

Minutes of the Roads, Transportation & Marine Strategic Policy Committee meeting
held on Friday 18th September 2020 at 10.00 a.m.

**Minutes of the Roads, Transportation & Marine Strategic Policy Committee
meeting held on Friday 18th September at 10.00 a.m.
The Council Chamber, Áras an Chontae, Prospect Hill, Galway.**

I Láthair:

Baill: Cllr. Peter Roche (Cathaoirleach)
Cllr. Geraldine Donohue
Comh. Tomás Ó Curraoin
Cllr. Pat Hynes
Cllr. Gerry King
Mr. Kenny Deery

Oifigí: Mr. Damien Mitchell, Senior Engineer, Infrastructure and Operations Unit
Mr. Sean Breathnach, Senior Executive Engineer, NRDO
Ms. Rose Gaughran, Senior Staff Officer, Infrastructure and Operations Unit
Mr. Noel Madden, Broadband Officer, Infrastructure and Operations Unit
Ms. Nora O'Connor, Assistant Staff Officer, Infrastructure and Operations Unit

Apologies: Mr. Tom Madden, Mr. Diarmuid Kelly, Mr. Jim Cullen, Director of Services, Infrastructure and Operations Unit, Ms. Eibhlin Curran, Administrative Officer, Infrastructure and Operations Unit

Absent: Cllr. Jim Cuddy, Cllr. Albert Dolan, Mr. Martin Gibbons

1. Minutes of meeting of Roads SPC held on 21st May 2020

On the **proposal** of Comh. T. Ó Curraoin and **seconded** by Cllr. G. King, the minutes of the meeting of the Roads, Transportation and Marine Strategic Policy Committee held on 21st May 2020 were **agreed** and adopted.

Matters arising from the minutes.

In response to Comh. T. Ó Curraoin, D. Mitchell explained that there are one and a half modules of the Oral Hearing for the Galway City Outer By-Pass outstanding. The decision as to when the oral hearing will reconvene is a matter for An Bord Pleanála and no date has been notified at present.

Cllr. G. King asked about the procedure to get rumble strips and/or speed bumps in a village/area in order to reduce motorists' speed. Cllr. G. King also requested an update regarding road surface grading and road numbering to be carried out.

In response to Cllr. G. King, D. Mitchell explained that there is an issue with the utilisation of rumble strips and speed ramps, as traffic calming measures, as they are very noisy and are not allowed to be used near private homes or businesses. There are many objections to rumble strips and speed ramps, with about 50/50 for and against them. D. Mitchell advised Cllr. G. King to forward details of specific locations which are of concern, and these can be investigated further.

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In relation to road surface grading, D. Mitchell confirmed that the grading of road surfaces is done through the Pavement Surface Condition Index (PSCI) whereby the road surface condition is graded between 1 and 10. He outlined that the PSCI frames the 3-year and annual roads programmes, determining which roads are given priority for funding in these programmes.

D. Mitchell explained that the numbering of public roads has been largely completed, however if there are any roads across the County which have been omitted, these will be investigated if details are submitted to him.

Cllr. G. Donohue questioned if the rumble strips and driver feedback signs can be used outside schools to reduce speed and increase safety. Cllr. G. Donohue also sought clarity on the policy on speed limits outside schools.

Cllr. P. Roche pointed out that as part of the last speed limit review, a motion was passed by the council to reduce the speed limit at all schools to 50km.

D. Mitchell outlined that periodic speed limits are being installed at 14 schools on National Roads, following the recent speed limit review. These are in operation in Milltown. Installation at other schools are ongoing – some ran into issues with civil works. He explained that driver feedback signs are only allowed inside speed limit locations. He stated that statistics show that the effectiveness of these signs lasts for a period of approx. 6 weeks; it was found that removing them and bringing them back is proving to be more effective. He asked Cllr. Donohue to speak to him directly on any location of concern and these can be investigated further.

K. Deery informed the meeting that the importance of the oral hearing getting back on track was highlighted by the Chamber of Commerce this week and the organisation is pushing for the process to be completed by the end of this year. Cllr. Roche agreed that this is very important, stating that 6 months has been lost because of covid19. D. Mitchell reiterated that it is a matter for An Bord Pleanála to reconvene the oral hearing.

2. Update on virtual meeting held 07th September with Eamon Ryan, Minister for Transport, and Hildegard Naughton, Minister of State (Galway West)

Cllr. P. Roche outlined that a virtual zoom meeting took place with members of the Oireachtas and he would ask those present, who took part, to give their feedback. He stated that the Minister's level of knowledge and interest in projects in Galway was both encouraging and enlightening.

