

## Written Answers.

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**The following are questions tabled by Members for written response and the ministerial replies as received on the day from the Departments [unrevised].**

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*Questions Nos. 1 to 12, inclusive, answered orally.*

*Questions Nos. 13 to 18, inclusive, resubmitted.*

### Cabinet Committee Meetings

19. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Taoiseach when the next meeting of the Cabinet committee on the environment is due to meet. [37534/19]

**Taoiseach (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** Following a Government decision on 25 July on the establishment of Cabinet Committees, Cabinet Committee structures were reorganised.

The Cabinet Committee on the Environment covers issues relating to the environment, including the implementation of the national Climate Action Plan.

Political and popular momentum for necessary climate action is growing. This was reflected in the Government's publication of the cross-sectoral Climate Action Plan in June 2019. Given the cross-cutting nature of the plan that affects all aspects of the economy and society, the need for an all-of-government approach to climate action is obvious. This includes a deliberate and sustained focus at Ministerial level and at Cabinet.

The Cabinet Committee on the Environment will therefore focus on the implementation of the Climate Action Plan in the immediate term. It met for the first time on 30 September 2019 and is due to meet again at least once more before the year end.

*Questions Nos. 20 to 42, inclusive, resubmitted.*

*Questions Nos. 43 to 52, inclusive, answered orally.*

### Public Transport Initiatives

53. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if Leap cards will be introduced for commuters in south County Kildare stations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39910/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. I am not involved in the day-to-day operations of public transport, nor decisions on fares. Following the establishment of the National Transport Authority (NTA) in December

2009, the NTA is the statutory body with responsibility for the regulation of fares charged to passengers in respect of public transport services, provided under public service contracts and shared systems such as the Leap Card. However, I will pass on the Deputy's concerns in relation to commuters in south County Kildare stations to the NTA.

The NTA also has statutory responsibility for securing the provision of public transport services by way of public transport services contracts in respect of services that are socially necessary but commercially unviable.

The funding of those services comprises both the fares paid by passengers and the subvention payments from the Exchequer. The main purpose of the subvention payment is to meet the gap between income from fares and the cost of operating services. In 2019, the Irish Exchequer will provide just over €300m in subvention for public service obligation (PSO) transport services and Rural Transport Local Link services.

The NTA have informed me that it is important to distinguish between two aspects when determining fares, i.e., the fare zone and the fare payment system.

Due to Dublin's large population it is possible to achieve significant economies of scale in the operation of rail services. Accordingly, it is possible to have an urban fare zone, called the Short Hop Zone, offering discounted fares. This type of urban fare structure is common in many major cities internationally. The Leap Card can be used for rail travel between stations within the Short Hop Zone. This Zone includes all stations in the Dublin area from Kilcoole to Balbriggan and Commuter Stations from Dublin City Centre to Kilcock and from Dublin Heuston to Sallins and Naas.

However, the NTA has indicated that it is not possible to offer the same discounted fares across the rest of the rail network as that would put an unsustainable financial strain on Iarnród Éireann. Accordingly, the NTA has no immediate plans to extend the current boundaries of the Short Hop Zone around Dublin.

Leap Card is not an optimal system for the payment of rail fares in areas outside the Short Hop Zone as customers would need to maintain a significant balance on their Leap Card. Accordingly, the NTA have no plans to make Leap Card available across the national rail network. However, even if Leap Card was made available as a means of payment for rail fares nationally, it would not be possible to reduce fares in areas outside the Short Hop Zone for the reason I have already mentioned.

The mobile ticketing service is the first phase of the NTA's Next Generation Ticketing (NGT) programme, which seeks to implement new and more flexible ticketing systems, provide additional ways of paying for travel and improve the overall customer experience. The NGT programme will eventually lead to the replacement of the Leap Card system with this improved alternative.

## **Departmental Funding**

54. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if increased funding will be expedited for public transport and cycling infrastructure in the mid-western areas of Dublin, particularly areas adjacent to and in proximity of the M50, in order to mitigate levels of nitrogen dioxide that exceed the EU limit which has been recorded by Traffic Infrastructure Ireland at various locations in the area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39690/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I am of course committed toward improving sustainability mobility options in all areas of the country, including within the Deputy's particular constituency.

Heavily trafficked roads, such as the M50, can record higher levels of nitrogen dioxide, although the Deputy will know from the report that the highest levels are found within 10 metres of the motorway's edge. Levels further than that distance typically fall back to within "background concentration" level.

Notwithstanding that important clarification, I am clear that we need to increase not just the sustainable options available, but also the numbers of people choosing to use those options too.

I am glad to say that *Project Ireland 2040* provides for a significantly enhanced investment programme with measures to be funded in the short, medium and longer term.

In the short term, we have increased funding to support expanded bus and rail services throughout Dublin Mid-West, like for example the extra bus services in the Lucan area earlier this year or the increase in trains now serving Clondalkin-Fonthill and taking the Phoenix Park tunnel into the city centre. I have no doubt the Deputy has noticed a number of hybrid buses which Dublin Bus are now operating in the area as part of a trial and that is also very welcome. These improvements and expansions are resulting in increased levels of patronage and that's obviously important.

In the medium term we are rolling out BusConnects which will massively improve the bus infrastructure and active travel infrastructure in the area and result in much improved services. It will also mean we switch the entire bus fleet toward lower emission technologies and I have no doubt the Deputy supports the roll out of that programme as quickly as I do. On rail we are funding the electrification of the existing rail line in Dublin Mid-West as part of the DART Expansion Programme.

And we are planning for the longer term too through the funding of the appraisal, planning and design of a new Luas line right through the Deputy's constituency.

I look forward to the Deputy's continued support on the ground in relation to all of these improvements as we look to deliver improved and expanded public transport and active travel infrastructure across Dublin Mid-West.

## Road Network

55. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to enhance road transportation in County Meath. [39692/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Firstly, I would like to explain that, as Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, development and construction of individual national road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

The National Development Plan (NDP), which has been developed by Government to underpin the implementation of the National Planning Framework, provides the strategic and financial framework for TII's national roads programme for the period from 2018 to 2027. The focus of TII's activities over the coming years is, therefore, being directed towards the development of the major national road improvement schemes that are listed in the NDP.

Following consultation with TII, I can provide an overview of national road developments in County Meath, to which the Deputy refers.

The proposed **N2 Slane Bypass** is included amongst a number of major national road schemes that are identified for development during the period of the NDP. The scheme is also contained in the National Transport Authority (NTA) Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area.

The project is currently at route selection stage. Meath County Council have also commissioned a supplementary assessment of East-West options in relation to Slane. This process is well advanced and once the preferred route is identified, the scheme will be progressed through planning and design. A Business case will then be prepared for the approval of both my Department and the Department of Public Expenditure & Reform. In addition, the statutory documentation will be prepared, including the environmental impact assessment. Meath County Council have indicated that the scheme will be lodged with An Bord Pleanála in 2021, post the adoption of the new County Development Plan. TII has provided an allocation of €1m to Meath County Council for the scheme this year.

The proposed **N2 Rath Roundabout to Kilmoon Cross scheme** is also included amongst a number of major national road schemes that were identified in the NDP for progression through pre-appraisal and early planning during 2018. In this regard, the Project Pre-Appraisal for the proposed scheme has been approved.

This approx. 6 km scheme will address the existing operational and safety problems on this section of the N2, which has an annual average daily traffic of circa 16,000 vehicles per day and experiences considerable peak time congestion.

Meath County Council has engaged the services of Technical Advisors to commence the planning and design of the scheme. I am advised that it typically takes three to five years from this point through Phases 1 – 4 of the Project Management Guidelines, in order to have the scheme ready to submit to An Bord Pleanála for planning approval. This year, TII has provided an allocation to Meath Co. Co. of €250,000 to allow the scheme to progress to planning and design.

The **N51 Dunmoe Phase 2 scheme** comprises the construction of approximately 4 km of single carriageway and associated ancillary and consequential works, including the provision of side roads, accommodation works/roads, junctions, from the townland of Blackcastle Demesne to the townlands of Cruicetown and Pighill in County Meath. An Oral Hearing was held on 12th July 2018 and An Bord Pleanála confirmed the CPO for the scheme in October 2018. Meath Co Co are currently progressing the final design and tender documents and intend to go to tender for this scheme in 2020. TII has provided an allocation to Meath Co. Co. of €150,000 for the scheme this year.

### **Regional and Local Roads**

As regards regional and local roads, the maintenance and improvement of these roads is the statutory responsibility of the relevant local authority, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works are funded from the Council's own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the Council.

During the recession there were substantial cutbacks in the funding available for State grants for national, regional and local road programmes. Project Ireland 2040 does provide for the gradual build up in funding for the road network. Grants in the three main grant categories

(Restoration Improvement, Discretionary Grant and Restoration Maintenance) are allocated based on the length of the road network within a local authority area and taking traffic factors into account.

I have been pleased to be able to allocate significantly increased grant funding to Meath County Council in respect of regional and local roads over the last two years. In this context grant allocations to Meath in 2019 total €19,676,500 which is an increase of over 45% compared to the 2017 allocation.

While the bulk of the funding for regional and local roads under Project Ireland 2040 is earmarked for maintenance and renewal works, provision has been made for grant funding towards the cost of 12 significant capital road improvement schemes. The upgrade of the Bettystown to Laytown Link Road is one of these projects. Following the confirmation by An Bord Pleanála of the Compulsory Purchase Order related to the scheme, the detailed project appraisal has now been submitted to the Department for consideration.

Funding has also been allocated this year under the Specific Improvement Grant Programme to progress proposed safety improvement schemes at Curragha junction and Phase 1 of the R162 Kilberry traffic calming scheme.

### **Public Transport Provision**

**56. Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to increase public transport provision in view of the declaration of a climate emergency; his further plans to make all public transport free of charge in budget 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39901/19]

**95. Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on steadily increasing the State subsidy to public transport with the aim of providing free public transport to promote the decarbonisation of transport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39752/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 56 and 95 together.

As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport.

The NTA has statutory responsibility for securing the provision of public transport services by way of Public Services Obligation (PSO) contracts in respect of services that are socially necessary but commercially unviable. The NTA also has been given statutory responsibility for the regulation of fares in relation to public passenger transport services.

The funding of those services comprises both the fares paid by passengers and the subvention payments from the Exchequer. The main purpose of the subvention payment is to meet the gap between the income from fares and the cost of operating services. In 2019, the Irish Exchequer will provide just over €300 million in subvention for public service obligation (PSO) transport services and Rural Transport Local Link services.

I understand from the NTA that, in 2018, passengers paid €625 million in fares on subsidised bus and rail services. Therefore, if such services were to be provided free to passengers, then the expected cost to the Exchequer would be in excess of the €625m collected in fares in 2018. This amount would be additional to the 2019 Exchequer allocation of €300m for PSO support

and the further amount (€95m allocation for 2019) that the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection pays to public transport providers in respect of its Free Travel Scheme which provides free transport to almost 1 million people in the State, including all people aged over 66 living permanently here, along with some other qualifying people.

So taking round approximate figures, the Deputies idea would cost the taxpayer about €625 million per year, in addition to the €400 million that the Exchequer already spends on public transport services. And this is just the cost of the actual services; it does not count the Exchequer investment in public transport and active travel infrastructure which in 2019 is about €480 million.

These are just the estimates of the full year cost of providing a windfall of free travel to everyone who is an existing passenger. The figures do not factor in the cost of providing the additional fleet, depots, drivers, etc. that would be needed to meet the likely resultant substantial increase in passenger numbers if fares were reduced or eliminated. In summary Introducing free public transport for all users would require substantial additional funding by the taxpayer or from other sources; the Deputies have not indicated how they propose that this would be funded.

The Deputies are correct in focusing on the need to reduce private car emissions and also to stimulate and support increased uptake of public transport. That is exactly the Government's approach as set out in our recent Climate Plan. According to 2017 emission estimates:

- Around 52% of transport emissions come from private car use;
- Just over 18% comes from the freight sector; and
- Around 4.4% of emissions come from the public transport fleet.

As such, it is clear that inroads must be made in reducing the dominance of the private car in Ireland's transport sector.

Modal shift from the private car to sustainable means of transport remains central to the transport sector's response to climate change. Investment in public transport has supported an increase of almost 58m journeys annually on subsidised public transport and commercial bus service since 2012. Last year we saw an increase of 16.3 million passenger journeys provided by Dublin Bus, Bus Éireann, Irish Rail, Luas and Go-Ahead Ireland on PSO services. That is an increase of over 6.5% compared to 2017. I think the Deputies would agree that this increase in passenger growth is very positive. The growth in public transport services has been supported by higher levels of subvention in 2016, 2017 and 2018 and as I mentioned earlier it was increased again this year to provide a total allocation of over €300 million.

In order to reduce the prevalence of the private car and encourage a shift to more sustainable forms of transport, a number of key policy measures to increase public transport capacity will be progressed over the next decade. The National Development Plan has earmarked €8.6 billion for investment in public and sustainable transport to 2027. By maintaining a focus on expanding the carrying capacity of our public transport over the coming years, we can help address the largest sustainability challenge in the transport sector, which is shifting more journeys from private motoring towards suitable alternatives in public transport and active travel.

## **Rail Network**

57. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views

on the removal of rail lines for the purposes of constructing greenways; if he has considered the negative ramifications of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39766/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I thank the Deputy for her question and I know this is an issue she has raised with me before in relation to the old Navan to Kingscourt line.

As I have previously stated, the operation of the operation of the rail network, including former lines on the network, is an operational matter for Iarnród Éireann in the first instance.

As the Deputy will also recall, the priority funding objective in relation to mainline rail is to maintain and renew the existing operational network. That objective is supported by the significantly enhanced funding now available to support that network as evidenced by the 23% increase in Exchequer funding provided in 2019.

Across counties Dublin, Louth, Kildare and Meath an additional objective is to start work on the DART Expansion Programme which will electrify the lines as far as Drogheda, Dunboyne, Maynooth and Hazelhatch and allow for expanded services across the wider region.

As part of the statutory review of the National Transport Authority's *Transport Strategy* further analysis will be undertaken in relation to the existing M3 Parkway line to consider whether that line might be further extended to serve Navan.

So that is the broader context to the rail network in the region.

Specifically in relation to the disused line to Kingscourt, I am aware that the local authorities in the region are exploring options to develop a greenway and those options include the potential of using the existing disused rail alignment.

The most important issue to consider in terms of long term potential in the area of future rail infrastructure is not preserving old track bed, with all its potential unsuitability for future use; rather the important issue is about preserving the alignment of the route from intrusion by property.

So, in that respect, the exploratory discussions that I understand are underway between the local authorities and Iarnród Éireann adhere to that perspective and I do not believe that any such removal of track bed is inherently negative.

The long term potential of rail infrastructure and services in that area will ultimately be driven by careful analysis of the underlying transport demand in the area.

## **Traffic Management**

58. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his policy on congestion charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39689/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Traffic congestion is an issue in Ireland's cities and some towns; it can impose economic and social costs on residents, commuters and businesses, and it worsens emissions that impact on air quality and the environment. As our population and economic performance grows, more journeys are created only adding to the issue. Over time, rising travel demand coupled with a scarcity of space to expand road supply will exacerbate the issues that we see in our cities today. We estimate that, without intervention, by 2040 commuting trips nationally could rise by as much as 35% over current levels. So, my focus must strongly remain on ensuring sustainable and efficient

movement of people and goods on the transport network, and pursuing suitable measures to safeguard against congestion.

In 2017 my Department estimated that congestion could have a cost of over €2 billion per annum by 2033 in the absence of appropriate intervention. Such a cost would have a substantial impact on our national economic competitiveness. There is also a social cost to our citizens spending more time in unnecessary traffic delays. In addition, congestion also negatively impacts on our national carbon emissions and can cause localised air quality issues. So there are many motivations to tackle congestion.

We are addressing some congestion issues by encouraging more people to move away from their private passenger cars to public transport and active travel where practical. To this end, a significant investment of €8.6 billion has been earmarked under the *National Development Plan* to increase the capacity and attractiveness of sustainable mobility. Major forthcoming projects such as *MetroLink*, the *DART Expansion Programme* and *BusConnects* will significantly increase public transport capacity providing a viable and attractive alternative to private cars for more people, for more of their journeys. And the substantial step-up in walking and cycling infrastructure investment will also increase the shift to active modes.

In parallel, demand management measures must also be considered, including the potential role of congestion charging. Indeed, under the *Climate Action Plan* my Department is committed to examining a range of demand management measures for Irish cities. The study will review international best practice and recommend the most appropriate responses for Dublin, Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford, taking into account overall transport strategies and the unique make-up of each of the cities. We will work in close collaboration with the relevant local authorities and I expect the results of this study are to be published next Autumn.

## Electric Vehicles

59. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has considered introducing specific measures to incentivise and support the use of e-bikes on roads; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39747/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Firstly, let me state that I am keenly aware of the potential role of e-bikes as part of our overall policy in supporting a greater shift to sustainable mobility in people's daily lives.

As the Deputy is no doubt aware, that potential is found in a number of ways, most obviously in extending the potential "reach" of cycling as an attractive daily commuting option for people.

In the Netherlands for example, the relevant Dutch Ministry estimates that potential to be an additional 7 kilometres, so that cycling becomes really viable for those living up to 15 kilometres approximately from where they work, or go school etc. instead of the current 7 or 7.5km.

And that highlights the importance of the BusConnects programme with its 16 core bus corridors along each of the major commuting routes into Dublin from the outer suburbs providing around 200km of largely segregated cycling infrastructure.

I have no doubt the importance of BusConnects in that regard is recognized and supported by the Deputy.

In terms of specific measures and incentives, the Deputy is aware that there already exists a

significant incentive under the Bike-to-Work Scheme.

That Scheme applies to e-bikes as it does to ordinary bikes and it represents a significant support to encourage greater use of cycling, including e-bikes. I think there might well be a potential for a communications campaign around its application to e-bikes to ensure people are aware of that fact.

The Deputy might say that the overall cap on the Bike-to-Work scheme should be lifted given the greater cost of e-bikes as opposed to other bikes; however, I would say that, as percentage of overall potential cost, it still represents a significant level of assistance.

I am about to launch a consultation on sustainable mobility policy and, as part of that, I would welcome engagement with the Deputy on any particular incentives he might have in mind. I think it important that any fiscal incentive is supported by appropriate analysis and forms part of an overall policy framework: an approach I would hope he supports.

### **Light Rail Projects**

60. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the progress to date with Metrolink; his views on whether the planning and construction of this vital infrastructure for Fingal and Dublin city will be expedited over the next three or four years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39753/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I thank the Deputy for his interest in this important project and his implicit support for its delivery.

At the outset, let us all be clear that any “megaproject” like this requires careful planning and design and must rightly conform to a very high standard of statutory requirements in areas such as environmental protection or procurement for example.

In addition to those statutory requirements, both Transport Infrastructure Ireland and the National Transport Authority have held two significant non-statutory public consultations on the project. I am sure that the Deputy welcomes the fact that the public has been consulted at this early stage in the project’s development and the level of engagement that has been facilitated by both agencies.

The submissions received during the last of those two public consultations are still being considered and will inform the overall development of the project as it moves into its next phase.

This next phase is essentially composed of two elements –

1. Ensuring compliance with the Public Spending Code; and
2. The statutory planning process.

I would like to think the Deputy agrees both are of fundamental importance.

TII and NTA will in early 2020 present a business case for my consideration in line with the Public Spending Code. My Department will ensure appropriate and rigorous analysis of the business case as one would expect for a significant investment project.

A project of this scale requires Government approval and that approval will be sought once that analysis of the business case has been conducted.

The project is then expected to move into the statutory planning system during 2020 and again, given the scale and complexity of the project, it is probable that a decision will be made during 2021 which would allow the project move into its construction phase in 2021.

This is a huge and complex project with all of the requirements such scale imposes.

I am satisfied with progress to date and the timescale I have set out and am unclear as to what expedited measures the Deputy has in mind but am happy to hear of any suggestions.

### **Public Transport Initiatives**

61. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the recent initiative of Irish Rail to persuade workers to avoid rush hour DART times on weekday mornings; his further views on whether this is a reaction to a lack of infrastructure investment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39728/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding of public transport. The operation and provision of services on the rail network are matters for Iarnród Éireann in the first instance, which, in consultation with the National Transport Authority (NTA), is currently examining how best to source additional rolling stock as efficiently and effectively as possible, while ensuring value for money for the taxpayer in that regard.

I acknowledge the fact that at certain times of the day, some rail services are currently crowded due to the level of demand. The Deputy can be assured that the safe operation of the rail network and services is the overriding priority at all times of both the company and, of course, the Commission for Railway Regulation, which is the independent, statutory body charged with overseeing the safety of our network.

From late September to early December is the busiest commuter period of the year for all transport modes, given the return of third-level educational institutions. Iarnród Éireann launched the website [peaktime.ie](http://peaktime.ie) on September 23rd.

I am advised by Irish Rail that its intention in launching [peaktime.ie](http://peaktime.ie) was not to “persuade workers to avoid rush-hour DART times on weekday mornings”, but to equip those commuters who have flexibility in their travel times with information on demand levels on DARTs serving their stations, thus enabling them to decide their travel times based on the available options.

With one in six weekday DART journeys made between 8am and 9am, the morning peak is particularly concentrated. The information provided on [peaktime.ie](http://peaktime.ie) may enable some commuters to travel at a time when there is greater capacity, thus increasing overall the contribution of DART to providing sustainable transport options for a greater number of commuters and helping those commuters make the modal shift from private to public transport.

Iarnród Éireann increased DART frequency to a 10-minute weekday service from 7am to 8pm in September 2018, and is maximising capacity within its existing fleet at the busiest times. These changes mean that there remains scope for further growth in passenger numbers at the busiest times. However, capacity will come under increasing pressure, based on economic and employment growth forecasts. This is the case not only for DART, but also peak Commuter and Intercity services.

Currently, with the existing rail fleet fully deployed at peak times, the NTA in conjunction with Iarnród Éireann are examining options in the short, medium and longer term for addi-

tional train capacity to meet the increased commuter services demand across the network. I can confirm that my Department has now received a business case from the National Transport Authority-Iarnród Éireann in relation to the proposed purchase of 41 InterCity Rail (ICR) Cars. As the Deputy is aware, all public expenditure must comply with the *Public Spending Code* which sets out the requirements to which sponsoring agencies and sanctioning authorities must adhere, including the requirement that any project with an expected cost of €100 million or more must obtain specific approval from Government. In line with the *Public Spending Code*, that business case is currently being considered by my Department and once that consideration is complete I will seek Government's decision in relation to same. Pending Government approval to proceed, NTA-Iarnród Éireann anticipate delivery of the ICRs will commence in late 2021 and enter into service in early 2022. Separately, in May of this year NTA-IÉ began a tender process for up to 600 electric and battery-electric powered carriages over a 10 year period.

## Public Transport

62. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to enhance public transport in County Meath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39691/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport.

The NTA has statutory responsibility for securing the provision of public transport services by way of Public Services Obligation (PSO) contracts in respect of services that are socially necessary but commercially unviable. In relation to services in Co. Meath, the NTA has informed me of the following:

1. The contract for the Ashbourne to Swords service has been awarded to Go Ahead Ireland and the necessary arrangements for the introduction of that service are in progress. However, the schedule for the commencement of services has not been finalised at this time;
2. The NTA has approved a revised town service for Navan and services will be introduced following completion of associated infrastructure works by Meath County Council;
3. The NTA is planning an extension of the current Bus Éireann Dundalk to Ardee bus service. The extended service would operate to Mullingar via Carlanstown, Kells, Clonmellon and Delvin. The development of this extended service is at an early stage. The objective is to implement the extended service as driver resources become available later this year following the transfer of certain bus routes from Bus Éireann to Go-Ahead Ireland;
4. The NTA in conjunction with Bus Éireann is examining a number of options for services between Drogheda and Mullingar via Duleek, Navan, Athboy and Delvin. As this process is at an early stage, it is not possible to indicate when or if any specific service may be implemented;
5. The NTA is examining options to improve bus/rail integration between Ashbourne, Ratoath and Dunshaughlin and the commuter rail line from M3 Parkway via Dunboyne, with a view to implement improvements before the end of the year;
6. The NTA has approved the extension of current bus services between Tullamore and Edenderry to Enfield as part of the transfer of certain bus routes from Bus Éireann to Go-Ahead Ireland;

7. The NTA is continuing to work with Local Link Louth Meath Fingal on its application for funding to secure the provision of a bus service between Duleek, Ardcath, Clonalvy and Balbriggan. As this process is on-going, the NTA is not in a position to provide more detail at this stage.

### **Public Transport**

63. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the considerable capacity issues across the public transport system; and if he will take steps in the short to medium-term to address same. [39768/19]

64. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the chronic overcrowding issues faced by commuters in the greater Dublin area, most notably on DART and bus services, at peak rush hour times; and the way in which he plans to address the matter without placing the emphasis on commuters to plan their journeys around busy periods. [39763/19]

211. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the measures he is taking to improve rail travel for commuters in particular regarding busy rush hour peak times and sufficient carriages and timetabling; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40017/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 63, 64 and 211 together.

