

PRESS RELEASE from representatives of Slane community.

Minister Ultimately Responsible for Fast-tracking Slane Bypass says NRA Chief

We have a medieval bridge and an 18th century road carrying 21st century articulated traffic. Sixteen hundred trucks pass through this residential village each; an intolerable situation that has directly caused numerous deaths and made hostages of the community.

This was the message put by representatives of the community in Slane to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Transport in Dáil Éireann yesterday 15th July. The group returned after a previous presentation to put questions directly to Meath County Manager Mr Tom Dowling, and the Chief Executive of the National Roads Authority, Mr Fred Barry who had been summoned to the meeting to explain their organisations' position on these issues.

During a tough questions-and-answers session during which the officials were pressed by committee members, both Mr Dowling and Mr Barry admitted that the only solution to the ongoing problem in Slane is a bypass and that both organisations wholeheartedly back its construction. Mr Barry said 'there must be a bypass of Slane on economic, environmental and safety grounds' and Mr Dowling stated that Slane village 'will be destroyed' without a bypass.

Asked when the bypass is likely to happen Mr Barry explained that while previous delays to the project were caused by changes in national policy, the NRA expects to be ready to submit plans to An Bord Pleanála in October, a process which could take up to two years after which time, funding alone will be the determining factor. Mr Barry confirmed that currently the Slane Bypass is in Phase 2 of the Government's Transport 21 strategy which means that all current major interurban projects must be completed before Slane is considered. However, in relation to exceptional cases like that in Slane, he did add that 'the Minister has ultimate discretion' to prioritise such projects.

On the HGV ban, Tom Dowling admitted that although it could be put in place, his advice was that it would be very difficult to implement. Meath TD Thomas Byrne, pointed out that two alternative routes to the N2 route through Slane already exist in the M1 and the M3/N3 and that more creative thinking should be used to make the ban work. Committee Chairman, Frank Fahy suggested an introduction of the ban on a trial basis. Fergus O'Dowd stated that Meath County Council have no choice but to implement the ban as it is a reserve function of the Council, voted through unanimously in April.

Mr Dowling admitted that current traffic calming measures in Slane do not meet acceptable standards and undertook to look at all options and although Mr Barry promised the full support of the NRA no clear timeframe for this work was given. TDs and officials alike were reminded by Shane McEntee that the next road traffic fatality in Slane will be 'blood on our hands' should no action be taken immediately.