

Chapter 8 Transport, Movement & Accessibility

8.0 Aim

To promote the use of sustainable and integrated modes of transport and support the development of a safer, more efficient transport system for Birr, with improvements to the road network, public transport, cycleways and pedestrian ways.

8.1 Context

8.1.1 National Development Plan and Transport 21

The National Development Plan and Transport 21 provide funding for infrastructural improvement works. In the case of County Offaly, and the Birr Area in particular, significant improvements have been made to **national, secondary and regional roads**.

8.1.2 Midlands Regional Planning Guidelines 2004

The Midlands Regional Planning Guidelines (2004) highlight the requirement to reinforce the linkages between the Midlands, Border, Mid-West and West Regions by strengthening the N55/N62 (Longford/Athlone/Birr). The guidelines have classified this initiative as a critical enabling investment priority.

8.1.3 Offaly County Development Plan 2009-2015

The County Development Plan 2009-2015 focuses on the strategic policies and objectives for transport planning in County Offaly. Issues include proposed routes for public roads and public transport. Also included are development standards for new development gaining access onto public roads.

8.1.4 Birr LUTS 2007

Birr Land-Use and Transportation Study 2007 (Birr LUTS 2007) was adopted on 12th November 2007. The Birr Town and Environs Development Plan 2004-2010 listed the completion of this LUTS as one of its strategic objectives. The principal aims of this study are to make proposals to accommodate traffic growth in the town over the next 20 years. The recommendations arising from the LUTS include:

- Determine the optimum route for the Birr by-pass.
 - Provision of new distributor routes and the upgrading specific existing routes within the town and environs.
 - New pedestrian routes outlined.
 - Improvements in traffic calming and management, parking, public transport, disabled, pedestrian and cycle facilities recommended.
- (It is proposed to implement the LUTS over a 20 year period.)

This document also surveyed land-use and planning issues in relation to transport activity. An important principle outlined in the study is to consolidate the existing built environment and encourage in-depth and infill residential development at higher densities along with improved accessibility within the town.

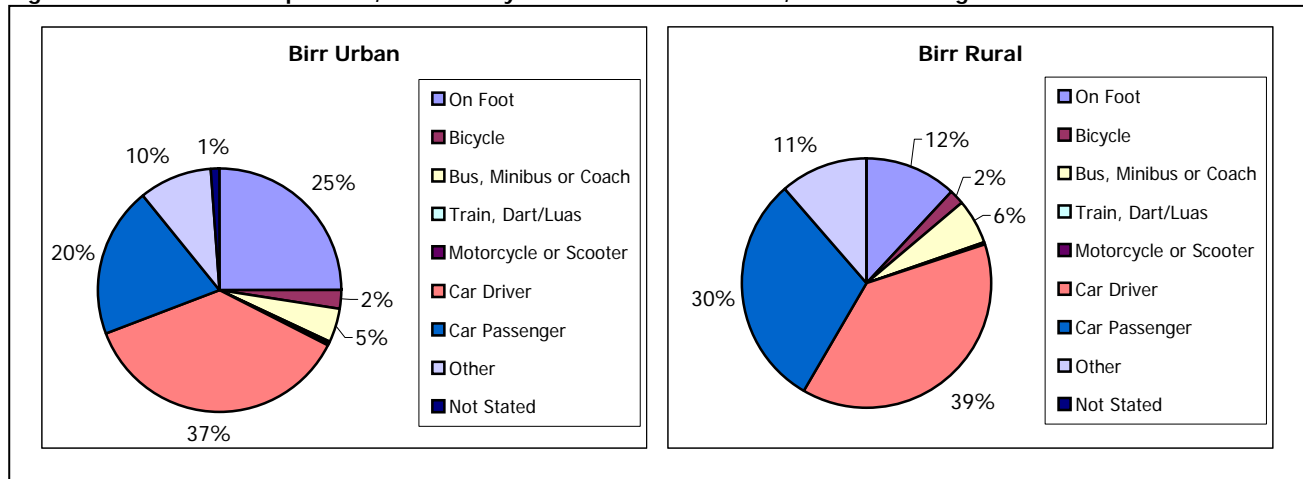
8.1.5 Birr Transport, Movement and Accessibility Issues

