

ICE's priorities for the next UK government

June 2024

Summary

The next UK parliament is critical for the country's progress towards its long-term strategic objectives. Infrastructure has a vital role to play in meeting those goals. It is key to reducing the UK's carbon emissions, with two-thirds of UK emissions coming from economic infrastructure, including transport, energy (including heat) and water. Infrastructure is also the bedrock of society. The right infrastructure systems are needed to unlock economic growth, overcome the challenges posed by climate change, manage demographic change and improve the lives of the public.

The next government will be responsible for meeting some important milestones towards those longer-term targets. The next parliament is also the last opportunity to make significant progress towards the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

This paper examines the outcomes that must be delivered and sets out the ICE's priorities for how the next UK government can strengthen the country's infrastructure planning and delivery framework to achieve those outcomes at the required pace and scale.

Key messages

- On infrastructure spending: **Without increasing investment in 2025/26 and beyond to cover cost increases due to inflation, budgets for major infrastructure projects will effectively be cut, and it will be harder for the UK to achieve its wider strategic goals.**
- On infrastructure planning and prioritisation: **Decisions about what infrastructure gets built should give more weight to the social, economic and environmental benefits projects will deliver over their lifetime, as well as considering no-build and nature-based solutions. While it is important that public money is used wisely, people support investing in infrastructure when they can see how it will improve their lives.**
- On improving infrastructure delivery: **Infrastructure delivery in the UK costs too much and takes too long. Many tools to deliver projects faster, cheaper and more sustainably already exist. But they will only be effective if used across government and industry as standard. Sharing what works well across global partners will also help.**

Key asks

- On decarbonisation: **The ICE recommends prioritising public engagement and behavioural change to reduce carbon emissions and mitigate the risk of relying on unproven technologies to achieve net zero.**
- On climate adaptation and resilience: **To improve infrastructure's climate resilience, the Adaptation Reporting Power of the UK Climate Change Act should be made mandatory for all infrastructure owners and operators. This would give the new government the information required to address the most pressing needs first.**

- On transport planning: **The ICE recommends that the next government develops a national transport strategy for England to clarify long-term plans for transport investment.**
- On regional growth and connectivity: **The next government should work with regional leaders to review rail development plans in the North and Midlands to determine how gaps left by the cancellation of the northern leg of HS2 will be filled.**
- On accountability: **The role of the National Infrastructure Commission should be strengthened. Making it a statutory body would improve strategic infrastructure planning and prioritisation, give more certainty to investors and the supply chain and increase accountability for ensuring infrastructure delivers the outcomes the UK needs.**



1. The UK infrastructure system in context

Outcomes over the next parliament

Decarbonisation

The UK has made rapid progress towards net zero. It is the first G7 country to halve its carbon emissions relative to 1990 levels. However, the second half of emissions reductions will be much harder to achieve.

The UK has committed to reduce emissions by at least 68% by 2030, relative to 1990 levels, and by 78% by 2035. However, progress towards those targets is slowing. The UK is on track to meet the fourth and fifth carbon budgets (2023–27 and 2028–32) but is slightly off track for meeting its legally binding sixth carbon budget (2033–2038).¹

The Climate Change Committee (CCC) has expressed 'low' confidence in the UK meeting its 2030 emissions target. A lack of urgency, policy gaps and rollbacks on key commitments have lowered expectations. Recent progress has been mainly achieved in the electricity supply sector alone. Reductions outside this sector need to accelerate fourfold to meet the 2030 target. Further delaying action will also likely cost the economy more in the long term.²

Climate adaptation and resilience

The UK's infrastructure is facing pressures from climate change that, for the most part, it was not designed to withstand. Without adaptation and improved emergency response to build greater resilience, the UK's infrastructure will lose value, repairing damage will be more costly and increasingly frequent, and the public will face higher levels of disruption.

