

Joint Committee on Transport and Communications
Meeting of the Committee with TII on Wednesday 14 February 2024

Subject: Large Scale Capital Projects

Peter Walsh, Chief Executive, Opening Statement

Introduction

Chairman, Members of the Committee, I thank you for your invitation to attend today. I am joined by my colleague Nigel O’Neill, Director of Capital Programme.

I understand that the Committee wishes to discuss large scale capital projects.

Before providing an update, I would like to briefly describe the duties and functions assigned to TII through legislation.

The National Roads Authority (NRA), operating as Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) since 2015, was established under the Roads Act 1993. It is the general duty of TII to secure the provision of a safe and efficient network of national roads having regard to the needs of all users. Under the Infrastructure Guidelines (previously known as the Public Spending Code), TII is the Approving Authority for National Road Projects and works in partnership with Local Authorities, which are the road authorities for all roads, including national roads.

In 2015 the NRA was merged with the Railway Procurement Agency and the Roads Act of 2015 added the function of securing the provision of, or providing, such light railway (such as Luas) and metro railway infrastructure as may be determined by the National Transport Authority (NTA). The NTA has the statutory function of providing metro and light railway infrastructure. In doing so, the NTA arranges for TII to secure the provision of metro and light railway infrastructure. The NTA is also the Approving Authority for public transport infrastructure and services. For that reason, I will be deferring to the NTA in relation to light railway and metro projects.

In September 2021 TII became the Approving Authority for Greenways on behalf of the Department of Transport.

NDP National Roads and Greenways Programmes

We have prepared a briefing paper providing an update on delivery of the NDP national roads and greenways programmes and I hope members of the Committee find it useful.

Under section 24 of the Roads Act, the Minister sets terms and conditions in relation to grants from moneys provided by the Oireachtas towards national roads capital projects and current expenditure of TII. The amounts of the 2024 Exchequer Capital and Current grants for national roads, and conditions were issued to TII on 31st January and are summarised here.

The Exchequer Capital Allocation for New Roads projects is based on the following prioritisation:

1. Maintenance of existing national roads assets, helping to keep them to a safe and robust standard;
2. Progression of projects currently under construction and those close to construction;

3. Progression of the major projects at pre-Approval Gate 2 in the Infrastructure Guidelines,
4. For projects further back in the development pipeline, i.e. pre-Approval Gate 1 in the Infrastructure Guidelines, the focus of the remaining funding should be on progressing by-passes and other projects that will contribute to supporting the National Planning Framework's national strategic outcome NSO 1: Compact Growth and achieving the objectives of Government's "Town Centre First" policy.

Safety is the priority for the Government and so it has prioritised funding for Protection and Renewal of the National Roads network in the National Development Plan. For 2024 the Government is making Exchequer grants of approximately €298 million available for both current and capital Protection and Renewal works. Additionally, €97 million of Exchequer grants is being provided to TII for Public Private Partnerships that are all in the operational phase.

In relation to New Roads, the Exchequer Capital grants to be provided to TII for 2024 amount to approximately €147 million, subject to the condition that this funding is allocated toward those projects listed by the Minister – refer to the Appendix.

For Greenways, the Exchequer Capital grant to be provided to TII for 2024 is €72 million.

TII provides allocations to Local Authorities on an annual basis, so they can deliver on their road authority functions on behalf of TII in relation to national roads and greenways. Before the end of this month, TII will issue the grant allocation booklets for national roads and greenways to all Local Authorities. Those allocations are an indication of the progress that TII believes is possible on each national roads or greenways project or programme during 2024. The allocations will be used to reimburse the relevant Local Authorities for costs incurred in accordance with national roads and greenways chargeability requirements. If the progression of any national roads or greenways project or programme is impeded or priorities change, the funding will be redistributed by TII, in accordance with its statutory remit, to other national roads or greenways projects or programmes.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge the achievements of Local Authorities and their civil engineering contractors, and my colleagues in TII, on the following projects that opened recently:

The N40 Dunkettle Interchange was opened by An Tánaiste Micheál Martin T.D. on 12th February.

