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Give Me a Crash Course in the Stimulus Package

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News

Give me a crash course in . . . the stimulus package

Mary Minihan

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What is it? It was the Government's big announcement this week. Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform Brendan Howlin (pictured) outlined details of a €2.25 billion infrastructure plan targeting roads, education, and justice.

But we're cash-strapped. Who's providing the funding? It is expected to come from a number of sources. These include public-private partnerships, the sale of State assets, the National Pensions Reserve Fund and the European Investment Bank.

How many jobs will it create? Howlin said it would generate a significant number of jobs in construction, which he described as the sector of the economy most affected by the financial crisis. He said analysis suggested 13,000 jobs could be created.

What exactly are the projects and where are they? These are projects that were ready to go but had been postponed for cost reasons. The selected road projects are the N17-N18 Gort-Tuam road, the M11 Gorey-Enniscorthy road and the N25 New Ross bypass. Primary healthcare centres are on the way. A list of 35 potential locations was published, of which 20 will get the nod. There will be investment in Garda divisional headquarters in Dublin south central, Galway and Wexford, as well as courthouses across the State. Schools in Clare, Cork, Kildare, Louth and Tipperary will benefit, but the flagship announcement in education was the development of the first phase of the centralised DIT campus at Grangegorman.

Hasn't Grangegorman been announced before? Many times. A decade ago, in a pre-2002 general election announcement, the then taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, said the issues that had led to delays in the Grangegorman project had been resolved and the green light could be given to phase one of the development.

What's the new timeframe? The road projects are expected to get under way in 2013 (Co Galway) and 2014 (Co Wexford). Construction of the health centres is expected to start in 2014. The justice projects are due to begin next year, and the school projects are scheduled for completion in 2017 and 2018. Enabling works for Grangegorman should begin in 2013.

What is the Opposition saying? Fianna Fáil complained that the stimulus package would generate very few jobs in the short term. The party's public expenditure spokesman, Seán Fleming, said many people would have expected to see this money going into projects that would start this year.

Sinn Féin's finance spokesman, Pearse Doherty, dismissed the initiative as "little more than window-dressing and clever accountancy".

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