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# NEWS

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27 September 1976

SPEECH BY MR DON CONCANNON MP, MINISTER OF STATE AT THE NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE AT THE LAUNCHING OF A JOINT STUDY BY THE GOVERNMENTS OF THE UNITED KINGDOM AND IRISH REPUBLIC INTO CROSS-BORDER COMMUNICATIONS IN THE LONDONDERRY AND DONEGAL AREAS, ON 27 SEPTEMBER 1976 IN LONDONDERRY:

Londonderry is a very old established city. Not only does it occupy a special place in the affairs of Northern Ireland but it is also a significant influence for a large area of the Republic of Ireland. And so it is most appropriate, Mr Mayor, that you have invited today a Minister of the Irish Government and the Chairman of the Donegal County Council. I am very pleased and grateful to be their fellow guest at this pleasant function.

Londonderry City's significance does not just reside in its often stirring history. It is its influence in physical, economic and cultural terms, as a major regional centre which makes it a natural focus of activity for the whole north-west area in spite of the existence of the border. This major sphere of influence makes the city a very important factor in the overall physical development plan for Northern Ireland and particularly in the effort to encourage industrial growth in the north-west and in the area west of the Bann generally.

It is for this reason that the Government in Northern Ireland has over the years been at pains to develop the infrastructure of the area so as to render it more attractive not only to those who already live and work there but to potential investors. And one of the most important factors in this planned development is communications - this is vital to industry, to housing development, to leisure pursuits and to so many other aspects of modern life. This is why a great deal of effort and a lot of money has been expended in the past few years in, for instance, improving the roads system not only within the

immediate Londonderry area but between Londonderry and Belfast and other areas - of which you will have seen some evidence on your way here. The same may be said to a greater or lesser extent of other aspects of communications - the port of Londonderry, railway links and telecommunications - all of the things which will be examined by the study we are here today to launch.

That study will take fully into account the geographical fact that Londonderry is very close indeed to the border and its natural sphere of influence extends widely through Co Donegal. Its terms of reference recognise that it is advantageous to consider jointly its implications for both countries. After all industry and commerce, roads, telephone lines and so forth do not stop short of the border - they cross it and some measure of co-operation is clearly essential to their planning and maintenance. Such co-operation between governments and between local authorities on either side of the border is nothing new, but as our joint membership of the community becomes a more and more pervasive part of our way of life, it makes even more sense to consider the situation on each side of the border in conjunction so that both may benefit from co-ordinated planning. And of course such planning can benefit from information produced by studies such as this one we are launching today.

What we hope to find out from the study is whether or not the efforts which have already been made and which are planned for the future in this important field of communications are adequate and are taking us in the right direction in the light of current trends and projected future needs. Needless to say, there is always room for argument about priorities, especially when resources are limited, so I cannot say in advance that the British Government can bind itself to accept the recommendations which emerge, and I shall be surprised if my colleague from Dublin is in any different position. But I do promise that the findings of the study will be built into our thinking on the area.

This type of co-operation, for the benefit of two neighbouring countries, can be one major benefit of EEC membership - the best possible utilisation of the resources of two areas, brought about by careful planning and co-operation. It is therefore not surprising, but nevertheless very much appreciated, that the efforts of the two

Wells

administrations to have the study set up have been greatly helped by the keen interest of the EEC authorities in Brussels. I am delighted to see this evidence of their continuing concern for our economic and social affairs and it says much for that interest that we have with us today Doctor Ruggiero (paying his second visit to Northern Ireland within six months), Herr Waldchen and Mr Richard Wells. They are very welcome to Northern Ireland, and I should like to thank them for their continued interest and for the support which has made possible this joint venture.

I am also pleased to see amongst us representatives of the consultants, who have the heavy but I hope fruitful task of actually carrying out the study. I wish them all success and promise them the fullest co-operation on behalf of the Government in Northern Ireland, short of promising to agree immediately and without exception to everything they recommend.