Cllr. G. Donohue explained that there was good engagement throughout the meeting which lasted about 1 hour 10 minutes, and everyone had the opportunity to speak. She referred to the Active Travel Stimulus recently notified, which is to do with footpaths, etc. and stated that Active Travel is good in theory but, the roads are not good enough. Cllr. G. Donohue expressed her disappointment that school buses do not come in under the Department of Transport but are responsibility of the Minister for Education.

Comh. T. Ó Curraoin stated that the virtual meeting was interesting and proposed that the same two people meet face-to-face with the members of Galway County Council, in the council chamber for the same length of time, to discuss the needs of the County. He expressed concern about the narrowness of the coast road for cyclists and traffic, and that a cycle lane is required along the shore, from Galway

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city to Silver Strand and out to Bearna Pier. He also asserted that something needs to be put in place for cyclists on the N59 and R336. Comh. T. Ó Curraoin queried if cyclists could be allowed to use the footpaths instead of having to use the road alongside the busy traffic.

Cllr. P. Roche outlined that the Rail Review and Smart/Active Travel (Greenways/Cycleways) formed a large part of the discussion throughout the virtual meeting. Minister Eamon Ryan committed to further discussions, once the Rail Review has been published. The Minister asserted that he would not like to see any further ambiguity about the findings; the Rail Review when published should be clear on whether continuity of rail services is the way forward or if the greenway is the preferred option. In response to Comh. T. Ó Curraoin, Cllr. P. Roche explained that once the findings of the Rail Review are published, the opportunity should arise for the Ministers to come back to a face-to-face meeting.

In response to Comh. T. Ó Curraoin's concern about the requirement for additional cycle lanes, D. Mitchell outlined that a huge amount of work is being done and that €2.6m has been allocated for development of greenways. He stated that 13km of 22km is now complete between Clifden and Recess and the council are working with landowners to try to progress the remaining sections to Oughterard and Galway city. The government have been very proactive in promoting additional cycling lanes and greenways. There is a dedicated team now in place for the Ballinasloe to Galway greenway, so the commitment is there to try to advance this project. From a greenway perspective, the Rail Review will need to be published to get further clarification on the way forward, but progress has been very positive to date.

Cllr. P. Roche asked, if the Rail Review findings are positive towards rail investment, what will happen to the €75,000 already committed. In response to Cllr. P. Roche's query, D. Mitchell explained that nobody could be definitive as there is no clarity at present. The Minister has given an indication that once the decision is made, he will discuss this matter further.

Cllr. P. Roche pointed out that he is coming from a very rural part of Galway, where severing of lands or farm holding would not be acceptable; 100% buy-in from the farming community will be required or he could not support it.

Cllr. P. Hynes outlined that the most important thing about the greenways is that engagement with landowners and farmers takes place and any potential difficulties should be resolved through dialogue. He pointed out that the Athlone-Galway greenway should come to fruition, given the funding that is available and the initiative by the council to have a specific team in Ballinasloe allocated to the greenway. Athenry, Tuam, Portumna, Gort, Kinvarra and all parts of East Galway should eventually get greenways.

K. Deery sought clarity on whether there is an allocation of funding of €2m for the Oughterard to Galway greenway. D. Mitchell clarified that a €2m funding allocation is in place for survey work and that there have been difficulties accessing the lands required to carry out those survey works. It is hoped that a planning application will be made in 2021.

Cllr. P. Roche pointed out that investment in tourism is far greater in West Galway than in East Galway and that there is a wealth of untapped tourism resources in East Galway. Comh. T. Ó Curraoin agreed that money should be shared across the County, if funding becomes available.

Cllr. G. Donohue explained that Minister Eamon Ryan outlined his thoughts on the integration of the city and County Council, saying that it makes sense. Cllr. G. Donohue pointed out that this is a concern as the County Council is underfunded at present.

3. National Broadband Project Update.

N. Madden gave a presentation on the National Broadband Plan which included a handout which was distributed to all present.

Cllr. P. Roche commended N. Madden on his presentation and suggested that a copy of the broadband update for Galway be distributed to all 39 elected members as this had answered many of his questions on the matter. N. Madden confirmed that the presentation would be distributed to all 39 members.

Cllr. P. Hynes thanked N. Madden for his informative presentation and outlined that most of the queries from the public in Loughrea are from people seeking a broadband service. He gave examples of people working from home with no broadband, schools which have no broadband, and asked when those anomalies will be addressed.

