

IMPACT STATEMENT : Norma Kealy, Survivor

Good afternoon.

Ladies and gentlemen I would like you to consider this for a moment.

- How would you feel if, every day your life and your family's lives were in constant danger?
- How would you feel if you were afraid to cross the road in your village or town?

That is what living in Slane is like these days, and that is why we are here.

- How would you like to live in a village where over 22 people have been killed and the people who were supposed to do something about it had dragged their feet and kept putting off key decisions and action during that time?

You would probably feel very angry and demand that something meaningful be done as a matter of urgency, and that is why we are here.

Let me introduce myself.

My name is Norma Kealy. I am one of a group of mothers who survived the latest crash in Slane and I am speaking today on their behalf. Let me tell you briefly what happened on Monday 23rd March.

That morning, we had just dropped our children off at the local national school. We were driving southwards, along the N2, down the steep approach to the crossroads in the centre of Slane Village. My three-year-old son was in the back of my car and one of the other mothers had her 19-month old baby with her.

While stopped at the red light, suddenly there was a loud bang from behind. In our rear-view mirrors, we saw a HGV coming towards us, with no sign of slowing. We knew immediately that our cars were going to be hit, but there was absolutely nothing we could do and for the majority there was nowhere to escape to on this confined section of roadway. Several violent impacts followed as the HGV ploughed down the hill through the traffic, the force of its momentum smashing our cars into each other. One car was flipped forwards onto its roof and another was pinned between a truck and a telephone box. I speak for everyone when I say that we will never forget the shock, fear and panic we all felt in those few moments.

When everything eventually came to a stop, I got out of my car with my son and I could hardly believe the scene of chaos and destruction around me. In the minutes following the crash it gradually became clear that, by some miracle, nobody was dead or seriously injured. Most of the impact had been absorbed by a smaller truck that by pure chance happened to be directly in front of the HGV. Had that truck not been there, it is almost certain that the HGV would have caused several deaths and many serious injuries. Analysis by the Gardai of traffic collisions put Slane in the top 1% of most dangerous roads in the country. Few, if any, of these roads cuts through the heart of a small rural village and pass directly in front of a primary school.

The crash happened immediately after the morning school-run. If this pile-up had occurred just ten minutes earlier, the results would have been catastrophic. The victims

would have included even more children. Over the years, many children have been caught up in a number of incidents, most notably the bus crash on the bridge in 1985 involving 46 children and the tragic and completely unnecessary death of 2-year-old David Garvey in 2001.

These crashes are NOT 'accidents'. No one in Slane is surprised when they happen. The only real accident in our case was our survival. This crash **should not** have happened. Action should have been taken long ago. **The village of Slane needs a bypass.** Unless something is done, the one certainty is that there will be more crashes and more deaths.

There are twenty-two white wooden crosses mounted on a wall, close to the bridge, in Slane. These represent those who have lost their lives on this most treacherous stretch of road because of this inaction. There could be several additional crosses there now, including one each for myself and for my son. The trauma and distress we experienced that morning is something we will never forget. We are reminded of it, on a daily basis, as we go about our lives in our village. We have no choice but to sit in that very same spot, looking in our rear-view mirrors, fearing what might happen next.

The construction of the Slane bypass is vital to our community. It must become part of the Government's Transport 21 Strategy. You have the power to help us make Slane a safer place for our families. Visit our village; see the situation for yourselves. When you do we are confident that you will make the strongest recommendation you possibly can to the Cabinet to proceed with the construction of the bypass as a matter of urgency. We cannot tolerate this situation continuing indefinitely. Don't leave our lives at risk for a second more than is necessary.

Thank you.