



DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DÁIL ÉIREANN

TUAIRISC OIFIGIÚIL—*Neamhcheartaithe*
(OFFICIAL REPORT—*Unrevised*)

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DÁIL ÉIREANN

Dé Céadaoin, 10 Bealtaine 2017

Wednesday, 10 May 2017

Chuaigh an Ceann Comhairle i gceannas ar 12 p.m.

Paidir.

Prayer.

Leaders' Questions

Deputy Micheál Martin: I think the Taoiseach will agree that An Garda Síochána is central to our democracy and to the security of our State. Over recent years, unfortunately, the force has been mired in scandal and debacle, lowering morale and confidence within the force. We have had the whistleblowers' stories, the penalty points, the malpractice, the phone recordings, the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission, GSOC, bugging, the 1 million fake breathalyser tests and, of course, the fixed charge notices which resulted in many thousands of people being wrongly charged. Now we have had very damning revelations pertaining to Templemore Garda College and the whole issue around the 42 bank accounts and the complete breach of procedures, law and accountability, which is an extraordinary story in itself.

The revelations of the director of human resources, John Barrett, are particularly damning about the culture that has protected this edifice for so long and the inaction of the senior management of An Garda Síochána, including the Garda Commissioner, in dealing with this issue in a transparent, accountable and effective way. Mr. Barrett met the Commissioner and other senior members of the force in July 2015. It was a two hour meeting, as far as he and others have testified, but in addition to that, it was clear that the head of legal affairs in An Garda Síochána, Mr. Ken Ruane, had written to the Commissioner stating that she had a legal obligation under section 41 of the Garda Síochána Act to make a section 41 report to the Minister. Section 41 of the Garda Síochána Act is very clear that significant developments that might reasonably be expected adversely to affect public confidence in the Garda Síochána should be notified to the Minister. That did not happen, even though the Garda Commissioner was given written notice by the head of legal affairs to do that, given all that had transpired in regard to Templemore Garda College.

Does the Taoiseach accept the Garda Commissioner did not discharge her legal obligations to inform the Minister for Justice and Equality of significant developments that would clearly adversely affect public confidence in An Garda Síochána, namely, the issues relating to Templemore? It took 15 months from the date of being told she should do it by her legal adviser to

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having the Minister informed. Is that good enough? Could the Taoiseach indicate what the Minister for Justice and Equality has to say about this? Will the Minister come into this House and make a statement on these issues, and on that specific matter? Why would the Commissioner tell the Minister at that time? What is the issue? What was the problem? In the light of all that, do the Taoiseach and the Government still have confidence in the Garda Commissioner to discharge her duties and manage the Garda out of this series of debacles?

The Taoiseach: The first point Deputy Micheál Martin makes is important. I agree it is critical that the public and the Government have absolute faith and trust in the Garda Síochána and, clearly, that has been a matter in respect of which there has been pressure for quite some time. I have faith and every confidence in the Garda Commissioner to do her job. I must point out to the Deputy that the issues here are being examined by the Committee of Public Accounts, the Policing Authority and the Comptroller and Auditor General. It is appropriate that the work under way in that process should be able to be completed.

I would further point out that the work initiated here relates to a period quite a number of years ago. Action was taken by the Commissioner - when it was brought to her attention - in order that these matters would be dealt with conclusively. The Committee of Public Accounts is to meet again on 13 July. As I understand it, the Garda Commissioner will attend again at the committee to give evidence.

When the information was brought to the attention of the Minister, she sent it to the Policing Authority. The Deputy will be aware that the report contains recommendations which must be overseen by the Policing Authority. Obviously, the authority acts completely independently of both the Commissioner and the Government. I note that earlier today it made another appointment of an assistant commissioner in accordance with the new method of making senior appointments to the Garda.

Section 41 of the Garda Síochána Act enables the Commissioner of the day to send notices to the Minister for Justice and Equality. That is a matter of judgment for the Garda Commissioner.

Clearly, this process has not been completed and needs to be dealt with so that all of the evidence and facts can not only be ascertained but also judged. For that reason, the reform that is under way is quite extensive. The Deputy will be aware of the enhanced powers being sought in respect of GSOC, the Garda Inspectorate report, the independent Policing Authority and now the appointment of a commission to examine the structure of the Garda in the context of the way it is run and the mechanics of how it does its business. The commission will not be examining the qualities of any individual personality within the ranks of An Garda Síochána but will be looking at the structure overall so that the force can be seen to be professional and competent in terms of how it does its job in the interests of the people of the country, as one would expect.

The Government retains confidence in the Garda Commissioner. Obviously, in my view, it would be a mistake to personalise issues in respect of the new commission looking at the structure and the culture of the Garda. It is not about that. The work is under way by the Committee of Public Accounts, the Policing Authority and the Comptroller and Auditor General. They should be entitled to finish their work and report on it.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Act does not enable the Commissioner, it legally obliges the Commissioner. The Taoiseach is trying to wash this issue away, day after day, week after week.

Does the Taoiseach not get it? The thing is completely untenable and unacceptable in light of what we have heard here. The reports in 2008 and 2010 into Templemore were hidden from the audit committee and they were denied. Mr. Barrett points out that requests for copies of previous audits in 2008 and 2010 were denied to the audit committee and described this as a “bizarre course of action”. It is absolutely bizarre. How much more does it take for the Taoiseach and the Minister for Justice and Equality to get it? This matter demands urgent action on the part of the Government. The Taoiseach has the power to do it. The Policing Authority has a role. This is stretching the credibility of the force to its very limit, and with it the Government’s credibility as well, in terms of its seeming paralysis in acting on the issue. I urge the Taoiseach to read the material that has come into the public domain and assess it himself because I get the feeling he is glossing over it and passing it on to various other agencies and bodies.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Martin’s time is up.

Deputy Micheál Martin: This is extremely serious and it is time the Taoiseach acted on it. I would appreciate if he would indicate to me whether the Minister for Justice and Equality is prepared to come into the House to issue a statement on the latest revelations and to take questions on them.

The Taoiseach: The latest revelations are part of a very extensive report produced by a very competent civilian. The report is now before the Committee of Public Accounts. I am quite sure Deputy Micheál Martin, with his long experience in here, realises the importance of the committee and the independent way it is entitled to do its business. The Minister has sent the information to the Policing Authority because there are recommendations that must be overseen by it, and that independent body will see that this happens.

Deputy Martin stated I do not seem to get it. The situation is that this work is under way. The Comptroller and Auditor General is examining the issue and the Committee of Public Accounts is examining it. The Policing Authority will do its job in terms of monitoring and oversight of what is involved. The Minister for Justice and Equality has been here on so many occasions about issues relating to the Garda-----

Deputy Dara Calleary: Exactly. Has the penny not dropped? That is the point.

The Taoiseach: -----and that is why the reforms the Government has put in place will deal with the nature, culture and structure of what has evolved in the Garda Síochána for so many years. As the leader of Fianna Fáil, Deputy Martin knows that over many years this culture has moved to a point where it is no longer acceptable and that is why this Commissioner is taking action in accordance with Government requirements to ensure that those matters are sorted out.

Deputy Micheál Martin: She did not take action on this issue.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: This is shocking.

The Taoiseach: That is why the new commission to look at the structure, professionalism and competency of how the Garda is run is important in terms not of personalities but of that structure.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Taoiseach should read the documentation.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: There is a complete denial of the facts.

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Deputy Micheál Martin: It has been 15 months.

The Taoiseach: I do get it, but I think it is important that the Committee of Public Accounts is able to do its job.

Deputy Alan Kelly: I raised the matter here a month ago.

The Taoiseach: The Minister has no problem coming in here-----

Deputy Alan Kelly: Good. She should come in tomorrow.

The Taoiseach: -----to answer questions about matters relevant to the Department of Justice and Equality but there is no point in jumping to conclusions before allowing the agencies and committees that are vested with the authority to report to do so.

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank the Taoiseach. We are way over time. I call Deputy Gerry Adams.

Deputy Gerry Adams: Contrary to the Taoiseach's assertion a moment ago, the Comptroller and Auditor General is not examining this issue. In fact, it was kept from him. Yesterday, I raised these matters with the Taoiseach and the fact that John Barrett, the head of Garda human resources, had handed over documentation to the Committee of Public Accounts that completely contradicts the evidence provided to the committee by Garda Commissioner Nóirín O'Sullivan last Thursday. I raised that along with a raft of other scandals that have shaped Ms O'Sullivan's leadership of An Garda Síochána and, once again, the Taoiseach expressed his confidence in the Commissioner and he did that again a moment ago.

Last night the details of the 122-page document provided by Mr. Barrett emerged in the public domain. The information provided is damning. Mr. Barrett states that the actions taken by senior gardaí in response to financial irregularities at Templemore would be seen as a cover-up. The financial irregularities include how moneys generated from various Garda College areas were moved outside the purview of the normal accounting practices and into some 42 unauthorised accounts. Mr. Barrett further claims that Garda auditors were purposely kept in the dark about what was happening. The Garda Commissioner has claimed she was not aware of the scale of the irregularities two years ago. She said it was mentioned in a brief chat. However, the documents provided by Mr. Barrett support his position that he first raised these concerns about financial irregularities at Templemore in July 2015 with Commissioner O'Sullivan, Assistant Commissioner John Twomey and the head of Garda legal affairs, Ken Ruane. The meeting was a detailed discussion that lasted for over two hours. Mr. Barrett also claims that Commissioner O'Sullivan failed to act on advice from the head of Garda legal affairs to inform the Minister for Justice and Equality about the irregularities discussed in July 2015. The Commissioner does not have flexibility. She has a statutory obligation to do so under the Garda Síochána Act, yet the Minister remained silent this morning. In fact, the Minister remains absent this afternoon. As I told the Taoiseach yesterday, accountability or the lack of it is the key issue underpinning all of these controversies and scandals. That goes to the heart of public alienation in public life and politics, and disillusionment with State agencies. This is unacceptable. What is happening is a waste of taxpayers' money. It is all the more alarming because An Garda Síochána is the body that is supposed to be enforcing the law. Those are not my words, they are the words of the Minister for Social Protection, Deputy Leo Varadkar, this morning.

The fact is that there is no accountability for those in high places. Can one imagine a poor,

powerless person getting away with even a smidgen of these offences? My question to the Taoiseach is simple. He says he has confidence in the Commissioner and maybe he has good reason for that. We do not know it or share that, but he should explain to us why he has confidence in the leadership of An Garda Síochána.

The Taoiseach: Deputy Adams made a point about the leadership of An Garda Síochána under Commissioner O’Sullivan. These events took place quite a number of years ago and is it not only right and proper that we should find out the truth and facts about them? That is why the Committee of Public Accounts is investigating this matter and looking at it. That is why the Policing Authority will oversee the recommendations of the information that is being sent to it. Remember that it was Commissioner O’Sullivan who acted on this. She is the first Commissioner since these events happened to take action. She is the Commissioner *in situ* when the greatest reform of An Garda Síochána in the history of the State is taking place. That is led by the Government decision, which was quite controversial at the time, to set up an independent Policing Authority. This morning that authority made an independent appointment of another assistant commissioner. It does take time for these things to evolve to a point where that culture will be seen to change and be accepted as such by the public. That is why the Government’s decision to have a root and branch analysis of the structure and the way in which the Garda Síochána is run is now beginning to take place. It will be appointed formally next week.

Mr. Barrett has obviously written his report in great detail and it is right for it to be examined by the Committee of Public Accounts. That committee, which is charged with examining this matter, is entitled to produce its report and findings in the same way as it produced a detailed report on Project Eagle, out of which has come a decision by the Government to have a commission of investigation.

The Garda Commissioner, *in situ*, is taking action and is responsible to the Policing Authority for the way the Garda Síochána is now being run.

Deputy Alan Kelly: That is a laugh.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: What action?

The Taoiseach: The Policing Authority will make its findings in respect of the oversight there. The Minister for Justice and Equality has no problem in attending the House and has done so on many occasions in recent years, dealing with controversies in the Garda Síochána. These are matters that have to be dealt with and will be dealt with. I would like to see the Committee of Public Accounts meeting on 13 July being able to do its job. That is what it was set up for, in part. I would like to think they will have the Garda Commissioner there to answer the charges the Deputy is making here in respect of differences between what Mr. Barrett says in his report and the evidence the Commissioner gave at the Committee of Public Accounts.

Deputy Gerry Adams: I presume the Taoiseach accepts that all is not well. Despite this, I asked him why he had confidence in the Commissioner and he ignored that question. The Taoiseach said he set up an independent Policing Authority, but he did not. He set up a Policing Authority but it is not independent. He refused our motion in that regard and is only now moving slowly in that direction. These are serious allegations of malpractice, corruption and breaches of the law. I brought even more troubling allegations to the attention of the Taoiseach and the Minister for Justice and Equality 18 months ago, yet the Taoiseach did nothing about that. It appears that he is going to do nothing about the Garda Commissioner before he leaves office.

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I have been trying to understand why this is so. As I watch all of this unfold, I have genuinely been wondering why the Taoiseach does not move on this matter. Is it because the institutions are all in this together? I do not mean that the Taoiseach is complicit or is in a conspiracy, I just mean that the institutional instinct is to leave things be. It is to protect the establishment and not to move unless one is absolutely forced to take action. There is no other rational explanation for why the Taoiseach will not remove the Garda Commissioner from office. He has a second chance to give us an explanation as to why he has confidence in the Commissioner.

The Taoiseach: It seems that Deputy Adams wants to continually tick boxes and ask for another head on another plate. Does he not think that it is appropriate that the most influential committee of this House, the Committee of Public Accounts, be allowed to do its job? On occasions in the past, people associated with the Deputy's party have been the subject of television programmes on a variety of issues, but nothing was ever wrong there. All is not well here. Neither I nor anybody else can stand over a situation where the issues that have been raised are not identified and dealt with factually and in full. If money was shifted or misappropriated-----

Deputy Brendan Howlin: That is exactly what happened.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: That is accepted.

The Taoiseach: -----or money was diverted, as we now have some evidence of having happened in Templemore-----

Deputy Brendan Howlin: It is accepted.

Deputy Alan Kelly: There is no argument.

The Taoiseach: -----it was this Commissioner who took action to find out what exactly had happened.

Deputy Alan Kelly: It has gone way beyond all of that.

The Taoiseach: That is why it is necessary for the Committee of Public Accounts to be allowed to do its job, finish its report and present it to the House. The Minister for Justice and Equality will have no difficulty in coming before the House, as necessary-----

Deputy Brendan Howlin: Will she come in today?

The Taoiseach: -----as she does for Questions to the Tánaiste and Questions to the Minister for Justice and Equality, to give an account of her stewardship of her Department in this matter.

Deputy Alan Kelly: When will she come in?

The Taoiseach: I say again to the Deputy that the terms of reference set out for the commission's analysis of root-and-branch activities include: the structure and management arrangements apply for An Garda Síochána; the appropriate composition, recruitment and training of the men and women who serve in An Garda Síochána; the culture and the ethos of policing; the appropriate structures for oversight and accountability; and the legislative framework for policing. That is the focus of the new commission, in order that we can all be happy that, over a period, the Garda force will have the trust, confidence, professionalism and wherewithal to do its job as the people of the county would expect.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: That is a fantasy land.

The Taoiseach: This is a matter that needs to be dealt with and is being dealt with. I hope the Deputy agrees that the Committee of Public Accounts and the other oversight bodies should be allowed to do their work.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: Last week, I raised the rise in crime rates in County Kerry in the form of a Topical Issue debate. During that debate, I also touched on the fact that elderly people are having their homes invaded and are being attacked. Very sadly, since then a man aged 94 years and his wife, who is 87, had their home invaded last Sunday. Two men attacked him. They broke his walking stick over his head. They ransacked his house and stole money. Representatives of the active retirement associations around the country have said that politicians will have to step up. I agree.

This type of behaviour from any human being should not be tolerated. I am not blaming Government or An Garda Síochána. These people are scumbags. They are the worst type of cowardly blackguards that God ever had the misfortune to create and bring into this world. They are horrible people. I know that they will not hear this because they are all thrown in a slumber somewhere sound asleep and would not be up until evening time, but if any one of them is awake I would send a message to them out of this House: they are cowards; they are horrible blackguards.

I commend the Government that was in office at the time of Veronica Guerin's death. It came in here and worked diligently - Opposition and Government together. It brought in new rules and regulations that ensured the formation of the Criminal Assets Bureau. The Taoiseach and others that were here tackled organised crime in a very diligent and workmanlike way. We, as Government and Opposition and as elected Members of Dáil Éireann, have to stand up and say that we will not tolerate this type of behaviour. We will ensure elderly people in their homes will be safe, secure and happy in the knowledge that if any person is stupid enough to enter their homes and hurt a hair on their heads, they will be dealt with severely. I am talking about punishments such as tagging. This is not an outrageous thing to say. They should be tagged for life because people should know where they are if any person is cowardly enough to do this. Why do they not take on big strong men in their homes and see how they would come out of it? I am very supportive of what the Government did in the Criminal Law (Defence and the Dwelling) Act 2011 under which a person is entitled, and rightly so, to use reasonable force to protect their home. I would like to hear what the Taoiseach has to say about that.

The Taoiseach: The attack on Jimmy Champion at the age of 94 in Roscrea, County Tipperary and his wife, Maura, who is aged 87, was an attack of cowardice and wanton brutality. I do not know who the people who broke into that house are, the condition they were in or the state of their minds, but to do that to an elderly person is unforgivable in so many ways. Unfortunately, it is not the first time it has happened and probably will not be the last. I hope Mr. Champion is making a recovery. I note the reports of the walking stick being broken and the effect this is having on his wife, Maura, with the post-traumatic stress caused by people entering a house and beating up a man in his senior years. I saw his neighbour and colleague on television saying that he was a gentleman of the first type against whom he had played hurling so many years ago. They would not have attempted to break into the house if he had been in his younger years as a hurler. I share the Deputy's view on this matter.

It is a fact of life that we have made serious attempts to involve communities through the text alert system and Macra na Tuaithe where communities are advised to be in contact with the Garda and Garda stations when unusual happenings and these type of suspicious movements

take place. The TheftStop partnership with the IFA aims to deal with the stealing of livestock and machinery. As the Deputy is aware, efforts are under way to deal with this through various technological chips and so on to prevent machinery being stolen and to ensure that if it is stolen, people will know where it is. A total of 75% of burglaries are committed by about 25% of these people. Some of those involved are professional gangs. Operation Thor, which has been funded by the Minister for Justice and Equality and the Government, has put a stop to a great deal of that because many of those professional gangs who leave particular areas to travel throughout the country in high-speed cars have had their run ended.

I hope the local gardaí in Roscrea are able to apprehend these people. It will be for the courts to punish them. The Deputy made a very clear case about how he feels they should be punished. It is simply unforgivable that a man and his wife in the comfort of their own home who expect they will be able to live their lives in peace and tranquility should have that breached by thugs who enter a house for no other reason than to beat someone up and rob money. I hope the local gardaí find these people, that they are brought before the courts and that the judge on the bench will deal with them.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: I cannot agree with the Taoiseach about Operation Thor because I believe it has sent these criminals underground and into rural areas. A couple of weeks ago, 64 people were arrested in one day in Carlow and Kilkenny, but it was all in urban areas. We must be very careful about what we are doing here and how we are tackling the problem. I thank the Taoiseach for his comments but I want action. I want an end to these people being treated with kid gloves. There is free legal aid and every sort of pampering and nonsense for them. The full rigours of the law must be applied to them. Every one of us has parents or grandparents who grew older and more frail until we possibly lost them. We became more protective of them. We want to protect our elderly people. That is how we will be judged as politicians. I ask the Taoiseach and the Government to get cross about this issue because we cannot and will not tolerate it or allow it to go on in our country. It is not right and it is not fair.

The Taoiseach: This case has been raised by many Deputies. The Criminal Justice (Burglary of Dwellings) Act 2015 was targeted at burglars with previous convictions and who are charged with multiple residential break-ins. That Act requires that the courts provide for consecutive jail sentences when a burglar is being sentenced for multiple offences. It also allows courts to refuse bail to offenders who have a previous conviction for domestic burglary.

This case involves an aggravated situation where the burglars beat up an elderly man. The criminal justice forensic evidence and DNA database system was commenced a year ago and introduced the DNA database, which provides the Garda with investigative links between people and unsolved crimes, including burglary. The Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality, Deputy Fitzgerald, this morning turned the sod on a new forensic laboratory in County Kildare, which will cost over €30 million.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae should not underestimate the impact of Operation Thor, which began in November 2015 at a time of straitened public finances. It led to a sharp decline in the national rate of burglary, which has been reflected in successive statistics published by the CSO. The full year figures for 2016 are the most recent available. They indicate a 30% reduction in burglary over that 12-month period.

That does not excuse what happened to the Champion couple in Roscrea. I hope that the Garda is able to apprehend the perpetrators and that they are brought before a court to be dealt

with by a judge. The Deputy's point is valid. Whether they be urban, semi-rural or what one might call really rural, communities need to be on the alert. Facilities such as the text alert scheme and so on are available that allow suspicious vehicles or people acting suspiciously to be reported in the hope that issues such as this one will not arise again or at least will be reduced. Should an incident unfortunately occur, those facilities will mean that the perpetrators can be apprehended.

I hope that Jimmy Champion makes a full recovery. I hope that the condition of his wife, Maura, improves and that they will be allowed to live their lives as a long-married couple in the peace and tranquillity of their home, which they have known for a very long time.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: Climate change is the biggest challenge of our time and the greatest opportunity for us to switch to a more secure, sustainable and just economic model. However, our draft national climate mitigation plan is an unmitigated disaster. The head of the EPA says that the Government's policy measures are failing. John FitzGerald, the head of the climate advisory group, says the plan lacks substance, detail and analysis. The environmental NGOs have given it an F rating and it is lucky not to have been given a G rating.

In terms of the European Union, we are now mentioned in the same breath as Poland. There are only two countries in the EU that will not meet their emission targets and we are one of them. There are only four countries which are not going to meet the renewable targets. This country, which has some of the richest renewable resources in the world, is unfortunately in that category and heading in the wrong direction. The Institute of International and European Affairs estimates that those failures could cost us between €3 billion and €6 billion over the next decade.

What do we have? We have a Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, Deputy Naughten, who has the cheek to say the problem is that we were too ambitious. During the Green Party's period in Government between 2008 and 2011, emissions fell by 15%. Half of that drop was due to the economic downturn but the EPA recognised that the other half was because of political commitment in government to the issue at that time. The EPA projects that we are now facing a 15% increase in emissions up to 2030. If we were to take this issue seriously and grab the opportunity, we would go in the opposite direction.

The Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, Deputy Ross, was absent from the talks and had no interest whatsoever. The plan has many gaps where there should be transport initiatives. The Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine says to count agriculture out because that sector has nothing to do with it. This is part of the reason - and it is not just because there are thousands of acres of forestry burning in the west today - that we are turning this green island brown. This is not in the interests of farmers, landowners or foresters.

We do not have a single public transport project ready to go to tender. We cannot get a cycle lane built along the Liffey quays because of a lack of funding from the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport and as a result of a lack of political support at council level. We cannot build a greenway to Galway; it could even go by that plant in Athenry that the Government can get built for Apple, which will be an innovative part of the new green economy because it will be 100% powered by renewable energy. The Danes are building a similar plant and while matters here are stuck in planning, they are actually going to commission that facility. Will the Taoiseach tell us what is going to change and what the Government is going to do differently? The lack of political ambition and lack of economic understanding in the Department of Public Ex-

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penditure and Reform is at the core of our failure. It is the Government's responsibility to stop this country going from green to brown and to start grasping the opportunity that is before us.

The Taoiseach: Deputy Eamon Ryan has been talking about change recently. He stated that he wants to become quite promiscuous - from a party point of view of course - and that he is quite prepared to jump into bed with any other political party in order to be back in government. The Deputy was in government and he had some very good ideas, many of which were not followed through.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: He had some bad ideas also.

The Taoiseach: I share Deputy Eamon Ryan's enthusiasm for dealing with climate change and where we stand in that respect. Ireland's profile is the same as that of New Zealand and it is very different from most other countries. Ireland is the most carbon-efficient producer of milk in the world and the fifth most efficient producer of beef in Europe. If milk quotas go and Ireland is in a position to double the national herd-----

Deputy Micheál Martin: The quotas are gone.

The Taoiseach: -----then there is an issue in respect of being able to protect our farmers and deal with natural emissions of methane gas.

The Deputy will be aware that climate change is one of the key environmental issues globally, not just in Ireland. In the context of the scale of transformation, there is a real challenge for the State to meet its targets between 2020 and 2030. It is not a case of being ambitious enough; it is a case of having letting this slip in Tokyo in the first instance, where our profile - for what it was - was not recognised. It should have been the case of building the ambition on top of that and of not in making the target completely unreachable. The extent of the challenge to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in line our EU and international commitments - including the Paris Agreement - is well understood by Government. The best technical minds are working on this to see how we can be ambitious between 2020 and 2030 and meet with our requirements in that regard. These are reflected in the 2014 national policy position on climate action and low-carbon development, which is underpinned by the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015. The national policy and the 2015 Act provide the high-level policy and statutory direction for the adoption and implementation of successive national mitigation plans.

The Deputy spoke of building the greenway from Athlone to Galway. Does he not appreciate the difficulties that arise when one tries to do something like that? It is now virtually impossible to make any move in this country without taking into account the litigious nature of people. This presents difficulties and, under the law of the land, there are opportunities for people to object to everything. It is not possible to walk in on farmer X or farmer Y and say that we are suddenly putting in place compulsory purchase orders in respect of their land in order that we might put in place a greenway to allow people to pass through. There must be a process of consultation and discussion in the same way that I hope Ministers will be able to bring forward the regulations relating to wind turbines in the next weeks. We have had this debate for quite some time, including around carbon emissions, diesel emissions and the fraudulent activity of a number of motoring companies that have resulted in fines which are exceptionally high. The measures include the emissions trading scheme; the carbon tax; the renewable electricity support schemes; the renewable energy prototype development funding; financial supports through the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, SEAI, large industry energy network and

the small to medium enterprises support schemes; social housing energy efficiency upgrades; the near zero energy building standards; the building energy rating certificates; the public sector energy efficiency strategy; public transport investments and smarter travel initiatives; tax and financial incentives for low-emission vehicles; biofuels obligation schemes; the Rural Development Programme; and the forestry programme. These are all areas in which Ireland is working intensively to meet its targets and live up to its requirements.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: We are not working hard enough. The reason I spoke about going into coalition with other parties is that I have a sense of urgency. We need to pull together, left and right. I will work with anyone here to try to achieve these goals. We would go into government with the aim of effecting change, working harder and going further. My experience is that it is possible. We protected the metro project right through the hardest budget decisions and times. We had it ready to go with European Investment Bank, EIB, funding. It was in the four-year plan. Fine Gael's Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport will need to answer this question in the next few weeks. He killed it and now we are all paying the cost.

The Taoiseach: The Deputy's banking crisis killed it.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: We introduced building retrofit schemes that helped people to save money and create warmer homes. During the time of the current and last Government, the level of activity halved. We were able to get EIB funding for a €500 million interconnector which helps us balance our power. No other EIB project has gone through in the last five years because we do not have ambition. The Government lacks ambition and the understanding that we need to do more. That need is clear to anyone looking at its plan, which only sets out about 60% of the response we need. Where is the other 40%? What is the Government going to do differently?

The Taoiseach: We are going to work harder and are working very hard. Another Private Members' Bill was introduced by Deputy Pringle, seeking to amend the National Treasury Management Agency (Amendment) Act 2014. It seeks to instruct the NTMA to divest the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund from its fossil fuel assets within five years of the Act's commencement. The Bill's intention is that this timeline will assist in the orderly management of Ireland's climate change commitments on decarbonisation under article 2 of the Paris Agreement. That debate took place on 19 January. The Government tabled a reasoned amendment which was put to a vote on 26 January and defeated. The Bill has now been referred to the Select Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach.

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire: Does the Taoiseach want credit for that?

Deputy Micheál Martin: On a point of order, has Deputy Pringle become a Member of the Government or something?

The Taoiseach: It is fine for Deputy Ryan to come in and tell me to do all of these things. We have opened a European Investment Bank office in Dublin for major projects. Maybe the Deputy has forgotten the time he was in government. It is not as easy as he thinks to put in his interconnector-----

Deputy Eamon Ryan: We built it.

The Taoiseach: -----to put up his wind farms and solar panels, or put in his greenways.

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Deputy Peadar Tóibín: Zero energy government.

The Taoiseach: These are all wonderful aspirations but if the Deputy visited the communities he would find a very different reaction from his nice perception of people saying we will all be energy and fuel efficient and we will all have emissions control and we will have a lovely country.

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire: The Taoiseach should have some faith.

The Taoiseach: It took 16 years to bring the gas pipeline in from the Corrib field and there were legitimate reasons for that as it went through one court case after another. The gas is now flowing.

I support the Deputy in so many ways. We have to become more understanding of what climate change and climate action actually mean. It is the overriding requirement not just for Ireland but for the planet. It is perfectly evident now from the storms, hurricanes, cyclones, increased flooding, icebergs off the Antarctic, the way the Northwest Passage in the Arctic is now open summer after summer, that the world is changing. With the heating of the Atlantic, if the temperature goes up another half degree the entire salmon stock will move 1,000 miles north. These are all massive challenges that have to be met. Ireland will play its part but it cannot happen overnight. The chance might come for Deputy Ryan again sometime to play his part in government. One never knows.

Questions on Promised Legislation

An Ceann Comhairle: Leaders' Questions have run over time by 12 minutes. We have 18 Deputies who have already indicated. The provisions are for a one-minute question and a one-minute answer.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I commend the Taoiseach on the Joycean stream of consciousness we were just privileged to witness.

There have been numerous issues with new drug technologies and medicines coming on stream. We have had one row after another. One of the issues is the lack of ring-fenced funding to enable decisions to be taken with one eye on the current health budget. The most recent case concerns malignant melanoma, for example. New technology has developed a combination drug made of nivolumab and ipilimumab. This combination has had a dramatic impact on lengthening the lifespan of people with malignant melanoma. Despite this, along with Portugal, we are the only country in the European Union that has not made it available for financial recoupment for patients. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence in England has worked with remarkable speed to approve this combination drug. There are approximately 150 people per year with progressive melanoma.

An Ceann Comhairle: Your time is up, Deputy.

Deputy Micheál Martin: This would have a dramatic impact on their lifespan. Will the Taoiseach indicate whether a provision could be put in place under the health (miscellaneous provisions) Bill to provide a mechanism to deal with this more effectively than what we are currently doing?

The Taoiseach: I will have a look at that. Malignant melanoma is a horrible ailment when it strikes people. The point Deputy Martin makes is one that will be considered. I will come back to him on that.

Deputy Gerry Adams: I begin by commending you, a Cheann Comhairle, and your office on facilitating the planting of the tree of hope on the lawn at Teach Laighean. I also thank No-eleen Fulham and her group as well as Deputy Mary Lou McDonald, who initiated the project here. It was a simple but uplifting event.

I want to ask the Taoiseach about the Government commitment to review legislation relating to elder abuse. Earlier this week, a Red C poll on behalf of the Health Information and Quality Authority, HIQA, found that 63% of people have endured poor provision of health and social services. HIQA's 2016 report, published last month, stated that services are still not adequately providing protection for citizens from harm or abuse. The report recommended new legislation that would enshrine adult safeguarding in law and acknowledge the State's responsibility to protect those who may be at risk.

Two years ago, I urged the Taoiseach to establish a public inquiry into care provision in homes for citizens with intellectual disabilities, including elders. The Taoiseach refused to do that. Now, on foot of these two reports, when will the Taoiseach introduce legislation to safeguard vulnerable adults?

The Taoiseach: A great deal of activity is going on all the time on this. I do not have the detailed information that Deputy Adams has requested before me in respect of the particular Act, but I will respond to him.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: The Taoiseach answered a number of questions from leaders this morning relating to rather disquieting revelations in respect of funds in Templemore. During the Taoiseach's replies, he said that the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality would make herself available to answer questions. I do not agree with the Taoiseach's view that this should be left to a committee of the House alone. This is a matter for the full House because little is more important than public confidence in policing in this country.

Will the Taoiseach indicate whether the Tánaiste will make herself available this afternoon to make a statement and answer questions from Members on a matter of fundamental importance?

The Taoiseach: That is not for me to direct, as Deputy Howlin is well aware. There are opportunities for Deputies in the House to table questions. If they are approved by the Ceann Comhairle, then that can happen.

The Tánaiste does not have all the details. The Tánaiste referred the report that she got to the Policing Authority. The report from Mr. Barrett is now before the Committee of Public Accounts. It will remain the position that the Tánaiste can report factually on the information she has, but that is not the conclusion. We should not be jumping to conclusions here, as Deputy Howlin is well aware. At the end of the day, the Committee of Public Accounts should be allowed to do its job. There are competent people on that committee and they will follow right through.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: Will the Tánaiste come to the House?

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The Taoiseach: The Tánaiste has no difficulty in answering questions, but she cannot give the Deputy the outcome of the report of the Committee of Public Accounts.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: We will not ask for that.

The Taoiseach: It is not for me to direct any Minister to come to the House on any day. Deputy Howlin has the right, as a Deputy, to put a question before the House or to the Ceann Comhairle in this regard, as he is well aware given his long years of experience.

Deputy Gino Kenny: I wish to ask the Taoiseach about proposed legislation on the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, because a number of people have raised this issue numerous times since I have been here. From looking at the statistics it is almost a national embarrassment. A total of 156 countries have ratified the convention. Ireland signed the convention in 2006 but it is the only country in the EU not to have ratified it. People are asking, as are many Deputies, why Ireland has not ratified it. I know this is being dealt with on Committee Stage under the Disability (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill but surely the convention can be ratified. From my experience here, I have learned that democracy works extremely slowly. Surely we have to give the 300,000 people with disabilities who are waiting for the convention to be ratified an answer before the summer recess.

The Taoiseach: I explained this before. It is possible to ratify the convention, but then we have to introduce the legislation. We have always taken the view to go the other way, which is to put the legislation in place first and then ratify the convention, as it means something. It was necessary to go through a suite of legislation and quite a number of Bills were dealt with. As the Deputy pointed out, this Bill, which is part of the suite that is being processed, is on Committee Stage. To my recollection, there is a number of amendments to others that must be gone through. The Minister of State, Deputy Finian McGrath, is adamant about this and has raised it at Cabinet on numerous occasions. However, this is a combination of the parliamentary office, the nature of the business of the House and the rights of Deputies to discuss these things at committees and through-----

Deputy Gino Kenny: This could go on forever.

The Taoiseach: The answer to the Deputy's question is that we have not ratified the convention because we want to put the legislation through first-----

Deputy Gino Kenny: It was 11 years ago.

The Taoiseach: -----rather than do what other countries do, which is to ratify it and state that they have ratified it but to have no legislation to back it up.

Deputy Catherine Connolly: On the residential institutions statutory fund and Caranua, can the situation relating to Caranua's moving into new premises and paying rent out of a fund that is meant for vulnerable people be clarified? If it is so, has the Minister given his permission, pursuant to section 7(7) of the Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Act, and when did the Minister give it?

The Taoiseach: I will ask the Minister for Education and Skills, Deputy Bruton, to deal with the question.

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Caranua board has certain discretion as to how it deploys. It is an independent board with an independent chair. It

has discretion in that area. I will revert to the Deputy to get her detailed information.

Deputy Catherine Connolly: The question was if the Minister had given permission.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: Last week I asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of armed gardaí that are at our airports. I could not be told. Our airports are not secure. We are no exception to terrorist attacks at our airports. Why do we not have more armed gardaí at our airports? Newspaper reports has the number at fewer than four. I urge the Taoiseach to call in the Defence Forces to protect our airports.

The Taoiseach: I had a briefing recently with the Garda Commissioner and the national security group. These matters are constantly monitored. It is not information that should be given out publicly. Let me assure the Deputy that the Garda is vigilant in this matter. The Deputy will note the action taken in the past few days to deal with claims of activities of certain people. He will also be aware that the Government provided funds and facilities for special armed units of the Garda to deal with activities, if that be so, of particular groups. This matter is under constant review. Airport police are employed in airports and the Garda is in constant touch about keeping our airports secure. The Deputy will appreciate that, unfortunately and tragically, what happened in France, Paris, Belgium and Berlin were not in all cases occasions brought about by armed terrorists. Conventional vehicles were used to terrorise people, most recently again in Sweden. This is a case of communities being vigilant and our Garda being vigilant, which it is.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: When will the mortgage special court Bill, which is also named the mortgage arrears Bill, see the light of day? This was a central commitment in the programme for Government more than a year ago. We have startling data over the period of this Government and the last Government. Since 2013, 5,306 family homes were repossessed through court orders or voluntary surrenders. There have been 28,917 family homes subject to court cases. We see today that more than 33,000 households are in excess of two years in arrears, and the amount by which they are in arrears is increasing. Where will this special mortgage court take place? When will the heads of the Bill be published? When will the mortgage arrears Bill be published, or is this just another of the Government's false promises last year?

The Taoiseach: It is not a false promise, but I cannot give Deputy Doherty a date as to when the court will be set up. The legal advice is that there may be some constitutional difficulties with the way it has been proposed. I will advise Deputy Doherty on the progress being made to deal with the matter.

Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony: Under the programme for Government, the Government committed to protecting farming income, yet the tillage farmers in west Cork and other areas throughout the country are still awaiting their compensation. Will the Taoiseach give me a date as to when these farmers will receive said compensation?

The Taoiseach: I am not aware of the number of farmers in west Cork who are out of pocket, nor am I aware of what the problem is. Is it on the application side or the delivery side from the Department? If Deputy Murphy O'Mahony would like to give me the details, we could have them followed up for her. In any event, I will have the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine respond to her.

Deputy Michael Moynihan: The motion was passed.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The motion was passed in the Dáil.

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Deputy Jackie Cahill: The programme for Government contains a commitment to tackle education in disadvantaged areas, DEIS schools and applications for DEIS status. I tabled a parliamentary question on this matter for written answer on 3 May. The answer from the Minister tells the schools involved that they are not entitled to the information as to why they did not qualify for DEIS status. In a town like Tipperary, which has substantial unemployment and considerable disadvantage, the least we can expect from the Department of Education and Skills is detailed reasons these schools did not qualify for DEIS status. I hope the Minister will come forward with a more detailed reason and explanation for the schools involved as to why they did not qualify.

The Taoiseach: I ask the Minister, Deputy Bruton, to respond to Deputy Cahill.

Deputy Richard Bruton: I assure the Deputy that the criteria used in the selection of schools for DEIS status have been fully published. We were able to include 79 new schools and 30 upgrades in the scheme. Of course, there are many disadvantaged schools that fall outside the criteria. If in future we have more resources, we will of course extend the scheme. I will communicate directly with all schools that sought a verification to clarify the position. Later in the summer, as soon as the 2016 results from the census for small areas are produced, we will review the outcome based on the most up-to-date data. I assure the Deputy that schools will be fully informed of the criteria used and the approach we have taken.

Deputy Imelda Munster: Rents in Louth have increased by over 60% since 2012 and jumped a further 4.3% in the first quarter of this year. County Louth has seen the highest percentage increase in rents in the State. The Taoiseach's indifference and lack of action on this is causing untold financial misery and uncertainty and is compounding the homelessness crisis. I have raised this issue with the Taoiseach several times before, so I ask him not to give me his usual spiel in response because it is clearly not working. What plans has the Government set in place to deal immediately with this crisis, which is now at its highest level ever?

The Taoiseach: I do not accept at all the Deputy's charge of indifference or lack of action. There has never been more action, more focus or more priority attached to the housing problem. The real issue is supply. I read out for Deputy Adams the other day a list of sites in County Louth where construction is under way or about to get under way. The Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, Deputy Coveney-----

Deputy Imelda Munster: Rents, Taoiseach.

The Taoiseach: -----has made an issue specifically of rent and rent increases. The figures published show a decline in the rate of increase in rents in the Dublin area. Yes, in the greater Dublin area there has been an increase. It is all about supply, though, which is why more money than ever before-----

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: What about the 50,000 empty houses?

The Taoiseach: -----more incentive than ever before, more opportunity for local authorities and private developers, the purchase of sites, the housing assistance payment, HAP, scheme and the rent pressure zones-----

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: The HAP scheme is a disaster.

Deputy Imelda Munster: The HAP scheme is not working.

The Taoiseach: -----were all introduced after discussion here. However, the real problem is the supply of houses. I remind Deputy Munster again that in the so-called boom years we were building 90,000 houses a year, a rate of building that collapsed to fewer than 9,000 per year.

That must be rebuilt, which does not happen overnight.

Deputy Shane Cassells: The programme for Government includes an entire section on the rights of local communities when energy pylons are to be imposed on them, yet the terms of reference for the independent review of the North-South interconnector published on Monday do not include any reference, as per the Fianna Fáil Party motion adopted by all sides, to the devaluation of property or land in counties Meath, Cavan and Monaghan, the impact on tourism and health or a realistic study being done on this issue. The North East Pylon Pressure Group contacted me this morning and issued a statement on what it describes the “terms of preference” as an “irresponsible charade”. Does the Cabinet stand over this charade? Can the section in respect of the impact on landscape, tourism and health be included in the terms of reference?

1 o'clock

The Taoiseach: This is not about legislation but about terms of reference. The North East Pylon Pressure Group has been around for some time and I have met members of the group over the years. This is a matter Deputy Eamon Ryan spoke about. I will have the Minister look at the request Deputy Cassells makes regarding the terms of reference.

Deputy Declan Breathnach: The programme for Government includes a commitment to reduce carbon emissions, particularly in respect of diesel. Will the Ministers for Transport, Tourism and Sport and Finance carry out an urgent review of variations in diesel prices at the pumps, which, despite the same company supplying the fuel, can be as much as €10 per fill? There is also a concern, which is not related to diesel laundering, that the integrity of the fuel process may be compromised in terms of the supply of fuel to customers. I ask that the Minister for Finance and Revenue Commissioners examine this matter.

The Taoiseach: I am not sure whether the Deputy is referring to the quality of diesel or interference with diesel, which is a serious issue that has been under investigation for many years. I will have the Minister reflect on the Deputy’s comments. Motorists and consumers have at their disposal instantaneous communications about where cheaper prices apply at filling stations. I will have the Minister respond to the Deputy on the question he asked.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: The programme for Government refers to access to breakthrough and expensive medicines. While I acknowledge the Minister for Health signed the Valletta declaration with other countries yesterday, my specific question relates to a meeting on 18 May of the powers that be in the Health Service Executive who will decide on the availability of Translarna, a breakthrough drug for the treatment of Duchenne muscular dystrophy. Only two children in Ireland, both of whom are extremely ill, are eligible for this drug. Substantial delays have occurred in the highly obscure process operated between the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics and the drugs company in question. Having taken a decision on this matter in September 2016, the HSE did not inform the company of that decision until January 2017, despite a Government commitment, through the IPHA - Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association - framework agreement, to inform companies of decisions within 14 days. I ask the Taoiseach to use his good offices to make contact with the powers that be in the HSE in order that the two families in question, one of whom lives in his constituency, are not made to wait beyond 18 May for a decision on the availability of this important medicine.

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The Taoiseach: I will have a discussion with the Minister for Health on the matter raised by Deputy MacSharry.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I want to know the basis for the previous and current Governments' dislike of Leader companies. Rural areas have not had a Leader programme since 2013. It takes 18 stages to get a programme going and it is clear we will not have one in place until 2018. Five years without a Leader programme is not good enough. Rural Ireland is being hurt again. I am glad the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, Deputy Humphreys, is here as perhaps she will explain what is wrong and why the Government dislikes Leader companies and, likewise, people in rural Ireland.

The Taoiseach: The Minister is well able to answer the Deputy's question so I will ask her to do so.

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I thank the Deputy for raising this matter. The Leader programme is up and running in all areas and €40 million has been allocated towards it in my budget this year. I have arranged a meeting for next week with the CEOs of all of the Leader companies as well as various local action groups and local community development committees. I will meet the CEOs in order that they can outline the issues, which I will then address.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: There is no-----

Deputy Charlie McConalogue: The Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Deputy Creed, has continued his habit of vacating the Chamber before questions on promised legislation are taken. It may be because he does not want to account for his inaction on the matter raised by Deputy Murphy O'Mahony, namely, the Dáil's vote on introducing a tillage fund. The Taoiseach indicated that, if we gave him details, he might follow up with the Minister. I will remind the Taoiseach of the details. A Private Members' motion passed by the Dáil on 19 January sought a fund for approximately 250 tillage farmers who had been affected by weather events and lost the majority of their crops. The cost would be approximately €4 million. The Department has the spare capacity to follow through on that. Unfortunately, the Minister has shown a lack of will. He claims that it is down to the process. On the one hand, he hopes that we will have confidence in his ability to deal with the vast challenges posed by Brexit but, on the other, he cannot deal with the challenge of putting together a tillage fund. Will the Government deliver on the will of the Dáil and put that fund in place or will it continue kicking the issue to touch and ignoring it?

The Taoiseach: I am sorry. I may have misunderstood the first question, Deputy. I will follow that up with the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine in respect of the vote in the Dáil and the proposition to put together a tillage fund for those who are so affected.

Deputy John Brady: The programme for Government has committed to the full implementation of the national maternity strategy, yet the Minister for Social Protection, Deputy Varadkar, seems confused about something as basic as the current waiting times for the payment of maternity benefit. In a reply to a parliamentary question four weeks ago, he stated that the average waiting time was 17.7 weeks. This morning on the radio, however, he stated that it was between four and six weeks. Some clarity is necessary. Given that the Minister referred to 17.7 weeks only a few weeks ago, why is he only now committing to taking on additional staff and providing overtime to clear these unsatisfactory delays? He seems to be zen about when

the Taoiseach will be departing and the latter's long goodbye, but he is also zen about maternity benefits.

An Ceann Comhairle: This might be more suitable as a Topical Issue.

Deputy John Brady: Advising expectant mothers to sign on for the supplementary welfare allowance is totally unacceptable. Why is there any delay and when will the additional staff be taken on to deal with these unsatisfactory delays?

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Ó Laoghaire, on the same issue.

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire: Approximately 3,000 women are waiting on these payments. It is a time in people's lives when there are considerable extra costs. These women and their families are effectively being left without income. The Minister, Deputy Varadkar, has pointed to supplementary welfare and exceptional needs payments. In reality, though, and as he knows well, a great deal of these women and families will not qualify for those payments.

Will the Taoiseach commit to taking on the additional staff and directing community welfare officers to exercise additional discretion and give wider latitude in terms of those women who are affected by this unacceptable delay?

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank the Deputy but I suggest that he table a Topical Issue. Does the Taoiseach wish to comment?

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: Are they being defrauded by the Department of Social Protection?

The Taoiseach: I agree with the Ceann Comhairle. Obviously, if there is a scheme in place, people should not be expected to have to wait. I am quite sure that the Minister, Deputy Varadkar, is acutely aware of this now and will deal with the matter. Obviously, he did introduce the paternity benefits. This is always a time, by and large in the vast majority of cases, of great excitement in a family home. Obviously, to have a scheme, one would expect it to work, so I will discuss that with the Minister and make sure that the facilities are there to pay mothers quickly in respect of their newly-born children.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: My colleague, Deputy Michael Healy-Rae, raised the issue of the savage attack on that wonderful family in Tipperary. I wish to ask about the bail legislation and the proposals on tagging. These criminals - roving rogues and scurrilous scumbags - have to be tagged. I have seen an experiment done in England where there was tagging of badgers. It is amazing what can be done when there is tagging and the amount of crime that can be cut by watching on a monitor. They have to be tagged and we have to stop the charade of free legal aid happening once, twice and even ten times. It is just a money machine and the barristers will have to answer for it too. It is not good enough. There was an horrific attack in south Tipperary and in some cases some of them had 80 previous convictions and were out on bail. It is a joke. We need to tackle those laws.

