

The Southern Star

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Collins seeks restoration of railway to West Cork

In Cork South-West, where for up to 150 km there is absolutely no rail, there is huge pressure on the depleted roads system, Independent Deputy Michal Collins told the Taoiseach Leo Varadkar.

In the mid-1850s, there was rail from Cork through Innishannon, Bandon to Clonakilty, Skibbereen through Ballydehob, and all the way to Schull and Mizen Head, and on the north side through Dunmanway and Drimoleague to Bantry, he said. “Remember that this was the 1850s, and it allowed people to both travel and do business throughout West Cork but now, 168 years later, we have nothing. Will the Taoiseach sanction a study on how we can bring rail back to West Cork, if only as far as Bandon, to start once again opening up west Cork as a place where strong business can be done?” he asked.

The pressure on our roads due to a lack of rail or any type of proper public transport means that the roads throughout Cork South-West are in a depleted state, he said.

“Representatives have pleaded time and time again for money to be spent on the roads in West Cork,” he said. “The bypass in Bandon remains unfinished, and has been for decades now. Innishannon is a bottleneck for workers and all drivers who try to come and go through it in the morning and evenings. Long-suffering drivers might have to stay behind vehicles from Clonakilty to Skibbereen for 50 minutes, a journey which should take 25 minutes. The sheer frustration for long-suffering motorists is palpable in what we are led to believe is a modern era.”

In the leading article in the *Southern Star* newspaper in West Cork, it was reported that in 2015 there were claims by motorists for damage to vehicles from bad roads in County Cork amounting to a total of €30,000, he said.

In response, the Taoiseach said what makes sense in terms of transport planning is investment in the roads between the cities and in rural areas, but within the cities not spending any more money on building new roads because that will not solve the traffic problems. “The money in the cities will be spent on buses and railways,” he added. “Funding for roads essentially comes from two sources, either grants from central Government or from local revenues such as commercial rates, local property tax and other ways in which local authorities have revenue. To a certain extent, therefore, local authorities can raise revenue and spend it on the roads or other priorities if they wish to do so, and there is also funding from central Government.”

Threatened closure of Sherkin Island course

The threatened closure of a BA course in the visual arts on Sherkin Island was raised in the Dáil by Deputy Michael Collins and Kerry Independent Deputy Michael Healy-Rae.

Deputy Collins said the Sherkin Island Development Association has worked with the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, the Dublin Institute of Technology and Cork County Council to co-fund the running of a BA course in the visual arts on Sherkin Island since 2012. “It has been hugely successful for the island and created jobs and an economic boom in the off-season,” he said. “The local authority promised to provide €20,000 each year in partnership with the DIT and the Department, but it is renegeing on its promise and will now only give €10,000 which will lead to the collapse of the course. I ask the Taoiseach to personally intervene to save the course for the people of Sherkin Island and surrounding islands as it provides a unique opportunity for them.”

Deputy Healy-Rae said the continuation of this very successful programme with Dublin Institute of Technology is of “massive importance”. “We all have to work together in whatever way we can to avoid the teaching staff being made redundant in the next three weeks,” he said. “There are difficulties getting Cork County Council to comply with the commitments given to support the programme.”

In response, Minister of State Joe McHugh said the Department is engaging with the group on Sherkin Island, with which he was familiar. “When I was on the island, I met the group and it is a great project,” he said. “As the Deputy pointed out, there was a history and precedent of Cork County Council funding part of the programme. We will continue to consult the island community and need some pathway to a solution. We do not have it, but perhaps the Deputy might influence Cork County Council which could be a way forward.”