Figure 8.1 illustrates the different modes of transport used and the level of usage. Birr Urban covers the majority of the Town Development Plan area. Birr Rural covers the environs of the Town Development Plan area and also the Birr rural hinterland. The diagram highlights a high level of usage of the private car. Approximately 10% of the population walk to work, school or college. A small minority of the population travel to work, school or college by bicycle, bus, minibus and/or coach.

In order to achieve the aims and goals as set out in Chapter 1, transport, movement and accessibility are key areas of importance. The following is a list of the key issues in Birr:

- Vehicular traffic congestion in the town centre arising from through traffic (According to Birr LUTS, almost 83% of traffic originates from outside Birr and almost 60% of traffic passing through Birr does not stop here).
- Vehicular traffic congestion at pinch-points through-out the town and environs, arising as a result of through traffic and local traffic.
- Lack of public road network into proposed development lands and therefore, a lack of permeability in new developments – many new developments tend to follow public roads in a linear fashion.
- Lack of provision of pedestrian friendly areas/paths and cycle networks due to capacity of public space given to private automobiles in terms of road space and car parking spaces, specifically in town centre.

Figure 8.1: % Share of Population, 5+ Years by Means of Travel to Work, School or College in 2006



Source: Central Statistics Office, Census Report 2006

It is the aim of the Councils to resolve these issues through policies and objectives contained within this chapter. Due to the nature of the overall aims and goals (within Chapter 1), planning for issues relating to transport, movement and accessibility are closely tied to achieving the policies and objectives held within other chapters of this plan, such as:

- Chapters 3, 5 and 12 – More efficient and people friendly places to enjoy during times of work, visiting and socialising and which highlight Birr's historic built environment in a positive manner for everyone to see.
- Chapter 4 - Creation of pedestrian friendly areas in the town centre.
- Chapter 6 - New development with greater permeability into existing urban fabric.
- Chapter 10 - Modal shift to more sustainable modes of travel.

8.1.5.1 Long Distance Trips and Short Distance Trips

The means used to address the above issues are analysed by separating trip patterns in Birr (as highlighted in Figure 8.1) into the following headings:

- 1) Long distance trips and
- 2) Short distance trips.

Long distance trips focuses on movement from Birr to other rural areas, towns and cities in the country. The main mode of transport for long distance trips out bound and inbound to Birr is by private car. Public transport at this level is limited and provided mainly by private and public bus operators.

Short distance trips relate to trips within the town and environs of Birr only. Due to the relatively short distances involved within these trips and the fact that Birr town has a historical built form that could facilitate different modes of transport, efforts should be made to encourage walking and cycling as an alternative to the private car for short distance trips.

8.2 Strategy

8.2.2 Long Distance Trips

8.2.2.1 National and Regional Routes

Birr's central location, in the middle of Ireland makes it accessible to all cities, ports and airports. Birr is conveniently located between the N7 (Dublin-Limerick) national primary route, which is proposed to be fully upgraded to motorway status in the near future, and the M6 (Dublin-Galway). It is also located on the N52 (Dundalk-Nenagh) and N62 (Athlone-Roscrea) national secondary routes. The N52 and the N62 provide Birr with direct links to Tullamore and Athlone respectively, both part of the Midlands Gateway designated in the National Spatial Strategy 2002-2020. Shannon Airport is the nearest international airport located approximately 80km to the south-west of Birr.

8.2.2.2 Through Traffic – Bypass

One of the most significant issues facing Birr is the traffic congestion caused as a result of a backlog of through traffic arising from the Tullamore, Roscrea and Nenagh/Portumna public roads. The major pinch point of this congestion is in Emmet Square.

