

# Report on Cycling Participation and Economic Value of the An Post Tour of Sligo 2014

## *A Survey of Participants*



### **Conducted and Presented by:**

Máire McCallion on behalf of Sligo Sport and Recreation Partnership, Riverside, Sligo

Tele: 071 9161511 [www.sligosportandrecreation.ie](http://www.sligosportandrecreation.ie)

January 2015

## FOREWORD

The An Post Tour of Sligo 2014 with 2,407 cyclists was a great celebration of cycling for all ages and attracted cyclists from every county on our Island and some overseas visitors. On behalf of Sligo Sport and Recreation Partnership, as lead agency for the event co ordination I wish to acknowledge the work of our partners for making such a wonderful cycling occasion possible; Sligo County Council, Innisfree Wheelers Cycling Club, Eire Og Cycling Club, Fáilte Ireland, Mayo Sligo Leitrim Education and Training Board, An Garda Síochána, Local Community Groups, Clubs, numerous volunteers, local sponsors and Special Olympics Connaught which was our nominated charity for 2014. At national level I want to thank An Post and the Irish Sports Council for taking the lead in developing the An Post Cycle Series and supporting this very popular cycle series in Sligo and throughout the country.

This survey depicts a very positive experience for almost all participants (94%) who stated that they would be willing to participate again in the cycle. The report also estimates the very significant economic value of €452,551 of the An Post Tour of Sligo to the local economy. There was also enormous tourism value for the cyclists and the average two friends and family that accompany them.

Our vision is to make *Sport and Recreation a Way of Life* and it is wonderfully encouraging that after the cycle so many of the respondents reported cycling at least once a week. I want to thank our co-ordinator Deirdre Lavin and the staff of SSRP for the significant investment of time and energy that goes into making an event of this size such a success.

Finally, I want to thank the 457 respondents who completed the questionnaire, you have given us great affirmation and considerable insight on how to further develop the An Post Tour of Sligo and support our vision of having '*More People, More Active, More Often*'.

**Máire Mc Callion**

**Chairperson**

**Sligo Sport and Recreation Partnership**

## SUMMARY OF RESULTS

The 2014 An Post Tour of Sligo involved 2,407 cyclists aged from 6 years to over 70 years in the 2K, 10K, 60K, 100K and 160K cycles. This report presents findings from a survey of 2,005 participants in the 60K, 100K and 160K cycles only. There were 457 valid respondents to the survey.

- 94% of respondents stated they would participate in the An Post Tour of Sligo again.
- 42% stated that they would return to Sligo for holidays or leisure while another 53% stated they regularly visit Sligo.
- 24% was training especially for the event and 85% reported cycling at least once per week after the event.
- The overall satisfaction level of respondents to the organisation of the event, marshalling and routes was very high.
- There were 2,224 bed nights occupied by cyclists and their friends and family, which would generate approximately €111,185 to the County<sup>1</sup>
- An average of 2 friends and family accompanied all the cyclists.
- The reported spend on non accommodation costs in Sligo was just over €250,000.
- The estimated combined spend on accommodation and non accommodation costs of cyclists and their friends & family is €364,551.
- In addition, there was a spend of €88,000 by the Organising Committee on the hosting of the event including locally sourced signage, food, print materials, advertising etc
- The total value of the An Post Tour of Sligo is estimated at €452,551 to the local community.

### Comments on the event were overwhelmingly positive:

*“An Post Tour was organised to a very high standard, all of which we have become used to over the years. Well done to all concerned”.*

*“Very well run event. Great atmosphere and great people. Very good marshalling on the route. Well done to all of you for organising such an enjoyable event”.*

*“Very well run event, one of the best I have attended, marshalling at all major junctions was the best I have encountered on a non closed road sportive”.*

*“Again, thank you very much for making me most welcome, it was mine and my wife's first trip to Ireland and we will be back”.*

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<sup>1</sup> Using an estimated cost of €50 per bed night

## BACKGROUND

The An Post Tour of Sligo is an annual mass participation recreational cycling event facilitated by Sligo Sport and Recreation Partnership since 2009. The event is modelled on the Sean Kelly Tour of Waterford and is part of a national series of five events sponsored by An Post and the Irish Sports Council. The cycle series events take place over the summer months starting with Sligo in May, Clare in June, Meath in July, Waterford in August and Cork in September.

The Sligo event is co-ordinated annually by Sligo Sport and Recreation Partnership with support from Sligo County Council, Sligo Borough Council, Mayo Sligo Leitrim Education and Training Board, Eire Og Cycling Club, Innisfree Wheelers Cycling Club, Fáilte Ireland, An Garda Síochána, Local Community Groups, Clubs, and numerous volunteers and local sponsors. The nominated charity for 2014 was Special Olympics Connaught.

The primary aim of the event is to increase participation in cycling and attract recreational cycling enthusiasts, families and cycling club members from across the country to come to Sligo to cycle. In addition, the tourism and economic benefits associated with the event are significant and a key objective is to showcase Sligo scenery and promote the county as a cycling destination. Additional outcomes sought for the community include health related fitness benefits, social benefits and a fostering of a strong sense of community.

The popularity of the An Post Tour of Sligo has developed year on year with an initial 750 cyclists involved in 2009 across all events (10k/ 60k/ 100k/ 160k) which increased to 1,300 in 2010, to 1,800 in 2011, to 2,110 cyclists in 2012, to 2,505 cyclists in 2013 and 2,407 in 2014.

