

**Minutes of Meeting of Infrastructure Strategic Policy Committee
held on 5th December 2022 at Anner Hotel, Thurles**

PRESENT: Cllr. Michael O'Meara (Chair)
Cllr. Micheál Anglim
Cllr. Michael Fitzgerald
Cllr. Declan Burgess
Cllr. Kevin O'Meara
Cllr. Mark Fitzgerald
Cllr. David Dunne
Mr. Liam Browne, PPN
Mr. Marcus O'Connor, Director of Services, Roads, Transportation and Infrastructure
Mr. Liam Brett, Senior Engineer, Roads Operational
Mr. John Nolan, Senior Engineer, Roads Capital
Mr. James Murray, Senior Engineer, Roads Operational
Mr. Paddy Crowley, A/Senior Engineer, Active Travel
Ms. Michèle Maher, Administrative Officer, Roads
Mr. James Hayes, Senior Staff Officer, Roads (Minutes)
Mr. Paul Keane, Executive Engineer, Nenagh MD

APOLOGIES: Cllr. Jim Ryan, Mr. Brian Pope

1. Minutes of Meeting held on 3 October 2022 and Matters Arising

Cllr. Michael O'Meara welcomed everybody to the meeting.

The Minutes of the meeting of 3 October 2022 were proposed by Cllr. Kevin O'Meara and seconded by Cllr. Declan Burgess. There were no matters arising.

2. Vehicle Activation Signage, Result from Pilot Scheme

Mr. Marcus O'Connor introduced this item, giving an overview and comment on how the Vehicle Feedback signs were popular with the public and Councillors, but that a different message was coming from TII in relation to how effective they were.

Mr. Paul Keane gave a presentation updating the meeting on the Vehicle Activation Signage Pilot Scheme and their effectiveness as a traffic calming measure. The items covered in the presentation included: Project brief and objectives; Responsibility for speed management on public roads; Locations to be assessed and associated problems; Site selection parameters; Data Collection and Methodology; Results and conclusions.

Mr. Liam Brett thanked Mr. Paul Keane for his presentation and commented that this was the first study of its type in Ireland and would inform other Local Authorities. 100 of these signs are already operating in county Tipperary.

Cllr. Declan Burgess thanked Mr. Keane for his presentation. Cllr. Burgess noted that he could see how these signs lose effectiveness, but they have a role on certain types of roads. He queried the role of An Garda Síochána and had raised queries at a community meeting as to where speed vans are placed. Cllr. Burgess had been advised that the placement of speed vans was based on number of criteria, including accidents. Cllr. Burgess commented that speed vans do slow down traffic, however clarity on their locations is required. He enquired regarding effectiveness of the average speed cameras in operation on the M7 motorway.

Cllr. David Dunne commented that the presentation summed up his own personal thinking that drivers don't take notice of these signs. A temporary sign had been in place in Carrick-on-Suir and traffic slowed down for a while due to the novelty factor. Cllr. Dunne noted that money might be better spent elsewhere.

Cllr. Michael O'Meara agreed that the signs lose effectiveness. They were effective when first introduced to Riverstown. Cllr. O'Meara commented on issues around sporting venues located in rural areas, particularly GAA, where people were walking. He felt that it is only a matter of time before a child is hit crossing the road. Cllr. O'Meara requested that a policy be developed on GAA centres and how to calm traffic, suggesting that the Council should work in conjunction with the GAA on this policy and do a safety audit.

Mr. Liam Browne commented that feedback signs can have a calming effect particularly where they signify entering an urban area, however there is no punishment factor. Once a camera is put on them then you have an effect, and he noted the example of Merck work facility.

Mr. Paul Keane in reply to Cllr. Burgess stated that the VFS signs were more effective when used with other traffic calming measures. The locations for speed vans are a matter for An Garda Síochána. In reply to Cllr. Dunne, he noted that the pilot scheme will give guidance and learning outcomes of where the signs should be located and sighted, agreeing that they do have a novelty effect. Mr. Keane said that studies in the US show that rotating the signs is effective. In reply to Cllr. O'Meara, Mr. Keane advised that traffic calming measures can be applied such as introducing kerb lines, optical widths, vertical road markings to create the right environment. Regarding GAA centres, the Districts are doing speed surveys in some locations and there may be opportunities arising from that.

