

Longford County Council

Longford County

Active Travel Strategy

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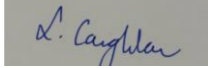
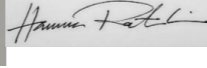
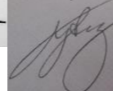
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1. Introduction

Active Travel is ‘travelling with a purpose, using your own energy’. (Department of Transport). For example, walking, wheeling and cycling as well as using a non-motorised scooter to make journeys to work school or the shops are all considered forms of Active Travel. Active Travel is, therefore, an affordable, sustainable and healthy alternative to mobility.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

Early 2022, the Minister for Transport Eamon Ryan announced an acceleration for active travel in Ireland. The announcement is supported by funds allocated to Active Travel across Ireland’s local authorities, through the National Transport Authority’s (NTA) Active Travel Investment Programme.

Arup has been commissioned by Longford County Council (LCC) to complete an Active Travel Strategy for County Longford in order to avail of NTA’s Investment Programme. The aim of this Strategy is to establish a strategic framework for the future development of active travel in the study area to support LCCs ambition to “establish Longford as a pioneering county for active travel” by “making active travel an attractive and realistic choice for short journeys”. (LCC).

The overall strategy presents an analysis of the current active travel context in County Longford. The opportunities and constraints associated with the overall land use, population and transport context are identified and are used to inform potential solutions to improve active travel usage in the county. The study area for this strategy includes all land within County Longford as shown in Figure 1-1.

1.2 Background

County Longford (‘the County’) is the second smallest county in Ireland. Located in the midlands of Ireland, County Longford is bordered by County Westmeath, Cavan, Leitrim and Roscommon.

Longford town is the principal town of the County with established employment areas and substantial administrative and retail functions. It is located centrally in the County as seen in Figure 1-1. Other major towns and villages in the County are Edgeworthstown, Ballymahon, Lanesborough, Drumlish, Granard and Newtown Forbes.

Given its Midlands location, Longford is strategically positioned as a portal to the Northern and Western Region, with the county well served by transport links in the form of the Sligo-Dublin railway line, and several strategic national primary and secondary routes traverse the County from east to west and north to south. These include the N4 and N5, both of which are components of the Trans-European Transport Networks (TEN-T) Comprehensive Network.



Figure 1-1 County Longford

1.3 Benefits of Active Travel

Benefits of active travel are manifold ranging from health and the environment to economy (see



Figure 1-2). Active travel has a range of benefits associated with it, including reducing congestion in urban areas through providing an alternative to the private car. However, there are a wide range of multi-disciplinary benefits also associated with active travel, and/or increasing active travel’s modal share, such as:

- **Environmental:** reduced levels of carbon emissions and greenhouse gases; improved air quality levels in towns and cities including lower levels of harmful particulates; reduced noise levels due to lower vehicle volumes / speeds; reduced environmental impacts due to reduced levels of energy and materials used in car manufacturing.
- **Health:** improved levels of fitness and public health generally from increased activity. Improved air quality in towns and cities as a result of traffic management measures and reduced car volumes.
- **Safety:** increased levels of cycling tend to lead to lower accident rates for cyclists overall through a “safety in numbers” effect. Increased levels of active travel can also stimulate the increased provision of quality footpaths and cycle paths by public authorities, further increasing safety generally.
- **Economic:** increased active travel usage can lead to reduced congestion levels and improved accessibility in urban areas. The space and infrastructure required for large numbers of pedestrians and cyclists are often

significantly more economical to provide, when compared to the costs associated with new roads or railways, for example.

- **Social:** increased provision for active travel modes can drive improved transport equity. Although environmental considerations are increasingly at play in consumer choices about transport, it is still the case that low levels of private car ownership and use can be an indicator of lower income levels. Increasing the provisions for active travel modes can improve accessibility and mobility for lower income groups, while improved active travel infrastructure (e.g., high quality footpaths) can also increase accessibility for people with mobility impairments or disabilities.



Figure 1-2 Benefits of active travel

2. Strategic Context

2.1 National Policy

Project Ireland 2040 – National Planning Framework (NPF) provides a high-level strategic planning framework to guide development and investment over the coming decades, with the Project Ireland 2040 - National Development Plan (NDP) 2018-2027 setting out investment priorities. Growth of the Eastern and Midland Region is a clear priority in the two documents, with growth in population (to around 2.85 million) and employment (to 1.34 million) targeted.

The NPF acknowledges and highlights the strategic role of the Midlands, stating: “Its central location in Ireland can be leveraged to enable significant strategic investment to a greater extent than at present, supported by a sustainable pattern of population growth, with a focus on strategic national employment and infrastructure development, quality of life and a strengthening of the urban cores of the county towns and other principal settlements”. Placemaking, sustainable mobility, prioritising alternative forms of transport to car and developing comprehensive walking and cycling are key objectives identified in the documents which are relevant to Longford County.

The Climate Action Plan 2019 states that modal shift is important in Ireland meeting the 2030 decarbonisation ambitions. To do this, high-quality public transport, cycling and walking infrastructure must be provided, to reduce reliance on private cars, and congestion. The plan has committed to an additional 500,000 public transport and active travel journeys daily by 2035.

The National Sustainable Mobility Policy provides an opportunity to change our daily travel choices by making it easier for people to travel by more sustainable modes – be that walking, cycling or public transport. The Policy aims to support this modal shift between now and 2030, through infrastructure and service improvements, as well as demand management and behavioural change measures. It also aims to continue to make existing and new walking, cycling and public transport networks more accessible for all users. The Policy is guided by three key principles and 10 high-level goals and is summarised in Table 2-1.

Table 2-1 Principles and Goals of the National Sustainable Mobility Policy

Principles	Goals
Safe and Green Mobility	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improve mobility safety. 2. Decarbonise public transport. 3. Expand availability of sustainable mobility in metropolitan areas. 4. Expand availability of sustainable mobility in regional and rural areas. 5. Encourage people to choose sustainable mobility over the private car.
People Focused Mobility	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Take a whole of journey approach to mobility, promoting inclusive access for all. 7. Design infrastructure according to Universal Design Principles and the Hierarchy of Road Users model. 8. Promote sustainable mobility through research and citizen engagement.
Better Integrated Mobility	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. Better integrate land use and transport planning at all levels. 10. Promote smart and integrated mobility through innovative technologies and development of appropriate regulation.

2.2 Regional Policy

The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midlands Region Assembly (EMRA) 2019-2031 sets out a framework to direct future growth of the Eastern and Midlands Region over the medium to long term.

Similar to the national policy objectives, placemaking and the development of active travel networks are seen as key enablers in creating vibrant, attractive and safe, places to work, live, shop and engage in community life.

The regional policy objectives for Longford includes Regional Planning Objective (RPO) 4.59 to “enhance accessibility and sustainable mobility within the town centre by improving links between the core and surrounding areas through the further integration of public transport, walking and cycling facilities”.

2.3 Local Policy

The Longford County Development Plan (CDP) (2021-2027) sets out the policies and objectives for the proper planning and sustainable development of the study area. The key transport objectives and policies contained within this plan are centred around the following themes:

- Reducing the need to travel by private car
- Encouraging alternative means of travel (other than car) where practicable
- Providing footpaths, cycle paths and public lighting in towns and villages
- Supporting the delivery of a high-quality, permeable and attractive pedestrian and cycling network
- Integrating land use and transport planning to facilitate sustainable urban development and reduce the need to travel and
- Relieving traffic congestion, particularly in town centres, by means of traffic management and traffic calming.

Longford County Council and the National Transport Authority are currently preparing a Local Transport Plan (LTP) for Longford town. The plan aims to identify future transport requirements and solutions, with the aim to improve connectivity and ease of access for all, using sustainable travel options. The plan will also aim to enhance Longford town’s attractiveness as places to live, visit and do business.

2.4 Other Key Policy Documents

2.4.1 National Cycle Network

The National Cycle Network (NCN) focuses on linking cities and towns of over 5,000 people with a safe, connected and inviting cycle network. It includes plans to create cycle routes to destinations such as transport hubs, centres of education, centres of employment, leisure and tourist destinations. Longford town is the only town that fits this criteria in the County.

Where possible, it will optimise the potential for people to cycle as part of their daily activities, such as work or educational commuting. It will also integrate with existing and proposed cycle infrastructure. Both road safety, and the safety and security of users, will be central to the development of the NCN.

2.4.2 CycleConnects

CycleConnects is intended to form a comprehensive cycle network for all cycle user types across each county in Ireland. The draft proposals envisage an extensive cycling network across the 22 counties, complementing the cycling plans already developed for the Greater Dublin Area (Meath, Kildare, Wicklow and Dublin). Together, these plans will create an overall comprehensive cycle network for Ireland.

In Longford, CycleConnects will look to link towns and villages together as part of a fully connected network. 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 in the County and into adjacent Counties. Where possible, these routes were also located within TII National Cycle Network Corridors.

2.5 Key Projects and Schemes

There are number of key projects and schemes which are at various stages of their development that are relevant to the development of this Active Travel Strategy. These include the Camlin Quarter Urban Design Framework and Royal Canal Greenway projects.

2.5.1 Royal Canal Greenway

The Royal Canal Greenway is the longest greenway in Ireland. It comprises of a 144km walking and cycling greenway between Dublin’s Spencer Dock and Cloondara, County Longford, with a spur to Longford town.

3. Baseline Assessment

3.1 Land Use Context

According to the 2022 Census, County Longford has nearly 47,000 inhabitants making it the second smallest county of Ireland. These inhabitants are spread across 23 main settlements, of which the largest towns are shown in Figure 2-1:

- Longford: 10,000 inhabitants
- Edgeworthstown: 2,100 inhabitants
- Ballymahon: 1,900 inhabitants
- Lanesborough: 1,500 inhabitants
- Drumlish: 900 inhabitants
- Granard: 800 inhabitants
- Newtown Forbes: 800 inhabitants and
- Keenagh: 600 inhabitants.

The population is centred in Longford town with 25% of the County’s population living there. Meanwhile Edgeworthstown, the second largest town, is only 20% of the size of Longford, by population.

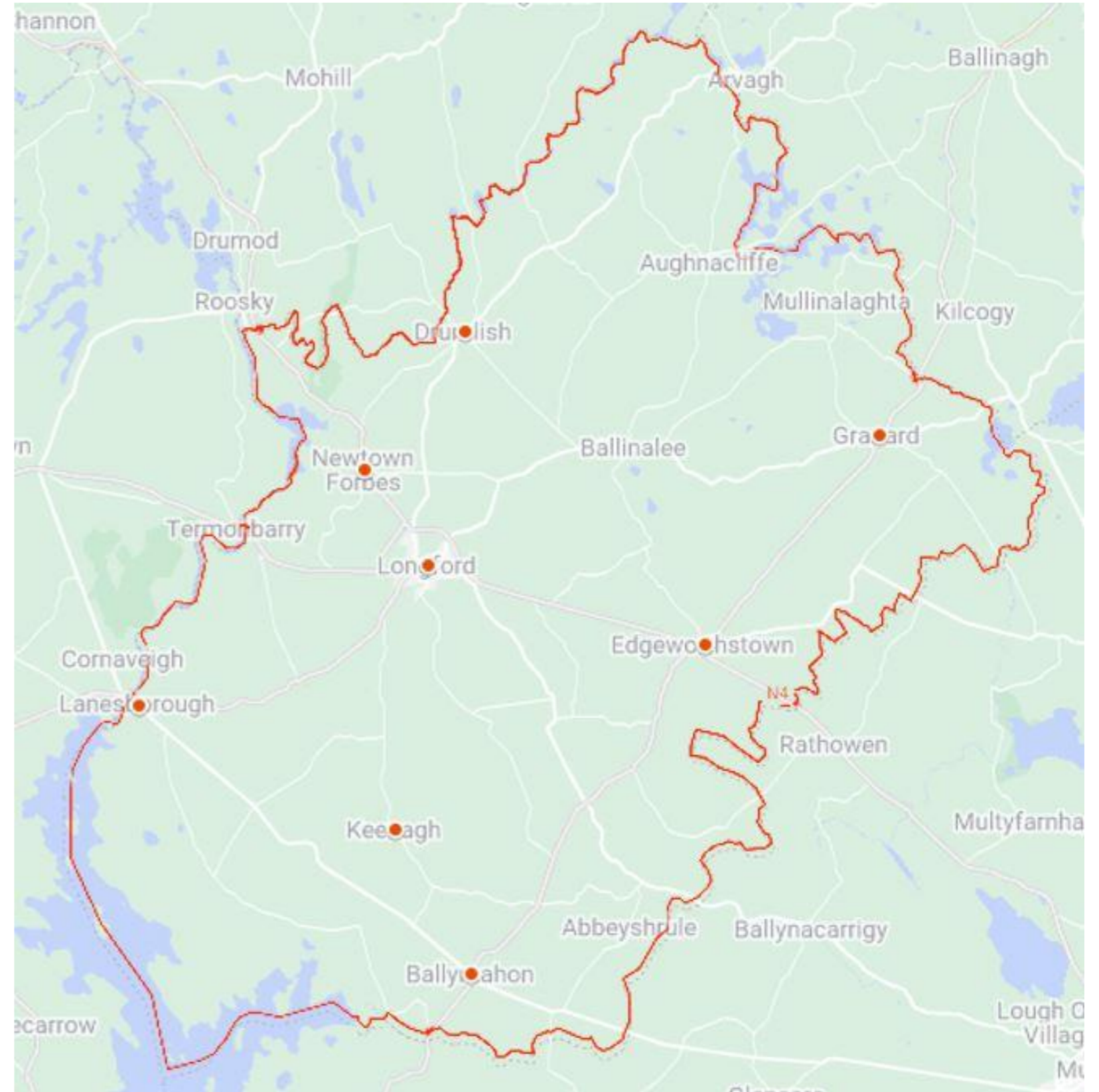


Figure 2-1 Largest settlements in County Longford

Active modes can be used for various trip purposes. To understand for which potential purposes there are opportunities or constraints for active travel within County Longford, this section investigates trip destinations for education, retail and leisure. A selection of the key non-residential trip destinations in the County are shown in Figure 3-2.

The main trip destinations in County Longford include:

- Train stations of Longford and Edgeworthstown
- Primary and secondary schools
- Center Parcs Longford Forest
- Royal Canal Greenway
- Retail stores and shopping parks and
- Entertainment, leisure and sports facilities.

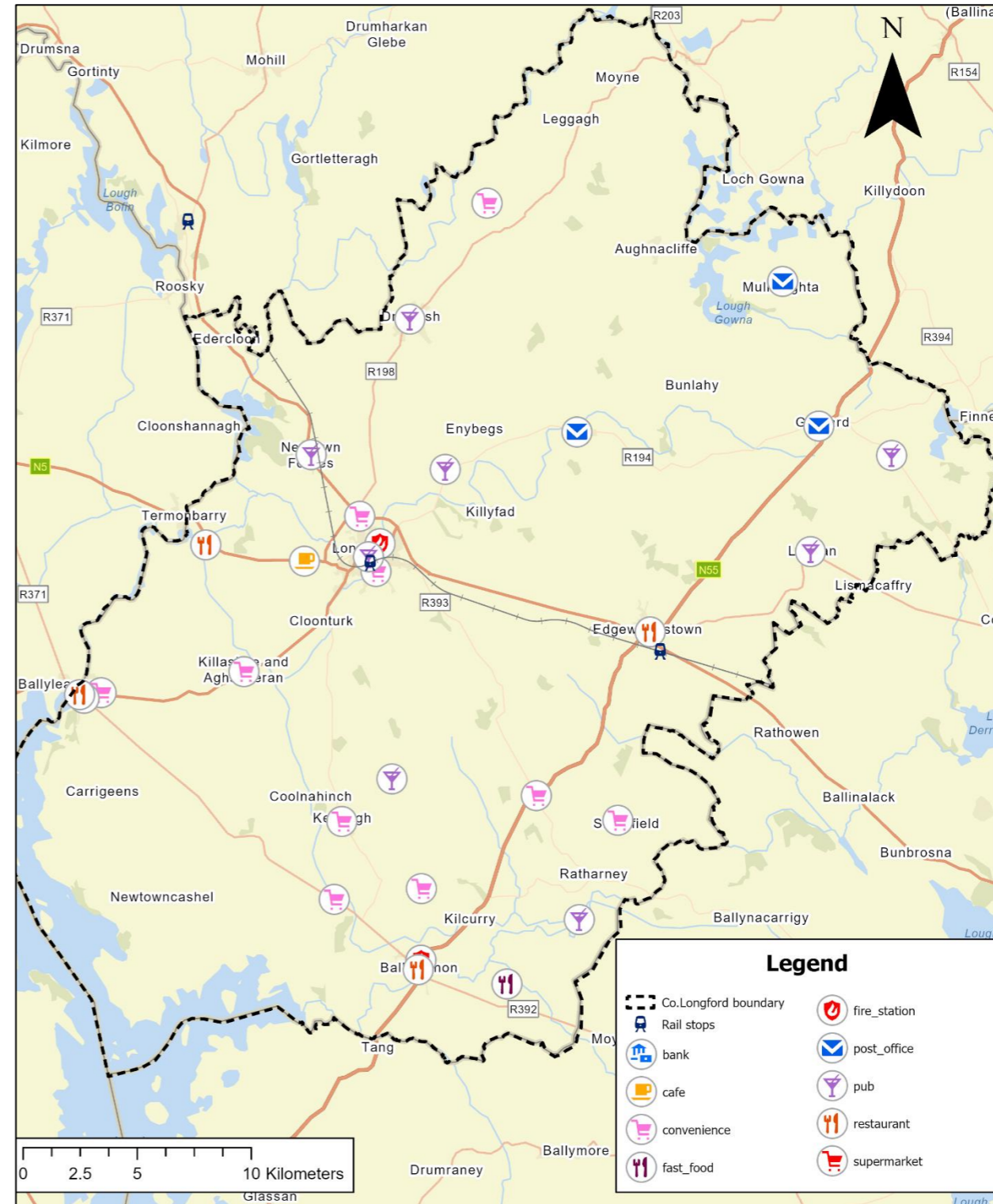


Figure 3-2 Key trip destinations in County Longford

3.1.1 Education

Figure 3-3 shows the primary and secondary schools in County Longford. While primary schools can also be found in the rural parts of County Longford, most secondary schools are located within the larger settlements, namely Longford town, Granard, Ballymahon and Lanesborough. The only rural secondary school is in Moyne to the north of the County.