The Taoiseach: The first thing that has to happen is that, as I hope, these burglars are apprehended and brought before the court. As the Deputy is aware, the facility exists in law at the moment to provide for tagging but, obviously, the punishment meted out for this particularly savage, aggressive burglary is one for the judge and the court to decide.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Why are they not tagged?

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The Taoiseach: I hope everybody co-operates and that gardaí can apprehend them as quickly as possible and bring them before the court where justice can be meted out.

Deputy James Lawless: The programme for Government at page 45 references the development of a nationwide greenway network, to which we have already heard reference today. We are well aware of the benefits of tourism, leisure and recreation to local communities. While the Wild Atlantic Way is rightly hailed as highly successful, we cannot forget about Ireland's Ancient East. In particular, I am concerned with the greenways in Kildare, in particular the stretch from Naas, Sallins, Ardcrough and on into Dublin city. This is a project that was hailed four to five years ago but it has yet to advance. There seems to be interminable interagency dialogue between the National Transport Authority, NTA, the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, the county council to an extent and Waterways Ireland, but it has not progressed. I was recently told in correspondence that the Grand Canal was not a priority. Could the office of the Taoiseach or the Government inject some impetus into this project and get the agencies to engage with each other and advance this project, which is very important for tourism and recreation in County Kildare?

The Taoiseach: These are a wonderful success but it has been a bit haphazard. Money has been allocated to some schemes that have not been able to be moved because of objections and so on. Yesterday evening, I had a meeting of the Cabinet sub-committee dealing with rural affairs and development. One of the decisions is that we should co-ordinate under the different Ministries a small sub-committee to put together the map of where these can apply, be they blueways, greenways, old railway lines, Coillte trails or other areas, so money that is allocated can be spent on projects that are ready to go. I look forward to the one on the Grand Canal and I thought it would have been finished by now. I think sections of it have been paved and may be suitable for walking but not yet for cycling. Over a period of five to ten years, we will have the entire country, North and South, as a brilliant opportunity for people to come and walk or run, or use buggies and bicycles. I expect that the co-ordination of the three Ministries should provide a real focus on getting money spent where we can, while hoping to deal with the problems that exist in other cases.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: The Taoiseach promised there would be legislation in regard to the Citizens' Assembly and to abortion, yet the committee that was meant to be established has not yet been convened. When will it be finalised? It seems the delay is that the Taoiseach's party and potentially Fianna Fáil cannot find enough Deputies to fill their allocation. If the two big parties are not interested, could they allocate the spaces to those parties that have an interest, even an intense interest, and would like to take extra spaces?

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: They would take an extra space.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: This is unbelievable. The names were meant to be given in before Easter. It seems to me that parties that have not done that should forfeit their places. Why should they be allowed on the committee if they did not meet the deadline? As the Taoiseach knows, given the Citizens' Assembly was his brainchild, the assembly reported weeks ago. This committee should have been convened and everyone is asking why it has not been. It seems there is now a row in the Seanad that is further delaying it. The delay seems to be that the two big parties cannot find a Deputy with an interest. We have an interest, if they want to give us their spaces.

An Ceann Comhairle: The formation of that committee is not a matter for the Taoiseach

but a matter for the House through the Business Committee. Does the Taoiseach want to comment?

The Taoiseach: Deputy Coppinger can make her suggestion but it will not be accepted. I expect that this committee will be formed next week. I remind the Deputy that the Citizen's Assembly completed its deliberations but the report has not been furnished and will not be before the end of June. It is important we have the committee in place to receive that report and it can then start its deliberations. Obviously, out of those deliberations, legislation will be required before the Oireachtas in due course. I have no doubt a referendum on whatever is the nature of the question to be asked will have to take place as well.

Deputy Michael Moynihan: Page 70 of the programme for Government refers to improving the lives of people with disabilities. Is the Taoiseach aware that, at this moment, no funding has been released by the HSE to the service providers in regard to respite care services for adults and children with disabilities? We are heading into the second week of May but it has not been released. This is not improving the lives of people with disabilities.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: Yesterday, for the 23rd time, the case of Ibrahim Halawa was not finished. What is the Government doing to ensure there is EU monitoring of the case? Is the Government looking at other options in terms of an international legal challenge against that treatment of an Irish citizen, for whose health and safety I fear? Are we considering trade sanctions? What new measures is the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade going to take to address this disgraceful situation which has seen our citizen not get a fair trial on 23 occasions?

Deputy Thomas Byrne: I am sorry, a Cheann Comhairle, but I had my hand up at the very start of proceedings today. Many people who came into the Chamber since have spoken.

With regard to the modern languages-----

An Ceann Comhairle: Sorry, Deputy. I have listed everybody in the order in which I saw them.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: I am sorry if you did not see me.

An Ceann Comhairle: If it is an issue, you can come and talk to me afterwards.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: I cannot believe the Deputy is impugning the-----

Deputy Thomas Byrne: I am standing up for my rights as a Member of this House, as I am entitled to do.

The modern languages strategy was first announced in a consultation in 2014. In 2015, a number of fora were held on the publication of the strategy. In 2016 it was announced in the Action Plan for Education that not only would it be published by the end of 2016 but it would begin to be implemented in early 2017. The Minister for Education and Skills announced the foreign languages strategy on 19 April in advance of the TUI conference, where it was the centrepiece of his speech. Then, on 28 April, the Minister quietly acknowledged in his Action Plan for Education report that the modern languages strategy has not been achieved and is not published. When is it going to be published and why did the Minister announce on 19 April that it was in fact published?

The Taoiseach: In respect of disability and respite care, referred to on page 70 of the pro-

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gramme for Government, I will have the Minister of State, Deputy Finian McGrath, respond directly to Deputy Moynihan. Obviously, there is an extensive budget for disability under his remit.

I will ask the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Deputy Flanagan, to deal with the Halawa case, and the Minister for Education and Skills, Deputy Bruton, to deal with the question on modern languages.

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am very concerned about the ongoing delay in having this matter reach a conclusion. The matter was heard in court in Cairo yesterday. Officials from my Department were present, as indeed they were present on each and every occasion on which the case was heard over recent years. I am satisfied, however, that matters are now moving towards a conclusion. The hearing has been returned for next week and I would expect that further progress will be reported at that stage.

Of all the consular cases in my Department, this remains a top priority. I want this citizen home at the earliest opportunity. In the meantime, I am concerned as to his health and welfare within the prison and, again, we are keeping a very close eye on the situation there to ensure all medical and welfare assistance is available to him. I am in regular contact with my EU colleagues and I intend raising the issue once again on Monday next with my EU colleagues. Every effort is being made to have influence brought to bear to have this trial brought to a conclusion at the earliest opportunity.

Deputy Richard Bruton: I agree with Deputy Byrne that modernising our approach to languages is certainly a major priority, particularly in the wake of the decision by the British people, whereby we will need to diversify our markets. We have high ambitions in that area. We will publish over the coming months a policy statement to implement those ambitions, and that is at an advanced stage of development.

Exchange of views with Mr. Michel Barnier: Motion

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I move:

(1) That Dáil Éireann:

(a) notes that the Treaty on European Union recognises the active contribution of National Parliaments to the good functioning of the Union through being informed and having the ability to express their views on matters of particular interest to them;

(b) in view of the economic, political and social implications for Ireland of the decision of the United Kingdom to withdraw from the European Union as notified under Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union on 29th March, 2017, considers that members of the Houses of the Oireachtas should be enabled to express their views and be informed on this issue of significant national importance;

(c) resolves therefore that the Dáil shall sit in Joint Committee with Seanad Éireann on Thursday 11th May, 2017 at 11.30 a.m., for the purpose of an exchange of views with Mr. Michel Barnier, Chief Negotiator of the Taskforce for the Preparation and Conduct of Negotiations with the United Kingdom.

(2) The following arrangements shall apply:

(a) the Ceann Comhairle shall be the Chairman and shall adjourn the proceedings immediately following the Cathaoirleach's concluding statement;

(b) the proceedings shall be as follows:

(i) 11.30 a.m. – Ceann Comhairle's opening statement;

(ii) 11.34 a.m. – statement by Mr. Barnier;

(iii) 11.54 a.m. – statements from members in the following order, and to which the following time limits shall apply:

— Government – 12 minutes,

— Fianna Fáil – 10 minutes,

— Sinn Féin – 8 minutes,

— the Labour Party, Solidarity-People Before Profit (Sol-PBP), Independents 4 Change, the Rural Independent Group, the Social Democrats-Green Party Group, the Seanad Independent Group, and the Seanad Civil Engagement Group – 3 minutes each,

and members may share time;

and

(iv) 12.45 p.m. – Cathaoirleach's concluding statement.

(3) On Thursday 11th May, 2017, the Dáil shall meet at 2 p.m.

Question put and agreed to.

Ceisteanna - Questions

Cabinet Committee Meetings

1. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Taoiseach when the Cabinet committee on social policy and public service reform last met; and when it is planning to meet next. [20059/17]

2. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Taoiseach when the Cabinet committee on social policy and public service reform last met; and when it is scheduled to meet again. [21878/17]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 1 and 2 together.

The Cabinet committee on social policy and public service reform last met on 10 April 2017. The next meeting of the committee has been scheduled for 15 May.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Once again, the divisive and dishonest campaign to pit

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public sector workers against private sectors is under way, this time in the form of the review on public sector pay by the hand-picked group which recently published its report on this issue, thus perpetuating this utterly divisive narrative. I wonder whether this sub-committee dealing with public sector reform believes it should challenge this divisive narrative and recognise that public sector workers, even with this so-called phased restoration the Government is talking about, will still in 2018 be worse off than they were in 2009, by €200 if they are on a salary of €30,000, by €1,250 if they are on a salary of €40,000 and by €2,000 if they are on a salary of €50,000. This is so-called pay restoration. Nine years later, public sector workers will still be worse off than they were when all of the so-called emergency started and targeted their pay and made them scapegoats for the financial crisis produced by bankers, developers and politicians.

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank the Deputy. The time is up.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Similarly, on the issue of pensions as I understand it, it is outrageous that we will get rid of the pension levy but replace it with a pension levy, that is, the pension levy stays when the emergency, we are told, is well over and public sector workers have paid through the nose for the past nine years for the crimes of others.

The Taoiseach: First, on the role of the Cabinet sub-committee on social policy and public service reform, it provides a basis for cross-departmental co-ordination in the delivery of the programme for Government in the areas of equality, social policy and social inclusion, including a focus on particularly vulnerable groups and to support continued improvements in the area of public service.

I welcome the report from the commission chaired by Mr. Kevin Duffy. The programme for a partnership Government committed the Government to establish a public service pay commission to examine pay levels across the public service and in line with this commitment, the Government agreed in principle in July of last year to establish that independent advisory body to examine public service remuneration and pay rates. The terms of reference were finalised after an open consultation process that was carried out on the role and methodology of the commission and how it should approach this trifold relationship. The terms of reference provided that the commission would be advisory in nature. The Government retains the right to negotiate terms and conditions directly with the employees.

For its initial report, the commission was asked to provide inputs on how the unwinding of the financial emergency measures in the public interest, FEMPI, legislation should proceed having regard to particular issues: the evolution of pay trends in the public and private sectors based on published information, a comparison of pay rates for identifiable groups within the public service with prevailing non-public sector market rates, international markers and comparisons where possible and the state of the national finances.

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank the Taoiseach.

The Taoiseach: Finally, on this matter, the role of the Government is to strike an appropriate balance between what we pay our public servants to ensure we can attract, train and retain staff and compete in the labour market for those skilled staff who need to provide public services and the primary consideration for any employer, which is the ability to pay its employees. The State is no different from other employers. The process of direct negotiations will begin shortly.

Deputy Gerry Adams: We all will be aware that public sector workers have taken significant cuts in pay and in terms and conditions since 2009 and key issues in this sixth round of

pay talks - it would be useful to know when the Taoiseach thinks they may begin - will be equal pay for equal work and the timely and full unwinding of FEMPI. Sinn Féin believes that pay restoration must prioritise those earning below €65,000, with pay increases for the low paid. That is especially important since the low to middle-income workers in the public service have not had a net pay rise in nearly ten years.

The Taoiseach states that the committee has a responsibility, among other matters, for equality but the Government refuses even to acknowledge that equal pay for equal work is an issue despite the fact that it affects An Garda Síochána, nurses and teachers and is the source of considerable unrest and discontent. The Minister is now talking about extending, not replacing, the Lansdowne Road agreement, and it disproportionately benefitted those earning over €65,000. We want to see a new agreement that will address this issue of equal pay for equal work. We want to see the timely unwinding of FEMPI with the focus first on those on low and middle incomes. There is an opportunity - I do not have much confidence that the Government will seize this opportunity - to move fairly on these issues. Does the Government accept the need for a single-tier pay structure and would the Taoiseach commit to placing both the issue of equal pay for equal work and the focus being on low and middle-income workers on the agenda for the first round of pay talks?

The Taoiseach: The Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform has stated clearly the value that the State places on its public employees and the work that they have done and the sacrifices that they have made over the past period. The State also must have regard to its legal obligations to unwind the FEMPI measures, which were imposed on public servants during the crisis and significantly reduced their remuneration and pay as a consequence. The commission report reflects those requirements but it makes particular note of the fact that control of the public service pay bill is a central determinant of budgetary policy. It will be a matter for the parties to negotiate a timeframe that will provide for the orderly unwinding of the financial emergency legislation having regard to maintaining sustainable national finances and competitiveness, other Government spending priorities, the public service reform agenda and equality considerations on public service pay.

I hope that the Minister will be in a position to commence negotiations quickly following engagement between the civil servants of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the representatives of the unions involved. The Minister is anxious, on behalf of Government, to commence that as quickly as possible and to have an extension of the Lansdowne Road agreement. It is in the interests of everybody to have a balance here of affordability, sustainability and fairness, and the Minister has made those points clearly to date.

An Ceann Comhairle: We will have supplementaries from Deputies Micheál Martin and Howlin.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Last week, I had an exchange with the Taoiseach on the attempt by the Minister for Social Protection, Deputy Varadkar, to massively exaggerate the amount of money which was lost on welfare fraud. Of course, no fraud is justified and the State has an obligation to catch fraud but, equally, the Minister of the day has an obligation to be balanced in his approach. When I mentioned that the claim to be saving €500 million was bogus, the Minister stated loudly here that he had misled no one and that the figure concerned both fraud and administrative errors. The true figure is that savings of €41 million have been projected for this year on fraud and other savings seem to be due to overpayments for a variety of reasons. To be fair to the Minister, I went back and checked his statements. The campaign he launched

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refers solely to fraud. Its slogan is “Welfare Cheats Cheat Us All”. At the launch the only figure mentioned was €500 million. The Minister stated fraud can cost the State tens if not hundreds of millions.

We all understand there is a campaign under way and it is important in terms of the Minister’s last minute attempt to create some form of policy record for himself, but the facts show he was being a lot less than the straight talker he claims to be. Given the Taoiseach’s role as chairperson of the social policy committee, will he tell us if the committee signed off on this misleading campaign, which estimated that €500 million has been lost in fraud-----

Deputy Brendan Howlin: Leo has his Rebuilding Ireland campaign.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Simon.

Deputy Micheál Martin: -----when the actual amount in question was €41 million? I received the figures in total savings from the Minister in reply to a parliamentary question.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: I wish to ask the Taoiseach about the focus on pensions which seem to have dominated the preliminary discussions on a new pay round in the public service. The single pension scheme we introduced came into effect from 1 January 2013 now encompasses 15% of all public servants and is growing each time new public servants are recruited. It has been found by the review group to be equal to what is available in the private sector and confers no pension benefit over and above what would be normal. Does the Taoiseach accept that public servants employed prior to 2013 were employed on the basis of a contract which specified getting a pension after payments for 40 years based on their final salary? That is what they contractually worked for over a period approaching 40 years and it would be invidious and wrong to change the goalposts now towards the end of their working career. Does the Taoiseach also accept that many public servants now have an integrated pension, so the notion that there is no provision for it is untrue because people who pay PRSI and have the contributory State pension calculated as part of their benefits are paid from the Social Insurance Fund? There is provision on an annual basis for that. Does the Taoiseach debunk the notion that because of real difficulties in private sector pensions that somehow the solution is to worsen public sector pensions significantly? Does he agree that would be the wrong approach? Surely the approach is to try to improve pensions available for private sector workers to the degree that used to be available to them before the economic collapse?

The Taoiseach: In respect of the question from Deputy Martin, the committee did not consider the campaign by the Department of Social Protection. On the previous occasion we met we discussed unallocated cases from Tusla, the national women’s strategy and single affordable child care, which is an issue that is being dealt with here. This campaign has been launched by the Department of Social Protection itself.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: It is a solo run.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: The Minister is campaigning.

The Taoiseach: I will check with the Minister for Social Protection on the specific point Deputy Martin raised in respect of fraud or other issues.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The only point is that I do not think the Department of Social Protection should be used by any Minister as a prop for his or her personal campaign.

The Taoiseach: I take the Deputy's point.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I am sure the Taoiseach would agree with that.

The Taoiseach: I will come back to Deputy Martin on it. Deputy Howlin raised an important point. The report sets out a basic bedrock for valuable discussions and it is not for me to predetermine what the Government outcome on it might be. As I understand it, the next step is that officials from what was at one time Deputy Howlin's Department will engage with personnel in the public sector unions and the Minister will start the negotiations as soon as possible for an extension of the Lansdowne Road agreement.

In respect of pensions, the commission was tasked, first, with assessing the overall value of the public service remuneration package, which includes not only pay but pensions. That was provided for in the terms of reference of the commission. The work undertaken in that regard was both significant and important and I commend Mr. Duffy on his report. The approach of the Government to the issue of public service pensions is based on the fiscal sustainability of providing public service pensioners, current employees and future employees with public service pensions now and into the future. Deputy Howlin made a specific point on that. Both the State and its employees who are public servants have a shared interest in securing the sustainability of the pension system. Reform measures over the years such as integrating the occupational pension with the contributory State pension, extending the minimum retirement date from 60 to 65 and the introduction of a new career single public service pension scheme linked to the Civil Service pensions, CSP, age and the consumer price index, CPI, have contributed to the future sustainability of the public service occupational pension system.

However, we know from right across the economy that pensions have become increasingly expensive. The outputs from the commission confirm that and they reflect the values of the pension entitlements for various pension cohorts currently within the public service. The proposal by the commission that any agreed adjustment in pension contributions for public servants in respect of pension benefits should be linked with the discontinuance of the pension related deduction, PRD, imposed by the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest, FEMPI, 2009 Act has been noted. Those are matters which will undoubtedly feature in the proposed public service pay discussions. That is best left for that engagement and interaction to take place.

The commission considers that the values identified for those on legacy standard accrual pension schemes and fast accrual schemes should be addressed by providing for an increased employee contribution for those who continue to benefit from such schemes. Rates of contribution are a matter for negotiation. While the commission considers it would be reasonable to apply any agreed adjustments in contributions in conjunction with the discontinuance of the pension related deduction currently imposed on public servants under the FEMPI Act, in the commission's view the value of public service pensions could be reasonably fixed in a range of 12% to 18% over private sector norms for pre-2013 standard-accrual pension schemes but that fast accrual schemes incur greater costs. The point raised by Deputy Howlin is an important one and I expect it will feature centrally in the discussions.

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Commissions of Investigation

3. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach when he received the Fennelly commission report; and the actions he took thereafter. [20723/17]

The Taoiseach: I received the final report of the Fennelly commission on 31 March 2017 and it was published on my Department's website on 6 April 2017. The commission's final report made findings of great concern to the Government and, I am sure, to this House.

The commission found that recording and retaining non-999 calls was not authorised by common law or by statute and that An Garda Síochána therefore infringed the constitutional rights of those recorded. The commission also made damning findings about the lack of effective oversight and procedures within An Garda Síochána over a lengthy period and the failure to respond when some technicians and officers raised concerns and questions. However, the commission also found that it is "reasonable to conclude, based on the evidence before it, that no widespread or systematic, indeed probably no significant, misuse of information derived from non-999 recordings took place". The commission also found no evidence of knowledge of the recording of non-999 telephone calls on the part of relevant Ministers for Justice and Equality, the Department of Justice and Equality, or other State agencies.

Taken together, the findings of the Fennelly commission reinforce the Government's determination to carry out a fundamental review of the future of policing in Ireland. In April, the Government approved draft terms of reference for a commission on the future of policing in Ireland, and the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality is consulting all parties in the House before those are finalised. The review will look at all functions carried out by An Garda Síochána, including community safety, State security and immigration. It will also consider the full range of bodies that provide oversight and accountability for policing in Ireland. It will take account of the changing nature of crime, society and public expectations; best practice in other countries; previous reports concerning policing in Ireland; and any specific challenges to delivering consistent reform in policing.

In addition to this comprehensive reform agenda, the Government has also agreed that the Tánaiste will refer the Fennelly report to the Policing Authority to oversee implementation of its recommendations in the context of its oversight of An Garda Síochána; examine the need for legislation on the recording of calls and related matters on foot of the recommendations of the Fennelly commission; and refer matters in the report relating to the Bailey case to the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission, GSOC, to consider whether it believes any further investigation is necessary against the background of the investigation it has been carrying out already into the case.

Deputy Micheál Martin: This question was submitted before Easter. In his reply the Taoiseach made the point that the Fennelly report made damning findings about the lack of effective oversight and procedures in the Garda Síochána over a lengthy period of time, and the failure to respond when some technicians and officers raised concerns and questions. This goes to the heart of the issue that I raised again this morning, which is that when the current Garda Commissioner was made aware, back in 2015, about the situation in Templemore and when the head of legal services in An Garda Síochána made it very clear in writing to the Commissioner that she had a legal obligation under section 41 to report that issue to the Minister for Justice and Equality, the Commissioner decided not to do so at that time, and took a further 15 months.

That is exactly the lack of oversight or action that Fennelly refers to in relation to the phone recordings. It is evident here again. The matter has been raised for quite some time by the head of legal services. It is akin to the Attorney General saying to the Taoiseach “You legally have to do this, Taoiseach.” The head of legal services told the Commissioner that she legally had to tell the Minister, yet the Commissioner did not do so. That is quite fundamental and we need a serious answer as to why the Commissioner did not follow through on that legal advice that came from the head of legal services.

I am not satisfied by the Taoiseach’s response this morning. I am not sure he has grasped the key point that there was a legal obligation which was not upheld. It is a very serious issue in terms of the discharge of one’s duties. I put it to the Taoiseach, however, that the lessons have not been learned. In the midst of everything that has happened, that failure to discharge a legal obligation is quite damning for the current Commissioner, given the level of awareness she should have had concerning all the other issues that were swimming around An Garda Síochána back in 2015, including whistleblowers and GSOC. With everything that was going on, surely the Commissioner should have said this was something she had to go to the Minister with immediately. At least the Minister should have been made aware of an issue that would involve reputational damage to An Garda Síochána because of the issues that have been revealed in the context of the Templemore report.

The Taoiseach: First, the interim internal audit report in relation to the finances of the Garda College were submitted to the Tánaiste’s Department on 27 March this year. That raises serious issues concerning the governance and accountability in the college, which the Tánaiste has stated must be addressed comprehensively and thoroughly. Some of the main issues of concern highlighted by that report include the manner in which the college was run, the existence of a large number of bank accounts and investment accounts linked to the college, staffing issues, and issues relating to the ownership and use of certain lands, the previous 2008 report raising issues in relation to the college, and the non-implementation of its recommendations.

The Accounting Officer for the purposes of the Comptroller and Auditor General Acts is the Garda Commissioner. The Commissioner has accepted the findings set out in the report and has put in place arrangements to ensure the recommendations are implemented. The Commissioner sent the report to the Committee of Public Accounts as well as to the Comptroller and Auditor General. The Committee of Public Accounts commenced its examination of the report on 4 May and will continue its work on 13 July.

The Tánaiste has been assured that the Garda authorities recognise the gravity of the issues raised here and that they are taking active steps to progress the recommendations in the report. External governance expertise and auditors have been engaged. A steering committee, chaired by the chief administrative officer and including a representative from the Tánaiste’s Department, is overseeing the implementation of the recommendations. There are several aspects to that implementation of the recommendations that do require further consideration to ensure there is a full understanding of the extent of the issues identified, the implications of the actions required to put the appropriate governance structures and financial and operational processes and procedures in place in the college to address fully the recommendations, and the future development of the Garda College. This work is under way.

On receipt of the report and in view of the gravity of the issues raised, the Tánaiste immediately requested the Policing Authority to oversee the implementation of the recommendations and to report back to her on a quarterly basis in relation to the progress being made. The author-

ity intends to submit its first report in July.

In the course of the Committee of Public Accounts hearing on 4 May, a discrepancy emerged in the evidence given by the Garda Commissioner and the executive director of human resources and people development, Mr. Barrett, over the length of a discussion in late July during which the executive director raised concerns about the college's finances. The Commissioner recollected what she described as a brief discussion when she and a number of other senior officers were having tea after a long meeting at the college. Mr. Barrett recollected the discussion extending to over two hours.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: A minimum.

The Taoiseach: Mr. Barrett had recorded the start and end times of the discussion in a document that he had prepared in September 2015. In his evidence to the committee he described this document as a minute of the discussion, but on further examination it emerged that it was not a contemporaneous note but rather a document prepared for a different purpose over a month later, which included his recollection of the discussion.

In her evidence to the committee, the Commissioner said she was fully briefed on the issues a couple of days after the discussion with Mr. Barrett in July. The discrepancy would appear to be of no significance in so far as the Commissioner's handling of the issues in relation to the college is concerned-----

Deputy Brendan Howlin: That is shocking.

The Taoiseach: -----but does point to some internal division in the senior management team in An Garda Síochána upon which it would not be appropriate for me to comment.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Taoiseach has not answered my question about the letter and the legal reference.

The Taoiseach: I will have that looked at.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Well start looking. Basically, the Commissioner was legally advised by the head of legal services.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I will allow brief supplementaries.

The Taoiseach: The Commissioner sends material under section 41 to the Minister for Justice and Equality on an occasional basis. I do not know the extent of the referral of section 41s.

Deputy Micheál Martin: It is very clear.

The Taoiseach: I am not sure it is.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I will allow a short supplementary from Deputy Martin first and we will then group them together.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Under section 41 the Commissioner has an obligation to "keep the Minister and the Secretary General of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform fully informed of significant developments that might reasonably be expected to affect adversely public confidence in the Garda Síochána". In 2015, the head of legal services wrote to the Commissioner saying, "You are obliged under section 41 to report this to the Minister",

but the Commissioner decided not to do that. Why did the Commissioner keep this away from the Department and the Minister? That is my net point. There was a legal obligation on the Commissioner to report this to the Minister and she decided not to. The Minister only found out in March.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: We will group the questions. I will call Deputy Howlin and then Deputy Adams.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: I genuinely found the Taoiseach's answer profoundly worrying. I have taken Leaders' Questions over the last number of years and I know that these notes are prepared by the parent Departments. The Taoiseach's speaking note was prepared by the Department of Justice and Equality. Anybody who read the documents submitted yesterday by Mr. Barrett could not come to the conclusion that this can be reduced to an internal management dispute, a difference of views. Mr. Barrett has no axe to grind. He was brought in as an external person with extraordinary human resource management experience in the private sector. He has taken comprehensive notes. It is not reconcilable that the Commissioner would view this as a chat for a few minutes over a cup of tea. What Mr. Barrett laid out was at a two-hour plus meeting with detailed, fundamentally provocative and difficult allegations about the misuse and misappropriation of funds, allegations of illegality concerning proper accounting mechanisms, which in other circumstances may well have amounted to embezzlement. I worry desperately, if whoever in the Department of Justice and Equality prepared the Taoiseach's speaking note today had sight of that and reduced the Taoiseach's commentary here to suggest that this is somehow a dispute between two individuals. We have bounced from profoundly disturbing issue to profoundly disturbing issue.

I was going to talk about the Fennelly commission here. Mr. Justice Fennelly's recommendations suggested that common law, statute law and the Constitution all breached the European convention. We have had a hiatus for a while on that. We then moved on to the fact that we had a million breath tests recorded without being carried out, and we have a hiatus for that. There are 14,700 wrongful convictions that still have to be addressed. We still have no explanation for any of this from the management of An Garda Síochána. Now we come onto the next issue. Everything has become compartmentalised. It is sent to some review body, or sent to the Committee of Public Accounts, or sent somewhere, but nobody is ever fundamentally held to account. I ask the Taoiseach personally to sit down and read the full documentation provided to the Committee of Public Accounts. Collectively, as a Dáil, we have to make decisions on future policing in this country.

Deputy Gerry Adams: The Fennelly commission, as the Taoiseach knows, is one of a long litany of investigations and commissions of investigation into myriad scandals that have emerged in recent years around An Garda Síochána and its leadership, management and actions. I am fairly certain that these go back to well before the Taoiseach took office, in fact I referred to some of that yesterday in respect of a Fianna Fáil led Government that was tackled on some of these issues around the revelations that emerged about Donegal. Unfortunately for the Taoiseach, his term of office has been dogged by these issues. He has responsibility for the Garda Commissioner because he refused to give that responsibility to the Policing Authority. If he had done so, the issue would have been dealt with there. It would have decided whether the Garda Commissioner should stay or go. The buck stops with the Taoiseach. That is where it stops. So far he has failed to exercise that responsibility properly, in the public interest or, indeed, in the interests of members of An Garda Síochána.

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Then we have this strange relationship between the Taoiseach's party and Fianna Fáil. He is Taoiseach at Fianna Fáil's pleasure. Fianna Fáil now says that it has no confidence in the Commissioner, but it supports the Taoiseach, who continues to express confidence in the Commissioner. The leader of Fianna Fáil rails, quite rightly, against the Taoiseach's lack of action but continues to support his inaction despite his protestation. How does that play out in the public sphere? This latest batch of revelations came out last evening. One would have thought the Minister for Justice and Equality would have presented herself here-----

Deputy Brendan Howlin: Absolutely.

Deputy Gerry Adams: -----to be asked about this. I know time is running out, but I ask the Taoiseach once again to ask the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality to come into the Dáil and take questions on these issues as soon as possible. I ask the Taoiseach to do this to instill some confidence back into this forum, this Oireachtas, and show people out there, who are wondering what this is all about, that these matters can be sorted out and that he is prepared to do so. That would be a start.

The Taoiseach: The Tánaiste attends on Thursday mornings to deal with Leader's Questions. There are other facilities, as the Deputy knows, for Deputies to put down questions to individual Ministers. I point out to the Deputy again that the Accounting Officer for the purposes of the Comptroller and Auditor General Acts 1866 to 1998 is the Garda Commissioner. She has accepted the findings set out in the report and has put in place arrangements to ensure the recommendations are implemented. These activities in Templemore in respect of bank accounts and movements of money do not represent acceptable accountancy. That is why it has to be dealt with by this report. What did the Commissioner do? She sent the report to the Committee of Public Accounts and to the Comptroller and Auditor General. That is what she should have done, and that is what she did. The Committee of Public Accounts commenced its examination of the report on 4 May. What happened at the Committee of Public Accounts? We now have different accounts of a meeting. I do not speak for the Commissioner or for Mr. Barrett. He prepared a report. The information I have says that in his evidence to the committee, he described the document as a minute of the discussion.

Deputy Gerry Adams: We know all of that. We have read all of that.

The Taoiseach: On further examination, however, it emerged that it was not a contemporaneous note, but rather a document prepared for a different purpose over a month later.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: Is the Taoiseach saying that it is not factual?

The Taoiseach: There is a very serious difference of opinion here.

Deputy Gerry Adams: The Commissioner has put forward no evidence to support her position.

Deputy Micheál Martin: It is a month later.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Taoiseach without interruption. We have other questions.

The Taoiseach: I do not speak for Mr. Barrett. I have no remit either for Mr. Barrett, or indeed for the Commissioner, in respect of this committee. They are to answer to the committee.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: The language indicates that they have not.

The Taoiseach: Let me make the point-----

Deputy Brendan Howlin: Whoever rolled back wanted to undermine Mr. Barrett.

The Taoiseach: Who sent this report to the PAC? The Garda Commissioner. Why did she do that?

Deputy Micheál Martin: How long did that take?

The Taoiseach: Because she is the Accounting Officer for the purposes of the Comptroller and Auditor General Acts 1866 to 1998. She took action by sending the report to the committee and to the Comptroller and Auditor General. She attends at the committee herself. Obviously the committee continues its work and will be in session again on 13 July.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: Hopefully it will meet before then.

The Taoiseach: It will have this report and Mr. Barrett's report before it and it will have the Commissioner before it. Is that not the location where both can give their view on the minutes of this meeting, on whether they were made contemporaneously or for a different purpose and on the different recollections of both-----

Deputy Brendan Howlin: The breath tests are parked somewhere. The convictions are parked somewhere.

The Taoiseach: No, I will be clear on this. The Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality was very clear with An Garda Síochána. The Commissioner herself was very clear on where responsibility lies. It is very easy, as the Deputy well knows, in this age of digital accuracy to determine who made the phone calls to PULSE, when they were made and whether they were true. The work to determine the veracity of this is now under way.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: How long will that take? Two years-----

(Interruptions).

The Taoiseach: There cannot be a situation where a million tests were purported to be carried out when they were not.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: We still have no answer.

The Taoiseach: Obviously there is a responsibility to address this.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: We have eight minutes left and we have to deal with the next question.

The Taoiseach: Both the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality and the Garda Commissioner have stated very clearly where that responsibility lies. We have to define for certain who was responsible down the line for making these decisions-----

Deputy Brendan Howlin: How long is that to take?

The Taoiseach: -----and making the calls that led to these figures, because the figures do not lie in this case.

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An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Six Deputies have raised Questions Nos. 4 to 10, inclusive. We have seven minutes left. Do the Deputies wish to continue with a quick round of supplementaries to this question or move on to the next question?

Deputy Brendan Howlin: There is no point in starting if there are seven Deputies on the next question, is there?

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Taoiseach has made a point in his response that the Commissioner sent the reports to the Committee of Public Accounts. The timeline for that is the point. There was a report in 2008 and another in 2010. The internal audit committee was denied access to them for some reason. The essence of what has been suggested and said here in respect of the documentation from Mr. Barrett, is that there was an overall attempt to prevent this from getting into the public domain, or an attempt to massage or manage this internally. There is the suggestion that everybody in An Garda Síochána knew about Templemore, this elephant in the room, and all of the issues around it. To use Mr. Barrett's language, it was in plain view. It was nonetheless not getting the traction it should have gotten in terms of proper accountability and so on.

There is a part to which I have not gotten a satisfactory response. If we go back 15 months from the time the report was given to the Minister, when the head of legal services wrote to the Commissioner telling her that she was legally obliged to refer this to the Minister. Despite this, the Commissioner did not take that legal advice and did not refer it to the Minister. Has the Taoiseach or the Minister received any response from the Commissioner as to why she did not act at that time on that legal advice from the head of legal services of An Garda Síochána?

2 o'clock Why did she take a decision not to act on this and not to bring it to the Minister's attention? There was a legal obligation, but in my view there was also a moral obligation. In terms of due process and procedure and accountability, the Minister should have been made aware of this given the comprehensive nature of the reports that were there at the time - the audits and so on.

There was no argument at this stage about the 42 accounts or the OPW lands. Clearly, if this got out, it would be very problematic for the Minister of the day. It seems extraordinary that the Minister would have been kept in the dark about all of this for what seems to have been up to 15 months. The Taoiseach has not really responded to that specific point. Why did the Commissioner not alert the Minister? Can the Minister come in to the House and explain that sequence of events and the failure of the Commissioner to tell her at the time?

Deputy Brendan Howlin: That question was put to the Commissioner at a meeting of the Committee of Public Accounts. Her response was that she subsequently called for a committee to be put in place and the Department of Justice and Equality was represented on the committee and as far as she was concerned, that addressed her legal obligations. I do not think anybody could accept that. The senior legal adviser to An Garda Síochána told the Commissioner that under the law, she must notify the Minister because she was now aware of these very serious allegations relating to the Garda training college. Were the Taoiseach to get a letter from his senior legal adviser, namely, the Attorney General, he would have to act on it. The notion that the problem would be solved by setting up a committee on which an official from the Department might sit and who might tell the Minister is not believable.

The Taoiseach spoke about the Commissioner acting with alacrity. She did not act with alacrity. That is the problem. It was always the case that we need to do something at the last

minute and do the minimum. The audit committee had no knowledge of it when it should have been alerted to it immediately. The external chairman of the audit committee, who was a former Secretary General of the Department of Defence, was unaware of it.

Deputy Micheál Martin: He was kept in the dark as well.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: What is the point in selecting an external person to be chairman of the audit committee if they are not giving any access to information as it arises? These are fundamental issues. We do not want to have a parallel process here but if our primary job is to restore confidence in the administration of An Garda Síochána, it is not good enough that after the arrival of one momentous crisis after another - each of which would bring down the head of any policing organisation - we simply say we will investigate and explore it. These are very fine sentences. In his last answer to me regarding the breath tests, the Taoiseach said that now with electronic following and so on, it is very easy to get an answer. It has been two years and we still have no answer.

Deputy Gerry Adams: I am very much against trial by media, unsubstantiated allegations that are then repeated and get into the ether or this Chamber being turned into a pretend court of law. I am against all of that but we have a responsibility to try to hold public agencies to account. We do not have the time to go through all of these allegations. The Taoiseach conceded earlier that all is not well, which was an understatement and the most I could get out of him. So all is not well. Deputy Enda Kenny is the Taoiseach. He has responsibility for this issue because he refused to give it over to an independent authority. This is one of the very few places where a Minister still has responsibility for policing. I invite the Taoiseach to do something which he has so far refused to do. He has said time out of number that he has confidence in the Garda Commissioner. I do not know the Commissioner. I have met her a few times, mostly in Croke Park, so this is not personal. The Taoiseach says he has confidence in her leadership. Could he tell us why he has such confidence in her leadership? This is going to be dragged out tomorrow, the next day and the day after in the way every one of these scandals has been dragged out under his watch for the five or six years he has been in this office.

The Taoiseach: The question involved asking me when I received the Fennelly commission report and the actions I took thereafter. That is the question I was asked but we are now in detailed discussion about the meetings that took place and the actions that did or did not happen, as the case may be, in respect of the issues relating to Templemore. I do not have all of that paperwork. I will read the documentation from Mr. Barrett. I do not think I said that the Commissioner acted with alacrity. I did say that she accepted the findings of the report, put in place arrangements to ensure the recommendations were implemented and sent the report to the Committee of Public Accounts and the Comptroller and Auditor General because she is the Accounting Officer for the purposes of the Comptroller and Auditor General Acts.

Deputy Howlin mentioned a sub-committee and said that the question was asked regarding the purpose of the sub-committee. Its purpose was to find out further information that the Commissioner required in order to satisfy herself that she was happy that the section 41 requirement would be completed and a response sent to the Minister. These questions are being actively pursued by the Committee of Public Accounts. I do not speak for the Commissioner here but all these events and issues took place long before she became Commissioner. I read in some of the newspapers that her function when she was in Templemore was specialist training and that she did not deal with that side of the activities at the Garda College. In respect of what Deputy Micheál Martin pointed out, I read about Mr. Barrett, that he received quite serious push-back

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in respect of the issues he was raising here and that he was counselled by people to be careful. These are matters that need to be teased out at the Committee of Public Accounts, as I am sure they will be. I have no doubt that the Commissioner will attend there and defend her position as Garda Commissioner and as the only Garda Commissioner who took action in this matter to see that it was sorted out. Everybody knows that we have had a range of issues relating to An Garda Síochána for six, eight or ten years and before. Deputy Howlin was very forthright in making the point that we should have a totally independent police authority and repeated that on many occasions. That has been a fundamental change in the way we look at all of this. I hope that the commission looking at the structure with a root-and-branch focus on An Garda Síochána, its culture and competence and the way it is run will produce serious dividends for the community and the force itself in the time ahead. What has happened in the past has not been to the benefit of the pride of An Garda Síochána in many respects but yet there are so many gardaí who do their job as one would expect - professionally and in the interests of the State and the uniform they wear. I hope that 13 July will be the next opportunity for the Committee of Public Accounts to follow through on further details about the issues surrounding Templemore.

Topical Issue Matters

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I wish to advise the House of the following matters in respect of which notice has been given under Standing Order 29A and the name of the Member in each case: (1) Deputy James Browne - facilities for provision of mental health services in University Hospital Waterford; (2) Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony - the deadline imposed on applications to the knowledge transfer group scheme; (3) Deputy Peadar Tóibín - the need for a rail service from Navan to Dublin; (4) Deputy David Cullinane - development on the north quays in Waterford; (5) Deputy Thomas P. Broughan - HSE funding withheld from the Irish Wheelchair Association and pay scales in section 39 organisations; (6) Deputies Michael Moynihan, Niall Collins and Kevin O'Keeffe - construction of the M20 motorway from Cork to Limerick; (7) Deputy Thomas Byrne - delays in provision of occupational therapy for children in Meath; (8) Deputy Declan Breathnach - delays in payments under the TAMS II scheme; (9) Deputy Dessie Ellis - development of lands around Dunsink Lane in Finglas; (10) Deputy Robert Troy - the future of the An Post network; (11) Deputy Frank O'Rourke - the HSE's monitoring of the quality and integrity of the home care package; (12) Deputy Peter Burke - the inclusion of the Longford to Rooskey N4 bypass in the capital infrastructure plan; (13) Deputy Bobby Aylward - accommodation for pupils and staff at Scoil Phádraig, Ballyhale, County Kilkenny; (14) Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin - second-level school places for children with special needs in the Newbridge area; (15) Deputies Jackie Cahill and Mattie McGrath - job losses at the Bord na Móna plant at Littleton, County Tipperary; (16) Deputies Eoin Ó Broin, Brian Stanley and Joan Collins - the issue of rising rents; (17) Deputies Marc MacSharry and Catherine Connolly - the impact of forest fires in the west; (18) Deputy Gino Kenny - the plight of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails; (19) Deputies Richard Boyd Barrett, Eamon Ryan and Bríd Smith - the provision of an update on the case of Ibrahim Halawa; and (20) Deputy Mick Wallace - the discussion of the latest Garda revelations.

The matters raised by Deputies Peadar Tóibín, Peter Burke, Marc MacSharry and Catherine Connolly and Gino Kenny have been selected for discussion.

Ceisteanna - Questions (Resumed)

Priority Questions

Bus Éireann

40. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the deal brokered by the Workplace Relations Commission is not accepted by workers, his contingency plans for Bus Éireann; his plans to set up a stakeholder conference as promised if the deal is accepted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22356/17]

Deputy Robert Troy: Does the Minister have a contingency plan for Bus Éireann if the recommendations put forward by the Workplace Relations Commission are not accepted by workers? If the recommendations are accepted by the workers, what are his plans to set up a stakeholder conference as promised?

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I thank the Deputy for his question. He is aware that trade union members are currently balloting on a Labour Court recommendation. In accordance with long-standing practice, I do not wish to comment on the details of the recommendation.

As the Deputy knows, I have taken a number of important steps during the past few months. I have increased the amount of funding made available by the National Transport Authority, NTA, to Bus Éireann in 2016 in respect of its public service obligation, PSO, services. I have secured an additional 11% increase in the total amount of funding available to support PSO services generally in 2017. I have committed to further PSO increases in the coming years as resources allow and have instructed my officials to work with their colleagues in the Department of Social Protection regarding concerns expressed about the level of funding associated with the free travel scheme. I am confident that any issues identified in the context of current funding levels will be satisfactorily addressed.

It is obvious from the Deputy's question that he is aware that I have consistently expressed my willingness to meet stakeholders to discuss public transport policy issues once any industrial relations dispute is fully resolved. I have made that offer both here in the House and at the Joint Committee on Transport, Tourism and Sport. In recent weeks I reiterated not just my willingness to meet stakeholders once any dispute is fully resolved but I also announced my intention to hold a stakeholder dialogue as soon as is practicable. It is vital that stakeholders have the opportunity to voice their opinions on public transport policy issues and I am of the view that this dialogue will provide such an opportunity. I look forward to this process and the participation of all stakeholders in what I hope will be a very constructive meeting of minds in the near future.

Deputy Robert Troy: I am aware that the unions are still balloting and I accept that the Minister is limited in what he can say. I met the unions and strongly urged them to accept the recommendations of the Labour Court in order to safeguard the future sustainability of the company. As I have said on many occasions, Government inaction over the past 18 months has contributed to this problem. The Minister has talked about the work he has done in respect of social

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protection but that contact was only initiated early this year. There has been mismanagement at a senior level which has led to inefficiencies in recent years. Bus Éireann has been inadequately funded by the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport. The issue of how licences for commercial routes were issued is another factor. All of these issues have led to the current situation.

As union members are balloting, the Minister has belatedly given a commitment to establish the public transport stakeholders dialogue. When will it be established? What will be the terms of reference of the forum? How many participants will be involved? What is the timeline for the establishment of the forum? I sincerely hope that the Labour Court recommendations are not rejected. Are there contingency plans to put in place in the event that they are? The Minister does not have to outline the details of any such plan.

Deputy Shane Ross: I welcome Deputy Troy's constructive attitude to this issue. His hope and mine is that the dispute will be settled, one way or another, in the interests of all stakeholders and everybody else as soon as possible. I have given this pledge, as the Deputy knows. When the industrial dispute ends and the balloting is over, I intend to consult all parties on the terms of reference. The initiative for this dialogue has come from a large number of parties. No party has been particularly specific about its wishes apart from the desire to get all parties into a room to discuss the future of transport in this country. I am willing to do that. However, it would not be right to set out the terms of reference while under the shadow of a ballot. I wish to keep the pledge I made to all these parties that they will not only participate in this forum but also help with setting out the terms of reference. I intend to do that as soon as possible.

Deputy Robert Troy: I acknowledge that the Minister has given the commitment. However, he does not have people's trust. It is felt that his inaction in recent months contributed to this issue. It would be beneficial, in terms of the ballot, for the Minister to honour his commitment. He can show that he is true to that commitment by outlining what his intentions are for this forum, who will participate in it and the timeline for its establishment. Key stakeholders such as the unions representing Bus Éireann workers do not want the ballot on the Labour Court recommendation to be accepted only for the Minister to then say that he is just beginning the process to establish this forum. That would kick it further down the road. The inaction in recent months and years has led to the crisis in Bus Éireann. Are there even draft terms of reference for the forum? I do not expect the Minister to give details, but in the event that the Labour Court's recommendations are rejected, is there a contingency plan to cater for the tens of thousands of people who rely on the services of Bus Éireann?

Deputy Shane Ross: I repeat that I am constrained in what I can say about what I intend to do. I am committed to the assurances I gave prior to balloting that this forum will be called at a very early date and will proceed as rapidly as possible. There is no intention to delay or dilute that promise. This could be a very important forum for bringing stakeholders together to discuss the future of Dublin Bus, Bus Éireann, CIÉ and Iarnród Éireann. That is my intention and I will engage with people at an early date. In answer to the second part of Deputy Troy's question, it would be wrong if my Department and I had not considered all available options in the event of anything happening in the near future. Those options are being looked at and will be further examined in light of the result of the ballot.

Dáil Éireann
Transport Policy

41. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans for the future of public transport across the State, including in cities, towns and rural areas; his plans to remedy the current problems within the sector; if he will review the current funding arrangements for the sector (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22358/17]

Deputy Imelda Munster: What is the vision of the Minister, Deputy Ross, for the future of public transport in cities, towns and rural areas across the State? How does he envisage remedying the current problems in the sector? Does he hope to review the current funding arrangements for the sector; and will he make a statement on the matter?