The Birr LUTS recommended an eastern route for the bypass. The bypass will alleviate through traffic coming from the Tullamore, Roscrea and Nenagh/Portumna public roads, whilst also strengthening economic activity and attracting inward investment to the area.

The proposed network of distributor roads within the town and environs are designed to compliment the proposed bypass route by alleviating traffic and congestion.

8.2.2.3 Other Modes of Transport

Public and private bus services connect the locality to important economic and social urban centres of Dublin, Galway, Tullamore, Athlone and Roscrea. The Birr LUTS indicated that the increase in destinations and frequencies would benefit the people of Birr.

The West Offaly Partnership has operated the "Rural Transport Initiative" for West Offaly since 2003, with the addition of areas of South Offaly in 2004. Routes include Birr to Moate Business College, Kinnitty to Birr, Rath/Kilcormac to Birr and Banagher to Tullamore via Birr. Furthermore, Birr Airfield is located to the adjacent south of Crinkle village on the Roscrea road and provides leisure activities for people with aviation interests.

8.2.2.4 Parking Bays for Public Transport

As part of the traffic management plan and creation of pedestrian friendly areas for Emmet Square, the Councils will incorporate parking bays for public transport (buses and taxis) within the square. The square is the central nodal point of Birr and the provision of parking bays for buses and taxis within and/or around this location makes public transport highly accessible for all users.

8.2.2.5 Technical Standards for New Developments

The Councils will restrict new development requiring direct access to national routes which are outside designated speed limits in Birr environs. Routes subject to these policies are the N52 and N62 national secondary roads (refer to policy BTEP08-13). Also, developments that generate significant traffic movement as a result of the use proposed are subject to a Traffic Impact Assessment. The Councils may also require the provision of Road Safety Audits in the case of substantial road works (refer to policy BTEP 08-14)

8.2.3 Short Distance Trips

8.2.3.1 Aim

In terms of short distance trips within Birr town and environs, where appropriate and feasible, it will be the aim of this plan to encourage and facilitate the shift from private car to different modes of transport, such as walking, cycling and environmentally friendly methods of travel.

8.2.3.2 Land-Use Development and Urban Permeability

Much of the traffic within Birr, and between Birr and Crinkle, is short distance trips (local traffic), travelling to and from points within the environs. The following are means of relieving traffic congestion for short distance trips:

- 1) Locate land uses such as residential areas, schools, work places and leisure spaces closer together and therefore:
 - Reduce the need to travel
 - Create more sustainable short distance travelling i.e. walking and cycling.
- 2) Congestion created by local traffic can be greatly relieved by increasing “permeability” or the number of possible routes that can be taken. Links between these land-uses need to be safe and direct for people to walk and cycle to their destination. They also must be designed in such a way so as to discourage “short cutting” by non-local vehicular traffic. This plan is important to identifying possible locations for new vehicular, pedestrian, cycling and traffic links (refer to Chapter 5: Amenities & Open Space and Chapter 6: Local Area Strategies).

The Birr LUTS 2007 proposed a number of distributor routes with the aim of improving the road network and permeability in Birr town and environs (refer to Map 8.1) and therefore creating a better distribution of traffic throughout the settlement. Such routes are key in opening up development lands for future development. Under Birr LUTS 2007, several distributor routes are proposed. They are proposed to be completed on an on-going basis as part of the development of the different sectors of the town (refer to Chapter 6: Local Area Strategies). The highly important and strategic routes are as follows (refer to BTEO 08-01 for a full list of routes):

- Route 1A: Banagher Road to Tullamore Road.
- Route 1B: Tullamore Road to Burkes Hill.
- Route 1C: Burkes Hill to Syngefield.
- R1D - Syngefield Road to Junction of N52/N62 on Railway Road.
- Route 7: Roscrea road to Riverstown road.

(Route 1A, 1B, 1C and 1D are also referred to as the “Town Distributor Road” in this plan).