Moreover, promotion of walking and cycling amongst pupils is vital in order to create a culture of active travel within County Longford. Due to the rural nature of the County, however, it is essential to establish acceptable travel distances for schools within the County.

Within towns and settlements, most schools are within 15-minute walking and cycling distance. However, this is not the case in rural areas where primary schools are typically less accessible due to these greater distances and additionally a lack of infrastructure. The catchment areas by walking and cycling for primary and secondary schools within the County can be seen in Appendix A.

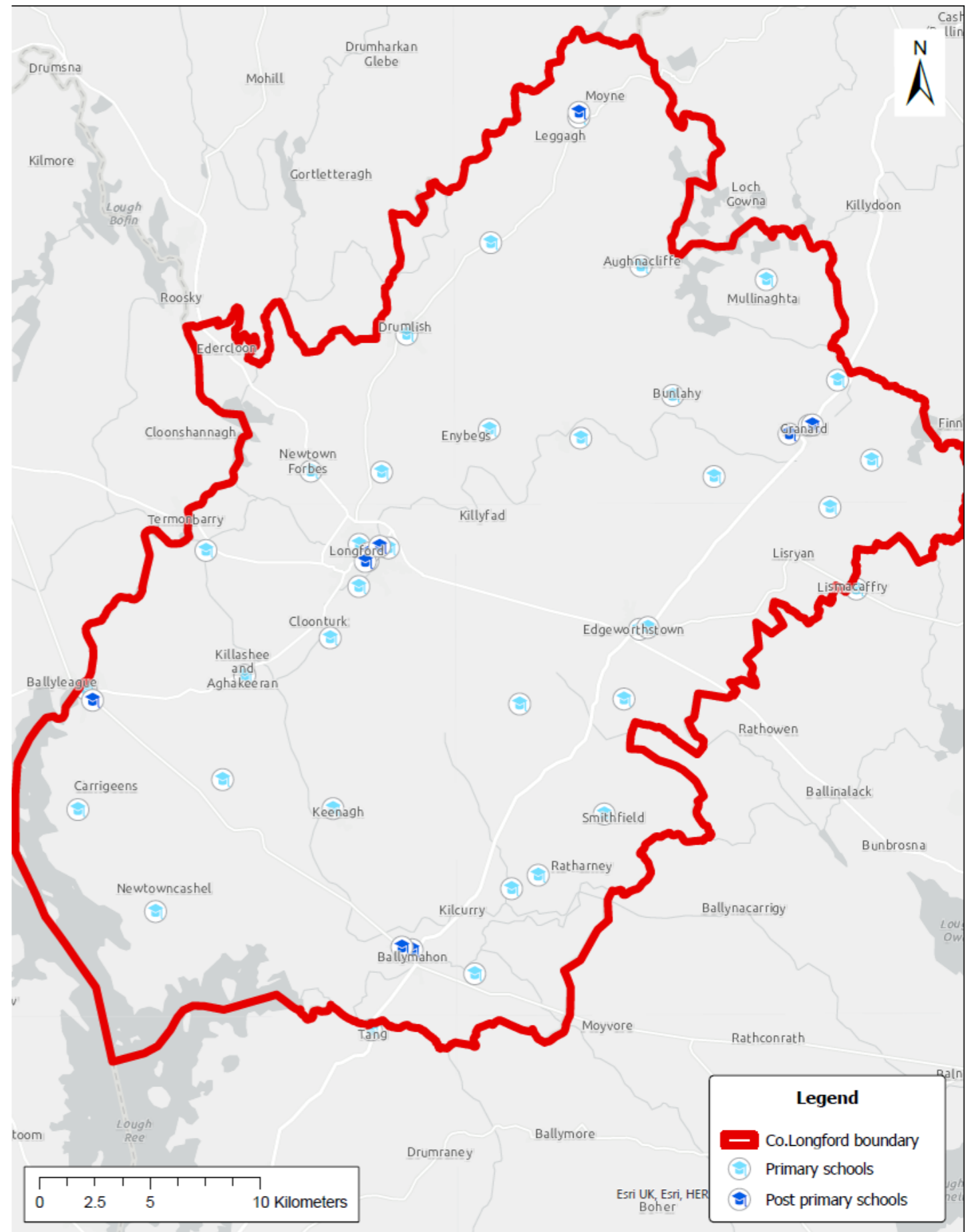


Figure 3-3 Primary and secondary schools within County Longford.

3.1.2 Retail

Figure 3-4 shows the points of interest for retail. It shows that the main retail concentration is located in Longford Town. It also shows smaller concentrations of retail in Granard, Ballymahon and at Centre Parcs, located approximately 3.5km east of Ballymahon.

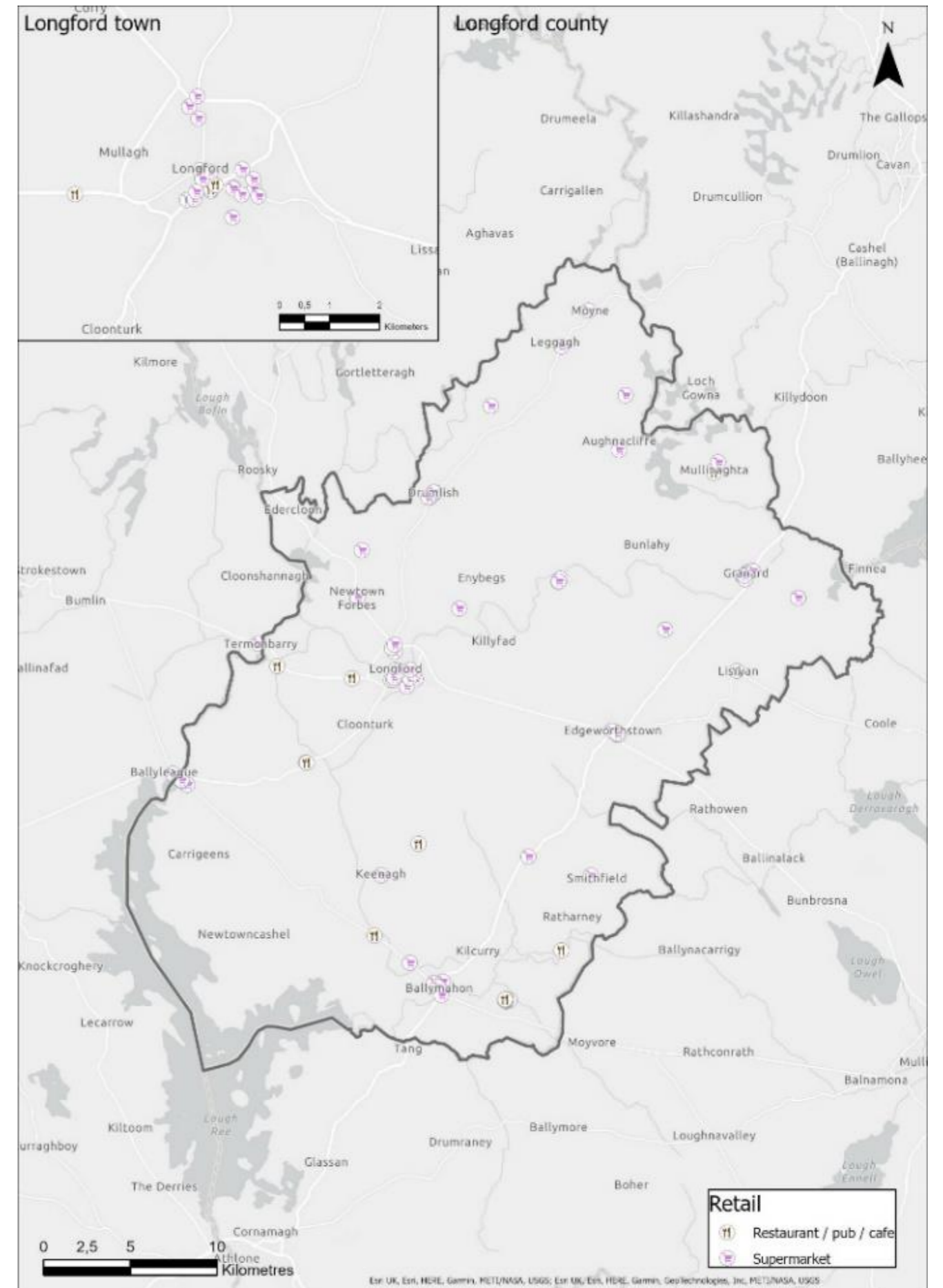


Figure 3-4 Retail locations in County Longford

3.1.3 Entertainment / leisure / sports

Figure 3-5 shows leisure points, including leisure, culture, sports, community centres and places of worship. Leisure attractions are present throughout the County with the highest concentrations present in Longford town and in and around Ballymahon.

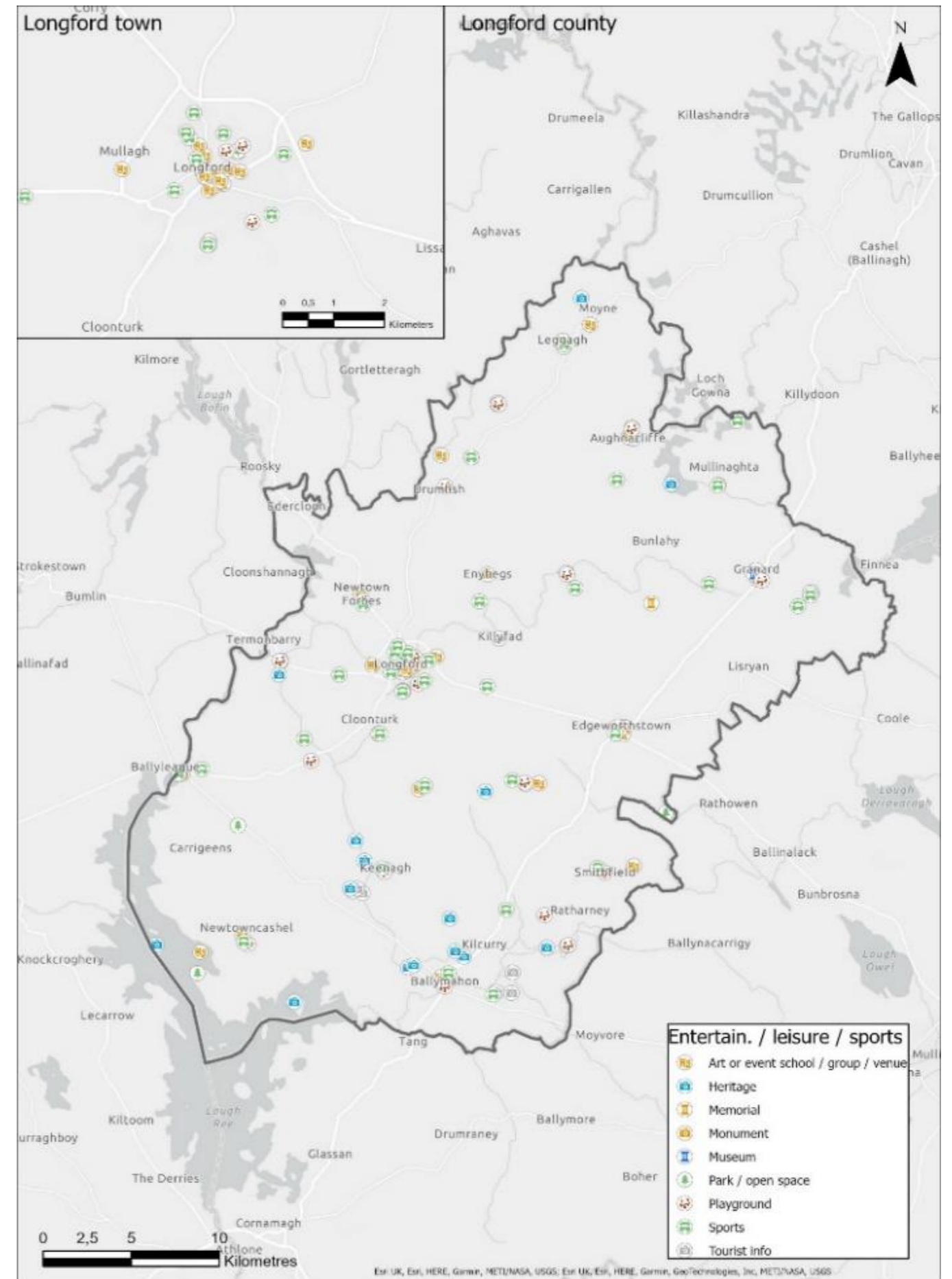


Figure 3-5 Locations of entertainment / leisure / sports in County Longford

3.1.4 Socioeconomics

The Pobal Haase and Pratschke (HP) Deprivation Index data¹ is the primary dataset on social deprivation in Ireland and is a key indicator for all local authorities. Based on earlier deprivation indices for Ireland, as well as analyses from other countries, three dimensions of affluence/disadvantage are identified: Demographic Profile, Social Class Composition and Labour Market Situation.

The Deprivation Index at electoral division (ED) level was mapped for County Longford for year 2016 and the results are shown in Figure 3-6. The results show that County Longford is generally disadvantaged or very disadvantaged. There is one very affluent area in the County, namely Killashee and Aghakeeran. The main settlements within the County are generally disadvantaged.

With regards to the active travel strategy, it is important to ensure that the proposed tasks, measures and schemes are designed in an inclusive manner and thus providing opportunities and benefits to the disadvantaged communities.

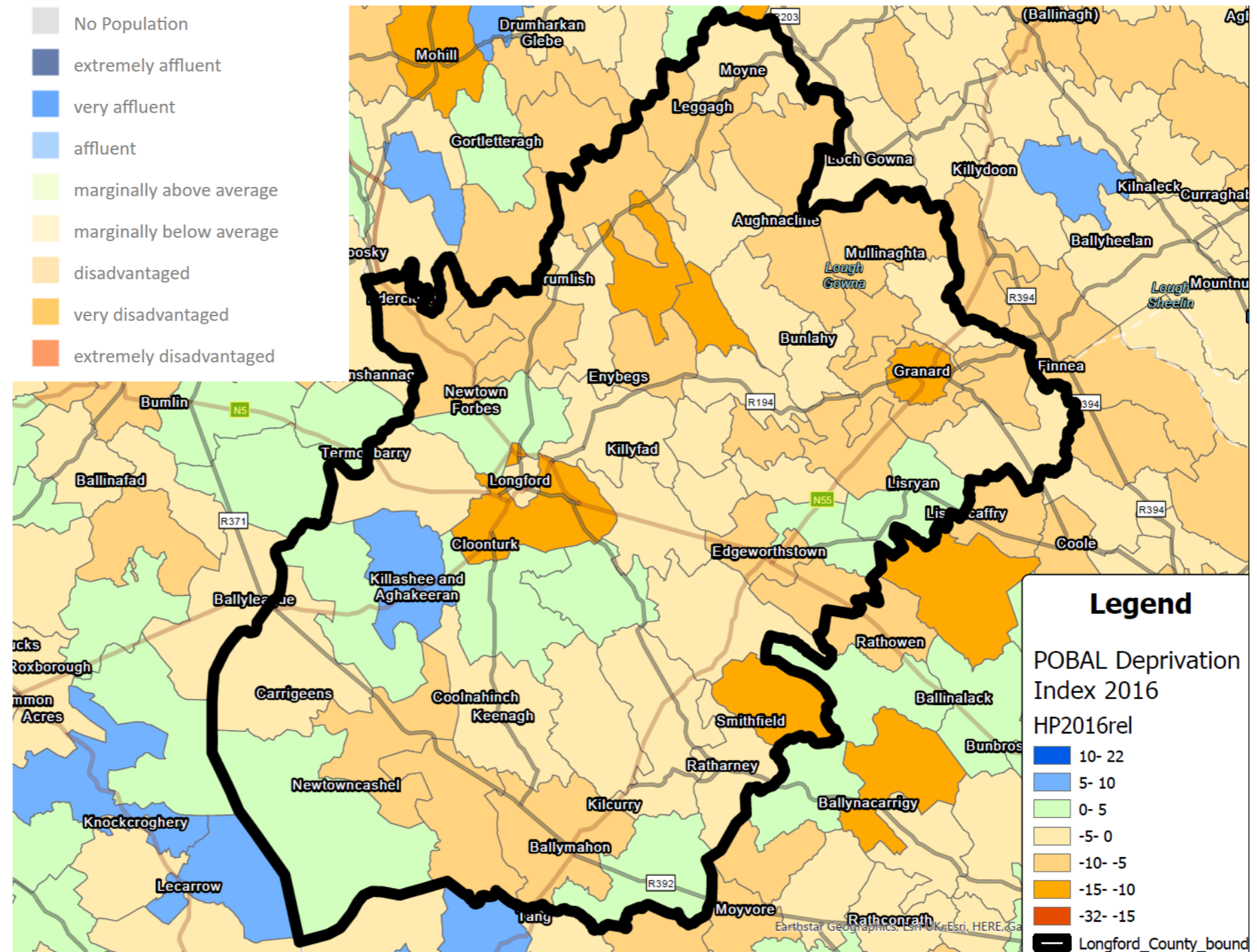


Figure 3-6 Pobal HP deprivation index for County Longford on an electoral district level

¹ Available from the Trutz Haase website: <http://trutzaase.eu/>

3.1.5 Employment

The main centres of employment in County Longford are Longford town, Ballymahon, Granard, and Edgeworthstown. Additionally, Drumlish and Lanesborough have little higher employment densities in comparison to the rest of the County. Figure 3-7 shows the density of workers per workplace zone, based on Census 2016. These three towns lend themselves for the promotion of active travel for commuting with Longford town having the highest potential due to higher number of employees.

Additionally, as Newtown Forbes is located within an acceptable cycling distance (<7.5km) of Longford, there is potential for the promotion of cycle commuting between the village and Longford town. The N4 road is currently a barrier to connecting these two settlements by cycling due the nature of the road with high speeds and lack of segregated safe cycling infrastructure. Moreover, the other main settlements are located further away from Longford which would mean that cycling is viable as a commuting mode with the use of e-bikes.

