

Draft Westmeath
CYCLE
Network



1. Introduction

AECOM, as part of the NTA Cycle Design Office, have been requested by the NTA to develop comprehensive cycle plans for counties outside the Greater Dublin Area (GDA), including Westmeath County Council. CycleConnects is intended to form a comprehensive cycle network for all cycle user types across each county in Ireland and to develop on from the cycle network proposed for the counties in the GDA.

This will include existing cycle networks such as urban cycle routes, greenways and interurban routes. This will be supplemented by proposed cycle routes/links outlined in latest development and transport plans, and other networks required to maximise the connection of the network to communities. It should be noted that this network does not specify any infrastructure types on any route and is focused on highlighting the key links required to form a comprehensive cycle network connecting all major communities and destinations.

This note will briefly summarise the proposed cycle network for Westmeath. For details of methodology, national policy and the overall aspirations for the CycleConnects networks, please refer to the main report of which this technical note is an appendix of.

2. Westmeath Population and Settlements

Westmeath is located in the midlands of Ireland in the province of Leinster. It is bordered by the counties of Longford, Meath, Offaly, and Roscommon.

According to the 2016 Census, the county has a population of 88,770. This is a 3% increase since the 2011 Census. During this period Athlone and Mullingar. Table 2.1 below shows the population of towns within Westmeath with at least 1000 people. Athlone and Mullingar are the only towns with a population of over 5000 people.

Table 2.1: Population Settlements in Westmeath

City/Town	Population (2016)
Athlone	21,349
Mullingar	20,928
Moate	2,763
Kinnegad	2,745
Rochfortbridge	1,473
Kilucan- Rathwire	1,370
Kilbeggan	1,288
Castlepollard	1,163

3. Existing Westmeath Policies and Plans

Westmeath County Development Plan 2021 - 2027

The Westmeath County Development Plan (WCDP) outlines the objectives and plans of the County Council for Westmeath for the years of 2021-2027. It sets out the proposed policies and objectives of the Council for the development of the County over the Plan period. It aims to develop and improve, in a sustainable manner, the social, economic, environmental and cultural assets of the County.

The Strategic Vision for the Plan is as follows:

“To create and facilitate sustainable competitive growth throughout the County that supports the health and well-being of the people of Westmeath, providing an attractive destination, as a place in which to live, work, invest, do business and visit, offering high quality employment and educational opportunities within sustainable communities whilst safeguarding the environmental, cultural, heritage and tourism assets of the County”

This is supported by strategic aims relating to a number of themes. Within these aims, there is an emphasis on sustainability with some key strategic aims outlined below:

Sustainable Communities: To develop and support vibrant sustainable communities in Westmeath where people can live, work and enjoy access to a wide range of community, health and educational facilities and amenities, suitable for all ages and needs, in both urban and rural areas, thereby supporting a high quality of life for all to enjoy.

Tourism: To provide for the continued expansion of the tourism sector, with a focus on creating strong visitor destination towns and sufficient high-quality visitor services and the continued development and enhancement of visitor attractions and activities to provide memorable, immersive visitor experiences, capitalising on our natural and cultural heritage assets, whilst safeguarding these resources for future generations.

Urban Centres & Placemaking: To protect and enhance the unique identity and character of Westmeath’s towns and villages and improve quality of life and well-being through the application of Healthy Placemaking, underpinned by good urban design, with the creation of attractive public spaces that are vibrant, distinctive, safe and accessible and which promote and facilitate positive social interaction.

Settlements: To create a network of attractive, liveable towns and villages in the County with increased levels of population, employment activity and enhanced levels of amenity which support a high quality of life and well-being.

Transport, Infrastructure and Energy: To achieve a sustainable, integrated and low carbon transport system with excellent connectivity within and to Westmeath by enhancing existing strategic transportation infrastructure in the County. To provide, improve and extend water, wastewater, surface water and flood alleviation services throughout the County and to prioritise the provision of water services infrastructure, to achieve improved environmental protection and to protect public health. To provide for the development of indigenous energy resources, with an emphasis on renewable energy supplies.

Climate Action: To transition to a low carbon and climate resilient County, with an emphasis on reduction in energy demand and greenhouse gas emissions, through a combination of effective mitigation and adaptation responses to climate change.

