



Turbo-charging  
Infrastructure to deliver  
cleaner, greener,  
sustainable and  
inclusive growth for all



October 2020



## CONTENTS

1	Executive Summary .....	3
2	Acknowledgements .....	6
3	Overview .....	9
4	International Benchmarking .....	21
5	Survey responses.....	24
6	Common themes from the virtual evidence sessions .....	46
7	Consideration of potential legal structures.....	49
8	Panel Recommendations.....	52
9	Next Steps .....	59
10	Bibliography & References .....	60
	Appendix 1 Panel Composition .....	64
	Appendix 2 Terms of Reference for the Ministerial Advisory Panel on Infrastructure .....	65
	Appendix 3 Literature Review.....	67
	Appendix 4 Stakeholder Engagement – Copy of survey issued to stakeholders .....	70
	Appendix 5 Stakeholder Engagement – Stakeholders who provided written evidence to the Panel .....	71
	Appendix 6 Transcriptions from a diverse sample of virtual consultations.....	99

## Background

This report presents the findings of an independent Ministerial Advisory Panel on Infrastructure (The Panel/MAPI), which was established in late August 2020 by Infrastructure Minister, Nichola Mallon MLA. The Panel's Terms of Reference are included at Appendix 2 and the primary task was to consider how an Infrastructure Commission for Northern Ireland might support the long-term planning and development of relevant infrastructure here.

The Panel engaged with a very wide range of stakeholders and consultees, from NI and around the world. The aim was to consider where the current NI infrastructure longer-term planning and delivery model could be improved, and to learn from global best practice.

## The Challenge

Infrastructure underpins everything we do in our society. Good infrastructure can help us to achieve a step-change in quality of life, economic development and environmental performance.

The Panel have gathered evidence from over 100 individuals and organisations. Their views on the issues with the current infrastructure longer-term planning and delivery system in NI can be summarised as follows:

- Strategic infrastructure projects frequently suffer time delay and cost overruns
- Over-reliance on the Barnett funding allocation to fund our public infrastructure is stifling growth and innovation
- Crucial parts of our infrastructure are at a critical point and there is clear evidence that this is having a negative impact on other major investment decisions
- We struggle to see beyond our political and financial timeframes which, by their nature, are too short term for effective infrastructure planning
- Our neighbours on these islands have ambitious infrastructure plans for the next 20-30 years
- Lack of longer-term planning and appropriate market management often results in legal challenges which cause major delays
- The population of NI is projected to increase by 8% by 2041, with the 65+ age brackets increasing to 25% of the population. There is little evidence that we are planning sufficiently for this demographic change
- The current system operates in silos with limited co-operation between central and local government, and with the private sector
- There is a general failure to identify potential synergies to collaborate or secure economies of scale by working more closely together within NI, or with other bodies outside NI facing up to these very same challenges
- We are lagging behind in terms of our environmental performance, and urgently need a step change to address climate change and meet our ambitions in respect of the wider UK 2050 net zero targets

- There is a regional imbalance and urban-rural divide in terms of infrastructure provision. This needs to be addressed to ensure inclusive growth and to improve the quality of life and wellbeing for everyone in NI
- External factors such as COVID-19, Climate Change and Brexit are dramatically impacting the economic landscape of NI (and will continue to do so for years to come); we must ensure we are nimble, able to capitalise on the growth opportunities that will arise

All of these issues deter and undermine investment in our long term, strategic infrastructure.

Current estimates indicate that by 31 March 2021, a total of £14.8<sup>1</sup> billion will have been invested in public infrastructure over a ten-year period<sup>2</sup>. However, rather than helping us to achieve our potential, our infrastructure delivery is perceived as being incoherent, lagging behind other regions, and actually undermining our potential to reach our over-arching social, economic and environmental objectives.

## Recommendations

The unequivocal recommendation of the Panel is that an Infrastructure Commission, with a clear remit and the support of the entire Northern Ireland Executive, should be established as soon as practical.

- The Infrastructure Commission should set a longer-term vision for 30+ years, aimed at improving societal wellbeing, environmental performance, and economic growth. It should be a key driver in building a better future for everyone in NI
- In order to attract high calibre individuals and provide independent, evidence-based expert advice, it should have a permanent and fully funded status, with budgets for staff, research, specialist support and, most critically, community engagement
- The structure should comprise a non-executive Chair and Board, with a Chief Executive supported by a professional, experienced executive team
- It should be established as a Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) of the NI Executive that has statutory independence. Further work will be required to establish the most appropriate legislative framework to establish the Commission
- It is recommended that the Commission has the remit to 'self-task' and recommend infrastructure investment on basis of its forecast impact on sustainable and inclusive economic growth and free of fiscal remit
- The Commission should advise Government on all elements of NI's economic infrastructure. This is defined as: energy, roads, rail and bus, water and wastewater (drainage and sewerage), waste, flood risk management and digital communications. The Commission will also consider the interface opportunities with the wider infrastructure landscape

---

<sup>1</sup> NIAO-Major Capital Projects, December 2019

- Infrastructure cuts across a range of Executive Departments, Local Councils and other Agencies, as well as many elements of the private sector. Therefore, it is recommended that the Infrastructure Commission reports to the entire NI Executive, possibly through The Executive Office
- The Commission should be tasked to play the role of strategic broker to break down investment and delivery silos and ensure that NI is agile and able to fully realise its growth ambitions. This should include scope to explore the opportunity for utilisation of all proven funding and financing models
- The Commission should publish a '2050 Vision' with outcomes for infrastructure provision. It should also publish an annual report on progress, to which the Executive should be required to respond
- Climate change is widely seen as one of the key risks and drivers for our infrastructure development. The sector needs certainty around long term policy regarding both climate change adaptation and mitigation. The Commission's vision should include delivering the net-zero targets by 2050, if not before
- The membership of the Commission is crucial. The Chair should be appointed first and empowered to recruit non-executive directors and executive staff thereafter. Remuneration should be benchmarked internationally in order to attract high calibre and internationally respected individuals
- The Commission should engage with the public, stakeholders and all relevant areas of regional and local government to stimulate and manage debate and discussion on the aspirations for infrastructure and society. It should aim to promote a better understanding of spending, funding and usage of infrastructure in order to provide transparency on the use of public monies
- In particular, the Commission should seek to engage actively with the young people of NI, as the long-term beneficiaries of better infrastructure investment, and consideration should be given to establishing an Infrastructure Youth Forum
- The Commission should be outcome focussed, making the most of all of the strands detailed above to ensure that public finances are used effectively and efficiently to deliver better (and better value) outcomes for society in a cleaner, greener and more inclusive future for all

## Conclusion

Our infrastructure is not delivering for our people. This is not because of a lack of skill, innovation or leadership within the sector. Rather, it stems from the systemic weaknesses of the wider governance and delivery structure, which is too fragmented and lacks a long-term strategic view.

Our society is facing a range of crises – the COVID-19 pandemic, the economic downturn, climate change. We have a unique opportunity to 'Build Back Better' – to improve the quality of life for our citizens, to protect and enhance our environment, and to reset our economy.

These objectives cannot be fully achieved without first reforming infrastructure planning and delivery. The Panel believes that the establishment of an independent Infrastructure Commission is the crucial first step in empowering us to turbocharge infrastructure to deliver cleaner, greener, sustainable and inclusive growth for all.

## 2 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Panel would like to express their gratitude to the following individuals and organisations who agreed to engage with the group and to share their views and experience in respect of infrastructure planning and delivery. The information gathered through the various online virtual engagement sessions has been used to inform the recommendations set out in the Panel's final report.

Advisory Council on Infrastructure Investment (ACII) 2004-2007 former Chair John Keanie

Alliance Party

Arc21

Architecture & the Built Environment

Association for Consultancy & Engineering (ACE)

Belfast Chamber of Commerce

Belfast City Airport

Belfast City Council (including Belfast Digital Innovation Commissioner, Commissioner for Resilience and Director of Place and Economy)

Belfast Harbour Commission

Belfast International Airport

BT Group

Causeway Connections and Bell Architects Ltd

CBI Northern Ireland

CEF NI

Centre for Cross Border Studies

Chartered Institution of Highways and Transportation

City of Derry Airport

Climate NI

Crossrail

CTS

Danske Bank

David Orr

Department for Communities (NI)

Department for Infrastructure (NI)

Department for the Economy (NI)

Department of Housing, Planning & Local Government (ROI)

Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (ROI)

Department of Transport (ROI)

Derry & Strabane Council

DUP

Engineers Ireland & Construction Professionals Council (NI)

Enterprise Northern Ireland

Flood Control NI

Foyle Port  
Global Infrastructure Hub, Sydney  
Government of Canada  
GRAHAM Group  
HM Treasury  
Institute of Asphalt Technology  
Institute of Directors (NI)  
Institute of Government (UK)  
Institution of Civil Engineers  
Invest NI  
Londonderry Chamber of Commerce  
Mineral Products Association NI  
Ministerial Advisory Group for Architecture & the Built Environment  
Mutual Energy  
National Infrastructure Commission UK  
National Infrastructure Commission for Wales  
New Zealand Infrastructure Commission  
NIAUR  
NIFHA  
NIO  
NIRIG  
Northern Ireland Audit Office  
Northern Ireland Better Housing Forum  
Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce and Industry  
Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA)  
Northern Ireland Electricity Networks  
Northern Ireland Environment Link  
Northern Ireland Water  
OECD  
OFCOM  
Openreach Northern Ireland  
Outdoor Recreation NI  
Planning Appeals Commission  
Queen's University Belfast  
Renewable Energy Systems Limited  
Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS)  
Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI)  
RSPB  
Ryse Hydrogen  
Sinn Fein

Strategic Investment Board  
The Chartered Institute of Building  
The Consumer Council  
The Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee  
The Infrastructure Commission for Scotland  
Tourism NI  
Translink  
Turley Planning and Development Consultants  
Ulster Bank  
Ulster University  
UUP  
Warrenpoint Harbour Authority  
World Economic Forum

The Panel would also like to thank Gillian McCausland and Ryan Hogg of the Ulster University Economic Policy Centre for their diligent support on the survey and consultation element of the report.

A special thanks to our secretariat team within the Department for Infrastructure which included Angus Kerr, Catherine McEvoy, Simon Kelly and Joann Hanna.



In August 2020, the Minister for Infrastructure, Nichola Mallon MLA, appointed a Ministerial Advisory Panel on Infrastructure (The Panel/MAPI) to consider how an Infrastructure Commission for NI might support more effectively the long term planning and development of relevant infrastructure in NI and how it might underpin delivery of cleaner, greener, sustainable and inclusive infrastructure.

The Panel, a small group of independent experts and key stakeholders with an interest in infrastructure, were asked to undertake a focused piece of work which would provide the basis for a series of recommendations to the Infrastructure Minister and assist with the Executive's COVID-19 recovery and Brexit planning.

The Panel's initial remit was principally the "hard" infrastructure that falls within the remit of the Department for Infrastructure. However, it was recognised that consideration of the broader infrastructure picture would help provide a more holistic view of the issues and potential solutions. The Panel sought written and oral evidence from a range of key stakeholders and engaged with a range of global infrastructure organisations to develop their recommendations

The following report provides a summary of the Panel's findings and sets out its recommendations.

## Background

A modern and well maintained, sustainable infrastructure system is essential to deliver economic growth; provide a key building block for prosperity; address regional imbalance and support a thriving region where people want to live, work and invest.

At present, there is no longer term (out to 2050) shared vision or plan which sets out an agreed approach to infrastructure delivery across NI. The absence of a broad, system-wide approach, or delivery focus, points to the need for a clear vision and plan for infrastructure development and delivery which will direct and prioritise infrastructure spend in a manner that best reflects the needs of all of the people of NI and delivers inclusive and sustainable growth.

The challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic; the need to urgently address the impact of climate change; the impact of Brexit; the development of a new Programme for Government focused on outcomes and cross-Departmental partnership working; a move to multi-year budgets and ongoing North-South co-operation in respect of all-island infrastructure, all signal it is time for a new, bold and effective step-change in the Government's approach to the planning and delivery of Infrastructure.

## Context

NI has a wide-ranging set of devolved infrastructure-related powers that give the NI Executive a degree of autonomy. The chart below provides an overview of devolved responsibilities across different infrastructure sectors.

Sector	Devolved Responsibility	Not Devolved
<b>Economic Infrastructure</b>		
Water & Wastewater	✓	
Roads	✓	
Flood Defences	✓	
Rail & Bus	✓	
Airports	✓	
Ports	✓	
Energy		✓
Communications		✓
Waste	✓	
<b>Social Infrastructure</b>		
Housing	✓	
Health	✓	
Education	✓	
Justice	✓	

Figure 1 NI Executive Devolved Responsibilities for Infrastructure

While NI may have much autonomy in respect of infrastructure policy, The Executive Office, the eight government departments and many of their related arms-length bodies and the eleven local councils, all have infrastructure roles, some to a much lesser extent than others, meaning that the planning and the delivery of infrastructure is complex as shown in Figure 2.

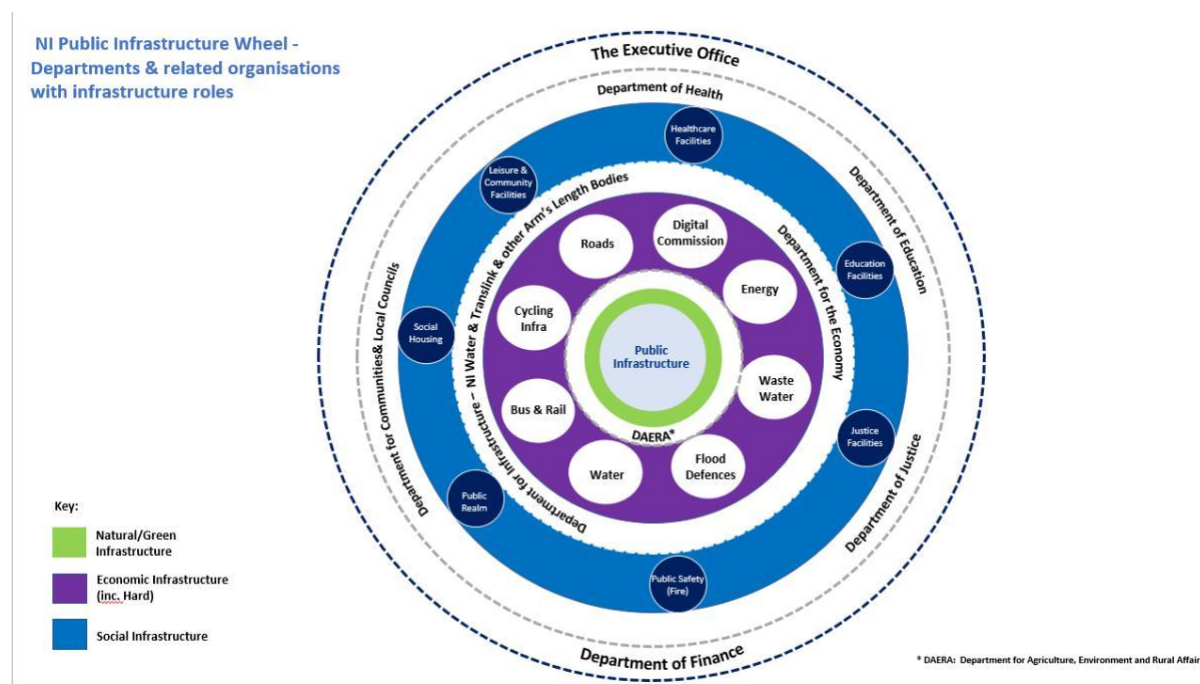


Figure 2 Overview of the many organisations with public infrastructure roles in NI

The Executive Office has responsibility for the strategic planning of NI’s infrastructure investment, the Investment Strategy for NI (ISNI) and the oversight and monitoring of the Strategic Investment Board (SIB)<sup>3</sup>. SIB prepares ISNI, a rolling 10-year plan that sets out the NI Executive’s approach to planning, financing and delivering its programme of infrastructure investment. The current phase of ISNI covers the period 2011-21. SIB also supports government departments, local councils and other organisations in relation to the articulation and delivery of their major investment programmes and projects. SIB also assists with the management of assets and reform programmes across the public sector.

Economic infrastructure is currently planned, delivered and funded across several different Executive Departments. The Department for Infrastructure (DfI) has responsibility for water, drainage and inland waterways; public transport; roads and cycling infrastructure and manages the largest capital budget across The Executive Office and eight government departments. The Department for Economy has responsibility for telecoms and energy while the Department of Finance’s budget process sets expenditure plans for the NI departments and undertakes the strategic planning of NI’s public sector procurement.

The Department for Communities (DfC) is responsible for housing while the Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) is responsible for Climate Change, Sustainable Development and the proposed new Green Growth Strategy. Responsibilities in respect of social infrastructure, such as that associated with the health, education and justice facilities and systems, largely fall to other NI Executive departments. As referenced above, and explained in greater detail in our recommendations, one of the most consistent themes to emerge from the evidence provided to the Panel was that any longer-term solution for

<sup>3</sup> The Strategic Investment Board, established on 01 April 2003, is a company limited by guarantee, wholly owned by The Executive Office. It is classified as an Executive Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB), sponsored by The Executive Office.

effective planning and delivery of infrastructure in NI must consider infrastructure in its widest sense. To focus solely on hard infrastructure and/or that solely within the remit of DfI, would not only limit the potential benefits that an Infrastructure Commission could bring to the delivery of infrastructure generally, but would also ignore the fact that infrastructure is inherently connected – hard infrastructure is essential to support soft infrastructure and without soft infrastructure our society cannot operate and thrive in the manner we would all hope.

## Policy Framework

A range of policy and strategy documents exist across the aforementioned departments and give an indication of the regional context and direction for infrastructure planning and delivery.

The Regional Development Strategy 2035 (RDS) prepared by DfI<sup>4</sup> is the overarching strategic framework which facilitates and guides long term spatial development in NI. The document provides a complementary spatial perspective to the key strategies of the NI Executive, namely the Programme for Government (PFG), the Investment Strategy for NI (ISNI) and the Economic Strategy.

The Investment Strategy for NI (ISNI) is a rolling ten-year plan which identifies future investment in major capital projects across NI and sets out the Executive's approach to planning, financing and delivering its programme of long-term infrastructure investment across the region. Its scope encompasses every area of government including education, health, transport and the environment. The Strategy is developed alongside the Executive's Programme for Government and the Budget as part of the Executive's long-term planning. The current phase of ISNI expires in 2021.

DfE's Economic Strategy: Priorities for Sustainable Growth and Prosperity aims to improve the economic competitiveness of the NI economy while the draft Industrial Strategy for NI sets out a plan to build a globally competitive economy based around five priority pillars for growth. In the area of telecommunications, DfE is leading on "Project Stratum", which is aimed at those unable to get superfast speeds and has identified 97,000 premises in NI that will be eligible for a broadband boost. This £165m project began in mid-2020.

DfE is also leading on a new Energy Strategy, due in March 2021, which will set out key policy options for the future of the power sector. NI has been hugely successful at bringing forward renewable electricity investments. It is a market leader, achieving almost 48% of electricity consumed in the region from indigenous renewable sources and the Minister for Economy has signalled her intention to set a target that this should not be below 70% by 2030.

The New Decade, New Approach 2020 document aims to transform public services and to invest in the NI economy by driving the delivery of essential infrastructure projects, prioritising investment in infrastructure and 'turbocharging' infrastructure delivery through increased funding for capital infrastructure investment.

While the policy framework set out above provides short-medium direction for infrastructure planning and delivery, wider circumstances, infrastructure mega trends and global events can also impact at a regional level. The following factors are considered likely to have a significant influence on future infrastructure planning, financing and delivery.

---

<sup>4</sup> The Regional Development Strategy 2035, published in 2012, was prepared by the Department for Regional Development (DRD). Following the reform of government departments in Northern Ireland in 2012, DRD'S responsibilities transferred to DfI.

## Global Challenges and Opportunities

### Climate Change

Climate change is one of the greatest challenges in our lifetime facing our society. The scientific evidence is overwhelming, and the global impacts are predicted by many to be severe. While it is often seen as a long-term challenge, the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report makes clear that impacts are being experienced now; largely through unprecedented global trends and more localised severe weather events<sup>5</sup>.

While climate change will have a lasting impact on people and wildlife, it will also define future economic progress. Only those places that can demonstrate climate resilience will be able to secure insurance and attract investment going forward. Developing infrastructure that is resilient to the impact of climate change is therefore vital to future economic prosperity and social well-being.

Successful adaptation strategies involve much more than simply addressing flood risk, although this is important. They must also take account of a range of severe and complex climate impacts upon our society and infrastructure. Above all, climate adaptation must be understood as the main priority for long-term planning to secure climate resilience.

In addition to adaptation there is a need for infrastructure investment to help mitigate climate change. The UK has set a target of net zero emissions by 2050, and infrastructure must be planned and delivered in order to shape places that contribute to this target. NI is the only region of the UK without specific climate change legislation but bound by the UK commitments to play our part in achieving net-zero by 2050.

Successful outcomes will require holistic planning over the long-term, with mitigation and adaptation strategies based on a sound understanding of how climate change will impact the infrastructure upon which our society depends. In view of the cross-sectoral nature of much infrastructure provision, building the climate resilience of our infrastructure will require an inter-organisational, inter-departmental response.

### Brexit

The impacts of EU environmental legislation on land use and land use planning in the UK are wide-ranging and have, over time, become embedded in domestic legislation and practice<sup>6</sup>. The effects of the decision of the UK to leave the European Union are therefore significant and are likely to continue to emerge after negotiations on the UK's future relationship with the EU are concluded.

There may be continuing impact on infrastructure investment within sectors as diverse as waste management, transport and energy. Continuing uncertainty around how Brexit will impact NI's relationships and ability to trade with its nearest and most significant trade partners in the Republic of Ireland and in Great Britain is also likely to have an impact on how NI is perceived as a place to invest. These uncertainties pose additional challenges in planning for and delivering infrastructure investment.

More broadly the impact of Brexit on future migration flows may have implications for assumptions underpinning population growth and has the potential to introduce additional uncertainty when planning for appropriate levels of infrastructure investment.

---

<sup>5</sup>Rising to the Climate Crisis: A guide for Local Authorities on Planning for Climate Change

<sup>6</sup>The Impacts of Brexit on UK Implementation of Key EU legislation Affecting Land Use, RTPI (2019)

Changes to free movement have the potential to impact the capacity of the construction industry to implement infrastructure development due to the large number of EU migrant workers within the construction sector.

The EU has recently announced its own €100 billion European Green deal, setting out its ambition to make Europe the first climate neutral continent by 2050. There is also continuing uncertainty regarding funding, including in relation to the mechanisms that the UK government will introduce to replace the activities of the European Green Deal and TEN-T which provide a source of funding for infrastructure projects.

The UK Chancellor, Rishi Sunak, is currently drawing up plans for a new infrastructure bank to provide billions of pounds of new financing (offering a cheaper long-term source of financing than private debt and equity providers) for UK capital projects, as ministers seek to kickstart the UK's economic recovery in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. With the UK unlikely to remain a member of the European Investment Bank after the end of the Brexit transition period (31 December 2020), discussions are taking place over how a new state-owned lender could accelerate upgrades to the UK's creaking infrastructure, although there is widespread recognition that this source of cheaper long-term financing would not be available until the new infrastructure bank is established which could take years.

In general, the uncertainty associated with Brexit, its implications for a wide range of sectors and the general risk associated with the broader economic effects have the potential to impact procurement decisions and infrastructure investment across the UK in the short term. This uncertainty further emphasises the need to closely monitor progress in delivering essential infrastructure projects and programmes.

## COVID-19 Pandemic

The pandemic and subsequent lockdown has seen far-reaching changes to the way people live, work and travel. There has been a significant increase in home working and associated decrease in travel by public transportation, rail and air. How long these trends will persist is not clear, however there will be a need, going forward, to closely monitor emerging evidence on the long-term impacts of the crisis, for example permanent changes to working and commuting patterns. This evidence gathering will be crucial to informing policy approaches in respect of infrastructure planning and development.

The economic cost of COVID-19 to the government is estimated to be at least £317bn<sup>7</sup> in public borrowing and will continue to rise. The economic effects of the pandemic have amplified the need for urgent action including the prioritisation of infrastructure investment to support recovery.

Notwithstanding the uncertainty around long-term effects, it remains the case that infrastructure is a key enabler of economic growth, and in the aftermath of COVID-19, it will play an important role in the UK's economic recovery<sup>8</sup>. The need to invest as part of any COVID-19 economic recovery has been clearly highlighted and many commentators have identified a significant opportunity for a "green recovery" approach.<sup>9</sup>

Amongst other things, COVID-19 has demonstrated how essential good broadband connectivity is to an economy and to society more generally. For many months now, video-conferencing has been the primary means for many people to maintain both personal and business relationships and it is anticipated that this could become a key part of the "new-norm" if and when the pandemic ends. The vast majority of homes (89%) in NI can now access superfast broadband, which offers download speeds of at least 30 Mbit/s.

---

7 The impact of coronavirus on the UK's public finances, Institute of Government, September 2020

8 Investing in Infrastructure: Sourcing the finance to build back better, CBI, September 2020

9 Infrastructure Commission for Scotland: Phase 2 Delivery Findings Report, July 2020

However, availability of superfast broadband in rural areas, at 66%, is significantly lower<sup>10</sup>. This is a key reason why the efficient and effective delivery of digital infrastructure must be a key strand in any aspect of a long-term strategy for NI and fully address the urban-rural digital divide.

As part of the COVID-19 economic recovery, the UK government has vowed to borrow an extra £100bn over the five-year parliament for capital spending; the NI Executive will directly benefit from increased funding for capital infrastructure investment as a result of the UK government's infrastructure revolution, albeit not explicitly 'ring fenced' for NI infrastructure.

The effect of the pandemic has undoubtedly placed a significant and immediate burden on the UK's economy and public finances. The extent to which this poses a risk to the availability of government funds to support infrastructure investment is unknown at this time. "Responding to the twin challenges of a public health crisis and an economic downturn require a new playbook, rapid innovation, learning and adaptation<sup>11</sup>". There is a need to fully explore alternative models of infrastructure financing and funding so that constrained public finances do not pose a barrier to wider economic recovery from the pandemic.

## Green Recovery

As well as the climate change challenge there is also a global biodiversity crisis. The UN have just published their Global Biodiversity Outlook, which has confirmed that the international community has failed to meet any of its global biodiversity targets. In Northern Ireland, even our protected areas are not helping biodiversity as they are meant to. Less than 14% of all our land-based protected areas were under favourable management; the proportion for marine protected areas was even lower at only 4.5%. Coupled with the need for a recovery to address the economic impacts of COVID-19, this provides an opportunity for a focus on a 'green recovery' centred on environmental programmes and a new socio-economic model that is climate-neutral, resilient, sustainable and inclusive. DAERA is currently developing a new Environment Strategy and an overarching multi-decade 'Green Growth' Strategy which will both be crucial to the wider recovery. Many nations around the world have already adopted the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a way to integrate environmental, social and economic dimensions in their development plans.

An opportunity to bring forward lasting improvements that would have been unimaginable even six months ago exists by restoring purchasing power; creating new jobs; prioritising the least well-off in ways that simultaneously make it possible to deliver climate stability and a thriving planet.<sup>12</sup>

Whilst the public finances budgetary outlook for NI remains challenging, an opportunity exists to deliver a cleaner, greener recovery and to move towards a new and better normal. More than ever, when faced with the challenge of the current pandemic, the turbulence of Brexit and the climate emergency, a co-ordinated and strategic approach to the future provision of infrastructure is key to recovery and ensuring future economic, environmental and social wellbeing.

## Scope of this Review

MAPI were tasked with considering how an Infrastructure Commission for NI might support more effectively the long-term planning and development of relevant infrastructure in NI.

The Panel were asked to focus on the development of a proposal that:

---

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/about-ofcom/latest/media/media-releases/2019/latest-northern-ireland-broadband-and-mobile-coverage-revealed>

<sup>11</sup> COVID-19 and jobs: Monitoring the US impact on people and places, McKinsey Global Institute

<sup>12</sup> We must not miss this glorious chance to address the climate and biodiversity crises, Jonathon Porritt – the Guardian, June 2020

- Identifies the specific role and value of a Commission;
- Considers how a Commission might be established;
- Considers how a Commission might operate;
- Considers options for a Commission's structure;
- Considers options for a Commission's operation;
- Takes account of possible cost models;
- Examines systems in other such bodies around the world.

The Panel's remit reflected the 'hard' infrastructure that is the responsibility of the Department for Infrastructure, namely, water, drainage and inland waterways, public transport, roads and cycling infrastructure. Although not part of its formal remit, to ensure the development of series of holistic recommendations, MAPI were not precluded from giving consideration to the appropriateness of any future Infrastructure Commission having a remit beyond that infrastructure which falls within the immediate remit of the Department for Infrastructure.

Acknowledging that issues associated with addressing infrastructure supply and demand at a regional level have the potential to be wide and far reaching and in light of the need for a short, focused piece of work to be undertaken, a series of objectives were identified to provide focus and direction for the Panel, namely:

- To consider the approach to relevant infrastructure across these islands and make recommendations on the need for an Infrastructure Commission in NI and the benefits it would bring.
- To consider the role of a commission in supporting the Minister's objectives of delivering cleaner, greener, sustainable and inclusive infrastructure.
- To advise on the potential role and function of a NI Infrastructure Commission in relation to the Minister for Infrastructure's responsibilities.
- To produce a report for the Minister for Infrastructure, detailing recommendations on the way forward and to inform the Minister's preparation of a wider proposal for submission to the Executive in September/October 2020 as part of NI's COVID-19 recovery and Brexit planning.

## Panel Composition

To ensure that any proposal was independent of the Minister and DfI and informed by partners and experts, an Advisory Panel was formed to develop the proposal set out above. Members of the Panel were asked to share their specific skills and experience and to provide impartial, expert advice.

The Panel brought together a diverse range of expertise and experience (both local and international) in relation to the planning, procurement, funding and financing of strategic infrastructure; infrastructure planning, delivery and operation and assessing the economic and environmental impacts of infrastructure investment.

## Strategic context within which infrastructure decisions are currently made

Investment in major infrastructure remains at the heart of many strategies and initiatives within NI including the New Decade, New Approach and the current programme of City Region and Growth Deals. A summary of some of these proposed investments is set out below. Identifying the potential and need for a major infrastructure project is, of course, just the first step in securing its delivery. There is, unfortunately, a legacy in NI over the last two decades of announcing intentions to invest which, for a variety of reasons, do not



ultimately progress in the manner originally intended. For example, the original Investment Strategy for NI<sup>13</sup> identified nine new hospitals for NI, many of which were to be delivered using private finance or a combination of private finance and capital contributions from government. Ultimately only one of these projects, the Acute Hospital for the South West, was delivered under a non-conventional route, notwithstanding significant effort from the Strategic Investment Board to attract the interest of prospective contractors and funders to bid, and thereby ensure competitive tension in the interests of securing a value for money outcome for the public purse. This is just one of many examples where a need was identified, a route to market determined, but ultimately the projects did not proceed or when they did, they encountered protracted planning and/or procurement processes and years of unnecessary delay and additional cost.