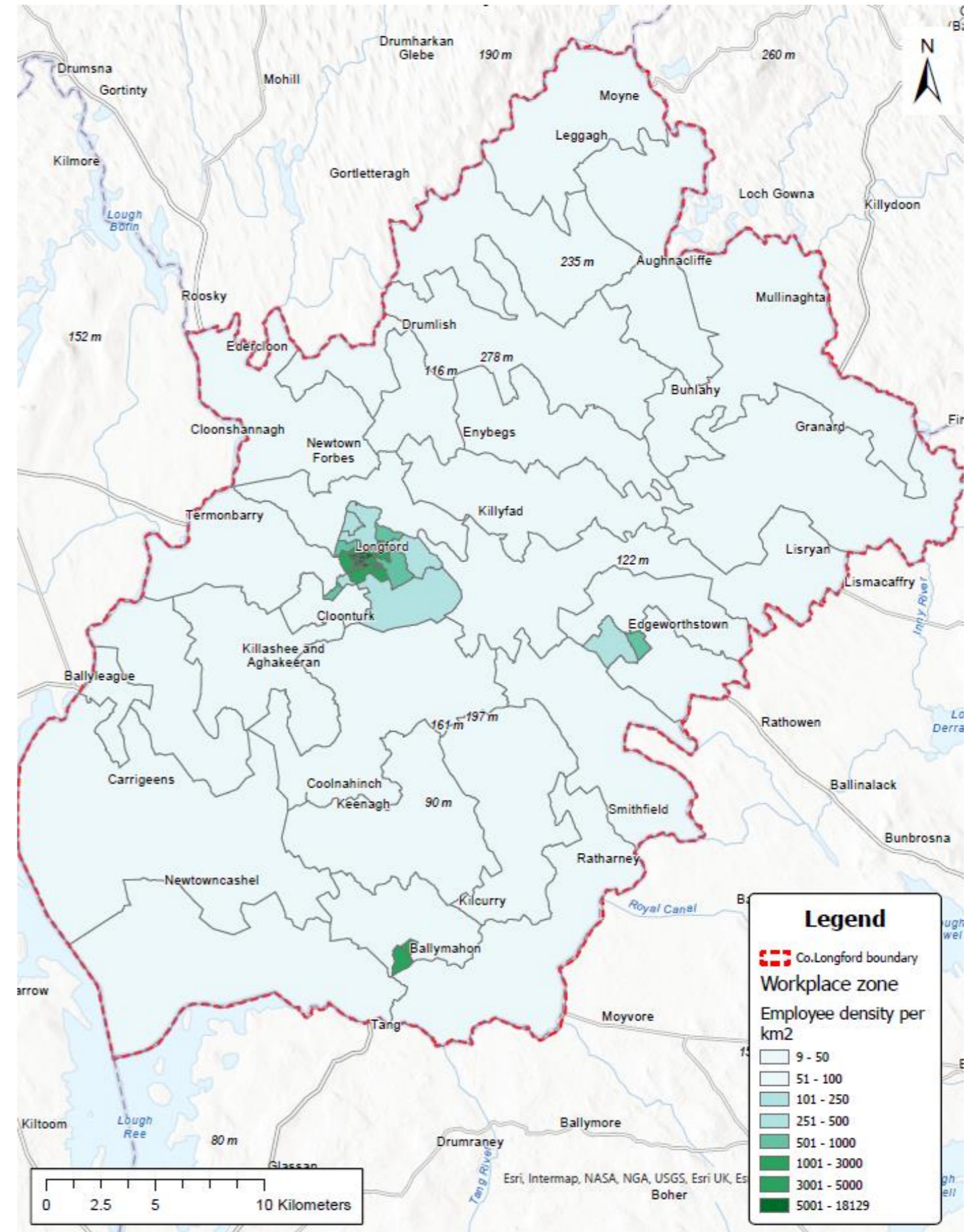


Figure 3-7 Employment density per km² in County Longford

3.2 Environmental Context

3.2.1 Water

There are several water elements present within County Longford. For example, the County is bordered by Lough Ree to the south, Lough Gamhna to the north and River Shannon to the west. Moreover, Camlin River traverses the County, and Longford town, in east-west direction, and Royal Canal in the North-South direction.

While water is a leisure trip attractor in its own right and contributes to a pleasant environment for walking, wheeling and cycling, it also poses a barrier to active travel networks due to limited crossing opportunities. The challenge of narrow bridges is present across the County with main crossings over waterways being too narrow to accommodate all modes of transport comfortably and safely side by side.

Furthermore, areas with high probability of flooding must be taken into consideration when planning for new active travel facilities by, for example, building bridges with extra span to accommodate for any potential flooding.

3.2.2 Topography

The topography of the County Longford is relatively flat with hilly areas in the northern parts of the County. This topography generally lends itself to walking, wheeling and cycling.

3.3 Transport Context

This section will discuss the transport context from the perspective of transport infrastructure as well as travel behaviour. The section is divided on a mode basis and concludes with a discussion of current travel patterns.

3.3.1 Walking and Wheeling

Walking infrastructure within County Longford comprises footpaths and in addition to few rural leisure routes. The quality of pedestrian facilities varies between settlements.

With relatively compact town and village centres, the distances are easily walkable. In most cases, however, the pedestrian network covers the town centre but disappears at the gateway to the town/village. Albeit this is common practice around Ireland, it does leave the settlements disconnected from one another. In addition, the width of these footpaths is generally not sufficient to allow for people wheeling to travel comfortably.

Meanwhile the walkway network is concentrated to the southwest of the County with most routes intercepting each other. Leisure routes are provided in the form of trails with the Royal Canal Greenway being the major attractor for walking and wheeling. Although the trail network contains portions in nature, generally the routes are located along the roads, similarly to the cycle network. Below is a summary of the prevalent trails within Longford County:

- **The Royal Canal Greenway:** the backbone of walking and cycling trails in the County. It provides a high-quality trail with segregated facilities for active modes. This is currently the only walking trail connected to Longford town.
- **Peatland trails:** crosses peatland fields. Also follows tracks of an abandoned rail network.
- **Walkways on the shore of Lough Ree:** an intermittent network from Lanesborough to Ballymahon. There are additional planned improvements to complete its missing links.
- **Town walkways:** these are mostly circular routes around certain towns or attractions with connections to the nearby towns. There are circular routes near Killyfad, a route from Cloondara to Newtown Forbes, and a circular route in the vicinity of Centre Parcs which connects to the Royal Canal Greenway.

In addition, there is room for improvement with regards to wayfinding across the County. Although the train station of Edgeworthstown is located within a kilometre from the town, a distance easily covered by walking, no signage has been provided between the town and station.

3.3.2 Cycling

The existing cycle trails in County Longford, are shown in Figure 3-8. It includes the Royal Canal Greenway and the Peatland trails. Moreover, there are some signed on-road cycle routes across the County which require the cyclists to share the space with motorised vehicles. Such routes are generally located along local or regional roads.

Although a number of segregated cycling facilities are under construction within Longford town, they provide only limited improvements within the town. To improve cyclability across the County, Longford would benefit from safe, oftentimes segregated, cycling infrastructure that is complemented by connecting quieter local roads.

There are many small local roads within County Longford that lend themselves for cycling with regards to traffic volumes and topography. However, further assessment is needed to create a final local network. Also within the town of Longford, smaller residential streets lend themselves for cycling but without improved permeability, cyclists cannot avail of these routes.

Similarly to walking and wheeling, cyclists would also benefit from a wayfinding strategy across the County. Current routes are either partly signed in only one direction or are completely missing signage which makes it more difficult for cyclists to navigate their way. In addition, crossing priorities should be reconsidered throughout the County in order to improve the safety of cyclists and pedestrians.

Additionally, the number of cycle parking facilities is limited within the County. For instance, provision of secure, covered cycle parking at train stations would encourage cycling the first mile by those who commute by train. There should also be secure bicycle parking provided at schools to encourage children to cycle. Moreover, any cycle parking provided should be able to facilitate cargo bicycles and adaptive bicycles.

There are currently no bike share schemes present in Longford.

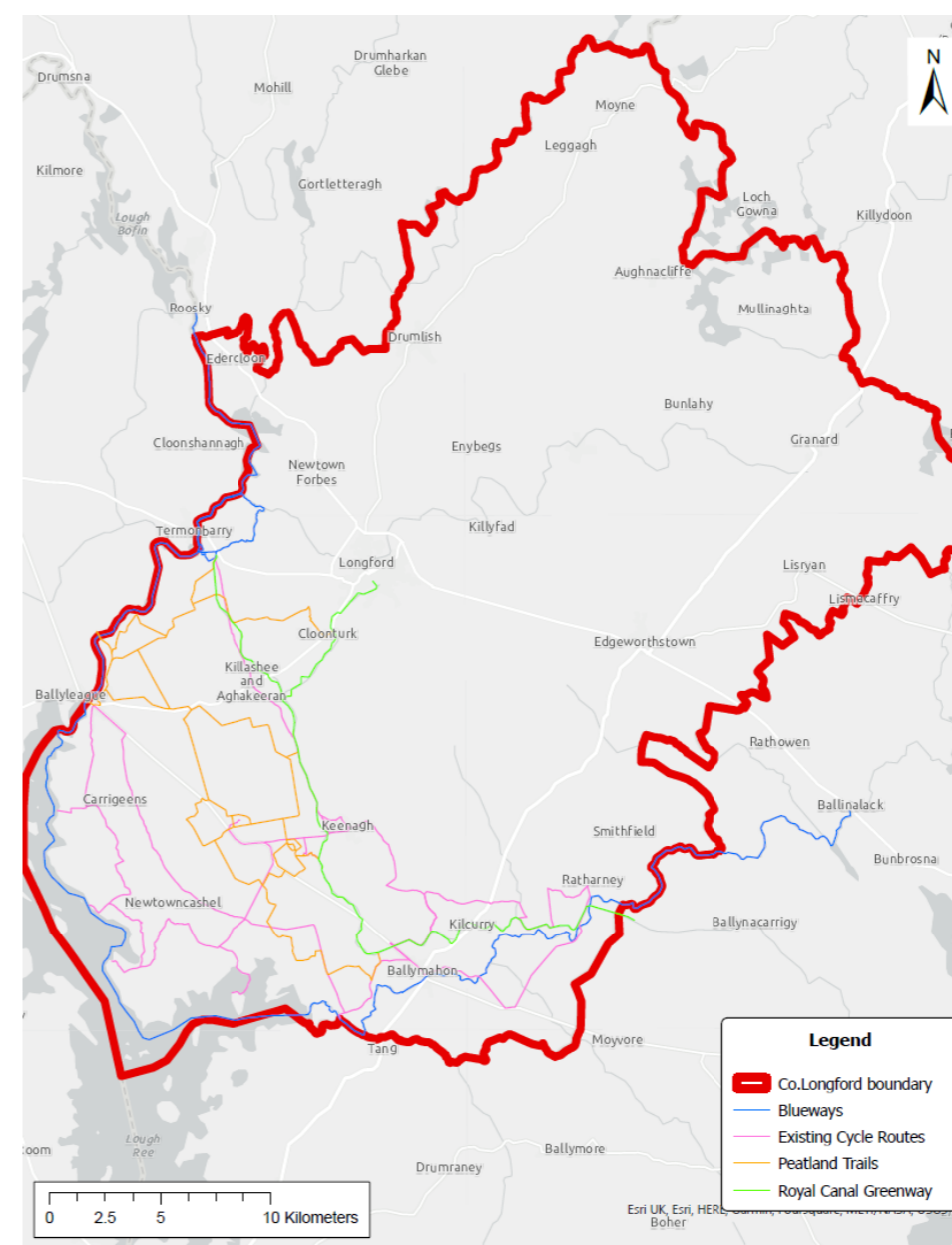


Figure 3-8 Cycle infrastructure in County Longford

The planned National Cycle Network (NCN) connects Longford town to Roscommon in the south-west and Sligo in the north. Moreover, the NCN plans to connect Longford town with Dublin in the east by making use of the existing Royal Canal Greenway. The full NCN is shown in Figure 3-9. The realisation of NCN has the potential of also attracting more cycle tourism to Longford and, thus, have a positive impact on the local economy. To enhance the experience of cycling in County Longford, any county-level cycling schemes should look to connect to and compliment the NCN.

Meanwhile, the Longford County Cycle Network Study proposes interurban cycle connections throughout the County. The secondary network avails of the national and regional roads to connect settlements. However as seen earlier, the cyclability of these roads is low and will require segregated infrastructure in order to ensure the safety of cyclists. The plan also proposes a tourist route following Lough Ree.

Meanwhile, the primary network is focused on the towns of Longford, Newtown Forbes and Edgeworthstown where the primary network is again focused on the national roads. For instance, in Longford town, the primary routes are planned on Dublin Road, Park Road, Ballinalee Road, R198 and N63 as shown in Figure 3-10. Due to their nature, however, their cyclability is lower than the planned secondary routes. Therefore, special attention needs to be given to ensuring that cyclists are provided sufficient space through, for example, recirculation of traffic to other routes or removal of parking. Recirculation may be possible, for example, along the L1004 Lismore Road, to create a safe cycling route between Longford Town and Newtown Forbes.

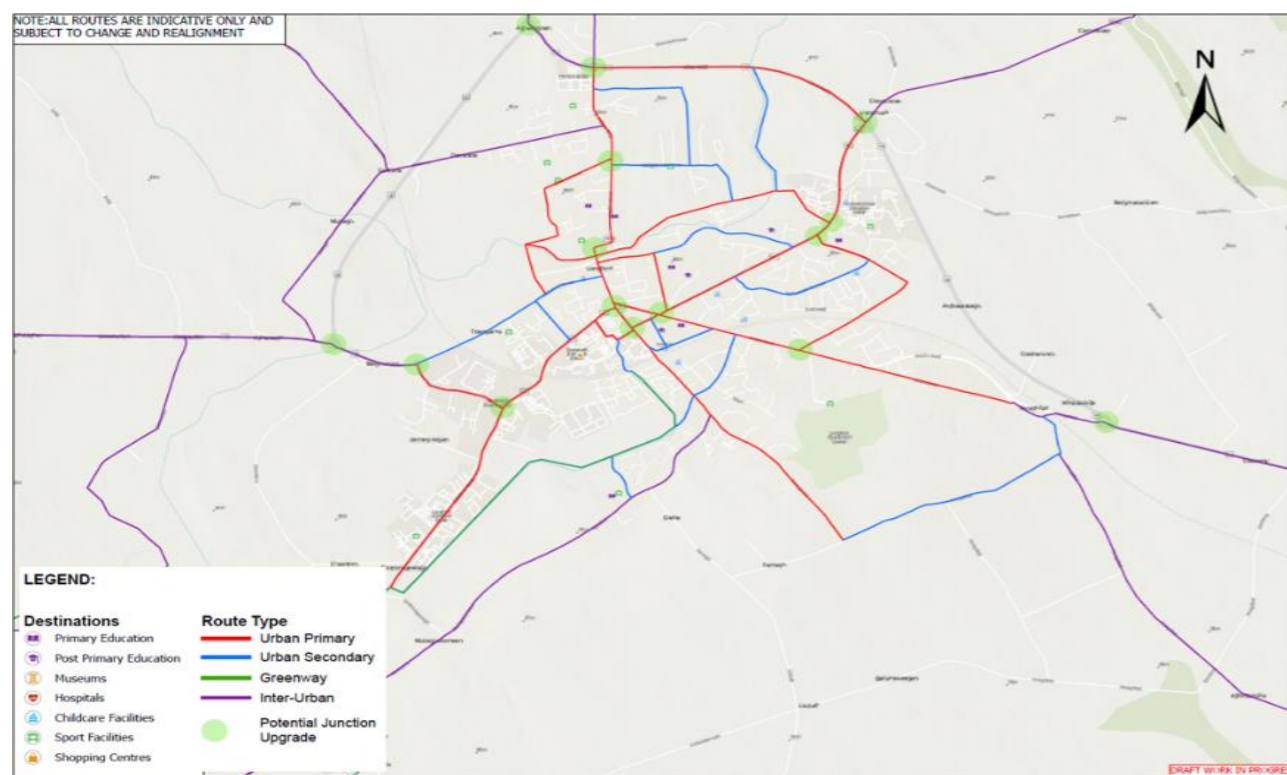


Figure 3-10 Longford urban cycle network (NTA)

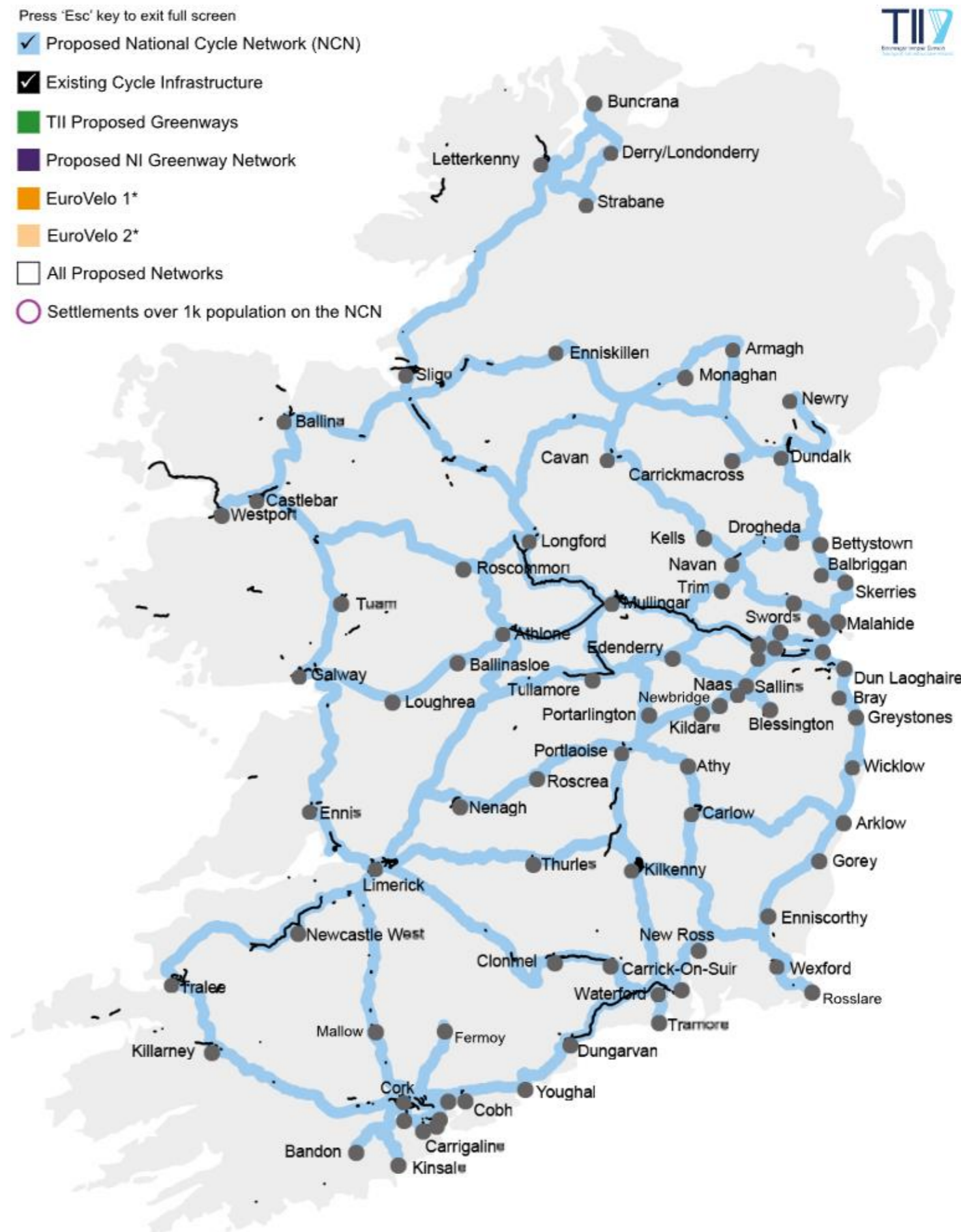


Figure 3-9 National Cycle Network (NCN)

3.3.3 Safety

Traffic collisions between cyclists and motorised traffic have a high probability of severe injury or fatality. The Dublin Bike Life 2019 survey shows that concerns with safety is the primary reason why people do not cycle.