The current National Adaptation Plan (NAP3), the third iteration, covers 2023 to 2028, after which it will be followed by NAP4. However, the CCC has also called for an urgent refresh of NAP3 and adaptation governance in the new parliament. It says the current version 'falls far short of what is needed', lacking pace and a compelling, measurable vision for what a 'well adapted UK' entails to enable and monitor delivery.³

NAP3 progresses only around 40% of the short-term actions recommended to address urgent risks identified in the last Climate Change Risk Assessment. Further inaction will increase the risk of locking in poorly adapted infrastructure in the energy, water and rail sectors, which all start new price control periods before 2030. Without effective resilience mandates, investment during these price control periods could be misaligned with that needed to adapt to future climate extremes.

Social and economic prosperity

Income inequality is continuing to widen in the UK.⁴ The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) recently published its final 12 levelling up missions and metrics to measure progress as part of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act.⁵ The missions cover the period up to 2030 and include gigabit-capable broadband and 4G access, skills training, improved life expectancy and further devolution. However, the opportunity to align the levelling up agenda with net zero, as previously recommended by the ICE, was missed.⁶

¹ Climate Change Committee (2023) [2023 Progress Report to Parliament](#)

² Climate Change Committee (2023) [2023 Progress Report to Parliament](#); National Infrastructure Commission (2023) [Second National Infrastructure Assessment](#)

³ Climate Change Committee (2024) [Independent Assessment of the Third National Adaptation Programme](#)

⁴ ONS (2023) [Household Income Inequality, UK: Financial Year Ending 2022](#)

⁵ Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (2024) [Statement of Levelling Up Missions](#)

⁶ ICE (2022) [ICE Policy Position Statement: Defining the Outcomes from Levelling Up](#)

Infrastructure pipeline priorities

The National Infrastructure Commission's (NIC) Second National Infrastructure Assessment (NIA2) should be the focus for infrastructure investment planning over the next parliament.⁷ An updated National Infrastructure Strategy (NIS) based on NIA2's recommendations will provide long-term visibility and confidence to investors and the construction supply chain and assure the public of the country's infrastructure ambitions.

Energy

The energy sector faces a series of challenges: reducing high energy costs, phasing out fossil fuels and delivering new infrastructure at pace to meet increased electricity demand of around 50% by 2035. The NIC has set out detailed recommendations for increasing grid capacity and flexibility at the pace required in NIA2, which should be implemented as part of the next National Infrastructure Strategy.⁸

Reducing energy demand will ease the scale of new infrastructure required. Ensuring those measures are fair is a challenge for the next government. For example, half-hour metering at scale will optimise the balance of energy supply and demand. Many people will benefit from more bespoke products matched to their usage and needs. However, some customers may be unable to change their usage patterns away from peak periods and risk having to pay significantly more for energy. More research is needed into the risks of the transition across all sectors of society.⁹

Heat in buildings

Heating buildings accounts for almost a quarter (24%) of fossil fuel demand in the UK and around 20% of emissions. The next ten years are crucial – emissions from buildings need to be halved in that time.¹⁰

UK homes are among the worst insulated in Europe, and the target of 600,000 heat pump installations by 2028 is already off track.¹¹ The UK has 4 million households in the social rented sector, covering about 17% of the housing stock. They include a higher proportion of lower-income and vulnerable populations who could gain the most from energy efficiency improvements but are also least likely to be able to afford them.¹² Committed funding would set the trajectory for a longer-term social housing retrofit programme and enable local authorities and suppliers to get on with delivery.¹³

Transport

Urban connectivity in most UK towns and cities is poor compared to similar European locations, constraining regional productivity.¹⁴ Surface transport is also the UK's highest-emitting sector, contributing 23% of total UK emissions in 2022. The vast majority (98%) of these come from road transport.¹⁵ Achieving a cost-effective net zero transition and maximising the co-benefits, such as cleaner air and economic growth, will be much harder without reducing car-driven miles.¹⁶

The decision last year to cancel the northern leg of HS2 has left a strategic gap to fill on improving rail connectivity and capacity between some of the UK's major cities. A new government should commit to a review, in partnership with local leaders, of rail schemes in the North and Midlands. If these schemes are robustly scoped with clear delivery timelines, these challenges can still be addressed.

