

DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN ROGHCHOISTE UM IOMPAR, TURASÓIREACHT AGUS SPÓRT

SELECT COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORT, TOURISM AND SPORT

Dé Céadaoin, 18 Aibreán 2018

Wednesday, 18 April 2018

Tháinig an Roghchoiste le chéile ag 9.40 a.m.

The Select Committee met at 9.40 a.m.

Comhaltaí a bhí i láthair / Members present:

Teachtaí Dála / Deputies	
Imelda Munster,	
Catherine Murphy,	
Kevin O’Keeffe,	
Shane Ross (Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport),	
Robert Troy.	

I láthair / In attendance: Deputy Danny Healy-Rae.

Teachta / Deputy Fergus O’Dowd sa Chathaoir / in the Chair.

Estimates for Public Services 2018

Vote 31 - Transport, Tourism and Sport (Revised)

Chairman: This meeting has been convened to consider the Revised Estimates for Vote 31 - Transport, Tourism and Sport, which was referred by the Dáil to the committee with instruction to report back no later than 19 April. I am awaiting the Minister's arrival. He is outside and will be with us shortly. As members are all aware, transport, tourism and sport face challenging times with numerous issues arising from Brexit and capital and current infrastructure projects in all three sectors, as well as many other issues that we have discussed in our joint committee. The financing and resourcing for the year ahead of the responses to those challenges will be very important. Our committee will get to explore this today with some emphasis on several key issues. The proposed format of today's meeting is that we will deal with Vote 31 on a programme-by-programme basis. At the outset, the Minister will make an opening statement. There are five programmes and we will then consider each of the programmes separately, with questions from members of the committee.

Before proceeding to the business of the meeting, I remind members that their mobile telephones should be turned off completely for the duration of the meeting, as they cause interference with the recording equipment in committee rooms even in silent mode. Members are reminded of the long-standing parliamentary practice to the effect that they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person outside the House or an official either by name or in such a way as to make him or her identifiable. As I have mentioned, members have been provided with an advance briefing on the various programmes by the Department and the committee secretariat. We will now proceed.

Just before I call the Minister, I wish to say that all the attendees are very welcome. I do not know if Secretaries General attend meetings like this. If so, it would be great to have the Secretary General here, because he might give us an outline of the administrative and policy issues facing the Department as he sees them.

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I thank the Chair. The Secretary General certainly gets a full transcript and he is probably watching the meeting as we speak.

Chairman: I would like the Secretary General to attend, as it is important.

Deputy Shane Ross: I will tell him that.

Chairman: I thank the Minister.

Deputy Shane Ross: First, I thank the committee for the chance to present the Revised Estimates for 2018 for the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport. The 2018 provision for the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport comprises an overall gross allocation of €2.03 billion. This is to be used to provide investment in critical infrastructure and to ensure that vital services are available to the public during 2018. The €2.03 billion represents an increase of more than 11% on gross expenditure levels from 2017. This is an increase of 3.4%, or €23 million, in current or day-to-day expenditure, while capital or investment expenditure will increase by more than €197 million, or 17%. This additional funding across all sectors will help us to

invest and expand services this year beyond what was conceivable only a few years ago. In following years, there will be a significant intensification in activity.

I wish to say a few words about Project Ireland 2040 which, as members are aware, includes the national planning framework and the ten-year national development plan, NDP. The programme of investment set out in the NDP will result in a comprehensive road, bus and rail network. This will provide a high level of service to all regions and will link the regions to one another, as well as to Dublin. It will be delivered progressively to match transport demand and deliver benefits steadily over the next decade. This investment in transport will improve accessibility to every part of the country. In the context of Brexit, this is crucial for the transport and tourism sectors. This is supported by the non-Exchequer investments set out in the tier 1 area of the NDP, namely, ports and their access routes. Similarly the improved access to airports will facilitate access to tourism and export markets.

I will now briefly address the five programmes of investment in my Department and the funding levels and plans we have for 2018.

The civil aviation programme has an allocation of €28 million this year. The largest element of the programme is the regional airports programme at €13.6 million. Funding is also earmarked to cover costs associated with our membership of Eurocontrol, other subscriptions to international organisations and costs incurred by the Irish Aviation Authority, IAA, for exempt services. The State reimburses the IAA for communication and air navigation services in respect of exempted classes of users, that is, military and state aircraft. The key priority for investment in the aviation programme over the short to medium term is to facilitate continued safe and viable operations at the regional airports and to maintain air access to relatively remote regions, specifically counties Donegal and Kerry.

The land transport programme, which is the largest programme by far in my Department's Vote and represents 81% of my overall budget, will increase this year by €203 million or 14% to €1.66 billion. A large portion of this is capital investment. The main components of the programme are roads improvement and maintenance funding with an overall budget of €883 million, the public transport investment programme at €401 million and public service provision payments at €300 million. The programme also includes provision of €5.5 million towards the carbon reduction programme and operating costs of the national vehicle driver licensing system at €19 million.

In respect of public transport, I secured increased multi-annual capital investment funding envelopes for the coming four-year period. This includes providing an enhanced capital envelope of €2.7 billion for a multi-modal public transport investment programme between 2018 and 2021. The four-year envelope will allocate investment to protect the quality and value of our existing public transport networks. Programmes to be funded include BusConnects, MetroLink, DART expansion, ongoing retrofitting of older existing public transport facilities to improve their accessibility features, as well as cycling and walking and traffic management measures, both in our capital and nationwide. These programmes will be implemented by Irish Rail and the National Transport Authority, NTA, which has statutory responsibility for development of public transport in the greater Dublin area.

This year, I secured an 8% increase in the overall Exchequer funding for public service obligation, PSO, services across the bus and rail networks. These services have grown in recent years, and the increase in funding in 2018 brings the cumulative increase over the three years from 2016 to 2018 to €75 million, or 36%. That means that a total of more than €285 million

will be allocated in 2018 to support the delivery of these socially necessary but financially unviable services. It is of course also an area that requires ongoing scrutiny to ensure the taxpayer receives value for money in respect of the services delivered, given the considerable expenditure incurred. As is normal, the precise allocations to the companies, including Iarnród Éireann, will be decided by the NTA in accordance with the various contract arrangements that it has in place with PSO service providers. Additionally, rural transport services that respond to local needs have also increased and we will continue to support these through enhanced funding.

In respect of roads, my main priority remains the maintenance and safety of the network. The 2018 allocation will allow approximately 2,300 km of the regional and local road network to be maintained and approximately 2,100 km to be strengthened. Major capital roads projects to be progressed include the Naas bypass widening, Sallins bypass and Osberstown interchange project, the upgrading of the Nangor and Adamstown roads near Grange Castle Business Park; and two public private partnership, PPP, projects which are under construction, namely, the New Ross bypass and the Gorey to Enniscorthy project, the Gort to Tuam PPP having been completed and the route opened. Planning, design, land acquisition and advance works will continue on other major capital plan schemes including the Dunkettle scheme, the N22 Ballyvourney to Macroom scheme, the N4 from Collooney to Castlebaldwin scheme and the N5 from Westport to Turlough scheme.

I will now comment on road safety. The operations of the Road Safety Authority, RSA, and the Medical Bureau of Road Safety are within the remit of my Department. While the funding for these two bodies is small, at just over €5 million, the work achieved by both is huge and vitally important. I note the RSA has significant revenue-raising powers. Last year, 2017, was the safest year on Ireland's roads since road deaths were first recorded in 1959, with 159 deaths. While even one death is too many, I hope this trend in decreased road deaths continues. We will continue to support those bodies in achieving their goals.

The key funding priorities for the maritime transport and safety programme in 2018 are the maintenance of the Irish Coast Guard's search and rescue helicopter service, the continuation of the Coast Guard building programme for volunteers and an annual contribution of more than €7 million towards the costs of the Commissioners of Irish Lights. Of the €96 million provided for the maritime, transport and safety programme, €66 million is provided for the Irish Coast Guard's helicopter search and rescue contract. Current expenditure of €3.5 million is provided to meet the operational costs and training of volunteer Irish Coast Guard units. The capital allocation of €5 million will be used to meet the building and renovation costs of Irish Coast Guard stations, replace and upgrade search and rescue-related equipment, develop new IT systems and procure other equipment relating to the Irish Coast Guard's remit. My Department continues to support the excellent work carried out by the Irish Coast Guard and its volunteer cadre. Its work was seen during the recent Storm Emma weather alert, where it supported local communities, principal response agencies and the emergency services.

The sports programme shows an increase from 2017 of more than €3 million to €111 million. The sports capital programme is the primary means of providing Government funding to sport and community organisations at local, regional and national level. In November and December 2017, the Minister of State, Deputy Griffin, and I announced €60 million in allocations under the 2017 round of the sports capital programme to more than 1,800 different sporting projects. The investment envelope covers these awards and commitments made under earlier rounds of the programme. The capital envelope for sport also provides €4 million to meet all existing commitments under the local authority swimming pool programme. Further fund-

ing of €5 million was made available for sports measures through dormant accounts funding, mainly towards supporting the implementation of the national physical activity plan in disadvantaged communities.

As for future investment, the recently published national development plan contains a commitment to establish a new large scale sport infrastructure fund for which at least €100 million will be available during the roll-out of the NDP. My officials will draft the terms and conditions of this new fund over the coming months. This fund will be for larger projects where the proposed Government contribution would exceed the amount currently available for projects under the sports capital programme. The allocation for Sport Ireland will allow it to continue to address its key priorities of increasing participation in sport and developing and supporting high performance sport in Ireland. Work commenced in July 2017 on the development of phase 2 of the national indoor arena, which is due for completion in mid-2019. This phase will see the construction of full-sized and half-sized covered synthetic pitches, capable of accommodating all field sports, together with changing facilities, offices, meeting rooms etc.

I turn to the tourism services programme. The overall envelope for tourism this year will be €134 million, which represents an increase of €12 million on 2017. This includes an allocation of €3.6 million for greenways. Greenways have been a stand-out success story and a new development strategy is being worked on at present. The draft strategy should be published and available within the next few weeks. The €134 million allocation for the tourism programme will allow Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland to continue to develop Ireland's tourism industry, driven by the further development and promotion of the signature experience brands Wild Atlantic Way and Ireland's Ancient East. Last Thursday, I launched Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, a new tourism brand that will significantly enhance the midlands and bring jobs and economic growth to the whole region.