Moreover, a study by Trinity College Dublin with 2,500 respondents across Ireland shows that majority of collisions (56%) that involve cyclists happen primarily with motorised vehicles, followed by single cyclist collisions (29%), collisions with other cyclists (8%), and pedestrians (7%).

Therefore, the provision of segregated cycling infrastructure is essential for the creation of a safe cycling environment for all users, particularly for the vulnerable user groups, such as children and the elderly. This is particularly important on roads with speeds higher than 50kph as collisions at high speeds yield a higher probability of a fatal collision.

The Safe Routes to School Programme is designed to encourage as many pupils and students as possible in primary and post-primary schools to walk and cycle. It has three aims:

- To accelerate the delivery of walking/scooting and cycling infrastructure on key access routes to schools.
- To provide “front of school” treatments which will enhance access to your school grounds.
- To expand the amount of bike parking available at schools.

The Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Programme launched in March 2021 and was open to all schools in Ireland to apply for active travel funding and delivery. The programme is an initiative of the Department of Transport and supported by the Department of Education. It is operated by the Green-Schools Programme in partnership with the National Transport Authority (NTA) and the local authorities.

3.3.4 Public Transport

Train

Current train and bus services in County Longford are shown in

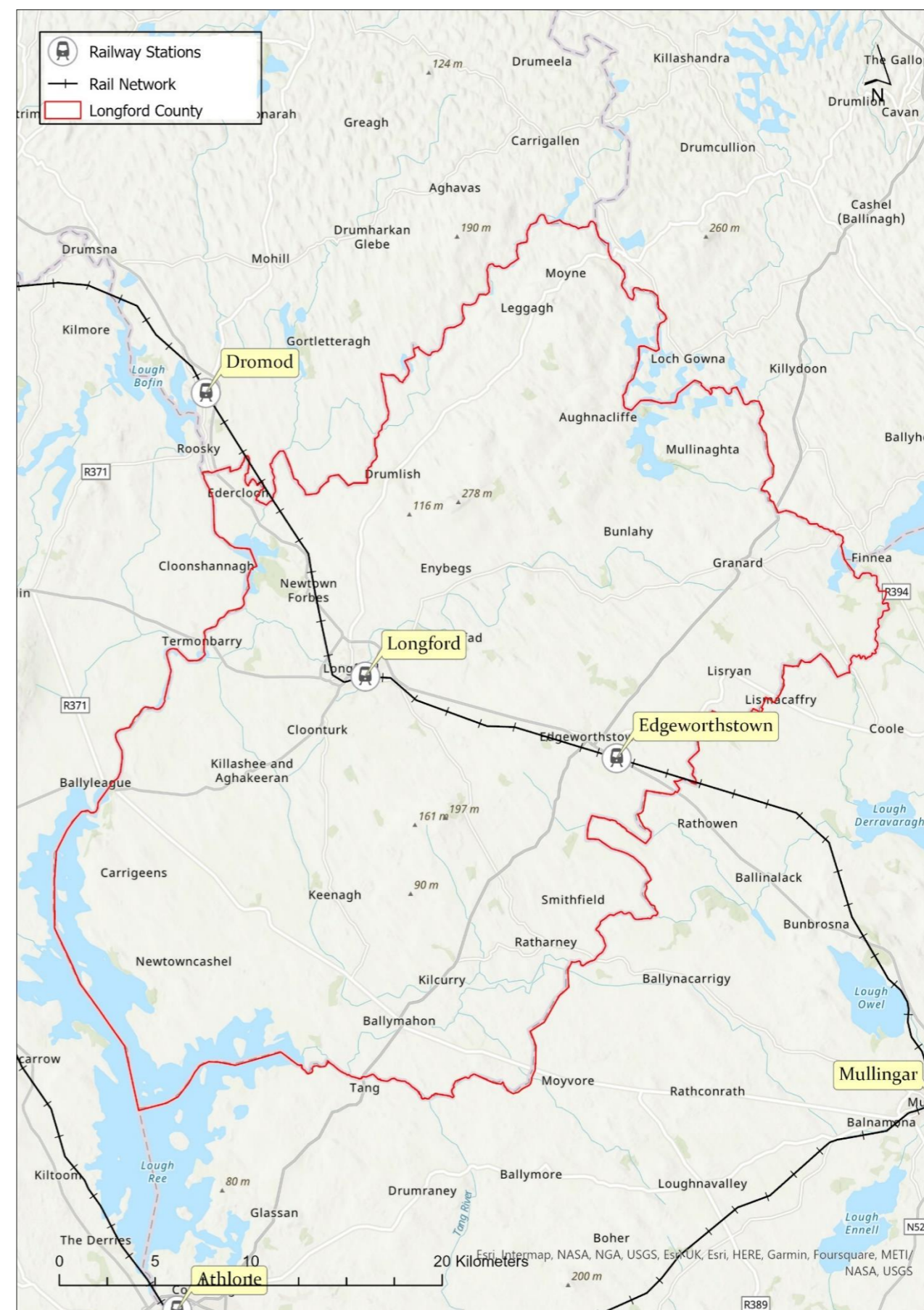


Figure 3-11. There are two train stations, Longford and Edgeworthstown connecting the towns with Dublin to the east and Sligo to the west.

On weekdays, there are ten train services per day in each direction. Trips taken by train have the potential to facilitate first and last mile journeys by active modes. To do this, it is important to improve the provision of cycle parking facilities at stations and providing safe infrastructure to and from the stations with clear signage.

Moreover, the rail infrastructure is also a barrier to walking and cycling, as it reduces permeability, which requires the introduction of safe infrastructure to get past the tracks. This is especially the case within the town of Longford where the number and capacity of underpasses and bridges is limited.

Lastly, the walking and cycling catchments from train stations by walking and cycling can be found in Appendix B. The coverage of Longford rail station already covers the whole town while the introduction of a cycling network would increase the catchment as far as Newtown Forbes. Attractive and safe cycling facilities provided at the stations would further encourage train journeys to be made in combination with cycle journeys.

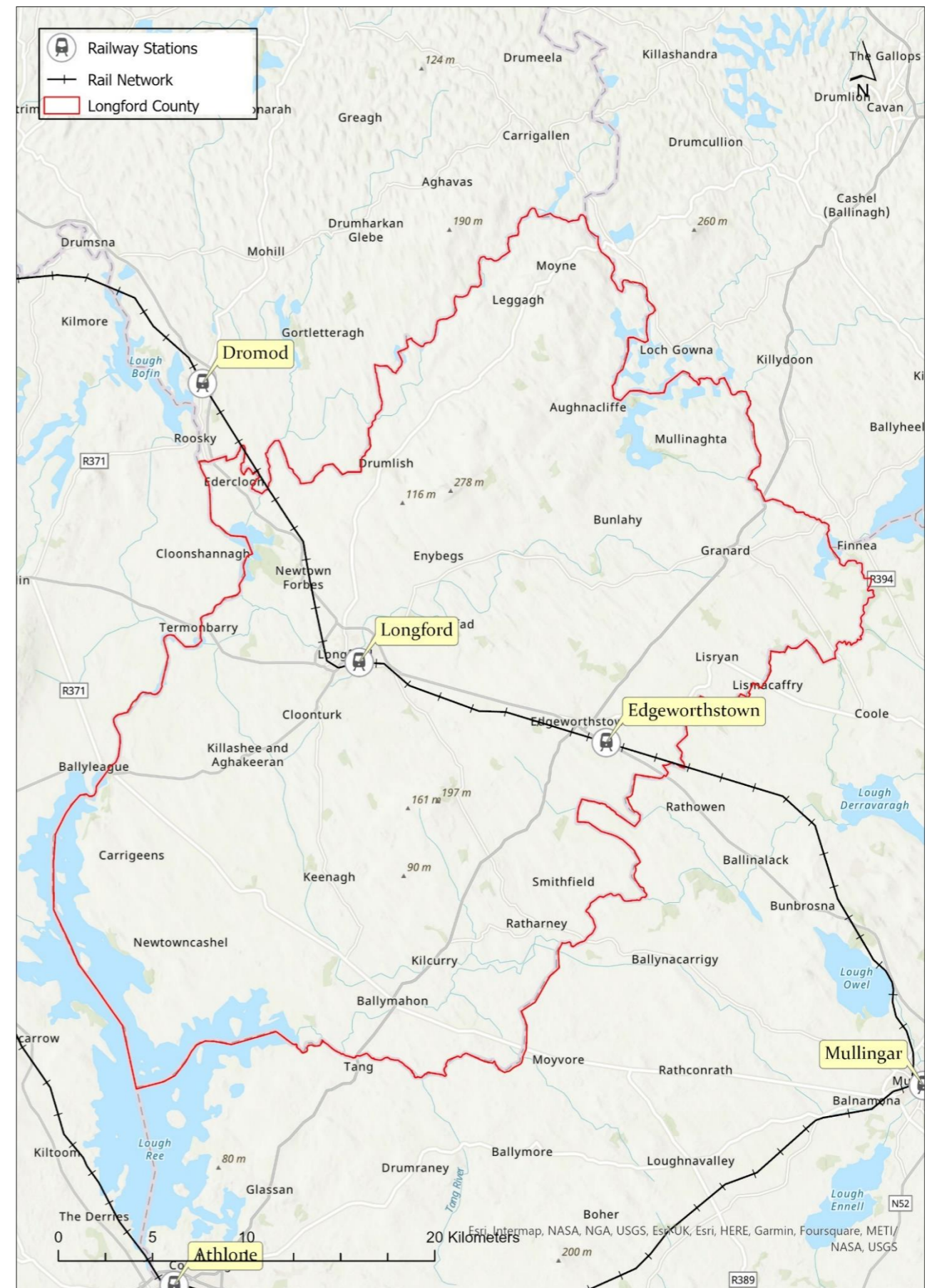


Figure 3-11 Rail network and stations in County Longford

Bus

There are also several bus/coach services connecting the County with most of them traversing Longford. The services are operated by Expressway, Bus Éireann, TFI, Local Link and M4 Direct:

Expressway:

- 22: Dublin – Ballina
- 23: Dublin – Sligo

Bus Éireann:

- 65: Galway – Athlone – Cavan – Monaghan
- 73: Waterford – Athlone – Longford
- 111A: Cavan – Granard – Delvin
- 425 Galway – Mountbellew – Roscommon – Longford
- 463: Longford – Carrigallen
- 466: Athlone – Ballymahon -Longford
- 467: Longford – Lanesborough – Roscommon

Transport for Ireland Service:

- 975: Cavan – Crossdoney - Drumlish – Longford
- M4 Direct Service
- 842: Ballymahon - Edgeworthstown – Dublin

Moreover, Local Link provides a number of on-demand bus services within the County, for instance between Longford and Ballymahon. The network is shown in Figure 3-12. Similar to the train service, there is an opportunity to increase the use of active modes by encouraging walking, wheeling and cycling to bus stops and stations. Therefore, the bus lines could serve as backbones for the cycling network especially in the rural parts of the County to reduce the dependency on private cars.

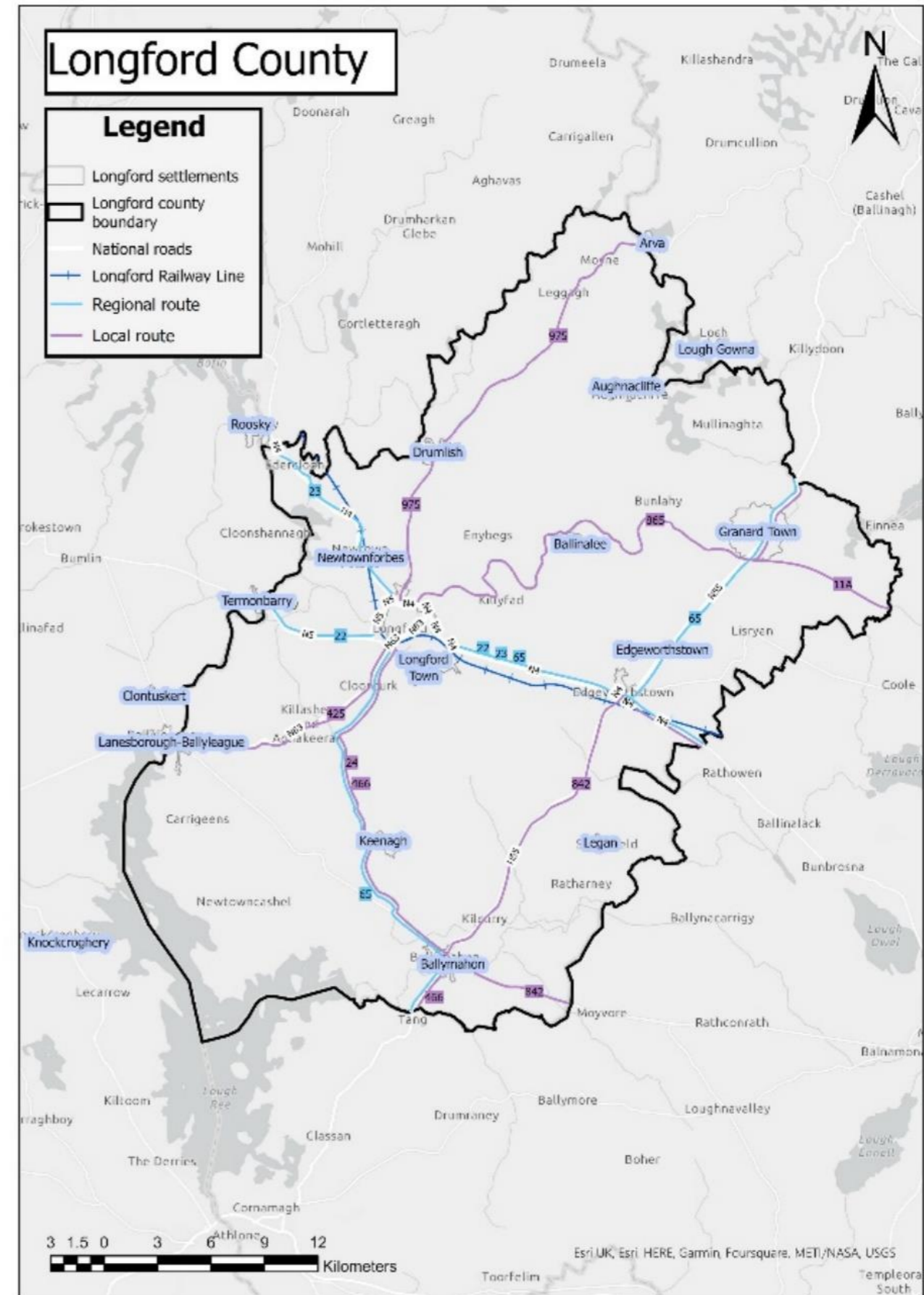


Figure 3-12 Local Link Network within County Longford

Public Transport Accessibility Level (PTAL)

PTAL (Public Transport Accessibility Analysis) is a measure of connectivity by public transport. PTAL gives an overview of how well an area is connected by public transport. The score is a combination of the walk time to the transport stop (bus or tram stop, railway station) and the level of service at that stop. As well as walk time and frequency, the calculation also introduces the average wait time at a stop and a reliability factor which is different for rail and bus. The scoring rating for PTAL is shown in Table 3-1 PTAL scoring index.

Table 3-1 PTAL scoring index

PTAL	Access Index range	Map colour
0 (worst)	0	
1a	0.01 – 2.50	
1b	2.51 – 5.0	
2	5.01 – 10.0	
3	10.01 – 15.0	
4	15.01 – 20.0	
5	20.01 – 25.0	
6a	25.01 – 40.0	
6b (best)	40.01+	

PTAL was used to assess transport connectivity in Longford, Figure 3-13. The results show that County Longford has poor access to public transport due to its rural setting and low frequencies. The results are only slightly higher for Longford due to the train service complemented by many coach services traversing or starting in the town.

Lastly, the accessibility of bus stops by walking and cycling are shown in Appendix B respectively. It can be seen that by creating a network that connects with the public transport, a good network coverage can be reached especially in the northern parts of the County.

