

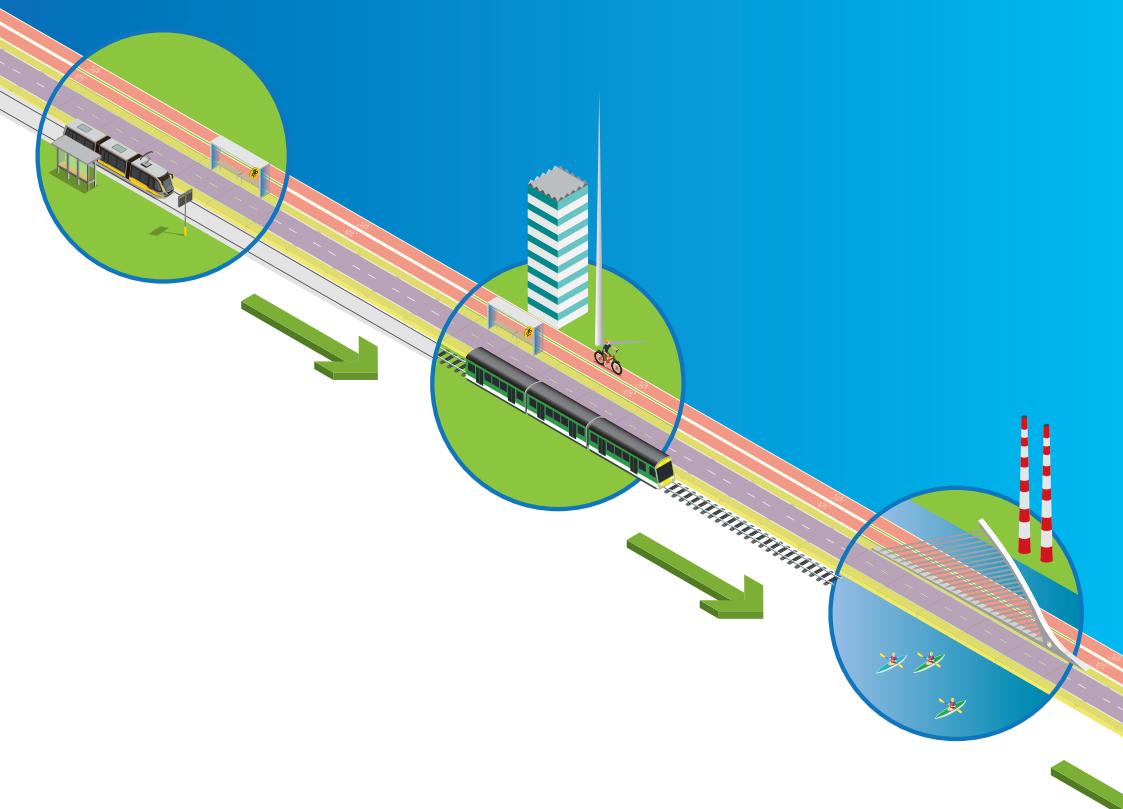


DUBLIN: THE 15 MINUTE CITY



Dublin Chamber is the representative body for business in the Greater Dublin Area, representing firms across the spectrum from small start-ups to major multinationals. The Chamber is committed to improving the city's business environment and quality of life in tandem, and strongly supports the vision of compact growth, urban density, sustainability, and brownfield regeneration contained in the National Planning Framework. With this in mind, and based on the insights brought by the Covid-19 crisis, this policy document explores the concept of Dublin as a '15 Minute City'.

Dublin's distinct communities, urban villages, and Georgian core are intrinsic to the city's unique feel and atmosphere. However, Dublin needs ambitious and progressive planning to become a world leader as a smart and sustainable city. By creating a 15 Minute City we can significantly enhance the liveability of Dublin. Reduced congestion and pollution, enhanced public spaces, thriving local economies and efficient public transport would all improve Dublin's international reputation and competitiveness. Such a vision, if carried out successfully, could prove transformative for Dublin and enhance not only the lives of its residents and local economy, but its attractiveness as a place to do business.



THE 15 MINUTE CITY

The 15 Minute City is an ambitious urban planning concept focusing on community planning, the local economy, and the liveability of a city. Creating a 15 Minute City is about designing walkable communities in which people can live and access most of their daily needs within 15 minutes of active transport, i.e. walking or cycling. These places should have diverse housing options and access to: safe cycle routes and local public transport, local health facilities, parks, shops, and other local infrastructure.

