

FUTURE OF LIMERICK'S SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT IS NOW ON TRACK

The Limerick Greenway has been the largest tourism project ever undertaken by Limerick City and County Council. The 40km route stretches through the county's western heartlands along the old railway line, creating a vital piece of infrastructure for sustainable living, transport and tourism in the region.

The view from The Limerick Greenway at Barnagh Tunnel, Newcastle West.

With a €10 million investment, the Limerick Greenway has already proven its worth as a major draw for domestic tourism, with people holidaying at home this summer. And in just a few short months, the success of Limerick's largest tourism project to date can already be seen with new businesses and jobs in the towns and village along the 40km route, and by the countless walkers and cyclists who travel along the amenity each day.

Carving a path through the countryside of West Limerick, the Greenway links the towns of Rathkeale, Newcastle West and Abbeyfeale with other stops along the way. Offering an authentic experience of rural Ireland to cyclists, runners and walkers of all ages and abilities, the Greenway showcases the unique draws of each town, the deep local heritage, and all the sights and sounds that make rural Limerick unique.

A huge effort went in to getting Limerick Greenway ready for the 2021 summer season as the pandemic caused significant delays to construction. The constant changes to restrictions meant the goalposts kept shifting, but the team behind the project pushed ahead.

ACCESSIBLE OUTDOOR AMENITIES

Limerick City and County Council Chief Executive, Dr Pat Daly, said: "Trojan work has gone into making the opening of the Greenway possible this summer despite the pandemic.

"Although construction ceased earlier this year, causing significant delays to timelines, our ambition for the Greenway never faltered."

Opening the Greenway in such uncertain times has meant not only developing the physical Greenway, but also delivering an amenity that is of the moment. The pandemic has shown the value of accessible, outdoor amenities, and the ongoing shift towards sustainable transport has called out the need to expand Ireland's walking and cycling routes.

With 40km of resurfaced pathways, the Greenway is closed off from main roads, keeping users safe from traffic. This is not only a tourism and leisure draw, but also a vital piece of commuting infrastructure, providing a safe route between several West Limerick towns as part of the county's rapidly expanding cycle infrastructure.

Limerick City and County Council is investing in active transport infrastructure, with the Treaty City having become a leader for sustainable transport since 2012 when

LIMERICK GREENWAY



Lisa Ruttle and family walking The Limerick Greenway at the Barnagh Tunnel.



Delam Carter and family from Caherdavin in Limerick enjoying their cycle along The Limerick Greenway at Ferguson's Viaduct.

it received funding for a package of measures for smarter travel.

KEY TRANSPORT PROJECTS

Since then, further investments to support work commuters, students and visitors include cycle lanes and walkways, a shared cycle scheme, and secure bike storage options.

Work is currently underway to give pedestrians priority in the city centre, with wider footpaths and cycle lanes, as well as new seating areas and on-street trading to

create a more open public realm.

In addition to transforming existing infrastructure, key transport projects such as the Coonagh-Knockalisheen Distributor Road and the planned South Canal Bridge have been designed with active transport in mind from the start including cycle and walking paths.

Projects like the Limerick Greenway are extending that approach to sustainable transport outside the city, and the council is now also collaborating with Waterways Ireland, the ESB and Clare County Council

on the new Limerick to Scariff Greenway.

The Greenway has also met people's unique needs for their 2021 holidays, by providing an accessible, safe and family-friendly outdoor amenity. Through a targeted communications campaign, Limerick City and County Council established the Greenway as an authentic experience of rural Ireland, with vibrant county towns and a wealth of historical and natural treasures along the way. The opening came just after Limerick City was named a Wild Atlantic Way Gateway City.



Gerry and Mary Liston walking The Limerick Greenway, pictured at Barnagh Station House.

THE GREENWAY HIGHLIGHTS

Each town on the Limerick Greenway has something to offer, and no stage of the journey is the same as the last. Here are some of the highlights that visitors will see along the way:

Rathkeale to Newcastle West: The first stop on the Greenway adventure is Rathkeale. This town is steeped in local history and surrounded by natural beauty. Visitors will see the ruins of Rathkeale Abbey, which dates to the early 13 century and two fascinating churches, St Mary's, and Holy Trinity, showing the range of architecture on offer in the region.