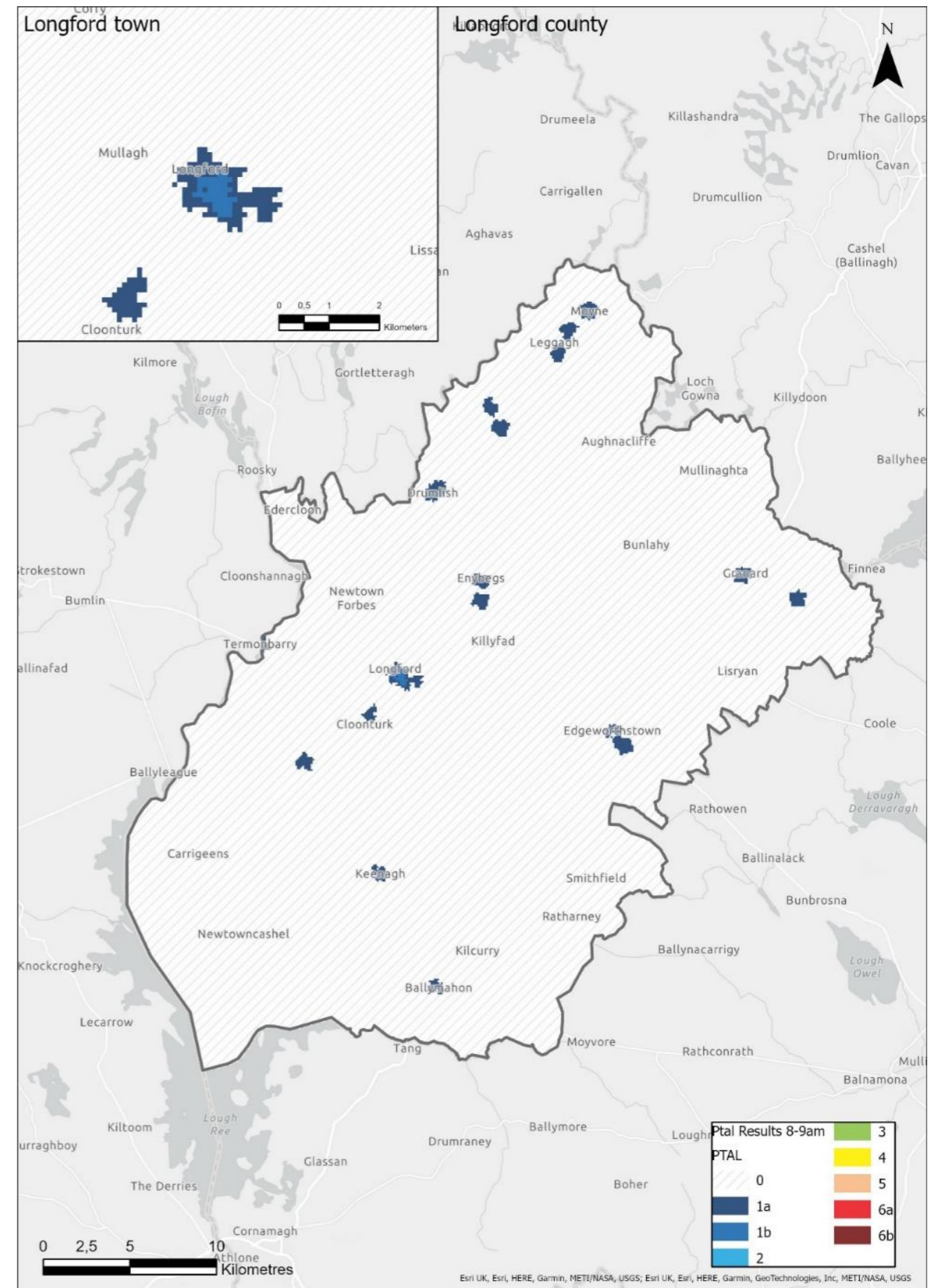


Figure 3-13 Public Transport Accessibility Level (PTAL) 8-9 am

3.3.5 Road Transport

County Longford is traversed by four national roads: N4, N5, N63 and N55 as shown in Figure 3-14. Majority of the larger settlements within the County are located along the national roads with three traversing or starting in Longford town:

- N4 connects Sligo in the north to Dublin in the east. Towns and villages along the way: Edgeworthstown, Longford and Newtown Forbes;
- N5 starts in Longford and ends in Westport.
- N63 starts in Longford, passing Lanesborough and continuing in the direction of Galway until it merges with the M18 in Annagh Cross; and
- N55 runs from Athlone to Carrickmacross in the north. Towns and villages along the way: Granard, Edgeworthstown, Ballymahon.

Figure 3-15 illustrates the usual profile of a national road within County Longford. Although national roads have hard shoulders that can be used by active modes, they are not sufficient for walking, wheeling and cycling due to the lack of physical segregation in a traffic environment with high speeds.

Additionally, they act as barriers to any active travel networks due to their width making crossing them difficult. Any active travel route crossing a national road must provide safe facilities for everyone to do so. This is an especially important as majority of the larger settlements within the County are located along the national roads and, therefore, any commuting route to and from these towns is likely to cross paths with at least one national road.



Figure 3-15 National road N55 at Annagh Lower Invalid source specified.

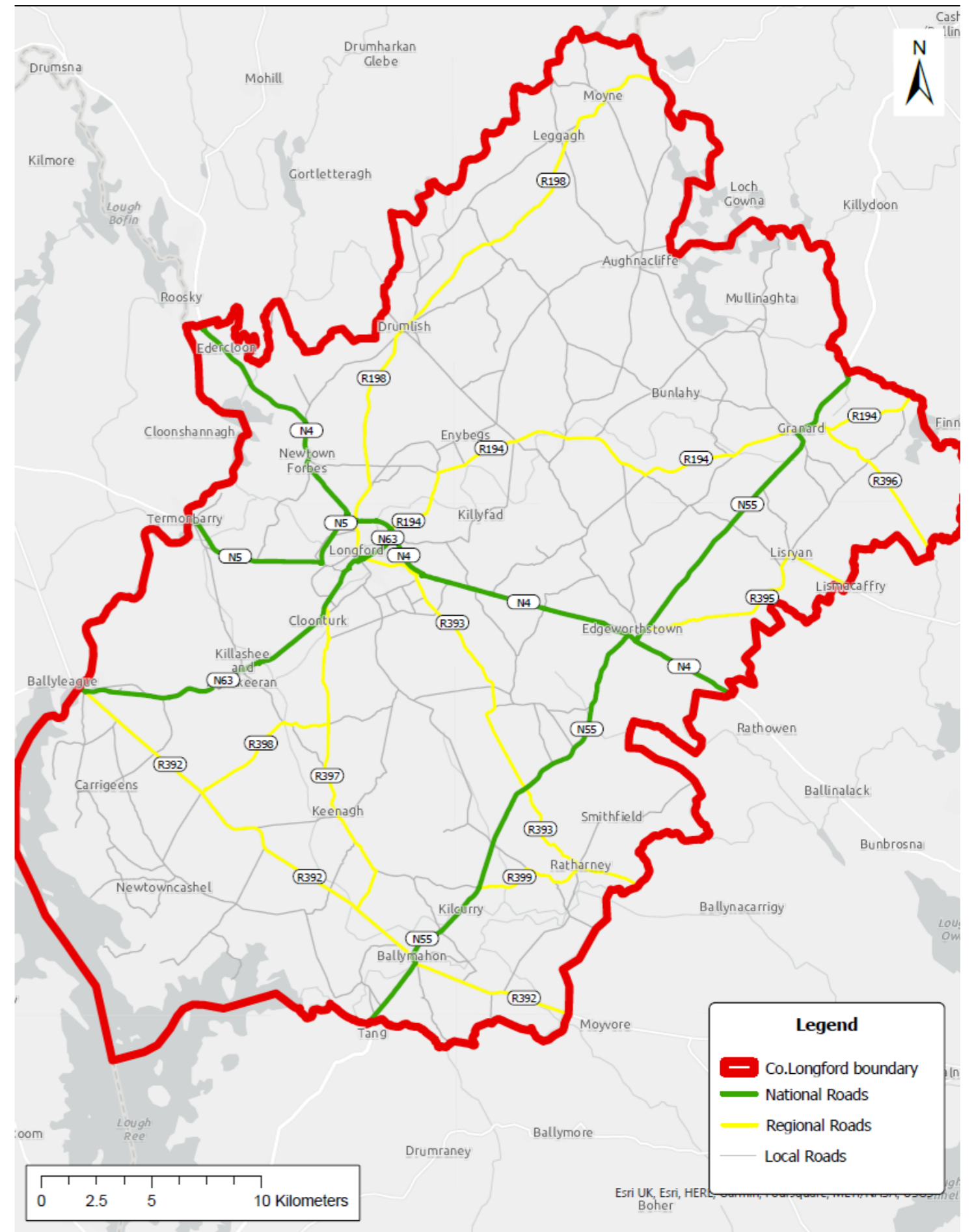


Figure 3-14 Road network hierarchy in County Longford

Moreover, there are several regional roads connecting the rest of the main settlements in the County. These roads generally have no hard shoulders which further reduces the space from active modes forcing people walking, wheeling and cycling to make use of the carriageway. This is demonstrated in Figure 3-17.

Meanwhile, the local roads have a much narrower profile, lower traffic volumes and usually one lane which further reduces the speeds of motorised traffic as shown in Figure 3-16. However, these roads have generally poor sight distances and, thus introducing walking, wheeling and cycling on them without adjustments may potentially be unsafe.



Figure 3-16 Regional road R198 outside of Drumlish Invalid source specified.



Figure 3-17 Local road next to Rathcline Castle Invalid source specified.

Car Parking

Parking is one of the most significant components of a seamless mobility system for active modes, not only in terms of cycle parking but also in terms of parking for motorised vehicles.

Currently, car parking is present within the public realm throughout the County. Within the main towns and villages, ample on-street parking has been provided throughout the settlements. Evaluation of on-street parking is relevant as parking places are major barriers to the planning and creation of cycleways but also to widening of footpaths due narrow road cross sections. Moreover, public parking is the low hanging fruit for implementing parking policies as the council has direct control thereover.

In addition, parking has been provided at both train stations of the County as well as recreational locations, such as for the Royal Canal Greenway outside of Ballyloughan, and in Lanesborough to access the Commons North Woodland Walk.

Longford Town

On-street parking is present, for instance, on Main Street and Dublin Street. Additionally, ample public-surface parking has been provided across the town with the largest parking facility located at Longford Shopping Centre. With ample parking available away from the Main Street, LCC has the opportunity to reallocate this space for the use of active modes. The reallocation does not only create a more pleasant environment for people walking, wheeling and cycling but it also reduces the amount of car movements on these streets. Considering the significant size of many of parking facilities in the Town, even the removal of few parking spots can free up significant space for active travel infrastructure.

Moreover, increasing the cost of parking is another option for deterring car use and incentivising people to walk, wheel or cycle. Currently, parking at public parking is cheap with most parking locations having hourly and daily rates of €1 and €2, respectively.

3.3.6 Current Travel Patterns

Current travel patterns provide insights as to how active modes could be competitive alternatives in relation to existing modes in County Longford, in particular to the use of private cars. The description of the patterns is mainly based on the results of the 2016 Census.

Modal Split

The results of the 2016 Census provide information on the modal splits for various trip purposes. Due to lack of available data on modal split across all trip purposes, however, this analysis is focused on commuting and education trips as, they are likely to constitute the two main travel purposes for daily trips for average commuters. Moreover, analysis on modal splits across all purposes makes use of the NTA Travel Survey 2019 which presents modal splits for Ireland as a whole.

Commuting

Modal splits for commuting in the County and town of Longford are shown in Figure 3-18. The majority of commuting trips are made by car at 61% and 70% in the County and town, respectively. This is somewhat comparable to the average share of car use of approximately 66% for commuters in Ireland. However, when comparing to County Longford to rural areas, the share of car trips is significantly lower with an average of 76% of rural residents commuting by car. The share of Longford town is comparable to other towns of similar size. Additionally, the average distance for commuting trips in County Longford was 20km and the average travel time was between 15 to 35 minutes in 2016.

Although distances can vary widely around the average of 20 km, when combined with the average travel times of minimum 15 min and dominance of car use, the results suggest that commuting trips are relatively long trips. This is a constraint for improving the rates of walking, wheeling and cycling for the full distance of the commute.

However, walking and travelling by bus are also well represented. On the county-level, the share for both is at 11%. When comparing the County with rural areas, the share is higher; in other rural areas in Ireland, commuting mode shares for walking and bus are 4% and 1%, respectively. This shows the importance of the bus network for people living outside of Longford town. Therefore, the potential for improving the uptake of active modes is in increasing the access and egress trips to public transport. At the same time, 19% of commuting trips within Longford town are made on foot while only 1% are made by bus. In other similar sized towns, the shares for walking and bus are 11% and 5%, respectively. This indicates that Longford is a compact enough town to be covered by walking and wheeling.

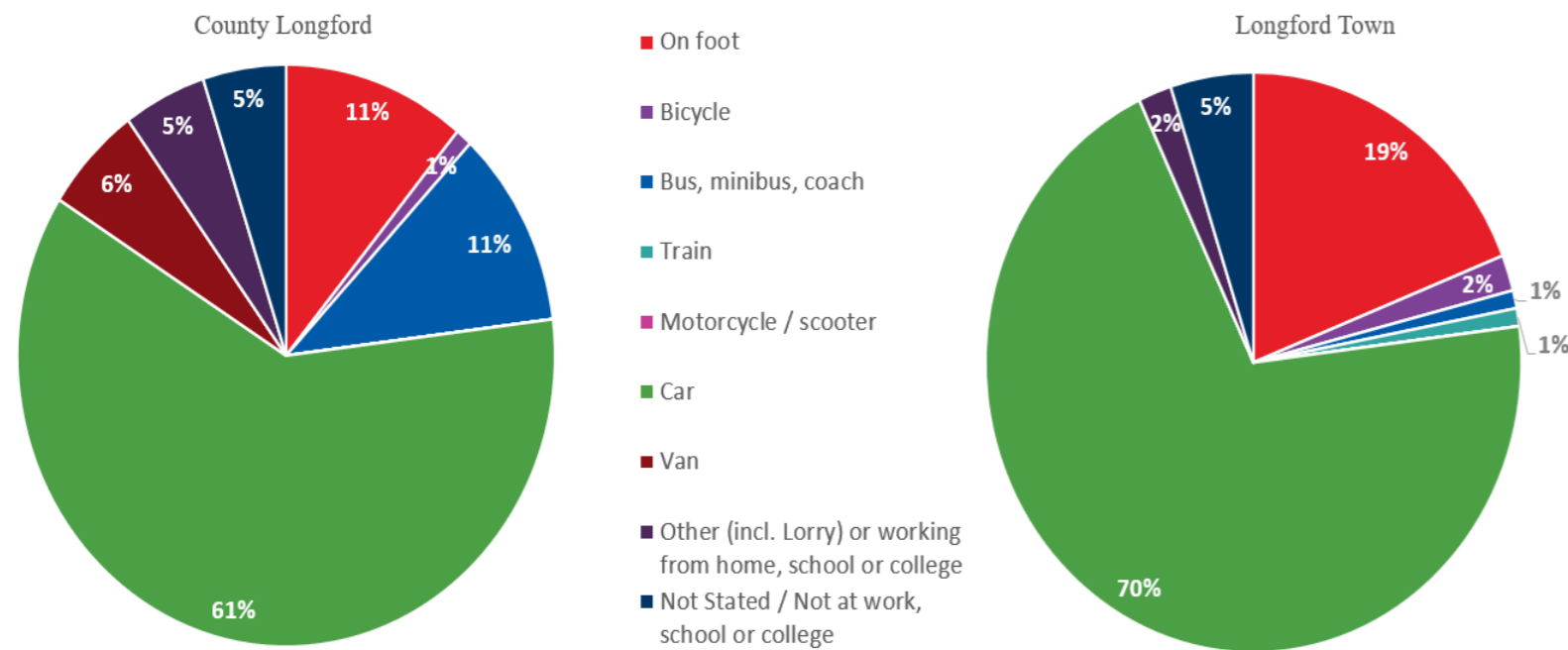


Figure 3-18 Modal split for commuting trips in County Longford (left) and Longford town (right) in 2016

Moreover, only a small share (1%) of trips are made by cycling which can be explained through limited cycling network within the County. This is comparable to other rural parts of Ireland. Results of the 2016 Census suggest, however, that there is interest in commuting by bike. As can be seen in Figure 3-19, the number of people cycling to work has increased around Ballymahon, Longford town, Newtown Forbes and Drumlish. The most significant growth can be seen south of Longford near the Royal Canal Greenway. Improving the cycling infrastructure in proximity to these towns and villages has the potential to improve commuting by bike. While car ownership is lower in County Longford (71%) than in Ireland (85%), it still suggests that rural counties are significantly dependent on the use of a private car. All these findings combined present a constraint for active modes in County Longford, similarly to the rest of the rural counties in Ireland.

Results from NTA's travel survey (2019) show that the three main reason for people to drive:

1. Family/child related activities (22%);
2. It is more convenient (21%); and
3. There are no alternatives (20%).

In order to reduce the dependency of car usage in County Longford, it is important to take these results into consideration and create a mobility ecosystem in which family activities can be covered by alternative or, alternatively, ensuring that children can travel to school independently by active means of transport.

