

**Minutes of the Joint Meeting of
the Southern & Eastern Regional Assembly and
the Border Midland Western Regional Assembly
Friday 23rd April 2010, Knightsbrook Hotel, Trim, Co. Meath**

Southern & Eastern Regional Assembly

Present:

Cllr. Kevin Murphy (Chair),	Cllr. Paddy Bourke,	Cllr. Joe Brennan,
Cllr. Christy Burke,	Cllr. Ciaran Byrne,	Cllr. Sean Crowe,
Cllr. Anne Devitt,	Cllr. Dessie Ellis,	Cllr. Dan Fleming,
Cllr. Mary Freehill,	Cllr. Jim Holloway,	Cllr. Stephen Keary,
Cllr. P.J. Kelly,	Cllr. Dermot Lacey,	Cllr. Brian Lawlor,
Cllr. Tim Lombard,	Cllr. John McGinley,	Cllr. John Mulvihill,
Cllr. Bobby O'Connell,	Cllr. Liam Purtill,	Cllr. Leo Walsh,
Cllr. Jack Walsh.		

Apologies:

Cllr. Tomas Breathnach,	Cllr. Clare Byrne,	Cllr. Aidan Culhane,
Cllr. Jimmy Fegan,	Cllr. Damien Geoghegan,	Cllr. Senan Griffin,
Cllr. Ted Howlin,	Cllr. Kevin Humphreys,	Cllr. Paddy Kavanagh,
Cllr. Conal Kavanagh,	Cllr. Pamela Kearns,	Cllr. Thomas Kinsella,
Cllr. Micheal Lowry,	Cllr. Denis McCarthy,	Cllr. Brian Meaney,
Cllr. Dara Murphy,	Cllr. Denis O'Flynn,	Cllr. John Ryan,
Cllr. Barry Saul.		

Officials:

Mr. Stephen Blair, Director;
Mr David Kelly, Assistant Director;
Ms Karen Coughlan, Assistant Staff Officer

Border Midland Western Regional Assembly

Present:

Cllr. Andrew Boylan (Chair),	Cllr. Owen Bannigan,	Cllr. Larry Bannon,
Cllr. Aidan Boyle,	Cllr. Cyril Burke,	Cllr. Padraig Conneely,
Cllr. Tom Crosbie,	Cllr. Michael Crowe,	Cllr. James Daly,
Cllr. James Deegan,	Cllr. Frank Dolan,	Cllr. Eamon Dooley,
Cllr. Peter Feeney,	Cllr. Gerry Finnerty,	Cllr. Joe Flanagan,
Cllr. Imelda Henry,	Cllr. Charlie McConalogue,	Cllr. Damien Ryan,
Cllr. Peter Savage,	Cllr. Tiernan Walsh	

Apologies:

Cllr. Terry Brennan,	Cllr. Matt Carthy,	Cllr. Martin Connaughton,
Cllr. Gerard Corcoran,	Cllr. Marie Therese Gallagher,	Cllr. Connie Hanniffy,
Cllr. Eugene Lavin,	Cllr. Dara Mulvey,	Cllr. Terence Slowey.

Officials:

Mr. Gerry Finn, Director;
Mr Kieran Moylan, Assistant Director;
Mr. Adrian O Donoghue, Policy & Research Officer;
Mr. Gerry Lavelle, Programme Executive Corporate Affairs

1. Welcome to Minister and Opening Documents by Cllr. Kevin Murphy, Cathaoirleach Southern & Eastern Regional Assembly

Cllr. Kevin Murphy, the Cathaoirleach of the Southern & Eastern Regional Assembly, began the meeting by welcoming Mr Noel Dempsey, T.D. Minister for Transport on behalf of the two Assemblies to the joint meeting in Trim, Co. Meath

In his opening address, Cllr. Kevin Murphy called on the Government to maintain and continue to prioritise investment in Ireland's transportation infrastructure as a means of protecting our international competitiveness. He expressed his personal disappointment at the current state of the regional and county roads. Cllr. Murphy also urged the Minister to continue to promote a greater utilisation and development of a linked and efficient public transport network.

