

The Corkman

Tim Ryan, Oireachtas Correspondent

Long waiting time for driving tests in Cork and Kerry

There is great anxiety among many younger drivers and their parents who are waiting for the driver test, Deputy Aindrias Moynihan told the Dáil. They have completed the lessons and are well-practised but are stuck in the queue waiting for the driver test.

“It is four or five months in many centres in Cork, Mallow, Skibbereen and Killarney,” he said. “That contrasts with five and six weeks in Waterford and Carrick-on-Shannon. It is clearly possible to address this in some places but not in others. I am aware that the Minister has been talking about taking on additional testers. That is being proposed over the next 12 to 18 months. The problem is there now and waiting for a long time for testers is not realistic. Will the Taoiseach raise it with the Minister and ask him to prioritise having additional testers so that people who are stuck waiting for the driver test can have a realistic test time.”

In reply, Taoiseach Leo Varadkar said the recruitment of additional testers will happen and that will reduce the waiting times for a driver test. “However, there are many cancellations around the country every day and if somebody has a pressing need, especially if he or she needs a full licence for work, he or she can contact the Road Safety Authority and those cancellations can be made available,” he said.

“Full steam ahead” with the M20 motorway

An assurance that the M20 motorway between Cork and Limerick will be developed in a timely fashion was sought from the Taoiseach by Cork East Labour Deputy Séan Sherlock. “In the interests of ensuring proper regional development, I ask him to give a concrete commitment that the M20 project will not be put on the back burner and that other projects relating to it, including bypassing towns such as Mallow, will not be forgotten,” he said. “I seek assurances from the Taoiseach on this matter.”

In response, the Taoiseach said he could absolutely give the Deputy a commitment that it is “full steam ahead” with the Atlantic economic corridor and improving our road infrastructure between Cork, Limerick, Shannon, Galway and on to Sligo. “Much of the work has already been done, as the Deputy knows, including the Gort to Tuam section and south, beyond Limerick,” he said.

Call for more funding for rural walks

The rural walks scheme gives rural communities a great opportunity to develop tourism in their own areas, Fianna Fáil Deputy Aindrias Moynihan told the Dail. “We have seen walks such as the Ó Súilleabháin Bhéara way coming through Cork and on up through the country,” he said. “Other communities want to develop walks on old railway lines, such as those in Muskerry. People in Muskerry have developed the walk but are locked out of the rural walks scheme and cannot get paid for maintaining their walks. Similarly, others in Coachford and Crossbarry want to develop walks along the old railways.”

Deputy Moynihan said that when he raised this matter with the Minister for Tourism last year, he said a review of the scheme was being conducted. “It has not started, however,” he said. “To get the scheme up and running, the review needs to be completed.”

In response Tánaiste Simon Coveney said he did not have a timeline for the review of the rural walks scheme. “Cork County Council, however, has been proactive in facilitating greenways, cycleways and walks,” he said. “I will endeavour to come back with a timeline for the review.”

Improper handling of youth crimes a matter of serious concern

The very serious issues outlined in the Garda Commissioner’s interim report on youth crime cases from 2010 to 2017 were a matter of serious concern, Minister of State David Stanton told the Dáil.

Replying to Opposition Questions, he said in that period, almost 160,000 youth crime incidents were referred for consideration under the Garda diversion programme. Roughly one third of these incidents were deemed unsuitable for inclusion in the juvenile diversion system, and it had emerged that almost 8,000 of these crimes were not properly pursued.

“This is a completely unacceptable situation that must be thoroughly addressed in the interest of victims and the proper administration of justice, and for the future welfare of the children who committed the crimes,” he said.

In addition to the apology which was appropriately issued by the Garda Commissioner, he said gardaí had commenced a process to contact victims and have also provided a helpline for anyone who might be affected by the failure to process these cases. Details of the helpline are available on the Garda website.

“I am anxious that all relevant information must be made available to the victims, including the steps being taken to deal with the failures that have occurred,” he said. “A number of fundamental issues have been identified by the Garda examination, including inadequate ICT and supervision, a lack of training, and alleged failings by individual gardaí.

Concerns about similar gaps surfaced previously on different issues and last month the Government published the implementation plan which will give effect to the report of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland, he said. This plan is aimed at addressing, in a systematic way, all the failings identified.

“The Government is committed to the implementation of the commission’s report and a programme office has been established in the Department of An Taoiseach to oversee and report on progress,” he added.