

# CCBS – LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS

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23 June 2017 – 30 June 2017



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

The Northern Ireland Assembly was dissolved at 00:01 on Thursday 26 January 2017.



Tuesday 27 June 2017

Department of Social Protection

Free Travel Scheme Data

Alan Kelly asked the Minister for Social Protection if her Department keeps an individual record of a person's use of the free travel scheme such as the journeys the person has taken and cost to the State thereof; if so, the purpose of same; and if she will make a statement on the matter.

**Regina Doherty:** There are currently in excess of 882,000 customers in receipt of free travel. The scheme permits travel for free on most CIE public transport services, Luas and some 80 private operators are also participating in the scheme. Free travel is also available on cross border journeys and within Northern Ireland to those eligible customers over age 66.

Travel operators participating in the scheme are not paid on a per journey basis so all information on an individual's specific journey or the associated cost is not available. It is possible, however, to

collect some non-identifying data on overall usage where the integrated ticketing system (ITS) is enabled by participating transport operators and customers are using the new Public Services Card Free Travel (PSC-FT) variant rather than the old form of paper free travel pass.

The rollout of the ITS by the National Transport Authority to travel operators is ongoing. In parallel with that programme, my Department continues to replace the old paper pass with the new PSC-FT variant. The new pass has been issued already to over 80% of customers who have a free travel entitlement. The completion of these programmes will allow for more comprehensive data to be collected on usage of free travel.

Source: <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2017-06-27a.1479&s=cross-border+2017-06-23..2017-06-30#g1481.r>

**Thursday 29 June 2017**

**Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade**

Darragh O'Brien asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the areas within his Department which remain outstanding in respect of the confidence and supply agreement; the status of plans for the implementation of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

**Simon Coveney:** One of the policy principles set out in the Confidence and Supply Arrangement is to strengthen and develop cross border bodies and services in Northern Ireland and implement the Fresh Start Agreement.

All of the North South Bodies are continuing to operate effectively, making a considerable contribution towards economic growth right across the island and demonstrating what can be achieved when we pool our resources in key strategic areas. For instance, Tourism Ireland and InterTradeIreland are playing continuing and central roles in supporting the all island economy.

Tourism Ireland is driving record tourism numbers and spend to this island. InterTradeIreland is building vital exporting capacity among our small and medium enterprises and assisting SMEs in navigating the challenges of Brexit through its new advisory service and carrying out important research into various trade scenarios.

I am currently representing the Government at the ongoing talks in Belfast and am hopeful that there will shortly be agreement on the restoration of the devolved institutions. This will allow meetings of the North South Ministerial Council to recommence next month to enable further important engagement on progressing all-island cooperation in general and in particular addressing the challenges of Brexit.

Discussions on sectoral priorities and on new and expanded areas of cooperation have been taking place within the NSMC. While there is always scope for exploring the expansion of areas of cooperation and of the work of the North South Bodies, in line with the Good Friday Agreement, such expansion must of course obtain the agreement of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

The Deputy will also be aware that the Government has in the Programme for Partnership Government committed to a number of actions to facilitate greater North-South cooperation.

Full and timely implementation of the Good Friday Agreement and subsequent agreements, including the 2015 Fresh Start Agreement, is a key priority for the Government, as reflected in the Programme for a Partnership Government. The Agreements, and the principles and values underpinning them, are at the core of the Government's approach to peace, reconciliation and prosperity on this island. The Government will continue to work tirelessly for the full implementation of the Agreements in both letter and spirit.

Despite the political challenges of recent months in Northern Ireland, there has been sustained progress with implementation of the Fresh Start Agreement, with each administration actively pursuing the necessary work to fulfil the respective commitments. In order to have continued progress it is critically important to see devolved Government working effectively in the interests of the people of Northern Ireland. As a co-guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement, the Government is determined to uphold its principles and protect its institutions. Effective devolved Government, underpinned by a genuine spirit of partnership, is what the people of Northern Ireland voted for in 1998 and what they expect their politicians to deliver.

The Fresh Start Agreement provided for the establishment of the Joint Agency Task Force on cross-border crime. That Task Force was launched in Dublin in December 2015, and has quickly become fully operational, progressing its work to tackle cross-jurisdictional organised crime and bring to justice those involved in it.