The Cathaoirleach also stressed the importance of protecting the capital envelope to ensure that the State continues to invest heavily in transport infrastructure in the years ahead. He emphasised the importance the Regional Assemblies place on transport infrastructure by highlighting that it has been included as a co-funded activity under both Regional Operational Programmes over the 2007-13 period, in accordance with regional, national and EU investment priorities.

Cllr. Kevin Murphy outlined that for many parts of the regions, far from the rail network, roads represent the only viable mode of transport, and it is essential that the past level of investment in both the national and strategic non-national roads is maintained. He added that with the imminent completion of the major inter-urban routes, the focus of the road building programme now needs to shift to important inter-Gateway routes, such as the Atlantic Road Corridor. He, however, expressed concern that Bus Eireann are reducing some of their routes which will have a particularly negative impact on rural communities.

The Cathaoirleach said that two Regional Assemblies strongly support the reopening of the Western Rail Corridor and welcome the recent opening of the first phase between Limerick and Galway. However he expressed disappointment at the recent announcement by Irish Rail that it intends to cease passenger services between Rosslare and Waterford.

2. Address by Mr. Noel Dempsey, Minister for Transport

Minster Dempsey began by thanking the Regional Assemblies for the opportunity to address them. He referred to the harsh economic reality, but stated that the Government is committed to a strong sustainable transport system. He highlighted that over €2.1bn has been committed by his Department in 2010 to continue the State's transport investment programme. The Minister stated that following the completion of the major inter-urban routes in 2010, the priority would shift to the Atlantic Road Corridor to better link the Atlantic Gateway cities. He stated that the completion of this Corridor was hugely important for regional development.

With regards to the Western Corridor maximum usage of the line is essential to dissuade any scepticism towards this route. It is not expected to make a profit and will be subsidised €20 million for the public good. However, this is not an ideal situation as it cannot be subsidised forever.

Minister Dempsey acknowledged Cllr. Murphy's point on the Rosslare to Waterford rail line however highlighted the fact that it is currently being subsidised to the tune of €1.9 million. This amounts to €80,000 per passenger which is difficult to sustain in the long term. He advised that the Department have met up with Public Representatives and the Chair of the Wexford Co Co. and has asked them to put forward a business case for keeping the line open and indicate that alternative uses should be considered, e.g. a Heritage Railway Line. He also acknowledged that the Waterford to Limerick Junction line is another route of concern being the second highest subsidy.

On the issue of the current state of the Local & Regional roads, Minister Dempsey expressed the view that the various Local Authorities are doing their best under the current circumstances and feels that it is important for the Local Representatives to communicate this to their constituents.

The Minister acknowledged the critical role that regional airports play in stimulating business development and improving connectivity to Ireland's regions however also acknowledged that it was a difficult time in general for the aviation industry.

The Minister highlighted the contribution played by Local Authorities in promoting sustainable transport. While he acknowledged there is a focus on moving people from cars to public transport he stressed that is not an anti car measure but rather to encourage people to consider other means of travel e.g. bikes etc. Under the smarter travel policy document he has met with City & County managers to encourage local authorities to participate and work with the Department of Transport, Department of Health and the Sports Council. The Minister also pointed out that there has been €14 million invested in larger cities on green routes, QBC, park & ride etc.

On the issue of Rural Transport, Mr Dempsey stated that there has been a recent increase from €9 million to €11 million for the RTI. It is considered to be an important programme and it is hoped that this will continue and expand.

Minister Dempsey finished off by thanking everyone for the opportunity and hoped it proved to be a useful session for the Assemblies.