Deputy Shane Ross: I thank the Deputy for her question. I welcome the opportunity to address a wide subject such as this at this time.

I want to see an accessible, integrated, well-funded, high-quality and efficient public transport system. I want to see a public transport system that provides a viable and popular alternative to travel by car. That is an objective upon which nearly all parties in the House agree. We have been through a difficult period in recent years and investment levels in both infrastructure and services were reduced. My Department's strategic investment framework for land transport, published in 2015, states that the top priority is to achieve steady-state levels of investment. However, the period of reductions in funding is behind us.

Whether the Deputy wishes to acknowledge that or not, progress has been made in the past two years or so. More money continues to be made available to support transport services and infrastructure. That increased investment is bearing fruit, as can be seen from the increased passenger numbers across nearly all elements of our public transport system, including PSO bus, PSO rail, light rail and commercial bus services. I want to make more progress. For that reason, I will be seeking further increases in both the review of the capital plan and budget 2018 in order to build upon the progress made and provide for even more services and better infrastructure across the public transport system. At a policy level, A Programme for a Partnership Government contains a commitment to reviewing public transport policy to ensure services are sustainable into the future and are meeting the needs of a modern economy and my Department is preparing to move forward with this commitment.

The Deputy will also be aware that I recently announced my intention to establish a stakeholder dialogue on the issue of public transport. It is vital that stakeholders have the opportunity to voice their opinions on public transport policy issues. I look forward to that dialogue and the contribution it can make towards future public transport policy.

I am committed to placing the citizen at the heart of our public transport policy to allow us realise the true potential of public transport and allow it to play its full role in promoting both social progress and economic prosperity.

Deputy Imelda Munster: It is more than one year since the Minister took office and it must be said that transport is in a sorry state because of the lack of investment in infrastructure and very poor investment in land transport overall. The area of public transport is in deep crisis. I asked this question because the Minister has refused to engage with the discourse around the future of public transport amidst the recent crisis in Bus Éireann and Iarnród Éireann. Industrial

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action at Dublin Bus, Bus Éireann and the Luas should have been a wake-up call that the sector is in real trouble; that and the fact of workers willing to put their necks on the line for the sake of CIE and public transport. It is fair to say that the current state of Bus Éireann and Iarnród Éireann is alarming, but that is an understatement in itself. Both companies have indicated that they are close to insolvency.

I would like some clarity from the Minister about his intentions in this regard. The Minister has said he does not intend to privatise Bus Éireann. Does this intention stretch as far as CIE companies? How does that statement stand up to scrutiny when 10% of bus routes have already been put out to tender? These are bus routes on Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann and we have no idea what the NTA intends to do in the next year or the year after. Is it correct that the NTA can privatise as many routes as it wants? I know the Minister will say that it is putting routes out to tender and that it is not privatisation, but it is privatisation. Will the Minister give a commitment that no further routes will be put out to tender to protect our services? Will he also give clarity on the issue around the legislation that can be misinterpreted by the NTA with regard to having an obligation to outsource all the routes?

Deputy Shane Ross: I thank Deputy Munster. We are being a bit more specific here than was intended in the original question. On the Bus Éireann issue, I repeat that I stand by everything I have said in the past, especially about privatisation. I cannot understand why people ask the same question time after time after time. They are going to get the same answer. The answer is the same as the one I have given to the Deputy and to others in the House many times and this remains the case.

On the issue of public transport generally, it is not true just to come in with a broad sweep and be a foreteller of doom. The situation has improved. It had been on a terrible downward spiral for a very long time, but the Deputy will know that in recent years public service obligation, PSO, funding has increased in each of the last two budgets. Budget 2016 provided for a 13% increase and budget 2017 provided for a further 11% increase. In 2017, almost €263 million has been made available to the NTA to support the PSO in bus and rail services. Things were pretty bad but they are improving. I am looking forward to increasing the PSO this year also.

Deputy Imelda Munster: The Minister has said, and he has stated repeatedly, that he is not in favour of privatisation and that he has no intention of privatising. He has not, however, answered my question on whether he would give a commitment that no further routes would be put out to tender to protect the existing services. Will the Minister give that commitment? As I said earlier, we do not know what the NTA will do next year or the year after. It could put all the routes out to tender or outsource them or whatever words the Minister wants to use other than privatisation, although it is still privatisation at the end of the day. Will the Minister give a commitment in that regard? I am sure if he is in disagreement with the routes being put out to tender, the NTA would have to adhere to his wishes. Will the Minister give the commitment that no further routes will be put out to tender to protect our public services? Is the Minister truly in favour of protecting, preserving and enhancing our public services, as opposed to outsourcing, tendering or privatising?

Deputy Shane Ross: It has been absolutely clear what the situation is. It is up to the NTA what it does as provided for in the Act and within the legal constraints under which the authority operates. I have made it absolutely clear that there will be no move towards privatising routes in the headlong way described by the Deputy. There is no obligation on the NTA or anyone

else to privatise all the routes in 2018-2019. I will introduce legislation to ensure this, as the Deputy is well aware. I have made that commitment, it is being done and has been committed to many times in the past.

Airport Development Projects

42. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the need for a second runway at Dublin Airport; and the way in which plans are progressing in this regard. [22357/17]

Deputy Robert Troy: This is the third time I have raised this question or a similar question in the last four or five months. Will the Minister provide an update on the progress of the second runway at Dublin Airport? What are his views on when we can expect the work to commence and be completed and the plans to ensure residents' concerns are also being taken on board?

(Deputy Shane Ross): The Dublin Airport Authority, DAA, holds statutory responsibility for the management, operation and development of Dublin Airport, including the north runway project. Passenger traffic at Dublin Airport in 2016 increased to almost 28 million, making it the second fastest growing airport in the EU in 2016, growing at three times the EU average. The airport is now the fifth most important European hub for connectivity to North America, ahead of such competing airports as Rome, Munich and Zürich.

New capacity at Dublin Airport is essential to meet growing demand and delivery of the runway is urgently required to minimise constraints on service expansion. The north runway project is a critical piece of airport infrastructure which will ensure Ireland's international connectivity into the future. Moreover, despite the challenges presented by Brexit and the wider international geopolitical uncertainty, international aviation associations forecast demand for air travel to nearly double over the next two decades. Ireland, as an island and a small, open economy, must be well placed to expand our connections with the rest of the world. Failure to build the runway now would incur the loss of a major economic opportunity for Ireland to support trade, foreign direct investment and tourism. Increased costs, more delays and more congestion at Dublin Airport would offer reduced service levels for the travelling public.

Work on the project has commenced with the runway scheduled to be operational in 2020. On 6 March, Fingal County Council approved an extension to the time limit of the planning permission in relation to the second parallel runway. As I am sure the Deputy will be aware, this is a very sensitive issue because it is now the subject of judicial review proceedings taken by local residents against Fingal County Council and the State and is listed for hearing in the Commercial Court in October. It would be inappropriate, therefore, for me to comment any further on the issue to which these proceedings refer. Whereas there are constraints on that, the enthusiasm of the Government, me and my Department, and everyone in the House for this runway is undiminished.

(Deputy Robert Troy): We can all agree that it is a critical piece of infrastructure that enables economic development, supports job creation and supports international connectivity. We all know the difficulties the airport faces in capacity issues.

The Minister alluded to the statutory instrument. His Department gave the authority to the Irish Aviation Authority, IAA, in September 2016. We are unaware of where that statutory

instrument currently stands. The residents do not know how they can engage in a structured manner with the appropriate authority to make their views known in respect of noise. The delay is impeding the progression of the runway in terms of the DAA. Where exactly do we stand in respect of the statutory instrument? Has the Department completed its work? Will secondary or primary legislation be necessary? When will the concerned citizens know how they can engage with this process? When will DAA know it can progress with the development of a critical piece of infrastructure, not just for the Dublin region but for the country as a whole?

Deputy Shane Ross: The residents have been engaging on the noise and planning issues, maybe not as constructively as they wished but certainly frequently, not only with DAA but also with me. I have met a large number of delegations on the issues to which the Deputy refers and on other issues as well. The issue of primary legislation and statutory instruments is very delicate. It has taken longer than I had wished. I apologise to the Deputy. I think I gave the impression on the previous occasion that it was imminent and I certainly felt that was the case. It is now with the Attorney General's office. There are some fairly detailed and difficult legal problems in determining what is decided by statutory instrument and what is decided by primary legislation in respect of the noise issue. I think that a draft of what looks like the final stages of the statutory instrument was seen by my Department on Friday last. We are absolutely determined that the noise issue and the appointment to the IAA will go ahead as soon as possible. As matters stand, the runway is going ahead and is on target still for 2020.

Deputy Robert Troy: The Department has given the authority for controlling the noise level to the IAA. Concerned residents wishing to engage in a structured manner do not know how they may do so. The DAA does not know how it can progress with the runway. I understand that it is not on target because of the delay on the part of the Minister and his officials to have the statutory instrument published.

I have looked back at the previous oral questions I tabled in respect of this matter. In December 2016, the Minister said that the secondary legislation would be before the Oireachtas by the end of the year. That is on the record of the Dáil. In March of this year, he said he would expect to be in a position to sign off on it in the coming weeks. Does the Minister know what is going on in his Department at all? What is the delay? It is not as if the Department is bringing out a raft of legislation in other areas. There is nothing coming from the Department. This is delaying the progression of a much-needed, critical piece of infrastructure that supports job creation, economic development and international connectivity. It is being impeded by the Minister and his officials.

Deputy Shane Ross: The Deputy is absolutely right. It has been delayed and that is a great pity. It has been delayed much longer than we expected. However, he is also absolutely wrong. The delay has nothing to do with my Department. Taking this as an opportunity to have a swipe at the Department and everything else it is doing is absurd. The project has been delayed because there are serious legal problems and the matter is with the Attorney General's office. I respect the right of the Attorney General's office to do a thorough and exacting job.

Deputy Robert Troy: The Minister respects the Attorney General's office when it suits him.

Deputy Shane Ross: There would be nothing worse than having flawed secondary legislation come before this House. This matter is complicated and difficult, and progress on it has been delayed. However, the Deputy should not say it has been delayed in my Department. That

is factually untrue and the Deputy knows it. It has been delayed because the lawyers are looking at it and it is a difficult problem.

The Deputy is right; I did say I hoped to have it by the end of the year. I also still hope to have the secondary legislation within weeks.

Deputy Robert Troy: That is what the Minister said in March.

Deputy Shane Ross: I am not, at the behest of the Deputy or anybody else, going to demand that flawed legislation be put before this House. I would rather that they got a thoroughly robust piece of legislation to bring before the House and that is what will happen.

Deputy Robert Troy: It was made flawed by the Minister's Department. Who wrote the legislation? It was the Minister's Department that wrote it and referred it to the Attorney General's office.

Local Improvement Scheme Funding

43. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22364/17]

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: I thank the Minister most sincerely for giving very generously of his time in coming to County Kerry recently. My question is in regard to roads in the county and local improvement schemes. This year, Kerry County Council has allocated €100,000. This will be enough to complete four roads. That is not good enough. Kerry County Council is only taking money from other funding to finance this. We want to see specific funding made available centrally and allocated to local authorities specifically for the local improvement schemes.

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I thank the Deputy for his question and for hosting part of my trip around Kerry, when he showed me many of the roads to which his question alludes.

As the Deputy is aware, the improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads including those in County Kerry is the statutory responsibility of each local authority, in accordance with the provisions of section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from local authorities' own resources, supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for local authorities. Maintenance of laneways and roads not taken in charge by local authorities is the responsibility of the landowners concerned. Due to the major cutbacks in roads funding, it was necessary for my Department to cease making separate allocations to local authorities in respect of the local improvement scheme, LIS. The approved scheme remains intact and local authorities can use a proportion of State grant funding for LIS should they wish to do so. While there is a modest increase in funding for roads this year, it will take some years yet under the capital plan to restore steady-state funding levels for regional and local roads. The primary focus has to continue to be on the maintenance and renewal of public roads. All grant funding in respect of regional and local roads for 2017 has been allocated. In light of the provision in the programme for Government indicating that, as the economy recovers, the Government will promote increased funding

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for local improvement schemes, I will review the scope for making a separate grant allocation once the planned review of the capital plan is completed.

In respect of hedge cutting, section 70 of the Roads Act 1993 sets out the responsibility of landowners to take all reasonable steps to ensure that trees, hedges and other vegetation growing on their land are not, or could not become, a danger to people using a public road or interfere with the safe use of a public road or the maintenance of a public road. This section also allows the relevant road authority to step in where a landowner fails or is unable to remedy a hazard.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: I thank the Minister. I am glad that he referred to the programme for Government. He and I, along with others, were there for every day of the negotiations to form this partnership Government. During those negotiations, I continually stated that the local improvement scheme grant should be reintroduced. What happened, happened. I am not in the business of looking backward; what I am interested in doing is looking forward.

The most important part of the road to a person's property is the part that leads up to it. An individual must use the latter before he or she can get onto any other road. Some people say that the local improvement schemes are not really all that important. They are actually of paramount importance. My local authority, Kerry County Council, is an organisation that I am proud of and that does great work. The management, in conjunction with the excellent councillors, do great work in our county. However, they need funding. They need a specific local improvement scheme grant like what we had before, whereby every year we were able to do 40, 50 or 60 roads leading up to people's houses. We had at list of approximately 300 or 350 roads and we were able to make good solid progress in respect of that list. We cannot do that now because we are only robbing Peter to pay Paul. As the Minister can see, doing four roads is ridiculous.

Deputy Shane Ross: I understand the importance attached by Deputy Michael Healy-Rae and others to the local improvement scheme. In fact, I think the Deputy is partly responsible for it being in the programme for Government because of his work before he departed from that aspect of the talks. Others were involved as well but I think the Deputy was responsible and he can claim credit for some of that.

It is in the programme for Government. Certainly, the objective is to restore it as soon as is practicable, possibly by the end of 2017, but I cannot guarantee that. It is certainly my intention to assess the scope for ring-fenced funding for the local improvement scheme once the capital plan review is concluded. That should be done at an early date.

While there will be a modest increase in funding for roads in 2017, it will, under the capital plan, take some years to restore steady-state funding levels for regional and local roads. Therefore, the primary focus in 2017 continues to be on the maintenance and renewal of public roads. Having said that, we have a commitment and we intend to keep it.

I wish to comment briefly on hedges. While landowners and occupiers of land are responsible for ensuring that trees, hedges or other vegetation growing on their land do not become a danger to people using a public road, road authorities have the power to require landowners or occupiers of land to do any necessary works. Where landowners or occupiers do not do this, road authorities can carry out such works themselves. There is no proposal to amend the statutory provisions in this regard.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: I very much welcome the Minister's statement on LIS fund-

ing. That is terribly important.

The Minister referred to hedges. A great system was in place previously, as the Minister is aware. Every councillor in the country gets a councillor's allocation. In the past, councillors were allowed to use some of their allocation to cut hedges. That system worked. Unfortunately, forcing farmers to cut their hedges does not make sense. Some farmers are unable to cut their hedges. Some may be elderly. Others may own property and be away - they might be out of the country. Let us suppose there is a roadway where one farmer is cutting his hedge and another person is not doing so. This means there is no uniformity. Our roads are being narrowed. The Minister saw it himself when he was in Kerry. The roads are becoming so narrow because of year after year of growth. It is proving impossible. It is true that some farmers make an effort and they are able to do so, but others cannot.

I humbly suggest that the Minister should allow local authorities to once again do what they did in the past, that is, allow councillors to allocate sums of money from their councillor's allocation to cut certain roads where they deem fit. That would be a solution to the problem.

Deputy Shane Ross: I hear what Deputy Michael Healy-Rae is saying but I am not sure that I can give him the same comfort on hedges or comment with the same conviction that I can give to him on our determination to pursue the restoration of the LIS. This is because of the statutory provisions on landowners and occupiers. Section 70 of the Roads Act 1993 provides that landowners and occupiers of land must take all reasonable steps to ensure that trees, hedges and other vegetation growing on their land are not, or could not become, a danger to people using a public road and such growth does not obstruct or interfere with the safe use of a public road or the maintenance of a public road. Section 70(2) provides that if a tree, hedge or other vegetation is or could become a danger to those using or working on a public road, or obstructs or interferes with the safe use or maintenance of a public road, a road authority may serve a written notice on the owner or occupier of the land requiring action to be taken to remove the danger or potential danger within the period stated in the notice. Whereas the Government has a large amount of discretion on the LIS and what it produces after the capital review in the budget, it does not have the same discretion on hedges because of the statutory requirements.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

44. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to set out the expected emissions from the transport sector in 2020 and 2030; and the reason the national mitigation plan has a number of gaps relating to reductions in emissions from the transport sector. [22362/17]

Deputy Eamon Ryan: I am asking the Minister about his ambition in terms of the transport contribution to reduce climate change emissions. Everyone else is saying that they are going to expand. The Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport was absent without leave at the recent formation of the national climate mitigation plan. We can see it in the plan. Large sectors are supposedly going to have plans to reduce emissions, but there is nothing from the transport sector.

I am keen to hear the view of the Minister and the Department. What does the Minister believe his responsibility to be? What target is the Minister setting himself for emissions in 2020 and 2030? How does he envisage achieving it? Everyone else in the system is coming with

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one message: the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport has opted out. I do not believe that is good enough.

Deputy Shane Ross: I do not believe that is the case because the plan has not been published. I do not know how Deputy Eamon Ryan can say that.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: The draft plan was published-----

Deputy Shane Ross: A draft plan is very different to a final plan.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: I look forward to hearing the details.

Deputy Shane Ross: Deputy Eamon Ryan will hear about the final plan in the coming weeks. He should not quote something to me that is not true. It has not happened yet. That is the Deputy's anticipation. I hope he will not be disappointed.

In order for Ireland to effectively and equitably contribute to the EU emissions reduction commitments in line with the Paris agreement and the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015, a low-carbon development strategy is being developed. My Department is working closely with the Departments of Communications, Climate Action and Environment and Agriculture, Food and the Marine to prepare this national mitigation plan. The responsibility for emissions reduction is collective and Ireland's emissions reduction targets are national rather than sectoral in nature. Transport is one of four key sectors requiring development of sectoral plans, each forming a key component of the overall national plan.

Ireland's first national mitigation plan will set out the challenges to meeting emissions reductions targets and chart a clear and quantified path towards Ireland's long-term objective of transition to a low-carbon and climate resilient economy by 2050. Transport will, of course, have to play a significant role in the national mitigation effort. Transport emissions are projected by the EPA to show growth over the period to 2020, with a 10% to 12% increase on 2015 levels. This reflects forecast strong economic growth and growing transport demand.

In 2015, transport accounted for 27% of Ireland's non-emissions trading scheme emissions. By 2020, under the EPA projected scenario of 10,000 electric vehicles on the road and further development of the biofuel obligation scheme, transport will have increased its projected sectoral share of non-emissions trading scheme greenhouse gas emissions to 29%, rising further to 32% by 2030.

A draft national mitigation plan, including transport proposals, was recently released as part of an extensive public consultation process. I figure that this draft plan is what Deputy Ryan is referring to, and that is fair enough. The public consultation has now come to a close and submissions are currently under review. Alongside this, officials in my Department have been working with key stakeholders such as the Climate Change Advisory Council in developing the proposed final transport elements. The measures under consideration for transport will be wide-ranging and will focus primarily on modal shift to public transport in urban areas, movement to alternatively-fuelled vehicles, and targeted behavioural change.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: Is the Minister happy that the transport projected emissions are due to increase from 27% to 29%, then to 32% and to continue rising after that? If not, what does he intend to introduce that is not in the draft plan but that might start to reverse those figures? In the process, such measures should improve our economy and free us from the €2 billion

congestion costs that we face in this city alone because of the absolute inadequacy of our investment in public transport, including cycling and walking infrastructure.

I was shocked when I looked at the draft plan because there is effectively next to nothing relating to cycling or other projects that could vastly improve capacity and help our cities to work. No such projects are funded by the Department at present. I was also shocked at a recent meeting of the Committee on Budgetary Oversight. The commissioning authority for new infrastructure admitted that there is not a single rail-based public transport project ready to go to tender that would influence how our emissions develop in the coming five, ten, 20 or 30 years. If the Minister states that I have got it wrong and am just reading the draft plan, I have to put a question back to him. What will the Minister change in the final plan? What will the Minister change in his budget provisions so it is not 3:1 in favour of roads to public transport? How can the Minister state that we will introduce a smarter travel plan when he has no money in his budget for it? It cannot be built on thin air.

Deputy Shane Ross: I know Deputy Ryan will hate this but he will have to wait until it is published. I am sorry but I cannot reveal it in advance and the Deputy will have to accept that. I will tell the Deputy the progress we are making and give him some broad outlines. This Friday, in accordance with the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015, I will submit the transport mitigation measures which I propose to adopt to the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, Deputy Naughten, for inclusion in the national mitigation plan. The Minister will collate the mitigation measures from the four participating sectors, namely, agriculture, built environment, energy generation and transport, into a final draft of the first national mitigation plan. This will be considered by Government for approval and publication no later than 10 June.

I expect to include increasing the capacity and quality of public transport, particularly in urban areas; measures to encourage the transition to alternative fuels in private cars, electric vehicles and HGVs; using a green public transport fund to support the uptake of low-carbon energy-efficient technologies within the public transport sector; working with the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment on progressively increasing the biofuel obligation rate; and encouraging more efficient driving within HGV and bus fleets.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: Among the measures the Minister mentioned and that I specifically cited are some of the projects which could be built next year. They could be included in the 2018 budget. They include projects such as a Dodder greenway, a Liffey cycle route or a Clontarf-to-the-city-centre cycle route. All those projects, which have been designed and planned for years, have no budget. If the Minister wishes to extend his list, he should take 10% of his budget for transport next year and put it into such cycling and pedestrian measures. They are achievable, deliverable and give huge bang for their buck in terms of making the city work again, as well as cutting our emissions.

Why did the Minister exclude that from the list of projects he is considering, given that it is the most practical, achievable and immediate response he could make? He should do it at scale and start putting hundreds of millions into that sort of investment rather than blowing everything on big intercity motorways and other roads, which we have done a lot of in the past 20 or 30 years.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Minister has no latitude this time. He has one minute.

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Deputy Shane Ross: I thank the Leas-Cheann Comhairle for his latitude in the past few minutes. I have stated perfectly clearly that the Deputy will have to wait. He should not assume anything is omitted or included. However, he must not for one moment doubt our commitment. I have also stated that the Government investment must support emissions mitigation in the transport sector by financing additional public transport capacity; by using alternative fuels within the public transport sector; and funding leadership and demonstration projects and the uptake of alternative technologies.

The smarter travel initiative has been allocated €100 million in funding under the capital plan, Building on Recovery. I have made a strong case for public transport investment to be both increased and accelerated as part of the mid-term review of the capital plan to address on-going transport needs. On the further development and promotion of cycling as a viable mode of transport, to which the Deputy referred, a review of the national cycle policy framework is currently under way and will be published later this year.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: We will move on to Deputy Clare Daly. It is no latitude day, Deputy.

Other Questions

Noise Pollution

45. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Question No. 1252 of 21 March 2017, the reason the DAA has refused to provide longitudinal measurements of noise (details supplied) to local residents as promised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22101/17]

Deputy Clare Daly: On 21 March I asked why the DAA had not furnished residents in St. Margaret's with the longitudinal noise measurements which they required to assess the impact of the new runway on their homes. At that stage, the Minister assured me that he had been in contact with them and that the information was being finalised and would be made available to them on 30 March. It is now 10 May and they still have not got it. I am wondering what is the story.

Deputy Shane Ross: The Deputy is correct. As she is aware, the DAA has statutory responsibility to manage, operate and develop Dublin Airport, including the north runway project.

When the Deputy first raised the issue in March, I had, as she referred to, made inquiries of the DAA and was informed at the time that the longitudinal analysis requested at the community liaison group meeting was being finalised and would be presented at the next meeting of that forum which was scheduled for 30 March.

However, I have now been advised by the DAA that it is not in a position to provide the information to the community liaison group, as intended, due to the legal proceedings taken by local residents in the vicinity of the airport in respect of the runway project. I regret this. This matter, along with other legal proceedings against Fingal County Council and the State, have been listed for hearing to commence in the Commercial Court in October. It would, therefore, be inappropriate for me to comment further on issues to which these proceedings refer.

Deputy Clare Daly: The heart of this matter is the contempt the DAA is displaying towards local residents. When we asked the question in March, the meeting on 30 March was unilaterally cancelled without any alternative meeting with the community liaison group being put in place. As the Minister correctly stated, in the interim legal proceedings were commenced. Presumably the information had been obtained beforehand, however. Would it not be valid to state that perhaps the residents would not have had to get into costly litigation, which they do not want, if the DAA had consulted them and addressed their concerns in an open and upfront manner? It has failed to do that. I also put it to the Minister that the DAA has ignored him as well. It gave him information which turned out to be invalid.

This information has always been made publicly available. The residents asked for it more than six months ago. That litigation has now started is neither here nor there. I put it to the Minister that it is an indication of how much the DAA is riding roughshod over the interests of local interests, which is not in the interests of anyone, the DAA included. I ask the Minister to go back to the DAA again and ask it to reconsider this.

Deputy Shane Ross: I obviously have some sympathy for the residents in terms of their frustration with the situation in which they find themselves. However, when the law or legal action comes into issues of this sort, it rather takes it out of the hands of politicians and Ministers. We cannot be seen to intervene in the legal process in any way or to do or say anything that would be prejudicial. I am informed that the legal advice which the DAA received subsequent to the reply which I gave in this House was such that it put it in a situation where it made this decision. Having made a decision of this sort and having said that its legal advice is not to hand over that particular information, it is unfortunate that it happened in that time. However, I will not interfere with, or comment on, the situation.

Deputy Clare Daly: I put it to the Minister that the issue of litigation is a convenient excuse for the DAA to not fulfil the obligations which it had all along. Had it discharged its duties and functions as it should have six months ago when residents asked for the information, the issue would not have arisen. We now have a scenario where homeowners are facing the uncertainty of negotiations and dialogue with the DAA about the purchasing of their homes and how their lives will be post the new runway. The uncertainty has extended to members of the Traveller community who have a halting site and residential development on DAA lands, which will also have to be relocated. This group is also being sidelined. While the Minister may not be able to interfere in litigation, the Minister does have a role in asking the DAA to engage much more responsibly with surrounding communities if they want to have their project fulfilled in the area.

Deputy Shane Ross: I thank the Deputy for her contribution. If members of the Traveller community are adversely affected by this, I would urge the DAA to meet them to discuss those problems. I would be very happy to meet them myself.

I do not think the Deputy would question my bona fides on the interaction between the DAA and the Traveller community or between the DAA and local residents. I have facilitated I think virtually every residents' group with a meeting and passed on their problems to the DAA where appropriate and I will continue to do so. There is a constant problem of large organisations being confronted with difficulties and smaller groups feeling absolutely helpless in the face of State monopolies. I will facilitate these smaller groups and do everything I can to help any members of the Traveller community or any other small community or residents of the area who are adversely affected by the work of the DAA. However, I will not intervene in or say

anything which prejudices any legal action or legal case.

Tourism Promotion

46. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will increase the tourism marketing budget to mitigate the decline in visitor numbers from the UK experienced in the first quarter of 2017; and his plans to implement a business support fund to aid small to medium-sized tourism businesses affected by the decline in visitors from Britain. [22125/17]

Deputy Robert Troy: Will the Minister now acknowledge that Brexit poses a real threat to the tourism industry, something he did not seem concerned about originally when the result of the referendum came out? I refer specifically to the decline in visitor numbers from the UK in the first quarter of 2017. Will he confirm to the House whether he has any intentions to increase the marketing budget to Tourism Ireland to mitigate this decline in visitor numbers?

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Following what was a record year for overseas visitors to Ireland in 2016, recent figures published by the CSO showed that overseas visitors in the first quarter of 2017 were slightly up on 2016. While there was strong growth from the North American market, visitors from Britain were down 6.5% year on year.

It is too early to state definitively the reasons for this decline and whether it will carry through to the remainder of the year. It is clear, however, that the depreciation of sterling following the Brexit referendum has made Ireland, and every other eurozone country, more expensive for British travellers than was the case previously. Furthermore, research has indicated that British consumers are likely to scale back on overseas holiday activity this year.

The tourism action plan is committed to seeking to restore the tourism marketing fund to pre-recession levels on a phased basis. I have secured increased funding for the tourism marketing fund this year of over 2% and will seek further additional funding for next year to mitigate any negative effects of Brexit on tourism. Tourism Ireland will continue to focus on protecting our market share in Britain while at the same time seeking to increase diversification into other markets, particularly those that deliver higher tourism revenue.

Fáilte Ireland is also working on a number of fronts to assist the diversification and development of our tourism industry and the attractiveness of our tourism product offering. Ongoing work to develop the main experience brands and enhance visitor experiences is aimed at boosting our appeal to key target markets and priority consumer segments. Regarding training and business supports, Fáilte Ireland offers a suite of supports to enhance the competitiveness, enterprise capability and sustainability of the tourism sector. In addition, it is creating a new Brexit response programme that will focus on delivering a capability building programme for industry.

Maintaining the overall competitiveness in our tourism industry is also vital at this time. While the industry itself acknowledges its primary responsibility in this regard, I will be endeavouring to assist by seeking to maintain the lower VAT rate for the tourism industry and to keep the air travel tax at zero.

Deputy Robert Troy: No one disputes that tourism is a critical sector. Last year, 9 million visitors contributed €4.5 billion in revenue, supporting 220,000 jobs. It is a critical sector. I acknowledge there have been previous initiatives that have supported the sector, but I raise this in the context of Brexit. We cannot rest on our laurels and be complacent about the fact that visitor numbers from other destinations are up. The simple fact of the matter is that 41% of tourists coming to this country come from the UK, a figure that fell significantly in the first quarter of this year. While I do not want to cause alarm, we need to put in place a plan to mitigate this. Not only have we a decrease in the number of visitors from the UK, we are now competing with the UK, which offers a fairly similar experience to that which one can get in Ireland. The UK Government, following the Brexit vote, allocated in excess of £35 million to its marketing fund in order that it can market the country. What specific items-----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Jim Daly): The Deputy is out of time. I call the Minister.

Deputy Robert Troy: -----is the Minister implementing to mitigate the decrease in visitors from the UK?

Acting Chairman (Deputy Jim Daly): The Deputy has taken 30 seconds over his allotted time. I ask him to watch the clock.

Deputy Shane Ross: The Deputy is correct to raise this as a serious issue, flag it as a difficulty and ask the question about the response, and there is alarm about Brexit, especially its effect on tourism. However, I point out to him, notwithstanding the recent CSO figures, and I think he is referring to visitors from Britain, that Tourism Ireland aims to grow overseas tourism revenue by a further 4.5% in 2017. The issue is to find new markets and address the matter through the Brexit response. Tourism Ireland has sought additional funding for the tourism marketing fund to address urgently the declining share of voice advertising awareness in key markets overseas; increase focus and investment in the short to medium term in mainland Europe and North America; defend Ireland's tourism position in the vital Great Britain market, dealing with the emerging threats and securing business while also maximising opportunities for the future; and accelerate investment in developing markets, building on the outcomes of the developing markets review recently completed-----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Jim Daly): I must ask the Minister to stick to the time.

Deputy Shane Ross: -----for the medium to long term.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Jim Daly): I ask Deputy Troy to be brief. I want to be fair to other Members.

Deputy Robert Troy: The Minister mentioned his plan for 2025, but that is for 10 million visitors and revenue of €5 billion. That is totally unambitious in the context of our position now. We need a new plan that takes on board the effects of Brexit. I compliment Tourism Ireland on the work it has done in the past. It is now ranked third in the world from a marketing perspective out of 141 countries by the World Economic Forum. I ask the Minister to consider what it has done as a company in marketing this country over recent years with a substantially reduced marketing fund. I welcome his commitment today to maintain the 0% landing charge at airports and his commitment to the 9% VAT rate for the hospitality sector but we need to see a greater level of investment in our marketing budget and our capital budget to ensure that when people come here, they have a good experience and there are things to see and do.

Deputy Shane Ross: I thank the Deputy for acknowledging that we have a commitment to the tourism industry, particularly in the area of tax, specifically VAT and the air travel tax. I hope this commitment will remain intact for many years to come because I think its effect has been to increase tourism in this country, which will be increasingly necessary, especially in the situation in which we find ourselves because of Brexit. The Government's response to Brexit acknowledges that a number of key sectors will be impacted significantly, including tourism. To mitigate these risks, the Government is taking a five-pronged approach, as part of which we will continue to manage our economy and the public finances prudently to enable us to meet future challenges; negotiate effectively as part of the EU 27 with the objective of reaching an agreement that sees the closest possible relationship between the EU and the UK while ensuring a strong and well-functioning EU; and continue supporting business and the economy through Government measures, programmes and strategies.

Road Projects Expenditure

47. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated cost of the proposed upgrade to the M11 as outlined in Transport Infrastructure Ireland's recently published M11-N11 corridor study; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21960/17]

Deputy Mick Wallace: I was a little disheartened to read the recent AECOM report which came out last month, carried out for Transport Infrastructure Ireland, on the M11-N11 corridor. Among other things, the study advocates enhanced capacity on the M11 in the form of an 8 km third lane from junctions 4 to 8. The thinking is that the third lane will ease bottleneck congestion at rush hour periods. While I understand these are recommendations and not a definitive plan, will the Minister outline whether he supports the recommendations in the report and how much it would cost to carry out such an upgrade?

Deputy Shane Ross: I thank Deputy Wallace for his question which relates to a road with which he and I are both familiar for obvious reasons. I travel on it every day, including this morning. As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual national road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland, TII, under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for TII in accordance with section 19 of the Roads Act.

I understand from TII that the aim of the strategic study of the M11-N11 corridor is to consider the National Transport Authority's Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2016-2035, which has identified that, in addition to public transport improvements or investments along the M11-N11 corridor, additional road infrastructure or capacity is required. TII has considered various possible interventions to reduce congestion on the corridor and cater for continued growth in the Wicklow area. These interventions include upgrades to the M11 junctions, widening of sections of the M11 to three lanes, provision of service roads to address direct access and some local road improvements to assist in providing better links between local areas.

As stated in the report, the proposals in the study are indicative at this stage and need further development, including engineering design and appraisal. Accordingly, a full costing of the

proposals is not available at this point.

Deputy Mick Wallace: The Minister did not indicate whether he is in favour of the project. I ask him to clarify his position.

Successive Governments have incentivised the use of cars by building motorways and refusing to invest in public transport. While the works proposed on the M11-N11 corridor would ease one bottleneck by creating an 8 km stretch of three-lane roadway, it would merely help drivers to travel a little quicker to the start of the dual carriageway and a new bottleneck. The towns that stand to benefit most from the project are Bray, Greystones and Wicklow, all of which are served by rail. Why does the Government not invest in improving the rail line from Connolly Station to Rosslare? We all hope Rosslare Port will become more significant in the years ahead. In light of increased road congestion, would it not be commonsense to start investing more in rail?

Deputy Shane Ross: The Deputy has strayed some distance from his original question. I am not averse to investing more in rail lines if good and cogent reasons are provided for doing so. If there was a commercial imperative for increasing investment in rail, it would be perfectly acceptable to do so.

Deputy Robert Troy: Most rail lines are not commercially viable.

Deputy Shane Ross: If Deputy Wallace can present a good case for more investment, let us address the issue but it would have to make commercial sense.

Deputy Robert Troy: Public transport does not make commercial sense.

Deputy Shane Ross: Deputy Wallace knows the route from Dublin to Rosslare well. We could certainly examine the issue, although I emphasise that it would be an operational matter for Iarnród Éireann. The company would certainly be prepared to listen to the Deputy if he had any suggestions to offer.

Transport Infrastructure Ireland is seeking funding under the mid-term capital review to commence work related to capacity improvements to the N11 between the M50 and Kilmacanogue, at an estimated cost of €30 million within the timeframe of the existing capital plan. Given that measures have not been finally decided upon at this stage, not to speak of designed, this should not be considered an estimate of the overall likely cost. It is, however, indicative of the anticipated expenditure on some measures within the period of the plan.

Deputy Mick Wallace: I assure the Minister that it is currently not possible to increase the number of lanes on an 8 km stretch of motorway from two to three for less than €10 million per kilometre, which gives a total cost of €80 million as opposed to €30 million. The Minister only uses the N11 from Enniskerry. If he were to drive from Rosslare to Dublin, he would find that the absence of jobs in Wexford means the road is congested again with builders driving to Dublin for work. It would be great if people had access to a decent and fast rail network, which we do not have currently. It would be wonderful if the Government was prepared to invest in rail.

The North Sea-Mediterranean core network corridor includes the route from Cork to Dublin and across the Irish Sea to England. This route will close after Brexit, which means the nearest point of access to the Continent will be through Rosslare Port. The route from Belfast through Dublin and Rosslare and into France should be the new corridor. Brexit will impact on Euro-

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pean funding and investment in the core network corridor. It is common sense to invest in the rail line between Dublin and Rosslare to link up to the Continent. Such investment would be an example of forward and joined-up thinking.

Deputy Shane Ross: I am always open to suggestions of this sort. I will refer the Deputy's proposal to the Department and obtain a response for him if he likes because, on the surface, it appears sensible. I have no doubt the Department will have some comments to make on it. The Deputy can have an interaction with officials on the issue. While I frequently travel from Enniskerry to Dublin on the N11, I also go further and I am frequently puzzled to find that the clear stretch of road between Shankill and Ashford suddenly gives way to a traffic jam on the dual carriageway. This is a most unusual phenomenon which will have to be addressed. I hope it will be addressed after the mid-term capital review.

Deputy Mick Wallace: The reason for the traffic jam-----

Deputy Shane Ross: I ask the Deputy not to interrupt me. He can speak again in a moment.

There is a shortfall in the existing capacity of the M11-N11 mainline corridor and capacity will need to be increased as far south as junction 8 Kilmacanogue, which is just beyond the area to which the Deputy referred.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Jim Daly): We must move on to the next question.

Deputy Mick Wallace: The Minister indicated I could speak again. The petrol station in Kilmacanogue is a key reason for the bottleneck to which the Minister referred.

Military Aircraft Landings

48. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if an aircraft (details supplied) sought and received permission to transport arms or munitions through Shannon Airport on either of the dates it was at the airport. [22103/17]

Deputy Clare Daly: This question relates to National Air Cargo flight No. N176CA, which arrived at Shannon Airport from Norfolk US naval base on 20 April headed for Kuwait International Airport. The aircraft landed at Incirlik airbase in south east Turkey before returning to Shannon Airport. Given that it operated on a US military call sign, was an exemption sought for carrying weapons or ammunition on either of the dates on which it was at Shannon Airport?

Deputy Shane Ross: The Air Navigation (Carriage of Munitions of War, Weapons and Dangerous Goods) Order, SI 224 1973, as amended, provides that no munitions or weapons of war may be carried by an aircraft in Irish airspace without an exemption granted under the order. I confirm that, in accordance with Article 5 of the Air Navigation (Carriage of Munitions of War, Weapons and Dangerous Goods) Order 1973, a munition of war permit was issued on 13 April 2017 for each of the National Airlines flights that landed in Shannon on 20 and 21 April 2017.

Deputy Clare Daly: I tabled the question in response to a reply received by Shannonwatch in February when it lodged a freedom of information request for correspondence and records relating to a sample of 12 US military contracted flights which landed in Shannon Airport or flew through Irish airspace in October 2016. These were classified as civilian rather than military flights, even though they had military call signs and were operated by airlines that have

indefinite delivery or indefinite quantity contracts to provide these services to the US military. In its response, the Department stated it had no records or information in respect of flights by Sun Country Airlines, UPS Airlines and National Air Cargo. The problem is that all of the Sun Country Airlines flights listed in the freedom of information request were *en route* to the NATO airbase on the Turkish border with Syria, which is the primary location used by the US military for airstrikes against Syria and Iraq. It is beyond belief that these aircraft would travel through Irish airspace and would not be involved in military activity. The answer provided to Shannonwatch indicated that either the United States did not provide the Department with information on the flights or the Department did not provide information on them to Shannonwatch because the record shows that exemptions were not sought for many of them.

Deputy Shane Ross: I am not familiar with those specific cases, so I will ask my Department to clarify the situation for the Deputy.

The Deputy also referred to the Turkish-Syrian situation, but that is a matter for the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, not me. I have made and will make decisions on grounds of safety, have made certain demands and refused permission to several aircraft on safety grounds, but I am not entitled to do so on grounds of policy. That is a matter that the Deputy should refer to the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Due to the obvious need in this regard, I decided recently that my Department should conduct an internal review of the aforementioned statutory instrument, the Air Navigation (Carriage of Munitions of War, Weapons and Dangerous Goods) Order 1973, as amended. Given the age of that order and changes to international law since 1973, particularly as regards dangerous goods-----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Jim Daly): The Minister might continue that point in his next response, if he does not mind.

Deputy Shane Ross: -----I am of the view that it would be timely to carry out a full review of SI 224 of 1973, the Air Navigation (Carriage of Munitions of War, Weapons and Dangerous Goods) Order.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Jim Daly): Deputy Wallace wishes to contribute as well. Deputy Clare Daly will speak first.

Deputy Clare Daly: A review is long overdue and badly needed. Based on freedom of information requests, the indication is that the Department does not have reliable information. I remind the Minister that the Hague convention on neutrality specifically prohibits the transportation of munitions of war. It does not say that they must be on military aircraft - their transportation on civilian aircraft is also prohibited. The Minister must sign off on these craft before they are given an exemption. I remind him that, when Deputy Wallace moved his Bill in 2015, the Minister stated that he had deep concerns about this matter and that he regretted Ireland bending its knee to foreign authorities, for example, the US. He should follow through on that and there should be a strict timeframe for this review. There are flights through Shannon more than once per day with different call signs and military tags on civilian aircraft. They are not travelling for nothing. They are doing it for a reason. Those foreign authorities are heavily invested in war zones and we are facilitating that situation.

Deputy Mick Wallace: Regardless of what is written on these civilian aircraft, the Minister's Department is responsible for them. Does he not believe that it is long past time that we

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stopped allowing Shannon to be used as a US military base for wreaking havoc in areas of the Middle East and beyond? We understand that this issue is not all under the Minister's remit, given that the Departments of Justice and Equality and Defence are also involved, but he is responsible for civilian aircraft and there are civilian aircraft carrying munitions through Shannon to cause destruction and kill people day and night in other regions. Does he believe that we should still be facilitating that?

Deputy Shane Ross: I thank the Deputies for straying into the area of foreign affairs, which is something that I do not intend to get into this afternoon. My duty, job and function in this matter are purely related to grounds of safety and civilian aircraft. That is where the question is. That said, and given the need to define the various functions between the Departments of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Justice and Equality and Transport, Tourism and Sport more clearly, I have launched a full root and branch review of the statutory instrument. That is what I propose to do. In light of the fact that so many aspects of the statutory instrument require review, it is likely that implementing the recommendations will require a new statutory instrument to replace SI 224, rather than piecemeal amendments to bring it into line with EU legislation. That is where I will leave the matter for the moment.

Traffic Management

49. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to alleviate congestion in Dublin within the next four years, in view of the estimated annual cost of €350 million due to delays in traffic. [22109/17]

85. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the way in which he plans to manage the situation outlined in recent reports from his Department's economic and financial evaluation unit that the cost of traffic congestion in the greater Dublin area is €350 million annually and that this could rise to €2 billion a year within 15 years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22123/17]

Deputy Eamon Ryan: My question is set in the context of the latest report, according to which the €350 million cost of traffic blockages in Dublin will increase to €2 billion unless we do something about the issue. I am keen to hear about the Minister's measures to reduce congestion. Everyone can see that, with the economy growing quickly, Dublin's traffic is like the Richter scale - when traffic volume increases by 5%, congestion increases by 20% or 30% as roads near their capacity limits, which is the case currently. What does the Minister intend to do about this?

Deputy Shane Ross: I propose to take Questions Nos. 49 and 85 together.

I recognise that there is considerable evidence emerging of increased travel demand across the Dublin region in particular, with growing traffic levels on many of its roads and streets. The welcome increase in employment has impacted on transport, not only through the beginning of a recovery in public transport numbers, but also through increased car usage and the re-emergence of peak period congestion.

In recognition of this growing body of evidence, my Department's economic and financial evaluation unit has undertaken a research project to estimate the cost of congestion in the greater Dublin area. As Deputy Ryan noted, the analysis estimates that the cost of time lost

due to congestion in the area is €350 million per annum and is forecast to rise to €2 billion per annum in 2033.

My Department has worked closely with the National Transport Authority, NTA, in recent months to develop an approach to tackling congestion in Dublin. Major road development is not the solution to our congestion issue. Our best option in the short-to-medium term is to focus on sustainable modes. This means increasing public transport usage supplemented by cycling and walking for shorter trips.

I am pleased to inform Members that the NTA will launch an important initiative at the end of May that will seek to transform the bus system in the Dublin region. The core elements of the initiative lie in the transformation of the bus system, but other elements, such as new cycling infrastructure, will help to improve mobility. I did not intend to give Deputy Eamon Ryan this information until he pressed me so hard earlier.

The NTA will progress the early stages of the initiative through public consultation on bus network design, engagement with local authorities concerning bus corridors and a major public consultation on proposals for individual corridors. The implementation of this significant initiative will serve to transition Dublin to a city with a modern, efficient and effective bus system that provides a world-class transport service. This work has been an important consideration in formulating my overall approach to tackling congestion in the short-to-medium term and forms a key part of the case for a step change in public transport investment as part of the mid-term review of the Government's capital plan.

In the time available, I will use the additional information that I have to elaborate further on the initiative. The proposal's aim is to overhaul the entire Dublin bus system and entails a suite of measures to transform the network of bus corridors with segregated cycling, a simpler fare structure, new bus branding, three bus rapid transit routes, a cashless payment system, new bus stops and shelters, a complete redesign of the bus network, a state-of-the-art ticketing system and the use of low-emission vehicles. The next step is the launch of the programme by the end of May, with public consultation on the bus network redesign to begin in early June, a subsequent engagement with local authorities and strategic transport committee chairpersons to agree an approach to consultation on individual bus corridors and a major public consultation later this year giving details of the proposals on the individual corridors, including the bus rapid transit routes. Key outcomes noted will be a transformation of the Dublin bus system, a fast and reliable bus service, journey times on many routes reducing by a third or more thanks to continued bus lanes, connecting more people to more places, a programme that delivers across the region, safe and largely segregated cycling facilities and providing Dublin with a world-class bus transport service.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: That initiative will be welcome. I agree that the main response to our traffic problem must be buses and cycling and pedestrian facilities in the first instance. We have been talking about it for 20 years and I am slightly nervous that if we are just saying we are going into a consultation process, it is not real. For this to be real, there has to be a budget allocation in 2018. This has to be agreed over the summer as part of the budget process and it has to be substantial.

I mentioned earlier the projects that are ready to go, such as the Liffey cycle route, the Sutton-to-Sandycove bike route, the Dodder greenway, the Tolka greenway and the Santry greenway. These would all have a major effect in terms of making the city work, in addition to the

bus measures the Minister mentioned. However, when we talk to local authority officials to see if these projects can be advanced, they say they do not have a single penny to do it. If this is to be real on both the bus and cycling front, yes, let us consult, but we have been doing that for 20 years. More than anything else, the Minister's seriousness or otherwise will depend on whether the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform allocates him the funding and whether he allocates within his own budget the funding for 2018 to make this real. Otherwise, there will be deep cynicism that we are just talking again as the gridlock gets ever worse.

