

Limerick Leader

By Tim Ryan, Oireachtas Correspondent

O'Donnell proposes rail spur to Shannon Airport

There is both a logistical and financial logic to providing a spur from Shannon Airport onto the existing Limerick to Galway rail line, Fine Gael Senator Kieran O'Donnell told the Upper House.

Prior to 2010 the Limerick to Galway rail line was not in use, he said. The Limerick to Ennis line was in use and there was a major upgrade from Ennis to Athenry costing in the order of €160 million. The line was reopened in 2010 so there is a functioning line in place and if a spur is added it will not only link Shannon Airport to Limerick but to Galway as well.

“Certain railway stations were upgraded, including Limerick, Cratloe, Sixmilebridge and Ennis,” he said. “Sixmilebridge would appear to be the logical location for a spur to Shannon Airport which would involve a distance of approximately six miles. However, Cratloe, which is prior to Sixmilebridge is another option. A spur could be run along the existing road, the N18, into Shannon Airport. That would be a shorter distance.”

“I do not expect the project to happen overnight but it must be considered in terms of the overall public transport network, regional development and the serious issues that arise in the capacity of Dublin Airport,” he said. “Shannon Airport has excess capacity available. We can deal with 4 million passengers and the current level is approximately 1.6 million. In the future we could have a super train commuting from Limerick to Dublin in an hour. Anyone flying into Ireland is willing to accept commuter time of one and half to two hours from their landing airport to their final destination.”

In response, Transport Minister Shane Ross said in 2007 a feasibility study was carried out on behalf of Iarnród Éireann with input from a steering group representative of local interests on a rail link to Shannon Airport and it concluded that the economic case for the rail link was poor. “The feasibility study indicated the cost of a Shannon rail link would range from €246 million to €440 million at 2006 prices, excluding enhanced onward links to Galway which were also assessed,” he said.

The Minister said a Shannon rail link is not identified as a priority in the Government's capital investment plan, *Building on Recovery 2016-2021*. “As Senator O'Donnell is aware, to say the least, Iarnród Éireann remains in a challenging position financially and has limited resources of its own available to fund new projects,” he said. “He should not rule out the possibility for the future and should keep pushing it.”

Limerick rents up ten per cent

Rents in Limerick city have risen by 10.5% in the past year, Fine Gael Senator Maria Byrne told the Upper House. “It is frightening because the report shows that rents in Dublin city centre can be anything up to €1,800 per month,” she said. “In many other cities they can be

€1,100 or €1,200 per month. There is a need for a cap. Rent caps and rent pressure areas have been highlighted by the Minister, but he needs to come into the House to address the issue.”

Senator Byrne said more than 2,000 complaints have been received from tenants who are being evicted because they have received notice that major renovations to their properties are to be carried out.

“I believe the Residential Tenancies Board is to issue directives in the near future on what it means and how a landlord can be covered under the terms of legislation,” she said.

“Threshold has received over 2,000 calls. I have been visited by a number of people in my office who are participating in different schemes, be it the Housing Assistance Payment scheme or the Rental Accommodation Scheme, and who have been told by their landlords that they have to move out. The landlords want to put up the price of their accommodation.”

Senator Byrne said she knew that the Residential Tenancies Board is also concerned about the fact that more than half of the complaints have been received from people whose landlords have said they have to move out because they want to move in family members.

“In many of these cases that is just an excuse to get the tenants out and seek higher rents,” she said. “Something has to be done about the matter. I would like the Leader to bring it to the attention of the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government.”