

Lee to Sea: Joined-up thinking could create a 45km greenway through Cork City and County

Campaigners proposing a green route through Cork cite international examples which they say offer compelling evidence that the whole community would benefit from the development



The Lee to Sea campaign advocates joining up routes — from this one in Inniscarra through Ballincollig, Cork City, the Marina, and on the path of old railway lines to Passage, Carrigaline, and Crosshaven — to create the 45km route for cyclists and walkers.

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Campaigners have challenged politicians and policymakers to think big and fast-track the development of a 45km cycling and walking superhighway in Cork.

They said the ambitious Lee to Sea project — a continuous greenway from Inniscarra Dam some 15km west of Cork City, through the heart of the city and onwards via Mahon and Passage West to Cork Harbour — would be a life-enhancing, carbon-reducing and money-saving asset if the political will was there to build it.

“The Lee to Sea ticks all the boxes of national and regional priorities strategies,” campaign spokesman Dean Venables said. “It’s sustainable, it supports public health and physical activity, it provides a safe school run, it boosts tourism, it’s accessible to all ages and abilities, and it raises our economic competitiveness. It’s a compelling project.

“That’s why we’re calling for the Lee to Sea to be a top priority in both city and county development plans. Much of the route already exists — it’s just a matter of joining the dots.”

Lee to Sea has been a long-held ambition and sections are already in place, with some being upgraded and more in planning.

However, campaigners said it’s being delivered in a piecemeal fashion.

International inspiration

They said we should look to international examples, such as The 606 in Chicago and the High Line in New York, both





Cycle and walking paths such as the one linking Carrigaline and Crosshaven are much loved by local communities. If joined up, campaigners say, they could collectively provide both an invaluable commute route and a biodiversity superhighway. Picture: Denis Minihane

While Eamon Ryan, the transport minister, announced a €50,000 grant this year to progress a route study, campaigners said the cycling routes in the Regional Park in Ballincollig, the Lee Fields, the Marina, along the Blackrock-Passage line and the Crosshaven-Carrigaline path could become “so much more” if they were linked.

Writing in today’s *Irish Examiner*, Dr Venables sets out the arguments for the project and urges the public to ramp up pressure on politicians and policy-makers to deliver it.

He also said calculations using a WHO model show the project, even with low usage, would have an annual economic benefit from improved public health of €21m, so could pay for itself in a year.

- Read the analysis piece by Lee to Sea campaign spokesman Dean Venables [online at this link](#) and in the *Irish Examiner* print and e-paper editions on Monday, April 5.

High Hopes: How New York and Chicago inspired a global movement





Communities living in southwest Manhattan rallied together to reimagine the disused railway line and ultimately created the High Line.

THEY were once abandoned railway lines, riddled with weeds and branded eyesores that should be demolished.

However, thanks to the vision and determination of people who lived alongside them, backed later by political leaders, sections of disused industrial railways in New York and in Chicago have been transformed into stunning greenways and public spaces.

They have both become a global inspiration for cities on how to transform unused industrial zones into dynamic public spaces.

The High Line in New York was developed in the 1920s as an elevated freight railway line in response to increased safety concerns about the operation of street-level freight trains.



New York's High Line is now a treasured local resource and tourist destination created on a hitherto unloved railway spur line on the west side of Manhattan.

However, between the 1960s and 1980s, train use dwindled as trucking became a more popular mode of freight transport. A freight traffic on the line had stopped by the 1980s, followed soon after by calls for the structure to be demolished.



NEWS SPORT LIFESTYLE OPINION

The community living in southwest Manhattan had other ideas, and rallied together to reimagine the structure. Where some saw a weed-riddled eyesore, they saw a thriving garden of wild plants that could be turned to good use. Inspired by the beauty of this hidden landscape, Joshua David and Robert Hammond founded Friends of the High Line, a non-profit group that campaigned for its preservation and reuse as a public space.

In 2003, they organised an ideas competition for its reuse and, the following year, with support from then mayor Michael Bloomberg, special zoning was proposed to facilitate the use of the High Line as a public park. When the city council passed the rezoning, the front page of *The New York Times* read: "Frog of a Railroad to Become Prince of a Park".

In public ownership

Ownership of the structure was donated to the City of New York, and work started on its transformation in April 2006. The first section of the High Line opened to the public from Gansevoort to 20th Streets in 2009.

Today, it is a stunning 2.3km greenway, which features more than 500 species of plants and trees, public spaces and gardens, and runs through south western Manhattan.

It is also home to a diverse suite of public programmes, community and teen engagement projects, and world-class artwork and performances, free and open to all.

Chicago's Bloomingdale trail

It was a similar story in Chicago, where the city's abandoned Bloomingdale elevated rail line became the centrepiece of a 4.4km biking and pedestrian trail, which opened in June 2015 on the city's westside.

Officially called the Bloomingdale trail, The 606 gets its name from the common numbers in Chicago's westside zip codes.

It was included in the development plans for years, but it took a group of determined residents to drive the vision before the park and trail system became one of the signature projects of former mayor Rahm Emanuel and his push to create 800 new parks, recreation areas and green spaces throughout Chicago.

Runners, walkers, cyclists — and shoppers

The trail features a string of elevated parks, connecting Logan Square, Humboldt Park, Wicker Park and Bucktown, and provides pedestrians and cyclists with easy access to some of the city's best restaurants, bars, music venues and more.

It includes a chain of street-level parks, scenic look-out points, an observatory, and art installations.

It is a favourite spot for walkers, runners, cyclists and families. Bikes are available to rent on the route as part of the city's bike-share programme.

The '606 effect'

It has also led to what's known as the "606 effect", where the trail has led to a staggering boost for nearby house prices.

The Institute for Housing Studies at DePaul University found that the price of single-family homes within a half-mile of the trail surged by 48.2% in the three years after work started on the project.

[Read More](#)[➔ The Lee to Sea Greenway: a better way to travel and to live](#)