Cllr. G. Donohue thanked N. Madden for his presentation and asked if she could give out the broadbandofficer@galwaycoco.ie email address to members of the public. N. Madden agreed that the email address could be distributed, explaining that himself and N. O' Connor would reply to any emails received. Cllr. G. Donohue asked if, as elected members, they can identify any area or black spots that they might think is suitable for Broadband Connection Points (BCP).

In response to Cllr. G. Donohue, N. Madden asserted that there are rules set down by the department regarding the locations but advised Cllr. G. Donohue to email the details of areas of concern and these would be investigated further.

Cllr. G. King outlined that a major frustration for members of the public is when cables come halfway into villages and then stop; phone coverage is even an issue in some of these places. He stated that there is an issue in South West Connemara, and it is very frustrating for people working from home, or students at home not having enough connectivity to download their work for projects, etc. Cllr. G. King pointed out that 5 – 7 years is a long time to wait for broadband, but it is positive that there is now a plan in place.

K. Deery noted the importance of broadband connectivity and how it is more relevant than ever with so many working from home and many companies changing their working model for the foreseeable future. He asked if there had been any additional funding to make BCP a priority since start of the covid19 pandemic.

In response to Cllr. G. King's point about cables coming halfway into villages and then stopping, N. Madden agreed that there are anomalies present and he understands the frustration when commercial companies have stopped short, rather than including all houses along a road. He said under the Eir 300K projects, over 30,000 eircodes in County Galway received a fibre connection, these Eircodes were agreed in advance between Eir and the Department of Communications and delivery of same was subject to a commitment agreement, details of which are on the Department of Communications website. Any extension beyond the agreed eircodes, is a commercial decision for the provider. N. Madden said that he has in the past contacted commercial providers to ask them to consider extending the connectivity to areas based on queries received, but it is the commercial provider's decision in these instances.

N. Madden agreed with Cllr. G. King stating that 5 – 7 years is a long-time frame; however, the time frame reflects that this is one of the largest projects undertaken by the state with significant investment by the state.

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In response to K. Deery's query about additional funding for the BCP scheme, N. Madden stated the BCP project will bring broadband connectivity to identified local premises, that will act as places for the community to get on line or the BCP operators may wish to offer more facilities if they wish (e.g. remote working spaces). There is Grant funding available to help BCPs respond to the covid19 pandemic through such schemes as T&V & Leader. N. Madden also referred to Cllr. G. King's point about mobile phone signal being an issue and recommended the Comreg website as a good source of information, which includes relevant details and contact information.

Cllr. P. Roche asked if it is intended to publish this national broadband plan update on the website as it would be very useful for members of the public to access this information. N. Madden confirmed that there is a broadband page on the Galway County Council website which can be updated to include the information included in the presentation.

4. Any Other Business

S. Breathnach SEE, gave an update on the current and planned roadworks being carried out on national roads across the County.

Cllr. P. Roche stated that he met with the TII back in 2016 and had requested village signage for Abbeyknockmoy, Corofin, Mountbellew and Ballygar be installed, before the relevant junctions on the M17 motorway, but there is still no signage in place. He pointed out that additional signage was put at roundabouts but not on the motorway. S. Breathnach committed to following this up with the engineer dealing with this motorway.

Comh. T. Ó Curraoin asked about the widening of the road at the Glenlo Abbey Hotel. S. Breathnach explained that the stretch of road in question is only 900 metres, but it is not a good section of roadway and it is quite a difficult project with the road being so close to the River Corrib. Discussions are ongoing with TII regarding this matter.

In response to Cllr. G King, S. Breathnach explained that pebbles are piling up under the bridge and the river is part of the Special Area of Conservation (SAC), making it a complicated job, and difficult to get permission to carry out the works. This job comes under the Office of Public Works (OPW). D. Mitchell agreed to go back to the National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS) to try to agree regular maintenance at a local level first. He outlined that the Council has been blocked from doing works on three occasions this year because of the SACs.

D. Mitchell gave an update on the Roads Programme for Regional & Local Roads. Additional funding of €1,005,000 was allocated under Climate Change Adaptation and €2,688,095 under Active Travel Measures. He outlined that there was 9 weeks of work lost in 2020 due to Covid19. However, it is expected that the €33.8m funding from the regional road grant allocation will be spent on time to be claimed from the department by the deadline at the end of November.

Cllr. Peter Roche Cathaoirleach thanked the committee members for their attendance.

Críochnaigh an cruinniú ansin.

12.00p.m.

Approved by:


Cllr. Peter Roche
Cathaoirleach

Date: 17/12/2020

Roads & Transportation Strategic Policy Committee