Any relief from traffic pressures which can be given to the town centre or any other parts of Birr in the future will present opportunities for local environmental improvements by the Councils or other bodies i.e. better and wider footpaths and cycle paths and landscaping, etc. The Birr Public Realm Plan will inform any improvements to the built environment as a result of the construction of the above distributor roads. Where possible and feasible, new developments will be required to “overlook” the above distributor roads. The aim being to create a sense of place and ownership of newly designed public realm/spaces in Birr. These distributor roads will be an integral part of the implementation of this plan and while it is likely to be mostly funded by private development, in the interest of planning gain and the strategic development of the town, the complexity of these projects is such that the Councils will have to be involved in guiding and steering each route to completion.

The provision of the “Town Distributor Road” is critical to the future development of Birr, especially during the time period before Birr’s bypass is built. It is envisaged that this route will be constructed to the east side of the town centre from the Tullamore road to the junction of the N52 and N62 at Drumbawn. This will distribute traffic, as well as **opening the backland** elements of Birr for **future development**.

In supplementing the above proposed distributor routes, new private and public developments will also create opportunities for greater permeability, especially in the case of greenfield sites being developed for housing. There may be locations where new transport links can facilitate greater all round accessibility within local areas.

8.2.3.3 Cycle Networks and Cycle Parking

The Councils recognise the opportunity to market Birr as a *“green cycle/transport town”*. The provision of a cycle network in the town and environs will give:

- Residents - the opportunity for healthier lifestyles.
- Investors - an attractive place to do businesses.
- Tourists - an exciting way to see the built heritage of the town and environs.

It is the Councils' policy, in line with Government policy, to support and promote the use of bicycles in Birr. It will be an objective to commission a *"Cycle Network and Parking Study"* for the town and environs. It is currently the Councils' policy to ensure that new public roads provide for the provision of footpaths and cycle paths and new developments make provision for bicycle parking (refer to Chapter 14, Built Form and Urban Development Standards). The *"Cycle Network and Parking Study"* will add an overall strategic framework to this policy. Within the overall framework of this study, the following members of the community will need to be closely involved in order to achieve a quality network of routes:

- Schools
- Businesses and tourist operators
- Residents

As recognised within Birr LUTS 2007, there is a over reliance on the use of private cars for transporting students short distances to their schools at peak times, which contributes to traffic congestion in Birr. It shall be a key aim of the *"Cycle Network and Parking Study"* to concentrate on this issue. Another important element of the study will be the provision of a different means of travel for visitors to see what is on offer in Birr and Crinkle. Also to note, it will be important that adequate parking facilities are made available at public places and private places as part of new developments.

8.2.3.4 Pedestrian Network, Pedestrian Friendly Areas and Vehicular Parking

This provision of pedestrian networks and pedestrian friendly areas, along with cycle paths and related infrastructure as mentioned in the above section, are dealt with throughout this plan in the following relevant chapters and are of high importance to achieving the policies and objectives within each chapter:

- Chapter 4 - Town Centre, Retail and Renewal (Birr Public Realm Plan)
- Chapter 5 - Amenities & Open Space – (*Paragraph 5.2.8: Pedestrian Linkages/Permeability and Accessibility*)
- Chapter 6 - Local Area Strategies

Chapter 5: Amenities & Open Space especially concentrates on improving pedestrian linkages, permeability and accessibility.

There can be a conflict of interest between providing vehicular parking spaces in the town centre and making the town centre more pedestrian friendly. It is recognised that the short stay parking control system in the town centre has helped to relieve a certain amount of congestion, although further traffic management mitigation measures are required. The Councils will continue to progressively reduce the level of car parking in the town centre, streets, squares and public spaces in an efficient manner without negatively impacting on the balance of vibrancy and vitality of the town centre. The Councils will be informed by Birr LUTS 2007 and Birr Public Realm Plan in relation to same.

With the continued rise in ownership of the private car and the Councils' policy to progressively reduce the level of car parking in the town centre, squares and public spaces, there will be need for additional parking facilities on the fringe of the town centre and in close walking proximity to the town centre. In addition to on street parking and parking at Market Square/Emmet Square, designated car parking areas are also located at:

- Marian Hall
- Convent Grounds

Further, private car parking is available at:

- Catholic Church Grounds
- Eight Commercial premises - including the new car parks of Tesco, Supervalu, Lidl and local schools during out of school hours.

