



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Infrastructure

Minutes of Proceedings

6 November 2024

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings

Present:

- Mrs Deborah Erskine MLA (Chairperson)
- Mr John Stewart MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
- Mr Danny Baker MLA
- Mr Cathal Boylan MLA
- Mr Keith Buchanan MLA
- Mr Stephen Dunne MLA
- Mr Mark Durkan MLA
- Mr Andrew McMurray MLA

Via video conference: Mr Peter McReynolds MLA

Apologies: None

In Attendance:

- Mrs Kathy O'Hanlon (Assembly Clerk)
- Mr Phil Pateman (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
- Mr Jonathan Lawless (Clerical Supervisor)
- Mr William Kinnear (Clerical Officer)



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The meeting commenced in public session at 10:01 am.

1. Apologies

As above.

Mr John Stewart joined the meeting at 10:02 am.

2. Declaration of Interests

Mrs Deborah Erskine declared interests as someone who lives in an unadopted housing development and having relatives who work for the Driver and Vehicle Agency.

Mrs Deborah Erskine, Mr Cathal Boylan, Mr Keith Buchanan, Mr Stephen Dunne and Mr Andrew McMurray each declared an interest as an owner of a diesel vehicle.

3. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson informed Members that she has received a request to meet with Matt Brewis, Director of Insurance at the Financial Conduct Authority, along with the Chairpersons of the Committee for the Economy and the Committee for Justice, to discuss motor insurance.

4. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 23 October 2024.

Mr Mark Durkan joined the meeting at 10.04am.



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5. Matters Arising

None.

6. Correspondence

Response from the Minister for Infrastructure providing an update on the delays in discharging of planning conditions.

Agreed: To request information from local councils on delays in discharging planning conditions, including the number of new homes and developments affected and the reasons for delays.

Correspondence from the Advice NI on proposals to extend the Bereavement Service in NI.

Agreed: To forward to Minister for Communities and Minister for Infrastructure to ask what consideration has been given to extending the Bereavement Service to include relevant matters within DfI's remit.

Correspondence from the Law Society in respect of concerns regarding the content of Regional Property Certificates and a request to meet with the Committee.

Agreed: To forward the correspondence to the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) for response to the concerns raised.

Agreed: To schedule a formal oral evidence session with the Law Society once a response has been received from DfI.

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

- Correspondence from DfI providing a copy of response to the Committee for Communities regarding housing planning applications currently on hold.
- Written briefing from DfI on staff vacancies and work to fill vacant posts.
- Written briefing from DfI on traffic congestion in Belfast.



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- DfI Roads Western Division - Annual Report to Fermanagh & Omagh District Council 2024-25.
- DfI Roads Southern Division – Annual Report to Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council 2024-25.
- DfI press release – Appointments to the Drainage Council for Northern Ireland.
- DfI correspondence providing notification of launch of a competition to appoint a Chair to the Board of the Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company.
- Committee for Finance correspondence regarding Budget 2025-25 and Future Years Information Gathering Exercise.
- Committee for Finance correspondence regarding the Outturn and forecast outturn - September 2024.
- Chairpersons' Liaison Group providing an update on strengthening committee scrutiny.
- Update from Ards and North Down Borough Council on The Green Road Conlig (Abandonment) Order (Northern Ireland).
- Invitation from the Mineral Products Association Northern Ireland to visit a quarry and road material manufacturing site.
- Office of Environmental Protection Report – Drivers and pressures affecting terrestrial and freshwater biodiversity in Northern Ireland.
- Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland – Investing Activity Report – October 2024.
- Urgent Oral Statement by the Minister of Finance on the Chancellor's Budget announcement.
- Invitation to the "Driving for the Future Today" event at Belfast Grand Central Station on 14 November 2024 .



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7. All Island Strategic Rail Review - Next Steps – Department for Infrastructure – Oral Evidence

The following officials joined the meeting at 10:08 am:

- Jackie Robinson, Director of Transport Regulation & Public Transport Policy;
- Linda Buick, Head of Public Transport Strategy Branch; and
- Claire McKeown, Public Transport Strategy Branch.

The representatives provided the Committee with an update on the All Island Strategic Rail Review (AISRR). A question and answer session followed.

The evidence session was reported by Hansard.

The representatives left the meeting at 10:45 am.

Agreed: To ask the Department to provide:

- The estimated costs of electrification of the rail network;
- Details of feasibility studies currently underway, including the level and source of funding for the studies and indicative timescales for their completion;
- An assessment of the funding that DfI expects to allocate to AISRR implementation and projects in each of the next few years; and
- How the capital funding for projects arising from the AISRR will be assessed and prioritised alongside other capital projects within the Department's remit.



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8. Statutory Instrument - The Road Transport (International Passenger Services) (Amendment) Regulations 2024

The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister for Infrastructure advising of the making of the Statutory Instrument (SI) 'The Road Transport (International Passenger Services) (Amendment) Regulations 2024' at Westminster.

Agreed: To ask the Department for clarification on the process for progressing the SI; and its assessment of the practical impact of the SI.