As we are all aware, Brexit is a significant challenge and Tourism Ireland has a programme of marketing activity in place for 2018. This programme will ensure Ireland is marketed appropriately in Great Britain while seeking to build on the successful strategy of market diversification implemented since 2014. Fáilte Ireland also launched a "Get Brexit ready" programme of business supports to provide all the relevant information and insights businesses will need. Last year, I said that 2016 had been an exceptional year for overseas visitors. Today, I am happy to be able to say that 2017 was a record-breaking year. The pattern is continuing in the early months of 2018. The CSO recently confirmed that, in the two months to the end of February 2018, the total number of trips to Ireland increased by 7.9% when compared with the same period in 2017.

To conclude, in 2017 we made good progress across all the programmes under my Department's remit. I have secured in budget 2018 increased multi-annual capital investment funding envelopes for the coming four-year period and look forward to progressing the major infrastructural projects included in the NDP. I expect to see continued momentum across all sectors. I am happy to answer any questions in respect of the 2018 Estimate.

Chairman: The meeting is now open to the floor. I have been advised that the normal process is to deal with each programme separately. As such, I ask members to confine initial questions to programme A on civil aviation. When members are satisfied, we will move to the next programme and so on.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: I ask about breaking down the time. One tends to find that a lot of time is taken but not necessarily with the programme that one-----

Chairman: If we keep it to questions, it might help. In fairness, Deputy Catherine Murphy was here first. Like me, she was early.

Deputy Robert Troy: I notice there has been an increase in the allocation for administration and pay under civil aviation. Is that based on the fact that there has been recruitment within the Irish Aviation Authority? What has contributed to it? For the best part of 18 months, the Irish Aviation Authority was due to be the competent authority for noise regulation at Dublin Airport. My understanding is that it engaged in recruitment to have the necessary expertise in place to carry out that work. Ultimately, that is not going to happen. Is there a financial liability for the Department, given there had been a clear indication from the Minister that the IAA was going to be the competent authority and prepared to take up that role for the best part of 18 months? It is no longer going to be the competent authority.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: My question relates to air accident investigation insurance. We are told that there are two aviation insurance policies to indemnify against third party costs arising from aviation related incidents. Are they new? Are there claims and to what extent? I had always understood that the State does not take out separate insurance. Why is this the case in relation to this particular aspect?

Deputy Imelda Munster: I refer to previous representations from the Irish Aviation Authority. There were questions about the propriety of the authority's dual role in regulating airlines and aviation safety, given that the IAA is funded by the airlines. Will the Minister address that by way of legislation? If so, will it involve a cost to the State?

Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe: Does the Minister have a timeframe for the rolling out of a second runway at Dublin Airport?

Chairman: The Minister can respond in whatever order he wishes.

Deputy Shane Ross: Deputy Troy referred to the pay increase. It is departmental administration. As overall administration costs went up in the Department, all programmes went up. We do not fund the IAA at all. It is completely self-funding and, in fact, very profitable. I think that answers the Deputy's other question on the engagement of the IAA in recruitment. We would not incur a liability on that basis, as the authority stands alone completely and makes a lot of money.

I will come to Deputy Murphy's questions lastly, if that is acceptable. Deputy Munster asked about the propriety of the dual role. A decision was taken by the Government in September 2017 that the roles should be divided and that there should be one regulator, merging the Commission for Aviation Regulation, CAR, and IAA regulatory functions. I am preparing legislation to do that and it will be introduced shortly, although I do not know the exact timetable.

I do not anticipate there being any particular cost to the State. It will certainly involve some cost, but that will not be significant.

Deputy Imelda Munster: Will the Minister keep us updated on the progress of that, please?

Deputy Shane Ross: Yes.

Regarding Deputy Murphy's question, the aircraft accident investigation insurance policy was first taken out in 1993. It indemnifies the Minister and the air accident investigation unit's costs incurred by the Department in the investigation of major commercial transport aircraft

accidents, including the costs of recovery, package and storage of wreckage but excluding the costs associated with the search and rescue of aircraft.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: Is there a second insurance policy?

Deputy Shane Ross: I do not know, but I can find out. I will inquire for the Deputy.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: The briefing note refers to the cost of two aviation insurance policies.

Deputy Shane Ross: Okay. There are two. Regarding the purpose of the two policies, the note reads:

to indemnify the Minister and the [IAA] against the cost of claims by third parties for damages arising from aviation related incidents deemed attributable to negligence on the part of the Minister or the Authority in the exercise of their aviation related functions (These costs are refunded by the IAA ...) and

indemnify the Minister against costs incurred in the investigation of major public transport aircraft accidents.

The purpose of this subhead is to provide for the small cost of the two aviation policies.

Chairman: Deputy O’Keeffe also asked a question.

Deputy Shane Ross: We intend that to be operational by 2021.

Deputy Robert Troy: Has each of the 2017 legislative and document output targets been met? I am referring to the ratification of the two EU aviation agreements and the two bilateral air transport agreements, the Irish Aviation Authority (amendment) Bill and the national policy statement on airport charges?

Deputy Shane Ross: Just a moment, Deputy. I am sorry.

Chairman: While we are waiting, are there other questions members would like to ask? If not, then I will take it that, after this answer, we will move on to programme B, land transport. We will wait for the Minister’s response, whenever that is convenient.

Deputy Shane Ross: I will revert to Deputy Troy.

Deputy Robert Troy: I do not remember the legislation passing through the Dáil in 2017. Has the national policy statement on airport charges been published or at what stage is it?

Deputy Shane Ross: We will have to revert to the Deputy.

Chairman: Will the Minister revert to him during this meeting?

Deputy Shane Ross: Yes.

Chairman: That is fine. We will move on to programme B, land transport.

Deputy Imelda Munster: The Minister referred to public service provision payments of €300 million. Is that the PSO, only under a different title?

Deputy Shane Ross: Yes.

Deputy Imelda Munster: I just was curious.

Chairman: Are there further questions?

Deputy Robert Troy: Have we moved on to land transport?

Chairman: Yes.

Deputy Robert Troy: Then not at this moment.

Chairman: I welcome the provision in the budget for the expansion of land transport, the investment in roads and, in particular, the extension of the DART to Drogheda. Deputy Munster will agree with me on that. It has the capacity to transform the area, not just for commuters, although that is important, but also in terms of inward travel. The choice in transport that will be offered to the whole region will be significant and will get people off the roads. An efficient, effective and fast system is what people want.

Deputy Imelda Munster: On a point of clarification, has the Minister a date for the delivery of the DART to Drogheda?

Deputy Shane Ross: It is meant to be done within the next ten years, or by 2027.

Chairman: I will correct the Minister on that.

Deputy Imelda Munster: The Minister has added a touch of reality.

Chairman: No, I am glad to say the Minister is wrong, so I will respectfully correct him. I have been on to the-----

Deputy Imelda Munster: Ten years is-----

Chairman: No, I will respectfully say that the Deputy is wrong as well. Hybrid diesel electric engines are being ordered. These do not require electrification to commence. I am told that they will be put into use immediately upon delivery, which should be a maximum of four years time. The ten-year cycle does not apply to the Drogheda extension.

Deputy Imelda Munster: I was just going by what the Minister said.

Chairman: He might clarify.

Deputy Imelda Munster: If the Chairman wants to contradict him, that is fair enough.

Chairman: He can clarify if he wants, but he cannot contradict me on this because I know what I am talking about.

Deputy Shane Ross: I bow to the Chairman's greater local knowledge.

Deputy Imelda Munster: We can expect the extension in four years.

Deputy Shane Ross: The Chairman is an optimist,-----

Deputy Imelda Munster: Yes.

Deputy Shane Ross: -----so I will join him in that optimism.

Chairman: No, I am not an optimist. I am factual. I would welcome it if the Minister got

confirmation, though, as that is what I have been told by the body that is charged with doing this job.

Deputy Imelda Munster: I would welcome that, too.

Deputy Shane Ross: Simultaneously.

Deputy Imelda Munster: Yes, please.

Chairman: There is no problem with that. The timeline will not be ten years. The extension will not take greater than four years. Deputies Murphy, O’Keeffe and Troy are next to ask questions.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: I have a number of questions on this programme. The introduction of the third Luas line has exposed a capacity constraint in the city centre in terms of the amount of surface space to be shared. A project that is not included in the national development plan is the DART underground. The Minister referred to how every part of the country was accessible, but the place that is probably the least accessible is the one where there is the greatest amount of public transport. As part of this meeting, we will be considering matters such as moving people into more sustainable types of public transport owing to potential fines, since transport is one of the main areas in respect of which those fines will be incurred. Is the Minister involved in any discussion on revising the plan or is there any scope for such a reconsideration in this year’s budget?

I asked questions about the rolling stock. The point of order to the point of delivery takes five years and I understand that there is nothing on order at the moment, although some rolling stock is being refurbished. To use the Maynooth line as an example, services that originate in Maynooth are standing room only even from the first train at 6.40 a.m. until it reaches Leixlip, which is the next stop. We can only move people onto sustainable forms of public transport if that transport is available. They would undoubtedly use it. Is there any scope with regard to orders regarding new rolling stock in the budget at which we are looking or will any be initiated?

In respect of the roads programme, I know some of the money goes to Transport Infrastructure Ireland and that is for national roads. Other funding comes from the local property tax. About ten local authorities are required to self fund from the local property tax. For example, Dublin funds entirely through the local property tax. It does not get a transfer from Transport Infrastructure Ireland. What account, if any, is taken in this budget of the local property tax in the figures that have been presented? Is that an additional amount? Given that this is being revisited, is the Minister accounting for the changes that might happen as a consequence of those changes and that might reduce the amount that is required to be self funded by some of the local authorities?

Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe: In respect of the roads budget, and I acknowledge there is an increase, does the Department factor in the exceptional weather such as that we experienced in the past number of months? The allocation that came in last January is as good as spent. There has been major infrastructural damage to our regional byroads. Does the Department provide any exceptional funding to sort out these roads and get them up to some safety standards? Otherwise, we will keep falling behind, as the Department has acknowledged. We are falling with regard to maintaining our roads because of funding. Does the Department make exceptional funding available because of the exceptional weather?

Chairman: Does Deputy Munster wish to add something?

Deputy Imelda Munster: We are not on roads as yet.

Chairman: Sorry, we are not.

Deputy Imelda Munster: The Chairman was trailing off there.

Chairman: My apologies. I was thinking of the DART actually. Deputy Munster will be first when we come to address roads. Did Deputy Munster wish to speak?

Deputy Imelda Munster: No, I will wait. I thought we were going through the schedule.

Chairman: My apologies. Does anybody else wish to comment on programme B?

Deputy Robert Troy: Are we not dealing with public expenditure B - land transport?

Chairman: That is what I thought.

Deputy Robert Troy: Is that not roads?

Chairman: It is. Deputy Munster was objecting to it.

Deputy Imelda Munster: No, it is my understanding that roads were further down. Is that the way the Chairman is doing it?

Deputy Robert Troy: But that is the Minister's speech, not the-----

Deputy Imelda Munster: What way is the Chairman going?

Chairman: I was letting Deputy O'Keeffe in until the Deputy objected. She will probably withdraw her objection.

Deputy Robert Troy: It is section B, land transport.

Deputy Imelda Munster: Fair enough, I will come back in.

Chairman: I did let Deputy O'Keeffe in and he did ask a proper question. Is Deputy Munster happy?

Deputy Imelda Munster: Yes, I thought we were doing them separately.

Chairman: Does Deputy Munster have a question on roads?

Deputy Imelda Munster: I will come back in when we go through the others.

Chairman: I have a question then.

Deputy Robert Troy: So do I.

Chairman: I will take Deputy Troy's question first.

Deputy Robert Troy: I understood we were doing it section by section.

Chairman: We are.

Deputy Robert Troy: I acknowledge the marginal increase this year with regard to funding under land transport. However, I have a number of concerns. Deputy O'Keeffe has already highlighted one that concerns the condition of our regional and county roads. We brought for-

ward a Private Members' motion in January 2018 to which the Minister undertook to reply and outline clearly how he and the Department intend to address the deficiencies highlighted in the review of our county and regional roads. The roads have got progressively worse with the bad weather over the past number of months. I acknowledge that the Minister cannot be blamed for the bad weather. I would not try to land blame on him where it is not merited but he is in a position to ensure that each local authority is adequately resourced to respond to that bad weather. Could he indicate when he will fulfill his commitment under the Private Members' motion and publish his reply and timeframe for the works to be completed?

Under documents to be published, I understand the Department is reviewing optimal land use in terms of settlement strategy. At what stage is that optimal land use review? The Minister identified a number of bottlenecks that would help address and give priority to buses and public transport. Have the various transport companies - Bus Éireann, Dublin Bus and Irish Rail from a signalling point of view - identified a list of works that could be completed that would alleviate bottlenecks, reduce journey time and increase the efficiency of the service? If so, where are those lists, who is adjudicating them, who is costing them and is there a timeframe for when work might commence?

In his contribution, the Minister mentioned cycling infrastructure. Unfortunately, during his term, the cycling infrastructure budget has almost halved. Perhaps I am missing it in the documents here. Is it the Minister's intention to reverse previous years' reductions in the cycling infrastructure budget? If so, how much does he intend to reverse it by? What is the 2018 figure?

Anyone looking in here today will acknowledge that there are plans for Metro North, BusConnects and new road investments but the simple fact is that I got a phone call yesterday morning from a friend of mine who lives in Dublin 8 who told me that at 8.30 a.m. two trams and three buses passed him by because they were chock-a-block. There is no capacity in our public transport services. With the best will in the world, as Deputy Catherine Murphy already alluded to, there is a five-year lead-in time for any new train to be ordered. The Minister has yet to say what he can do now to address overcrowding. Is there any commitment on his part to increase the number of buses? He constantly says that the number of new buses ordered by Dublin Bus is in the region of 100 or 112 - correct me if I am wrong - but in fact, he never allows for or acknowledges the fact that every year under the 12-year rule, a number of buses go out of service so the net increase in terms of the number of buses for Dublin Bus is in the low teens per annum at a time when the number of people using public transport is increasing steadily, which is to be welcomed. However, people will not continue to use it if it is not reliable and is overcrowded. Unfortunately, this is what is happening now. The longer trams have been delayed. Freedom of information requests I have submitted to the Department indicate that it was aware that there were potential technical difficulties with the longer trams but the Minister proceeded to roll them out. Now we have a situation where they have gone back to the manufacturers.

Has the Minister a timeframe as to when we can expect those longer trams to be back in operation?

Chairman: Deputy Troy has alluded to the question of increasing congestion and I accept what he said about trams, trains and buses. The Department needs a strategic plan for dealing with congestion to ensure work days do not get any longer than they have become. Delays for people commuting by car in Drogheda and east Meath, where I live, are increasing all the time and traffic speeds are being reduced. If one has to use the car, one has no alternative but to sit in longer queues. I know the metro has good proposals for strategic park-and-ride facilities around the Malahide estuary which would be hugely welcomed when they are in place. Is there

any way we could fast-track some of those proposals?

What plans has the Minister for dealing with congestion, longer commute days and people getting home late at night? When I use the M1 motorway, the average speed, even at 10 o'clock at night, is 100 km/h. People are in long traffic queues. I fear for the issue now unless we deal with it strategically. In the context of his Department's budget, how does the Minister plan to deal with this issue?

Deputy Imelda Munster: In 2016, a dire picture was predicted of a €3 billion deficit for our roads. How far behind are we now? What progress has been made? How much do we need to spend each year to counteract that deficit?

Is it correct that two of the major capital road programmes listed are public private partnership, PPP, projects? There are serious questions about the value for money from PPPs. What has the Minister done since coming into office to gauge what sort of value for money we are getting from PPPs? Has he conducted any analysis or does he intend to commission any reports on this matter? Will the two PPP projects in question be tolled roads?

The Minister has promised the public transport forum for quite some time. In fact, prior to Christmas, he said he hoped to schedule it for 4 March. We are now in mid-April but there is still no sign of it.

Recently, we saw the Minister outsource some Kildare bus routes. What further plans has he to outsource the public transport network? The Minister pretty much glossed over rural transport in his opening statement. He did not outline in detail what plans he has for public transport in rural areas, particularly in light of the drink-driving legislation which is coming forward. Will he give some detail on his plans for rural transport and how he proposes to improve it?

Deputy Shane Ross: On Deputy Catherine Murphy's question on the DART underground, the Phoenix Park tunnel rail link is the first step in this. It was envisaged as a kind of first step in the DART underground project. We do not anticipate going ahead with the DART underground in the immediate future.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: Is it excluded from the national development plan?

Deputy Shane Ross: Yes, it is. We do not anticipate going ahead with it on grounds of cost.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: That is mad.

Deputy Shane Ross: That is the decision taken. I do not anticipate making any representations on that this year.

Deputy Robert Troy: Is that a political decision?

Deputy Shane Ross: The National Transport Authority, NTA, actually advised on it. I would also have an input into it and I would take the decision at the end.

Deputy Robert Troy: Ultimately it is the Minister's position to direct policy. It is the job of the NTA to implement that policy. I am just trying ascertain the Minister's own position on this.

Deputy Shane Ross: My own position is that we will not be doing that at the moment. It

might be something which we might like to do but we cannot do it at the moment.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: Why is that the case?

Chairman: I appreciate this is an important issue and I do not want to interrupt members. The Minister has said he is accountable for the policy issue ultimately.

Deputy Shane Ross: Yes. While Deputy Catherine Murphy said it was not part of it, we get a great benefit from using the Phoenix Park tunnel link. It may be as great a benefit as we would get from using the DART underground at significant cost.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: The Phoenix Park tunnel was always regarded as a temporary measure. With speeds and so forth, it does not equate with a DART underground. We already have a problem with capacity on surface rail. Without using below-ground capacity, there will always be that constraint.

I was a member of the Dublin transportation initiative in the early 1990s when a suite of measures was deemed necessary to make the city capable of functioning. The reason European funding was provided at the time under a particular programme was because Dublin was underperforming due to congestion. For example, Luas, metro and the DART underground proposals were all critical components in making the city function. The investment in the railways was from the 19th century where they are all disconnected from each other. The 20th century required pulling them together. We failed to do that in the 20th century and we are now going to fail to do it in the 21st century.

I was in Berlin recently, a city with a population of 4.5 million, a much larger population than Dublin, and did not see one traffic jam. It is because it has a network and not bits and pieces of a network. The DART underground is that critical missing piece for Dublin. I have to take issue with the Phoenix Park tunnel being equated with a substitute for DART underground. It simply is not. There is no understanding of the requirement of making this capital city work. The city and the region cannot work without that piece of the network. The ever longer traffic jams on the M1, the M4 and the M7, as pointed out by the Chairman, are a consequence of not having a proper public transport system in Dublin city.

The Minister has made a political decision on it and it is not part of the ten-year strategy. It is a disgrace that it is not. I accept the Minister's point that he is not going to do anything about that this year, but I disagree that that is the way to go.

Deputy Shane Ross: It will not happen within ten years. That decision has been made. The route will be protected, but there is no intention to build it within that period. It is a matter of costs.

I was also in Berlin recently and agree with what the Deputy said, but she will find that that city was originally intended for a greater number of people than 4.5 million. That is one of the reasons she found it like that. We have a situation which is antediluvian and ancient and have to tackle it as best we can. The rail link is one of the ways to do so. It is a first step, but the cost, with the tunnel included, is approximately €4 billion. That is money we simply do not have.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: I would not expect us to have money like that in the short term-----

Deputy Shane Ross: Sure.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: -----but this is infrastructure one would build for future generations. Some of the tunnels used as part of the London Underground are almost Victorian. It would be a long-term investment. Was the business case revisited? Is it even possible to revisit it? Did the Minister examine it in the context of the national development plan and was such an investment in such infrastructure possible in the long term?

