

PRESS RELEASE

14 January 2008

DRAFT BUDGET COULD LEAD NORTHERN IRELAND ON A ROAD TO NOWHERE

The lack of adequate provision for infrastructure in the draft budget could leave Northern Ireland stranded on a road to nowhere. This is the claim made today (14 January 2008) by leading local business organisations who believe that the Government's proposed £572million spend on infrastructure over the next three years falls far short of the £1billion that is required.

The Quarry Products Association for Northern Ireland (QPANI) speaking with the support of other leading organisations such as the CBI, Construction Employers Federation and the Freight Transport Association welcome the priority that the Executive has given to investment in and maintenance of infrastructure in Northern Ireland but warns that it is nowhere near the true figure required to bring the roads network up to an acceptable standard.

Expressing his concern Gordon Best, Regional Director of QPANI says:

"It is our strong belief that Government investment policy is failing to deliver value for money in terms of maintaining the assets that we already have. The Roads Network in Northern Ireland is by far the largest asset that the public sector manages and is worth some £30 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.

The figures set out in the budget for roads maintenance over the next 3 years of £200 million is totally inadequate adding £125 million to the already colossal shortfall in roads maintenance spend of some £450 million. The QPANI are calling on the Executive to give Roads Maintenance the priority it deserves by ring fencing and index linking a rolling 3 year budget of appropriate structural maintenance funding of £110 million per year. This will deliver better value for money through more effective planning by the Client and the Industry.

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. We spend £2,800 per km on roads maintenance compared with recent outturns in England of some £12,000 per km and Wales of about £7,500 per km. The need for significant investment in our infrastructure has never been greater and we need look no further than to our friends in the Republic of Ireland to see clear evidence of how a clear thought out national development plan together with an effective planning system can deliver a

revitalised and growing economy. Adequate investment in and maintenance of our infrastructure is vital for the economic success of Northern Ireland” said Mr. Best.

Supporting the views of the QPA, Nigel Smyth of the Northern Ireland CBI said:

“The increase in capital investment in the roads infrastructure is welcome but we question whether it is sufficient to deliver the necessary improvements required to reduce journey times. The increase is clearly not sufficient to meet the full needs and we would argue strongly that further resources should be committed to achieve a more acceptable and sustainable level of funding.”

The Construction Employers Federation echoed this call. Managing Director John Armstrong said:

“The Federation is surprised by the low targets that have been set for Roads Maintenance and calls for the Executive to consider whether it is appropriate that in three years time the public will still be driving on motorway and trunk road that is in an unsatisfactory structural condition.”

The Freight Transport Association has also expressed their concern. Tom Wilson, Manger, FTA Ireland

“The FTA met with Regional Development Minister, Conor Murphy to highlight concerns regarding the state of the NI roads and in particular those into and out of our ports plus the improvements required to ensure that hauliers are not being delayed through poorly maintained roads which would reduce their efficiency and affect the overall economy of the country. With the Northern Ireland Executive promising 6,500 jobs to be created in the private sector and increasing tourism, 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.”

Ends

For all media enquiries please contact Linda Beers or Ross Williamson, Inform Communications Tel: 028 90233550 Mob: 07884437376 (LB) or 07734821070 (RW)

Notes to Editors

- Gordon Best is available for interview to be arranged through Inform Communications
- Founded in Northern Ireland in 1998 the Quarry Products Association NI now represents over 95% of the quarry products industry. Our membership

includes major, medium and smaller sized companies directly employing over 5000 people with an annual turnover of over £750million