

**CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY SPARE CAPACITY SHOULD BE REDIRECTED TO
PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE**

- Chartered Surveyors President Calls on Government to Make Budget Provision

Any spare capacity in the construction industry arising from the residential slowdown should be used to accelerate public infrastructure projects, states the president of the Society of Chartered Surveyors (SCS).

Felix McKenna, president of Ireland's largest construction and property industry body the SCS, called on the government to make provision for a redirection in the Budget.

"The government should use the opportunity presented by the forthcoming Budget to avail of any surplus capacity and competitiveness emerging from the residential sector and accelerate the much needed delivery of public infrastructure and facilities", he stated.

Addressing the Society of Chartered Surveyors Annual Dinner in Dublin today (Friday, November 23, Burlington Hotel), Mr. McKenna declared that the government would achieve a two-fold objective – ensuring that total construction output and employment levels would be maintained, thus "underpinning the wider economy", and delivering the much needed public infrastructure under both the NDP and Transport 21.

The SCS president stressed that the anticipated reduction in tax revenue should not be allowed to impact on infrastructure delivery, urging the government to borrow if necessary. "Some limited government borrowing to accelerate the delivery of projects that will benefit future generations for literally decades ahead is entirely justifiable", he declared to his large audience of almost 1,300.

He also stated that the new procurement processes in the public sector should not be allowed to hold up delivery either.

In his address, chartered building surveyor Felix McKenna FSCS FRICS Barrister at Law, managing director of Osprey Property, the eircom property development company, and director of property services at eircom, urged a more integrated approach to city governance and stronger local government in our next phase of Ireland's economic development.

“I believe that it is important that in our next phase we have an altogether more fully integrated approach to planning, land use and public transportation”, said Mr. McKenna, welcoming the government’s commitment to a directly elected Lord Mayor for Dublin in 2011 as it would only have a positive impact on planning and service delivery. He complimented planners and Local Authorities on their achievements, saying that “we should recognise that they have delivered an enormous amount in recent years”.

The SCS president signalled his disappointment at “the apparent dilution of the role of the Forum for the Construction industry” (as recently published in the Terms of Reference for that Forum). He criticised the irony of such a move, saying that “it seems entirely inappropriate that the role of the Forum should be diminished in any way at a time when the impact of this [construction] industry is more important than ever”.

However on a positive note, the SCS president said that the medium and longer-term prognosis for the construction industry remains positive.

“It should be noted that many of the economic indicators that underpin the construction and property industries remain strong”, stated Felix McKenna. He pointed to the fact that both the population and overall economy is set to continue growth, and said that this performance coupled with anticipated interest rate reductions later next year and into 2009, “is by no means a bad outlook for our industries”.

The Rt. Hon. Peter Robinson, Minister for Finance & Personnel in the Northern Ireland Executive was the special guest this year at the Society’s Annual Dinner, one of the largest events on the construction & property industry calendar. It saw the usual large turnout with a near 1,300 members and guests, a point to which it has grown in its long tradition dating back to 1895.

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Note to editors: The SCS now has over 1,800 qualified members and a further 1,000 students and probationers. Members include quantity, planning & development, building, rural, and specialist surveyors, as well as general practice surveyors working in the valuation area, countrywide.