

The Corkman

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Details sought on upgrade of the N22

Details of the works to be carried out on the N22 Ballyvourney to Macroom road were sought in the Dáil by Cork North West Fianna Fáil Deputy Aindrias Moynihan.

“Since 2013, when the compulsory purchase orders, CPOs, were confirmed for the Macroom bypass in 2022, tendering for construction has been the next key milestone in that project,” he said. “The process could take much of a year, including putting it out for tender and assessing the details afterwards. It does not need to be held up with any of the other processes, such as land purchase, archaeological issues or fencing. It can be done at the same time.”

In response, Transport Minister Shane Ross said the planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland, TII, under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

“This road scheme involves the construction of 22 km of new carriageway from just east of Macroom to west of Ballyvourney, including a bypass of Macroom town,” he said. “The scheme will address the inadequacies on the existing road layout in a variety of ways, including improving road safety, increasing the capacity of the road, improving journey times and relieving congestion in Macroom town. TII is responsible for implementation of the project within available budgets. The scheme has full statutory approval. TII has progressed land purchase and advance works on the project, including archaeology and site investigations. The tender documentation for the construction contract is also being prepared, and EirGrid and Cork County Council have sought procedural advice from An Bord Pleanála in respect of pylon relocation.”

Sherlock seeks debate on Cork foster services

A HIQA report which found a serious lack of compliance in foster care services in Cork was raised in the Dail by Labour Deputy Seán Sherlock. A report issued in February and a subsequent report issued recently found a glaring lack of compliance with safety requirements and a lack of social workers, he said.

“HIQA has produced 16 reports to date on foster care services in all the regions,” he said. “The Department responsible for these services has received a headline budget allocation of €750 million. Will time be provided for a proper debate or statements on child care services, particularly in respect of fostering and the lack of resources, specifically for social workers, as well as the glaring lack of compliance with HIQA requirements?”

In response, Taoiseach Leo Varadkar said he was sure a debate on the matters Deputy Sherlock raised would be timely but it would be a matter for the Business Committee to agree the time available.

Moynihan highlights need for extra resource hours for Cork schools

There is a serious issue with regard to resource hours for schools and how they have been allocated, Fianna Fáil Deputy Michael Moynihan told the Dáil.

He said two schools recently came to him which will need more resource hours in the 2017-18 school year, but they have been allocated the same resource hours as last year. “This will put enormous pressure on the schools to help and accommodate the extra children who will need more resource hours,” he said. “The way resource hours were allocated is totally inadequate. Due recognition must be taken of the number of children who need help with resource hours rather than a blanket number of hours being allocated.”

In response, Education Minister Richard Bruton said the new resource allocation model involves 1,000 additional teachers being allocated to schools. “It dispenses with the needs for diagnostic tests or labelling of children before they get access to the support of a resource teacher,” he said. “It is a significant improvement. Schools have resources available for them to meet these educational needs. If there was an exceptional intake in one year that was not reflected in previous years, there is a possibility of making a case to the National Council for Special Education, NCSE.”

The expectation is that schools have been accommodated with resources without the need for these diagnostic tests, he said. “They are in a position to meet the needs of the children from the profile of the school established in the past. By and large, this is working well. If the schools in question want to submit a case to the NCSE, it will be assessed.”

Date sought for completion of broadband roll-out

A precise date on which finalisation of the national broadband plan will be complete in view of the fact that the expenditure allocations 2018 to 2020 document allows €15 million for finalisation of the procurement process for the State-led intervention for the plan was sought in the Dáil by Cork North West Fianna Deputy Aindrias Moynihan.

“The roll-out of the national broadband plan calls to mind the old dial-up connection,” he said. “It is slow, we are hearing lots of noise and screeching and it is simply not uploading. People need to see the plan being rolled out much more rapidly. The roll-out of fibre by Eir is a positive development and the service is wonderful in those areas where it is being made available. However, a timeline is needed for the so-called amber locations and communities that are not being reached. We must also establish where these areas stand in terms of broadband.”

In response Minister Denis Naughten said the National Broadband Plan will ensure high-speed broadband access of a minimum of 30 Mbps to all premises, regardless of location. “The plan continues to act as a catalyst to commercial investment, with more than €2.75 billion invested by industry in the past five years,” he said. “Current investment is running at €1.8 million per day. As a result, approximately 1.5 million or 65% of the 2.3 million premises in Ireland now have access to high-speed broadband. By the end of 2018, this figure will reach 77% and it will exceed 90% by the end of 2020.”