

‘Green Shoots v Green Transport’ workshop held at NUI Galway

By Richard Manton

Significant progress has been made in recent years to improve sustainability in transport. Ireland’s economic crisis, while causing unprecedented hardship, offered an opportunity to challenge ideas of car-based mobility and to increase 'green transport' provision. However, the recent 'green shoots' of economic recovery have seen an increase in road traffic volumes, car sales, shipping volumes, and public transport fares.

On 27th August, against this backdrop, NUI Galway researchers held a workshop asking: ‘Green shoots v. green transport: are economic growth and sustainable transport compatible?’ Academics, students, practitioners and policy-makers from across the Irish transport field were joined by four expert speakers: Dr. Georgina Santos (Cardiff University), Dr. Robin Hickman (University College London), Prof. Aisling Reynolds-Feighan (UCD) and Cllr. Ciarán Cuffe (DIT/Dublin City Council).

The discussion covered links between transport, environment and economy at a variety of scales: from international concerns, such as oil consumption, GHG emissions and COP21, to local Galway issues including the proposed N6 road project. A key theme emerged as the need to reorientate transport planning by changing appraisal methods from an emphasis on time savings and economic growth to a new focus on environmental impact and human wellbeing.

Urbanisation was also raised by a number of speakers, this trend offering some solutions for sustainable transport provision as long as there is sufficient planning for capacity and to promote liveable neighbourhoods and cities. Finally, a number of concrete policy recommendations were offered for sustainable job creation, including subsidies for clean technologies and investment in retrofitting for energy efficiency and alternative transport.

The workshop was co-organised by researchers from civil engineering, economics and sociology as part of the Irish Transport Research Network annual conference. The events were kindly supported by the EPA-ESAI Grassroots Workshop Support Scheme, Ryan Institute and Whitaker Institute, NUI Galway, ITS Ireland and IMDO.

Photo caption: Prof. Aisling Reynolds-Feighan (UCD) discusses economic growth, megacities and high-speed rail at the ‘Green Shoots v Green Transport’ workshop