

# ROTHAR ROADS

*Part of the 'Vision for Cycling in Rural Ireland'*



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## **Rothar Road concept**

*by Jo Sachs-Eldridge & Caitriona Corr*

In rural Ireland we have an enviable dense network of smaller roads (1) potentially safe and great for cycling. These are lightly trafficked, generally have good surfaces and already go virtually everywhere.

What we need is for key minor rural roads to be reclassified as \*'Rothar Roads' - roads where bicycles and pedestrians are expected and respected (2). What we need is for the people who use them to travel at a speed that would allow them to react to a cyclist around any corner.

The current default speed limit on these minor rural roads is 80 km/h. The current recommendations for these narrow country roads is the rural speed limit sign - the 'white circle with black diagonal stripes'. This sign means that drivers must use their judgement when using the road in question but must not exceed 80km/h in any event.

We propose that this RUS Sign 041A is reclassified nationally to indicate a new lower default speed limit.



## Why map Rothar Roads?

These roads are one of Ireland's best kept secrets - an active travel treasure whose time has hopefully come.

What we are proposing could help build awareness of the wealth of human and natural heritage that is accessible through much of our extensive and often little used minor road system as well as making it part of a national cycle network.

The mapping of these routes, together with gathering and telling the stories of our ancient roadways could greatly increase the reach of our cycle network.

Some of these routes are not even known by locals and many could become part of comprehensive cycle touring networks. The mapping of these routes will also enhance the connections between those travelling the routes now and the travellers of the past.

### Links to Golden Mile programme

In many ways the Rothar Roads could be viewed as building on the government supported Golden Mile (3) programme that has been in operation for the last 20 years.

The Golden Mile programme complements the Tidy Towns committees in that it encourages local rural communities to develop a sense of ownership of local, typically low traffic roads and celebrate their local history, flora and fauna.

The Rothar Roads delivery team could draw on the data and knowledge gathered by the Golden Mile programme particularly in relation to the celebration of the history and local environment.

**Smart technology** can bring this information to everyone's fingertips, through the use of downloadable (GPX) files for wayfinding or locally displayed QR codes to enhance story telling and perhaps even visual augmented reality for sites of significant interest.

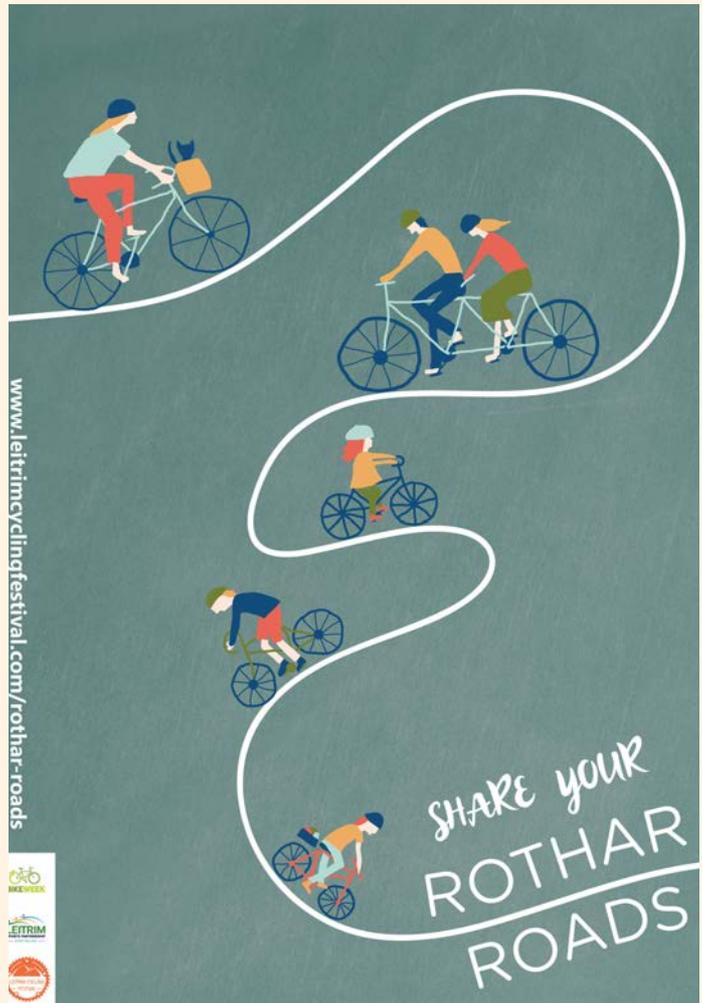
These roads have huge potential to change how we travel to and through rural Ireland.

## Proposed criteria

The list below can be used in the process of identifying Rothar Roads.