The Birr LUTS and Birr Public Realm Plan also consider other locations on the fringe of the town centre that are designed to alleviate traffic congestion, including Birr Mart, Rectory field and other locations on private lands. The efficient use of the above car parking facilities will strongly benefit plans for the town centre (refer to Chapters 4 and 6). It is important that appropriate positioned signage indicating the location of car parking facilities is also provided.

8.2.3.5 Vehicular Signage

It is recognised that there is an over proliferation of vehicular and advertisement signage in Birr. While recognising the importance of vehicular signage, the Councils will adopt a strict policy to location and quantity of same.

8.2.3.6 Disabled Facilities

The Birr LUTS 2007 highlighted that disabled facilities in the town were generally adequate, although certain areas still require attention. The Councils will continue to provide for appropriate resurfacing and maintenance of public spaces and appropriate designing of disabled parking. As part of any proposals for the renewal of the public realm, disabled facilities will be given high priority.

8.3 Policy

Strategic/ Transport and Land-Use

BTEP 08-01 It is the Councils' policy to **locate land-uses**, such as residential, schools, work and leisure areas **closer together**, without negatively impacting on the residential/public amenity of Birr. The purpose of this policy is to:

- Reduce the need to travel.
- Create more sustainable short distance travelling i.e. walking and cycling.

This policy will be achieved by adopting the **sequential approach** to development in a proper and plan-led manner. That is, a positive presumption in favour of developing from the centre most point outwards (in relation to Birr town centre and Crinkle village) and a presumption against the development of isolated or outlying sites (refer to Chapter 3: Development Strategy and Chapter 6: Local Area Strategies).

BTEP 08-02 It is the Councils' policy to connect public roads to a **"network"** to promote **permeability** and coherence of the urban fabric. The "network" of roads will open land for development in a coherent plan-led manner.

BTEP 08-03 It is the Councils' policy to secure the implementation of Birr LUTS 2007. Key areas of this study include:

- Examine the need for, and feasibility of, improved traffic management measures, especially at trouble spots.
- Identify and reserve lands for a by-pass for the town, and to protect this bypass corridor from future development.
- Implement road proposals and traffic management measures which will contribute to reducing the volume of extraneous through traffic in the town centre and relieve pressures on the historic and intimate character of the town centre street network.
- Implement proposed distributor roads which will improve the road network and permeability in Birr town and environs
- Provision of the "Town Distributor Road" which is critical to the future development of Birr, especially during the time period before Birr bypass is built. This route will distribute traffic, as well as opening the backland elements of Birr for future development.

BTEP 08-04 It is the Councils' policy that the Birr Public Realm Plan will inform any improvements to the built environment as a result of the implementation of proposed distributor roads and/or traffic calming measures in the town centre. Where possible and feasible, new developments will be required to "overlook" the proposed distributor roads. The aim is to create a sense of place and ownership of newly designed and existing, public realm/spaces in Birr.

BTEP 08-05 It is the Councils' policy to market Birr as a "*green cycle/transport town*". Having regard to short distance trips within Birr town and environs, it is the Councils' policy to encourage and facilitate the **shift** from private car to **different modes of transport**, such as walking, cycling and environmentally friendly methods of travel. The integration of environmentally friendly/smart methods for short-distance travel, along with the car-user, will make Birr a safer, pleasant and efficient town in which to live, work, do business and visit.

BTEP 08-06 It is the Councils' policy to continue the programme of improvement of footpaths/cycle paths throughout the town and to further develop/extend the network of interlinked pedestrian/cycle routes throughout the town and environs (also refer to Chapter 5: Amenities & Open Space).

BTEP 08-07 It is the Councils' policy to improve the links with local and regional towns and to co-operate with the National Roads Authority in making Birr more accessible by road.