The Grand Canal Greenway Phase 1 – Ayers Bridge to Sallins was opened by the Minister for Transport Eamon Ryan T.D. on 10th January.

The N59 Moycullen Bypass was opened by An Taoiseach Leo Varadkar T.D. on 11th December 2023.

The N22 Ballyvourney Macroom was opened by An Taoiseach Leo Varadkar T.D. on 6th November 2023.

The Great Western Greenway Extension from Achill Sound to Cashel was opened by Minister of State at the Department of Transport and Department of Environment Climate and Communications Jack Chambers T.D. on 1st September 2023.

The Athlone Greenway River Shannon Bridge was opened by Minister of State Jack Chambers T.D. on 8th August 2023.

The N17/R320 Lisduff Junction was opened by Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment Dara Calleary T.D. on 28th July 2023.

The New Ross to Glenmore section of the Sout East Greenway was opened by Minister of State Jack Chambers T.D. on 25th July 2023.

The N5 Westport Turlough was opened by An Taoiseach Leo Varadkar T.D. on 15th June 2023.

The N24 Limerick to Tipperary Roundabout, Beary's Cross safety improvement project was opened by Minister of State Jack Chambers T.D. on 14th June 2023.

Enablers for Delivery of the NDP

When I addressed the committee in June last year, I provided my views on challenges that must be overcome if Ireland is to deliver on its NDP objectives for transport infrastructure. At the time several reforms had been put in place. From my perspective, the reforms to inflation risk sharing and other measures now included in the State's standard forms of contract has supported the increased interest we now see in tendering for construction contracts by Ireland's civil engineering sector. Furthermore, the increased resourcing allocated to the State's planning system appears to be speeding up planning decisions.

In my opinion, it is important that the State continues to drive out delays to the delivery of transport infrastructure. Therefore, I believe continued progress is needed in the following areas: (1) ensuring alignment of stakeholders, especially State bodies and State-owned enterprises; (2) continue to review and update the State's standard form of contract to support the viability of the civil engineering sector; and (3), ensuring a reasonably stable supply of tendering opportunities for the civil engineering sector in order that capabilities can be maintained and developed. With respect to that last point, the "Windfall Capital Fund" announced by Government will be of great importance to avoid stop-start funding of infrastructure, especially during downturns.

That concludes my opening statement. My colleague and I will endeavour to provide any further information members of the committee may require.

Peter Walsh

Chief Executive Officer

Supporting Material:

Appendix: New Roads List of Projects

Report: Delivery Status Update

Appendix – New Roads List of Projects

Construction and Closeout Commitments

N5 Ballaghaderreen to Scramoge

N8/N25 Dunkettle Interchange

N69 Listowel Bypass

N59 Moycullen Bypass

N22 Ballyvourney to Macroom

N5 Westport to Turlough

Projects Proceeding to Construction

M28 Cork to Ringaskiddy

N21/69 Limerick to Foynes (Adare Bypass) - delivery of Adare Bypass as advance works for the main scheme

Projects Delayed by Judicial Review

N6 Galway City Ring Road

N52 Ardee Bypass

Projects Approaching Planning Approval

N2 Slane Bypass and Public Realm

Donegal TEN-T Improvement

Bypasses

N3 Virginia Bypass

N4 Mullingar to Longford

N4 Carrick-on-Shannon to Dromod

N21 Newcastle West Relief Road

N21 Abbeyfeale Relief Road

N24 Cahir to Limerick Junction (including Tipperary Bypass)

N25 Midleton to Youghal

N58 Foxford Bypass

N72/N73 Mallow Relief Road

N17 Knock to Collooney - progress Tobercurry and Charlestown Bypass elements of scheme

Accessibility

N2 Clontibret to the Border

N11/25 Oilgate to Rosslare

N/M20 Cork to Limerick