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News

€2.25bn stimulus to create 13,000 jobs, says Howlin

Mary Minihan

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THE €2.25 billion infrastructure stimulus package announced by the Government yesterday will generate about 13,000 jobs, according to Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform Brendan Howlin.

He said the positions created would be “local” jobs “in as far as it is legally possible”. The jobs will mostly be in construction.

He said the first phase of a public-private partnership (PPP) programme would see the delivery of the N17-N18 Gort-Tuam road, the M11 Gorey-Enniscorthy road and the N25 New Ross bypass.

Mr Howlin said the Co Galway project would begin next year while the projects in Co Wexford would proceed in 2014. He said the construction industry was the sector of the economy most severely affected by the financial crisis and the projects would create a welcome boost for those unemployed.

The projects earmarked for progression had been “proffered” by the departments concerned. “These are things that are ready to run but have been held for lack of money,” he said.

Asked why road projects were getting the go-ahead in his own constituency of Wexford, he said: “The fact that the land is bought, all the planning done and it is ready to run is more a comment on the previous government than the current one.”

He said he hoped the Galway city bypass, which is on hold pending the outcome of legal proceedings, could be progressed as an additional PPP project in the future.

Minister for Transport Leo Varadkar, speaking to journalists via teleconference from Cyprus where he was attending a transport ministers’ meeting, said he hoped unemployed construction workers could find work through the projects.

“What we are going to try to work into the contracts is that they take on a certain number of people from the Live Register and that they take on a certain number of apprentices who haven’t finished their training,” he said. However, he cautioned: “I don’t want to promise that that can be done.”

Mr Howlin said the international financial crisis had made funding PPP projects very difficult over the past number of years, but he was now confident the correct funding structure had been put in place to ensure delivery of important projects.

“That structure will involve a combination of funding from a number of sources including our domestic banks, the European Investment Bank and the National Pension Reserve Fund,” he said.

In the health sector, he said 20 primary care centres would be built with procurement beginning before the end of next year and construction starting in 2014. He did not announce the potential locations, saying he would not “steal the thunder” of Minister for Health James Reilly and Minister of State for Primary Care, Róisín Shortall.

In justice, he said there would be investment in courthouses and some Garda divisional headquarters. Minister for Justice Alan Shatter later revealed these would be in the Dublin south central, Galway and Wexford divisions.

The State would also invest in a new State pathology laboratory, “which is urgently required”, Mr Howlin said.

In education, Mr Howlin described the centralised DIT campus at Grangegorman as the “flagship” announcement. He said it provides an opportunity to develop and rejuvenate an important urban quarter.

He also said “two new PPP schools bundles” would be delivered, which would each contain about six new or replacement schools, mostly at post-primary level.

Mr Howlin said the Government also considered the national children's hospital to be a "flagship" project. He has said part of the National Lottery sale proceeds would be used to part-fund construction of the facility.

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