9. SR 2024 178 The Trunk Road T3 [Western Transport Corridor – Sion Mills (North) to Ballygawley (West)] Order (Northern Ireland) 2024

The Committee considered SR 2024 178 The Trunk Road T3 [Western Transport Corridor – Sion Mills (North) to Ballygawley (West)] Order (Northern Ireland) 2024.

The Committee noted that the Examiner of Statutory Rules had raised no concerns regarding the technical aspects of the Statutory Rule.

Agreed: That the Committee for Infrastructure has considered SR 2024 178 The Trunk Road T3 [Western Transport Corridor – Sion Mills (North) to Ballygawley (West)] Order (Northern Ireland) 2024 and has no objection to the Rule.

The Committee noted SR 2024 184 The Private Accesses on the A5 Western Transport Corridor – Sion Mills (North) to Ballygawley (West) (Stopping-Up) Order (Northern Ireland) 2024.

The Committee noted correspondence from the Ulster Farmers Union (UFU) requesting an opportunity to meet with the Committee to discuss the vesting of land in relation to the A5 Western Transport Corridor (A5WTC).

The Committee also noted correspondence from the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs proposing a concurrent meeting to take evidence from UFU on the A5WTC.



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Agreed: To hold a concurrent meeting with the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.

10. Subordinate Legislation – SL1s Not Subject to Assembly Procedure

The Committee noted the following proposal for a Statutory Rule, which is not subject to Assembly Proceedings:

- SL1 – The Roads (Speed Limit) (No. 5) Order (Northern Ireland) 2024.

11. Northern Ireland Concessionary Fares Scheme – update – written evidence

The Committee considered an update on the Northern Ireland Concessionary Fares scheme, which advised of the fees to be implemented for applications for 60+ SmartPasses along with details of groups to which exemptions will apply.

The Committee noted the significant public interest in this matter and the number of responses received to the consultation on changes to the eligibility for the Northern Ireland Concessionary Fares Scheme that was undertaken in 2023.

Disappointment was expressed at the proposed introduction of SmartPass fees and the impact this may have, particularly given the recent changes to eligibility to the Winter Fuel Payment.



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12. Changing the emissions test for light vehicles with a new diesel engine – outcome of public consultation – written evidence

The Committee considered written evidence on the outcome of the public consultation on changing the emissions test for light vehicles with a new diesel engines. It was noted that a significant number of respondents to the consultation did not support the proposal to introduce PN testing.

Agreed: To ask DfI to clarify whether the tests, if introduced, will be performed across all testing centres from the same operational date; and to request details of the current regime for emission testing of vehicles across test centres in Northern Ireland.

13. Amendment to Northern Ireland law for people who return to Northern Ireland with an EEA driving licence – outcome of targeted consultation – written evidence

The Committee considered written evidence on the outcome of the targeted consultation on an amendment to Northern Ireland law for people who return to Northern Ireland with a European Economic Area (EEA) driving licence who formerly held a NI or GB driving licence.

Agreed: To ask the Department to clarify what the position is for EEA licence holders after 12 months has expired.

14. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered the Draft Forward Work Programme.

Agreed: To proceed with the scheduled evidence as set out in the Draft Forward Work Programme.



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15. Any Other Business

None.

16. Date, Time and Place of next meeting

The next meeting will be on Wednesday 13 November 2024 at 11:00 am in Moyola Water Treatment Works.

The Committee was suspended at 11:07 am.

The Committee resumed in closed session at 11:10 am with the following members present:

Mrs Deborah Erskine MLA (Chairperson)

Mr John Stewart MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Mr Danny Baker MLA

Mr Cathal Boylan MLA

Mr Keith Buchanan MLA

Mr Mark Durkan MLA

Mr Andrew McMurray MLA

17. Termination of the Vehicle Testing Equipment Contract - Driver and Vehicle Agency – Oral Evidence

The following officials joined the meeting at 11:10 am:

- Jeremy Logan, Chief Executive, Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA); and
- Pat Delaney, Director of Operations, DVA.



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Mr Stephen Dunne returned to the meeting at 11:11am.

Mr Peter McReynolds joined the meeting at 11:15am.

The representatives provided the Committee with an update on the termination of the vehicle testing equipment contract. A question and answer session followed.

The officials agreed to clarify a point regarding the procurement process.

The representatives left the meeting at 12:32pm.

Mr Peter McReynolds left the meeting at 12:32pm.

Agreed: To commission research on the procurement process in Northern Ireland including the roles and responsibilities of those seeking to procure goods and/or services; an overview of the functions of the Construction and Procurement Delivery (CPD) and Centres of Procurement Expertise (CoPEs) in supporting this; and the controls and safeguards that are in place for assessing the viability of bids received.

Agreed: To commission legal advice to ascertain the scope or limitations in considering issues of a commercially sensitive nature in the context of live legal proceedings.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:37pm.

Mrs Deborah Erskine
Chairperson, Committee for Infrastructure
13 November 2024