced in CAP23 and has carried through to CAP25. A number of actions have been developed for the transport sector under CAP25, including the actions set out below, which are of relevance to the proposed development:

TR/25/6: Commence work to develop new Sustainable Mobility Policy Action Plan for 2026 to 2030.

TR/25/7: Advance roll-out of walking/cycling infrastructure in line with National Cycle Network (NCN) and CycleConnects plans.

TR/25/24: Identify measures to improve sustainability of School Transport Scheme, informed by Phase 3 review.

The proposed development will assist in achieving the aforementioned actions by offering a safe and substantially segregated walking and cycling facility between Kilrush and Kilkee.

2.3.4.11 National Cycle Network Plan 2023

Transport Infrastructure Ireland developed the National Cycle Network (NCN) Plan to create a cycle network that links cities and towns of over 5,000 inhabitants across Ireland. The Plan was presented to the public between May and June 2022, with the final plan published in January 2024. The Plan's proposed network spans approximately 3500km and seeks to connect over 200 cities, towns, and villages as well as integrating with other cycle infrastructure such as EuroVelo, greenways, regional, and urban networks.

The vision of the NCN Plan is to:

“Develop a safe, connected, and inviting cycle network between urban areas and key destinations to achieve accessible, sustainable, and high-quality routes that will help to reduce the carbon impact of transport and promote a healthy and inclusive society.”

Many of the objectives identified in the NCN Plan are of relevance to the proposed development, including the following:

- Increase the number of cycle trips by improving the provision of safe and attractive cycle infrastructure.
- Connect to strategic destinations outside of urban area as appropriate (including centres of education, centres of employment, and leisure destinations). Support the development of cycling and walking culture in Ireland. Integrate with existing and proposed cycle infrastructure (including greenways, safe routes to schools, the EuroVelo network, Interreg projects), as appropriate.
- Incorporate existing greenways, disused railways, canals, bypassed national roads, regional and local roads, long distance trails, as appropriate.

2.3.4.12 Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021-2025

Our Rural Future provided a framework for the post-COVID-19 recovery and development of rural Ireland up to 2025. It addresses key challenges affecting rural areas in relation to investment, job creation, sustainable population growth, balanced regional development, access to services, broadband connectivity, social cohesion and inclusion, Brexit, and adapting to climate change.

The emergence of remote and connected working during the pandemic has the potential to reverse long-standing trends of people leaving their local communities to live and work in cities. Access to comprehensive and reliable transport infrastructure is vital to help encourage this urban to rural transformation and build resilient and sustainable rural communities. The Policy prioritises the provision of walking and cycling infrastructure, including Greenways, to enhance rural connectivity, acknowledging the *“huge potential for cycling within and between rural towns and villages, and particularly in the hinterland of rural towns”*.

Our Rural Future sets out 150 Policy Measures to be delivered by Government Departments, State Agencies and Local Authorities during the period 2021 - 2025. Investment in rural walking and cycling infrastructure is prioritised in Policy Measure 102:

- *Invest in high-quality walking and cycling infrastructure specifically targeted at towns and villages across the country.*

Increased demand for outdoor pursuits led to a surge in outdoor activity tourism, which is now a key growth sector worldwide. According to Our Rural Future, it presents *“opportunities for employment growth in rural areas in particular, through local businesses and entrepreneurs using the tourism assets in their area in a sustainable way to support recreational activities such as walking, cycling, canoeing and angling”*. Support for the provision of infrastructure to facilitate outdoor activity tourism, including Greenways, is highlighted in Policy Measure 36:

- **PM 36:** *Invest in greenways, blueways, walking trails and other outdoor recreation infrastructure to support the growth in outdoor recreational tourism.*

The proposed development will help retain and attract people to live and work within the study area by providing a high-quality facility for commuting and leisure. It will also help stimulate growth in outdoor activity tourism, encouraging the emergence of new businesses and activities along the proposed development's route.