⁷ National Infrastructure Commission (2023) [Second National Infrastructure Assessment](#)

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ ICE (2024) [ICE Briefing Paper: What Should the 'Day 1' Priorities be for a New UK Parliament?](#)

¹⁰ Climate Change Committee (2023) [2023 Progress Report to Parliament](#); National Infrastructure Commission (2023) [Second National Infrastructure Assessment](#)

¹¹ National Infrastructure Commission (2024) [Infrastructure Progress Review](#)

¹² Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (2023) [English Housing Survey 2021 to 2022: Social Rented Sector](#)

¹³ ICE (2024) [ICE Briefing Paper: What Should the 'Day 1' Priorities be for a New UK Parliament?](#)

¹⁴ Royal Society of Arts (2023) [Unleashing the Potential of the UK's Cities](#); National Infrastructure Commission (2023) [Second National Infrastructure Assessment](#)

¹⁵ Climate Change Committee (2023) [2023 Progress Report to Parliament](#)

¹⁶ RAC Foundation (2023) [Is it Necessary to Reduce Car Mileage to Meet our Carbon Emission Goals?](#); Green Alliance (2021) [Not Going the Extra Mile: Driving Less to Tackle Climate Change](#)

New public transport infrastructure can improve connectivity within towns and cities. By 2030, a new urban tram delivery body could develop the evidence base and a replicable model for designing and delivering new urban tram infrastructure. Over the same period, 10 UK towns and cities could develop plans for new schemes to be delivered in five more years.¹⁷

Significant reductions in freight emissions through modal shift from road to rail can be achieved with the right investments. For example, the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport (CILT) estimates that electrifying less than 60 miles of 'infill sections' on Britain's railways would decarbonise around 2 million train miles annually.¹⁸ This could provide a starting point for a longer-term rail electrification programme, setting out a rolling programme of works that drives investment across the supply chain, freight industry and customers.

The ICE recommends that the government develops a national transport strategy for England to set out an overarching vision of a sustainable transport network. This would align England with Scotland and Wales. It would establish a 'golden thread' of desired outcomes for the different modes, regions and levels of government to deliver transport infrastructure and services aligned with the UK's wider strategic goals.¹⁹

Water

The UK's water and wastewater infrastructure system faces enormous challenges, including meeting net zero while keeping the taps on, improving the quality of waterways and reducing flooding in the face of changing weather patterns.²⁰

The UK's population has grown by approximately 10 million people since the last reservoir was completed in 1991. New reservoirs are badly needed, with the NIC predicting that water demand will exceed supply by 4,000 megalitres per day by 2050.²¹

The issue of sewage discharges onto UK beaches and rivers has attracted significant attention in recent years. Reducing discharges from combined sewer overflows on the scale planned in an environmentally sensitive and cost-effective way will be a huge challenge. Attempting to rush the process will likely result in ineffective solutions that may do more harm than good.²²

Making the UK's infrastructure more climate resilient

There is no time to lose in making the UK's infrastructure system more resilient to current and future climate extremes. The ICE has made the following recommendations:²³

- Make the Adaptation Reporting Power of the UK Climate Change Act mandatory for infrastructure owners and operators.
- National Policy Statements should include a list of climate hazards and desired standards of protection for selected climate scenarios.
- The next government should undertake a national review of the economics of adaptation.
- Infrastructure owners and operators should be encouraged to consider the interconnectivity of infrastructure systems and to use connected digital twins to understand how critical infrastructure assets work as part of a wider system.