Note: these are suggested guidelines. All of these criteria DO NOT need to be present for a road to qualify as a Rothar Road

- single carriageway in width
- low volumes of motor traffic
- located in areas of low residential density
- few junctions with 'non-Rothar Roads'
- mainly local access roads i.e. absent of major trip generators and through traffic
- classification as an "L" road or disused road
- presence of sites of cultural or heritage significance



# Rothar Roads - rural roads where people cycling are 'Expected and Respected'

## Proposed markings

A single brand throughout the 32 counties should indicate that you have entered a Rothar Road.

The Rothar Roads would be marked by a sign incorporating the Rothar Road logo and an indication of the potential presence of people walking and cycling.

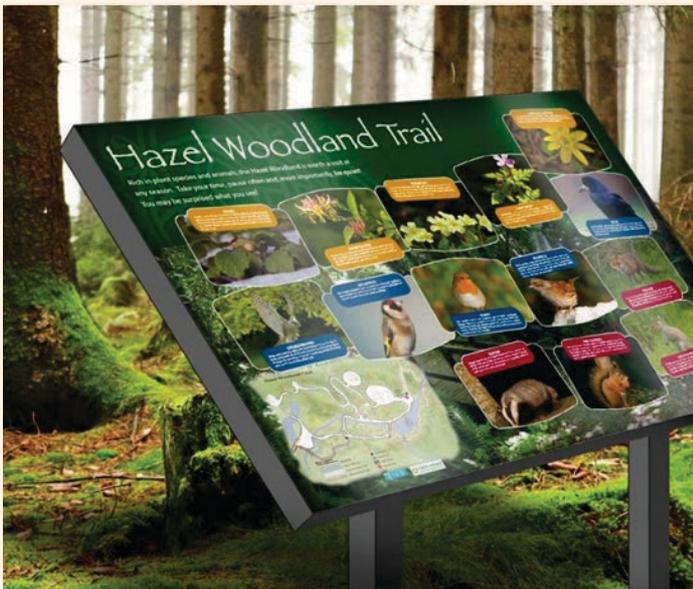
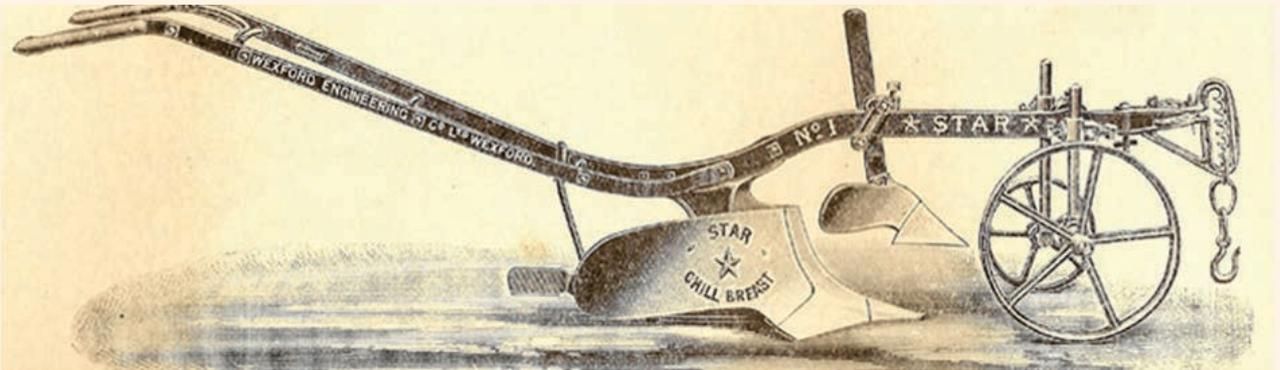
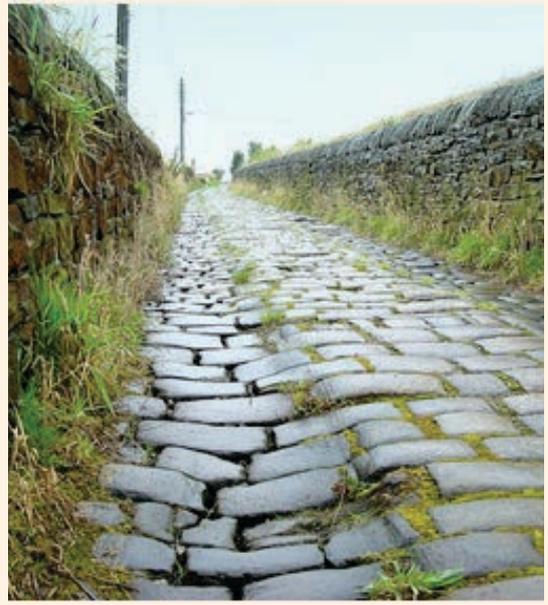
The Rothar Road brand should be recognisable throughout Ireland, and could be displayed on locally occurring material e.g. limestone, bog oak, corner stones etc.

