

More sparks fly over Rose Kennedy Bridge

Further rancour over the naming of the 900-metre Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Bridge was aired at last Wednesday's Piltown Municipal District meeting held in Ferrybank.

The latest words shared on the issue by Councillors Melissa O'Neill (Ind) and Fidelis Doherty (FG) arose after Cllr O'Neill had requested that the Municipal District issue an open invitation to the Kennedy family to attend the new bridge's official opening.



Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy, matriarch of the Kennedy family. | Photo: JFK Library

Cllr O'Neill told the meeting she had contacted New Ross Municipal District Director Eamonn Hore (Wexford County Council is the lead authority on the N25 Bypass Project) about such an invite. She assured Councillors that, as far as Mr Hore was concerned, there was no issue on his behalf with such an invitation being extended by the Piltown District. Having praised the project's progress, Cllr Doherty claimed: "The public's view was completely ignored" regarding the naming of the bridge, while Cllr O'Neill sought support from the meeting for issuing such an invite.

Cllr Doherty then put it to Cllr O'Neill that "you voted against us" regarding the naming of the bridge. Cllr O'Neill strongly rebutted Cllr Doherty's contention before Municipal District Chairperson Ger Frisby (FF) appealed to both Councillors to refrain from further comment on the issue within the chamber. At a joint meeting of South Kilkenny and New Ross Councillors held at the Rhu Glenn last October, members voted 8-6 in favour of naming the bridge in Rose Kennedy's honour.

Cllr O'Neill was the only Piltown Municipal District member who stated a preference for the mother of the late US President John F Kennedy when voting, with the remaining five Kilkenny Councillors opting for the 'Pink Rock Bridge' proposal. New Ross-based Cllr Michael Sheehan (FF) was the only Wexford representative who voted in favour of the Pink Rock option.

During a six-week public consultation phase held into the naming of the bridge which was held last summer, Kilkenny County Council received 78 submissions, while Wexford County Council received a total of 151 submissions, including 10 from Kilkenny addresses.

"For me and for a lot of people it's hugely disappointing that the Pink Rock Bridge, the name which gained the most public

support in terms of submissions to both local authorities, 34 in our Municipal District and 17 in New Ross, a total of 51, has not been selected for the new bridge,” said Cllr Doherty following the vote.

“A majority of Councillors have instead approved the name of Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy for the bridge despite it receiving just one public submission in Kilkenny and 27 in Wexford. The statistics are there. The facts speak for themselves: 51 to 28, overwhelming support for the Pink Rock Bridge to be put forward as the name for this magnificent new bridge but seven New Ross Councillors, in addition to one of our own, supported the Rose Kennedy option, and to me, it’s hugely disappointing.”

In explaining her preference for Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy, Cllr O’Neill stated: “Naming the bridge in Rose Kennedy’s name reflects the strength she brought to the women of Ireland. The vote for the bridge’s name was democratically conducted and I feel the right decision was reached. The Pink Rock proposal was, in my view, more related to physical geography whereas the Kennedy name is part of the area’s heritage. I’m originally from Bruff in County Limerick where we have our own connection to the Kennedys (it’s the birthplace of Thomas Fitzgerald, JFK’s Great Grandfather) and I’ve seen the benefit that the link has brought to Bruff. It’s brought the whole community together. The new bridge will be the largest in the country and I feel the name of Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy was well chosen.”

While most Councillors didn’t appear averse to issuing such an invitation to the Kennedy family, Cllr Tomás Breathnach (Lab) felt it important to check if Wexford County Council had formally adopted the bridge’s name on a statutory basis. Cllr Frisby agreed, meaning it’s likely that the matter will again be raised come the Municipal District’s May meeting.

Cllr O’Neill felt it was important to issue an invitation to the Kennedys at the earliest possible date, given their busy schedule.

The name of the new bridge, which is the most prominent element of the €250 million N25 New Ross Bypass Scheme, has been a source of considerable debate in both Kilkenny and Wexford. The official opening date of the bypass and bridge has yet to be formally established.

Meanwhile, the overall design and construction phase of the project’s Public Private Partnership contract is “scheduled to be complete in quarter 4 of 2019,” according to the Bypass update issued to South Kilkenny Councillors on Wednesday last. “Of a total of 36 deck segments that will make up the main river span between piers 3 and 4, 21 segments have now been completed, and 7 of 18 cables at pier 4 have been installed.

Works to the mainline road are significantly advanced with final elements such as signage, road markings and landscaping well underway. Final elements of accommodation works including any remaining fencing, gates or access tracks will also be closed out in the coming weeks.” The L4026 Strokestown Road is scheduled to remain closed to traffic until Monday next, April 15th to facilitate realignment and tie-in works.