At the Plenary meeting of the NSMC on 18 November 2016 in Armagh, the NSMC considered an update by a group of Senior Officials from relevant Departments, North and South, on the progress being made on implementing the commitments set out in Section E of the Fresh Start Agreement, to provide support and funding for North-South infrastructure projects. The review is ongoing and a further report will be presented at a future Plenary meeting.

A key element of the Fresh Start Agreement relates to the ending of the legacy of paramilitarism. On 13 September 2016, Minister Flanagan signed an international agreement with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to establish the Independent Reporting Commission (IRC). The IRC will report annually on progress towards ending continuing paramilitary activity connected with Northern Ireland. Following the December review meeting, both Governments and the Northern Ireland Executive announced the appointees to the IRC. The IRC Bill, which will establish the IRC in this jurisdiction, was published by the Tánaiste and then Minister for Justice and Equality, Frances Fitzgerald, on 7 June and it is intended that it will be brought forward by Minister Flanagan in the weeks ahead.

**Source:** <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2017-06-29a.379&s=cross-border+2017-06-23..2017-06-30#g381.r>

Thursday 27 June 2017

Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation

Brexit Issues

Catherine Connolly asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the measures which have been taken to assist small and medium businesses in the Border regions to prepare for all eventualities of the Brexit negotiations; and if she will make a statement on the matter.

**Frances Fitzgerald:** Given the extent of North-South trade, I am very conscious of the particular challenges faced by companies operating in close proximity to the border, many of which trade freely on both sides of the border.

Current trade between Ireland and Northern Ireland is extensive and far-reaching. South to North trade in goods was valued at €1.65 billion in 2016 and North to South trade was €1.05 billion. This trade is particularly significant for SMEs – over 15% of Irish SME exports are destined for the Northern Ireland market.

A recent study undertaken for InterTrade Ireland by the ESRI analyses a so-called “worst-case scenario” whereby WTO tariffs would apply to the trade of goods between the UK and the EU’s Member States. The report’s key findings are that the imposition of WTO tariffs alone would have an effect of reducing cross-border trade by 9%. In addition to the imposition of WTO tariffs, if the cost of Non Tariff Barriers, e.g. administrative and regulatory requirements were included, this would reduce cross-border trade by 16%. The possible imposition of customs duties on cross border trade could also represent a significant impediment to such trade.

The Irish Government is engaged at every level in the Brexit negotiations and our trade, economic ties and our land border with the UK are central to these talks and every effort will be made to minimise the impact on the border. You will recall that at the start of the formal talks between the EU and the UK on the 19 June, the EU’s chief negotiator Michel Barnier specifically referenced the centrality and sensitivity of Ireland’s border with the UK to the negotiations.

Since the UK referendum, the State agencies under my remit - Enterprise Ireland (EI), the Local Enterprise Offices and Inter Trade Ireland - have been active in supporting companies in assessing and addressing their exposure to Brexit.

EI’s current “#Prepare for Brexit” campaign includes a Brexit Scorecard available to all companies to self-assess their preparedness for Brexit across all aspects of their business and which generates a report suggesting appropriate responses. A €5,000 ‘BePrepared’ grant is also available to clients to prepare a Brexit action plan.

My Department is providing InterTrade Ireland with additional funding this year to establish a new Brexit Advisory Service, which will provide factual advice, supports for capability building and other specialist expertise to SMEs.

Each of the Local Enterprise Offices in the border counties can offer advice, training and mentoring to address Brexit challenges. Each LEO can now offer financial assistance to clients to examine export options, to improve product innovation and improve the competitiveness of their business in the face of Brexit.

I secured new resources, including an extra €52Min Capital funding and funding for the agencies, extra staffing, in Budget 2017 to assist businesses to maintain and grow export markets.

Based on significant analysis and stakeholder consultation, my Department is currently working on further measures targeted at the needs of companies in the wider economy around working capital and business development.

The Regional Action Plan for Jobs for the Border region contains a large number of actions aimed at strengthening the enterprise sector in the region. In particular, the new Regional Enterprise Development Fund of up to €60m was launched on 29th May. This Fund is aimed at supporting collaborative approaches to grow and sustain indigenous enterprise and jobs across the regions of Ireland.

**Source:** <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2017-06-29a.5&s=cross-border+2017-06-23..2017-06-30#g7.r>