As the Deputies are aware, the continued economic growth and increased employment levels have seen demand increase across the public transport networks and particularly in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA).

*Project Ireland 2040* commits over €8 billion to public transport and active travel projects over the next 10 years. This investment will transform our public transport network and enable more people choose sustainable mobility as their preferred mode of transport.

This increased level of investment allows for a range of short, medium and longer term responses as the Deputies have referred.

In the short term, the size of the Public Service Obligation (PSO) bus fleet has increased and that, together with service improvements, has meant increased and improved service provision. This is a significant development as the bus is by far the most important part of our public transport network.

On the Luas network, the first of the extensions to the Luas Green Line fleet has entered service with the remaining 25 extensions set to enter service on a rolling basis from now on. Next year will also see delivery of the 8 additional trams that have been ordered as part of the Luas Green Line Capacity Enhancement Project.

On rail while there have been improvements introduced last year in peak-time services, and this year in off-peak services, there are two fundamental constraints, namely the need to physically expand the fleet through the purchase of additional carriages and also the need to improve the overall management of the network.

And I am pleased to say there is progress underway in relation to both. In relation to the fleet, a business case for the purchase of 41 additional InterCity Railcars is currently under con-

sideration by my Department in line with the Public Spending Code. That business case will be submitted to Government for its approval and it is expected that the new fleet will be delivered by 2021.

Separately, in May this year the National Transport Authority (NTA) and Iarnród Éireann commenced pre-qualifying in relation to a 10-year procurement framework for electric and battery-electric units which will massively expand the fleet.

In the summer, the Government approved the development of a new National Train Control Centre and contracts on this are expected to be awarded before the end of the year.

In the medium and longer term, the Deputies will acknowledge the on-going development of BusConnects, DART Expansion and MetroLink each of which will transform the capacity of the relevant public transport modes and create better linkages between them too.

I would hope that Deputies can see that there are a range of measures underway to improve our public transport network and services.

### **Road Projects Status**

65. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the progress of the A5 project; the funding that will be made available for the project; when the funding will be made available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39686/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As the Deputy is aware, the planning and implementation of the A5 upgrade project is the responsibility of the Northern Ireland authorities.

Following the conclusion in 2018 of the legal challenge to the approval of the scheme, the Northern Ireland Department for Infrastructure (DfI) updated the project assessments and undertook a public consultation on a number of environmental reports including an Environmental Statement Addendum 2019 and Reports of Information to Inform an Appropriate Assessment. DfI issued a project update in August which indicated that over 260 responses to the consultation had been received and that following on from consideration of the number and nature of the issues raised the DfI had concluded that a further public inquiry is required. DfI also indicated that it had written to the Planning Appeals Commission seeking a hearing in relation to the project.

The current funding arrangements in relation to the A5 are governed by the Stormont House Agreement and Implementation Plan - A Fresh Start. Under this Agreement the Government is committed to provide funding of £75 million (sterling) towards the cost of Phase 1a of the A5 upgrade scheme once the statutory planning process in Northern Ireland is concluded.

### **Dublin Bus Fleet**

66. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason Dublin Bus has opted for electric-hybrid low emission buses and not fully electric, zero emission buses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39772/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The movement to low-emission urban buses is central to the promotion and normalisation of cleaner fuels and

technologies. A major shift to cleaner alternatives across the entire transport sector is necessary if we are to reduce harmful emissions. However, the switch to alternative fuels and technologies cannot be effected without a considerable State investment in supporting refueling infrastructure.

In order to meet our commitment under the *National Development Plan* to cease purchase of diesel-only buses from July this year, a decision was taken by the National Transport Authority (NTA), which is responsible for procurement of vehicles in the public service obligation (PSO) fleets, to purchase hybrid-electric buses in the short term. Hybrid bus technology acts to reduce transport emissions without the need for costly supporting infrastructure to be made immediately available. This enables the fleet replacement and fleet expansion necessary to support rising travel demand to continue uninterrupted; it also ensures that our longer-term procurement decisions will not need to take into account potentially hasty investment made in short-term infrastructure. Care must be taken to avoid investment in technologies which may be suitable for our current, but not our future public transport needs.

The *Climate Action Plan* sets out a clear commitment that, by the end of 2020, the first one hundred low-emission buses will have entered the urban bus fleet. Also, the NTA will prepare and publish a medium-term fleet technology pathway for the urban public bus fleet by year end, in line with the commitment set out in the *Climate Action Plan*. The findings of the Low-Emission Bus Trial are expected to inform this decision, taken together with ongoing market analysis and public fleet procurement requirements under the EU Clean Vehicles Directive. My Department will continue to engage closely with the NTA on the development of this longer-term procurement strategy, which will see our public transport sector become steadily cleaner and greener in the coming years.

Notably, the Clean Vehicles Directive at EU level will oblige Ireland to incorporate zero-emission technologies, such as fully electric or hydrogen, into the bus fleet as we move towards 2030, and consequently consideration of electric buses is ongoing. Indeed, and as I have mentioned, the findings of the Low-Emission Bus Trials show that electric buses performed strongly across a range of metrics. In addition, hybrid-electric technology, where deployed in conjunction with certain biofuels, also emerged as a potentially viable alternative, as did biogas. The overall results suggest that electrification represents a feasible option for fleet transition that could help us to tackle our carbon emissions, our air quality and increase our use of renewable energy in transport.

It is, however, important to note that double-deck full electric models were not available to trial and that these results refer to single-deck electric vehicles. There are a number of reasons for this; notably, right-hand drive vehicles (which Ireland would need) represent only a small part of the EU market, which can limit the number of suppliers and manufacturers open to us.

Furthermore, given our rising travel demand and the predominant role of the PSO fleet in our public transport system, double-deck buses are the most appropriate vehicle type for Irish circumstances. The articulated single-deck vehicles deployed in various continental cities, which do not offer the same ratio of standing to seating passengers, are not a suitable alternative due to these capacity concerns. While fully electric single-deck buses have been commercially available for some time, electric double-deck pilot models are only now becoming available. Up until this year, Transport for London (TFL), which operates a fleet of about 4,000 vehicles, had just two electric double-deck buses in operation. I understand that TFL is currently in the process of acquiring a further 68 electric double-deck buses that will be deployed on two specific routes for in-service performance monitoring and evaluation. It is worth noting that Irish bus routes tend to be long and that battery capacity for fully electric vehicles may be a concern. However, it is expected that battery capacity will further improve over the next few years, mak-

ing it feasible to fully transition to electric vehicles at that stage.

While we await the development of higher battery capacity double deck bus fleet, the approach the NTA is pursuing is to begin the electrification pathway by purchasing diesel-electric hybrid vehicles.

### **Public Transport**

67. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason the NTA is not fining a company (details supplied) despite the fact it confirmed that the company is not fulfilling its contractual obligations in terms of the delivery of service on the 10% of routes it is running in Dublin; if it is open to the NTA to cancel the contract with the company in view of the failure to fulfil its contractual obligations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39900/19]

96. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number and scale of services cancelled by a company (details supplied) on the routes it operates in Dublin; the reason these services failed to operate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39899/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 67 and 96 together.

As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have overall responsibility for policy and funding in relation to public transport. The issue raised is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) and I have forwarded the Deputy's questions to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

### **Brexit Issues**

68. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the efforts he is making to ensure that drivers in Northern Ireland will be permitted to drive legally here without additional paperwork or stickers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39904/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Although the Deputy does not say so, I am assuming that he is referring to drivers from Northern Ireland being able to drive into this jurisdiction if Brexit occurs without a deal in place. The answer is that they will.

Specifically, driving across the border in a no-deal Brexit scenario will raise three issues. The first is the driving licence. Under the 1949 Geneva Convention on international road traffic, people will be able to drive here on their Northern Ireland licences, on a visitor basis. No additional documentation will be required in this regard.

Next, there is the question of insurance. There is a international system, pre-dating the EU, under which a so-called 'Green Card' acts as proof of motor insurance in international travel. This system was created to facilitate international road traffic by providing for a single standard document as proof of motor insurance across all participating countries, rather than requiring people to carry different documentation for each country they enter.

Under EU law, Green Cards are not required for travel within the EU. If the UK becomes a Third Country without a deal, the default position will be that Green Cards will be required for

UK-registered vehicles entering the EU from the UK. EU law does, however, provide that the EU Commission should set a date after which Green Cards will not be required from a given Third Country, if the Motor Insurers' Bureaux of all the Member States so request. This request was made late last year. The Commission has yet to make a decision on setting a date. Ireland has continued to request that the Commission make a decision, so that Green Cards will not be required.

The third and final matter is whether vehicles should have a national identification sticker. These stickers are prescribed under international road traffic conventions, including the Geneva Convention which I mentioned, and which applies between Ireland and the UK. The purpose of the sticker is largely to identify a vehicle as visiting rather than as based in the jurisdiction, for tax purposes. However, there is no offence of not having a sticker of this kind in Irish road traffic legislation. While I need hardly point out that a person is unlikely to be made liable for vehicle tax simply as a result of not having an international sticker, this is essentially a matter for Revenue. I understand that there is likewise no offence of not having a sticker in UK law.

### **Tourism Industry**

**69. Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the additional resources which will be provided to Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland to support the tourism sector in the face of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39907/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The Government's Brexit Contingency Action Plan Update was published on 9 July. It is the Government's assessment that there is a significant risk of a no deal Brexit on 31 October and accordingly work on no deal Brexit preparations continue to have the highest priority across Government Departments and Agencies.

There is a high degree of uncertainty in forecasting the macroeconomic impact of a no deal Brexit. However it is clear that the impacts would be very damaging. The Contingency Plan Update confirms that in parallel to the predicted macroeconomic impacts, a no deal Brexit will have severe negative effects in a number of sectors and will be widely felt on a regional basis. The impacts will be felt most notably in many exporting sectors including tourism.

In 2019 the Government allocated almost €8 million in additional funding to the tourism agencies specifically to respond to the impact of Brexit. Tourism Ireland put in place a programme of marketing activity, post-Brexit research, and stakeholder information to ensure that potential visitors in relevant markets fully appreciate that it is "business as usual" for Ireland and the Irish tourism industry. It is also implementing a market strategy for growth in the British market.

Fáilte Ireland is supporting tourism enterprises to respond to the impact of Brexit. The 'Get Brexit Ready' programme is helping businesses to assess the risk and respond to changes and will also assist the sector in diversifying into other markets. Fáilte Ireland's work is focusing primarily on border counties and the South East region which have been most adversely affected by the drop in the value of sterling.

The Budget allocation for 2020 is subject to the annual estimates discussions and my Department, in engaging with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, is highlighting the exposure of tourism to a no deal Brexit.

## Tourism Industry

70. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the degree to which tourism continues to be developed nationwide with particular reference to the regions in which it appears considerable scope exists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39956/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** My Department is primarily involved in the development of national tourism policy, while the tourism agencies have responsibility for the implementation of this policy.

With regard to the various regions, Fáilte Ireland develops and promotes their tourism potential in line with the relevant tourism experience brands – namely, *Ireland's Hidden Heartlands*, *Ireland's Ancient East*, the *Wild Atlantic Way* and the *Dublin* brand – which are designed to boost tourism and drive visitor growth throughout the country, with consequential benefits for the local economy and jobs right across Ireland.

Fáilte Ireland also provides targeted capital investment in attractions and other tourism infrastructure throughout the regions, consistent with the objectives of *Project Ireland 2040* to help support and grow tourism. Priority areas for tourism capital investment, as identified under the NDP, include the development and enhancement of tourist attractions and activity-based tourism to provide the type and quality of experience that visitors are seeking. This capital investment is further supported by Fáilte Ireland current investment in complementary programme supports – including festivals and events, business supports and training – aimed at enhancing, animating and promoting the regional tourism experience brands.

In this regard, the Deputy will be pleased to note the latest Fáilte Ireland estimates for tourism employment, which indicate that tourism now supports c. 260,000 vital jobs in communities around the country.

## Departmental Priorities

71. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his primary budgetary priorities in advance of budget 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39946/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As part of the 2020 estimates process, my Department is currently engaging with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in relation to funding in 2020. When my Department's allocation is confirmed in the Budget, decisions will be made regarding the appropriate level of funding for all programmes under my areas of responsibility. Foremost in 2020 will be the ongoing consideration of the Government's commitment to the climate change agenda and how that is reflected in the spending at my Department.

In broad terms, my ongoing priorities will be to ensure that my Department has the necessary resources to deliver on strategic priorities in a number of areas. In broad terms these are:

- Continued investment in public transport, including further progression of the key BusConnects and Metrolink projects; continued investment in the public transport fleet; and the further development of sustainable cycling and walking facilities

- Ongoing significant investment in the national roads network, which entails completing some road projects currently under construction, due for delivery in 2020, as well as commencing

ing construction of new routes in Transport Infrastructure Ireland's project pipeline

- Continuing the ongoing key maintenance programmes for National Roads, Rail and Regional and Local Roads

- Investment in the Tourism Sector to ensure that the sector continues to deliver a quality product, as well assisting the sector in mitigating the effects arising from Brexit, under different Brexit scenarios

- Continued investment in sport, including the ongoing allocation of the very successful capital grants scheme, and supporting planned major events, such as the 2020 European Championships, and the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

### **Public Transport**

72. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to tender out parts of the public transport service that is currently the remit of Bus Éireann; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39902/19]

80. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he supports a continued policy of tendering out further routes operated by Bus Éireann and Dublin Bus; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39897/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 72 and 80 together.

As the Deputy is aware, it is a statutory function of the National Transport Authority, under the Dublin Transport Authority Act 2008 and EU Regulation 1370/2007, to award PSO contracts and to determine the appropriate mix of directly awarded and competitively tendered PSO services.

The PSO programme represents a significant expenditure of taxpayers' money and has increased substantially in recent years. I secured €287m to fund our PSO services in 2019.

International experience indicates that introducing competitive tension into our PSO bus market (i.e. a mixture of direct award and then competitively tendered contracts) should allow us to capture potential benefits as regards value for money in terms of the use of taxpayers' money in securing the provision of PSO services.

We are always looking for ways to improve our public transport services and the NTA conducting an open, competitive process as part of providing enhanced and expanded services for passengers, and then monitoring and implementing its contracts, is part of that improvement process. Passengers are at the centre of our public transport policy and competitive tendering encourages everybody to focus on their customer's needs. It also encourages innovation and improvements to service quality for bus passengers.

All public transport services - whether they are provided by direct award contracts or through competitive tender - will continue to be regulated by the NTA so that LEAP, Free Travel Pass, Real Time Information etc. will all continue to operate on these services and fares will continue to be regulated by NTA.

The NTA's current direct award public service obligation (PSO) contracts with Bus Éireann and Dublin Bus expire at the end of November 2019. The NTA is required to follow a statutory process underpinned by both EU and national legislation before the direct award contracts may

be renewed.

As part of this process, the NTA launched a public consultation process in early October 2018 in relation to the bus services contracts. This consultation informed the NTA's decision on the renewal of the contracts, including in relation to the Direct Award / Competitive Tender balance of contracts for Bus Éireann.

Regarding the direct award contracts post-2019 in relation to Bus Éireann, the NTA has announced that it will:

- directly award an equivalent service level that the company has in December 2019;
- amend that contract in 2021 to reduce it by up to 5% of services; and
- provide the removed services through a separate contract following an open competitive tender process.

It will be open to Bus Éireann to tender for these services if they so wish.

The new direct award contracts proposed by NTA will provide a guaranteed level of PSO funding to Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann up to 2024. The NTA decided that Dublin Bus should retain service levels at 2019 levels at least, and that there should be no further tendering processes during the term of the new contract which would reduce service levels by the company.

To conclude, the NTA has the statutory responsibility to award PSO contracts and to determine the appropriate mix of directly awarded and competitively tendered PSO services. Under the law, this is not an area in which I have a role.

## Public Transport

73. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to ensure that all public transport is fully accessible to disabled persons and those with mobility issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39903/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport.

Under the Dublin Transport Authority Act 2008, the National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for promoting the development of an integrated, accessible public transport network.

Accessibility features, such as wheelchair access and audio/visual aids, are built into all new public transport infrastructure from the design stage. Newer systems such as LUAS are fully accessible. However, there are legacy issues in relation to older infrastructure and facilities, for example our Victorian era railway stations. Significant investment has and will continue to be made to fund the retrofitting of older public transport facilities to enhance accessibility.

I refer the Deputy to my reply (Ref no. 46) earlier today.

## Rail Network

74. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has

applied to the European Union to designate the Dublin to Rosslare railway line with Trans European Transport Network, TEN-T core status; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39688/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The TEN-T Core Network is a subset of the Comprehensive Network and represents the strategically most important nodes and links of the trans-European transport networks.

The Core TEN-T network on the Island of Ireland links the main urban centres of Belfast-Dublin and Cork and encompasses the road, rail and other transport modes on this route. There is also an offshoot to the Core Port of Shannon Foynes. The Dublin to Rosslare Europort railway line is on the Comprehensive TEN-T network. Rosslare Harbour is also on the TEN-T Comprehensive Network and doesn't meet the threshold for TEN-T Core port status. The European Commission's methodology for establishing the core and comprehensive layers of the network are available online. I have not applied to the Commission to designate the Dublin to Rosslare railway line as part of the Core Network.

With regard to the amending the TEN-T network, the EU Transport Commissioner, Violeta Bulc, wrote to EU Transport Ministers in February 2019, announcing that the European Commission is advancing the review of the TEN-T Network, which was due to take place no later than December 2023. This review process will include: an evaluation study, due to be completed in spring 2020; a public stakeholder consultation, which was open for contributions from April to July 2019; and targeted consultations with Member States and a wide range of stakeholders expected to take place later this year. Following the conclusion of the Commission's review, a legislative proposal to amend the TEN-T Regulation may follow.

In August 2019, honouring a Programme for a Partnership Government commitment, I made a submission to Commissioner Bulc on the matter of reviewing the TEN-T network in which I outlined national policy developments since the TEN-T Regulation came into force in 2013. These developments include the Government's National Development Plan and National Planning Framework, jointly referred to as Project Ireland 2040, and the implications of Brexit on Ireland's international connectivity. In relation to Rosslare Europort, while State investment is not permitted under EU Regulations on State Aid, Project 2040 sets out the Government's plans in relation to roads projects such as the recently opened Gorey to Enniscorthy stretch of the M11 and the planned Oilgate to Rosslare stretch of the N11/N25.

As regards the potential for EU funding for the development of Rosslare Europort going forward, the Deputy will be aware that Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) co-funding is available to projects on both the comprehensive and the core parts of the TEN-T Network, subject to such projects satisfying the eligibility criteria of a given call for proposals, and being selected in the evaluation process.

While the current CEF programme finishes at the end of 2020, a proposal for a new CEF Regulation for the period 2021 –2027 was published by the European Commission in May 2018. Ireland has advocated at EU level for projects on our comprehensive network to continue to be eligible for co-funding during the period 2021 - 2027.

Ireland submitted written comments to the European Commission in conjunction with two other island Member States, Cyprus and Malta, calling for projects on the comprehensive network in Member States which have no land border with another Member State to be included as eligible actions. This position was accepted by the Commission during negotiations, and as a result the latest text of the proposal retains this amendment. Subject to the proposed Regulation being adopted, this means that during the period 2021 – 2027, projects on Ireland's comprehensive TEN-T network, including the rail and road networks, will be eligible to apply for CEF

co-funding through relevant calls for proposals.

### **Tourism Promotion**

75. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has allocated specific funding or resources to attracting tourists from the Chinese market; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39767/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Under the Government's Global Ireland Strategy, we are committed to developing tourism from new and emerging tourism markets with potential for Ireland. This year, Tourism Ireland has commenced the implementation of a strategy for growth in these markets. In Budget 2019, I provided almost €4 million in additional funding to Tourism Ireland for this purpose. China, as the largest source of outbound tourism in the world, is one of the main emerging markets we are targeting.

While the resources allocated to any particular market is an operational matter for Tourism Ireland, I am aware that the additional funding I provided has allowed the agency to substantially increase its activity in the Chinese market this year. It has doubled its investment to €1 million and increased its on the ground marketing team to 12, including a presence in Hong Kong. It has also increased its publicity, digital and social media activity in the market and continues to interact with the travel trade in the market.

In order to make the most of the potential from a market such as China, it is important that the industry here is sufficiently prepared in order to be able to offer visitors a quality experience which meets their requirements. To this end, Fáilte Ireland is working with Irish tourism businesses across the country to help them capitalise on this potential by training them in how to meet the specific needs of the Chinese visitor. Its *Get China Ready* programme was developed in partnership with Tourism Ireland and Tourism Northern Ireland and is jointly delivered with the support of the Centre for Competitiveness, which is the licensed provider of China Outbound Tourism Research Institute programmes in Ireland.

With the support of Government, the work being done by the tourism agencies both in China and here in Ireland, together with the industry, leaves us well placed to attract increased tourism from China in the coming years.

### **Rail Services Provision**

76. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the ordering of new rail carriages; when Irish Rail will receive delivery of same; and when passengers will see increased capacity in services. [39940/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As the Deputy is aware, all public expenditure must comply with the *Public Spending Code* which sets out the requirements to which sponsoring agencies and sanctioning authorities must adhere, including the requirement that any project with an expected cost of €100 million or more must obtain specific approval from Government. In addition to that there are also procurement requirements which must be complied with in line with relevant legislation.

There are two active proposals in relation to the purchase of additional rail fleet.

I can confirm that my Department has now received a business case from the National Transport Authority-Iarnród Éireann in relation to the proposed purchase of 41 InterCity Rail

(ICR) Cars. In line with the *Public Spending Code*, that business case is currently being considered by my Department and once that consideration is complete I will seek Government's decision in relation to same. Pending Government approval to proceed, NTA-Iarnród Éireann anticipate delivery of the ICRs will commence in late 2021.

Separately, there is also a proposal to significantly expand the commuter rail fleet through establishing a 10-year procurement framework in relation to a minimum of 300 electric and battery electric units, with the potential for that to increase to 600 units over the life of the procurement framework.

The NTA and Iarnród Éireann commenced procurement pre-qualifying in May and I expect a business case will be submitted early next year. This is a significant procurement and later construction project and I understand delivery lead-in time would be in the order of 3 years.

### **Tourism Industry**

77. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if specific assistance will be provided for the tourism and hospitality sector in the Border region due to the difficulties that will arise from Brexit and the heavy dependence of the region on business from Northern Ireland and the UK; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39877/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The Government's Brexit Contingency Action Plan Update was published on 9 July. It is the Government's assessment that there is a significant risk of a no deal Brexit on 31 October and accordingly work on no deal Brexit preparations continue to have the highest priority across Government Departments and Agencies.

There is a high degree of uncertainty in forecasting the macroeconomic impact of a no deal Brexit. However it is clear that the impacts would be very damaging. The Contingency Plan Update confirms that in parallel to the predicted macroeconomic impacts, a no deal Brexit will have severe negative effects in a number of sectors and will be widely felt on a regional basis. The impacts will be felt most notably in many exporting sectors including tourism.

In 2019 the Government allocated almost €8 million in additional funding to the tourism agencies specifically to respond to the impact of Brexit. Tourism Ireland has put in place a programme of marketing activity, post-Brexit research, and stakeholder information to ensure that potential visitors in relevant markets fully appreciate that it is "business as usual" for Ireland and the Irish tourism industry. It is also implementing a market strategy for growth in the British market.

Fáilte Ireland is supporting tourism enterprises to respond to the impact of Brexit. The 'Get Brexit Ready' programme is helping businesses to assess the risk and respond to changes and will also assist the sector in diversifying into other markets. Fáilte Ireland's work is focusing primarily on border counties and the South East region which have been most adversely affected by the drop in the value of sterling.

The Budget allocation for 2020 is subject to the annual estimates discussions and my Department, in engaging with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, is highlighting the exposure of tourism to a no deal Brexit.

### **Road Projects**

78. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if key road infrastructure projects will be prioritised for investment in 2020 such as the proposed east to west route, namely, the road from Cootehill, Shercock, Carrickmacross and Dundalk, in view of the particular challenges facing the Border region due to Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39876/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As the Deputy is aware, the improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of local authorities, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from the Council's own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the local authority.

This year I gave an allocation of €100,000 to Cavan County Council to enable the Council to undertake a detailed project appraisal, in line with the current requirements in the Public Spending Code and the Capital Investment Framework, of the Cavan to Dundalk section of the proposed east-west route. The aim of this appraisal would be to assess the extent to which the scheme or elements of it can be justified in terms of appraisal and advanced for further consideration in relation to schemes for future development. Preparation of the appraisal is the responsibility of the Council.

Allocations for 2020 will not be decided on, or issued until early 2020.

### **Bus Services**

79. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the roll-out of the LocalLink bus service in counties Cavan and Monaghan; the supports his Department is providing to the initiative; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39714/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport.

