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A Chaothaoirligh,

At the outset of this statement, I would like to have my disappointment, and that of the people I represent in the South Limerick area, recorded at the manner in which the Board are conducting today's proceedings.

As I am sure the assembled participants will be aware, the Ministers for Finance and Public Expenditure are presenting details of Budget 2023 in the Dáil today. As a Dáil Deputy for the constituency of Limerick County and a Minister, I am required to be in Leinster House today. In keeping with the processes which An Bord Pleannála used in oral hearings during the COVID-19 Pandemic, where those wishing to be heard were facilitated remotely, I contacted the Board some time ago, asking that the same provision be afforded to me to participate in this oral hearing. I know that the venue where the hearing is taking place, has the capacity to hear submissions from individuals remotely, and that was communicated by my office to the Board. However, there was no attempt made to facilitate me on the same basis as people were facilitated in oral hearings that surrounded the proposed Limerick to Foynes motorway. I know that local people, whom I have engaged with as part of this application from the very beginning, are very annoyed that I have not been afforded the opportunity to speak at this hearing. They understand that there is a requirement for Dáil Deputies to be in Dublin on the day of the Budget, and they were shocked that the duty placed upon Dáil Deputies in accordance with the Constitution to make financial provision for the State, has not been adequately recognised, and accommodated by the Board. Given the pronouncements of the Government previously on the need to accommodate public servants in different working environments and the Board's previous accommodation of persons at similar hearings, it is my intention to write to the



Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government on this matter, to alert him to it. This will not be my first time writing to Minister Darragh O'Brien TD regarding the operation of An Bord Pleannála in the recent past. However unfortunately given the lack of willingness to make accommodating arrangements on the day of the national budget, the Board leaves me with no other option but to alert him to what I believe to be a completely inflexible approach.

The application up for consideration today is that for a Railway Order that impacts adversely on communities at Fantstown and Thomastown, Co. Limerick. I refer to my previous correspondence to the Board, which I advanced with the requisite fee to make an observation on the matter. The communities in South Limerick that are proposed to be impacted by these proposed orders are small rural communities who for generations have lived beside the railway. Indeed the railway has for well over 150 years been part of the daily lives of these parishes. Removal of the crossings in the manner in which it is proposed to do, would I believe be detrimental to the social and economic lives of these communities, something in accordance with the basic principles of sound planning, the Board must consider.

The extinguishing of the Thomastown (XC201) crossing should in theory be regarded as a good thing. This is something that the local community and I relayed to Irish Rail when we met them at my invitation in Effin. Making a road crossing safe for all road users is naturally something that everyone would welcome, however doing it in the manner proposed is something that the residents and road users in the area are not in favour of.

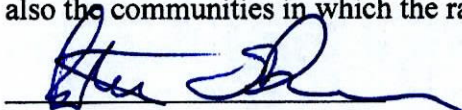
It is proposed, in conjunction with Limerick City and County Council, to construct a new junction on the R515. This is a very busy regional road, linking Charleville to Kilmallock. No provision has been made for the installation of a stacking lane that will allow for safe right hand turns off the R515. This will mean that cars stopped in the middle of the road to turn right, will be liable to be rear-ended. This is a risk which is unnecessary and which the Community have on more than one occasion asked to be reconsidered. The residents and I have therefore asked that in the removal of the level crossing that the R515 junction be provided with a stacking lane for right hand turns off the R515 in the direction of the railway.

This particular crossing also contains a proposed new bridge over the rail line. The current proposed design of the new bridge is wide enough for only one vehicle to cross at any one time. Again, the local communities have identified this as an unnecessary risk as they have pointed out to Irish Rail of the possibility of a collision on the bridge, particularly at times when there is likely to be high volumes of traffic such as dropping off times for the local school. In the last



number of years, a number of community initiatives have taken place in Effin to enhance the attractiveness of the community as a place in which to live. Several new houses have been constructed and there are a number of additional children travelling to the school in Effin. Parents of young children, while welcoming the removal of the level crossing and the impact that delays have had on their lives, were keen to point out to me the risk that a new narrow bridge, at variance with what would be constructed if this issue was anywhere else, I proposed to be constructed. As you will be aware, the area is a strong agricultural area and the roads in the area have high levels of heavy agricultural vehicles and machinery. Therefore, you will appreciate the views of the local people when they were to find out that the bridge being proposed is as narrow as it is similar to our contention around the junction, the community and I would again ask that the bridge be constructed to a standard that will provide for two cars to be able to pass. With regard to Fantstown (XC187), the proposed extinguishing of the level crossing has a detrimental impact as it severs an artery right through a small rural community. Again, while most people accept that the removal of level crossings is a good thing as it provides for greater safety on railway routes, due regard must be given to the communities through which the rail line passes. Any determination, which does not examine the societal and economic impacts of such enormous changes after generations of operation of the railway, would in my estimation be completely flawed and not in keeping with good planning practices which should look at unintended consequences. It is the concept of unintended consequence, which strikes to the heart of what the Board is being asked to deliberate on. This line travels through small communities on its way from Dublin to Cork, but because the populations of these communities is tiny in comparison to the rail termini at either end, should be no reason for them to be any less important during this deliberation stage.

I regret through a decision of the Board not to be able to present my views in person at this hearing in Newcastle West on something so fundamentally important for the people of these areas. However even in the face of not being facilitated by the Board, I still wanted a view presented from me and that is why I have asked my Parliamentary Assistant to present this today. I know that the residents in the impacted communities in Limerick will be monitoring this process to ascertain if the principles of good planning, for not only the project itself but also the communities in which the rail line is based will be properly adhered to.



Patrick O'Donovan T.D.