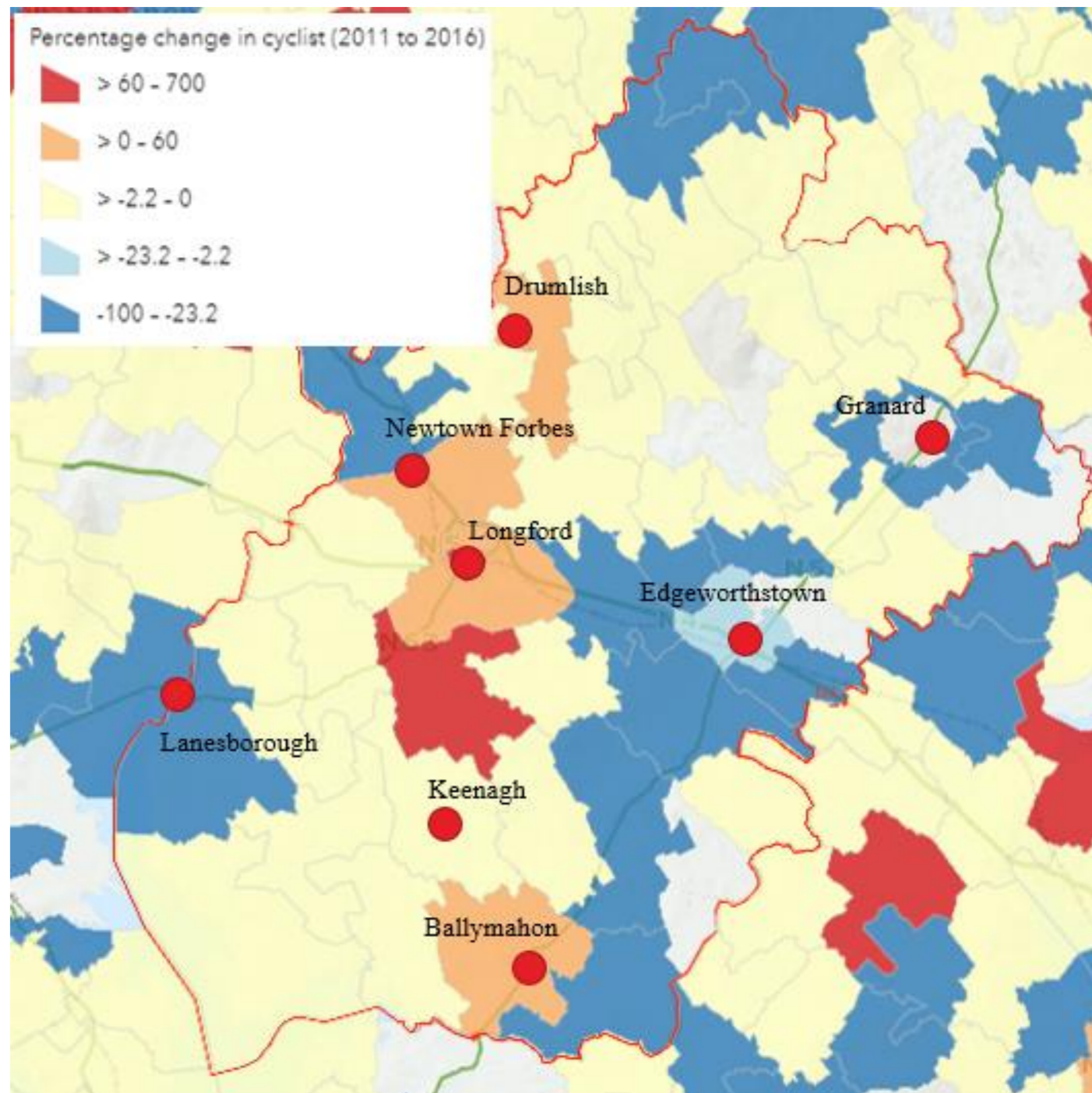


Figure 3-19 Percentage change in people cycling to work from 2011 to 2016

Education

Modal splits for education trips in Longford town are presented in Figure 3-20. It shows that 31% of students within the town travel to school by active means of transport which is a considerably higher share than the share for commuting within the town (22%). Furthermore, the share of active modes for Longford is higher than the national average of 24% shown in Figure 3-21. This may partly be explained by the three secondary schools located in the town as older students are more likely to travel by active means.

Although the share of car trips to education (48%) is lower than the car share for commuting in the town (61%), it is still the highest share across all modes.

It is also relevant to compare the share of trips made as a car passenger. Car trips have a share of 48% for education purposes while 21% of trips to work are covered by being a passenger in a car. The reasons for higher results for education trips can be explained by students' low age and, thus, lack of driving licenses. In addition, it can be seen that being driven to school is more common amongst primary education which can be explained by young pupils' natural dependency on their parents as well as potentially parents' safety concerns.

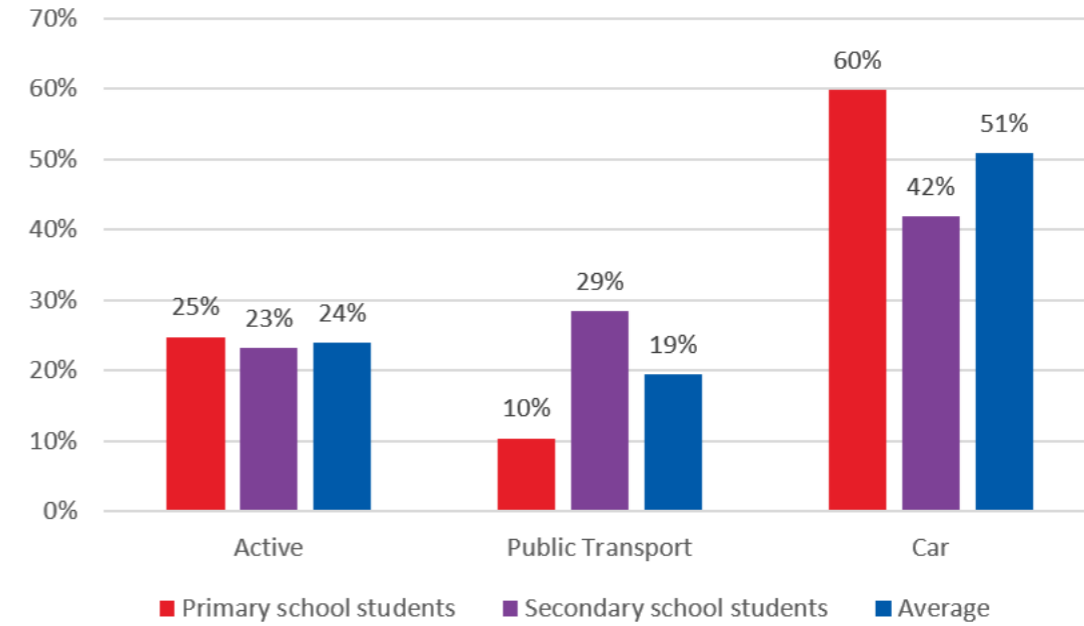


Figure 3-20 Modal split for different school levels in Ireland in 2016

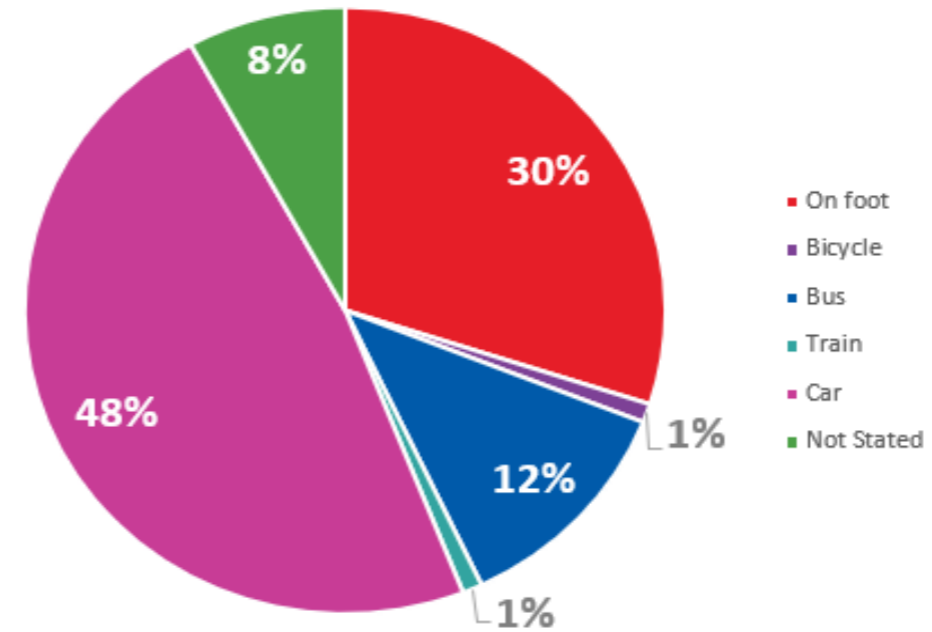


Figure 3-21 Modal split for trips to education in Longford town in 2016

Walking and Cycling Patterns

NTA Survey results from 2019 show that people who cycle do so mostly because they enjoy it or to keep fit/exercise (Figure 3-22). The results show a similar trend for reasons to walk. This suggests that education on the health benefit of walking and cycling may motivate new people to take up active modes.

Other responses included greater freedom and convenience which may be relevant for the creation of this strategy. By improving the active travel network will make walking, wheeling and cycling a more competitive mode in relation to car and, thus, reduce people’s dependency on the use of private cars.

Furthermore, factors that would encourage more walking and cycling included safety, health and infrastructure as shown in Figure 3-23. Therefore, it is crucial that the emphasis of this strategy is on the creation of a safe active travel experience for all users. Most responses are similar across male and female respondents except the notable case of safety and health, which is bigger concern for young and adult female respondents.

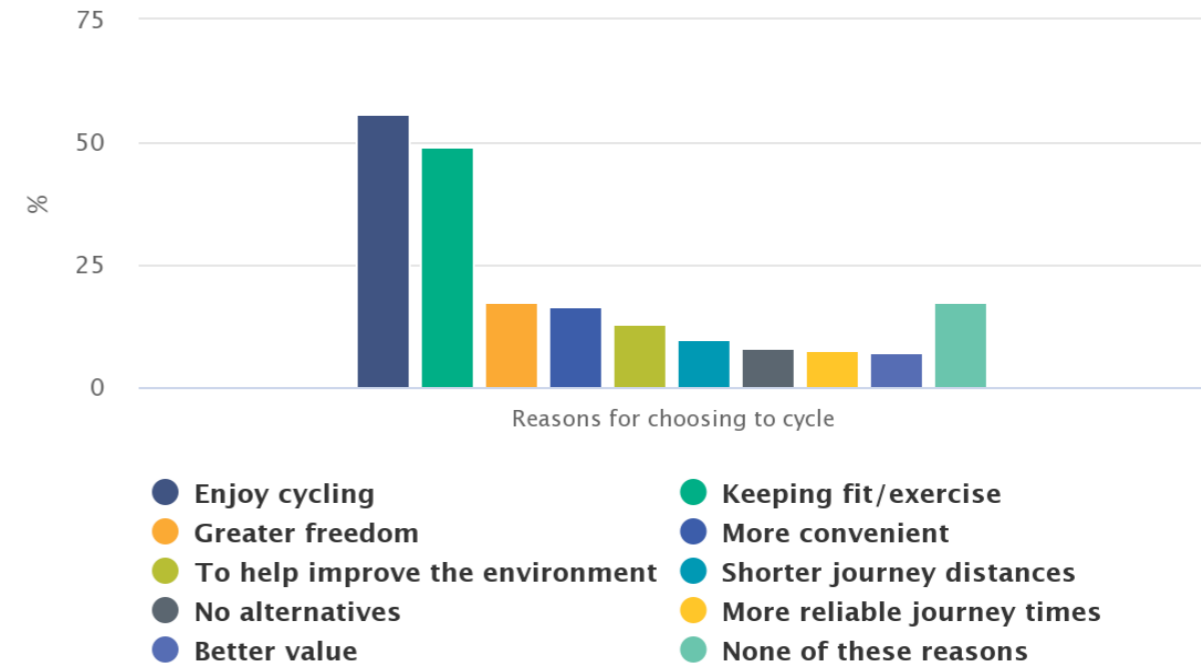


Figure 3-22 Why people cycle in Ireland in 2019

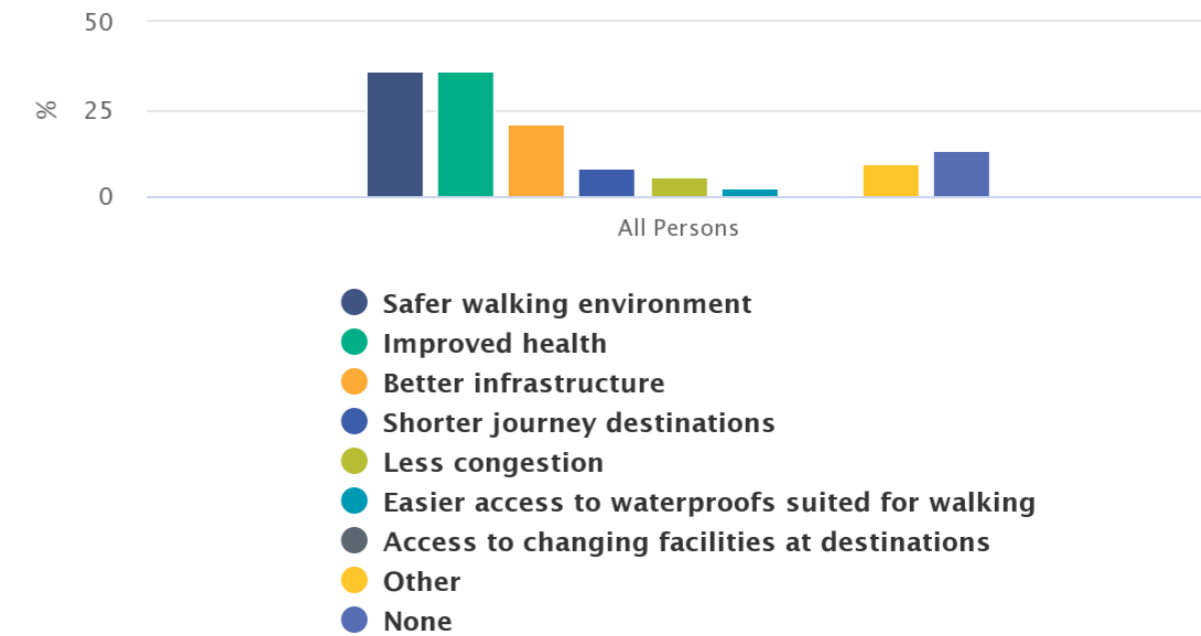


Figure 3-23 What would encourage more people to cycle in Ireland

Source: CSO Ireland

4. Opportunities and Constraints

4.1 Opportunities

- For the most part, the topography of County Longford lends itself well to cycling.
- Towns and villages within Longford are compact enough to be covered by active modes.
- Relatively short distances to school have the potential to improve uptake of cycling for education trips, especially in primary schools.
- LCC is already constructing cycle infrastructure within Longford town which is making cycling more visible to the residents.
- Several regeneration projects are opportunities to introduce active modes from the beginning of the development.
- Improvements to the Royal Canal Greenway, and the creation of a River Camlin Cycle Route could drive further growth in cycling. Recent cycling growth along the Royal Canal has been high as demonstrated in the previous section.
- Number of people cycling to work is increasing which shows that there is momentum for active modes within the County.
- National road N4 bypasses Longford town and, thus diverts northbound traffic away from the town centre.
- Most large settlements are located within 15km, a cyclable distance, from Longford town.
- Exploring the Peatland route as a tourist and leisure attraction can be an opportunity to encourage walking and cycling.
- There are many vacant sites in Longford town that can be used as cycle parking or the land can be used to host new active travel infrastructure.
- Space for on-street parking can be reutilised for active modes, especially in Longford town due to ample parking off Main Street.
- While distances between many settlements are too long for walking, wheeling and cycling, there is good potential for integrating the active travel network with the bus network and, thus, making active modes access and egress modes in the rural areas.

4.2 Constraints

- Distances to school for secondary school students are long which is a constraint for walking, wheeling and cycling.
- Inhabitants of County Longford commute approximately 20km on average. Such distances are not easy to cover by active modes without availing of electrification.
- The rail and national road infrastructure, and waterways are barriers to the creation of a safe active travel network.
- Most schools in the County are in rural locations, and where schools are located in the fringe of the town, provisions for active travel (e.g., footpaths/protected crossings/ cycleways) are generally missing.
- In most of the larger settlements, national roads serve also as the main street with shops and other services placed along them. Modifying the double function of these roads would have a significant impact, especially on road hierarchy, diversions and logistic supply.
- The weather in Longford is unfavourable which may be perceived as a constraint by residents when looking to create an active travel culture.

5. Vision

The vision for the County Longford ATS is:

“To establish Longford as a pioneering county for active travel by ‘making walking, wheeling and cycling an attractive and realistic choice for short journeys.’”

To achieve this vision, several principles have been set to guide the sub-strategies within this document. They are an important set of criteria to ensure future decisions align to achieve the vision and aspirations of the strategy.

5.1 Objectives

The strategy is framed by a set of objectives that encapsulate the desired outcomes for County Longford. By achieving these objectives, the number of trips made by walking, wheeling and cycling can be achieved.

1. Improve the environment for walking, wheeling and cycling in County Longford;
2. Provide better access to cycles and cycling support across the community; and
3. Enable and encourage people to walk, wheel and cycle short distances.

6. Interventions

Based on the vision, objectives outlined in the previous section, this section sets out the various interventions proposed as part of the strategy.

6.1 Improve the environment for walking, wheeling and cycling in County Longford

6.1.1 Active Travel Network and Connections

In order to encourage those in County Longford to walk, wheel and cycle more frequently, the active travel network needs to be attractive, safe, direct, continuous and comfortable.

Within towns and settlements, where walking and wheeling are realistic choices for trips, this means that the paths need to be of excellent quality, especially within the catchment areas of schools, public transport and high streets. Interventions should include improving permeability to reduce the travel time for people using active modes of transportation.

For inter-communal travel within County Longford, the network should have dedicated routes for cycling, and walking. Intercommunal travel will be facilitated along the National Cycle Network, Figure 6-1.

- Enable direct, clear active travel journeys for short trips within County Longford with priority for schools and public transport.
- Eliminate traffic danger as a reason not to cycle by improving cycling network.
- Ensure footpaths and cycle lanes are usable all year round, by ensuring required maintenance and gritting is undertaken.
- Provide new footpaths where there are gaps in the existing network or where there is high demand for walking with priority given to schools, public transport and main streets within settlements.

Provide easy access to Royal Canal Greenway for active travel modes including access points that are well lit and signed.

Improve existing footpaths by upgrading their surface, width, lighting, drainage and signage.

- Provide new pedestrian crossings where they are needed to facilitate safe and convenient crossing of roads, particularly on routes to schools.
- Provide new cycle parking where they are needed to facilitate secure and convenient storage of bikes such as at train stations and schools.
- Integrate active modes of transport with public transport, such as providing bicycle parking at bus and train stations.
- Set minimum standards for bicycle parking to ensure that safe, secure cycle parking will be available across the county at key locations, including bicycle parking for cargo bicycles and adaptive bicycles.