### New Decade, New Approach (January 2020):

- Essential infrastructure projects, including York Street Interchange
- Match capital funding for infrastructure for City Deals for the Belfast Region and Derry/Londonderry
- Work with the UK Government to develop and deliver the Growth Deals for Mid-South West NI and Causeway Coast and Glens
- Urgently invest in wastewater infrastructure

### UK Government funding for:

- Essential sewage investment (Living with Water Programme)
- 'Better Connecting Dublin and Belfast' strategy
- A5/A6 roads
- York Street Interchange to Narrow Water bridge

### Irish Government Commitments:

- Complete key infrastructure projects including the A5 and the Ulster Canal connection (Clones to Upper Lough Erne)
- Serious and detailed joint consideration of a high-speed rail connection between Belfast, Dublin and Cork, creating a spine of connectivity on the island, which could be progressed as a priority
- Jointly progress consideration of options for the development of the Narrow Water bridge
- Review potential for Government support to renewed viable air routes from Cork to Belfast and Dublin to Derry
- Greenways in border areas
- North West region highlighted as a particular area for investment

### Draft Programme for Government Framework (2016-21)/Outcomes Delivery Plan (December 2019) - We connect people and opportunities through our infrastructure:

#### Key Strategic Areas:

- Improving access to suitable housing
- Enhancing provision of water and wastewater services

---

<sup>13</sup>The Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland 2011-2021 (ISNI)

- Improving journey times on key economic corridors and increasing the use of public transport and active travel
- Overall Performance Assessment (NI Water)
- Proportion of premises with access to broadband services at speeds at or above 30Mbps
- Enhancing the uptake of online channels to access public services Maintaining our existing infrastructure

## City Region and Growth Deals Programme

### Belfast Region City Deal – Projects underpinning the Infrastructure Investment Pillar comprise:

- Newry Southern Relief Road
- Belfast Rapid Transit (BRT) Phase II
- Lagan Bridge and Gasworks to Ormeau Embankment (pedestrian/cycle bridge)

The Digital and Innovation Investment Pillars include an Infrastructure Enabling Fund (IEF) but this will not be focused on household or individual business connectivity. Instead it is designed to provide funding in support of strategic projects and programmes aligned to the Belfast Region’s Digital Innovation ambition. The fund will mainly focus on additional cutting-edge fibre, wireless and IoT infrastructure.

### Derry-Londonderry City Deal Vision:

- Investment in **innovation**
- Investment in our **digital infrastructure**
- Investment in our **enabling infrastructure and the regeneration** of our City and Town centres, central riverfront and A2 road economic corridor will remove existing barriers to growth currently constraining the development of our key strategic sites
- Investment in **regional infrastructure** through the major road upgrades of the A5 and A6

### Mid-South West Region Growth Deal – Regional Economic Strategy

The strategy sets out a number of potential projects under each of the pillars which, with investment, would help boost productivity. These include further development of critical road infrastructure; the implementation of a Skills Action Plan; the development of an Innovation and Skills Academy through the South West College and an Agri-Food Robotics Centre, at CAFRE Loughry Campus; the development of a life and health science opportunity in Carn, Craigavon; delivery of a MSW destination tourism experience; and further development of cross-border assets such as the Marble Arch Caves UNESCO Global Geopark.

### Causeway Coast and Glens Growth Deal

It is anticipated that the growth deal capital fund will be used to support digital and innovation projects, while the NI Executive’s investment will focus on supporting infrastructure, tourism and regeneration and a complementary employability and skills programme<sup>14</sup>.

## Draft Industrial Strategy for Northern Ireland (Economy 2030)

### What do we want to achieve?

- Investment in energy, water, transport and connections, digital communications, waste disposal networks and facilities, as key components for a competitive modern economy;
- Investment in key infrastructure projects to provide the physical and digital connectivity to enable our business to thrive globally;
- Investment both in better access to major population and business centres through our strategic road network in the West and in tackling significant drainage and flood risk issues in Belfast and other regional centres.

### What are we going to do?

- Become Europe's best-connected region for broadband by 2030 by further extending broadband coverage through the NI Broadband Improvement Project and Superfast Rollout Programme, and through further new interventions that will enhance broadband speeds and mobile coverage across NI as part of a new Digital Infrastructure Strategy;
- Invest in infrastructure to support the growth of Belfast as a regional driver and Londonderry as the driver of the North West;
- Enhance the security, sustainability and cost-efficiency of our energy supply;
- Develop a new Energy Strategy to meet NI's medium- and longer-term energy needs;
- Invest in the connections to our ports to enhance our access to global markets and the efficiency of our supply chains.

## NI Protocol

### Common Travel Area

- The United Kingdom shall ensure that the Common Travel Area and the rights and privileges associated therewith can continue to apply without affecting the obligations of Ireland under Union law, in particular with respect to free movement to, from and within Ireland for Union citizens and their family members, irrespective of their nationality.

### Customs Territory

- NI is part of the customs territory of the United Kingdom. Accordingly, nothing in this Protocol shall prevent the United Kingdom from including NI in the territorial scope of any agreements it may conclude with third countries, provided that those agreements do not prejudice the application of this Protocol. In particular, nothing in this Protocol shall prevent the United Kingdom from concluding agreements with a third country that grant goods produced in NI preferential access to that country's market on the same terms as goods produced in other parts of the United Kingdom. Under the protocol, NI will continue to enforce the EU's customs rules and follow its rules on product standards (known as the single market on goods) and that means, in order to comply with EU requirements, some checks will be needed on certain goods entering NI from Great Britain.

## North-South Cooperation

- Protocol shall be implemented and applied so as to maintain the necessary conditions for continued North-South cooperation, including in the areas of environment, health, agriculture, transport, education and tourism, as well as in the areas of energy, telecommunications, broadcasting, inland fisheries, justice and security, higher education and sport. In full respect of Union law, the United Kingdom and Ireland may continue to make new arrangements that build on the provisions of the 1998 Agreement in other areas of North-South cooperation on the island of Ireland.

## Protection of the UK internal market

- The UK internal market bill is designed to secure the “seamless functioning” of trade between England, Wales, Scotland and NI after the UK leaves the EU single market and customs union at the end of this year.
- There are significant questions around the practical implications of the Bill's disapplying provisions to parts of the NI protocol.

## Irish Sea Bridge

- A range of officials across different departments and within the Cabinet Office are looking into general options to improve connectivity between the nations of the UK.
- Work is at a very early stage in the policymaking process and there are no completed studies on the feasibility of a road and/or rail bridge between NI and GB.
- No external work has been commissioned by Departments on a bridge between NI and Scotland.

As part of the research to review how an Infrastructure Commission could be established in NI, Commissions and similar bodies from other countries have been reviewed to address what approach NI could take and any best practices that could be followed.

The following table provides an overview of similar bodies across the globe, to demonstrate the variety of approaches taken to the establishment and management of each of these and so that comparisons can be made to help inform key areas of focus for an Infrastructure Commission for NI.

	UK	Scotland	Wales	Ireland	Australia	New Zealand	Montreal	Quebec
<b>Organisation</b>	National Infrastructure Commission	Infrastructure Commission for Scotland	National Infrastructure Commission for Wales	Project Ireland 2040- comprising of National Planning Framework and Development Plan	Infrastructure Australia	New Zealand Infrastructure Commission	The Office de consultation publique de Montréal (OCPM)	Bureau d'audiences publique sur l'environnement (BAPE)
<b>Established</b>	2015	2019	2018	2018	2008	2019	2002	1978
<b>Objective</b>	Support sustainable economic growth	Deliver sustainable economic growth across Scotland	Advise on economic and environmental infrastructure needs for Wales	Achieve 10 strategic outcomes building around wellbeing, equality and opportunity	Provide research and advice for the government, and auditing on nationally significant infrastructure	To create a 30-year infrastructure strategy that will boost planning and delivery to a strategic level and New Zealand's long-term economic performance and social wellbeing	Urban and land-use planning projects under municipal jurisdiction, also cover any project submitted by the executive committee or city council	Encourage participatory democracy, in the benefit of a structuring and sustainable vision of Quebec's development
<b>Status</b>	Independent, non-departmental public body	Independent, providing long-term informed, strategic advice	Non statutory advisory body	Project 2040 is the Irish Government's overarching plan to make Ireland a better place for all.	Independently evaluates infrastructure proposals, does not make decisions on project funding	Independent board	Independent	Independent agency, immunity under An Act Respecting Public Inquiry Commissions

	UK	Scotland	Wales	Ireland	Australia	New Zealand	Montreal	Quebec
<b>Membership</b>	Chair and 4-12 non-executive commissioners	Chair and 9 Commissioners	Chair and 11 Commissioners	-	Chair and 11 board members	Chair and 6 non-executive directors	President and 25 ad-hoc commissioners	5 full time, 13 part-time who are appointed by decree
<b>Staff Level</b>	40-50	3 secretariats	2.5 staff seconded from civil service	-	26 and 4 secondments from Dept. of Premier and Cabinet	Permanent staff, secondees and consultations support the Commission	11	50
<b>Costs</b>	£4.9m 2018/19	£0.5-£0.7m	No budget in Year 1 or Year 2	National Dev. Plan commits £145 bn-£82bn from the Exchequer, and £22.7bn by State-owned companies	£6.6m 2018/19	£4.2m 2019/20	£1.5m 2018	£3.5m 2018
<b>Strategy Timeframe</b>	30 years	30 years	30 years	National Planning Framework -2040	15 years	30 years	40+ years	40+ years
<b>Responsible to/ Sponsoring department</b>	HM Treasury	Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity	Welsh Ministers, Welsh Government	Informed by the Programme for a Partnership Government 2016, The 10 priorities below will be led by the relative government department	Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development, Assistant Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development	Minister for Infrastructure and monitored by Treasury	Public consultation mandates entrusted to it by the Ville de Montréal City Council or Executive Committee	Minister of the Environment and the Fight Against Climate Change for Quebec
<b>Projects/ areas to address</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Energy</li> <li>- Digital</li> <li>- Water &amp; wastewater</li> <li>- Flood risk</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Transport</li> <li>- Energy</li> <li>- Telecoms</li> <li>- Water</li> <li>- Waste</li> <li>- Food defences</li> <li>- Housing</li> <li>- Education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Environment</li> <li>- Energy</li> <li>- Transport</li> <li>- Digital communication</li> <li>- Water</li> <li>- Drainage</li> <li>- Flood risk</li> <li>- Waste</li> <li>- Decarbonisation</li> </ul>	<p>shared priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Compact growth</li> <li>-Rural economies</li> <li>-Regional accessibility</li> <li>-Sustainability mobility</li> </ul>	<p>2019 Infrastructure Priority List:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Regional road network safety improvements</li> <li>-Remote housing overcrowding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Long term strategy and planning.</li> <li>-Major Projects, procurement and delivery advice and support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-To understand and highlight concerns expressed by citizens</li> <li>-Analyse relevant issues</li> </ul>	The Minister sends BAPE applications for public consultations and confers a mandate. The President of BAPE then sets up a

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Justice and culture</li> <li>- Net zero carbon</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Amenity and heritage</li> <li>-International Connectivity</li> <li>-Low carbon</li> <li>-Water</li> <li>-Childcare, education and health</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-National Electricity Market</li> <li>-National electric vehicle fast-charging network</li> <li>-Canning Bridge crossing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Infrastructure is described as both horizontal, for example roads, pipes, rails and wires; as well as vertical, such as schools, hospitals and prisons</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- aspects of each project</li> </ul>	<p>Commission designating a person in charge, commissioners are then appointed based on expertise.</p>
--	--	--	--	---	--	---	---	--

## 5 SURVEY RESPONSES

To support the development of this report, the Panel carried out a survey of key stakeholders in order to ascertain their perspective on the potential value that an Infrastructure Commission could bring to NI. The survey also gave respondents the opportunity to provide their views on potential scope, scale, and time horizon if an Infrastructure Commission is recommended.

In total there were 58 respondents to the survey. Some questions were left unanswered by several respondents and therefore the figures presented add to less than 58 in some instances.

This section summarises the written and virtual evidence provided to the Panel. The survey and the written evidence provided can be found in Appendix 4 and 5 respectively.



*Question 1: What should society in NI seek to achieve from infrastructure and why is it important?*

There was a broad consensus amongst respondents on the first seven of the top ten responses as illustrated below. It is clear that most respondents share a similar view on what they believe infrastructure should deliver for the citizens and communities, both urban and rural, of NI, which is helpful in terms of considering longer-term priorities.

Many of the separate elements of individual responses support other priorities, for example – a more digital future could support environmental safeguarding, increase competitiveness and economic growth, leading to higher levels of societal wellbeing. There was broad consensus that investing for the longer term is what is required to support competitiveness and boost economic growth rates.

Letters of evidence provided more in-depth analysis of the role of infrastructure in NI's future prosperity, particularly in reference to the economic and societal impact arising as a result of COVID-19. Respondents highlighted the growing importance of digital infrastructure in maintaining standards of living for NI citizens during this time and believe smart infrastructure will play an increasing role in sustained prosperity moving forward. One respondent made the following statement:

***“Inclusive economic and green stimulus recovery from the impact of COVID-19, and the drive for enhanced resilience to disruptive shocks and to achieve net zero, has further bolstered the vital role of economic and social infrastructure to society. The challenges ahead in both mitigating against and adapting to the extremes of climate change, protecting and future proofing communities and place, and the critical role of both existing and future infrastructure in delivering this cannot be overstated.”***

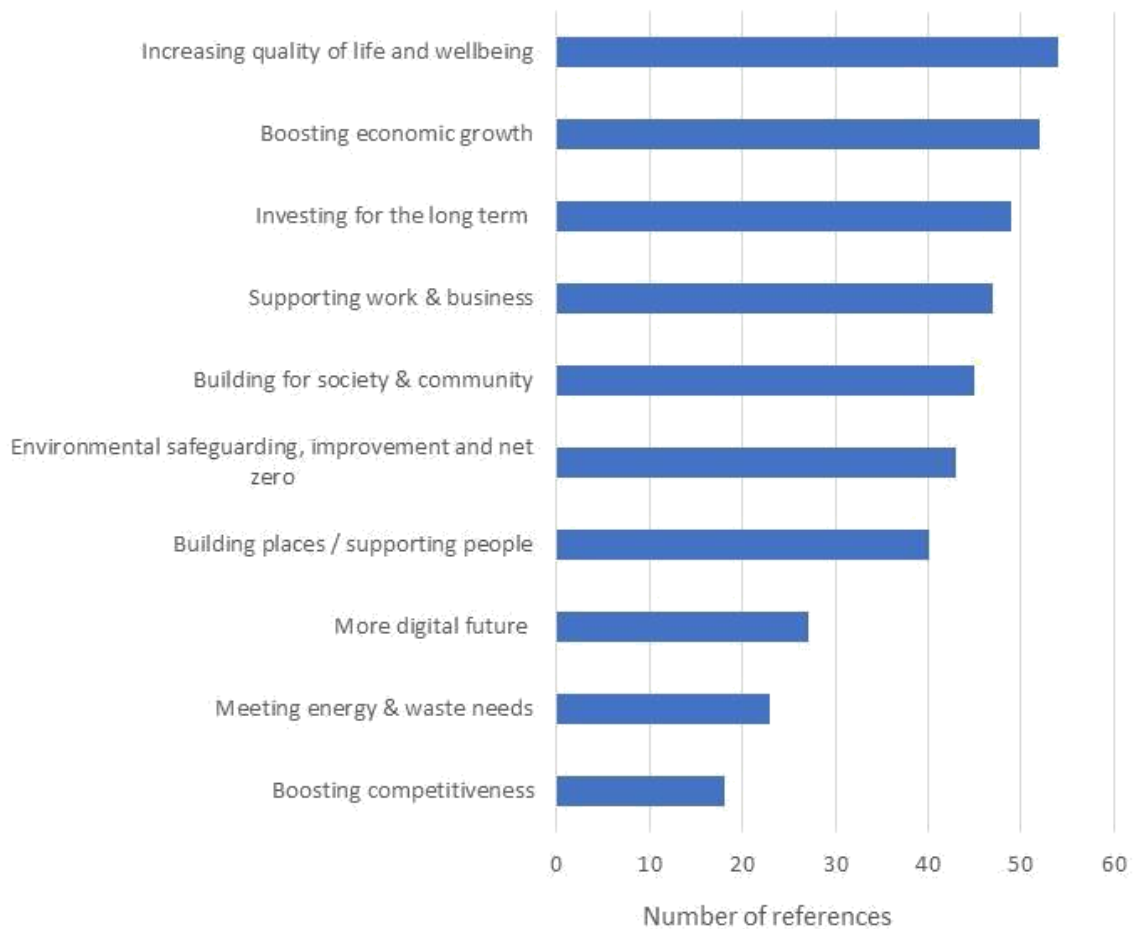


Figure 3 Top ten responses to “What should society in NI seek to achieve from infrastructure and why is it important

Source: UUEPC

There were a range of references<sup>15</sup> to other factors that did not make it into the top ten, but which should also be included in the discussion. These include:

- How infrastructure can support better mental and physical health throughout the population;
- That inclusion is important throughout different groups in society;
- That safety, resilience and reliability is essential (although this may be taken as a given in NI);
- That high quality, internationally connective infrastructure is important; and
- NI must step up to the challenges and take the opportunities presented by COVID-19 and Brexit.

Overall, the responses suggest that NI should seek to achieve more than current outcomes, leading to greater societal benefit from infrastructure provision. There are points made about process, improving efficiency and taking a more long-term and strategic view, alluding to concerns that the status quo should no longer be tolerated, that we must do better and that change is urgently needed.

## Question 2: How do you see infrastructure needs and demands changing over the long term?

Climate change and the environment were, by far, the most commonly referenced factors that respondents expect to influence infrastructure demands in the long term. Indeed, most respondents referred to both. Many respondents felt that the consumption of natural resources at current rates are unsustainable and COVID-19 has proven that change is possible when societal needs are great enough.

Clearly, some of the factors are interdependent as, for example, a larger and more aged population will impact upon the type and location of energy requirements (heat, vehicle fuels and charging etc.), whereas digitisation and remote working might work in reverse to reduce overall energy requirements, and alternative fuel sources such as hydrogen may be options to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the not too distant future.

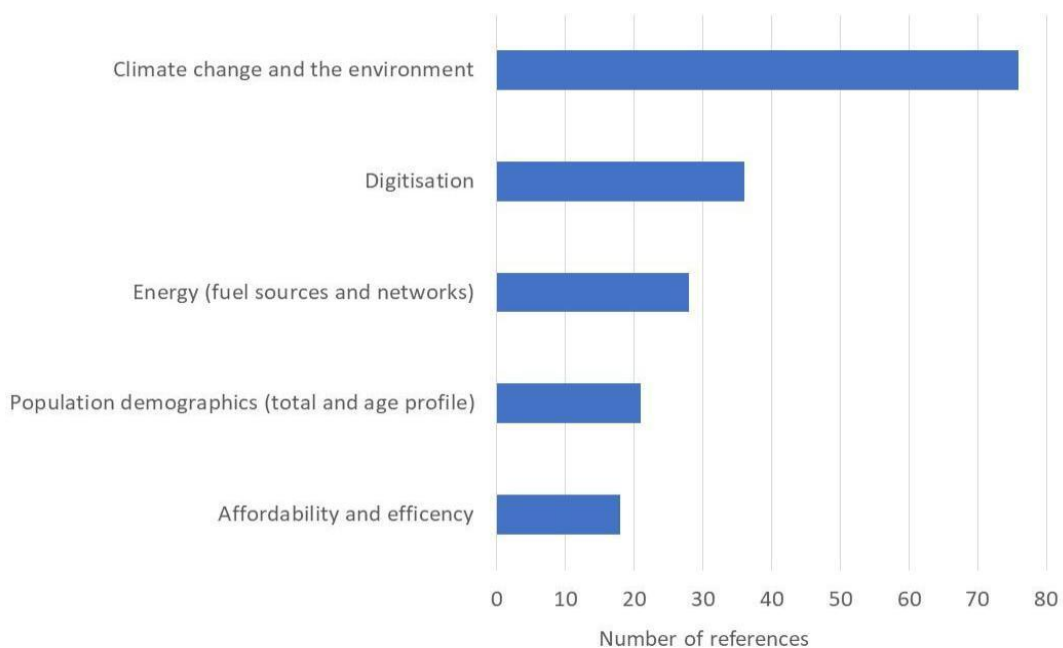


Figure 4 Top five responses to “How do you see infrastructure needs and demands changing over the long term?” n=55

Source: UUEPC

A number of other respondents focussed on spatial issues such as rural infrastructure and connectivity in order to support inclusive growth and opportunity. Others felt that infrastructure should be prepared for any potential future shocks, such as those that occurred from COVID-19 restrictions and Brexit.

Responses also included a range of helpful suggestions on how NI could meet the needs and demands on future infrastructure provision. These include:

- Enhancement of green infrastructure such as cycling networks and use of natural resources;
- Development of digital infrastructure and its expansion to rural areas;
- Development of public transport networks;
- Increasing the supply of housing; and
- Continuation of road building to improve connectivity between towns and cities and rural areas.

### Question 3: What works and what doesn't work in the current system of infrastructure decision making and delivery?

When asked about NI's current system of infrastructure decision making, respondents pointed out a range of positive factors. These were focussed on NI's geographical characteristics (a small region with population hubs) and public sector investments that helped to develop a highly competitive broadband infrastructure and all-island electricity network.

The key points about what works well in terms of infrastructure decision making and delivery in NI were:

- All-island approach for electricity;
- Highly competitive, UK-leading broadband coverage;
- Champions for water and public transport (NI Water and Translink);
- Skills and innovation in the Construction industry;
- NI's work ethic;
- Extensive natural resources; and
- Infrastructure in and around Belfast.

In response to this question the focus tended to be on the areas in which NI could improve. It is clearly illustrated in the following chart that the lack of a longer-term vision, strategy and focus, and planning and procurement issues are, by a clear margin, the two most significant concerns.

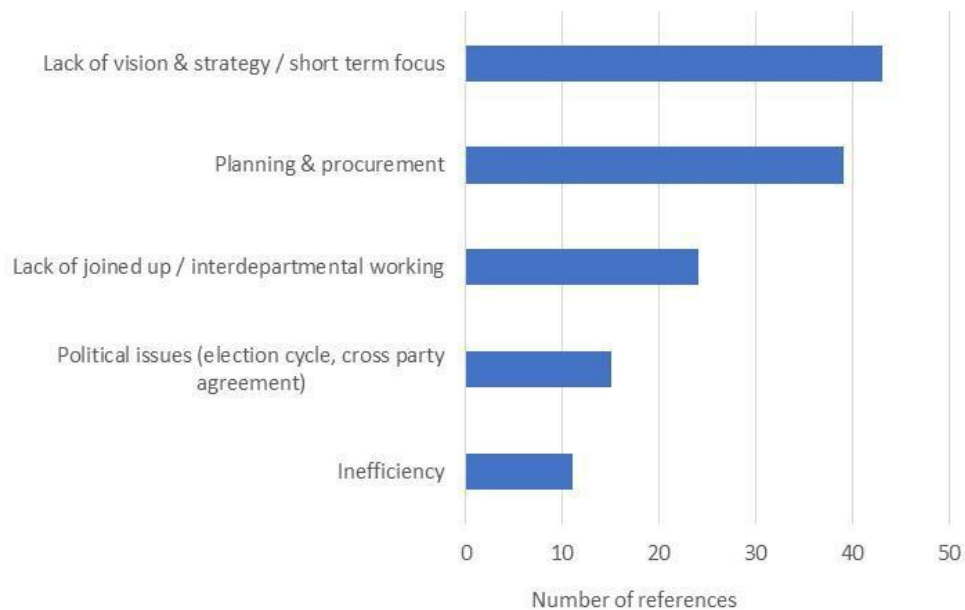


Figure 5 What doesn't work in the current system of infrastructure decision making and delivery?"  
n=54

Source: UUEPC

Question 4: *Do you have any comments on how infrastructure decisions are currently made in Northern Ireland? Would you propose any potential reforms to the current decision-making process? How could these reforms be best achieved?*

Naturally, the responses align closely to the key issues identified in question three. It is evident that there are frustrations with timelines and processes and there are 39 references to how reform and acceleration could improve current decision-making processes. The importance of independence, accountability and making evidence-based decisions was also a clear priority for respondents.

Interestingly, the development of a clear, longer-term vision and strategy was cited as the most significant issue of what doesn't work in NI, yet it only ranked third in terms of reforms that could improve infrastructure related decision making in NI.

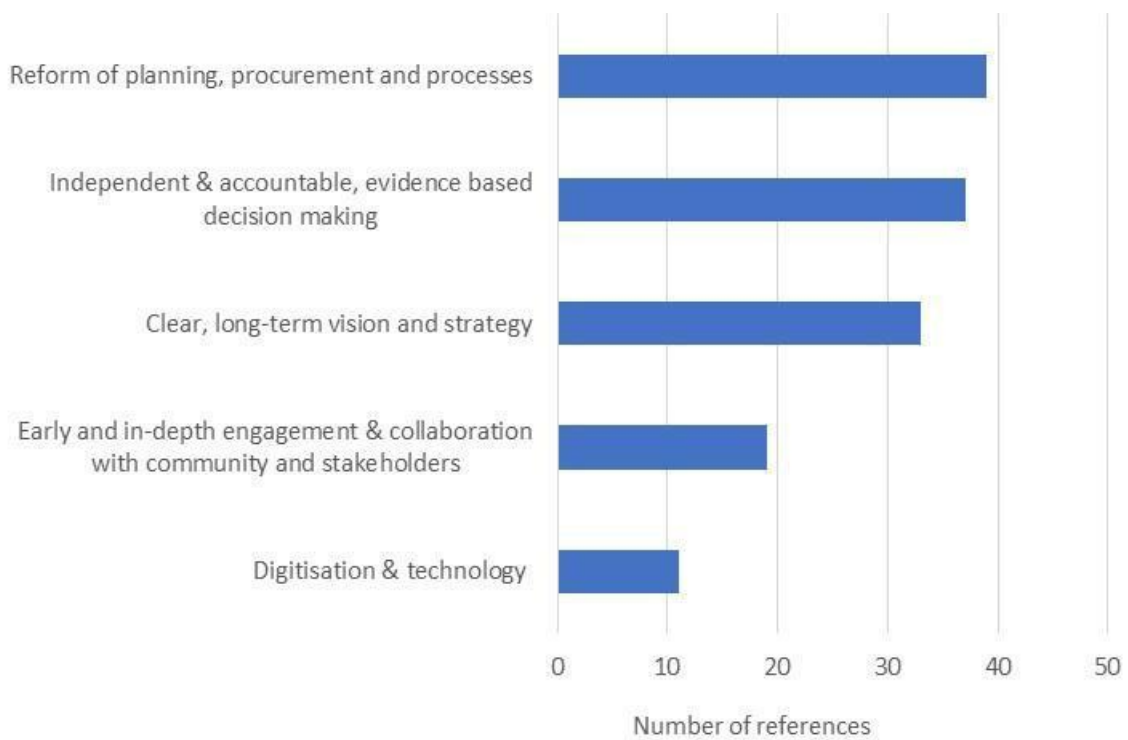


Figure 6 Top five responses to “Do you have any comments on how infrastructure decisions are currently made in Northern Ireland? Would you propose any potential reforms to the current decision-making process? How could these reforms be best achieved?” n=54

Source: UUEPC

Respondents were keen to offer advice on this subject and some of the comments are included below.

## Timescales

*“The greatest challenge is developing a long-term vision for delivery. NI does not currently have an agreed, long term strategic infrastructure vision (for the next 30 years) and therefore prioritisation does not occur on the basis of long term, objective advice. Rather the Executive is beset with short termism (driven by the pressures of annual budgets), and the limitations of a mandatory coalition.”*

## Lack of joined-up working

*“Currently, there is little evidence of cross departmental working on inter-related initiatives. For example, while DfE have invested heavily in broadband infrastructure, and are still doing so with Project Stratum, there are challenges with other Departments’ maximisation of the benefits of that investment i.e. digital skills as an initiative sits within DoF under NIDirect, and there appears to be little evidence of a willingness to align both these initiatives.”*

## Outputs focussed approach

*“Infrastructure decisions and potential reforms should be examined in terms of how they improve the lives of everyone in NI and not serve a proportion of that. They should proactively seek to address a legacy of regional imbalances that have stifled economic growth in NI for decades.”*

*“Infrastructure affects peoples’ lives greatly and so the way we measure its benefits should be in terms of the impacts on people’s lives - quality of life, health and social inclusion.”*

Question 5: *Would you support the establishment of an Infrastructure Commission in Northern Ireland? - Selected Choice*

All but one respondent stated that they would support the establishment of an Infrastructure Commission in NI, suggesting that there is value to be added by a Commission.

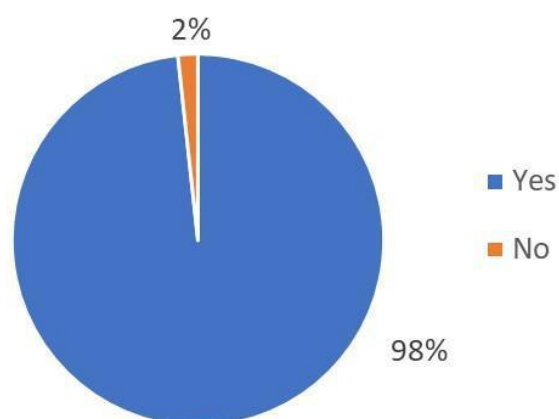


Figure 7 Responses for the question "Would you support the establishment of an Infrastructure, Commission in Northern Ireland?" n=58

Source: UUEPC

Respondents believed that an Infrastructure Commission should lengthen and expand the vision for infrastructure and the potential benefits in NI, including:

- longer term societal wellbeing;
- addressing the climate emergency;
- speeding up infrastructure projects; and
- ensuring sustainable development.