¹⁷ ICE (2024) [ICE Briefing Paper: What Should the 'Day 1' Priorities be for a New UK Parliament?](#)

¹⁸ Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport (2023) [Freight Electrification Map](#)

¹⁹ ICE (2023) [ICE Policy Position Statement: A National Transport Strategy for England](#)

²⁰ ICE (2023) [Presidential Roundtable Summary: Could the UK Benefit from a Water Strategy?](#)

²¹ National Infrastructure Commission (2023) [Second National Infrastructure Assessment](#)

²² ICE (2023) [Civil Engineering Insights into Combined Sewer Overflows \(CSOs\)](#)

²³ ICE (2023) [ICE Policy Position Statement: How Can the UK's Infrastructure System be Made More Climate Resilient?](#)

2. Can the system achieve this?

At a strategic level, the infrastructure planning and prioritisation framework now in place, centred on independent and impartial advice from the NIC, is a good starting place.²⁴ It provides a clear, well-evidenced plan of action for policy- and decision-makers to use. The NIC's work on taking an adaptive approach to infrastructure policy is particularly useful for long-term planning in periods of political and economic uncertainty. There is growing evidence that when the NIC's advice is followed, the UK makes progress on its long-term goals and the public sees the benefits of infrastructure investment.²⁵

The UK's ability to deliver major infrastructure projects

The UK must improve the efficiency and effectiveness of infrastructure delivery to cut delays, tackle waste and reduce uncertainty across key infrastructure systems. Major infrastructure projects and programmes regularly cost more or take longer than initial estimates outline.²⁶ However, the recent stop/start approach to major infrastructure has driven up costs, made it harder to build up and retain skilled workers, and delayed businesses and communities from benefiting from infrastructure investment.

The cost of building economic infrastructure in the UK is high by international standards. Long-standing issues in infrastructure delivery include a lack of strategic workforce planning to coordinate demand, the tendency to set optimistically low budgets for major and giga-projects, particularly without contingencies, and the inflexibility in adjusting budgets to take account of cost increases.

The UK's glacial and inflexible planning system is also part of the problem. Recent reforms, based on solutions developed by the NIC, have begun to address this. These must be carried through while maintaining a balance between meeting community needs, environmental responsibilities and moving quickly to deliver national goals.

More broadly, there are questions about whether the construction industry can deliver. For example, Tier 1 contractors in the UK have low profit margins, limiting the amount of money they have to invest in new delivery approaches and upskilling; contracting methods are still transactional and not agile enough and would benefit from a shift to Enterprise Based Delivery Models and greater use of collaborative contracts such as NEC.

The UK investment landscape

Implementing the recommendations in NIA2 will require public investment in economic infrastructure to align with the NIC's fiscal remit of 1.3% of GDP per year over the coming decades. Alongside this, there will need to be a sustained increase in private investment.

However, this is not consistent with last year's decision to freeze capital budgets in cash terms from 2025/26 instead of increasing them in line with inflation. The Resolution Foundation has indicated that capital investment will now decline as a share of GDP by one-third between 2023–24 and 2028–29, when it will reach just 1.8%. That decline is equivalent to a £20 billion annual reduction in investment.²⁷

Crucially, NIA2 states that decisive action will lower public costs in the long term. The cost of inaction is greater: these challenges are not going away. Indeed, the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) notes that acting early to achieve net zero would add 21% of GDP to public sector net debt by 2050, less than that added by the COVID-19 pandemic.²⁸

²⁴ ICE (2021) [Evolving the UK Strategic Infrastructure Planning System Post-National Infrastructure Strategy](#)

²⁵ ICE (2023) [5 Takeaways from the UK's Second National Infrastructure Assessment](#)

²⁶ ICE (2019) [Reducing the Gap between Cost Estimates and Outturns for Major Infrastructure Projects and Programmes](#)

²⁷ Resolution Foundation (2023) [A Pre-election Statement](#)

²⁸ ICE (2021) [Infrastructure Policy Watch: Cost of Climate Change to UK Finances, Public Views on New Zealand Infrastructure](#)

3. What needs to change?

Unlocking private investment

Policy certainty leverages private sector investment; companies create skills programmes, and government and industry partnerships grow. Without a more definite pipeline of capital projects, delivery will be impacted, costs will spiral and delays will deter private sector investors from backing major infrastructure projects the public needs.