In 2014 there were 5 routes to choose from including the 10K and 2K Family events, the 60K Lough Gill Circuit, the 100K Innisfree Tour and the 160K Ox Mountain Challenge. The Tour took place over two days with the Family Events taking place on Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> May followed by the longer events on Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> May.

With five events on offer people of all ages and all cycling experience levels are catered for and are welcomed.

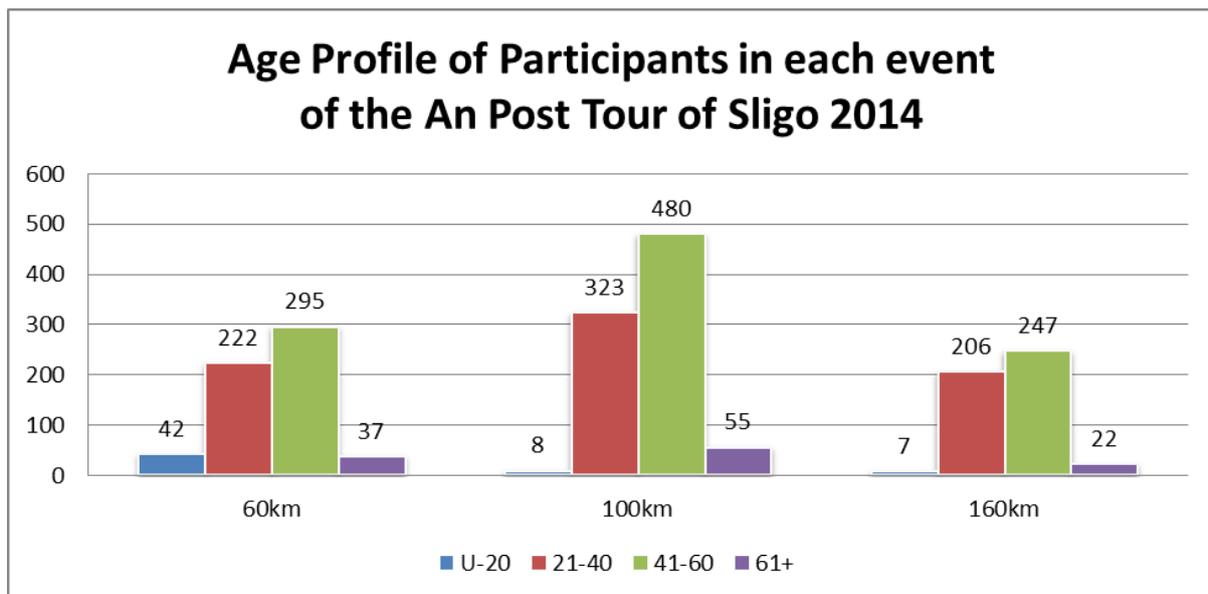
## OVERVIEW OF PARTICIPANTS ON THE CYCLE

	160km		100km		60km		Totals	
<b>Male</b>	444	92%	711	79%	329	53%	1484	73.90%
<b>Female</b>	38	8%	189	21%	296	47%	523	26.10%
	<b>482</b>		<b>900</b>		<b>625</b>		<b>2007</b>	

**Table 1: Gender breakdown of participants by event**

A total of 2,007 cyclists participated in the events of 60K, 100K and 160K. Almost three quarters of the participants were males and one quarter females however, in the 60K there was almost equal participation of men and women (Table 1: Gender breakdown of participants by event).

Figure 1 shows the age profile of participants in the Sunday events. While the age range in the events varied the most participants were from the 41-60 years age group which is consistent with other years. It is encouraging that 114 participants were from the 61 years and over age group.



**Figure 1: Age profile of participants in the 60k, 100k and 160k events**

There were participants from all counties in the island of Ireland and from the UK, Switzerland, United States and Australia as depicted in Figure 2 below.