However, whilst the majority are in support of a Commission, there were certain caveats referenced that would need to be considered including that an Infrastructure Commission should be independent, transparent, expert-led, collaborative etc. One respondent summarises this by saying;

*"We would support an infrastructure Commission that aimed to raise quality of life and societal well-being by promoting infrastructure development that fully balances economic, social and environmental considerations in line with the principles of sustainable development"*

Question 6: *What value would an Infrastructure Commission bring to Northern Ireland?*

Respondents felt that independence, expertise and a focus on growth and competitiveness in the longer term were the key elements of value that an Infrastructure Commission could bring to NI. Environmental protection made it into the top five, but featured less prominently than other factors.

It is noteworthy that long term vision is the key issue that respondents felt wasn't working in NI, however, it ranked only fourth in terms of the value that could be added. A theme that is prevalent in the responses is that if an Infrastructure Commission is set up in NI, it should be funded over a long time period, to give independence and stability.

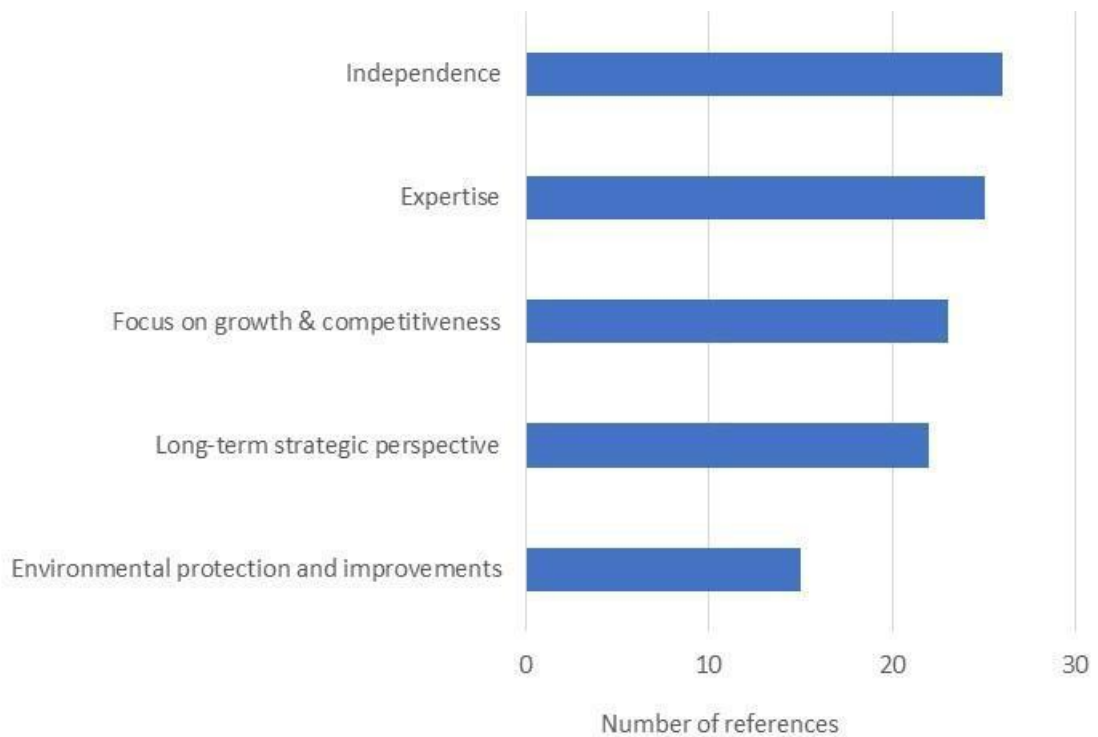


Figure 8 Top five responses for the question “What value would an Infrastructure Commission bring to Northern Ireland?” n=54

Source: UUEPC



### Question 7: How might the Infrastructure Commission be established and operate?

The majority of respondents were in favour of an independent organisation that is focussed in the long term, on prioritisation and strategy. Importantly, only three respondents were in favour of a Government-led organisation.

It should be noted that the respondents can choose more than one option to this question. An Infrastructure Commission could facilitate debate, focus on projects and programmes, or focus on prioritisation and strategy, two of the three, or all three options.

The clear majority felt that a body should independently focus on prioritisation and strategy and almost half of respondents believed that an independent Infrastructure Commission should only focus on this.

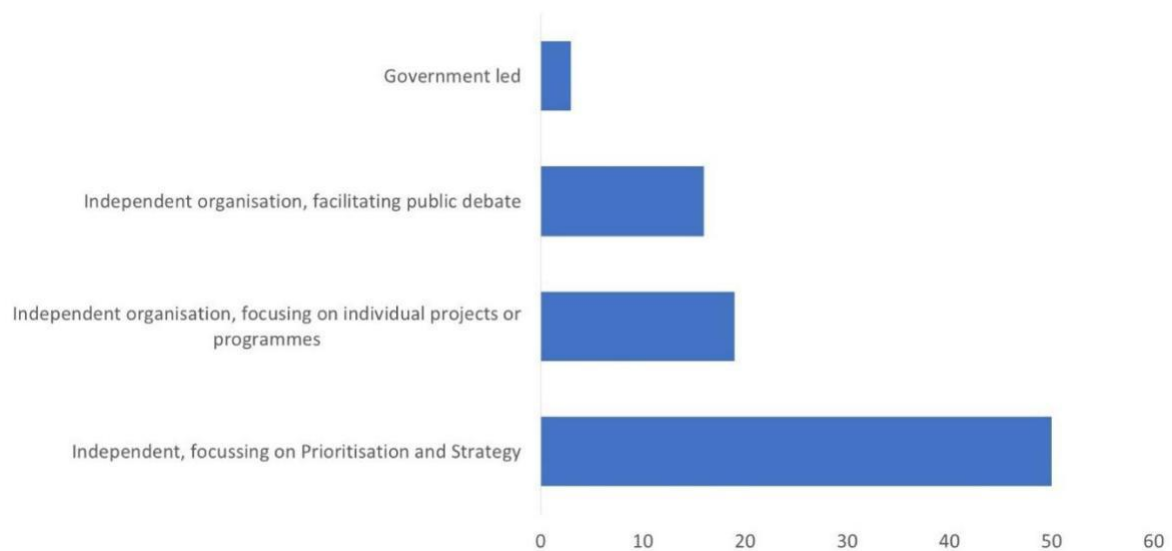


Figure 9 Responses for the question “How might the Infrastructure Commission be established and operate?” n=57 (Note: respondents could select multiple choices)

Source: UUEPC

**Question 8: What scope do you believe the Infrastructure Commission could / should have?**

All 57 respondents to this question believed that an Infrastructure Commission’s scope should include hard infrastructure. 93% and 91% of respondents felt its scope should also be extended to cover energy and digital infrastructure respectively. 72% of respondents felt that the scope should include housing, with half favouring the inclusion of education and health infrastructure.

Figure 10 demonstrates the sectoral characteristics of respondents to this question. Those respondents more likely to be in favour of all forms of infrastructure came from finance, housing, policy and recreation. Those from the IT sector were most in favour of a more focussed approach on hard and digital infrastructures. However, in every sector a majority of respondents were in favour of an Infrastructure Commission that focussed on hard and digital infrastructure.

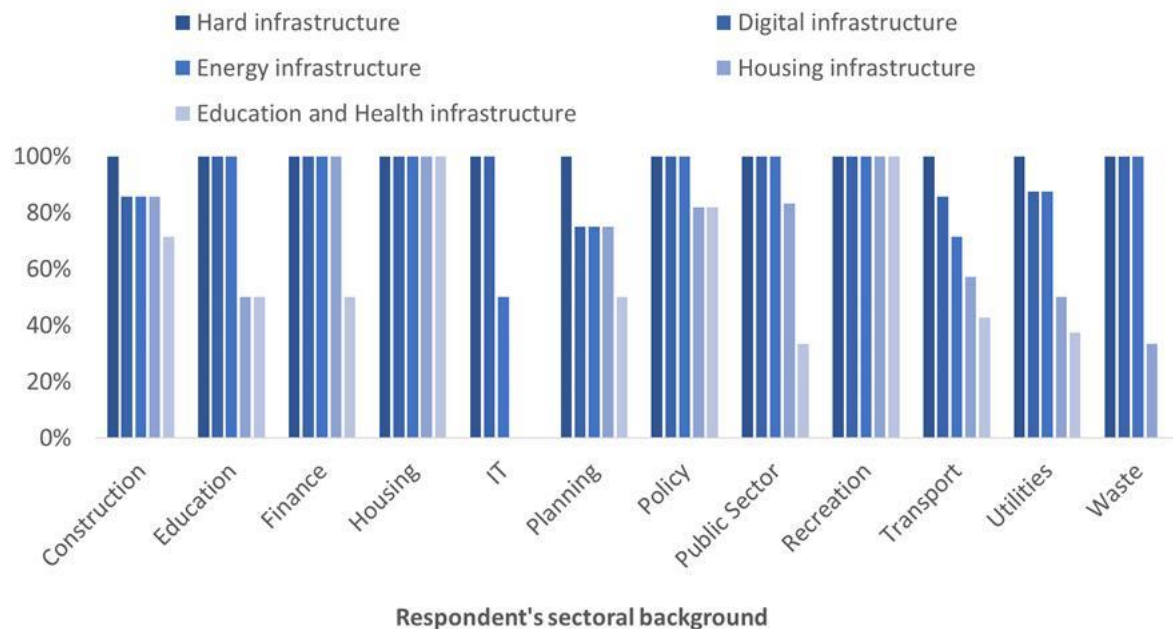


Figure 10 Responses for the question “What scope do you believe the Infrastructure Commission could / should have?” by sector, n=57

Source: UUEPC

### Question 9: *What time period should an Infrastructure Commission focus on?*

A majority of survey respondents (58%) favoured an Infrastructure Commission which would look at the infrastructure priorities for NI over a for 20-30 year period. In total, 68% of respondents favoured a Commission that lasted for more than 20 years, compared with less than a third of respondents favouring a timespan of less than 20 years.

Rationale given for the most popular 20-30 year timescale in letters of evidence centred on its alignment to regional strategies, namely the NI Programme for Government and various City and Region Growth Deals, as well as to ensure fulfilment of net zero 2050 targets.

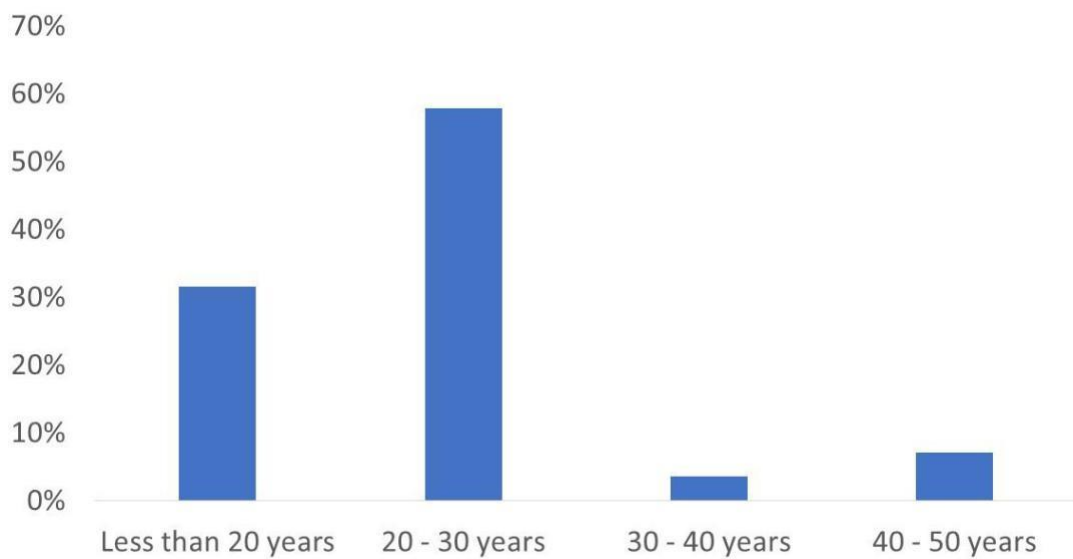


Figure 11 Responses to the question “What time period should an Infrastructure Commission focus on?” n=57

Source: UUEPC

*Question 10: The Infrastructure Minister aims to deliver cleaner, greener, sustainable and inclusive infrastructure. How could an Infrastructure Commission support these objectives?’*

Greener, sustainable infrastructure was identified by respondents as a key area to be addressed in respect of NI’s future infrastructure needs and an Infrastructure Commission’s priorities throughout the survey.

Respondents felt that a Commission could support the delivery of cleaner, greener, sustainable and inclusive infrastructure by:

- Encouraging the development of a long-term infrastructure strategy and vision to 2050;
- Including sustainability in the remit of a Commission;
- Acting as an enforcer of infrastructure policy that works toward the net zero 2050 commitment;
- Creating a framework across various infrastructure sectors and forms of infrastructure that contributes to goals on decarbonisation;
- Encouraging inclusive stakeholder engagement that re-focuses to an outcome-based delivery model; and
- Depoliticising infrastructure policy on sectoral and regional grounds.

One respondent cited the actions of an Infrastructure Commission in Singapore as an example of a body’s ability to influence climate policy and development, stating:

*“...they focused on developing Singapore in a sustainable way as well as providing a quality living environment placing people and quality of life as priorities. They achieved this through having a Master Plan which concentrates on inclusive and green neighbourhoods, rejuvenating familiar places, as well as building capacity and resilience for sustainable growth. Northern Ireland’s investment strategy can have a similar focus whilst delivering on the goals in the Programme for Government.”*

### Question 11: *What specific role should a Commission play in NI?*

In response to this question, 17 respondents (30%) believe the role of a Commission should include providing a long-term vision of 10+ years for infrastructure in NI. 16% felt it should develop strategy and operational plan formation, while 12% saw it as a monitoring body, reporting on the success or otherwise of infrastructure implementation in NI.

42% of respondents answered 'other' and the reasons provided were varied. Most favoured a combination of at least two of the highlighted options, with a significant number favouring all three. One participant noted:

*“An Infrastructure Commission that does not carry out all of the roles listed above to some extent is not going to be able to fulfil its overall objectives.”*

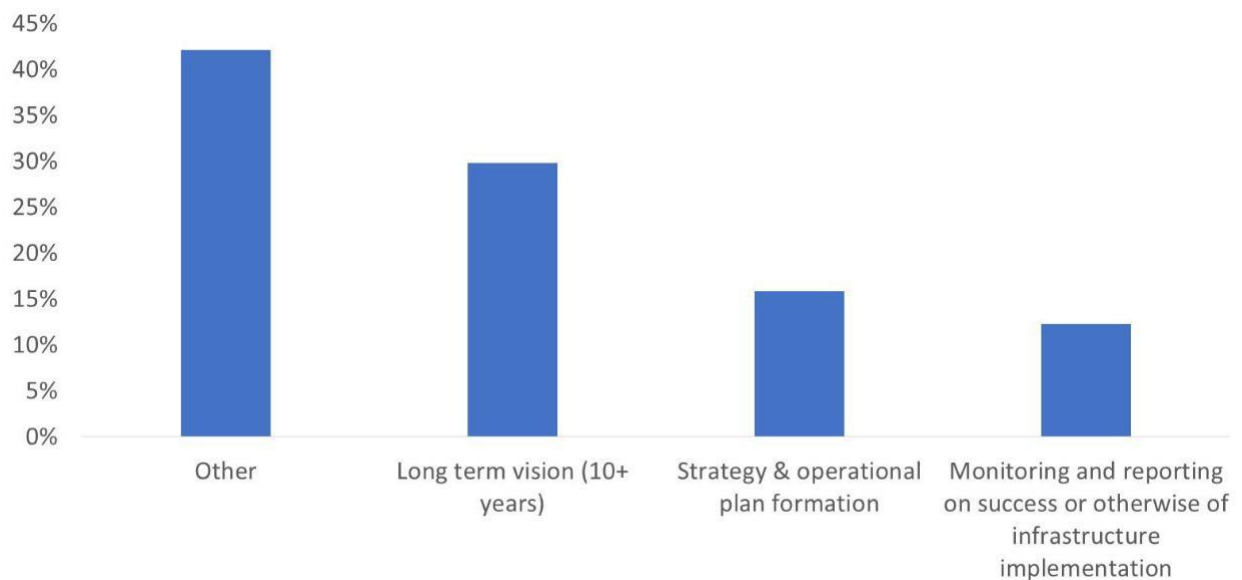


Figure 12 Responses to the Question “What role should a Commission play in NI”? n=57

Source: UUEPC

**Question 12: What is the minimum project value (£m) that the Infrastructure Commission should be engaged at (if it is involved at project level)?**

The average minimum value that respondents felt was appropriate for a Commission’s involvement was £22 million. Almost half of respondents felt that the minimum project value that a Commission should be engaged at was £10 million to £20 million. More than a third of respondents felt that the minimum project value should be more than £20 million.

One respondent helpfully provided some feedback on a ‘layered approach’ to project involvement based on value:

*“To ensure the effectiveness of the Commission in having a comprehensive view across the inter-linked infrastructure landscape, there may be scope to potentially adopt a layered approach; for example - all projects above £5m reported to the Commission (visibility to the investment pipeline and ongoing works), all projects above £10m engaged in, all projects above £50m special defined role”*

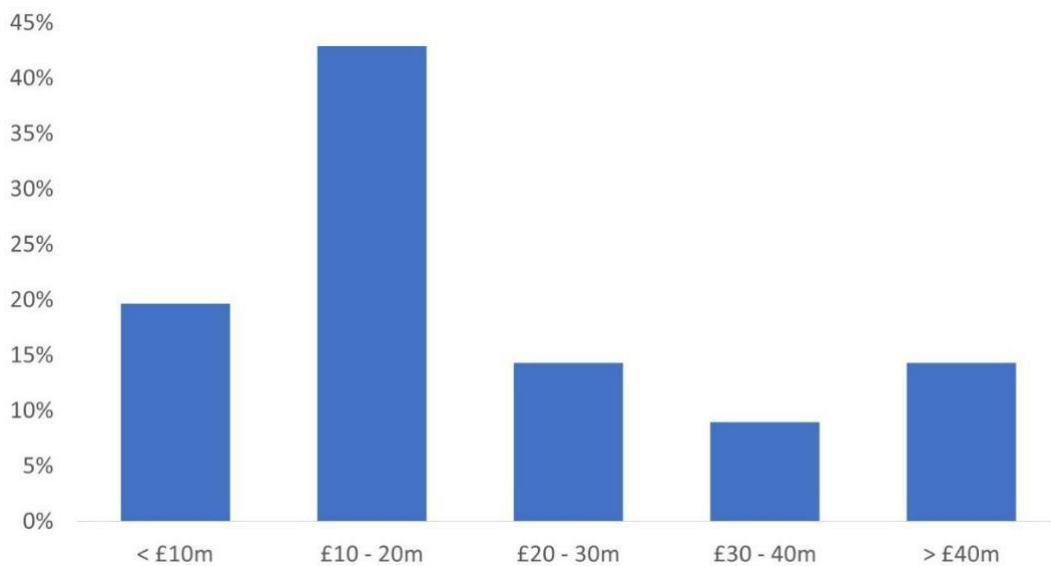


Figure 13 Responses to the Question “What is the minimum project value (£m) that the Infrastructure Commission should be engaged at?”, n=56

### Question 13: *What stage of the infrastructure lifecycle should the Infrastructure Commission be involved in?*

A vast majority of respondents (79%) believe that an Infrastructure Commission should be involved from the beginning of a project's life cycle. This refers to elements such as pre-planning, prioritisation and strategy, and feasibility. While some respondents feel that engagement should end after this phase, others argue that the Commission should be involved in all stages of a project lifecycle, acting as a monitoring and review body as the project ages, reducing its direct involvement gradually.

The following quote is representative of a majority of responses to question 13:

*“At the inception/concept stage (pre-OBC<sup>16</sup>) - with an aim for inclusive economic and green infrastructure, assessing an infrastructure asset should be informed by advance considerations of all stages of the lifecycle – from initial policy context and need, to asset management. In this context, we need to take a ‘whole-of-industry,’ a ‘whole-of-life,’ and a ‘whole-of-asset/system’ approach.”*

---

<sup>16</sup>Outline Business Case (OBC)

**Question 14: To what extent do you think that the Commission should be tasked to hold Government to account?**

The vast majority of respondents felt that an Infrastructure Commission should hold the Government to account. Six were unsure if this should be within the remit of a Commission, five felt that other parts of the institutional framework in NI already had responsibility in terms of holding those responsible for delivery to account, and the remainder did not answer the question.

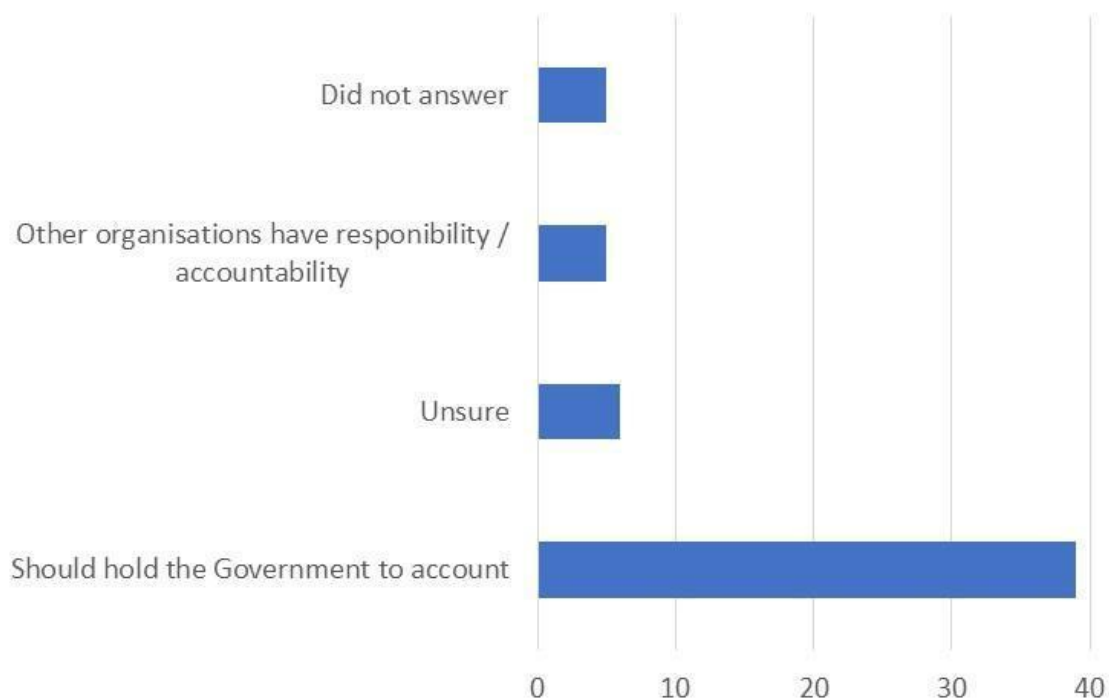


Figure 14 Responses to the Question “What is the minimum project value (£m) that the Infrastructure Commission should be engaged at?”, n=56

Source: UUEPC

A number of respondents emphasised the need for a Commission to be apolitical. This would be particularly important if the Commission was tasked with holding Government to account.

There were several helpful examples given of how an Infrastructure Commission might hold Government to account, while maintaining a distance and independence that may help to avoid the political dimension. These include:

- Producing a report every 1-3 years highlighting progress made in projects and areas for improvement;
- Undertaking an Infrastructure Assessment in every parliamentary cycle which informs Government of pressing infrastructure needs in medium and longer term;
- Two-way accountability, where the Infrastructure Commission is accountable to Government for the effectiveness of its proposals, and Government is accountable to take those proposals forward if accepted;
- Undertaking specific studies on pressing infrastructure challenges as set by Government.



### Question 15: *Should the Infrastructure Commission engage on procurement issues?*

More than two thirds of respondents were in favour of an Infrastructure Commission engaging in procurement issues, which aligns to earlier responses in the survey that focus on procurement issues as one of the main challenges impacting infrastructure delivery timescales in NI. Some respondents felt that it should take a direct role in procurement in the same vein as it could with planning and strategy. Others felt it should take an advisory role for Government in best-practice procurement, while maintaining independence and detaching itself from decision making.

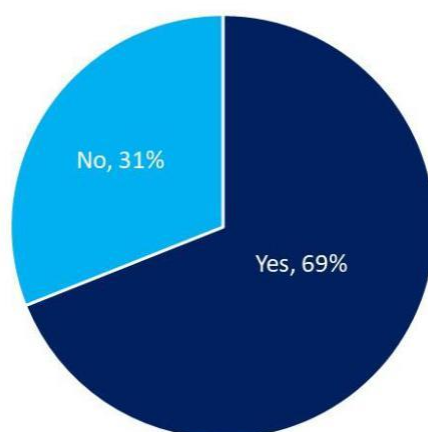


Figure 15 Responses to the question “Should the Infrastructure Commission engage on procurement issues?” n=58

Source: UUEPC

Responses focussed on procurement engagement in the context of NI’s current approach to managing public sector and regulated utility procurement, which respondents described in their evidence as “*broken*”, “*the single biggest barrier*” and “*lacking transparency*”. In general, respondents recognised the conflicts of interest that extensive procurement related engagement could create for an independent body; and therefore, most respondents in favour of engagement believe that a Commission should act as an advisor to Government on best-practice procurement policy.

Those not in favour of procurement related engagement felt that it would compromise the independence of an Infrastructure Commission or would distract from the primary focus of prioritisation and strategy. There was more division in the Transport, Utilities and Waste sectors in terms of procurement issues. Only 43% of respondents from the Transport sector were in favour of engagement in procurement, while 63% were in favour in Utilities and 33% in favour in Waste.

Question 16: *If created, who should an Infrastructure Commission be responsible to?*

Three quarters of respondents believe that if created, an Infrastructure Commission in NI should be responsible directly to the NI Executive. This aligns to a recurrent theme throughout the responses of ensuring joined-up thinking across departments and political parties which, under any one department or politician, respondents do not feel would be achieved.

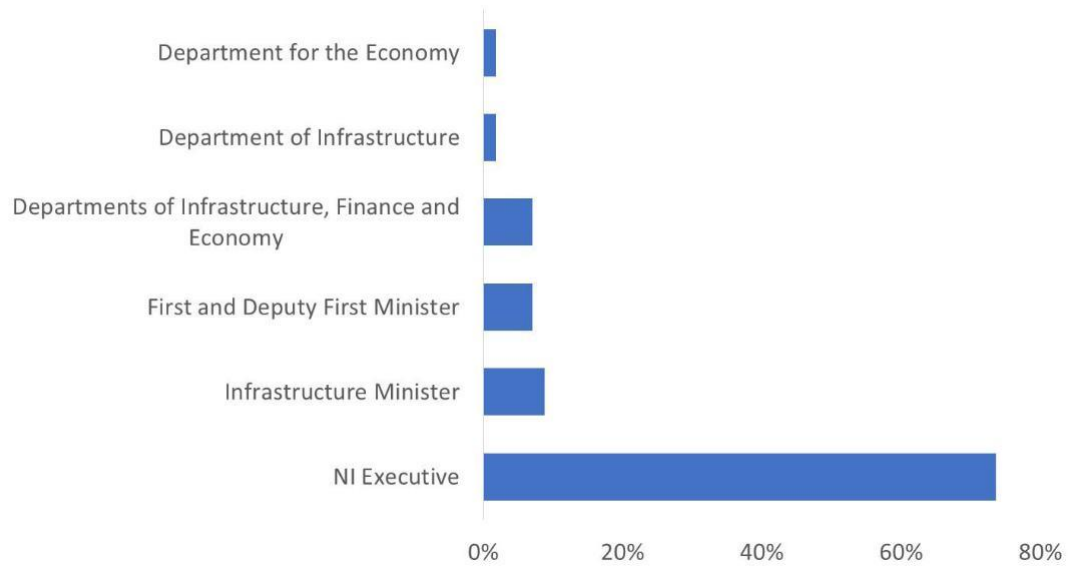


Figure 16 Responses to the question “If created, who should an Infrastructure Commission be responsible to?” n=57

Source: UUEPC

Question 17: Which international Infrastructure Commission model do you think is most appropriate for NI?

If an Infrastructure Commission were to follow best practice of an existing model, almost half of respondents believe that model should be the UK National Infrastructure Commission. Most of these provided the rationale that the UK approach is suitable, and NI could “dock into” the broader UK framework.

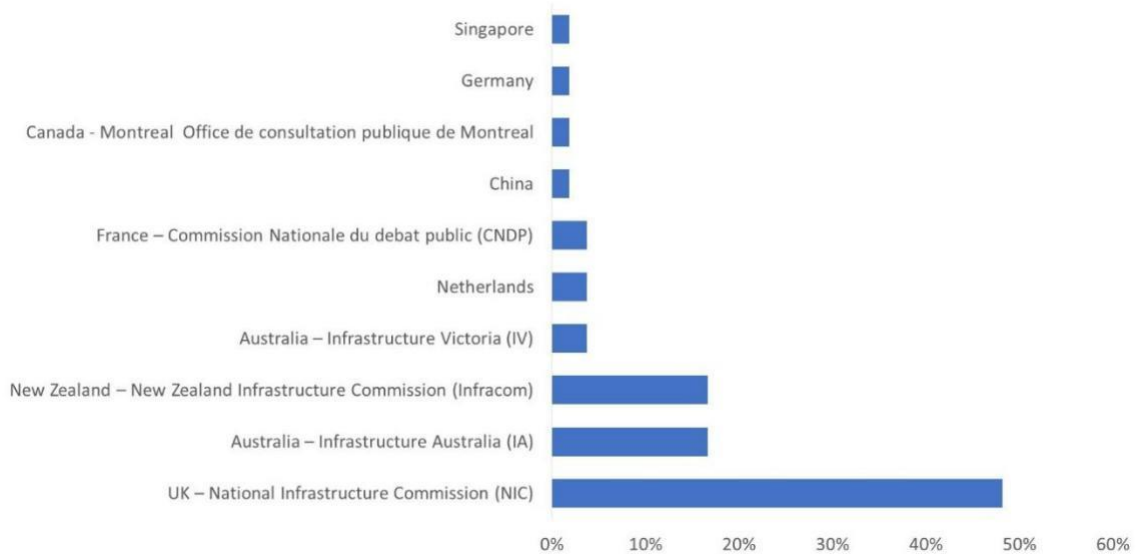


Figure 17 Responses to the question “Which international Infrastructure Commission model do you think is most appropriate for Northern Ireland?” n=54

Source: UUEPC

Note: The Commissions in Scotland and Wales were not provided as a choice for respondents here, but these Commissions were noted elsewhere by stakeholders as appropriate models for NI and so should also be considered by MAP.