The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for securing the provision of public transport services nationally. It also has national responsibility for integrated local and rural transport, including management of the Rural Transport Programme which now operates under the 'Local Link' brand.

In light of the NTA's responsibilities in this matter, I have referred your question to the NTA for direct reply to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

*Question No. 80 answered with Question No. 72.*

### **Rail Network**

81. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if funding will be allocated to allow widening of a railway bridge (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39909/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding of public transport.

The operation of the rail network and stations on the network including the development of infrastructure, is a matter for Iarnród Éireann in the first instance.

In view of Iarnród Éireann's responsibility in this matter, I have referred the Deputy's question to the company for direct reply. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

## Brexit Issues

82. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which alternative transport routes have been identified and provided in the aftermath of Brexit in order to ensure that Irish importers and exporters can circumnavigate the UK in order to provide reliable routes to mainland Europe; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39955/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Brexit has been identified as my Department's highest strategic risk and the Department, along with other Government Departments and key Agencies, has been preparing for Brexit for three years. Consultations regarding Brexit with key maritime stakeholders has included a Transport and Logistics All Island Sectoral meeting in Dundalk in January 2017, three Brexit Maritime Transport Workshops / Seminars (in April 2017, March 2018, and in January 2019) with a further Brexit Maritime Connectivity 'Be prepared' Workshop held on 4th September 2019, together with on going contact with various stakeholders.

A significant proportion of our goods destined for Continental European markets are transported via the UK landbridge to access these markets. Brexit could impact on the efficiency of the landbridge route particularly where there are increased border and custom procedures and associated delays, or were the UK to subsequently apply differing standards, road charging or regulatory regimes. The landbridge is the fastest route to continental Europe and as such is relied upon for the transport of time-sensitive products, such as some in the fresh agri-food/perishable goods sector, just-in-time and high value goods. Any delays or barriers to this key route to European markets will be detrimental for certain sectors. Significant work has been and continues to be undertaken through the Landbridge Project Group, chaired by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, in seeking to ensure continued access through the landbridge to markets in continental Europe.

Eight Meetings have been held with shipping companies and shipping interests by my Department and the IMDO in January and February 2019. These discussions with shipping companies have been continued by my Department since then, up to recent days, while the Irish Maritime Development Office (IMDO) who report to my Department have been consulting extensively with the Maritime sector, including shipping, port and other maritime interests regarding Brexit issues on an ongoing basis. A number of consistent views has emerged from the meetings and consultations with the shipping companies. Shipping companies remain confident that the market will be responsive in meeting any challenge in a no-deal scenario should there be a switch in demand to direct services.

In the context of Brexit, there has already been a significant market response evidencing the capacity of market participants to respond to shifts in trade patterns resulting from Brexit. This includes:

- In 2018, CLdN launched *MV Celine*, the world's largest RoRo vessel, and in 2019 launched the *MV Laureline* RoRo vessel, significantly increasing capacity on the Dublin-Rotterdam and

Dublin-Zeebrugge routes.

- In May 2018 Brittany Ferries commenced a service from Cork to Santander and Roscoff.

- Irish Ferries investment of €150 million in its newest passenger and freight vessel, *MV W.B. Yeats*, provides year-round freight capacity between Ireland and France of 165 HGVs per sailing or 60,600 HGVs per annum and a vessel of a similar size is due to be delivered on the Irish sea routes in 2020. - In July 2019, BG Freight Line announced the commencement of a direct Waterford-Rotterdam route weekly Lo/Lo freight service, which will act as a deep sea feeder through Rotterdam port and onwards to worldwide destinations for Irish importers and exporters.

I am confident in the light of my Department's consultation with shipping companies, and the previous responses of shipping operators, that shipping services can be expected to adapt to changing market demands that may arise as a consequence of Brexit and we have seen the evidence of this over the last few years with the increase in shipping capacity on direct routes to continental ports that I have mentioned.

### Public Transport

83. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the MetroLink project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39944/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area, including the MetroLink project

Noting the NTA's responsibility in the matter, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for a direct reply. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 days.

### Public Transport

84. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has considered establishing a transport security unit to tackle widespread and dangerous antisocial behaviour on public transport and at public transport hubs. [39771/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The safety and security of public transport passengers and staff, including arrangements to deal with anti-social behaviour, are important matters that, first and foremost, must be managed by every public transport company, in conjunction with An Garda Síochána, where appropriate.

While the vast majority of public transport passenger journeys occur without incident, I am concerned to ensure that the necessary arrangements are in place to ensure the safety of all passengers and staff.

Following representations from the National Bus and Rail Union, my Department wrote to the three CIÉ companies to get their views on the issue of anti-social behaviour and ensuring the safety of both passengers and staff. All companies stressed their strong and close working relationships with An Garda Síochána.

I also wrote to the Minister for Justice and Equality to seek his views on how we could address the issue of anti-social behaviour on our public transport system. The allocation of all Garda resources, including the manner in which Garda personnel are deployed, is solely a decision for the Garda Commissioner and his management team.

I understand that An Garda Síochána met with the Railway Safety Advisory Council (RSAC) in relation to the issue of anti-social behaviour on our public transport network and that further engagement and initiatives are planned. Following that engagement, I note and welcome the recent deployment of gardaí to public transport locations and to DART, Luas and commuter rail services under 'Operation Twintrack'.

Irish Rail has advised that it has undertaken a range of measures and proposes further measures to address anti-social behaviour on the rail network, including increased security personnel, allowing for a doubling of security patrols, the introduction of Customer Service Officers on all Intercity routes and enhanced CCTV coverage.

A new text alert service has also been introduced to enable customers to discretely report anti-social behaviour incidents and allow security personnel and/or Gardaí to be alerted and dispatched as required to an incident. The entire Intercity fleet is also equipped with CCTV and with communications buttons at doors.

Iarnród Éireann's annual spend on security has risen from €4.1 million in 2017 to €4.5 million in 2018 and it is projected by the company that its spend on security will rise again this year to €4.7 million.

Both Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann have reported that the level of anti-social behaviour is relatively low on their services and noted a declining trend, which is positive. Following a recent serious incident at Busáras, Bus Éireann has introduced more stringent security measures at the station with a view to combatting increased levels of anti-social behaviour at the site.

## **Road Safety**

**85. Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will report on the improvements of the Road Safety Authority for the processing of court information on drivers disqualified in court; the average length of time for the national vehicle drivers' file to be updated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39751/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Insofar as the Road Safety Authority is concerned, this is an operational matter, and I have referred it to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response has not been received within ten days.

Primarily this programme will automate the current manual process for sending notification of driver disqualifications by the Court Services. Automation of this process will reduce the time taken to update my Department's National Vehicle Driver File (NVDF) with details of driver disqualifications and will ensure accurate and current records on the status of a driver on the NVDF. This reduction in time will reduce the risk of disqualified drivers obtaining licences because the National Driver Licencing Service (NDLS) were unaware of a disqualification. It will also help reduce any errors due to manual updating of disqualification notifications and driver records.

## **Driver Licences**

86. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a progress report will be provided on the extension of the right of asylum seekers to obtain a driver licence. [39939/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** This matter is still under consideration in consultation with the Minister for Justice and Equality.

### Driver Licences

87. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has engaged with his Cabinet colleagues and UK counterparts to ensure that returning emigrants who hold UK licences will continue to be able to swap their licences for an Irish driver licence even in the event of a no-deal Brexit. [39770/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I refer the Deputy to the answer provided in Priority Question No. 1.

### Electric Vehicles

88. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on whether the target of 1,000,000 electric vehicles on the roads by 2030 is a realistic target; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39729/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Driving cars accounts for over half of all land transport emissions, and so a transition to low and zero emission cars is one of the necessary changes if Ireland is to substantially reduce its transport emissions. Accordingly, electric vehicles (EVs) are a prominent mitigation technology in the whole-of Government *Climate Action Plan*, which sets targets of 180,000 EVs on our roads by 2025, and 936,000 EVs by 2030. Clearly these targets are very challenging, and they are indicative of the scale of transformation that is needed across all sectors if Ireland is to reduce national emissions and reach its legally binding emission ceiling in future years.

It is widely expected that, over the coming years the combination of :

- improvements in technology,
- reductions in vehicle purchase prices,
- increasing driving ranges and model availabilities,
- coupled with Government incentives and new investment in the recharging network,

will maintain the current positive policy environment under which we have seen EV sales rise steeply over the past year, albeit from a low base.

In addition, car manufacturers will be stepping up production of EVs in the coming years due to an EU Regulation that sets production benchmarks for new cars and new vans being zero-emission. This should mean that more vehicles will be available for Irish consumers to purchase. Accordingly, I am confident that we can make real progress towards the target by 2030.

To date, the Government, supported by the *Low Emission Vehicle Taskforce*, has worked to ensure that conditions and policies are in place to support citizens in making greener vehicle choices. As the Deputy will be aware, several of the principal supports, such as the EV Pur-

chase Grant Scheme, the Domestic Charger Grant and the roll out of an extensive recharging network, fall under the remit of my colleague the Minister of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment. Support from the Minister for Finance has also been fundamental, with EVs now benefiting from favourable motor tax, vehicle registration tax (VRT) and benefit-in-kind (BIK) tax rates. In my role, I am directly responsible for two initiatives supporting EV uptake rates: the Electric Vehicle Toll Incentive Scheme and the Electric Taxi Grant Scheme.

This concerted work across several Departments must continue if we are to accelerate the current trajectory of EV sales. Action 79 of the *Climate Action Plan* commits my Department to develop a *Roadmap* on the optimum mix of regulatory, taxation and subsidy policies to drive significant ramp-up in passenger EVs and electric van sales from very early in the next decade; I will convene the relevant Departments before year-end to pursue this aim.

Collectively, I believe that these actions, alongside a supportive environment, will ensure that Ireland is well positioned to make the transition to electrification as efficiently as possible and progress the delivery of our collective ambition for nearly one million EVs by 2030.

### Road Projects

89. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the Bonagee link road project in County Donegal; when the project will commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39685/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Firstly, I would like to explain that, as Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, design, construction and development stages of individual road projects is a matter for

(a) the relevant road authority (i.e. local authorities) in relation to local and regional roads, or

(b) Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), in conjunction with the local authorities concerned, in relation to national roads.

### Overview

The National Development Plan (NDP) provides the strategic and financial framework for the roads programme for the period from 2018 to 2027. In the ten years, over €11 billion will be invested in the overall road network.

The National Development Plan (NDP) identifies two categories of national road improvement projects

The first covers projects to advance to construction, subject to the satisfactory outcome of project appraisal and development consent. The second relates to projects at pre-appraisal and early planning to be assessed, to develop a pipeline of suitable projects. Advancing projects in the second, pipeline, category will be subject to prioritisation within the overall national road programme and funding.

Having consulted with the relevant authorities, I can provide the following information and update to the Deputy on the Bonagee Link Road project, also referred to as the Letterkenny Inner Relief Road.

- In Co. Donegal the Trans European Network-Transport (TEN-T) Comprehensive road network runs from the Leitrim County Boundary (on the outskirts of Bundoran to the Border with Derry in the Northeast at Bridgend, on the outskirts of Derry City, and involves sections of the N13, N14 and N15.

- In 2016 Donegal County Council commissioned a Corridor Needs Study on the TEN-T Comprehensive network within Donegal. The study identified projects to improve the TEN-T Comprehensive network to the required standard under TEN-T regulations. The Study identified a priority list of schemes. It recommended three priority projects to advance:

- N15/N13 Ballybofey – Stranorlar Bypass

- N56/N13/N14 Letterkenny Bypass, and Letterkenny-Manorcunningham Dual Carriage-way

- N14 Manorcunningham-Lifford Realignment, including the N14/N15 link to the A5 in Northern Ireland

The Bonagee Link Road, or the Letterkenny Inner Relief Road, forms part of the proposed Letterkenny Bypass.

Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) has provided an allocation of €2.5m in 2019 to Donegal County Council to progress planning work on priority national road improvements projects that were identified in the study on the TEN-T Network I mentioned. These projects are identified as Strategic Investment Priorities in the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the NDP. Under the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) 2014-2020 Transport calls for proposals 2019, Donegal County Council applied for funding for the TEN-T project and have recently been successful in their application for funding for planning work under the 2019 call.

### **Current Status**

Feasibility Studies for the priority schemes commenced in 2017 and the route selection process is ongoing. Public consultations on identified route options were held in April and May 2018 in Letterkenny, Lifford and Ballybofey.

An Emerging Preferred Route Corridor for each section has now been identified. Public Consultations on these Emerging Corridors took place in February 2019. A public display of the Stage 3 Preferred Options will be organised for later this year.

It can typically take 8 to 13 years to bring a major project from conception to completion. There is no timeframe fixed yet for completing the Bonagee link road project, as it will need to obtain both Business Case approval and Planning Consent and will be subject to the availability of funding in the future and the of course the necessary approvals.

The specific preferred route selection process is on-going. However, you may wish to note that update information may be available on the project website, <http://donegal-ten-t.ie/>

### **Bus Services**

90. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the BusConnects proposal for Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39943/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for

Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area, including the BusConnects programme.

Noting the NTA's responsibility in the matter, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for a direct reply. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 days.

### **National Convention Centre**

91. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on whether a cultural group (details supplied) that have used a centre is now being precluded from doing so in view of the fact that his Department is the sponsoring Department for the centre. [39764/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The national conference centre, known as the Convention Centre Dublin (CCD), is a Public Private Partnership. Under the terms of the Project Agreement, the Office of Public Works (OPW) acts as "the Authority" on behalf of the Government and a private company is responsible for managing and operating the centre. Under the agreement, any issues relating to use of the premises are properly dealt with by the facility operator.

The primary objective in developing a national conference centre, as set out in the Project Agreement, is to increase Ireland's share of the international conference market, thereby increasing tourism revenues. In light of this objective, my Department is the "sponsoring Department" of the centre. As such, my Department has some responsibilities relating to monitoring and reviewing of the CCD's performance in the context of delivering on overall tourism policy objectives, including motivating large numbers of international conference delegates to visit Dublin and Ireland.

However, my Department has no role or involvement in relation to the CCD's commercial and operational decisions including those relating to programming or commercial bookings.

### **Bus Services**

92. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to ensure that bus routes operated by private companies and licensed by the NTA but which are not in receipt of PSO funding will be accessible to passengers with mobility issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39898/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport.

Under the Dublin Transport Authority Act 2008, the National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for promoting the development of an integrated, accessible public transport network. It is also the licensing authority for commercial bus services that are not subject to a public transport services contract.

In light of the NTA's responsibilities in this matter, I have referred your question to the NTA for direct reply to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within

10 working days.

### **Olympic Games Funding**

93. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if additional resources will be given to Olympic sports and athletes in advance of Tokyo 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39908/19]

**Minister of State Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin):** The Government has made a very significant investment in high performance sport this year, with an additional €1.5m allocated to Sport Ireland in Budget 2019 for high performance programmes in support of preparations for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games. This additional funding has enabled Sport Ireland to provide increased allocations to the relevant National Governing Bodies of Sport under its High Performance programme this year.

The additional funding for 2019 follows on from an additional €1.75m allocated for high performance sport in August 2018.

The level of funding allocated to date positions our high performance athletes well as they prepare for the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2020.

The level of funding to be allocated for sport next year will be part of the Budget 2020 announcement.

### **Road Network**

94. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the introduction of variable speed limits and other demand management measures on the M50; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39748/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Firstly, I would like to explain that, as Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, design, construction and development stages of individual national road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

I fully recognise the demand pressures on the M50.

#### **Enhancing Motorway Operation Services**

Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), along with other stakeholders, is continuing to implement a number of measures on the M50 to manage demand and optimise operational efficiency, including:

- enhanced vehicle recovery services;
- establishment of an Interagency Incident Coordination Group;
- changes to merging and diverging layouts at junctions;
- the establishment of signed Emergency Diversion Routes; and

- improved access for incident support and emergency services.

TII has also commenced a project titled ‘enhancing Motorway Operation Services’ which will include, inter alia, Variable Speed Limits and Lane Control Signalling.

### **Variable Speed Limits**

The variable speed limit regime on the M50 will improve the operational efficiency of the motorway by smoothing traffic flow, improving journey time reliability and reducing the number of traffic collisions. Lane control signalling will also be installed as part of the project which will allow the closing off of lanes.

I can advise that my Department is progressing the legislative arrangements that will provide TII with the necessary powers to regulate and operate VSL on motorways. The legislative proposals will be contained in the Road Traffic (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill. A General Scheme of the Bill, including the proposal for variable speed limits, was approved by Government for formal drafting last December, subject to two proposals within the Scheme being examined further in Cabinet Committee. These two proposals - for graduated speeding penalties and the carrying of driving licences - have now been examined in detail at official level and will be considered by Cabinet Committee shortly. Once this process is completed, I hope to see work on drafting the Bill for publication completed, and to publish the Bill before the end of the year.

In the meantime I am advised that, in order to progress this important measure, TII is extending the motorway traffic control centre at Dublin Tunnel to cater for the additional workload from the introduction of VSL and is currently procuring the management systems and hardware for the operation and roll-out of VSL for the M50. All the preparatory technical and logistical frameworks will need to be in place, by TII, before VSL can be introduced and become operational and as I have outlined, this work is on-going. It is expected that the enabling works which TII is undertaking will be completed in late 2019 or early 2020.

### **Public Transport Role**

In addition, Project Ireland 2040 identifies a number of key public transport priorities including the BusConnects programme, MetroLink and the DART expansion programme. These will be delivered by the National Transport Authority (NTA) progressively and steadily over the short, medium and long term, to deliver a comprehensive public transport network that will match transport demand, alleviate congestion, provide an alternative to private car use and deliver a range of benefits over the next decade, all of which will have a positive effect on the M50.

*Question No. 95 answered with Question No. 56.*

*Question No. 96 answered with Question No. 67.*

## **Infrastructure and Capital Investment Programme**

97. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the details of each State infrastructure project that is in development or is due for completion in 2019 in which it is in excess of the budget assigned to the project for its current stage to date. [39522/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport and roads.

The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area and our regional cities. Noting the NTA's responsibility in the matter, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for a direct reply. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 days.

The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of the relevant local authority in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from the Council's own resources supplemented by State road grants. Each local authority is the contracting authority for the purpose of implementation of regional and local road improvement projects.

In the case of national roads Transport Infrastructure Ireland in conjunction with the relevant local authority is responsible for the implementation of road improvement schemes.

I would point out that cost estimates for road improvement schemes are reviewed at project development milestones and allowing for cost inflation and project implementation risks are subject to change. The Total Scheme Budget at the point of the award of the main construction contract forms the basis for assessing the cost outturn once the final account for a scheme is settled.

In relation to the road PPP projects, the PPP company is responsible for construction and carries the budget risk for the project.

The details for road projects in development or completion in 2019 are included in the following table.

#### NATIONAL ROADS

SCHEME NAME	ESTIMATE STAGE	BUDGET OUTTURN
AT CONSTRUCTION IN 2019		
N11 Gorey Enniscorthy PPP (Scheme Open)	Construction Estimate	Construction Risk with PPP Co.
N25 New Ross Bypass PPP	Construction Estimate	Construction Risk with PPP Co.
M7 Naas Road Widening	Construction Estimate	Final Account TBD
N56 Mountcharles to Inver	Construction Estimate	Final Account TBD
N56 Dungloe to Glenties	Construction Estimate	Final Account TBD
N4 Collooney to Castlebaldwin	Construction Estimate	Final Account TBD
SCHEMES PROGRESSING TO CONSTRUCTION		
N5 Westport to Turlough	Final Business Case Cost Estimate	To be determined
N22 Ballyvourney to Macroom	Final Business Case Cost Estimate	To be determined
SCHEMES INTENDING TO GO TO TENDER		
M8/N25 Dunkettle	TBD for Final Business Case	To be determined

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SCHEME NAME	ESTIMATE STAGE	BUDGET OUTTURN
N69 Listowel Bypass	TBD for Final Business Case	To be determined
N52 Ardee Bypass	TBD for Final Business Case	To be determined
N5 Ballaghaderreen to Scramoge	TBD for Final Business Case	To be determined
N59 Moycullen Bypass	TBD for Final Business Case	To be determined
INTENDING TO PROCEED TO PLANNING APPROVAL		
N21/N69 Limerick to Foynes, incorporating the Adare Bypass	Business Case Cost Estimate	To be determined
SUBJECT TO JUDICIAL REVIEW POST STATUTORY PROCESS		
N28 Cork to Ringaskiddy	Business Case Cost Estimate	To be determined
REGIONAL & LOCAL ROADS		
AT CONSTRUCTION/CONSTRUCTION COMPLETED		
R407 Sallins Bypass	Construction Estimate	Final Account TBD
Adamstown & Nangor Road Upgrade	Construction Estimate	Final Account TBD
Sligo Western Distributor Road	Construction Estimate	Final Account TBD
Portlaoise Southern Distributor Road	Construction Estimate	Final Account TBD
Dingle Relief Road	Construction Estimate	Final Account TBD
SCHEMES PRE MAIN CONSTRUCTION TENDER STAGE		
Coonagh to Knockalisheen	TBD for Final Business Case	To be determined
Athy Southern Distributor Road	TBD for Final Business Case	To be determined
Eastern Garavogue Bridge & Approach Road	TBD for Final Business Case	To be determined
R498 Latteragh Re-alignment	TBD for Final Business Case	To be determined
Tralee Northern Relief Road	TBD for Final Business Case	To be determined
R150 Bettystown to Laytown	TBD for Final Business Case	To be determined
Shannon Crossing/Killalloe Bypass/R494 Upgrade	TBD for Final Business Case	To be determined

**Capital Expenditure Programme**

98. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when decisions will be made on applications for capital projects in County Kildare under Project Ireland 2040; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39640/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As the Deputy is aware, *Project Ireland 2040* provides indicative allocations over the next ten years for a range of transport related projects and programmes.

As noted in *Project Ireland 2040* individual projects and programmes remain subject to compliance with the *Public Spending Code*, including its requirements in relation to appraisal and Sanctioning Authority approval points.

Details regarding indicative allocations, current status and expected completion dates where applicable are on the *Project Ireland 2040* Tracker that is published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/6db7c4-investment-projects-and-programmes-tracker/>

County Kildare road improvement projects identified in Project Ireland 2040 for implementation, subject to the necessary approvals, are the Athy Southern Distributor Road, the Sallins By-pass and the M7 Naas Newbridge Bypass upgrade. The M7 Naas Newbridge Bypass upgrade and the Sallins Bypass are already at construction.

In relation to Tourism, Fáilte Ireland is currently evaluating a total of 141 applications under Stage 2 of its Platforms for Growth tourism investment programme, the first funding call of which invited proposals for immersive heritage and cultural attractions. Fáilte Ireland is planning to notify applicants, including those from Co. Kildare, by November 2019.

While there are currently no outstanding applications for Greenways in Co. Kildare, funding of €1.7m was granted to Kildare County Council for work on the Grand Canal Greenway in June 2019.

In relation to Sports Capital Funding, the 2018 round of the Sports Capital Programme closed for applications on Friday 19th October last. By that deadline, a record 2,337 applications were submitted seeking a total of €162m in funding. 186 of these applications were for projects that were deemed invalid under the 2017 round of the programme that subsequently submitted corrected documents. These applications were assessed first and approximately €7m in allocations to 170 projects were announced on the 17th January. 619 equipment only applications were assessed next and 466 allocations with a value of €9.8m were announced to these organisations in May. Work is now underway in assessing the remaining applications for capital works. It is likely to take a further number of weeks to have all applications assessed with allocations announced shortly after that.

With regard to larger projects, the Large Scale Sport Infrastructure Fund opened for applications on 19th November 2018 and the closing date for receipt of applications was 17th April. 72 applications were received in total. Details of the scheme and all applications received have been published on the gov.ie website <https://www.gov.ie/en/service/d13385-sports-capital-programme/#sports-capital-programme-allocations-and-payments> along with the evaluation procedures and guidelines. Assessment of the applications received has commenced. In view of the detailed information contained in each application, I am advised that it will take a number of months to have all of them assessed.

Accordingly, I expect that it will be towards the end of this year before any allocations are announced.

**State Claims Agency**

99. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if it is standard practice for the State Claims Agency to delay paying costs associated with the cases relating to discovery orders until personal injuries claims are settled (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40116/19]

100. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the costs incurred to date arising from a case (details supplied) involving the State Claims Agency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40118/19]

106. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if his attention has been drawn to delays in paying costs associated with a case (details supplied) in which the State Claims Agency and a person are party to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40114/19]

107. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he is still in the process of contesting aspects of a case against the State by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40117/19]

108. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the progress made to date regarding the disclosure of a range of documents to a person (details supplied) in the Air Corps regarding exposure on dates during the 1990s to dangerous chemicals; the reason for the delay in providing the documentation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40135/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 99, 100 and 106 to 108, inclusive, together.

The Deputy will be aware that the State Claims Agency manages personal injury claims on behalf of the Minister for Defence.