2.3.4.13 National Physical Activity Framework 2024-2040

The National Physical Activity Framework 2024-2040 highlights the importance of physical activity primarily in terms of its physical benefits to individuals, whilst also acting as a *“protective factor”* for the prevention of cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and cancers. Physical Activity has also been linked to improved mental health as well as playing a key role in improving quality of life and wellbeing.

The vision of the National Physical Activity Framework 2024-2040 Framework is to have, *“by 2040, the most physically active population in Europe, across all age groups and all sectors of society”*.

A range of actions to be implemented to achieve this vision are set out in the National Physical Activity Action Plan 2024-2029, which will subsequently be replaced in the 2029-2034 and 2035-2040 Action Plans.

National Physical Activity Action Plan 2024-2029

The aim of the Department of Health's *National Physical Activity Plan* is to increase physical activity levels across the whole population, and the Plan sets separate targets for adults, children, and older people to reach the recommended levels of physical activity.

The 2024-2029 Plan aims to foster “*significant statistical improvements in the numbers of people meeting the recommended levels of physical activity*”, bring about transformational change by developing the appropriate guidance and scrutinise the efficacy of the policies and programmes currently in place to achieve the vision of this plan and greater framework. The Plan provides metrics to enable Ireland's activity level to be compared with European counterparts based on population levels participating in physical activity or sport once a week or more.

Recognising that there are many reasons that people are unable to meet the recommended levels of physical activity, the Plan contains some guiding principles to promote increased levels of physical activity, including by ‘*inviting Sports Inclusion Disability Officers, Active Disability Ireland and disability-focused NGBs to explore avenues to further promote physical activity among people with disabilities*’.

The Plan highlights the benefits of incorporating active travel into commutes, from both a health and environmental perspective and the opportunity for reduced travel times.

The Plan sets out actions under eight physical activity investment areas, as shown in Plate 2-4 below.



Plate 2-4 **Eight Investments in Physical Activity (Source, National Physical Activity Action Plan 2024-2029)**

The Plan includes several actions aimed at promoting active travel and recreation which are of relevance to the proposed development, namely:

Under Active Travel:

- ‘*Building on the Climate Action Plan target of 1,000km of active travel infrastructure which will be rolled out by 2025, over the period to 2029.*’
- ‘*Continued implementation of the GDA Cycle Network Plan, Cycle Connects and National Cycle Network plans.*’

- *'Explore avenues to make cycling as a form of transport or exercise more financially accessible to those who cannot avail of current incentives.'*
- *"Supporting a variety of infrastructures to support safe walking and/or cycling and/or wheeling, including measures to calm speed, reduce vehicle traffic and enhance active mobility.'*
- *'Explore the development of initiatives to support a behavioural and modal shift towards active travel to increase the number of people choosing these modes as their primary travel mode.'*
- *'Work closely with Get Ireland Walking and Cycling Ireland to ensure their strategic aims reflect the roles of both forms of physical activity in the area of active travel.'*

The proposed development will encourage additional physical activity by attracting more people to walk and cycle, therefore fully aligning with the National Physical Activity Action Plan 2024-2029.

2.3.4.14 CycleConnects: Ireland's Cycle Network (Draft Version)

Cycle Connects is being developed by the National Transport Authority (NTA) and aims to form a comprehensive cycle network for all cycle user types across each county in Ireland. The draft proposals specific to County Clare, can be viewed at <https://consult.nationaltransport.ie/en/consultation/cycleconnects>, contain County Clare cycle networks, including the indicative route of the West Clare Railway Greenway.

Plate 2-5 illustrates the draft proposed County Clare Cycle Network. It includes the indicative route for the Kilkee to Kilrush Greenway which aligns with the proposed development.