The Development Plan notes that a number of walking and cycling routes have been developed in the County. These include the Royal Canal, Westmeath Way, Old Rail Trail, Fore

Trail and Slí na Sláinte. As part of Chapter 7 of the WCDP (Urban Centre and Placemaking) the following objectives are outlined which the development of the Westmeath CycleConnects network can assist in meeting: :

- **CPO 7.3:** Encourage transition towards sustainable and low carbon transport modes through the promotion of alternative modes of transport and ‘walkable communities’ whereby a range of facilities and services will be accessible within short walking or cycling distance.
- **CPO 7.6:** Promote the development of healthy and attractive places by ensuring:
 - Good urban design principles are integrated into the layout and design of new development.
 - Future development prioritises the need for people to be physically active in their daily lives and promote walking and cycling in the design of streets and public spaces.
 - New schools and workplaces are linked to walking and cycling networks.
 - The provision of open space considers different types of recreation and amenity uses with connectivity by way of safe, secure walking and cycling routes.
 - Developments are planned for on a multi-functional basis incorporating ecosystem services, climate change measures, Green Infrastructure and key landscape features in their design.

Transport

Chapter 10 of the WCDP outlines transport objectives for Westmeath. It is an aim to achieve a sustainable integrated and low carbon transport system with excellent connectivity. The Census indicates that 72.9% of commuters in Westmeath use a car. To encourage a modal shift to more sustainable modes of transport and a low carbon transport system the Council will seek to achieve a more balanced and sustainable pattern of movement within the County and will endeavour to facilitate a greater choice of transport modes.

There are a number of policy objectives that relate to cycling and the promotion of sustainable transport.

- **CPO 10.1:** Promote and deliver a sustainable, integrated and low carbon transport system with ease of movement throughout County Westmeath by enhancing the existing transport infrastructure in terms of road, bus, rail, cycling and pedestrian facilities.
- **CPO 10.2:** Support the development of a low carbon transport system by continuing to promote modal shift from private car use towards increased use of more sustainable forms of transport such as cycling, walking and public transport.
- **CPO 10.3:** Support the implementation of national and regional transport policies as they apply to Westmeath.
- **CPO 10.4:** Seek to ensure primacy for transport options that provide for unit reductions in carbon emissions. This can most effectively be done by promoting public transport, walking and cycling, and by actively seeking to reduce car use in circumstances where alternative options are available.

Integration of Land Use Planning and Transportation Policy

The following objectives relate to Land Use Planning in Westmeath of which the development of CycleConnects in Westmeath can assist in meeting these objectives:

- **CPO 10.5:** Encourage transition towards sustainable and low carbon transport modes, through the promotion of alternative modes of transport, and 'walkable communities' together with promotion of compact urban forms close to public transport corridors to encourage more sustainable patterns of movement.
- **CPO 10.7:** Integrate the County's transport and tourism strategies to promote increasingly sustainable travel patterns and improved linkages between Athlone, Mullingar and other towns and villages.
- **CPO 10.8:** Prepare in conjunction with Roscommon County Council and relevant agencies, an Area Based Transport Plan for Athlone to facilitate the growth of Athlone as a regional economic driver.
- **CPO 10.9:** Prepare an Area Based Transport Plan for Mullingar in conjunction with relevant agencies to support the growth of Mullingar as a Key Town.

Cycling

The Plan notes that cycling is one of the most sustainable modes of transport, along with walking. These are key components to movement and accessibility in urban and inter-urban areas. Encouraging and promoting these as sustainable modes of transport and decreasing the reliance on private cars will depend on providing well connected and integrated pedestrian and cycling infrastructure.

Pedestrian and cycle facilities will be most successful where they form a coherent network, place an emphasis on safety, directly serve the main areas where people wish to travel, provide priority over vehicular traffic at junctions, are free from obstructions and have adequate public lighting where considered appropriate.

The Council has invested in the development of a networks of greenways in the county including the Old Rail Trail Greenway, Royal Canal Greenway, Lough Owel Greenway and the Kilbeggan branch of the Grand Canal Greenway.

The follow cycling and greenway policy objectives are included in the Plan

- **CPO 10.11:** Promote walking and cycling as efficient, healthy and environmentally friendly modes of transport by securing the development of a network of direct, comfortable, convenient and safe cycle routes and footpaths, particularly in urban areas and in the vicinity of schools.
- **CPO 10.12:** Improve pedestrian and cycle connectivity to stations and other public transport interchanges and request Iarnrod Eireann to provide accommodation for bicycles on inter-city and commuter trains.
- **CPO 10.13:** Design pedestrian and cycling infrastructure in accordance with the principles, approaches and standards set out in the National Cycle Manual, the Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets and international best practice.
- **CPO 10.14:** Encourage and seek sustainable transport movement at the earliest design stage of development proposals, to ensure accessibility by all modes of transport and all sections of society and promote the provision of parking space for bicycles in development schemes.