BTEP 08-08 It is Councils' policy to assist and support the further improvement of public transport services for Birr and in particular facilitate in the provision and promotion of privately run transportation systems in rural areas, such as the Rural Transport Programme.

BTEP 08-09 It is Councils' policy to support and facilitate the operation of existing bus services and to facilitate the provision of improved facilities for bus users, including increased destinations and frequencies.

Parking

BTEP 08-10 It is the Councils' policy to continue to monitor off-street parking in the town centre and to take appropriate action regarding under-supply or incorrect use and to reserve lands for car parking in the Rectory field with pedestrian access to Emmett St and Johns Mall. The Councils will have regard to the Birr Public Realm Plan in relation to this issue.

BTEP 08-11 It is the Councils' policy to continue to secure an adequate parking provision for the town and accompanying enforcement to ensure that best use is made of this provision. The Councils will have regard to the Birr Public Realm Plan in relation to this issue.

BTEP 08-12 It is the Councils' policy to ensure there is adequate provision, in an appropriate location within or on the periphery of the town centre, for safe and convenient coach-set down and coach parking. Also, it is the Councils' policy to make provisions for appropriate facilities/set down areas for coaches and bus shelters at bus stops, where feasible. The Councils will have regard to the Birr Public Realm Plan in relation to this issue.

Technical Development Standards

BTEP 08-13 It is the Councils' policy that permissible development requiring direct access (i.e. other than via a public road) to the N52 and N62 national secondary roads, outside designated speed limits in Birr environs, will be restricted to the residential requirements of established landowners (e.g. farmers) and their sons/daughters only, where the requirement to live on their land is essential for the management of the land. It must be clearly demonstrated in the case of permissible development that a "need" for the dwelling is established and that no reasonable alternative site with access off a minor road is available.

BTEP 08-14 It is the Councils' policy to ensure that developments that generate significant traffic movement as a result of the use proposed are subject to a Traffic and Transport Assessment (T.T.A) especially where national routes are involved and a Traffic Impact Assessment (T.I.A). The Councils may also require the provision of Road Safety Audits in the case of substantial road works.

BTEP 08-15 As part of Birr's image as a *"green cycle/transport town"*, it is the Councils' policy, where feasible, to require the provision of cycleways and walkways as part of new development.

BTEP 08-16 It is the Councils' policy to apply car-parking requirement standards to all new developments in the town in accordance with Chapter 14: Built Form and Urban Development Standards. It is policy to consider the relaxation of same where a proposed development warrants this relaxation. Where a development is facilitated by public car parking accommodation which has been or will be provided, it is the Councils' policy to ensure a contribution towards the cost of providing such parking accommodation shall be required, as provided by the **Planning and Development Acts 2000-2009**.

8.4 Objectives¹

Strategic/ Transport and Land-Use

BTEO 08-01 To progressively implement the recommendations of the Birr Land Use and Transportation Study, namely:

- Facilitate the provision of the bypass and reserve the designated corridor to allow for implementation.

Secure the construction of the following Internal Distributor Roads as follows:

- Route 1 (Town Distributor Road) which for the purposes of staged development is divided into the following sections:
 - R1A – Banagher Road to Tullamore Road.
 - R1B - Tullamore Road to Burkes Hill Road.
 - R1C – Burke's Hill Road to Syngefield Road.
 - R1D - Syngefield Road to Junction of N52/N62 on Railway Road.
 - R1E – Railway Road to Drumbane Road.
- Route 2 - Burkes Hill Road to Sandymount Lane at the community hospital.
- Route 4 – Improve and complete Woodlane as a distributor road linking Syngefield Road to Hillside.
- Route 7 – Facilitate the provision of the link road from Roscrea Road to Riverstown Road and reserve land for this purpose.
- Route 5 & 6 – Upgrade these routes and associated junctions to improve carrying capacity and safety.
- This network of roads will open land for development and will be constructed as part of the on-going development of the area. It will facilitate ease of access for all parts of the area including possible future bus routes.