Deputy Shane Ross: I thank the Deputy for his partly positive response. It might be sensible for him to sit back and look at this when it is presented at the end of May, and then make a judgment on it. However, it is a very serious proposal that will require an enormous amount of funding. For those who say we have no vision and no plans, here is a concrete and very constructive plan for relieving congestion in the Dublin region, which we in government acknowledge is a very serious problem. That is why the NTA has already made several presentations on this matter. My officials have seen the plans and they welcome them and believe they will make real progress in relieving congestion in the city, in moving people to efficient bus services and bus corridors, in improving cycling facilities and in being part of what has been the Government's policy and vision for a very long time.

As the Deputy said, the proof of the pudding will be in the eating but the first step is now. We will have a public consultation. However, that does not indicate some sort of lack of will. It means we will take from other people - I include the Deputy because I know his commitment to this - their suggestions and constructive proposals on the matter.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: I am positive but I reiterate the key point that there is no point doing this consultation if it is not done at the same time that the Minister indicates the budget is there to deliver it. As I said, the problem lies at the heart of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, which historically, for many years, have had a flawed economic analysis that always favoured new roads over public transport and cycling infrastructure. If the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and the Government are serious, let us do the consultation at the same time that we are doing the budget process - I am on the budgetary oversight committee, so I have oversight of this. There needs to be a radical and fundamental shift in the Department's budget allocation for 2018, and not any further into the future, because that is when we need to start making amends. If it does that, we will have a much more serious, productive and real public consultation system because everyone will know the Department is going to lead to real change, not just more of the same talk we have had over the past 20 years.

Deputy Robert Troy: It appears this is positive news but the devil will be in the detail and we are eager to see the detail of the Minister's proposals. This simply must not be about an announcement made to great fanfare and the Minister's aspirations must be backed up with the necessary resources. At present, transport in the capital city is in gridlock and it takes a huge amount of time for people to make very short journeys, which is having a negative impact on people's personal and family lives and on their mental well-being. It has to be said that the Minister's actions in the past 12 months would not lead us to say he will take on board the views of stakeholders. When will the Minister inform the House of the plans in detail?

Deputy Shane Ross: I anticipate that the launch of this project will happen before the end of the month and I am quite happy to have a debate in the House, to answer questions or to go to the joint committee on this issue, perhaps with the NTA. Anything that is necessary in order

to inform people of this, I will do it. However, I do not think it would be helpful if we started suggesting the record of the Government in the last year has been this, that and the other. Let us look positively at this. Let us look at it with a very objective view. People talk about a lack of vision and have been critical about that, perhaps rightly so. However, this is part of a vision which I think we all share, which is to get people out of their cars and into buses, to get bus corridors working, to consequently reduce emissions and to resolve traffic congestion. That is what we are looking to do and, while this is only part of it, buses will be a major aspect. This will involve more investment in buses and in public transport, although that does not mean less investment in roads. That is the commitment we are making.

Railway Stations

50. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to a security system for train stations (details supplied) which is designed to replace the need for staff at train stations and comprises of a CCTV system monitored at a remote site by a security firm; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21956/17]

68. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to implement a policy of staffed train stations throughout the country in order to improve the security at train stations and to assist persons with disabilities to avail of train services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21955/17]

Deputy Brendan Ryan: I am becoming increasingly concerned about the impact of un-manned or under-staffed railway stations. The level of anti-social behaviour at train stations is increasing and the impact on disabled travellers is very serious indeed. This is not just a local issue for me. I know from speaking with other colleagues it is a real problem not only throughout Dublin but all over the country.

Deputy Shane Ross: I propose to take Questions Nos. 50 and 68 together.

The Deputy is presumably aware that issues such as those set out above are operational matters for Iarnród Éireann and not issues in which I have any statutory function. I am, however, informed by Iarnród Éireann that the company has instituted some remote monitoring from Howth Junction covering all stations along the DART and commuter network. This is designed to enhance station security and is separate from consideration of staffing issues at stations. Iarnród Éireann states that it has not at this time changed staffing at DART stations. However, the company is keeping staffing under review as there have been changes in customers' purchasing preferences. Overall, only 17% of revenue is now via the traditional booking office and booking office volumes dropped by as much as 55% in a single year in some locations, as overall passenger numbers rose.

Iarnród Éireann's priorities in determining staffing levels are as follows: to ensure busier stations are manned at all times; to provide a more flexible resourcing to respond to customer demand and improve response for customers requiring assistance; to ensure a safe and secure environment, working with a live monitored CCTV system, contracted private security resources and Garda liaison; and to ensure revenue is protected, working with the company's revenue protection unit. I am also informed that Iarnród Éireann hopes to confirm shortly new arrangements for mobility-impaired customers requiring assistance, which will dramatically reduce the advised notice time and ensure a better response when customers requiring assistance cannot

give notice. These new arrangements have been developed in close consultation with relevant representative organisations. Furthermore, Iarnród Éireann has commenced the recruitment process for summer temporary employees in the greater Dublin area to ensure the company has the necessary customer service resources in place at stations for the busy summer months.

Deputy Brendan Ryan: At a recent public joint policing committee meeting, it arose that Irish Rail will be, or perhaps already is, employing a system whereby stations are being monitored remotely through CCTV cameras. If any situation arises, a person who is sitting in front of a screen bank can call gardaí and also, through a speaker system on the train platform, warn any vandals to cease their actions. If this is a strategic decision to cut costs and keep staff out of train stations, it is not acceptable. Quite simply, it is no substitute for having staff at stations.

One aspect of this is the impact on coastal communities on rail lines at weekends. Young people are being ferried free of charge on trains to places like Donabate, Portmarnock, Malahide, Skerries, Balbriggan and Rush. They board a train without a ticket and know they will not be checked at the coastal destination. In many cases, they are travelling to cause vandalism and to commit crime against these communities. As a senior garda said at the meeting to which I referred, we cannot have local communities suffering as a result of cost-cutting measures by a State-owned body. I agree 100% with that sentiment and the effect is to give free travel for some criminals.

Deputy Shane Ross: I am told by Iarnród Éireann that it has not changed its staffing policies at DART stations, although it is keeping all this under review. If the Deputy-----

Deputy Brendan Ryan: I referred also to commuter stations.

Deputy Shane Ross: If the Deputy has any specific cases, I would be happy to bring them to Iarnród Éireann's attention. I am not aware of them but I will certainly do so, and I will ensure that the company responds to the Deputy.

Deputy Brendan Ryan: We all welcome the CCTV cameras. Monitored CCTV cameras are a good development but they are no replacement for a well-staffed train station. The Minister states this is an operational issue for Irish Rail, but Irish Rail is answerable to the Minister and the Minister does have power.

We have train stations which have become no-go areas for people. People are choosing alternative transport solutions due to their fear of passing through certain stations late at night. We do not invest millions of euro on State infrastructure only to cut costs and corners once a station is operational.

Staff provide proper surveillance. They can be better than any security team and, certainly, more effective than a person sitting in front of a bank of television monitors.

Having staffless train stations also has other impacts which I have raised previously, particularly for those with disabilities. If a person who uses a wheelchair wishes to use the train system, he or she needs assistance to get on a train, and it is made worse by the staffless stations. They need trained station staff. Wheelchair users are not presenting themselves to some train stations at certain times because of the aforementioned change and this is not acceptable.

Deputy Shane Ross: Deputy Brendan Ryan is welcome to take me up on my offer about safety and the lack of staff in any particular instance where he believes that is the case.

On mobility, Iarnród Éireann plans to confirm new pilot arrangements for mobility-impaired customers requiring assistance very shortly. These will dramatically reduce the advice notice time and ensure a better response when customers requiring assistance cannot give notice. This is being designed following extensive customer research and liaison with its disability users group. While final details are being confirmed, the intent is to ensure that the advised notice period reduces from the current 24 hours to a fraction of this by guaranteeing staffing across grouped stations and ensuring flexibility to enable staff move between stations within each group to provide assistance.

Furthermore, Iarnród Éireann is working with individual users and representative bodies to explore the use of technology or apps to enhance assistance and response further. Additionally, improved information on lift issues and improved station signage and awareness measures are planned.

Written Answers are published on the Oireachtas website.

Message from Seanad

Acting Chairman (Deputy Jim Daly): Seanad Éireann has passed the Companies (Accounting) Bill 2016, without amendment.

Topical Issue Debate

Rail Network Expansion

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: In 1862, the Dublin-to-Meath railway line was constructed comprising a branch from Clonsilla to Navan. One hundred years later, Córas Iompair Éireann closed and lifted the line. There is only one functioning line into the middle of the county, that is, the Drogheda to Tara Mines line. Tara Mines is one of the few freight lines operating in the country at present and it takes approximately 40 HGVs off the road every day. The NTA has refused to transform that freight line back into a passenger line stating that due to the journey time from Navan to Dublin via Drogheda, it would not be used, but when one considers the figures I will cite later on, that is debatable.

In 1946, the rail line functioned into County Meath while the population was only 60,000. Now the population of County Meath is 200,000. As a Dublin man, the Minister will be happy to hear that there will be 250,000 of us Meath people living in the country very shortly.

Each morning, more Meath people leave the county to go to work than work in the county. That is the only county in the country where that happens. We have the notoriety of having the highest rate of commuting in the country. Yet Navan is the largest town in the country without a rail line. That has a massive cost for society. It is a major cost on business, it is a major cost on enterprise and it also involves a major cost on families.

For the average family who are commuting from Navan currently, the commute at rush hour takes roughly three hours a day. If one takes that back and forth, it is roughly equivalent to 90

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days unpaid work for everybody who is commuting from Navan currently. If one lives in places such as Oldcastle, Athboy or Trim, that daily commute often increases to four hours a day in rush hour - two hours in the morning and two hours back to those places - which is the equivalent of 120 days unpaid work on an annual basis. There is certainly a major cost on business, but the Minister can imagine a mother or father undertaking 720 hours commuting on an annual basis from these towns and how their family life is negatively affected as a result.

There are also major costs to the families themselves. If one lives in Kells and works in south Dublin, one will pay two tolls a day. This involves a cost of €2,350 a year on tolls for anybody in Kells or Oldcastle working in south Dublin. The average cost of running a car is €4,500 on an annual basis. Private transportation is a significant cost for individuals.

There are also massive environmental costs. This has been brought to the fore today, which is a good development. Ireland faces approximately €600 million worth of fines by 2020 if we do not meet our climate change targets. By 2030, we could face €5.5 billion worth of fines in this country if we do not meet our climate change obligations. There is a trend within transportation, of which the Minister has charge, of an increase of between 10% and 16% in the level of CO₂ being emitted before 2020. We are going completely in the wrong direction with regards CO₂ emissions in transportation at present. That is not only about polar bears. We are talking about an increase in temperature of between 2.6° to 4.8° Celsius, which will lead to untold environmental damage and deaths.

Industry, business, family, safety, environment and health are being radically damaged at present due to the lack of provision of projects such as the Navan-to-Dublin rail line.

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I thank the Deputy for raising this issue in the House today.

As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding of public transport. The National Transport Authority has responsibility for the development of public transport infrastructure in the greater Dublin area, which includes County Meath, and Iarnród Éireann is responsible for the maintenance and operation of the heavy rail network.

The Navan rail link project was included under the Transport 21 initiative and was to be developed in two phases: Phase 1 comprised the Dunboyne rail line project. This involved the reopening of 7.5 km of a railway line running off the Maynooth line, at Clonsilla, to the M3 interchange near Dunboyne. This line opened in September 2010 with park-and-ride facilities with 1,200 car parking spaces available and at Dunboyne with 300 car parking spaces available. Phase 1 was completed in 2013 with the opening of Hansfield Station. The plan for phase 2 involved the extension of the Dunboyne line between Clonsilla and M3 Parkway station, onwards to north Navan. This development, together with a number of other transport projects, was postponed in 2011 due to the economic and fiscal crisis.

The Deputy may be aware that the NTA, which has statutory responsibility for development of public transport in the greater Dublin area, GDA, included an examination of the Navan to city centre rail corridor in the preparation of its transport strategy for the GDA for the period 2016-2035. The NTA concluded that, based on current population and employment forecasts, the level of travel demand between Navan, Dunshaughlin and various stations to the city centre is insufficient to justify the development of a high-capacity rail link at this time. Instead, the

authority proposes to develop an enhanced bus service along the route and to develop a bus hub in Navan. This position will be kept under review taking account of future developments in the catchment area and the NTA recommends that the corridor identified for a rail link to Navan should be protected from development intrusion. Exchequer funding for public transport projects is set out in the Government's capital plan. The transport element of the plan covers the period up to 2022. I have previously outlined that my Department's first priority under the capital plan is to ensure the maintenance of our existing transport infrastructure at steady-state levels in order that it remains safe and fit for purpose. Based on the funding allocations for public transport under the capital plan, we should achieve steady-state levels by 2020. In view of the current constraints on availability of funding, the priority for the heavy rail network under the plan is to improve efficiency and maintain safety standards rather than expanding the network by opening new lines or stations. A mid-term review of the capital plan is under way and I will seek to improve the funding available for public transport in that context.

If additional funds were to be made available, there would be many competing demands within the public transport sector. All projects would be subject to robust analysis and would require strong business cases to justify their value and demonstrate how they would significantly improve the public transport system. The House will be aware that the role of heavy rail in Ireland's transport sector is under review. A public consultation process on the rail review document prepared jointly by the National Transport Authority, NTA, and Iarnród Éireann concluded on 18 January. The NTA is preparing a report about the process which I intend to bring to Government in due course. The public consultation process gave the public and all interested parties the opportunity to give their views and contribute to the debate on the future of heavy rail in Ireland. No decisions on any changes to the rail network will be made until the outcome of the public consultation process has been evaluated and the NTA's report considered. I thank the Deputy for raising this matter.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: With due respect, the Minister will not even be happy with the answer provided because the first third of it was a civil servant's potted history of the rail line itself. I welcome robust analysis. No project should ever happen in the Department without robust analysis, but how is this for robust analysis? Meath has roughly the same population as Kildare, a higher population than Wicklow and a higher population than Louth, yet both of those counties are well served by regular rail services into Dublin.

The Minister said he is responsible for policy and that the NTA and Iarnród Éireann are responsible for transport and heavy rail lines, but he is responsible for those two organisations as well. It is not the case that he shares the Department with them. He is in charge of all those organisations. The NTA said the people of Meath should have buses, but the fact is there is no continuous bus route from the centre of County Meath into Dublin. The bus lanes have massive pinch points along the way and traffic regularly gets snarled up.

Not only is Navan the largest town in the country not to have a rail line but the bus service is the most expensive one in the country. The cost works out at 26 cent per kilometre compared with the Dublin to Drogheda route which costs 16 cent per kilometre. We are not talking about a massive distance. We are only talking about 30 km on an alignment that already exists.

There are two variables that will determine whether this project goes ahead. The first is population. As we discussed, Meath has roughly the same population as comparable counties. The second variable is political will. The issue is whether the Independent Alliance has the political will to build the necessary infrastructure in this country. The truth of the matter is that

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capital investment in this country is second from the bottom in the European Union. The only country beating the Minister with regard to low investment is Romania. Until that changes, the Minister will not be fulfilling his responsibility.

Deputy Shane Ross: I thank Deputy Tóibín, who makes a very good case. I do not dispute that for a second. It is fair enough that Navan is the largest town in the country without a rail line. Some town has to be the largest town in this country without a rail line. Someone was going to make that case at some time. However, the Deputy makes a good case and provided he makes a good commercial case, the project will not be ruled out.

As I pointed out in my initial contribution, “This position will be kept under review taking account of future developments in the catchment area and the NTA recommends that the corridor identified for a rail link to Navan should be protected from development intrusion.” That should be taken by the Deputy as encouragement at a time when new railways are not being built, for good reasons, namely, because of the financial constraints upon us. It is fully explained that the existing transport infrastructure is being kept “at steady-state levels” for the moment, and that is the absolute imperative for us. It is all very well to say we are undercapitalised and we have the lowest capital investment of any country in Europe, but at the moment we do not have any capital. That is the reason. We do not have capital for such projects, but when the mid-term capital review is completed and when more capital is available, which will be 2019 to 2020, I would have thought the project in question would be one of the first to be considered. As Deputy Tóibín so helpfully said, I am sure I will not be in office at that time, but someone else will and it is a project that would be looked at seriously. The fact the NTA has said not to build or develop on that line indicates to me that it is one of the projects being considered for the future.

Road Projects

Deputy Peter Burke: I thank the Ceann Comhairle for selecting this very important issue for discussion in the Topical Issue debate. The upgrade of the N4 bypass to Roosky is very important to the Longford-Westmeath constituency. The road is currently operating at 120% above capacity, which is a significant problem for infrastructure in the area. It gives rise to a major safety issue in terms of traffic travelling on the road and there have been a significant number of accidents in the area. I recently met the chief executive and the executive team of Longford County Council. They made very clear to me that it is difficult for the IDA to sell Longford abroad because one of the main IDA sites in Longford, the Abbott site, is almost sterilised because of the corridor that is this road. In other words, the compulsory purchase order, CPO, process has not yet been approved, and because of that, there is no certainty. We need to provide clarity on the issue as soon as possible because to get it to the CPO process would not take much funding. In capital terms it is approximately €5 million. In the context of the mid-term review of the capital budget and in terms of the major projects in the country, it is amazing that the only significant piece of motorway north of a line east to west from Drogheda is the M1. We really need to invest in the bypass.

My Fine Gael council colleagues in Longford are in touch with me day and night about the issue because they see how important it is to attract investment to Longford and to ensure the county gets its fair share. When Dr. Brian McCann appeared before the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Transport, Tourism and Sport recently, he spoke about the national planning frame-

work and said it is a key piece of infrastructure which we need to get across the line urgently to develop the north west as a region.

It is important to note we need accessibility in the midlands. We need to ensure it is conducive to people going there and doing business. The N4-N5 is a key artery which has been mentioned recently in terms of the mid-term capital review and the bypass is a key component of that. I have been advocating the project to the office of the Minister, Deputy Ross, through parliamentary questions. I have also been in touch with the Minister of State, Deputy O'Donovan. I am trying to make the case for this very important issue and to get funding for it in the capital plan.

Deputy Griffin is chairperson of the Joint Committee on Transport, Tourism and Sport. A number of chambers of commerce came together to present to the committee on the importance of this piece of infrastructure to the midlands as a region. Anyone can tell the Minister connectivity is very important in modern Ireland. It is very important that people can get to towns quickly to do business and that they are not subjected to the current infrastructure.

The country is on course to break even in 2018. More money is becoming available. That means more tough decisions have to be taken because there are many competing projects, but drawing a line east to west from Drogheda, there is no project with as strong a case as this upgrade. It is a key piece of infrastructure in terms of the national planning framework to 2040 that would open up the north west. People are crying out for this vital piece of infrastructure.

If Sligo is to obtain city status in future, this is a key avenue for that to happen. I appeal to the Minister to give this matter strong consideration. I am hopeful that we can deliver it and get it to the CPO process, thus giving certainty to Longford, Westmeath and other counties in terms of the planning process. After that, we will hopefully get the full operation to motorway status.

Deputy Shane Ross: I thank Deputy Burke for raising this important issue. I am familiar with the site as I visited it recently with the Deputy's colleague, Deputy Moran. It is useful to have this debate again with Deputy Burke.

As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Within its annual budget the planning, design and implementation of individual road projects, such as the N4, is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland, TII, under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Ireland has just under 100,000 km of road in its network and the maintenance and improvement of national, regional and local roads places a substantial financial burden on local authorities and on the Exchequer. Because of the national financial position, there have been large reductions in Exchequer funding available for roads expenditure over the past number of years.

Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for TII in accordance with section 19 of the Roads Act. The Government's Capital Investment Plan entitled *Building on Recovery - Infrastructure and Capital Investment*, provides the strategic and financial framework for TII's national roads programme for the period from 2016 to 2022. As Minister, I have to work within the capital budgets included in the plan and TII in turn has to prioritise works on the basis of the funding available to it.

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Decisions on the transport elements of the capital plan 2016-2021 were framed by the conclusions reached in my Department's Strategic Investment Framework for Land Transport. Based on the findings in that report it is envisaged that maintenance and renewal of the road network will continue to be the main priority over the next period and the bulk of the roads capital budget, approximately €4.4 billion, is earmarked for such essential work, with a further €600 million allocated for implementation of the PPP road programme which is already under way.

The transport element of the capital plan, Building on Recovery, makes provision for a limited number of development projects which are targeted at removing critical bottlenecks or upgrading inadequate sections of road, including the N4 Collooney to Castlebaldwin upgrade scheme. It was not, however, possible to include a range of projects, including the N4 Mullingar to Longford section which incorporates Roosky.

As regards the N4 Collooney to Castlebaldwin project, I understand that land acquisition and advance works for that project are under way and TII has provided an allocation of €7.5 million to Sligo County Council this year to advance the process. As regards the possibility of additional funding within the plan period for national road projects, the capital plan review process is under way and my Department is making a strong case for extra funding to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, including the development of a project pipeline for national road schemes.

The final decisions on allocations are, however, matters for the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and the Government as a whole. However, I do consider the case the Deputy has made to be a very strong one.

Deputy Peter Burke: I welcome the fact the review process is under way and that the Minister is making a strong case for funding under this capital plan. The key is investing in infrastructure because when we do so it unlocks our potential. Since I was elected to the Dáil, my Fine Gael councillor colleagues in Longford have been on to me morning, noon and night stressing the importance of this issue. It is also important to give certainty to those who have land along the route, as well as State investments such as IDA parks. Investors from abroad require certainty about building units of certain specifications on sites. We must also ensure that our road network is safe. Operating roads at 120% capacity is unsafe, so we need finance to improve that.

If the Longford to Roosky N4 bypass could be included in the capital infrastructure plan it would provide a significant boost for the midlands. We have learned from past mistakes in terms of how much investment went into the greater Dublin area where the economy took off. Rural areas must be given a fair chance to compete also, but they cannot do it without the necessary infrastructure. We must therefore invest in infrastructural projects in order to achieve that.

I thank the Minister for attending the House to deal with this Topical Issue. I have also raised this matter with the Minister of State, Deputy Patrick O'Donovan, who is also here. I have spoken to other Ministers about the issue too. We have to keep the pressure on in order to deliver this project and thus ensure that the midlands will have a fair chance to compete for investment on the national and international stage.

Deputy Shane Ross: I take the Deputy's point about road safety, which is particularly pertinent. Safety has certainly been compromised in many places. One of my prime objectives as Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport is to reduce the number of road deaths and non-fatal

road collisions. I will advise Transport Infrastructure Ireland of this particular project which the Deputy has raised and will ask them to consider it as one of the areas to be targeted for safety. The TII has been relieved of VAT on some of the money it collects in tolls, so that will now be targeted for road safety projects. The TII has identified four such projects for this year and several for 2018. While it is not certain, more funds might become available for the TII from a decision of the European Court on VAT. I hope the TII will use those savings to remedy accident black spots, including the Longford to Roosky N4 bypass project referred to by Deputy Burke. I ask the Deputy to bear that in mind and let us hope that what he has done today will bring us closer to safer roads and fewer road deaths and non-fatal accidents. If this particular project is considered in that light it should perhaps be given a higher priority than others.

Forest Fires

Deputy Marc MacSharry: I thank the Minister of State, Deputy Canny, for taking the time to be here for this debate. As he knows, substantial tracts of land have been destroyed by fire in County Sligo recently. I am sure that Deputy Connolly will outline what is happening in County Galway. Given the weather in recent weeks, some 4,000 acres in Sligo have been destroyed around Killery Mountain. I appreciate that the Government may well be considering some compensatory package to deal with the damage caused and the loss of income for local communities. One specific case in Sligo concerns the destruction of about 500 m of the Sligo Way, which is a substantial 34 km walk from Dromahair in County Leitrim to Coolaney in County Sligo.

The Sligo Camino is a significant walking event which takes place in July every year with substantial numbers of people already booked to participate. In order for the event to go ahead, this 500 m stretch of timber boardwalk needs to be repaired urgently. Perhaps some funds could be diverted for this purpose from the minor works scheme which is normally used to repair coastal erosion and flood damage.

The affected area is relatively small and would not require a large amount of money to restore it. The Sligo Camino is of national standing in terms of the tourism it creates. The Coolaney Development Association, which organises the event each July, is offering volunteers and any help it can give to carry out this work. Some funds will be required, however.

I am asking officials from the Minister of State's Department to make contact with Sligo County Council's CEO, Mr. Ciarán Hayes, to get specific details of what is needed. In the grand scheme of things it would not be very much at all. It is 500 metres of what is known as the Sligo Way. It threatens the Sligo Camino, which is to take place and for which up to 1,000 participants have already pre-booked. Notwithstanding a broader package of measure to deal with the tragedies that we have had in Galway, Sligo and in other counties, I ask the Minister of State to deal with this specifically.

Deputy Catherine Connolly: Go raibh míle maith agat a Cheann Comhairle agus go raibh míle maith agat as ucht an ábhair seo a phiocadh. As I stand here raising this matter the fire service, the Army, the Air Corps, Coillte staff and local people are out on the ground trying to bring a raging forest fire under control. Already, more than 1,500 ha of forestry and 2,000 ha of bogland have been destroyed. I understand from the local media that is an area five times the size of the Phoenix Park. That is happening as I stand here. The forest fire is raging from the Oughterard side of Galway over to Inverin on the other side.

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I raise this issue first to pay tribute to the staff on the ground, but also to ask the Minister of State what are his and his Department's plans in respect of this matter. I understand that the loss of productive timber and its replacement alone will be at a multi-million euro cost, not to mention the loss of wildlife, the damage to the environment, the serious threat to people's houses and livelihoods and so on. This fire is in the Cloosh Valley which is the biggest forest in Ireland as I understand it, covering more than 4,000 ha. That means that, already, 25% of the forest has been destroyed. These figures are difficult even for me to comprehend, but are even more difficult for the people on the ground where the fire is raging as we speak. I was on the Aran Islands on Monday with the Joint Committee on the Irish Language, the Gaeltacht and the Islands, and we could see the smoke from there. I have a number of questions to which I will return after the Minister of State's response, but the first is how could this have happened? What fire assessment was carried out? What risk assessment was done? The biggest wind farm in Ireland is right in the middle of the forest. How was it allowed to go in there? When it was allowed to go in there, what assessments were carried out?

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney): I thank Deputies MacSharry and Connolly for raising these matters. Forest fires have a significant impact, as we are witnessing. Deputy Connolly has set out the scene that is taking place at Cloosh Valley in Galway, a place I know well as I am from Galway.

Responding to these fires and to public safety is key at this time. Forest fires can destroy habitats, wildlife, farm land and farm structures and can threaten homes and lives. They bear a huge cost not just to physical property, but also the cost of disruption to normal emergency services operations. On behalf of the Government, I acknowledge and pay tribute to the tremendous work of the emergency services and the co-operation of other State agencies, including the Army, the Air Corps and Coillte in keeping these fires under control and attempting to extinguish them. I take this opportunity to remind and urge the public to follow the advice of the emergency services and to stay away from any areas affected by the fires. Any uncontrolled or unattended fires should be reported to emergency services.

I understand the Sligo Camino follows the Sligo Way through some of the finest scenery in the west of Ireland. The route is a challenging mixture of tracks, trails and forest paths. The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine has today informed my office that the part of the boardwalk on the Sligo Camino that was damaged by the gorse fires is not on Coillte land and is not afforested. I am advised that the boardwalk damage is located on privately owned commonage, which was developed jointly by Sligo County Council and the Sligo Leader programme.

In respect of my own office, under the minor flood mitigation works and coastal protection scheme, referred to by Deputy MacSharry, the Office of Public Works provides funding to local authorities to undertake minor flood mitigation measures costing less than €500,000 each to address local flooding and coastal protection problems within their administrative areas. Funding of up to 90% of the cost is available for approved projects with the balance being funded by the local authority concerned. Local authorities submit funding applications in the prescribed format, which are then assessed by the OPW having regard to the specific technical, economic, social and environmental criteria of the scheme, including a cost benefit assessment. With regard to the latter, proposals must meet a minimum benefit to cost ratio of 1.5:1 in order to qualify. The scheme operates to fund works to mitigate flood risk. Repairs to forest trails destroyed by forest fires do not qualify under this scheme.

While today we are seeing the Government's proactive response to forest fires when they occur, the Government is also very active in its management of the risk of fires, including through issuing fire danger notices. The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine has issued a number of fire danger notices to the forestry sector since the beginning of March, including elevating the risk to red on 2 May in advance of the recent spate of fires. These fires are monitored through a combination of EU Copernicus and US NASA data streams which have detected over 50 illegal fire locations using satellite data up to 21 April of this year.

The Government has also legislated to prohibit burning on land that is not cultivated. It is an offence under section 40 of the Wildlife Act 1976, as amended by section 46 of the Wildlife Act 2000, for landowners or the public to burn any vegetation growing on any land not then cultivated from 1 March to 31 August in any year. Individuals who are found to burn vegetation within that prohibited period are liable to prosecution by An Garda Síochána or by the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

I assure the Deputies that the Government will continue to work closely with the emergency services, local authorities, An Garda Síochána and the National Parks and Wildlife Service, as well as with farm organisations and the forestry industry to try to address the problem of uncontrolled fires and will act on any incidents cross-reported to it, as appropriate.

I urge all forest owners, farmers, rural dwellers and other countryside users to be vigilant to the threat of fire, to report any suspicious activity to An Garda Síochána, and to report any uncontrolled or unattended fires immediately to the fire and emergency services via the 112 or 999 service.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: I thank the Minister of State. Unfortunately I do not hear any good news in his response about funds being available. I ask the Government to look at a package of measures, particularly in Galway where there is a substantial amount of damage. I am talking specifically about an area in Sligo. The Minister of State himself mentioned that the Sligo Camino is on privately owned commonage. It is a public amenity. The private owners of whatever areas of commonage facilitate it. It would not cost a huge amount of money. I said in the wording of my Topical Issue that the minor works scheme might not be appropriate, and the Minister of State has said that it is not, but there are other funds there. It is not a huge amount of money. I appeal to him to speak to his colleagues to see if some few shillings can be found to rectify this situation because we are talking about tourism. Some 1,000 people from all over the country, and beyond, are coming to the area for this event, which will have to be cancelled. We are talking about 500 m. Surely we can knock our heads together to come up with the small level of resources needed to deal with this matter, notwithstanding the need for a larger look at the whole issue, particularly in Sligo and Galway where there has been substantial damage and ultimately a loss to the State in terms of revenue.

Deputy Catherine Connolly: While I appreciate the Minister of State's attempt to give an answer I am shocked that in the five pages there is no mention of Galway.

Deputy Seán Canney: There is.

Deputy Catherine Connolly: This is an emergency. An emergency should be declared. I have pointed out the figures - between 1,000 and 1,500 ha of forestry alone are gone along with 2,000 ha of bogland. They have been burned. There is a serious threat to people's lives and, as has been outlined, to wildlife and habitats. At the very least I would have expected to have

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heard what the emergency response from the Department has been. Has the Minister of State or any Minister gone down to inspect the area and talk with the services on the ground? What interim report has come back? What are the Minister of State's long-term and intermediate plans? I would have expected that at the very least. This is a most serious fire. An area five times the size of the Phoenix Park has been destroyed, and there is nothing in the five pages about Galway.

Deputy Seán Canney: First, I did mention Galway in my response. The kernel of Deputy MacSharry's issue is funding to replace a small section of the Sligo Camino. As that was installed by the local authority with Leader funding, if the local authority looks at it, appraises it and sees what the costs involved would be, it can submit those to the Government and we will see what we can do. I am saying, honestly, that money used for flooding cannot be taken and put into something else. That cannot be done. It is ironic that we have responsibility for flood relief and here we have a drought and fires. In China, the relevant minister is responsible for floods and drought.

Going back to the question raised by Deputy Connolly, emergency response is dealt with by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment. The reason I am answering the question is that the Deputy was looking for funding from minor works flooding to deal with it. I will bring her concerns back to Government regarding what can be done. All of the emergency response units are there dealing with it and people are being told to keep back from the fires. All of the warnings have been issued. The satellite pictures show how many fires are happening at the moment. It is incredible that the fine weather we have had and the wind have created a huge number of issues. There is more than one Department involved in this - including the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and others - so there must be a whole-of-Government response to it. Right now, the emergency services are dealing with the issue and are trying to bring the fires under control.

The Deputy asked who started the fires. We do not yet know who did so. Hopefully, the cause of the fires will be found but the most important thing right now is to get them under control and ensure they are put out. We are working on doing so.

Middle East Issues

Deputy Gino Kenny: I thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade for taking this issue. As he might know, 1,500 Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails are on hunger strike. The strike is in its 23rd day and has been named "Freedom and Dignity". The prisoners are only accepting water and salt to sustain themselves. The reason why the prisoners are on strike is the continuing brutalisation of Palestinian prisoners in Israel. I include 300 children who are not on hunger strike but who are in the prison population. I will read out the demands of the hunger strikers because they are crucial to understanding why the prisoners are on hunger strike. They include an end to the denial of family visits, the right to pursue higher education while in prison, appropriate medical care and treatment and an end to solitary confinement and detention and imprisonment without charge or trial. The prisoners are subjected to solitary confinement, torture, medical negligence, abuse, withdrawal of phone calls to their family members and violations of their basic human rights.

Over the past 23 days, some of the prisoners have been moved to other jails by the Israeli authorities, which is highly suspect. The Israeli Government has even stated that it is willing

to force feed some of the prisoners, which I find unbelievable. I thought this was probably an exaggerated statement but apparently it happened in the 1980s with other Palestinian prisoners on hunger strike in Israeli jails. One of the prisoners' leaders, Marwan Barghouti, has been in solitary confinement for the past 23 days, which is quite outrageous. The Israeli Government has refused to negotiate with the prisoners on their demands and refers to the prisoners as terrorists. I would refer to them as political prisoners.

There is growing international solidarity with and support for the prisoners. In general, Ireland has a very good record of showing support for Palestinian rights and statehood. We had a similar situation in the early 1980s with hunger strikers in Northern Ireland so we know what people have to do to demand their rights and the extremes to which they will go to highlight their issue. I am asking the Minister to highlight this issue and summon the Israeli ambassador and tell him to negotiate with the prisoners because it is only a matter of time before some prisoners die.

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The position of Palestinian prisoners jailed by Israel is an issue which Ireland has consistently raised over recent years in our dialogue with Israeli authorities. This has included contacts both here in Ireland and in Israel as well as in our discussions at EU and UN level. Our concerns have related to both the incidence and the conditions of detention. This has included the increased use of administrative detention without trial and our concern that detention is in some cases being used to try to deter activists from engaging in peaceful and legitimate protests against the occupation and related policies. Of course, we must also acknowledge that many Palestinian prisoners, including some now on hunger strike, have been convicted of very serious offences, including involvement in violent attacks.

Issues raised under conditions of detention have included physical conditions, medical issues, legal processes and family visits. It is only fair to recognise that we could express similar or stronger concerns about prisoners in many other jurisdictions in the region as well as in Israel. Within those representations we have made to Israel, there has been a particular focus on detention of children and Ireland raised this question in our intervention at the universal periodic review of Israel at the UN Human Rights Council in 2013. We have also engaged with the Israeli authorities on some specific issues relating to children and there have been some improvements such as the raising of the age at which young persons are treated as adults in the judicial system.

Regarding the current situation, some 1,500 prisoners were reported to have begun a hunger strike on 17 April. We cannot support the use of hunger strikes as a means of exerting pressure. There is a real risk of attitudes hardening on either side leading to tragedy. We do not want to say anything that could add to that risk. We are all aware here, of course, of the danger of a hunger strike leading to increased tensions and clashes on the streets as we have seen in the past. For these reasons, I will not comment on the specific issues which the strikers have raised. However, I would reiterate our essential position, which should be an obvious one, namely, that detained Palestinians should have the same protections and conditions that Israel affords its own citizens when detained. I would also stress that since Palestinian prisoners should under international law be held within their own territory, when Palestinians are being held in Israel, special attention must be given to ensuring that family visits are realistically facilitated.

My Department raised this issue with the Israeli ambassador on 9 May. We also raised it yesterday with the Israeli mission to the EU in Brussels. The EU missions in Palestine, includ-

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ing Ireland's mission, issued a public statement on Saturday concerning the hunger strikes and issues related to conditions of detention and calling on Israel to respect fully the rights of prisoners. I am aware that previous hunger strikes have been resolved allowing a tragic outcome to be avoided. I very much hope that this will also be the case on this occasion. More generally, issues regarding prisoners will continue to be followed closely by my Department.

Deputy Gino Kenny: The Minister should take sides because these are not ordinary prisoners. Most of them have been incarcerated against their will. As the Minister stated, 300 children, who are not part of the hunger strike, are in Israeli prisons. Palestinian prisoners are subjected to the most inhumane treatment Israel can mete out. If it mirrors what Israel does on a larger scale - how it treats Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza and Israel - it is a terrible reflection on the state of Israel. It is important for the Minister to contact the Israeli ambassador and state that he is extremely worried about the ongoing issue of political prisoners in Israel. It is very important that he relays that message. Only recently, it was reported in the news that Ireland bought military drones from the Israeli military. I find it extraordinary that the Irish Government buys military hardware from a country with an appalling human rights record - a horrendous, obnoxious, racist state such as Israel. The Minister says he is not going to take sides. That is the problem. He needs to take a side. He needs to see that an oppressor is oppressing the Palestinian people. These men are on hunger strike to highlight that they are being brutalised in Israeli jails. I would do the same as them. Out of solidarity not only with Palestinian prisoners but also the Palestinian people, we should tell the Israeli ambassador that this situation needs to be dealt with before people die.

Deputy Charles Flanagan: I will not comment on specific issues which have been raised by the strikers as I do not regard it as appropriate. I assure the Deputy that Ireland will continue to be active on this issue. Officials from my Department yesterday spoke to the Israeli ambassador in respect of this matter.

Deputy Gino Kenny: What did he say?

Deputy Charles Flanagan: We have been active for many years in regard to prisoners' issues. We have raised directly with the Israeli authorities the current situation of the hunger strikers. These contacts are being kept low key. I do not want to do anything that might exacerbate the situation. European Union missions in Palestine, including Ireland's, are aware of the situation and are actively engaged. We have issued a public statement of concern in this regard, in the course of which we have reiterated the call by the European Union for Israel to respect fully international humanitarian law and its human rights obligations towards all prisoners. The detention in prisons in Israel of Palestinians who qualify as protected persons under Article 4 of the Fourth Geneva Convention is in contravention of Article 76 of the convention. Access by family members to the detainees should be facilitated rather than impeded in any way. The heads of mission, including Ireland's, have reiterated their long-standing concern about the extensive use by Israel of what the Deputy has described as administered detention without formal charges.

There are many issues of concern. I assure the Deputy of Ireland's interest in this matter. He mentioned the issue of force-feeding specifically. I am opposed to its use. Israeli doctors' organisations have long said they would refuse to co-operate with force-feeding. I assure the House and the Deputy that Ireland will continue to play a role in this matter.

Sitting suspended at 4.33 p.m. and resumed at 5.13 p.m.

Message from Seanad

An Ceann Comhairle: Seanad Éireann has passed the Misuse of Drugs (Supervised Injecting Facilities) Bill 2017, without amendment. Seanad Éireann has also passed the Courts (No. 2) Bill 2016, without amendment.

Dublin Transport: Motion [Private Members]

Deputy John Lahart: I move:

That Dáil Éireann:

recognises:

— that transport and travel trends within the Greater Dublin Area are unsustainable, congestion is increasing, transport emissions are growing, economic competitiveness is suffering and quality of life for commuters and inhabitants is declining;

— the capacity of the Dublin region as a destination for living, visiting and for locating and doing business is being seriously undermined;

— that significant actions are required to increase capacity and usability of public transport, to better manage traffic during peak periods and to reduce the private car share dependence by commuting traffic especially;

— that the population in the Greater Dublin Area is expected to grow by 22 per cent to 1.8 million by 2030 and by 26 per cent to 700,000 in the Mid-East Region alone including Kildare, Meath and Wicklow and increasing investment in rail services including the Dublin Area Rapid Transport (DART) expansion, as well as vital bus services including Bus Rapid Transit, is absolutely essential;

— that this Government lacks a comprehensive vision and strategic plan for how to cope with future public transport demand in the core Dublin City Area as well as the Greater Dublin Area; and

— that the Capital Plan is emblematic of the lack of ambition, vision and forward planning for public transport;

acknowledges:

— that many of the main arterial routes into Dublin, including the M50, either have already reached operational capacity or are expected to reach capacity in the near future;

— the lack of preparation and forward planning for the impact of the Luas Cross City, including the impact of its construction on city trade and mobility;

— the urgent need to increase the numbers and frequency of buses, either public or private, from expanding suburban areas in order to tackle capacity issues, relieve traffic congestion and provide practical choices for commuters;

— that while expanding capacity on our motorway and primary road network is

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something we need to plan for in the future, recognises that traffic demand policies are essential to relieving congestion as will sustained increases in public transport investment;

— that transport bottlenecks and congestion are increasingly becoming a drag on growth and productivity in our cities as well as hindering wider regional development in large parts of the country;

— that despite the historically low cost of financing to deliver economically and socially critical infrastructure projects, this Government has produced no policy plans for how to mitigate transport infrastructure deficits;

— that now is the time to:

— build critical transport infrastructure like the DART Underground and Metro North;

— make vital improvements such as bus lane completions and removing ‘pinch points’ for Dublin buses;

— ensure priority signalling at junctions;

— continue to invest in real time passenger information, which will increase capacity and service reliability on public transport, make it easier for commuters to get to work and relieve congestion in our cities; and

— develop park and ride infrastructure in order to facilitate ease of use of various public transport modes;

— that the Government has completely failed to mobilise additional investment in transport infrastructure available under the European Fund for Strategic Investment (EFSI), and of the EFSI transactions within the European Union, 6 per cent are in the transport sector, yet in Ireland there has not been a single transport project put forward by the Government to the European Investment Bank (EIB) under the €500 billion funding stream; and

— that the decision to cancel the DART Underground project, described by the National Transport Authority as ‘the missing link’ in Ireland’s rail infrastructure, was short-sighted and a costly set-back for the liveability of the city, while the only large transport infrastructure contained in the Government’s Capital Plan, ‘the optimised Metro North’ proposal, could be fundamentally lacking capacity as it was recommended on the basis of reduced employment growth and passenger demand projections in 2013, which are no longer accurate; and

calls on the Government to:

— commit to giving enhanced governance, democratic input and administration of transport in Dublin by enacting section 17 of the Dublin Transport Authority Act 2008 which provides for the establishment of the Dublin Transport Authority Advisory Council;

— give a firm commitment to significantly increase annual investment in public

transport, including funding to Córas Iompair Éireann (CIÉ) companies to improve attractiveness, reliability and integration of public transport;

— establish a new, dedicated Cycle Way Fund for bike-lanes and cycle-friendly infrastructure, Dublin Bike extensions, the rolling out of secure bike lockers and parking throughout the city as well as funding for pedestrianised ‘open streets’ initiatives to encourage cycling;

— earmark a portion of the Local Government Fund to annual resurfacing, maintenance and quality improvements in bike lanes and road verges to enhance safety for cyclists;

and

— commit, as part of revisions to the Capital Plan, to bolster capital investment levels by securing funding agreements from the EIB and further Public Private Partnerships under the EFSI for critical transport investments like the DART Underground and Metro North.

The context for this motion could not be simpler. Dublin is growing and is going to grow even more in the next 30 years. The greater Dublin area, taking in the commuter counties, is growing exponentially also. Some 70% of workers in Wicklow travel to Dublin for their work and in Kildare the figure is 40%. Dublin is growing and it is leading to traffic congestion that is only going to get worse.

This chronic congestion affects everything from competitiveness to quality of life to carbon emissions. People are trying to get their kids to school, trying to get to work, trying to deliver goods and trying to get to college, and the traffic congestion is clogging up and impeding public transport. As a consequence, economic growth in the greater Dublin area is being held back.

This motion is not just about the capital city. Dublin is the gateway to the rest of the country. When Dublin gets congested, it delays inward traffic and outward traffic, delaying goods, people, commerce and tourism to the rest of the country.

The major infrastructural projects that were intended to solve the growing traffic problems have not only been paused or cancelled in some cases, but we can reasonably say that a child born in Dublin today will not ride a metro to the airport or travel DART underground until they are about to enter post-primary school.

The previous Government cancelled the DART underground project, the missing link as the National Transport Authority, NTA, called it, and then sold off a critical piece of the land associated with delivering the project. The DART underground would link Heuston Station, Connolly Station and the Docklands station. It would open a gateway to the rest of Ireland from Dublin and a gateway to Dublin from the rest of Ireland. Work on metro north and the DART underground will not commence - if it ever does commence - until the middle of the 2020s.

I acknowledge that the Luas cross city is going provide significant additional capacity for commuters. I warmly and enthusiastically welcome it connecting and expanding the existing green and red Luas lines. The impact of Luas cross city on other users of road space in Dublin remains to be seen. In the meantime, we are told by successive Governments that public transport is the way forward. For Dubliners this means buses, according to the Minister. Recently,

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the NTA has added walking and cycling to this, which is fine and welcome. Along with my colleagues I want to see public transport and other non-private car travel becoming the primary mode by which commuters travel to our city.

The problem is that the Minister has added only 20 buses to the bus fleet serving Dublin in 2017. In the absence of the major infrastructure, which will take years to deliver, the public will have the choice of using buses or private cars, walking or cycling. I acknowledge that Dublin Bus has made huge strides in recent times. I also applaud the NTA and the local authorities for the work done on the provision of quality bus corridors. In spite of the huge progress made over the years in the Dublin Bus service, there are still inconsistencies and large inadequacies in the service in particular areas.

Older people feel that the service neglects them at off-peak times. Digital display timetables often change within seconds leaving passengers stranded. A constituent from a part of my constituency that was once the Minister's constituency emails me regularly in exasperation at full buses passing her by or simply not turning up at the timetabled time. She emailed me last night asking me to include the following words in my contribution: "the urgent need to increase the numbers and frequency of buses, either public or private, from expanding urban areas in order to tackle capacity issues, relieve traffic congestion and provide practical choices for commuters". Ballycullen in my constituency is one such expanding area and Dublin Bus cannot expand the number 15 service to the area because the company does not have the money. In parts of Tallaght the low frequency of buses from 6.30 a.m. to 8 a.m. creates journey times of up to 90 minutes to the city.

The Minister has an awful lot of work to do to convince the public that buses are going to transport them on time every day from where they live to where they work. This is why there must be a democratic input into the decisions that are going to be made. The Minister is expecting people to choose public transport, cycling and walking over the private car in the absence of the infrastructure that was committed to by the previous Fine Gael-led government, in the absence of additional buses and additional routes, in the absence of radical changes that facilitate bus priority on major arteries into and out of the city, in the absence of real safety for cyclists on the main routes into the city, never mind safe places for them to store their bikes, and with only a few joined-up cycle links. The Minister has stood by while the development of greenways into the city have been postponed. He has shown no ambition for the city bikes scheme, which is now an essential component of public transport, although there has been a huge appetite for years for this scheme in the suburbs of Dublin. How can the Minister expect private car drivers to abandon their cars in the absence of any strategy or investment in these key areas?

The Minister could be investing in the bus fleet, in opening up more routes to tender, and designing regional and localised park and ride facilities for buses. Localised park and ride facilities are going to have to become reality in order to make travel by bus a real option for people who live just that bit too far away from the nearest bus stop or who, worse still, have no regular and efficient bus service. Ten years ago, a Government thought it was prudent to include the provision of a Dublin transport advisory council in legislation establishing the Dublin Transport Authority. Its membership was to include transport experts, the CEOs of the four Dublin local authorities, a senior garda, members of the public and stakeholders such as those with disabilities. Its chair was to be a person with expertise in transport administration, so that it could advise and respond to NTA proposals. Quango it was not. If the Minister is proposing that public transport is the way forward – despite having paused Metro north and probably cancelled the DART underground – then the public, business and every other stakeholder has a

right to a say about their bus service and how it can be improved, about what type of cycle ways they want and input into where they ought to be.