**Question 18: Do you have any additional comments on how the Infrastructure Commission's role should operate in regard to Stakeholder engagement and any recommendation or evidence of best practice on how this can be achieved?**

Final comments by survey respondents covered a range of potential stakeholders that could be engaged to achieve the best result for infrastructure in NI. Suggestions included:

- the public;
- industry panels covering hard, digital, energy, housing, and education and health infrastructure;
- those with both direct and indirect sectoral relationships to those in infrastructure;
- other Infrastructure Commissions, particularly the UK NIC;
- climate regulators;
- those opposed to specific projects; and
- Local Councils.

1. One respondent stated,

*“Infrastructure is what delivers the services that are essential for sustainable development. Whether by providing the public transport that makes it easier for women in rural areas to participate in the workforce. A diverse panel is vital to ensure the decision-making process is inclusive and robust and able to cater for the needs of society. What is the vision for this? How is success measured? What is the dividend for the people of NI?”*

2. Some respondents suggested models of best practice, or approaches to understand best practice, in their responses. These included:

- Ensuring the Commission reports to the NI Executive;
- That a Commission works across Government Departments;
- Replication of the UK model which focusses on a wide range of stakeholder engagement and not specific projects;
- Creation of an official panel to engage stakeholders; and
- Using the ‘Consumer Principles’ to help form a common language for best-practice engagement.

## Summary of survey responses

1. There was almost unanimous support for the establishment of an Infrastructure Commission in NI from survey respondents.
2. The key themes emerging from the survey responses were that an Infrastructure Commission, if established, should focus on, in no particular order:
  - Raising quality of life and the wellbeing of citizens in NI;
  - Maintaining independence from Government, but reporting directly to the NI Executive;
  - Long term vision setting (20 years +), strategic oversight, monitoring and reporting on progress;
  - All forms of infrastructure, including hard infrastructure, energy, digital, housing and health and education infrastructure;
  - Driving economic growth and competitiveness;
  - Delivering a step change in environmental performance in order to address climate change and meet 2050 net zero targets;
  - Making the most of digital opportunities, including off-site working, AI, machine learning and the Internet of Things;
  - Collaboration, engaging relevant stakeholders early in the process;
  - Advising on how speed and efficiency could be increased in the planning and procurement processes; and
  - Applying best practices from the UK National Infrastructure Commission to ensure alignment and co-operation.

The Ministerial Advisory Panel on Infrastructure (MAPI) carried out 45 virtual consultations in September 2020 with a variety of stakeholders across NI as well as external, global organisations with deep expertise and insights.

These consultations provided primary information to help understand the needs and opinions of organisations regarding the establishment of an Infrastructure Commission. These consultations facilitated a direct and very useful discussion around the challenges and opportunities in establishing an Infrastructure Commission in NI, how it might be set up and specific challenges and "lessons learnt" elsewhere.

MAPI members leveraged their extensive infrastructure related network to identify consultees. A full list of the individuals and organisations that took part in these online virtual evidence sessions are included in the Acknowledgements page. Permission was granted by the consultees for their organisation's information and views to be published as part of this report. Transcriptions from a diverse sample of the virtual consultations are provided in Appendix 6.

This section explores the key themes emerging from the organisations consulted and explores the suggestions which were made regarding the viability and value an Infrastructure Commission can potentially deliver for NI. These insights and ideas have been used to help inform the panel's recommendations.

The overwhelming majority of the consultees indicated their belief that the establishment of an Infrastructure Commission for NI would be positive for the more effective approach to the longer-term planning and delivery of infrastructure. This very much aligned with the survey results which also support the approach. Notwithstanding this, the consultations also served to highlight the very wide range of considerations which must be taken into account when determining the optimal approach to any future Infrastructure Commission.

The key themes that emerged from the consultations included that any future Infrastructure Commission needs:

- independence;
- to be credible;
- to develop a longer-term vision;
- to be focused on climate concerns;
- to ideally report to the NI Executive;
- to enable effective decision-making in NI;
- to be led and made up of industry experts from NI and beyond;
- to be able to hold project sponsors and policy makers accountable;
- to tackle issues regarding budgetary constraints, particularly regarding how the block grant is used;
- to have a clear focus on the role of planning in NI; and
- to ensure rebalancing and inclusive growth for NI.

Consultees emphasised the important role that an Infrastructure Commission could play in NI in providing leadership and focus on complex infrastructure projects which have societal benefits but may not be high on the political agenda as outcomes are not quickly produced or require long-term planning. Many discussed the Infrastructure Commission in the context of the implementation of the City Region and Growth Deals which they suggested are a step in the right direction for NI's long-term planning, consistent with the vision brought by an Infrastructure Commission that could have the skills and expertise to take this longer-term vision further.

When asked about the length of time that a Commission should be in place, the consultees were broadly split between something longer-term of around 50 years and short-term of 5, 10 or 20 years. There was no clear consensus on the specific time frame. However, when speaking about specific projects that a Commission could support, consultees did recognise that a longer-term focus on these was required and often spoke of the lifespan of projects and the need for NI to think about a sustainable future.

To ensure its success, all consultees argued for independence of the Commission which appeared crucial to its long-term success. Consultees suggested that the Commission report directly to the NI Executive to ensure that it had political buy-in and powers needed to be successful. A number of consultees suggested that the Commission would need to have statutory powers to be fully successful and able to hold Government to account.

Many consultees raised a concern around political buy-in, noting that the nature of the power-sharing Executive could hold back such a Commission. It was also noted that if the Commission were to sit within one department it could lead it to short-termism and risked greater political interference. Where the Commission could not be placed within NI Executive, some consultees felt that in order to aid expediency it may be necessary to place the Commission within a Department, it was felt that DfI, DoF or DfE would be best placed. It was also expressed that an Infrastructure Commission could help to hold the NI Executive or relevant departments to account for infrastructure projects and this accountability was vital to ensuring the success of projects.

It was further suggested that the Commission could be embedded within the next Programme for Government so that Government Departments could commit to infrastructure investment and refer to its importance in the next Programme for Government. Some consultees raised concerns that the NI Civil Service should not be involved in the Commission, but they did question how such a Commission would interact with the Civil Service.

When asked about the make-up of the Commission all consultees suggested it should include those who are experts on infrastructure and that it should be led by a well-known and respected figure who can Chair the Commission. Consultees held mixed views about whether the remaining cohort of Commissioners should be entirely from NI or should include those from other countries. Some consultees were keen for the Commission to be made up from individuals from NI as they felt that there was ample talent in NI to do this and these individuals would also understand the political playing field. Meanwhile others felt that, by engaging those from elsewhere, NI could learn from experiences in other countries.

Many expressed frustrations at the current approach to allocating the Barnett budget consequential and suggested a Commission could help to tackle these frustrations. For instance, some consultees felt that NI policy makers and politicians too often waited for direction from Westminster authorities before acting rather than providing leadership within NI; they felt that this Commission would be a good step towards NI being pro-active in planning for the future.

All consultees were increasingly alarmed at the ongoing climate emergency which needs to be addressed immediately to prepare NI for a sustainable future and ensure NI catches up and accelerates towards the achievement of net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. Consultees, as well as information from those who provided written evidence, suggested that COVID-19 has accelerated our awareness and concerns about the environment and so this needs to be a focus going forward. Consultees felt that an Infrastructure Commission could lead the way on this issue, providing leadership, accountability and expert guidance as to how future projects could be sustainable and climate friendly.

Unsurprisingly, NI Water did raise their concerns about the state of water infrastructure in NI. However, unprompted, many other consultees also recognised that wastewater infrastructure is at a crisis point in NI. They suggested that this is something which needs to be dealt with immediately given the direct and adverse impact this is having on new developments in over 100 towns in NI. “No Drains, No Cranes” is now an urgent and critical issue that NI must address.

There was a sense that NI, whilst it should be ambitious, does need to be realistic about what it wants to achieve given the size of the country and population.

Lastly, regarding other organisations with infrastructure strategy and planning roles already in existence, for example SIB, certain consultees mentioned that how these organisations would or should work together also needs to be addressed. Consultees did feel that this Commission should not simply replicate SIB in order that it can add something new and of value to NI. Rather, an Infrastructure Commission for NI and SIB should be complementary and work together to ensure a comprehensive approach to infrastructure planning in the longer term (to 2050).



## Institutional Structure – Statutory versus Non-Statutory

One of the most common threads to emerge from the evidence submitted to MAPI is that, if an Infrastructure Commission (IC) is to be established, then it is essential that the Commission be established, empowered and ultimately operated in a manner which is independent from the NI Executive and the Departments and which, to the greatest extent possible, removes it from the realms of political influence. This is not to say that engagement with the Executive should be limited. Indeed, a key recommendation of this review is that the Commission should be established with the consent and support of the entire Executive. This is considered essential if it is to be both as effective as other similar organisations internationally and, importantly, if it is to achieve all that we might hope in supporting the future, effective delivery of sustainable and resilient infrastructure in NI.

It is clear from the evidence, that such a Commission will only be able to fulfil its remit if it can do so with a degree of freedom from Ministerial and Executive control. Therefore, whilst recognising past criticisms, both in NI and in the rest of the UK, of the number, cost and, on occasions, conduct of Arm's Length Bodies (ALB's), it is clear that if ultimately established, then an Infrastructure Commission for NI must be able to step back from short-termism, politics, political influence and interference, and operate on a genuinely arm's length basis to fulfil the recommendations we have made in this review.

A report by the Institute for Government<sup>17</sup>, identified at least 11 types of ALB in the UK but noted that 'there is no consistency over why bodies were given the institutional form that they were.' Ultimately, no matter what form an Infrastructure Commission takes in NI, the most crucial feature must be its ability to operate and advise in a manner which always reflects what is in the best interests of all of the people in NI.

That said, MAPI does recognise that if we consider the options in a very broad sense (i.e. statutory versus non-statutory), then it is clear that there are some actual and perceived benefits and otherwise for both approaches, and these are summarised below.

Statutory Pros	Statutory Cons
One of the primary benefits of establishing an IC through statute is that it would indicate a degree of permanence to the function, which is less susceptible to change generally but, in particular, should there be a shift in power or influence at Executive level.	It seems likely that it would take much longer to draft, agree and implement legislation to establish a statutory body (though accepting that it may be possible to establish a body in "shadow" form to support the development of the legislation for establishment including in particular its role and remit).
Related to the point above, having its independence enshrined in law could be very beneficial in terms of continued efforts to remain immune to political influence and election cycles.	As the body has been established through statute, it would seem likely that it would be more difficult and time consuming to amend the role, remit or bodies of the organisation should the need arise. This indicates that it is essential to get this right first time, and that compromises at the point of establishment may prove detrimental in the long term.

<sup>17</sup> *Read before Burning*, Institute of Government, July 2010

<p>Legislation is generally, by its nature, very precise and as such, this could be useful in securing a clearer understanding of what the role, remit and powers of the IC is, which would/should avoid disagreement in the future. (This, of course, must be balanced against the fact that securing agreement of such "precise" language may be more difficult and time-consuming.)</p>	<p>Will require the Commissioners to be appointed via Public Appointments Process which is a lengthy process (estimate 9 months) and will further delay the establishment of the Commission.</p>
<p>There could be a perception that by establishing a statutory IC it would have greater authority or indicate that it is of greater importance, akin to the Office of Budget Responsibility. In short, enshrining the IC in law, could give it additional credibility.</p>	<p>Statutory agency will require the Commissioners to be recruited via the Public Appointment process which can be a lengthy process (9 months)</p>
<p>Given the long-lived nature of infrastructure and the long lead times in its construction, a longer-term, non-partisan approach to its planning, prioritisation and assessment will be required. A statutory agency guarantees perpetual succession and provides bandwidth to strategically look at our infrastructure needs that has largely been absent in NI over the past decade.</p>	
<p>Statutory agency provides certainty of funding; organisations that have an independent funding stream are more likely to be robust over the long term.</p>	

Non-Statutory Pros	Non-Statutory Cons
<p>Whilst recognising that the timetable to establish and constitute a body in any form will always be driven by how long it takes to secure political agreement, it seems clear that it would be considerably quicker to establish a non-statutory body to fulfil the role of an Infrastructure Commission.</p>	<p>The primary concern in establishing an IC on a non-statutory basis, is that it would appear considerably easier to either change its role, remit or powers such as to undermine its effectiveness or, indeed, to wind-up up the organisation even in circumstances where there is support for its continued existence.</p>
<p>Related to the point above, it would be considerably easier to "enhance" and "refine" the role of the IC if it is non-statutory as this would mean that legislative change is not necessary to implement such changes. This recognises and supports a role that could evolve over time.</p>	<p>If not statutory, there could be a perception that the IC does not have either the status or the influence of a statutory body and lack of permanency.</p>
<p>Flexibility on appointing the Commissioners without having to leverage the Public Appointments process. Shape the team of Commissioners based on their expertise.</p>	<p>IC Wales is a statutory agency and has unsuccessful secured funding for the commissioner in the Year 1 and Year 2 of its current existence. Lack of certainty of funding extremely limits the ability of the Commission to fulfil its role and remit.</p>
	<p>The advisory board is vulnerable to changes or its demise after each political cycle.</p> <p>For example</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the previous Advisory Council on Infrastructure Investment (ACII) which existed from 2004 - 2007 under Direct Rule was wound up in 2007 following the restoration of the NI Executive.</li> <li>- NI Economic Advisory Group was established in 2010, then stood down in 2016. The group was then re-established by Minister Dodds in June 2020.</li> </ul> <p>The lack of a permanent structure could mean that a Commission is vulnerable to political cycles and this will limit the ability to attract world class talent.</p>

## Recommendations

On the basis of evidence from consultations, surveys and research on best practice around the world and having engaged extensively with key stakeholders from across NI, ***the Ministerial Advisory Panel on Infrastructure recommends the establishment of an Infrastructure Commission in Northern Ireland as soon as is practical (prior to 2022 Elections)***. In order for the Commission to deliver fundamental step-change in the approach to longer-term (out to 2050) efficiency and effectiveness of infrastructure planning, prioritisation and delivery for the benefit of all communities, urban and rural, and all generations, young and ageing, the Panel advise that the Commission is:

### Focused on the longer-term needs of society

- The Infrastructure Commission should be ambitious, aiming to improve wellbeing, environmental performance, economic growth and inclusion in order to play its part in building a better future for all in NI.
- Infrastructure investments are, by their very nature, long-term commitments, supporting and impacting society for many decades and therefore it is important that sustainable choices are made. A Commission that sets the longer term infrastructure vision over the next 30+ years should help decision makers to focus on the longer term, above and beyond current strategic, political and budgetary cycles.
- Climate change is widely accepted as one of the key challenges and drivers of change in terms of future infrastructure priorities and policy. Northern Ireland will require an agreed vision and strategy in relation to long-term policy objectives for climate change adaptation and mitigation. This is a relatively small place and collectively, citizens and decision makers should consider how NI might lead by example in addressing the climate emergency. The Commission's vision must include delivering the net-zero targets by 2050, but preferably before in order to present Northern Ireland as progressive and forward-looking to the world, which will help to attract FDI and generate tourism.
- The Commission can connect our existing world class skills in clean, smart, digital technologies with the overall vision of a longer-term infrastructure plan, to help fulfil our ambitions to deliver inclusive sustainable economic growth and ensure we are competitive in a wide range of markets and sectors.

### An independent, permanent and fully funded organisation

- In order for the Commission to attract high calibre individuals and be able to provide independent, evidence-based expert advice, it is recommended that it should have a permanent and fully funded status, with budgets for staff, research, specialist support and, perhaps most critically, community engagement.
- The structure should comprise of a non-executive Chair and Board, with a Chief Executive supported by a professional, experienced and respected executive team.
- It is recommended that the Infrastructure Commission is established as a Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) of the NI Executive that has statutory independence. Further work will be required to establish the most appropriate legislative framework to establish the Commission for NI.
- It is important to draw distinction between the basis and nature of the Commission's powers. It is recommended that the Commission has, the ability to 'self-task' and is able to recommend infrastructure investment free of fiscal remit (funding guidelines set by government).

---

## Charged with advising on all aspects of infrastructure

- The Commission should advise government on all elements of NI's economic infrastructure. This is defined as: energy, roads, rail and bus, water and wastewater (drainage and sewerage), waste, flood risk management and digital communications. The Commission will also consider the interface opportunities within the wider infrastructure landscape.
- The Commission can play the role of strategic broker to break down investment and delivery silos and ensure that NI is nimble and able to fully realise its growth ambitions and turn vision into new reality in a post COVID-19 world. This should include scope to explore the opportunity for utilisation of all proven funding and financing models.
- Develop a close working relationship with all Executive Minister will be essential to influencing decision makers.
- High quality and future-focussed infrastructure is necessary to ensure that NI is a competitive and attractive location to invest, live, learn and work and that citizens can avail of high quality services and public spaces. It also cuts across a range of Executive Departments, Local councils and other NDPBs as well as many elements of the private sector. Therefore, it is recommended that the Infrastructure Commission reports directly to the entire NI Executive, so that decisions are made that reflect our society as a whole.
- The Commission should work with the NI Executive to support decisions on longer-term and strategically important infrastructure projects. It should also complement and work with the Strategic Investment Board to assist and inform the strategic direction of the rolling 10-year Investment Strategy for NI.
- The Commission should publish:
  1. A 2050 vision and targets for infrastructure provision in NI, that remain a live vision of ambitious targets that can evolve with the needs of society and which actively seeks to secure the benefits that smart, clean, digital technology can increasingly bring to such matters;
  2. A publicly available annual report, which will be evidence-based and articulate an up-to-date assessment of infrastructure needs and demand, the progress against those needs and demands over the preceding year, and plot annual targets that are required to meet 2050 targets.
- The NI Executive should respond on an annual basis to the Commission's Annual Infrastructure report within ten weeks of publication.

## A highly respected, trusted and professional organisation that engages society

- World class members with wide-ranging expertise and an independent mind-set, who are interested in developing a better future for NI should be appointed to the Commission. The Panel recommend that the Chair is appointed first and empowered to recruit non-executive directors and executive staff thereafter. Remuneration should be benchmarked internationally in order to attract high calibre and internationally respected individuals to turbocharge longer-term infrastructure planning and delivery, bringing prosperity to all.
- The Commission should engage with the public, stakeholders and all relevant areas of regional and local government to stimulate debate and discussion on the aspirations for infrastructure and society. It should aim to promote a better understanding of spending, funding and usage of infrastructure in order to provide transparency on the use of public monies. In this regard, the Commission should have the expertise and understanding to be able to consider how public and private investment must be complementary in order to maximise the potential for sustainable and exponential economic growth. The Commission can become a rich testing group to crowdsource some of our prevailing infrastructure challenges and create barrier busting groups to improve our deliver of strategic infrastructure projects.
- In particular, the Commission should seek to engage actively with the young people of NI, as the long-term beneficiaries of better infrastructure investment, and consideration should be given to establishing an Infrastructure Youth Forum.

## Focussed on better outcomes for all

- The Commission should be outcome focussed, making the most of all of the strands detailed above to ensure that public finances are used effectively and efficiently to deliver better (and better value) outcomes for society in a cleaner, greener and more inclusive future for all.

“The role of an independent commission in creating the political space for consensus to be achieved and their potential for liberating the strategic infrastructure planning process from the short-term stresses of elections and leadership challenges. The establishment of an independent body to lead the process is the most promising way of anchoring the spending to a longer-term funding commitment independent of the election cycle. This type of institutional structure will also have the benefit of enhancing transparency and should help to increase the longevity of infrastructure plans and ultimately reduce the cost of projects” - The International Transport Forum

## Potential role and remit of an Infrastructure Commission for NI

Figure 18 illustrates the proposed role of the NI Infrastructure Commission within the current approach to infrastructure planning. As clearly evidenced, there is a current gap which the Commission can fulfil to enable stable strategic planning for infrastructure over the longer-term, to 2050 and beyond.

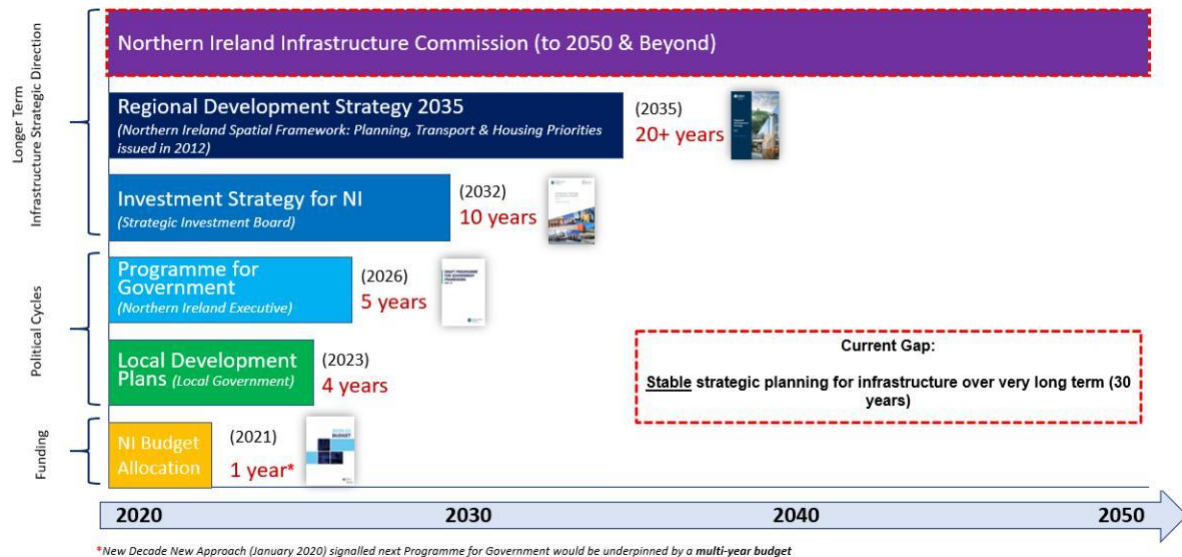


Figure 18 Current approach to the planning and delivery of infrastructure in NI

Organisation	Infrastructure Commission for Northern Ireland	Notes
Establishment	Ideally legislative framework would be passed prior to 2022 Elections	
Duration of Commission	Ongoing Commission - permanent	Beyond political lifecycles
Purpose/Mission	Infrastructure has a vital role to play in the delivery of an inclusive, net-zero carbon economy and Covid-19 has amplified the need for urgent action and change for economic, social and natural infrastructure. A modern, sustainable infrastructure system is essential to deliver economic growth; provide a key building block for prosperity; address regional imbalance and support a thriving region where people want to live, work and invest.	
Independent	Independence is fundamental to establishing credibility in the market: however, a close working relationship with government is	It is recommended that the Commission is established as an NDPB

	essential to influencing decision makers. In order to successfully achieve this balance, the body will need to act transparently.	of the NI Executive and has statutory independence.
Infrastructure Lifecycle	Strategy & Prioritisation Public Engagement	
Commissioners/Members	6 or 7 Non-executive commissioners Chair will be appointed first and will be directly involved in the recruitment of the secretariat and the 6 Non-Executive commissioners.	Securing the “right” people on the board was seen to be very important by all consultees.
Staffing	Chief Executive supported by a professional, experienced and respected executive team Independent research budget.	
Annual Budget	Comparators (Scotland Commission £0.5-0.75m, New Zealand Commission £4.2m, SIB £9.9m total employment costs in 2019-20 <sup>18</sup> , Scottish Futures Trust salaries and associated costs £8.35m in 2017-18) <sup>19</sup>	
Culture Characteristics	Collaboration, Independence, Transparency, Respected, Credible, Evidence-based, Innovative, Excellence, World-class, Best Practice	
Governance/Government Department	Reporting line to NI Executive but sponsored by the the “The Executive Office”  - Bi-annual meeting with all Executive Ministers  - Annual Letter of Expectations (LoE) issued by the NI Executive  - NI Executive will commit to responding to any recommendations issued by the Commission within a set period	The Commission will publish an annual report.  The Commission’s work will operate in an open and transparent manner that can be accessed by all stakeholders

<sup>18</sup>Strategic Invest Board Limited, Annual Review and Financial Statements 2019-20 Year Ended 31 March 2020

<sup>19</sup>Scottish Futures Trust Limited, Annual Report and Group Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31 March 2018



	<p>- NI Assembly and relevant select committees will also have an opportunity to scrutinize the work of the Commission.</p> <p>Close working relationship with Government in order to foster an effective, influential working relationship with decision makers.</p>	
Delivery of Infrastructure	No	
Workload designation	<p>Freedom to choose beyond remit of the LoE, and specific requests from Executive</p> <p>Ability to 'self-task'.</p>	
Infrastructure Audit/Strategy	Infrastructure Commission focus on 30 years strategy for NI – out to 2050 and beyond.	
Infrastructure Plan	Yes, at a strategic level, but not programme or project specific.	
Infrastructure Prioritisation/Pipeline	Yes, at a strategic and cross-sector level to identify key trade-offs, outcomes and prioritisation principles; but not at a programme or project level.	
Public Consultation	<p>Yes</p> <p>As part of the stakeholder engagement, not related to specific infrastructure projects. Bring together business, community, regionally and local government throughout NI to make sure new and existing infrastructure most effectively addresses the opportunities and challenges to better support economic development and quality of life for current and future generations.</p>	<p>Opportunity to create an Infrastructure Youth Forum, given the intergenerational nature of infrastructure assets</p> <p>Fulfils our NDNA ambition of citizen engagement and co-design and recognise the role that wider society plays in supporting effective and accountable government.</p>
Sectors	The Commission advises government on all sectors of economic infrastructure, defined as: energy, roads, rail and bus, water and	

	wastewater (drainage and sewerage), waste, flood risk management and digital communications. We also consider interactions between our infrastructure recommendations and housing supply.	
Key Relationships	<p>NI Executive, NI Civil Service (Government Departments and their Arms-Length Bodies) and NI Assembly</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Local Government</li> <li>- Strategic Investment Board</li> <li>- Business, third sector and community</li> <li>- Equivalent bodies in Scotland, Wales, UK, ROI and across the globe</li> </ul>	
Specific Projects work	No	
Deliverables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Develop a 30-year strategy (to 2050) that will provide the overarching framework and vision to meet our future economic growth and societal needs.</li> <li>- Undertake specific studies on pressing infrastructure changes as set by NI Executive for example, how we can capitalise on the digital revolution or realising the economic benefits of a green economy for NI.</li> <li>- Ability to “self-task” based on the emerging megatrends that will impact longer term infrastructure planning</li> <li>- Produce a report in every parliamentary cycle which informs NI Executive of pressing infrastructure needs in the medium and long term.</li> <li>- Significant engagement with the public and key stakeholders to crowdsource ideas and co-create the 30-year strategy</li> </ul>	

The Panel will work with the Minister to agree the appropriate next steps to inform the wider NI Executive and key stakeholders interested in our evidence findings.

A number of consultees have indicated their willingness to engage and support the Executive in exploring the recommendations of this report further. MAPI is able to provide relevant contact information and provide introductions as appropriate.

Armitt, J. (2013). *The Armitt Review An independent review of long term infrastructure planning commissioned for Labour's Policy Review*. [online] <https://www.policyforum.labour.org.uk>. Labour's Policy Review. Available at: [https://www.policyforum.labour.org.uk/uploads/editor/files/The\\_Armitt\\_Review\\_Final\\_Report.pdf](https://www.policyforum.labour.org.uk/uploads/editor/files/The_Armitt_Review_Final_Report.pdf) [Accessed 21 Sep. 2020].

Bowditch, G., Noble, G. and Maguire, G. (2016). *Shifting Australia's Infrastructure Mindset to the long game*. [online] <https://business.nab.com.au>. John Grill Centre for Project Leadership, The University of Sydney. Available at: <https://business.nab.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/shifting-australias-infrastructure-mindset-to-the-long-game.pdf> [Accessed 21 Sep. 2020].

CBI (2020). *Investing in infrastructure - Sourcing the finance to build back better*. [online] <https://www.cbi.org.uk/>. CBI. Available at: <https://www.cbi.org.uk/media/5496/2020-09-investing-in-infrastructure-report.pdf> [Accessed 21 Sep. 2020].

Committee on Climate Change (2017) UK Climate Change Risk Assessment 2017, <https://www.theccc.org.uk/uk-climate-change-risk-assessment-2017/national-summaries/northern-ireland-2/>

DAERA (2019) Northern Ireland Climate Change Adaptation Programme, <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/daera/Northern%20Ireland%20Climate%20Change%20Adaptation%20Programme%202019-2024%20Final-Laid.PDF>

Department for Regional Development (2015). *Regional Development Strategy 2035 | Department for Infrastructure*. [online] Infrastructure. Available at: <https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/regional-development-strategy-2035> [Accessed 21 Sep. 2020].

Dolan, T. (2015). *Infrastructure Commission: what are the opportunities and how should it work?* [online] Infrastructure Intelligence. Available at: <http://www.infrastructure-intelligence.com/article/oct-2015/infrastructure-commission-what-are-opportunities-and-how-should-it-work> [Accessed 21 Sep. 2020].

Infrastructure Commission for Scotland (2020). *Phase 2: Delivery Findings Report A blueprint for Scotland*. [online] <https://infrastructurecommission.scot>. Available at: [https://infrastructurecommission.scot/storage/276/Phase2\\_Delivery\\_Findings\\_Report.pdf](https://infrastructurecommission.scot/storage/276/Phase2_Delivery_Findings_Report.pdf) [Accessed 21 Sep. 2020].

Institute for Government (2014). *The Political Economy of Infrastructure in the UK*. [online] [www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk](http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk). Available at: [https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/Political%20economy%20of%20infrastructure%20in%20the%20UK%20final\\_0.pdf](https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/Political%20economy%20of%20infrastructure%20in%20the%20UK%20final_0.pdf).

Institute for Government (2020). Net Zero; How government can meet its climate change target <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publications/net-zero>

Institution of Civil Engineers (2019). Enabling Better Infrastructure: 12 guiding principles for prioritising and planning infrastructure.

<https://www.ice.org.uk/ICEDevelopmentWebPortal/media/Documents/Media/ice-enabling-better-infrastructure-report.pdf>

Institution of Civil Engineers (2020). Infrastructure as a stimulus – laying the foundations for the new normal. <https://www.ice.org.uk/news-and-insight/policy/infrastructure-as-a-stimulus>

Institution of Civil Engineers (2020) An infrastructure advisory body for Northern Ireland. <https://www.ice.org.uk/infrastructureeni>

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2018). *Global Warming of 1.5°C - A summary for policymakers*. [online] Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Available at: [https://report.ipcc.ch/sr15/pdf/sr15\\_spm\\_final.pdf](https://report.ipcc.ch/sr15/pdf/sr15_spm_final.pdf).

