

# Project Ireland 2040 Delivery Board

20<sup>th</sup> September 2023

Whitaker Room, Department of Public Expenditure, NDP

Delivery and Reform, Government Buildings, Upper Merrion Street,

Dublin 2



Tionscadal Éireann  
Project Ireland  
**2040**

## Minutes

### Participants

**Chair:** Minister Paschal Donohoe TD

**External Board Members:** PJ Rudden, Sean O'Driscoll, Thomas Barrett, Terry Prendergast, Mary Hughes.

**Secretary General Board Members:** David Moloney, Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform (DPENDR), Graham Doyle, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH), Colm O'Reardon, Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS).

**In attendance:** Ken Spratt, Secretary General, Department of Transport (DTRANS), Paul Hogan (DHLGH), John Conlon (DPENDR), Fiona O'Connor (Special Advisor to Minister Donohoe), Claragh Mulhern (DHLGH), Garret Doocey (DTRANS), Deborah Sweeney (Press Advisor to Minister Donohoe) and Marie Mulvihill (DPENDR).

**Secretariat:** Kevin Meaney, Margaret O'Donnell, Tom Fleming (DPENDR).

The Minister opened the meeting and welcomed the new Secretary General of DFHERIS, Colm O'Reardon, as a member of the Board. The Minister said that the work of the Board to-date had focused on identifying the key constraints on the delivery of the Project Ireland 2040 capital investment programme and the Board would now focus on how we would address those constraints.

### 1. Minutes of the July 12th Meeting

The draft minutes of the July 12th meeting and the agenda for today's meeting were agreed as circulated. The minutes of the July meeting (and those of future meetings) will be published on the [gov.ie/2040](https://gov.ie/2040) website.

### 2. Discussion on the presentation from Department of Transport

DTRANS gave a brief overview of their presentation. They highlighted that NDP allocations were in line with agreed figures and while there had been some underspend in the years 2021 and 2022, this is likely to be negligible in the coming years. In addition, DTRANS is applying maximum pressure on the agencies to spend their allocations but without compromising value for money. DTRANS stated there has been substantial investment in numerous active travel projects throughout the country and noted strong passenger growth on services delivered under BusConnects Network Redesign as well as on new Connecting Ireland services introduced in rural Ireland. On roads DTRANS summarised the projects already delivered under the current NDP, as well as those major projects in construction and others advancing through relevant approval processes.

On planning, DTRANS stated that there were signs of progress in relation to An Bord Pleanála's consideration of major transport projects with an Oral Hearing on DART+ West scheduled to commence next week. DTRANS raised for discussion whether sufficient assistance to the Board was

currently provided in terms of signalling Government's prioritisation of projects and also whether such signalling might also better ensure alignment among various State authorities in terms of their engagement on major NDP projects as they enter the planning system to avoid unnecessary inter-agency disputes.

DTRANS acknowledged the Public Works Contract supported the successful delivery of many projects but noted that for certain types of projects there were well-identified issues with its use and a desire to use other contract forms such as NEC or FIDIC to ensure appropriate competitive tension and drive value for money and acknowledged derogations had been granted in that respect to certain transport projects recently. On resources DTRANS noted the issue of adequately resourcing relevant Departments and agencies to assist with successful NDP delivery but also noted wider labour market issues impacting the roll-out of BusConnects and Connecting Ireland services (e.g. bus driver recruitment) and potential issues in the coming years with a significantly ramped up infrastructure delivery programme. On funding, DTRANS stated that prioritisation of projects within the overall programme will be required as inflationary pressures are severe and impacting the level of output possible from within the available allocations.

The external members made a number of points on transport including:

- the degree to which expenditure is focussed on compact growth;
- the capacity of regional roads to accommodate coaches;
- the need to entice international contractors to bid on public contracts;
- the move to digital construction and away from traditional methods;
- a whole of Government approach to planning and
- prioritising projects to address the issue of inflation and available skills.