The Minister made a name for himself in the Seanad and in the Dáil, representing a good chunk of what is my constituency, as being a champion of the underdog, the shareholder and the toll payer. He possessed a bold, swashbuckling style. As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, however, he has seemed uninterested, lacking in motivation and desire to make a difference and certainly lacking in any vision, passion or dynamism to create solutions to the problems that face us. During Question Time today, the Minister said we do not have the capital. He needs to fight for capital. He needs to fight as hard for funding for the big projects this city needs as he is fighting for Stepside Garda station. Others have identified that this funding is undoubtedly out there. The Minister needs to articulate a vision for the future of transport in Dublin.

Deputy John Curran: I am sharing time with Deputies Jack Chambers and Darragh O'Brien. I have brought the increased traffic congestion we are facing daily to the Minister's attention by means of Topical Issue debates and numerous parliamentary questions. This issue is particularly urgent in the western part of Dublin. It does not just affect economic development and activity; it also impacts on our future housing needs. We have a strategic development zone that is half built at Adamstown, and a second one in planning at Clonburris. Transport infrastructure is delivered not only to ease the congestion of today but to provide the growth we need for the coming years. The Minister is well aware that a very significant rate of increase is predicted for the population of the greater Dublin area over the next couple of decades. We must plan, forecast and build our infrastructure to deal with that longer term issue.

In that regard, I have some concerns. When I compare the projected figures that Transport Infrastructure Ireland, TII, uses with those used by South Dublin County Council, there are some divergences. If they cannot agree now on projected growth, the delivery of transport in the future may not meet requirements. While TII reckons that the population in South Dublin County Council's administrative area will grow by 10% by 2030, South Dublin County Council reckons it will grow by 19%. In terms of jobs, TII suggests a 20% increase while South Dublin County Council is looking at something like 39%. Those variances matter. The transport we plan has to be future-proofed. The traffic on the M50 between the junctions with the N4 and the N7 is now at the level predicted for 2023; hence the urgency of the problem. This is not coming down the tracks at us; we are facing and meeting the problem today.

I have asked the Minister many questions and he has said he would make a submission which, at this point, he has made, on the public transport review. I am very critical of one point. I have asked him time and again to conduct a public transport policy review in advance of the mid-term capital review. He has answered time and again that it is coming up. One of his more recent replies on the matter stated that the submission deadline for the mid-term review of the capital plan did not allow for the completion of the significant body of work and consultation required to undertake a comprehensive review of public transport policy. The reason it did not is that the Minister did not start the review in time. I am concerned that the capital review that is going on currently will not have the evidence that a public transport policy review would have provided. I am disappointed in that regard, and the blame lies fully at the Minister's door. Matters are now out of date, in the sense that we will do a public transport policy review with no option and no additional funding in the future.

My colleagues have mentioned a number of issues. We talked about Metro north. Metro

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west has been taken off the map. It was an orbital route for which South Dublin County Council had made significant provision through land banking and so forth. The greater Dublin transport plan 2016-35 excludes the possibility completely until after 2035. I acknowledge that the plan was made when funding was not available. However, it did not look forward to the needs of a growing capital city. An orbital route to link up Tallaght, Clondalkin, Lucan, Blanchardstown and on out to the Metro north route is simply gone with no alternative. People from the western part of the city feel strongly that we need orbital routes. I welcome the acknowledgement in the greater Dublin transport plan that there will be an extension of the Luas line to Lucan. Again, the problem is that it is an immediate issue yet there is no prospect of funding until sometime after 2021. That certainly is a concern.

I also want to talk about buses. The Minister has stated on numerous occasions that a bus-based solution will be used to deal with the issue in the short term. I have asked him how many buses we will get and he has usually referred me to the National Transport Authority, NTA. I find it contradictory that although he is the Minister responsible, the NTA is going to tell us how many buses. Surely to God, in advance of the budget, the additional capacity should have been determined and that should have been the objective of the budget negotiations. On budget day, the Minister announced that there would be 110 additional buses. It took me months to find out from the NTA how many of those were replacements and how many were additional; it turned out 20 were additional. The Minister has talked about the role Dublin Bus will play in the coming years. I have asked him in a series of written questions how many additional buses there will be. What is the demand for additional buses to meet public transport needs in the greater Dublin area? The Minister has not answered. He has said it will depend on what is available. That is not dealing with transport. It is saying that whatever money the Minister gets on budget day is what will deliver buses. That is not how to do it. The right way is to calculate the demand and look for the allocation to meet it. If that is not done, we will fall behind time and again.

I asked about park and ride facilities for traffic coming in to Dublin from west of the M50, perhaps on the N7 towards Rathcoole or the N4 towards the Spa Hotel. The Minister, of course, passed me back to the National Transport Authority. It responded that it is assessing a number of bus-based park and ride locations and expects to make a determination on whether to proceed with them in the coming months. However, it also stated that the delivery of those facilities will also be contingent on funding being available and that the NTA awaits the outcome of the Government's capital plan review. That is backwards. Those facilities should have been the subject of a specific submission, rather than waiting to see what comes from the capital plan. Every reply I get is like this. The detail needed to meet current demand is not being given.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: I welcome the motion proposed by our Dublin spokesperson, Deputy John Lahart. The public transport system in Dublin is at breaking point and is creaking at the seams. There is no question about that. Deputy Curran mentioned buses. There is no provision for multi-annual funding, meaning that Dublin Bus cannot plan its routes. Deputy Curran mentioned, rightly, how we have to wait until budget day to see how many buses are going to be purchased. That is absolutely ridiculous.

A total of 1.8 million people will live in the greater Dublin area by 2030. That is 13 years away. The more I look at the announcements by the Department, the more I am amazed. Let us consider the cancellations by the previous Government. I will not lay all the blame specifically at the door of the current Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, Deputy Ross, because that would be unfair. However, the Minister is suffering from the severe lack of ambition shown

by his Fine Gael and Labour Party colleagues in the last Government. They slashed capital expenditure when they should have been spending and investing in metro north and DART underground. That was at a time when we would have got good value for money. Now, there are problems in Connolly Station following the opening of the Phoenix Park tunnel, although it was heralded and is good for commuters in that area. Anyway, people cannot get through Connolly Station. The northern rail commuter line and the DART line on the north side of the city and county are absolutely at capacity. Without the DART interconnector we cannot increase capacity within the city.

We need a government that has direction, leadership and ambition because we are living in the 21st century with an early 20th century public transport system. Ambition, leadership and direction was shown to deliver Terminal 2, a motorway network and Luas. However, all we have seen in the past seven years is Luas cross-city. In itself, that is welcome but what about the growing areas in the greater Dublin area? What about towns like Balbriggan, Skerries, Rush, Lusk, Donabate, Malahide, Portmarnock and every place along the northern line where commuters have to shove themselves onto the trains? I am one of those commuters.

The biggest problem arises when we see population growth rates. Let us consider the census figures of 2016 and the associated projections. There is no increased capacity. Instead, we see reports by successive Ministers, such as the second capital review. The former Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, Deputy Donohoe, carried out a capital review. The Minister, Deputy Ross, is now undertaking a capital review. The great thing about capital reviews is that Ministers need do nothing else but review them. The Minister need only get his officials to go out and get more reports carried out, although we know what needs to be done.

Metro north was ready to go, but we sent €600 million back to the European Investment Bank. We should have started the work. The route was selected. The land was available and purchased. The railway procurement order was in place. What did the Fine Gael and Labour Party Government do? It went back to the drawing board. A new route is required along with new planning permission and a new railway procurement order. What did the Government say? Those responsible said they would deliver it by 2027. I do not believe that.

What we need is something that will pull all this together. That is why this motion is welcome. I urge the Minister to make a start on this, because commuters in Dublin and the greater Dublin area deserve far better than what they are getting from this Government and from the previous Government.

Deputy Jack Chambers: I thank my colleague, Deputy Lahart, for raising an important motion. The net point from what my colleagues have said is that we need a vision and a plan. We cannot keep hearing the excuses about reviews and the long term from the Department in respect of what the Minister is planning to do.

Generally, we need to look at Dublin as it is growing. We are seeing vast urban sprawl. Dublin, as a city and county, will become a county of Leinster. Effectively, Leinster is sprawling to the extent that Dublin will encompass its whole environs. That is a big problem.

We need to look at our local authorities. In particular, Dublin City Council needs to examine increased intensity of development within the context of Dublin city, such that development is not all about a concentric building of transport infrastructure outside the city. Within the city at present we need to meet the infrastructural deficit for the people living in suburban areas who

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have no infrastructure to get to work or to commute.

This is a crisis around quality of life and the transport deficit. Moreover, the cost of getting to work is excessive. Cycling has been a major failure in recent years. People who want to cycle and embrace healthy living are left with poorly-planned cycle lanes and are left to compete against the biggest road users, that is, the buses. That is a major failure of planning. We need to utilise our canal network to extend cycle lanes to all suburban areas. It would not involve a major cost.

We also need to examine the commuter line in my constituency of Dublin West. I am referring to the Maynooth line. Commuters are like sardines in the morning. Irish Rail, the Department and whoever is responsible have failed to provide extra carriages at increased frequency despite a population equivalent to that of any city relative to Dublin. In my area, people cannot get to work without being in complete congestion or moving in conditions that are beyond humane.

We need to look at costs and the infrastructural kick-back that has to occur in the context of improving public finances. Moreover, the Minister needs to work with his Government colleagues, including Deputy Coveney, if he is still in his current Department, to examine the planning infrastructure in Dublin. It is not all about building concentric transport patterns within Leinster; it is about how we can have greater intensity of development within the city itself. It should not all be about massive capital plans. We need to deliver for those who have no transport because there is a deficit and it is affecting their ability to live and work within the city boundary.

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I move amendment No. 1:

To delete all words after “Dáil Éireann” and substitute the following:

“recognises that:

— there is clear and compelling evidence of increasing levels of traffic congestion across the Dublin Region;

— congestion is already presenting a significant cost to the economy of the Dublin Region and, if unaddressed, could adversely affect the competitiveness of the region and the health, well-being and quality of life of its commuters and inhabitants;

— major road development is not the solution to congestion issues in Dublin; and

— the core elements of the solution to congestion in the Dublin Region in the short to medium term lie, among other things, in an efficient public transport system, including a transformation of the bus system, alongside park and ride provision;

acknowledges:

— the important role of the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) Transport Strategy 2016-2035, which was adopted last year and which sets out a clear vision for transport planning in the Dublin Region;

— that there is already a significant number of projects and initiatives being implement-

ed to improve the capacity and effectiveness of the public transport system in the Dublin Region, including Luas Cross City, which will be delivered this year, and other transformational rail projects such as the new Metro North, the DART Underground and the wider DART Expansion Programme that are being progressed;

— the commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government that the €3.6 billion investment in the public transport system, provided for in the Capital Plan, will uphold the principles of Smarter Travel;

— the important role of the Capital Plan and the Strategic Investment Framework for Land Transport in setting out a vision for public transport at national level; and

— the importance of a forthcoming National Transport Authority (NTA) initiative that will seek to transform the bus system in the Dublin Region; and

calls on the Government to:

— commit, while taking cognisance of the overall Budgetary parameters, to achieving a modern, efficient and effective public transport system for the GDA; and

— request that the NTA continue to pursue strategies for alleviation of congestion in the GDA, including the implementation of a proposed transformation of the bus system in Dublin.”

Let me start by saying that I welcome this debate. For many Deputies it is somewhat Dublin-centric, but it is nonetheless very important because the greatest problems of traffic and congestion in this country lie in Dublin. No one is going to run away from the fact that we have a problem there.

The only issue I have with Fianna Fáil is in respect of what we do about it, as well as some of the statements made by those in that party about the lack of ambition of the Government and the condemnation of our output. Apart from that, I think we are probably on the same sheet. I look forward to all Members who have spoken so eloquently making submissions to the many public consultations that we have held and that we will continue to hold on the issues they have raised. I say as much in all sincerity because it is important that the Opposition, especially at this time of partnership Government and the agreement we have, co-operates in this area for the good of the people of Dublin, who certainly have suffered in recent years because of the congestion of traffic. We are going to address this.

There are elements of common ground between the Government’s views and the Fianna Fáil motion. I share the view that congestion, if unaddressed, can adversely impact on the health, well-being and quality of life for commuters and inhabitants. I agree that, if unrestrained, congestion could affect the overall competitiveness of the Dublin region. Most important, I am strongly in favour of a solution with public transport at its core. Let there be no doubt about it: we recognise this problem. We recognise that it is our problem and we recognise that it must be addressed urgently.

We have all heard the anecdotes of growing congestion in Dublin. These anecdotes are borne out by compelling evidence that everyday journeys of people are becoming more and more difficult. In recognition of this, my Department and the National Transport Authority have undertaken work to provide an evidence base to address travel demand growth in the

Dublin region.

The motion calls on Government to improve the attractiveness, reliability and integration of public transport. That is perfectly reasonable. The Government is committed to a well-funded public transport system that achieves these objectives. The capital plan allocation of €3.6 billion will enable several major public transport projects to proceed and to fund additional capacity to meet existing and future commuter needs, including Luas cross-city and metro north. Of course, I have made a strong case for increased public transport investment as part of the mid-term review of the capital plan.

Notwithstanding our common ground, there are elements of the Fianna Fáil motion that Government simply cannot support. That is why, on behalf of the Government, I have proposed amendment No. 1. The Fianna Fáil motion states that Government lacks vision and a plan to cope with future public transport demand in Dublin city and the wider region. It also refers to a lack of ambition in the capital plan for public transport. I hope to be able to answer those particular criticisms in the weeks ahead. These assertions do not consider the substantial provision made in the capital plan for public transport projects, including Luas cross-city – a project welcomed by Deputy Lahart. I do not want to claim the credit for it but it is coming.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: Something for the north side would be good.

Deputy Shane Ross: Other projects include metro north, elements of the DART expansion programme, bus, bus rapid transit, heavy rail, light rail and sustainable transport programmes. These projects will all add capacity to our transport system.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: When?

Deputy Shane Ross: Luas cross-city is coming now, this year, and Deputy O'Brien knows that. The motion assumes no forward planning for public transport. It fails to acknowledge the NTA transport strategy for the greater Dublin area, which sets out a clear vision for transport planning in the greater Dublin area for the period 2016-35. Furthermore, the NTA has been actively developing specific proposals to tackle congestion. As a result, an important initiative which proposes a radical transformation of the bus system in Dublin will be launched to the public by the NTA at the end of this month. That is why today's discussion is so timely.

I recognise that establishing an advisory council for the NTA as proposed in the motion is possible under the Dublin Transport Authority Act 2008. However, as the NTA is a national body, I do not believe that the structure of the proposed council, which was originally conceived as a body for the greater Dublin area, is appropriate for the expanded national remit of the NTA. I must also clarify that the DART underground project has not been cancelled.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: 2035.

Deputy Shane Ross: Funding has been provided in the capital plan for the redesign and planning of the tunnel-----

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: Go away out of that.

Deputy Shane Ross: -----as well as the extension of the DART to Balbriggan.

Deputy John Curran: We are not going to see the opening of it.

Deputy Shane Ross: The DART expansion programme, including the underground element, is a key part of the NTA's transport strategy.

Deputy John Lahart: Are you serious, Shane?

Deputy Shane Ross: The NTA and Irish Rail are currently working to progress the pre-planning stage of the DART expansion programme, which is not something I would countenance if the underground element had been cancelled.

Finally, there is the issue of funding. It should not be a case, as proposed in the motion, of simply committing as part of the mid-term review of the capital plan to further public private partnerships and securing funding agreements from the European Investment Bank without any consideration for the long-term implications. We must take a strategic view on the extent to which PPPs can play a useful role in delivering additional infrastructure without severely constraining future capital budgets. The Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Deputy Donohoe, has established a senior level group to assess the affordability, sustainability and value for money of PPP procurement. Let us consider the recommendations of the group before making any decisions that could reduce the funding available for transport investment in the future.

As Deputies know, congestion is already presenting a significant cost to the economy in the Dublin region. My Department's economic and financial evaluation unit estimates the cost of congestion is currently approximately €352 million per annum. This is forecast to rise to €2 billion per annum by 2033. Looking at transport patterns and levels of transport usage in recent years, it is easy to see why this is the case. Towards the end of 2013 and the start of 2014, the welcome increase in employment manifested itself in growth in the numbers of people using public transport but also through increased car use and peak period congestion. During 2014, users of the M50 began to experience significant increases in journey time for the first time since the M50 upgrade was completed. In terms of traffic flows, average daily traffic at the tolling point on the motorway was almost 18% higher in 2016 than in 2014. M50 users are experiencing slower speeds and longer journey times. Elsewhere there is evidence of a substantial degree of congestion at many locations on the road network approaching the city centre.

As I mentioned, there are projects under way that will go some way to adding capacity to our transport system. Luas cross city, which is due to commence operations before the end of this year, will provide for an estimated 10 million additional passenger journeys per annum. The recently completed Phoenix Park tunnel, additional bus fleet and bus lane infrastructure, and small-scale interventions on the M50 will go some way, although not the whole way, to addressing travel demand in the Dublin region. Approximately €800 million is allocated over the lifetime of the capital plan for bus measures covering Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann PSO fleets, bus infrastructure in the Dublin region and regional cities and bus rapid transit programmes in the Dublin region.

Therefore, what is the answer to our congestion problem?

A Deputy: Make a few decisions.

Deputy Shane Ross: It certainly does not lie in major road development. While the large-scale projects set out in the NTA's transport strategy are a vital piece of the overall solution in the long term, we need to deliver improvements now. We have a sense of urgency about this. Despite what Deputies say, we do have a vision. Congestion is not confined to a single corridor

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and it cannot be solved by focusing on just one or two corridors. It needs an approach that addresses the whole region. The bus network is undeniably the cornerstone of the public transport system. I believe a priority in tackling congestion in the Dublin region in the short to medium term is to improve the bus system radically.

As I stated in reply to a question this afternoon, I am pleased to inform the House that the NTA will be launching an important initiative at the end of this month that will transform the bus system in the Dublin region. The transformation of the bus network will involve a package of measures, namely, a network of so-called next generation bus corridors with segregated cycling facilities; three bus rapid transit routes; a complete redesign of the network; simpler fare structures; implementing a cashless payment system and a state-of-the-art ticketing system; implementing new bus branding; integrating bus vehicles of different operators and types; new bus stops and shelters; and use of low emission vehicles.

Cycling infrastructure is an important part of the package but the core elements of the response lie in the transformation of the bus system alongside park and ride provisions.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Minister will need to conclude there because we are out of time.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: It is all right. We have heard it all before.

Deputy Shane Ross: The NTA-----

Deputy John Lahart: It is depressing.

Deputy Shane Ross: May I finish this paragraph?

An Ceann Comhairle: Go on.

Deputy Shane Ross: The NTA will progress the early stages of the initiative through public consultation on bus network redesign, engagement with local authorities on individual corridors and a major public consultation for individual corridors. I will be urging members of the public and members of Fianna Fáil to get involved in the consultation process.

Deputy John Lahart: An advisory council.

Deputy Shane Ross: After all, this is their public transport system and the needs of the travelling public must be at the heart of what we do.

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you, Minister. I call Deputy Imelda Munster, who is sharing with her colleagues.

Deputy Imelda Munster: We agree with the sentiment behind Fianna Fáil's motion but feel it needs a considerable amount of strengthening. Therefore, our amendment includes some of what Fianna Fáil proposed in its motion but with additional measures, such as recognising the importance of keeping public transport in public ownership, ensuring all transport services are accessible to people with disabilities, giving CIE companies the space to plan ahead to cope with capacity changes, and several other measures.

The Fianna Fáil motion outlines many problems with transport in Dublin, which I think are universally acknowledged, but it is effectively asking for very little. One of the biggest problems with this motion is that it does not contain any timelines for the commencement or

completion of projects or measures mentioned in it. It is clear that we need timeframes when it comes to practical issues such as traffic management in our capital city. Our amendment contains a clause calling on the Government to implement timelines for the measures contained in the motion.

We all know that planning matters in this State historically have been disastrous. No one knows this more than Fianna Fáil which was in power when much of the corrupt planning took place.

Deputy Robert Troy: Now look it-----

Deputy Imelda Munster: We have had several lengthy tribunals detailing that particular horror show.

Deputy John Lahart: There was no waterboarding going on.

Deputy Imelda Munster: This has affected planning matters and, therefore, transport management hugely. We continue to suffer to this day as a result of poor planning. There has been a lack of joined-up thinking to ensure developments are correctly catered for, areas which are experiencing growth in population have sufficient transport links and road and rail infrastructure is properly planned to cater for the needs of people in the locality. Over the past decade we suffered a huge setback when Fianna Fáil's economics led to the bankruptcy of the State. A large number of planned projects had to be shelved, postponed or curtailed. We got away with this for some time when unemployment in Dublin plummeted and there were fewer commuters, but now we are reaping what was sowed.

As the Fianna Fáil motion details, the city suffers from dreadful congestion at peak times, the M50 and many rail routes are at capacity and we lack sufficient infrastructure to cater for buses, cyclists and other modes of transport that involve leaving the car at home. These measures are vital both from a traffic management point of view and to achieve our emissions targets for 2020, which the Environmental Protection Agency has said will not happen under the current range of policy measures. We have included measures regarding park and ride facilities to link in with existing infrastructural projects and areas to keep bicycles to facilitate commuters in order that they can use public transport easily and efficiently.

This is not only a problem in Dublin. Our cities are suffering as a result of this legacy too. Galway has been mentioned in the media as being one of the worst cities suffering congestion. Of course, the west has essentially been ignored when it comes to development, so this should come as no surprise. Cork and other cities and towns such as Drogheda also suffer from this problem of congestion. The movement of goods is also affected, further damaging industry. This is why we propose in our amendment to have regional advisory authorities, rather than only one authority for the greater Dublin area. This might be especially helpful as we prepare the national planning framework.

Our amendment also calls on the Government to protect CIE companies. We all know what these companies have gone through in the past few years. We also know that the NTA is putting 10% of bus routes out to tender. Protecting the national carriers is vitally important. The motion outlines the crucial role public transport will play, particularly in Dublin city, if we are to manage our growing population and transport needs into the future.

Sinn Féin would like to see future infrastructural projects being owned and run by the State.

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The State should be willing to invest in these projects, with support from EU funding sources. The State should retain ownership and control over these assets to ensure we enjoy a high-quality service that meets the needs of the people they serve and not merely business interests.

I am happy to see that the Luas cross-city project is due to be completed by the end of the year. It will certainly come as a relief to the people of Dublin and to transport carriers and businesses that have been inconvenienced by the building works. However, this project is yet another example of the lack of forward planning. We are playing catch-up. Projects such as metro north, Luas cross-city and the outer orbital route are coming decades too late. We need to grab the bull by the horns now and prioritise these projects to ensure that our citizens have excellent transport links, allowing business, trade and tourism to grow in the coming decades.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: Current transport trends within the greater Dublin area are unsustainable. Congestion is increasing, transport emissions are growing, economic competitiveness is suffering and the quality of life for commuters and inhabitants is declining. To rent a house stretches most people financially and to own a house is beyond the means of most people. On top of this, we are spending more and more time commuting, especially from the outskirts of Dublin. Dublin is a city under severe pressure with no sign of a let-up. It is also evident that this situation will adversely affect any new business looking to set up here, especially in the wake of Brexit. This is a direct result of the lack of foresight of this Government and previous Fianna Fáil Governments. It highlights the lack of joined-up thinking when it comes to transport, especially when the capacity of the Dublin region as a destination for living, visiting, locating to and doing business is being seriously undermined.

There is another threat to the development of the city that is probably the most significant. This threat to the public transport service is the privatisation agenda being driven by the Government and previously by its Fianna Fáil colleagues who put the process in train. Dublin Bus, Bus Éireann and the rail network should be retained in public ownership to allow the people of this country to benefit from increased and enhanced transport infrastructure over the coming years.

Our amendment to this Private Members' motion aims to kick-start the process of planning a city that will match and exceed the projected rise in population in the greater Dublin area, which is expected to grow by 22% to 1.8 million by 2030 and by 26% to 700,000 in the mid-east region alone, including Kildare, Meath and Wicklow. Now is the time to start this process and fast-track the many plans for an increase in infrastructure to provide for the future. Projects such as DART underground, which was put on hold, and metro north should be reintroduced. The consultation for metro north is supposed to start at the end of this year. It should be brought forward. In addition, the Dublin outer orbital route, which was kicked down the road to 2035, should be seriously reconsidered.

In Dublin north west, two major projects would increase capacity: the metro north through Ballymun and the extension of the Luas to Finglas. I also contend that these two lines should be joined up in the future. The benefits for Dublin, our national airport and the surrounding areas are obvious. Thousands of cars will essentially be removed from the roads, improving the environment of Dublin city. Jobs will also be created both during and after construction. The situation we face is we either build the capacity now or will suffer in the future. It is imperative that the Government commitments to these services be fully implemented. The alternative of an increased population and underdeveloped transport infrastructure will strangle the city both socially and economically.

The Minister mentioned the three bus rapid transit routes, which the NTA is considering again, but I hope it will not be at the expense of many areas served by buses. If we mainstream many of these areas and confine things to a few main routes, which seems to be the plan, many areas will be affected, so we need to watch that space very carefully.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: I wish to use the few moments I have to speak in support of the Sinn Féin amendment, particularly the call to extend metro north to Balbriggan. This is not just to alleviate the hardship of commuters, of whom I am one - the trains are rammed daily and it is difficult, if not impossible, to get some space, never mind a seat, when coming into town - but also to improve the chances of the town of Balbriggan and the surrounding areas in terms of tourism and development. We want to see people visiting this beautiful city but we would like them to go to the north of the county as well to explore the many wonderful and beautiful things to do there. However, it is extremely difficult to access areas such as Balbriggan, Skerries, Rush and Lusk. We call on metro north to be fast-tracked because it is desperately needed. The preliminary census figures that show that ours is the fastest-growing population of any constituency in the country support the claim we are making about the extension of metro north. When one talks to people in north county Dublin about metro north, they throw their eyes up to heaven and say it is just like the draining of the Shannon: it gets wheeled out at election time and then gets put back with the mothballs. This is no reflection on the Minister but rather the previous Government and the one before that headed by Fianna Fáil.

I sincerely hope we will see metro north. It is essential not only that it be fast-tracked, but also that the Government give consideration to supporting the Sinn Féin motion. I call on all parties and Independents in the House to support the Sinn Féin motion and consider the extension of metro north up to the north of the county where it is so badly needed.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: The greater Dublin area is being choked by a troika of policy failures. First, we have lopsided, rudderless spatial development, which is over-concentrating economic and population activity in Dublin and at the same time gutting regional Ireland. For example, more people leave County Meath every day to work than actually work in the county. No other county in the country has that experience. The M3 obviously goes both ways, but one direction is congested in the morning and the other side empty, and *vice versa* in the evening-time. We have the shocking situation that there are farms within the M50 yet people travel from Cavan, Leitrim and Wexford to work in Dublin. A big problem with the transport situation is the lopsided spatial plan we have in this country.

Divestment in public transport is forcing people into private transport. The Minister's Government and the previous Government have taken hundreds of millions of euro out of public transport, leaving people only with the opportunity to use private transport. I mentioned infrastructure to the Minister earlier. We have a famine of infrastructural spend in this country, his Government being the second-lowest infrastructural spenders in the EU, second only to Romania. If there is an accident on the M50, which there regularly is, that road and all the feeder motorways into it can be completely like a car park for about two hours. That road is beyond capacity. I talked to him earlier about the Dublin-to-Navan rail line. If the line was in operation, not only would people from County Meath get into the city quicker but approximately 15,000 cars would be removed from the capital's streets. As well as studying the route, a new feasibility study must examine the knock-on effects that opening the Dublin to Navan line would have on the rest of the Dublin network. The line will not open until 2045 at the earliest because the Government does not have a plan to do so.

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The lack of continuous bus lines on all the radial routes into the city is a major problem because it causes buses to get snarled up in city traffic. I hope the Minister will address the absence of an orbital public transport service along the M50. People travelling to destinations in the city must first travel to the city centre before taking another public transport service outwards to their destination in Dublin. If I get to Blanchardstown off the M3 and need to go to Dunshaughlin or Swords, I should be able to take a bus to those destinations. The Minister's predecessor indicated that this type of service would be provided.

Cyclists are the poor relation in transport. I cycle into work every day and I often see mothers and young children on bicycles fighting for space on the north quays with heavy goods vehicles and double-decker buses. A cyclist's life is lost almost monthly on our roads.

There does not appear to be any plan to introduce electric, hybrid or biogas-fuelled buses, local authority fleets or taxis in Dublin. This is unlike cities such as Paris and Mexico, which are examining ways of removing diesel powered vehicles from the city.

I am sick of horizon politics, by which I mean the attitude that everything will be okay some day in the sunny future. I am sure the Minister is also sick of it. We are living with real difficulties now. Horizon politics is not new. A former Fianna Fáil Minister with responsibility for transport, Mr. Noel Dempsey, promised a train service to Navan by 2015 and we still do not have one. I ask the Minister to move beyond horizon politics. Rather than promise a shiny new future some day, he should ensure investment is made now.

Deputy Brendan Ryan: The first line of the motion is spot on. Transport and travel trends in the greater Dublin area are unsustainable. Congestion is increasing and the quality of life for commuters diminishing. One traffic incident on any of the main arteries into Dublin city or on the M50 can result in traffic chaos during rush hour.

The motion is all motherhood and apple pie in so far as it features a little bit of everything that is good - some metro north here, a DART underground there, cycleways, pedestrianisation, park-and-ride projects, the removal of bottlenecks and synchronisation of traffic lights. No one in the Chamber will disagree with any of these measures, all of which enjoy broad support, at least from representatives of the greater Dublin region.

While there is nothing in the motion with which one could disagree, the text hides some classic Fianna Fáil populism that needs to be interrogated a little. Fianna Fáil is positioning itself to be the Government after the next election. For this reason, all the wonderful aims it has set for transport need to match up and be compatible. There is some looseness in the motion regarding buses, however. It calls for an increase in the number of buses "either public or private". Does Fianna Fáil care whether bus services are public or private or does it simply want more buses? Does it seek further tendering of Dublin Bus routes as opposed to the current bare minimum of tendering to comply with European directives? Does it want bus workers to have fair remuneration, pensions and good terms and conditions of employment or does it want the opposite, which is a feature of privatisation?

We have all felt the effect of these Fianna Fáil three-card tricks in the past. It will argue it is in favour of increased and improved public transport, be it Bus Éireann or Dublin Bus, but then includes in a motion a vague, seemingly innocuous call for an increase in all kinds of buses. This call is made three sentences after an acknowledgement of a lack of vision and strategic plan. What is Fianna Fáil's strategic plan for buses? Is it committed to public bus transport,

ensuring the subvention to Dublin Bus is increased and investment made in new buses and the provision of more routes and improved real time passenger information? Unfortunately, in the real world, increasing the frequency of both public and private bus services is not easily achieved and it is worth pointing out that increasing the number of private operators would have a definite negative impact on the sustainability of our public bus networks in Dublin. The Labour Party fought tooth and nail in government to protect our bus services from the worst excesses of the troika programme. Fianna Fail needs to pick a side because it cannot be everyone's friend on this issue. It seems the era of responsible opposition is over and the party is moving back towards its natural position of irresponsible government.

I take issue with the line which refers to a "lack of forward planning for the impact of the Luas Cross City, including the impact of its construction on city trade and mobility". I cannot see any other way the Luas cross-city project could be constructed without causing disruption as it is major infrastructure that cuts through the busiest part of the capital. I commend Luas cross-city on its communication with members of the public throughout the works. The Luas cross city communications office is open and doing a good job in providing a fixed point for any individual or body to interface with Transport Infrastructure Ireland on the project. The website for the project is also very informative and an excellent information campaign has been run on radio keeping us informed of progress and disruption. Let us give credit where it is due.

While Fianna Fáil has introduced a motion that features many laudable aspects, it is lapsing into a regrettable and familiar pattern of pandering to certain stakeholders' bias. In this case, the stakeholder is the chambers of commerce. Large infrastructure projects cannot but have an impact during the construction phase. However, the long-term benefits of this cross-city Luas project will be felt by commuters and traders alike for decades to come. I predict similar noises from city traders when construction work on metro north begins in a few years. This, too, is vital transport infrastructure and we must all be committed to its delivery.

It is complete and utter nonsense for a Fianna Fáil Deputy to suggest the previous Government could have proceeded with the original metro north plan given the state of the public finances when his party left government and given that a bailout programme was in place and the troika was in town. I congratulate my constituency colleague, Deputy Darragh O'Brien, on having the hardest neck in Irish politics.

The National Transport Authority and all other transport stakeholders are doing their best to improve transport in Dublin. Pinch points are being tackled, quality bus corridors continue to improve and traffic lights are being synchronised. I have more to say on this issue but as I am sharing time with my colleague, Deputy Joan Burton, I will conclude.

Deputy Joan Burton: Dublin is a fabulous city but its transport infrastructure is something of a shambles. It is a little like a recovering patient in that while there has been some progress, many things have simply not been done. I will focus on a couple of issues which I raised with the Minister previously. The Minister should not bury everything under the idea of having an underground DART because that project will not be completed for a long time. What he could do is electrify the Sligo line as far as Maynooth to facilitate the DART. Approximately 12,000 houses have been built in the Ongar, Clonee and Hansfield areas in recent years and a special development zone has been in place in the area for more than ten years, although it collapsed when Fianna Fáil ruined the economy. Some 3,000 houses are ready to go in a lovely area in which people will buy and happily settle. However, the train service must be substantially upgraded. A pregnant woman using the Maynooth line will probably be advised by her doctor

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and will most certainly be advised by her mother not to use the service because the trains have become extremely overcrowded again. Extending the DART to Maynooth would be a fairly simple project. It would add lustre to any Minister's legacy to focus on a relatively simple project that feeds in subsequently to the rest of the transport plan. The return to work of large numbers of people has created a major capacity problem on the train service. Almost every train needs two additional carriages to ease overcrowding. This would be a relatively simple and cheap measure that would immeasurably improve commuters' lives.

As I have stated many times, Dublin Bus has made significant improvements in its service in the past decade, despite the financial crisis. The Minister should give up his mistaken policy of seeking to privatise buses. Be it in respect of rural Ireland or Dublin, this policy is wrong. We need a public transport system whose workers are paid well and have good conditions of service. I am biased - I come from a CIE railway family, but the Minister would get the loyalty of people who work well and provide a great service to the public.

We need more capacity on buses. They are packed. Like the Minister, I am a regular bus and Luas user. At times, one would feel like fainting, such is the level of crowding now that people have returned to work. Most capacity on the routes is necessary. While I welcome the Minister's comments, please do not tell me that it will take years and years. Instead of paying down the debt, it would be better if the Government used the €3 billion that it proposes to get from the sale of AIB to invest-----

Deputy John Lahart: Hear, hear.

Deputy Joan Burton: -----in some element of public infrastructure, as we proposed last night. The Minister is well up on financial affairs. He should talk to his colleague, the Minister for Finance, Deputy Noonan, as the idea of throwing €3 billion into paying down debt at a time when we are more than exceeding our debt schedules does not make sense.

We need orbital routes. One cannot travel from Swords to Blanchardstown or from Blanchardstown to Tallaght or places in between using public transport. That needs to be addressed.

The Minister must publish the cost-benefit analysis. Dáil committees, such as the Committee on Budgetary Oversight, cannot get cost-benefit analyses. Given the rural bias of the Government, I fear at times that we will have the DART to Dingle before we have the DART to Maynooth or Skerries, Rush and other places on the north side. A significant amount can be done with relatively small quantities of money to make lasting improvements. Please, let us have green buses as well.

Deputy Robert Troy: There was certainly no rural bias when Deputy Burton was in government.

Deputy Mick Barry: I support the amendment submitted by Solidarity-People Before Profit. We are debating transport in Dublin, but we cannot have such a debate without dealing with the question of the workers who provide that public transport, including those in Bus Éireann who are based at Broadstone or drive buses in and out of Busáras in the capital as well as outside Dublin. Currently, these workers are considering recommendations from the Labour Court. I put it to the Minister that they are being asked to do so with a gun to their heads. A couple of weeks ago, we read in *The Sunday Business Post* that the company's board had indicated that if workers chose to reject the recommendations, it would file for examinership within

a matter of hours. That is blackmail. It is disgraceful and deserves to be exposed. It is not industrial relations - it is thuggery, pure and simple. I want to put that on the record. Without such threats, is it likely that workers would accept what is a poor deal? It means 200 jobs lost as well as pay cuts and a disimprovement in conditions for a not insignificant proportion of the workforce. The powers that be were forced to make some improvements in pensions and to retreat on the scale of the pay cuts that were originally planned. This change only happened because of the strike action waged by workers over the three weeks during which they were out.

The key question about the deal is whether it strengthens or weakens the company in the face of competition from private operators. What happened in Cork last week can be indicative in that regard. The diktat came down from the top that there should be no more than 48 hours worked in any given week. Many people worked a longer week than that, but the change was to take immediate effect. The result, which the workers and experienced union activists had warned about, was the company's inability to operate 17 of its daily services on the Friday of the May bank holiday weekend, including the Waterford route, the Goleen-west Cork route and the city and suburban routes. The policy undermined the company's ability to deliver a service, increased its reliance on private operators and worsened the service to the general public.

This gives us a glimpse of where the deal is leading Bus Éireann. There can be no solutions to the problems at the company without a significant increase in public funding. I am in favour of an investment of more than €9 million, but the latter amount would solve the immediate problems. This comes at a time when the political establishment is prepared to spend more than €10 million on the trials of the Jobstown defendants in the Circuit Court as well as other trials that it has planned.

This is a poor deal from the point of view of the workers and there is blackmail involved. Should the workers choose to vote "No" to the proposals, we will stand by them entirely in applying the necessary political pressure on the Minister, Deputy Ross, and the Government to give public transport the funds that it deserves.

Deputy Bríd Smith: There is a crisis in public transport in Dublin. Mistakes were made time and again by various companies. It is not that long ago that the NTA and Dublin Bus re-configured their routes, yet the situation has not improved significantly. That said, a number of the extended routes work very well.

Investment in CIE has decreased in recent years. For example, investment in Dublin Bus fell from €85.6 million in 2008 to €57.7 million in 2015. Although it increased slightly last year, it is nowhere near pre-2008 levels, which is where it should be going. We are supposed to be in recovery. Instead, investment is continually being undermined. The Government's response is to use the NTA as a shield against responsibility. The Minister stated that traffic congestion in Dublin cost the economy approximately €350 million, which is almost six times the amount of subvention that he is prepared to give Dublin Bus. It does not make sense.

I will remind the Minister of the feelings he expressed about CIE workers in an article back in the day. Regarding cuts at CIE, he wrote:

Not a bad idea as CIE has in recent years been exposed as a swamp of waste and skulduggery. Quangos like CIE and its three subsidiaries - Dublin Bus, Bus Éireann and Iarnród Éireann - are in dire need of efficiencies. There is plenty of fat hidden in the darker corners of these bloated bodies.

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It is eloquent language, but it is clearly angry and directed at CIE's workers.

The NTA's actions have helped to shield the Minister from responsibility in the recent disputes. The various justifications that he and agencies have trotted out have everything to do with EU regulation and competition and nothing to do with a serious attempt to provide a decent transport service in this city despite the fact that, as the Minister knows, Dublin has one of the lowest PSO levels among major European cities. The Minister withdrew several million euro from Dublin Bus when it performed well a few years ago and the competition that the NTA facilitates produces lower pay levels and conditions for workers at every turn. This is what has been at the heart of the Bus Éireann dispute and other disputes in Dublin Bus. The Government is now about to rebrand the NTA and Dublin Bus by painting bus stops and bus shelters and painting buses. Low emissions will be welcome but, on their own, they will not do the business unless we get cars off the road, and we will not get cars off the road until there is a major funding exercise in respect of public transport.

The grand announcement by the NTA is really a cover. It will be very expensive branding exercise and will certainly make the NTA look like it is providing the transport when in fact the three companies are providing it. The NTA constantly says that the conditions and pay of workers are none of its concern but it has no problem awarding contracts to companies which drive down the pay and conditions of other workers.

Those in Fianna Fáil seem to have had another collective case of amnesia because it was their party and the Green Party that began the cuts which led to this chaos and congestion, taking 200 buses from the Dublin Bus fleet back in the day-----

Deputy John Lahart: We built the motorway system and the Luas.

Deputy Bríd Smith: -----and putting more cars on the road by building the motorway system and putting an emphasis on private instead of public transport.

Our motion cuts through the nonsense of Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the Minister, Deputy Ross. It states clearly that we would scrap the NTA and its politically-driven agenda and that public transport would be central to the policy in the years ahead in terms of giving proper subvention, providing facilities for cyclists and treating workers correctly, not least because of climate change and the need that exists for this city to grow and develop. I commend the amendment from Solidarity-People Before Profit, which would completely change the Fianna Fáil motion.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan, who is sharing time with Deputy Broughan.

Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan: The motion before us is interesting and there is a lot to support in it, as, indeed, there are aspects of the amendments that are worthy of support also. We hear about a traffic management plan for Dublin but, unfortunately, we often see the absence of traffic management. When there is a problem, I fail to understand why we cannot prevent it from worsening by diverting traffic when it is possible to do so instead of allowing that problem to be exacerbated.

I note the term "lack of vision" but I do not think it is confined to this Government only as previous Governments have also shown a lack of vision. I believe we see that in regard to the Luas. We had all of the disruption with the first Luas and we then went into years of disruption

with the second Luas. Now, we are into more disruption while joining them up. Forward thinking and a vision for the future would have prevented that.

There have been a number of extensions, junction upgrades and widenings on the M50 over the years but there are times that this busiest road in the country is not fit for purpose. What is happening is that motorists are avoiding the M50 instead of it being used for the purpose for which it was intended, namely, as a ring road to pass around Dublin. Now, however, it is very much a commuter road linking the suburbs. I have previously asked the Minister questions about the need for an outer ring road.

Dublin Airport is the sixth busiest airport in Europe. Many cities in Europe have rail links to the city centre. I would make the point that we have excellent Aircoach cover and excellent bus services to the airport, as well as taxis, and I believe they are serving passengers very well. I think an opportunity was lost when the port tunnel was being developed in that there could have been a rail link with it. I want to acknowledge the service provided by Dublin Bus, particularly the cross-city service.

I would also like to mention the plans for the pedestrian plaza. I like pedestrian plazas but I am not too sure about this one around Trinity College, in particular when one wants to drive from the northside on O'Connell Street over to the southside. There have been elements of an anti-car agenda. What I saw in another city was that Sunday is traffic-free in the city centre and I would suggest that.

While I am all for people slowing down, the 30 km/h limit can be very difficult at times and, of course, it is not going to be of any use unless it is enforced. What will happen is that some people will obey the 30 km/h limit and they will be passed out by other motorists who are not obeying. I also wonder if it applies to cyclists because I have been doing 30 km/h and I have been overtaken by cyclists at times.

With regard to the commuter belt in neighbouring counties, there has to be realistic investment in rail and road transport. When we visit other cities and see their public transport, we find it is efficient and regular so people know it is coming, and it is also not costly. That is what encourages people to use it.

I want to make one special plea regarding the canals. We always talk about walking and cycling along the canals but we are not looking at actually using them as a method of transport.

To conclude, while I am not being parochial, I think we need to look again at Dublin, where there is a need for a different advisory council for the city. It is the capital and has the biggest population and I believe we have to look at it in a wider context, with more joined-up thinking.

An Ceann Comhairle: I think we had better look out for the cyclists in Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan's area. I call Deputy Broughan.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: It is highly ironic that it is Fianna Fáil which is tabling the Dublin transport motion before us. It was that party and its current Fine Gael partners in government which starved the Dublin region of transport and other key infrastructure over the past five decades. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, for example, the proposed light rail system included a northside Ballymun-Dublin Airport line but the Ahern Government scrapped the northside proposal and went ahead with the minimum red and green lines. Now, three decades later, we are still talking about metro north and the Minister for Public Expenditure and Re-

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form, Deputy Donohoe, has again put it on the long finger until 2026 or whenever. I want to commend Fingal County Council chief executive, Paul Reid, and his staff on highlighting the issue and protecting the metro north economic corridor up to Swords and Lissenhall. With the huge population growth in the north fringe and Swords, and with the airport heading towards 30 million passengers *per annum*, it is not a question of whether metro north can be fast-tracked; it must be fast-tracked. It is also disappointing that a completion date for the metro light rail could not have been targeted for, say, 2022, the anniversary of national independence and in time for the possibility of the Rugby World Cup being hosted here. In fact, it could have been part of the package that Dick Spring and his committee were offering to the other rugby federations. Instead, the NTA talks of yet more consultations whereas Spain and other EU partners have many examples of metro and light rail systems being built in three to five years.

At a meeting of the Committee on Budgetary Oversight yesterday, during our review of the capital programme, we again heard of the desperately low levels of investment in Ireland, this time from the Dublin Chamber of Commerce. The austerity Governments since 2008 have allowed investment to fall below minimum depreciation levels and Ireland had the lowest gross fixed capital formation in the EU at less than 2% in 2015. The current Government's programme down to 2021 is a feeble attempt to remedy this and the funding available needs to be doubled, especially in the areas of social housing and transport. I thoroughly agree with the Dublin chamber that metro north and DART underground projects should be prioritised in the next five years. The commuter train networks in the west of Dublin city should also be urgently transformed into DART services. The subsuming of the Railway Procurement Agency into the NTA was a grave mistake by the last Government and I was very disappointed to learn from the railway procurement section of the NTA recently that none of the fixed rail projects to which I refer are shovel-ready despite the millions of euro - perhaps €60 million - that have already been spent on planning metro north.

Obviously, the network direct system introduced by Dublin Bus in the past decade has transformed the structure of bus transport in the city and Dublin Bus staff must be complimented on the great efficiencies they have produced. However, further massive investment is clearly necessary in the bus network, especially to facilitate orbital travel around the city region. While a well-developed fixed line rail system for Dublin is critical, the bus network will continue to be the workhorse of public transport.

The number of people cycling to work at the end of 2016 was almost the same as the number carried by the Luas lines and, of course, many more commuters use the Dublin bikes scheme. Nonetheless, I note the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport has still not undertaken a formal review of the implementation of the national cycle policy framework and, hopefully, this will be carried out later in the year. I and colleagues on Dublin City Council in the early 1990s promoted a city-wide cycling network but it has again taken decades to develop this and to expedite measures for pedestrian safety. I also proposed Dutch-style home zones, with 25 mph speed limits for residential areas in the mid-1990s.

While I welcome the completion of the Sutton to Sandycove cycleway in my constituency, Dublin Bay North, I have received many complaints from constituents that the new James Larkin Road is dangerous on road safety grounds because it is so narrow and no lane has been provided for public transport and emergency vehicles. Constituents believe the original 2008 plan should have been constructed with a public transport lane and the safe cycleway beside it.

Last year, I made a generally positive submission on the proposed College Green plaza.

However, many workers have complained that this and other current plans for the Dublin quays emanating from the traffic department of Dublin City Council do not recognise the need for well-structured north-south arteries across Dublin for necessary motor traffic. Most of Dublin city lies north of the Liffey and the current city manager forgets that 65% to 70% of his administrative area is actually located on the northside. City planners have continued to approve large-scale office and other workplace developments in Dublin 2 and Dublin 4. That approach requires, alongside increased facilities for pedestrians and cyclists and greatly enhanced public transport, the maintenance of a core network of cross-city street linkages. Indeed, the recent plans for the city quays also fall into that category because it would inevitably have deflected a lot of east-west traffic into the suburbs of Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan's constituency, which is unacceptable.