Mr. Liam Brett commented that enforcement supports the rotating of signs and influencing driver behaviour. Learning outcomes are to make better use of other measures and not on the signs as a stand-alone.

Cllr. Kevin O'Meara queried why most of the analysis was on V85 parameter. Mr. Paul Keane commented that 15% takes in average speed and included in 2nd and 4th parameters. Cllr. O'Meara agreed with the policy on GAA centres but noted we must identify the issues, including at school locations. Cllr. Michael O'Meara asked if this could be looked at.

Mr. Paul Keane commented that this can be looked at in terms of the speed limit review. Mr. Liam Brett commented that Safe Routes to Schools (An Taisce) and Active Travel programmes are in place to make those areas safer. Regarding GAA centres he advised that the ideal solution is to create GAA owned carparking, and so to remove cars from the side of the road. Mr. Marcus O'Connor agreed with Mr. Brett's comments and said there is a need to work with the community to take the risks away. This should be looked at on a case by case basis. Mr. O'Connor advised that the average speed cameras on the M7 were catching people exceeding the speed limit, which is in contrast with the Port Tunnel where there is nearly full compliance. He noted that it is a very expensive system to roll out. The Local Authority has no say on speed van locations. The key point learnt from the pilot scheme on Vehicle Feedback Signs is that they are less effective than thought. They are more effective when new and used in conjunction with other measures.

Cllr. Michael Fitzgerald queried who maintains the signs. He commented on the speed ramps in Rosegreen/New Inn and noted that on the Dualla Road out of Cashel the feedback sign was only pointed one way, and cars were going quickly.

Mr. Paul Keane stated that the Municipal Districts were responsible for maintaining the signs.

Cllr. Declan Burgess stated it was a pity the RSA didn't consult with the Local Authorities as well as An Garda Síochána. He noted that the Speed Limit review would be of benefit and needs to be done as soon as possible.

Mr. Marcus O'Connor commented that the speed limit review was delayed due to waiting on Department policy relating to 'go slow' legislation for urban areas. Mr. O'Connor was hopeful this was imminent.

3. Tipperary Greenway Projects

Mr. Paddy Crowley gave a presentation on Tipperary Greenway Projects. The following items were covered in the presentation: Greenway funding allocation; Greenway projects 2022 including Lough Derg Greenway, Cashel to Cahir, Cahir to Clonmel and Suir Blueway; Greenway requirements; National network; Tipperary greenways form part of the national cycle network; Major project phases and corresponding CAF stages; Code of Best Practice for National and Regional Greenways; Tourism numbers and potential; Suir Blueway.

Cllr. David Dunne stated that he was blown away by the figures and statistics presented. He commented on a recent incident on the Blueway where emergency services had difficulty in accessing a casualty noting the need to ensure that Rescue Services have the right equipment. Cllr. Dunne commented that education was important and issues around conflict between walkers and cyclists. He queried what are the rules/regulations for how Greenways are used. Cllr. Dunne also expressed concern around the possibility of too many greenways, and would we be diluting what we have, making businesses unviable by splitting up visitor numbers.

Cllr. Michéal Anglim thanked Mr. Crowley for his presentation. He said that communication with landowners was important and gave the example of Ardfinnan where there was a lack of understanding as to what was happening.

Cllr. Kevin O'Meara stated that it was great to see this being managed from a high level. Cllr. O'Meara queried if there were any plans to link back to Thurles and stated that a local study was being carried out via Leader funding.

Cllr. Declan Burgess welcomed the body of work being done and stated that links from Cahir down would be a game changer. Cllr. Burgess noted that there were many economic opportunities and that the code of practice was an interesting and important piece of work.