- **CPO 10.15:** Improve the streetscape environment for pedestrians, cyclists, and people with special mobility needs by providing facilities to enhance safety and convenience, including separation for pedestrian infrastructure from vehicular traffic.
- **CPO 10.16:** Provide better sign posting and public lighting where considered appropriate and ensure that the upgrading of roads will not impact negatively on the safety and perceived safety of cyclists.
- **CPO 10.17:** Work with the National Trails Office, Coillte, the Department of Planning, Housing and Local Government, the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, and other relevant stakeholders, to improve on the existing level of infrastructure and facilities for walking and cycling.

Greenways are allocated specific objectives which are outlined below:

- **CPO 10.18:** Continue to develop an integrated and connected network of sustainable greenways and green routes within Westmeath and to adjoining counties, in accordance with the “Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways”.
- **CPO 10.19:** Progress the expansion of the National Cycle Network westwards from Athlone to the Roscommon County boundary.
- **CPO 10.20:** Support the development of a greenway extending northwards of Athlone, along Lough Ree to the Longford County border, in accordance with a habitat management plan for Lough Ree.
- **CPO 10.21:** Support the development of a greenway linking the Hill of Uisneach to the Old Rail Trail, subject to the protection of the archaeological significance of Uisneach.
- **CPO 10.22:** Support and promote the development of additional greenway links from the various towns/villages to the Old Rail Trail and Royal Canal Cycleways, subject to Environment and Habitats Requirements.
- **CPO 10.23:** Maximise both pedestrian and cycle connectivity to the network of existing greenways within the County.
- **CPO 10.24:** Protect established Greenways within the County against inappropriate new vehicular accesses and increased traffic movements.
- **CPO 10.25:** Carry out a permeability and connectivity audit of existing pedestrian and cycle facilities in all towns and villages.

Tourism

In Westmeath there are 89km of greenways developed. The County is traversed by The Royal Canal Greenway and Old Rail Trail Greenway, both of which interconnect in Mullingar. These will form part of EuroVelo 2.

Within the Plan’s tourism policy there are a number of objectives relating to the promotion of cycling as a tourist resource.

- **CPO 6.35:** Continue to promote the Hill of Uisneach as a sustainable visitor offering and enhanced access to the site, including the creation of walking and cycling connections with the Old Rail Trail (Galway to Dublin) Greenway.
- **CPO 6.41:** Support sustainable initiatives and projects that enable visitors to enjoy and connect with our natural heritage, including walking or cycling trails, viewing

points, facilities for bird-watching and angling, tours and events, subject to the requirements of the Habitats Directive.

- **CPO 6.49:** Support the provision of walking and cycling links between lakes and nearby villages, towns and visitor attractions, provided such developments do not negatively impact on sensitive environments.
- **CPO 6.57:** Support the provision of visitor services within existing towns and villages, such as cafes, accommodation etc, by providing linkages with greenways, trails etc where appropriate.
- **CPO 6.58:** Continue to support the development of the Galway to Dublin Cycleway, completing the connection to the west of the River Shannon in Athlone and working with neighbouring counties and national bodies to complete and promote the entire route. The development of the cycleway shall comply with the provisions of the Habitats Directive and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport's "Dublin to Galway Greenway Plan 2017" and associated measures relating to environmental management and sustainable development.
- **CPO 6.60:** Continue to maintain and further enhance the County's walking and cycling trails, striving to achieve National Trails accreditation and other standards as set by Sport Ireland, in partnership with local communities and landowners.
- **CPO 6.64:** Support the provision of a greenway link from Mullingar to the Lough Ennell shoreline and to Belvedere House, Gardens and Park, subject the protection of environmentally sensitive areas and the requirements of the Habitats Directive.
- **CPO 6.66:** Support the delivery of a River Shannon walking and / or trail, from Athlone to Clonmacnoise in collaboration with local communities and Offaly County Council and from Athlone to the Royal Canal at Ballymahon in collaboration with Longford County Council.