The core of this concept is mixed development, integrating as many uses as possible within the same space. This in many ways counteracts the past century of planning which has focused on separating residential areas from those for retail, employment, manufacturing, and entertainment.¹ This traditional way of planning has been a key driver behind modern planning problems, such as urban sprawl and car-dependent communities. The concept of 'hyper-proximity' – of creating spaces and enhancing both their liveability and sustainability – is now being seen in many ambitious planning projects across the world: Melbourne's '20 minute neighbourhoods', Barcelona's 'Superblocks', East London's 'Every One, Every Day', and of course Paris's '15 Minute City'.²

Dublin Chamber argues that the 15 Minute City is a guiding principle that must now be adopted by planners and local and national government to improve the liveability of our cities. In previous submissions relating to Development Plans, Local Area Plans and Strategic Development Zones, the Chamber has emphasised the need for long-term planning and joined-up thinking in the Dublin region, with a particular focus on the need for increased urban density, enhanced public transport, and investment in public realm. Drawing on our long history of campaigning on these interlinked issues, and in the face of the Covid-19 crisis, Dublin Chamber is proposing the concept of a 15 Minute City to enhance the liveability of Dublin. Cooperation between local government, communities, and industry

can deliver the changes needed to create a 15 Minute City in Dublin.

Successful elements of the 15 Minute City concept can be found throughout Dublin and many aspects of the vision are already reflected in the local authorities' development plans. Dublin Chamber's ambition to have a 15 Minute City in Dublin will complement current and future development plans and will provide a new lens through which both planners and residents can identify the infrastructure and facilities which their communities need.

Both the 'Superblocks' project in Barcelona and the '15 Minute City' project in Paris were developed and championed by the cities' Mayors. Dublin Chamber has previously called for the establishment of a directly elected Mayor for all of Dublin. Local government plays a vital role in urban planning for the city and the Chamber has previously called for more joined up thinking and collaboration across the four local authorities. The establishment of the office of a directly elected Mayor could greatly benefit this collaboration and would be significantly beneficial in achieving cross-city visionary projects, such as the 15 Minute City.



THE VALUE OF INFRASTRUCTURE

House prices can reveal a lot about the importance of local infrastructure to the desirability and liveability of an area. According to research, buyers in Dublin are paying €129,000, or 34%, more, than the average house price to live close to a DART or Luas station.³ Homes near a Luas or DART station have higher asking prices, while being within walking distance to a park significantly adds to the property value.⁴ Similarly, families purchasing a home will often look at factors such as proximity to a playground or local school before purchasing.⁵ Infrastructure has a particular value for the people who use it every day or live in close proximity. To make Dublin a more liveable city, we need to increase all residents' access to these facilities.

Community development, however, has often taken place on an ad hoc basis. The 15 Minute City concept creates a focus and ensures that planners and local authorities look at the needs of a local community, what facilities or infrastructure are in place, which are not, and how shortfalls can be addressed. Planning should not always focus on greenfield sites but more on how to improve the liveability of existing communities and transform them into desirable and safe places for their current and future residents. This strategy aligns closely with the National Planning Framework (NPF) which focuses on compact growth and brownfield regeneration.⁶

Hyper-proximity also moves planning away from the model of having large public spaces carrying out just one function, e.g. grouping eight sports pitches together as opposed to spreading them throughout the multiple communities they serve. This reduces the need for road infrastructure to service these 'hubs' and instead the facilities can be accessed through active transport. Moves like this can already be seen in other areas of Government policy such as the Primary Care Centre model of health care – providing a single access point integrated into a community to meet the local population's needs.⁷ A distinction must be made between facilities and services that are required to enable local living, and higher-level facilities. Every community cannot be home

to a full service hospital, university, national sports facility, or theatre. The aim of the 15 Minute City is not to disperse these facilities or to move away entirely from city districts, such as the shopping districts around Grafton Street and Henry Street, or business districts such as the IFSC or Docklands, but to allow residents to live locally in close proximity to everyday services and with excellent public transport to take them to these higher-level services when required.

POPULATION GROWTH AND URBAN DENSITY

The current and future demographic pressures facing the Greater Dublin Area must inform policy to create a 15 Minute City. The population of Dublin City and its suburbs is set to grow by 20-25% to 1.41 million people by 2040. Dublin Chamber is a strong advocate for the economic, social, and environmental benefits of urban density. Failure to achieve adequate population density in urban areas is a significant contributor to Ireland's current housing, public transport, and infrastructure problems. The scarcity of sites available for new large-scale residential and community development in Dublin City places a heavy onus on planners to make the most effective possible use of remaining opportunities. In making the case for higher residential density we need to ensure that the facilities and infrastructure to sustain residents' needs are also in place. By increasing its urban density, Dublin can also enhance the viability and cost-effectiveness of public transport projects. This was a key element of the 20 Minute Neighbourhoods Project in Melbourne.⁸ Increased population and consequent demand for services and public transport creates communities that can sustain the facilities vital to their local economy. Creating a balance between sustainable levels of growth and demand on infrastructure is vital. However, some of Dublin's infrastructure had already reached maximum capacity prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. Planning for the 15 Minute City can help to ensure that this does not continue in the future, taking population projections into account and investing in infrastructure accordingly.



SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability is an increasingly important factor in decision-making and is particularly relevant in city planning. Goal eleven of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals focuses on creating Sustainable Cities and Communities. Creating a 15 Minute City in Dublin would significantly decrease levels of congestion and air pollution, increase green spaces throughout the city, and work to deliver a sustainable smart city through compact growth and brownfield regeneration.

HOUSING

The housing shortage and rental crisis in Dublin is well documented. This has led to significant problems throughout the city including high levels of homelessness, longer commuter times, and greater wage pressures to meet the costs of living in Dublin. Housing will still be a key issue after the Covid-19 crisis as Dublin struggles to meet the demands of an increasing population. Mixed-use development will be key to achieving sustainable communities and realising the 15 Minute City vision. This includes ensuring there are restaurants and shops as well as leisure and cultural facilities within such developments. Mixed housing is also important. The aim should be to ensure that an area caters for all, including families, renters, first time buyers and the elderly. Thus as people age in the community, there is a variety of housing options to suit their needs and stage in life. By having a mix of housing options, a mix of demographics in an area is cultivated. This ensures that local facilities are neither over nor under capacity due to demand. For example, a neighbourhood with a high level of elderly residents might have capacity issues with healthcare demands but have no need for a playground or local school. By ensuring an appropriate mix of housing, more sustainable communities are created.

BROWNFIELD REGENERATION

Dublin Chamber's ambition is for Dublin to be a smart, sustainable city with a high population density. Land is a finite resource and Dublin Chamber welcomed the emphasis in the National Planning Framework (NPF) on brownfield development and the renewal and development of existing cities and urban areas. The NPF aims to achieve a significant proportion of future urban development on infill/brownfield development sites. The NPF target is that 50% of all future population and jobs growth must take place within the existing 'footprint' of cities and their suburbs.⁹ Brownfield regeneration offers opportunities to address deficits in community infrastructure and facilities to help achieve the vision of the 15 Minute City.



DUBLIN POST COVID-19 CRISIS

Government restrictions during the Covid-19 crisis confined people to within 2km of their home and mandated no unnecessary journeys. People across the country became increasingly aware of their local facilities, and what they did and did not have access to within a 2km radius. In Paris, efforts to develop a 15 Minute City have been accelerated in response to the Covid-19 crisis as the city tries to manage a reduced-capacity public transport system and increased demand for local services in neighbourhoods.¹⁰ As Dublin moves towards a model of compact growth and increased population density, the city must achieve a balance between badly needed housing and the facilities that sustain and enhance communities.

Areas that have an excellent range of facilities, such as greenspace, public transport, or employment, should be prioritised for housing, while areas that lack facilities present opportunities for developers to bring these forward in tandem with new developments. Often when new developments are proposed local residents object on the grounds that the space in question could be used for the park, playground, school or community centre, for example, that the community requires. There are plenty of examples of this occurring throughout the city. Protests took place in Dublin 8 about the removal of a green space and allotments for the purpose of rapid build housing¹¹ and strong objections were made to the proposed demolition of the Markievicz Leisure Centre in the city centre to allow for MetroLink.¹² When removing cultural, social or recreational facilities to enable other developments, there should be an onus on city planners to ensure that, where practicable, residents of the affected area have alternative facilities, or that lands are zoned to specify for a replacement space. While this might not always be possible, by listening to and addressing community needs, local government can alleviate concerns about new developments. The overarching aim of the 15 Minute City should be to provide the vital infrastructure that enables people to meet their everyday needs within in their local community.

In order to achieve the 15 Minute City in a timely manner, the current automatic right of appeal of planning permissions must be reviewed. If the issues in question have been met and addressed by the local planning authority, additional rigour must be placed on the right to challenge a planning decision which can add 12 months or more to achieving a planning permission. The planning process needs to be brought to the fore for increased debate and discussion.

The Covid-19 crisis has also had a significant impact on the way we work, which in turn impacts on the way we commute and move around the city. Remote working and flexible working practices will have a significant impact on transport infrastructure and its capacity. Flexible work practices such as staggering of the start of the working day between 7am and 10am will enhance capacity at peak times. Companies could use a target number of 'work from home days' as part of their contribution towards a carbon footprint reduction, thereby freeing up capacity for those who are unable to work from home.