The Rothar Roads could be further identifiable in a uniquely Irish way, by placing the brand on or alongside features that highlight the traditions, values and customs of the locality.

Features that could be used in this way include old water pumps, post boxes, sections of cobbled surfaces, water troughs, traditional seating or stones. Some features might celebrate the rural industries and could include traditional farm machinery.

Interpretative signs at access points or at notable features along the route could enhance the experience by sharing information on holy wells, mass paths, fairy forts, old churches or some of the other many features that dot the Irish landscape. The biodiversity of the routes could also be shared in this way, with interpretive signs, QR codes and audio pieces.





## Potential for change

These roads are public spaces. They are for all of us to travel safely.

Often these roads are too narrow for two-way motor traffic yet it works because everyone wants to make it work - everyone negotiates the space, they pull in, slow down, reverse if necessary.

For Rothar Roads to work, the same respect needs to be extended to people cycling.

We know it is possible to change a culture and change behaviours.

We have seen this demonstrated by the recent restrictions on our behaviour associated with Covid-19.

When there is a mandate, behaviour change is possible.

There is a mandate for change on our rural roads right now coupled with huge potential for change.

Many short journeys even in rural areas are less than 10km\* and the Covid-19 lockdowns have demonstrated the numbers of people willing to walk and cycle on our rural roads when there is reduced traffic.



## Process of change

We see the identifying, mapping and designation of these roads to involve a number of steps.

We would initially seek designation as Rothar Roads. Should we be successful in having roads designated as Rothar Roads, we would then seek for them to have a lower maximum speed limit and restricted movement of motor traffic.

However given the narrow carriageways and proliferation of blind bends on these roads we need more than a lower speed limit to make these safe public spaces for all users.

We have created suggested guidelines on how to share Rothar Roads regardless of the speed limit.

# "Rothar Roads" an active travel treasure whose time has come



## Proposed guidelines: how to share Rothar Roads

### Guidelines for people cycling

- **Awareness** – look behind often to check for vehicles
- **Blind bends** – check your position when approaching one and listen carefully for drivers that may not be able to see you
- **Courteousness** – acknowledge the presence of vehicles and if needed pull over as soon as it is convenient to allow them to safely overtake

### Guidelines for people driving

- **Expect**

People driving should assume there is someone cycling/walking on the other side of any **blind bend** and drive at a speed that would allow them to react safely - as per Article 7 of the Irish Traffic Regulations (4).

- **Respect**

Respect is key to safe interactions between road users on narrow rural roads.

As the Road Safety Authority (5) states:

**"We need to remind motorists to keep a safe distance when overtaking cyclists on urban and rural roads. They should give at least 1 metre clearance when overtaking a cyclist in speed zones that are 50 km/h or under, and at least 1.5 metres in speed zones over 50 km/h."**

**"If the road isn't wide enough to overtake, you don't overtake. It's as simple as that"**

**RSA Ireland**

On narrow roads this means people driving should **wait** until:

(i) there is enough space to safely overtake e.g. at a driveway/gateway or where the road widens

or

(ii) the person cycling has come to a complete stop on the side of the road in which case drivers should slow down to a maximum of 10kph to pass them safely.

Remember: waiting that extra minute or so will not make much difference to your journey.

In addition be mindful of the effort involved in pedaling **up hill** and pull in so that the person cycling does not need to restart on a hill.

**Rothar Roads - change how we travel**

## References

(1) Ireland has an average of 24 km of road per 1000 people. Compare that to the UK which has 6.33 km per 1000 people and the E.U average of 10.14. Source <https://www.nationmaster.com/country-info/stats/Transport/Highways/Total/Per-capita>

(2) Initial Rothar Road concept <https://leitrimcyclingfestival.com/2019/06/11/why-cycling-matters-and-why-greenways-are-not-the-only-answer/>

(3) Golden Mile (2000) <https://www.independent.ie/regionals/newrossstandard/news/golden-mile-to-extend-to-nationwide-status-27460008.html>

(4) <http://irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1997/si/182/made/en/print#article7>

Irish Traffic Regulations - General regulation on speed

"Article 7. A vehicle shall not be driven at a speed exceeding that which will enable its driver to bring it to a halt within the distance which the driver can see to be clear."

(5) <https://www.rsa.ie/road-safety/campaigns/cyclists>

