

A chara

I believe that there is an urgent need to consider the adverse impacts of Brexit in formulating the National Planning Framework.

I am very concerned about the effects Brexit will have, particularly on the border region and areas like Cavan/Monaghan, and these challenges need to be factored into all future planning.

Through Parliamentary Questions and other debates in Dáil Éireann I have been continually highlighting the infrastructure deficit in the Cavan/Monaghan area and the need to improve the road network.

Attached is the Report of a Topical Issue Debate I had on this subject on the 20th September last. In that Debate I highlighted the huge dependency Cavan/Monaghan has on the road network and the challenges facing the sectors of the economy that we are most heavily dependent upon as well.

Indeed Cavan and Monaghan County Councils in their submissions have outlined the concerns of local residents and enterprise in relation to the need to prioritise infrastructural spending in the border region.

Mise, le meas

Brendan Smith T.D.

(See attached file: Topical Issue Debate Road Network.docx)



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A COMMITTED, EXPERIENCED AND DEDICATED VOICE FOR CAVAN/MONAGHAN

Topical Issue Debate

Road Network

Deputy Brendan Smith:   I thank the Leas-Ceann Comhairle. I appreciate the Ceann Comhairle selecting this Topical Issue. It is an issue of huge concern in the Cavan-Monaghan area and in the general Border region, namely, the need to upgrade our infrastructure, particularly road infrastructure. I welcome the fact the Minister, Deputy Ross, is here. From my observations in this Chamber, in previous debates he is a very good attender and replies to the Topical Issues put to his Department. That is a welcome development but unfortunately, it is not one that is followed by all Ministers.

As the Minister will be aware, Cavan, Monaghan and Donegal are more heavily dependent on road infrastructure than other counties in the State because we do not have a rail service.



Road Network (Continued)

Dáil Éireann Debate
Unrevised

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**Wednesday, 20 September
2017**

(Speaker Continuing)

[Deputy Brendan Smith:  ] Allied to that dependence on the road network is the fact that the local economy is very heavily dependent on the agrifood, construction products and engineering sectors. By and large, these are bulky products that are transported by heavy goods vehicles, HGVs, either to the domestic market outside Cavan and Monaghan or to ports and airports for export to foreign destinations. Those HGVs, in transporting the finished products from our region, need proper roads and proper infrastructure to get the products to markets within Ireland and to the ports and airports in good time. In previous debates in this House, through both parliamentary questions and topical issues, I have highlighted the need for additional resources for the Department's road works programme in the mid-term review of the capital programme. In those debates I made a special appeal to the Minister to address the infrastructural deficits of the Border region. This is particularly urgent in the context of the difficulties and challenges we face as a Border region. If enterprises in Cavan, Monaghan and the general Border area are to have any hope of remaining competitive, the Government must invest urgently in infrastructure.

Again, I refer to the fact that our local economy is very heavily dependent on the agrifood, construction and engineering sectors. These are also the three sectors in our economy that are most heavily dependent on the British market for exports. The economies of Cavan and Monaghan and North of the Border in Fermanagh and Tyrone are heavily dependent on these three sectors and in turn, these three sectors are most heavily dependent on the British market. These sectors are already facing difficulties because of the serious decline in the value of sterling since the middle of 2016, following the Brexit referendum. There is an obvious need to try to assist enterprises to remain competitive. The Government, we as public representatives and non-governmental organisations, NGOS, will put the very best case

forward to Europe and to the British in regard to the best possible deal and the fact that we cannot countenance the return of a border on our island. Those issues are all up for negotiations but there is one decision that is totally within the competence of our own Government, namely the decision to invest in infrastructure and to provide additional financial resources to upgrade a road infrastructure that is deficient. There are many historical reasons, as the Leas-Cheann Comhairle will attest, for the deficits in the Border region, including the impact of decades of the Troubles on our doorstep and the lack of investment that followed on from that. Thankfully, since 1998 we have had huge positive developments in all of the province of Ulster and throughout our State following the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. We have had an increase in North-South trade and the development of enterprises on an all-Ireland basis. Those enterprises that are based in the Border region face very serious challenges in trying to remain competitive. We must ensure that at Government level extra investment is targeted at the Border region to try to assist those companies to remain competitive. If we are to have any hope of those enterprises retaining their current complement of employees, not to mention creating much needed additional jobs, there is a huge onus on Government to prioritise investment in the deficient infrastructure in that region.

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):   I thank Deputy Smith for his tireless representation on this and other issues affecting his region, particularly through the raising of topical issues in this Chamber. The impact of Brexit is a major concern for the country as a whole. As regards road infrastructure, as the Deputy is aware, while I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme, the planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland, TII, under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for TII in accordance with section 19 of the Roads Act.

The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of each local authority, in accordance with the provisions of section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from local authorities' own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the local authority.



The capital plan published in September 2015 outlined proposed transport investment priorities to 2022. Maintenance and renewal of the road network will continue to be the main priority over the next period and the bulk of the roads capital budget, approximately €4.4 billion, is earmarked for such essential work with a further €600 million allocated for implementation of the public private partnership, PPP road programme which is already underway.

