



Take Care, worsening roads spell danger!

November 2008

That's the stark message delivered yesterday to the Assemblies Regional Development Committee by the Quarry Products Association NI.

Speaking as part of a Construction Industry Group delegation QPANI Regional Director, Gordon Best, said that "once again the condition of our roads network is not being given the priority it deserves. The low funding given to maintaining our roads will have long term repercussions for the local economy, jobs and the health and safety of the travelling public". His statement is supported by recent statistics in the Department of Regional Developments Roads Service 2007-2008 Annual Report. The report published earlier this year shows that the condition of the roads network, on which we all depend, is getting worse. The figures show that 84% of the motorway network has a residual life of more than 5 years compared to 85.5% in 2006, 89% in 2005, 91% in 2004. Also 70% of the trunk road network has a residual life of more than 5 years compared to 71.8% in 2006, 73.5% in 2005, 73% in 2004. On the rural road network Roads Service state "we continue to paper over the cracks on too many occasions. The low funding means that good practice resurfacing intervals of once in 25 or 30 years is not achieved. Indeed resurfacing frequencies on the non trunk road network are often in excess of good practice and the resurfacing frequency for a U class road last year was 1 in 104 years.

In the report the Roads Service Chief Executive States

“The funding made available to us means that we can treat our local roads network at around 46% of that recommended in National Good Practice Guidelines”

In October of last year Regional Development Minister stated in the Assembly that 43% of Northern Ireland’s trunk road network is ‘at or below’ satisfactory levels of skid resistance. Also 3.6% of the motorway network and nearly half of the Trunk road network is ‘at or below’ the national skidding resistance investigatory level. In February of this year the Assembly passed a motion to *”review roads maintenance funding and to ensure that sufficient funding will be made available in line with the Roads Service structural maintenance funding plan; and further calls for an urgent review of end of year management of funds to ensure that a more strategic approach is applied to the way in which maintenance schemes are undertaken immediately before the end of the financial year”*. ***NOTHING HAS HAPPENED.***

The roads network in Northern Ireland is valued at some £34 billion. If we are not maintaining that asset we are devaluing it, Government is attempting to maintain this asset for less than a one fifth of one percent of its overall value.

Already with the downturn in the economy Companies involved in road construction and resurfacing are having to lay off skilled valuable employees and those that are left face the possibility of short term working. The quarry products industry has lost over 800 jobs so far in 2008 and is projected to lose 1500 by the end of the year if current economic conditions continue.

The current policy of investing in the maintenance of our existing roads network is not working and means we will not be able to grow a vibrant and sustainable economy in Northern Ireland. The first thing potential inward investors will look at is the infrastructure around the ports and airports. In order for Northern Ireland to be economically viable we need Government to get serious about the maintenance of our roads network.

Mr Best added, “the current shortfall in funding for roads maintenance now stands at well over £500 million. We need a ring fenced index linked annual budget going

forward of no less than £110 million. If we don't grasp the nettle now then future generations will have to pay much more as maintenance work for roads turns into reconstruction work".

Quarry Products Association NI

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 employs over 5000 people across Northern Ireland and has a turnover of some £750 million.

OUR ROADS – AN ASSET WORTH INVESTING IN

THE FACTS

- In 2007 – 2008 the Structural Maintenance Budget was boosted by in year allocations to £77 million. Still £33 million of what all professional and Roads Service opinion say is required to maintain an asset worth £34 billion.
- 2008 – 2009 budget allocation stands at £56 million. Approximately £25 million of this is allocated to the Roads Service own direct workforce leaving £31 million for work carried out by the private sector. In deed current out turns on Asphalt Resurfacing Contracts and Small Scale Responsive contracts up to the end of October and volume of roads service work within company order books indicate that unless more work is allocated only 60% of the original estimated budget will be delivered.
- In Northern Ireland we spend some 21% less per capita on our transport network than in GB. This is unacceptable given that we depend more on our network than any other region in the UK.
- The historic shortfall in maintenance spend on our roads now stands at over £500 million.
- 2007 – 2008 Roads Service annual report indicates that our roads network is deteriorating further,
 - 84% of the motorway network has a residual life of more than 5 years compared to 85.5% in 2006, 89% in 2005, 91% in 2004.

- 70% of the trunk road network has a residual life of more than 5 years compared to 71.8% in 2006, 73.5% in 2005, 73% in 2004.

The Roads Service Chief Executive States

“The funding made available to us means that we can treat our local roads network at around 46% of that recommended in National Good Practice Guidelines”

- 43% of Northern Ireland’s trunk road network is ‘at or below’ satisfactory levels of skid resistance. Also 3.6% of the motorway network and nearly half of the Trunk road network is ‘at or below’ the national skidding resistance investigatory level. (statistics stated by Regional Development Minister in the Assembly in October 2007)
- The Industry and Regional Development Committee have made representations for increased priority to be given to roads maintenance and **NOTHING HAS CHANGED.**
- In February of this year the Assembly passed a motion to *“review roads maintenance funding and to ensure that sufficient funding will be made available in line with the Roads Service structural maintenance funding plan; and further calls for an urgent review of end of year management of funds to ensure that a more strategic approach is applied to the way in which maintenance schemes are undertaken immediately before the end of the financial year”*. **NOTHING HAS HAPPENED.**
- Once again the industry and Roads Service are depending on a significant extra allocation of funds from the Executive in the December monitoring round.
- The current funding process creates problems for both the industry and Roads Service in terms of planning and investment and does not deliver a 21st century roads network for a 21st century economy.
- In terms of capital works we need a speedy rolling out of projects to cushion the extreme downturn the industry now faces. The industry requires accurate information on actual construction spend.
- Extra funding that becomes available both locally and nationally must be allocated through the revenue spend in order that maximum benefit can be realised in the wider economy.

THE EFFECTS

- If we are not maintaining that asset we are devaluing it, Government is attempting to maintain this asset for less than a one fifth of one percent of its overall value.

- Companies involved in road construction and resurfacing are having to lay off skilled valuable employees and those that are left face the possibility of short term working. The quarry products industry has lost over 800 jobs in so far in 2008 and is projected to lose 1500 by the end of the year if current economic conditions continue.
- Current investment in maintaining our existing roads network will mean we will not be able to grow a vibrant and sustainable economy in Northern Ireland.
- The first thing potential inward investors will look at is the infrastructure around the ports and airports, in order for Northern Ireland to be economically viable we need greater investment in our infrastructure and roads maintenance

COMMENT

The current and historic level and practice of funding the maintenance of our largest and most valuable asset MUST CHANGE NOW!

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