

Topical Issue Debate

Transport Infrastructure Provision

3:00 pm



[Pat Buckley](#) (Cork East, Sinn Féin)

Link to this: [Individually](#) | [In context](#) | [Oireachtas source](#)

I welcome the opportunity to speak to this matter. The R630 is a regional road linking Whitegate with the N25, a national primary road at Midleton, and **Lakeview roundabout** in east Cork, which serves the **Cork** to Rosslare Europort via Waterford city. This regional road from Whitegate also carries traffic from adjoining areas such as Upper Aghada, Lower Aghada, Rostellan, Saleen, Ballycotton, Clyne and Ballinacurra, just to mention a few locations.

Whitegate village can boast to be the home of the only oil refinery in Ireland but the most startling fact is that it accounts for over 40% of **Cork's** road tonnage, and it travels on the R630 all year around. There is also Aghada power station, which is Ireland's largest, and this means the regional route is extremely busy. The Minister can understand why. Unfortunately, all this traffic must enter the N25 at **Lakeview roundabout** at Midleton, which is constantly choked with long tailbacks every morning. Midleton town council had approached what was then the National Roads Authority, now Transport Infrastructure Ireland, TII, a number of years ago about having an extra slip lane at the junction between the R630 Whitegate route and the N25 to alleviate this very problem. Unfortunately, over the years nothing has happened.

The commuters who use this route day in and day out have grown very frustrated with the lack of progress. More worrying is the question of safety in the area, particularly with regard to emergency services and the ambulance service in Midleton. I received information from the Minister for Health, Deputy Harris, recently indicating that the new ambulance base is to be in Ballinacurra, which is on the R630 road. From seeing all these tailbacks, I know that if the problem remains, we should fear for people's safety.

As well as all the people who use the route, I would like to know if TII will make use of the land adjacent to the **Lakeview roundabout** and put in an extra lane leading to **Cork** from the Whitegate road, thus alleviating this very serious congestion problem. I spoke to the Minister very briefly about this a while ago. It is basically a T-junction with the national route - the N25 - and the R630, which comes to a pinch

point at the **roundabout**. There is enough land on the left to install a slip or feeder lane but there has never been support from TII. There is a large population in the area that travels the road and I mentioned some of the towns and villages. Very large trucks also use the road, and as I mentioned, fuel being taken from Whitegate accounts for some of the 40% of tonnage travelling in **Cork**. There is also counter-flow with the population working and living in the area. If the Minister could see the road on any morning, he would see tailbacks from **Lakeview roundabout** to Ballinacurra, which is the bones of a mile away. We cannot alleviate the problem unless a slip road is installed.



Shane Ross (Dublin Rathdown, Independent)

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I thank the Deputy for raising this matter, in which I know he has a great and persistent interest. It has registered on my radar because he has spoken to me about it both privately and publicly. I am grateful to him for doing so.

As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for overall policy and funding for the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual national road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland, TII, in conjunction with local authorities concerned. Ireland has just under 100,000 km of road in its network and the maintenance and improvement of national, regional and local roads places a substantial financial burden on local authorities and on the Exchequer. As a result of the national financial position, there were very large reductions in the Exchequer funding available for roads expenditure after the financial crisis. For this reason the focus has had to be on maintenance and renewal rather than new improvement projects in recent years and I envisage that this emphasis on maintaining assets together with safety measures will continue into the next capital plan period. Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual national projects is a matter for TII, in accordance with section 19 of the Roads Act.

I understand from Transport Infrastructure Ireland that **Cork** County Council recently completed a pavement improvement scheme at Ballyvergan, on the N25 close to Youghal, which involved the overlay of the existing pavement. In addition, the council is completing the N25 Killeagh pavement scheme which involves pavement improvements and associated works through Killeagh village. The N25 Castlemartyr pavement scheme which has been put out to tender will involve pavement

improvements and associated works on the N25 through the **east** side of Castlemartyr village and beyond. It is anticipated that the project will go to construction in 2018. I understand, in addition, that the council is starting design works on a number of pavement improvement schemes on the N72, primarily between Mallow and Fermoy.

Cork County Council, as the statutory roads authority, is responsible for regional and local road maintenance and improvement in the county. Funding is provided from the council's own resources, supplemented by grants. In 2017 the Department allocated €36 million to the council. We have been emphasising to all councils the importance of prioritising expenditure on roads when allocating their own resources, including local property tax receipts. Apart from a requirement that a minimum of 15% of maintenance and renewal grants be expended on regional roads, local authorities decide on allocations for regional and local roads in their areas. As such, allocations to individual municipal districts within a county are a matter for the council. Grant allocations for 2018 will be announced early next year and, in line with overall allocations in the capital plan, there will be a significant increase in funding.

3:10 pm



Pat Buckley (Cork East, Sinn Fein)

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I thank the Minister for his response which shows he is well acquainted with the background to this issue. I congratulate **Cork** County Council and **East Cork** Municipal District on the additional works completed in Killeagh and Castlemartyr and the planned improvements between Fermoy and Mallow. The Minister referred to national routes. That is the crux of the issue. As I said, **Cork** County Council has tried very hard to secure funding for its plans. I accept that moneys are limited and that the Minister has no direct remit when it comes to regional roads. However, some 40% of the traffic passing through County **Cork** travels this road and thereby encounters the largest chicane of a bottleneck one could ever expect to see. That tonnage is mostly coming from the Whitegate oil refinery, but there is also commuter traffic from the ESB power station, Trabolgan holiday centre and all of the towns and villages that feed into the route. Given these circumstances, will the Minister ensure this project which would alleviate a great deal of hardship for commuters in the area is prioritised? It is on the

N25 national route, which is part of the difficulty. Being a regional route, it is the responsibility of **Cork** County Council and **East Cork** Municipal District which do not have the funding required to implement the proposal, but it is attached to the national route which is within the remit of TII. If the Minister cannot give me an answer today, I will be happy to follow up with him later. This might seem like a minor issue, but it affects thousands of commuters day in and day out.



[Shane Ross](#) (Dublin Rathdown, Independent)

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I understand the urgency of this matter and the Deputy's frustration at the lack of progress in addressing it. As he knows, nearly all of the moneys available to us for the immediate future are going on repair works and steady-state investment. It will be 2019 or beyond before moneys will be used for new projects which, although equally important, simply cannot be funded at this time.

On the slip road issue, I understand TII received no formal submission from **Cork** County Council. TII's position on funding for the proposal was advised to the council during the course of discussions between officials of TII and the council. TII's view is that the proposal to construct a slip road feeder lane is a development-led matter and, accordingly, funding for any such project should be provided by way of an appropriate development contribution rather than from the limited Exchequer funding available to TII for the national road network. I accept the urgency of the matter, but the Deputy must accept that there is very little funding available and, given that constraint, the priority must be safety above the easing of congestion. Traffic congestion is a very serious problem, but I am pressing TII to focus on safety in view of the extraordinary and unacceptably high number of road deaths. I will be perfectly happy to discuss the matter with the Deputy in private and to raise it with TII.