While the private infrastructure finance market is broadly strong, there are areas where it might not be the best vehicle to deliver infrastructure projects. Some investors are unwilling, unable or lack the experience and skills to invest in certain types of projects or various stages of completion, which could lead to gaps in provision.

Private finance favours stable and attractive returns and low risk. This might be particularly true for institutional investors and pension funds, which tend to prioritise long-term returns over short-term profit.

Lower-risk projects tend to be concentrated in large population centres that can provide a guaranteed revenue stream and have a strong economy. In a UK context, this would tend to be London and the South East. Projects elsewhere may not have the footfall or demand to remain sustainable, and lower population density would make delivery and maintenance of that infrastructure more expensive.

The principal ask for the private sector is to show leadership in accelerating decarbonisation and ensure investment in transition initiatives while exploring new solutions. Outside of the UK, corporate and institutional investors have started to decarbonise their own business models and portfolios and this needs to be replicated domestically.

Concerns about the availability of finance, or perhaps the willingness to invest, from private sources during an economic downturn also call for institutions which can provide support where market conditions deteriorate. Intervention, incentive, inducement or risk reduction efforts are therefore necessary to ensure private finance is directed towards such projects.

Finally, there is a need to maintain and expand the UK's expertise in financial management and technical delivery of projects, particularly major projects and programmes. The UK Infrastructure Bank helps to consolidate the considerable expertise already available through the Infrastructure and Projects Authority (IPA), NIC and other agencies and institutions.

Regulatory reform

The regulatory framework for economic infrastructure will also need to become more flexible to meet complex challenges such as net zero and energy security.

Current defined regulatory periods governing utilities inhibit strategic, long-term thinking and delivery of core infrastructure networks. Regulators with a primary duty to protect the interests of consumers might prioritise short-term affordability for consumers at the expense of meeting complex, dynamic, long-term strategic needs. At the same time, the new government needs to define the pathways and metrics of energy security and net zero further to help regulators, companies and investors.

Enabling public behavioural change to achieve net zero

To influence the public to make net zero-friendly behavioural changes, the right infrastructure and services need to be in place. A recent ICE and All Party Parliamentary Group on Infrastructure (APPGI) paper on public behaviour and net zero includes the following recommendations:²⁹

- Provide a single point of reference to demystify net zero choices for the public.
- Address market and non-financial barriers to ensure energy and electric vehicle companies provide a market response that encourages take-up of low-carbon technologies.
- Develop a consistent policy framework outlining a long-term plan for an approved pipeline of infrastructure upgrades designed to support change in public behaviour.

Policymakers can provide industry with the necessary signals to invest in and develop improved low-carbon alternatives to existing behaviours that are equally affordable or cheaper.

Using existing tools more effectively

Many of the tools and approaches needed to embed sustainable outcomes while delivering projects at the pace and scale required exist. The emphasis should now be on driving implementation across government departments.

Construction Playbook

The Construction Playbook was created in 2021 to enable faster, better and greener infrastructure delivery through improved processes and stronger relationships. It focuses on getting the fundamentals right and has strengthened the connections between government and industry and encouraged people to look harder at ensuring things work.³⁰

However, awareness and take-up of the Playbook needs to increase. For example, it is yet to trickle down to SMEs, which can often provide an element of specialism and innovation that can make a difference to efficiency, productivity and regional government. Improved productivity and delivery in projects run by local authorities can help smooth out capacity and capability gaps at that level.

In order to accelerate delivery, policymakers should focus on ensuring project compliance with the Construction Playbook and setting hard dates after which non-compliant contracts are no longer allowed. This will signal intent that the UK is serious about driving change in the construction industry to improve how things are done.

The IPA has also updated its Transforming Infrastructure Performance (TIP) Roadmap to 2030, which aims to improve infrastructure performance and productivity in delivery and operation. However, the IPA requires further backing to ensure its mandate can be taken seriously. This includes regular (and public) reporting on progress with Playbook implementation, client and project adoption, and benefits realisation.