Deputy Shane Ross: There is a cost benefit analysis for the DART expansion project and it is constantly under review. There was a decision that this kind of money was simply not available. It is a vision, one I would share with the Deputy, but if I were to make a commitment to do it, I would be telling her an untruth.

Chairman: Perhaps we might hold a special meeting of the committee to deal with the issue of congestion in the city and bring in the key players to talk about it.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: And also to look at the business case.

Chairman: Absolutely. That is critical. Another matter dealt with in the national development plan is resignalling in the city.

Deputy Shane Ross: What did the Chairman say?

Chairman: I mentioned resignalling and increasing capacity in places such as Connolly Station. That is key.

Deputy Shane Ross: Yes.

Chairman: There would be 20 or more trains per hour, as opposed to the eight or nine that can now operate. There is the question of throughput. If that bottleneck could be removed, we could have better connectivity, but not having it now is a significant issue. Taking account of the totality of all of the plans, it would be useful for the committee at its next official meeting to have the issue of congestion at the top of its agenda, starting with the rail and road transport network in the city and the length of commutes and trying to shorten them, as family life suffers hugely as a result. Commuters are sitting in traffic queues.

I will let the Minister finish his point.

Deputy Shane Ross: In response to Deputy Catherine Murphy, we will have to agree to disagree. It will not happen in the short term. Twenty-eight carriages have been refurbished. The Deputy asked about rolling stock for use in 2019. New trains will be ordered when the expansion of the DART takes place.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: I received a reply from the National Transport Authority in January last year. It stated that in the case of heavy rail, the National Transport Authority and Irish Rail were in discussions on a fleet strategy for the overall rail network, that the exact details of the fleet strategy were expected to be agreed to in the following months and that it was expected to commence the procurement process for the new fleet during 2018. Presumably, that has all been agreed to. What is the strategy and the amount of money for the ordering of the new fleet in 2018? I understand there is refurbished rolling stock available. It is welcome that we will have new rolling stock, even if it is refurbished, but there is no doubt that new trains need to be ordered. I presume they will not have to be paid for upfront and can be paid for on an incremental basis. What is in the budget in that regard? What fleet strategy was decided or has ordering commenced?

Deputy Shane Ross: As I said, 28 carriages have been refurbished. I will give the Deputy a note. It is an operational matter for the NTA, but I can provide the Deputy with the details.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: It is a budgetary issue.

Deputy Shane Ross: Yes. I will provide the Deputy with a note from the NTA on what it is going to do.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: What is in the budget for the ordering of new trains?

Deputy Shane Ross: Budget 2018 provided for a four-year capital envelope for public transport of over €2.7 billion to 2021. It includes over €400 million for investment in public transport in 2018. The increased funding will allow for the roll-out of a number of key programmes to address congestion and emerging capacity constraints on the public transport system across the cities. I can give the Deputy a more detailed note, if she wants.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: I thought we were going to be given some of the details in the context of the budget. I would like to know how much a train would cost and the amount included in the budget for such expenditure. It is welcome that there is an increased budget and that there is money available to buy rolling stock, buses and all the rest, but we need to know exactly what is included in the budget in order that we can do our work and know exactly what is likely to be funded. There is a five-year lean-in period in the ordering of trains. We need to know if some of the money is provided for in this year's budget and the orders have been made.

Deputy Shane Ross: As the Deputy probably knows, there is the provision of €210 million for heavy rail safety and development in 2018.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: Does it include rolling stock?

Deputy Shane Ross: I will provide the Deputy with the details. I can give her some of the details of the DART expansion outline programme, but she is looking for a great amount of detail which will have to be obtained from the NTA. I cannot give her the details of the amounts of money provided, but I can give her a summary of the programme. In the second quarter of this year there will be the appointment of a specialist advisory team for fleet acquisition. In the fourth quarter there will be the commencement of a diesel electric fleet tender competition. There will be the award of a contract for a new diesel electric fleet in the third and fourth quarters of next year and there will be the commencement of the delivery of the new fleet in 2022.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: I would welcome receiving a note on the matter. Having been a member of the Committee of Public Accounts for many years and forensically examined matters, in his ministerial role, I would not have expected the NTA to come to the Minister with a global figure but would have stated the amount it wanted. I would have expected the Minister to have taken the approach of asking what he would get for it, whether he would get good value for money for it and when he would get delivery? Is that the type of engagement that happens with Transport Infrastructure Ireland or the NTA on the detail?

Deputy Shane Ross: The NTA goes through the full details with my officials.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: With the Minister.

Deputy Shane Ross: With me, as required.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: Does the Minister know what we will be getting?

Deputy Shane Ross: I have regular meetings with them.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: I do not understand why the Minister cannot give us a flavour of it. I would have thought it would be a big selling point to say we were ordering X number of trains, bearing in mind that people are being crucified by congestion.

Chairman: The Minister read the details in response to an earlier question. They conform to my knowledge. I hope he will have the hybrid diesel electric trains in service by 2022. That is hugely important, as it will be transformational in passengers travelling to and from places such as Drogheda. Approximately 1,200 passengers per day use the rail service between Drogheda and Dublin. As each of the trains will carry at least 1,000 passengers, there is no doubt that there will be a huge transformational effect on the commuter network. I acknowledge the Minister is fast-tracking this so we do not have to wait ten years for electrification.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: It should all be fast-tracked.

Chairman: It is hugely important and that is what the Government is doing.

Deputy Robert Troy: With respect, what is being said here today is that with the best will in the world and everything going to plan, no new trains will be ordered until the fourth quarter of 2019.

Deputy Shane Ross: Let me say that 2022 is when they will commence. The Chairman realises that.

Chairman: That is when they will start.

Deputy Shane Ross: Yes.

Chairman: It is not in ten years' time; it is as soon as they arrive.

Deputy Shane Ross: It will go on. The intention is to commence them in 2022.

Deputy Robert Troy: How many will commence in 2022?

Deputy Shane Ross: Deputy Catherine Murphy is saying I am not providing her with detail. I said there would be 28 carriages refurbished for use in 2019. Is that not what the Deputy wants to hear?

Deputy Catherine Murphy: I want to hear about the new trains that are to be ordered. I received a reply in January 2017 about the new fleet strategy. What is the fleet strategy? How much is in the budget this year for the fleet strategy? I knew about the 28 carriages last year. I got a reply, which I appreciated, but what is done this year, to which the Minister has just alluded, has an impact on what happens in five years' time, for example, if it will take time for orders to be placed.

Chairman: The problem when the trains are ordered, because hybrid diesel trains are new trains, is they have to be constructed to our specification. That is why it will take that length of time.

Deputy Robert Troy: If we ordered them now we would have them two years sooner.

Chairman: The whole thing is in play.

Deputy Shane Ross: There will be 300 trains ordered for delivery starting in 2022.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: Starting in 2022.

Deputy Shane Ross: Yes. That is a lot of trains and a lot of money. It is a very big commitment. The Deputy cannot expect me to say I will order trains tomorrow on a whim.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: No.

Deputy Shane Ross: This has to be done on a graduated basis.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: That is why I asked the question last year and why I am following through on it this year.

Deputy Shane Ross: I will give the Deputy further detail on it if she wants it. It is a good news story but Deputy Catherine Murphy does not seem to be very interested in a very good news story. She seems to be interested in a very bad news story.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: No, I am not-----

Chairman: In fairness to Deputy Catherine Murphy, she is entitled to ask these questions-----

Deputy Shane Ross: That is right.

Chairman: -----and she is entitled to get the answers today.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: When the Minister says it will commence in 2022, does that mean the trains will be here in 2022 or he will begin ordering them in 2022?

Deputy Shane Ross: They will be here.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: Is that 300 trains?

Deputy Shane Ross: Three hundred have been ordered to start in 2022. They will be here.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: All 300?

Deputy Shane Ross: I do not know whether all 300 will be, but the intention is to start that programme in 2022.

Chairman: Deputy Danny Healy-Rae has been waiting. We are discussing programme B.

Deputy Robert Troy: I do not mean to be rude to Deputy Danny Healy-Rae but perhaps the Minister could finish answering our questions and then bring in the Deputy.

Chairman: I do not mind, if Deputy Danny Healy-Rae is happy to wait.

Deputy Robert Troy: The Minister has started to answer the questions.

Chairman: The Minister is answering the questions.

Deputy Shane Ross: Deputy O'Keefe asked about exceptional funding for local roads. The situation is that virtually every local authority is in a similar situation to the one referred to by Deputy O'Keefe. As a result of Storm Emma and Storm Ophelia, they are feeling the pinch.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: My question is relevant here and the Minister could answer it at the same time.

Deputy Shane Ross: I am quite happy to take the Deputy's question now.

Chairman: Every Member of the Oireachtas is entitled to ask questions. If Deputy Danny Healy-Rae wishes to ask a question now I do not have a problem with it. Other questions have been asked. We are answering questions. The Minister is not finished. I think it is appropriate.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: My question is related to what the Minister-----

Chairman: It is appropriate for Deputy Danny Healy-Rae to ask his question.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: It was good to hear the Minister talking about trains and rail services but the people of County Kerry do not have many trains, apart from the one from Killarney to Mallow. For the most part they are reliant on cars and motor vehicles to take them around the county and to bring them in and out of it. In the last number of months, the ponding of water has become a serious problem on county, regional and national secondary roads and even on the national primary road at Glenflesk. Does the Minister have contingency or emergency plans to deal with the ponding of water? It is a serious issue affecting the health and safety of people who travel on our roads. It is a severe risk. Many of the inlets where the water should be going are closed up. I ask the Minister to liaise with the local authorities - we have been asking them and it appears they do not have the funding - with a view to giving them more funding to specifically deal with the problem of the ponding of water on the sides of our roads. Cars have to swerve out but if there is a car coming against them they cannot do that. It means they drive into a pool of water, it goes over the roof of the car and they cannot see where they are. They are hitting ditches and it is a problem at present. It is a fine day in Dublin today and it was a fine day here yesterday but it poured out of the heavens in Kerry yesterday and it is pouring out of the heavens in Kerry again today. It is like we are in two different worlds. There is a serious problem down there.