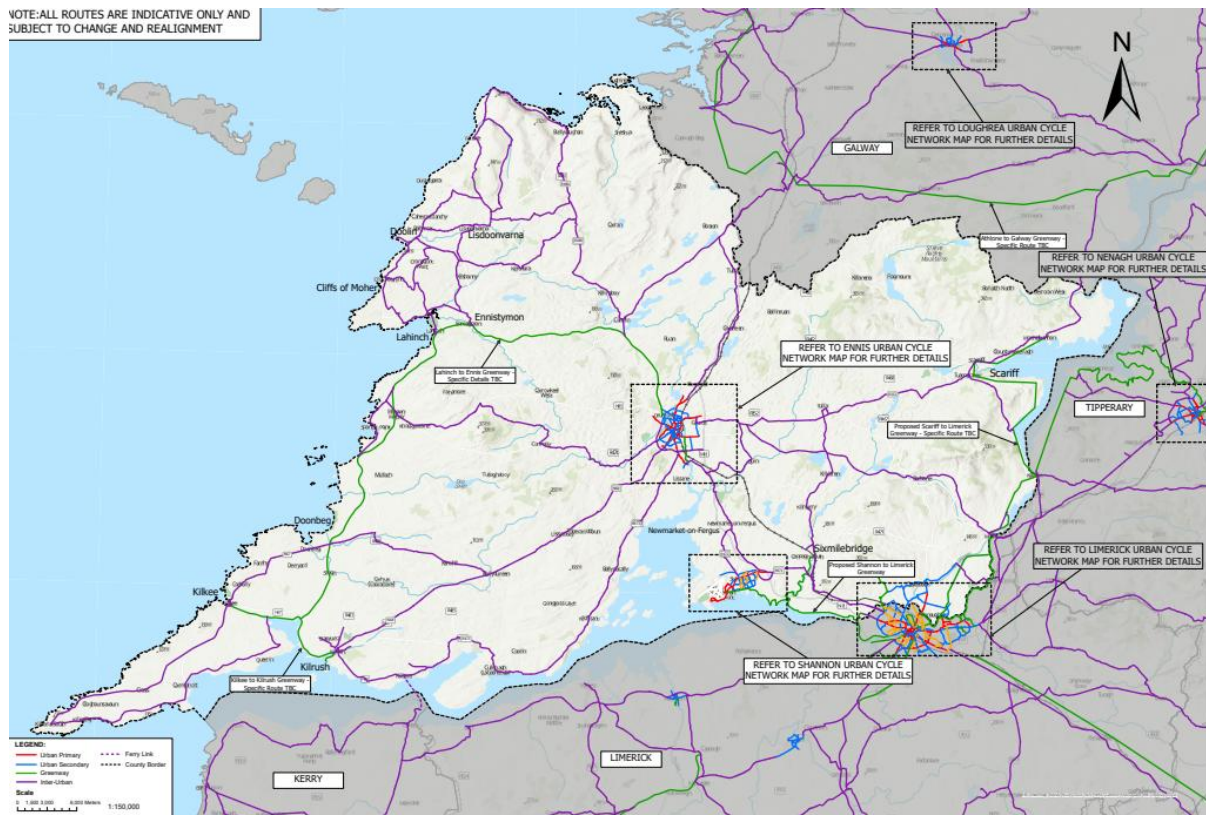


Plate 2-5 Proposed County Cycle Network Clare County Area (Extracted from Draft Cycle Connects)

2.3.5 Regional Policy

2.3.5.1 Southern Region Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (S-RSES)

The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Southern Region of Ireland (S-RSES) outlines how the policies and objectives from the National Planning Framework (NPF) and any other relevant Government policies and objectives will be implemented in the Southern Region. The S-RSES intends to reflect these policies and objectives through economic and spatial strategies targeted specifically at the Southern Region, which comprises counties Clare, Limerick, Kerry, Cork, Tipperary, Waterford, Kilkenny, Carlow and Wexford.

