



***Border, Midland & Western
Regional Assembly
Shaping the Region***

Transport 21 Deputation to meet Martin Cullen TD, Minister for Transport

12th December 2005

Introduction

We welcome this opportunity to meet with Minister Martin Cullen to discuss the details of the Transport 21 announcement and to highlight some important issues for the BMW Region.

It is generally agreed that the stock and quality of a region's infrastructure is essential for its competitiveness as it affects accessibility, transport costs and the attractiveness of a region to foreign investment.

However, it must be acknowledged that there has been under-investment in the BMW region's transport infrastructure under the NDP to date due to the effective frontloading of investment in the Greater Dublin area

Overall therefore, we welcome a number of elements of Transport 21, in particular

The commitment to upgrade key national primary and secondary routes

The commitment to the phased re-opening of the Western Rail Corridor

The commitment to develop the Atlantic Road Corridor

The commitment to double funding for rural transport initiatives

We wish to highlight today some concerns that we have with Transport 21, for example

The absence of a clear work programme and timescale for the upgrading of outstanding sections of national primary and secondary routes from 2010 onwards

The overly lengthy timeframe for the re-opening of the Western rail Corridor

The absence of a timescale for completion of the Atlantic Road Corridor

The need to strengthen the role of the National Spatial Strategy as the framework within which to plan transport investment programmes.

1. National Roads Programme - Priority Primary and Secondary Routes in the BMW Region

Infrastructural investment should be strategic and should contribute towards the goal of balanced regional development, a cornerstone of the National Spatial Strategy. This would imply a greater emphasis on the road network connecting the gateways and hubs within the BMW Region.

We are concerned that no timescales are given for the upgrading of outstanding sections of national primary and secondary routes post 2010. These routes have been highlighted in the Regional Planning Guidelines of the Regional Authorities within the BMW region.

With the anticipated completion of the inter-urban routes by 2010, these key routes should assume a higher order of priority:

N2 Ardee to Monaghan

N3 Kells to Belturbet

N4 Mullingar to Sligo

N5 Longford to Westport

N15 Sligo to Bundoran

N17 Claregalway & Tuam Bypasses & Coollooney - Charlestown

N18 Galway – Ennis

N26 Ballina – Castlebar & link to Knock

N52 Dundalk to Nenagh

N80 Moate to Rosslare

N56 Donegal Coast Route

N59 Sligo to Galway Coast Route

N55 Cavan to Athlone

N60 Athlone - Castlebar

N61 Athlone to Sligo

2. Timeframe for Re-opening of the Western Rail Corridor

We welcome the commitment to re-open the Western Rail Corridor from Ennis to Claremorris and to preserve the alignment from Claremorris to Collooney.

We would question the length of time required for the re-opening of the Athenry to Tuam section (2011) and the Tuam to Claremorris section (2014). We believe that these works could proceed much sooner as there are few obstacles to working on an existing disused line compared with working on a new line.

We are also concerned that the timing for much of this work will co-incide with the major public transport investment in Dublin, which could draw resources away from the Western Rail Corridor.

We also believe that the project should be brought forward to relieve pressure on the heavily congested N17 and N18 routes.

No timeframe is given for the re-opening of the line to Collooney.

3. Transport 21, the NSS and Strategic North/South Routes

We welcome the commitment to double funding for rural transport initiatives by 2007 and the commitment to provide Quality Bus Corridors in Galway (no timescale given)

The BMW Regional Assembly believes that all road programmes should relate to the National Spatial Strategy as the strategic framework for guiding future investment and sees the development of roads as an essential feature of the NSS.

The Assembly recommends that a number of strategic cross-radial corridors (national secondary routes) should be allocated a greater degree of priority and that a higher Level of Service (LoS) is required on all roadways between gateways and hubs. These routes would serve as essential linking points between the BMW and S&E Regions in a north-south direction.

Consideration should be given to upgrading N52/N80 as a key outer ring route
Dundalk→Mullingar→Tullamore→Portlaoise→Carlow→Wexford?

North-South linkages should also be considered in prioritising road schemes and whilst considerable progress has been made on the M1 Dublin-Belfast route, the N16 between Sligo and Enniskillen and the N3 Cavan/Enniskillen linkage should be improved. Furthermore, development of the proposed East-West Road link Dundalk to Sligo should be advanced.

The road connection between Mullingar and Athlone should be upgraded and plans advanced for the re-opening of the Mullingar-Athlone rail link.

4. Timeframe for completion of the Atlantic Road Corridor

The Transport 21 announcement made a commitment to develop the Atlantic Road Corridor to dual carriageway and 2+1 standard, but no timescale for the route is given.

We acknowledge that some sections of the route (e.g. Sligo Inner Relief Road, Claremorris Bypass) have been completed and that others are under construction (Ballyshannon-Bundoran). However, key stretches of the route remain to be completed, in particular the N17 and N18 routes.

It is essential to establish a counterbalance along the West coast to the economic dominance of the East coast and to strengthen the connections to the designated gateways of Galway, Sligo and Letterkenny.

5. Investment in Regional Airports

The BMW Regional Assembly supports investment in regional airports, particularly Knock International Airport which would have a very significant impact on the access to, and travel within, the region in the medium term and provide an immediate boost for tourism.

International air access now considered prerequisite to sustaining economic growth and attracting investment. It is also crucial to the growth of tourism as direct access is the bedrock of the short-break market.

Knock International airport is 20 years in existence and handling 500,000+ passengers 2005. Impressive increases in passenger numbers in recent years: 2003 up 27%; 2004 up 51%; 2005 projected 45%. It aims to have 1 million passengers by 2009. Recently launched new brand image and ambitious targets for 2025.

The airport management have prepared detailed investment plans, marketing plans and have undertaken an economic appraisal of the airport's contribution to the region. The airport plans to invest €29.5m in infrastructure between 2005 and 2007. They are seeking government support of €14m for investment in:

- navigational aids such as CAT 11 which will vastly improve the airport's reliability during poor weather conditions;
- upgrading of perimeter fencing which is a key requirement of the IAA;
- the provision of additional aircraft stands on the Apron to facilitate greater numbers of aircraft landings;
- runway works;
- terminal building expansions to cope with greater numbers of passengers;
- ground handling;
- Arrivals and Ramp services
- Baggage and security
- ATC
- CCTV, fuel services, link roads.

6. Planning for Post '06

As already stated, we believe that the NSS should provide the framework for future transport investment under the next National Development Plan.

There should be synergies between the investment programmes funded by the state and the EU co-funded regional programmes under the next round of structural funds. We would propose that there should be provision for exchequer funded infrastructure investment in the Regional OP 2007-13.