DTRANS responded to note the close working relationship between it and DHLGH in relation to supporting compact growth and referenced the recent jointly produced report on transport-orientated development in Dublin and that analysis being widened to include the GDA and other cities also. On the issue of coaches and regional roads DTRANS noted that much of the Connecting Ireland growth is serviced by smaller 'Local Link' coaches but in addition to that a significant level of funding is being provided for the protection and renewal of the regional & local roads network as well. DTRANS recognised the importance of the move to digitisation for new construction contracts and also referenced the work led by the National Transport Authority to create awareness among foreign contractors about the opportunities available in the transport sector here. They noted that prioritisation can be an issue where projects are delayed and other projects may have to be progressed instead.

Board members said that An Bord Pleanála (ABP) has always prioritised certain projects but expressed the view that more certainty around timelines would be helpful. There have been significant improvements in planning and the newly resourced ABP had the potential to do business differently with a better team approach to achieving quicker turnaround in decisions taken. DHLGH noted that the new Planning Bill will contain mandatory timelines for projects and that the resources put into ABP since April have made a significant difference.

The Chair noted that prioritisation is not the only constraint affecting delivery and spoke about the skills and capacity within the market to delivery on all the projects that have been planned at the same time. He endorsed the need to prioritise projects in light of the challenges around the skills shortage and the inflationary pressures that we are currently experiencing.

It was pointed out by a Board member that there is a very reliable capital programme of work on offer, there are real opportunities to attract companies from abroad to tender for contracts and that

they could bring a new dimension to the current situation. DPENDR also noted the need to look beyond one year profiling of expenditure.

### **3. Discussion on the actions points to address NDP delivery constraints**

The Chair referred to the paper circulated to the last meeting setting out the main constraints impeding NDP delivery as identified by Board members. As a follow-up, DPENDR has prepared a paper which sets out a range of possible actions to address those constraints. DPENDR outlined to the meeting the proposed action points in the paper. The points were grouped under three headings:

1. Actions on Planning Capacity
2. Actions on Public Sector Capacity
3. Actions on Wider Skills and Capacity

DFHERIS referred to current pressures on apprenticeship schemes and that these bottlenecks were actively being addressed. In addition, DFHERIS were engaged in more planning and forecasting of future demand in the coming years. DHLGH informed the Board that the Planning Bill will be enacted by the end of the year. The external members complemented those involved in the preparation of the Planning Bill. The external members also said that the issue of circulars on planning at an early stage would be a quick win. In relation to the actions on wider public sector capacity, DPENDR said that a meeting of the Project Ireland 2040 Co-Ordination Group would be convened later this year which would examine progress on some of the ongoing actions in this space.

The Minister put a proposal to the Board that the standing agenda for future meetings would focus on those actions needed to address the constraints that were highlighted in today's presentation. At future meetings the Board will evaluate progress on the actions and so add value to the process. The Minister also noted that it would be useful to identify timelines in relation to the proposed actions. The external members endorsed the proposal put by the Minister. They also noted the need to improve public confidence in the planning system. The question of resources both centrally and at local level, to deliver on all the planned projects was again referred to by the external members. They highlighted the fact that the vast majority of projects are completed on time and on budget and that this needs to be better communicated with the public overall.

The Minister summed up by saying that we need to come up with an acceptable process to address the constraints and that he was conscious of available resources at both local level and indeed in his own Department.

### **4. National Planning Framework revision -update**

DHLGH gave an update on the National Planning Framework (NPF) revision and noted that the Report of Expert Group for the First Revision of the National Planning Framework, published on September 7<sup>th</sup>, had been circulated to the Board. DHLGH stated that a whole of Government approach was needed to guide the new revision of the NPF along with input from the ESRI and others. DHLGH said that a cross-Departmental Steering Group had been set up to guide the work of the NPF revision. In December DHLGH will conduct a public consultation on the revision. DHLGH also noted that investment and prioritisation in infrastructure would play a pivotal role in reaching the compact growth targets in the NFP by providing certainty for the market and better timing of projects. A further update on progress on the NPF revision will be given to the next meeting of the Board.

### **5. Date of next meeting**

The Secretariat will confirm the date of the next meeting which will be held in November 2023.

6. AOB

No items were raised under any other business.

<b>Actions arising from September 20<sup>th</sup> 2023 meeting</b>
1. Timelines to be identified for the proposed actions to alleviate NDP constraints. 2. Next meeting to focus on progress made on the actions under item 3.