The provision of walking and cycling routes within urban centres and rural areas is targeted as they endorse a healthy lifestyle for the population and create an opportunity for attracting tourism to the area. Regional Policy Objectives (RPOs) within the Southern Region RSES have been identified to promote the development of walking and cycling routes as well as Blueways, Greenways and Peatways in the region. RPOs of the RSES support investment of greenway as follows:

- **RPO 53 Tourism** supports developments in relation to the enhancement of tourism and leisure amenities including investment in walking and cycling infrastructure and includes the following objectives:
 - *“Sustainably develop walking and cycling trails opening greater accessibility to the marine and countryside environment by sustainable modes of transport and promote the sustainable designation of delivery of Greenway and Blueway Corridors.”*
 - *“Facilitate appropriate tourism development and in particular a National Greenways, Blueways and Peatways Strategy, prioritising sustainable projects that achieve maximum impact and connectivity at national and regional level.”*
- **RPO 125 Green infrastructure corridors** *“Transport infrastructure provides potential opportunities to act as green infrastructure corridors. It is an objective to support Local Authorities acting together with relevant national infrastructure providers to co-develop infrastructural management plans to enhance biodiversity”.*
- **RPO 201: National Trails, Walking Routes, Greenway and Blueway Corridors** *“It is an objective to support investment in the development of walking and cycling facilities, greenway and blueway corridors within the Region between our Region’s settlements and potential for sustainable linkages to create interregional greenways. Proposals for investment in walking and cycling facilities, greenway and blueway corridors should be based on rigorous site/route selection studies and Local Authorities should ensure that decision-making in relation to such developments is informed by an appropriate level of environmental assessment, including all necessary reports to assess the potential impact on designated European sites and on biodiversity outside of formal protections such that proposed development does not contribute to loss of biodiversity. Local Authorities and other public agencies shall seek to promote and support access to rural areas including upland areas, forestry, coastal areas and the development of existing walking routes, pilgrim paths, mountain trails and nature trails in conjunction with other public bodies, representative agencies and community groups and shall identify and protect existing paths, walkways and rights of way”.*
- **RPO 174 Walking and Cycling** This RPO supports investment for developing walking and cycling infrastructure in the region.

The construction of the proposed West Clare Railway Greenway will support the listed regional policy objectives by promoting walking and cycling activities in the area. It will also improve connectivity between towns, villages and rural areas while also supporting the tourism sector and potential diversification in the rural economy.

2.3.6 Local Policy

2.3.6.1 Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029

The Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029 sets out an overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of the functional area of Clare County Council over a 6-year period. The Clare County Development Plan came into effect on 20th April 2023 and while the final plan is currently being prepared and graphically designed, an Interim Version of the Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029 has been prepared and has formed the basis of this paragraph. The County Development Plan has identified specific walking and cycling objectives to be implemented between 2023 and 2029, under several headings such as "Tourism", "Sustainable Communities" and "Physical Infrastructure, Environment and Energy".

The proposed development supports and complies with the following objectives set out in the County Development Plan:

Tourism

Objective CDP9.8:

"d. To sustainably develop greenways, blueways and peatways and walking and cycling trails including the West Clare Railway Greenway to achieve greater accessibility to the countryside and the marine environment by sustainable modes and to achieve maximum benefit and connectivity at local, regional and national levels."

"e. To promote activity tourism subject to appropriate site selection and environmental assessment processes."

"f. To ensure that development of new or enhanced tourism infrastructure and facilities includes an assessment of the environmental sensitivities of the area including and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA); Appropriate Assessment (AA) and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) if required in order to avoid adverse impacts on the receiving environment." and,

"g. To ensure the siting of Blue and Green Infrastructure is carefully considered in the context of climate change and resilience and flood protection."

Objective CDP 9.26:

"In addition to the development of its greenway potential to facilitate the reopening of appropriate sections of the West Clare Railway as an operational tourist attraction by permitting where appropriate new sections of railway to be built as alternatives to parts of the line which have been built on or are inaccessible since its closure."

