

Ireland 2040 – What should Ireland look like in 20 years' time?

IRELAND 2040 – OUR PLAN

I welcome the proposal by the National Planning Framework to plan for 2040. I do not propose to address all the issues in the discussion document, as I wish you to focus on some **health and environmental** related aspects, which I now do below.

Older people: Ireland's population is ageing, so provision must be made to take account of the needs and lifestyles of older people over the next 25 years.

Children: we also have a very high number of young families and children under 10 years of age. Their world must be made safe, pleasant and accessible, with clean air and water.

Both age cohorts have, ironically, quite similar needs:

- Safe housing
- Safe play and activity spaces
- Safe walking areas
- Safe cycling routes
- Safe parking
- Safe shopping areas
- Clean water
- Clean air
- Green spaces
- Access to public transport
- Access to medical care
- Access to public services: libraries, primary care centres, off-road cycle lanes, designated parking, public transport, postal services, Internet connection,

Community-based Services: As people age, their priorities change. They require more community-based services: social, medical, and activity related. They may still live in their own homes, but need to have ready access to services in their community, without having to drive or travel long distances. Thus, housing, roads and infrastructure must be designed with this in mind, keeping people in 'pods/clusters', villages and towns, rather than strung out in one-off houses across the countryside. A community is made up of people, so towns, villages and suburbs should be designed with the needs of people to the fore. Infrastructure must include well-designed footpaths, lighting, dished access from road to footpath, widths and entrances to accommodate wheelchairs, park and bus stop seating, non-slip surfaces, to mention a few.

Healthy Old Age: People are living longer, so we must aim to keep them fitter and healthier for much of that longer life. If people are physically fit and healthy, then their mental health will also be better. Providing for independent living and with ample regular opportunities for interesting activities is in all our interests. Physically and mentally healthy older people cost the State less, contribute and participate more, and are an asset not a burden to their relatives and the State. The State has a responsibility to make as much provision as it can to assist them in this independence.

CSO figures (quoted in I. Times 22/2/2017) *'the population aged 80 or older in Ireland is set to increase from 128,000 in 2011 to 344,900 by 2036'*. They will not all want to or need nursing home care. The cost of keeping them fit, healthy, well and independent will be far less than residential or hospital care. Again, this must be planned for now, by developing appropriate infrastructures.

Alzheimer's Research – it's not all in the mind!

Majid Fotuhi, a neurologist specialising in the prevention of Alzheimer's disease based at the NeuroGrow Brain Fitness Center in Virginia, USA maintains that physical exercise reduces the risk and severity of cognitive decline. Aerobic exercise has been shown to grow the volume of certain brain regions that tend to shrink during ageing. Being sociable and better sleep are also connected with better brain health. (www.neurogrow.com)

Recent research from University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center highlights studies showing that 'about 30% of Alzheimer's Disease cases may be related to modifiable risk factors such as physical inactivity and cardiovascular risk factors'. (*Exercise & Sports Science Review*). They quote compelling evidence suggesting that habitual aerobic exercise helps reduce age-related cognitive decline by helping to preserve brain structure.

Department of Illness – not Dept. of Health:

Our health policy in Ireland is backwards. We wait until people are ill, then we try and fix or cure them with medication and expensive hospital-based interventions. There is almost no emphasis on preventative approaches to medical care, on positive, specific and focused health promotion at local or national level. Keeping people fit and well, by providing access and supports to encourage exercise and fun outdoor activities for all ages, in schools, in colleges, in the community, would be a start. It has to be policy-led, and supported at local level. For example, in every housing estate and town, build a handball alley, a running/cycle track, with trees and landscaping to encourage people to walk out every day. A handball alley can be used by all ages, for tennis, handball, or football practice. It builds stamina, can be done alone or as a group, requires no special clothing or equipment, is great fun and is not expensive to build.

People will work for longer in future years, through need or for choice and quality of life reasons. Long commutes are toxic and detrimental on both personal and environmental counts. Flexible working conditions need to be planned now. Working from home will require good Internet connections. Public transport access and flexible hours and contracts will keep older people contributing and participating way beyond their 60s.

