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# Portarlington Greenway Proposal

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## Introduction

PBA SEC (Sustainable Energy Community) was set up in late 2020 as a sub-group of the Portarlington Business Association and the group has a strong focus on sustainable transport. In that regard, the SEC group and its members have made several submissions to Laois and Offaly County Councils regarding improved cycling and walking infrastructure as well as traffic calming in Portarlington.

The Portarlington Cycling Campaign (PCC) was formed as an off shoot of the SEC group and is affiliated with Cyclist.ie (the national cycling advocacy group). The PCC group has organised several cycling events in the town such as Critical Mass cycle events, Tour de Port cycle events as part of the French Festival as well as the Port Bike'tivity Day event as part of Bike Week 2023.

This proposal relates to the construction of a 'Greenway' walking and cycling route (including active travel bridge) across the Barrow to connect the Laois and Offaly sides of the town via an active travel route.

## Aims

The initial aims of this proposal are;

- For both Laois and Offaly County councils to **work with local groups** (PBA Sustainability Group and Portarlington Cycling Campaign) **as well as jointly** (given that the proposed route covers both jurisdictions) to take this proposal forward
- to obtain funding for an initial **feasibility study**
- For Kilgallen & Partners to assess this proposal, review the route and **include in Local Transport Plan** currently being drafted for the Laois side of town

## Background

Portarlington is one of Ireland's fastest growing towns with a population of c. 10,400 in the 2022 census (up from c. 8,000 in 2016). As with most towns in Ireland, the town experiences very high traffic volumes and very low levels of commuting to school/work via active travel modes. - Therefore, a strong argument exists that Portarlington has an urgent need to improve its cycling and active travel infrastructure to cater for the needs of the town and her population. This is especially relevant in relation to the low rate of commuting to school by active travel modes by pupils to the town's schools.

Coláiste Íosagáin, the sole secondary school in the town, is located on the Offaly side of the town and caters for 1,100 pupils, the vast majority of whom live on the Laois side of the town, across the river Barrow. Laois pupils who choose to cycle to the school can only travel to the school across the Barrow Bridge and up Patrick Street which have no cycle paths and the danger associated with cycling that route acts as a great disincentive for children cycling to the school.

Similarly, primary school students from the Offaly side of the town cannot safely cycle to the three primary schools in the town, all located on the Laois side of the Barrow. There are no plans and extremely limited ability to introduce safe segregated cycling facilities on a street as narrow as Patrick Street.

Also, for residents on both sides of the Barrow who do not have access to a car, the lack of safe cycling infrastructure and heavy traffic volumes on Patrick St can lead to a social and economic disconnect between the Laois and Offaly sides of the town which has gradually developed over the years as traffic volumes have increased through the town.

## Proposal

The main elements to this proposal are;

- To construct a **cycling and pedestrian path and bridge crossing the Barrow and connecting the Laois and Offaly sides of the town**. This route would be c. 500m across a Green-field site crossing the River Barrow.
- **Upgrades of Riverside estate** on Offaly side for safe cycling/walking (c. 300m)
- **Upgrades to roads/crossings on Offaly side** from Riverside estate to Colaiste Iosagain secondary school (c. 325m)

See below approximate proposed route for Cycle & Pedestrian Path and Bridge across the River Barrow.



Below is a panoramic photo of the proposed route – Laois side on far left (Portlaoise Road), Barrow crossing in the centre, and Riverside estate to the right (with St Michaels Church to the far right)



***Note: This proposal has been discussed with the two affected Landowners of the fields through which this route would cross, and both are amenable to the proposal.***

## Benefits

### Cycling Infrastructure

Creating a safe active travel route for cyclists and pedestrians through Portarlington where presently no safe routes exist.

Per the 2021 Survey of Portarlington primary and secondary students (commissioned by this Group - 319 responses) less than 5% of students in Portarlington schools cycle to school each day, but 80% of students live within cycling distance of the schools. Over 90% of students have access to a bicycle to cycle to school. 20% of respondents cited lack of safe cycling routes as the reason they do not cycle to school. 50% of respondents travelled to school by car. Over a fifth of students travelled by bus and another fifth walked to school.

99% of respondents said they would like to see more safe/segregated cycleways to travel around Portarlington.

286 respondents (90%) said that if safe infrastructure was available with secure bike locking facilities they would consider cycling as a mode of transport to school.

### Traffic Congestion Reduction / Emissions Reduction

Presently, Portarlington experiences significant traffic issues each working day during peak times (School drop off times).