Sustainable Communities

Objective CDP 10.11:

"a) To support the maintenance of existing off-road walking and cycling trails and support investment in the sustainable development of walking and cycling facilities, greenway and blueway corridors within the County and region extending into and between our County's settlements;"

b) To support and facilitate the development of the West Clare Railway Greenway and necessary supporting infrastructure".

Physical Infrastructure, Environment and Energy

Objective CDP 11.5:

"a) To require walkability and accessibility to be a central consideration in the planning and design of all new developments, transport infrastructure and public transport services;"

“b) To facilitate and support the delivery of a safe, accessible and convenient cycle network and environment across the County and in the Limerick-Shannon Metropolitan Area as set out in the Cycle Network Plans;”

“c) To support the development and enhancement of long-distance cycling routes in County Clare, in accordance with the Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways;”

“d) To safeguard, where feasible, the route of the old West Clare Railway which has not been affected by existing development and to encourage its use for recreational purposes and/or as part of a tourist attraction. Exceptions to this include short sections within the curtilage of residential or commercial property;”

“e) To support the development of cycle-lanes in urban areas linking residential areas to town centres, employment centres and school locations;”

“f) To support the development of new accessible walking routes and trails throughout the County;”

The proposed development is aligned with the objectives of the Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029 by acknowledging the cultural significance of the West Clare Railway corridor and preserving its rich history while enhancing its appeal as a tourist attraction. The project aims to deliver an approximately 15km-long route (to ultimately form part of an approx. 85km route - subject to planning), suitable for walking and cycling, as well as users with mobility impairments. The development will enhance connectivity and provide a safe cycle and pedestrian network across the area.

West Clare Municipal District Settlement Plans

The interim Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029 also provides settlement plans which outline land zoning details in addition to aims and objectives for all towns and villages in County Clare, excluding Shannon Town. Volume 3(d) of the draft Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029 contains the West Clare Municipal District Settlement Plans. The objectives set out in the Kilkee, Kilrush and Moyasta settlement plans which support the West Clare Railway Greenway, are outlined below.

Kilkee

It is an objective of Clare County Council:

- *“To prioritise the development of the West Clare Railway Greenway and facilitate an initial Kilrush to Kilkee pilot project in line with Strategic Priority 15 ‘Prioritise the development of the West Clare Railway Greenway’ of the County Clare Tourism Strategy 2030”.*

Kilrush

The draft West Clare Municipal District Settlement Plan for Kilrush states the following in relation to the West Clare Railway Greenway:

“The development of the West Clare Railway Greenway along the line of the old West Clare Railway as a proposed recreational route, in particular between Kilrush and Kilkee, is supported in this Plan. The benefits of linking Kilrush and Kilkee are two-fold. It will enhance the existing linkages between the towns in terms of settlement, tourist facilities, expansion of the tourism base for both towns and will also create green infrastructure linkages between the towns. Proposals to redevelop the former railway line will be subject to the requirements of the Habitats and Environmental Impact Assessment Directives.”

It is an objective of Clare County Council:

- *“To prioritise the development of the West Clare Railway Greenway and facilitate an initial Kilrush to Kilkee pilot project in line with Strategic Priority 15 ‘Prioritise the development of the West Clare Railway Greenway’ of the County Clare Tourism Strategy 2030.*
- *To support the development of appropriate micro enterprises along the West Clare Railway Greenway route, subject to proper planning and sustainable development and screening for appropriate assessment.*
- *To safeguard the section of line of the West Clare Railway and incorporate it into any development proposal for the marina as a walking/cycle way that can connect into a riverside walkway and the open countryside”.*

Moyasta

The West Clare Municipal District Settlement Plan for Moyasta states the following in relation to the West Clare Railway Greenway:

“The development of the West Clare Railway Greenway along the line of the old West Clare Railway Greenway as a proposed recreational route is supported in this Plan and in particular the provision of enhanced connections to the village centre and community facilities such as the local school.”