TOWN CENTRES – THE LOCAL ECONOMY

Town centres are a historic planning feature of Dublin. Many of Dublin's suburbs were originally small towns or villages that grew with the city until they became part of it. These hubs are vibrant parts of the community where people shop, work, meet, relax, and live. They range in size from local neighbourhood high streets to significant urban centres with universities and major shopping centres. The Dublin City Development Plan breaks them down into three distinct urban spaces: Key District Centres, District Centres, and Neighbourhood Centres, all of which provide services at different scales enabling people to live locally.¹³ These centers are critical to compact growth and the sustainable consolidation of the city and provide for the economic and community support of local neighbourhoods.

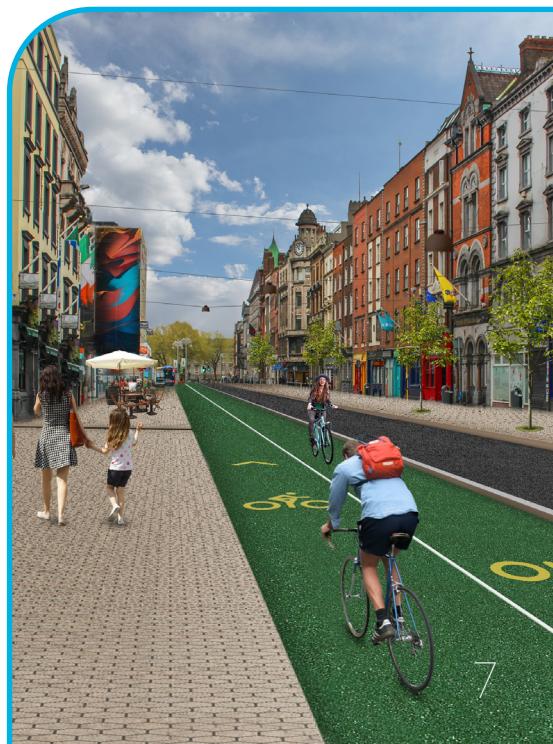
These centres or hubs act as the central focus of the community and service the needs of those living in the locality. They need to provide a wide range of services to ensure mixed-use development, including retail, commercial and residential, well linked with good public spaces, cycle paths and safe footpaths. They must also be well connected to other central hubs through a range of public transport options such as Dublin Bus, the Luas, DART or DublinBikes. Enhancing the walkability and connectedness of these town centres through the 15 Minute City vision will support local businesses and the development of well balanced and sustainable local economies. By developing communities that enable residents to meet their needs locally, both historic and new town centres, high streets and activity hubs will grow and be capable of supporting a range of different facilities.

Importantly these areas must be accessible in order to thrive. Whilst being cognisant of climatic conditions in Ireland, consideration should be given to opening 'cycle/local access only' roads from within the existing network to increase accessibility and attractiveness and to support local businesses and trade.

CREATING WALKABLE CITIES

Active transport plays a vital role in the vision of a 15 Minute City. Every journey starts first with a walk, whether that is the full journey or a short walk to access a bike, car, or public transport. Having a high-quality public realm and facilities that promote active transport is necessary to effect modal change. Pedestrian first policies and green infrastructure have been very successful in Barcelona's Superblock redesign and has significantly enhanced the walkability of the city.¹⁴

Pedestrian-first policy focuses on improving the walkability of a city and recognises the role that active transport plays in improving both public accessibility and the health of citizens. Safe walkways, crossroads, shade and shelter, permeability, and access are all key features of a walkable space.¹⁵ By investing in the public realm, focusing on access for all, lighting and safety, and safe distances between cars and pedestrians, Dublin can create communities that are walkable and support the vision of a 15 Minute City. Creating connected and walkable places in which people can live, work, and play also encourages social interaction, thereby building stronger communities.



PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Transport is a critical function of any city, and Dublin is seeing the effects of years of underinvestment in urban infrastructure with high levels of congestion. Dublin is frequently ranked as one of the world's most congested cities.¹⁶ In times of crisis, recession, and economic downturn the first projects to be pulled are often capital investments in infrastructure.