Future Local Transport Plans

Westmeath County Council are required to develop Local Transport Plans as part of their Development Plan process. While the cycle network outlined in this plan have been created to reflect current transport arrangements, it may be subject to change based on the more detailed analysis and recommendations developed as part of the LTP process

4. Proposed Westmeath Network

Introduction

Following a review of existing data, policies and conducting workshops with Westmeath County Council to review the draft cycle network, the following summarises the methodology and cycle network development for Westmeath. The full details of how all the CycleConnects networks were developed are available in the NTA Consultation website.

Prior to developing the Westmeath County Network, a GIS model was established for the county. This model mapped all existing information made available for the county, supplied by various bodies including the NTA, CSO, Department for Transport, Transport Infrastructure Ireland, Department for Education and Westmeath County Council. The data collected includes;

- Locations of major employment and job density
- Existing cycle infrastructure and routes
- Existing bus stops, rail lines and other public transport
- Location of schools and education centres
- Shopping centres, hospitals and other destinations that may attract cyclists

The collation of this data has aided the selection of cycle routes in Westmeath that are available to as many people as possible. It has also allowed for the servicing of key destinations within County Westmeath.

Methodology

Following the collation of existing data, the cycle network plan for Westmeath was developed. This is based on a three-tier system outlined in Figure 4.1 below:

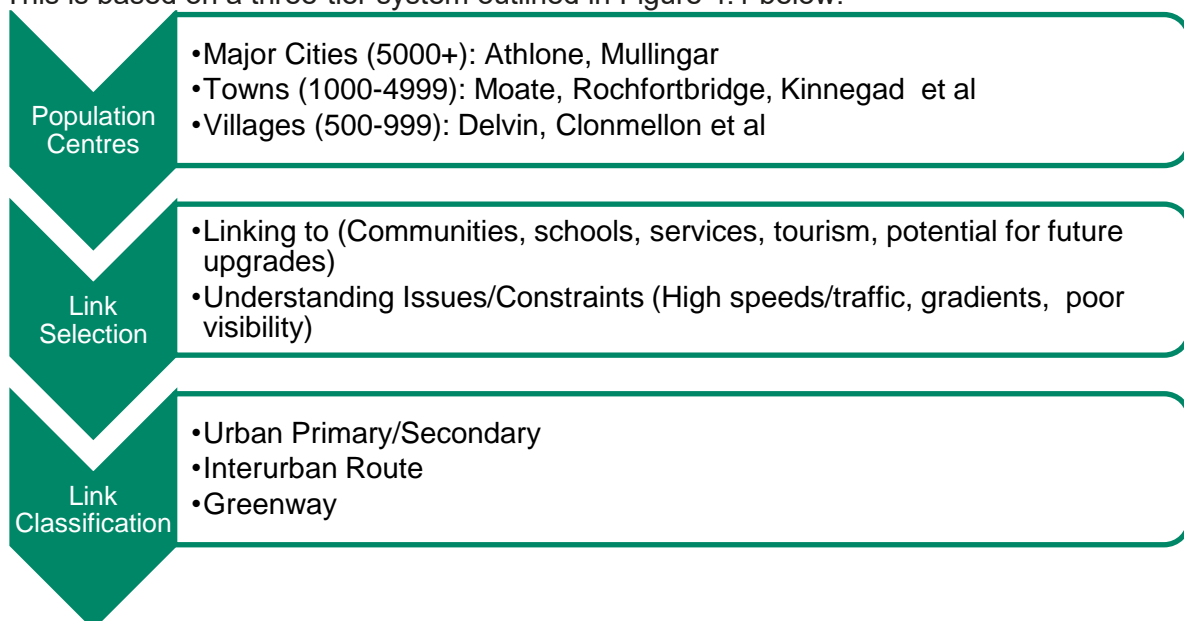


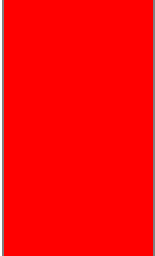
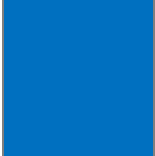
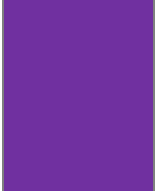

Figure 4.1: Interurban route selection methodology

Population Centres: The Westmeath CycleConnects Network will look to link towns and villages together as part of a fully connected network. Thus, all towns were mapped with the larger towns such as Westmeath Town noted. By mapping all towns and villages, a profile emerged of where most people in Westmeath were situated and where potential cycle routes should be provided. CSO Settlement data was also referenced to inform where people were located within the county.

