



Narrow Water Bridge Community Network

PRESS RELEASE

Mr Jim Boylan, Chairman of the Narrow Water Bridge Community Network, has welcomed the recent offer of financial support for Northern Ireland from the Theresa May government to the DUP despite the storm of controversy that it has provoked. Mr Boylan, the Network's chairman has especially welcomed the £400 million that has been earmarked for infrastructure within the package totalling a billion pounds.

In reply to a question put by the Newry Democrat on whether some of this money should go to the Narrow Water Bridge project Boylan was very clear that it should. The cash, as Boylan understands, is front-loaded with funding focused on the immediate term to support needy and approved projects. A shovel ready project such as the bridge at Narrow Water, which dramatically failed to proceed in 2013 despite approval of both governments and substantial funding from the EU, is exceptionally well positioned to benefit from such a financial injection said Boylan.

Commenting on whether the Southern Relief Road could also expect to benefit from the funds on offer Boylan said that this was unlikely for a number of reasons. The main reason is that the SRR is at a much earlier stage of development and will fall outside the timeframe of any offer of funding within the May package. The amounts of money involved are also of a different order of magnitude when considering the two projects. It must also be remembered that Dublin is fully expected to maintain its earlier funding commitments to the Narrow Water Project.

It is important, continued Boylan, to emphasise that the Narrow Water Bridge and the Southern Relief Road are two separate and complementary projects. The SRR is essentially a strategic traffic management project designed to relieve congestion in Newry and to provide access for traffic to and from Warrenpoint Port to the Belfast-Dublin Corridor. The Narrow Water Bridge is a valuable tourism development project.

It is widely accepted, argues Boylan, that despite its prime location and natural capital the Carlingford Lough area is significantly under-achieving both in economic development terms generally and in tourism in particular. Regional tourism performance figures produced for 2014 by Fáilte Ireland clearly reflect the lack of balanced tourist distribution with very few tourists being drawn to the Carlingford Lough area from the prime entry point at Dublin.

Boylan and his committee are convinced that Narrow Water Bridge will provide a natural interconnector for the scenic areas of Cooley, Gullion and Mourne and argue strongly for the recently launched Ireland's Ancient East to be extended into counties Armagh, Down and Antrim. This will decisively capitalise on the

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growth in active tourism and tap into an underexploited market especially in Britain and among our near-neighbours on the continent for new and interesting walking and cycling destinations. Fáilte Ireland has recently identified a potential market of 11 million cyclists in Germany alone. Dublin Airport, just over an hour from Narrow Water and now clearly the gateway into Ireland, reported passenger numbers for 2016 of some 28 million, a figure which is approximately 5 times that of Belfast International, George Best City and City of Derry Airports combined. The NWBCN also believes, said Boylan, that the potential of a bridge connection in uniting communities should not be underestimated. The recently constructed Peace Bridge in Derry is a clear case in point.

Finally when asked how optimistic he is regarding the project proceeding, Boylan replied that he is convinced that the Narrow Water Bridge will go ahead with or without funding from the May package and in the immediate term. The building of the bridge at Narrow Water has widespread political support. At a local level the Newry Mourne & Down Council are overwhelmingly supportive of the project. In addition both the former Minister Hazzard and Minister Ross indicated their commitment to the project in a joint press release in May fully endorsing the potential of the Narrow Water Bridge to deliver significant economic benefits particularly in area of tourism in the Carlingford Lough area.