

Dear Minister Roche,

I was very disappointed when I read of your “scathing attack” on the opponents of the proposed route of the M3 as reported in the Meath Chronicle published June 22nd 2005.

You have accused us of airing “untruths” and “a lack of open-mindedness”. At my meeting with you and the Taoiseach in May, both of you commented on my being so reasonable

I told both of you the truth when I said that there would be no court case if you moved the road out of the Valley. In a recent independent survey conducted for Sacred Ireland, 7 out of 10 people believe the motorway should be rerouted. I told the truth when I explained that 38 sites would require excavation and that the Tara landscape was the archaeological, literary, spiritual and historical centre of our past. I told you the truth when I said that the land in the Valley was being bought for development particularly at Blundelstown and that no one could stop this. This is already beginning.

I presented you with an alternative, a vision for Meath based on Brian Guckian’s integrated transport plan. There was no discussion of this vision for Meath then and there has been none since. I suggest that it is you and the Government who “lack open-mindedness”.

You stated then and now that your decision was based on issues related to archaeology and that you had little power. I explained then that you had the power to declare all 38 sites national monuments and ask the NRA and MCC to move the route west of the Valley. You have argued that the planning process cannot be overturned. The planning process was overturned, along with the County Development Plan in the case of Woodstown in Waterford. The Taoiseach also changed the planning permission to facilitate a concert in Slane last year. . Michael D. Higgins has since stated that your powers are much wider than you admit. I suggest that it is you and the Government who are airing “untruths”.

You are reported as saying that it was obvious that many of those leading the campaign have never been to Meath. This is nonsense. Of the seven core committee members active in this campaign, 5 live in Meath, some within a mile of Tara.

You have said that other countries can build infrastructure without these objections. Other countries take heed of their cultural icons and do not threaten them with tolled motorways

You have said that we have not taken part in the planning process – the chairperson attended the oral hearing as did other committee members. Many other opponents were also present – most of them local to Meath. They were ignored.

Conor Newman who worked on Tara for 14 years and was nominated by the Discovery Programme to give a submission to the hearing was also ignored. No one in their right mind could have expected the Government to choose Tara’s landscape as the route for a tolled motorway. Again, I suggest that it is you and the Government who are airing “untruths”

You maintain that you have been “open-minded” in your consultations and that the opponents to this route were not. You declare yourself “astonished at their attitude and lack of respect of other people’s point of view” and you criticize an inability to see any “argument but their own”. I suggest that you show “lack of respect” in disregarding me, STSV campaign, the experts, 320 academics worldwide and the Director of the National Museum, who all asked you to re-consider the route. All stressed being not against the motorway per se only against the section going through the Valley. The Route Selection Report and the initial archaeological reports also warned against this route. Indeed, the new CEO of the NRA, Fred Barry, told my colleague Dr Edel Bhreathnach that

if the selection were taking place today \*this route would never have been considered\*. If it is wrong now, it was wrong in the years 2000-03.

He also said that if the Government asked them to move the road that it would be awkward but that they would have to do it. The Government has the power to move this motorway. Why do you not choose to do so? Once again, I suggest that it is you and the Government who are not "open-minded" are airing "untruths" and are showing a "lack of respect".

The same applies to your lack of consideration of our suggestion that the Tara landscape be designated a World Heritage Site and National Park. Such a move would mark real "progress" and bring economic benefit to Meath without the wholesale destruction caused by refusing to reroute the proposed tolled motorway.

Indeed, the insistence on a tolled motorway rather than road improvement, bus lanes, re-opening rail services, a World Heritage Site/National Park is quite sinister. It appears that the decision to have a tolled motorway predates the planning process and that you and the Government had no intention of listening to any alternative

You deny being a philistine, a person "indifferent to culture" according to the Oxford English Dictionary. This Government, of which you are a part, has shown itself singularly indifferent to culture by dismantling Dúchas and the Ministry for Culture. You maintain that you respect the "heritage left behind by the people of 2,500 years ago". The heritage of Tara stretches back 4,500 years and not 2,500 years.

If this is the face of new Ireland it is not a pretty one. The loss of our language is leading to the loss of the meanings of our surnames, personal names and place names and this ensures a loss of appreciation of the wider cultural, spiritual and mythical environment. The Government is choosing roads as the badge of our economic success rather than Health or Education. What a legacy for future generations. What a myopic vision for our country.

I ask that you apologize and retract the remarks that you have made about me and other opponents to this route. We have declined from launching personal attacks on those advocating this route despite many stinging personal attacks made on us in public and in private. Our arguments have been consistently made on the basis of sound archaeological, environmental and historical knowledge. As citizens of Ireland we are still entitled to protest and voice our opinions. Or do we live in a banana republic?

Yours sincerely

Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin

PRO Save the TaraSkryne Valley Group