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News

Metro North to be deferred under capital spending plans

IRISH TIMES REPORTERS

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Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform Brendan Howlin has confirmed the deferring of a number of infrastructure projects and said the “flagship” National Children’s Hospital will be funded by the National Lottery.

Metro North, Thornton Hall prison and the Grangegorman DIT campus project are among the projects that are being postponed in the Infrastructure and Capital Investment 2012-2016 plan, although the plan to link the two Luas lines in Dublin will proceed.

According to the plan, the entire capital investment for the duration of the plan will be €17 billion. Next year’s budget has been cut by €755 million to €3.9 billion. This will fall to €3.3 billion in 2013 and €3.2 billion in the following three years.

The launch of the medium term exchequer framework was attended by Taoiseach Enda Kenny and Tánaiste Eamon Gilmore, as well as Mr Howlin. All three stressed that “jobs, schools and hospitals” were the Government’s priorities.

Mr Howlin said the construction of the new national children’s hospital at the Mater Hospital campus in Dublin would begin in 2013 and the construction period was “just over two years”.

Mr Howlin said he will seek an upfront payment for the National Lottery licence when it comes up for renewal on January 1st, 2012. He said he would bring details of the funding arrangements to Government early in the new year.

In the past there have been staged payments for the licence. But Mr Howlin has asked to see if it would be possible to require the successful bidder to pay the entire licence fee at the start of the process. A source suggested that could generate somewhere between €400 million to €600 million. The estimated cost for building the new hospital is €650 million.

Mr Howlin said existing planned levels of health capital investment will remain, allowing for the replacement of the Central Mental Hospital and the National Project for Radiation Oncology at St James’s Hospital.

He described the plan as “not a true measure of our ambition” but said that €17 billion over five years was a significant capital investment by any standard.

Mr Kenny described the plan as “realistic” and based on the reality of the economic situation. He said he would love to be able to say that all projects the Government would like to proceed would go ahead, but he could not do so.

“This plan is based on what the country can afford,” he said. He said some very good projects were being changed or put on hold until the public finances improved. “This is about choosing what the country needs most in the next few years and deferring others until resources become available.”

Certain large transport projects were being postponed, he added.

Mr Kenny said the Government’s priority is job creation. “Jobs are the very core of the plan. We all know that doing a day’s work gives us more than an income,” he said. “Just as importantly, it gives us dignity, purpose, confidence. The very qualities and attributes we need for our country to recover and prosper again, this time correctly, sensibly, sustainably.”

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