

INDUSTRY WELCOMES INCREASE IN ROAD SPENDING

Following meetings with the Regional Development Minister, Connor Murphy, and the Finance Minister, Nigel Dodds, the Quarry Products Association of Northern Ireland (QPANI) has welcomed the statement that the money allocated to the maintenance of our roads network will increase by £13 million in the 2009 -2010 financial year to £71.8 million. QPANI Regional Director, Gordon Best, welcomed this commitment and the recognition by both Ministers that the condition of our existing roads network is an area of concern and one that requires more investment in the future when funds become available.

Mr Best added, "The increase for 2009 -10 is welcome but falls way short of the recognised **£105 million per year** that is currently required to maintain our strategically important roads network. Current cumulative figures for annual under spend in roads maintenance over the past 10 years now stands at a staggering **£310 million**. This past year we have come closer than ever to spending as much money on filling potholes as resurfacing roads. This is a statistic and practice that is unsustainable and cannot continue or it will mean significant extra cost in future, significantly impacting on the potential growth and development of our economy. We must prioritise the resurfacing of roads over the next few years in order to reduce the high level of spend on filling potholes. Our roads network is quite literally the veins and arteries through which the lifeblood of our economy flows through. The recent cold weather and significant increase in salting of roads has put further pressure on the crumbling roads network. One only has to look at the deteriorating condition of some of our most important trunk roads such as parts of the A8 Larne road, the A57 Templepatrick to Airport Road and parts of the Omagh to Enniskillen road in the west to realise we need to spend more on maintaining our roads. The bumpy road signs, erected by Roads Service, on the A57 are one of the first images visitors and more importantly investors see when they travel between our main airport and our capital city. Is this the image of Northern Irelands infrastructure we want to show to the world? Will we see reduced

speed limits and potential closure of some rural roads if we can't maintain them? The sight of such bumpy road signs on our trunk and motorway network is reflection on years of mismanagement and under funding”.

Mr Best commented “We all accept that the Executive have serious financial challenges at present and only so much money available with pressures coming from areas such as fuel poverty, health and education. The time is fast approaching when we as a society have hard choices to make. If we want to maintain our roads, schools and hospitals then we are going to have to pay more. In future that may mean paying water charges, increased rates and getting more of the economically inactive into employment and contributing to the tax pool”.

“The quarry industry and wider construction industry have been one of the hardest hit sectors by the current economic downturn. However we are managing our way through it as best we can and it is vital that the limited financial resources we have are spent in a way that delivers value for money. We need flexibility from Government, a true partnership approach and decisive leadership from our political leaders to ensure that we are cushioned from the worst effects of the current downturn and that our economy and people are ready for the upturn when it comes”.

Notes for the Editor

The Quarry Products Association NI represents approximately 95% of companies involved in the supply of quarry products to the Construction Industry in Northern Ireland. Our Association draws its membership from companies engaged in providing primary aggregates, the processing of recycled and secondary materials, the production of downstream products such as asphalt, lime mortar, ready-mixed concrete, precast concrete and road surfacing contracting. The Quarry Products Sector now employs over 3500 people across Northern Ireland and has a turnover of some £500 million.

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