Given my responsibilities and the fact that the Minister for Defence is a Defendant in these claims, you will appreciate it would be inappropriate for me to make any comment in relation to these cases, either generally or individually, whilst such litigation is ongoing.

**Defence Forces Personnel**

101. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the amendments made to a document (details supplied); the dates the amendments were made; the changes made; if these amendments were initiated by the military or officials in his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40021/19]

102. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if changes were requested by the military to a document (details supplied); if so, the dates the changes were made; the actions taken by his officials; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40022/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 101 and 102 together.

Defence Force Regulation R5 (New Series) is the governing Regulation for the Reserve Defence Force and Paragraph 31 thereof governs promotions within the Army Reserve and Naval

Service Reserve.

The Regulation is in the process of being reviewed by the civil and military sides of the Department. This review is an iterative process with ongoing deliberation between civil and military authorities as to how and why text of the Regulation might be changed or amended. The intent is to rationalise and update the Regulation in its totality when this process is completed.

### Defence Forces Reserve

103. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of Reserve Defence Forces officers commissioned after 1 October 2005 that have been promoted; the ranks to which each has been promoted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40023/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** Military Authorities have confirmed that 48 Reserve Defence Forces, commissioned after 1 October 2005, have since been promoted.

The rank breakdown, as at 31 August 2019, is as follows:

Rank	Sub Lt	Lt	Capt	Comdt
Total	2	43	1	2

### Defence Forces Reserve

104. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number, appointments, functions and ranks held by Reserve Defence Forces personnel gazetted to specialist reserve staff; if the decision per 8.5.3 in the White Paper has been implemented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40024/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The Government appreciates the service of the members of the Reserve Defence Force (RDF) and the White Paper is clear that there is a continued requirement to retain and develop the RDF.

Under the current phase of implementation of White Paper actions outlined in Section 8.5.3, a project was established to:

- conduct a skills survey to identify individuals in the First Line Reserve, Army Reserve and Naval Service Reserve with relevant professional qualifications and their potential availability and
- establish a panel of professionally qualified members of the RDF, to be known as the Specialist Reserve.

The skills survey has been completed and this project is currently paused pending completion of a linked project relating to a gap analysis of skill-sets in the Permanent Defence Force (PDF). Preliminary work has been undertaken within the PDF to identify the frequency of gaps and appropriate measures to address them.

The work undertaken on these projects will also now inform and complement relevant projects of Phase One of the High Level Implementation Plan for the recommendations of the Public Service Pay Commission's report on recruitment and retention issues in the PDF.

Currently there is no establishment for a Specialist Reserve, therefore no RDF personnel are gazetted to any corresponding appointment.

### **Ministerial Meetings**

105. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he has formally met with the United States of America Secretary of the Navy. [40063/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** I can confirm that I have not met with the United States of America's Secretary of the Navy.

*Questions Nos. 106 to 108, inclusive, answered with Question No. 99.*

### **Tax Code**

109. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Finance if he will restore the tourism VAT rate to 9% in view of economic uncertainty in the context of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40036/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As the Deputy will be aware, it is a longstanding practice of the Minister for Finance not to comment, in advance of the Budget, on any tax matters that might be the subject of Budget decisions.

### **Tax Code**

110. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Finance if he will consider not increasing the carbon tax or provide for the offset of carbon tax on licensed hauliers in view of the fact that this sector is already under pressure with the uncertainty of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40037/19]

111. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Finance if he will introduce measures to reduce fuel costs for licenced hauliers by doubling the rebate level allowed under the diesel rebate scheme from 7.5c to 15c and reducing the floor from which the rebate starts from €1 to 85c. [40038/19]

112. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Finance if he will consider not increasing motor tax VRT or other taxes on the licensed haulage sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40039/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 110 to 112, inclusive, together.

As the Deputy will be aware, it is a longstanding practice of the Minister for Finance not to comment, in advance of the Budget, on any tax matters that might be the subject of Budget decisions.

### **Tax Data**

113. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated first year and full-

year cost of a proposal by an organisation (details supplied). [40101/19]

114. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated first year and full-year cost of a proposal by an organisation (details supplied). [40104/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 113 and 114 together.

I am advised by Revenue that information is not available on tax returns that separately identifies business assets and share disposals from other qualifying assets for retirement relief. Also, to estimate the cost of the proposals would require information on the gains made on disposal of the assets. For these reasons, it is not possible to accurately estimate the cost associated with removing the caps as outlined by the Deputy.

### **Tax Data**

115. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated first and full-year cost of a proposal by an organisation (details supplied); and the estimated number of persons that are liable to the levy in question. [40105/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised by Revenue that approximately 25,000 taxpayer units (spouses or civil partners opting for joint assessment are counted as one unit) are liable to the 3% USC (Universal Social Charge) surcharge, which applies to non-PAYE income in excess of €100,000. The cost of abolishing this surcharge is estimated at €69 million in the first year and €128 million in a full year.

These estimated figures are based on projected 2020 incomes, calculated on actual data for the year 2017, and may be revised when more recent data become available. The estimates do not account for any behavioural effects that might result from the proposal.

### **Tax Reliefs Application**

116. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Finance his views on a proposal by an organisation (details supplied); and if costs would arise. [40106/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Start-Up Capital Incentive (“SCI”) was introduced in Finance Act 2018 as a tax relief for early stage micro companies to attract equity based risk finance from family members, including parents, and other “connected persons” up to the €500,000 lifetime limit.

I am advised by Revenue that they are aware of the concern raised in the Deputy’s question. While acknowledging that the issue is raised in a third party publication, if the Deputy can provide any further information that would help to clarify the precise nature of the concern, Revenue will further examine the matter and I am advised by them, that they will issue updated guidance to provide clarity through the Tax Administration Liaison Committee.

### **Tax Reliefs Application**

117. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Finance his views on a proposal by an organisation (details supplied); and if costs would arise. [40107/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** In general, consideration of any tax changes in advance of Budget 2020 are undertaken within the annual Budgetary and Finance Bill process. The Deputy will appreciate that I cannot comment on any possible changes at this time.

As regards the relief, I am advised by Revenue that capital acquisitions tax relief is available in relation to certain business assets passing by way of gifts or inheritances. This ‘business relief’ takes the form of a 90% reduction in the taxable value of gifted or inherited business property. For relief to apply, the business assets must constitute what is defined as “relevant business property”. Included in this definition are unincorporated businesses, unquoted shares in certain family companies and assets used wholly or mainly for the purposes of a business carried on by a family company or a partnership. A business consisting wholly or mainly of dealing in land, shares, securities or currencies or making or holding investments does not qualify for business relief.

The relevant business assets must have been owned by the disponent for a minimum period prior to the gift or inheritance. The minimum period of such ownership for gifts is 5 years and for inheritances is 2 years.

There is a ‘past use’ test in that the relevant business assets must have been used wholly or mainly for the purpose of the business concerned throughout the 2-year period immediately prior to the gift or inheritance. The value attributable to assets not satisfying this ‘past use’ test (known as ‘excepted assets’) is excluded from the relief. The operation of business relief does not include a ‘future use’ test in respect of assets that may be excluded from the relief as ‘excepted assets’.

### **Small and Medium Enterprises Supports**

118. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Finance his views on proposals by an organisation (details supplied) for the key employee engagement programme, KEEP, to support job creation and talent retention; and if costs would arise. [40108/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As the Deputy may be aware, in May and June of this year, my Department undertook a consultation process on various taxation measures and how they might better support the small and medium enterprise sector.

In relation to the Key Employee Engagement Programme (KEEP), the purpose was to seek to identify potential changes that could help it to operate in a more effective manner in assisting SMEs.

The consultation included a very useful public event on 6 June at which various proposals were discussed in detail with stakeholders.

In the intervening months, my Department has further considered the proposals with a view to bringing forward a package of measures for my consideration in the context of the forthcoming Budget and Finance Bill.

As I am sure he will appreciate, and with less than a week to go to the Budget, it would not be appropriate for me at this time to discuss any such measure that may or may not be contained within the Budget and Finance Bill.

### **Employment and Investment Incentive Scheme**

119. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 164 of 4 December 2018, the updated cost of adapting the employment and investment incentive scheme (details supplied) in tabular form. [40109/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised by Revenue that the estimated cost to the Exchequer of increasing the current allowable tax relief cap of €150,000, available to individual investors under the Employment and Investment Incentive (EII) Scheme, in the manner described by the Deputy is set out in the following table.

Threshold	Cost (€m)
€200,000	0.4
€300,000	0.7
€400,000	0.8
€500,000	0.9
€600,000	1.0
€700,000	1.0
€800,000	1.1
€900,000	1.2
€1M	1.2
€1.1M	1.3
€1.2M	1.4
€1.3M	1.4

This costing assumes a maximum of relief of 30% and does not include the additional 10% relief that is currently available under the Scheme after a period of 4 years from the initial investment. It is based on actual data relating to the operation of scheme in 2017 and assumes that there are no behavioural changes as a result of the increased caps on the relief.

### Flood Relief Schemes Eligibility

120. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the cost-benefit analysis criteria set down by the OPW will be permitted to take loss of income, workable land, payments to farmers and the environment into account when assessing the need for flood relief works in the Lough Funshinagh area of south County Roscommon; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40015/19]

121. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will instruct the OPW to find a permanent solution to the flooding issues in the Lough Funshinagh area of south County Roscommon in view of the fact that the stringent cost-benefit analysis criteria set down by the OPW has now prevented Roscommon County Council from taking further action; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40016/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 120 and 121 together.

I am advised by my Office that funding was approved in 2018 to Roscommon County Council under the OPW Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme for a study at this location.

The report prepared by Malachy Walsh & Partners on the flooding of Lough Funshinagh, has been submitted to my officials this week. Following consideration of this report, further

contact will be made with Roscommon County Council to establish whether or not there is a viable, cost beneficial and environmentally acceptable measure to provide appropriate protection to properties in the area.

### **School Admissions**

122. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on a matter regarding a school (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39983/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** In relation to school admissions, it is the responsibility of the managerial authorities of all schools to implement an enrolment policy in accordance with the Education Act, 1998. My Department's main responsibility is to ensure that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all pupils seeking school places in the area.

Parents have the right to choose which school to apply to and where the school has places available the pupil should be admitted. However, in schools where there are more applicants than places available, as in the case of Presentation Secondary School, Milltown, a selection process may be necessary. This selection process and the enrolment policy on which it is based must be non-discriminatory and must be applied fairly in respect of all applicants. However, this may result in some pupils not obtaining a place in the school of their first choice.

The question of enrolment in individual schools, including the setting of catchment areas, is the responsibility of the Board of Management on behalf of the school Patron and my Department does not seek to intervene in decisions made by schools in such matters.

A Board of Management may find it necessary to prioritise enrolment of children from particular areas or on the basis of some other criterion, including giving priority to applicants who have attended a particular primary school, commonly known as a feeder school. The criteria to be applied by schools in such circumstances and the order of priority are a matter for the schools themselves.

### **School Transport**

123. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding school transport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39984/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):** School Transport is a significant operation managed by Bus Éireann on behalf of my Department. In the 2018/2019 school year over 117,500 children, including over 13,000 children with special educational needs, were transported in over 5,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres at a cost of over €200m in 2018.

The Bus Éireann audited accounts are available on my Department's website for the years 2006 onwards and they contain the information sought by the Deputy in regard to costs of the school transport scheme.

The Department has not provided wrong or misleading information in the investigation referred to by the Deputy.

## School Transport

124. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address a matter regarding school transport (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40003/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):** School Transport is a significant operation managed by Bus Éireann on behalf of my Department. In the 2018/2019 school year over 117,500 children, including over 13,000 children with special educational needs, were transported in over 5,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres at a cost of over €200m in 2018.

As previously outlined the Bus Éireann audited accounts are available on my Department's website for the years 2006 onwards and they contain the information sought by the Deputy in regard to costs of the school transport scheme.

## School Staff

125. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an increase in the administration days for teaching principals to one release day per week will be allocated to deal with the administrative demands of the job in view of the fact that the role of the teaching principal has not been reviewed, qualified or quantified since a circular in 1973; if additional resources will be allocated to address this issue in Budget 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40004/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** Since my appointment as Minister for Education and Skills I have met with a number of Teaching Principals and I appreciate the pressures they face. In Budget 2019, school leadership is again supported with an additional release day for teaching principals in primary schools and a further four additional release days for teaching principals in schools with special classes. These additional release days - 18, 24, and 30 depending on the size of the school - will be effective from 1st September 2019.

This builds on measures in previous budgets, including €0.4 million made available in Budget 2018 to fund almost 4600 additional release days for teaching principals in primary schools. This funding provided an increase in the number of release days available to teaching principals in the 2018/19 school year to 17, 23 or 29 days depending on the size of the school.

€2.75m was allocated in Budget 2017 to restore middle management positions i.e. the equivalent of approximately 1,300 middle management posts (Assistant Principal I and Assistant Principal II) at both Primary and Post-Primary (2,600 in total).

The Department has committed to revising the Posts of Responsibility table in the leadership and management circulars to take into account retirements during the school year. This ensures that the current level of Posts of Responsibilities are maintained in the school system.

Earlier in the year, I hosted a symposium on Small Schools which gave me an opportunity to restate the Government's commitment to small schools and to open a dialogue with all the key stakeholders. The purpose of this work by the Department is to develop a policy proposal to help support and strengthen small primary schools throughout the country.

Any additional increase in principal release days will have to be considered as part of the annual budgetary process, alongside the many other demands in the education sector.

*Questions - Written Answers*  
**Schools Building Projects**

126. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress to date in developing a purpose-built school for the pupils of a school (details supplied) further to the Private Members' debate in Dáil Éireann of 25 September 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40005/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The Deputy will be aware that a major capital project for the school in question is included in my Department's school building programme to be delivered as part of the National Development Plan. This project necessitates the acquisition of a new site and a number of site options were identified by Galway Co. Council. These were comprehensively assessed and a preferred site option was identified and negotiations entered into between the Department and the Agent for the Vendors. Unfortunately, the Vendors subsequently withdrew from the process.

However, a potential alternative site option has been identified and discussions are ongoing with the Landowner with a view to acquiring this site. Please be assured that this Department is doing all it can to progress the matter. The school has been notified accordingly.

### **National Educational Psychological Service**

127. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to ensure 20 extra NEPS psychologists are provided for in budget 2020. [40048/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** As the Deputy may be aware my Department's National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) provides educational psychological support to all primary and post-primary schools. This involves direct support in the event of a critical incident, access to national and regional support and development work to build school capacity to support students, access to a NEPS psychologist for responses to queries arising, and access to individual pupil casework via a NEPS psychologist or through the Scheme for the Commissioning of Psychological Assessments. (SCPA).

I can inform the Deputy that starting from a level of 173 whole-time equivalents in 2016 and following increases allowed in Budgets 2017, 2018 and 2019 the sanctioned number for NEPS psychologist currently stands at 204 w.t.e.

Some 193 of these posts are currently filled which represents the highest number of psychologists to be employed within NEPS since the inception of the service in 2000. The filling of the remaining posts is being actively pursued by my Department in conjunction with the Public Appointments Service and a number of new appointments are imminent.

This Government remains firmly committed to the maintenance of a robust and effective educational psychological service and any further increase in the number of psychologists will be a matter for determination in the context of the Departmental Estimates process and forthcoming Budget 2020.

### **Special Educational Needs Service Provision**

128. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to introduce assistive technology passports for persons with disabilities engaged in the education system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40049/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The purpose of my Department's Assistive Technology Scheme, as set out in my Department's Circular 0010/2013, is to provide grant-aid to schools to allow them to purchase the type of specialist equipment which has been recommended by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) as being essential for students who have been diagnosed as having a serious physical disability and/or sensory or communicative disability to the extent that their ability to communicate through the medium of speech or writing is materially curtailed.

When sanctioning such equipment, it must be clear that existing equipment in the school is insufficient to meet the child's needs without unduly depriving other children of access to the equipment and without such equipment it will not be possible for the students for serious physical and/or sensory/ communicative disability to access the school curriculum.

The recommendation of the NCSE is based on accompanying professional reports, as necessary from relevant professionals, such as Educational Psychologists, Occupational Therapists, Speech and Language Therapists etc.

The circular also outlines the type of equipment that is not provided under the scheme including communication devices or medical or therapy related devices which are not specific educational interventions, or equipment that is not specifically required as essential for school educational access.

Although equipment is sanctioned under the Assistive Technology scheme for use by particular students, it is the property of the school, and the school's management authority is responsible for maintenance, repair, and insurance of the equipment.

While there are no plans to introduce assistive technology passports for persons with disabilities engaged in the education system currently, a departmental working group has recently been established including NCSE, to review the operation of the scheme and the terms of circular 0010/2013.

## **School Transport**

129. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a Bus Éireann appeal (details supplied); if the response from the transport provider will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40062/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):** School Transport is a significant operation managed by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Department.

The purpose of my Department's School Transport Scheme is, having regard to available resources, to support the transport to and from school of children who reside remote from their nearest school.

In the 2018/2019 school year over 117,500 children, including over 13,000 children with special educational needs, were transported in over 5,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres at a cost of over €200m in 2018.

An appeal was lodged with the School Transport Appeals Board on the 28th August 2019.

The Board has requested the School Transport Section of the Department of Education and Skills to provide a report in accordance with the terms of the Board's Operating Procedures.

When received, the Board will liaise directly with the family regarding the appeal date and their subsequent deliberations.

### **Living Wage**

130. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of workers employed by his Department and in each office or agency under the aegis of his Department that earn less than the living wage of €12.30 per hour; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40074/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** My Department issues Circulars detailing pre-determined salary scales which are negotiated at central level.

I am advised that all staff paid on payrolls operated by my Department are paid in excess of €12.30 per hour.

There are also a significant cohort of staff paid directly by Agencies and/or Bodies coming under the aegis of my Department. Information in relation to the individual hourly wages of all of these staff is not readily available and accordingly, it is not possible to estimate what cost, if any, would arise from implementing a living wage of €12.30 for all employees either directly employed and/or employed in Agencies and/or Bodies coming under my remit.

I would also like to take this opportunity to outline the current position in respect of two specific categories of staff in the Education and Training sector

1. The position in relation to Secretaries and Caretakers employed and paid directly through grant funding by the managerial authorities of schools is that, on foot of a Chairman's Note to the Lansdowne Road Agreement, officials from the Department of Education and Skills engaged with the Unions representing school secretaries and caretakers, including through an independent arbitration process in 2015. The Arbitrator recommended a cumulative pay increase of 10% between 2016 and 2019 for staff and that a minimum hourly pay rate of €13 be phased in over that period. This arbitration agreement was implemented by my Department and covers the period up to 31 December 2019.

2. The hourly rate of pay for Bus Escorts will vary from time to time in line with revised salary rates arising from the various Public Service Stability Agreements[1]. School management authorities are notified of any revised salary rates as they occur by way of circular issued by my Department. The current hourly rate of pay is €12.85."

### **National Training Fund**

131. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on a proposal by an organisation (details supplied); the share and amount of the national training fund budget that was allocated to the Skillnet programme in each of the years 2016 to 2019, in tabular form; the drawdown in funding in each year; and the forecasted share and amount that will go towards the programme in each year over the 2020 to 2022 period. [40102/19]

132. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of micro-sized and SME businesses that availed of enterprise training, workforce learning and upskilling services from Skillnet Ireland in each of the years 2014 to 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form; and the percentage share of micro-sized and SME businesses that availed of such training from Skillnet from the number of such sized businesses that operate. [40103/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):**

I propose to take Questions Nos. 131 and 132 together.

Skillnet Ireland is funded by my Department through the National Training Fund (NTF) to act as an enterprise-led support body dedicated to the promotion and facilitation of enterprise training and workforce development as key elements in sustaining national competitiveness. Its primary role is to increase participation in enterprise training and workforce learning within Ireland's small and medium enterprises (SME), to upskill the workforce and provide greater access for workers to skills development.

Skillnet Ireland operates a joint funding model where training is funded by combining contributions from employers with Skillnet grants.

As the following table outlines, Skillnet have increased the number of SMEs they fund over the last number of years and continue to engage with enterprises of this size in a collaborative and innovative way, such as through the establishment of the SFA Skillnet.

Skillnet Ireland has drawn down their full allocation since 2016 as outlined in the following table:

	2016	2017	2018	2019
Allocation	16,200,000	18,200,000	21,700,000	28,000,000
% of NTF Expenditure	5%	5%	5%	6%

The expenditure ceiling for the National Training Fund is set as part of the Estimates process, having regard to the Government's overall budgetary and fiscal stance, and so the amount available for expenditure in any given year would only be decided as part of the budget process.

[<a href="https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2019-10-02\_pq131-02-09-2019\_en.docx">National Training Fund Budget</a>]

### School Placement

133. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the pressure for second-level school places in Gorey, County Wexford and the concerns of local schools and parents that there may not be a sufficient number of places available within two years; his plans to provide for the construction of a new second-level school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40113/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** In order to plan for school provision and analyse the relevant demographic data, my Department divides the country into 314 school planning areas and uses a Geographical Information System, using data from a range of sources, to identify where the pressure for school places across the country will arise. With this information, my Department carries out nationwide demographic exercises to determine where additional school accommodation is needed at primary and post-primary level.

Major new residential developments in a school planning area have the potential to alter demand in that area. In that regard, as part of the demographic exercises, my Department engages with each of the local authorities to obtain the up-to-date data on significant new residential development in each area. This is necessary to ensure that schools infrastructure planning is keeping pace with demographic changes as there is a constantly evolving picture with planned new residential development, including additional residential developments arising from the

## Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF).

Where data indicates that additional provision is required, the delivery of such additional provision is dependent on the particular circumstances of each case and may, depending on the circumstances, be provided through either one, or a combination of, the following:

- Utilising existing unused capacity within a school or schools,
- Extending the capacity of a school or schools,
- Provision of a new school or schools.

As the Deputy will be aware, in April 2018 the Government announced plans for the establishment of 42 new schools over the next four years (2019 to 2022).

This announcement follows nationwide demographic exercises carried out by my Department into the future need for primary and post-primary schools across the country and the 4-year horizon will enable increased lead-in times for planning and delivery of the necessary infrastructure.

In addition to the new schools announced, there will be a need for further school accommodation in other areas in the future through either planned capacity increases in existing schools or additional accommodation or extensions to existing schools.

A new 1,000 pupil post-primary school was established in 2011 to serve the Gorey school planning area and moved into its permanent accommodation in 2014 and this school has capacity to meet demand in the area.

While the announcement did not include a new post primary school for the Gorey school planning area, the requirement for new schools will be kept under on-going review and in particular will have regard for the increased rollout of housing provision as outlined in Project Ireland 2040.

## School Transport

134. **Deputy Michael Lowry** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding part-time school bus drivers that must compulsorily retire at 70 years of age; if this retirement age can be extended beyond 70 years of age subject to the passing of an annual medical exam; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40140/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):** School transport is a significant operation managed by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Department.

There are currently over 117,500 children, including over 13,000 children with special educational needs, transported in over 5,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually.

It is Bus Éireann policy that the normal retirement age for all staff is currently 66 years. Bus Éireann part-time school bus drivers and drivers nominated by private operators as school bus drivers may continue to perform this role, subject to completing an annual medical examination up to the retirement age of 70 years.

This criteria is applied to all drivers who provide services as part of the School transport

scheme that is operated by Bus Éireann, on behalf of the Department of Education and skills. As this age limit has been examined previously and the retirement age extended to 70 years, there are no plans to extend this limit further at this point in time.

### **Services for People with Disabilities**

135. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to ensure the installation of changing places at strategic locations in towns nationally for persons with disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40044/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy Finian McGrath):** As the Deputy will be aware, installing changing place facilities is not at present a requirement under Part M of the Building Regulations. Notwithstanding this, some local authorities have installed changing place facilities and an additional example of a public body going beyond the minimum requirements in Part M is the recent motion passed by Dublin City Council to install changing place facilities in all new build and green field developments. I would certainly encourage all local authorities to be as far-sighted as this to enable the dignity, and indeed safety, of the person with the disability to be maintained at all times.

The objective of Changing Places Ireland to introduce fully accessible toilets to public places such as shopping centres, libraries and sporting arenas across the country is important and requires careful consideration. As the Deputy is aware, the Government did not oppose the Community Participation Bill 2019, a Private Members' Bill which is currently before Seanad Éireann. The Bill's objective is to facilitate the inclusion and full participation of people with disabilities and their family and friends in their communities by enabling greater access to public spaces.

### **Commencement of Legislation**

136. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to implement the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40045/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 provides a modern statutory framework to support decision-making by adults with capacity difficulties. The Act was signed into law on 30 December 2015 but has not yet been fully commenced. The Act provides for the establishment of new administrative processes and support measures, including the setting up of the Decision Support Service within the Mental Health Commission (a body under the Department of Health).