(Please note these route numbers cross reference directly with the Birr LUTS 2007)

BTEO 08-02 To implement the following:

- Reserve access points as indicated in Chapter 6: Local Area Strategies.
- To preserve carriage arches as means of access to the rear of properties.
- To provide access from the Nursing Care Unit at Sandymount Lane to Burkes Hill.

These will open up backlands for development and increase permeability within the road network.

BTEO 08-03 To commission a *"Cycle Network and Parking Study"* for the town and environs. The *"Cycle Network and Parking Study"* will add an overall strategic framework to this policy. Within this framework, the following members of the community will need to be closely involved in order to achieve a quality network of routes:

- Schools
- Businesses and tourist operators
- Residents

¹ The order of listing of objectives is not intended to indicate priorities. Subject to the availability of resources, it is the Councils' aim to monitor and accomplish the objectives listed in this section within the period of the plan.

BTEO 08-04 To facilitate the provision of transport infrastructure in the Birr area in line with national policy as outlined in Transport 21 and the National Development Plan 2007-2013 and also in line with the Councils' own programme of works.

Road Improvements/Maintenance Works

BTEO 08-05 As outlined in Table 8.1, to facilitate the development of the national secondary road network in the Birr area through the continued upgrading and improvement of the national secondary roads i.e. the N62 and the N52 (improve the links from Birr to the N6 (South of Athlone) and to the N7 (South of Roscrea)) and to reserve land for future relief roads adjacent to Birr town. The undertaking of any works will be subject to the availability of finance and resources.

Table 8.1

OBJECTIVE REFERENCE	NATIONAL SECONDARY ROUTES	SCHEME DESCRIPTION
BTEO 08-06	N62	Upgrade, widen and reconstruction of N62 from Kennedy's Cross to the County boundary at Ballynahown.
BTEO 08-07	N62	Construction of Birr Relief Road and construction of Birr By-pass and Distributor Road Network (Birr LUTS).
BTEO 08-08	N62	Birr-Riverstown \ local widening and re-surfacing.

BTEO 08-09 To upgrade and improve, where necessary, the regional roads in the Birr area as outlined in Table 8.2. The Councils will have regard to national and regional transport plans and the Councils programme of works. The undertaking of any works will be subject to the availability of finance and resources.

Table 8.2

OBJECTIVE REFERENCE	REGIONAL ROUTES	SCHEME DESCRIPTION
BTEO 08-10	R439	Birr to Banagher Road.
BTEO 08-11	R440	Birr to Kinnitty Road.

BTEO 08-12 To facilitate the continued improvement and upgrading of all roads under the national roads programme and/or the Councils road programme.

BTEO 08-13 To cooperate with the NRA in relation to the location of development adjacent to interchanges in order to assess the impacts and implications on the operation and performance of the relevant interchanges.

BTEO 08-14 To implement the recommendations of Birr LUTS having regard to road works/improvements, including traffic management, traffic calming and safety improvement measures at:

- Emmett Square, Market Square, Main Street.
- Seffin.
- Drumbane Moorpark Junction.
- Whiteford Cross.
- Continue programme of resurfacing the town's streets using appropriate surface finish.

BTEO 08-15 To investigate the need for further works to be undertaken at Whiteford Cross, notwithstanding the recommendations of the Birr LUTS, to create a safer junction for traffic, pedestrian and cyclist movement.

Parking

BTEO 08-16 To promote greater efficiency in traffic circulation and to provide additional car parking accommodation in appropriate locations on the periphery of the town centre.

BTEO 08-17 To investigate the feasibility of providing a coach parking facility adjacent to the Castle.

BTEO 08-18 To introduce short stay parking control system in Emmett Square and Market Square to achieve greater efficiency in the use of public car parks.

BTEO 08-19 To introduce traffic management and traffic calming measures in town centre area in order to upgrade environmental quality and safeguard heritage environment.

BTEO 08-20 To reserve site in part of Rectory Lands to the rear of St. Johns Hall for future town centre car-park.