While the IPA can ask departments to 'comply or explain' with the Construction Playbook and mandate Major Projects Leadership Academy (MPLA) attendance, currently, it lacks the authority to enforce the implementation of key principles such as these to improve delivery for major projects. The new government should consider mandating the Playbook, which was developed in conjunction with industry and commands industry support.

The Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects regime

The Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIP) regime was established in 2008 to reduce the time major projects would take to achieve development consent. While it worked well at first, the system has become slower and more uncertain just as the number and complexity of projects needed to deliver the UK's strategic goals is growing.

²⁹ ICE and All Party Parliamentary Group on Infrastructure (2024) [What are the Public Behavioural Changes Required to Meet Net Zero?](#)

³⁰ ICE (2024) [Presidential Roundtable Summary: The Construction Playbook, Three Years On](#)

The UK has begun implementing reforms set out in its NSIP action plan designed to speed up planning. These include recent updates to the national networks and energy National Policy Statements (NPSs), which should ensure planning decisions are more aligned with net zero. They also include commitments that the NPSs will be reviewed at least every five years to ensure they remain appropriate, agreeing with recommendations made by the ICE.

However, a single National Policy Statement (NPS) for infrastructure published alongside the NIS would further close the loop to ensure strategy drives planning and development. This would include providing guidance for regulators on price reviews, which is crucial over the next decade.

New approaches to delivery

A frameworks-based approach would improve delivery and future development of UK infrastructure rather than focusing on delivery on a project-by-project basis. One key problem impacting the future development of UK infrastructure is that innovative tools and approaches outlined above are not being used with the consistency needed to make a tangible and sustained impact within projects. If the UK is to achieve true reinvention, that needs to change. What is needed is a move away from tactical solutions towards a strategic system-level shift in infrastructure performance.

Digital

Data-driven technologies can improve resilience and benefit infrastructure delivery. Models like digital twins can fill information gaps by providing real-time monitoring information. Digital twins can also help policymakers understand how infrastructure assets work together as part of a wider system. Currently, there is insufficient information about how infrastructure assets can work together in a system.

No-build and nature-based solutions

More and more, the narrative is shifting from 'building' infrastructure to delivering interventions which allow new approaches to enter the fray, such as low, no-build and nature-based solutions over 'pouring concrete' solutions. To see more of this, a shift in how benefits are factored into project appraisals will be required, with a greater focus on whole-life as well as non-monetised benefits.³¹

Shift in thinking

There needs to be a shift in thinking around how projects are appraised and what constitutes success. In NIA2, the NIC also emphasised the need for 'pace over perfection'.³²

Giving more weight to whole-life costs and benefits

Scrutiny of projects is too often focused on lowest capital cost. Whole-life costs, which factor in operation, maintenance, renewal and disposal costs alongside construction costs, are now more important than just the upfront costs in a world of tighter budgets.

In general, more weight should also be attached to the whole-life benefits of projects and programmes – be they economic, social or environmental – and the role of improved interconnectivity through enhanced infrastructure investment.

There is evidence that the public agrees with this approach. In YouGov polling commissioned by the ICE, the most important success metric for the public is that infrastructure projects will regenerate and benefit communities. Just 3% said that the most important factor is the overall cost of constructing the project. Over two-thirds (68%) of the public agreed that

³¹ ICE (2024) [Presidential Roundtable Summary: How can governments Incorporate Nature-Based Solutions in their Infrastructure Systems?](#)

³² National Infrastructure Commission (2023) [Second National Infrastructure Assessment](#)

they wanted politicians to tell the public more about the benefits of major infrastructure projects rather than the costs. This rose to 74% of people over 55.³³

'Decide and provide' is a new outcomes-focused approach to determine what infrastructure should be provided to meet national goals; in a world of uncertainty, this is more proactive than an approach based on historical usage data that may no longer be relevant.

Global, not local, solutions

The UK is far from the only country struggling with the cost of infrastructure delivery. Inflation and workforce capacity are global challenges.