Finally, last week Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham and Bristol elected their first mayors and received some reasonable autonomy from London. The Dublin region, more than ever, needs an elected mayor to fight for necessary transport and other infrastructure for our capital city. In fact, it was the Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael parties on Fingal County Council which prevented us from having a referendum on the mayoralty of Dublin. We need a mayor. We need somebody to fight for Dublin. Manchester and London have mayors. We have seen the success of the London mayor, the Paris mayor, the New York mayor, etc. We need a Dublin mayor as well to move forward on transport and not to be relying on Governments that are dominated by Members who do not really care about Dublin.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: I compliment and thank Deputy Troy and the Fianna Fáil Party on bringing this motion before Members this evening.

The Minister and the Minister of State might ask why am I talking about issues in Dublin. A pile of people from Kerry work in Dublin. Kerry people, myself included, travel here on business and for different reasons. I have seen a lot of changes over the past number of years when it comes to transport in Dublin city and in the short time that I have, I want to ask Deputy Troy and Fianna Fáil to show an amount of interest in the rest of the country that is equal to their interest in Dublin. They will do that because we have other transport-related problems. For instance, in my native county, we have problems with access and different issues but I will talk about that in a moment. I merely want to thank Deputy Troy for bringing this issue to a head here tonight because it is terribly important.

I want to compliment a very important group of people, that is, those who provide our public transport service here in Dublin. I refer to those who drive the buses, the trams and the DART. All these different modes of access are terribly important. The staff work really diligently, sometimes in difficult circumstances, and I compliment them on that.

A short number of years ago, when coming from Kerry one did not get choked up until one hit the Red Cow roundabout but it has become so bad that now one is below in Naas when the traffic starts to get backed up. Something has to be done, whether it is trying to encourage motorists to use public transport or trying to get them to take out the bicycle. We all have our bikes which we use in the best way we can. We have to really knuckle down to this problem because, if one reads the statistics, the population in the greater Dublin area is expected to grow by 22% to 1.8 million by 2030 and by 26% to 700,000 in the mid-east region alone, including Kildare, Meath and Wicklow. This will lead to a chaotic situation. I call on the Minister and the Minister of State, and on the Government, as Fianna Fáil is doing, to put measures in place now that will act in a progressive and workmanlike way to deal with the problem because the

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Minister and Minister of State are in charge and it is up to them at this time to put measures in place to ensure we will be able to cater for this great amount of people.

While I again thank Deputy Troy, coming back to the rest of the country I ask that it does not all happen inside the Red Cow roundabout. I accept the population is increasing in Dublin but we want to see our part of the country, rural Ireland, and our areas progress and grow and be attractive for employers and to be attractive for those who want to invest. That will not happen unless we have proper road networks and proper access and unless our towns are not choked, because that is the case at present where I am from. We lack parking and bypasses and are looking for our share of the investment. I do not want to see it all happen in Dublin. Quite simply, the world does not revolve around Dublin.

I very much support Deputy Troy in what he is doing here tonight and thank him for bringing the motion before the House. I call on the Minister and Minister of State to ensure that they will act accordingly and ensure that the people will not be completely choked up in another couple of years' time. It has changed so much in the past five or six years. It has got so busy it is literally chaos trying to move around Dublin city at present. I ask them to try to do something about it.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I, too, am happy to speak on this motion tonight.

I note that the motion recognises that transport and travel needs within the greater Dublin area are unsustainable - we heard that a long time ago - and that "congestion is increasing, transport emissions are growing, economic competitiveness is suffering and quality of life for commuters and inhabitants is declining". I had to look at the motion twice to ensure they were not talking about rural Ireland. I note it also states "the capacity of the Dublin region as a destination for living, visiting and for locating and doing business is being seriously undermined", and "that significant actions are required to increase capacity and usability of public transport". While I am completely supportive of the needs of the Dublin population and have no desire to engage in a game of rural versus urban Ireland, I have serious concerns about the overall thrust of this motion and will not be supporting it. My fear is that we will end up compounding an already disproportionate focus on the capital. We need a National Transport Authority that takes into account the dire needs of the regions to develop better transport infrastructure. If we want to get another authority or, as I call such a body, a quango which prioritises Dublin, which so many already do in a de facto manner, then where will we be in ten years' time? It is like a monster gobbling up all before it. I simply do not believe that the capital and the transport infrastructure associated with it are in need of superior levels of support. They have got all the support. They have got all the investment including everything from the DART to the Luas, the buses and whatever.

We need to develop the regions. We need to stop the swallowing up of rural Ireland and the draining away of industry and employment from the regions. I met the head man of the IDA in Washington on the eve of St. Patrick's Day and he told me that not only do companies coming to Ireland not want to go to Tipperary where we want jobs, they will not even go to Galway, Limerick or Waterford. Everything is about Dublin and successive Governments have created that. I certainly am not supporting the motion. I am not begrudging anything that they have here, but I cannot walk home to night but I will be hounded by taxis to hop in. If I ordered a taxi in Tipperary, I would not get one tonight - not a hope. I would not get one in the towns. Maybe one would get one at the weekends. One will not get a taxi. It is totally unfair and totally imbalanced.

Quality of life, quite frankly, is not good in Dublin because of the pressure, the traffic, the emissions and everything else. I honestly believe we need to achieve some progress. There are too many authorities. One would know Dublin Port authority, by its name, is there for years. It is quango-land and they all are compounded in the public service commission, below where the Luas line is, where they control every appointment to every board, every club and nearly every dog race. They want to keep control of it. That is the way it is. That is the way many officials in the Department are too.

I welcome the fact that the Minister's first visit outside of Dublin when he was appointed was to Tipperary.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: He came to Kerry too.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: He did. He came to Kerry as well. It was very important that a lot of the officials were down with the Minister and understand. We need a spur road now to come from the N24 at Cahir, off the M8 motorway, right up to Limerick and we cannot have it all on the western corridor.

We need investment. We have a proud population that can work. We have people with all kinds of skill sets who can do any work. We have a lot of foreign direct investment, which is happy with us in Tipperary, but it cannot all be about Dublin.

Deputy John Lahart: It is not all about Dublin.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: It is all about Dublin.

Deputy John Lahart: No, it is not.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: All about Dublin, every way we turn, not only in here but in the system. It has gobbled it up now. It has cannibalised itself. It is Dublin, Dublin, Dublin, Dublin, and who are we from outside in the country to complain? We hit the Naas junction for the-----

Deputy Robert Troy: Why does the Deputy stay here?

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Was not Deputy Troy's party in government?

Deputy Robert Troy: It was.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I did not interrupt Deputy Troy. The Deputy is entitled to put down his motion. I have no problem with that. That is his right. I am not supporting it. I am surprised at a man from the back end of Mullingar to be giving everything to Dublin.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: If the Deputy does not wish to speak through the Chair, he will have to go elsewhere.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Of course I will. I understand that. I am meeting Donie Cassidy in the bar while I have my supper. I must get this man back on track because he is getting a bit out of hand going off after Dublin and abandoning rural Ireland. We need jobs in rural Ireland. We need development in rural Ireland. We need infrastructure in rural Ireland. We are not begging for anything. We are entitled to get a fair bang for our buck. We pay taxes too. We work. We pay road taxes and everything else. It is not right to have it all in Dublin. There is a total imbalance. I did not go into government but I am supporting the Government on this one.

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Deputy Declan Breathnach: It is a long way to Tipperary.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: You will not be able to find it if you keep going the way you are.

Deputy John Lahart: There will be a grant announcement for Tipperary shortly.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: I wish to share time with Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice. I will take approximately six and a half minutes.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Seven minutes and two minutes. Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: It is worth going back to the early 1990s to consider when the Dublin Transportation Initiative, DTI, was put in place. I was a member of one of several consultative panels. The purpose of the DTI was to deal with traffic congestion in the capital and European funds were available for initiatives to deal with it. The case was very strongly made by Ireland at the time because Dublin was underperforming due to congestion. There were traffic delays, loss of productivity, increased accident rates, increased insurance costs and people's time wasted, among other issues. If anything, that case has got more extreme and it will not improve until key projects are in place and more people live in the city centre itself. The DTI reported in 1996 and set out what should be done. Not only did the report identify projects such as the DART underground, the Luas, metro north, a doubling of the Maynooth rail line and many other initiatives but it tested those pieces of infrastructure against population scenarios. The preferred scenario at the time was that there would be a population increase in the city centre and that was to be achieved through higher densities. Other growth scenarios were tested, including the do-nothing scenario, or leave it to the markets. The latter is pretty much what occurred. Fianna Fáil was in government for most of those years. It was all very well having a plan but when the plan did not match the growth scenarios, it was a mismatch. It is important to say that.

The very big projects include the DART underground that would connect the main rail lines and which has been described as a game-changer with the potential to treble rail capacity in the greater Dublin area to 100 million journeys per annum. All these years later, this project is still, largely, at the planning stage and the same is true of metro north.

It is well worth looking at the population changes between 1996 and 2016 in percentage terms. The Dublin Transportation Initiative had a 20-year horizon and it concluded in 1995 to 1996. It showed in graphic terms why we face such significant congestion. Over those 20 years Dublin city grew by just 13%; Dún Laoghaire grew by 13%; South Dublin grew by 22%; Fingal by 43%; Kildare by 39%; Meath by 44% and Wicklow by 28%. More people now live in the three counties of Kildare, Meath and Wicklow than live in Dublin city centre. That is what is called a doughnut. It is a typical American city that is car-dependent. We have created a perfect doughnut. While the DTI linked land use and planning when testing scenarios, clearly the city must be an attractive place for people to live, and that includes for families as well as individuals. One must look at apartment size, quality open spaces, good levels of security, investment in schools and good places to work.

One could ask what is occurring now and whether anything has changed. The growth experienced in the commuter counties is increasing. For example, Kildare is currently working through local area plans that include the development of 32,000 housing units up to 2023. If one assumes 2.5 people per housing unit, that is 80,000 extra people up to 2023. We are reinforcing the doughnut, which is absolute madness. The trend will add to the commuting demands and

the national primary route will become a distributor route for the outer counties. The same is occurring in Meath and Wicklow as is occurring in Kildare. What occurs in doughnut-type cities is a demand for increased road capacity, calls for roads to be widened and new roads to be built. In that way one copperfastens the problem.

While we agree with Fianna Fáil on the need for capital investment, we believe it is short-sighted not to invest in capital projects in order to pay down the debt where they make absolute sense, which is the case with some of the projects outlined. In fact, we are convinced it will cost us more in the long run. We have climate obligations that will result in us paying hard cash when we should be investing that money in this hard infrastructure at this stage. We need to look at cities such as London that had the foresight in Victorian times to put in an underground, which has stood the test of time. There are plenty of other such examples.

Not only do we have a significant problem with congestion but we also have the climate obligations. We need more houses and apartments. However, let us not be so short-sighted that we resolve one problem and make another problem worse. Where the housing units are located is critically important. While an advisory council is useful it will not resolve the problem. It will take time to deliver big projects such as the DART underground and metro north and in the meantime interim solutions must be found to deal with the problem. We cannot separate land use from transportation planning. What we are doing at the moment is making a bad situation worse in terms of what is going on with the regional guidelines and I caution against that.

Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this motion. There is no doubt Dublin needs infrastructure but so does the rest of the country. I heard an earlier speaker say the population of Dublin is growing and this and that is happening. The reason the pressure exists is that more pressure will develop in one area when there is imbalanced regional development. I am surprised at the lack of emphasis in the motion on rural Ireland. I did not think Fianna Fáil was concentrating on one part of the country.

I remember when the M50 was built and the rest of the country got its potholes filled. An outer ring road in Galway was objected to for planning reasons. The N59 was also objected to for planning reasons. The Cork to Mallow road was not done when the country was awash with money. That has left a deficit of infrastructure around the country and that has caused major problems.

Perhaps the Minister will find a map of Ireland on Google and see that when one crosses the Shannon, there is a place called the west of Ireland. Money has not been invested in the N4 road. The same is true of the N5. We know the problems in Galway city, where the situation is worse than Dublin because of the rigmarole with regulations and rules. We have seen what has happened in Cork, Limerick and Sligo. Let us go around the country. Those places count. They matter but, unfortunately, 80% of the staff in the Department live and work around Dublin and they do not realise the rest of the country exists. If the Minister does one thing I urge him to move the Department to a rural area because where one works and where one drives from is what will change one's mind about the various problems.

In the programme for Government it is stated that the western rail corridor would be considered. Has that been done? No. There is also a reference in the programme for Government that funding would be provided for the N4, N5 and other roads. One year later no funding has been provided. The issue that was considered the most urgent was to get TEN-T funding for the west, and that was taken out in 2011 by the previous Government. I see the Minister of

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State, Deputy O'Donovan, is in the Chamber. I hope he will make an input and try to deliver for rural Ireland, for example, in terms of TEN-T funding, because it is crucial for the west to make sure there is balanced regional development. When one looks at the rate of spending in Departments, rural Ireland needs to get €2 out of every €3 but that is not happening. A person could have their thumb out all day for a bus or train but they would need binoculars to see them coming. That is the reality of what is happening rural areas. Dublin does matter but the rest of the country matters as well.

Deputy Pat Casey: I welcome this debate on the motion tabled by my colleague, Deputy Lahart, which aims to address the problem of transport gridlock that exists in the greater Dublin region. As a Wicklow Deputy, I want to put on record the fact that part of this congestion is because 70% of Wicklow's workers are leaving the county every day to work mostly in Dublin. This situation is unsustainable, not just from a transport perspective but also from a social perspective and from the point of view of people's well-being. The obvious answer that would be of benefit to Dublin's transport problem is more sustainable jobs based in County Wicklow. No one in Wicklow or east Carlow would disagree that commuting to Dublin has increasingly become a nightmare. This puts extra pressure on our residents. Transport Infrastructure Ireland has confirmed that Wicklow has the worst traffic congestion in the commuter belt. In north Wicklow large numbers of commuters are trying and failing to access rail services. A lack of rail capacity is forcing people to use the N11 and this further contributes to gridlock. It was disappointing that, under the most recent transport plan for the greater Dublin area, the Luas line was not extended to Bray. That formerly proposed route needs to be put back in the plan. Additional park-and-ride facilities would also be required in Bray, Greystones, Wicklow and Arklow.

Traffic management on the N11 is often non-existent, thus creating gridlock every morning as commuters make their way to work. The smallest drop of rain or a minor traffic accident can result in hours being lost as vehicles are backed up as far as Newtownmountkennedy. A major upgrade of the N11 is vital for north Wicklow with improved access on all junctions that merge with the M50. The N81 in west Wicklow is also a crucial arterial route into Dublin for many people in Wicklow, Carlow and Kildare. It needs to be upgraded urgently to tackle notorious bottlenecks in Hollywood, Blessington, and Brittas. The people of Wicklow and east Carlow need a transport plan, with specific timed actions that are managed with a view to regional growth and sustainability. I urge the Minister and the Government to start resolving these problems rather than just observing them.

Deputy Shane Cassells: I am delighted to have a chance to participate in this debate and support my colleague Deputy Lahart's motion. A special emphasis and focus on Dublin city has been lost in much of the debate here. In the past 20 years, a lot of good has been done in terms of investment in Dublin, including by the Government led by the former Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern. Deputy Broughan likes to be disrespectful about it and so does Deputy Bríd Smith. Perhaps Deputy Broughan has not travelled outside Dublin in recent years following the expansive transportation plans that were put in place by former Ministers such as Séamus Brennan, Martin Cullen and Noel Dempsey.

In the same way that Deputy Bríd Smith thinks magical fairy dust will build all the houses that are needed in the country, it is the same thing when it comes to public transport from Solidarity-People Before Profit - the "M&Ms party", "Skittles party" or whatever they are calling themselves this week.

This historic city looks exceptionally well today in the resplendent sunshine, but the choked traffic arteries detract from that image. They block the city centre and main access roads, including the M1, N2 and N3. Transportation around the Dublin region impacts on all citizens, including in my constituency in County Meath. I have raised the Navan-Dublin train line with the Minister, Deputy Ross.

Dublin city is under pressure as a result of the number of commuters with which it must deal each day. Some 60% of people living in Meath are working outside the county. We need to invest in heavy infrastructure, such as the Navan rail link, so that we can help Dublin to grow and help our own county as well. The Minister of State should work with the Minister to ensure that the second phase of the Dublin-Navan rail line is progressed beyond the existing plans.

Deputy Frank O'Rourke: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this motion and I commend Deputy Lahart on bringing it forward to the Dublin Transport Authority's advisory council. Kildare is a commuter county and I am a Deputy for Kildare North. A recent article in the *Leinster Leader* referred to the area as "a bed for the night" because at peak times on most weekday mornings, traffic is tailed back from Heuston Station to the Leixlip, Maynooth, Celbridge and Kilcock interchanges. That is something that needs to be changed. We should consider increased capital investment under two headings, namely, public transport and infrastructure.

Since being elected to the Dáil, I have consistently pressed for better public transport services. To this end, I have met various stakeholders, including Bus Éireann, Dublin Bus and the National Transport Authority. We need additional bus and train services, as well as extra park-and-ride facilities. We also need to examine the inclusion of a rapid public transport service which is not currently there. That would obviously assist greatly in getting people from A to B. We should also look at improved infrastructure, such as a road linking the M4 to the M7. Currently, 5% of vehicles that come onto the M50 after the M1 only follow it through to the airport interchange. That is a significant statistic, so we also need to consider an outer ring road.

Traffic congestion is causing major problems for the environment and for public health, including stress. It also reduces the impact people are having in carrying out their daily work. Commuters from North Kildare to Dublin are currently spending four hours in their vehicles per day. We need to deal with this as a matter of urgency.

Deputy Declan Breathnach: When one hits the outskirts of Dublin on the M1 at 6 a.m., it is clear that the queues of commuters trying to access work in the city grow longer every day. The mixture of container freight is causing untold delays for those trying to get to work and school. Dundalk to Dublin off-peak can be achieved in one hour, but at rush hour it can take two and a half hours. That often means that people spend more time travelling than working. This morning one of my staff said that the bus she was on reached Bachelors Walk at 9.20 a.m. but did not arrive in Nassau Street until 9.45 a.m. That is a mere 750 m that could be walked in ten minutes, yet it took 25 minutes for the bus to travel the distance.

The level of gridlock that commuters to and from Dublin must endure daily is unacceptable. I use the M1 every day and know that a number of simple, short-term solutions could be implemented straight away in order to alleviate traffic on the main arterial roads into the city. For example, proper car-parking areas could be introduced to encourage more car pooling and park and ride facilities. I am sure we have all seen lines of cars parked close to roundabouts at entry points, particularly to the M1. Car parking should have been, and can be, included at the Apple Green stations that are readily placed at strategic locations along the motorway. While

the port tunnel works well by taking trucks off the road and straight to their destination, there are major back-ups of trucks on the M1 heading towards the port tunnel. This is at rush hour and thus causes delays. I suggest that sea ferries should operate outside rush hour times. The current departure time of one ferry is 9.30 a.m. and this adds to our gridlock on our roads. We need some form of incentive to get trucks to switch from off-peak times, perhaps allowing them to pass through the various tolls free prior to 6 a.m. We could also stagger school opening times and introduce a range of other short-term measures. I could go on *ad infinitum* about simple measures, rather than macro ones, but I will allow Deputy Donnelly to come in.

Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly: I welcome Deputy Lahart's motion and congratulate him on seeking action in respect of the increasing traffic congestion in Dublin and surrounding counties. In Wicklow the situation is now extreme. Some 70% of the working population leave the county to go to work. As my colleague Deputy Casey said one solution to that is more local jobs. In the meantime, however, something has to be done about the increase in congestion that we are witnessing. The vast majority of those leaving County Wicklow are travelling to Dublin. Whether they are travelling from the east or west of County Wicklow, they just see more and more congestion on a monthly basis.

This is not primarily a planning issue, which is important, but rather it relates to a lack of implementation. Despite numerous promises, Wicklow commuters see no relief on the horizon. The new public transport links are strained to breaking point.

The long-promised extension to the Luas has been kicked so far down the line that it is now probably decades off. Increased capacity for rail is obviously not possible without serious capital investment. The Bus Éireann services, such as the 133, and the Dublin Bus services, such as the 84X, are now regularly filled beyond capacity so people have to use private transport. This, as we know, is coming under huge pressure too. A recent Transport Infrastructure Ireland report indicates that a third lane is needed for the M11 around the Greystones and Bray area, and yet, as the Minister pointed out to me a number of months ago, no funding has been allocated and no funding will be allocated without a review. It is well known that the Minister of State and the Minister, Deputy Ross, work hand in glove together, so I ask him to relay to the Minister that the reviews have now been completed and we would like to see some serious action in terms of capital investment for commuters in Wicklow.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I have a slight problem. There are 14 minutes left and there are two ten minute slots on the order of the House. I have no discretion, but can we come to an accommodation? Does the Minister of State need ten minutes?

Deputy Patrick O'Donovan: I probably do not a Leas-Cheann Comhairle.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Hopefully his speech will last five or six minutes.

Deputy Patrick O'Donovan: Will we divide the time into seven minutes each?

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: The Minister of State could have taken some of the time of the Minister, Deputy Ross, earlier.

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): At the outset I will start by thanking the contributors to the motion. I particularly thank the rural Deputies who spoke. This is not an either-or situation, as many of them pointed out. It is both rural and urban. As the Minister, Deputy Ross, said earlier, there is no magic

bullet for congestion but there is a drive and a determination in Government to respond to the issue. While there are differences of opinion across the House, what we have in common is a commitment to a quality public transport system for the greater Dublin region and a willingness to respond to the challenges posed by increasing congestion.

Transport is an area that impacts on all our lives. Therefore it is important to build consensus regarding how we approach the difficulty. The first step in building consensus is to have a shared understanding politically of what the priorities and objectives should be in terms of tackling congestion in Dublin. Today's discussion has been informative in this regard.

From our perspective, there are a few key issues at the heart of this debate. We cannot discuss transport in Dublin without referring to the availability of funding. While there is common ground, we must bring an element of political realism to the debate regarding the resources available from the Exchequer and how the public transport can be financed. We must accept that the Exchequer does not have limitless resources to fund transport projects or indeed any other infrastructure projects. That does not mean that we jump into public private partnership, PPP, arrangements without understanding the true implications for future capital budgets. It means the projects and programmes we select must be the right ones at the right time. PPPs may have a role in delivering additional transport infrastructure, but we have to be strategic about using them to ensure we properly understand their future implications.

In the interests of moving towards a common consensus today, the House should acknowledge that significant investment has already been made in public transport in the greater Dublin region and that the range and quality of the public transport services has undoubtedly benefited from this investment. Funding continues to be allocated to the National Transport Authority, NTA, to promote public transport use and to improve customer experiences through the use of smart technology. Successful initiatives that have been introduced include the Leap card, real time passenger information and journey planning apps. As regards infrastructure, the Minister, Deputy Ross, noted earlier the Luas cross city and the Phoenix Park tunnel are two important projects which will add capacity to the transport system in the greater Dublin region.

A total of €3.6 billion has been allocated in the capital plan for public transport projects. This will enable a number of Dublin-based projects to be completed or to proceed, including Luas cross city and metro north. There is €800 million allocated in the capital plan for bus measures. These include fleet replacement and enlargement programmes for Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann, bus network infrastructure development and bus rapid transit programmes in the greater Dublin area. Projects funded under the capital plan will fund additional capacity to help meet existing and future commuter needs.

I fully accept that projects funded under the capital plan will not solve the congestion problem facing Dublin in isolation. However, combined with quick win projects already funded such as the Phoenix Park tunnel, additional bus fleet and infrastructure and small-scale interventions on the M50, we can at least acknowledge that they will go some way towards meeting the existing and future levels of transport demand in the region. The delivery of these projects on the ground helps to create momentum and allows the travelling public to see the benefits of the correct types of investment and the correct approach. I echo what the Minister, Deputy Ross, said earlier regarding the need for a step change in the public transport system across the greater Dublin region to tackle congestion and increasing levels of demand. This requires a corresponding change in funding.

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Another issue at the heart of the debate is the long-term strategy and vision for public transport in the Dublin region. I mentioned at the start of my speech that to build consensus, we should have a shared understanding of the priorities and objectives for transport in Dublin. I assure the House that there is a long-term vision for transport in the Dublin region. The NTA's transport strategy, which was adopted last year, sets out a clear vision and a statutory basis for transport planning in the region. Given the planning and design requirements as well as the very significant capital investment requirements, it will not be possible to deliver many of the large-scale projects set out in the transport strategy in the short to medium term, notwithstanding the long-term merits of these projects. We must be realistic, therefore, about how we can effectively tackle congestion in the near term.

We must look to the bus network in the short to medium term to deliver the step change in the performance required of our public transport system to cater for growing demand. The bus-centred initiative to be launched by the NTA at the end of this month will seek to transform the bus system in the Dublin region within the overall framework of the long-term transport strategy for the region. The initiative will capitalise on the role of the bus as the cornerstone of the public transport system in the Dublin region. A shared understanding of what is proposed is as important for the public as it is for this House. Like the Minister, I will be urging members of the public to get involved in the consultation process for the proposed transformation of the bus system in Dublin. Fundamentally, the initiative will result in a revamped bus system that will deliver faster journeys, with more certainty of arrival times; deliver a high quality of service which is punctual and reliable; provide an attractive alternative to many existing car users; provide passengers with more journey options; and allow for the transition to use of low emission vehicles.

This is the vision for Dublin that we should be working towards for the short to medium term. The NTA's transport strategy sets out the priorities and objectives for the long term, but an incremental approach is needed to reach our long-term objectives. A transformative programme of investment in the bus system in Dublin provides the best chance to tackle growing congestion now before it significantly impacts on the future economic recovery of the area.

I thank the Deputies in the House for raising this important issue and contributing to our shared understanding of the issues around the Dublin region. It has been a worthwhile debate that has brought a number of important issues to the fore, particularly in relation to the cost of congestion, growing evidence of increasing levels of congestion, funding availability, projects that have already been planned and those that are under way, and the imminent launch of the NTA's bus transformation initiative. I will be following and supporting the roll-out of the bus transformation initiative with interest. There is potential to adopt a similar approach in other cities, especially the regional centres referred to earlier where the growth in travel demand is becoming an increasing problem. We must start in Dublin where the need to address congestion is most acute. The counter-motion is a fair statement of Government's position. We have established a way forward to respond to the congestion issue. It is now time to get on with the task in hand.

Before I commend the counter-motion to the House I would like to say that many of the problems we are facing in terms of congestion are direct results of the economic recovery in the State, which is leading to problems. As commuters, I and other Deputies coming from rural constituencies have experienced these problems. None of us is saying the issues in Dublin do not need to be addressed. What I am saying is along the lines of what Deputies McGrath and Healy-Rae have said, that this is not an either-or situation. We have to take a whole-island ap-

proach to this. While Dublin is the capital city, it is no less or more important than any of the other centres throughout the country.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I thank the Minister of State for his co-operation. There are seven minutes left which are to be divided into two one and a half minute sections and a four minute section.

Deputy James Browne: As a Wexford Deputy representing a county with a significant number of commuters who use the N11-M11 every day to get to and from Dublin, I am all too aware of the difficulties these commuters face. Commuting impacts commuters' mental health, their family life, their social life and their economic well-being. People are stuck in traffic when they should be at home with their families or in work. I welcome the acknowledgment this week that a third lane is badly needed on the N11-M11 roadway to tackle increased traffic congestion, as reported by TII this week. It was a long-awaited report.

The Government is failing Wexford in its job strategy, leaving the county with one of the highest rates of unemployment and forcing people to commute to Dublin for work. The Government is failing in its housing strategy in Dublin, forcing people to leave Dublin to come to counties like Wexford to seek housing, thus adding to the commuting problem. The Government is failing in its transport policy by not having one.

Some 80% of our goods are exported across the Continent of Europe via the UK land bridge. These include perishable goods such as pharmaceuticals, agrifood and livestock. These sectors are vital to our economic well-being. When a hard Brexit happens, that land bridge will be gone. We have to find another way to get our 80% of goods to the Continent, particularly those perishable goods. The only suitable alternative route is through Rosslare Europort, yet the Minister continues to fail to publish the Indecon report and refuses to set out a pathway for Rosslare Europort. Despite all these issues, the Minister is also prepared to stand by while CIE threatens to close the Dublin-Rosslare Europe service south of Gorey. In the interests of commuters, regional balance relating to areas like Wexford and our economy post Brexit, I ask the Minister to bring forward a proper infrastructural plan.

Deputy James Lawless: I represent north Kildare, which along with the rest of Kildare and counties Louth, Wicklow and Meath, is said to be the commuter belt. Someone said that Naas in Kildare is the buckle on that belt. It is pretty much the centre of the commuter belt with huge numbers from the county travelling to Dublin daily for work and most of the country passing through the N4 and N7 to get to Dublin so it is very much steeped in commuting and private and public transport. It is estimated that between 60,000 to 80,000 vehicles travel the N7 daily along with commuters coming in from Sallins, Celbridge, Leixlip, Maynooth and Kilcock train stations and those travelling on buses from Prosperous, Clane and Naas along with private transport along the N4 and N7.

As has been already said, what is lacking is a big picture - a vision. We do not have a transport policy, as Deputy Browne noted. A 30-year transport strategy was published as the Government took office. There was barely a hint in it of any kind of connectivity in respect of projects like the interconnector, metro north, metro west or the outer orbital route for the M50. There is no joining of the dots. We have multiple routes. If people want to get into the city centre and back out again, they can do it - albeit very tortuously and slowly - making their way through traffic jams. If they need to go from A to B and up to C, it is far more difficult. We need to put in place a basic transport infrastructure of the kind that every other capital city

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of its type in the world has. We are lacking in it. The Fianna Fáil plan was mentioned earlier. This plan, which was called Transport 21, was actually a fine plan. If we could revisit it now, we would be well served. I urge the Minister to take this motion seriously and I commend my colleague for tabling it.

Deputy Robert Troy: I thank all Deputies who contributed to Private Members' business this evening. We are all agreed that congestion in Dublin and indeed across many of our cities is having a detrimental impact on economic activity and the family life and mental health of so many commuters. According to the Minister, this is costing our economy €350 million per annum. Can Members imagine how many infrastructural projects could be developed if that money was spent on infrastructure? As a party that invested in Terminal 2 at Dublin Airport, expanded the M50 from four to six lanes, constructed the initial two Luas lines and invested in rail improvements, we are delighted to give Members across all parties the opportunity to speak to this motion this evening.

This motion is not about pitting Dublin against the rest of Ireland. It is about how Dublin needs to be addressed as a capital city. Deputy Eamon Ryan criticised Fianna Fáil because for some reason he thinks Dublin Chamber of Commerce should not be given a voice in this debate. Dublin Chamber of Commerce represents retailers who generate employment for up 300,000 people. If, as is suggested in this motion, the transport advisory group was adopted, it would give a voice to a range of stakeholders.

What is critically important is the lack of investment over the past number of years in public transport and road infrastructure. The past number of years has seen Ireland fall down to the second lowest level of investment in this critical infrastructure in Europe. Only Romania is behind us. This Government has failed to make a case to the European Commission for greater flexibility in the fiscal rules when it comes to investing in critical transport projects. The Juncker plan is there. A total of €500 billion can be availed of at unprecedented low interest rates. A total of 10% of this plan has been already been drawn down for critical transport infrastructural projects but where is that 10% of the plan being drawn down? It is being drawn down in every country other than Ireland. We have not applied for one cent of this fund to invest in any infrastructural projects across this country. If we applied for funding under this fund, we could invest in improving public transport, including DART and commuter rail expansion and increased capacity and reliability. We could offer better access to well-serviced commuter and inter-regional rail for commuters because that would be central to reducing car dependency.

The Minister talks about the new bus policy that will appear at the end of this month. I will welcome the publication of that and we will definitely engage in that just as we engaged in and made a comprehensive submission to the national rail review. However, the worrying thing is, which was alluded to by one of the previous speakers, is that the Minister never saw fit to conduct a public transport policy review in advance of the review of the capital plan. It is a case of seeing what crumbs from the table we will get from the capital plan and adjusting our transport policy accordingly. We should publish an integrated national transport plan and the Minister should fight at Cabinet level to ensure the necessary funding is put in place to have a national integrated transport plan. We should not devise a plan based on the level of funding that is available. I call on Members to support this motion but, more importantly, I ask the Minister to ensure that he avails of the funding that is there at European level to invest in our public transport because without investment in public transport, it will not be fit for purpose.

Amendment put.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: In accordance with Standing Order 70(2) and the report of the Business Committee dated 4 May 2017, the division is postponed until the weekly division time on Thursday, 18 May 2017.

Ireland and the Negotiations on the UK's Withdrawal from the EU: Statements (Resumed)

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I welcome the draft guidelines published by the European Commission last week. These reflect Ireland's position and take on board some additional concerns and issues that have been identified in the Government's document, which is currently under discussion. As I have emphasised over the last year, the positions that are adopted by the UK in negotiations with the EU will be critical to achieving solutions to the issues that are raised on the island of Ireland and indeed between these islands.

Ireland and our EU partners have explicitly prioritised these issues - the Border; the rights of Irish and, therefore, EU citizens in Northern Ireland; the gains of the peace process underpinned by the Good Friday Agreement; and the common travel area - and the UK must do the same. I have also consistently stressed that the responsibility for political leadership in dealing with the challenges that Brexit raises for the island of Ireland is a shared one North and South. While the talks process in Belfast has had to pause during the UK general election campaign, I remain available to engage bilaterally with the parties in the weeks ahead, particularly in respect of the unfolding Brexit negotiations. I look forward to participating in the resumed talks process at Stormont after 8 June to support and facilitate the political parties there to reach agreement on a new power-sharing Executive. I strongly urge all political parties to pursue through a new power-sharing Executive Northern Ireland's fundamental interest in dealing with the challenges posed by the withdrawal of the UK from the EU. The importance of this for people's daily lives and for the future prospects in Northern Ireland cannot and must not be understated.

My focus at EU level and that of my Government colleagues will now be on working as part of the EU-27 team to advance our common goals within the complex and dynamic process of negotiation that lies ahead. We have now reached a point where both the EU and the UK have set out their political objectives for the forthcoming Brexit process. There are, of course, some differences of approach, which are inevitably receiving increased exposure against the backdrop of the election campaign in the UK, but I do not believe they are insurmountable. I fully support the phased approach set out in the EU's guidelines, which will see an initial focus on the key withdrawal issues with a view to opening discussions on the future relationship when sufficient progress has been made. This is fully in line with the Government's long-standing approach.

On the question of the rights of citizens, it is fair to say that the political will is clearly there on both the part of the UK and of the EU to provide clarity and legal certainty for the four million citizens concerned. As set out in the comprehensive policy document, I believe that an agreement on the rights of citizens should be wide, ambitious and comprehensive. Full account will also have to be taken of the fact that Irish citizens residing in Northern Ireland will continue to enjoy rights as EU citizens. I acknowledge that this will be complicated. However, early agreement on the principle is achievable.

In the context of the UK's financial liabilities, I have consistently stressed that this is not about punishing the UK or issuing a bill for leaving. Naturally, the European Union should

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expect the UK to honour any financial commitments into which it has already entered.

We have a long and difficult road ahead of us. The European Union has a positive and unified platform on which to advance its interests in the coming negotiations. The Government has established a clear and strategic approach that will enable it to pursue Ireland's goals and objectives as part of the EU team. The European Union has agreed its position, the UK has set out its objectives and the Government has outlined its approach. This is only the beginning of a long and difficult process, one in respect of which the Government is determined that the interests of Ireland and its people will be protected and advanced.

Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly: This debate concerns the Government's Brexit strategy, which was published a few days ago. Brexit is widely acknowledged as the greatest economic threat Ireland has faced in decades. The Taoiseach has said that the negotiations will be the most important in our history as an independent State. Nearly half of exports from Irish-owned firms go to the UK. Representatives from international airlines told us yesterday that without a transition agreement - the future conclusion of which is uncertain - planes in the UK could be grounded from March 2019 onwards. That would in turn ground planes in Ireland because much of our air transport goes through the UK. The Department of Finance and the Central Bank estimate that a hard Brexit, which we are now firmly in the throes of, could reduce trade to the UK by one third and result in 40,000 fewer jobs in Ireland. Brexit threatens jobs in many sectors here, including retail, tourism and manufacturing. It has the potential to wipe out Ireland's fishery sector and several parts of the agrifood sector.

In his address yesterday, the Taoiseach stated that the Government has been planning for Brexit planning for two years. Almost a year has passed since the Brexit vote. Given that amount of time and the severity of the threat Brexit poses to Ireland, the Government's new Brexit strategy needed to be comprehensive, ambitious and strategic. It is none of those things. It contains no budgets, targets or timelines. There is nothing tangible in it for the people throughout Ireland who are trying to figure out how they and their companies can prepare for Brexit. It is a document bereft of political leadership, political direction or ambition in respect of how Ireland can and must respond to Brexit. It is a well-written document created by the Civil Service, which is doing what it can in the vacuum created by Fine Gael's internal political considerations. The first third of the document explains what Brexit is. The second third lays out the Government's negotiating positions, which are already known. The final third lists already published information and a speech the Taoiseach made in the Mansion House three months ago. The document describes itself in its introduction as a position paper. Irish businesses and farmers need a plan, not a position paper. They need to know that the Government has their back, they need to know how it is going to help them and they need to know when that will happen.

There has been much debate this evening on Northern Ireland and its strategic importance and rightly so. The issue has been addressed by the Government and my colleagues. I will focus on jobs and trade. The Government position paper states that adaptive sectoral Brexit response plans will be developed by all Departments under the direction of the Department of the Taoiseach to mitigate emerging sectoral challenges. It states that work is under way to develop options for improving the level of business planning advice available to SMEs. For Irish businesses trading with the UK, Brexit is not something that is going to be agreed in March 2019, it is already happening and they need support now.

How seriously is the Government taking Brexit in terms of supporting industry and protect-

ing jobs? The numbers tell a very interesting story. The 2017 Action Plan for Jobs tells us that in order to mitigate against the impact of the UK's decision to leave the EU we have allocated additional resources in a number of areas, including an additional €3 million to Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland. Bord Bia got €1.6 million. That is €4.6 million for three of the most important State agencies helping react and respond to Brexit. In 2016, the Dáil voted through Supplementary Estimates for health care. This was money which no one had anticipated would be spent on health care until the Minister for Health, Deputy Harris, said he needed it. Almost €800 million was voted through. The Government allocated 171 times more money to health care than it has to the three agencies tasked mainly with dealing with Brexit and it tells us with a straight face that it is taking Brexit seriously.

Irish companies, farmers and food processors need support now. They need to know how to hedge currency, expand into new markets and create new products and services for those markets. Brexit may result in risks to their supply chains, access to credit, cost of credit, the enforceability of contracts and the rights of employees. They need to know how to address these risks and start planning for them today.

The most recent data strongly suggests that while some Irish companies know what to do, many do not. Last week, the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation published a report on how Irish SMEs are reacting to Brexit. One thousand SMEs were surveyed. Fifteen out of every 20 Irish SMEs believe they will be harmed by Brexit. However, only five companies in 20 intend taking action and only three companies in 20 have done so to date. This suggests that half of Irish SMEs believe they will be damaged by Brexit but do not intend to do anything about that. Why is that? Many do not know what to do or they do not know how to do it. For example, even if they know they should be hedging currency, they have no idea how to do so. Some companies do not have the contacts, experience or resources to act. The State needs to tell Irish companies that there is much they can and should do and that the State will help them do it. While companies may need to consider reducing their exposure to Brexit, they might also be able to turn it into an opportunity.

A Wicklow company in the building sector used to trade in the UK and Ireland. It experienced rapid growth and was very successful. After the Brexit referendum, its orders from the UK fell as builders there started to source UK-based products. The company carried out a feasibility study of various EU member states. It discovered that its product fit perfectly into the market in the Netherlands. The company worked with Enterprise Ireland, went to the Netherlands and conducted marketing there. It is now selling its product in the Netherlands. Due to this success, it has revised its growth projections upwards beyond what they would have been if there had been no Brexit.

Companies are sourcing new supply chains and beginning to work with Enterprise Ireland. They are learning how to hedge sterling and are revising their UK pricing strategies. However, many more companies need to take such action.

I recently met diplomats from several EU member states, a number of whom told me the same thing, namely, that to date there has been little direct trade between Ireland and their countries, they have struggled to get high-level access to Ireland's State agencies and much of the trade between Ireland and their countries has been facilitated by UK companies. However, their governments and industrial sectors are open for business and looking for trading partners. They want to do business with Ireland. We must use Brexit as the push it seems we need to forge these new alliances.

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We must remember that Brexit is not the only material threat to Irish jobs and trade. There is also the erosion of our tax competitiveness. President Macron of France has indicated that he will push for tax harmonisation among eurozone states. The common consolidated corporate tax base, which could wipe billions off Ireland's corporate tax receipts, was being pushed by the European Commission within 48 hours of last year's Brexit referendum. Northern Ireland is moving towards having a corporation tax rate of 12.5% next year. Britain is moving towards a rate of 17% and has signalled that it may move towards a lower one. President Trump has signalled that the United States is going to move towards a rate of 15%. In this ever-changing world Ireland's exporters - farmers and businesses alike - must be adaptable. Some are, but others need help. The economist Dan O'Brien recently reported on the findings of a new ESRI study of Irish-owned companies. The study showed that of all the exports from Ireland, the percentage from Irish-owned companies was only 13%. It also suggested Irish companies tended to be sold rather than scaled and that the level of innovation capacity was not where it needed to be. Let us do something about that. Brexit is a national challenge which requires a national response. To date, the Government has not provided it and its new Brexit strategy does not pave the way for it. We must be much more ambitious for Irish companies. We must engage directly with them to help them to mitigate the risks and seize opportunities arising from Brexit. We need detailed contingency planning per sector. We must review existing strategic plans, including Food Wise 2025. We must also consider every opportunity to develop an all-island economy. In 1959, the Lemass Government adopted the White Paper on Economic Development led by Dr. T. K. Whitaker. It formed the basis for the first programme of economic expansion. The resulting expansion of trade benefited Ireland for nearly 60 years. While the level of international trade from Ireland grows, we must begin to look further afield than the Anglo-Saxon world. If we do, we will have a chance not only to limit the damage caused by Brexit, but to use its impetus to drive future economic growth to service Ireland for decades to come.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Catherine Connolly): Bogfaimid ar aghaidh anois go dtí Sinn Féin. Labhróidh an Teachta Crowe i ndiaidh an Teachta Cullinane.

Deputy Seán Crowe: Tógfaimid cúig nóiméad an duine.

On 29 March, the British Government triggered Article 50 of the European Union treaty and began the formal process of withdrawal from the Union. Its intention to leave the Single Market and the customs union will have a detrimental impact on Ireland in replacing a hard border on this island. It is clear from the mood music that we are on a path towards a hard Brexit which will have a detrimental impact on the Good Friday Agreement and the principles of the peace process, as well as having devastating consequences for citizens and the economy across Ireland.

It is very welcome that at the last meeting of the European Council it agreed a provision to ensure the North would seamlessly resume full EU status following a successful referendum on Irish unity. That is, however, just the bare minimum of what we need and it was already assumed to be a given when we consider the precedent of German reunification and the Cypriot protocol on reunification. It is an agreed view of the Dáil that what is needed is special status for the North to remain in the European Union, or Brexit will have a profound negative effect on the economy and the people of Ireland. With a stronger, proactive approach the Government could have achieved far more. There is now a huge amount to be done in the forthcoming negotiations. We know that the European Union has shown itself to be flexible in dealing with different forms of integration and relationships for member states and non-member states. Following that logic, it is surely time to secure some flexibility for Ireland.

It is now crunch time. The British Government which, according to itself, has no strategic or economic interest in Northern Ireland and little regard for the consequences of the decision for people on this island has triggered Article 50. It has now called a general election to supposedly strengthen its hand in the negotiations. Its plan or wish list for Brexit to date clearly shows that it is ignoring the views of the peoples of Northern Ireland and Scotland. The recent leak from Prime Minister Theresa May's meeting with European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker which appeared in a German newspaper was illuminating. It was reported that during the talks Mrs. May had said she would not agree to pay an exit or divorce bill when leaving the European Union because there was nothing in the EU treaties on that type of settlement. Mr. Juncker reportedly told her that if Britain did not respect its financial obligations, it would not be possible to agree a future trade deal. After the meeting he is reported to have said: "I have the impression sometimes that our British friends... underestimate the technical difficulties we have to face." This is the mood music in the background. According to the report, he was so alarmed that he called the German Chancellor, Mrs. Angela Merkel, the next morning to say Mrs. May was "living in another galaxy" and deluding herself. Later that day Mrs. Merkel said in a speech that some in the British Government had "illusions" about the nature of the talks. Let us cut through all of the delusions; we need to be prepared for tough and difficult negotiations. The Government must act in the national interest and the interests of the whole island, not just this State. It should abide by the terms of the Sinn Féin Private Members' motion passed by the Dáil which calls on the Government to negotiate special status for the North in the European Union.

Sinn Féin has a mandate and a duty to defend the democratic wishes of the cross-community majority who have not consented to leave or be dragged out of the European Union by the British Government. We will not let the British Government use Brexit to unravel the progress made in the past 20 years. We call on the Government to play its part also. It must ensure, at all costs, that an external EU border is not placed on the island of Ireland. The best way to do this is through negotiating special status for the North within the European Union, no more and no less.

Deputy David Cullinane: Many people in the State are a little surprised that the Government is so ill-prepared for Brexit and has been for some time. I am not surprised, however, because it failed to see why people in Britain had voted for Brexit in the first place. It had failed to even contemplate that it was a possibility and that it could happen. Like on many other issues around the world and especially across Europe, the Government failed to see the impact austerity policies were having on ordinary working people and the part it had played in the eventual Brexit result. Of course, those who were advocating for Brexit were pointing to real problems, but they were not offering real solutions; they were only offering false solutions. Unfortunately, the people of Britain and people in this State now have to deal with the consequences. It is no surprise to me, therefore, that the Minister is ill-prepared.

It is also no surprise to me that the Government has absolutely failed in the case of the North. I cannot for the life of me understand how we have a Government that is not prepared to stand up for the majority in the North who voted to remain in the European Union. Perhaps the Minister might explain that to me. How have the majority in the North who want to remain in the European Union been so badly let down by the Government? They recognise that a hard or any kind of border would be bad for them. How is it that the Minister is not prepared to go to the European Union to argue for the type of arrangement Spain achieved for Gibraltar? How is it that the Minister is not prepared to argue for special status for the North within the

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European Union? It is because his party has always been partitionist. For his party, Ireland stops at the Border, but for many on the island it includes all of the Thirty-two Counties. The prospect of there being any kind of border will be a disaster for many counties, the entire island, cross-border trade, agriculture and so many other areas, yet the Government seems to be so ill-prepared and, at times, indifferent. It is no surprise to me, however, because the only time I hear the Government representatives talk about the North in the Dáil is when they criticise Sinn Féin. That has been their *modus operandi*.

I raise the issue of workers' rights which does not receive any real attention when we talk about Brexit, but it is real nonetheless. There is the prospect that a majority Tory Government in facing into Brexit will also want to dismantle many of the rights workers have such as trade union and collective bargaining rights, as well as many of the good conditions achieved for workers in the European Union. We know that many workers' rights in the North are currently much stronger than they are in Britain. For example, they have strong collective bargaining rights in the North, but what will happen after Brexit and what will the protections be? Will a Fine Gael-led Government be interested in any of these issues that will have a real impact on workers? I do not believe it will. We have to look beyond Brexit and consider the prospect of a majority Tory Government. What impact will that have on the island of Ireland and in the North? We can only surmise that a strong Tory majority combined with Brexit will be an absolute disaster for Ireland.