International Monetary Fund (2017). *Ireland: Technical Assistance Report-Public Investment Management Assessment*. [online] <https://www.imf.org>. Available at: <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/CR/Issues/2017/11/10/Ireland-Technical-Assistance-Report-Public-Investment-Management-Assessment-45383>.

International Transport Forum (2017). *Strategic Infrastructure Planning - International Best Practice*. [online] *OECD Collections*. Available at: <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/4142787d-en.pdf?expires=1600691023&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=B08AB4D16C659694E0ED7774DF4B7EF3> [Accessed 21 Sep. 2020].

NIAO (2012). *Strategic Review of the Commissioning and Delivery System for Major Infrastructure Projects in Northern Ireland*, NIAO.

NIAO (2019). *Major Capital Projects - REPORT BY THE COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL*. [online] Northern Ireland Audit Office. Available at: <https://www.niauditoffice.gov.uk/publications/major-capital-projects-0> [Accessed 21 Sep. 2020].

Nick, D. and Slade, D. (2017). *How to design an infrastructure strategy for the UK*. [online] [www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk](http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk). Available at: [https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/IfG\\_infrastructure\\_strategy\\_final.pdf](https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/IfG_infrastructure_strategy_final.pdf) [Accessed 21 Sep. 2020].

Northern Ireland Executive (2012). *Economic Strategy Priorities for sustainable growth and prosperity*. [online] <https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/>. Available at: [https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/nigov/ni-economic-strategy-revised-130312\\_0.pdf](https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/nigov/ni-economic-strategy-revised-130312_0.pdf) [Accessed 21 Sep. 2020].

Northern Ireland Office (2019). *Devolution settlement: Northern Ireland*. [online] GOV.UK. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/devolution-settlement-northern-ireland> [Accessed 2020 Sep. 21AD].

Northern Ireland Office (2020). *New Decade, New Approach*. [online]

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/856998/2020-01-08_a_new_decade_a_new_approach.pdf). Available at:  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/856998/2020-01-08\\_a\\_new\\_decade\\_a\\_new\\_approach.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/856998/2020-01-08_a_new_decade_a_new_approach.pdf) Jointly published by Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, and Simon Coveney TD, Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade.

OECD (2017). *Getting Infrastructure Right - A framework for better governance*. [online] OECD library. Available at: [https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/governance/getting-infrastructure-right\\_9789264272453-en#page1](https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/governance/getting-infrastructure-right_9789264272453-en#page1) [Accessed 21 Sep. 2020].

OECD (2020) Building back better: A sustainable, resilient recovery after COVID-19  
<http://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/building-back-better-a-sustainable-resilient-recovery-after-covid-19-52b869f5/>

Porritt, J. (2020). *We must not miss this glorious chance to address the climate and biodiversity crises* / Jonathon Porritt. [online] The Guardian. Available at:  
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jun/24/climate-biodiversity-crises-government-green-recovery-coronavirus> [Accessed 21 Sep. 2020].

Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (2020). *Delivering the Government's infrastructure commitments through major projects*. [online] publications.parliament.uk. Available at: <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/2162/documents/20079/default/> [Accessed 21 Sep. 2020].

Royal Town Planning Institute (2018). *The impacts of Brexit on UK implementation of key EU legislation affecting land use A briefing by the Institute for European Environmental Policy*. [online] <https://www.rtpi.org.uk>. Royal Town Planning Institute. Available at:  
<https://www.rtpi.org.uk/media/1824/impactsbrexitonukimplementationofkeyeulegislationaffectinglanduse2018.pdf> [Accessed 21 Sep. 2020].

Royal Town Planning Institute & Town & Country Planning Association (2019). *Rising to the Climate Crisis: A Guide for Local Authorities on Planning for Climate Change*. [online] [www.rtpi.org.uk](http://www.rtpi.org.uk). Available at: <https://www.rtpi.org.uk/practice/2019/september/rising-to-the-climate-crisis-a-guide-for-local-authorities-on-planning-for-climate-change/> [Accessed 21 Sep. 2020].

The Irish Academy of Engineering / Forfás (2011). *The Cost-Effective Delivery of Essential Infrastructure*. [online] <http://iae.ie>. Available at: [http://iae.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/IAE\\_Delivery\\_of\\_Essential\\_Infrastructure\\_WEB.pdf](http://iae.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/IAE_Delivery_of_Essential_Infrastructure_WEB.pdf) [Accessed 21 Sep. 2020].

The Strategic Investment Board (2016). *Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland (ISNI) 2011–2021*. [online] Strategic Investment Board. Available at:  
[https://sibni.org/investment\\_strategy\\_for\\_northern\\_ireland\\_2011\\_-\\_2021/](https://sibni.org/investment_strategy_for_northern_ireland_2011_-_2021/) [Accessed 21 Sep. 2020].

World Economic Forum (2017). *Recycling our Infrastructure for Future Generations (Prepared in collaboration with Atkins Acuity)*. [online] <http://www3.weforum.org>. World Economic Forum. Available at:  
[http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_Recycling\\_our\\_Infrastructure\\_for\\_Future\\_Generations\\_report\\_2017.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Recycling_our_Infrastructure_for_Future_Generations_report_2017.pdf) [Accessed 21 Sep. 2020].

World Economic Forum (2019). *Community Paper Transforming Infrastructure: Frameworks for Bringing the Fourth Industrial Revolution to Infrastructure*. [online] <http://www3.weforum.org/>. World Economic

Forum. Available at: [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_Technology\\_in\\_Infrastructure.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Technology_in_Infrastructure.pdf) [Accessed 21 Sep. 2020].

## APPENDIX 1 PANEL COMPOSITION

The Panel was chaired by Kirsty McManus (Institute of Directors) and comprised of the representatives/members of the following key organisations:

- Jenny Green, Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE)
- Ashleen Feeney, Confederation of British Industry (CBI) Member
- Freddie Patterson, Chartered Institution of Highways and Transportation (CIHT) Member
- Richard Johnston, University of Ulster Economic Policy Centre (UUEPC)
- Craig McGuicken, Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL)
- Stuart Cairns, Bird & Bird LLP (International Law Firm)



## Background

A modern and well maintained, sustainable infrastructure system is essential to deliver economic growth; provide a key building block for prosperity; address regional imbalance and support a thriving region where people want to live, work and invest. Such an infrastructure system will also play a key role as part of the post-Covid-19 recovery and in addressing the climate change challenge.

The Minister for Infrastructure has taken account of the views of key stakeholders on the need for a long term approach to infrastructure planning and delivery and is keen to develop a proposal, informed by partners and experts, which explores the establishment of an Infrastructure Commission for NI. The Minister is therefore establishing an Expert Ministerial Advisory Panel on Infrastructure to prepare a document which will progress this objective.

## Role and Purpose

The Ministerial Advisory Panel on Infrastructure will be appointed by the Minister for Infrastructure and will be tasked with considering how an Infrastructure Commission for NI might support more effectively the long-term planning and development of relevant infrastructure here.

## Scope

The Ministerial Advisory Panel will focus on developing a proposal that will identify the specific role and value of a Commission and how it might be established and might operate. The Panel will also consider the options for a Commission's structure and operation, to take account of possible cost models, examining systems in other such bodies around the world. Its scope will reflect the "hard" infrastructure that falls within the remit of the Department for Infrastructure, namely, water, drainage and inland waterways, public transport, roads and cycling infrastructure. To ensure the development of a series of holistic recommendations, the Advisory Panel may also give consideration to the appropriateness of any future Infrastructure Commission having a remit beyond that infrastructure which falls within the immediate remit of the Department for Infrastructure but this will not be part of its formal remit.

## Objectives

Issues associated with addressing infrastructure supply and demand at a regional level, have the potential to be wide and far reaching. The objectives set out below are intended to provide focus and direction for the Ministerial Advisory Panel.

- To consider the approach to relevant infrastructure across these islands and make recommendations on the need for an Infrastructure Commission in NI and the benefits it would bring.
- To consider the role of a commission in supporting the Minister's objectives of delivering cleaner, greener, sustainable and inclusive infrastructure.
- To advise on the potential role and function of a NI Infrastructure Commission in relation to the Minister for Infrastructure's responsibilities.
- To produce a report for the Minister for Infrastructure, detailing recommendations on the way forward and to inform the Minister's preparation of a wider proposal for submission to the Executive in September/October 2020 as part of NI's Covid recovery and Brexit planning.

Members of the Panel will be responsible for:

- Sharing specific skills and experience; and
- Providing expert, impartial advice.

The Department for Infrastructure (Regional Planning Directorate) will provide a secretariat to the Ministerial Advisory Panel on Infrastructure.

## Timing

The intention is that the Ministerial Advisory Panel will undertake a short, sharp, focused exercise to address the objectives set out above. Given the wider economic and environmental context, it is appropriate that the Panel is formed and commence work in a timely fashion. It is therefore anticipated that the Panel will meet as required during August and early September 2020 and that it will present a final report, including a series of key recommendations to the Minister for Infrastructure by late September 2020.

## Literature Review

A desk-based review of relevant resources has been undertaken to set the aforementioned key challenges and the existing policy and organisational frameworks which influence the planning, delivery and implementation of infrastructure projects in NI in a wider context.

A consistent theme across the literature is the need for a stable long-term direction to infrastructure investment that retains the flexibility needed to deal with uncertainty over long horizons. It is argued that this can be a challenge for governments.<sup>20</sup>

### The National and International Perspective

The Institute for Government (2015)<sup>21</sup> identify a range of issues including short-sightedness and lack of forward-looking strategy; failure to secure cross-party agreement; serious weaknesses in the evidence base and frequent inability to secure local community consent as factors which impact on the way the UK makes strategic infrastructure decisions. These problems, it concludes, stem from ‘gaps in the institutional architecture for infrastructure investment decisions’ and the lack of ‘strong deliberative institutions that effectively engage politicians, experts, interest groups and local communities in the policymaking process.’ These **institutional gaps are viewed as leaving the political process exposed to unconstructive interactions between party-political tactics, pressures from interest groups with legitimate claims on infrastructure decisions and hostility from local communities to individual projects.** There is therefore a compelling need for governments to shift their mind set and define future infrastructure challenges in terms of service outcomes and ensure city, state and national network arrangements can work together coherently to meet the changing needs and expectations of customers and the community.<sup>22</sup>

These views are also supported by the OECD<sup>23</sup> who indicate that political dynamics may undermine sound decision making with regards to infrastructure and that coordination across all levels of government can be difficult as regional preferences do not always align with national ones. It is proposed that better public investment coordination and governance can materially boost investment outcomes and that independent, formal mechanisms and bodies that coordinate investment in infrastructure can create the strong institutional framework that is necessary for infrastructure delivery. It is further suggested that **successful governance of infrastructure depends upon a coherent strategic planning process; an open and transparent prioritisation mechanism and decision-making processes based on affordability and cost efficiency; a clear regulatory and institutional framework; robust coordination across levels of government and evaluation mechanisms that monitor performance.**

The Institute for Government<sup>24</sup> reinforce these views, highlighting that **the absence of a national strategy for infrastructure can result in uncertainty, delays and increased costs for taxpayers and consumers.** This, they argue, is not necessarily the fault of individual organisations or people but due to ‘*systemic problems with government institutions and the politics of infrastructure decision making in the UK.*’ The need for a credible evidence base and long-term approach are considered essential to prevent infrastructure decision making being subject to continuous and disruptive policy change. This view is further supported by the World

---

<sup>20</sup> Strategic Infrastructure Planning: International Best Practice - International Transport Forum Policy Papers, No. 29 Case Specific Policy Analysis (2017)

<sup>21</sup> Political Economy of Infrastructure in the UK, Institute For Government, 16 December 2014

<sup>22</sup> Shifting Australia’s Infrastructure Mindset to the Long Game, John Grill Centre for Project Leadership, The University of Sydney, September 2016

<sup>23</sup> Getting Infrastructure Right: A Framework for Better Governance (2017)

<sup>24</sup> The Institute for Government, How to design an infrastructure strategy for the UK, 01 December 2017

Economic Forum<sup>25</sup> who suggest that the policy and regulatory environment must be modernised to create a flourishing ecosystem of infrastructure innovations and that creating the right partnerships between the public and private sectors can produce effective policies and fully informed strategies.

These matters remain to be addressed, with the House of Commons Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee<sup>26</sup> recently being advised that:

- infrastructure investment needs to be properly co-ordinated if it is to achieve the most benefit;
- government needs to take a cross-departmental approach and improve co-ordination between complementary projects across the wider portfolio of infrastructure investment;
- the more long-term view needed when planning infrastructure can often be hindered by a desire for quick outcomes within parliamentary cycles; and
- infrastructure priorities and spending need to be depoliticised

## A Local Perspective

The issues identified at international and national level are also evident more locally. The Irish Academy of Engineers (2011) suggest that both the Irish and Northern Irish Governments are severely constrained in their ability to invest in infrastructure because of the lack of available capital and that there is a requirement for sustained investment in critical infrastructure to permit essential economic growth.<sup>27</sup> A specific need, in NI, to eliminate stop/start programming of infrastructure and place greater emphasis on multi-annual longer-term plans is also identified.

A similar commentary is outlined in a NI Procurement Board review of the commissioning and delivery of major infrastructure projects in NI which concludes that *'the 'decentralised' model reinforces departmental silos; increases competition in the prioritisation of projects; makes it more difficult to generate efficiencies through economies of scale and incurs additional costs.'*<sup>28</sup> Similarly, a 2013 review of the commissioning and delivery of major infrastructure projects in NI found that, 'the system as a whole is not fit for purpose and works against best endeavours to deliver.'<sup>29</sup> A more recent NIAO report<sup>30</sup> suggests that *'the existing cumbersome governance and delivery structures within the NI public sector are not conducive to maximising the achievement of value for money;'* that the current commissioning and delivery arrangements are not fit for purpose and that there is a need to eliminate duplication in administrative functions and institutional frameworks; improve project prioritisation; reduce bureaucracy by focusing more on *'within budget'* and *'on time'* delivery, rather than on process.

The importance of environmental and climate issues within infrastructure has been highlighted in a number of reports. The Institution of Civil Engineers set out 12 Guiding Principles<sup>31</sup> for prioritising and planning infrastructure. They noted that the UN Sustainable Development Goals provide a blueprint which will protect our planet's fragile ecosystems, while making sure that every person can flourish. However, there can be no sustainable development without connectivity, and for that we need better infrastructure. The OECD have similarly written that the economic recovery from the COVID -19 crisis needs to be durable and resilient<sup>32</sup> – a return to 'business as usual' and environmentally destructive investment patterns and activities must be

---

<sup>25</sup> WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM Community Paper - Transforming Infrastructure: Frameworks for Bringing the Forth Industrial Revolution to Infrastructure (November 2019)

<sup>26</sup> Delivering the Government's Infrastructure Commitments through Major Projects – Third Report of Session 2019 -21 (28 July 2020)

<sup>27</sup> The Cost-Effective Delivery of Essential Infrastructure, The Irish Academy of Engineering / Forfas, June 2011

<sup>28</sup> NIAO Report 2012 Procurement Board review

<sup>29</sup> NIAO Report 2012 Procurement Board

<sup>30</sup> NIAO Northern Ireland Audit Office, Major Capital Projects, Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General, December 2019

<sup>31</sup> Enabling Better Infrastructure, Institution of Civil Engineers

<sup>32</sup> Building Back Better : A sustainable, resilient recovery after COVID-19, OECD, June 2020

avoided. They highlight the need for a holistic approach to the recovery, which focuses on well-being and inclusiveness, and is based around 5 pillars: aligning with net zero GHG emissions; strengthening climate resilience; reducing biodiversity loss; innovation building on behaviour changes; and improving supply chain resilience and circularity.

### *The Role of Independent Infrastructure Agencies*

The World Economic Forum<sup>33</sup> advocates the establishment of an independent infrastructure agency as a means of addressing those issues outlined above and proposes that such organisations can:

- offer a system-wide vision of infrastructure which crosses the boundaries of government bureaucracy;
- contribute to better communication and transparency by conducting and publishing reviews of projects and publishing lists of prioritised projects based on diligent cost-benefit analysis;
- help support the process of rethinking infrastructure needs and planning;
- potentially take charge of establishing a list of prioritised projects and oversee management of an infrastructure trust fund to protect from risk of a political government removing funding.

The International Transport Forum<sup>34</sup> also highlight the role of independent commissions in creating the political space for consensus to be achieved and their potential for liberating the strategic infrastructure planning process from the short-term stresses of elections and leadership challenges. It is suggested that the establishment of an independent statutory body to lead the process is the most promising way of anchoring spending to a long-term funding commitment independent of the election cycle. This type of institutional structure will also have the benefit of enhancing transparency and should help to increase the longevity of infrastructure plans and ultimately reduce the cost of projects.

Notwithstanding the above, the Armit Review<sup>35</sup> highlights that the aim of a Commission is emphatically not to take power away from politicians, but rather should make it easier for politicians to take difficult decisions on controversial, technically complex issues which are vital to economic success and where time horizons are well beyond the lifetime of any one Government. The Review also emphasises the importance of any Commission having a clear remit and clarity as to what it is there to do. This will not only achieve political consensus but will also provide public understanding around the role of the organisation.

The International Centre for Infrastructure Futures, proposes that an Infrastructure Commission should be:

- inspirational and raise awareness of the importance of infrastructure;
- systemic and encourage broad cross-sectoral thinking;
- purposeful and identify the societal level outcomes that infrastructure will enable;
- future facing;
- methodologically transparent;
- tasked with identifying solution neutral needs;
- engaged to provide a cross sectoral approach to translating need into solutions; and
- subject to regular review.<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> Recycling Our Infrastructure for Future Generations (19 December 2017) Author: World Economic Forum in collaboration with Atkins Acuity

<sup>34</sup> Strategic Infrastructure Planning: International Best Practice - International Transport Forum Policy Papers, No. 29 Case Specific Policy Analysis (2017)

<sup>35</sup>The Armit Review, An Independent Review of Long Term Infrastructure Planning Commissioned for Labour's Policy Review, September 2013

<sup>36</sup>Infrastructure Commission: what are the opportunities and how should it work? Opinion piece, Dr Tom Dolan, Research Associate and Centre Co-ordinator, International Centre for Infrastructure Futures (ICIF), 27 October 2015

## APPENDIX 4 STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT – COPY OF SURVEY ISSUED TO STAKEHOLDERS

### Consultation Questions for MAP Infrastructure Panel

1. What should society in NI seek to achieve from infrastructure and why is it important?
2. How do you see infrastructure needs and demands changing over the long term?
3. What works and what doesn't work in the current system of infrastructure decision making and delivery?
4. Do you have any comments on how infrastructure decisions are currently made in Northern Ireland? Would you propose any potential reforms to the current decision making process? How could these reforms be best achieved?
5. The Ministerial Advisory Panel have been asked to develop a proposal that will identify the specific role and value of a Commission and how it might be established and might operate. The next set of questions will test the viability of an Infrastructure Commission in Northern Ireland. Would you support the establishment of an Infrastructure Commission in Northern Ireland?
6. What value would an Infrastructure Commission bring to Northern Ireland?
7. How might the Infrastructure Commission be established and operate? (Pick one or more options)
8. What scope do you believe the Infrastructure Commission could / should have?
9. What time period should an Infrastructure Commission focus on?
10. The Infrastructure Minister aims to deliver cleaner, greener, sustainable and inclusive infrastructure. How could an Infrastructure Commission support these objectives?
11. What specific role should a Commission play in NI?
12. What is the minimum project value (£m) that the Infrastructure Commission should be engaged at (if it is involved at project level)?
13. What stage of the infrastructure lifecycle should the Infrastructure Commission be involved in?
14. To what extent do you think that the Commission should be tasked to hold Government to account?
15. There is a lot of ongoing debate around procurement issues at the minute. Should the Infrastructure Commission engage on procurement issues?
16. If created, should an Infrastructure Commission be responsible to;
17. Which international Infrastructure Commission model do you think is most appropriate for Northern Ireland? Please provide your reasons for selection and deselection
18. Do you have any additional comments on how the Infrastructure Commissioners role should operate in regard to Stakeholder engagement and any recommendation or evidence of best practice on how this can be achieved?

## A response from RSPB Northern Ireland, September 2020

### Introduction

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (the RSPB) is the charity that takes action for wild birds and the environment. We are the largest wildlife conservation organisation in the country with over one million members. We own or manage 151,954 hectares of land for nature conservation on 213 reserves throughout the UK. We believe that sustainability should be at the heart of planning and decision-making. The RSPB's policy and advocacy work covers a wide range of issues including planning policy, climate change, energy, marine issues, water and agriculture.

RSPB NI welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Ministerial Advisory Panel on Infrastructure Call for Evidence.

### Commentary

#### Climate and Ecological Emergencies

The need to address the causes and effects of climate change and biodiversity loss has never been more urgent and there is a growing political consensus that we face a climate and ecological emergency that threatens biodiversity, ecosystem functionality, and human health and wellbeing.

Development, whether housing, industrial, or infrastructure, has historically been one of the causes of biodiversity loss as well as a source of increasing carbon emissions. This situation cannot continue if we are to successfully reverse the net loss of nature and avoid the worst impacts of climate change on the environment and people.

Climate Change is one of the most pressing challenges facing our society and will require a response from all sectors of government to mitigate and adapt to ensure the future resilience of Northern Ireland. In recent years, we have witnessed with increased frequency the significant impacts flooding and extreme weather events have on communities, infrastructure and businesses, and with ever rising repair costs, there is a clear need to take resilience and adaptation to climate change seriously.

#### Infrastructure Shift

The current global pandemic has heightened awareness of the longer-term climate and ecological crises, with a majority of the public already clear that they want the environment prioritised in our post-COVID-19 economic recovery<sup>37</sup>. This will require a shift in the way we plan, design and build major and large-scale infrastructure.

Infrastructure planning and development must shift towards an approach that has the environment and nature at its core - seeking to not only minimise the environmental damage done by continuing infrastructure development, but to maximise new infrastructure's contribution to repairing and

---

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/two-thirds-britons-believe-climate-change-serious-coronavirus-and-majority-want-climate-prioritised>

restoring the natural environment, and to upgrade existing infrastructure to realise its potential to benefit the environment.

Infrastructure deployment must be done in a way that delivers overall benefits for nature and meets the UK's zero carbon commitments. That means that development must not just avoid damaging nature, but actively enhance it, helping restore wildlife and biodiversity to a nature-poor landscape.

#### Net Zero

Future infrastructure supply and demand will require to take greater cognisance of the environment and climate change. Infrastructure needs to demonstrate how it is contributing to biodiversity net gain and UK net zero carbon targets by going beyond mitigating and compensating the impacts of development by enhancing natural capital, supporting the recovery of nature and meeting future environmental challenges. Done correctly, it should help to deliver sustainable development, restore nature, and create and enhance places where people live and work. Furthermore, public and private finance should meet a 'net zero test' and prioritise investment in low carbon infrastructure. In protecting natural capital, the significance of infrastructure impacts on biodiversity at the strategic level must not be underplayed. Biodiversity must be properly taken into account in infrastructure planning and natural capital approaches. If there is failure to invest in infrastructure which is fit for the future, we will not be able to mitigate and adapt to climate change and we will lose yet more of our exceptional biodiversity and the ecosystem services that it provides.

#### An Integrated, Longer Term and Whole-Life Approach to Infrastructure

An effective integrated approach to infrastructure planning is required, looking across the different categories of infrastructure (e.g. land use planning, marine spatial planning, health, transport, environmental policy) to fully realise the benefits of long term infrastructure planning within environmental limits, thereby enabling Northern Ireland to meet climate change targets whilst protecting, enhancing and restoring our exceptional natural environment.

Such an approach could include a national spatial plan for infrastructure which would help to ensure that infrastructure is properly located, minimises conflicts with wildlife and maximises opportunities for biodiversity enhancement. At the sub-national level, strategic spatial planning is critical for delivering connected, liveable towns and cities, delivering new homes in the right places and well-sited energy infrastructure, while also enhancing natural capital. A high-quality natural environment which includes multi-functional green infrastructure is also fundamental to liveable towns and cities (see comments below on Blue and Green Infrastructure for further details).

The long-term risks from climate change necessitate a longer-term approach to whole life infrastructure planning and investment. In addition to changes required in the approaches to identify supply and demand in the context of the climate and ecological emergencies, a longer term assessment will require consideration of the decommissioning phase of redundant infrastructure. This can benefit the natural environment through minimising any future potential *in situ* pollution risks, and 'releasing' land back to the benefit of nature and human health and wellbeing.

An integrated approach to infrastructure will allow a focus on the role of nature-based solutions, which are key in tackling the nature and climate emergency. See also the Transport section below for further commentary on infrastructure integration.



## Nature Based Solutions

State of Nature 2016 identifies urbanisation (which includes infrastructure development), as one of the top ten drivers of biodiversity change in the UK since 1970, with a largely negative impact<sup>38</sup>. After agricultural and climate change, hydrological change and urbanisation are the next most important drivers of species decline<sup>39</sup>.

Investment in Northern Ireland's natural environment has an important role to play in our economic recovery from COVID-19, as a core component of the Green Growth strategy being developed by the Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, the 'Rebuilding the Economy' framework being developed by the Department for the Economy, the Green New Deal planned in the New Decade, New Approach agreement and the NI Investment Strategy.

The most high-profile scientific journal, *Nature* has called for governments to 'include the true value of nature when rebuilding economies after corona virus'<sup>40</sup>. The UK Natural Capital Committee, a statutory advisor to the UK government on natural capital policy also recognises the superior cost-benefit ratio of nature based fiscal stimulus measures:

*'Nature based interventions can deliver carbon reductions at a fraction of the cost of engineered solutions...Public spending projects that consider natural capital offer large benefit-cost ratios, in many cases larger than the benefit-cost ratios of traditional built capital investments, such as rail and road projects . In some cases, natural solutions can represent a more cost-effective alternative way of providing what would otherwise be provided by built capital, while at the same time providing additional benefits.'*

In addition to this, the inclusion of natural capital and nature-based solutions within the infrastructure solutions mix could facilitate a greater role for the 'principles of preventative spend' by reducing public expenditure in other government departments. The following projects delivered by RSPB NI in partnership with a Health Trust and the Public Health Agency in Case Study 1; and, in Case Study 2 with Northern Ireland Water and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency illustrate this effectively:

### Case Study 1

Savings can be accrued by improving mental health and wellbeing through facilitating increased access to green/blue infrastructure and nature. In this regard, a 12-week pilot project called 'Head to Nature' organised by RSPB NI in partnership with Derriaghy Social and Educational Centre of the South-Eastern Health Trust and the Public Health Agency, saw eight service users voluntarily attend Portmore Lough nature reserve near Aghalee to carry out nature related activities like guided walks, wildlife photography and practical conservation work on the reserve. The participants all suffered from mild mental health problems like depression and anxiety.

Participants in the project were asked to fill out questionnaires at the beginning and end of the scheme and their answers were marked against the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale. The mean

---

<sup>38</sup> Hayhow DD, Burns F, Eaton MA et al. (2016) [State of Nature 2016](#). The State of Nature Partnership.

<sup>39</sup> Burns F, Eaton MA, Barlow KE, Beckmann BC, Brereton T, Brooks DR, et al. (2016) Agricultural management and climatic change are the major drivers of biodiversity change in the UK. *PLoS ONE* 11(3): e0151595. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0151595>

<sup>40</sup> [https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-01390-w?WT.ec\\_id=NATURE-20200514&sap-outbound-id=5DE9C676E07F617BF89CF93E26F5999808762002](https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-01390-w?WT.ec_id=NATURE-20200514&sap-outbound-id=5DE9C676E07F617BF89CF93E26F5999808762002)

score in week one was 36.25 – classed as ‘below average’ wellbeing. But by week 12 the mean score had risen to 49.37 which is classed as ‘average’ wellbeing, showing that the Head to Nature scheme had a positive impact on the participants’ wellbeing. The pilot saw 100% participant retention rate throughout the project. In comparison, only around one in eight people referred to gym programmes for similar mild mental health problems by their GP complete the course.

Some of the substantial mental health challenges facing society (Foresight 2008; HSE 2008), and physical challenges arising from modern diets and sedentary lifestyles (Wanless 2002; Wanless 2004; DH 2005a; Sport England 2006; Wells et al. 2007; NICE 2008; DH & DCSF 2009; NICE 2009), could be addressed by increasing physical activity in green settings. If children are encouraged and enabled to undertake more green exercise, then they are more likely to have active exposure to nature embedded in their lifestyle as adults and they will reap the associated health benefits’ Paragraph 23.8, page 1173).

#### Case Study 2

Another example of cost savings/preventative spend is in our uplands. 80% of our blanket bogs have been overexploited by the commercial extraction of peat, (particularly for horticulture), and have been severely damaged by drainage, overgrazing, and inappropriate management. This has knock-on effects for our water quality, resulting in high levels of dissolved “brown water” carbon, which costs money and energy to treat.

RSPB NI joined Northern Ireland Water and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency to produce a management plan for almost 2,000 hectares of blanket bog that forms the catchment around the Dungonnell Reservoir, on the Garron Plateau. Despite its designation as an Area of Special Scientific Interest, overgrazing has left the Dungonnell site in a poor state. By reducing grazing in the area, we will allow the blanket bog to recover, increasing the amount of carbon it can store, in turn improving water quality, reducing water treatment costs and securing high-quality habitat for rare and threatened wildlife.

For further details please see web links below:

<http://ww2.rspb.org.uk/our-work/rspb-news/news/361922-giving-nature-a-home-at-garron>

<http://ww2.rspb.org.uk/our-work/rspb-news/news/340365-peak-district>

#### Environmental Economist

The NI Executive should include the expertise of an environmental economist to develop a Northern Ireland Natural Capital Investment Plan as a core component of future government policy. By integrating Natural Capital into our decision making we can make more informed decisions that better reflect the values of nature when taking investment decisions to help rebuild our economy. Carbon accounting needs to be fully taken into account in projects, with the Department ensuring that public and private finance meets a ‘net zero test’.

## Green and Blue Infrastructure

RSPB NI recognises the crucial role that green and blue infrastructure can play in supporting healthy communities, supporting wildlife and mitigating the effects and causes of climate change.

In this regard, green and blue infrastructure will have a crucial role in delivering sustainable solutions for Northern Ireland including for example, sustainable tourism and recreation; active travel; and flood alleviation and sustainable drainage. Green infrastructure can convey flood water through residential areas so that it causes least damage, reconnect floodplains to hold flood water away from cities and towns and be used as engineered wash lands to reduce the peak of dangerously high river flows. In this regard, green infrastructure has a positive role in both reducing flood risk, and dealing with extreme events. A natural capital account for Derry City and Strabane Council demonstrated that green and blue spaces provide £75million worth of benefits to residents every year, with every £1 invested providing £22 of public benefit<sup>41</sup>. Meanwhile, an options appraisal<sup>42</sup> published by Vivid Economic estimates that a £5.5bn capital investment in a green infrastructure programme across England, Scotland and Wales to upgrade existing parks and greenspaces, greening urban neighbourhoods and creating new parks could deliver £200bn in physical health and wellbeing benefits.