Section 3 People's Health and Well-Being

3.2.4 Modern indoor lifestyles are associated with reduced levels of exercise, increasing rates of obesity, diabetes and heart disease and higher incidence of depression. Recent evidence indicates that 60% of adults and one in four children in Ireland is either overweight or obese. Whilst diet clearly has a significant role to play in tackling threats to human health, planning also plays an important part.

3.2.5 Population ageing is also one of the most significant trends of the 21st century, with far-reaching implications for all aspects of society. While the number of people aged 65 or over in Ireland has effectively doubled since 1960, the proportionate increase in the population aged over 85 has been even greater and has nearly quadrupled during the last half-century. These trends will accelerate in the near future.

3.3.1 Creating and maintaining environments that encourage people to make healthier, more active choices is central to making the healthy choice the easy choice. Factors that are of relevance in promoting an active environment include location, density and mix of land use; provision of safe walking and cycling routes; street layout and connectivity; availability and density of open and green space; accessible sports facilities and proximity to public transport facilities and services.

Planning Ahead: My interests are health and environmental.

1. Cycling provision:

To create cleaner air and fitter people we need to encourage more outdoor activities, and cycling is one that can benefit both children and the elderly. Cycling is an inexpensive and healthy way to get around. However, it must be separated from cars, buses and heavy vehicles by the provision of clearly marked and separated cycle lanes and adequate dedicated cycle parking at shops and all public service places. Towns and cities can build in this infrastructure as they make repairs and upgrades over the years ahead. But, this must be planned ahead and factored into both budgets and future planning.

Cycling has seriously increased in recent years, particularly in the greater Dublin area. This is in response to the Bike to Work scheme, the City Bikes, and the increasing provision of cycle lanes and parking hoops. People will gain confidence to 'get back on their bikes' and cycle for business, for shopping or for pleasure, especially if it is off-road and away from vehicular traffic. Witness the increased use of such off-road routes where they are provided, such as the greenways, the canal cycleways and that part of the S2S route where it exists on the

north side of Dublin bay. With more dedicated routes, cycling will become an accepted form of transport.

Many thousands of school-children and college students are currently driven to schools and colleges, creating traffic chaos on commuter routes twice daily. With planning and forethought, local authorities could create dedicated cycle routes to these schools and encourage the option to cycle and group-walk.

We have a growing obesity problem, so the option to walk or cycle would meet a health benefit as well as being more environmentally friendly. Exercise does not require gyms, expensive special clothing or equipment. Just going out your door, to walk, run, cycle, to shop/socialise/commute, can all be done easily – provided that roads, footpaths, cycle lanes and lighting are properly maintained. By removing unnecessary car journeys, commuter travel times would improve for those who must drive.

With climate change and fossil fuel pollution, we need to plan now for environmental alternatives to benefit both our planet and our people. Changing mind-sets is never easy or quick. But, if we plan alternative options and make them attractive and popular, they will catch on.

Tourism will also benefit from increased cycling provision. Europeans, especially, love to cycle and, with marketing, we can promote Ireland as a good cycling destination. Dublin city has always turned its back on Dublin Bay. Yet, with the planned completion of the full 22 km S2S Cycleway and Promenade (www.s2s.ie) we can turn Dublin into a bay city, with the longest capital city off-road cycleway in the world! Alongside cruise ship offerings at Dublin Port, we can offer visitors an off-road Dublin Bay cycle route!

Local authorities must work together, not compete, when it comes to creating suitable infrastructure towards a 2040 Plan. Joint committees on issues such as public transport, cycleways and promenades, health and leisure facilities, community services must be planned – not on political lines – but on what is best for the community. There is a good precedent for joint committees. DLR and Dublin City Councillors (across parties) formed and work well on a joint committee on the S2S route.

2. Cycling Without Age

Ageing does not have to be a time to lose everything: your freedom, your independence, your mobility, your health, your hearing etc. It can mean those things, but enjoyment of life should not end at that point. With planning and goodwill, those who have to move into residential care can still be offered a fun time.