The Decision Support Service is working towards being operational and ready for the commencement of the main provisions of the Act in 2020. This lead in time frame ensures that sufficient staff resources, processes, IT system, expert panels, codes of practice and regulations will be in place so that the Decision Support Service will have the capacity to be up and running effectively. There are many complex strands to this preparatory work, including the involvement of multiple organisations.

A high-level Steering Group comprised of senior officials from the Department of Justice and Equality, the Department of Health, the Mental Health Commission and the Courts Service, together with the Director of the Decision Support Service, is overseeing the establishment and

commissioning of the Decision Support Service and this work is ongoing.

A number of provisions of the 2015 Act were commenced in October 2016 in order to progress the setting up of the Decision Support Service. The Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 (Commencement of Certain Provisions) Order 2016 (S.I. No. 515 of 2016) commenced provisions of the Act to enable the recruitment of the Director of the Decision Support Service. Ms Áine Flynn was appointed Director of the Decision Support Service on 2 October 2017.

The commencement of Part 8 of the Act, which provides a legislative framework for advance healthcare directives, is a matter for the Minister for Health. The Minister for Health, under the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 (Commencement of Certain Provisions) (No. 2) Order 2016 (S.I. No. 517 of 2016), brought some provisions of Part 8 of the Act into operation on 17 October 2016. The commenced provisions provide for the establishment by the Minister for Health of a multi-disciplinary group to make recommendations to the Director of the Decision Support Service in relation to codes of practice on advance healthcare directives. In anticipation of the completion of that process, the Minister for Health commenced the remainder of section 91 on 17 December 2018 (S.I. No. 527 of 2018).

The key preparations are being put in place under the oversight of the Steering Group to allow for further commencement orders for the provisions of the 2015 Act to be made when the Decision Support Service is ready to roll out the new decision-making support options.

Significant progress has been made on preparing for commencement of the remainder of the 2015 Act. In April 2018, the Mental Health Commission engaged the consultancy firm BearingPoint to support the development of a detailed, costed plan to establish a fully operational Decision Support Service. The contract also includes ongoing project management support for the design and establishment of the organisation, business processes, IT systems and risk management framework.

The Mental Health Commission has also received sanction for the recruitment of a number of staff for the Decision Support Service and also a number of staff to provide shared services for the Mental Health Commission and Decision Support Service. These staff are being recruited on a phased basis by the Mental Health Commission.

The National Disability Authority is currently finalising its work on the suite of draft codes of practice in relation to non-healthcare matters which are required to be prepared under section 103 of the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015.

In June 2018, my Department recruited an external legal expert to assist in the preparation of draft regulations in relation to decision-making assistance agreements, co-decision-making agreements, certain matters relating to decision-making representatives, and enduring powers of attorney. These regulation-making powers are provided for in sections 10(4), 31, 45(3), 45(4), 46(3) and 79 of the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015. Work on the draft regulations is on-going.

## **Brexit Issues**

137. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he has discussed security in the Border region with Prime Minister Johnson recently. [39896/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy will appreciate, policing in the border region has always presented particular challenges. These neces-

sitate a collaborative approach to policing with law enforcement agencies north and south of the border.

In November 2015, the British and Irish Governments and the Northern Ireland Executive agreed a series of measures in the agreement *A Fresh Start, The Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan*, as part of a concerted and enhanced effort to tackle organised and cross jurisdictional crime. These measures included the creation of the Joint Agency Task Force.

Both Governments are determined that, regardless of the political outcome of Brexit, the excellent ongoing cooperation between An Garda Síochána and the Police Service of Northern Ireland must and will continue to combat the threat posed by dissidents and criminals that seek to exploit the policing challenges posed by the border.

Last week, I attended the 17th Annual Cross Border Conference on Organised Crime in Co. Cavan, aimed at enhancing cooperation between law enforcement agencies on both sides of the border, particularly in relation to cross border organised criminality and related issues. I met with the Permanent Secretary of the Northern Ireland Department of Justice, the Garda Commissioner and the Chief Constable of the PSNI in the margins of this conference, where we discussed matters relating to security in the border region, both now and in the context of Brexit.

I recently spoke to the Home Secretary and have also met the new Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. I can assure the Deputy that I took these opportunities to reaffirm our deep commitment to continuing the close working relationship that we have with our colleagues in Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom and we discussed matters including security and risks in the Border region. The Deputy will also be aware of An Taoiseach's discussions with Prime Minister Johnson, as detailed in his responses to recent Parliamentary Questions on the matter.

It is also important to note that the Garda Commissioner recently made an operational decision to establish an additional Armed Support Unit (ASU) in Cavan which became operational this week. It will complement the work of the Units nationwide, including those in Ballyshannon, Co. Donegal and Dundalk, Co. Louth in the Northern Region.

The Northern region also continues to benefit from the accelerated recruitment to An Garda Síochána as part of the Government's plan to achieve an overall Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021, supported by the unprecedented level of Government funding to the organisation. Garda strength in the Northern Region has increased to approximately 1,500, an increase of 150 Gardaí since the end of 2017. These Gardaí are supported by approximately 150 Garda staff in the region, which represents an increase of almost 30% over the past 3 years, which means that additional Gardaí can be redeployed from administrative to operational policing duties where their training and policing expertise can be used to best effect.

Requirements in the region will in the usual way be kept under ongoing review by Garda management. In the event that a "no deal" Brexit gives rise to additional requirements in border areas, I understand from the Commissioner that further resources can and will be provided as needed.

### **Stardust Fire**

138. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if adequate resources will be provided to expedite the inquest process as much as possible in view of the length of time families have campaigned further to the recent announcement of a fresh coroner's inquest into a tragedy (details supplied). [40014/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I sympathise enormously with the families of the 48 young people tragically killed in the Stardust fire 38 years ago for the terrible loss they suffered. The fire was one of the most harrowing events that has ever happened in Dublin and it has left a horrendous legacy of grief and pain.

In April, the Victims Committee presented a formal petition to the Attorney General to direct a second inquest into the deaths of those who died in the Stardust fire. The Attorney General confirmed on 25 September that he will direct the Dublin District Coroner to hold a second inquest in the public interest and in the interests of justice. Once a formal direction is received from the Attorney General, the Dublin Coroner will begin preparations for the carrying out of the inquests.

My Department is fully committed to ensuring that necessary resources are available to the Coroner.

### Garda Equipment

139. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the tender for the handheld devices for the roads policing unit will be published; the timeframe for the procurement of the necessary handheld devices; the reason there has been a delay thus far; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40025/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The resources provided by Government to An Garda Síochána have reached unprecedented levels, with an allocation for 2019 of €1.76 billion. Very significant capital investment is also being made, including investment of €342 million in Garda ICT infrastructure between 2016 and 2021.

The Deputy will be aware that investment in Garda ICT infrastructure was emphasised in the report of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland and An Garda Síochána has under *'A Policing Service for the Future'*, the implementation plan for that report, committed to commencing the rollout of 2,000 devices to frontline members by the end of the year.

I am informed by An Garda Síochána that it is working with the Office of Government Procurement (OGP) to finalise a tender document in this regard, to allow selection of the preferred telecommunication company as well as suitable devices and services.

### Visa Applications

140. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he is satisfied with the level of communication offered by INIS to persons seeking visas and while acknowledging the average processing time of six months the way in which he can improve general communication and speed at which IDs are assigned under the Service Improvement Plan 2018-2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40059/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I understand that the Deputy's reference to visas actually refers to the granting of citizenship through naturalisation. The Deputy will be aware that the granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation is governed by the provisions of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended. All applications for a certificate of naturalisation are processed and assessed individually in accordance with the provisions of the Act.

The granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation is a privilege and an honour which

confers certain rights and entitlements, not only within the State but also at European Union as well as international level. It is therefore important that appropriate procedures are in place to ensure that the integrity of the regime for granting Irish citizenship through the naturalisation process is held in high regard both at home and internationally. These procedures are continually evolving arising from, for example, service improvements due to the introduction of new technology and updated work practices.

In general, it takes around 6 months for a standard application to be processed from the date it is received to the date a decision is made. The nature of the naturalisation process is such that, for a broad range of reasons, some cases can take longer than others to process.

Specifically, the average processing time from the date an application was received on to the date a decision was made was 6.7 months in 2016, 7.2 months in 2017 and 6.5 months in 2018. Additional security checks can result in some applications taking longer than this average timescale. Such checks are fundamental to maintaining the legitimacy of the naturalisation process both nationally and internationally.

In addition, processing timescales can be impacted due to incomplete applications having to be returned, further documentation being required from the applicant, or where payment of the required certificate fee is awaited, or the applicant has not been engaging with the Immigration Service of my Department. Sometimes the input of several government agencies, both within and without this jurisdiction is needed and the request and receipt of information from these sources can result in delays in processing some applications. Delays can also arise at the final stage of the naturalisation process, for example, where additional information comes to light which requires to be considered. In other instances the applicant themselves may request that their application is put on hold.

The Immigration Service Improvement Plan 2018-2020 commits the Immigration Service to significant investment in technological developments including the roll-out of online forms and payments for citizenship applications. Such developments are expected to deliver significant improvements to customer experiences and processing timescales. Customer improvement is to the fore, a recent example of which is that applicant's Passports are generally returned to them within 2 working days of receipt. This development has been positively received by applicants. As of 11 September 2019, a notice was placed on the Immigration Services website indicating that if an applicant does not receive their passport within 10 working days they should contact the Citizenship office helpline: [citizenshipinfo@justice.ie](mailto:citizenshipinfo@justice.ie) This is a major improvement in comparison to the period of approximately 10 weeks which pertained in the early summer months.

The final stage of a naturalisation process, as it relates to adults, requires the applicant to attend at a citizenship ceremony. Obviously, the applicant does not become an Irish citizen until they attend the ceremony to make their declaration of fidelity to the Irish nation and loyalty to the State, give an undertaking to uphold the laws of the State and to respect its democratic values and receive their certificate of naturalisation.

The Immigration Service of Department devotes considerable resources to the processing of these applications. It also operates a dedicated phone helpline and email helpdesk available for all applicants interested in the progress of their application, details of which are available on [www.inis.gov.ie](http://www.inis.gov.ie).

## **Gambling Sector**

141. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the way in

which he can progress changes to regulation and enforcement in the gaming sector and if he acknowledged the concerns raised by bingo club operators on the impact the Gambling and Lotteries Amendment Bill 2019 could have on their particular niche industry, including needing a distinction between lotteries and bingo within legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40060/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):**

In relation to progressing changes to regulation and enforcement in the gaming sector, I can inform the Deputy that the Gaming and Lotteries (Amendment) Bill 2019 completed all stages in the Seanad on 11 June 2019. I hope to be able to take Report Stage in the Dáil as soon as possible in this session so that the Bill can be finalised and enacted.

During the preparation of the Bill, my Department was made aware of the views of stakeholders. This Bill is an interim reform measure and provides an updated regulatory system for local gaming and lottery activity promoted under a permit or licence in Ireland. This measure will enhance consumer protection and assist the better promotion of lotteries.

Bingo is deemed, by court decisions, to be a lottery activity. Accordingly, a lottery permit or licence must be obtained in accordance with the Gaming and Lotteries Act 1956. Lottery licences are issued by the District Court under the Act, with lottery permits being issued by An Garda Síochána.

At present there is no legislative provision for a special distinction for commercial bingo operators whether under the current Gaming and Lotteries Act 1956 or under the Gaming and Lotteries (Amendment) Bill 2019. It is not my intention to change public policy in this regard.

The modernisation of this area of law is an important priority for the Government and the current Bill is an interim step pending further and more comprehensive reform of the gambling area in general.

### **Parental Leave**

142. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the paid parental benefit scheme will be enforced by November 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40069/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):**

As the Deputy will be aware, on 23 April 2019, the Government announced that it had approved the priority drafting of the Parental Leave and Benefit Bill 2019. The proposed legislation will provide for two weeks of parental leave and benefit for all new parents in employment or self-employment in respect of babies born on or after 1 November 2019. This will facilitate parents in spending more time with their babies in their critical first 12 months. I expect the Bill to be published shortly.

### **Passport Data**

143. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of UK citizens currently resident here that hold and do not hold an Irish passport. [40088/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Deputy may wish to note that EEA nationals residing in Ireland, including UK citizens, are not required to register their presence in the State with my Department. My Department, therefore, does not hold the

information requested by the Deputy in relation to the number of UK nationals resident in the State.

In relation to the question of UK citizens who hold an Irish passport, this is a matter for my colleague, the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade. That Department has advised that it is not possible to determine the number UK citizens currently resident in Ireland that hold and do not hold an Irish Passport. The Passport Service does not record if an applicant holds any other citizenship.

I am further advised that all passport applications are subject to the provisions of the Passports Act, 2008, as amended. The Passports Act provides, among other things, that a person must be an Irish citizen before a passport can be issued to him or her. Entitlement to Irish citizenship is governed by Irish law and in particular the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended.

### Courts Service Data

144. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of convictions for possession and-or supply of a controlled substance that were recorded in each court district in each of the years 2016 to 2018. [40089/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy is aware, under the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998, management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Service, which is independent in exercising its functions, and this includes the provision of information on the courts system.

I have requested information from the Courts Service in relation to this matter and the Courts Service has stated it will contact the Deputy directly as soon as the information is to hand

### Garda Data

145. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda members allocated to the Waterford divisional drugs unit in each of the years 2017, 2018 and to date in 2019. [40090/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner has responsibility for managing An Garda Síochána, including in relation to personnel matters. Garda management keeps the distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities, to ensure their optimum use.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the number of Garda members attached to the Waterford Drugs Unit for each of the periods sought by the Deputy is as set out in the following table

Waterford Drugs Unit	Sergeant	Garda Detective	Total
31/12/2017	0	6	6
31/12/2018	0	6	6
31/8/2019	1	11	12

The Government is committed to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout

the country in order to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and to deter crime.

Since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, almost 2,800 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide. I am pleased to say that we are on target to achieve the Government's a plan for an overall Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021 comprising 15,000 Garda members, 2,000 Reserve members and 4,000 civilians.

### **Enterprise Support Services Provision**

146. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if there are supports available to a person who is developing a prototype product; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40095/19]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** My Department has been continually supporting and encouraging start-up enterprises and entrepreneurs developing new products through the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) and Enterprise Ireland (EI) with both agencies contributing to the economic success of the country. They are central to the continued growth of small and medium business and the success of future start up enterprises and entrepreneurs.

The LEOs, located in the Local Authorities nationwide provide a 'first-stop-shop' for advice, guidance, financial assistance and other supports for entrepreneurs intending to start or grow a business.

The LEOs can offer direct grant aid to microenterprises (10 employees or fewer) in the manufacturing and internationally traded services sectors which, over time, have the potential to develop into strong export entities. Subject to certain eligibility criteria, the LEOs can provide financial assistance within three main categories: Feasibility Grants (investigating the potential of a business idea); Priming Grants (to part-fund a start-up); and Business Development Grants for existing businesses that want to expand. (It should be noted that the LEOs do not provide direct grant-aid to areas such as retail, personal services, local professional services, construction/local building services, as it may give rise to the displacement of existing businesses). In addition, there is a Technical Assistance Grant available for eligible micro-exporter applicants who are seeking to explore alternative markets for their product or service.

Anyone with a viable business proposal can also use the LEO to make an application to MicroFinance Ireland, which offers support in the form of loans of up to €25,000 to start-ups with viable business propositions that do not meet the conventional risk criteria applied by the banks. The LEOs can work with these clients on their applications to Microfinance Ireland (MFI) for small business loans of between €2,000 and €25,000 (unsecured). Loans for commercially viable proposals can be used to help fund start-up costs, working capital or business expansion.

Furthermore, The Agile Innovation Fund has been developed by Enterprise Ireland to support product, service and process innovation to build competitive advantage. The key benefit of this support is that it allows for a simple application process and delivers a faster response time from application to approval. The new Agile Innovation Fund is also open to eligible Local Enterprise Office clients and it allows companies to access up to 50% in support towards innovation projects with a total cost of up to €300,000.

Additionally, Enterprise Ireland actively works with High Potential Start-Ups, companies with the potential to develop an innovative product or service for sale in international markets

and the potential to create 10 jobs and €1m in sales within 3 to 4 years of starting up.

The LEOs and Enterprise Ireland are an outstanding resource available to businesses and their variety of clients in such a diversity of sectors is a demonstration of the expertise available through these Agencies. Businesses that work closely with benefit significantly from the supports, mentoring and training they provide. My Department will ensure that the Enterprise Agencies continue to get the resources they need to allow start-up entrepreneurs develop and explore new products and ideas.

### **Small and Medium Enterprises**

147. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the years the management development council operated; the function and remit of the council when operating; the annual capital and current budget in each year it operated; and the number of staff employed, in tabular form. [40110/19]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Management Development Council (MDC) was established in 2007 by the then Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Micheál Martin, T.D., to advise Government on the adequacy and relevance of management development provision in Ireland and to promote a coordinated approach to building awareness and appreciation in SMEs for the value of and need for upgrading leadership and management skills.

The Council held its first meeting in September 2007, met on ten occasions and ceased its deliberations at the end of 2009 following which its report was published in February 2010. <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/Publications/Publication-files/Forf%C3%A1s/Management-Development-in-Ireland.pdf>

The Council was supported by a secretariat in Forfás who managed the work of the Council and undertook the research upon which this report is based. The secretariat comprised of a manager, a senior policy analyst and policy analyst.

A budget of €200,000 was allocated in 2007 towards the operation of the Management Development Council allocated on a 50/50 basis between salaries and research activity. A further sum of €200,000 was allocated for the ongoing funding requirement for the MDC for the period 2008 to cessation of the Council at the end of December 2009 and subsequent publication of the report in February 2010.

### **Departmental Funding**

148. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if Enterprise Ireland, the IDA and InterTradeIreland, respectively, applied for an increase in funding for 2020; if so, the amount requested by each; when the application will be decided upon; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40111/19]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I am currently in discussions with my colleague the Minister for Finance and the Public Service and Reform regarding the capital and current expenditure allocations for my Department, our Offices and Agencies, including Enterprise Ireland, the IDA and Intertrade Ireland, for 2020. In the circumstances, it would not be appropriate to make a statement on these matters in advance of the publication of the Budget Statement.

## **Small and Medium Enterprises**

149. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if she is considering prioritising SMEs and entrepreneurs in budget 2020; if she will consider providing a Brexit SME fund to protect indigenous firms and small businesses from all Brexit scenarios and protect associated jobs and export sales. [40112/19]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Since the decision of the United Kingdom to leave the European Union, my Department and its agencies have put in place a wide range of Brexit supports for businesses. My Department's focus is on helping firms to improve their competitiveness and innovation, and to diversify markets.

My Department and its agencies are working to provide extensive supports, schemes and advice to ensure that businesses are prepared for Brexit. The suite of enterprise and finance supports now in place covers the spectrum of potential Brexit impacts and aims to assist businesses in identifying key risk areas and the practical preparatory actions to be taken over the coming months. I continue to prioritise the development and support for SMEs and entrepreneurs as part of my ongoing engagement with my colleague the Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform in the preparation of Budget 2020.

These will build on the broad array of existing Brexit supports already in place. Since 2016, my Department and its agencies have been working to prepare Irish businesses for the potential challenges posed by Brexit by helping them to assess their preparedness and helping them to implement practical action plans in areas such as customs, supply chain and sourcing, and financial management. While we cannot yet know the form that Brexit will take, these measures aim to assist businesses in identifying and managing key risk areas and develop practical preparatory actions regardless of the circumstances of the UK's withdrawal from the EU.

The Government's suite of Brexit supports includes preparedness vouchers, consultancy and mentoring supports, tariff advisory services, research on new markets and innovation supports through Enterprise Ireland, the Local Enterprise Offices and InterTradeIreland. Support and advice is also available from the National Standards Authority of Ireland, the Health and Safety Authority, IDA Ireland, Revenue, Skillnet Ireland, the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland, Bord Bia and Fáilte Ireland.

The most immediate consequences of a hard Brexit are likely to be currency movements, supply chain constraints, delays, duties and tariffs. In the first instance, there will be a strain on the working capital position of businesses.

Of the Government's suite of supports, the €300m Brexit Loan Scheme is designed to address working capital challenges brought about by Brexit. Under the scheme, loans of up to €1.5 million are available at a rate of 4% or less, with loans of up to €500,000 available on an unsecured basis.

As at 27 September, there have been 816 applications for eligibility under the scheme, of which 738 have been approved, and 194 progressed to sanction at bank level to a total value of €43.52 million. Of the approved applications, 153 were reapplications as eligibility expires after four months.

Similarly, the €300m Future Growth Loan Scheme is designed to support strategic long-term investment in SMEs in a post-Brexit environment. As at 27 September, there have been 1,353 applications for eligibility under the scheme, of which 1,283 have been approved, and 270 progressed to sanction at bank level to a total value of €43.8 million.

InterTradeIreland (ITI) also plays a major role as part of Ireland's Brexit response and offers Brexit-related advisory services to eligible businesses. So far this year, more than 4,500 SMEs have directly engaged with the Brexit Advisory Service.

ITI offers Brexit Planning Voucher and Brexit Implementation Voucher schemes, which enable businesses to get professional advice on how best to plan, prepare and implement for the UK's withdrawal from the European Union. These supports help businesses obtain advice on specific areas such as tariffs, currency management, regulatory and customs issues and movement of labour, goods and services.

ITI's Brexit Planning Vouchers are worth up to €2,250 (inclusive of VAT) each. 1,893 businesses have applied for a Brexit Planning Voucher, of which 1,630 have been approved. ITI's Brexit Implementation Voucher provides financial support up to £5,000/€5,625 (inclusive of VAT), with InterTradeIreland paying 50%. This allows businesses to implement critical changes making them better prepared to deal with a new trading relationship.

In August, ITI launched a new advertising campaign and a new online resource to encourage and assist firms in preparing for Brexit. The online "Bitesize Brexit" resource is a one-stop-shop for cross-border traders, presenting information in easily digestible segments and includes specific actions businesses should take in preparing for Brexit.

Enterprise Ireland also recently launched twelve 'Brexit Essential' questions aimed at helping exporting businesses further prepare and take action ahead of the UK's impending withdrawal from the EU. The Brexit Essentials campaign highlights the key questions and documentation that businesses need to address in order to trade successfully with the UK post 31 October.

The Irish Government, in association with key industry partners, also launched a new support measure to help customs agents, intermediaries and affected Irish businesses develop the capacity to deal with the additional customs requirements due to the UK's departure from the EU. The new initiative called Clear Customs comprises of a training programme and a customs financial support to assist with the costs of recruiting and assigning new staff to customs roles.

In addition, the Government has held over 100 Brexit information seminars and events since last September. I also have been convening regular roundtable discussions with the main retail grocery and distribution players since December to better understand contingency planning within the sector on food supply. Revenue, the Food Safety Authority of Ireland, Dublin Port and relevant Government Departments also attend these meetings.

With the deadline for the UK's withdrawal from the EU fast approaching, the ongoing uncertainty around Brexit continues to represent a significant challenge for businesses in Ireland. I want businesses, particularly those most impacted by Brexit, to know my Department and its agencies are here to help.

### **Services for People with Disabilities**

150. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to obtain funding for a transport support scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40050/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The Deputy will be familiar with the background to the closure of both the Mobility Allowance and Motorised Transport Grant schemes in 2013.

The Deputy may be aware that my colleague, the Minister for Health and I, brought a Memorandum to Government on proposals for a new Transport Support Payment Scheme. Following consideration of the matter, it was decided to withdraw the Memorandum from the Cabinet Agenda at that time. I intend to revert to Government in due course with revised proposals to reflect the discussions at that Cabinet meeting and further discussions between myself and Minister Harris, on the best way to progress the Transport Scheme.

In relation to funding, the level of funding available to my Department is considered as part of the national Estimates and budgetary process which is currently underway in respect of 2020. Pending completion of this process it is not appropriate for me to comment further at this stage.

Regarding the Motorised Transport Grant, this scheme operated as a means-tested grant to assist persons with severe disabilities with the purchase or adaptation of a car, where that car was essential to retain employment. The maximum Motorised Transport Grant, which was payable once in any three-year period, was €5,020. Following closure of the scheme in February 2013, no further Motorised Transport Grants have been payable.

It is important to note that the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers scheme, operated by the Revenue Commissioners, remains in place. This scheme provides VRT and VAT relief, an exemption from road tax and a fuel grant to drivers and passengers with a disability, who qualify under the relevant criteria set out in governing regulations made by the Minister for Finance. Specifically adapted vehicles driven by persons with a disability are also exempt from payment of tolls on national roads and toll bridges. Transport Infrastructure Ireland has responsibility for this particular scheme.

There are improvements in access to a range of transport support schemes available to persons with disabilities in the State and on-going work is being carried out by Government Departments, agencies and transport providers to further improve access to public transport services. Under the National Disability Inclusion Strategy, the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport has responsibility for the continued development of accessibility and availability of public transport for people with a disability.