## Transport

The transportation of people and goods has a crucial role to play in fostering economic prosperity and social integration. However, it also accounts for 21% of the total greenhouse gas emissions for the UK, with cars alone accounting for 12%. In this context, local authorities' Local Development Plans (LDPs) can make a significant contribution to reducing these emissions through decision-making on the location, scale, mix and character of development. The integration of transportation with LDPs spatial growth strategy, which if conducted correctly, could potentially make a significant contribution to securing sustainable transport and active travel within local authority council areas. Further detailed planning policies could ensure that measures to accommodate active travel are adequately incorporated into new building design e.g. cycle parking and storage, and maintained shower facilities at place of work etc. The need to travel should be reduced. The principle way of avoiding the environmental impacts associated with transport is to reduce the need to travel and to minimise demand.

A greater use should be made of information technology to minimise demand for travel. The last six months following the COVID-19 lockdown have demonstrated that this is possible with people increasingly working from home, holding virtual meetings and online ordering.

There should also be a greater shift towards the use of sustainable modes of transport (walking, cycling, buses and rail). Even with measures in place to minimise the demand to travel, it will still be necessary to make some journeys. In this case, as many journeys as possible should be made using sustainable modes of transport. Government should ensure there is adequate investment in these modes to provide a suitable alternative to private car travel.

There should be a move towards the use of low carbon vehicles and fuels, including a more rapid deployment of electric vehicles and supporting charging infrastructure. Biofuels can pose significant sustainability risks and a cautious approach is needed to their role. Improved vehicle efficiency is a more sustainable approach. Vehicle and engine manufacturers should invest further in research and

---

<sup>41</sup>[https://d1ssu070pg2v9i.cloudfront.net/pex/carnegie\\_uk\\_trust/2020/02/25084102/NCA-Final-Report-CUKT.pdf](https://d1ssu070pg2v9i.cloudfront.net/pex/carnegie_uk_trust/2020/02/25084102/NCA-Final-Report-CUKT.pdf)

<sup>42</sup><https://www.vivideconomics.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Greenkeeper-Report-for-FPA-Greening-Programme-July-2020.pdf>

development programmes aimed at reducing emissions. The Government should encourage vehicle manufacturers and operators to develop and fit new technology.

#### RSPB Principles for major and large-scale infrastructure

The following principles set out the high-level approach to planning major and large-scale infrastructure that is required in order to meet society's needs in the face of the abovementioned urgent environmental challenges.

1. Decisions on major and large-scale infrastructure projects (henceforth known as infrastructure) should be based on a clear National Spatial Plan and vision which considers all types of infrastructure and major development in a coherent way, providing certainty for the long term – this needs to be developed as a matter of urgency. This will, in turn, provide an effective framework for spatial planning at the local level and help integrate other public objectives, such as nature's recovery.
2. Infrastructure proposals should be subject to early and effective democratic scrutiny through public participation and consultation at both local and national levels. This is essential to ensure transparency. Those adversely affected by decisions on infrastructure should have a fair opportunity to challenge it.
3. Infrastructure projects and the plans underpinning these should be based on up-to date and scientifically robust evidence, including evidence on the value of the natural environment. Plans should be monitored and reviewed regularly.
4. Infrastructure projects and the plans underpinning these should be rigorously assessed for their environmental impacts and the results used to improve the plan to ensure that plans do not exceed environmental limits and tolerances. This includes, but is not limited to, Strategic Environmental Assessment, Habitats Regulations Assessment and Environmental Impact Assessment.
5. Alternative options must be considered, particularly alternatives that are less damaging to the environment and the reasons for rejecting any options should be made public.
6. Infrastructure proposals should not lead to any regression of existing standards and requirements including those relating to environmental assessment and statutory protected sites. Proposals must also be compatible with new environmental commitments and requirements emerging as we exit the European Union.
7. New infrastructure projects must achieve no net loss of biodiversity through rigorous application of the mitigation hierarchy. Once no net loss has been demonstrated, projects should then look to deliver significant net gain for biodiversity with a minimum of 10% (but best practice being significantly higher).
8. All new major and large-scale infrastructure projects must be compatible with (and ideally further) the UK's net zero target. The RSPB is calling for a UK target of net zero sooner, by 2045, and for this to be enshrined in law.

9. Public authorities must have the legal powers and resources to enforce planning laws, especially where illegal development is resulting in environmental damage.

Infrastructure Commission in Northern Ireland

An Infrastructure Commission in Northern Ireland should:

- Ensure effective integration with the land-use planning system and all other infrastructure sectors;
- Endure openness and transparency with full opportunities for public and stakeholder consultation, scrutiny and challenge to ensure climate change and biodiversity interests and issues are fully taken into account given the climate and ecological emergencies faced;
- Ensure a broader remit than exists within the National Infrastructure Commission in England, and commensurate with biodiversity and climate change crises faced;
- Take impact of whole life costs, benefits and implications of major infrastructure on diversity and climate change fully into account;
- Have an advisory and consultative remit with responsibility for decision making clearly lying within a democratically accountable structure;
- Have a 30-40 year planning horizon with 5 yearly reviews, which are transparent and open to consultation and challenge;
- Reflect the significant changes in technology and lifestyles that will occur over the coming years in the strategic planning of major infrastructure investments.
- Have a remit to ensure and support a green recovery that is sustainable in the long term. This may require a very different focus and approach to that adopted by other infrastructure commissions to date. A continuation of business as usual in terms of major and hard infrastructure delivery is only going to further compound long term costs and damage to the environment, economy and society. A new model, which has nature-based solutions at its heart, is required for new times, that prioritises, invests and builds back better.

Procurement

There is a need for a sustainable procurement duty that requires consideration of social and environmental well-being in the procurement process focusing on delivery of long-term sustainable procurement. It should also include measures on resource efficiency, encouraging a reduction in the need for procurement through demand reduction, energy efficiency and reduction of waste for contracting authorities. Sustainable procurement has the potential to create long-term positive environmental, social and economic cycles within Northern Ireland by utilising the Northern Ireland annual government expenditure to positively influence markets, supply chains and decision-making in wider society, and can instigate far-reaching positive effects on land use, wildlife habitats, biodiversity, energy and food security, health and wellbeing.

**For further information contact:**

Michelle Hill MRTPI , Head of Nature Policy and Casework, RSPB Northern Ireland

## A response from The Centre for Competitiveness, September 2020

### Ministerial Advisory Panel on Infrastructure delivering cleaner, greener, sustainable and inclusive infrastructure.

Two of the fundamental infrastructure building blocks in a progressive economy is an adequate supply of both energy and water. With regards to water supply you either bring the water to the people or the people go to the water as is evident in underdeveloped nations. These two primary infrastructure essentials underpin most other infrastructure developments in a modern and progressive economy, be it transport, housing, sewerage, telecommunications or healthcare etc.

As the saying goes: “a system is more than the sum of its parts” so a coordinated approach to all infrastructure can only result in building a stronger eco infrastructure system incorporating energy with transport, cycling and the other infrastructures with both gas and electricity carriers’. Combining our efforts will enable better efficiency and reliability, to facilitate the meeting of those commitments and address the post COVID-19 recovery plan meeting national net-zero carbon reduction targets underpinning a sound and complete infrastructure design.

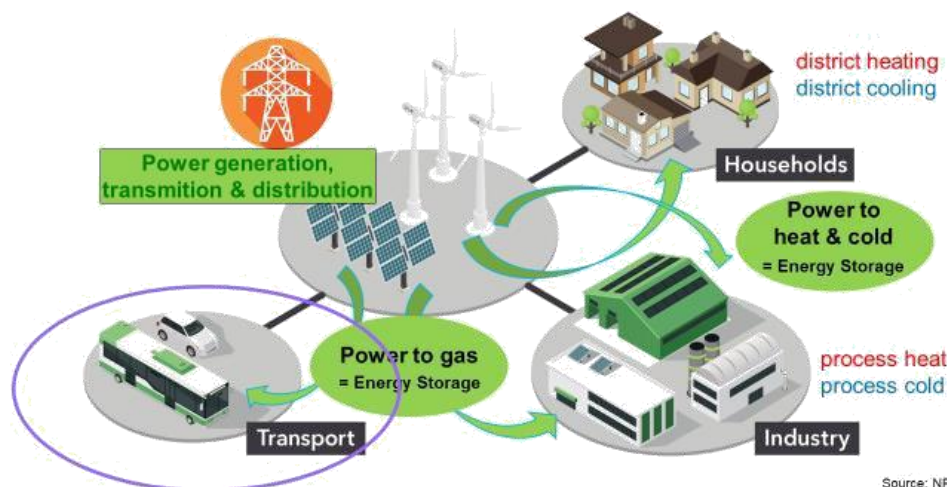
The key issue for the Infrastructure Advisory panel is whether energy is included within the scope of any proposed Infrastructure Commission. Because energy is under the Economy Minister rather than the Infrastructure Minister, there is a real risk that Minister Mallon will establish a Commission that deals with infrastructure within her scope only (transport, water etc.), and exclude energy. That would leave a major gap from our perspective.

The emphasis on the Smart Grid Ireland submission is on sector coupling in terms of looking across electricity and gas as important within infrastructure design and development. We think it is also important to emphasise the need to look for coupling across energy within the developments in transport, and water and telecoms etc. For example, in a zero-carbon world, you can't really look at transport infrastructure without considering energy infrastructure, and vice versa!

In the model shown in this paper, I would suggest that the panel give more emphasis to the linkage with Transport and indeed with Housing that is shown on the graphic. As the debate further develops on how gas and electricity systems in particular can help to meet the infrastructure needs associated with the 2030 and 2050 climate and energy targets both operators recognises the changing landscape and consequently, the changing infrastructure needs for transporting increasing volumes of renewable, decarbonised and low-carbon gases, such as hydrogen and biomethane.

Smart Grid Ireland are currently carrying out feasibility testing on sector coupling infrastructure with an international European corporation covering electro-thermal-energy-storage systems for district heating, cooling, storage and generating electricity within both transport, district heating and healthcare. (Example).

## Sector Coupling – The players and stakeholders



*Sector coupling involves the increased integration of energy end-use and supply sectors with one another to foster the full potential of sector coupling in several end uses and supply applications, it is important that existing techno-economic, policy and regulatory barriers are removed. (Source: European Parliament – Europa)*

One of the recommendations to the panel is to address the opportunity for sector coupling – that is, to allow for flexibility, storage options, cross-border transportation capacities and security of supply in a faster and more efficient way, whilst also meeting decarbonisation targets in infrastructure design and development. This is an important first important step to identify and assess the interlinkages and interactions between the gas and electricity systems and the other infrastructures within the Advisory Panel's remit. For a cost-efficient decarbonisation, a coordinated and coherent interaction between electricity and gases and other infrastructure developments is essential

Due to the intermittency of renewable energy, the power sector will need decarbonised gases to ensure security of supply and to reach climate neutrality. Power to Gas for example in Transportation, enables renewable energy supply in the form of hydrogen to be transported via gas grids to sectors difficult to electrify. This technology can help to alleviate local/regional congestion in electricity infrastructure, avoiding the curtailment of non-dispatchable renewable electricity.

It would thus contribute to solving challenges in relation to balancing the power grid – for storage and flexibility and maintain supply to transport and water infrastructures. The challenge today is not that the individual technologies are not proven and ready, but that they need to be massively scaled-up in order to offer cost-effective climate benefits across the different developments.

SGI believe it is possible to realise the synergies between infrastructure development and the existing gas and electricity infrastructures in evolving technologies

Innovation, integration and efficiency are key to meeting energy consumers' needs, in water and transport whilst also achieving decarbonisation goals. We recommend that the infrastructure panel particularly focus on the role that gas and electricity infrastructure will play as part of an Energy System Integration strategy, whilst also highlighting the societal cost savings and environmental and infrastructure benefits of a hybrid energy system that uses electricity and gas.

A hybrid energy system of both electricity and gas connected to transport, water supply, housing with energy carriers / infrastructure is a backbone which can result in increased flexibility, storage and security of supply. We propose policy measures as inputs to the review panel that can accelerate the deployment of biomethane and hydrogen alongside renewable electricity in infrastructure planning and development.

The first important step is to identify and assess the interlinkages and interactions between the gas and electricity systems and other infrastructures is paramount in order to deliver the best infrastructure assessment enabled by a hybrid energy supply.

It would also be useful to present to consumers, industry and institutions relevant studies, case-studies and examples of innovative infrastructure developments with gas and electricity projects connected that showcase smart sector integration, as well as examples of the interlinkages and synergies between TSOs and DSOs.

Now is the time to foster the deployment of innovative technologies in infrastructure developments in Transport, water, sewerage etc along with smart grids, hydrogen networks or carbon capture, storage and utilisation, energy storage, also enabling sector integration.

Bob Barbour – Smart Grid Ireland.

*Source Material: Energy System Integration Europe.*

*The Centre for Competitiveness is Secretariat for Smart Grid Ireland - an all island industry cluster of energy companies.*

---

## A response from Belfast City Council

### Q1. What should society in NI seek to achieve from infrastructure and why is it important?

Well governed, planned, resourced and sustainable infrastructure is a driver and enabler for national and regional policy, and for delivery at a city level. Regional policy (the Regional Development Strategy 2035) recognises the importance of infrastructure to support sustainable growth and this is reflected at a local level in Belfast. The Belfast Agenda highlights the importance of appropriate sustainable development to make the city competitive and to connect people to opportunities. Fundamental to creating the conditions for and enabling this inclusive growth, is infrastructure. The Belfast Resilience Strategy identifies the central importance of infrastructure to the city's economic and climate resilience and includes a number of recommendations for reform- in particular the importance of integration of infrastructure, and of systems efficiency. The strategy was developed following detailed analysis of what works in similar cities. A key learning from this analysis is the importance of good infrastructure in attracting capital to ensure sustainable funding models over the short and long term.

The Belfast Agenda also recognises that there are gaps in Belfast's key infrastructure which must be addressed if the city is to grow. The Agenda identifies that infrastructure planning and investment for Belfast needs to be taken forward in a strategic and integrated way and a core goal of the Agenda is to create a partnership and plan for sustainable urban infrastructure.

The infrastructure investment should be targeted to release the greatest economic potential and support inclusive economic development that provides the opportunity to sustainably increase GVA, and the ability of the region to compete internationally.



This should take into account the global trend for the role of cities within society, both in terms of population growth enabling more sustainable and efficient infrastructure provision, and in the growing role of cities in terms of economic growth. Successful regions have strong and vibrant cities at their core. Belfast drives much of the economic growth and shares its wealth across the Region and as such the role of the future city needs and requirements in terms of residential, economic, health and well-being and place-making should be at the heart of the infrastructure provision.

Furthermore, given the potential impacts of climate change to the city of Belfast (see visual representation of sea-level rises using land elevation data), the ability of NI society to build its resilience to climate change must be a key objective of infrastructure in the coming years. Furthermore, the UK's legal commitment to net zero emissions by 2050 will also be a key driver for how we build infrastructure, and the infrastructure classes which are prioritised for investment. The findings of the 'Mini Stern' for Belfast have identified the step changes required in this decade to ensure achievement of the 2050 objective. All major infrastructure projects must act as levers towards net zero emissions from this point onwards, given the legal requirement to arrive at net zero emissions by 2050.

## Q2. How do you see infrastructure needs and demands changing over the long term?

Globally, there are several recognised key drivers and emerging trends which influence infrastructure needs and shape methods of infrastructure delivery both now and in the future. It is assumed that many of these will also relate to Northern Ireland in some form. These key drivers and emerging trends include:

- Population, housing and employment growth
- Changing working and shopping / spending patterns
- Changing demographics – aging population - increasing demand for homes + smaller household sizes
- Urban densification and regeneration – desire for city centre living
- A changing climate and decarbonisation
- Impact of extreme weather events, of changing temperatures, warmer summers and wetter winters, sea level rises and impacts of climate change on biodiversity
- Increasing recognition of the value of the environment to the economy and social well-being
- Importance of improving air quality
- Increasing efficiencies of infrastructure
- Behavioural change
- Increasing digitalisation
- New technologies, artificial intelligence and automation
- Increasing use of smart technologies and environments – disruptive technologies
- Growth in Ultra-low emissions vehicles- public transport, private transport and freight –impacts on the grid and step change in demand for renewables in this decade
- Reduction in Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Brexit
- Covid-19

## Q3. What works and what doesn't work in the current system of infrastructure decision making and delivery?

The majority of Northern Ireland infrastructure has suffered from long-term under-investment resulting in the need for significant investment in key infrastructure provision including waste water, rail, and sustainable and active travel. There is a need for a longer-term regional prioritised infrastructure strategy and updated integrated localised strategic plans such as Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan and Living With Water Programme. These strategic documents should provide a holistic and prioritised approach to the delivery of NI infrastructure and be considered in the context of a realistic funding model to achieve the level of infrastructure required to enable the region to continue to grow and to compete effectively.

The strategies should also provide for infrastructure delivery based on a place-making approach, taking into account local and regional social and economic developments, and enabling and encouraging innovation and new solutions to complex infrastructure issues.

There needs to be an approach that ensures or helps support a process where infrastructure investment decisions can be made, and to ensure delivery on a long-term basis that sits beyond the standard political decision making timescales.

Work is required to learn from other jurisdictions regarding funding models to ensure sustainable approaches to funding infrastructure over the long term. Optimum models will be required to ensure Northern Ireland's infrastructure can attract capital to work alongside public funding and ensure value for money and excellent services for the public.

Furthermore, infrastructure in Northern Ireland has traditionally been designed and delivered in silos - decarbonisation of our economy, and a range of other factors have driven greater systems integration, and this must become the hallmark of our delivery models in the future. Belfast City Council, through its Resilience and Sustainability Board is taking forward a number of partnerships which integrate different forms of infrastructure- e.g. the V-PACH project to develop EV infrastructure in the city, bringing together transport and energy infrastructure; working with partners to explore potential opportunities for retrofit of housing stock through partnerships with energy industry; opportunities for green hydrogen which over the long term also provide potential to improve wastewater treatment capacity. This builds on the work taken forward by Belfast City Council several years ago took part in an Innovate- UK funded 'Future City Demonstrator project', which identified opportunities for integrating infrastructure. BCC Resilience Commissioner is a member of the World Economic Forum Executive Working Group on Systems Efficiency- working with global partners to explore opportunities to integrate buildings and energy infrastructure and extract greater value and efficiency in the public interest.

#### Q4. Do you have any comments on how infrastructure decisions are currently made in Northern Ireland? Would you propose any potential reforms to the current decision making process? How could these reforms be best achieved?

Infrastructure decision should be made in line with a prioritised and agreed delivery strategy that takes into account social and economic change, demands and the longer term return from the investment in terms of growth and sustainability. While political oversight is required, expert independent advice and guidance can help ensure that the infrastructure prioritisation is undertaken based on delivering the sustainable infrastructure requirements of the region as a whole, encouraging sustainable development and promoting the region to grow and to compete effectively.

An approach to longer term strategy development and associated Infrastructure Plans that are subject to regular review and monitoring in relation to the longer term aspirations and outcomes on which they are based.

Local authorities, in particular within the capital city, are critical convenors and enablers for ensuring strong and effective partnerships to design and deliver sustainable infrastructure. However, this informal role should be strengthened, so that they can plan the provision of infrastructure to ensure sustainable growth within the city, and to ensure that the cross-cutting infrastructure provision is adequate for the future social, environmental and economic needs of the city. The local authority should form an integral part of the Infrastructure Commission to ensure alignment, and the successful delivery of the growth plans of the region's economic driver.

Furthermore infrastructure is a critical Executive Priority, and several infrastructure classes (e.g. energy and housing) sit within the responsibility of other departments. To take a genuinely holistic and integrated approach to infrastructure, as is the norm in many other jurisdictions, the development of infrastructure must be understood as an Executive priority.

Q5. The Ministerial Advisory Panel have been asked to develop a proposal that will identify the specific role and value of a Commission and how it might be established and might operate. The next set of questions will test the viability of an Infrastructure Commission in Northern Ireland. Would you support the establishment of an Infrastructure Commission in Northern Ireland?

Yes. An independent, expert-led Infrastructure Commission that is transparent and accountable, focusing on strategic prioritisation and delivery could bring value. The Commission should define infrastructure broadly, and should seek to integrate the operation of various infrastructure classes, working together to meet government objectives. If the focus is clearly on developing a strategy which will incorporate an infrastructure plan with associated delivery in the form of projects and priorities to improve both the quality and impact of infrastructure development. As suggested in the circulated research it needs to move beyond the consideration or management of individual risks or assets (beyond just DfI aspects), to the systems as a whole. Its advice role should be set out in detail, e.g. like the Committee on Climate Change in the UK, it should be required to produce regular reports to the NI Executive and NI Assembly on the design and operation of infrastructure across NI and the extent to which it meets existing government policy and it should be required to comment on future resiliency.

Q6. What value would an Infrastructure Commission bring to Northern Ireland?

An independent, expert-led Infrastructure Commission could add value by;

- Offering independent expert advice to government
- Take a coherent and integrated approach to reviewing the operation of NI's infrastructure
- providing a challenge role in the reviewing of proposed infrastructure projects
- Helping to prioritise and develop Infrastructure Plans with the ongoing monitoring of delivery
- Helping to prioritise infrastructure projects
- Conducting expert reviews of ongoing projects to keep them on track
- Increasing accountability and transparency
- Provide advice on the resiliency of infrastructure- the extent to which it is fit for the future

Q7. How might the Infrastructure Commission be established and operate? (Pick one or more options)

Independent, focussing on Prioritisation and Strategy

Q7. How might the Infrastructure Commission be established and operate? (Pick one or more options)

Independent, focussing on Prioritisation and Strategy

Independent organisation, facilitating public debate

Government led

Independent organisation, focusing on individual projects or programmes

Q8. What scope do you believe the Infrastructure Commission could / should have?

- Hard infrastructure (water & waste, drainage and inland waterways, public transport, roads and cycling infrastructure)

- Digital and communications Infrastructure
- Energy Infrastructure
- Housing Infrastructure

Q8. What scope do you believe the Infrastructure Commission could / should have? (pick one or more options)

Hard infrastructure (water & waste, drainage and inland waterways, public transport, roads and cycling infrastructure)
Digital infrastructure
Energy infrastructure
Housing infrastructure
Education and Health infrastructure

### Q9. What time period should an Infrastructure Commission focus on?

20-30 years linked to regional strategies

Q9. What time period should an Infrastructure Commission focus on?

Less than 20 years
20 - 30 years
30 - 40 years
40 - 50 years
More than 50 years

### Q10. The Infrastructure Minister aims to deliver cleaner, greener, sustainable and inclusive infrastructure. How could an Infrastructure Commission support these objectives?

The infrastructure Commission must ensure that NI's infrastructure is driving progress towards the 2050 net zero carbon target, as required under legislation. Furthermore, it should seek to ensure achievement of UN Sustainable Development Goals, as other countries infrastructure commissioners are doing. It should seek to ensure climate resilience is a core design requirement for all future infrastructure, and that it contributes to the wider resilience of NI society.

An Infrastructure Commission can provide benefit through independent oversight and guidance of emerging plans and delivery projects to ensure the maximum benefit in delivering green, sustainable and inclusive infrastructure. The panel should also be suitably qualified to provide the expertise in best practice and learning from international infrastructure delivery and city growth.

The approach for the Commission should not be about seeking to provide for all the future infrastructure needs upfront, it should develop the capacity or processes for identifying and planning the trigger points or indicators that will point towards new or upgraded infrastructure requirements at the appropriate times,

ensuring that the infrastructure can be operational when they are reached alongside the collaboration needed to achieve such an integrated model.

The Commission should take into account the role of the local authority to influence, lead and deliver cross-cutting infrastructure requirements based on community planning, and enabling enhanced greener, sustainable and inclusive infrastructure. Global cities are taking on a greater role in leading economic and place making provision, and collaborative working such as the Bolder Vision for Belfast has shown how local authorities in NI can lead and influence the direction of travel for the city residents and users across economic, social and sustainable provision.

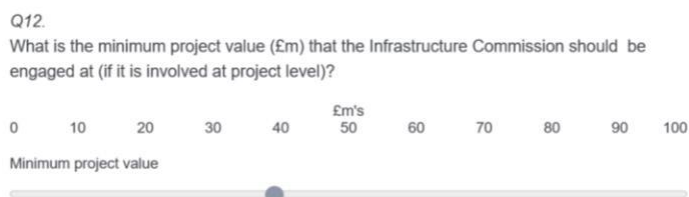
### Q11. What specific role should a Commission play in NI?

An Infrastructure commission in NI can provide a statutory advice role, an oversight and challenge role, and provide strategic advice and knowledge on the development and delivery of infrastructure policy and projects in NI to ensure effective, sustainable and efficient delivery of the infrastructure requirements.

As noted above there needs to be an approach that ensures or helps support a process where infrastructure investment decisions can be made and ensure delivery on a long-term basis that sits beyond the standard political decision-making timescales.

### Q12. What is the minimum project value (£m) that the Infrastructure Commission should be engaged at (if it is involved at project level)?

£30m



### Q13. What stage of the infrastructure lifecycle should the Infrastructure Commission be involved in?

The infrastructure commission should be involved in the early process of strategic planning and the prioritisation of strategic project delivery. The commission should also have a challenge/ oversight role in the delivery of infrastructure projects to ensure adherence to, and delivery of green, sustainable and inclusive infrastructure in the delivery of the longer-term aspirations and outcomes.

### Q14. To what extent do you think that the Commission should be tasked to hold Government to account?

As an independent body the Commission should have the authority to challenge and to provide advice on infrastructure delivery and prioritisation. The commission should through the strategy development be able to provide recommendations to the infrastructure delivery bodies, and to the NI Executive / Committee for Infrastructure.

### Q15. There is a lot of ongoing debate around procurement issues at the minute. Should the Infrastructure Commission engage on procurement issues?

Yes, including providing advice and experience on funding options and routes to procurement.

## Q16. If created, should an Infrastructure Commission be responsible to;

NI Executive – accountable directly to the Infrastructure Minister or Finance Minister

## Q17. Which international Infrastructure Commission model do you think is most appropriate for Northern Ireland? Please provide your reasons for selection and deselection. Please note that a summary of each of these models is contained within Appendix G.

The Independent Strategy & Prioritisation Organisation model would be the most appropriate fit for NI. The models provided for Australia and the internal states provide for a remit for the setting the policy agenda on long-term opportunities for infrastructure and evaluating business cases for nationally significant investment proposals. The 'place based' approach on infrastructure planning, providing advice to government, industry and communities allows for a wider approach to infrastructure delivery, taking into account wider societal and economic considerations rather than the typical siloed or political led infrastructure decision making process. The long term 30yr infrastructure strategy of Infrastructure Victoria with a 5yr Infrastructure Plan Projects Pipeline allows for long term prioritised planning with a focused approach on short-medium term delivery.

It should also be noted that, in regard to cities in particular, the role of the local authority in Northern Ireland differs from much of the rest of the United Kingdom and the majority of the examples provided. The role of the local authority within growing cities that have a significant economic role within the region should be considered in terms of their expertise and experience in developing the city infrastructure requirements. Opportunities should be provided for cities to influence and deliver infrastructure that directly aligns with the cities growth agenda and economic targets, while ensuring that infrastructure provision is not siloed, but takes into account community and place making focused infrastructure to provide places to work, live, visit and enjoy.

## Q18. Do you have any additional comments on how the Infrastructure Commissioners role should operate in regard to Stakeholder engagement and any recommendation or evidence of best practice on how this can be achieved?

In its approach to stakeholder engagement, an Infrastructure Commission should acknowledge the importance of focused consultation within key infrastructure sectors, but also the need for cross-sectoral engagement that recognises the relationships (direct and indirect) between different sectors, and the value of interagency working in understanding issues and their impact, and in identifying synergies that can drive efficiency in the delivery of sustainable infrastructure solutions.

Stakeholder engagement by a Commission should reflect the far-reaching impacts of infrastructure decisions and enable integrated consultation, and decision making, that directly links city priorities such as connectivity and climate change, which have direct relevance to the city's infrastructure. When considering stakeholder engagement the commission should take into account the importance of the role of local communities when considering infrastructure provision, ensuring that communities are adequately represented, informed and enabled to take part in the formation of infrastructure planning, design and decision making.

The Belfast Agenda is the first interagency plan for the city, and identifies that infrastructure planning for Belfast needs to be taken forward in a strategic and integrated way, with a core goal of the Agenda being to create a partnership and plan for sustainable urban infrastructure. An interagency approach to infrastructure that identifies cross-cutting themes and complementary interventions should aim to support sustainable and inclusive growth to 2035 as outlined in the Belfast Agenda and the Belfast Inclusive Growth Strategy.

The Local Development Plan 'Draft Plan Strategy' also recognises that cross-sectoral infrastructure planning is integral to the day to day operation and socio-economic sustainability of the city, which should be reflected in the approach to engagement and consultation.

The role of a future Infrastructure Commission should include consideration of factors which fall outside the immediate remit of the Department for Infrastructure, and timely stakeholder engagement across sectors including for example, social infrastructure, and green and blue infrastructure will be necessary.

The 'Infrastructure Commission for Scotland- Appendix G' refers to the National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) as working across the infrastructure system to 'counteract siloed working', and notes the value of consultation around individual projects, and the broader infrastructure strategy or plan within which they sit.

In this context, a Commission for Northern Ireland should explore stakeholder engagement options relating to independent long-term advice, including organisations which work with, but sit independent of or outside of, government and are either instrumental in the delivery of independent and long-term advice or provide a vehicle for comprehensive public engagement.

This response has been approved by the City Growth and Regeneration Committee at Belfast City Council.

## A response from Belfast City Council's Innovation Commissioner

### Q1. What should society in NI seek to achieve from infrastructure and why is it important?

Well governed, planned, resourced and sustainable infrastructure is a driver and enabler for national and regional policy, and for delivery at a city level. Regional policy (the Regional Development Strategy 2035) recognises the importance of infrastructure to support sustainable growth and this is reflected at a local level in Belfast. Belfast's Community Plan and City Strategy, The Belfast Agenda, sets out ambitious aspirations for growing the city's economy, growing the city's population, and an inclusive approach to connecting people to opportunities, to address social and economic inequalities. It highlights the importance of appropriate sustainable development to make the city competitive and to connect people to opportunities. Fundamental to creating the conditions for and enabling this inclusive growth, is infrastructure.