It is an objective of Clare County Council:

- *“To make provision for the continued development of Moyasta train station and the West Clare Railway as an important tourism asset for the village and larger West Clare area, including the development of the West Clare Railway Greenway.”*

The proposed development is referenced within the West Clare Municipal District Settlement Plans for Kilkee, Kilrush and Moyasta, where the development is noted as a priority for Clare County Council. The greenway will provide means for economic growth through the promotion of tourism and increased accessibility to places of work. The West Clare Municipal District Settlement Plan aims to support sustainable development of the largest municipal district in Clare by promoting settlements with high-quality amenities and employment opportunities, while prioritising environmental preservation. The proposed developed will help achieve these aims while easing the reliance on private vehicles and improving local infrastructure.

2.3.6.2 Clare Climate Action Plan 2024-2029

The Clare Climate Action Plan (CAP) 2024-2029 has been prepared by Clare County Council to act as a mechanism of implementing mitigation and adaptation actions across the administrative area of County Clare to *“drive positive climate action”*.

The Mission Statement of the Plan is to *“deliver and enable climate action for a just transition to a low carbon and climate resilient future within County Clare which results in sustainable growth, a high quality of life, inclusivity, and service accessibility”*.

The Plan acknowledges that the tourism sector is one of the key drivers of the local economy for County Clare which has diverse geographical landscapes. In 2018, approximately 769,000 tourists visited the county, generating approximately €244 million of revenue which supported 6,600 jobs. The Plan notes that services and infrastructure will need to increase over time to meet the growing tourism demand and as such, *“it is imperative therefore that the Local Authority positions itself to lead on Climate Action and sustainable practices to ensure that the county has a resilient future”*.

Kilkee and Loop Head Peninsula has been designated as a Decarbonisation Zone (DZ) for County Clare within which the proposed development is located as shown in Plate 2-6 below. The total greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions within Kilkee/Loop Head Peninsula DZ were quantified in 2018 and equated to approximately 136,185 tCO₂e sources of which area “agriculture (67%), land use (18%), buildings (residential, commercial, and public) (11%), and transport (4%)”.



Plate 2-6 Kilkee and Loop Head Peninsula DZ boundary (Source: Figure 6 in the Clare CAP 2024-2029)

To inform climate action within the Kilkee and Loop Head Peninsula DZ boundary, a community workshop was held to gather feedback and recommendation from the community on the actions that can be implemented. A list of priority actions have been identified across the topics of sustainable energy, sustainable transport, community and economy, and natural environment. Under sustainable transport, the “*development of greenway/cycle lanes in Loop Head Peninsula*” have been ranked as the highest priority under this topic.

The Plan therefore aims to “*Advance the delivery of the West Clare Railway Greenway*”, as identified under **Transport Action DZ-T1** and **Objective T1.2**. The proposed development will construct a section of the West Clare Railway Greenway between Kilkee and Kiltrush within the Kilkee and Loop Head Peninsula DZ boundary.

2.3.6.3 County Clare Tourism Strategy 2030

The County Clare Tourism Strategy 2030 establishes a 10-year vision for the development of tourism in County Clare. In 2018 the County Clare tourism industry has generated €244 million and created 6,600 jobs connected to tourism; due to the global pandemic these numbers have since decreased. The Clare County Strategy focuses on the recovery of the economic development brought on by tourism and on creating a path towards a new future in tourism.

The strategy sets the following objectives:

- *“To deliver compelling quality experiences that reflect and leverage our unique identity.”*
- *“To be globally recognised as a sustainable destination.”*
- *“To create a smart destination that reflects our strong commitment to sustainability, connectivity, innovation and new approaches to doing business.”*
- *“To be regarded as ‘the gateway to the west’.”*
- *“To spread the benefits of tourism across the county and throughout the seasons in a way that enriches our communities while maintaining our distinctive identity and the integrity of our landscapes.”*

West Clare Rail Greenway has been identified within the Strategy as the *“top priority initiative”* for the county and to *“move forward with the initial Kilrush to Kilkee pilot project”*. The proposed development will realise the Kilrush to Kilkee section of the West Clare Rail Greenway which is consistent with the strategic priorities of this Strategy.