I apologise to Deputies Troy and O'Keeffe. I realise it is mostly the same question.

Chairman: The question was very clear.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I thank the Chairman for allowing me to ask my question.

Chairman: I thank Deputy Danny Healy-Rae for being so brief.

Deputy Shane Ross: A new drainage grant of €10 million has been given by the Department, which should address the problems the Deputy is talking about.

To answer Deputy O'Keeffe, and in anticipation of what everybody else may quite rightly and understandably ask about as a result of the problems in their local areas brought about by the storms, everybody received their allocation at the end of January. That allocation was a largely increased allocation. It was a substantially increased allocation for local roads. It was accompanied by a clear message to local authorities that they should provide their own contingency fund in the event of exceptional damage of this sort. That was made absolutely clear to them at the time and that remains the situation. There obviously will be forms to fill in. They can apply clean-up charges, which I gather they are doing at the moment, and they are receiving them. There are no plans for any extra funds to be provided as a result of the storm damage in Storm Emma because of the stipulation that was made at the time that they should make their

own contingencies and because there were large increases.

Deputy Troy asked about the clean-up costs. Local authorities could certainly apply for clean-up costs and I gather a large number of them have done so. They will get a response from my Department in due course.

Deputy Troy also asked about cycling infrastructure and said the budget has been halved. The intention is to increase the budget on cycling infrastructure over four years and to treble it. That was made absolutely clear. More than €100 million - I think it was €110 million - was provided for new urban cycling and walking routes in the greater Dublin area and in the Galway, Limerick, Cork and Waterford city areas, which will provide additional and sustainable travel options to complement increased capacity and faster, higher quality public transport in our main cities. In previous years, the greenways provided the bulk of the cycling infrastructure. We separated greenways and increased their funding in the current budget and in the years ahead. We have provided a large amount of money - I think it is €56 million - for greenways in the coming three years. That is a commitment which is part of the cycling infrastructure and one which I think the Deputy will welcome. I think the Deputy is wrong on that issue. There is a massive commitment to cycling infrastructure which will continue.

Deputy Robert Troy: I am sorry to interrupt but a lot of the Minister's answers this morning are like a copy and paste from the Ireland 2040 document. He is outlining the Department's aspirations over a longer period of time. While a lot of those aspirations and commitments are welcome like Deputy Murphy, I am interested in the here and now, in this year. I am merely seeking the figure for 2018 for the cycling infrastructure fund. I ask the Minister to provide that figure because his reply to a parliamentary question differs from what he is saying today. He is either wrong today or the reply to the parliamentary question was wrong. The funding for cycling infrastructure decreased by approximately 50% over the last two years. What will the increase be for 2018?

In terms of the technical issues with the longer trams, the bottlenecks have been identified. I would appreciate it if the Minister would stick to the specific questions that I have asked today.

Deputy Shane Ross: Let me take the figure. I think Deputy Troy is working with the €3 million figure. I have actually allocated €8 million for 2018. The figure is massively increased because we recognise the importance of this.

Deputy Robert Troy: The 2018 figure for cycling is €8 million. Can I take that as a given?

Deputy Shane Ross: That is correct, absolutely and the Deputy should not doubt the commitment to cycling. It is taking a huge step forward, not just in this but in greenways and in other areas as well. The Deputy has seen the Stayin' Alive at 1.5 campaign and has been a great supporter of it. It is important that it is recognised that the Government is behind cycling infrastructure, safety for cyclists and other cycling measures which we are taking and are going to pursue. The greenways will not only attract tourists, they will also be useful in terms of reducing pollution and traffic congestion in towns and villages.

The Deputy has asked what we are doing now. The thrust of Government policy on congestion is long term; it has to be long term. The long-term aim is to get people out of their cars but we are not going to get people out of their cars overnight, just like that. We will do it using a multifaceted approach which includes increased investment in public transport, cycling and walking and in other areas. We need to do this, not just because of congestion but for many

reasons, including health. Some of these projects are moving faster than others, of course. The Luas cross-city and green line extension means that the Luas will accommodate an extra 10 million journeys per annum. That is immediate and is happening now. It has been a massive success to such an extent that there has been overcrowding on the trams. That is something that should be acknowledged. Passenger numbers on the green line have increased by 28% and that is obviously taking a lot of people off the roads. The numbers are much larger than expected and we welcome that. The teething problems to which one of the speakers alluded are being resolved and the Luas will continue to keep those people off the roads. The BusConnects programme will be starting next year, which is a very exciting and modern form of public transport. It will be comfortable, efficient and fast and will be effective in taking people off the roads, as will the DART expansion and MetroLink. I am not going to be able to get people off the roads in the morning and I have never said that. However, we are attacking this problem in both the short and long term in a way which will resolve it over the medium term. That is the way it is going to be done but Deputies cannot ask me to say “tomorrow, this will happen”. It will not happen. There are increasing numbers but it is going to happen in the long term. The plans are laid out very clearly as to how that is going to be done. It is going to be very effective and that is what the national development plan is all about.

Deputy Robert Troy: With all due respect, I have read the plan for 2040. I have read about BusConnects and I know what is promised. I asked specific questions this morning in relation to the bottlenecks and the pinch points identified by Bus Éireann and Dublin Bus. Is the Minister aware of them, have they been costed and when can they be implemented? That would help with congestion here and now. I also asked a question about the longer trams. The reply to the freedom of information request that I submitted indicated that the Department was aware of the technical issues but proceeded to roll them out anyway. The longer trams are now off the tracks. When will they be back in use?

When will the Department’s policy paper on optimal land be published? Finally, in February a private members’ motion was unanimously supported in the Dáil and at that stage the Minister said that he would come back to the House with a clear timeframe for addressing the inadequacies in our regional and county roads. When can we expect that? These are all very clear, specific questions and with all due respect, I do not need the Minister to read out national policy documents that I have already read.

Deputy Shane Ross: The plan will be published at the end of May. The Deputy referred to the detailed pinch points but that is a matter for the NTA. It is an operational matter and not one in which the Minister can get involved.

Deputy Robert Troy: Yes, but more funding will be required to identify them.

Deputy Shane Ross: Of course it will, but funding is given to the NTA and it has discretion on various things like that.

Deputy Robert Troy: Has the NTA made an application for funding?

Deputy Shane Ross: It will probably come out of its general funding. Surely the Deputy does not expect me to say “do this, that, there, everywhere” -----

Deputy Robert Troy: No, I do not.

Deputy Shane Ross: -----on a daily basis and I am not going to be doing that. It is the job of the NTA, TII and others to identify and remedy the pinch points.

The Deputy is absolutely right that the longer trams were delayed but they will all be in operation by the end of May of this year. The Deputy is also absolutely right about the overcrowding issue. The overcrowding was very bad on the Luas for a certain amount of time. There were problems with the trams. Some trams had to be moved from the red line onto the green line to sort out the overcrowding and it has now been relieved enormously. There were also one or two technical problems which will be resolved shortly. The longer trams and the new timetables will be operational from 21 May, as far as I recall. It will all be in order at the end of May.

The plan to which the Deputy referred will be published at the end of this year.

Deputy Robert Troy: Is the Minister referring to the optimal land use paper?

Deputy Shane Ross: Yes.

Deputy Robert Troy: Was it wise to publish the Department's long-term strategy for investment in public transport in advance of knowing the optimal land use? Surely one would feed into the other? The Minister has prioritised investment in public transport infrastructure for the next decade but his Department does not yet know what is the optimal use for land and will not know until the end of this year.

Deputy Shane Ross: We fed into the spatial strategy. If I had not published any long-term strategy, the Deputy would have been asking me why it was so delayed.

Deputy Robert Troy: One would imagine that the optimal land use policy would be done before investing in public transport.

Deputy Shane Ross: I thought the intention was to breathe into the spatial strategy, which is what we did.

Chairman: The spatial strategy is reviewed every five years. In other words, it is the broad brush stroke in the spatial strategy, while the day-to-day spending is dictated by the issues to which Deputy Robert Troy refers.

Deputy Shane Ross: Deputy Imelda Munster asked about value for money. The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform has commissioned a review which will probably be published at the end of the year. In referring to outside the public transport network I take it the Deputy is again talking about privatisation. We have made clear what we have done in putting routes out to tender and have the results. As far as I know, there is a 10% ceiling. I have no intention of going any further, nor have I received representations to do so. No one in government has ever mentioned it to me as a proposition that we should adopt a policy of outsourcing and that is not the plan. The plan is to limit it but to have competition in the market. A figure of no more than 10% is intended.

I have a note on rural transport. In the context of the drink driving Bill I asked the NTA to carry out a review and it is to introduce some pilot schemes to test matters. It has put a budget to one side to implement it. We intend to address the question of isolation by seeing whether these pilot schemes work, are used and make an impact on what is a serious problem. I do not accept that it is related to the drink driving Bill, but we are going to do it because we accept that it is a problem to the remedying of which the NTA and the Department may be able to make a contribution.

Deputy Imelda Munster: I thank the Minister. Will he elaborate on the types of pilot scheme envisaged and the amount of money allowed for in the budget?

Deputy Shane Ross: It is in its infancy. I am not delaying it. The NTA has looked for expressions of interest which are coming in. It will take a couple of months more before it happens. It is not something on which we are delaying or procrastinating. We will go ahead with it. It is a promise I made and we are doing it.

Deputy Imelda Munster: The Minister does not have a timeframe, as such.

Deputy Shane Ross: No. There is a budget attached to it and the NTA is progressing it. It has not been stalled.

Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe: Would it not be wise to put the pilot projects in place before bringing in these draconian laws?

Deputy Shane Ross: The intent is to bring them in as soon as possible. That is why we are running them in parallel with what is happening. Neither is contingent on the other. Rural isolation is a problem which I fully acknowledge fully and is so independent of what the Deputy calls “draconian laws”. It is a problem we want to acknowledge and we will go along with both measures in parallel, if necessary. They are both going to happen.

Deputy Imelda Munster: On the public transport forum, the Minister originally set 4 March as the date.