The Belfast Agenda also recognises that there are gaps in Belfast's key infrastructure which must be addressed if the city is to grow. The Agenda identifies that infrastructure planning and investment for Belfast needs to be taken forward in a strategic and integrated way and a core goal of the Agenda is to create a partnership and plan for sustainable urban infrastructure.

The spatial and physical aspects of the Belfast Agenda will be realised through the Belfast Local Development Plan which will:

- provide a 15-year plan framework to support economic and social needs in the city
- facilitate growth by coordinating public and private investment to encourage development where it can be of most benefit to the wellbeing of the community
- allocate sufficient land to meet the needs of the city
- provide an opportunity for all stakeholders, including the public, to have a say about where and how development within the local area should take place
- provide a plan-led framework for rational and consistent decision making

The infrastructure investment should be targeted to release the greatest economic potential and support inclusive economic development that provides the opportunity to sustainably increase GVA, and the ability of the region to compete internationally.

This should take into account the global trend for the role of cities within society, both in terms of population growth enabling more sustainable and efficient infrastructure provision, and in the growing role of cities in terms of economic growth. Successful regions have strong and vibrant cities at their core. Belfast drives much of the economic growth and shares its wealth across the Region and as such the role of the future city needs and requirements in terms of residential, economic, health and well-being and place-making should be at the heart of the infrastructure provision.

The Belfast Agenda highlights that modern and secure digital infrastructure is vital not only for the city's economic success, but also in its role as an economic driver for the region. Advanced digital infrastructure is a pre-condition for many of the Belfast Agenda's aspirations including future economic competitiveness and attracting investment, providing connectivity for future business growth, and enabling innovation in business, research and development, as well as innovation in delivery of public services. In placing inclusive growth at the heart of The Belfast Agenda, and setting our goals to connect people to opportunities arising from a successful and growing city economy, it is necessary to advance the development of a modern and sustainable digital city infrastructure that can facilitate and sustain these opportunities.



There are two main ways of thinking about digital and infrastructure:

1. **Digital connectivity** (ie) the fibre and wireless infrastructure required to connect households and businesses.
2. The **digitalization of 'hard' infrastructure** (ie) embedding digital technologies in the design, build and management of 'hard' infrastructure, such as buildings, transport, energy, water management systems. Needless to say, is dependent on (1) above.

## Q2. How do you see infrastructure needs and demands changing over the long term?

Globally, there are several recognised key drivers and emerging trends which influence digital infrastructure needs and shape methods of infrastructure delivery both now and in the future. It is assumed that many of these will also relate to Northern Ireland in some form. These key drivers and emerging trends include:

- Population, housing and employment growth
- Changing working and shopping / spending patterns
- Changing demographics – aging population - increasing demand for homes + smaller household sizes
- Urban densification and regeneration – desire for city centre living
- New technologies, artificial intelligence and automation
- Increasing use of smart technologies and environments – disruptive technologies
- Growth in Ultra-low emissions vehicles- public transport, private transport and freight –impacts on the grid and step change in demand for renewables in this decade
- Reduction in Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Brexit
- Covid-19

In terms of Digital connectivity:

The vast majority of homes (89%) in Northern Ireland can now access superfast broadband, which offers download speeds of at least 30 Mbit/s. However, availability of superfast broadband in rural areas, at 66%, is lower.<sup>43</sup>

**Project Stratum**, which is aimed at those unable to get superfast speeds, the Department for the Economy has identified 97,000 premises in Northern Ireland that will be eligible for a broadband boost. This £165m project began in mid-2020.

**Mobile:** 75% of the Northern Ireland's land area is covered by good 4G reception from all four networks. And 97% of the country can get reliable 4G from at least one operator. But there are stark differences in the level of choice available to customers in urban and rural areas. Ninety per cent of urban areas can get 4G coverage from all four operators, compared to 74% of rural areas.

Mobile operators have worked with Government and Ofcom on a plan to introduce a '**shared rural network**'. This will see high-quality 4G coverage reach 95% of the UK by 2025, as mobile companies share their existing masts and invest in new sites.

**5G launched in 2019**, with all four mobile networks rolling out 5G across a total of 40 UK towns and cities. Initially, 5G will be an enhanced version of 4G – offering faster speeds. But in the longer term it can support a host of innovative new services for mobile users and businesses, from farming to factories.

---

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/about-ofcom/latest/media/media-releases/2019/latest-northern-ireland-broadband-and-mobile-coverage-revealed>

<sup>43</sup> Infrastructure Enabling Fund Strategic Outline Case 2019, p9.

**Belfast Region City Deal – The Infrastructure Enabling Fund (IEF)** will not be focused on household or individual business connectivity. Instead it is designed to provide funding in support of strategic projects and programmes aligned to the Belfast Region’s Digital Innovation ambition. The fund will mainly focus on additional cutting-edge Fibre, Wireless and IoT infrastructure.

IEF will spur significant wider economic growth the Belfast Region. Based on the findings from a DCMS 2018 report, IEF will bring an annual increase of 0.8% in employment and a 0.3% in productivity. Applying conservative assumptions, it is estimated that £359.5 million of additional GVA (2018£) will be generated over the 20-year period between 2019 and 2039. This represents a cost-benefit ratio of 8.5.<sup>44</sup>

The ‘digitalisation’ of hard infrastructure coverages a range of topics:

The utilisation of digital **Building Information Models (BIM)** and **Geographical Information Systems (GIS)** for the design, procurement and ongoing whole-life management of infrastructure including buildings.

Embedding digital technologies into hard infrastructure – by exploiting **Internet of Things** sensors and networks. These allow for the lower cost management and monitoring of infrastructure.

The development of **Digital Twins**<sup>45</sup> – Drawing from BIM and IoT systems (and cloud, AI and wireless technologies) to create a virtual twin of the hard infrastructure. This allows for fine-grain monitoring, analysis and predictive modelling. It also supports more holistic planning across a range of complex systems. Digital Twins can range from individual buildings right up to entire cities.

Furthermore the convergence of Digital connectivity with Digital infrastructure provides further opportunities for consideration with respect to Infrastructure policy. For example, UK DfT already studies value of time to factor into transport modelling and management (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/values-of-travel-time-savings-scoping-study> ). This already puts development of digital infrastructure as a substitution for travel to the fore in developing future travel scenarios. Therefore, even travel and transport infrastructure should take into consideration the role of digital and ICT.

### Q3. What works and what doesn’t work in the current system of infrastructure decision making and delivery?

Collectively, digital technologies can support more integrated, resilient, responsive and efficient infrastructure. They will allow the city to flex and adapt to challenges, shocks and stresses such as climate change, emergencies, and technological disruption (eg) introduction of autonomous and/or electric vehicles.

Elements of these approaches have been adopted piecemeal by individual organisations. Their real impact can best be achieved collectively and at scale. There is an opportunity to develop joint approaches within the context of the planned Belfast Smart District. It will be a complex urban environment but at a small enough scale for partners to develop joint approaches in a manageable way.

Of particular note is Northern Ireland planning legislation for wireless deployment which is not concurrent with GB legislation. Work is required to update Permitted Development to include recommendations for the Future Telecoms Infrastructure Review. (This legislation sits with DfI.)

Recommendation re need to coordinated approach to opportunities re digital deployment:

---

<sup>44</sup>Infrastructure Enabling Fund Strategic Outline Case 2019, p9.

<sup>45</sup>In Christchurch, New Zealand, the city is collecting real-time data on things like pedestrian and vehicle traffic flow, water and air pollution to find ways to improve the quality of life for its citizens.

The deployment of next generation wireless technologies is recognised as a critical foundation stone for a successful modern economy. Belfast is no exception. The city has committed to supporting, and jointly investing in, next generation digital connectivity across the city in support of ambitious economic, environmental and societal goals. In particular, we have committed to significant digital investments through the Belfast Region City Deal to support cluster growth, world class academic research, and societal impact.

However, there are significant challenges to the timely and comprehensive deployment of such infrastructure – particularly in the urban environment (something which UK Government has recognised in the Future Telecoms Infrastructure Review).

A key success factor is maximising the opportunities to deploy digital hardware as part of ‘hard’ infrastructure projects (eg) new roads, buildings, street lights, bus shelters, etc.

DCMS have encouraged cities to create barrier-busting teams that bring together planners, asset and infrastructure owners, the local authority and private sector to identify and plan for these opportunities. Done well, these barrier busting teams reduce costs, street clutter, and support economic growth.

As the major public asset owner in the city, the Department of Infrastructure has a critical role to play in supporting this work (alongside colleagues in the Dept for Economy and Dept for Communities).

#### Q4. Do you have any comments on how infrastructure decisions are currently made in Northern Ireland? Would you propose any potential reforms to the current decision making process? How could these reforms be best achieved?

As previously noted Northern Ireland planning legislation for wireless deployment is not concurrent with GB legislation. Work is required to update Permitted Development to include recommendations for the Future Telecoms Infrastructure Review. (This legislation sits with DfI.) Other potential areas for consideration include:

Many UK cities have established cross-sector **‘barrier busting’ groups** that seek to support fibre and wireless deployment. Such groups have a role in providing easier access to assets; supporting better engagement with industry; identifying opportunities to deploy ducting and/or dark fibre as part of any larger scale hard infrastructure projects such as road or street schemes, etc. There is a need in Belfast for such a barrier busting group – with initial work under way by Belfast City Council supported by consultants Real Wireless.

Develop a **‘Mobile Action plan’** for Northern Ireland that seeks to develop a supportive environment for the deployment of digital infrastructure across the city and the region.

Consider the **development of shared infrastructure** (particularly in the urban environment) - (ie) working with industry to deploy shared ducting/fibre/wireless infrastructure to help reduce costs and urban clutter while at the same time supporting the innovative adoption of digital technologies by businesses and more extensive coverage.

A single shared connectivity map (similar to London <https://maps.london.gov.uk/connectivity/>) could be considered to assist investors, infrastructure providers and decision-makers in channelling support and addressing “not spots” where digital infrastructure is not of a sufficient standard.

**Develop a common public sector approach to BIM/GIS** (eg) common data, asset audits and shared register, and standardised processes. Introducing awareness and skills programmes for management and exploitation of BIM. Introducing BIM requirements into contracts for build and management.

**Leveraging physical investment to deployment fibre and wireless infrastructure.** (ie) Ensuring that all relevant hard infrastructure projects support the deployment of digital connectivity (eg) by deploying ducting, mounting points for wireless infrastructure, etc. Use of common asset registers and working through joint barrier busting group.

Develop proposals within the **Belfast Smart District** to develop joint approaches to digitalisation of infrastructure. (See note below). And seek to use learning from successful projects to deploy in other parts of the region. (There are specific opportunities to consider this in relation to mobility, energy and waste water management.)

There are three lighthouse projects being developed as part of the Smart District that can support a shared approach to infrastructure at a city and regional level which both help develop digital infrastructure practically and demonstrate the case for it, whilst also relying on it:

**Modelling integrated urban mobility.** This proposed Smart District lighthouse project seeks to work with partners to develop sophisticated digital twins of the district mobility systems (using existing data, IoT, AI, etc) to support the deployment of multi-modal transport solutions in the city.

**Energy District** - This proposed Smart District lighthouse project seeks to work with partners to utilise hydrogen and renewable energy to develop a district level holistic energy network. The project would seek to incorporate zero-emission public transport solutions, district heating, waste water treatment, and energy storage to address renewable curtailment issues,

**Smart Healthy District** – Working with the Universities, Life & Health Sciences sector, housing bodies, and public services providers to develop a real-world environment where technologies and services can be developed, tested and deployed to support whole-life multi-generational living. The District will not only support world class research and private sector product development, it will also act as a demonstrator for the development of next generation services. There are opportunities to consider in a holistic manner building design, street design, energy, mobility solutions, etc.

Q5. The Ministerial Advisory Panel have been asked to develop a proposal that will identify the specific role and value of a Commission and how it might be established and might operate. The next set of questions will test the viability of an Infrastructure Commission in Northern Ireland. Would you support the establishment of an Infrastructure Commission in Northern Ireland?

Yes. An independent, expert-led Infrastructure Commission that is transparent and accountable, focusing on strategic prioritisation and delivery could bring value. The Commission should define infrastructure broadly, and should seek to integrate the operation of various infrastructure classes, working together to meet government objectives. If the focus is clearly on developing a strategy which will incorporate an infrastructure plan with associated delivery in the form of projects and priorities to improve both the quality and impact of infrastructure development. As suggested in the circulated research it needs to move beyond the consideration or management of individual risks or assets (beyond just DfI aspects), to the systems as a whole.

## Q6. What value would an Infrastructure Commission bring to Northern Ireland?

An independent, expert-led Infrastructure Commission could add value by;

- Offering independent expert advice to government
- Take a coherent and integrated approach to reviewing the operation of NI's infrastructure
- providing a challenge role in the reviewing of proposed infrastructure projects
- Helping to prioritise and develop Infrastructure Plans with the ongoing monitoring of delivery
- Helping to prioritise infrastructure projects
- Conducting expert reviews of ongoing projects to keep them on track
- Increasing accountability and transparency
- Provide advice on the resiliency of infrastructure- the extent to which it is fit for the future

## Q7. How might the Infrastructure Commission be established and operate? (Pick one or more options)

Independent, focussing on Prioritisation and Strategy

## Q8. What scope do you believe the Infrastructure Commission could / should have?

- Hard infrastructure (water & waste, drainage and inland waterways, public transport, roads and cycling infrastructure)
- Digital and communications Infrastructure
- Energy Infrastructure
- Housing Infrastructure

## Q9. What time period should an Infrastructure Commission focus on?

20-30 years linked to regional strategies

## Q10. The Infrastructure Minister aims to deliver cleaner, greener, sustainable and inclusive infrastructure. How could an Infrastructure Commission support these objectives?

The Infrastructure Commission must keep a focus on ensuring NI's infrastructure will deliver inclusive benefits and impacts for people, in particular to drive opportunity for those in greatest need by supporting jobs led economic growth. For example, the Commission will need to pay attention to how infrastructure can support improving digital inclusion, to ensure all citizens are able to benefit and participate fully in the city and NI region of the future, in accessing services, training and skills development, in work/business and in maximising engagement and participation in civic life and leisure opportunities. This requires significant focus and investment to address the needs of those in society who are 'digitally excluded' at present; whether this be through lack of access to IT equipment, connectivity or skills, and also requires innovation in how services are delivered. The infrastructure Commission must ensure that NI's infrastructure is driving progress towards the 2050 net zero carbon target, as required under legislation. Furthermore it should seek to ensure achievement of UN Sustainable Development Goals, as other countries infrastructure commissioners are doing. It should seek to ensure climate resilience is a core design requirement for all future infrastructure, and that it contributes to the wider resilience of NI society. We should, also, be conscious of the energy infrastructure that is required to support digitisation and, here, Northern Ireland is positioned well to take advantage.

An Infrastructure Commission can provide benefit through independent oversight and guidance of emerging plans and delivery projects to ensure the maximum benefit in delivering green, sustainable and inclusive infrastructure. The panel should also be suitably qualified to provide the expertise in best practice and learning from international infrastructure delivery and city growth.

The approach for the Commission should not be about seeking to provide for all the future infrastructure needs upfront, it should develop the capacity or processes for identifying and planning the trigger points or indicators that will point towards new or upgraded infrastructure requirements at the appropriate times, ensuring that the infrastructure can be operational when they are reached alongside the collaboration needed to achieve such an integrated model.

The Commission should take into account the role of the local authority to influence, lead and deliver cross-cutting infrastructure requirements based on community planning, and enabling enhanced greener, sustainable and inclusive infrastructure. Global cities are taking on a greater role in leading economic and place making provision, and collaborative working such as the Bolder Vision for Belfast has shown how local authorities in NI can lead and influence the direction of travel for the city residents and users across economic, social and sustainable provision.

### Q11. What specific role should a Commission play in NI?

An Infrastructure commission in NI can provide a statutory advice role, an oversight and challenge role, and provide strategic advice and knowledge on the development and delivery of infrastructure policy and projects in NI to ensure effective, sustainable and efficient delivery of the infrastructure requirements.

As noted above there needs to be an approach that ensures or helps support a process where infrastructure investment decisions can be made and ensure delivery on a long-term basis that sits beyond the standard political decision making timescales.

### Q12. What is the minimum project value (£m) that the Infrastructure Commission should be engaged at (if it is involved at project level)?

£30m

### Q13. What stage of the infrastructure lifecycle should the Infrastructure Commission be involved in?

The infrastructure commission should be involved in the early process of strategic planning and the prioritisation of strategic project delivery. The commission should also have a challenge/ oversight role in the delivery of infrastructure projects to ensure adherence to, and delivery of green, sustainable and inclusive infrastructure in the delivery of the longer-term aspirations and outcomes.

### Q14. To what extent do you think that the Commission should be tasked to hold Government to account?

As an independent body the Commission should have the authority to challenge and to provide advice on infrastructure delivery and prioritisation. The commission should through the strategy development be able to provide recommendations to the infrastructure delivery bodies, and to the NI Executive / Committee for Infrastructure.

### Q15. There is a lot of ongoing debate around procurement issues at the minute. Should the Infrastructure Commission engage on procurement issues?

Yes, including providing advice and experience on funding options and routes to procurement.

### Q16. If created, should an Infrastructure Commission be responsible to;

NI Executive – accountable directly to the Infrastructure Minister or Finance Minister

**Q17. Which international Infrastructure Commission model do you think is most appropriate for Northern Ireland? Please provide your reasons for selection and deselection. Please note that a summary of each of these models is contained within Appendix G.**

The Independent Strategy & Prioritisation Organisation model would be the most appropriate fit for NI. The models provided for Australia and the internal states provide for a remit for the setting the policy agenda on long-term opportunities for infrastructure and evaluating business cases for nationally significant investment proposals. The 'place based' approach on infrastructure planning, providing advice to government, industry and communities allows for a wider approach to infrastructure delivery, taking into account wider societal and economic considerations rather than the typical siloed or political led infrastructure decision making process. The long term 30yr infrastructure strategy of Infrastructure Victoria with a 5yr Infrastructure Plan Projects Pipeline allows for long term prioritised planning with a focused approach on short-medium term delivery.

It should also be noted that, in regard to cities in particular, the role of the local authority in Northern Ireland differs from much of the rest of the United Kingdom and the majority of the examples provided. The role of the local authority within growing cities that have a significant economic role within the region should be considered in terms of their expertise and experience in developing the city infrastructure requirements. Opportunities should be provided for cities to influence and deliver infrastructure that directly aligns with the cities growth agenda and economic targets, while ensuring that infrastructure provision is not siloed, but takes into account community and place making focused infrastructure to provide places to work, live, visit and enjoy.

**Q18. Do you have any additional comments on how the Infrastructure Commissioners role should operate in regard to Stakeholder engagement and any recommendation or evidence of best practice on how this can be achieved?**

In its approach to stakeholder engagement, an Infrastructure Commission should acknowledge the importance of focused consultation within key infrastructure sectors, but also the need for cross-sectoral engagement that recognises the relationships (direct and indirect) between different sectors, and the value of interagency working in understanding issues and their impact, and in identifying synergies that can drive efficiency in the delivery of sustainable infrastructure solutions.

Stakeholder engagement by a Commission should reflect the far-reaching impacts of infrastructure decisions and enable integrated consultation, and decision making, that directly links city priorities such as connectivity and climate change, which have direct relevance to the city's infrastructure. When considering stakeholder engagement the commission should take into account the importance of the role of local communities when considering infrastructure provision, ensuring that communities are adequately represented, informed and enabled to take part in the formation of infrastructure planning, design and decision making.

The Belfast Agenda is the first interagency plan for the city, and identifies that infrastructure planning for Belfast needs to be taken forward in a strategic and integrated way, with a core goal of the Agenda being to create a partnership and plan for sustainable urban infrastructure. An interagency approach to infrastructure that identifies cross-cutting themes and complementary interventions should aim to support sustainable and inclusive growth to 2035 as outlined in the Belfast Agenda and the Belfast Inclusive Growth Strategy.

The Local Development Plan 'Draft Plan Strategy' also recognises that cross-sectoral infrastructure planning is integral to the day to day operation and socio-economic sustainability of the city, which should be reflected in the approach to engagement and consultation.

The role of a future Infrastructure Commission should include consideration of factors which fall outside the immediate remit of the Department for Infrastructure, and timely stakeholder engagement across sectors including for example, social infrastructure, and green and blue infrastructure will be necessary.

## A response from Imtac

What are we seeking to achieve from infrastructure, why is it important, how do people see the needs changing over the long term?

Imtac views the design and provision of infrastructure as being central to building a more inclusive and fairer society. It can be the difference between people being isolated and people being active members of our communities.

What works and what doesn't work in the current system of infrastructure decision making and delivery?

Although there have been improvements around inclusivity in both decision-making and the delivery of infrastructure in recent years, too often opportunities are still missed to maximise investment and improvements to benefit everyone in society. This can often be linked to a lack of awareness and basic understanding of what creates barriers for many. The planning process is also an issue as plans are often outdated. Additionally investment in supporting infrastructure including transport does not materialise.

Do you have any comments on how infrastructure decisions are currently made in Northern Ireland? Would you propose any potential reforms to the current decision making process? How could these reforms be best achieved?

There are 5 key requirements that must be met to deliver more inclusive infrastructure – (1) a clear commitment to make infrastructure inclusive, (2) a clear understanding of how to make infrastructure inclusive, (3) a clear direction, (4) direct engagement with those affected by inclusion / exclusion and (5) clear and enforceable standards around inclusion.

Would you support the establishment of an Infrastructure Commission in Northern Ireland?

If a Commission is established it must be something more than another layer of bureaucracy. Clearly from Imtac's perspective it must have a clearly defined remit to promote social inclusion.

What value would an IC bring to Northern Ireland?

Responsibilities for infrastructure and the services delivered on or through that infrastructure are spread across a range of Government Departments and as a result there is often a "disconnect" in objectives. A Commission could bring a focus which is cross Departmental. It would see the value in investing in infrastructure and the connections it creates rather than viewing issues through Department "silos".

How might the IC be established and operate?

- a) Should this be an entity that is a) Independent, focussing on Prioritisation and Strategy b) Independent, facilitating Public Debate Organisation or c) Government led? D) Independent, focussing on individual projects/programmes? E) combination of a, b and d
- b)
- c) Please provide your rationale for your selection

We believe "C" would not be in line with the principles of establishing a Commission. "E" would seem to be the ideal but would it be trying to do too much and end up doing too little. This option might be more practical if it did not focus on detail of individual projects.



What scope do you believe the Infrastructure Commission could / should have, and over what period of time? (Hard infrastructure, digital, energy, waste, housing, education & health infrastructure )(20, 30, 40, 50 years?)

Scope should be as wide as possible. It is important when planning physical infrastructure that the nature of the services connecting to/providing access to that infrastructure are included. No point building centralised hospitals if people cannot access them. 30 years would fit with climate change targets which will be a significant element of a Commission's remit.

The Minister wants to deliver cleaner, greener, sustainable and inclusive infrastructure. How could an Infrastructure Commission support these objectives?

BB also keen to get a clear indication of meeting duration as this will largely determine what can feasibly be discussed

What specific role should a Commission play in NI?

- a. Long term vision (10+ years) Yes – and longer? see Q7
- b. Strategy/Plan formation Yes – but how does this fit with Planning System
- c. Monitoring and reporting on success or otherwise of infrastructure implementation
- d. What level of project (£) value the IC be engaged (if it is involved at project level)? Project level (ie design commissioning) too low?
- e. What stage of the infrastructure lifecycle should the IC be involved in?
- f. To what extent do you think that the Commission should be tasked to hold Government to account? No Comment
- g. There is a lot of ongoing debate around procurement issues at the minute. Should the IC engage with this? No Comment

If created, should an Infrastructure Commission be responsible to;

- NI Executive
- FM & DFM
- Infrastructure Minister
- Dfi
- DoF
- DfE
- Other Departments

If a Commission is dealing with Strategies/Programmes across a number of Departments/Authorities it could lead to a clash of interests if one Department has responsibility/control. This would imply the NI Executive should have oversight.

Do you have any additional comments on how the IC role should operate in regard to Stakeholder engagement and any recommendation or evidence of best practice on how this can be achieved?

The membership of a Commission must address knowledge and expertise across the cleaner, greener, sustainable and inclusive agendas. While there clearly should be an onus of a Commission to engage with the widest range of stakeholders there is a bigger onus to ensure membership reflects its priorities / remit and society more generally. While the public appointments system has provision to ensure that the recruitment/appointment process is fully inclusive, the Commission's function may benefit from having a specific appointment to represent the older people and disabled people

The Commission should have powers to require that all Strategies/programmes/projects are subject to review/scrutiny involving stakeholder engagement at all stages ensuring the needs of all of society including disabled people, older people and Deaf people are taken into account.

## APPENDIX 6 TRANSCRIPTIONS FROM A DIVERSE SAMPLE OF VIRTUAL CONSULTATIONS

The following transcriptions are taken from a diverse sample of the virtual consultations, undertaken during the course of the Panel's work.

## Consultee: ACE

### Role and make-up of an Infrastructure Commission

An Infrastructure Commissioner should be involved in all stages of the life cycle, thereby ensuring that a project with strong governance and monitoring at the beginning of a cycle doesn't fatigue before the end. There should be a commitment to ensuring monitoring and evaluation is more effective. If you have an adjudicator keeping their eye on high-level projects, that's more beneficial to NI than being in at design phase.

ACE suggested that an Infrastructure Commission needs to sit as a monitoring body within a Department, which will handle the financing and policy. An independent Infrastructure Commission would be too vulnerable to biases from outside government, particularly the influence of private development, instead ACE suggest that an independent department would be best suited that can monitor and provide feedback to the NI Executive.

### Long-term versus short-term

ACE suggest that an Infrastructure Commission sit for no longer than 20 years due to political reasons. If you have an Infrastructure Commissioner which sets out framework in 30 – 50 year period, by the time parties change, civil servants move about, no focus on short term projects, that harms people of NI. Long term planning and funding in place is important, but on short term basis there might be more political focus. If you have a short-term focus, you could get some progress done, instead of 50-year project. If you're talking about a minister changing every two years, imagine 50 year plan. With 20, at least some remit to focus on that.

### Engagement with society

Regarding engaging with communities and achieving social targets, developing social infrastructure is an effective tool for achieving societal aims. However, this would require monitoring by the Infrastructure Commission rather than setting output and location targets which can be politically divisive. Targets also need to be taken away from purely financial driven targets and toward these four other outputs, you start a Commission with this as gold standard for how to enhance outputs in NI. That would be ideal, something we're bringing to govt. departments.

### Best practices

ACE suggest that an Infrastructure Commission adopt the Five Capital Model, which addresses natural; financial; human; manufactured; and social targets. This would help to address shortcomings in previous projects. For example, new build housing in Aberdeen where suburban estates link into a city or a town but have no immediate facilities, namely parks and schools, leading to increased congestion and limited community engagement.

In regard to the Infrastructure Commission in Scotland ACE and suggest that their issues are currently in the concept of placemaking for infrastructure, particularly the Highlands and Islands problems are connectivity, internet access and public transport and look at these on a lifetime perspective.

## **Consultee: Andrew Haley – Ministerial Advisory Group for Architecture and the Built Environment**

### **Role and make-up of an Infrastructure Commission**

Mr Haley from the Ministerial Advisory Group for Department for Communities suggested that currently infrastructure is working in silos and so NI needs to inspire collaboration and ensure that resources are ensuring best outcomes for the people of NI.

There is also a challenge of providing a wider understanding of the importance of infrastructure as well as providing understanding to outside developers how a Commission would be independent yet also potentially sit within a government department, currently the connection is through Department for Infrastructure, but the remit needs to be cross-party as well as to all councils in NI and society. Meanwhile independence is also important to ensure a Commission would be seen positively for those looking in and helping to inform them about this independence, it was suggested that civil servants understand this independence, but big developers may not.

An Infrastructure Commission would need to be connected to Government in some way and it would be important that they have the right skills set to meet what is required of them as well as ensuring that those who sit on the Commission work well with each other. The members need to be advocates to help individuals achieve their goals. There should also be cross-over between other groups to combine expertise as well as engage with council to show how a Commission could benefit them and provide expertise which they may be lacking.

An area of current weakness in NI is measure outcomes, post-project evaluations and gathering the benefits to learn lessons and best practices so this is an area which needs addressed as well as allowing an organisation to share the lesson learnt without being criticised.

Mr Hayley suggested that it would be important to see if Ministerial Advisory Group could work together with an Infrastructure Commission to ensure two groups aren't doing the same thing and so it is worth exploring a way of shared working.

### **Best practices**

When addressing the make-up of the board it was suggested to learn best practices from Ireland but apply it here given the political situation. Also NI can learn from England and Wales who made boards diverse such as background of individuals, gender balance, LGBT, BAME which is important to ensuring decisions are made for all, however this will require preparatory work to ensure more people know about the Commission and apply. Mr Hayley suggests that it is beneficial to recruit a Chair first and then send out applications for tender for board members. It may also be worth having a champion for projects.

## **Consultee: Belfast City Council**

### **Role and make-up of an Infrastructure Commission**

BCC suggested that this was a good opportunity to set up a Commission from scratch and so it can be orientated around certain goals such as climate change with an overall holistic approach.

It was envisioned that a Commission could provide advice but there needs to be an assurance that Government is taking this advice and if not held accountable. The Commission should be highly independent to achieve this and in a way lead government on issues as well as take risks. Individuals who may work on the Commission need to be experts who want to be part of it and realise its importance to drive it forward.

It should also be a credible organisation made up of credible figures who can sit on par with the UK Commission, the example was given of OBR which is an outside organisation that is highly respected and listened to. The Commission also needs to have a place orientated approach and be investor friendly.

In regard to collaboration, BCC suggested that there is also an opportunity for housing to be involved in this type of planning, it was expressed that housing was rarely involved in planning which needs addressed. Currently projects are occurring in silos which is causing frustrations and so going forward everything such as housing, water and energy should be integrated which a Commission could help with.

### **Climate change**

BCC suggested that net zero carbon needs to be at the core of infrastructure plans, and this is supported by demand from the public to address climate change.

### **Brexit and COVID-19**

Regrading Brexit and COVID-19 an Infrastructure Commission could help to plan what the recovery and deal with challenges from Brexit whilst keeping the politics of the issue out.

### **Long-term versus short-term**

BCC suggested that any future Commission needed to be mission orientated with problem solving capabilities over the long-term of around 50 years.

