

Questions (39)

Brendan Smith

Question:

39. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the **Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport** if his attention has been drawn to the particular concerns of communities throughout the Border region regarding the adverse impact Brexit will have on the area and the need to upgrade infrastructure such as the road network in order to assist businesses to remain competitive (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25398/18]

[Deputy Brendan Smith](#)

As the Minister is aware, there is great uncertainty and concern in Border communities, in the Cavan-Monaghan constituency I represent and in neighbouring counties, both north and south of the Border, regarding the adverse impact Brexit will have on our daily lives. There are considerable concerns regarding the impact on the local economy. As the Minister is aware and as we debated in the Chamber previously, the economy of Cavan-Monaghan is very heavily dependent in the agrifood sector, the construction products sector and the engineering sector. By definition, those sectors involve bulky products that need to be transported to ports and airports in order that they might be exported to the marketplace. We need to assist those companies to remain as competitive as possible by having the necessary road infrastructure upgraded. It is the only means to get the product from the area because we do not have a rail service. The road network is of critical importance to us.

[Deputy Shane Ross](#) I thank the Deputy. I know he has been a most vocal and consistent advocate for the problems of Brexit, not only for the roads but also for the entire Border region. I share his concerns regarding the potential adverse effects of Brexit on the sectors he identified. The efficiency of our transport infrastructure is just one element that determines transport costs. Other elements include the cost of the vehicle and fuel, the cost of the driver, overhead and back-office costs and the time taken to transport the goods. Brexit has the potential to impact on overhead and back-office costs in particular and also on time-related costs.

My Government colleagues and I are working to address the potential impacts of Brexit across all sectors. On transport, we have identified the key areas of adverse regulatory and operational impacts and are seeking to ensure that acceptable alternatives to the current EU structures are agreed as part of the withdrawal agreement and future relationship with the EU.

The publication by the UK of written proposals on customs arrangements aimed at making progress in the Brexit negotiations is a welcome step. However, the Commission will make a first assessment of the technical and legal feasibility of the proposals, and whether they provide a basis for negotiation. We look forward to its assessment and to discussing whether the proposals could be helpful in meeting the UK's repeated commitment to avoiding a hard border and thereby making progress on the backstop on Ireland and Northern Ireland.

The national development plan, NDP, sets out the Government's ambition in the area of roads and the Border region. In chapter 4 of the plan, there is an examination of how targeted investment can promote economic resilience in the Border region in the context of Brexit.

This chapter touches on a range of measures, including investment in transport links. The NDP includes references to, among other projects, the N2-A5 roads, the N14 from Manorcunningham to Lifford, the N52 Ardee bypass, the N2 Slane bypass, the N4 from Collooney to Castlebaldwin and the N56 in Donegal.

Schemes on these routes are at various stages of development and Transport Infrastructure Ireland, in conjunction with the relevant local authorities, will be advancing them on a phased basis within the overall capital budget available to it.

The NDP also sets out ambitious investment programmes in our main ports and airports that will enhance capacity and facilitate smoother connectivity to international markets.

Deputy Brendan Smith

I thank the Minister for his reply. I referenced in particular the need to develop the east-west route. Unfortunately, this project is not referenced in the section of the plan dealing with investment in the Border region. It is regrettable that this is not a priority project.

I appreciate the opportunity to discuss in this Chamber with the Minister the need to develop to east-west route. In the early 2000s, the east-west route from Dundalk to Sligo was identified as an important project. It was concluded that the best route would be Dundalk, Carrickmacross, Shercock, Cootehill, Belturbet, Enniskillen, Sligo. In the meantime, substantial parts of the route were upgraded with the building of the Belturbet bypass and stages 1 and 2 of the Cavan bypass as well. In the road allocations for 2010 and 2011, substantial funds were allocated to the local authorities, with Cavan County Council being the lead authority, to carry out substantial planning and design work on the section of the route from Cootehill, Shercock, Carrickmacross to Dundalk. Unfortunately, the then Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, Deputy Varadkar, did not continue that specific funding for the planning, design and upgrade work on that particular route. We are fortunate that in that particular part of Cavan and Monaghan there is substantial employment, with Abbott Ireland and a number of major engineering companies in Cootehill and Carton poultry products in Shercock. There are many substantial employers in Carrickmacross and Dundalk as well. All of these companies need proper road infrastructure to get their products away from their base.

Deputy Shane Ross

To make an informed statement or decision on the basis of what the Deputy has spelled out to me requires me to visit the area concerned. This is a matter on which I cannot give any assurance across the floor. If the Deputy so wishes, I will visit the areas some time over the summer. Members opposite sometimes think that politicians on this side of the House are dripping with insincerity in terms of the responses they give in this House but that is not the case. I am conscious of the fact that the Border area is awaiting Brexit with trepidation in

terms not only of the roads but the industries to which the Deputy referred, including the agrifood industry and other areas. It would be beneficial if I visited the areas to see the roads to which the Deputy refers. I do not doubt what the Deputy says but there are incredible demands upon the public purse for these roads. I believe the Border area has made its case for priority attention, by which I do not mean preference over any other area. It is important it is not forgotten particularly because of the danger of a hard border, which could have a devastating affect not only on the roads but on industries and people in the area. I am conscious that we are speaking about an area where a devaluation has already had an effect.

Deputy Brendan Smith I welcome the Minister's commitment to visit the area. I would be happy to show him the roads concerned. Traffic from Cavan to Clones passes through County Fermanagh three times. From the point of view of the transport industry, the concerns of which the Minister will be aware of in terms of possible tariffs and barriers to the free movement of goods, people and services, economies North and South are intertwined and interdependent. I mentioned the local economies in Cavan and Monaghan. Neighbouring economies north of the Border in Fermanagh, Tyrone and Armagh are similarly dependent on the same sectors as a source of employment. There is huge concern in the wider Border area, which spills into neighbouring constituencies as well, be that Deputy Troy's constituency of Longford-Westmeath or Deputy Scanlon's constituency of Sligo-Leitrim. Also, the Leas Cheann-Comhairle spoke eloquently yesterday at the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly about the concerns of all of us in the south of Ulster, the north midlands and the midlands in regard to the adverse impacts, economic and social, of Brexit.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle

The Deputy did not seek additional time in view of that credit he was given.

Deputy Shane Ross

He did look for extra money for all of his colleagues.

There is considerable pent up demand for road improvement projects on regional and local roads. One such project, the east-west Dundalk to Sligo link, was referred to by the Deputy. The Department has provided funding this year to allow the appraisal to be updated. The Government is committed to cross-Border roads and development in this regard but there are one or two problems arising in this regard. The Deputy will be aware of the situation with the A5 upgrade, which is a massive commitment in monetary terms. The Stormont House Agreement, A Fresh Start, reaffirmed the Government's commitment to provide funding of €50 million for the A5 project and committed an additional €25 million to ensure that phase 1 of the project can commence as soon as the necessary planning issues are resolved by the Northern Ireland authorities. The Government will be contributing €75 million towards the estimated €163 million cost of phase 1A if the current legal challenge to the scheme is successfully defended. The construction of phase 1A will take about two and a half years to complete.

As regards decisions on any additional financial commitments in regard to further phases of the A5 project and others referred to by Deputy Smith, this is a matter for the Government as a whole.