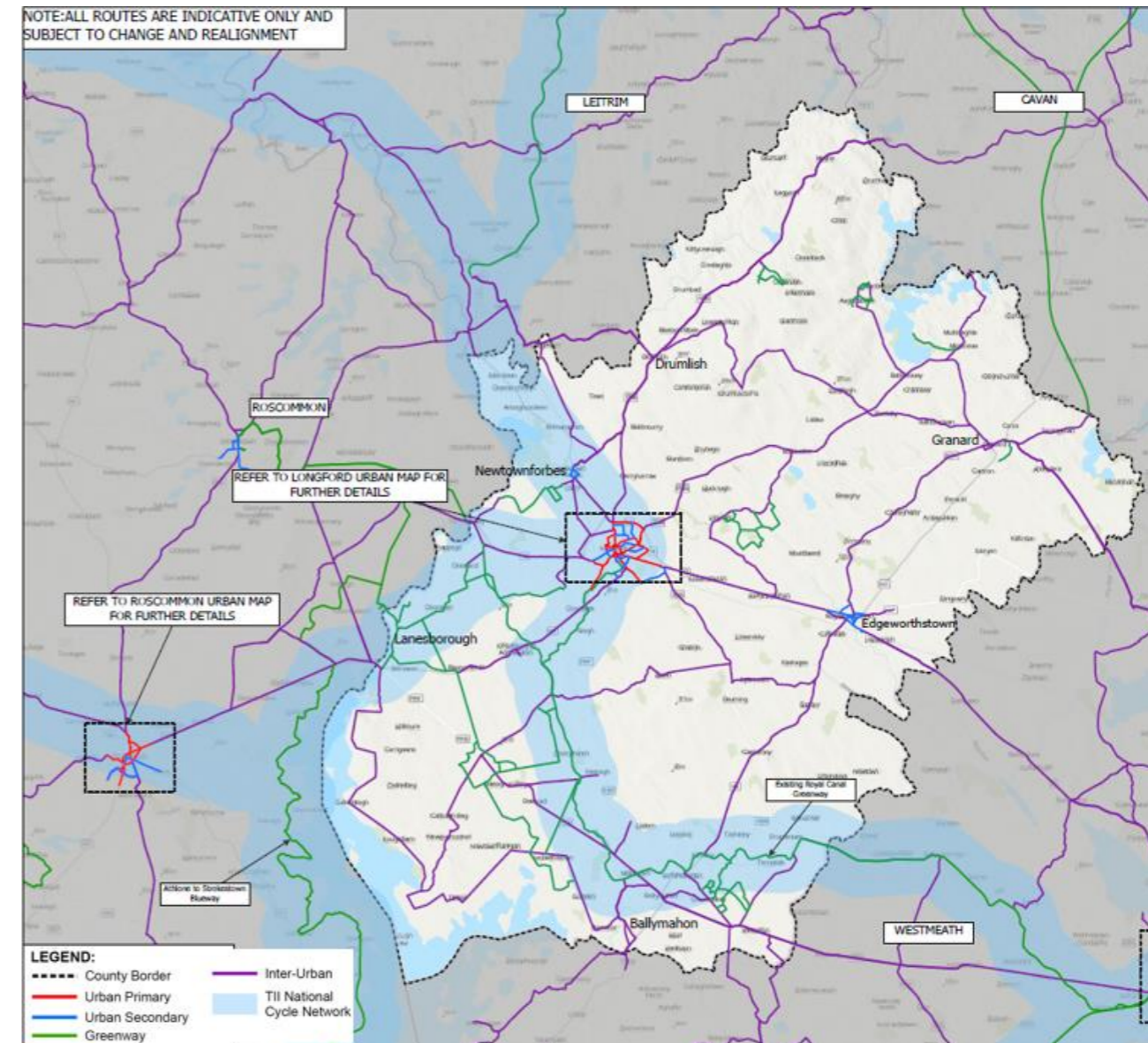


Figure 6-1 County cycle network (NTA)

6.2 Provide better access to cycles and cycling support across the community

There are many barriers to buying or accessing cycles, especially for those on lower incomes. It is therefore essential to explore the implementation of a rental scheme across the county, especially at public transport nodes and town centres with focus on e-bike availability.

Explore community and work-based solutions which improve access to cycles, such as cycle ‘libraries’ or ‘pools’, ‘swap fleets’ for children’s cycles, monthly subscription / purchase schemes, and the availability of low-cost refurbished cycles.

6.3 Enable and encourage people to walk, wheel and cycle short distances

Encourage demographic use which is representative of Co. Longford.

6.3.1 Collaboration and engagement

Engage with people from communities throughout the county, in particular encouraging people from groups currently under-represented in active travel to walk, wheel and cycle more.

Reduce the inequities experienced by different settlements, support development of community or sports hubs as focal points to host community active travel champions, disseminate sustainable travel information and deliver activities and training to individuals and groups.

Engage with under-represented, disengaged and seldom-heard groups to improve uptake of cycling in these groups.

Investing in Active Travel where people work, live and study, such as Longford town and Edgeworthstown and other large settlements.

Prepare a Sustainable Travel Behaviour Change Strategy.

6.3.2 Cycle training and education

- Make a range of training programmes available across the county to enable people of all ages and abilities to start and continue cycling.
- Support children to walk, wheel and cycle more:
- Every school student in county Longford should have access to bike training. This should be delivered to every student during curricular time at school.

6.3.3 Campaign, activities and events

- Promote walking, wheeling and cycling as a viable first choice for everyday journeys through the development of targeted campaigns.
- Focus on the benefits of active travel and align with national campaigns.
- Car-free Sundays on certain sections of the main streets within the settlement of Longford town and Edgeworthstown,
- Work with communities to develop a year-long programme of community events such as pop-up cycle roadshows and walking events, aiming to reach out to new audiences.

6.3.4 County Council leading by example

- Longford County Council its own travel plan and strategies and plans to encourage staff to walk, wheel and cycle as part of their commute.
- This can include incentives for cycling or internal competitions amongst the staff.

7. Implementation

7.1 Delivery Framework and Governance

Working in partnership and collaboration will be crucial for the successful delivery of this Active Travel Strategy. Action will need to be carried out by a range of organisations with their own timelines and funding mechanisms in play.

7.2 Funding

County Longford will identify different funding sources will be identified and pursued for different activities. External funding opportunities include the Irish Government and NTA. Developing long term sustainable revenue funding sources will be particularly important, not least for the delivery of the NCN within Co. Longford.

7.3 Monitoring & Reporting

Monitoring will be undertaken to gather data and information to assess the impacts of individual projects and the Strategy as a whole. The first step will be to review existing data and monitoring sources to see what is already being gathered, before commissioning any new data gathering. Data and analysis will be made available to all interested parties and stakeholders.

