

18th December 2009

Tony Loughran
Department for Regional Development
Regional Planning and Transportation Division
Room 3-01
Clarence Court
Adelaide Street
Belfast
BT2 8GB

<mailto:jonathan.saulters@drdni.gov.uk>

By email to tony.loughran@drdni.gov.uk

QPANI Response to the Regional Transportation Strategy Review

The QPANI welcomes the opportunity to comment on the proposals within the discussion document.

The QPANI is the principal trade association representing the Northern Ireland aggregates and quarrying industry. Our members produce over 95% of aggregates quarried in Northern Ireland – sand and gravel and crushed rock. They also produce agricultural and industrial lime, silica sand and marine dredged sand and gravel, as well as secondary and recycled aggregates, ready mixed concrete and asphalt products for roads.

Comment

The quality of our transportation system has a key role to play in the competitiveness of our economy and the wider well being of our environment. It is vitally important that investment is made where it will be of most benefit and deliver measurable economic success both to the local area and Northern Ireland as a whole. Roads should be viewed as “**economic corridors**” and should be planned in consultation with local business and other relevant Government Departments such as Planning Service, Invest NI and Department of Finance. The vision of this strategy should be to ensure that Northern Ireland will remain competitive in the global international marketplace and that the fruits of our economic success will be shared more equally at regional level and throughout society.

In our response to the 2006 Roads Service consultation on expanding the Strategic Road Improvement Programme 2015 we highlighted that one of the major obstacles to progressing public transport schemes faster is our current planning system. The QPANI welcomes the setting up of the Strategic Planning Group that has enabled a number of key infrastructure projects to be fast tracked. We hope that the current reform of Planning in Northern Ireland will enhance the work of the Strategic Planning Unit and that future public transport projects will be delivered in more acceptable timescales.

The revised strategy should be much shorter and succinct than the existing one focusing on delivering key schemes that

- Have a focus on joining up our ports and airports with industrial centres
- Reduce carbon emissions from Northern Ireland Transport.
- Increase Northern Ireland investment in transport to levels experienced other regions of the UK and Europe.
- Improve road safety in order to reduce the unacceptably high levels of road deaths in Northern Ireland.

1. Views on the Strategy so far.

- Significant progress has been made over the last three years through increases in investment and delivery of such road schemes as the M1 West Link / M2 upgrade (DBFO1) and almost completion of the Beech hill to Clogue A1 dualling and start of the A4 Dungannon / Ballygawley dualling (DBFO2). Preferred Contractors have now been appointed for the three sections of the A5 Aghnacloy to L Derry dual carriageway valued at some £650 million and the preferred route for the dualling of the A8 Larne road has been identified. However despite this our investment in transportation still falls far behind our main competitors in other UK regions and Ireland.
- The levels of maintenance in our roads network falls way short of what is required as highlighted in the recent Snaith Report. The report by Professor Martin Snaith showed that the backlog of roads maintenance waiting to be carried out across the 25,000km of roads in the North now stands at £700 million. The report recommends that current spending of some £74 million needs to rise to £108 million per year, to ensure we have safe and efficient roads.
- The existing strategy is too focused on funding mechanisms rather than strategic outcomes
- It lacks clear integration with planning policy.

2. Views on the way forward

- While increased investment over the past three years in both public and road transport infrastructure is welcome we need to see other strategic road schemes such as the A2 Greenisland to Carrickfergus dualling, the A6 Randalstown to L Derry dualling, A26 Glarryford to Coleraine progressed as soon as possible. We also need to see investment in schemes both in road and public transport to link up our airports and ports with key industrial and population centres.
- Any new strategy should consider and advocate alternative funding mechanisms through public, private and European investment bank contributions.
- In order to reduce NI transport carbon emissions the strategy needs to advocate and develop policies and processes that will
 - Reduce congestion
 - Introduce more sustainable construction methods for building and maintaining our infrastructure
 - Make public transport with our population centres more accessible and affordable

3. What are the main challenges for transportation and how do we meet them?

- It is our strongly held view that to have a world class economy you need to have world class transportation infrastructure. If Northern Ireland is to maintain its competitiveness on world markets then investment and subsequent delivery of infrastructure and planning policy needs to match those objectives.
- We need to see a two pronged approach from the Executive. Firstly at a rural level we need to see the proposed and suggested investment and delivery into road and rail networks. At an urban level we need to see investment and commitment to increasing use of public transport which will have the added benefits of reducing congestion and carbon emissions. The Rapid Transit System proposed for Belfast has the potential to make a significant contribution to this goal.
- As stated previously the integration of increased investment in infrastructure with land use planning policy will encourage a more integrated approach in avoiding population dispersion which has long term financial and environmental costs.

Conclusion

QPANI believes the key areas below should be central to the revised strategy and have most impact on delivering the necessary outcomes:

- Enhance investment in public transport.
- Complete the upgrading of the Strategic Road Network.
- Improve access to our ports and airports.
- Maintain existing assets more effectively
- Effective car parking policy and tariffs
- More effective traffic management of existing road space and enforcement of road transport vehicles and operators
- Cost effective measures to encourage cycling and walking,

Yours sincerely



Gordon Best

Regional Director QPANI