Following the old Limerick to Kerry railway line, the Greenway itself starts at the former Rathkeale Station, now home to the Irish Palatine Heritage Centre, which explores the lives and influence of a group

LIMERICK GREENWAY

of German refugees who made Limerick their home.

This first stage of the Greenway runs through lush rural farmland towards the village of Ardagh, a vibrant rural community. The landscape around Ardagh is dotted with ancient ringforts, and the Greenway runs close to the spot where the iconic Ardagh Chalice was discovered in 1868. The chalice is held in pride of place at the National Museum of Ireland in Dublin, and a replica can be seen at the Hunt Museum in Limerick City.

Newcastle West to Barnagh: After Ardagh, comes Newcastle West, Limerick's largest town. As well as offering boutique shops, local pubs and restaurants for rest, relaxation and retail therapy, the town is also a renowned spot for fishing, golf, and horse riding. Newcastle West is also the perfect place to break the journey and stay the night in one of its many B&Bs and hotels.

The town is steeped in local history too, with Desmond Castle, dating back to the 13th century and the Castle Demesne Park, a 100-acre garden once used by the Earls of Desmond and now open for the public to enjoy. The ascent to Barnagh begins at Newcastle West, offering amazing views of the landscape of Limerick and the surrounding areas.

The Greenway takes in Ferguson's Viaduct, a cast-iron rail bridge that has stood over Garryduff since 1880, followed by Barnagh Tunnel, another Victorian Era railway innovation. At 115-metres long, the tunnel once allowed trains to traverse the steep peak of Barnagh.

Closed for decades, it has recently been restored by Limerick City and County Council along with Barnagh Station House; both can now be seen up close by the public. At the peak of Barnagh is a viewing point where visitors can see out over the whole of Limerick and beyond.

Barnagh to Abbeyfeale: After Barnagh, the next stop is Templeglantine, a welcoming village with a shop and hotel. The village is home to the Holy Trinity Church, built in 1829 and one of the oldest churches still in use in the region. Just outside Templeglantine is Tullig Wood, a tranquil forest rich in native flora and fauna.



The view from The Limerick Greenway at Ferguson's Viaduct, Newcastle West.

The natural surroundings of Tullig Wood soon give way to bustling Abbeyfeale, one of the most culturally unique towns in the region. As part of the Sliabh Luachra tradition, Abbeyfeale is a hub for Irish music and dance, and is home to the Glórach Theatre and the annual Fleadh by the Feale festival.

As the final town on the Limerick Greenway, it's a great place to spend the night and take in a trad session at one of the many local pubs.

PROMOTING LIMERICK TOURISM

Located just east of this major tourist route, Limerick Greenway is an attractive option for road trippers who want to take a break from the car and explore rural Ireland by foot, bike or wheelchair.

It also coincided with the council's hugely acclaimed 'Double Your Summer' campaign to promote tourism across the county, with the Greenway being seamlessly adopted into the wealth of tourist attractions Limerick has to offer.

This campaign led to a bumper tourist season for Limerick, allowing local businesses to expand, create jobs and establish a new base to build upon in the years ahead. According to Gordon Daly, Director of Service at Limerick City and

County Council, those businesses and jobs will be key to supporting a sustainable rural economy in Limerick.

He described the Greenway as a "strategically important piece of economic infrastructure for the region" and a "milestone" for Limerick.

"The past 16 months have shown the value of outdoor amenities, and Limerick Greenway aligns with the Government's strategy to invest in infrastructure that support healthy lifestyles and sustainable travel options.

"Running all the way from Rathkeale to Abbeyfeale, this fully accessible route will allow people from all over the country to safely explore and enjoy County Limerick," he said, adding that the Greenway is perfect for day-trippers or short breaks and can be experienced in one visit or explored in shorter stages.

"Whatever option they choose along this sustainable transport option, visitors will be assured of a genuine welcome from the towns along the way, with delicious food, fun activities and quality accommodation to boot."

For further information visit www.limerickgreenway.ie or follow @limerickgreenway on Instagram.