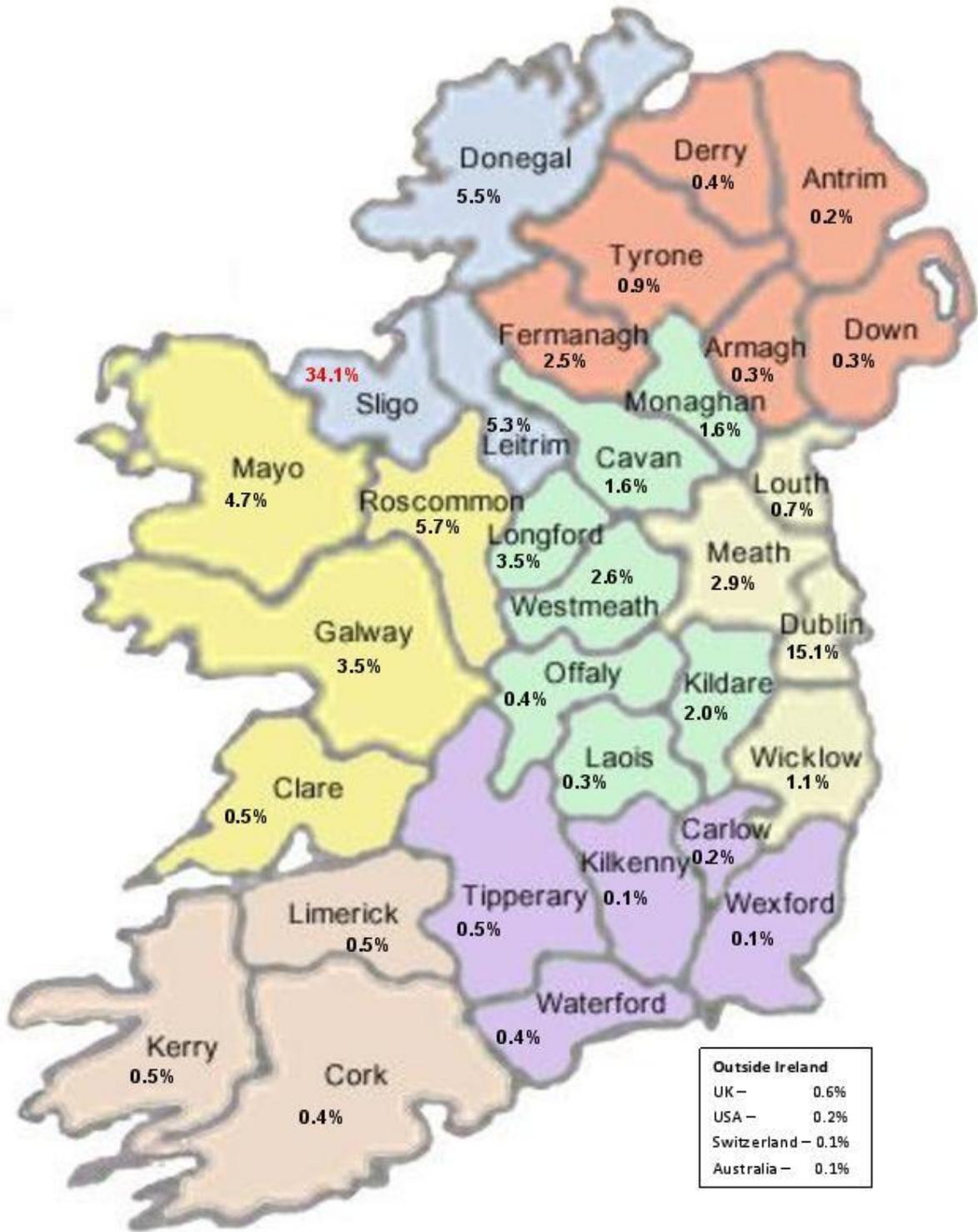


Figure 2: Percentage participating in 2014 in the 2k, 10k, 60k, 100k and 160k from each county

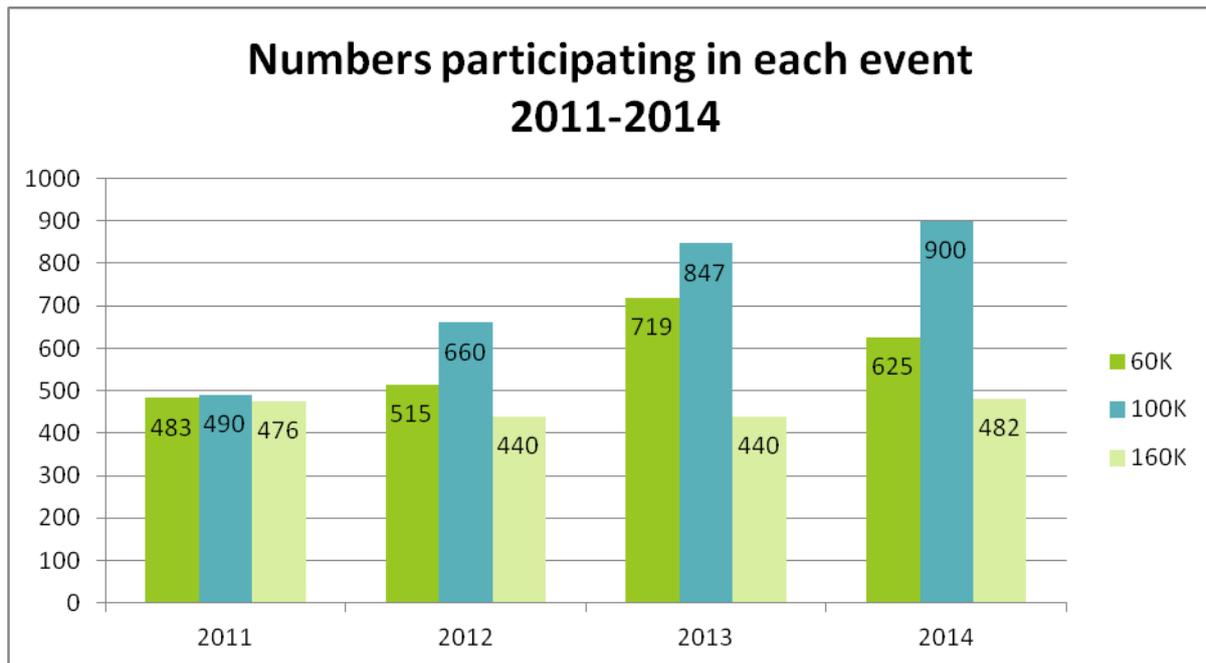


Figure 3: Numbers participating in each event between 2011 and 2014.