The Deputy may wish to note that in July last, my colleague the Minister for Rural and Community Development announced CLÁR funding of €890,632 to 20 voluntary community organisations. This funding will support the purchase and/or fit out of vehicles to provide transport for people in rural areas with mobility issues. It will support voluntary organisations that provide:

- transport for people with significant mobility issues, including those requiring specialised wheelchair accessible vehicles, to day-care or other medical, therapeutic or respite services; or
- transport to/from designated cancer treatment hospitals/centres under the National Cancer Care Programme.

### **Health Services Provision**

151. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39985/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

## HSE Planning

152. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 374 to 376, inclusive, of 24 September 2019, if the HSE Capital Plan 2019 to 2021 has a financial commitment to upgrade the long-stay residential unit, residential care units and dementia care of St. Joseph's Community Hospital and Ramelton Community Hospital, County Donegal; if the funding in the plan will bring these to community hospitals up to the full standards required for residential care units as opposed to the derogated standards thus ensuring the long-term future of these specific residential care units within the community hospitals beyond 2025; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39993/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As previously outlined, the Capital Plan provides for €220m capital funding to the Community Nursing Unit programme over the period 2019 to 2021.

The CNU programme provides for the retention of services and upgrade of both St. Joseph's Community Hospital, Stranorlar and Ramelton Community Hospital.

It is important to recognise that all capital development proposals must progress through a number of approval stages, in line with the Public Spending Code, including detailed appraisal, planning, design and procurement, before a firm timeline or funding requirement can be established.

The delivery of capital projects is a dynamic process and is subject to the successful completion of the various approval stages, which can impact on the timeline for delivery.

In the meantime, the HSE will undertake minor capital works in both units in order to deal with regulatory compliance requirements and to ensure the long-term future of both units.

## Home Care Packages

153. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Health when a home care support package for a person (details supplied) will be put into place. [40002/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

## Health Care Infrastructure Provision

154. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the status of plans for a multi-million Euro development proposed for the Sacred Heart Hospital, County Roscommon; the current stage of the proposed development; the status of the design process; to outline when construction will begin; the timeframe for completion of works; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40006/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Health Service Executive recently published its Capital Plan for 2019-2021 outlining 250 projects to be progressed over the three-year period.

The Capital Plan provides for €220m capital funding to the Community Nursing Unit programme over the period 2019 to 2021 and also sets out the current status of all projects within

the programme, including new development at the Sacred Heart Hospital, Roscommon.

The Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of public healthcare infrastructure projects and has advised that the tender documents are being prepared for the appointment of a design team. It is intended to proceed with the tender process later this year, once the new Framework for Design Teams has been completed.

It is important to recognise that all capital development proposals must progress through a number of approval stages, in line with the Public Spending Code, including detailed appraisal, planning, design and procurement, before a firm timeline or funding requirement can be established.

The delivery of capital projects is a dynamic process and is subject to the successful completion of the various approval stages, which can impact on the timeline for delivery.

### **Services for People with Disabilities**

155. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health the status of the provision of services in a facility (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40013/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

The Programme for Partnership Government states that the Government wishes to provide more accessible respite care to facilitate full support for people with a disability.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Services for People with Disabilities**

156. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health the availability of extras day service placements that may be available to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40018/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

## Hospital Appointments Status

157. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Clare will have surgery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40019/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

## Cancer Screening Programmes

158. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health if he will reduce the threshold age for accessing CervicalCheck from 25 to 21 years of age; if his officials are examining the possible positive impacts of extending the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40020/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** CervicalCheck, the National Cervical Screening Programme, was introduced in 2008 and offers free smear tests to women aged 25-60.

Women under the age of 25 are not invited for screening. The HSE advises that this is because there is no evidence that screening would be of any benefit to them. At this stage in life, normal cell changes in the cervix can look very like abnormal cells. If CervicalCheck tested women under 25, changes that are normal might be treated as abnormal and a woman could be sent for treatment when they don't need it. Invasive cervical cancer is also very rare at this age. The HSE advises any woman under 25 who is worried about their risk of developing cervical cancer to speak to their GP.

This approach is in line with screening programmes in other countries. The UK National Screening Committee recommended in November 2012 that the age of first invitation for cervical screening should be raised to 25 in Wales and Scotland on the basis that there is evidence of a large number of women screened and treated with relatively little benefit below this age.

Cancer screening is one important aspect of cancer prevention, and another is vaccination. The HPV vaccine protects against the HPV virus which can cause cancer and genital warts in both women and men, and has been offered to girls in their first year of secondary school since 2010. The Deputy may wish to know that, following a positive recommendation from HIQA, that an extension of the HPV vaccination programme to boys would be both clinically and cost effective, as of September this year HPV vaccination is now available to boys in first year of secondary school also.

## **Health Services**

159. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health if he will direct the HSE to investigate concerns raised in correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40027/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

I have noted the contents of the correspondence supplied by the Deputy relating to the Radharc Nua residential care facility at Charlesfort, Ferns, Co. Wexford.

This residential facility is operated by the Health Service Executive (HSE) and, accordingly, I have arranged for the Deputy's question to be referred to the HSE for direct reply and I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy as soon as possible.

## **Respite Care Services Provision**

160. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health when the respite facility regularly used by persons (details supplied) will be available full-time and not only for emergency cases; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40028/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

The Programme for Partnership Government states that the Government wishes to provide more accessible respite care to facilitate full support for people with a disability.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

## **Health Screening Programmes**

161. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health if a reply will issue to correspondence from a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40029/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** A response will issue to the individual in relation to this issue which will outline recent developments in relation to Newborn Screening.

Currently all newborn babies (between 3 and 5 days old) are offered newborn bloodspot screening (generally known as the 'heel prick') through their parents/guardians for eight very

rare conditions that are treatable if detected early in life.

Ireland has traditionally evaluated the case for commencing or expanding a national screening programme against the internationally accepted criteria (collectively known as Wilson Junger criteria). The evidence bar for commencing a screening programme should and must remain high. This evidence threshold ensures that we can be as confident as we can be that the programme in question is effective, quality assured and operating to safe standards for the population. We must continue with a robust, methodologically sound and detailed analysis of the evidence in each case.

A National Screening Committee will be established and will hold its first meeting before the end of 2019, as per recommendation 5, contained within the Scally Review (2018). The Committee's role will be to undertake an independent assessment of the evidence for screening for a particular condition against internationally accepted criteria and make recommendations accordingly.

I appointed Professor Niall O'Higgins as Chair of the Committee in July and asked that, as part of its initial body of work, the Committee prioritise a review of the national newborn blood-spot screening programme and look specifically at how Ireland should best proceed with an expansion in line with international best practice. Any future potential changes to the National Newborn Bloodspot Screening Programme will be incorporated as part of the Committee's work programme.

### **Health Screening Programmes**

162. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health if he will expand newborn screening tests to detect conditions such as MLD; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40031/19]

193. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health if he will consider expanding newborn screening; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40142/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 162 and 193 together.

Currently all newborn babies (between 3 and 5 days old) are offered newborn bloodspot screening (generally known as the 'heel prick') through their parents/guardians for eight very rare conditions that are treatable if detected early in life.

A National Screening Committee is being established and will hold its first meeting before the end of 2019, as per recommendation 5, contained within the Scally Review (2018). The Committee's role will be to undertake an independent assessment of the evidence for screening for a particular condition against internationally accepted criteria and make recommendations accordingly.

I appointed Professor Niall O'Higgins as Chair of the Committee in July and asked that, as part of its initial body of work, the Committee prioritise a review of the national newborn blood-spot screening programme and look specifically at how Ireland should best proceed with an expansion in line with international best practice.

### **Health Screening Programmes**

163. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health if he has engaged with stakeholders regarding the expansion of newborn screening tests since his appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40032/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Ireland has a well-established newborn screening programme. Newborn screening, more commonly known as the heel-prick test, is offered in respect of all newborn babies in Ireland through their parents or legal guardians when they are between three and five days old.

We have expanded the programme in recent years. Up to December 2018, we were screening for six conditions. Since then, the test has been expanded to screen for eight conditions.

I or my officials regularly meet with rare disease advocacy groups and families directly invested in the topic of the expansion of the Newborn Screening Programme.

A National Screening Committee will be established and will hold its first meeting before the end of 2019, as per recommendation 5, contained within the Scally Review (2018). The Committee's role will be to undertake an independent assessment of the evidence for screening for a particular condition against internationally accepted criteria and make recommendations accordingly.

I appointed Professor Niall O'Higgins as Chair of the Committee in July and asked that, as part of its initial body of work, the Committee prioritise a review of the national newborn blood-spot screening programme and look specifically at how Ireland should best proceed with an expansion in line with international best practice. Any future potential changes to the National Newborn Bloodspot Screening Programme will be incorporated as part of the Committee's work programme.

### **Departmental Funding**

164. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health if funding of €80,000 has been cut from the budget of an organisation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40033/19]

165. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to ensure that adequate funding is allocated to a named organisation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40034/19]

166. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to ensure that funding of at least €40 million is allocated to the disability sector in order for it to maintain existing services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40042/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 164 to 166, inclusive, together.

The level of funding available for my Department is being considered as part of the national Estimates and budgetary process for 2020 which is currently underway.

Pending completion of this process it is not appropriate for me to comment further at this stage.

### **Services for People with Disabilities**

167. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to ensure 300 extra therapy staff are recruited in order to improve disability services for children; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40043/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Medicinal Products Reimbursement**

168. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health if the reimbursement data set will specifically cover current HSE funded users of the FreeStyle Libre device; if the Health Technology Assessment Group review will compare total blood glucose strip usage spend year on year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40051/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Medicinal Products**

169. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health the weighting percentages to be used as part of the upcoming HSE FreeStyle Libre group review decision making process that will be given to criteria (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40052/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Mental Health Services Data**

170. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on mental health services waiting lists nationally to date waiting less than and more than 12 months, respectively by CHO area in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40061/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

## **Respite Care Services Funding**

171. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Health the status of an application for funding for a respite centre (details supplied) in Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40068/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives.

This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

The Programme for Partnership Government states that the Government wishes to provide more accessible respite care to facilitate full support for people with a disability.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

## **Mental Health Services Data**

172. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons treated in the mental health services nationally in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, by CHO area, in tabular form. [40070/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

## **Emergency Departments Data**

173. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons treated in University Hospital Limerick emergency department in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019. [40071/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** This is a very busy period for our health services, with many hospitals reporting significant numbers of patient attendances. For the first eight months of 2019, the number of patients attending hospital EDs increased by 2.9%, and the number of ED admissions increased by 1.7% compared to the same period last year.

Trolley numbers for the year to date from January to August were 71,532, a 3% increase compared to 69,446 for the same period last year.

The Department is engaging extensively with the HSE this year to identify mitigating actions to bring down trolley numbers and waiting times in the ED.

With regard to the Deputy's specific question, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly with the requested information.

### **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Data**

174. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Health the breakdown of the job vacancies outstanding in the CAMHS and adult mental health services in CHO 3. [40072/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Data**

175. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in CAMHS nationally in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, by CHO, in tabular form; the number of persons on the CAMHS waiting list nationally at this point in time under and over 12 months, by CHO, in tabular form. [40073/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Medicinal Products Reimbursement**

176. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the ongoing discussions and engagement with the manufacturer of Ocrevus with a view to having the cost of this medication reimbursed to a medical card holder (details supplied). [40075/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The HSE has statutory responsibility for medicine pricing and reimbursement decisions, under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013. The Act specifies criteria for decisions on the reimbursement of medicines.

HSE decisions on which medicines are reimbursed by the taxpayer are made on objective, scientific and economic grounds, on the advice of the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE). The NCPE conducts health technology assessments (HTAs) for the HSE and makes recommendations on reimbursement to assist HSE decisions. The NCPE uses a decision framework to systematically assess a drug’s clinical and cost effectiveness as a health intervention.

The HSE strives to reach a decision in as timely a manner as possible. However, because of the significant monies involved, it must ensure that the best price is achieved, as these commitments are often multi-million euro, ongoing investments. This can lead to a protracted deliberation process.

On 4 October 2018 the NCPE completed their assessment for Ocrelizumab (Ocrevus) indicated for the treatment of adult patients with early primary progressive multiple sclerosis (PPMS). They recommended that Ocrelizumab (Ocrevus) not be reimbursed for this indication.

The HSE and the manufacturer have had a number of rounds of commercial negotiations in relation to this indication. Commercial discussions have concluded, the medicine has been reviewed by the HSE Drugs Group and the HSE Senior Leadership Team have received the Drugs Group recommendation. The HSE’s final decision on reimbursement will take into consideration the statutory criteria contained in the 2013 Health Act.

### **Hospitals Data**

177. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the number of bed nights that were lost to Kerry University Hospital in the years 2017 to 2018 and 2018 to date in 2019 due to delayed discharges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40076/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly as soon as possible.

### **Hospital Staff**

178. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Health the job vacancies outstanding in the emergency department of University Hospital Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40078/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is a service issue, I have asked the HSE to reply to you directly.

### **Hospital Staff Data**

179. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the full-time necessary staffing requirement for all services in Kerry University Hospital in terms of nurses; the numbers in the hospital and the areas they are underserved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40079/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly as soon as possible.

### **Mental Health Services Provision**

180. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the provision of ECT at a location (details supplied); if an anaesthetist is employed there; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40084/19]

181. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health if ECT is currently available in an area (details supplied); if patients can receive treatment elsewhere; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40085/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 180 and 181 together.

As these are service matters I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Psychological Services**

182. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of child psychologists working in the health service in the Dublin 11 area; the average waiting time for a child to access a child psychologist in Dublin 11; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[40087/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

183. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will receive an appointment at Letterkenny University Hospital outpatient clinic; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40092/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

### **Hospital Services**

184. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if a letter of complaint sent to Letterkenny University Hospital by a person (details supplied) was received; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40093/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is an operational matter, I have referred the question to the HSE for direct reply.

### **Nursing Homes Support Scheme Data**

185. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health the number of nursing home residents availing of the saver transitional arrangements under the nursing home support scheme; if the saver provision also applied to persons in long-term residential psychiatric care on the day the nursing home support scheme came into force that subsequently transferred to long-term geriatric care; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40094/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** Section 12 of the Nursing Homes Support Scheme Act 2009 included a transitional provision whereby relevant nursing home residents could opt to remain outside the Scheme if they were already receiving long-term residential care within the meaning of that Act prior to the Scheme's commencement on 27 October 2009. Those availing of this option continued to be covered by any pre-existing

charging or contributions or subvention frameworks applicable to them. HSE data indicates that these transitional provisions currently apply to fewer than 700 nursing home residents (691 in July 2019).

These transitional provisions did not apply to those transferring, on or after 27 October 2009, to long-term residential care in a relevant nursing home from other types of care, including from residential psychiatric care.

### **Drug Trials**

186. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health if clarity will be provided on a clinical drug trial relating to Duchenne muscular dystrophy for which Dublin would be a trial site (details supplied); the reason the drug trial was not carried out in Dublin; if this was due to a decision by the company; if so, the reason provided for the decision not to use Dublin as a trial site; the efforts under way to have Dublin reinstated as a trial site; if his attention has been drawn to the distress caused to families of persons with the condition by the decision not to carry out this drug trial here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40096/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The requirements for the conduct of clinical trials in the EU are set out in Directive 2001/20/EC, which is transposed into national law by the European Communities (Clinical Trials on Medicinal Products for Human Use) Regulations 2004 (S.I. No. 190 of 2004), as amended.

As Minister for Health, I have no role in the authorisation of clinical trials, nor in the determination of what clinical trials are conducted in Ireland and their location. The decision to proceed with a clinical trial at a site within the EU, which is in compliance with the regulations, is a decision made by a commercial entity.

### **Health Care Infrastructure Provision**

187. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health if capital funding is being included in 2020 plans for the expansion of an intensive care unit at Tallaght University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40099/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Health Service Executive recently published its Capital Plan for 2019-2021 outlining 250 projects to be progressed over the three-year period.

The Capital Plan includes a number of developments at Tallaght University Hospital such as the renal dialysis unit and the intensive care unit.

The HSE is responsible for the delivery of public healthcare infrastructure projects and has advised that renal dialysis project is currently under construction and is funded to completion.

Meanwhile, the expansion and upgrade of the intensive care unit is at design stage and is expected to progress to the construction stage once the renal dialysis development has been completed.

It is important to recognise that all capital development proposals must progress through a number of approval stages, in line with the Public Spending Code, including detailed appraisal, planning, design and procurement, before a firm timeline or funding requirement can be established. The final decision to proceed with the construction of a project cannot be made until the

tender process has been completed and the costings reviewed to ensure that the proposal delivers value for money and remains affordable, and that sufficient funding is available to fund the project to completion, including equipping and commissioning costs.

The delivery of capital projects is a dynamic process and is subject to the successful completion of the various approval stages, which can impact on the timeline for delivery.

The HSE actively manages the capital programme in order to ensure it has flexibility to progress as many projects as possible within the available funding, particularly in the event of any project not progressing as anticipated.

### **Departmental Funding**

188. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if the new funding model for persons with disabilities and multi-annual funding will be implemented (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40119/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As the Deputy will be aware, the Independent Review Group was established in August 2017 to examine the role of voluntary organisations in health and personal social services. I welcomed the publication of the Independent Review Group's final report in February 2019, as did Minister McGrath.

The Group makes a series of findings and linked recommendations in its report, spanning a broad range of areas, including funding and governance of organisations. These recommendations are made to the Department, HSE, other State bodies, and voluntary organisations themselves.

It is important to note that the Group did not identify a new model for the funding of services for people with a disability, or any other health and personal service area, nor were they requested to do so.

Many of the recommendations align with work already underway to progress the Sláintecare programme. The Sláintecare Implementation Strategy commits to reform the funding system to support new models of care and drive value to make better use of resources. In this regard the Department is examining the feasibility of implementing multi-annual budgeting in the healthcare system, including in Social Care and disability service provision.

### **Rehabilitative Training Allowance Payments**

189. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the reason the rehabilitative training allowance is to be abolished for persons with disabilities (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40120/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** This Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. The commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

The payment of the Rehabilitative Training (RT) Bonus came into place on the transition

of Rehabilitative / Training Programmes to the HSE following the dissolution of the National Rehabilitation Board in June 2000.

The decision to phase out the Rehabilitative Training (RT) Bonus payment is designed to bring equity and consistency between people with a disability attending HSE funded rehabilitative training programmes who receive the payment, and those attending similar HSE funded Day Services or in other State schemes such as further education and training, who do not.

This action will ensure all HSE funded Day Services are provided on an equitable basis and will also ensure that the use of finite resources is maximised.

The Rehabilitative Training (RT) Bonus Payment is a historical payment, introduced in July 2001, aligned with a similar FÁS Training Bonus. However, during 2011 the FÁS Training Bonus was reduced to €20.00 and then eliminated the following year while to date the RT Bonus Payment has continued to be paid in the Health Sector

It is worth remembering that:

There is no cut in the number of RT places available

There is no cut in payment of the bonus - those who have it will continue to receive it for the remainder of their RT Placement

All participants continue to be eligible for Disability Allowance of €203 per week

All participants continue to be eligible for a free travel pass

No expectation of an additional RT bonus payment has been created by HSE for 2019 participants

The redirected funding (€3.7 m over 4 years), which will be ring-fenced, will facilitate 148 full day placements or 370 enhanced day places nationally based on priority need.

Each CHO will have the flexibility to redirect its own savings to address local service requirements. The HSE will put in place a monitoring system and regularly report the additional placements realised to the Department of Health.

### **Hospital Equipment**

190. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his plans for a scanner in University Hospital Kerry (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40121/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly as soon as possible.

### **Nursing Homes Support Scheme**

191. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health when the changes to the fair deal scheme will be fully implemented in order that families can properly plan for the nursing home care of their loved ones; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40127/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** The proposed policy

change to the Nursing Homes Support Scheme (NHSS), to cap contributions based on farm and business assets at 3 years where a family successor commits to working the productive asset, has been approved by Government. My Department developed draft Heads of Bill while considering a number of complex ancillary policy and operational matters which may need to be addressed in the proposed legislation.

It is intended that this proposed policy change, the 3 year cap, will be extended to eligible existing participants in long term residential care so that they are not disadvantaged, but that there would be no retrospective recoupment of contributions for those who have paid contributions over and above the 3 year period.

The General Scheme of Bill for the NHSS was approved by Government on the 11th June 2019 and subsequently published. The changes to the Scheme will come into effect as soon as the legislative process is successfully complete. I intend to progress this as quickly as possible, however, the timeline for completion of the legislation will also depend on how it passes through the Houses. The General Scheme has been sent to the relevant Joint Committee and I look forward to participating in pre-legislative scrutiny when a date is agreed with the Committee.

### **National Children's Hospital Status**

192. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the construction of the new national children's hospital; the estimated cost of its construction; when the hospital will be open and operational; and the cost projections for specific items (details supplied) in tabular form. [40138/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The National Paediatric Hospital Development Board (NPHDB) has statutory responsibility for planning, designing, building and equipping the new children's hospital. I have referred your question to the NPHDB for direct reply.

*Question No. 193 answered with Question No. 162.*

### **Health Screening Programmes**

194. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the steps he has taken to preserve the archive of blood spot screening cards retained without consent between 1984 and 2011 which could provide a lifesaving diagnosis for a large number of at risk family members of sudden cardiac death victims that died within this timeframe; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40143/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Following a complaint made to the Data Protection Commissioner in 2009, the State was found to be in breach of both EU and national data protection legislation in relation to the retention of newborn screening cards without consent.

A policy was developed to review and address the legal and ethical requirements arising for the National Newborn Bloodspot Screening Programme. This came into operation in July 2011.

Specifically, this policy requires parental consent for the primary use of screening (a baby) for 8 rare conditions. The policy also allows the card to be retained for a specific period of 10 years. Any secondary use (including research) requires explicit parental consent for that secondary use.

A decision in relation to the archive of blood spot screening cards retained without consent (1984-June 2011) is well advanced and I expect this to be finalised in the coming months.

### **Agriculture Scheme Applications**

195. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when an application by a person (details supplied) for a single farm payment will be processed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39982/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** A 2019 Basic Payment/Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme application in respect of the person named was received in my Department on 8th March 2019.

Processing of this application has recently been completed and a payment under the Area of Natural Constraints Scheme will issue shortly.

Payments under the Basic Payment Scheme are due to commence in mid October.

### **Agriculture Scheme Applications**

196. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when an application will be processed for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39998/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** A 2019 Basic Payment/Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme application in respect of the person named was received in my Department on 2nd March 2019.

Processing of this application is ongoing and an official of my Department has made direct contact with the person named in order to progress this case.

### **Agriculture Scheme Applications**

197. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when an application for a person (details supplied) will be processed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40000/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The person named submitted a 2019 Basic Payment/Areas of Natural Constraints Schemes application on the 23rd April 2019. EU Regulations governing the administration of these schemes require that full and comprehensive administrative checks, including in some cases remote sensing (i.e. satellite) inspections, be completed before any payments issue.

The application of the person named was selected for a remote sensing eligibility inspection. This inspection has been completed and the person named was notified of the findings by letter dated 30th September 2019. The notification issued outlines the options available at this stage, namely to accept the findings or to submit comments to my Department for consideration. On completion of this process, the inspection outcome will be finalised and any payments due will issue to the nominated bank account of the person named as soon as possible.

## **Beef Environmental Efficiency Scheme Pilot**

198. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will streamline certain elements of the beef environmental efficiency pilot scheme to assist farmers in rural Ireland who do not have access to high speed broadband and therefore may have difficulty completing all the details required in relation to the leasing or sourcing of weighing equipment within the specified seven to 14 days; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40057/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Beef Environmental Efficiency Pilot (BEEP) is a pilot scheme to further increase economic and environmental efficiency in the suckler herd through better quality data on herd performance, specifically as it relates to weaning efficiency of the cow, supporting decision making on farm. There are currently 19,131 participants in BEEP.

The BEEP scheme builds on the success of the Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP) with a funding provision of €20m in 2019. This pilot scheme is targeted at suckler farmers and specifically aimed at further improving the carbon efficiency of beef production.

BEEP was designed to be as accessible to farmers as possible and support is available through local marts to enable farmers to access the necessary equipment to participate in the pilot. It is also possible to submit weight data over the phone to ICBF, so access to high speed broadband is not necessary for participation in BEEP.

### **Agriculture Scheme Applications**

199. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when an application will be processed for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40082/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** A 2019 Basic Payment/Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme application in respect of the person named was received in my Department on 8th March 2019.

Processing of this application has recently been completed and a payment under the Area of Natural Constraints Scheme will issue shortly.

### **Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments**

200. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a payment will issue to a person (details supplied) under the disadvantaged areas scheme. [40083/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The person named submitted a 2019 Basic Payment/Areas of Natural Constraints Schemes application on the 1st May 2019. EU Regulations governing the administration of these schemes require that full and comprehensive administrative checks, including in some cases, remote sensing (i.e. satellite) inspections, be completed before any payments issue.