The PBA SEC group has installed traffic sensors around the town and has previously assessed the level, type and speed of traffic travelling through the town. As part of previous analysis conducted in 2021, between June 21<sup>st</sup> and July 21<sup>st</sup> of that year, 133,864 cars and 24,000 heavy goods vehicles were recorded as passing through Patrick Street (a street which cyclists would be enabled to bypass with the proposed bridge). Circa 8,000 vehicles per day (Mon-Fri) were recorded.

Notably this sample was taken during the summer holidays when schools were closed. 65% of vehicles travelling this narrow street were recorded as travelling between 30kmph and 50kmph with an

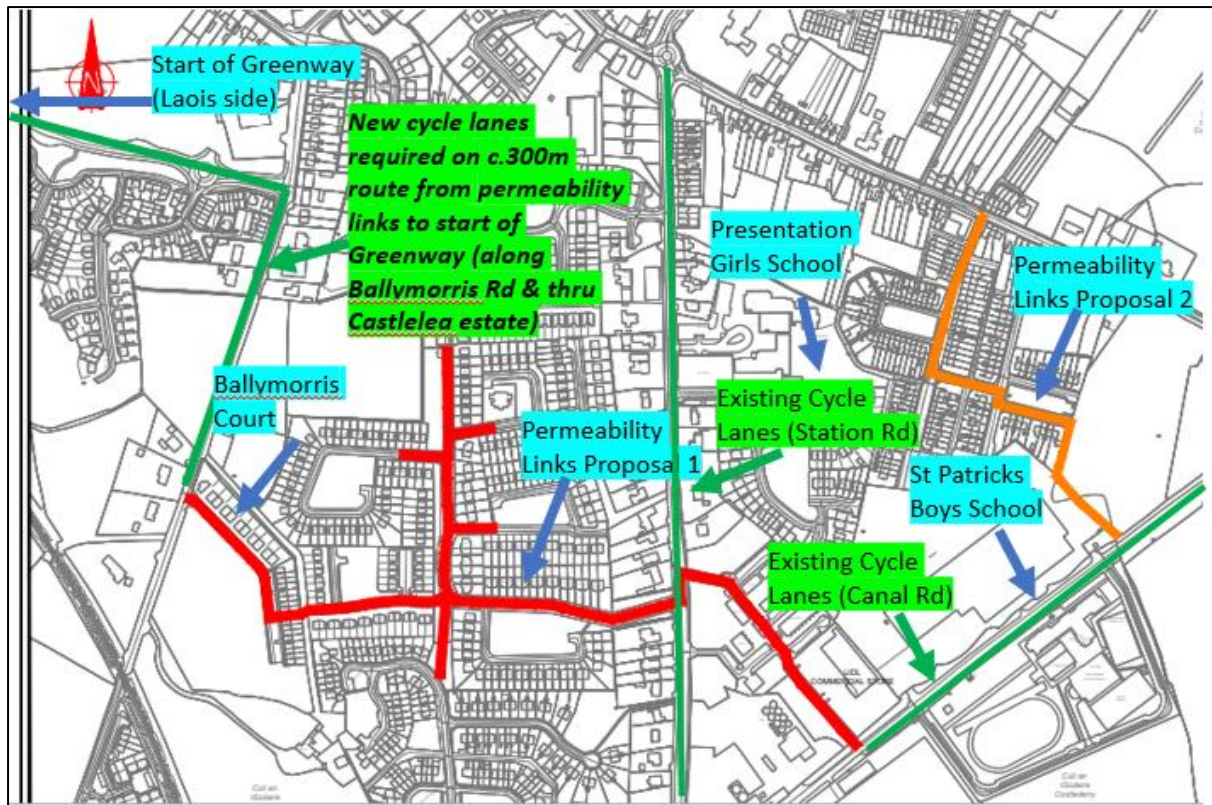
additional 15% of vehicles travelling at speeds exceeding 50kmph. In the appendix below, are sample photos indicating the narrowness of this street with cars parked on both sides of the street infringing on a safe space for cyclists.

During peak times of school drop offs and collections, approx. 1,000 car journeys are made for the 2,000 pupils attending the 4 schools in Portarlinton each day (50% driving with assumed two pupils per car on average). An increase in cycling as a means of transport would have the potential to transform the daily congestion experience in Portarlinton on school days at peak times. There is also the potential to significantly reduce transport emissions for the town and help to meet government targets to the reduce transport emissions by 50% by 2030 (as part of the Climate Action Plan).