The participation rates in the 60k event were less than in 2013 while there was a marked increase in the number of people participating in the 100k. The trend could be attributed to people increasing their cycling fitness level and experience and hence progressing from the 60k to the 100k.

## AIM OF THE SURVEY

A survey of participants of the An Post Tour of Sligo has been undertaken each year since 2011. The survey aims to find out the following information and to monitor yearly trends.

- What were the views of the participants of the event and of Sligo as a destination?
- What was the accommodation and non accommodation spend of non Sligo based participants?
- What were the cycling habits of the participants prior to and in the aftermath of the event?

## METHODOLOGY

An online survey was developed using Survey Monkey. The survey was emailed to participants on the 60K, 100K and 160K cycles 6 weeks after the event and left open for 3 weeks.

## RESULTS<sup>2</sup>

There were 457 valid responses to the questionnaire from 2,007 total participants on the 160k, 100K and 60K cycles representing a 23% overall response rate<sup>3</sup>. The respondents were broadly geographically representative of the participants in the An Post Tour of Sligo for the 60k, 100k and 160k (34% of the participants were from Sligo while 32% of the respondents of the survey were from Sligo). The results presented here do not include the 2K or 10K Family Spin as the follow up email addresses were not given at registration and a different survey would be more relevant for this group.

## PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS TO THE SURVEY

75% of respondents of the survey were male (311) and 24% (102) were female which was similar to the cycle in which 74% of the cyclists in the 60K, 100K and 160K were male. Almost all of the respondents (92%, 379) were working for payment or profit, while 2% (8 respondents) were unemployed. The remainder were students, retired or looking after home or family. Three respondents indicated that they had a disability.

## PAST PARTICIPATION

46% of respondents (213) were participating for the first time, one quarter (24%,103) had participated in two events while 14% (85 respondents), 10% (46 respondents), 4% (17 respondents) and 2% (7 respondents) had participated in 3, 4 5 or 6 events respectively. Cyclists currently living in Sligo were more likely to be have participated in previous events than cyclists from outside the county, with 65% of those currently living in Sligo having participated more than once compared to 49% of those living outside of Sligo.

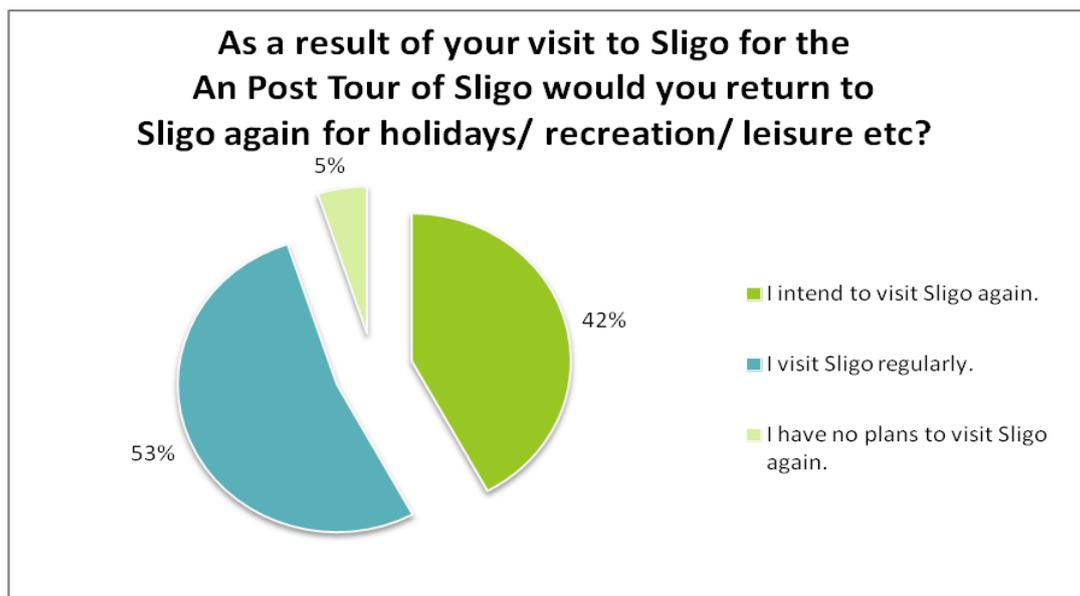
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<sup>2</sup> Note not all respondents answered each question. Also in the survey some respondents were automatically skipped to the next question- e.g. Those from Sligo were not asked about their accommodation.

<sup>3</sup> A 23% response rate for this population equates to a 95% confidence +/- 4% margin of error.

## FUTURE PARTICIPATION

Respondents were unanimous in stating that they would participate in the An Post Tour of Sligo again 94% (427 respondents), 5% (22 respondents) were unsure and 1% (5 respondents) stated that they would not participate again. Of those who were not currently living in Sligo, 42% (130 respondents) stated that they would visit Sligo again as a result of the An Post Tour. Most of the remainder 53% (163 respondents) stated that they already regularly visit Sligo, while only 5% (17 respondents) stated that they have no plans to visit Sligo again (Figure 4)



**Figure 4: Percentage of respondents who would return to Sligo for holidays or recreation.**

## RATING OF THE QUALITY OF THE EVENT

Participants rated the event highly under the categories as listed below.

