

ICE submission to the Transport Committee inquiry on rail investment pipelines: ending boom and bust

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About the ICE

The Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE) is a 97,000-strong global membership organisation with over 200 years of history.

It is a centre of engineering excellence, qualifying engineers and helping them maintain lifelong competence, assuring society that the infrastructure they create is safe, dependable and well designed.

Its network of experts offers trusted, impartial advice to politicians and decision makers on how to build and adapt infrastructure to create a more sustainable world.

For more information, please contact **David McNaught**, Policy Manager: policy@ice.org.uk

Submission

This response covers questions 3 and 6 of the Committee's call for evidence.

3. How could a potential pipeline provide transparency and certainty for industry?

The ICE's Next Steps policy programme on paying for Britain's infrastructure system explored how the UK Government can engage private investors.¹ It highlighted the need to focus on increasing certainty and lowering the risks, costs and time associated with delivering projects. The supply chain, investors, businesses and the public need long-term plans supported by evidence, stable policy and long-term thinking on financing options.

A clear, consistent and detailed project pipeline is a key component of this framework. The National Infrastructure and Construction Pipeline is intended to give investors and the supply chain an overarching view of planned UK infrastructure projects. However, its most recent iteration lacks detail and falls short of setting out the scale of infrastructure investment and transformation required in the coming decades. Businesses have suggested that too many of the projects listed are not economically viable investment opportunities but are more indicative of political aspirations.

This pipeline uncertainty is reflected in the level of stop/start infrastructure planning and delivery which has driven up costs and weakened confidence in the UK's commitment and ability to deliver major infrastructure projects. For example, repeated delays and cancellations on High Speed 2 made it harder for the supply chain to build and retain a skilled workforce.² The leadership and capability of key supply chains must be nurtured and grown so they can take on the huge infrastructure challenges required to meet wider societal objectives, like delivering net zero, adapting to climate change and unlocking economic growth.

¹ ICE (2024) [ICE briefing paper: paying for Britain's infrastructure system – alternative options](#)

² ICE (2024) [ICE briefing paper: the cancellation of HS2's northern leg – learning lessons](#)

Companies in the supply chain need confidence that there is a robust pipeline of future projects to invest in long-term skills training and retention.

For a pipeline to build that confidence it needs to be stable and set out credible investment opportunities. Projects need to reach market quicker and be subject to less political interference once launched. Pipelines can better support investors and the supply chain by providing more details on factors like prioritisation, investment and delivery models, risk profiles and maintenance requirements.

Enabling investors and contractors to plan for the longer term should reduce costs and delivery times. For example, the National Infrastructure Commission has highlighted that a more programmatic stable pipeline of similar projects would lower costs by enabling repeatability, standardisation and lower unit costs.³

Infrastructure Australia's Infrastructure Priority List is an example of a pipeline that emphasises being accessible and credible for investors.⁴ The list is being reformed to be more evidence-based, targeted and aligned with the Australian Government's investment priorities. The government wants to ensure it identifies Australia's top infrastructure investment priorities that are unfunded and ready for investment.

6. How should a pipeline interact with the Government's development of a wider long term rail strategy, rolling stock strategy, infrastructure strategy, and the Invest 35 industrial strategy?

Infrastructure is a system of systems. The strategic infrastructure planning framework being developed by the Government must be fully joined up. The Integrated National Transport Strategy must be linked to the upcoming 10-year National Infrastructure Strategy, the new industrial strategy, and other sectoral plans.

This framework should enable the development of a credible National Infrastructure and Construction Pipeline, and subordinate modal and regional transport pipelines, by aligning infrastructure projects and programmes with the Government's key long-term, strategic objectives. The ICE's policy paper on learning lessons from the cancellation of High Speed 2's northern leg highlighted that major projects and programmes need clarity and consistency on outcomes from the outset to achieve political and public buy-in – a key requirement for ending stop/stop or boom and bust planning and delivery cycles.⁵

To provide that clarity and help decision-makers prioritise projects, the 10-year National Infrastructure Strategy and the Integrated National Transport Strategy must be genuinely outcomes-focused, strategic documents – not just high-level lists of objectives, targets, and projects.

The 10-year national infrastructure strategy should set out the government's long-term strategic objectives in line with the National Infrastructure Commission's recommendations in the second National Infrastructure Assessment (NIA2). The Integrated National Transport Strategy should be vision-led, setting out the outcomes transport must deliver to help achieve the Government's strategic objectives.⁶

Establishing this 'golden thread' of desired transport outcomes would join up planning across different modes, regions and levels of government within a coherent overarching framework. National and subnational bodies responsible for delivery could develop strategies and pipelines based on the UK's wider strategic needs.

³ National Infrastructure Commission (2024) [Cost drivers of major infrastructure projects in the UK](#)

⁴ Infrastructure Australia [Infrastructure Priority List](#)

⁵ ICE (2024) [ICE briefing paper: the cancellation of HS2's northern leg – learning lessons](#)

⁶ ICE (2023) [ICE policy position statement: a national transport strategy for England](#)

The Industrial Strategy also needs to support the UK's ability to deliver project pipelines by focusing on the why, what, and how to deliver a long-term pipeline of projects at the right time and in the right places. The ICE welcomes the identification of growth-driving sectors in Invest 2035, efforts to identify priority subsectors and the intention to create subsector plans.

There is also a need to boost capability in the civil service in areas like contract management, procurement and negotiation. This includes increasing cross-departmental coordination to sequence major projects and help the supply chain manage the allocation of limited skills and resources. Unnecessary competition between projects for skills and resources drives up costs. Clarity is also needed on the role of the new National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority (NISTA), which will come from the merger of the current NIC and the Infrastructure Projects Authority, in developing the pipeline and overseeing its delivery.