Deputy Shane Ross: The only reason the public transport forum has not taken place is that there have been continuous industrial problems. There is a ballot today. If it is successful in bringing the sides together or getting agreement, there will not be any industrial dispute. It is my intention, the moment we have that window, to have the letters ready to go out. We have had them ready several times. We will then have the forum. We have had a few false starts where we had actually been ready to hold the forum and had the location but there was then an industrial dispute.

Chairman: Will the Minister invite the committee, if he can?

Deputy Shane Ross: Certainly. Of course, all members will be invited because it is important that the stakeholders and all those interested in this problem be there. I assure Deputy Imelda Munster that the moment we have that window, we will have the forum.

Deputy Imelda Munster: I refer to the two PPP projects mentioned in the list of capital works included in the Minister’s opening statement. Will those roads be tolled?

Deputy Shane Ross: I do not think so. They will not be.

Deputy Imelda Munster: The Minister said a report would be published by the end of the year, but will he wait for its findings before he commissions any other PPP? What would be the point in carrying out the review and reporting on it otherwise?

Deputy Shane Ross: I will not make a promise in that regard, but I see a logic in what the Deputy is saying.

Deputy Imelda Munster: What would be the logic in not doing so?

Deputy Shane Ross: That is why I say I see the logic.

Deputy Imelda Munster: Why would the Minister not make a commitment if that is so?

Deputy Shane Ross: I do not want to have any hostage to fortune in case there is something in the pipeline. There is no immediate PPP of which I know in the pipeline.

Deputy Imelda Munster: Will the Minister double check and revert to me?

Deputy Shane Ross: I will.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: I asked about the funding of roads and whether the self-funding element of the local property tax was in addition to or included in the amounts about which we were talking.

Deputy Shane Ross: It is in addition.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: On the review in that regard, it is likely that the self-funding element will be impacted on. I presume the impact of the review will be felt in 2019, not 2018, but has it been factored into any change in funding roads, in particular local and regional roads?

Deputy Shane Ross: We will give it full consideration, but I do not want to anticipate what the results of the review will be.

Deputy Imelda Munster: On that point, I have asked the Minister about the deficit of €3 billion identified in 2016 and where we are now. What is the deficit?

Deputy Shane Ross: It is €4.5 billion.

Chairman: I am anxious to move on. We have been discussing this issue for a while and everyone has had an opportunity to ask questions.

Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe: We welcome the Ireland 2040 programme and any capital investment project. We are delighted with programmes where contracts have commenced, for example, the Naas bypass and the Dunkettle interchange project. However, I ask whether the contractors are working within budget constraints. I have passed the Naas bypass project every week for the past couple of months and grave diggers would move quicker. I am being serious. One sees more workers working on an apartment project in Dublin. The contracts need to be increased. There should be more machinery on the ground and engaged in site works, otherwise it will take forever to complete the project. Are the contractors working within budget constraints or a timeframe? The projects should be moving quicker.

Deputy Shane Ross: I do not know the answer, but I assume they are. If the Deputy has specific complaints or observations to make, I ask him to send them to me and I will forward them to the appropriate authority. I would be delighted to do so. I presume they are and would be very surprised if they were not. Deputy O’Keeffe is saying the contractors do not seem to be going fast enough or working hard enough.

Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe: Those in place are working hard but for a contract of that size I would have thought more people would be on-site and more machinery would be on-site for the project to work.

Deputy Shane Ross: I do not know the specific project the Deputy is referring to.

Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe: The project in Naas is one example.

Deputy Shane Ross: I think that one is on programme and within budget. I do not see any reason for alarm or concern if it is on programme and within budget, which it is at the moment.

Chairman: It might be helpful if we get a note from the contractor, the National Transport Authority or whoever is dealing with it.

Deputy Shane Ross: You could refer that to the NTA yourself, Chairman.

Chairman: I could do it on behalf of the committee. It is a reasonable query.

Deputy Shane Ross: The works have to be done in a safe and orderly manner as per the agreement. I am not the judge of whether the contractors are doing that or otherwise but there are people who can judge it.

Chairman: It is a legitimate observation from Deputy O’Keeffe.

Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe: The Government could go out at the next election, turn the sod on every project around the country and say the works are at the Government’s behest, but when will they be done?

Deputy Shane Ross: It is on programme and within budget. Deputy O’Keeffe’s observations are entertaining and interesting.

Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe: I am serious.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: It is relevant for many of my constituents. I would withdraw the word “entertaining” because of the disruption caused. Some of that disruption is a consequence of our doing things at crisis point, which is the case at present. If a route features every day on “AA Roadwatch”, the likelihood of it featuring in a future capital programme is higher. That was the case with the Dunkettle roundabout and areas of traffic congestion that have been dominant up to now. I imagine provisions are built into the contract such that if the contractor loses a lane there are penalty clauses and so on. Given the amount of traffic on the route it is inevitable that there would be major disruption, and there is.

Deputy Shane Ross: It is a live network.

Chairman: We will get the update on that point.

We will move on to programme C. Programme C relates to maritime transport and safety. Do members wish to raise questions on maritime transport and safety?

Deputy Robert Troy: I notice there is a small increase in the allocation for maritime and the Irish Coast Guard. I submitted a number of parliamentary questions recently to which the Minister replied. The replies indicated that of the 58 Irish Coast Guard stations only 26 have running water, bathroom and Internet facilities. A total of 12 units have running water, bathroom and no Internet. One building unit has running water but no bathroom or Internet. The 19 remaining buildings have no bathroom running water or Internet facilities. What plans does the Minister have to ensure that the people who work in the Irish Coast Guard can expect at a minimum to have basic sanitary services in their facilities and basic services for Internet, including adequate connection?

They are structural facilities needed by the people operating in the Coast Guard. Is the Minister satisfied that all equipment being used by the personnel working in the Coast Guard

is up to best international standard? Is the Minister satisfied that there is no issue in terms of resources to ensure that all equipment has been tested and is up to international standard?

Deputy Catherine Murphy: I have a question on this year's budget. We are acutely aware of the changing political dynamic with Brexit. The maritime sector could end up being a significant aspect for our exports, for example, maritime administration. Are contingency plans being considered in respect of scaling up some of the ports?

I understand Rosslare Europort did not feature in the national development plan. It strikes me as something that should be kept under review in the context of Brexit. Is there anything in the budget specifically under maritime to provide for any contingency or how we might make changes more quickly than planned, if necessary?

Deputy Shane Ross: The Irish Coast Guard division in my Department has 45 units based in 58 Coast Guard stations. The Coast Guard building programme makes provision for works to commence in new stations houses for Coast Guard units. At present several units operate from owner-occupied houses. These buildings have long been identified as being in need of more suitable facilities. Our problem is being addressed probably because funding is up for the Coast Guard stations and for this particular area.

I do not want to say too much about anything that is likely to be sensitive, which might be the case in view of investigations going on. I do not want to go anywhere near that. However, we are certainly providing whatever funds are necessary.

Chairman: I think it would be helpful if we get a list of what improvements are being made.

Deputy Shane Ross: I can certainly do that.

Chairman: That would help.

Deputy Shane Ross: I simply do not want to get into any area that might be problematic.

Chairman: No one is asking you to do that, Minister.

Do members wish to break or continue? We will continue.

Deputy Shane Ross: Deputy Murphy is right on the issue of Brexit. The ports are going to be affected one way or the other. Contingency plans have been made for virtually all possible events that we can consider.

Committee members will be aware of the figures. Dublin Port is extraordinarily dependent on the British market, to the tune of 60%. Contingency plans are in place, although contingency budgets are not yet set out. It is fair to say that all manner of alternative scenarios are being painted. I was in Rosslare Europort last week. Certainly, the port there might even benefit. There is a possibility that the port in that geographic position may benefit since we do not know exactly what the movement will be. Although a land bridge may be vulnerable, we might find more hauliers and trade going through Rosslare port as a result of Brexit. We simply do not know, but those involved are certainly making preparations for Brexit and looking at the possible advantages as well as the disadvantages.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: There is a problem with the road network.

Deputy Shane Ross: It is not good.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: It is not. I was surprised given the context of what is happening that the network did not feature in the national development plan. I think the Minister is right to say that there could be an opportunity but we have to help that opportunity.

Is there any scope or discussion at European level for funding to assist in this particular area? Has the Minister been party to such a discussion?

Deputy Shane Ross: I have not been party to it, but I presume that, as the Deputy will be aware, there is scope for funds from Europe for various ports. We want to encourage people to consider those opportunities, not just Euroports, but for other ports as well. We are discussing Shannon Foynes and other places. I will be attending an event in Shannon Foynes next month that is aimed at encouraging ports to seek European funding.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: It is the ports themselves that have to do it as opposed to the Government.

Deputy Shane Ross: Yes.

Chairman: Will we move on to the next programme?

Deputy Robert Troy: No, I asked a question.

Chairman: Yes. While the Deputy was outside, we got an answer to part of it. The Minister undertook to give a list of improvements to Coast Guard stations that were planned for this year.

Deputy Robert Troy: Is the Minister satisfied that adequate resources are being put in place so as to ensure that improvements are carried out this year at those stations that need them? My point about the equipment used by the Coast Guard was-----

Chairman: Whether it is fit for purpose.

Deputy Robert Troy: In light of the awful tragedy involving the loss of four lives, the first anniversary of which was recently commemorated, has there been a review of the equipment that the Coast Guard is using and is the Minister satisfied that all of its equipment is fit for purpose and up to international standards?

My final point relates to Deputy Murphy's comments on ports and Brexit. The Minister stated that he had visited Rosslare Europort a week ago and referred to its potential. I share his sentiments, in that Brexit may possess significant potential for the port. I am wondering about something in the context of its funding, though. The rail line to the port generates in the region of €2 million per annum, which is absorbed by CIÉ into its central funding. I submitted a parliamentary question on this matter. A motion was passed unanimously by Wexford County Council calling for the structure to be examined with a view to Rosslare Europort retaining that funding and using it to extract even greater funding. The Minister mentioned how European funding was becoming available and that each port would have to apply for that itself. He has received correspondence on this matter. If he does not mind, would he share his thoughts on it?