2.3.6.4 Clare County Biodiversity Action Plan 2025–2031

The Clare County Biodiversity Action Plan 2025-2031 provides a framework for biodiversity action over the next six years with the aim of halting biodiversity loss in County Clare. The new plan supersedes the 3rd Clare County Biodiversity Action Plan 2017-2023 which achieved much success under the auspices of Clare County Council.

One of the objectives of the proposed West Clare Railway Greenway is to protect the natural environment of the County Clare region. This is achieved through the design of the proposed development and implementation of the recommended mitigation measures outlined in this EIAR, in particular Chapter 8 Biodiversity. Further detail is provided in Chapter 8 of this EIAR on the alignment of the proposed development with the Clare County Biodiversity Action Plan 2025 – 2031.

2.4 Project Need and Strategic Fit

Kilrush is identified in the RSES and the Clare CDP as one of County Clare’s two Service Towns, due to its role as an important service centre and driver of growth in West Clare. It is located on the Shannon Estuary, and the Wild Atlantic Way and it serves as the main retail, administrative and service centre to locals, as well as the wider community in West Clare, including the Loop Head Peninsula and towns such as Kilkee, Doonbeg and other West Clare settlements which are located further north along the N67.

Recently published data from the 2022 Census demonstrates the particularly low uptake of cycling and walking as commuting modes of travel for school and work in the towns and villages of Kilkee, Moyasta and Kilrush. These towns and villages are located in the Electoral Divisions (ED) of Kilkee ED, Kilfearagh ED, Einagh ED, St. Martins ED, Kilrush Urban ED, and Kilrush Rural ED. Overall, commuters in these electoral divisions (ED) travelling for school and work comprise 23.8% of the ED local population, of which only 1.4% are cyclists. Only 3.7% of this local population uses public transport as a means of commuting to school or work, while 8% of this population works from home. The reliance on the private car as a mode of transport is striking with almost 50% of this population commuting as either a driver or passenger in a car or van. These statistics reflect the lack of safe, accessible transport infrastructure in the area which would otherwise encourage a modal shift towards more sustainable modes of transport. In the absence of any alternative or segregated active travel route, the main transport corridor connecting Kilkee and Kilrush via Moyasta is the N67, a busy national road which does not lend itself to active travel due to high speeds and high traffic volumes.

Accident data received from TII on reported collisions along the N67 between Kilrush and Kilkee between 2018 and 2025 reflects the dangerous nature of the single carriageway national road. There have been 2 recorded fatalities on the N67 outside of the towns, both of which involved NMUs (i.e. pedestrians and cyclists). One other minor injury incident for NMUs was also reported. The NMU fatalities both occurred during the day, one of which was reported during good visibility and the other with poor visibility. Accident data within the towns indicates one other reported incident involving NMU, comprising a Serious Injury incident outside Gaelscoil Uí Choimín in Kilrush. The perception of cycling and walking as an unsafe mode of transport can be compounded by such collision data as described above, particularly where no segregated facilities are available. The potential positive health benefits of active travel modes are not being realised as a result of the low uptake described above.

The West Clare Railway Greenway has significant potential to improve active travel rates and pedestrian and cyclist safety. The development is backed by a number of policies from European to National level, including the EU Cycling Strategy – Recommendations for Delivering Green Growth and an Effective Mobility System in 2030, which supports projects related to cycle route networks and emphasises the need for segregation between cyclists and other traffic. A recent publication from the European Transport Safety Council “Improving the safety of cycling in Europe; PIN Flash 50” also supports the development of the greenway in its recommendation that local authorities separate pedestrians and cyclists from motor vehicle traffic on roads with speed limits of 50kph.

