

## **Presentation to Oireachtas Joint Committee on Transport**

by Mr John Ryle on behalf of Slane Community

15<sup>th</sup> July 2009

Mr Chairman, thank you for extending this invitation to us to again address the Joint Committee and we welcome the participation of the NRA and Meath County Council. At our previous meeting we described the intolerable road safety situation in Slane whereby the community lives in a constant state of fear. A number of unique features converge to make the N2 through the village one of the most dangerous sections of road in the country.

We have a medieval bridge and an 18<sup>th</sup> century road carrying 21<sup>st</sup> century articulated traffic. Sixteen hundred trucks pass through this residential village each day and directly in front of a large national school. Most incidents occur on the 1km-long steep downhill section of road which includes two particularly sharp bends. Nearly all involve out-of-control trucks which because of the road layout, cannot veer off the hill and stop safely. Countless collisions have resulted many involving fatalities and serious injuries and it seems certain that more will be killed if appropriate action is not taken without further delay.

The need for immediate effective action was once again highlighted in the starkest possible terms by a near-catastrophic collision in Slane on 23<sup>rd</sup> March detailed in our last presentation. Within two weeks, Meath County Councillors unanimously passed a motion calling for a HGV ban through the village of Slane. The Minister for Transport and the NRA referred the matter of the ban to Meath County Council and only now, almost four months later, has a report appeared. Rather than detailing how and when a HGV ban will be finally put in place, it summarises all of the reasons why a ban cannot be implemented. The main recommendations of the report are:

1. to write to the NRA to carry out a study to assess the full impacts of a HGV ban.
2. to write to the NRA to tell them how vulnerable N2 road users are and seek approval for the implementation of a 30kmph speed limit.
3. to write to the NRA to seek funding to implement further traffic calming measures

Significantly, the final point in this report is an expression of the Council's belief that the ultimate solution to the problem in Slane is the construction of the bypass.

We would like to make the following comments:

Firstly, the residents of Slane are extremely disappointed with the negative tone of the report. We are very surprised that it was so selective in the parties that were consulted and that there is no reference whatsoever to the safety, well-being and quality of life of the residents. We strongly question the value of requesting that the NRA carry out another similar report.

Secondly, without 24 hour-a-day speed cameras will a 30km speed limit offer any real improvement? Also, how will such a speed limit stop out-of-control HGVs on the hill through the village to the bridge?

Thirdly, in the absence of the bypass and a HGV ban, traffic calming measures would appear to be the most likely to improve road safety in Slane in the interim. However, measures that were put in place following the last fatality in 2001 have only been of limited success as incidents continue to occur regularly. We question the level of monitoring and maintenance of these measures. For example, the high friction surfacing appears to have almost completely worn away in certain places and most of the dividing strips separating the lanes on Mill Hill have disappeared. Cameras installed to monitor traffic activity, including accidents, apparently do not work.

Traffic calming measures did nothing to prevent the out-of-control truck on 23<sup>rd</sup> March and have, it may be argued, actually contributed to certain incidents. Even since then at least two further incidents involving HGVs have taken place.

We would welcome the speedy reinforcement of existing traffic calming measures and we would like to suggest that the following be considered. The carriageways should be visibly narrowed and include constrictions, especially on the northern approaches to the village, to force drivers to reduce their speed. Furthermore, pedestrian-controlled crossings need to be provided, especially at the school and the new playground. We also strongly urge the immediate installation of speed cameras and electronic flashing signage giving vehicle speeds and warning of the steep gradients.

Finally, we have a number of questions that we want to put to the parties present here today.

1. What will break this cycle of apparent inaction. When will construction of the bypass actually start and what will be done to protect us in the meantime?
2. Do you honestly believe that the current measures are adequate to ensure acceptable standards of road safety in Slane?
3. What do you think will happen on the N2 through Slane when the double-tolled M3 opens?

To conclude Mr Chairman, despite all relevant parties agreeing that Slane's road safety problems are very serious, all we have seen is a lot of deliberation and little effective action. Either they know how serious the situation is and they really don't care, in which case they are in gross neglect of their responsibilities, or they do not, in fact, understand the extreme urgency of the situation. In either case, we are looking at a reprehensible failure to act. I will finish by putting this question to Meath County Council and the NRA:

When the next multi-vehicle collision happens in Slane, as inevitably it will, this time perhaps causing several deaths - given the many warnings you have received already and the lack of effective and timely action, will you feel you have adequately discharged your duty of care to the people of Slane?