As somebody from the south east who has engaged with the chamber of commerce and with many exporters and businesspeople, I can tell the Minister that they are concerned about the impact of Brexit on their businesses. They are concerned about exports, trade with Britain and access to markets. In Waterford, as the Minister may know, we have a strong food and meat processing sector. Many of those companies have already suffered because of currency fluctuations. What contingencies is the Government putting in place to support those sectors? We have put a lot of time into building up clusters of industries in different parts of the country. Food is one of the big strengths of the south east, yet it is one of those issues that will be clearly under threat if Brexit happens. When we go under the bonnet of what all of this means for Ireland, these are the issues we need to deal with. I have not seen a scintilla of evidence from the Minister or his Government that they are remotely prepared for any of these issues.

I will finish as I started, by asking if, maybe for the first time in his life, the Minister might recognise that Ireland does not stop at the Border. The Minister might take an active interest in what happens in the North. While a Tory Government in Britain is prepared to stand up for a minority of people in the North, he and his Government stand by and do nothing for the majority, who want to remain part of the European Union, who recognise that a hard Border or any kind of Border is not good, and who see the negative impacts the Tory Government and Brexit will have on them and their families. They receive indifference from the Irish Government. Maybe in his reply the Minister will explain why that is the case.

Deputy Joan Burton: In a week in which Monsieur Macron became President-elect of France, the Oireachtas is due to receive an unusual visitor tomorrow - another Frenchman, Monsieur Barnier, who is the European Union's and therefore Ireland's principle negotiator in respect of Brexit. In France, Monsieur Macron seems to have slowed the populist march of the ultra right and the ultra left. At this very unsettled period in political history, there is a remarkable degree of similarity between the ultra right and the ultra left in that there is one thing upon which they agree vehemently, namely, that the EU is a bad thing. I do not know why this is so, except perhaps that with populism goes totalitarianism and totalitarianism probably

does not like the idea of 28 countries coming together in a loose association with certain rules. Populism-totalitarianism might just prefer one ruler.

Our own home-grown populists, some of whom are sitting in the Chamber tonight, are enthusiastic supporters of Brexit and have been since the debate began last year in the UK, according to everything I have heard. Never mind the hundreds of thousands of jobs North and South that are dependent on a good outcome for Ireland. Never mind the impact of Brexit on agriculture, tourism, or our general prosperity. Our Brexiteers across the Chamber favour, I think, some kind of post-colonial embrace with the UK outside of the EU. That is the only sense I can make of it. I have heard the various statements in the Dáil from time to time by their different spokespeople and must say they do not make a huge amount of sense. Being very populist, they must feel this stance has a lot of popular appeal. Of course, it lines them up side by side with the view of the American President, Mr. Trump.

Returning to Monsieur Barnier and his speech to the Oireachtas tomorrow, I wonder what it bodes for Ireland, and what kind of questions he is going to be asked and ought to answer. Yesterday, the Taoiseach was at pains to say that we are part of the 27 in terms of the negotiating structure, and of course we are. I do not have a problem with that. He said we have been consistent and clear that Ireland will be negotiating from a position of strength as part of the EU team of 27 member states. We need our own special strand, however, for the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland and the island of Ireland.

We have a model, as I have stated before, in the Belfast Agreement and in the structure of how parts of that agreement were advanced. Monsieur Barnier has implied that our situation will be at the forefront of his priorities. I accept that. He has made it clear in a number of statements and speeches. Ireland has had the framework of the Belfast Agreement accepted in the statements coming from the EU. The question we have to ask him is whether Ireland will be entirely subsumed into the other 27. Will it advance the precise outcomes upon which I think pretty much everybody, with the exception of our Brexiteers, has agreed? We need the common travel area and free movement between the two islands. For a variety of reasons both commercial and political, and in recognition of the Belfast Agreement, we do not want a hard Border.

We have debated all of this on a number of occasions. We do have to beware that the current Government does not land us in a “troika 2” situation, whereby because we sign up with the 27 we lose our autonomy in respect of those specific issues. As the site of the only land border between the UK and the EU and in terms of our historic linkages with the UK, we must beware of letting others negotiate on our behalf. Notwithstanding what I think will be an insistent, genuine concern about the interests of Ireland on the part of the EU negotiations leader, we need more. We should be clear and thoughtful. We want an orderly approach but there is a risk if we will not talk about the future relationship with the UK until we have signed off on the current one. That is what Monsieur Barnier’s structure is implying to some degree. In that case, the EU may surrender to that section of opinion in which there is a strong, understandable desire to punish Britain by imposing on it a form of economic isolation. That is why the constant response of the British Prime Minister has been that no Brexit is better than a hard Brexit. Negotiations are difficult enough if two people genuinely sit down to negotiate, never mind one party and 27 others, of which one has precise interests. We cannot go into negotiations if everyone around the table is likely to be a loser. We have to identify what will be a win in this case for people in the North and in the Republic as well as what can be a win for the UK. This will allow us to emerge from the negotiations with the minimum damage conceivable done to our common futures. If we allow that harsher Brexit vision to gain supremacy, then we will suffer

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even more economically and we will also suffer more in proportion to any other EU country.

This is the point those who will be speaking to Mr. Barnier tomorrow have to lay on the line: no other country from the 27, not even Gibraltar in the context of its relationship with Spain, has as much at stake as Ireland, North and South. We need to convey that clearly tomorrow.

I am unsure whether the dinner took place last week or beforehand but we saw the leaks last week of one of the most disastrous dinners in diplomatic history. Let us imagine if that happened on “Masterchef”. Let us imagine by the end of it people were going for each other with verbal knives as opposed to tasting the soufflés and checking on the soups. What would we think? We saw a debacle in terms of the contact between a high-ranking EU official and the UK Prime Minister. We have to bend our thoughts to how to avoid that. I do not think Mr. Barnier is getting as much as a cup of tea or coffee tomorrow. He is probably getting that in Druid’s Glen with the European People’s Party. Anyway, I strongly suggest that we should focus collectively on how we get the best deal possible.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Catherine Connolly): Deputy, you are way over time.

Deputy Joan Burton: Without a doubt this is the most difficult issue that has faced this country for a long period.

Deputy Mick Barry: Deputy Burton has thrown down the gauntlet with a disgraceful speech in which she attempted to compare the Deputies who stand in the tradition and carry on the tradition of James Connolly and James Larkin with the extreme right supporters of Marine Le Pen in France. Let us deal with some of the slurs thrown our way.

Who has helped to create the social conditions? Who has helped to create the level of discontent and alienation within French society? Unfortunately, these have pushed millions of people into the arms of the extreme right, whose policies we are completely opposed to. Of course, it was the sister party of Deputy Burton’s Labour Party, the *Parti Socialiste*, led by François Hollande. It is the equivalent of the Labour Party and its sister organisation in France. That party stood over a social system. It gave its blessing to and ran a capitalist system that transferred more and more wealth within French society into the hands of the super-rich and the 1% elite at the same time as unemployment among the youth went to all-time high levels and poverty in urban and rural areas reached a level not seen in recent times. Unfortunately, this pushed millions of people in the direction of the extreme right, which posed as an anti-establishment force in that country. There is a clear need to build a strong and powerful radical left within French society. I will deal with the question of its approach towards the European Union and membership of the Union.

There is no doubt that following the victory of the presidential candidate who won last Sunday night, there was a sigh of relief among tens of millions of ordinary people throughout Europe precisely because it was not Le Pen. Deputy Burton has gone beyond that. She has given a political blessing and has underscored her support for the new French President, who is, Deputy Burton maintains, a politician of the centre. If he is a politician of the centre, he is a politician of what Tariq Ali would describe as the extreme centre. What is his programme? He stands for the slashing of 120,000 civil service jobs. He stands for the slashing of corporation tax from 33% down to 25%. He is a strong supporter of what is known in France as labour reform, which might better be described as labour counter-reform, in other words, new measures enacted by law that would allow employers to more easily increase the hours of their workforces, sack and

dismiss workers and cut pay and pensions.

Deputy Burton's political ally, Mr. Macron, is not going to do this by means of democratic processes through the French Parliament. He has made it clear that he intends to introduce those policies by Government decree. This is the approach that has made a cropper of Jacques Chirac, Nicolas Sarkozy and François Hollande. The revolutionary traditions of 1968, when workers poured out onto the streets in their millions to defeat this reactionary agenda, can and will, I hope, rise again.

Much has been said of the victory of Mr. Macron on Sunday night but the extent to which fear was a factor has not been sufficiently commented on. Fear of economic uncertainty and xenophobia built the Le Pen vote. However, fear of Le Pen and the far right rallied people behind Macron. It was that rather than an endorsement of his agenda that brought his victory.

The lesson of recent history, to which the Deputy is blind, is that the politics of the extreme centre paved the way for the electoral victories of the extreme right. That is how it happened in the United States. The policies of Barack Obama, which concentrated more and more wealth in the hands of the 1% at the expense of working people and the poor in society, helped to prepare the ground for the extremely unfortunate victory of Donald Trump in the presidential election late last year. The policies of the extreme centre of Macron in France can pave the way for Le Pen in 2022 unless a genuine radical left alternative is built within that society. The mobilisation that can and, I hope, will take place against his so-called labour reform offers such an opportunity, because the candidate of the radical left, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, commanded almost 20% of the vote after the first round in France. There is considerable potential there.

What positions should he take on the European Union? Clearly, a candidate does not speak to those discontented millions and win them away from Le Pen by saying that he endorses the European Union and the inequality that has been sanctioned by the European project. A candidate must make it clear that he stands for a break with the current set-up, a completely and utterly different Europe, a Europe for the millions rather than the millionaires.

Unfortunately, the Deputy was not here to hear my reply, but I think her points have been answered comprehensively. I will conclude by making some points about the Government Brexit document.

Reference is made in it to a rainy day fund and to a plan to attract financial investment. Today, a report was issued by the Swiss-based Financial Stability Board which showed that Ireland is now the fourth largest shadow banking hub in the world, behind the United States, the Cayman Islands and Japan. There are €2 trillion worth of non-banking financial assets in this country, which is eight times gross domestic product, and at least a third has little or no oversight, according to official sources. I am not saying that all of the financial investments that the Government plans to win from London is in that category, but much of it is. It is not a recipe for more jobs. It is a recipe for more brass plate operations down at the IFSC.

To have real jobs, we need public sector investment in areas that are crying out for it as well as jobs and service provision such as housing and health. We undermine our ability to organise that investment if €1 billion is put aside in 2019, another €1 billion in 2020 and another €1 billion in 2021. The bulk of that money should be invested now in public sector enterprises. It will pay back the Exchequer because taking people off social welfare makes a saving and

workers will be paying taxes, which is also an input. They need to be well paid jobs.

The Public Service Pay Commission reported yesterday. It mentioned Brexit ten times. On page 27 alone, Brexit is mentioned six times. The Government is drawing from that report and other sources and using those examples as a tool for holding down the wages and conditions of workers. We have seen its position regarding the public sector pay negotiations. It wants to retain the unpaid hours, increase pension contributions and maintain a two-tier wage structure. We say the opposite. The FEMPI measures need to be completely unwound. We need to reverse the pay and pension cuts immediately. We need cost of living increases for public sector workers that take into account the hikes in rent and accommodation costs. If these changes cannot be won at the negotiation table, and it is clear from the Government's position that this is the case, the ground needs to be prepared to follow the example of the Dublin Bus and Luas workers and that of the gardaí. If they are not granted at the negotiation table, they need to be won through strong and well organised industrial action.

Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan: I respect the democratic mandate of the electorate in Britain, which means Brexit, but Northern Ireland and Scotland did not vote to leave. There are questions around the will and the decision of those electorates when they are still part of the British empire and not in the EU where they voted to remain. It is still incredible that there was such a lack of in-depth discussion or exploration in Britain on the implications of leaving the EU. It became focused on the issue of migration and how much Britain was going to save by not being in the EU, and then there was the huge gamble taken with Northern Ireland, the Good Friday Agreement and the peace and stability that has been achieved. While the Good Friday Agreement is not perfect, there is a generation of Northern Ireland citizens who do not know and have never experienced violence, bomb warnings, bombs going off, murders, abductions or the total destruction of daily life that the Troubles brought.

Our civil servants, the Departments, the ambassadors and various Irish bodies did a tremendous amount of work preparing for a possible vote for Brexit that may or may not have happened and when there was a vote for Brexit, preparing for it although they did not know when Article 50 would be triggered. They are still working in the unknown because we are only at the start of the process which, like all divorces, could be amicable but might also be totally fraught.

There are two issues, namely, safeguarding and not jeopardising what has been achieved through the Good Friday Agreement, and safeguarding Ireland's interests. It is a balancing act. We will be trying to maintain our ties with Britain. Regardless of whether we like it, we have significant economic, political, cultural and historic ties. We hope not to get caught in the crossfire between Britain and the EU, and there is bound to be crossfire.

When we examine the Government's approach, I accept the extent of the political discussions at various levels, Michel Barnier's understanding of Ireland's position - we will hear more of that tomorrow - and what appears from the document to be the Government's confidence that Ireland's specific priorities will play a central role. However, this is not just about Britain leaving the EU. Ireland is central for many reasons. I agree that our diplomats and officials are well experienced and held in good regard. The crux, however, is that the best deal for Ireland may not complement what is the best deal for the EU. The EU will be acting collectively. A majority vote will decide Ireland's relations with Britain and Northern Ireland and, under EU voting rules, it will be difficult to hold onto Ireland's interests and to ensure that they are a priority. It will take formidable negotiating skills and bargaining with the other EU member states. I hope we do not end up doing a Faustus on this and selling our souls. The reality is that if the EU-UK

agreement does not suit Ireland, as a member of the EU, Ireland will have to abide by it. We know what happens little fish in big ponds.

We have a wealth of information and papers, etc., but it seems clear that there will be at least four years of negotiations and a year for national ratification. This hinges on the financial settlement becoming a deal, which has implications for the Common Agricultural Policy. The specific issues that I see facing Ireland are our relationship with Northern Ireland; the Border; the common travel area; the protection of the Good Friday Agreement; the protection of Northern Ireland's citizens with Irish passports who are, therefore, EU citizens; Britain's financial commitments to the EU; the shortfall that will exist and how it is addressed; EU agencies currently in Britain and where they will locate; and Irish citizens in the UK and UK citizens in Ireland. We know that the common travel area, which came into being before we joined the EU, is vital for those who commute between Northern Ireland and the Republic for work, education, business, health and personal reasons. The Government papers seem to be aware of a need for transitional arrangements.

Our overdependence on the UK as a trading partner is obvious. We must look for other trading partners. We see the figures relating to that overdependence on the British market that has developed in the extent of the trade in beef, dairy products and cheese, etc. The agrifood sector has already been feeling the consequences with a loss of jobs. I know from my work with AWEPA and having been on the foreign affairs committee that so many countries outside the EU, in Africa and in the Americas want to do business with Ireland. I know, in particular, about our ambassadors in Africa who are working hard on this. We must ensure that we live up to expectations from those countries, that our trading with them will be ethical, that there will be respect for workers' rights and that taxation will be fair, open and transparent.

There are concerns around fishing. Our fishing industry lost out in previous years under the EU and just when there has been some slight improvement, there is a possibility of regression.

There is cause to reopen our embassy in Iran, but there is massive potential across the Atlantic. Given that Mexico is our biggest trading partner in Latin America, there are more opportunities there. This also applies to Cuba. We must look at having other embassies in South America because our embassy in Mexico has such a huge area to cover.

On Britain's foreign policy, it does not cover itself in glory with the extent of its arms selling to various countries. This fuels conflict and conflict fuels poverty, starvation and human rights abuses. There is a major irony here because Britain is a major contributor in terms of overseas development aid. There will be a shortfall but this will be an opportunity for the EU to look at how funding is allocated because there are major issues over the EU migration trust funds.

We need to focus on those areas such as tourism, the single electricity market and education where there is an all-Ireland approach.

I wish to mention drug trafficking and the potential impacts here from drug traffickers to exploit either a soft or a hard border. A huge drug trade already exists between Ireland and Britain. We see it in large scale seizures. The European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction has been very influenced by British expertise in the areas of research and practice in the social and health response surrounding drugs and drug addiction. English is the primary language of communication across Europe, and there could be difficulties in that regard.

The Good Friday Agreement gives special status to Northern Ireland, and this must be pro-

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tected. At a recent presentation to the Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, we examined the implications regarding reconciliation and calls for a detailed study into the potential implications of Brexit for reconciliation. The presentation submitted by a speaker from the University of Ulster stated: “The evidence of divided societies everywhere is that the implications of Brexit for identity and cultural issues may be more significant and potentially dangerous in the long term than the specific economic consequences [because] uncertainty about identity and political issues can rapidly escalate into direct confrontation.” We know there are threats to jobs in a number of sectors, so the negotiations must ensure high standards in employment, but there are also opportunities for more employment or alternative employment.

I acknowledge what Mrs. Theresa May said about acknowledging the UK’s relationship with the Republic, the importance of the peace process and the desire to avoid a hard Border and that the withdrawal does not harm the Republic or jeopardise the peace process. We have seen the initial EU response as an understanding of Ireland’s position, but it will be difficult. Regardless of what is being said, the reality is that when someone leaves a club, they will not have the same benefits as when they were a member, so there is a need for maturity, common sense and goodwill on all sides.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: There has been much talk and much worry but also much confusion as to what Brexit will actually mean and how it will impact on people’s lives, and the negotiations have not really even started yet. The mists are starting to clear and we are now getting a better idea of what is involved. It seems clear to me at least that this is a marathon and not a sprint, so we need to be ready for the long haul and maintain our stamina so that Ireland keeps its focus until the very end. We now know what the European Union wants out of the negotiations with the publication of the guidelines. I congratulate the Government on its work to gain recognition from our European partners that there are some issues in respect of which Ireland simply is different and unique. We have started well. I am not a critic. I give credit where credit is due and I give credit for that.

We are lucky with the choice of the chief negotiator, who will appear before this House tomorrow. Mr. Barnier is a man of great capability and insight and he starts this process with a great deal of knowledge about Ireland. I led a delegation of the Joint Committee on European Union Affairs to Brussels to meet him in February. He was extremely open to engaging with us, to improving his understanding of the situation on the ground and to hearing creative solutions to the challenges. He is our negotiator. He will represent us, so we need to maintain that engagement beyond this week.

A number of committees have met different Ministers and senior civil servants. The committee I chair has met the Minister of State, Deputy Dara Murphy, a number of times as well as officials from the Departments of the Taoiseach and Foreign Affairs and Trade. All of them have impressed me by how seriously they are taking this and how diligently they are working on engaging with our partners, as are our MEPs. I compliment our MEPs. I do not care what parties they are from. We met them all when we were in Brussels and, as far as I am concerned, they are working diligently and very well. Be they representatives of Sinn Féin, Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael or whatever, they are working very well, and we must respect that work.

It is important for all our sakes that we spend time on the detail and on working to make sure that whatever the result, it is the best it can possibly be across all headings, but particularly for the peace process in Northern Ireland, all Irish citizens living in the United Kingdom, all

our businesses, our farmers, be they big or small, and all our citizens who work within those sectors. We will find friends in this. Many member states share many of the concerns we have and we need to keep talking to them so that they understand us and we understand them. We all need to play our part. I try hard to meet at least one ambassador every week, which has been a very useful discipline. These men and women work hard at representing their countries and are willing to share that understanding and their concerns with me and the committee I represent. They are also willing to listen to, and better understand, the issues of Ireland. I started this engagement when I was fortunate enough to become Chairman of the committee. I like to do my work diligently. I set out to meet an ambassador every week because we can engage in an informal way and it is useful to build up a relationship with these people.

I suspect the actual process of the negotiations will be very technical, very boring and very detailed. However, every single line and issue will be important to us, so we need to play our part and remain interested, engaged and focused. We also need to do what we do best, which is to ensure the concerns of the citizens of Ireland and the citizens of our constituencies are brought into consideration. More than ever, we need to start talking about solutions. After this is all over and when the dust settles and we have to move on to a new approach and to a European Union of which the United Kingdom is not a member, we will still have to share an island with the United Kingdom and it will still be our nearest neighbour. We need to keep that in mind as we go through this. That relationship will be very important to us forever. These will be hard negotiations, but we all need to get through them in a friendly and professional manner. They may be hard, but we need not lose any friends over this.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I, too, am glad to be able to speak on this very important topic, which has many conundrums. I am also delighted that Mr. Michel Barnier will be in this Chamber tomorrow and I thank Deputy Michael Healy-Rae, as Chairman of the Joint Committee on European Union Affairs, for meeting him in February and inviting him here. It is very important that he comes here because he is a very important figure in the situation in which we now find ourselves. It is the height of summer but we are on thin ice. It could be two steps forward and one step back.

I supported our accession to the EU all those years ago as a buachaill óg when I was a member of Deputy Breathnach's esteemed organisation. Much has changed since. The ideals of Europe were noble but some of its players, as far as I am concerned, got too big for their boots. This was proved here many a time but most importantly during the bank guarantee and the bailout. When our back was to the wall, the EU did not put out the hand of friendship or throw us the lifebuoy; it put the boot in. I have been very disappointed in some of the leaders of the EU since the British people made a sovereign decision according to their system by democratic vote, and let us face it, they did. I know Northern Ireland and Scotland did not vote to leave but I will address that in a minute. Theresa May has taken everyone by surprise by calling a general election. In the middle of all this, she needs to get her own mandate. However, we are getting side threats, side remarks and snide remarks, such as that the English are not players on the team any more and that by all means we must all gang up against them. That is bad, foolish and wrong. That is not what the EU masters who designed the EU had in mind. It is very important that we have a balanced approach to matters.

I look forward to Mr. Barnier's comments tomorrow and the comments of the party leaders and speakers in response to him, the engagement and the body language. I also look forward to the outcome of the British election and to seeing whether we can get a charted course forward. The issue is just too serious for this country. From agriculture to education to all kinds

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of exports and imports, we have too much to lose. It has been suggested to me by some people that we should apply to rejoin the Commonwealth. It may be an abhorrent thought but perhaps we should think about it because we have too much to lose, including our nearest neighbours and our exports. There is also the thought of a hard Border between here and Northern Ireland, at Aughnacloy, Belleek, Caledon or anywhere in south Armagh. It would be unthinkable to have a hard Border now because we have motorways going through most of the areas. We also had customs posts in the past. It would be unthinkable that they would come back. Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan noted that young people born since the peace process started do not know anything about the Troubles. I salute the architects of the peace process, including the former Minister of State, Dr. Martin Mansergh.

In addition to uncertainty in the North and all over Europe, there is a degree of uncertainty in this country regarding the position of the Taoiseach. Deputy Breathnach showed me a tweet a moment ago which indicated that the Taoiseach had informed his erstwhile friends in the Fine Gael Parliamentary Party that they will know what his position is next week. It is a kind of a triple lock and a little like the third secret of Fatima. The 100th anniversary of the visions in Fatima will be celebrated tonight, tomorrow and at the weekend. Will we ever find out when the Taoiseach will step down? I am not criticising the job he has done but he must make up his mind whether he is in or out and whether he will tell his colleagues or keep them guessing. There is too much uncertainty. We need all players on the Government team to pull in one direction, rather than in a Cork, Dublin or Mayo direction. It is a kind of tripod or merry-go-round but the issue is too serious for that.

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): It is a bit like the Deputy and Fianna Fáil. Is he in or out?

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I am not in Fianna Fáil. I am an Independent.

Deputy Patrick O'Donovan: That depends on which House you are in.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: You quoted me high enough last year but we did not buy it.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Catherine Connolly): Members should speak through the Chair.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I am being taunted. I know where I stand, unlike the Members opposite. They do not have the courage to stand up in their party and tell the Taoiseach to either pee or get off the pot because they want someone new, some leadership and direction and to know what is happening.

Deputy Patrick O'Donovan: At least we have a party.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: While I do not wish the Taoiseach any ill will, I wish he would make a decision and take a definite position. If he wants to stay, I have no problem with that. If the sheep are back in the pen and will not take him on because the sheepdogs are minding him, he would be right to do so. As I stated, we are celebrating the 100th anniversary of the visions of Fatima. It is nearly easier to find out the secret of Fatima than it is to find out what is going on in the Fine Gael Party.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Catherine Connolly): I thank Deputy McGrath for sticking to the topic.

Deputy Patrick O'Donovan: I welcome the opportunity to comment on the forthcoming negotiations on the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union and the impact of Brexit, particularly on tourism and sport. On 23 January, the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, Deputy Shane Ross, and I hosted an all-island dialogue on the impact of Brexit, particularly on the tourism and hospitality sectors. The feedback from industry participants at the event reaffirmed the Government's analysis on the importance of Brexit for tourism. The Minister and I are committed to an ongoing dialogue with the tourism and hospitality industry as the Brexit negotiations proceed.

For tourism, the priority issues for the Government are preserving the common travel area, avoiding a hard Border on the island and minimising the impact of Brexit on the tourism industry and national and local economies. Notwithstanding the record performance in attracting overseas visitors in 2016, the most recent quarterly visitor numbers from Britain showed a 6% decline. While it is too early to be definitive about this development, it reflects feedback we have been receiving from our industry partners, including hoteliers and visitor attractions which have experienced some softening in visitors and bookings from Britain. We are also seeing the impacts of a difficult underlying trend in the British market. These include a drop in air access to the island of Ireland this summer, with 4% less capacity on cross-channel routes. Since the United Kingdom's referendum on Brexit, the decline in the value of sterling has made holidays and short breaks here more expensive for British visitors. Economic uncertainty is making British travellers more cautious about their discretionary spending, which is impacting on travel to Ireland.

Research commissioned by Tourism Ireland indicates a decline in overseas holiday activity by British consumers in 2017. In addition, the exchange rate movement has increased Britain's competitiveness as a destination. We will continue to closely monitor developments around Brexit to better understand and plan for the implications for travel. Competitiveness and value for money will be more important than ever given the decline in the value of sterling. The maintenance of the 9% VAT rate for tourism services, which was opposed by many parties, including one Opposition party during the most recent budget, and the 0% air travel tax are critical in maintaining Ireland's tourism competitiveness. They are policies I will strive to have maintained and I hope Opposition parties will support us in that endeavour.

The tourism sector has been an important jobs engine in the period since 2011. In that time, according to Central Statistics Office data, the rate of job creation in the sector significantly outperformed the overall rate of creation elsewhere in the economy. Drawing on the alternative approach, an estimate of all jobs in the tourism and hospitality industry based on previous Fáilte Ireland surveys of businesses indicates that total employment in the sector stands at approximately 220,000. This estimate includes an additional category of tourism services and attractions which is not covered by the Central Statistics Office. It is further estimated that every 1,000 additional tourists support 14 jobs in the tourism industry. Unfortunately, negative growth in tourism may be expected to result in tourism enterprises shedding employment at a comparable rate.

The Government's Action Plan for Jobs includes a number of tourism-related actions. Implementing these will mitigate some of the risks arising from Brexit. Accelerating diversification of overseas tourism to Ireland to reduce the impact of a possible decline in visits from Great Britain is vital for the sector. Other actions reflect the higher relative importance of tourism in rural and regional economies, as I am acutely aware as a representative of a rural constituency. These include the implementation of the Ireland's Ancient East brand, the continued develop-

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ment of the Wild Atlantic Way and the introduction of new initiatives such as a partnership between Fáilte Ireland and the National Parks and Wildlife Service which seeks to bring more visitors to our national parks and nature reserves. This initiative was recently complemented by the local authorities.

The response to Brexit must be across the tourism sector, not only from central government and its agencies. To this end, I was pleased to be able to launch the local authority tourism conference recently. I welcome that, for the first time, 31 local authorities now have tourism strategies, statements and work plans in place. This is in line with the aims of the tourism action plan and is a recognition of the importance of tourism for local economies. We must be cautious about the road ahead for the tourism industry given the risks arising from Brexit. The challenging negotiations which will take place in the coming two years will be closely monitored by the Department, its agencies, Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland, local authorities and all those involved in the hard-working tourism industry. In that regard, I single out those who work at the coalface of the tourism industry. The people working in our hotels, restaurants, visitor attractions and transport services are also at the front of house for Ireland. They are not only ambassadors for their enterprises and sectors but in many ways for the country and their role cannot be overstated.

On sport, the other side of the Department for which I have responsibility, the impact of Brexit is still subject to considerable uncertainty. However, anything that would impair or impede the free movement of sportspersons, their sports equipment and animals, for example, in the case of equestrian events, has the potential to present logistical difficulties that do not exist currently. We will work towards minimising and, if possible, eliminating any such disruption. I am particularly aware of the importance of cross-Border co-operation with Northern Ireland in the area of sport. In that context, it is appropriate to emphasise that 45, or approximately 70%, of our national sports governing bodies operate on an all-Ireland basis. This illustrates the extent of the very welcome co-operation in sport throughout the island.

As Deputies will agree, sport has been a unifying force that helps to bring together the two traditions and eliminate some of the doubt, uncertainty and suspicion among both communities on the island. My officials regularly meet their counterparts in Northern Ireland and engage in extensive and effective dialogue on topics of mutual interest relating to sport. I cite, for example, the valuable ongoing work between the Department and its opposite number in Northern Ireland on preparing the bid for the Rugby World Cup in 2023. This event has the potential to be transformative and a power of good for the island. It is being facilitated by both Governments and the unparalleled generosity of the GAA which has made the aspiration of lodging an application to host the event in 2023 a reality. This engagement will continue. By means of these contacts with the Department for Communities in Northern Ireland and the Department of Culture, Media and Sport in London, we have an effective mechanism in place to monitor the impact of Brexit on the sporting landscape.

Through bilateral meetings with my opposite number in Westminster, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ms Tracey Crouch, I had the opportunity to discuss some of the issues of concern to us, particularly in the areas of tourism and sport. The hospitality industry has come through a tumultuous period. Many of the measures introduced by the previous Government, including the 9% VAT rate, 0% air travel tax and separation of Shannon Airport, were opposed by the Opposition for naked political reasons. We are now reaping the benefits of these measures. However, had we not reduced VAT, abolished the travel tax, given Shannon Airport its independence and pursued The Gathering and its associated events, which were lampooned by

members of the Opposition for naked political reasons, our tourism industry would not be in its current position. It covers all parts of the island and has the potential to create employment, which is of major importance and has been a driving force for our economic growth following the carnage and wreckage that the Government was left with in 2011.

The Minister, Deputy Ross, our departmental officials and I are acutely aware of the needs in tourism and sport and we are ensuring that every and all opportunities to enunciate these concerns on behalf of the industries and participants involved are taken in the most effective fashion.

Deputy Declan Breathnach: My party leader addressed the macro issues of Brexit's impact on the European project and our party spokesperson, Deputy Donnelly, focused on the matter of trade and the difficulties and opportunities therein, so I will focus on the difficulties for the Border from a North-South perspective.

Rudderless leadership and squabbling over cash for ash and the Irish language north of the Border have diminished the ability of this island to ensure that the best Brexit situation on an all-Ireland basis is reached. I hope that, post the 8 June election, the Assembly can start operating and focus on the business that is required of it if it is to share in the burden of finding a solution on a Thirty-two County basis.

While respecting the participation of cross-Border sectoral engagement in the two all-island dialogues, it is my belief that there is a distinct lethargy among departmental officials north of the Border. If we are to have the best outcomes for the island, they need to engage in work that will guarantee the achievement of the unique solutions that Mr. Michel Barnier, Mr. Guy Verhofstadt and the negotiating team have asked the island to find. The old Irish phrase, "Ní neart go cur le chéile", springs to mind in this regard. For Northern Ireland officials, doing the bidding of the British Government's pro-Brexit stance appears to be in conflict with finding a solution that will not set the Border communities back decades through a lack of dialogue or achieve bespoke arrangements that suit the Thirty-two County island. While Northern Ireland has no autonomy on Brexit, I call on the Minister of State, Deputy Breen, to outline to the House the discussions that are taking place at departmental level North and South to ensure that the disruption caused by Brexit is kept to a minimum and funding streams are protected and enhanced.

I will focus on a number of issues that, while significant, have received little mention in all of the debate since 23 June. On health co-operation and in conjunction with the subsequent Good Friday Agreement, the Ballyconnell Agreement, which was signed on 10 July 1992, set up an organisation called Co-operation and Working Together, CAWT. It has seen great collaborative work on health projects and EU funding has allowed more than 50,000 people to avail of services that would not otherwise have been provided. How can we guarantee such co-operation in future?

Similarly, we need to focus on issues like energy, tourism, which pertains to the Minister of State who has just left the Chamber, the peace process, our economy and trade. A total of 88% of Ireland's energy needs are met by the UK, with 55% of fuel imports coming from there. Brexit could result in cutting off ties between our respective energy industries, leaving Ireland severely compromised. We should seek as a priority an all-island single electricity market.

Prime Minister Theresa May stated this week that no deal would be better than a bad one.

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No deal would be catastrophic for us on this island, as it would bring into effect the full extent of tariffs under World Trade Organization, WTO, rules. This week has seen testy exchanges, which has increased worries in Dublin about the upcoming negotiations ending without a deal. No deal means that Ireland's food market in the UK, which supports 150,000 jobs in many sectors, could face tariffs of up to 35%. Under the EU's external trading arrangements with WTO countries, dairy products are subject to an average bound tariff of 35.5%, animal products are subject to an average tariff of 16.9% and clothing products are subject to an average bound tariff of 11.5%. This would be disastrous for us in dealing with the UK, which is our largest trading partner and to which 45.5% of Irish food and animal exports go. More than 80% of products produced by individual firms in the agrifood sector are exported to the UK.

Our Government needs to get real on the prospect of this happening. It should stop believing that this will be a soft Brexit. There is a significant gap in expectations on both sides in these negotiations. European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker has said that Britain is not realistic about the negotiations and is more focused on its general election on 8 June.

Ireland's unique position has been alluded to in various discussions. We will need to get clarity - sooner rather than later - on what will happen to our Border with Northern Ireland. We also need to protect the common travel area. However, these are all contentious issues. If Britain leaves the customs union, there will certainly be some form of border control and possibly immigration checks. I have received no answer to this question yet, but has discussion on these issues taken place?

Currently, goods travel from warehouses in the UK to the Republic without a problem. Post Brexit, this will require some level of bureaucracy and duties, resulting in considerable cost increases for those engaging in that activity. Prices will rise significantly for Irish consumers, putting us at a severe competitive disadvantage. Going it alone is not an option for such a small economy. The IDA and the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation need to work fast, hire new staff to deal with this crisis and incentivise and attract new entrants to the retail sector from other countries.

With regard to tourism, we need clarity on the Border issue. The Minister of State referred to Ireland's Ancient East. Tourism knows no borders. Where I live, the opportunities presented by the Cooley Mountains, the Gullions and the Mountains of Mourne operating as a single entity to deliver on the £9 million investment in tourism go without saying. However, this initiative is now under threat despite the fact that local authorities on both sides of the Border have made every effort to ensure that non-contentious issues such as tourism and water supply operate seamlessly. Last week, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Deputy Flanagan, stated that he wanted to see the proposed high-speed rail link between Dublin and Belfast operate post Brexit. That was pure lip service, as no costing of that project has been done.

The symbolic Narrow Water bridge needs to be built regardless of Brexit. The project is another important link between the North and the South. It has been in the pipeline for many years, but if we do not act quickly, the planning application on the northern side of the Border will expire. Given that €1.95 million was spent on the project by Louth County Council before it was virtually shelved, it should be re-activated by the Government to ensure there is EU funding. It will help to create a critical mass and linkage in an area that is even more beautiful than the Kerry region.

Protection of the environment is another issue that should not be overlooked. Under EU

legislation, a huge range of environmental protections are set out. We need to ensure Northern Ireland will maintain the same level of environmental protection as under current EU standards. There are many common cross-Border issues, including the integrity of freshwater and marine habitats, climate change, air quality and a plethora of other issues.

For Border regions and my county of Louth, at the start Brexit seemed to be all about currency volatility. While there is no escaping the impact of that volatility and businesses manage to adjust somehow, it will inevitably lead to an increase in smuggling and illicit trading. There are, however, other issues of serious concern, for example, for cross-Border commuters and staff working on both sides of the Border. They include the reintroduction of customs checks, the position of education and research and the need to ensure Horizon 2020 projects will continue, as well as co-operation between universities.

I was born prior to 1969 and our membership of the European Union and the era of the Good Friday Agreement and have seen the benefits the European Union has brought to our community. We cannot go back to the past.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Catherine Connolly): Ó thaobh áilleachta de, a Theachta, nach raibh tú riamh i nGaillimh? Ag bogadh ar aghaidh go dtí Sinn Féin, glaoim ar an Teachta Ó Caoláin.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Aontaím leis an méid a bhí le rá ag an Teachta Breathnach faoi thuaisceart Chontae an Lú.

Last week, representatives of local authorities across the Border area met in County Fermanagh where the findings of an Ulster University report on the impact of Brexit on Border areas were presented. Not surprisingly, the report stated some of the weakest economies on the island of Ireland were along the Border and, therefore, required the most protection against the negative impacts of Brexit. Furthermore, it made reference to the fact that, in 2015, almost 1 million cross-Border journeys had been made every week to access work, education and other services. Unfortunately, the impact of Brexit is already glaringly obvious, particularly in the agrifood sector. Due to the weakening of sterling in the wake of the Brexit vote, agrifood sector exports were estimated to be €570 million less than they would have been in 2016 and beef farmers alone had taken a hit of €150 million. These figures are staggering considering the fact Brexit has not officially happened yet, but it does give us an insight into the severity of what is to come. Things are only going to get worse, with tariff barriers, border checks and other regulatory changes that will have a devastating effect on the sector.

In my county of Monaghan, the mushroom sector is vital. Britain and the North of Ireland account for 90% of the value of Irish exports in this sector, at over €80 million. A number of months back I referred in this House to the fact the mushroom sector was worth €180 million a year to the economy and employed 3,500 people across rural Ireland. Regrettably, I also had to record the fact that at least 10% of Irish mushroom producers had closed down since the referendum on Brexit. Needless to say, I continue to have real concerns that this percentage will increase and that many hundreds of people will be left unemployed. The same situation presents for the pigmeat and poultry sectors which have enjoyed significant bilateral trade, North and South and between these islands. All sections of the agrifood sector are in crisis mode.

Sinn Féin has been continuously stating a North of Ireland exit from the European Union will harden the divisions between the North and the South, with the potential for the reintro-

duction of customs check points, trading tariffs and adverse knock-on effects for all-island economic activity and co-operation. The only way to avoid the further deterioration of the situation and to try to reduce the overall negative impact of Brexit is for special designated status to be granted to the North where the majority voted to remain. They should not be pulled out of the European Union against their will. In addition, it is in all our interests to ensure special designation is granted. The majority of Members of this House agree, as does the European Parliament. While we, of course, welcome the provision for the North to resume EU status following a successful Irish unity vote, the Government must try to abate the serious repercussions for all-island economic integration and cross-Border trade, particularly the services, manufacturing, farming and agrifood sectors; ensure the North will remain within the European Union and that, as a country and an island people, we get the very best deal possible.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: Cuirim fáilte roimh an phlé seo anocht sa Dáil. Níl dabht ar bith go mbeidh thar na míonna agus na blianta amach romhainn go leor plé agus scansáil ar an Bhreiteimeacht agus na himpleachtaí agus na deacrachtaí a bheidh ann. Tá an díospóireacht tosaithe ó bhí an vóta caite ag muintir na Sé Chontae agus ag muintir na Breataine. Mar a dúirt an Teachta Ó Caoláin, labhair siad amach go soiléir i dTuaisceart na hÉireann agus dúirt siad go raibh siad ag iarraidh fanacht taobh istigh den Aontas Eorpach. Anois cíimid go bhfuil siad á thabhairt amach as an Aontas Eorpach in éadan a dtola. Labhair go leor dúinn sa Teach seo faoi Chomhaontú Aoine an Chéasta agus na prionsabail atá taobh thiar den chomhaontú sin, go háirithe an prionsabal ó thaobh consent de. Is é sin ná nach chóir go mbeadh aon rud curtha ar mhuintir na Sé Chontae nach bhfuil an tromlach ag aontú leis. Seo sampla maith ina bhfuil an prionsabal sin caite ar leataobh.

We need to recognise that there is an overwhelming national interest at play on all sides in regard to Brexit. However, when it comes to the Government, in particular Fine Gael, it believes it has a right to speak for all of the island in terms of its own policy on the issue. The reason I say this is the position it has adopted in the Brexit negotiations is a conservative one rooted in partitionism. It is not the approach that is needed and not the mandate it should pursue.

This House has spoken very clearly on the issue. It has stated clearly that Dáil Éireann supports special designated status for the North. The majority of parties represented in the Assembly have adopted the exact same position. The majority of civic society, the people, believe that is what is required. Farmers, workers' organisations and business leaders in almost every sector want special status, yet the Fine Gael-led Government chooses to ignore that overwhelming demand. Just last week we saw the European Parliament's chief negotiator make comments on special designated status for the North of Ireland. Let me say it again to the Government. There is genuine goodwill across the European Union, from the bureaucracy to the leadership, on the suggestion the North should not be sacrificed on the Tory altar of reactionary foolishness. Let us make the demand central to the negotiations that will take place in the weeks, months and years ahead in order to start building for special designated status. Let us start breaking it down to see what it means and how we can achieve it in real terms.

Those in Fine Gael are in the way of the will of the people on this issue and have made themselves an obstacle to genuine progress for the people. They must reassess their stance, go back to their constituencies and listen to their neighbours, families and the people who will be impacted on by Brexit. They must listen to the will of the Dáil, the majority of parties in the North and, indeed, the people in the North.

Likewise, the Government is not fighting Ireland's corner when it comes to looking for renegotiation or recognition of what the reality of Brexit will mean for this country, North and South, east and west. Fine words are well and good, but what we need is concrete action. When I say "concrete action", I mean that we need to be examining the exemptions built into the existing treaties, for example, state aid to allow for more investment in certain sectors in industry where necessary. This is possible, if we make this central to our negotiation stance. Let us look at the European Globalisation Fund, which in my party's view needs to be re-calibrated to fight the shock of Brexit in industries before the shock takes place and the redundancies are made to ensure that sectors, such as the mushroom sector Deputy Ó Caoláin talked about, are supported through that fund so that they can ride out the storm that will undoubtedly come, and has come in some areas, as a result of Brexit. The fiscal rules have built into them exemptions that can be unlocked if Ireland places them central to its negotiation strategy. We need to ensure that they are used so that we can invest, North and South, to limit the effects of Brexit on the island of Ireland, particularly through capital and other investment.

There are other areas, such as the Structural Funds, where we need to be making a case, for example, for more flexibility and greater co-financing. In that regard, we also need to ensure in these negotiations that Ireland is put at the front of the queue, not at the middle or end of the queue, when it comes to EU transport and infrastructure projects. That is what fighting for Ireland and putting Ireland's interests first and centre stage looks like. It is not what Fine Gael is doing at present. There needs to be a proper assessment of the impacts of Brexit, but particularly in terms of our Northern comrades.

There also needs to be an open and honest debate. There are 33 documents held within three different Departments about border controls being established - contingency plans by Revenue. Three different Departments have had presentations, Ministers included, in relation to that, but not one of those documents is being released to Members of this House or to the public. We need to have an open debate about what the real consequences of Brexit will look like. My community and Deputy Ó Caoláin's community need to know that there are contingency plans here, that there are dozens of documents and presentations-----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Catherine Connolly): Tá an Teachta imithe thar am.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: -----that are talking about erecting custom posts on the roads and streets that we traverse on a daily basis.

Minister of State at the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen): I welcome the opportunity to make a statement on Brexit. I listened to the various Opposition speakers since 7.30 p.m. or so, and it is interesting to hear the various different opinions out there. I suppose nobody expected of the guidelines, following the negotiations and consultations that we have had over the past number of months with our colleagues in the European Union and the meetings we had in the UK, and what happened when the British Prime Minister, Mrs. Theresa May, triggered Article 50 when she asked her ambassador to go to the President of the Council, Mr. Donald Tusk, that we would have a paragraph in them. In all the guidelines that were published, everything that we had discussed and brought up, and the concerns, were included. That is testimony to what the Government has been doing over the past number of months.

The result last June was not the result we wanted. We wanted the UK to remain in the European Union but, unfortunately, it voted to opt out. I suppose, of all the countries in the Euro-

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pean Union, the Government was more prepared than any other country. Why? The answer is because we had more to lose than any other country.

The unique relationship that exists between the UK and Ireland is something special. The trade between our countries, with €1.2 billion worth of goods being traded each week, outlines that special relationship. That is why, I suppose, from our point of view, our focus on Brexit has been to minimise the impact on trade and the economy, and that has been an important focus in my Department as well. Both the Minister, Deputy Mitchell O'Connor, and the Minister of State, Deputy Halligan, and myself, and the management team meet every week in relation to Brexit and what our Department will do in this regard.

One of the most important issues was to protect the Northern peace process. Our colleagues across the way, Sinn Féin, have mentioned that. That has been a very important part of our negotiations, to talk to our colleagues in Europe in relation to the peace process and the important and significant role the peace process has played in developing the economic situation between both sides of the Border as well.

We are not going back to the days of a hard Border because hard borders create friction. They create obstacles to the way of peace and obstacles to the way of economic progress as well. We are very conscious of the important role the Border counties are playing here in this. We know how food crosses the Border, North and South, before it is fully processed. These are our concerns which we have relayed in all areas at our meetings with our European colleagues.

Both the Minister, Deputy Mitchell O'Connor, and myself have travelled to various European countries to outline our concerns to our European partners. I visited Tallinn in Estonia on Monday last where I had a number of meetings with ministerial colleagues. They all are most understanding of the situation that exists between Ireland and the UK. I would compare it, as I said at the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications and to other Ministers, to the relationship they had with the other Baltic countries. It was the same when I visited Budapest. We have got our message across.

When we are negotiating over the next two years, we will be negotiating from within the European Union because our future lies in the European Union. Ireland has come a long way since 1973, when we very much depended on trade with the UK. Today, approximately 40% of our trade is to the UK.

Trade between the UK and Ireland is extremely import and we will not neglect that. We want a soft Brexit. We want to continue the trade with the United Kingdom because it is our closest neighbour and because that trade is very important. Maintaining the common travel area is a priority for us as well.

That is why I say to all Members that our preparations have been extensive over the past 12 months. We have conducted significant planning in all sectors, my Department included, including consultations with all the stakeholders. We have had extensive engagements. As I said, at ministerial level, the Taoiseach took control of the campaign at an early stage. We all heard about the Brexit Ministers, but we all know that our Departments - the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, my Department, the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, and various other Ministers when they travelled abroad had an important role to play. We have held extensive consultations at official levels as well. Our officials are travelling all the time to Europe to talk to their counterparts there. Our

diplomats who are based in Europe have been doing their work as well. Over 400 meetings have taken place on this. What is included in the guidelines is the result of the hard work by the Government, our diplomatic team and the Ministers in preparation for Brexit.

As I said, we are a small island nation. We export 80% of everything we produce. Of course, the first port of call for any exporter is the UK; it is easy and it is English speaking. That is why the British market is so important to us.

On Enterprise Ireland and our agencies, we have funded them with resources for staff and have provided funding in supporting clients and sustaining and growing exports to the UK. It is also encouraging and supporting diversification to new markets outside of the UK.

Of course, the eurozone is an area that we are targeting and marketing in as well. Two weeks ago, I visited Antwerp with 15 Irish companies in the pharma-construction sector. I spoke to some of those companies - I had a Brexit meeting in Brussels before with all of those companies. I refer back to the survey, which some of the speakers referred to, that my Department carried out.