Route Selection: Once the population areas were established, potential routes were then considered along strategic corridors. This allowed multiple communities to be linked along individual interurban routes both within the county and into adjacent counties. Where possible, these routes were also located within TII National Cycle Network Corridors. This avoided too many parallel cycle routes being developed and for an integrated cycle network to be developed within the county.

Cycle Route Classification: The route classification for each route has been summarised below in Table 4.1. It should be noted that this link classification does not reflect the existing condition of roads for cycling but seeks to highlight their potential for various route classifications. For example, while there are many interurban routes that currently have no cycle infrastructure, the aspiration will be to target these over the next decade for appropriate upgrades.

Table 4.1: CycleConnects Route Classification

City/Town	Colour	Description
Urban Primary		High quality cycle route that can accommodate a high volume of cyclists typical in most urban areas. These will look to feature on major desire lines in town centres and form distinctive radial and orbital cycle routes in the major towns and cities. These primary routes should also form a cohesive and connected network within the urban area that will be simple for cyclists to navigate
Urban Secondary		Second tier cycle route in major urban areas to link with urban primary network to add greater route density and options on the network. These will typically be passing through residential areas, school and employment areas
Interurban		On-road cycle route to link all key settlements and destinations outside urban areas both within the county and into adjacent counties. These may have potential to provide off-road/segregated routes parallel to the existing road in later years.
Greenway		Off-road cycle route with no adjacent traffic for the majority of its route. These are typically located on old rail trails and blueways (routes along rivers, lakes and canals) with cyclists sharing the route with pedestrians.

Proposed Westmeath County Network

Following the methodology outlined above, the Westmeath CycleConnects Network has been outlined in a series of maps shown in Table below. These are also available to view as an individual PDF when selecting county Westmeath in the NTA consultation page.

Table 4.2: Westmeath CycleConnects Network - List of Maps

Cycle Map List
Westmeath Cycle Network
Athlone Urban Cycle Network
Mullingar Urban Cycle Network

The Westmeath CycleConnects Network primarily extends the network beyond the key settlement areas of Athlone and Mullingar. In summary, it will consist of an urban cycle network for Athlone and Mullingar, with interurban connectors between the towns of Moate, Kinnegad, Kilbeggan and Castlepollard etc. These then extend into adjoining counties forming a comprehensive and connecting cycle network nationally.

Interurban Link Development

The primary towns with a population of over 1000 were connected via interurban links. Where possible, towns with a lower population that were located along the route were included in the routes. Connections were also made to larger cross border towns to create a more comprehensive cycle network. The selection of interurban routes was also influenced by the location of schools/sports grounds on various parallel routes.

As part of the development of the interurban network, the Google travel planning tool was utilised to assist in selecting the most appropriate route between the various settlements. This included avoiding routes/routes with excessive gradients. In some cases, selecting a sufficiently flat route was not available. Thus, the most available flattest route was selected. However, some routes were modified slightly to connect with adjacent towns/villages or key destinations such as schools, sports pitches or tourist attractions.

The TII National Cycle Network Corridors have also been used to overlap corridors. These include corridors and routes into counties Meath, Longford, Roscommon, and Offaly.

Greenway Route Integration

Old Rail Trail Greenway

Developed along a disused railway, the Old Rail Trail Greenway is a 43km purpose built off-road shared pedestrian and cycle trail connecting Athlone to Mullingar. This route will serve as the primary and most direct link between these two towns within the Westmeath Cycle Network. This greenway serves a number of smaller settlements along this route such as Moate and Castletown.

Royal Canal greenway

The Royal Canal Greenway is a 130km route linking Longford Town to Dublin City along the royal canal. 43km of this route passes through the centre of Westmeath via Mullingar. Within the Westmeath Cycle Network, the route connects several smaller towns such as Ballycarrigy and Killucan with the larger town Mullingar. This route also acts as an urban connector route within Mullingar, serving location such as schools, sports grounds, Mullingar Business Park, and Mullingar Train Station.

The section between Maynooth in County Kildare and the Shannon in County Longford has been completed and was officially opened on the 24th of March 2021. The full Greenway, when completed will offer a cycling link running from the river Liffey in Dublin, through Counties Dublin, Kildare, Meath, Westmeath and Longford to Cloondara on the River Shannon.