Cycling Without Age, www.cyclingwithoutage.ie is a Danish concept created in 2012 which offers to take residents of nursing and care homes out for spins on specially-designed rickshaw-type bicycles, giving them the experience of feeling the wind in their hair, touring their local neighbourhood and having a sense of freedom and fun. It is not a commercial but

a voluntary activity, with the cyclists, called pilots, giving their time freely, and the residents do not pay for the spin. (See attached photo to demonstrate the idea.)

My husband and I are the first Irish licence-holders for CWA, and we have purchased the first Irish trishaw bike, due in Dublin in March 2017. (We hope to crowd-fund or get sponsorship for its cost.) Wellbeing and fun are the basis behind the Cycling Without Age concept, especially for those who, through age or infirmity, have lost their independence and mobility. We hope that nursing and care homes throughout Ireland might consider joining CWA and extending this fun activity to their residents. Ireland is the 28th country in the world to join CWA, with thousands of nursing and community care homes worldwide already offering CWA rides to their residents. We plan a national launch in March, once we have the first trishaw bike here.

To make Cycling Without Age work well and be meaningful, there must be access to parks, to cycleways and promenades and other off-road options for the trishaw bikes. There must be willingness and commitment by local authorities and others to allow these 'slow-cycling' bikes to take their passengers through their neighbourhoods to 'feel the wind in their hair'. Check out www.cyclingwithoutage.org for more details of its success in 28 countries worldwide, as well as its Facebook page, *Stories from Cycling Without Age*.
[cyclingwithoutage@groups.facebook.com](https://www.facebook.com/cyclingwithoutage@groups.facebook.com)

Summary

Ireland in 2040 will be a very changed place demographically. More older people, living longer (*see CSO figures*). We need to make provision now to ensure that they are catered for to keep them active, independent, healthy mentally and physically, and able to live meaningful lives. To plan for this, we need progressive thinking, informed decision-making, creative infrastructural investment, and a commitment to change the status quo. Giving priority to cars and private transport is not the solution, nor is it environmentally responsible. It is up to our planners at national and local level to begin to think of the welfare of our citizens and to plan for that by developing appropriate support structures. To quote an old expression "*a stitch in time saves nine*". Plan now for having fitter, healthier older people, able to contribute, to participate in their communities, to allow them to actively give of their experience, their knowledge and their time, adding meaning to their lives and ours.

Clara Clark

Voluntary activities include being:

- Part of the www.s2s.ie team
- First Irish licensee of www.cyclingwithoutage.ie

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A rickshaw bicycle in action.



