



## **Committee for Regional Development**

Mr Mike Nesbitt MLA  
Chairperson  
Committee for the Office of the  
First Minister and deputy First Minister

20 January 2016

Dear Mr Nesbitt,

### **Re: European Commission Work Programme 2016**

At its meeting on 20 January 2016, the Committee for Regional Development noted that, as per the Research and Information Service (RaISe) analysis of the European Work Programme 2016, a number of issues relate to the remit of DRD.

In considering the likely priorities the Committee was mindful of the fact that this is the end of the mandate for this Committee and the new Committee may take a different view on its European priorities. It was also mindful of the fact that the DRD will cease to exist in May and the newly established Department for Infrastructure will have a greater number of functions assigned to it than DRD currently has; the European Commission related elements of these functions may well impact on the priorities for the new Committee.

For these reasons, this submission reflects the views of the current Committee for Regional Development.

### **Multiannual Financial Framework**

The Committee sees this objective as the highest priority of those objectives that relate the remit of it and the DRD. A budget of €26 billion until 2020 will bring about extremely significant improvements to the transport network and the importance of gaining access to this funding cannot be emphasised enough. The Committee recommends that the incoming Committee works extremely closely with the Department and counterparts in other jurisdictions to ensure that every effort is made to secure the necessary funding for the core network costs of the A8 and A1 road axis, the Belfast-Newry rail axis and Belfast port, as well as the comprehensive network of the Belfast-L/Derry rail line.

### **Proposal for a regulation establishing a framework on market access to port services and financial transparency of ports**

The Committee sees this proposals as extremely significant and feels that it is vital that our ports should offer the same high level service as other Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) ports and that every effort should be made to ensure that Northern Ireland's ports are not a barrier to commerce and investment. As an island that relies significantly on its ports to connect with the rest of Europe, we should ensure that the optimum use is made of them and that they are of a standard whereby our location is not considered a deterrent to investment. The Committee is of the opinion that every effort should be made to address the 5 specific challenges identified in the research paper.

The Committee would recommend that the incoming Committee for Infrastructure seeks to address this objective with the Department during the next mandate.

### **New public procurement by entities operating in the water, energy transport and postal services sector**

EU Directive 2014/25/E relates to the procurement of entities operating in the water, energy, transport and postal services sectors and replaces the 2004 Directive for Utilities Contracts. As this issue pertains to both transport and water and sewerage services, the Committee would be keen to work closely with the Department to ensure that this directive is fully implemented.

### **EU Airport Noise Regulation (EU) No 598/2014**

The Committee has, on a number of occasions, received briefing on the issue of airport noise, particularly in relation to Belfast City Airport. Whilst currently this is a grey area that impacts on both DRD and DOE, the Committee would welcome not just a single authority in charge of this issue, but would also welcome the proposals of this legislation that should create an improved noise environment around airports. The new regulation takes effect from 13 June 2016 and the Committee would recommend to the incoming Committee that it monitors the implementation of the regulation and its impact insofar as it relates to the new Department for Infrastructure.

### **Proposals for a regulation amending Regulation (EC) No. 91/2003 on rail transport statistics**

The Committee noted that this proposal aims to update, simplify and optimise the existing legal framework for European statistics on rail transport; the Committee also noted that, if not agreed within 6 months, it should be withdrawn.

DRD compiles statistics for rail, but the Committee is of the view that the impact of this proposal on the work of the Department is relatively minor and whilst it will continue to

monitor this issue through the bi-annual updates from the department, it does not feel that this is a significant priority going forward.

### **EU Maritime Legislation**

The Committee notes that this legislation is dealt with nationally and, although DRD has an interest given its role in relation to overseeing the Harbour Authorities, the Committee will keep a watching brief on this issue and communicate with the relevant Westminster committee, if necessary.

### **Planned Committee Action**

In addition to the comments above, and bearing in mind that the current mandate is coming to an end, the Committee would recommend that the incoming Committee considers:

- Flood prevention – responsibility for addressing flooding will be the remit of the Department for Infrastructure. On 14 January 2016, it was announced that the Irish government has secured €200 million in loans from the European Investment Bank for 30 flood prevention and protection projects across the Republic of Ireland over the next 5 years. The loans were agreed by the EIB Board on 17 December 2015 and will be 55% match funded by government. This is the first time flood prevention projects have been funded through the EIB in Ireland although it has provided €755million in loans in 2015 to other Irish infrastructure projects including at ports, motorways and universities. This is an extremely important development and the Committee would recommend to the incoming Committee that it pursues this issue.
- Receiving an early briefing from the Assembly's Research service (RaSe) in relation to the work programme as it relates to the newly constituted Department for Infrastructure;
- Receiving periodic papers and briefings from RaSe on the progress of the work programme;
- Continuing to receive a bi-annual updates from the Department on EU activity and to request briefings as necessary;
- Engagement with the Assembly's EU Affairs Manager in relation to matters included in the work programme and also emerging issues that are not contained therein.

### **Committee activity on 2015 European priorities**

In its submission in 2015, the Committee for Regional Development noted that the work programme for 2015 did not contain any activity in relation to its remit but did, however, identify that *"from a European transport perspective, it is important that the specific regional circumstances facing Northern Ireland in the context of the [...] TEN-T i.e. peripherality, isolation and proximity to another Member State, are appropriately considered and addressed within the overall Structural Funds landscape. In this regard, the continued strengthening of the TEN-T North Sea Mediterranean Core Corridor remains of greatest significance both regionally and territorially as a driver of economic growth and as*

*a priority for funding. It is, therefore, important from a future EU funding perspective that strategically sponsored projects are conceived with these circumstances in mind."*

During 2015, the Committee engaged with Departmental officials and the European Co-Ordinator of the "Motorways of the Sea" concept and his Senior Policy Advisor also met with representatives of the Committee.

#### **Other EU activity undertaken in 2015**

The Committee continued to receive bi-annual updates from the Department on European engagement and also information relating to EU proposals impacting on the Department.

Yours sincerely,

**Trevor Clarke**

**Chairperson  
Committee for Regional Development**