Mr. Liam Browne queried allocations and difference in spend. He also asked how realistic the figures for Cashel to Cahir were, and is this the best use of money. Mr. Browne queried who is responsible or has liability if someone is hurt on a greenway. Longer greenways may encourage cyclists to go faster. Mr. Browne commented that the age friendly access was fantastic and ability for mobility scooters to be used.

Cllr. Michael O'Meara commented on a scheme in his local area which would make use of an unused railway as a natural corridor.

Mr. Paddy Crowley responded, using Suir Blueway as an example, and noting that we want to get to Limerick Greenway standards with a 3m width. Mr. Crowley commented that you would be able to get an emergency vehicle down to the Blueway. He noted that there is an unwritten code on the Cashel to Cahir Greenway and cyclists are in a relaxed mode. The aim is to create an experience where people will stay for more than one day and the Council is looking for funding to deliver these experiences. In terms of education, greenways are still new and it is about getting the balance right. A code of respect and appropriate widths will be important. Location codes on signage are a good idea. He advised that Clandillon Consulting are working on a feasibility study for a Thurles link, based on Leader funding, however there is not a whole railway corridor there. The challenge is around funding for the national plan and delivering the Greenways programme with a small staff, also engaged in Active Travel.

In response to Mr. Browne, Mr. Crowley commented that allocations every year are a wish list and it takes time to procure services and to get through the process with TII. Inspectors are appointed now and it is good to get current spend and public consultations done. In response to Cllr. Anglim, Mr. Crowley commented that the Council wants to talk to the public in person and work through issues with them, brief the Members and look for their support, through a series of public consultations.

In response to Cllr. Michael O'Meara, Mr. Crowley advised that Offaly have included in their strategy to look at the railway corridor from Portumna to Roscrea and it is on the national plan.

5. Any Other Business

Cllr. Michael Fitzgerald commented on how recent weather had damaged rural local roads and mentioned border pinch points with Limerick and how Limerick City & County Council was maintaining roads in a better condition than Tipperary. He felt that there was no joined up thinking with other Councils. Cllr. Fitzgerald commented with regard to the 3-year programme and the need to concentrate on local roads to bring them to normal standards, but some roads won't qualify for schemes such as CIS.

Cllr. Michael O'Meara supported Cllr. Fitzgerald in his comments. Cllr. O'Meara stated that the Council is doing great work but need a better policy on getting water off roads.

Cllr. Michéal Anglim also supported Cllr. Fitzgerald in his comments and stated that roads are deteriorating faster than thought. Cllr. Anglim also commented that previously with CIS/LIS schemes the whole road was completed, and now 100m at the end of the road may be left out. This is putting Councillors in an impossible situation.

Mr. Marcus O'Connor responded by stating that the basic problem is there are a lot of roads in the county, some 6,000km. Allocations are not large enough and this has been pointed out to the Minister, most recently on his visit to Tipperary. Roads should be on a 10 to 20-year cycle but in many cases, it can be 30 years before a return to them. Latest indicators show an improvement, but we are still in the bottom third nationally. If the Council had more money, more works would be done. In terms of the 3-year programme he stated that the Council would like it to be 50% bigger. Drainage works have been emphasised to the Districts. The impact of high inflation will also inhibit the amount of work that can be done.

Mr. Liam Browne queried why roadworks were being carried out at this time of year. Mr. O'Connor responded that allocations don't carry over to the following year and that there are a limited number of contractors available for works, also some works such as drainage are more suitable at this time of year.

Cllr. Michael O'Meara queried if an emergency fund of €2 million for roads could be set up. Cllr. O'Meara knew of two roads that he feels won't last the winter. Mr. O'Connor responded that the 2023 Budget had been passed by the members and requested that Councillors use their contacts in Dail Eireann to highlight the issue of rural roads and lack of funding.

Ms. Michèle Maher noted that 2023 funding allocations may not be notified until late January/early February.

6. To note date of next meeting

Monday, 6th March 2023, at 10.00am via Zoom.

Signed: 
Cllr. Michael O'Meara
Cathaoirleach