

Discretion given to local authorities on road spending – 18th February 2014

To ask the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on whether local authorities should have greater discretion on spending on local and regional roads.

- Eoghan Murphy

Reply

The Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Leo Varadkar):

The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of each local authority, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from local authorities own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded from this additional funding is also a matter for the local authority.

Last month, I announced that a total of €331.9 million is being provided to local authorities for the maintenance and improvement of regional and local roads in 2014. I am in fact giving local authorities significantly increased flexibility this year. I have reduced the number of grant categories, increased the amount allocated under the Discretionary grant heading and will facilitate the transfer of funds between key grant categories where local authorities need this. Local authorities can also reprioritise their road strengthening programme where necessary. In addition local authorities can use up to 15% of their Discretionary Grant for the local improvement scheme covering non public roads.

In making adjustments to the regional and local road allocations in 2014, my primary aim has been, as far as is practicable, to strike an important balance. On the one hand, local authorities will have more flexibility than ever before to target funding to appropriate repair and rehabilitation schemes in local areas. On the other hand, I want to ensure that key programmes that promote preventative maintenance and safety projects on public roads continue to be funded. Given funding constraints, the Government's priority has to be to protect previous investment in the road network.

It is also particularly important that local authorities do not reduce expenditure from their own resources in respect of roads this year in view of the current difficult situation and that they carefully reassess their planned road programmes for 2014 in the light of the impact of the recent storms on their road networks.

In principle I intend to give local authorities greater, possibly full, discretion over their spending of state grants for roads in 2015. I believe that local authorities and their elected members are best placed to make decisions of where and for what roads funding should be spent in their own county rather than that decision being made by central government. This however will depend on wider government consideration of the funding of local authorities.