3. Response by Cllr. Andrew Boylan, Cathaoirleach, Border Midland and Western Regional Assembly

Cllr. Andrew Boylan, Cathaoirleach of the BMW Assembly thanked Minister Dempsey on behalf of both Assemblies for his attendance at the joint meeting. He supported the

sentiments of the Cathaoirleach of the Southern and Eastern Regional Assembly and added that in the BMW Region in particular, good transport connections are vitally important for businesses to operate efficiently, to enable people to access employment and to attract tourists to the region. Cllr. Boylan stressed that the BMW region has a particularly weak rail infrastructure.

4. Open Discussion

Cllr.'s Freehill, Lacey and Byrne raised issues concerning the White Paper on Reform of Local Government and the National Transport Authority. In response the Minister noted:

- He expects the White Paper to be published towards the end of June or early July.
- In terms of the Bill for the Dublin Mayor the issues around transport are still being finalised and hence the Bill is sparse on detail in relation to this. The objective is to retain as much as possible the detail of the DTA Bill in the NTA structure. The Mayor of Dublin will chair the structure dealing with traffic in the Greater Dublin Area.
- The Local Government Structure needs reform.

Cllr. Tom Crosby expressed the view that school bus fleets should be used for Rural Transport in general when not being used on school runs and acknowledged that the Minister has taken this idea on board.

Cllr. Jack Walsh referred to the Waterford to Rosslare line and suggested that a train network depends on links and feels that a totally integrated business model such as the European system could be successful, to which Minister Dempsey agreed. However, he suggested that a business plan needs to be put together.

In response to Cllr. Dessie Ellis & Cllr. Anne Devitt, the Minister expressed agreement that the Metro North is an important development to the entire public transport system. At the moment he does not know when it will open but the proposed start up date is 2012 with the creation of 37,000 jobs.

Cllr. Dan Fleming inquired as to whether agricultural contractors with relevant machinery have been considered to assist in this work to which Minister Dempsey explained that he is meeting with the IFA.

Cllr. Joe Brennan noted that the N24 links Rosslare to Limerick adding to Cllr. Walsh's thoughts that CIE policy has contributed to lack of service of bus service also. To which the Minister outlined that he has seen what Bus Eireann are proposing and it will be much improved. CIE are willing to give any councillor a briefing and he himself will help arrange this if needs be.

Cllr. Murphy finished off by thanking Minister Dempsey for taking the time to address the questions posed to him.

5. **(a) Consideration of Joint Statement on future of EU Cohesion Policy and the administration of Cohesion Policy in Ireland.**

Mr. Stephen Blair, Director of the S&E Regional Assembly provided a brief synopsis of the Joint Statement. He advised that a debate has started on the future of EU Cohesion Policy and the Assemblies need to contribute a position on this and this paper is to feed into that debate. The paper can be summarised under 2 key points:

1. Regional Policy in Europe should not just concentrate on the poorer regions of Europe but there should be a regional policy and funds transfer for all regions.
2. Within Ireland we need to streamline the delivery mechanisms of the funding and the Regional Assemblies are the ideal structures as we have built up the experience and expertise over the last number of years.

PROPOSED by Cllr. Jack Walsh (S&ERA)

SECONDED by Cllr. Christy Burke (S&ERA)

RESOLVED

“That the Joint Statement on future of EU Cohesion Policy and the administration of Cohesion Policy in Ireland be **ADOPTED**”

Mr. Blair reiterated that this is only the start of the process and the focus needs to be on getting an audience for their initiative.

6. **(b) Declaration of the Regional Competitiveness & Employment Regions on the future of EU Cohesion Policy post 2013**

Mr. Gerry Finn, Director of the BMW Regional Assembly gave a brief synopsis on this explaining that this proposal has come through the Irish Regions Office and Brussels, its origins being from Austria. It is effectively asking us to sign up to a declaration to continue with the Regional Competitiveness and Employment strategy post 2013 to ensure we are eligible and continue to receive funding.

PROPOSED by Cllr. James Deegan (BMW)

SECONDED by Cllr. Peter Savage (BMW)

RESOLVED

“That the Declaration of the Regional Competitiveness & Employment Regions on the future of EU Cohesion Policy post 2013 be ADOPTED”

Cathaoirleach

Director

Date