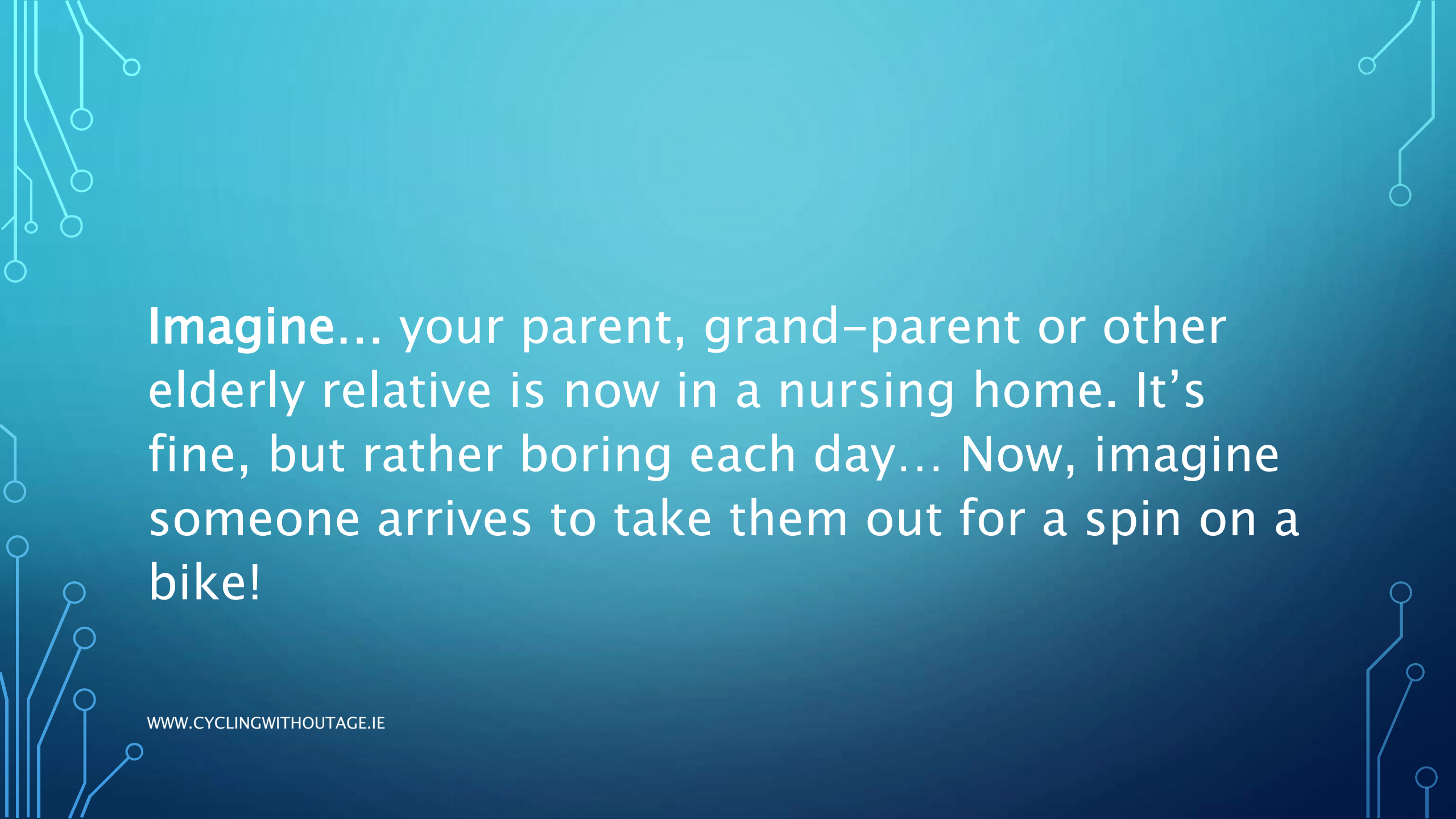
Cycling Without Age logo.

CYCLING WITHOUT AGE

CYCLING WITHOUT AGE COMES TO IRELAND!

WWW.CYCLINGWITHOUTAGE.IE



The background is a solid blue gradient. In the corners, there are decorative white line art elements resembling circuit boards or neural networks, with lines and small circles connecting them.

Imagine... your parent, grand-parent or other elderly relative is now in a nursing home. It's fine, but rather boring each day... Now, imagine someone arrives to take them out for a spin on a bike!

IMAGINE THIS! FOR YOUR RELATIVE/FRIEND...



WWW.CYCLINGWITHOUTAGE.IE

OR THIS...



WWW.CYCLINGWITHOUTAGE.IE



PEDALLING A NEW CONCEPT

Cycling Without Age is a Danish concept, in which elderly people are taken out on cycling trips from nursing homes on trishaw bikes piloted by volunteers. The first licence has been granted to run an Irish version and the organisers are hoping to raise €5,000 to buy a trishaw and arrange public liability insurance. Cycling at a slow and easy pace for a fragile passenger offers both cyclist and passenger a new experience. The organisers are also involved in the S2S cycleway and promenade around Dublin Bay, from Sutton to Sandycove, which would provide the ideal route for the elderly bikers to get maximum wind in their hair. cyclingwithoutage.ie & s2s.ie

Manchán Magan

WWW.CYCLINGWITHOUTAGE.IE

FIRST-EVER CWA RICKSHAW BICYCLE TO IRELAND

We are bringing the first-ever Cycling Without Age Rickshaw bicycle to Ireland. Cycling Without Age is a voluntary project, where we will offer free spins to nursing home residents, so they can feel the wind in their hair.

See www.cyclingwithoutage.ie .

WWW.CYCLINGWITHOUTAGE.IE

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