Two spur lines, one from Mullingar to Loch Owel, and the other running from south of Killashee to the town of Longford, are also part of the completed Royal Canal Greenway for Westmeath.

Athlone to Galway Greenway

This Athlone to Galway Greenway is a proposed 300km off road green route corridor from Athlone, through Cornafulla, close to Shannonbridge, and will link to Ballinasloe and onwards then to Clonfert, Eyrecourt, Portumna, Woodford, Gort, Kinvara, Clarinbridge, Oranmore and Galway. This route will form a large section of the Galway to Dublin Cycleway which will help facilitate the EuroVelo international long-distance cycle trails across Europe, linking Galway to Moscow. Public consultations are now closed for this proposed route.

Westmeath Urban Network Development: Athlone

With a population of over 5000, an urban cycle network has been developed for the town of Athlone. This includes existing greenways discussed previously, along with proposed primary and secondary routes. The urban network is comprised of primary orbital routes in the centre of the town along streets such as Southern Station Road, Garden Vale, Church Street, Northgate Street, Grace Park Road, Bower View and Sean Costello Street. This is then supplemented by primary radial routes along streets such as Abbey Road, Assumption Road, Ballymahon Road, Lower Road, and Castlemaine Street. Additional primary routes are also proposed on the western and eastern extents of the town along streets such as R196 Woodville Avenue, Magazine Road, R362 Old Galway Road, R 446 Galway Road and R914 Roscommon Road.

Locations that are served by these primary routes will include but not limited to:

- Athlone Town Centre
- Athlone Train Station
- Athlone Institute of Technology
- Athlone Hospital
- St. Mary's National School
- Athlone Training Centre & Garrycastle GAA Club
- Coláiste Chiaráin
- Cornamaddy National School
- Wansboro Field
- Athlone Mixed National School

A number of secondary routes are also proposed along streets such as Assumption Road, Beech Park, Old Galway Road and Springwell Road. These are intended to act as interlinks to the orbital and radial routes in addition to serving locations that have not located on orbital or radial routes previously mentioned.

Locations that are served by these secondary routes will include but not limited to:

- St. Peter's National School
- St. Paul's National School

- Dean Kelly National School
- Athlone Town Stadium
- Athlone Regional Sports Centre
- Scoil na gCeithre Máistri

Westmeath Urban Network Development: Mullingar

With a population of over 5000, an urban cycle network has been developed for the town of Mullingar. The network includes the existing Royal Canal Greenway discussed previously and urban primary and secondary routes through the town. In the centre of the town, a primary orbital route is proposed along streets such as Pearse Street, Austin Friars Street, Millmount Road, The Beehives, Lynn Road, and Mount Street. This will be supplemented by primary radial routes linking other parts of the town with the town centre. These additional routes will feature along streets such as Auburn Road, Newlands, Delvin Road, Dublin Road, Ballinderry Heights, Newbrook Road, Patrick Street, Ashe Road and Harbour Road. An additional outer orbital route is also proposed on the western side of the town along the R394.

Locations that are served by these primary routes will include but not limited to

- Mullingar Town Centre
- Mullingar Train Station
- Midland Regional Hospital
- Loreto College Mullingar
- Mullingar Park
- Mullingar Community College
- Gaelscoil An Choillín
- All Saints National School
- Gaelscoil an Mhuillinn
- Mullingar Educate Together National School
- St. Finians College
- St. Lomans Hospital

A number of secondary routes are also proposed along streets such as Friar Mills Road, Mary Street, Ardmore Road and Dominick Place. These are intended to act as interlinks to the orbital and radial routes in addition to serving locations that have not located on orbital or radial routes previously mentioned.

5. Next Steps

AECOM, as part of the NTA Cycle Design Office, have been requested by the NTA to develop comprehensive cycle routes for County Westmeath and the towns of Athlone and Mullingar.

The network design for Westmeath has now been made available for public consultation. This will allow for members of the public to submit their feedback. Individual maps are available to view on the National Transport Authority website and are available in the links below:

Figure 5.1: Westmeath CycleConnects Network - List of Maps

Cycle Map List
Westmeath Cycle Network
Athlone Urban Cycle Network
Mullingar Urban Cycle Network

Following the public consultation, submissions will be reviewed, and the network maps updated as required.