However, other countries have grasped the transformative social and economic opportunities arising from the net zero transition and have stepped up policymaking and investment. The US Inflation Reduction Act and the EU Net-Zero Industry Act have increased international competition for investment, resources and skills. Without strong leadership underpinned by clear, stable policymaking, the UK risks being left further behind.

The strategic challenges the UK faces are also being faced by other governments. Effective climate action requires a coordinated global response. The UK is no longer a leader in climate resilience.³⁴ There is an opportunity for the next UK government to both determine the country's delivery of its 2030 commitments and beyond, and step up its leadership on the world stage at a critical juncture for climate action.

Stronger accountability

The National Infrastructure Commission

The UK's approach of planning and prioritisation has delivered tangible benefits. The first NIS provided the long-term visibility and confidence investors in infrastructure and the construction supply chain need. The ICE's recommendations for evolving the system focus on improving transparency, consistency and certainty to unlock further benefits.³⁵

The ICE supports strengthening the role of the NIC to improve infrastructure planning and prioritisation and increase accountability for ensuring the infrastructure system delivers the outcomes the UK needs.

Giving statutory underpinning to the NIC would clarify its status and provide further certainty to investors, the supply chain and other stakeholders. In advance of that, giving statutory underpinning to the publication of a NIS every five years is a practical first step.

The ICE also recommends that Parliament make greater use of the NIC's advice on infrastructure system development to enhance scrutiny of government decisions. For example, the Treasury Select Committee could hold a one-off evidence session on the NIC's annual Infrastructure Progress Review, which takes stock of the government's progress towards previously accepted recommendations.

It is also important to close the loop between infrastructure planning, delivery and operation so that better decision-making leads to better outcomes, faster. Alongside a stronger NIC, the role of the IPA should be enhanced to mandate best practice throughout the infrastructure lifecycle.

Metrics to monitor progress

In relation to decarbonisation, there needs to be a greater focus on meaningful targets that recognise the costs of doing nothing and drive public behavioural change, and less reliance on unproven technological solutions.

³³ ICE (2022) [5 Surprising Ways that the British Public Rates the Success of an Infrastructure Project](#)

³⁴ Climate Change Committee (2024) [Independent Assessment of the Third National Adaptation Programme](#)

³⁵ ICE (2021) [ICE Policy Position Statement: Evolving the UK Strategic Infrastructure Planning System](#)

To strengthen climate adaptation and resilience efforts, the Adaptation Reporting Power of the UK Climate Change Act should be mandatory for infrastructure owners and operators.³⁶

Currently, adaptation reporting is mainly qualitative. This makes it difficult for the government and regulators to compare the degree of preparedness of different infrastructure owners and operators and focus on the less resilient. Mandating quantitative assessment, including financial quantification of expected damages/losses or impacts in a 'do nothing' scenario, would focus resilience efforts on the most material risks and ensure a systems-thinking approach to infrastructure is embedded in policy development and infrastructure planning.

In relation to reducing regional inequality, the 12 levelling up missions continue to lack detail around delivery that, unless addressed, will make it harder to deliver them. The ICE has recommended that metrics for measuring progress on levelling up should be geared towards local outcomes and greater alignment between levelling up and net zero. The levelling up missions should be aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), where possible. The synergy between them means the SDG indicators can be used as a framework to map policy options, such as infrastructure investment, against what places want to achieve.³⁷

There is also a risk that broad metrics, such as on productivity growth, will result in outcomes in already high-performing areas lagging compared to the lowest-performing ones. To ensure that parts of the country are not 'levelled down', the missions should set specific targets for high-performing areas, as many already do for the lowest-performing areas.

About 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, ICE
policy@ice.org.uk

³⁶ ICE (2023) [ICE Policy Position Statement: How Can the UK's Infrastructure System be Made More Climate Resilient?](#)

³⁷ ICE (2022) [ICE Policy Position Statement: Defining the Outcomes from Levelling Up](#)