Appendix A

Primary and Post Primary Catchments

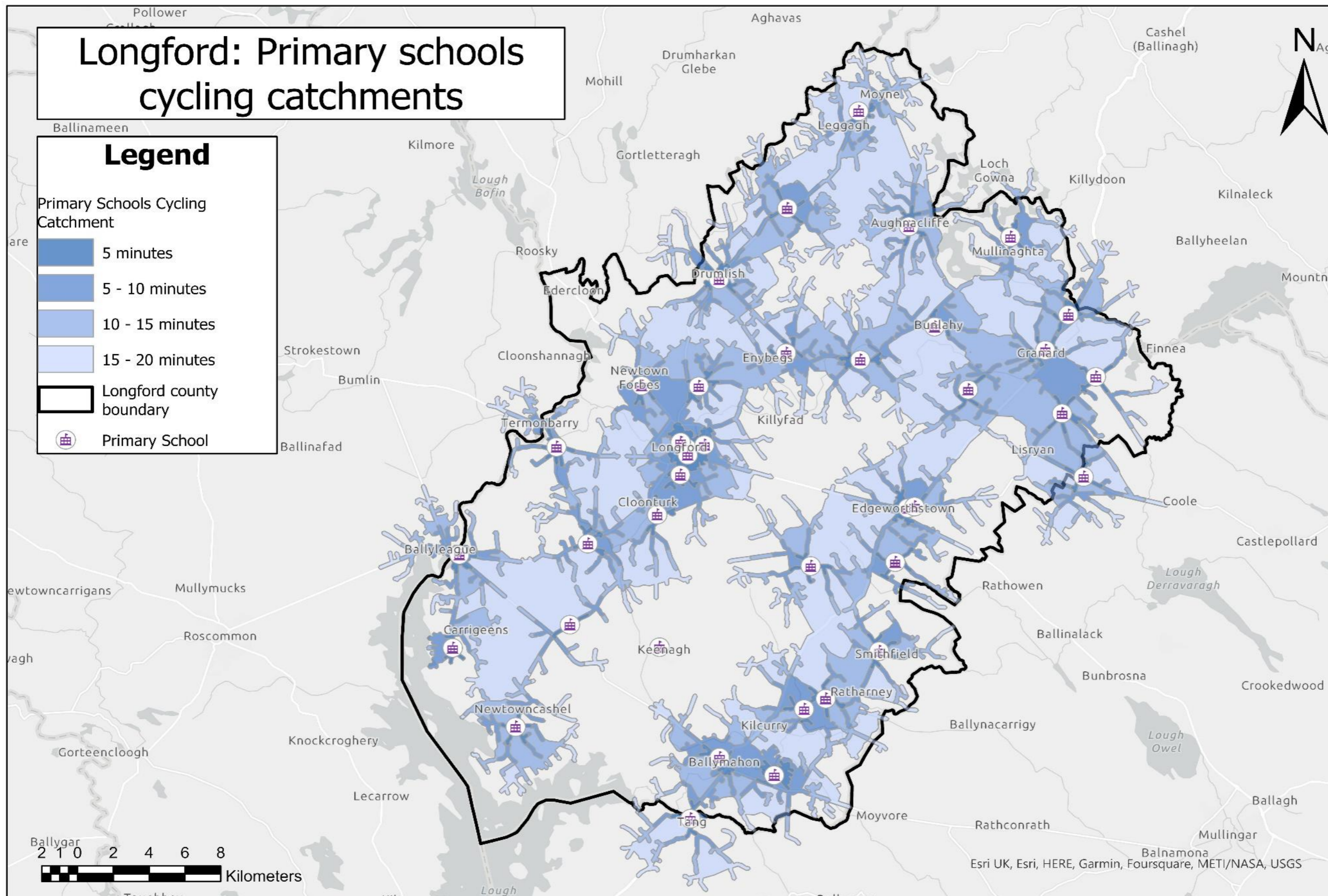


Figure A-1 Catchment of primary schools in County Longford by bicycle

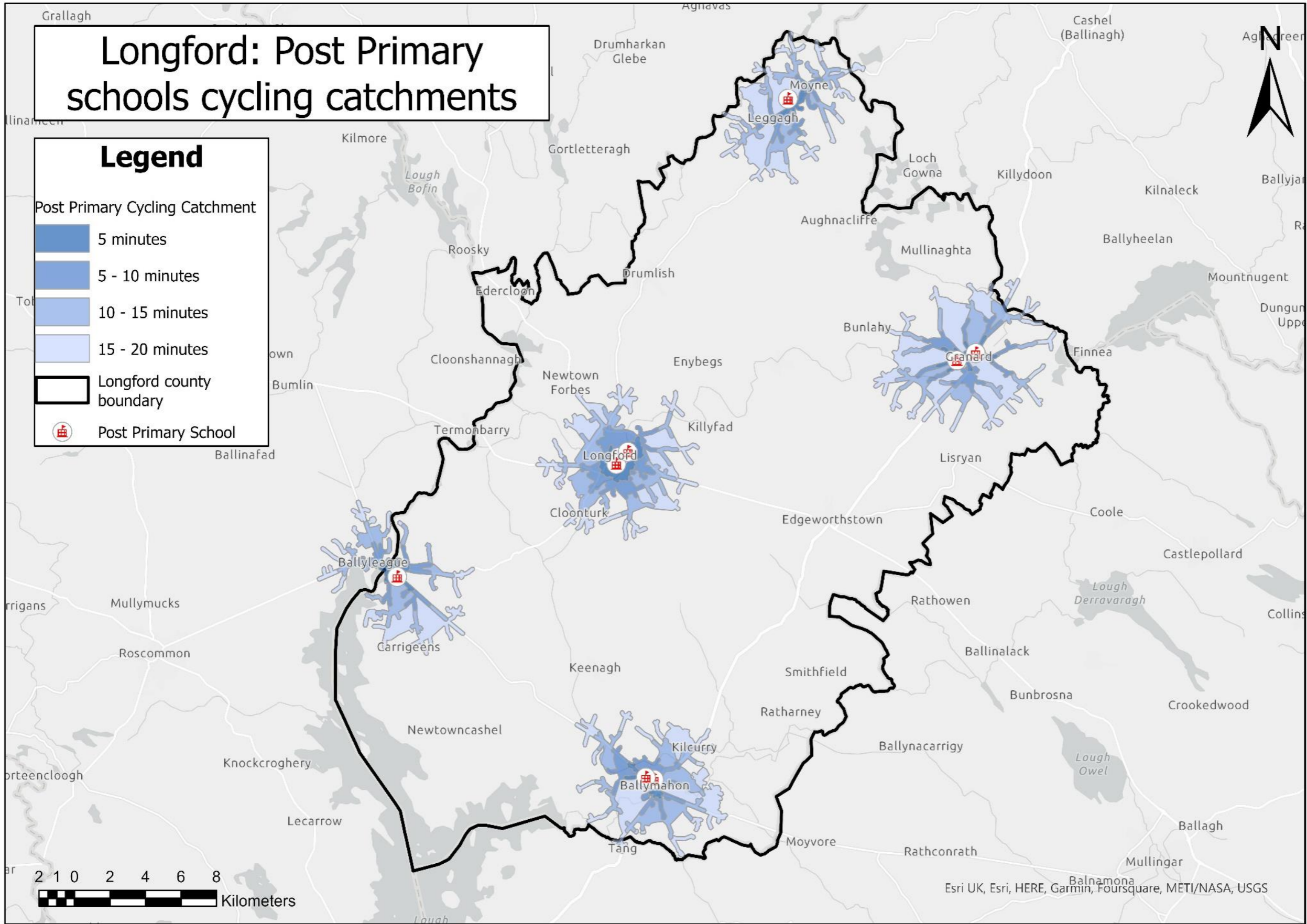


Figure A-2 Catchment of secondary schools in County Longford by bicycle

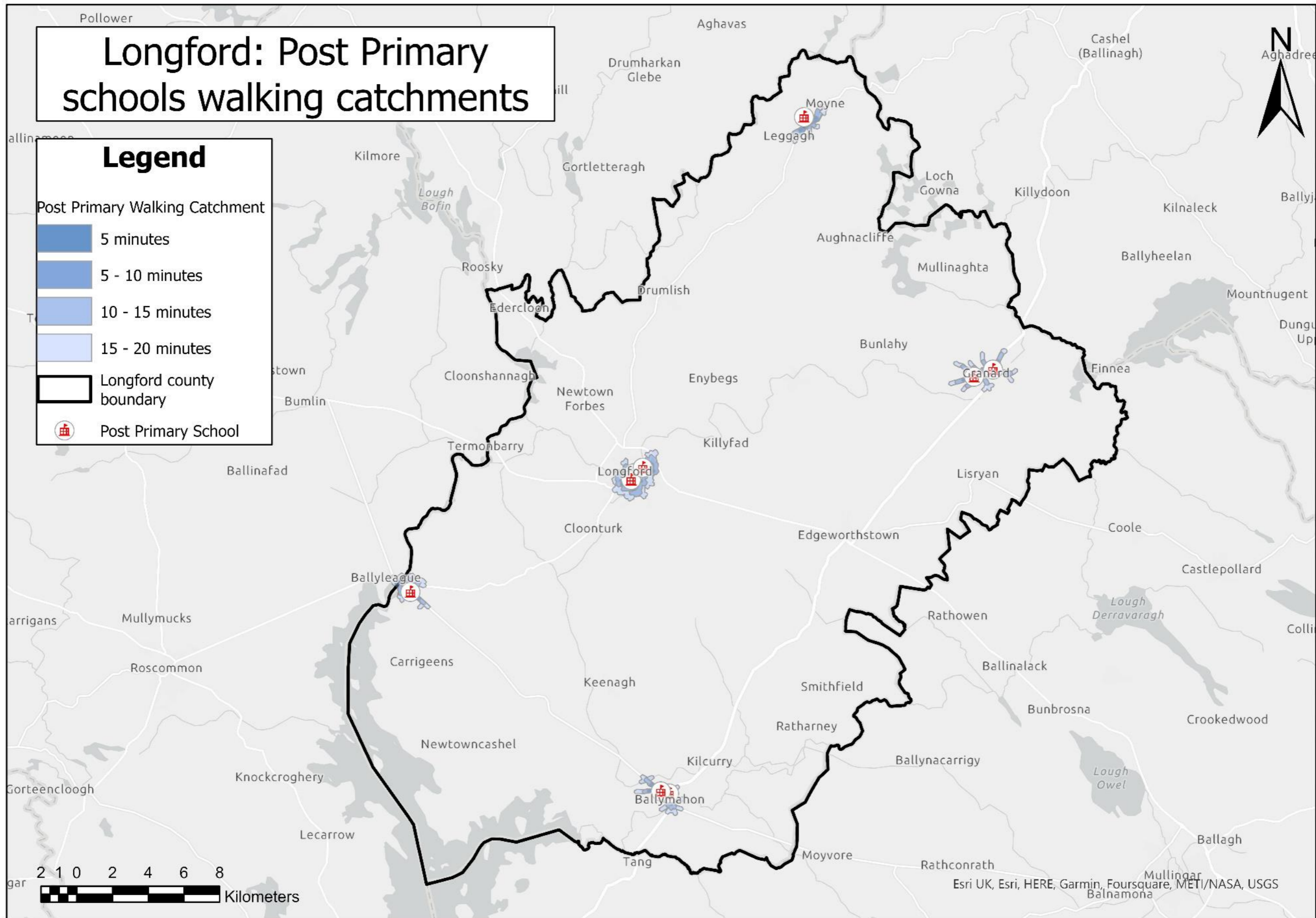


Figure A-3 Catchment of secondary schools in County Longford on foot

Appendix B

Public Transport Catchments

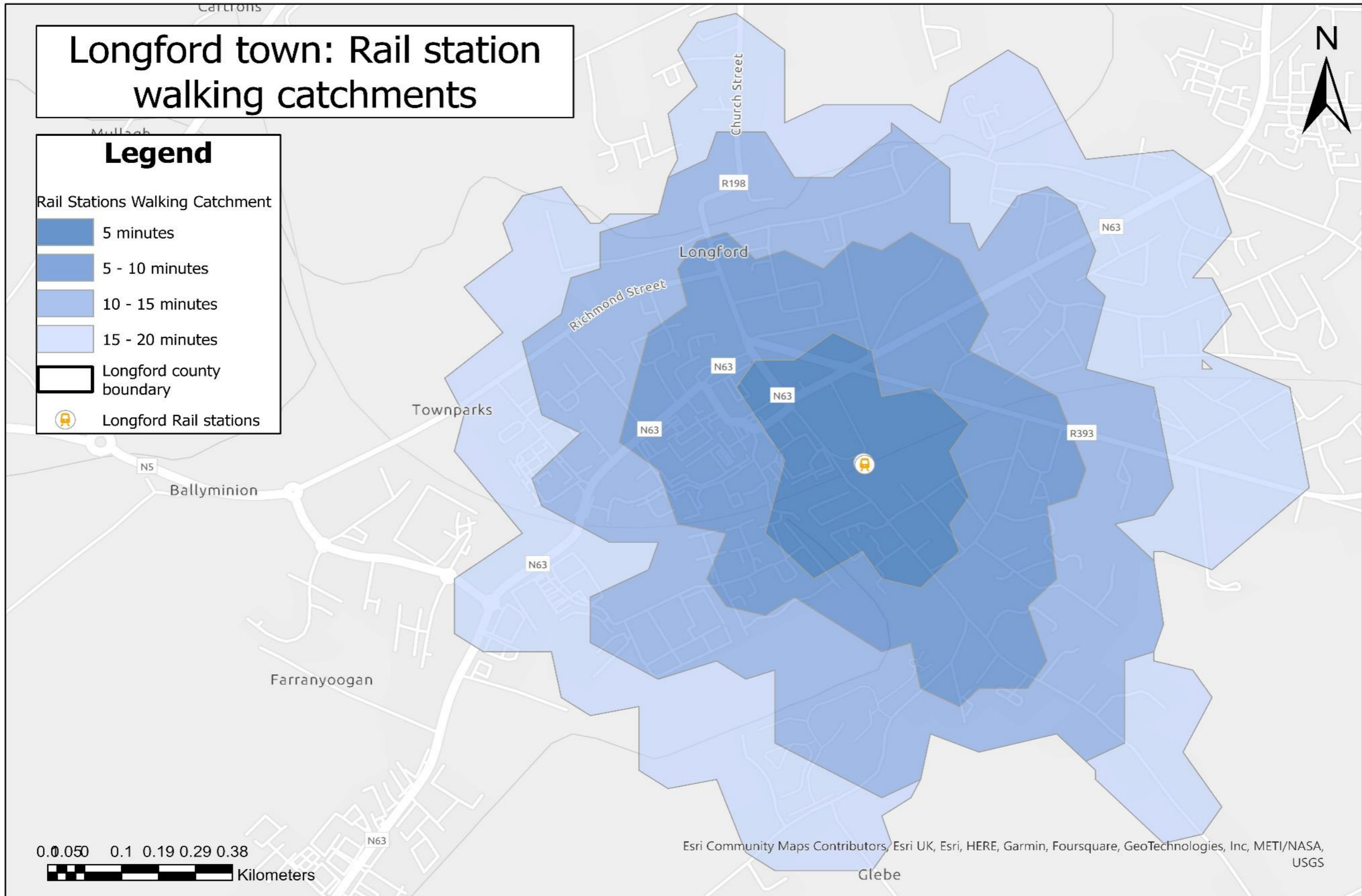


Figure B-1 Walking catchment of rail stations in County Longford (Longford town)

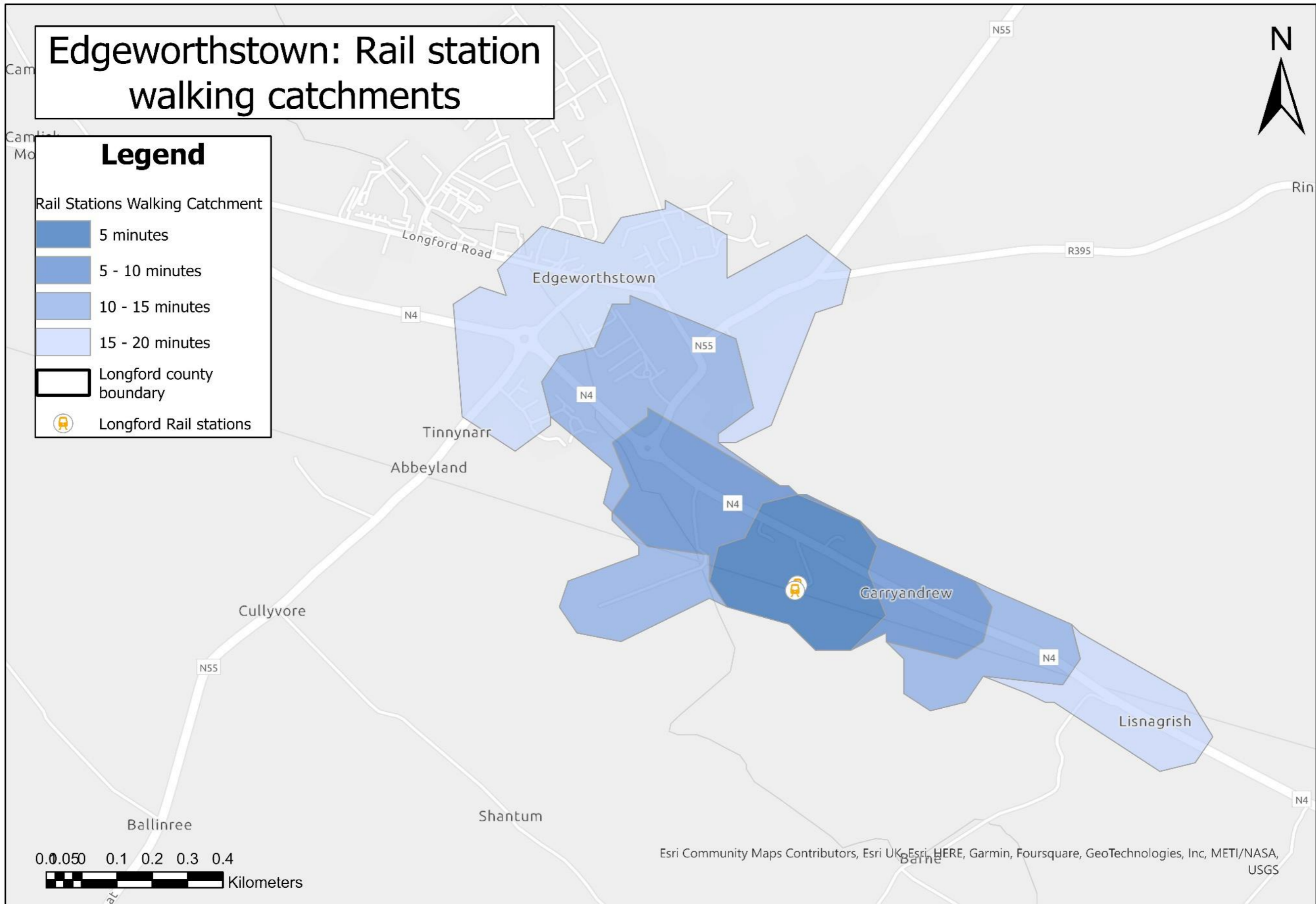


Figure B-2 Walking catchment of rail stations in County Longford (Edgeworthstown)

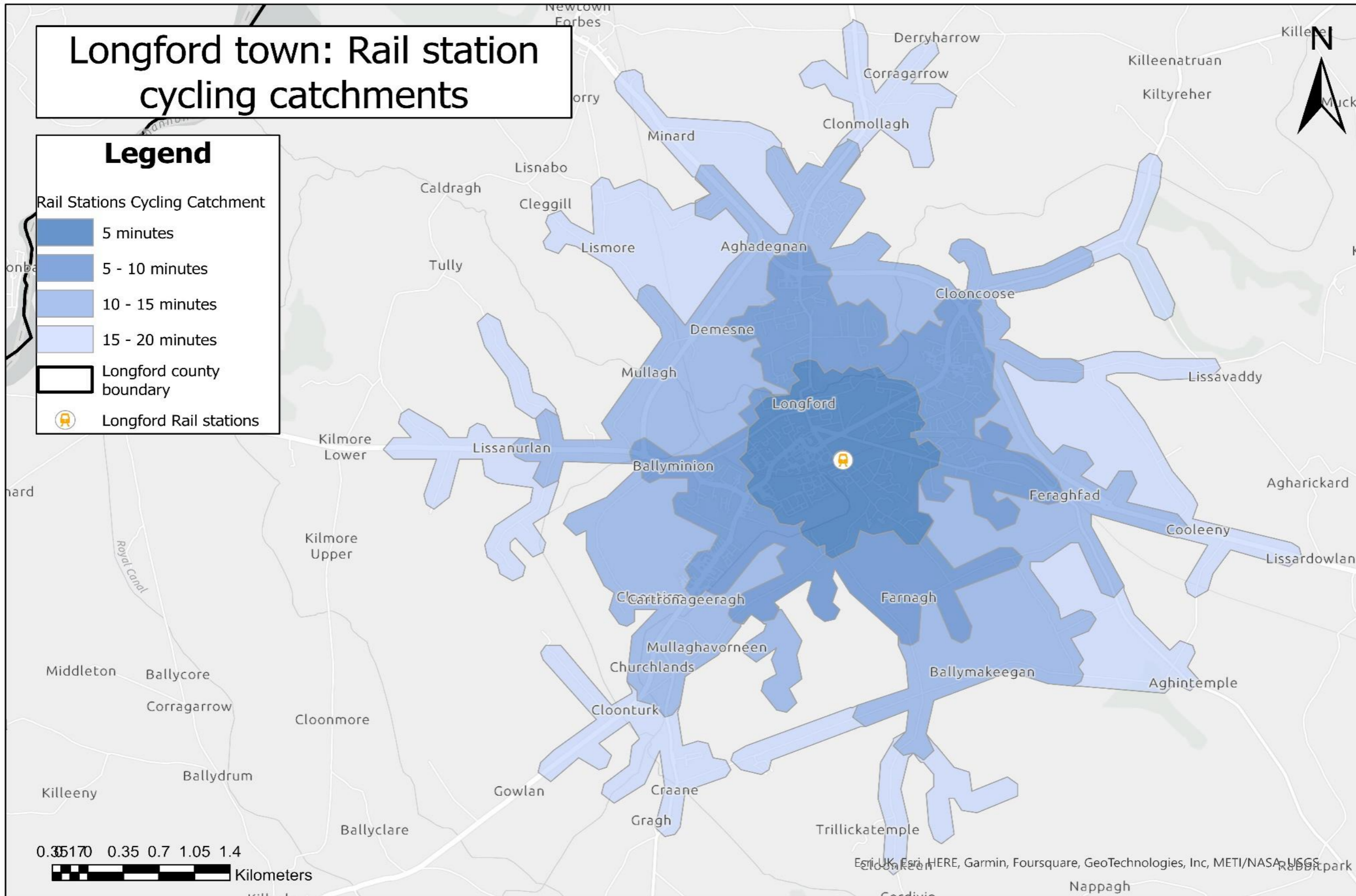


Figure B-3 Cycling catchment of rail stations in County Longford (Longford Town)

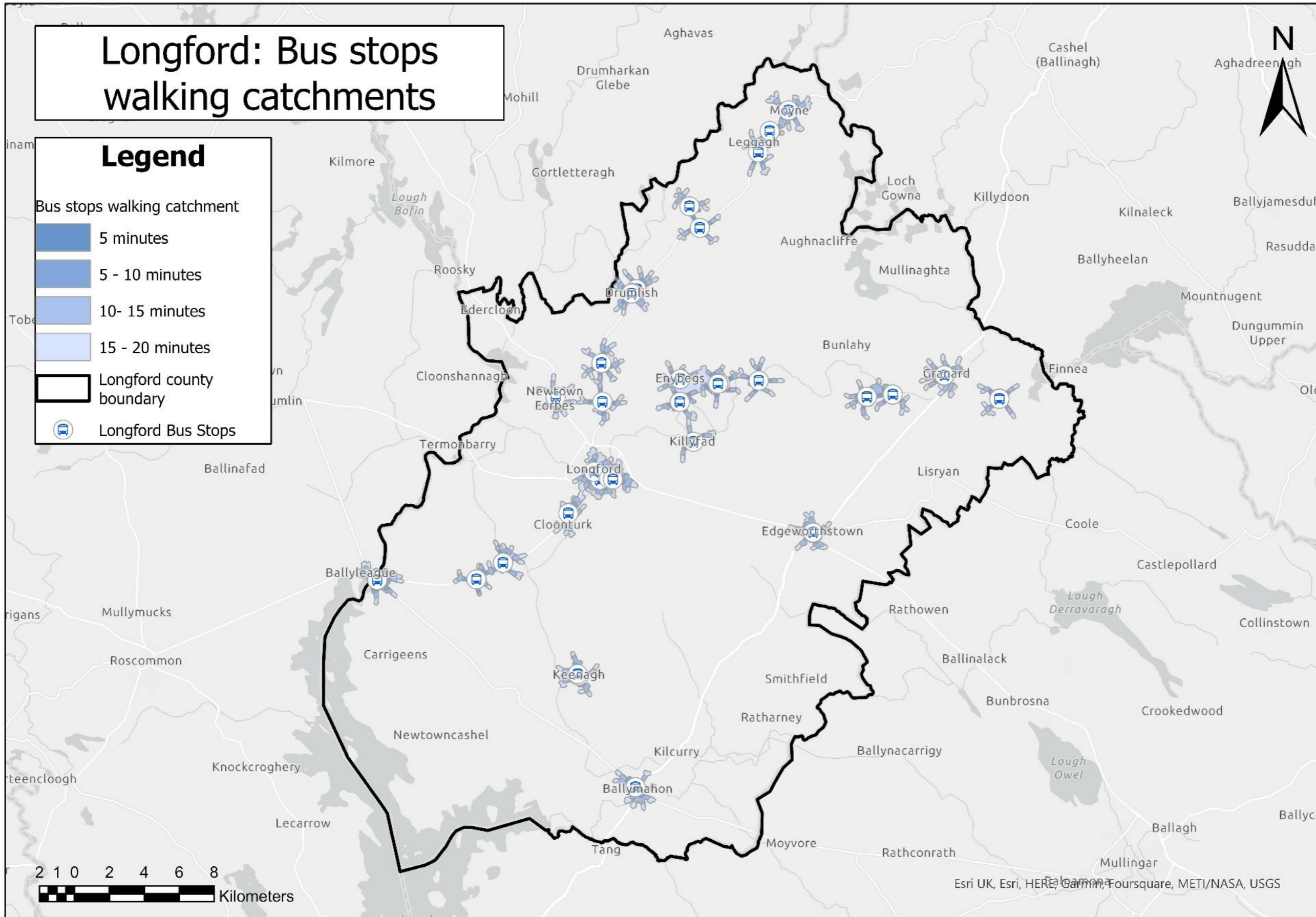


Figure B-4 Walking catchment of bus stops in County Longford

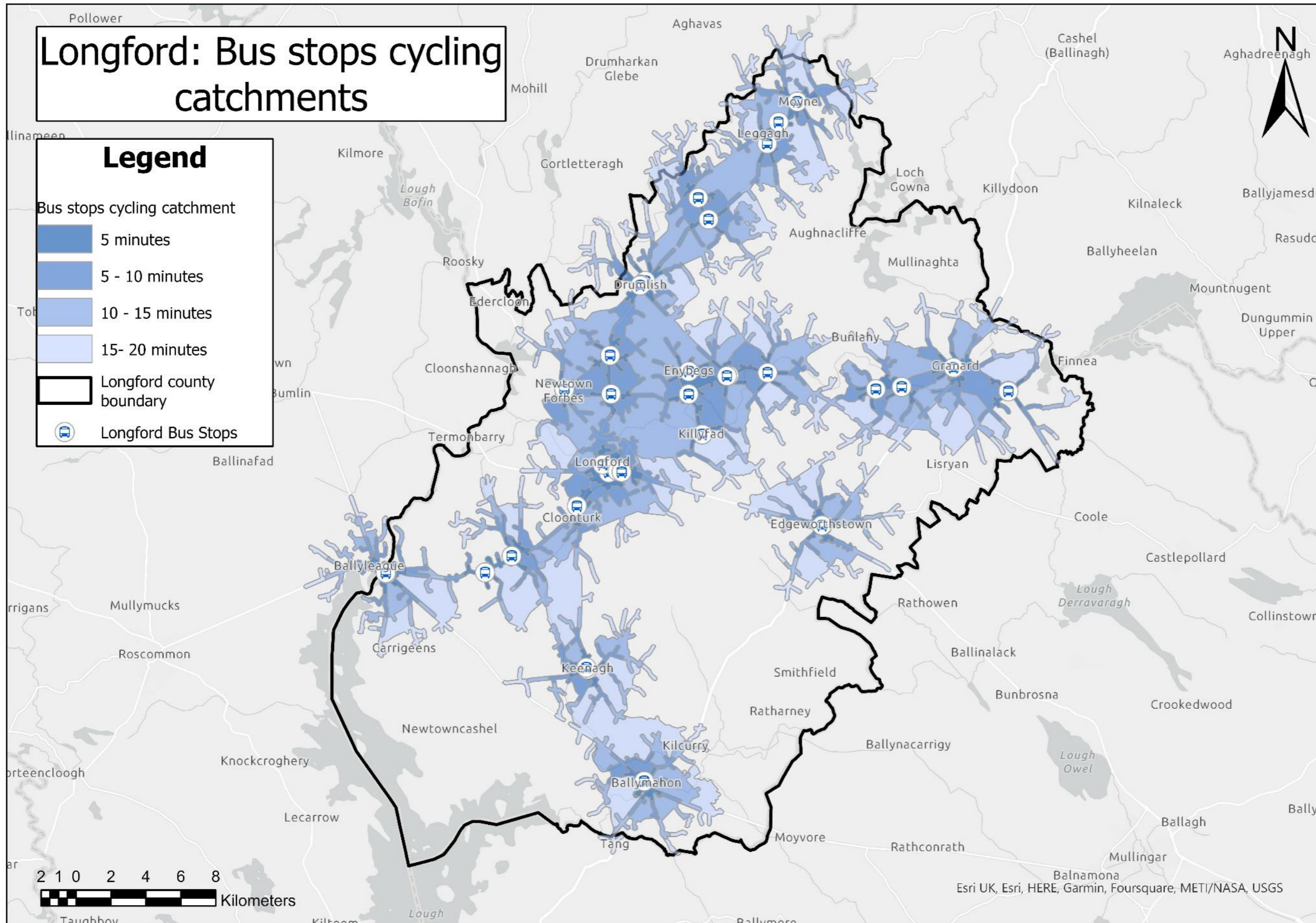


Figure B-5 Cycling catchment of bus stops in County Longford