Good public transport is essential to realise the vision of a 15 Minute City. In creating 15 minute communities, Dublin must also link them together and into the wider city using public transport. Modal change will be achieved if people can access reliable and efficient public transport within 15 minutes of their home to commute to work or access the wider city. Dublin Chamber's Vision for Dublin 2050 recognises the importance of a world-class public transport system to a high quality of life in the city. The people of Dublin desire a city that is easy to move around, and where public transport is reliable, sustainable and efficient. Dublin Chamber believes that, alongside the vision of a 15 Minute City, a desired commute time of no more than 30 minutes should be achievable from anywhere within the M50 to the city centre by the year 2050. In Barcelona's Superblock design, parts of the city were divided up into blocks of streets, eliminating cars and non-essential vehicles from the roads in the centre of the block and rerouting them around the block.¹⁷ The internal streets were then repurposed for active transport, playgrounds, and enhanced public realm projects. One of the main issues in transforming a city like Dublin is to understand how people will be encouraged to slowly change to rely on public transport, while also ensuring that the city transport system still functions for all its users, including businesses, those making deliveries, and those who need to use private cars, maintenance and emergency vehicles, and buses and taxis. Our public transport system is at capacity at commuter times and with new social distancing restrictions in place on public transport, the capacity of buses and trains is reduced significantly. Investment is needed to enable modal change.

When making positive changes in one part of the city, the impact of these changes on those who live in neighbouring communities, those from further outside the city, and commuters must also be considered. For example, the rollout of an extensive cycling infrastructure in the city centre would leave reduced capacity for private vehicles. While this is not necessarily a negative impact, it must be considered how a commuter without proper public transport access can take advantage of the cycle network for the end of their journey. A solution could be park and ride facilities with access to public transport or bike sharing/parking facilities. A step change in approach is needed to ensure that residents of all ages and mobility levels, from all parts of the city and the Greater Dublin Area, can reach their destination as efficiently and sustainably as possible.

The focus of public transport has historically been on bringing people from the outer edges of the city into the city centre. In order to increase connectivity, and support the objectives of a 15 Minute City, Dublin may need to move to a grid-type public transport system that connects more areas to each other, rather than just connecting with the city centre. BusConnects represents the first in a series of essential improvements that are needed to deliver the world-class and sustainable public transport system that the city needs. It also represents a change in public transport delivery in Dublin by reducing the need for bus routes to go through the city centre, and creating orbital routes better linking communities together, along with the rollout of and significant investment in segregated cycle lanes. This new approach will reduce interchange trips in the city centre, which is under significant congestion pressure, and support the vision of having more local, multi-use areas that are self-sustaining in the suburbs.

Government and local authorities must do more to invest in and deliver these transport projects, particularly the Greater Dublin Area Cycle Network Plan, the DART Expansion Programme and DART Underground, MetroLink, BusConnects and the Luas expansion. There is an urgent need for investment and for the delivery of these projects to achieve better integration of the various public transport modes in Dublin.



Delivering the 15 Minute City

Dublin Chamber's vision is that within 15 minutes of active transport from their home, Dublin residents should:

- Have access to a key public transport hub to commute around the city to access work or higher-level services;
- Be connected to their local community through safe, accessible, and well-connected footpaths and cycle paths;
- Have access to an open greenspace and high quality public realm;
- Have facilities and services that promote local living and a local economy.

To deliver this vision across the city region, Dublin Chamber recommends:

- Consideration of the guiding principles of hyper-proximity and the 15 Minute City vision in the upcoming reviews of the four local authority Development Plans. Dublin City Council, Fingal County Council, South Dublin County Council, and Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council, must work together to improve the liveability of Dublin for all its residents;
- Establishment of a pilot programme, similar to those used in Melbourne, to be trialled in one community in each of four local authorities to establish learnings and identify implementation issues arising from such an ambitious plan;¹⁸
- Use of the Local Area Plan and Strategic Development Zone models to deliver the 15 Minute City vision and to encourage further development and regeneration in built parts of the city;
- A review to identify parts of Dublin that have a particular shortage of the facilities essential to creating a 15 Minute City, particularly greenspace and public transport;

- A review of the 'Sustainable Urban Housing: Design standards for new apartments' document to ensure that access to communal amenity space and pedestrian-first policy is placed at the core of design;
- Integration and consideration of community needs into planning conditions and zoning;
- Consideration of partnerships between industry and communities to develop mixed-use spaces;
- Pedestrian-first planning to enhance the permeability of our public spaces, creating a walkable city that supports the delivery of inclusive, vibrant and healthy communities;
- Significant capital investment in transport infrastructure, including the delivery of key projects for Dublin such as BusConnects, MetroLink, and Luas and DART expansion;
- Accelerating investment in and delivery of the Greater Dublin Area Cycle Network Plan;
- A focus on mixed-housing developments, increasing population density and embracing the principle of compact growth and brownfield regeneration.

Dublin Chamber will endeavour to work closely with and offer assistance and support to the four local authorities and other key stakeholders within Dublin to achieve the vision of a 15 Minute City.

Footnotes

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