

The Evening Echo

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Cork worst example of depopulation of city centre

Cork is grinding to a halt, as are all Irish cities, with gridlock, Green Party leader Eamon Ryan told the Dáil. It needs to start concentrating development again for social, environmental and economic reasons.

Speaking during a debate on the Local Government Bill 2018, he said Cork is probably one of the worst examples of depopulation of a city centre with the sprawl ever outwards, the ever lengthening commute times and under-population in the city.

“It also has this very dysfunctional boundary that has existed between the county and the city where the county placed development without consideration of the impact on the city,” he said. “As happened in Dublin and elsewhere, both jurisdictions were competing for rates space. That needs to stop and it needs to change.”

He proposed an amendment to the Bill which would seek that in any review mechanism of the boundaries and the issue of what type of development is taking place would be looked at, and that a check would be put, in particular on the county, on using the new arrangements to continue the old ways of doing things where they were really ignoring the need for a strategic balance in how the city develops.

In response, Minister of State John Paul Phelan said while much of the development of Cork in the past 30 years has happened outside the existing city boundary, to the outside observer and many public representatives who are not from Cork, that area is naturally in Cork city. “There are large suburbs such as Glanmire on the north side and Togher and others on the south side which are contiguous with Cork city and which should, therefore, be in the same local authority area,” he said.

Speaking in the Seanad, Fine Gael Senator Jerry Buttimer said the extension of the city boundary was the culmination of a 51-year journey as the last boundary extension took place in 1967. “This process and project is too big to fail, to be personalised or to be made a political football by those who do not know what they are talking about, both here and beyond,” he said. “The transfer of an administrative area, staff, functions, services and many more issues must be done with clear management, vision, oversight, resources and buy-in. The Minister of State and the Government must tackle the unique challenge of marrying the new with the old and provide the people, whether they are in Douglas, Lehenaghmore, Glanmire, Blarney or wherever in that little hinterland of metropolitan Cork, with the service they expect and demand of a city.”

Cost of children’s hospital will see cutbacks in Cork hospitals

The ballooning costs of the new children's hospital and the nature of how this has come into the public domain suggests that many of these requirements of hospitals throughout the country will not now be met because of the impact of the soaring cost of the children's hospital and the lack of any controls put in place, Fianna Fáil leader Micheál Martin told the Taoiseach.

For example, he said breast cancer equipment in Cork University Hospital, which is a centre of excellence, is out of date.

“We have recently seen a report from the Health Information and Quality Authority, HIQA, which comments very critically on clapped-out equipment in hospitals throughout the country,” he said. “It refers to 12 year-old equipment at the Mercy University Hospital in Cork.”

In response the Taoiseach said the Cabinet had discussed the issue of the escalating costs. “We agreed to accept the new overall cost, which is €1.433 billion,” he said. “That represents a €450 million increase on what we had projected in April 2017. Of that, €319 million is made up of increased constructions, €50 million is VAT and the remainder relates to staff planning, design teams, risk contingency and the management equipment service to make sure that the hospital is properly equipped.”

Call for funding for local and regional roads in West Cork

Almost three years after the Programme for Government was commenced, the condition of many local and regional roads is appalling, West Cork Independent Deputy Michael Collins told the Dáil.

Recently, he said he witnessed 11 vehicles with punctures or damage to rims caused by potholes in or close to Cahalane's filling station in Bandon. This was prior to a meeting with the local area engineer in Bandon, at which he raised this shocking situation and he acknowledged the complete lack of funds for local roads.

“People who get up early in the morning cannot get to work due to the scandalous condition of the roads in Bandon and its surrounds,” he said. “In wet weather I am reminded of a war zone. Will the Taoiseach step in and provide proper emergency funding for roads in West Cork?”

In reply, Minister of State Brendan Griffin said funding for local and regional roads will be announced early in the New Year, which is earlier than usual. “All going well, there will be an announcement in the first fortnight of 2019,” he added.

1918 General Election an extraordinary act of self-determination

The General Election of 1918 was an extraordinary act of self-determination by the people, Tánaiste Simon Coveney told the Dáil. It was, he said, entirely right and appropriate that Dáil Éireann take the time to remember and reflect on this most significant act in our journey to independence and nationhood.

A century ago, he said the voice of the people was heard as never before - not through force of arms but through the ballot box, the transformative power of participatory democracy, and pen and paper.

“It was truly the first occasion in Irish history when all the people of Ireland, men and women, could take centre stage in shaping the future of their country,” he said. “Like all the events we remember as part of the decade of centenaries, the election was not a simple or isolated one. It was not experienced at the time, nor can it be remembered now, through a single political perspective. It was the election which saw women vote and run for parliamentary seats for the first time, and the one which saw large swathes of Ireland’s

disenfranchised poor, that is, those without property, vote for the first time, too. As a result, more than 1.9 million Irish people were able to exercise their political rights.”