Many of the Irish companies that are exporting are growing businesses in the UK. They are signing contracts at the moment and they are not affected by what is happening. Deputy Ó Caoláin is correct in what he said about the food sector, which is vulnerable, in particular in the Border region, as he outlined. That is why we introduced measures in last year's budget to try to protect food producers. The reason the food sector is vulnerable is that margins are very low. In addition, there is concern about fluctuations in sterling, which has affected many companies as well, especially those on low margins. *9 o'clock* The currency fluctuation is not as bad as we thought it might be in that sterling is still hovering around 83 cent or 84 cent at the moment. We would be very concerned if it reached the 90 cent mark. However, that did not happen and even when Britain triggered Article 50, the currency did not fall. From that point of view, we have time to prepare.

Enterprise Ireland is talking to approximately 1,500 client companies that are exporting to the UK. Being competitive is so important for companies in the current challenging economic situation. Companies must be competitive because if they are not, they will evaporate because the standards in eastern European countries are beginning to rise and they are competitive. They have the knowledge as well. We must be innovative all the time, which is the reason we encourage companies to innovate.

Enterprise Ireland is encouraging companies to prepare for Brexit by improving competitiveness, investing in innovation and diversifying into new markets, which is also important. I have responsibility for local enterprise offices, LEOs, which are organising workshops for small companies and micro enterprises and holding seminars to train and assist companies to better understand the challenges of Brexit and to continue to implement such initiatives as the online trading vouchers, which are important also. I urge all those in the sectors that are concerned about the potential impact of Brexit to contact LEOs as they can assist companies and provide advice.

In response to what Deputy Stephen Donnelly said, we carried out a survey which showed that 49% of companies had not been affected yet by Brexit and 15% of companies had been affected to a minimal extent, but there are concerns about the future. In terms of policy response, we are progressing the development of a Brexit working capital guarantee scheme and other

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loan options also for the long term. That will depend on resources and EU state aid rules as well. We have worked hard in recent months to ensure our specific concerns are being raised by our EU partners. Our consultative approach will continue with our economic preparations for Brexit.

Deputy Bobby Aylward: I wish to share time with Deputy Murphy O'Mahony and Deputy Cahill.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Catherine Connolly): Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Bobby Aylward: Arguably, Brexit poses one of the biggest risks to farmers, exporters and jobs in the agrifood sector since the foundation of the State. According to a recent report by Bord Bia, the agrifood industry in Ireland has already lost up to €570 million in sterling depreciation. The depreciation alone threw the mushroom industry into turmoil, with the loss of €7 million in exports and 130 jobs. It nearly decimated the industry. It seems that is only a drop in the ocean compared to the threats coming down the tracks facing farmers and the agrifood sector. At the end of the separation period, which will probably be March 2019, the United Kingdom could, for example, impose tariffs, which tend to be high for certain foods such as dairy and beef; decouple itself from EU food standards, adding many new regulatory checks, delays and costs; remove tariffs from low-cost regions like South America, making it extremely difficult for Irish farmers and producers to compete; and impose border controls around Northern Ireland, making it harder, slower and costlier to move product North and South.

The UK leaving the EU also creates a €3 billion shortfall in CAP funding, which is about 6% of the total budget. Irish farmers get more than €1.5 billion annually through basic scheme payments and the rural development programme, with direct payments accounting for two thirds of total farm income across all sectors. If the mushroom industry is to serve as a warning for the agrifood sector as a whole, we are nowhere close to where we need to be in terms of protecting indigenous food producers against the implications of Brexit. We need to explore options to keep the UK as close as possible to the Single Market and customs union and to maintain the current zero tariff situation which is crucial to the agrifood sector. We need to make use of Common Market measures in CAP providing for exceptional financial aid measures against severe market disturbances. We need increased resources for the market access unit in the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine to enable new export markets to be opened for Irish food and drink products. We need EU assurances that CAP payments are secure beyond 2020.

Before I conclude, I wish to return to the beef sector. Beef prices have come under pressure in 2017 as approximately 100,000 extra cattle come on-stream over the course of this year. The Minister, Deputy Creed, must consider introducing a €200 annual payment for suckler cows to ensure the sustainability of the national herd to supplement the existing payment structure in the beef genomics scheme and increase payments to €200 for the first 20 cows with the balance at €80 per cow. I raised the matter with the Minister last week during Question Time but I received a very negative response. Such an annual payment is very achievable given the likely underspend in the scheme and I urge the Minister to take another look at it, given that the beef sector will be the most exposed as 50% of all Irish beef exports go to Britain.

My time is up. I would never like to see a Border again between Northern Ireland and ourselves. Common travel and freedom of movement were the hallmarks of the relationship between Britain and Ireland and I wish to see that maintained. I urge the Minister if at all pos-

sible to achieve that in the negotiations and to keep what we have.

Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony: It is almost one year since the United Kingdom voted to leave the EU. Since then our Government's approach has been stagnant to say the least.

Deputy David Stanton: Come on.

Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony: The Government has failed to develop any cohesive plan that would secure our relationship with our nearest and biggest trading partner. That is despite the fact that reports indicate that sectors such as the agri sector, the tourism sector and the SME sector have already been adversely affected.

The agri sector has lost €570 million alone due to fluctuations in sterling, even though 37% of all Irish food exports are exported to the UK. That is not sustainable. In the area of tourism investment, I take the example of Cork Airport. There are approximately 18 flights daily between Cork Airport and the UK. Those flights are imperative to the continued rise in tourism numbers, especially in west Cork which I represent. Any disruption to the single aviation market would greatly impede that. Moreover, if we are to expect multinationals to locate and invest in rural areas, we must be mindful of the fact that adequate facilities are essential. In that regard, extra resources for State agencies such as Fáilte Ireland, IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland are essential. In the context of small and medium enterprises, I refer to a Department of Finance report published in October 2016 which indicates that regionally based SMEs are most likely to suffer a negative impact following a less than favourable Brexit deal for Ireland.

All of the above sectors, together with many other sectors in the Border area, will be negatively affected in the absence of a properly negotiated agreement. It is clear that it is vitally important that a plan is put in place for the Border counties. However, it is also vital that the non-Border counties are given equal consideration. I represent Cork South West, which is one of the furthest constituencies from the Border, and I want the Minister to understand how important proper negotiations are for all of us.

Deputy Jackie Cahill: I will focus my comments on the agrifood sector. The Minister of State, Deputy Breen, spoke about our preparations for these negotiations which are in their infancy, if not embryonic. As the former president of a farming organisation, my experience of EU negotiations is that concessions are only made in the final hours. That, however, is when we, as a country, will be at our most vulnerable.

We are by far the most dependent on access to the UK market. Just the other day, a major UK retailer said it was not going to stock Irish beef any more. This circling-the-wagons mentality by UK retailers and farmers has not even entered the equation yet or been considered.

As Deputy Aylward said, the beef sector is a hugely important market for us. Some 50% of our beef finds its way onto UK shelves. It is a high value market for us, as well as being the highest value beef market in the world. We have not yet done the preparatory work to try to find replacement outlets for our beef.

This year has seen an increase in Bord Bia's budget of €2 million. With the challenges that organisation is facing in trying to get alternative markets for our products, that figure does not show enough commitment from the Government in preparing the ground work necessary to cope with the consequences of Brexit for us.

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The British Prime Minister has said that no deal is better than a bad deal, but the reality is that the clock is ticking. If we come to the end of negotiations and there is no deal we will be on WTO tariffs which would put a levy of 16 cent per litre on dairy products going into the UK market.

Ornua, which is our major dairy marketing body, has huge business interests in the UK and is largely intertwined in that market. Some 80% of our cheddar finds its way onto UK shelves as a unique product for the UK market. We would have no alternative market for that cheese product.

There has not been much focus on the high standards that the EU Commission demands of our food producers. If the UK is operating outside the Single Market it will not be under the same restrictions. Not so many years ago we had a foot and mouth scare in this country, so what controls can the EU have on UK imports post-Brexit? We have been fighting for a generation to stop third country beef imports coming into the EU. Farmers in those countries operate on completely different standards to those within the EU. That can pose dangers for food production on this island.

The mushroom sector was the first casualty of the Brexit vote when sterling fluctuated. It had a negative effect on our mushroom business. Two mushroom growers in County Tipperary went out of business quickly after the British vote last year. Therefore, the challenges facing the agrifood industry are immense, yet we can only see the tip of the iceberg so far. To date, the Government's preparation has been inadequate. Nothing illustrates it more so than the budgetary allocation for An Bord Bia for the current calendar year.

Our dependency on cross-Border trade is illustrated by the fact that 300,000 litres of milk per day come into the Twenty-six Counties from Northern Ireland to be processed. All such matters will be major issues in the Brexit negotiations. The challenges are huge but as of now our preparations are not adequate to ensure that the agrifood sector can come out of the Brexit negotiations in an economically viable state.

Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick: I very much welcome the opportunity to contribute to this evening's debate on the negotiations on the UK's withdrawal from the EU. I have spoken on this topic on numerous occasions in this House and at many events in my home county of Louth. My message has been very clear from the start of this whole process. First of all, we must not forget that it was the UK that decided to leave the EU. As a result of an internal Tory feud, a referendum was called and the UK people decided, whether rightly or wrongly, to leave the EU.

We, in Ireland, will no doubt be affected by this decision. The UK is our nearest neighbour and also our largest trading partner. Over 200,000 jobs in Ireland rely on strong UK trade. Coming from a Border county like Louth, I know more than most the possible effects of a hard Brexit. Let us be very clear, however. Brexit also presents massive opportunities for us here in Ireland. We will become the only English-speaking country in the EU. We now have an opportunity to attract even more foreign direct investment. To put this in perspective, the UK is currently the largest recipient of foreign direct investment in the EU. The last recorded figures show the UK received over €35 billion in foreign direct investment.

If we look at Ireland during the same period we received just over €5 billion. In my opinion this represents a great opportunity to attract those investors to Ireland. The choice is simple for those companies. Do they want to invest in the only English-speaking country in the EU or do

they want to invest in the UK which wants to leave the EU? In my humble opinion the choice is very clear.

The work done by IDA Ireland must be applauded but we must do more to ensure these companies continue to increase their investments in Ireland. We only have to look at the papers to see that companies are already looking to move from the UK and set up their headquarters in Ireland. We must continue to support these companies and entice them to Ireland.

I know from my own constituency of Louth the effects of foreign direct investment. In Dundalk especially, we have seen many multinational companies locate to the town. The people and businesses of Dundalk know at first hand the many benefits that large multinational companies locating to the region can bring. I would like to put on record the good work done by IDA Ireland in attracting foreign business to the region. I urge it to continue attracting this type of investment.

Getting back to Brexit, I hear a lot of commentary about the effects of fluctuations in the value of sterling and how it will affect Border regions like Dundalk. I suspect much of this commentary is just scare-mongering. We, in Dundalk and other Border regions, have long battled against the fluctuating value of sterling. There are times when one wins and times when one loses. This is nothing new. We have overcome these challenges in the past and will overcome them in the future.

Shortly after the result of the Brexit referendum became known, David McWilliams stated that the result offered Ireland the greatest opportunity of our generation. I wholeheartedly agree with him. In my view there are far more opportunities now than ever before, including opportunities for Irish businesses to expand into new markets. In addition there will be opportunities to trade on better terms with our UK counterparts. There is also an opportunity to become the main English-speaking financial services centre in the EU, in addition to opportunities to develop new business relationships with our European counterparts and exploit the void that the UK will leave.

There will also be many challenges. We must resist completely any attempts to implement a hard Border between the UK and Ireland. We must also resist the political scare-mongering that is taking place in regard to a hard Border. Political parties like Sinn Féin are only interested in political point-scoring and not in looking at the bigger picture. They are more interested in setting up mock customs borders, as was the case just outside Dundalk recently, than trying to address the real issue of Brexit.

As regards borders, the EU already has arrangements in place with countries like Norway and Switzerland. These are examples where common sense prevailed and a practical solution was put in place. In my view we will see a practical solution in respect of the UK border. The Taoiseach has secured the EU's support to ensure that the special relationship between the UK and Ireland must be maintained.

I have listened to many different opinions on Ireland's membership of the EU since Brexit. It is my firm opinion that we must not be drawn into a debate about our own membership of the EU. We are a proud member of the EU and that is where our future lies. We must be committed to the EU, the Single Market, the euro and our low corporation tax. We must not be drawn into the UK's difficult negotiation with the EU. We must stand with our European counterparts and, at the same time, do everything in our power to protect our interests in these negotiations.

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Coming from the Border town of Dundalk, and having run a very successful business in that town, I know more than most in this House the importance of a border that is open not only for trade, but also movement of people. I do not doubt for one moment that there will be serious challenges and obstacles to overcome, but I also know there will be opportunities for us as a result of the UK deciding to leave the EU. We must be ready to take full advantage of these opportunities and not lose out to other European countries, which no doubt see the same opportunities. I urge all political parties to stop the scare-mongering, stop playing political games and look at the bigger picture. We have an opportunity to grow our economy and strengthen our links with Europe and countries further afield. We must not take the same road as the UK and shut the doors to the rest of Europe. We must take this opportunity to build bridges and create new alliances.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: I am supposed to be sharing time with Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin but we were not expecting our time to arise quite this early. I will propose to share the time in any event and hopefully she will realise our time has begun.

I believe Brexit is one of the biggest mistakes the British people have ever made and the British Government continues to make. It is an horrendous thing that has happened. It has happened in the context of a majority of the British public having a complete lack of education of the consequences for them. It has happened while powerful and sinister interests in global geopolitics have interfered in new and unprecedented ways in referendums over the last number of years. This has been reported as recently as last weekend by Carole Cadwallader in *The Guardian*. It brings a whole new dimension to our world political system and we would do well to read that article, particularly in terms of the influence of very sinister elements of the American right and of the Russian nation. We would do well to keep those particular influences in mind in various debates happening in this country as well. We also saw that influence attempted in France during the presidential election, where it failed. It succeeded in the UK and in the United States of America. We must be vigilant about that. I say that as an aside, but as an important aside.

I am education spokesperson for my party and it is very important to lay on the record the issues in respect of education that arise from Brexit because they are serious, multifaceted and, like everything else in the context of Brexit, they are not easily understood and they are not easily predictable. We must identify them, however, and the Government must get to work on them. The issues in respect of education span primary education, secondary education, third level and the whole area of further education, training and apprenticeships. It also spans the area of research, which should not be just a matter for the Department of Education and Skills but should be a responsibility and interest across Government.

With regard to primary and second level, there are small amounts of students who cross the Border to go to school and their particular status will have to be resolved in the context of the negotiation. It is not the biggest issue in terms of Brexit but it is an issue which is there and which the Government will have to identify and address. There is also an issue, particularly in terms of primary education, with the recognition of teacher qualifications. That will have to be seriously addressed and negotiated. It is an issue that will come across in various professions but it will have a key impact in terms of primary education.

In terms of secondary education, there are already signs that the English language is going to be downgraded to some extent post-Brexit. I wonder if that will happen on a practical basis. Will people start to speak French at meetings? The Leas-Cheann Comhairle will know that

English had become the *lingua franca* of many meetings at European level. I know that at our own party meetings at European level, which I attend regularly, English is the language used. I wonder will that begin to change. We must wait and see but we must be prepared for that at second level. The Minister must introduce his modern languages strategy and get to work on it. He announced it three weeks ago but has not yet published it. We must educate our young people, and indeed ourselves, up to a standard in a range of modern European languages that may become more useful in the years ahead.

It is at third level, however, that the greatest challenges face us in terms of Brexit. There are currently quite a number of students that come from the North to the South. There are also approximately 12,000 Irish students in the UK. Their particular status is uncertain. There was an increase in terms of the number of Irish students coming to the UK and UK students, including those from Northern Ireland, coming here. That seems to have tapered off in the last academic year or so. The universities are reporting anecdotal evidence to me of a drop-off in the number of Northern students coming to the South. That is deeply worrying. One of the ways I got to know a lot of people from both sides of the community in the North was in my class in college, where half of the class were from the North. That was an unusually large number at that time. We need to integrate our education systems more and we need to allow that free movement and access. That should be the Minister, Deputy Bruton's top priority in the context of Brexit. The common travel area and freedom of movement for students should be maintained post Brexit.

It caused some controversy, and indeed some interest, in the North of Ireland when I stated my beliefs regarding cross-Border education. While students who come to the South from the North or the UK are guaranteed to be treated as EU students for the remainder of their three or four years of academic life, that same guarantee and proposition is not available to students starting in September 2018 or thereafter. It is important to get that message out. On the basis of the Good Friday Agreement, and without prejudice to the rest of the Brexit negotiation, I believe it is open to the Government to tell students that we will give them EU status indefinitely if they come from the North of Ireland. The Government should do that unilaterally. It needs to be done. I think it can be done without regard to anything else. It can be done without regard to reciprocity. We should hope for reciprocity but of course we cannot deliver that. We are not the authority in the North or in the UK. That should be done as a generous offer. We should say that students can come here from the North as EU students indefinitely. That would certainly give a boost to our universities. It would give a boost to young people, certainly in the North of Ireland, but also in the UK as a whole. They voted in favour of remaining in the European Union. I think those benefits need to be extended to them unilaterally.

My worry about the education sector at third level, listening to the academics speak, is that the opportunities that arise from Brexit are being emphasised more than the threats. There will be opportunities because Ireland is an English-speaking country, a member of the EU, a member of the euro and has some excellent universities. There are opportunities there to attract research funding and academics who are EU citizens who wish to continue to work in the EU. Already there is anecdotal evidence of an increase in interest. I am worried, however, that optimism is overshadowing some of the threats. We need to carefully examine both sides of that particular ledger and I am not sure that is being done at the moment. There is too much of a sense of everything being rosy in the garden at the moment. I am worried about that. I ask for a note of caution while recognising that there are indeed opportunities.

I will yield to my colleague in a moment but there are tremendous links between Ireland and the UK in terms of research. Between 2005 and 2014, there were nearly 17,000 papers

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co-authored between Irish and UK academics. We need to continue that as best we can. I hope that type of co-operation will continue after Brexit but there are issues that we can deal with now at a national level.

Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin: I put it to the Minister that the detailed position paper which the Government published last week is a rehash of everything we have heard before. It is distinctly underwhelming with nothing new. It contains no ideas, no vision, no strategy, no budget, no timelines and no ambition. If this represents two years planning, as the Taoiseach has said, I greatly worry about the two years ahead of us.

Sectors such as the agrifood sector, the equine sector, the tourism sector and the small and medium-sized enterprise sector are already being affected and impacted by Brexit. These sectors and the hundreds of thousands of people employed in them cannot sit and wait for the Government to develop plans. They need help and support now. Now is the opportune time to help them. The agrifood industry has already lost €570 million due to sterling depreciation and jobs have already been lost in the sector, particularly in the mushroom industry. A recently published report by the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation has shown that 37% of those surveyed have already felt the negative repercussions on Brexit before it has even happened. We are almost a year on from the referendum and the Government's wait and see approach and promise to develop plans in the future is simply unacceptable. We need to see action. This is the most important negotiation that we, as a country, will ever enter into. The UK is traditionally our largest trading partner and our countries trade approximately €1.2 billion in goods and services on a weekly basis. A hard Brexit could reduce that by as much as one third. I understand that officials from the Department of Finance told the Joint Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach that their projections suggest that a hard Brexit would result in a reduction in national wealth, a 30% decline in exports to the UK, a rise in unemployment and 40,000 fewer people in work after ten years. The Government needs to plan for this scenario now, not hope for the best. This message seems to have been lost on the Government.

The actual negotiations have not yet begun but at the moment, there is a significant gulf between the UK and the EU in terms of expectations. The risk of coming away with no deal would be bad for the UK, bad for the EU and particularly bad for Ireland. We, as a country, must work with our colleagues in the EU to secure an agreement that safeguards the EU project and prevents it from further fragmentation. Our future is definitively in the EU and we must ensure that we protect it.

Upholding the Good Friday Agreement, which is an international treaty, in full is a legal requirement and the only thing to do. The impact of Brexit on our education system will be significant. Deputy Byrne outlined the impact of Brexit on primary, secondary and third level education but as Chairman of the Joint Committee on Education and Skills, I want to put on record my concern about the 125,000 EU students in the UK, of which approximately 10% are from Ireland. There is a significant number of issues there. We need to minimise the damage Brexit could do to our agriculture, tourism and education system and maximise the potential benefits we could gain.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: Today, a few dozen miles from where we are, in towns like Newry, Armagh and Enniskillen, Irish people democratically determined in the recent Brexit referendum to remain in the EU but not much has changed for these Irish people in the past 100 years. The self-determination of Irish people in Northern Ireland is being ignored and discarded by London, as it was in Dublin 100 years ago. Shockingly, what happens to the Border on the is-

land of Ireland and our national interest is still beyond the democratic control of the people and the issue of consent, which has been the foundation stone of the peace process for the past 14 years, has been binned by Tories because it was inconvenient.

Some 1.8 million people live in Northern Ireland and all of them have a constitutional right to be Irish citizens. That means they have a right to be EU citizens. However, because of way the Brexit negotiations are to take place, it is very likely that these EU citizens will be second-class citizens because they will be isolated outside the EU and unable to exercise most of their rights. Article 9 of the Treaty on European Union states that “in all its activities, the Union shall observe the principle of the equality of its citizens, who shall receive equal attention from its institutions, bodies, offices and agencies”. How in the name of God will EU citizens in Northern Ireland be able to get that equal attention? The treaty also states that citizens are equally represented at Union level in the European Parliament. Again, there is no talk at the moment about giving EU citizens in Northern Ireland a vote in European elections in the future. These are European treaties. They state that every citizen shall have the right to participate in the democratic life of the Union and that decisions shall be taken as openly and as closely as possible to the citizen. Again, how is this going to happen?

There is a precedent in this area. A European Council decision adopted in 2004 set the number of elected EU representatives in Cyprus at six. While elections are not held in the northern part of the island, almost 80,000 Turkish Cypriots who have acquired identity cards in the Republic of Cyprus are eligible to register as voters. They also have the right to be included on the special electoral list in elections to the European Parliament. We know that they are citizens and the EU has responsibility to them. At least we should be facilitating our brothers and sisters in their quest to exercise their rights as EU citizens.

The Good Friday Agreement has a number of core components. One of these is the European Convention on Human Rights. The EU has also been critical for peace in terms of providing substantial political and financial aid. This is in major danger due to Brexit. Co-operation on the island of Ireland is slowly developing. We can see it in a number of different areas. For example, Altnagelvin Hospital provides cancer care for the entire north west. Children in Northern Ireland can get some of their services in the South and a new cross-Border ambulance service literally saves people’s lives on a daily basis. Many of these services are funded, part funded or at least organised by INTERREG and other EU programmes, which will be deleted if Northern Ireland is taken out of the EU.

Of course, Brexit will be a severe blow to everybody involved in business on the island of Ireland. There is no doubt in my mind that the 12 counties in the northern half of the island will be worst affected. These people already live on a man-made periphery. They already deal with two different jurisdictions and two different legal and economic systems but if the UK comes out of the Single Market plus the customs union with all the divergence that entails, it will be far more difficult for them. Let us look at some of the statistics around the all-Ireland economy. A total of €6 billion worth of trade takes place on a cross-Border basis on annual basis and 177,000 trucks, 270,000 vans and 1.5 million people travel across the Border on a monthly basis so businesses face an enterprise minefield and it is hard to fathom how they are going to get through it. Again, if we go down the route of a hard Border, what we are looking at in terms of WTO tariffs alone is 375 different tariffs just for fish. There are 375 separate tariffs in one tiny sector of a massive supply chain. The level of non-tariff barriers that will appear if the UK develops genetically modified products means that we can say goodbye to cross-Border supply chains with regard to lots of agricultural products. The UK will change its regulations on the

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environment or workers' rights because there will be no point in bringing back sovereignty to London if the UK Government did not look to change those regulations.

We have heard that everything is hunky-dory from the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation and that lots of energy and money are put into this space to resolve the issue. InterTradeIreland carried out three surveys on the island over the past three quarters. A total of 98% of businesses on the island of Ireland surveyed by InterTradeIreland said they had no plans to deal with Brexit. The only thing that matches the size of the crisis posed by Brexit is our lack of preparedness. One of the methods to mitigate against the threats posed by Brexit is a reunited Ireland. I am heartened by the large number of different political and non-political organisations who in the past number of months have come to the same space as us with regard to the logic of unity. Even the Labour Party has strongly articulated that in recent times. I believe Fianna Fáil will participate in the local elections in Northern Ireland in 2019. I am heartened by that but until that sunny day arrives, another solution to the problem exists. That is to ensure that we shift the EU border from the line between Louth and Donegal into the Irish Sea. The North must stay within the Single Market, the customs union and the EU.

The Brexit train is currently raging down the tracks. Logic dictates that the Government should make its hand as strong as possible with regard to what is happening. The Spanish Government did so. A few weeks ago, it achieved a veto so that no agreement can apply to Gibraltar without Spanish agreement. Spain has imposed its will on the future of Gibraltar and ensured that any future agreement must be agreeable and acceptable to Spain. The Government has achieved no such cast iron veto. It has secured positive support and good wishes. This reminds me of a television advertisement for Donegal Catch. I do not know if the Minister of State remembers it. Spain may have received the cast iron guarantee but Michel Barnier is putting our interests on file.

The Minister of State at the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Deputy Breen, stated that the Government opposes a hard Border. However, if it has no cast iron guarantee, all the opposing in the world might amount to nothing. He said that we have great understanding from our European brothers and sisters. However, only a few short years ago the largest transfer of wealth on this island since the plantations took place through the banking guarantee. Our European brothers and sisters did not show us much understanding at that time.

This House has given the Government a mandate to seek special status. The majority of Members have voted in recent months to seek special designated status for Northern Ireland. It is outrageous that the Government is ignoring the will of the Dáil and the people. I ask the Government to get strong on this issue and fulfil the mandate it has been given by this House to ensure that it gets special status for Northern Ireland and adds some certainty to the challenges faced by all sectors of Irish society.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I listened with great interest to Deputy Tóibín's remarks. The situation we are in is less than optimal. I agree with the Deputy's point that negotiating through a third party will be a major challenge. Whenever a third party is sent to a negotiation, it is difficult to predict the outcome. I have previously thought that every angle had been covered in instructions given to a third party but then did not get the expected result. If one is not at the table, it is very difficult to control the unforeseen.

It is very important for this country to engage not only with our European colleagues, but also our near neighbour. Our interest is served by everybody using common sense here and

those on both sides of the divide, the European leaders who will be negotiating, including Mr. Barnier, and the British Prime Minister, Mrs. May, and her team, not getting into a test of strength to see who will win. If that leads to a hard Brexit, it will have huge consequences for this island.

The other big problem we face, accepting that Border controls within this island would be impossible to police and politically unacceptable, if there were to be a hard Brexit, Britain would probably put the effective Border at the Irish Sea. If people think that unlikely, I remind them that during the Second World War there was free movement on this island. One was checked by security getting on the boat up in Larne or Belfast or wherever one embarked because it was known that trying to seal the Border was impossible.

There are two issues on which I would like to concentrate. The first regards the possible implications of Brexit for our beef industry. Of all our agricultural industries, beef is the most vulnerable. Brexit could have a perversely beneficial effect on horticulture should it become more difficult to import products than to use Irish products. However, horticulture is a very small though important section of Irish agriculture. It is a very important section of agriculture in the north of Dublin. The challenge for the beef sector is not that Britain will not have to buy beef. It will. It does not have enough. It will probably produce more beef because intensive farmers there will be allowed to use methods of husbandry which are not currently permitted in the European Union. It has been made clear in the documentation published by the British Government that more intensive farming, genetically modified organisms and so on will be allowed. The big challenge for us will be Britain importing beef from other countries. If the British market is flooded with cheap beef from South America, it will pose a major challenge for our beef industry. We must try to minimise this. The Government could try to get Britain to agree that health and animal welfare standards and the use of hormones and so on would not be acceptable in either the production or the sale of livestock. We must be creative and innovative, keep our eye on the ball in the negotiations and devise a way to ensure that we protect our premium product and retain our ability to get a premium price. It will be very difficult.

The other immediate challenge which seems to have attracted very little attention - I am delighted go bhfuil An Leas-Cheann Comhairle sa Chathaoir anocht – is the issue of fisheries. We should always look at the political dimension of a problem because that can be more important than the economic dimension. It has been said that Britain is not overly concerned about repossessing our waters because it exports the fish caught in those waters and imports different species of fish for consumption in Britain. However, that ignores a fundamental political reality. The last referendum on Scottish independence was won by a margin of 4% or 5%. The British Prime Minister, Theresa May, is a unionist and does not want to lose the kingdom of Scotland from the United Kingdom. While there is a great attachment to Northern Ireland amongst Conservatives and unionists in Britain, the union of Scotland and England is a fundamental tenet of their political being. The emotional responses we have as a nation are equally strong across the water. I saw manifestations of this during my time as Minister, in particular at the British-Irish Council. The British Prime Minister would not like Nicola Sturgeon to get one over on her and pass another referendum. It is not that it has to be won. It is known that 40% of the electorate would vote one way and 45% the other, meaning a small swing would decide the referendum. It is my view that Britain will go for a hard Brexit on our waters. It will repossess the waters because there is more water around Scotland on its three sides than in any other part of these islands. They have the Orkneys, the Shetlands and the Outer Hebrides and that water extends way out into the ocean. In that circumstance, Ireland immediately loses 34%

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of its catch, mainly from the north west. Furthermore, those other European countries that have fishing rights in those grounds will be looking for compensatory grounds. I asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Deputy Creed, a question about this issue. He seemed to put the whole question onto some distant back-burner. I believe he is wrong and that from day one, he should put on the table that in the event of the European Union losing these hugely geographically spread out fishing grounds, which are of critical importance to our fishing fleet, we will be looking for a total renegotiation of the Common Fisheries Policy so that Ireland will not be a major loser in this respect.

To be honest, I believe that in every adversity there is opportunity. I have been critical of all Governments, including Fianna Fáil Governments, that the deal done on fisheries from the day we entered the European Union was pathetic. Back in the early 1970s I believed, as I do now, that we never thought it would go to 200 miles and we neglected the potential of our seas in favour of agriculture and short-term money. That money is beginning to dry up for agriculture and will dry up more after Brexit with the withdrawal of the British contribution to the EU Exchequer. It is now time for Ireland to start planning if this is going to happen - and in my view it is likely that it will happen. We not only want to minimise the negative effect, we also want to see if we can turn it to our advantage and ensure that if we own 14% of European waters, we get a lot more than the 4% of the fish quotas we currently have. I urge the Minister of State to urge his colleague to not see this as an afterthought. He should have been thumping the table from day one, saying that this is a likelihood and Ireland wants guarantees that the matter would be totally reviewed. I am out of time, unfortunately. In a lot of countries if there was a policy to return the coastal waters to the coastal communities - irrespective of nation, in France or wherever - and not have the super-trawlers taking everything, I believe we would find a wide consensus across Europe. There would be an exclusive coastal zone for boats under a certain size as recommended by an Oireachtas committee in a reform cap. This would be much more sustainable than the present arrangement of allowing hunters in very large boats to do inestimable damages to a vital natural resource.

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):

This was a very interesting debate and I have listened to most of it. There were some very positive and worthwhile contributions. On the morning after 23 June last year, most of us woke to get the news that Brexit was going to happen, as the British people had voted. Many people were in a state of shock and had not expected it to happen. The polls had been totally opposed to that. On 29 March this year, Article 50 was triggered. This was another milestone. Nothing could happen until that had happened because there was always a slim chance that maybe the decision might be reversed or the Parliament might go against it.

There is another milestone facing us with the 8 June elections in the UK, and the German elections after that in the summer. The real negotiations cannot start until those milestones are gone through. That is not to say we are not getting ready and preparing. Over the past ten months - since June last year - the Government, led by the Taoiseach, has travelled the length and breadth of Europe for consultations on Brexit. Our engagements have not been limited to meetings with direct government counterparts; our outreach effort has also encompassed meetings with parliamentarians, journalists, business leaders and representative groups. I have also raised Brexit with my opposite numbers at every practical opportunity. Setting out Ireland's key priorities and concerns has been at the heart of this exercise. Let there be no mistake about that.

There are two contextual factors that have become evident in this process. First, with the

exception of the UK, the level of political and public debate in Ireland about Brexit is completely without parallel anywhere else in the Europe. Colleagues on all sides have recognised the potential impact it will have in Ireland. Second, in the face of the challenges that Brexit poses to Ireland, the level of public support for Ireland's membership of the European Union is exceptionally high at 88% across the country and 94% in Munster I am happy to say. The fact that Ireland's position is grounded in such a high level of stakeholder and public engagement has commanded tremendous respect from our partners. This has undoubtedly contributed to the Government's success in ensuring that our concerns are reflected in the EU's negotiation position. This comprehensive document, published last week, reflects the intensive and multi-faceted approach the Government is taking to the Brexit process. Its publication was timed to coincide with a key milestone; the adoption of the European Council's negotiating position. I believe that this was the right moment to draw together the outcomes of the Government's domestic and international engagement to date, as well as the analysis and co-ordination that has been carried out across all Departments and many of our agencies. Its primary focus is in demonstrating how the policies and priorities identified by the Government will be pursued within the context of the most imminent steps of the Brexit process, which is the Article 50 negotiations on the UK's withdrawal from the EU.

The Taoiseach has already outlined that this process of engagement is dynamic and will further intensify in the coming weeks and months, especially in respect of the economic implications of Brexit. As set out in the comprehensive document, however, in order to advance as quickly as possible to the discussions of the future EU-UK relationship, we must work closely with our EU partners to achieve sufficient progress on the priorities that have been identified as part of the withdrawal process. This will be a key focus for the Government in the coming weeks. We will be working with the EU taskforce and with our EU 27 partners to agree a more detailed set of negotiating directives. Once these are adopted by the General Affairs Council on 22 May, I expect that the negotiations will, most likely, get under way in late June after the British general election.

Engagement with the EU taskforce has been an important focus for Government. It is therefore timely that Michel Barnier and members of his team are visiting Ireland later this week. During his visit, Mr. Barnier will meet with the Taoiseach, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Deputy Charles Flanagan and the Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Deputy Dara Murphy. He will also address a joint sitting of the Houses of the Oireachtas. Across our engagement with Mr. Barnier, the Government will take this opportunity to acknowledge the extensive level of engagement that he and his team have taken to date with Ireland at political and official level. We will use the occasion to welcome the draft negotiating directives that have been prepared by the task force that not only reflect the EU guidelines, but also take on board some additional concerns and issues that were identified in the Government's comprehensive document. We will also underline the Government's support for the phased approach and we will emphasise our hope that sufficient progress on the withdrawal issues can be made at an early stage so we can move on to the discussions around the future relationships. This depends very much also on the UK's approach to the negotiations and its willingness to engage constructively at all times. Mr. Barnier's visit will also take in meetings with citizens and stakeholders, including his visit to the Border area on Friday.

Of one thing we can be certain; Mr. Barnier is committing himself with an immense energy to the task of protecting Ireland's interests and the interests of the EU in the forthcoming negotiations with the UK. In delivering this concluding statement, I am more than aware that it rep-

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resents a mere punctuation mark in the continuing debate and discussions in the House. The EU guidelines and the draft negotiating directives speak to the effectiveness of the global supports to date, which has been clearly outlined in the comprehensive policy document. As the process continues we will continue to engage with the House and with citizen stakeholders to ensure that our approach to negotiations is understood. We welcome the support of all Members in the House. We must work together on this with constructive suggestions. Deputy Ó Cuív's speech earlier was very constructive and positive. I was taken with Deputy Byrne's contribution also on education and his opening remarks on the geopolitical influences. There are some very good ideas but we need to continue this, work together and put on the green jersey more than ever before. This is one of the biggest challenges the State has had to face in decades.

This is only a punctuation mark along the way. The work really only starts now.

Civil Liability (Amendment) Bill 2017 [Seanad]: Second Stage

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):

I move: "That the Bill be now read a Second Time."

On behalf of the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality, Deputy Frances Fitzgerald, who cannot be here this evening, I am very pleased to bring the Civil Liability (Amendment) Bill before this House and I look forward to our discussion of its provisions.

The primary purpose of this Bill is to empower the courts to make awards of damages in cases of catastrophic injury by way of periodic payments orders, which I will refer to for short as PPOs. The Bill will apply in cases involving both State defendants and non-State defendants. It addresses the concerns raised repeatedly by the courts about the absence of legislation to enable periodic payments orders in appropriate cases. At the outset, I acknowledge the work carried out by the High Court working group on medical negligence and periodic payments in bringing this matter to the fore. Since the publication of the working group's report on this issue, the Department of Justice and Equality has worked with other Departments, State agencies and other stakeholders to develop the provisions of the Bill.

Currently, damages for personal injuries are paid by way of a lump sum. The lump sum is intended to compensate for all past and future losses resulting from the injury, including the cost of care, medication, medical and assistive aids, and treatment. The lump sum is intended to represent the capital value of future loss. The working group on medical negligence and periodic payments noted that under the lump sum approach, there is no recourse for plaintiffs who exhaust their funds by exceeding their projected life expectancy. Many catastrophically injured persons have spent their final years without the means to pay for their care because the damages awarded have proved inadequate.

The principal recommendation made in the working group report was to address the deficiencies in the lump sum system by giving the courts discretion to impose, with or without the consent of parties, periodic payments orders in catastrophic injury cases. The working group recommended that periodic payment orders should be calculated to meet the cost of permanent and long-term care and treatment and should be index-linked. The principal advantages of introducing periodic payments orders are as follows. Inadequate compensation will be avoided, as payments will be tied to the actual rather than the expected cost of care and treatment; and

inappropriate compensation will be avoided, as payments will be linked to actual rather than expected duration of life. In addition, the payment of enormous lump sums will be avoided. Since the publication of the working group report, the courts have made more than 50 interim periodic payment orders. These interim periodic payments orders are subject to review by the courts on relevant returnable dates. However, the courts have indicated that they do not favour settlement of claims by periodic payments order in the absence of legislation. This Bill provides that a court shall have the power to award damages by way of periodic payments order where appropriate, having regard to the best interests of the plaintiff and all the circumstances of the case. I will shortly outline the details of the new provisions.

Deputies should note that, at the request of the Minister for Health, a new Part 4 was inserted into the Bill on Committee Stage in the Seanad to provide for open disclosure of patient safety incidents. At this point, I acknowledge on behalf of the Minister for Health that these open disclosure provisions benefited from detailed pre-legislative scrutiny by the Oireachtas committee on health. Open disclosure is about an open, honest and consistent approach to communicating with patients and their families when things go wrong in health care, as they sometimes do. When that happens, it is important to keep the patient informed and updated in a timely and comprehensible way as to what occurred, why it occurred and any investigations being undertaken. Open disclosure may also involve, depending on the particular circumstances of the incident concerned, an apology for what happened. The origins of the open disclosure provisions in the Bill can be found in the report of the commission on patient safety and quality assurance and the intention is to help create a safe space where honesty and respect can flourish and where lessons can be learned by health services providers and health practitioners and acted upon to improve the health service.

The provisions in Part 4 are therefore designed to give specific legal protections for the information disclosed and any apology made during the open disclosure process, but only when the information provided and the apology made are in accordance with the requirements of the legislation. To help ensure consistency and uniformity in open disclosure practice across the health system, the open disclosure protections in the Bill will apply in both the public and private sides of the health service. It is important to be clear that there is no question that this Bill will protect incompetent, negligent or other unprofessional patient care. Clinicians will still operate within existing accountability frameworks, including through the bodies regulating their particular professions. It is also important to point out that patient safety incidents may not be caused by the actions or inactions of individual clinicians. Systems failure can also cause patient safety incidents.

On the matter of whether legislative provisions on open disclosure should be of a mandatory or voluntary nature, the Minister for Health considered this issue very carefully, including the international evidence. He concluded that the best chance for achieving and embedding the necessary cultural change lay with a voluntary system that operated within a clearly defined legislative structure that emphasised the importance of communicating meaningfully with the patient. The Oireachtas committee on health in its pre-legislative scrutiny arrived at a similar conclusion. The Minister for Health has, however, indicated that a structured evaluation of the success of voluntary open disclosure will be undertaken in the future in the light of experience gained.

The open disclosure provisions form part of a number of initiatives to improve the management of patient safety incidents. These include the draft standards on the conduct of reviews of patient safety incidents developed by HIQA and the Mental Health Commission, which ex-

pand on the National Standards for Safer Better Healthcare. This set of standards, along with the mandatory external reporting of serious reportable events that will be provided for in the Health Information and Patient Safety Bill, and the provisions to support open disclosure, will provide a comprehensive patient-centred approach to preventing, managing and learning from incidents.

I would like now to outline briefly the main provisions of the Bill. Section 2 is the main provision regarding periodic payment orders. It inserts a new Part containing new sections 51H to 51O into the Civil Liability Act 1961. Section 51H is an interpretation section for the new Part. “Catastrophic injury” is defined as meaning “a personal injury which is of such severity that it results in a permanent disability requiring the person to receive life-long care and assistance in all activities of daily living or a substantial part thereof”.

Section 51I is the central provision relating to periodic payments orders. Where a court awards damages for personal injuries to a plaintiff who has suffered a catastrophic injury, it may order that all or part of the damages for future medical treatment, future care and the provision of assistive technology be paid by means of a periodic payments order, PPO. Where the parties agree to do so, damages in respect of future loss of earnings may also be paid by PPO. In deciding whether to make a periodic payments order, the court must have regard to the best interests of the plaintiff and the circumstances of the case. A court may make provision that a PPO may increase or decrease from a specified date to cater for anticipated changes in the plaintiff’s needs. This is termed a “stepped payment”. Changes in circumstances that may form the basis of a stepped payment include entry into primary, secondary or third level education, reaching the age of 18 years or changes to the care needs of the person including transfer to residential care.

Section 51J provides that a court may only make a PPO where it is satisfied that the continuity of payments under the PPO is reasonably secure. Section 51L deals with the issue of indexation of payments. The section provides for the annual adjustment of a payment under a PPO in line with the prevailing rate under the harmonised index of consumer prices and provides for a review of the application of that index after a five-year period.

Section 51M seeks to address the risk that a claimant could be encouraged to agree to commute their periodic payments order into a lump sum payment even if there were compelling reasons for the claimant to receive periodic payments. The section provides that if a plaintiff wishes to assign, commute or charge the right to a PPO, an application must be made to court for approval. Section 51O ensures that the new provisions on PPOs can apply to cases where a court has already made an interim award of damages.

Section 3 of the Bill amends the Insurance Act 1964 to provide that the limit on amounts that may be paid from the Insurance Compensation Fund shall not apply in cases involving periodic payments orders. This means that where an insurance company becomes insolvent, the full amount due to a person entitled to receive payments under a PPO will be paid in full from the fund.

Section 4 of the Bill makes technical amendments to the Bankruptcy Act 1988 to ensure protection of payments under a PPO in the event of bankruptcy. Section 5 provides an exemption from income tax in respect of payments made to persons under periodic payments orders. Section 6 of the Bill amends section 17 of the Civil Liability and Courts Act 2004, which deals with formal offers of settlement and costs in personal injuries actions, to make provision for

cases involving PPOs.

As I mentioned earlier, Part 4 of the Bill deals with open disclosure of patient safety incidents. Section 7 outlines the definitions of certain terms used in Part 4. The definitions of “health service” and “health services provider” capture the full range of public and private health services. A “relevant person”, in respect of a patient, is a person closely connected to the patient who may be present at an open disclosure meeting, or may receive the disclosure if the patient has died or is not in a position to receive the disclosure.

Section 8 defines the key concept of “patient safety incident”. The definition follows the accepted international classification and terminology used in the WHO conceptual framework for the international classification for patient safety.

Section 9 provides that a disclosure of a patient safety incident made in accordance with the Bill will be considered an open disclosure.

Section 10 provides for protections for open disclosures. These protections only apply if the disclosure is made in accordance with the requirements of the Bill. The protections are as follows: information and any apology given in an open disclosure will not constitute an admission of fault or liability in a clinical negligence action in relation to that patient safety incident; information and any apology given in an open disclosure are not admissible as evidence of fault or liability in a clinical negligence action in relation to that patient safety incident; and information and any apology given in an open disclosure will not constitute an admission of fault and are not admissible as evidence of fault in professional fitness to practice proceedings. Section 10 also provides that insurance or indemnity will not be affected by an apology made as part of an open disclosure.

Section 11 provides that a health service provider must prepare a written statement outlining the procedure for making an open disclosure and the restrictions on the use a patient may make of any information provided, as well as any apology made at an open disclosure meeting.

Section 12 states a health service provider may make an open disclosure on a patient safety incident.

Section 13 provides for who can make the disclosure on behalf of a health service provider. It will usually be the principal health practitioner involved in the patient’s care.

Section 14 deals with the timing of an open disclosure meeting while section 15 outlines the matters to be addressed by a health service provider before making an open disclosure.

Section 16 provides for the open disclosure meeting. It specifies the information to be provided at the open disclosure meeting and the manner in which that information may be provided.

Section 17 provides for what will happen when a patient or relevant person declines to participate in a proposed open disclosure meeting. It is important to note that there is no obligation on them to agree to participate.

Section 18 facilitates the provision of new information that may become available after an open disclosure meeting. The protections in section 10 also apply to additional information provided under this section.

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Section 19 deals with requests for the clarification of information provided by the health service provider. The protections in section 10 also apply to clarifications of information provided.

Section 20 provides for what will happen when a health service provider cannot contact a patient to arrange an open disclosure meeting.

Section 21 provides that a health service provider must keep records of specified matters relating to open disclosures.

Section 22 provides that the Minister for Health may, by regulations, provide for matters relevant to Part 4.

Section 23 will enable open disclosure of patient safety incidents that occur or come to the notice of a health service provider before commencement of the provisions.

The Bill will make a material difference to the lives of people who have suffered catastrophic injuries by enabling the courts to give them much-needed financial security by way of periodic payments orders. The open disclosure provisions mark a major step forward in creating a different mindset within the health service. Through the creation of a culture of open disclosure and emphasising the need to learn from the things that go wrong, we will see a safer health service emerge. I commend the Bill to the House.

Deputy Jim O’Callaghan: I welcome the introduction of the Bill on Second Stage. Fianna Fáil will be supporting the Bill, just as it supported it in Seanad Éireann. It is important that we try to have the legislation enacted as quickly as possible. There has been a delay not only on the part of this and the last Oireachtas, but also going back many years. There have been delays by the Government, the Dáil and the Seanad in introducing vital legislation for people who find themselves in one of the most difficult positions in which anyone could find himself or herself. Generally, these issues arise when someone has suffered catastrophic injuries, as the Minister of State said, and an award of damages is made by the court in favour of a young plaintiff, a minor in the care of his or her family. It is not, however, limited to a scenario involving young children who suffer catastrophic injuries at birth. It is also relevant to persons who sustain serious and catastrophic injuries during the course of life.

I commend the Minister of State on introducing the Bill because the definition of catastrophic injuries is simple, yet it communicates accurately what they are. It refers to them as being injuries sustained by a person that result in a permanent disability that require the person to receive lifelong care for all activities. One of the most tragic events that can happen to any person occurs at the start of life, at birth, when, as a result of fault or an accident, he or she suffers catastrophic injuries. Such injuries will dominate his or her life for as long as he or she lives. Not only are they catastrophic for the child, but they are also catastrophic for his or her parents who would have hoped and believed they were going to be able to bring home a child and bring him or her up in the ordinary way. Instead, they discover that they have a child who will require lifelong care. That is the reason the legislation is so important. In many respects, for parents who go through the court process for the purpose of seeking the damages to which they are entitled, it is traumatic. That process will be helped by this legislation.

Debate adjourned.

The Dáil adjourned at 10.15 p.m. until 11.30 a.m. on Thursday, 11 May 2017.