

My rural bus project not just drink link, says Ross

SHANE Ross has insisted his new rural bus service plan is not just a 'drink link'.

But Michael Healy-Rae TD has joined his brother Danny in dismissing the €1million scheme, saying it would not be enough to serve Co. Kerry alone, not to mind the whole country.

The Transport Minister told Morning Ireland, on RTÉ Radio 1 yesterday, that the pilot project to provide 50 rural transport links in 19 counties was not just to bring people to pubs.

He said: 'We decided to get together and look at the issue of rural isolation and we want to address it.'

'There will be 188 new journeys every week, 20 of those

By Michelle O'Keeffe

are extensions to existing routes, 30 are demand-responsive. The services will run, on average, from between 6 until 11. This is a very serious trial.

'It's for communities to get together, go off and play bingo. If they want to go to the pub they can. It's not all pub-orientated.'

However, Michael Healy-Rae then told the Seán O'Rourke show: 'If everything he is proposing was directed at Co. Kerry, that in itself would still not be enough, as the area of ground we are talking about is so diverse and has more regional and rural roads than

any other part of the country. It won't go anywhere near replacing what was there already, that people could make their own way.'

He said Mr Ross had 'lost the run of himself', and: 'If he's really interested in saving lives on our roads he should be looking at why we are having so many accidents. There are so many accidents that have nothing to do with alcohol and he's doing nothing about that.'

His brother Danny has already dismissed Mr Ross's plan as a 'deflection' from the minister's lack of interest in rural issues.

He is also taking legal action against Mr Ross for calling him a 'road traffic terrorist'.

Are you a voter?

Now that you've made up your mind to **vote** on May 25th, it's time to make some plans for the day itself.

Will you vote before work or college, or after? Drive or take public transport? Bring the kids or arrange a sitter? Do any of your neighbours need a lift?

They're just a few simple questions to answer now, that'll enable you to answer the referendum question on **May 25th**.

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An Coimisiún Reifrinn
Referendum Commission

Dr Mark Dooley



MORAL MATTERS

The destruction of nature just shows how far we have fallen

I HAVE just returned from my daily walk. Normally, it is a very pleasant affair, during which I ponder the world and its manifold gifts. Each day something in nature speaks to me of love, life or longing.

It might be a pale moon shimmering in a sun-filled sky. It might be a little dog taking its master for a walk. It might even be a tiny bird lying lifeless on a lawn.

Either way, what I see nourishes the senses and revives the soul. There are new experiences every day - experiences which soothe, enliven and console. The elderly couple, for example, who pass me hand-in-hand, their love as strong as it was on their wedding day. The old nun in full habit, her walking stick in the one hand and her Rosary beads in the other.

The man who looks uncannily like that appalling villain Bill Sikes from *Oliver Twist*. He even has a bulldog the spitting image of Sikes's canine companion Bull's-Eye. As it happens, the man is anything but villainous for, behind the grim mask, there is the nicest of men.

But, sometimes, the world offers a vision of real villainy. Today, for example, I walked along a road in full bloom. The gardens were ablaze with the most exquisite red and yellow tulips.

I stopped to admire at their velvet petals, to watch the bees extract their precious nectar. Suddenly, it caught my eye: beyond the pavement, I saw a young tree broken in half. It had been violently wrenched until it snapped and was left to wither.

I ceased to smile as I gazed at that wanton desecration. The tree was no more than a few years old, yet it had already acquired such natural grace and grandeur. Even in this state of decay, you could still see its beauty, and sense its vitality.

What could have possessed someone to commit such an act of barbarism? It is true that children often swing from trees, their branches detaching in the process. But this was no accident, no unfortunate consequence of some childish frolics.

How do I know? Because, having mourned for that tree, I quickly encountered another in a similar state. It, too, had been wrenched

in half, its fresh leaves now rotting on the ground.

Vandalism comes in many forms and is a scourge which no society can easily tolerate. But when the public space is violated so gratuitously, it surely suggests that we have crossed a moral Rubicon. That people could cause so much carnage in the midst of such beauty cannot be excused as a simple prank.

I was blind to the world for what remained of my walk. For me those shattered trees symbolised the moral sewer into which so much of our society has sunk. How is it that we have reached such a sorry pass?

As always it comes back to that pillar of the moral life: respect. In a world where that virtue has all but vanished is it any wonder that people routinely resort to violence and vandalism? Is it any wonder that they think nothing of tearing down trees in their prime?

We need respect because, without it, nothing is safe from harm or abuse. Without it, we can neither love nor care. We cannot feel sympathy or compassion for those in need of both.

I know there will always be vandals who deface the world for the sheer fun of it. But isn't it true that what was once the exception is fast becoming the norm? Isn't it true that in losing respect we have lost a vital barrier against brutality and barbarism?

ONCE upon a time, some trees were planted in rich soil. Time passed, the trees took root, supplying shelter and shade to all who sought it. Each day, an old nun strolled by them while deep in prayer.

A man known fondly as Sikes used walk his dog by those same trees. The old nun with her Rosary beads and Sikes with Bull's-Eye could not have been more different. And yet, they had something deep in common: they each liked to pass along that quaint stretch of road festooned with seasonal blooms and those graceful trees.

Then one day the trees were no more. Without reason they had been wrenched from the earth, and the soil in which they grew now served as their grave.

Two familiar figures strolled by expecting to see something that was a mere memory.

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