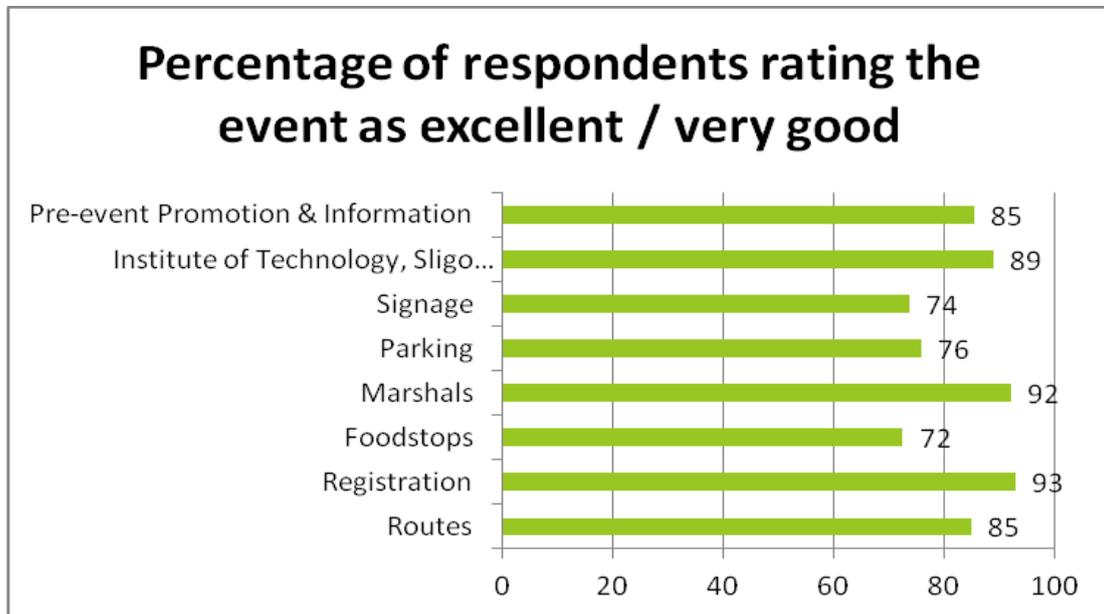


Figure 5: Rating of respondents of quality of various aspects of the event.

### The comments on the event were very positive:

*"Each year that I have participated has been a wonderful experience. The marshalls, food stops etc have been excellent".*

*"From start to finish it was really a credit to all who organised event. Marshalling and locations 100%. Food stops great well done. Safe enjoyable event. Thank you".*

*"Credit to all organisers, marshals, catering, registration staff, gets better year after year, hence I have progressed from the 60K to the 100K, roll on next year..160K here I come".*

*"I've completed 4 100k tours so far this year and the An Post Tour of Sligo was by far the best. Well organised and run and with great facilities afterwards and a cool jersey at reasonable entry fee".*

## ACCOMMODATION OF CYCLISTS

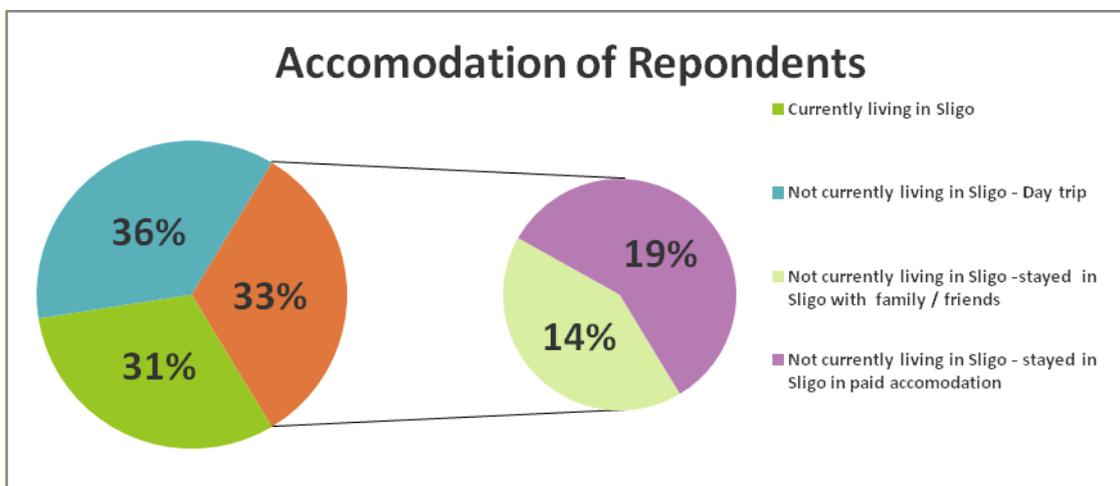


Figure 6: Shows the accommodation arrangements of all respondents<sup>4</sup>.

Of the 457 respondents to the 60k, 100K and 160K cycles 78% (n=301) were not currently living in Sligo

Under one-third were currently living in Sligo (31%, n=139). Thirty three percent (33%, n= 146) stayed at least one night in Sligo (the mean number of nights was 2.1 nights) and 36% (n=161) travelled from other counties for the day of the cycle (day trippers). Of the total respondents 19% (n=85) stayed in paid accommodation and 14% (n=61) stayed with friends and family.