#### [Link to Other Active Travel Projects](#)

Laois County Council are currently working on plans (with Kilgallen Consultants – due to go to public consultants in the coming months) for a permeability links project on the Laois side of Portarlinton, close to the Presentation Girls and St Patricks Boys primary schools. Should this Greenway be constructed it could link up with these permeability links to create a **continuous safe active travel route linking the secondary school on the Offaly side to both large primary schools** on the Laois side. This would open up the Greenway route as a safe route for pupils on the Offaly side attending primary schools on the Laois side.

Below image shows the proposed permeability links (proposal 1 in red) which - if new cycle lanes were installed on a c.300m route from Ballymorris Court to the start of the proposed Greenway – would create a full **segregated network of cycle routes connecting all schools in the town** (exception being Sandy Lane National school).



## Amenity Value

The proposed route would provide a much-needed **leisure and exercise amenity** site by facilitating walkers/runners and providing a scenic route linking both sides of the town which are currently not as accessible due to the bottleneck that persists at Patrick St. This route crosses the River Barrow at a picturesque point and would contribute greatly as a scenic opportunity for those looking to exercise or meet socially with friends in the town.

The below photo is taken from the Laois side of the Barrow overlooking the proposed route across the two fields, roughly parallel and to the right of the existing raised railway track running from Portarlinton to Tullamore.



The below photo is taken at/close to the likely bridge crossing for the proposed Greenway;





## Social Value

Such a safe, scenic and direct link between the Laois and Offaly sides of the town would also have the effect of **providing social and economic connections** which either do not exist currently and are stifled by the lack of active travel means of connection via Patrick St.

This route would open up a series of looped routes incorporating both sides of the town and allow residents to engage with the whole town and not be silo'ed to their side of the Barrow which is often the case currently.

## Appendix

### Appendix 1: Patrick Street – Cycling Safety Concern



Patrick St above and below with cars parked on both sides of the road leaving a dangerous proposition for students cycling to Coláiste Íosagáin from the Laois side of Portarlington or looking to cycle from Gracefield to the Primary Schools on the Laois side of the Barrow.

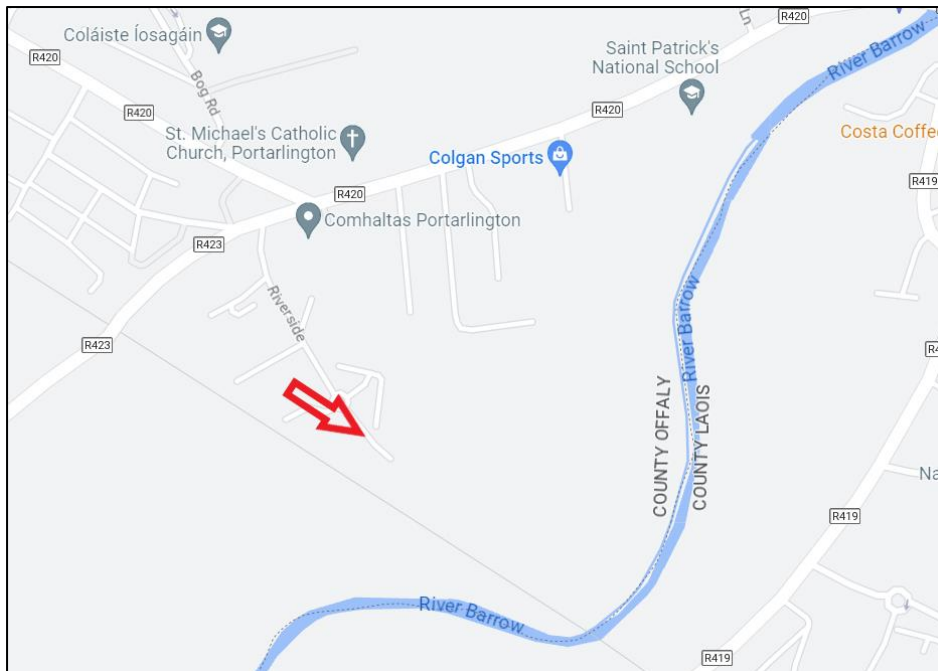


#### Appendix 2: Riverside Estate Access Point for Cycle Path

The below photograph shows the end of the road in Riverside, ended with a wall, beyond which is the proposed route for the cycling/pedestrian path connecting the town;



Map below illustrates the angle and location from which this photograph was taken;



Below picture shows the road through Riverside estate (wide carriage width which would facilitate segregated cycling);

