

Written Ministerial Statement

The content of this ministerial statement is as received at the time from the Minister. It has not been subject to the Official Report (Hansard) process.

Regional Development

Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) Regulation

Published at 12.00 noon on Thursday 17 October 2013

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): Members will be aware of the importance of the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) for Northern Ireland. It is important because of our location on the periphery of Europe, and our requirement to develop a transport network that ensures that we are not disadvantaged in terms of competing and participating nationally and internationally. My Department has already been successful in competing for funding through the EU's existing TEN-T programme to improve our roads and railways, and it is my intention that this continues in the next programme.

For these reasons I have taken a keen interest in the EU negotiations for a new TEN-T Regulation and the associated funding facility. I engaged pro-actively with key EU decision makers, including the Chair of the European Parliament's Transport Committee who accepted my invitation to visit Northern Ireland last year, the European Transport Commissioner, the UK Secretary of State for Transport, MEP's and Ministers from other jurisdictions.

I have kept the Committee for Regional Development and key stakeholders informed throughout the co-decision process, particularly as the Regulation entered the closing stages of negotiations. The Regulation is on track for a first reading agreement between the European Parliament, Council and Commission. It is envisaged it will be supported by the European Parliament at their Plenary Vote and adopted by Council later this year. I would like to provide Members with a full update of the positive outcome negotiated for Northern Ireland.

The amendments we have secured will ensure that Northern Ireland will not be subject to costly and inappropriate infrastructure demands and binding deadlines. In real terms this means that Northern Ireland will not be forced to spend some £1.46 billion on our rail network and £13 billion on our roads in order to meet what is clearly unjustifiable expenditure and otherwise risk infraction proceedings. This cost would have had to be borne by the Executive; it would have been money from our own resources. It is fair to say that had this policy been allowed to progress unchallenged, Northern Ireland could have faced a budgetary crisis on a huge scale. In addition, following my positive interventions, key transport routes in Northern Ireland have been maintained on the TEN-T Network, with the associated opportunity of EU funding.

I have lobbied extensively for the inclusion of Londonderry on the Core Network, and I have been supported in this by the Committee for Regional Development. This would provide true EU added value by improving access to the internal market across two Member States and promoting the competitiveness of this regional gateway. Therefore, I do not accept the European Commission's position which does not include Londonderry on the Core Network, although it will now be included in the TEN-T Comprehensive Network.

The Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) Regulation, which determines the conditions, methods and procedures for the Europe's contribution to TEN projects, is also on track for a first Reading agreement. It is envisaged this will also be supported by the European Parliament at their Plenary Vote and adopted by Council later this year. As a result of changes we worked with London to push for it is now much more likely that Northern Ireland will be in a stronger position to bid for EU funding for our TEN-T Comprehensive Network. This means that projects on Londonderry's transport links could still be eligible to bid for EU funding.

Whilst bidding for funding from the CEF for investment in infrastructure will be a highly competitive process, the outcome of the negotiations will put Northern Ireland in a significantly improved position.

These achievements are a result of consistent engagement on this issue. I would also like to put on record my appreciation for the help and assistance that I have received from Northern Ireland's MEPs, who tabled amendments on my behalf and provided invaluable advice on engaging with Europe on these matters.

Our achievements ensure that Northern Ireland's transport infrastructure will continue be a constructive and contributing part of Europe's vision for the future development of high-performing, sustainable and efficiently interconnected trans-European transport networks.

Therefore, it is with great pleasure that I am able to share with Members this positive outcome; one which secures our participation in Networks that provide genuine and tangible opportunities to support growth and improve competitiveness in Northern Ireland and across Europe, through more efficient and effective movement of goods and people.

Please note the above statement is embargoed until 12:00 on 17 October 2013.