The capital plan provides for significant investment in transport links impacting on the wider Border region including the N4 Collooney to Castlebaldwin upgrade scheme, the rolling schemes on the N56 from Dungloe to Glenties and Inver to Mountcharles, strengthening links in Donegal, and subject to necessary consents, the N2 Slane bypass on the Dublin, Monaghan route. The capital plan also restates the Government's commitment to contribute £75 million to the development of the A5 in Northern Ireland. In addition TII announced in July that it is reactivating planning work on the N2 Clontibret to the Border scheme to narrow down the number of options to a single preferred route. Further action



being taken on the N2 relates to a safety review of the section between Drumgeeny and the Castleblayney bypass. The draft engineering advisor's report concluded that the rate of fatal collisions on this single carriageway road exceeds the rate from a reference class of similar national primary roads. The report also identifies a number of measures to improve safety on this section of the route. Arising from this report, TII has committed to provide additional funding to develop the recommendation for an online upgrade of the N2 extending from north of Ardee to the south of the Castleblayney bypass. The intention is to progress the preliminary design and the achievement of planning consent as soon as possible.

As I have said many times, as Minister I have to operate within the budget available to me and the capital plan allocations set the parameters for what I can do. The review of the capital plan was initiated earlier this year and I put forward a strong case for additional funding. The Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Deputy Donohoe has now published a report setting out the conclusions reached in relation to the additional global amount available to boost capital investment. While I was heartened to see transport identified as one of the priority areas for consideration for additional funding, decisions on specific allocations to Ministers remain to be made by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

Deputy Smith makes a good case for his region. In the present circumstances, obviously anything that is particularly affected by Brexit must get special consideration when funds are being allocated.

Deputy Brendan Smith:   I thank the Minister for his response, in particular his references to the necessary upgrading of the N2, the Border to Clontibret road design reactivation, the Castleblayney bypass and the need to implement safety measures there because unfortunately there has been a considerable loss of life on that stretch of road in recent years. I have highlighted one particular route in this House previously. In the early 2000s, the development of an east-west route from Sligo to Dundalk was identified. At that time, it was concluded that the best route would be from Sligo, through Enniskillen, Belturbet, Cootehill, Shercock and Carrickmacross to Dundalk. Substantial funding was provided to upgrade the route through the development of the Cavan bypass and the Belturbet bypass, both of which were integral parts of the proposed route. Then, in 2009, Cavan County Council was identified as the lead local authority - to work along with Monaghan and Louth county councils - to plan and design the upgrade of the route. Substantial funding was provided in the road works allocations in 2010 and 2011.



(Speaker Continuing)

[Deputy Brendan Smith:  ] Substantial planning and design was carried out at that time, the details of which I will communicate to the Minister in writing. I would like to see that project re-activated because there are many substantial employers on that route, including Abbott and a number of engineering companies in Cootehill, Manor Farm, the Carton Brothers poultry enterprise, in Shercock and a number of other major enterprises in Dundalk. The time delay in terms of transporting the finished products from those factories and manufacturing facilities in Cootehill to Larne, Warrenpoint or the ports in this State, because roads are not up to the standard required for heavy goods vehicles, is a substantial additional burden on those enterprises. It is a route that I would like to see upgraded.

I recall that when planning was under way in respect of the development of the N3, I made a presentation at the then Oireachtas transport committee, which was based on research carried

out by Glanbia. One of the Glanbia manufacturing facilities is located in Virginia, Cavan, in my own constituency. The Glanbia analysis dealt with the delays and costs to it arising from its trucks sitting in traffic on the N3 and the impact of this right back to the primary producer and reduced prices. If enterprises in the Border region are to have any hope of maintaining existing employment or growing employment the local infrastructure must be upgraded.

In regard to the final sentence of the Minister's initial response, I sincerely hope that he will ask the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Deputy Donohoe, to ensure that the prioritisation of the road infrastructure needs of Cavan-Monaghan is given urgent consideration.

Deputy Shane Ross:   I do not like off-the-cuff commenting on specific issues or roads, such as has just been bounced on me, because I am not qualified to speak about them ad lib but in light of what the Deputy said I will ask my officials to contact the appropriate people and have the matter examined. It is only reasonable that I would do so. I appreciate that infrastructure in the Border areas is well below par, as it is all over the country, particularly the roads. I was in Cavan-Monaghan recently. I do not think the situation there is all doom and gloom. I acknowledge it is the job of Deputy Smith to bring these matters to my attention but in my view some of the roads are in fairly good condition and there are signs there of prosperity. I appreciate what the Deputy said about the need for competitiveness and the effect of the fall in sterling on the Border areas and the enterprises to which he referred but when I was in the area I noted a light of bright spots, including a new greenway, which is a cross-Border greenway and an important piece of infrastructure, the opening of which I was honoured to be associated with.

I will raise the specific points made by the Deputy about the roads and I will report back to him.