The application of the person named was selected for a Remote Sensing eligibility inspection. This inspection is currently being processed with the intention of issuing any payments

due as soon as possible. In the event that any queries arise, officials in my Department will be in contact with the person named.

### Electric Vehicle Grants

201. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the funding spent and number of cars covered by the electric vehicle purchase grant in each year since its creation by month, by hybrid cars, plug hybrid cars and fully electric vehicles to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39996/19]

202. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the annual expenditure on the electric and hybrid vehicle scheme since its inception; and the number of each class of vehicle that has been granted a subsidy in each year in tabular form. [40001/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 201 and 202 together.

The electric vehicle purchase grant, introduced in April 2011, provides grant aid of up to €5,000 towards the purchase of a new battery electric vehicle or new plug-in hybrid electric vehicle. The scheme does not support the purchase of standard hybrid vehicles.

From the introduction of the scheme to date, grant support has been provided for the purchase of a total of almost 8,400 new vehicles to the value of nearly €39 million. Approximately two-thirds of the grants have been provided to battery electric vehicles with the remaining one-third to plug-in hybrid electric vehicles.

SEAI, who operate the grant, have provided detail of the number of grants paid in each month and the annual spend since the scheme commenced. This is set out in the following table.

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Jan	0	2	1	14	38	0	20	61	0
Feb	0	0	6	27	89	69	131	135	566
Mar	0	8	5	30	44	127	93	153	588
Apr	0	3	2	22	72	88	88	153	662
May	0	18	4	24	64	46	83	211	425
Jun	23	23	6	9	27	42	59	159	307
Jul	5	10	5	19	41	32	51	58	301
Aug	11	14	7	22	71	93	112	475	573
Sep	2	6	5	33	66	54	86	221	394
Oct	0	17	3	25	20	42	55	210	
Nov	0	64	2	17	17	27	84	82	
Dec	1	18	7	14	6	18	46	83	
Total Number of grants	42	183	53	256	555	638	908	2001	3816
Amount paid (€m)	0.198	0.767	0.242	1,203	2.648	3.039	4.262	9.134	17.344

I have also requested the SEAI to follow up with the Deputies to provide further detail as requested in their questions.

203. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the reason for the delay in progressing the long-promised Aarhus Convention Bill; if the Bill will allow for financial assistance for community and environmental groups to seek expert advice in relation to planning and environmental issues in view of the fact that major planning applications contain detailed and technical documents which can be hard for lay persons to properly understand and critique; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40012/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (The Aarhus Convention) was adopted on 25 June 1998. Ireland ratified the Convention on 20 June 2012. The Aarhus Convention and related EU Directives had, prior to ratification, been given legal effect in Ireland by over 60 pieces of legislation and additional subsequent legislation has further reinforced its integration into Irish law. These provisions have significantly expanded the public's access to information and justice on the environment.

Due to the far-reaching nature of these legislative changes which gave effect the Aarhus Convention in Ireland, and in order to take due cognisance of the ongoing evolution of environmental law through judgements of national and EU Courts, my Department is preparing the general scheme of a Bill to consolidate and amend certain existing provisions in a single Aarhus Convention Bill, with the intention of providing greater legal clarity.

Progress of this Bill has been dependent on a number of outside factors, particularly the necessity of awaiting a number of Aarhus-related judgements from both the national courts and of the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU).

I look forward to publishing the General Scheme at the earliest possible date.

### **Waste Disposal Charges**

204. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when the annual support payment of €75 will be introduced for persons with lifelong, long-term medical incontinence as promised some time ago to help meet the average annual cost of disposal of incontinence products; if this payment will be administered through the HSE at local level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40067/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Since mid-2017, a range of charging options have operated, which encourage householders to reduce and separate their waste. This provides flexibility to waste collectors to develop various service-price offerings that suit different household circumstances. Mandatory per kilogramme 'pay by weight' charging was not introduced. A Price Monitoring Group (PMG) was established in mid-2017 to monitor the on-going cost of residential waste collection to homeowners across Ireland as the 'flat-rate structure' was being phased out. While fluctuations in prices and service offerings have been observed, the overall trend has been relative price stability.

My Department has engaged with relevant stakeholders, including representative organisations and the HSE, in an effort to see how best to provide a financial support to persons with long-term incontinence with respect to the disposal of medical incontinence wear.

My Department has been examining this issue in detail, however, there are complex issues at play in this area, which are understandable given the sensitive nature of the medical data in

question.

### **Inland Fisheries Ireland**

205. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his attention has been drawn to the fact that Inland Fisheries Ireland waited for over 15 years to implement the planning and development regulations contained in the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 pertaining to instream fishery work; the reason it took so long to implement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40132/19]

206. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the reason Inland Fisheries Ireland is not availing of their potential exemptions as referred to in Parliamentary Question No. 499 of 21 May 2019; if exemptions have been availed of; the details of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40133/19]

207. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the reason Inland Fisheries Ireland is referring instream fishery works that are within an Office of Public Works drainage scheme to local planning authorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40134/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 205 to 207, inclusive, together.

The principal statutory function of Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) is the protection, management and conservation of the inland fisheries resource.

Similarly to all bodies and individuals, IFI has an obligation to abide by statutory and EU requirements and consults appropriately with the Planning Authorities when necessary. There is a requirement that sponsors of fisheries development projects, to whom planning exemptions are not available, simply ascertain whether proposals, involving the expending of public funds, might require planning permission.

Specifically, IFI has obligations under national and EU legislation to ensure that projects that it oversees and licences that it grants, have due regard for the environment and environmental legislation. IFI introduced its Environmental Assessment Process (EAP) on foot of recent environmental legislation relating to the EU Habitats Directive (2011). The primary legislation related to the EAP pertains to Appropriate Assessment and Environmental Impact Assessment, guidance on which is provided respectively by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

IFI's has set out a guidance document describing the EAP and procedures in place within IFI to facilitate fisheries development and conservation works in inland and coastal waters. This is available publically on IFI's website: [www.fisheriesireland.ie](http://www.fisheriesireland.ie). It also outlines the internal and external review/screening processes for environmental assessment of plans and projects, and details the procedures that are in place to ensure that these works are carried out in compliance with the relevant EU and national legislation.

It should be noted that the vast majority of Ireland's inland fishery waters are included in, hydrologically connected to, or adjacent to Special Areas of Conservation (SACs). Development in, connected to, or within 15 kilometres of, an SAC requires screening for Appropriate Assessment (AA) under the EU Habitats Directive and this necessitates consultation by the project promoter with the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and the NPWS.

The Deputy may also be aware that since the European Court of Justice, ruling in the “People over Wind” case, in April 2018, screenings for AA can no longer include mitigation. This means that, since 2018, many more AAs have had to proceed to Natura Impact Statement (NIS) stage than was previously the case. When a project includes an NIS, it has to have the consent of the Planning Authority. Consequently, the number of fisheries development projects that require consultation with Planning Authorities has increased since 2018.

IFI provides grant aid for fisheries related work which may or may not be in OPW drained channels. The funding is available to angling clubs, community groups and Local Authorities and is subject, like all public funding schemes, to all statutory conditions being met and relevant statutory permissions/consents obtained. Grantees wishing to avail of such public funding are requested to provide confirmation of planning status (as opposed to obtaining planning permission), in many cases planning may not be required and a preplanning meeting with the relevant local authority will easily confirm same.

As outlined in the response to Question No. 499 of 21 May last, the potential exemptions available to IFI, under the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (Statutory Instrument 600 of 2001) are very narrowly constrained. There are a very limited number of potential exemptions available directly to IFI and these are tightly restricted to a small range of project types.

Such projects are usually undertaken by IFI or under IFI supervision in view of its statutory role. It is long standing IFI policy and practice, as a responsible public body, to consult with the relevant Local Authority and other statutory bodies in relation to projects it is undertaking, notwithstanding potential exemptions in domestic law. I would also emphasise that the application of such exemptions is ultimately a matter for the Planning Authority who, consequently, must be consulted.

IFI and my Department have consistently briefed stakeholders who have raised this issue and, despite this, some persist in the mistaken view that a broad range of exemptions is available under the Planning Regulations referred to and do not consider that EU environmental requirements have moved on in the 18 years since the 2001 Planning Regulations were enacted.

The environmental demands placed on IFI and others engaged in development work has become increasingly complex and, I therefore offer the Deputy a comprehensive briefing with IFI.

### **Haulage Industry**

208. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will consider bringing forward incentives for the haulage sector such as grants and capital allowances in order to increase the pace of transition of the national heavy goods vehicle fleet to Euro VI standards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40041/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Climate considerations have been placed at the heart of Government’s policy-making and decision-making processes. The Climate Action Plan clearly recognises that Ireland must significantly step up its commitments to tackle climate disruption. The transport sector, which accounts for a fifth of Ireland’s greenhouse emissions annually and which has a heavy reliance on fossil fuel usage, has an important role to play in this national decarbonisation effort.

The movement of goods by road is the second biggest source of transport emissions after private car use. According to the most recent emissions inventory, heavy-duty vehicles (HDVs) alone contributed over 18% of Ireland’s total land transport emissions in 2017. Clearly, emis-

sions from the freight sector are difficult to address – HDVs account for only around 5% of vehicles on EU roads but they are responsible for some 25% of all EU road transport emissions. Without significant policy action, their emissions trajectory is projected to continue to rise by almost a fifth between 2010 and 2050. This trajectory may be even steeper in Ireland where there has been a steady annual increase in road freight activity levels and the number of additional new goods vehicles being licensed in recent years. Accordingly, developing measures to help address emissions from this sector is critical.

The quickest way to avoid freight emissions is to streamline operations and ensure that vehicle loads and journey routes are optimised. Freight companies are adept at optimising logistical operations and these practices should be encouraged to continue. In tandem, using the most efficient and lowest emitting vehicles is also essential in limiting freight emissions. For this reason, Ireland was very supportive of the introduction of new EU Regulations that set maximum fleet emission averages for new HDVs. New vehicles must emit 15% and 30% less CO<sub>2</sub> by 2025 and 2030 respectively relative to average emissions over the period July 2019 to June 2020. Similar legislation has proved to be a very effective approach in other jurisdictions (e.g. Japan, the USA and Canada) and has already been demonstrated to deliver marked emission reductions with cars/vans in Europe.

As well as making the vehicles more efficient, lower emitting fuels must be employed. Although the Euro VI standard for HDVs represents a considerable improvement over older and more polluting Euro standards, for climate and air quality reasons Ireland must begin to move beyond the use of fossil fuels. A range of new alternative fuel solutions are emerging across the fleet spectrum. The Low Emission Vehicle Taskforce recently concluded its deliberations on the potential role of alternative fuels, including compressed natural gas (CNG) as a pathway to biomethane, biofuels, and hydrogen in the freight sector. The Taskforce has made recommendations to help accelerate the uptake of alternative fuels and technologies, which are being presented to the Government. This is especially important as new vehicles entering the fleet over the coming years will likely remain in the fleet for most or all of the coming decade.

At present there are a number of incentives in place to encourage the uptake of lower emitting alternatives, namely:

- a low excise rate for natural gas and biogas for a period of eight years;
- an accelerated capital allowance scheme for gas-propelled vehicles and related equipment; and
- support for the roll-out of refuelling infrastructure for alternative fuels and technologies.

In addition, my Department is supporting a range of research into decarbonising the freight sector. Two freight projects are also approved for funding under the Climate Action Fund.

We are focusing our finite resources on supporting the uptake of new lower emitting alternatives. Furthermore, more energy, fuel and emissions efficient fossil fueled vehicles should have no purchase price premium and lower running costs for operators and, accordingly, should need no incentive from Government to support uptake. Accordingly, I have no immediate plans to introduce a grant or capital allowance scheme to assist road haulage companies to buy new diesel vehicles.

### **Heavy Goods Vehicle Levy**

209. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the

practice will continue to allow UK commercial vehicles to use the road network system here free of charge excluding toll roads; if a daily tax certificate system will be introduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39981/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Road charging systems for HGVs have been introduced in a number of EU Member States under Directive 1999/62/EC, as modified by Directives 2002/38/EC and 2011/76/EU. These Directives set out the legal basis for charging HGVs for the use of road infrastructure and authorise Member States, if they so wish, to levy user charges, which can be time-based, for example per day, week or year, or distance-based, calculated on the number of kilometres driven. Any such charges must apply to all HGVs, both domestic and foreign, using the Member State's road infrastructure.

The Irish Government raised serious concerns about the introduction in April 2014 of the HGV road user levy in the UK, including Northern Ireland, and lobbied the UK authorities to exempt Northern Ireland from the charge because of the potential impact on cross-Border trade. However, the UK Minister for Transport rejected this proposal and opted to give only very minor exemptions from the levy to Northern Ireland. While it is appreciated that the road user levy has imposed significant additional costs on Irish hauliers operating across the region, its application is a matter for the UK authorities.

There are no plans at present to introduce a road charging regime in Ireland, over and above the various toll roads in operation. Any such plans would have to be considered having regard to the impacts on business and the economy, on the environment including climate change, and for the most efficient use of infrastructure as well as the social impacts.

### **Sports Capital Programme Applications**

210. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the sports capital grant application by a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40008/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin):** The 2018 round of the Sports Capital Programme closed for applications on Friday 19th October last. By that deadline, a record 2,337 applications were submitted seeking a total of €162m in funding.

186 of these applications were for projects that were deemed invalid under the 2017 round of the programme that subsequently submitted corrected documents. These applications were assessed first and approximately €7m in allocations to 170 projects were announced on the 17th January.

619 equipment only applications were assessed next and 466 allocations with a value of €9.8m were announced to these organisations in May.

Work is now underway in assessing the remaining applications for capital works, including an application from the organisation referred to by the Deputy.

For the first time, applicants who submitted incorrect documentation under this round are being given the opportunity to correct their application during the assessment period. While there will be no undue delay in completing the assessment process, in view of the opportunity to correct documentation, the record number of applications received and the detailed information contained in each application, it is likely to take a further number of weeks to have all applications assessed with allocations announced shortly after that.

*Question No. 211 answered with Question No. 63.*

### **Sports Capital Programme Applications**

212. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of a grant application by a club (details supplied); if this application will be awarded; if he will make a statement on the matter. [40080/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin):** The 2018 round of the Sports Capital Programme closed for applications on Friday 19th October last. By that deadline, a record 2,337 applications were submitted seeking a total of €162m in funding.

186 of these applications were for projects that were deemed invalid under the 2017 round of the programme that subsequently submitted corrected documents. These applications were assessed first and approximately €7m in allocations to 170 projects were announced on the 17th January.

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Work is now underway in assessing the remaining applications for capital works, including an application from the organisation referred to by the Deputy.

For the first time, applicants who submitted incorrect documentation under this round are being given the opportunity to correct their application during the assessment period. While there will be no undue delay in completing the assessment process, in view of the opportunity to correct documentation, the record number of applications received and the detailed information contained in each application, it is likely to take a further number of weeks to have all applications assessed with allocations announced shortly after that.

### **Sports Capital Programme Applications**

213. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of a grant application by a club (details supplied); if the application will be awarded; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40081/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin):** The 2018 round of the Sports Capital Programme closed for applications on Friday 19th October last. By that deadline, a record 2,337 applications were submitted seeking a total of €162m in funding.

186 of these applications were for projects that were deemed invalid under the 2017 round of the programme that subsequently submitted corrected documents. These applications were assessed first and approximately €7m in allocations to 170 projects were announced on the 17th January.

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Work is now underway in assessing the remaining applications for capital works, including an application from the organisation referred to by the Deputy.

For the first time, applicants who submitted incorrect documentation under this round are being given the opportunity to correct their application during the assessment period. While there will be no undue delay in completing the assessment process, in view of the opportunity to correct documentation, the record number of applications received and the detailed information contained in each application, it is likely to take a further number of weeks to have all applications assessed with allocations announced shortly after that.

### **Road Toll Data**

214. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated cost to buy out the operator of the M1 toll at Gormanstown; the number of years left to run in the contract; the estimated cost to buy out the Drogheda interchange ramp tolls; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40137/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the operation and management of individual national roads is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Therefore, matters relating to the day to day operations regarding national roads, including toll roads and the establishment of a system of tolls, are within the remit of TII. More specifically, the statutory power to levy tolls, to make toll bye-laws and to enter into agreements with private investors are vested in TII under Part V of the Roads Act 1993 (as amended).

Noting the above position, I have referred the question to TII for a more detailed and direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

### **Road Projects Status**

215. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when works are expected to commence on a bypass (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40139/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, design and construction of individual national roads is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Noting the above position, I have referred your question to TII for a direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

### **Brexit Issues**

216. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the degree to which he remains satisfied that the euro routes will continue to reach their destinations on the continent notwithstanding Brexit orderly or disorderly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40144/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** While the full im-

plications of Brexit for our air and maritime transport are not yet clear, I do not anticipate that direct maritime or direct air services by community air carriers between Ireland and continental Europe will be affected, even in a no-deal Brexit scenario.

However, both I and my colleagues in Government remain concerned about the impacts of a no-deal Brexit for Irish trade using the UK landbridge for accessing EU markets. This is something that remains under active consideration.

A significant proportion of our goods, estimated at €21 billion, destined for or coming from EU markets are transported via the UK landbridge. The landbridge is the fastest route to continental Europe and as such is relied upon for the transport of time-sensitive products, such as those in the agri-food/perishable goods sector, just-in-time and high value goods. Any delays or barriers will be detrimental for these sectors in particular.

Recent reports from the UK indicate the potential for significant reductions in traffic volumes through key ports such as Dover and Holyhead as a result of the additional requirements for customs and other regulatory documentation and procedures. Significant new infrastructure, and associated staffing, is in place in Dublin Port and Rosslare Europort to implement the additional customs, agriculture and environmental health controls that will be required in Dublin and Rosslare when the UK leave the EU. While these are designed to minimise the level of disruption that may arise from the additional checks, some disruption can be expected.

The main alternative to the UK landbridge is the direct shipping routes to continental EU ports. Following a series of meetings between my officials and the major ferry companies operating at Irish ports, I am assured that sufficient capacity exists on direct services and that shipping companies can adapt to changing market demands that may arise.

We have seen the evidence of additional capacity and services recently with the increase in shipping capacity on direct routes to continental ports. These services include the MV Celine which was last year launched from Dublin Port and will serve routes to Rotterdam and Zeebrugge and the MV WB Yeats, on the Dublin – Cherbourg route from March 2019 for the summer season. Additionally, a new ferry route to Santander in Spain commenced from the Port of Cork in 2018.

If disruption to the landbridge does arise, it is likely to be most acute in the immediate period following the UK exit. My Department, along with IMDO, is implementing a number of mitigating actions to encourage a market response in a timely manner. This includes a focussed awareness campaign for shipping companies, importers and exporters aimed at creating a dialogue to identify new market demands as early as possible. On the 4th September, my Department in conjunction with the IMDO, hosted a workshop in relation to Maritime connectivity. A range of stakeholders attended, such as importers, exporters, ferry companies, haulage companies and business sectors. The aim of this workshop was to provide a forum to consider the risk posed by the UK Landbridge and the options for future direct connectivity to continental ports.

However my Department is continuing to monitor and to assess the potential implications on connectivity to EU markets in the lead up to a potential no-deal Brexit.

## **Sport and Recreational Development**

217. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he expects to offer grant-aid to the various sporting and recreational groups nationally with particular emphasis on the development of supports to encourage a health conscious population; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40145/19]

218. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of sporting and recreational bodies or groups nationally to which he awarded major or minor capital grants over the past three years; the extent to which this investment has generated an improved awareness to sporting and recreational activity with consequent benefit to the health of the population; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40146/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 217 and 218 together.

The Sports Capital Programme (SCP) as operated by my Department provides funding to voluntary, sporting and community organisations for the provision of sports and recreational facilities and the purchase of sports equipment. Over 12,000 projects have now benefited from sports capital funding since 1998, bringing the total allocations in that time to close to €1 billion. The programme has transformed the sporting landscape of Ireland with improvements in the quality and quantity of sporting facilities in virtually every village, town and city in the country.

The Programme's objectives are to:

- Assist voluntary and community organisations, national governing bodies (NGBs) of sport, local authorities and Education and Training Boards and schools to develop high quality, accessible, safe, well-designed, sustainable facilities in appropriate locations and to provide appropriate equipment to help maximise participation in sport and physical recreation.

- Prioritise the needs of disadvantaged areas and groups (such as people with disabilities) in the provision of sports facilities.

- Encourage the sharing of sports facilities by clubs, community organisations and national governing bodies of sport

Details of all allocations under the programme are available on my Department's website at <https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/471ed5-sports-capital-allocations/>

The 2018 round of the Sports Capital Programme closed for applications on Friday 19th October last. By that deadline, a record 2,337 applications were submitted seeking a total of €162m in funding. 186 of these applications were for projects that were deemed invalid under the 2017 round of the programme that subsequently submitted corrected documents. These applications were assessed first and approximately €7m in allocations to 170 projects were announced on the 17th January.

619 equipment only applications were assessed next and 466 allocations with a value of €9.8m were announced to these organisations in May.

Work is now underway in assessing the remaining applications for capital works. For the first time, applicants who submitted incorrect documentation under this round are being given the opportunity to correct their application during the assessment period. While there will be no undue delay in completing the assessment process, in view of the opportunity to correct documentation, the record number of applications received and the detailed information contained in each application, it is likely to take a further number of weeks to have all applications assessed with allocations announced shortly after that. As soon as allocations have been made, my Department will carry out a review of all aspects of the 2018 round of the programme to include any possible improvements for the future. This review will include consideration of the timing and scale of the next round.

In relation to larger capital projects, the National Sports Policy which was published last

year provided for the establishment of a new Large Scale Sport Infrastructure Fund (LSSIF). The aim of the fund is to provide support for larger sports facilities where the Exchequer investment is greater than the maximum amount available under the Sports Capital Programme (SCP). These may be projects where the primary objective will be to increase active participation in sport or large scale venues/stadia where the focus is more related to social participation and high performance sport. The new fund is designed to provide a transparent and robust system for funding such projects.

The Government has provided a capital allocation of at least €100m for the period to 2027 for the LSSIF. The new scheme closed for applications on the 17th April with applications initially confined to local authorities and National Governing Bodies of sport. By the closing date, 72 applications were received. Details of all applications received have been published on the Department's website along with the evaluation procedures and guidelines.

Assessment work is continuing in the Department but in view of the detailed information contained in each application, it will take a number of months to have all of this work complete. Accordingly, I expect that it will be towards the end of this year before any allocations are announced.

### **Brexit Issues**

219. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the degree to which he remains satisfied that the main transport routes to mainland Europe are adequately provided for in order to ensure ready, unimpeded access to and from continue to facilitate imports and exports to and from this country post Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40152/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Brexit has been identified as my Department's highest strategic risk, and the Department along with other Government Departments and key Agencies, has been preparing for Brexit for three years. Consultations regarding Brexit with key maritime stakeholders has included a Transport and Logistics All Island Sectoral meeting in Dundalk in January 2017, three Brexit Maritime Transport Workshops / Seminars (in April 2017, March 2018, and in January 2019) with a further Brexit Maritime Connectivity 'Be prepared' Workshop held on 4th September 2019.

A significant proportion of our goods destined for Continental European markets are transported via the UK landbridge to access these markets. Brexit could impact on the efficiency of the landbridge route particularly where there are increased border and custom procedures and associated delays, or were the UK to subsequently apply differing standards, road charging or regulatory regimes. The landbridge is the fastest route to continental Europe and as such is relied upon for the transport of time-sensitive products, such as some in the fresh agri-food/perishable goods sector, just-in-time and high value goods. Any delays or barriers to this key route to European markets will be detrimental for certain sectors. Significant work has been and continues to be undertaken through the Landbridge Project Group, chaired by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, in seeking to ensure continued access through the landbridge to markets in continental Europe.

Eight Meetings have been held with shipping companies and shipping interests by my Department and the IMDO in January and February 2019. These discussions with shipping companies have been continued by my Department since then, up to recent days, while the Irish Maritime Development Office (IMDO) who report to my Department have been consulting extensively with the Maritime sector, including shipping, port and other maritime interests re-

guarding Brexit issues on an ongoing basis. A number of consistent views have emerged from the meetings and consultations with the shipping companies. Shipping companies remain confident that the market will be responsive in meeting any challenge in a no-deal scenario should there be a switch in demand to direct services.

In the context of Brexit, there has already been a significant market response evidencing the capacity of market participants to respond to shifts in trade patterns resulting from Brexit. This includes:

- In 2018, CLdN launched MV Celine, the world's largest RoRo vessel, and in 2019 launched the MV Laureline RoRo vessel, significantly increasing capacity on the Dublin-Rotterdam and Dublin-Zeebrugge routes.

- In May 2018, Brittany Ferries commenced a service from Cork to Santander and Roscoff.

