

Dear Editor

The Dáil goes into summer recess this week. It is due to sit again on Tuesday, September 19. The next column will be sent to you on Friday, September 22. Thank you for your continued support.

Tim Ryan

The Corkman

Tim Ryan, Oireachtas Correspondent

Call for urgent action on the M20

If there is no motorway connection from Cork to Limerick to Galway and it is not possible to get from Cork to Limerick in an hour and Cork to Galway in two hours, we do not have balanced regional development, Limerick Fine Gael Senator Kieran O'Donnell told the Seanad.

“The existing motorway from Limerick to Cork, in particular from Limerick to Mallow, is impossible to travel on,” he said. “Anyone who knows it will know about the bottlenecks at Charleville and Buttevant, in particular down by the quarry. This matter is very much to the fore in people's minds, in particular in Limerick but also in Cork and everywhere along the western seaboard, including Galway, because we need to have connection. The Minister of State (Michael D’Arcy) might indicate how the mid-term capital review is progressing, the anticipated timeframe for the collation of information, and where the M20 stands in this process.”

At the start of this year, he said the Minister, Deputy Shane Ross, agreed to his proposal to allocate €1 million to Transport Infrastructure Ireland, TII, formerly the National Roads Authority, to allow for the recommencement of planning work in respect of the M20. “The allocation has allowed TII to recommence planning, engage consultants and do the pre-planning work required before the main design feature gets under way,” he said. “As we stand, no further time is being lost. The key element now is to ensure that when the mid-term capital review is complete, we can effectively get the planning and design phase under way for the M20 with immediate effect.”

Well over 200 people attended the public consultation meeting he had held in the South Court Hotel in Limerick on Tuesday, 18 April, he added.

In response, Minister of State D’Arcy said the Programme for a Partnership Government committed to additional capital investment over the period of the capital plan to 2021, to be allocated on the basis of the outcome of a review of that plan. “This review is ongoing,” he said. “The process will guide and inform the decision by the Government on revised capital allocations made to Departments at Budget time in October. The review is also an important input to the long-term ten-year capital plan, intended to be finalised before the end of the year. Submissions on the review and the additional funding available for allocation were

sought from Departments in January 2017 and are currently under review by my Department.”

He said he personally would consider the M20 project as one of the priorities of the State. “Two of the State’s largest urban areas are not connected with a motorway of a sufficient standard,” he added. “However, I cannot predict what the dynamics of the review will be when it is concluded in quarter three this year, but I anticipate that the project will be one of the priorities. The importance of the motorway must be accepted.”

Less than 60,000 mortgages now in arrears - Stanton

The Government is fully engaged, via a range of initiatives already in place and with more on the way, in helping home owners in mortgage arrears to engage with the range of free supports and expertise now available to them with a view to getting solutions in place and, wherever possible, keeping people in their homes, Minister of State David Stanton told the Dáil.

Speaking during a debate on a Fianna Fáil Bill he said take-up is well ahead of expectations on the Personal Insolvency scheme and the new *Abhaile* services and the data suggested that these measures are operating successfully. “We expect their impact to continue and to expand significantly over the coming months,” he said. “For example, a national information campaign to encourage further engagement with *Abhaile* and take-up of its services, focusing on the local level, is now being finalised and will be rolled out in the coming months.”

He said the correct figure for civil bill repossessions was 633 bills nationwide in the first quarter of 2017. That was according to Courts Service figures. “This represents a drop of almost 60% from the rate at peak of the first quarter of 2015,” he said. “I want to put that on the record. Deputy Pearse Doherty and Deputy Michael McGrath both referred to 76,000 to 80,000 home mortgages in arrears. The Central Bank figure is 76,422 home mortgage accounts in arrears at the end of March 2017.”

“The Department of Finance indicates and the Central Bank states that there are an average of 1.3 accounts per mortgaged home,” he said. “Accordingly the number of homes in any level of mortgage arrears at the end of the first quarter of 2017 is approximately 59,000. It is still an awful lot, but it is not 76,000 or 80,000. The data simply does not support the persistent media claims of an impending tsunami of repossessions. Court repossession statistics are falling steadily and significantly, whether we look at the issuing of new proceedings or the making of possession orders.”