### Spending on Accommodation:

#### ***Number of bed nights for cyclists and their friends and family***

This section refers to results from those participants who were not currently living in Sligo and who participated in the Sunday events and stayed in paid accommodation.

85 of respondents (19% of total) stayed in paid accommodation. The average (mean) number of nights stayed was 2.1 nights. This represents 370 cyclists staying in paid accommodation with a total of 777 paid bed nights

The average number of friends and family accompanying those who stayed in paid accommodation was 1.7 people. They stayed an average of 2.3 nights contributing 1,447 bed nights.

So cyclist and friends and family are calculated to have stayed a total of 2,224 paid bed nights.

*Using an estimated cost of €50 per bed night, 2,224 bed nights generated €111,185 to the county.*

<sup>4</sup> There were a total of 446 respondents who gave full information for this result.

### **Non Accommodation Spending:**

#### ***Cyclists of those who stayed in paid accommodation or with friends and family***

The average non accommodation spend by those respondents not from Sligo who stayed at least one night (in paid accommodation or with friends and family) was €151 per person.

*The 648 cyclists who stayed overnight would have spent €97,844 on non-accommodation costs. These 648 cyclists would have been accompanied by 1,231 friends and family. The average spend for these friends and family was €40 which would have generated €49,248.*

#### **Spend by those currently living in Sligo or day trippers from other counties**

The average spend for respondents who were either from Sligo or did a day trip from another county was €53. As 1,359 of the total Cyclists were either from Sligo or did a day trip from another county they generated €72,027.

The spend on non accommodation by their friends and family (who did not stay overnight in Sligo/ those from Sligo) was €12. Again each cyclist was accompanied by an average of 2.1 cyclists. 2,854 friends and family spent €34,247.

So the total non accommodation spend of cyclists and friends and family was over €250,000.

**Table 2: Total Spend by cyclists and their friends and family is estimated at €364,551.**

<b>Spend</b>	<b>Unit Cost</b>	<b>Total Cost</b>
		<b>€</b>
<b>Cyclists &amp; Friends &amp; Family Accommodation</b>	€50	111,185
777 paid cyclist bed nights (370 paid cyclist average 2.1 nights) and 1,447 F&F paid bed nights (370 cyclists with average 1.7 F&F staying average 2.3 nights) =2,224 bed nights		
<b>Non Accommodation Spend</b>		
648 Cyclists who stayed overnight in Sligo (in paid/ unpaid accommodation)	€151	97,844
1,231 F&F of those who stayed overnight in Sligo (648 cyclist stayed brought 1.9 F&F)	€40	49,248
1,359 Cyclists – currently living/ did not stay overnight in Sligo	€53	72,027
2,854 F& F of those who currently living/ did not stay overnight in Sligo (1359cyclist brought average of 2.1 friends & family)	€12	34,247
<b>Total Spend by Cyclists and Friends and Family</b>		<b>364,551</b>

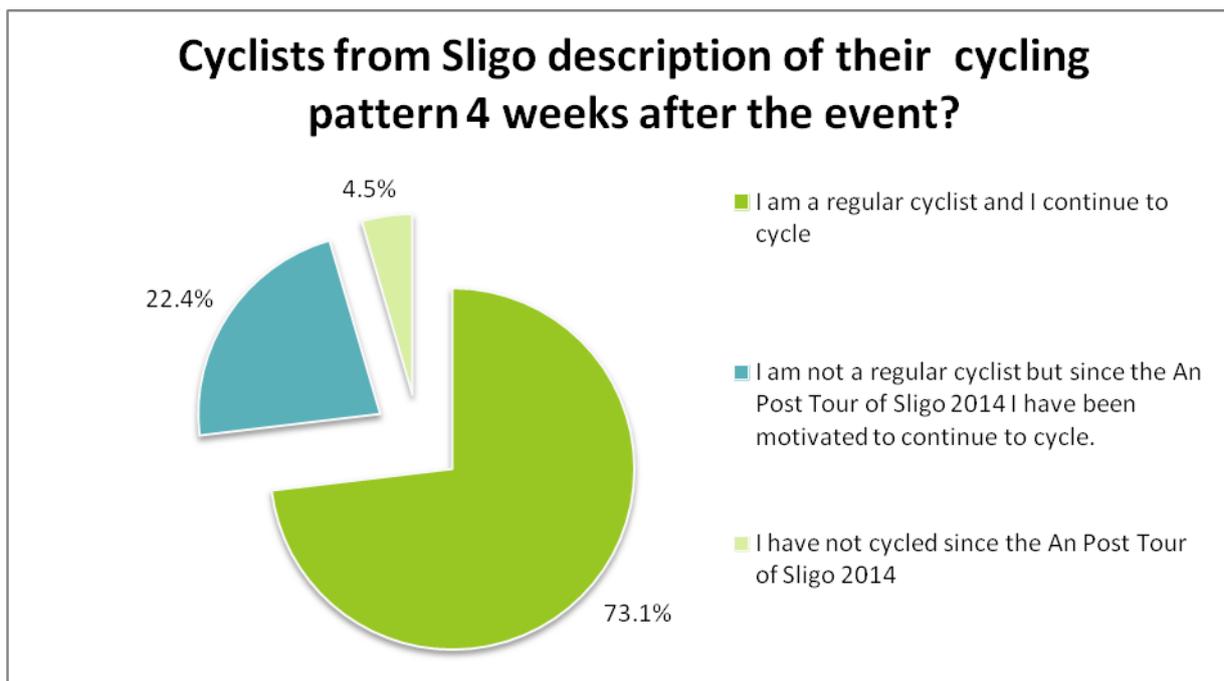
## CYCLING HABITS

Almost a quarter of participants (24%, n=105) trained specifically for the Sligo event while another quarter (24%, 104) were training for a number of events while 47% (203 respondents) reported to be training regularly regardless of any events. Just 4% (18) reported not training at all prior to the event.