The Greenway offers further opportunity for activity tourism in the region in addition to serving as a safe, segregated mode of transport for the local community. The Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029 objectives specifically detail the sustainable development of greenways and the promotion of activity tourism. The development will also offer a scenic and safer alternative for a section of the EuroVelo 1 route, a cycling route of international importance which follows along the coast near Kilrush and Kilkee.

The West Clare Railway corridor is situated in an area of natural beauty. The historic West Clare Railway line borders multiple areas of ecological importance, including the River Shannon and River Fergus Estuaries SPA and the Lower River Shannon SAC. This coastal area offers unspoilt landscapes, making the route ideal for nature tourism. The naturally flat topography of the region ensures its accessibility to a wide demographic, from outdoor enthusiasts to those seeking a leisurely walk or cycle. Tourism related to the abandoned West Clare Railway was previously prominent in the area, with the West Clare Railway Heritage Museum located in Moyasta. The proposed development will enhance the historical significance of this railway by utilising existing structures and, where possible, following the railway line, and will provide a significant tourism boost to the Heritage Museum.

The development of safe, segregated cycle and walking infrastructure as a means of travel and amenity will benefit the local economy and encourage additional tourism to the county as a whole. This is even more so the case for visitors with vulnerabilities (such as the elderly, young children, those with disabilities, or those within physical impairments). It will address a serious existing safety deficiency for NMUs on the N67 and will provide a significant tourism boost to the West Clare region.

2.5 Objectives of the West Clare Railway Greenway

The objectives for the proposed greenway have been developed in accordance with Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways (2018). The project will improve connectivity between Kilkee and Kilrush, providing a safe, inclusive mode of sustainable transport while promoting rural development within the area.

The objectives and sub-objectives of the project have been identified as follows:

- To develop a sustainable visitor attraction using the original West Clare Railway corridor where practicable.
 - To develop and promote a new sustainable tourism visitor attraction using the original West Clare Railway corridor where practicable by 2030
 - Provide improved access to scenic & rural areas of West Clare for modes other than private car.
- To contribute towards the decarbonisation of transport in County Clare.
 - To reduce the carbon dependency of the transport and tourism sector in County Clare through the completion of the scheme.
 - Enable the Climate Action Plan through the delivery of the relevant transport related actions by 2030.
- To encourage the use of and increase the mode share of sustainable transport modes.
 - To increase the mode share of sustainable transport modes, such as walking and cycling in the County Clare region by at least 10 % following the completion of the scheme.
 - Increase the mode share of sustainable transport modes, such as walking and cycling to schools or workplaces
- To provide a safe and substantially segregated sustainable transport corridor for vulnerable road users, using quiet routes where segregation is not possible.
 - To provide a safe and substantially segregated sustainable transport corridor for vulnerable road users using existing segregated corridors such as the West Clare Railway to reduce the number of pedestrian or cyclist related accidents.
 - Protect vulnerable road users through improvements in or removal of pedestrian / vehicle or cyclist/vehicle interactions.
- To improve the accessibility and connectivity between rural communities, employment areas, and other key services using sustainable modes of transport.
 - To provide direct access for rural communities to towns along the sustainable transport facility and enhance connectivity to employment areas, and other key services on opening
 - Encourage greater community participation in physical activity and outdoor activities by providing accessibility between rural towns in County Clare and the opportunity to safely commute to school and work by bicycle or foot.
 - Facilitate access to public transport and amenities by active modes from the greenway.
- To protect the natural environment of the County Clare region.
 - To minimise the impact to the natural environment, particularly in ecologically sensitive areas
 - Ensure no net loss of biodiversity habitat and seek to enhance biodiversity and provide a net gain
 - To increase public appreciation of the local culture and history and the natural environment, by prioritising environmentally diverse routes and promoting knowledge of same along and adjacent to the route.