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McEvaddy calls for 50-year national infrastructure plan

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21 May 2006 By Emmet Ryan

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Entrepreneur Ulick McEvaddy, who lobbied for the second terminal at Dublin Airport to be built on his land, has called for a long-term focus in planning Irish infrastructure.

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"We don't look 50 years down the road. Planning for five to ten years is a waste of time," said McEvaddy, the chief executive of Omega Air.

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"In 50 years' time, 80million passengers will travel through Dublin airport. At that threshold, we will have a need for a second airport in 25 to 30 years' time," he said. "For now, building properly at Dublin Airport will manage that development."

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McEvaddy was speaking at the National Infrastructure Summit, which was organised by The Sunday Business Post and iQuest. It was held last Tuesday and Wednesday at the IMI Conference Centre in Sandyford, Dublin. The conference was sponsored by Project Management Group.

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Among the speakers were Minister for Finance Brian Cowen, Finn Lyden, managing director of Siac Construction, and Ildefonso de Matias, general director, Metro de Madrid.

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McEvaddy said development of Dublin Airport could lead to an increase in transatlantic business.

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"It's not airports that are getting congested; it's air space," said McEvaddy. "If we had an airport capable of being a hub, US airlines would use it to avoid congestion over mainland Europe." McEvaddy said a short-term approach to development had hindered the Irish transport system.

"We need to learn from the M50 disaster, the Port Tunnel and other infrastructure deficits created. The ports are the worst area of neglect. There is a need to look outside the city and find a suitable location for a master port.

"Dublin and Cork will need an underground down the line so let's start now," he said.

Sean Barrett, senior lecturer in economics at Trinity College Dublin, echoed McEvaddy's call to learn from past mistakes.

"We don't seem, in Transport 21, to have picked up much of the lessons," he said.

"We need sound independent evaluation with more benefits than costs. I don't see the Department of Finance asserting itself in this role to ensure this.

"There is close to €2 billion already spent, yet there are no costings for individual projects."

Barrett said Transport 21 didn't pay enough attention to the role buses play in transport.

He said private sector operators such as Aircoach had shown the benefits of bus travel.

"Independent bus services have double the passenger income of rail travel," said Barrett.

But the Minister for Transport Martin Cullen said there was a focus on bus services in Transport 21.

"We are planning for a 60 per cent increase in capacity in bus usage in Dublin," he said.

"Over a half a billion is provided for investment in buses in Dublin. There's no question that it will continue to grow as a feature and a key part of the public transport network."

Gina Quin, chief executive of the Dublin Chamber of Commerce, said the current state of transport between Dublin Airport and the city was affecting foreign investment in the city.

"Several foreign companies that have invested in Ireland are moving their board meetings to London," she said.

"There is a clear need for a rail link between the airport and city." Cullen said the Metro North project would address this problem. Bent Flyvberg, professor of planning at Aalborg University in Denmark, said the costs of major projects like Transport 21 needed to be estimated accurately.

"Mega-projects [large infrastructural projects] tend to be designed with a disaster gene," he said. Flyvberg said the gene was a combination of cost underestimation and benefit over estimation.

"Projects with this gene are likely to become a drag on an economy not a boost," he said.

Flyvberg said his research found that nine out of ten "mega-projects" overran their costs. "The level of error has been constant for the past 70 years. The estimates have not improved," he said.

Flyvberg said this was an international problem that would only be solved if developers were encouraged to provide accurate estimates.

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