Forty two percent (177 respondents) had trained on the bike for over 6 months, 21% (n=91) trained for between 3- 6 months. While almost one fifth (19%, n=84) trained for between 1-2 months before the event.

Almost 80% of respondents (n=339) stated that An Post Tour of Sligo had helped to become very motivated or motivated to cycle or be more active. When asked how they would describe their cycling habits since the An Post Tour of Sligo, 85% stated that they are a regular cyclist and continue to cycle. Only 2% (n=9) stated that they have not cycled since the An Post Tour of Sligo.

When the cycling habits of respondents who were currently living in Sligo were examined it was found that 96% of them described themselves as a regular cyclist or stated that they had been motivated to continue to cycle. Only 4% of the respondents from Sligo stated that they had not cycled in the 4 weeks since the event.



**Figure 7: Cyclists cycling pattern description 4 weeks after the event description**

## COMMENTS FROM RESPONDENTS

Participants were asked for any other comments on the An Post Tour of Sligo and 308 respondents made comments. A sample of the comments are given below.

### **Organisation of the Event**

A majority of the comments complimented the organisation of the event.

*“Very well organised event, great weekend in Sligo had by our party of 8 cyclists”.*

*“Very well run event, will do it again, great exp had for the first time doing it. The IT is a great venue to park and start/finish the cycle at for both cyclists and friends”.*

*“Best Sportive I've done - mix of challenging but very do-able course, great organisation, great stops and a gorgeous jersey. A1”.*

*“This year I was a An Post Spokestar so the event was free as was my accommodation, but the even on the whole was so well organised I'll definitely be back and the next time with friends, Well done to everyone involved a Super event and one for everyones calendar!”.*

*“I've done a lot of An Post tours over the last few years. Travel time to Sligo put me off previously but this might be the best organised event I've done. Definitely plan to come again and will recommend it to my friends”.*

### **Sligo as a Tourist Destination/ Beauty of Sligo**

Many commented on the beauty of the scenery of Sligo.

*“A very well organised & enjoyable event to participate in. A nice scenic route, particularly strandhill & lough gill etc. but north Sligo coastal roads / Mullaghmore / Benbulbin could a nice alternative”.*

*“An excellent well run event, lovely scenic route also”.*

*“Nice scenery and route. Well marshalled and organised. Good food stops”.*

*“Thought it was an inspirational event even in the rain”.*

*“Friendly, efficient organisation. Scenic and challenging route. Well marshalled, particularly at junctions with major roads, with significant cooperation from the Gardai. Fine food stops en route and at the finish”.*

### **Involvement of Local Communities & Volunteers Marshalling:**

Some commented on the contribution and support of the local communities and volunteers and the Gardai to the smooth running of the event:

*"Brilliant event and will be back, pg. The stewards and marshals were excellent, encouraging, courteous, helpful and always smiling".*

*"Well organised, road marshalling was excellent with Gardai and volunteers helping out. Friendly at Knocknarea Arena at start /finish".*

*"Congratulations to all involved in organising an excellent event. The cheeriness and welcome of helpers at the food stops was fantastic".*

*"Thank you very much for a very well organised event and for all the very cheerful and helpful people who helped out on the day".*

### **Weekend Visitors to Sligo Town and Surrounding Area:**

Many cyclists commented on the positive benefits of the event for the town of Sligo.

*"Fantastic event, really well organised. Great energy for the town".*

*"Great event, very good for the area, I heard a lot of positive comments on Sligo from visitors during the event".*

*"Thank you for organising such a great event. I look forward to signing up for a longer tour next year".*

*"Great and very enjoyable event. A credit to Sligo sports partnership and to the town".*

*"This was my first cycling event as I just started cycling earlier this year. I found the entire event to be fantastic from beginning to end, in every possible aspect. It is my intention to enter this event every year from now on and have gathered a group of cycling buddies who will also attend this event going forward. I do plan to make a weekend of it next year so please let us have the dates as soon as you can! Keep up the great work in protecting our environment as well as ensuring we are healthy and happy".*

*"This was my second time riding the An Post Tour of Sligo and I really look forward to taking part next year again. Excellent buzz in Sligo - well organised event - Any chance of having another event say in September?".*

### **Cycling Habits:**

Cyclists comments suggest that the event contributed to positive cycling habits:

*"The family cycle day on the Saturday was a great idea. It got other members of the family into cycling too and helped make a weekend event for travelling cyclists".*

*"I bought a new bike in February and the An Post Cycle was my goal to get cycling again having not cycled in over 20 years due to children and work . I thoroughly enjoyed the experience and am continuing to cycle, just*

*looking now for other cycles to take part in. Would love if I could easily get information about other cycles that I could participate in”.*