Deputy Shane Ross: Rosslare Europort is a strange animal because of its historic ownership and operation and the fact that Iarnród Éireann receives funds from it. There is a good case for examining how the structure might be more beneficial to the port, whether efficiencies could be made and whether opportunities present. When I was in Rosslare, I was struck by how we had a port that could take more advantage of events like Brexit. It was my first visit to the port. I received some particularly enterprising suggestions, which should be examined in a more

forensic way than I could do in half an hour at a meeting. There are possibilities that might not have been examined. Perhaps some of the structure, template and model could be altered and improved. I do not want to say much more than that, but the Deputy understands what I mean. I am not in any way suggesting that the port should be reduced in size. Rather, if there are opportunities, it might be good for the region and the people who live in the locality. What the Deputy has said is constructive. He is kicking an open door as far as I am concerned, but my knowledge of the matter is only a week old. This prospect should be considered seriously.

Regarding Coast Guard equipment, I want to be careful in what I say. As the Deputy probably knows, the Department has been asked in the interim report to carry out a full review of search and rescue, SAR, operations. We have already set the terms of reference for that and we are going full speed ahead. I hope for it to come to a conclusion before the summer recess.

Deputy Robert Troy: I genuinely appreciate how restricted the Minister is in what he can say about an ongoing investigation, but what happened in the past does not absolve the Department or any of us from needing to ensure that an audit has been conducted so that the equipment used by people working in the Coast Guard has been tested and found to be fit for purpose. I will not ask the Minister to comment on previous events, but surely the Department has conducted an audit within the past 12 months and satisfied itself that everything was fit for purpose.

Chairman: A safety audit.

Deputy Robert Troy: Yes.

Deputy Shane Ross: I am satisfied that the equipment is audited properly.

Chairman: We will move on.

Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe: Regarding the Minister’s comments on our ports’ capabilities post Brexit, should Brexit happen, is he aware that our ports’ handling facilities are under severe pressure because of the fodder crisis? I have been made aware of many merchants trying to import feedstuffs, be they corn gluten feed or distillers grain. Due to excess demand, though, the ports are not in a position to handle the imports. Their facilities do not have the capacity to enable more feedstuffs to be imported. I am not referring to Rosslare and bales, but feedstuffs. Our ports are under pressure trying to handle the extra feed volumes. Since Brexit will also see extra usage, is the Minister sure that the ports will have operational capacity post Brexit?

Deputy Shane Ross: Yes. The problems that we face with Britain leaving the customs union are delays at the ports, difficulties in getting products in and out as speedily as possible and problems with tariffs, but I have not anticipated a problem of capacity as a result of Brexit.

Chairman: We will move on to programme D, sports and recreational services. Deputies Troy and Murphy have indicated.

Deputy Robert Troy: I have a number of quick questions to ask. Under the grant for sporting bodies and the provision for sports and recreational facilities part-funded by the national lottery, there is a decrease from the 2017 figure. Why is that? Various bodies from minority sports appeared before the committee. Deputy O’Keeffe arranged that with the Chairman recently. They do not like their sports to be referred to as “minority sports”, but they are sports with fewer participants than others. The bodies are finding it difficult to fund development officers and keep their sports going at an operational level due to a lack of State support. Does the Minister have any plans to look at how smaller sporting bodies will be funded into the future?

I think there is a sporting policy under review in his Department. When will it be published?

Regarding the large-scale capital grants that the Minister's Department will, I hope, administer this year, the timeframe as to when that application process will open changes depending on the parliamentary question response I read. It was to be opened early this year. The most recent PQ reply stated it would be open within a matter of months. It should be borne in mind that places such as the RDS are looking at redeveloping. There are others that do not come to mind at present but there are sporting bodies that are planning their long-term investment in their infrastructure and that need to know the timeframe as to when they can submit an application and how long the application process will take to be adjudicated on. The Minister has identified the overall envelope of funding, but again he has done so on a multi-annual basis. What funding will be available for major capital projects for 2018, and when exactly does the Minister intend to open the application process for that?

Deputy Shane Ross: Does the Chairman want me to go ahead with those questions?

Chairman: I call Deputy Catherine Murphy. I have a nice question for the Minister as well.

Deputy Shane Ross: Does the Chairman want me to respond to Deputy Troy first?

Chairman: I am just conscious of the time.

Deputy Shane Ross: Never mind.

Chairman: Whatever. I am easy. Perhaps we could take all the questions together.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: I am okay with allowing the Minister to reply first if that is-----

Chairman: There is no problem.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: I wish to focus in particular on swimming pools, to which the Minister referred in his statement. I use every opportunity to raise the matter. The Minister said in his statement, "The capital envelope for sport also provides €4 million to meet all existing commitments under the local authority swimming pool programme." The original local authority swimming pool programme opened in about the year 2000. I know in many cases swimming pools have been completed, but many others were on the list but did not commence or the work on them was not completed. The programme opened again in a very limited way and there were applications from three areas that fell within the criteria, and two of the applications were included. The one that did not meet the criteria, unfortunately, was the one in north Kildare, and that was because of a fault on the Kildare side. The object is to get one swimming pool per every 50,000 people. My understanding is that that is roughly the standard. In Kildare there is one swimming pool for 110,000 people and there is no public swimming pool north of Naas. The population of, say, Leixlip, Celbridge, Maynooth and Kilcock would be well in excess of that of Waterford city and would approach that of Limerick city, so it is a big gap. Regarding the sum of €4 million, for a reasonably modest and good-quality, but not gold-plated, swimming pool, it costs somewhere in the region of €8 million. There is €4 million in the budget, there are the two applications that came through on the most recent programme and there is the residual from the 2000 programme. What does the €4 million fund?

Chairman: I have a question. It is a general question but is based on the issues Deputy Murphy raises. Regarding the 2040 plan and population growth, taking places such as Drogheda

da, which has been designated a national growth centre, there will be significant population changes. The population of Laytown-Bettystown-Mornington in east Meath, for example, has grown from 5,000 to more than 10,000 in an eight-year period. Is there a case for planning sports infrastructure based on population needs? Our populations are expanding. Deputy Murphy rightly picked a conurbation that is bigger than the city of Waterford, and the population of my area is basically the same as that. There is a deficit, and the problem I see that is really serious is that the planning pressure comes from developers either to purchase existing sports facility grounds and therefore move them away from where the population is or, alternatively, to put pressure on planning authorities for developments without adequate and proper sports facilities. In other words, should there be, nationally and locally, a sports plan for the expected growth of each growth area in that an area may need X number of playing pitches, Y amount of green space and Z amount of whatever else? Planners and developers put fierce pressure on local authorities, and we need proper planning and development, we need proper green recreational space and we need proper swimming pools and other facilities. I do not expect the Minister to answer my question today but I hope this committee might, with the support and agreement of his Department, look at this issue in a national way in order that there are proper recreational facilities and amenities that are contiguous with the expected growth as we decide as a nation to increase the populations in these areas. One cannot have huge areas with no facilities, with developers running riot and the people left with no infrastructure, with nothing. I am not just talking about sports infrastructure, there are shopping and other facilities. However, does the Minister and his Department consider we should meet about just the sports section as a committee?

Deputy Shane Ross: I will start with Deputy Troy. He spoke about the smaller sporting bodies feeling inadequately funded, and we get that from many sporting bodies at present. We have a sports policy document which will emerge very shortly. It is in a draft form on my desk at present and will be adjusted accordingly but is very near conclusion. I think that that problem will be addressed in that sports policy document. It is a very comprehensive document. There was a public consultation, as the Deputy knows, to which many bodies made representations. I think there were more than 50 submissions. It will be a very ambitious programme that will seek a more prominent position for sport in the life of this country than it has at present. It is set out in a way that recognises the importance of sports, and I am sure the smaller sporting bodies' position will be recognised in the document as well.

Regarding the large-scale capital grants, the Deputy says that one reply to a parliamentary question stated it would be this year and the other said it would be within a few months. Those two statements are reconcilable.

Deputy Robert Troy: No. I said the parliamentary question reply one reads will determine when the scheme opens. One reply earlier this year indicated it would open within a number of months, and one last week indicated it would open in a number of months as well. The number of months keeps moving, depending on when one asks the question.

Deputy Shane Ross: The number of months could be smaller in the second reply than in the first. There is absolutely no delay on this. There is €100 million over the coming four years promised for it under the NDP - €50 million to start with - which we are absolutely determined to keep. The Deputy mentioned one specific project. I will not get into specifics, but there was a gap. The sports capital programme has been hugely successful. I know the limits sound very high, but they are actually very low when one gets into big projects. The question is how big projects like these have been funded in the past, and some of them undoubtedly need funding.

We are talking about ceilings of €150,000 or €200,000 in sports capital grants, which can be very small in the context of building stadiums and things like that which are absolutely necessary. The lack of large-scale infrastructure in Ireland is something people have pointed to in more prominent circumstances and perhaps it has cost us dearly in certain situations. That is there but there also are projects that are seeking €400,000 or €500,000 and which would qualify for the large-scale infrastructural projects. It is very important in the context in which Deputy Troy mentions it but there are and will be dozens of projects crying out for money. It is something which we will-----

Deputy Robert Troy: Can the Minister give the month in which applications will open this year and a ballpark figure as to how much funding will be available this year under the scheme?

Deputy Shane Ross: I do not want to give Deputy Troy hostages to fortune but let me say that it will be full speed ahead on this and it will be as soon as possible. It will be this year that the applications will be expected.

Deputy Robert Troy: To be fair, if the Minister only opens the applications in September - I do not wish to put dates in his mind - the chances are that no funding will be allocated under the 2018 budget because based on previous years, it will take a number of months to adjudicate on the applications. To be fair, there is a big difference in terms of when the application process opens and closes and that will determine whether we expect to see any funding in 2018. We are here to talk about the Revised Estimates. Will there be funding in the 2018 Estimates for large-scale capital projects?

Deputy Shane Ross: I am not going to give the Deputy a date but I will tell him that for all sorts of reasons I do not want to delay. I do not think Deputy Troy could think of any reason why I would want to delay. Even the most cynical politician could not possibly think of any reason why I would want to delay the process at all.

Deputy Robert Troy: As I outlined, if the Minister opened the process in September or October, it would mean he would not have to allocate funding this year.

Deputy Shane Ross: That is correct.