- Irish Ferries investment of €150 million in its newest passenger and freight vessel, MV W.B. Yeats, provides year-round freight capacity between Ireland and France of 165 HGVs per sailing or 60,600 HGVs per annum and a vessel of a similar size is due to be delivered on the Irish sea routes in 2020.

- In July 2019, BG Freight Line announced the commencement of a direct Waterford-Rotterdam route weekly Lo/Lo freight service, which will act as a deep sea feeder through Rotterdam port and onwards to worldwide destinations for Irish importers and exporters.

In the light of my Department's continued consultations with shipping companies, I am of the view that shipping services can be expected to adapt to changing market demands that may arise as a consequence of Brexit. We have seen the evidence of this over the last few years with the increase in shipping capacity on direct routes to continental ports that I have mentioned.

## **Tourism Policy**

220. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the degree to which he has put in place plans or provisions to enhance or develop the tourism sector with a view to ensuring the development of the industry notwithstanding Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40153/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The Government's Tourism Policy Statement "People, Place and Policy – Growing Tourism to 2025" was published in March 2015 and in July 2015, the then Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport appointed a Tourism Leadership Group, to put in place a series of Action Plans, setting out the actions required to achieve the overall objectives set out in the Tourism Policy Statement.

The Tourism Action Plan 2019-2021, published in December 2018, sets out the actions identified as priorities to be progressed during this period to maintain sustainable growth in overseas tourism revenue and employment, and aims to further build relationships within the tourism industry and encourage collaboration between all tourism stakeholders.

In Budget 2019, I secured a 26% increase in funding for the tourism sector, which represents the largest increase in the tourism budget in 15 years. This increased funding has allowed Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland to continue to grow tourism regionally and across the seasons in line with key policy objectives.

The promotion and development of tourism are primarily matters for the boards and man-

agements of Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland. Accordingly I have referred the Deputy's question to the tourism agencies for further reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

### **Traffic Management**

221. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which outstanding traffic bottlenecks will continue to receive remedial attention on local or regional routes in order to ensure the minimisation of traffic delays after Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40147/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of the relevant local authority in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from the Councils' own resources supplemented by State road grants. The selection and prioritisation of projects, within its available budget, is a matter for each local authority

Traffic management issues are also a matter for the relevant local authority.

### **Road Network**

222. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when upgrading the N4 Maynooth to Dublin can take place in view of the pivotal nature of this route as a commuter link; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40148/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, design and construction of individual national roads is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Noting the above position, I have referred your question to TII for a direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

### **Rail Services Provision**

223. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which it is anticipated upgrades to rail services serving the commuter towns of north County Kildare will be carried out ; if by provision of increased frequency of services the provision of extra carriages or alternatives; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40149/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure and services, including the contractual arrangements in relation to Public Service Obligation (PSO) services

In light of the NTA's responsibilities on this matter, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for a more detailed reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply

within 10 working days.

### **Bus Services**

224. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he anticipates the electrification of the bus fleet or rail services serving the commuter belt of north County Kildare to continue carbon reduction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40150/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding of public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the development of public transport in the Greater Dublin Area (including north Kildare) including the purchase of publicly subvented bus and rail fleet.

Noting the responsibility of the NTA, I have referred the Deputy's question to it for direct reply on the specific issues raised. Please advise my office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

### **Road Network**

225. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the degree to which he expects the completion of the motorway network nationally with a view to ensuring the availability of adequate transport services to all regions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40151/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, design and construction of individual national roads is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

The overall plans and priorities for upgrading of the national road network are set out in Project Ireland 2040 which encompasses the National Development Plan (NDP) and the National Planning Framework. TII are responsible for delivering the national road priorities set out in the NDP.

Noting the above position, I have referred the question to TII for a direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

### **Childcare Services Staff**

226. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to ensure all childcare workers in the early years sector are paid a living wage of €12.30 per hour; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40035/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The early learning and care sector has been identified as a sector in which low pay and poor working conditions for staff are common, which impacts on the quality of provision through its effect on the recruitment and retention of qualified staff. The lack of consistency of care together with high

staff turnover impact directly on quality, while low wages are a constraint on plans to upskill the workforce. My support for improved pay and conditions for early learning and care professionals has been explicit, as their role is critical to supporting children's development.

Over the past 4 budgets the level of public investment in early learning and care and school-age childcare services has increased 117%, and the level of investment needs to continue rising if we are to secure services that are of high quality, affordable and accessible. However, increased investment by itself will not ensure that staff wages and conditions will improve.

As the State is not the employer, my Department does not pay the wages of staff working in early learning and care settings, and I cannot set wage levels or determine working conditions for these staff.

I am, however, doing all that is in my power to improve wages and working conditions in the sector. I have repeatedly called for the sector to pursue a Sectoral Employment Order, which offers a viable mechanism to establish appropriate wage levels. My Department will readily cooperate with such a process when it is under way.

In the interim, I have introduced a range of measures to support employers to improve pay and conditions. These include a 7% increase in ECCE capitation in 2018; higher capitation payments for graduates and Inclusion Coordinators; annual Programme Support Payments to recognise administrative demands; support for school-age childcare, which will make it easier for service providers to offer staff full-time employment contracts; and a pilot measure to fund participation in CPD.

I have set out my vision for the sector, and a roadmap to achieve it, in First 5, which contains a commitment to develop a Workforce Development Plan which will ensure appropriate levels of early learning and care and school-age childcare staff at all levels in the sector. The Workforce Development Plan will establish role profiles, career pathways, qualifications requirements, and associated policy mechanisms. It will set out plans to raise the profile of careers in the sector, establishing a career framework and leadership development opportunities, and it will work towards a more gender-balanced and diverse workforce.

## **Departmental Strategies**

227. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the expenditure on baby boxes; the number distributed to date; if baby boxes are available at maternity hospitals nationally; if not, the estimated full year cost of providing a baby box to mothers on the birth of a child; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40077/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The First 5 Strategy was published in November of last year, followed in May of this year by the Implementation Plan for the first phase of implementation in 2019-2021.

First 5 outlines Government's intention to pilot the development and implementation of Baby Boxes and Book Bags initiatives to support parenting with a focus on parent-baby bonding, information on baby development and early learning and promotion of baby safety.

A Baby Box is a package of items and information to assist with the transition to parenthood including safety items, baby clothes, small toys, baby toothbrushes, and books to support early development. The intention behind Baby Boxes is to welcome a new arrival to a family, acknowledging this very significant moment for parents. Baby Boxes offer the opportunity to communicate important child development and safety messages and is an early opportunity to

link with parents in need of support services.

As indicated in the Implementation Plan, an oversight group will be established this year to lead the development of the pilot and scope to project to prepare for implementation and evaluation.

While resourcing has been secured through the Dormant Accounts Fund to progress the pilot, there has been no expenditure to date as this pilot has not yet begun.

The cost of providing a Baby Box will depend on the items selected for inclusion, as well as the design of the box and any logistical costs - all of which have to be determined. However, by means of international comparison, in Scotland a very well equipped baby box is costed at £160, exclusive of delivery costs. The equivalent figure in Finland is €170. There were just over 61,000 births in Ireland in 2018.

There are some baby box schemes in operation via maternity hospitals and otherwise in different parts of the country but my Department is not involved in funding or co-ordinating these.

### **Community Employment Schemes Supervisors**

228. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if there has been an advance in the position for providing a mechanism to secure a pension for community employment supervisors or to provide an ex gratia payment to those supervisors about to retire or recently retired; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39999/19]

229. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of work in relation to addressing the pension situation of community employment scheme supervisors; if she has had discussions with the Minister for Finance or the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform in relation to same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39994/19]

230. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of ongoing meetings with community employment scheme supervisors; her views on pension entitlements for supervisors of the schemes in view of the ongoing negotiations; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39995/19]

233. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the position regarding pensions claims by community employment supervisors; if high-level meetings have taken place; and when she will issue her findings. [40010/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 228 to 230, inclusive, and 233 together.

I am currently engaging with representatives of Community Employment supervisors and assistant supervisors to discuss issues arising following the 2008 Labour Court Recommendation. All parties to the engagement process have agreed that the detail of the discussions should remain confidential while the engagement is ongoing and I would ask Deputies to respect these wishes and allow the talks to continue free from speculation which might prove unhelpful. I expect that it will take a number of weeks to reach a conclusion.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

*Questions - Written Answers*  
**Carer's Allowance Review**

231. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a carer's allowance review will be completed for a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39997/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a child or an adult who has such a disability that as a result they require that level of care.

An application for CA was received from the person concerned on 14 November 2018.

It is a condition for receipt of a CA that the person being cared for must have such disability that they require full-time care and attention.

This is defined as requiring from another person, continual supervision and frequent assistance throughout the day in connection with normal bodily functions or continual supervision in order to avoid danger to him or herself and likely to require that level of care for at least twelve months.

The evidence submitted in support of the application was examined and the deciding officer decided that this evidence did not indicate that the requirement for full-time care was satisfied.

The person concerned was notified on 19 February 2019 of this decision, the reason for it and of his right of review and appeal.

The person concerned requested a review of this decision and submitted additional evidence in support of his application on 4 July 2019.

Following this review the decision has remained unchanged.

The person concerned was notified on 25 September 2019 of this decision, the reason for it and of his right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

**School Meals Programme**

232. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the meals provided for in each school meals programme meets the requirements set out in Healthy Ireland guides and the Obesity Policy and Action Plan; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40007/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The School Meals Programme provides funding towards provision of food services for disadvantaged school children through two schemes: The urban school meals scheme and the school meals (local projects) scheme.

The Urban School Meals Scheme for primary schools is operated and administered by Local Authorities and is part-financed by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. The type of food provided under the Urban School Meals Scheme is decided by individual schools and agreed with the Local Authorities.

The school meals (local projects) scheme provides funding towards the provision of food to some 1,580 schools and organisations benefitting 250,000 children. The objective of the scheme is to provide regular, nutritious food to children who are unable, due to lack of good quality food, to take full advantage of the education provided to them. The programme is an important component of policies to encourage school attendance and extra educational achievement.

The 'Nutrition Standards for School Meals', which was published in September 2017 under the auspices of Healthy Ireland, is a valuable resource to enable and promote healthy eating and healthy lifestyles in schools. These standards complement and strengthen the healthy eating guidelines that were already in place. The standards were introduced commencing from January 2018 and all schools participating in the school meals scheme are expected to fully comply with these standards from September 2018.

In terms of assessing whether schools meet the requirements set out in Healthy Ireland guides and the Obesity Policy and Action Plan, schools and organisations must reapply for funding in advance of each school year and are required to submit detailed records at the end of each school year. Expenditure on unhealthy food items is deducted from the funding allocation.

In addition, the Department initiated an on-site inspection programme in 2012 to ensure that the scheme rules are being adhered to including an assessment of the type of food provided. My Department recently introduced service level agreements with all participating schools and organisations which sets out the responsibilities of participants.

*Question No. 233 answered with Question No. 228.*

### **Carer's Benefit Applications**

234. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a decision will be made on a carer's benefit application by a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40026/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Carer's benefit (CARB) is a PRSI based payment, made to persons who are providing full-time care and attention to a person who has such a disability that they require that level of care.

An application for CARB was received from the person concerned on 8 June 2019.

The carers leave commenced on 2 September 2019. The application was awarded to the person concerned on 27 September 2019, effective from 5 September 2019. The first payment will issue to her nominate bank account on 3 October 2019.

Arrears of allowance due from 5 September 2019 to 2 October 2019 will issue shortly.

The person concerned was notified on 27 September 2019 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Social Welfare Benefits Data**

235. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the processing time for illness benefit, disability allowance, carer's allowance and ben-

efit and invalidity pension applications, respectively; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40030/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The information requested by the Deputy is detailed in the following tabular statement.

**Table 1. Average weeks to award a claim in August 2019**

Average Weeks to Award	August 2019
Illness Benefit	1
Disability Allowance	14
Carer's Allowance	16
Carer's Benefit	13
Invalidity Pension	10

### Disability Allowance

236. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection his plans to ensure the disability allowance is increased by €20 per week; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40046/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** Disability Allowance (DA) is a means-tested payment for people with a specified disability who are aged between 16 and 66. The disability must be expected to last for at least one year and the allowance is subject to a medical assessment, a means test and a habitual residency test.

The estimated annual spend on DA in 2019 is over €1.6 billion. At the end of July 2019, there were 143,516 people in receipt of DA. The estimated cost of increasing the weekly personal rate of DA by €20 would be an additional €166.9 million.

My department regularly reviews its supports and payment schemes to ensure that they continue to meet their objectives. Given the cost implications, any changes to the current payment rates would have to be considered in the overall budgetary context.

### Wage Subsidy Scheme

237. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to increase and index link the wage subsidy scheme for persons with a disability to 70% of the minimum wage level; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40047/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The Wage Subsidy Scheme (WSS) is an employment support to private sector employers, the objective of which is to encourage employers to employ people with disabilities and thereby increase the numbers of people with disabilities participating in the open labour market.

The scheme provides financial incentives to private sector employers to hire people with a disability for between 21 and 39 subsidised hours per week under a contract of employment. The contract of employment offered must be for a minimum of 6 months and the employee must be paid the going rate for the job (which must be at least the statutory minimum wage).

Private sector employers may claim a subsidy, subject to certain conditions, against the cost incurred where a productivity shortfall arises from a disability. The basic rate of subsidy is €5.30 per hour giving a total annual subsidy available of €10,748 per annum based on a 39 hour week.

The financial supports for employers are structured under three separate strands and companies could benefit under one strand or under two or three strands simultaneously, as the case may be, depending on the number of people with a disability employed, as below.

**Strand I** is a general subsidy for any perceived productivity shortfall in excess of 20% for a person with a disability, in comparison to a colleague without a disability. The subsidy is based on the number of hours worked.

**Strand II** subsidy is payable when an employer employs three or more people with disabilities who are supported by a WSS Strand I payment. Strand II is intended to cover the additional supervisory, management and other work based costs relating to such employees. This top-up payment is a percentage of the Strand I subsidy and is based on the overall number of employees with a disability employed under Strand I. It ranges from an additional 10% of wage subsidy for 3 to 6 employees with a disability to a maximum of 50% of wage subsidy for 23+ employees with a disability. Therefore when an employer has 23 or more WSS employees a 50% top up is applied to the hourly rate increasing the payment rate to €7.95 per hour for each employee.

Nos.	Percentage
3 to 6 employees with a disability	10% top-up of wage subsidy paid
7 to 11 employees with a disability	20% top-up of wage subsidy paid
12 to 16 employees with a disability	30% top-up of wage subsidy paid
17 to 22 employees with a disability	40% top-up of wage subsidy paid
23 + employees with a disability	50% top-up of wage subsidy paid

**Strand III** subsidy enables employers who employ 30 or more workers with a disability on the Wage Subsidy Scheme to be eligible for a grant of up to €30,000 per year towards the expense of employing an Employment Assistance Officer (EAO) to support these employees.

At end June 2019, there were 1,671 private sector employers availing of the wage subsidy with 2,722 people with disabilities employed. The existing annual cost based on the current number of contracted hours at the €5.30 rate is €26.9 million.

My Department regularly reviews its supports and payments schemes to ensure that they continue to meet their objectives. Any changes to the current rate of subsidy would have to be considered in the overall budgetary context.

I hope this clarifies the issue for the Deputy.

### Illness Benefit Payments

238. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when illness benefit arrears will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Cork. [40058/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The

person concerned was in receipt of Carers Benefit up to 11/09/2019 and prior to that she was an adult dependent on her spouse's Illness Benefit claim.

To date, no application for Illness Benefit has been received by the person concerned.

It is open to the person concerned to make an application for Illness Benefit in her own right, if she is unable to work due to illness or injury. Her spouse can also apply to add her as an adult dependent on his Illness Benefit claim, should she meet the qualifying criteria.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Carer's Allowance Applications**

239. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a decision on a carer's allowance application by a person (details supplied) in County Cork will be expedited. [40066/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a child or an adult who has such a disability that as a result they require that level of care.

An application for CA was received from the person concerned on 23 July 2019.

The application was awarded to the person concerned on 1 October 2019 with effect from 25 July 2019. The first payment will issue to her nominated post office on 10 October 2019.

Arrears of allowance due from 25 July 2019 to 9 October 2019 have issued also.

The person concerned was notified on 1 October 2019 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **State Pension (Contributory)**

240. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if there is a €190,500 disregard on the means assessment for qualified adult payments on the State pension (contributory) for persons who wish to downsize their home; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40086/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The legislation allowing for the disregard of proceeds from sale of principal residence - Article 158 of the Social Welfare (Consolidated Claims, Payments and Control) Regulations 2007 - applies to those moving to more suitable accommodation who are in receipt of one of the following payments:

- State Pension (Non-Contributory)
- Widow's, Widower's or Surviving civil Partner's (Non-Contributory) Pension (66 years of age or over)
- Disability Allowance

- Blind Pension

There is currently no provision for this disregard in respect of an adult dependant on the state pension (contributory). Any changes to disregards and means assessments would have to be considered in the overall policy and budgetary process.

### **JobPath Programme**

241. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a person who finishes a community employment scheme in June 2020 could be referred back to JobPath despite the fact that new referrals will cease at the end of 2019; if being on the scheme guarantees a person a year exemption from being referred to JobPath; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40091/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** JobPath is a service which supports people who are long-term unemployed to secure and sustain full time paid employment. Two companies, Seetec and Turas Nua, have been contracted by my Department to deliver the service.

The JobPath employment service commenced in 2015 and, under the terms of the contracts signed with the providers, was to run for at least six years comprising two consecutive phases. Phase one entailed four years' of client referrals, while phase two entailed a 'run off' period during which time no additional clients were to be referred. Therefore client referrals were due to cease on 31st December 2019. The contract included an option to extend the term of referrals for a period no greater than two years.

As per an econometric review carried out by my Department, JobPath has been, and continues to be, a successful service in providing a comprehensive and value for money activation service for the long-term unemployed. On this basis, my Department triggered the extension provisions of the existing contracts with the JobPath providers and secured agreement on the extension of these contracts on existing terms and conditions for a further twelve months.

This is not a renewal of the JobPath contracts but the execution of the extension clauses of the existing contracts.

This extension is important as it will ensure that the Government retains the necessary labour activation capacity to deal with any labour market uncertainty that arises as a result of Brexit.

With regard to Community Employment (CE) schemes, Jobseekers currently engaged on a CE scheme are not eligible for selection for the JobPath service. On finishing a CE placement however, long term jobseekers will become eligible for activation services provided by my Department, including referral to JobPath. This ensures that the benefits of the experience and training that they received during their time on CE are maximised.

If referred to JobPath they will receive one-to-one, intensive and regular engagement with a personal adviser who will assess their skills, experience, challenges and work goals and assist them in finding full-time sustainable employment. This process will also help identify potential employment opportunities and offer support to the individual in overcoming any barriers to employment.

From 1st June 2018 all persons currently engaged with JobPath may also elect to take up a placement on CE whilst continuing to engage with their JobPath provider. Application for

participation on CE by JobPath customers is entirely voluntary and at their discretion.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Fuel Allowance Eligibility**

242. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the fuel allowance can be paid on a discretionary basis to people participating in community employment schemes and of limited income despite not being on a qualifying payment prior to engaging with community employment. [40097/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Following recent changes to the eligibility criteria, it is now open to participants on Community Employment schemes to apply for a Fuel Allowance. If the Deputy would like to forward the details of a particular case(s) he is referring to I will have them examined.

I trust this clarifies the position.

### **Fuel Allowance Eligibility**

243. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the fuel allowance will be paid to recipients of carer's allowance should they satisfy a means test and are of limited income. [40098/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The fuel allowance is a payment of €22.50 per week for 28 weeks (a total of €630 each year) from October to April, to over 372,000 low income households, at an estimated cost of €240 million in 2019. The purpose of this payment is to assist these households with their energy costs. The allowance represents a contribution towards the energy costs of a household. It is not intended to meet those costs in full. Only one allowance is paid per household.

My Department also pays an electricity or gas allowance under the Household benefits scheme at an estimated cost of €188 million in 2019. This is paid at a rate of €35 per month, 12 months of the year.

The Government values the role of carers very much and it is for this reason that they receive significant income supports from the Department. In addition to carer's allowance carers receive additional support in the form of free travel and household benefits (for those who live with the person for whom they care) and the annual carers support grant (€1,700) in respect of each person for whom they care.

Fuel Allowance is a household-based payment, and a Carer will very often live with and be caring for a person with a qualifying payment for Fuel Allowance. Income from full rate carers allowance is disregarded if the carer is providing full time care and attention to the Fuel Allowance applicant, their qualified spouse / civil partner or cohabitant or qualified child(ren).

If a person is getting certain qualifying social welfare payments and also providing full time care and attention to another person, they can keep their main social protection payment and get the half-rate carer's allowance as well. They can also receive an extra half-rate carer's allowance if they care for more than one person. It should also be noted that the payment of half-rate carer's allowance does not preclude a person from qualifying for fuel allowance. If a person is in receipt of a non-contributory social welfare payment and a half-rate carer's allowance,

then they are deemed to have satisfied the means test and fuel allowance is payable subject to all remaining criteria being satisfied. If a person is in receipt of a contributory social welfare payment and a half-rate carer's allowance then they will have to satisfy a means test to qualify for fuel allowance.

Any decision to amend the criteria for receiving fuel allowance to include a carer's allowance as a qualifying payment in the circumstances the Deputy has outlined would have to be considered in the overall policy and budgetary context.

Under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme, exceptional needs payments may be made to help meet an essential, once-off cost which customers are unable to meet out of their own resources and this may include exceptional heating cost.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Disability Allowance Applications**

244. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for a disability allowance by a person (details supplied); and if the matter will be expedited. [40141/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** I can confirm that my department received an application for disability allowance (DA) from this lady on 31 July 2019.

On 27 September 2019 the person concerned was requested to supply supporting documentation required by the deciding officer in order to make a decision on her eligibility. On receipt of this information a decision will be made on her DA application and the person concerned will be notified of the outcome.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Housing Adaptation Grant Funding**

245. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will restore housing adaptation grants funding to 2010 levels; and if he will make provision of an additional €28.38 million for these grants. [40040/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** The funding provided for the Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and People with a Disability Scheme, to support people living in private houses, has increased year on year since 2014. Compared to a funding level of €43 million in 2013, the funding provided reached €71.25 million nationally in 2019, an increase of some 8% on 2018. I am conscious of the benefit accruing from these grants, particularly in terms of facilitating older people and people with a disability, to remain living independently in their own homes. As part of the annual budgetary process, consideration will be given in future years to increasing further the funding for these grants in line with both Rebuilding Ireland and the Government's Policy Statement on Housing Options for Our Ageing Population, which is available on my Department's website at the following link: [www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/housingoptionsforanageingpopulationeng\\_web.pdf](http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/housingoptionsforanageingpopulationeng_web.pdf).

## **ERASMUS Programme**

246. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the progress made on the development of ERASMUS Gaeltachta under the Irish language learners scheme; the third-level institutions that will offer a semester in the Gaeltacht to their students; the number of student places per institution that will be available; the Gaeltacht areas in which they may attend courses; the dates on which these places will be available; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40009/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Seán Kyne):** The Deputy will be aware that, earlier this year, I announced a new initiative - ERASMUS Gaeltachta - worth €250,000, under which third-level students are being provided with the opportunity to live with qualifying Gaeltacht families for a full three month semester while attending a third-level course.

Under the scheme, a subsidy of €17 per day per student is payable to qualifying households who provide accommodation to participating students. This subvention, which is being provided under the terms of Scéim na bhFoghlaimoírí Gaeilge, is the equivalent of approximately €1,428 per student.

This three-month language immersion opportunity is being directed towards third-level students:

- who have Irish as a core subject in their 3rd level programme (for example, B.A. in Irish or B. Comm with Irish) or:

- for whom Irish is not a core student subject but who require a high level of competency in Irish in order to work in professions in the public service, in particular, in which it is critical to ensure engagement with the Irish speaking community through Irish.

To date, Acadamh na hOllscolaíochta Gaeilge, NUIG, and Coláiste na hOllscoile, Corcaigh have embarked on providing courses which qualify under the ERASMUS Gaeltachta initiative - catering for approximately 90 students in total. It is anticipated that up to 175 students can be catered for initially under the measure, with a view to further increasing the number in the medium-term, depending on demand.

I am satisfied that this practical measure, which represents the outworking of a commitment made in the Government's Action Plan for the Irish Language 2018-2022, will generate both significant additional benefits for the language as well as downstream economic benefits for Gaeltacht regions. It will also go some way towards preparing students for employment in areas of the public service requiring a competency in the Irish language, thus contributing to efforts to meet the ambitious targets set out in the proposed Official Languages (Amendment) Bill.

## **Waterways Ireland Funding**

247. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the estimated amount it would cost in 2020 if the budget for Waterways Ireland increased by 9%. [40065/19]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** The allocation from my Department's Vote for Waterways Ireland for 2019 is €25.117m.

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The estimated amount it would cost in 2020 if the budget for Waterways Ireland is increased by 9% is therefore €2.260m.