*“Excellent event . It is one of the main reasons that I started cycling more. Thank you to all that make it possible”.*

*“Fitness is just not physical, mental fitness is more important than any 6 Pack, get out there and above all enjoy it, roll on 2015 An Post Tour of Sligo”.*

*“It was a wonderful event, great encouragement/challenge for people to get out and get active. Well done”.*

#### **Inclusiveness:**

The inclusive nature of the event was evident from comments:

*“It’s a great day, great fun and no pressure - have completed in other events and this is great in that you do not feel under pressure to be in the 'early' bunch crossing the line”.*

*“Really well organised. Felt safe. For someone fairly new to cycling. Good for non elite as well as more experienced cyclist”.*

*“Excellent event and very inclusive. seemed to get alot of people out cycling around sligo in the few weeks before it”.*

#### **SUGGESTIONS TO IMPROVE THE AN POST TOUR OF SLIGO**

**Participants were asked to give suggestions for improvement of the An Post Tour of Sligo. The following is a summary of the suggestions given by participants in the survey:**

- Some cyclists raised the issue of poor road surface along some road sections particularly in the Coolaney and Ox mountain areas and suggested the need for surface repair works.
- While the volunteers managing the foodstop in Coolaney were acknowledged for their hospitality the need to review the facilities and services at the Coolaney food-stop needs to be undertaken in order to cope with the large volume of cyclists arriving at the same time and the resulting queues need to be addressed.
- Some cyclists expressed disappointment with the lack of availability of hot showers for everyone at the event headquarters in IT Sligo.
- The lack of available jerseys in the correct sizes was raised as an issue.
- Some cyclists expressed disappointment with the lack of variety of food available at the finish of the event.

## CONCLUSIONS

- The participants of the survey viewed the An Post Tour of Sligo extremely positively.
- The steady increase in numbers over the past number of years from 750 in 2009 to 2,407 in 2014 is evidence of the increasing popularity of the event. The overwhelmingly positive feedback from participants about the organisation of the event is a reflection of the quality of the collaboration between the lead organisation Sligo Sport and Recreation Partnership and all the partner organisations. The enormous contribution of the statutory agencies, the cycling clubs, other community organisations and the volunteers was recognised by respondents to the survey. This very positive spirit was also reflected in the warm welcome and support cyclists reported that they received from spectators.
- Almost all of those surveyed stated that they would take part in the event again and those not from Sligo stated that they would return to Sligo for recreation or leisure. The event showcases Sligo as a tourist destination in a unique way that few other events can do by taking cyclists through very scenic and remote areas, including those which are off the traditional tourist route.
- This very positive feedback about the organisation of the event and how the cycle showcases Sligo as a tourist destination is consistent with previous survey findings in the past two years. There were some suggestions regarding improving the event and the organising committee should consider these and continue to strive to improve the event year by year.
- It should be remembered that the many cyclists do not come to the cycle alone. Over the past number of years of An Post Tour of Sligo respondents have consistently reported an average of two friends and family accompanying them regardless of whether they stayed overnight or were on a day trip. This is of immense benefit to the local economy.
- In addition the survey also documents the enormous economic benefit of the event which the value estimated at over €450,000 to the local economy. In addition to accommodation spend of over 110,000 there is a significant spend in the locality by cyclists and their friends and family totalling €250,000.
- Responses to cycling habits were encouraging with almost 80% of respondents stating that An Post Tour of Sligo had helped to become very motivated or motivated to cycle or be more active. When asked how they would describe their cycling habits since the An Post Tour of Sligo 85% stated that they are a regular cyclist and continue to cycle. Only 2% stated that they have not cycled since the An Post Tour of Sligo.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- The An Post Tour of Sligo cycle is a quality event centred around a model of delivery which is very inclusive of agencies, cycling clubs and community groups. This highly effective partnership approach to the delivery of the event should be maintained and developed.
- The event has huge potential to showcase Sligo as a tourist destination and this would suggest that the event continues from a tourism perspective. Greater promotion of the link between the event and marketing of the Wild Atlantic Way could be undertaken. In 2015 the committee should consider establishing a link between the event and the YEATS 2015 celebrations which would most likely result in additional promotional opportunities for the event
- The economic benefits of the event for Sligo are significant and this should be communicated more widely to all relevant stakeholders.
- Cyclists expressed a high satisfaction level with the event organisation and the committee should continue to focus on planning a high quality event which will be assisted by the number of entrants remaining capped at approximately 2,000 for the Sunday routes. Staggered starts with cyclists being started in groups may assist with overcrowding on the roads in the early stages of the cycle.
- Areas for improvement identified by cyclists including route surfaces, management of the Coolaney food stop and shower facilities at the Institute of Technology should continue to be addressed by the organising committee. Also, the provision of post event refreshments for cyclists at the IT Sligo should be reviewed in terms of food location provision and type of refreshments on offer.
- A number of cyclists commented positively on the inclusive nature of the event for people of all fitness levels and abilities and SSRP could focus on further promotion around attracting all target groups and in doing so work with partner groups in the community.
- The event attracts a large number of cyclists resident in Sligo and many new cyclists to the sport and hence the event contributes to the overall objectives of SSRP while it requires a considerable investment of staff time, it is a very worthwhile event in which SSRP is involved.