Deputy Robert Troy: That is the reason I ask the question. The Minister might open the process this year but allocate the funding in February or March 2019. That is a genuine reason why the process might not open this year. I just gave one example and the Minister rightly said there are many others out there who are anxiously waiting for a timeframe on the terms of the funding availability. People are planning investment in their projects and as the large-scale capital investment is a critical component of some of the funding structures they are putting in place, they deserve to know the timeframe.

Deputy Shane Ross: I am just told there is a pool of funding there for projects of that sort. The terms and conditions of the new scheme will be drafted shortly. All projects funded under the scheme will be subject to the public spending code and the state aid requirements. In terms of proposals, it is envisaged that at a minimum the national governing bodies of sport and local authorities will be asked to prioritise projects for possible inclusion. The sum of €50 million is available between 2018 and 2021 and under the national development plan, €100 million is available.

I ask Deputy Troy to accept my bona fides on this. I want to see this done as soon as possible. I will push it as hard as possible. I want to see structures going up and I want to see sports

recognised as being an important part of what happens in national life in a tangible way. This project is something we announced early because it is good news and it is something which is going to happen as soon as possible.

Chairman: The Minister should not forget my wonderful questions.

Deputy Shane Ross: I am really sorry. Deputy Catherine Murphy also asked a question.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: I want a swimming pool - yesterday please.

Deputy Shane Ross: We have discussed this one before.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: We have, on several occasions.

Deputy Shane Ross: I sympathise with Deputy Catherine Murphy's desire to promote her local area. It is something which apparently people are not supposed to do any more. I wish Deputy Catherine Murphy good luck in her endeavour.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: Let me put it this way, if one looked at it in the national context simply based on the numbers, it would jump out as a requirement in its own right. I accept the point the Chairman made. He is talking about the same dynamic as in my area, and so it is a wider problem.

Chairman: It is, and the problem is increasing because as some areas grow, under the NDP the demand will increase and yet it is not being recognised.

Deputy Shane Ross: The closing date under the current round of the programme was 31 July 2000 and since 2000, the total expenditure under the programme was almost €169 million. In January 2016 the Department contacted local authorities and sought expressions of interest in a limited round of swimming pool allocations. Three expressions of interest were received. Two of the applications for new pools were valid and they were both in Dublin. Of the two in Dublin, Lucan was chosen for inclusion in the programme. That means the projects that remain in the current programme are Castlebar, Buncrana, Edenderry and Lucan, each of which is at various stages of the programme. Another pool in Dunmanway officially opened on 6 June 2017. The priority in 2017 is on progressing projects through to the next stage of the programme, as appropriate. In relation to the future funding of swimming pools, a review of national sports policy is being finalised at present and it is expected to be published shortly. The policy statement will include a specific focus on how the Government should fund sports facilities, including swimming pools, in the years ahead.

That is not a satisfactory answer for Deputy Catherine Murphy and the Chairman. As members are aware, pools are very expensive and they do not make money. They are a service which quite rightly the State subsidises and gives to the community for their health and enjoyment and the importance of sport. There is a bit of a problem there. I do not want to say any more than this because people will scream at me if I say any more. We should not rule out the possibility of pools being included in the fund to which we just referred.

Chairman: Is that my answer as well?

Deputy Shane Ross: I am sorry. I think I know what you are asking, Chairman. At the moment the sports capital grants are allocated on the basis of population anyway. That is fair enough. You are saying, Chairman, that we should anticipate population changes.

Chairman: Yes, exactly, as a result of Government policy.

Deputy Shane Ross: It is not unreasonable but we would want to be pretty sure that the population would increase.

Chairman: That is in the Government's plan.

Deputy Shane Ross: Yes, of course it is, but we do not want to put up a big white elephant and find that nobody wants to move to Drogheda. We cannot do that.

Chairman: Not at all. No. I am not suggesting that. What I am saying is that as the Government has designated growth centres, there must be an implication in terms of increased demand for recreational amenities. That should not be dictated by developers, it should be dictated by Sport Ireland or the needs of the sporting organisations in order that when the developers come knocking on people's doors, issues on development are not being decided based on pressure but that the applications would stand or fall on their own merits and that the recreation and amenities are built into every single plan as part of what a developer pays in charges.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: Since the swimming pool programme opened in 2000 there have been four censuses of population. A total of 58,000 extra people have come to live in Kildare. The problem is that there is resentment against development when it is just a case of one dimension, namely, housing. What is really needed is for people to see an advantage in an area growing, but it must grow holistically. Sport plays such a major role in all of our lives and there is limited scope for fund-raising in new communities given that people are indebted with mortgages and all the rest of it. I welcome that the Government is taking a more strategic approach because that is what needs to happen. Nothing new has been added since those 58,000 people came to County Kildare, although the growth has been constant over three decades. I think we both understand the same thing, and that has been the dynamic right across the east coast.

Deputy Shane Ross: Yes. That is why investment is linked to spatial strategies. I am in agreement with the Deputy.

Chairman: Will we come back to that?

Deputy Shane Ross: The importance of sport should not be underestimated. It is vital.

Chairman: Perhaps the Minister can reflect on it with his Department. It might be helpful if, when he has discussed it, we can have a special meeting then to talk about it, in the mode of the constructive engagement we are having here. The Minister is accepting-----

Deputy Shane Ross: I accept what the Deputy is saying, if we can say where the population is going.

Chairman: We will move on to tourism services. Does any member wish to raise questions?

Deputy Robert Troy: Has the greenways strategy been published?

Deputy Shane Ross: No.

Deputy Robert Troy: When does the Minister envisage that it will be published?

Deputy Shane Ross: Before the summer recess, I hope.

Deputy Robert Troy: Before the summer recess?

Deputy Shane Ross: I hope so, yes.

Deputy Robert Troy: I think we all agree that-----

Deputy Shane Ross: It is nearing the last of its stages. I have a draft of it. It should be done before the summer recess. I would be amazed if it was not.

Deputy Robert Troy: What about the tourism action plan?

Deputy Shane Ross: The tourism action-----

Deputy Robert Troy: I refer to the plan from 2018 to 2020.

Deputy Shane Ross: Currently.

Deputy Robert Troy: The updated one?

Deputy Shane Ross: There was a date. I will have to come back to the Deputy on that.

Deputy Robert Troy: While acknowledging the huge increase in international tourists visiting Ireland, we do have a problem arising from Brexit. I think the Minister will acknowledge that. I refer to the fall-off in tourists from the UK.

Deputy Shane Ross: Yes.

Deputy Robert Troy: The Minister did make additional funding in the region of €1 million available in last year's budget to try to address that. However, when that is seen in the context of the funding that the UK Government put in place to mitigate the potential fall-off in tourists visiting the UK as a result of Brexit, it pales into insignificance. Moreover we have not been able - the Minister will correct me if I am wrong - to stop the downwards trajectory of UK visitor numbers. They have been falling month on month since the decision was taken. Does the Minister feel that we have put adequate resources behind the campaign to try to reverse that trend?

Deputy Shane Ross: I think the tourism action plan is due in a couple of weeks, or maybe two or three weeks. It is a new draft. Regarding Brexit, these tourist figures are a very curious thing. In a sense they are defying gravity at the moment. They are fantastic. The figures for the first two months of this year were up 7.9% on last year, despite what is happening as a result of Brexit, and despite the fact that numbers from the UK are falling. That might surprise people. They were up last year, by a smaller amount. I think it was 3.5%. They have increased by 7.9% this year, which indicates that we have momentum, despite the fact that there is a fall in British visitors.

I do not think that will continue. I do not know. However, what the tourism agencies are doing, and very successfully, is finding new markets. They are also spending money on the UK, so the numbers are not coming down as far as one might expect if viewed alongside the currency, which has fallen 12%. The number of visitors from the UK has fallen by a very small percentage compared with that, decreasing by 3% or 4%. We are doing very well despite the fall in the value of sterling. That does not mean there is any room for complacency. We did give them extra money last year for digital marketing and research, and they have used that very well. At the moment we are constantly looking at the possibility of giving more money to our

agencies, but we should bear in mind that they are massively successful in what they are doing. We have been surprised by the success shown in the figures and that they have not fallen further. We are very happy with them.

Chairman: We will move to appropriations-in-aid now. Are there any questions? I take it that general discussion is now concluded.

Deputy Robert Troy: Can we address one more question before we conclude? Under the first programme, programme A, concerning civil aviation, I asked about legislation and policy documents for which the Minister was unable to give a timeframe at the outset. I do not know whether correspondence came in through email or whether the Minister will be coming back to me later today or tomorrow regarding the national policy on airport charges and the ratification of two EU aviation agreements. They were part of 2017 output targets but I do not believe that target has been achieved. I am surprised to see that there is no reference to making Fingal County Council the competent authority for noise regulation in the 2018 output target. The Minister and I do not always agree, but we agree that we need to ensure that a competent authority is put in place so that the second runway at the airport can function to its full capacity.

Deputy Shane Ross: I agree with the Deputy. The appointment has been made and the decision has been taken. Fingal County Council will be made the competent authority and An Bord Pleanála will be the appeals mechanism. The primary legislation will be introduced as soon as possible. I hope that we will have that ready by the end of the year.

Deputy Robert Troy: I am just making the point that I am surprised it is not in the 2018 output target-----

Deputy Shane Ross: We will get an update on that.

Deputy Robert Troy: -----under “legislation”, because it should be.

Deputy Shane Ross: It should be. The Deputy is quite right. I thought it was, actually. I am sorry. It may not happen within 12 months. It may not happen this year, I am told, but my ambition is to get at least the heads of the Bill this year.

Chairman: That concludes the committee’s consideration of the 2018 Revised Estimates. On behalf of the committee I would like to thank the Minister and his officials for assisting the committee in its consideration of the Revised Estimates.

Message to Dáil

Chairman: In accordance with Standing Order 90, the following message will be sent to the Dáil:

The Select Committee on Transport, Tourism and Sport has completed its consideration of the following Estimate for public services for the year ending 31 December 2018: Vote 31 - Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Revised).

The select committee adjourned at 11.58 a.m. until 9.30 a.m. on Wednesday, 11 July 2018.