## **Consultee: CBI**

## **Consultee: CBI**

### **Role and make-up of an Infrastructure Commission**

CBI are very supportive of the implementation of an Infrastructure Commission for NI and suggest that such a Commission could support NI Executive leadership. The CBI highlighted the UK government's plans for a "New Deal for Northern Ireland", and stressed a commission could provide an NI Executive- driven framework for long term investment, rather than having one led by Westminster.

The CBI did however draw an important distinction between the future role of the SIB, and the role of an Infrastructure Commission. They proposed that the SIB could ensure timely and cost-effective delivery of projects, whereas the Commission's principal function would be long-term strategy and prioritisation of infrastructure. They added that SIB's role would need to be reviewed as part of the process to create a workable, efficient framework.

The CBI highlighted that an Infrastructure Commission could help to make NI investor friendly and show a seriousness in NI's development.

An Infrastructure Commission can help to ensure that projects are properly planned and financed for and the Commission could also support additional finance applications to the UK Treasury. Currently there is a reliance on the block grant, to achieve zero net carbon, amongst other things, NI needs to look at other funding models, including mutualisation.

### **Long-term versus short-term**

An Infrastructure Commission for NI would also help to support the planning and delivery of complex projects which fit within a long term (30 year) strategic outlook, which may be more difficult for politicians to judge when operating over the 4-5 year life of an Assembly.. This Commission could also help to depoliticise and prioritise infrastructure decisions in NI and make decisions which are beneficial for all of society. It could also provide an objective, expert led understanding about the benefits of a long term strategic outlook on infrastructure to politicians.

The Infrastructure Commission should be a permanent structure but shouldn't be taken as a given and should be reviewed with clear parameters for progress to provide accountability and make sure plans are delivered. It must however be independent with sufficient statutory powers to achieve its objectives.

### **Best practices**

The CBI suggest that while any future Commission be independent of politics, the Commission should be accountable to the NI Executive as a whole rather than one individual Minister or department. They acknowledged that this could provide its own challenges but this could be balanced by providing the Commission with sufficient statutory powers. This would require an acceptance from the NI Executive that they will be held to account from an outside body. The CBI suggest that lessons must be learned from SIB who have struggled because of their lack of statutory powers, meaning that they have become more of a consultancy type body.

An Infrastructure Commission would allow for a clean mandate and need not be overly costly, as some SIB personnel could be redeployed.

### **Climate change**

The CBI highlighted the water issues that NI is currently experiencing, and these are likely to worsen without action, there is also the issue of meeting net zero carbon targets. They added that achieving net zero carbon should be a principal driver for an independent body as it is a statutory commitment, not just an ambition. In that regard, NI lags behind all other administrations on these islands for long term planning around climate change.

### **North-South relationship**

Meanwhile the North-South relationship needs to be considered in any future planning. The Republic of Ireland has Project Ireland 2040, and NI risks falling behind in infrastructure if it doesn't have a similar long term plan. They added that many of the areas of N/S Co-Operation (for example, energy and transport) under Strand 2 of the Good Friday Agreement provide a strong structural framework for meaningful all-island engagement on long term infrastructure planning. The CBI is heavily engaged with IBEC and the Joint Business Council on these issues.

## **Consultee: CEF**

### **Role and make-up of an Infrastructure Commission**

CEF suggest that a Commission should not sit within a department as it will be politicised, and infrastructure also doesn't work alone. There should also be political buy in but a distance maintained.

CEF question the role that SIB would play and whether this Commission would be joined to SIB. The role of the Audit Office and work they produced also needs to be addressed, they already produce work on major failing related to capital projects and so there is potential of doubling this work. Procurement is also a major issue in NI the examples of legal challenges on the A8 were provided, therefore there should be lessons learnt from the past.

To be successful an Infrastructure Commission Strategy needs to sit above procurement and finance, they would also need to sit in or owned by the NI Executive, but not be driven by political persuasions and accountability is crucial.

### **Funding**

CEF note the preoccupation in NI with the block grant and that we are relying on the Treasury to fulfil NI's needs, we need to justify to Treasury why and what is done with the money. Decisions are also made for political reasons such as when the Department for Infrastructure had 75% of capital budget for major road schemes. Therefore, there can't be underspending in one area and overspending in another, particular the finance element is skewed towards major projects. In a post-COVID-19 and Brexit world alternative finance models need to be explored and this is vital in ensuring that the Commission would not be an academic research body.

### **Energy**

CEF express that some projects appear not as critical as they need to be for example the energy infrastructure document and so this is where a strong, independent voice could come in to help advice over the best decision making. Meanwhile in the planning system currently it feels as though there are a small group of people in and around significant projects, possibly over consulting on things which needs to be addressed. This over consulting can exceed the timeframe for a business case causing the project and finance to become obsolete.

### **North-South relationship**

Infrastructure also needs to be addressed on an all island basis, for instance there's a single energy market on island of Ireland meanwhile the rail connections need addressed. Typically, these issues get politicised and that's where problems arise.



## **Consultee: City of Derry Airport**

### **Role and make-up of an Infrastructure Commission**

The current NI system of multi-departmental agreements as well as waiting on UK based decisions for leadership can cause a sense of frustration for planning and projects, for the airport specifically there is no regional airport policy and things are dealt with on an ad hoc basis. An Infrastructure Commission may help to improve policy making and the speed at which decisions are made.

An Infrastructure Commission could assist with creating a more balanced view as they can assess projects independently, currently the City Deal are an encouraging step for NI at providing inclusive growth and levelling up the agenda to address the internal imbalance within NI. Additionally, with COVID-19, there has been a shift in focus and the implementation of an Infrastructure Commission would be a good news story.

The makeup of any future Infrastructure Commission would need to be of experts, in regard to their transport sector there is not always expertise on this in NIO. The Commission could also bring an aspect of better decision making as well as influence with a long-term vision, leadership and project delivery.

### **Best practices**

Scotland, due to their multiple regional airports have been able to develop the Highlands and Islands support which helps address the disproportionate costs associated with regional airports. Analysis and implementation of targeted bespoke measures would be justified on another 'Island' and one which is uniquely accessible directly by car to Irelands Airports with no APD and who also benefit from a Reginal Airports Program.

### **Funding**

There appears to be a reluctance in using the block grant with a reliance on the UK policies to dictate funding. for the City of Derry Airport like any other industry or part of industry when there is a differential, this approach will never address the differential without a specific injection of funds or appropriate allocated budget.

### **APD**

Removal of APD, (most likely short-term and driven by HMT) will have some effect to passenger numbers, however, will be less effective as a short-term measure for CoDA than our counterparts in Belfast. Removal of APD using a flexible PSO approach would deliver targeted benefits to airports, improve connectivity and in CoDA's case, reduce our subvention requirement. The unique geography and relationship with Ireland needs consideration in all topics above.

## Consultee: NI Water

### Role and make-up of an Infrastructure Commission

An infrastructure Commission made up of individuals with the appropriate range of industry and commercial expertise and independent of political parties and the NI Civil Service can help to provide understanding as to why infrastructure projects are necessary and require funding. Overall the Commission should be headed up by a well-respected, suitably experienced and capable individual who can carry this important brief.

NI Water highlighted that infrastructure does not exist in silos and there are different forms of infrastructure all of which require a long-term plan to be successful for all of society and independence is important to making funding and planning decisions.

The vision that an infrastructure Commission and system would require in NI may include:

- Key outputs with priorities
- Long-term outlook
- Delivering complex projects
- Help government planning
- Long-term capital intentions
- Good appointments that provide leadership
- Facilitates sustainable financing
- A differentiation between core, essential infrastructure and projects which might be considered more “iconic” or “flagship” in nature
- Provide an understanding and education of infrastructure to a wider audience NI Water highlighted that needs for infrastructure to be futureproofed and gave the example of Silent Valley which has been providing water for Belfast for 100 years, its developers had a long-term vision which is something NI needs to get back to. A focus on infrastructure and long-term vision can also help to attract further investment to NI, but this needs leadership which an Infrastructure Commission can provide.

The Panel asked NI Water if it feels the Utility Regulator (UR) has a pivotal role to play.

In response, NI Water shared it feels the role of the UR can be key to ongoing provision of water and wastewater services and also noted the role the Regulator has in the case of energy as well as water and wastewater infrastructure. Given that NI Water is publicly owned and predominantly funded by public money available only through the NI Block Grant, the question arises from time to time as to whether an independent regulator can inadvertently become constrained in assessing whether sufficient funding is able to be made available to a regulated government owned Water Company. Perhaps the regulator might feel more muted than is desirable in assessing whether a government shareholder is doing all required of it in considering how adequately financed a regulatory settlement is at the outset and throughout a price control period.

### Funding

There is an overall societal benefit that infrastructure can bring to NI which an Infrastructure Commission can provide leadership on, it would also help to gain access to different funding opportunities and move away the reliance on the block grant for funding. It was discussed that all stakeholders reached a conclusion during this current price control, PC15, that the current model, whilst it has worked to an extent successfully, particularly during the early years of its incarnation in 2007, has now reached a point where, as a result of funding constraints and uncertainties which have prevailed for some time, it is now broken and needs to be replaced, in its funding aspect, by something much more capable of allowing the service to be successfully delivered for customers across the next 10 to 15 years.

## **Best practices**

An Infrastructure Commission could help to provide a fair and transparent process which was highlighted in the Hillary Review which has been lost somewhat recently. There is an ambiguity and a lack of transparency as to how the service to customers is paid for, by whom and in what time horizon. Many domestic customers believe, because they have been told, it is paid for through their domestic rates. Whilst there may be a reference to a significantly small amount of a household rates bill paying for water and sewerage services, the amount that is notionally allocated is wholly inadequate.

That customers don't know how the service is paid for, and that it has been underfunded for many years, could be seen as neither fair nor transparent.

## **Long-term versus short-term**

The Infrastructure Commission would also need to be in place for at least 5-10 years which is sponsored by the NI Executive but remains independent and made up of subject matter experts, not individuals with generalist knowledge or solely civil service based. This expert make-up would be a key part in establishing the credibility of the Commission.

The Commission would have a core role in supporting Government here in NI, perhaps lifting the burden from an Executive in making prioritised, strategic and in many cases long term decisions in determining infrastructure strategy. Inherent in its support role is the need to challenge and hold up a mirror to Government to help assess how Government is doing in its role of underpinning and delivering on infrastructure priorities. This could be a credible way of providing much needed focus for projects which are necessary but can sometimes be overlooked.

## **Water**

NI Water is today an efficient organisation that provides high-quality water and wastewater services for all of society. They pride themselves in their planning and have long-term vision as to how to effectively plan water infrastructure for NI.

Water and drainage infrastructure is different from many other aspects of infrastructure in that at its core it provides to society a basic human right to clean safe drinking water every day. At a macro level, investment in water and drainage infrastructure is key to underpinning an economy which is capable of growth and expansion.

However, the current funding model and decisions around how a constrained funding envelope in the block grant is allocated too easily pushes out to the next generation the decision to invest in this vital infrastructure today. The "invisible" nature of the infrastructure renders it too tempting to decision makers to allocate funding to it at the end of an allocation process instead of at the opening stages of such processes.

An independent Infrastructure Commission can support government in reaching the necessary allocations of investment at the right point in the process.

## **Consultee: CPCNI**

### **Role and make-up of an Infrastructure Commission**

A future Infrastructure Commission needs to be cross-party, led by the NI Executive. It requires a fresh approach, a diverse commission is vital to ensure the decision making process is inclusive and robust and able to cater for the needs of all of society. It must be accountable and transparent in its decision-making. Learn from what didn't work previously. The Commission should provide vision, direction and commitment. with a focus on sustainability, well-being of the population and inclusivity. It should take an outcome based approach which translates into benefits for NI. It was also suggested that there needs to be a culture change in decision making, value as a concept needs to be established. Decisions around infrastructure need should not be solely political and financial.

One of the initial roles of a Commission would be to address how NI looks in the future. and so they can be a mechanism to deliver what the vision needs to be over the next 20 years with an overall view of accountability to the public, who are the shareholders for plans. The Commission also needs independence to work successfully whilst also having political buy-in.

There was recognition from CPC that COVID has caused a shift in priorities as well as Brexit and net zero which need to be factored in. Regarding Brexit, CPC expressed that there is an opportunity for a free trade area in NI. An Infrastructure Commission can help to address how NI can benefit from Brexit and take these to the Executive.

### **Long-term versus short-term**

Overall a Commission would need to have a carefully monitored short-term remit, but with the intention and potential for it to move in to the long-term depending on its success. The make-up of the Commission also needs to be diverse and inclusive to ensure robust decision making.

### **Engagement with society**

The Commission also needs to engage with the public through wide stakeholder engagement and marketing to understand what the public want and more importantly what they need then this can be fed into projects to be successful. There will need to balance what the public want and what society needs.

### **Best practices**

Infrastructure needs also must be identified and NI needs to review how infrastructure is measured in terms of capital spending rather than on a needs basis as well as capturing the wider benefits. For instance, developing Conswater Greenway enabled other businesses to be established in the surrounding area creating jobs, its use benefits the health of the local population which in turn translates to benefits for the NHS. Typically these benefits and the wider public dividend are not included in the decision making process to proceed with an infrastructure scheme. An Infrastructure Commission can help to assess what is really needed in NI going right through to education and skills.

When learning from other countries it also needs to be realised that NI is different so there need to be specifics and a tailoring of a Commission to NI.

### **Other issues**

CPC suggested other issues which need to be addressed such as wastage in procurement, the Infrastructure Commission would need to address where it sits in procurement and planning.

## Consultee: Engineers Ireland

### Role and make-up of an Infrastructure Commission

Engineers Ireland suggest that an Infrastructure Commission could support integrated decision making in NI as well as strategic planning across all sectors with a reflection on how previous plans were maintained.

Any future Infrastructure Commission needs to have a climate change theme considered as well as taking account of NI's political and economic position. Examples of projects that worked well in other places need to be applied here with local knowledge and understanding. To support the Commission should be made up of experts from NI instead of outsourcing these individuals.

An Infrastructure Commission could have a mentoring, advisory and accountability role. However, learning from SIB it lost its way and did take on too much of an advisory role as it didn't have the power to deliver projects. An Infrastructure Commission needs to be independent, have a mandate and its management needs to be external of the public sector along with long-term plan to hold the NI Executive to account.

Individuals who will work on the Commission need to do so on a full-time basis, Engineers Ireland suggested that those who worked on the Commission part-time would find difficulty in delivering projects.

The Commission also needs to be progressive and help to close the gap between GB and NI which Engineers Ireland suggest is increasing.

If the Commission were unable to sit within the NI Executive it could sit within this Department for Infrastructure, whilst this wouldn't be the ideal place, it would be a good starting point and better than the Commission not being set up at all. It could also start small and then widen as it progresses.

### Funding

Regarding funding, the Scottish Government have shown creativity for funding infrastructure such as borrowing which is then offset by future costs. In NI local authorities don't have this flexibility and so there is a continual look towards Westminster for funding when other avenues are available.

### Climate change

Engineers Ireland suggested that the policies on climate change need to be updated in NI as well as the speed of planning, they gave the example of John Lewis, suggesting that this is off-putting for investors.

An Infrastructure Commission would also need to note the all island economy when developing infrastructure and overall the Commission could act as a catalyst for the future.

## Consultee: Invest Northern Ireland

### Role and make-up of an Infrastructure Commission

INI suggest that an Infrastructure Commission could provide overarching leadership to bring different aspects of infrastructure together which usually act alone such as energy, telecoms, air and housing for instance. Net zero, community inclusion and competitiveness all work together and so these need to be planned for and developed in a holistic way. There also needs to be a regional focus as there are opportunities outside of Belfast to ensure inclusion.

Infrastructure is vitally important to FDI and investors need to know they are getting something which is world class. Therefore, a Commission needs to address how NI is seen from the outside looking in and help to create a seamless approach to which investors are dealt with. The example of investors in Boston was given where there was a single point of contact for all queries, the same one-stop approach needs to occur here to make it easy for investors.

Any future Commission needs to be agreed at Executive level to give it primacy, it was expressed that departmental engagement would be ineffective for this because each department has their own strategy and priorities. The Commission would need to have cross party and cross departmental support to allow for absolute clarity of focus along with a credible leader and team who are prepared to make tough choices which are put forward clearly. Independence and a long-term vision are also key as politicians are always seeking re-election and so they are focused on short term goals.

### Climate change

Regarding climate change, currently there is no legislation in place and so businesses can't plan effectively, net zero is going to be a commitment going forward and there needs to be a focusing on 'greening' the economy which can play a part in the post-COVID-19 recovery. There needs to be focus on energy and resource efficiency and how to develop the circular economy in NI, this will help not only the environment but also to ensure businesses are competitive.

### Engagement with society

An Infrastructure Commission should engage with the NI community and ensure inclusion, often FDI does not trickle down to a community level. Therefore, this Commission would need to have the responsibility for a regionally balanced economy with a realisation that economic development can't work in silos.

INI spoke about how to engage society and suggested using social media tools with an engagement campaign to provide clear messages and understandable, good choices to the public whilst always respecting the public.

### Wastewater

Wastewater treatment is an area of weak development in NI, where there is not the capacity for waste to support future capital investment, holding NI back. Opportunities do exist such as using waste wind power to multiply efficiency of wastewater treatment and leapfrog NI in to a hydrogen economy. An Infrastructure Commission could lead on projects such as this but require independence to do so with decisions based on economics and science rather than politics.

INI provided this resources for additional information : [Improving productivity through efficient resource management](#)

### Other issues

INI suggest that working from home will continue and this creates new opportunities to react strategically and give the business community an opportunity to lead. COVID-19 and Brexit are still ongoing issues and so it needs to be about how we make the most out of these.

## **Consultee: Mineral Products Association Northern Ireland**

### **Role and make-up of an Infrastructure Commission**

MPANI expressed concerns as to how a new Commissioner could add value to the existing structure with the role of SIB and CPD. MPANI commented on the size of SIB when it was formed, 15 - 20 people with a clear role in advice to the NI Executive to now where they have 115 staff and CPD are similar. Therefore, it needs to be assured that there is no duplication, a new Commission could take on this role, MPANI previously made a recommendation that there should be centralised unit.

The Commission would also need to be independent, made up of private sector experts which would give external stakeholder confidence. The Commission should sit in the remit of the NI Executive and not a specific department, where they can deal with multiple targets under one management. MPANI suggest that an individual should be brought in from outside NI who has experience to lead the Commission such as from Scotland or Australia. This individual should be given a timescale to come up with recommendations and then in 2-3 years there is an independent review to assess where the Commission is operating. MPANI referred the CBI Review of Planning whose Commissioner has made radical suggestions this approach, MPANI suggest is valuable and useful. There also needs to be a clear link between infrastructure and planning like in Scotland and in a strategic planning policy statement.

### **Long-term versus short-term**

MPANI mention the NI Audit Office which outlines previously some major issues in to the delivery of projects which need to be addressed such as the process on infrastructure, budgets, time scale and the political structures at play. To ensure that a Commission would not turn in to an 'empire' MPANI suggest that it would need to provide a report every 5 years on the successes and progress.

### **Best practices**

MPANI suggest that infrastructure needs a 3-5 year budget cycle as this delivers better value for money, giving the example of apprentices who see a pipeline of work and funding towards achieving a goal in the future. MPANI gave the example of New Zealand who have assessed their overall infrastructure system which NI could do to cut down on waste and address exactly what is needed.

### **Water**

MPANI suggest that NI water needs addressed immediately and this resource critical for everything else from tourism, infrastructure and City Deals. There also needs to be a focus on net zero which a Commission could help to do. They also mentioned the impact of COVID-19 and the potential for more people to be working from home and so this will impact transport hub, York Street, digital infrastructure which all need addressed if circumstances remain particularly in the medium-long term.

### **Brexit**

Meanwhile Brexit poses a challenge as to funding for their industry in which a lot in infrastructure was delivered here through EIB, so they question if that funding will be made available here. MPANI want decisions to be made and referred to the recovery plan they presented to the Minister in June, they want decisions made in order to prevent any negative impacts by 2021 which would see significant redundancies in the construction industry potentially.



## **Consultee: Ofcom**

### **Role and make-up of an Infrastructure Commission**

Ofcom were supportive of establishing an Infrastructure Commission in NI expressing that it would be beneficial to have an organisation looking at things from a cross-cutting, birds eye view. Ofcom expressed the view that there are many interdependencies between different infrastructure projects that could be aligned, and Ofcom encouraged the Panel to include digital infrastructure as part of the Commission's remit.

### **Planning structure in NI**

Ofcom suggested that the current planning structure in NI could cause commercial money to flow elsewhere in the UK, where planning for mobile infrastructure under permitted development isn't as restricted as in NI. The current planning legislation in NI could make it more difficult for mobile operators to fulfil their obligations as part of the Shared Rural Network (SRN) which includes binding coverage targets. Overall planning is potentially something that an Infrastructure Commission could look at and take the politics out of it. Planning, health concerns and community opposition for instance all need to be addressed to get a better solution for improved mobile coverage. A Commission would need to take a long-term view and be fairly unconstrained whilst working very closely with industry.

### **Digital connectivity in NI**

In terms of broadband coverage, NI is currently in a relatively good place, mobile coverage too but it did take longer to catch up from the initial roll-out of 3G. NI is well ahead of the UK in its full fibre coverage, but it is likely that gap will close in the coming years. Ofcom understand that broadband availability is unequal, and NI also has a higher proportion of premises that cannot access broadband speeds of more than 10Mbits. This is a challenge given the rural distribution of the population. There are particular issues in the Fermanagh & Omagh, Newry, Mourne and Down and Mid Ulster districts who suffer poor broadband and mobile coverage. COVID has highlighted the need for strong connectivity and digital infrastructure. Ofcom agreed that greater connectivity could bring environmental benefits from changed work patterns and increased machine-to-machine technology.

### **Best practices**

In regard to the National Infrastructure Commission and the Infrastructure Commission for Scotland, Ofcom had offered working groups and seminars to help the Commissioners' understanding of telecoms regulation. That would be something they would like to offer in NI if it came to fruition, so there is an understanding of principles and how they apply to NI, and how they can be subtly but crucially different to the rest of UK.

### **Other issues**

Ofcom noted greater sharing of telecoms infrastructure, for example access to existing ducts and telegraph poles, and hoped for greater sharing of infrastructure between telecoms and utility networks. It is worth looking into how operators and regulators operate to support future plans. Ofcom noted its close working relationship with the Department for the Economy, given their telecoms brief, and hoped for a joined-up approach across relevant departments to support improved connectivity in the future.

## **Consultee: Openreach**

### **Role and make-up of an Infrastructure Commission**

Openreach suggest that any potential Commission could learn from SIB and questions whether a new Commission would replace SIB or work collaboratively. It was suggested that SIB focus more on skills and individuals resulting in the context that they were meant to deliver in being lost. Openreach expressed concern at the already lack of joined up working for instance from central to local government and so there is a siloed approach for each touch point in departments. There should be a focus on what government and private sector are doing and how these could be done best to attract FDI.

When asked about the independence of new Commission, Openreach question whether any organisation is every fully independent. For the Commission to be successful it would need to be from an established body rather than one focused solely on independence.

### **Digital connectivity in NI**

There also needs to be good recognition of the positive work going on in NI, for instance currently NI has full fibre coverage of nearly 60% versus the UK at 15% and this recognition needs to be maximised for the benefit of NI PLC. This position of NI in terms of full fibre access sets NI apart especially due to the volume of people now working from home. Openreach think it is possible to have 100% coverage by 2025.

There is also the opportunity to develop digital skills particularly for old people and to encourage a transition from legacy to new technology which will require joining up investment pots.

### **Planning structure in NI**

There is also the challenge of planning which needs to be addressed and in particular the growth of new homes and developments all of which are built without broadband access which is left to the service provider, particularly challenging are rural homes with long lanes/driveways. Council currently do not have the legislative powers to compel developers to address connectivity concerns to their proposed sites, which may change with planned legislation in Westminster, but Councils could be more vocal with developers that connectivity is critical to them to support applications.

## **Consultee: Queen's University Belfast- Environmental Planning**

### **Role and make-up of an Infrastructure Commission**

Professor Geraint Ellis is the Chair of Environmental Planning at QUB and welcomes the initiative to set up an Infrastructure Commission. Professor Ellis suggests that it is important to have an independent and evidence-based voice. Currently the views of the climate emergency are not being addressed.

Any Commission would also need to go across different departments in order to deliver a regional strategy, the example of the Regional Development Strategy, specified in the Belfast Agreement highlighted. It would be problematic if the Commission could not cover energy or digitisation, which are currently not covered by the Department of Infrastructure.

### **Planning structure in NI**

Infrastructure planning needs to be viewed with a long-time frame (20 - 30 years), yet current governance arrangements means it is acting on much shorter horizons, and therefore not delivering what it could for NI. It is very important that an Infrastructure Commission would need to address where it sits with existing planning bodies; it should not overrule the local development plan system, which is where planning should get the credibility from local democracy, but we could imagine the Commission setting a long time framework through which these plans could operate. The Commission would need to address how it complements what is currently in place, but there is certainly a place for it.

Prof Ellis is not an expert on infrastructure procurement but would see the strategic planning function as being by far the most valuable function the Commission could deliver.

Overall a Commission could be an expert-led planning advisor, acting as an independent voice to review or evaluate government's infrastructure performance as well as hold government to account. The Commission would need to be independent and long-term, focussed on strategic issues and addressing previous issues of uneven development across the region.

### **Engagement with society**

Professor Ellis suggested that it would be a mistake to establish a body that takes legitimacy from public engagement; this must be the realm of elected representatives. Rather it should be seen as having its authority based on expertise, evidence, independence and strategic perspective, which are issues not often well served by representative democracy. The Infrastructure Commission should be independent, but any investment decisions ultimately made by government and this accountable to the people.

While it is important to try not to take power away from NI Executive, NI does currently have poor foresight capacity, made worse by increasing populist politics, and the Commission should be seen as addressing this particular issue, which is clearly detrimental to long term thinking and investment. In this respect, the Commission should place a particular emphasis on delivering infrastructure that adapts and mitigates for climate change – clearly it also needs to deliver social and economic goals, but these are often well voiced in the current institutions of governance.

## **Republic of Ireland's National and Economic Social Council**

Prof Ellis drew on his experience as an independent member of the National Economic and Social Council in the Republic of Ireland, which advises the Taoiseach on long term strategic issues (see <https://www.nesc.ie/>). This is an interesting example of an expert driven body, which also reflects a wide range of social, economic and environmental stakeholders (including agriculture, trade unions, and independent experts) that is able to reach consensus on critical issues facing the country (e.g. it has recently addressed climate change governance, the welfare system, transport orientated development and COVID-19 issues).

## **North-South relationship**

To be successful we have to realise that we live in same ecological and economic unit as the South and therefore many aspects of infrastructure will have to be developed on an all island basis, while others may have to have an east-west basis, or potentially beyond this, for example some marine relationships with France or Scandinavia.

## **Best practices**

NI could learn from the New Zealand models as it features an independent and strategic vision. Currently NI is spending lots of money to meet short term demand for instance building roads to meet demand for next five years, where it might not be there in 20 years, while fundamentally undermining climate change objectives.

## **Brexit**

Brexit can clearly not be ignored but may end up being a relatively short-term issues compared to many of the issues a Commission may consider. Here, the infrastructure that is needed to underpin sound environmental governance may be an important component to any future trade agreements or interface with the EUs Single Market.

## **Consultee: Translink**

### **Role and make-up of an Infrastructure Commission**

Translink were supportive of an Infrastructure Commission as it could provide long-term planning with a focus next generation infrastructure for NI, it may also be beneficial in assisting with the COVID-19 recovery setting out a clear plan for 'shovel ready projects'.

Translink also suggested that there may need to be a wider education about the role of infrastructure and its importance as when people know more about the role of infrastructure, they have a renewed appreciation.

An Infrastructure Commission could help to provide leadership and focus on this area and tackle difficult and large-scale projects which the NI Executive currently don't have time for. Translink suggested that an Infrastructure Commission would need to be strategically located with Civil Service and political buy-in, they mentioned how the Civil Service and the Commission would interact would be important for its success.

The role of the Commission could be to hold plans to account, ensure projects are for all of society. Its implementation would help to ensure a levelling up across the UK and NI which may help to get additional funding, this aspect may help to gain political buy-in. Translink also suggested that there was an overreliance on the block grant and a Commission would help to show that NI is being proactive and serious about its future investments.

The speed at which projects come to fruition in NI was mentioned and this is something that needs addressed.

### **Funding**

Translink suggested that unfortunately when it comes to the budget allocation infrastructure does not get priority like health and education do and so often industry actors feel that they are at the back of the queue causing frustration. However, the importance of infrastructure should not be overlooked as good quality infrastructure helps to support the labour market, therefore infrastructure needs to be thought of more strategically and as a priority like in Scotland, Ireland and Westminster.

### **Climate change**

There should also be a priority basis around net zero carbon which can help to make projects necessary. Translink highlighted that the UK Treasury Green Book does not take account of net zero and therefore they suggest that future economic models need to have a holistic approach with a focus on the social and environmental impacts, with future plans toughly measured and scrutinised.

## **Consultee: Northern Ireland Electricity Networks**

### **Role and make-up of an Infrastructure Commission**

A long-term focus on infrastructure is badly needed in NI and NIE Networks fully support the establishment of an Infrastructure Commission. Infrastructure is critical to a well functioning and sustainable economy and society. NI needs modern infrastructure on a par with the rest of the UK and Europe otherwise the region will be left behind. NIE Networks suggest that a Commission should have a major focus on long-term infrastructure needs, prioritisation and strategy, with perhaps some oversight of a small number of very strategic projects where appropriate. The overall model should allow NI to prepare for the future with a particular focus on successfully decarbonising the economy over the next 30 years and aligning climate action and economic development as the overall goal.

The Commission does need to be depoliticised and to achieve this it needs to be set up independently and report to the NI Executive and not to an individual minister due to the political and short-term nature of those roles. The Commission at the UK level shows where this has worked and how they can hold government to account whilst being independent. As well as holding government to account, the Commission should also hold planning, regulatory and delivery organisations to account. It should have oversight of and hold to account all aspects of the infrastructure delivery chain.

The core of the Commission should be physical infrastructure across NI, focussed on the key areas of energy, transport/roads, water/waster water, digital etc. It could also have a role in relation to housing development, which is very dependent on all the supporting utilities and infrastructure networks. There is probably a less clear case for including areas such as health and education as, while infrastructure support these and enable their delivery, there are much bigger policy issues involved. The primary focus should be infrastructure.

Giving this remit to the Strategic Investment Board might be an option but it feels quite different to their existing remit which appears to be more about supporting public sector delivery rather than setting out a long-term infrastructure vision for all of NI. The step change is so big that a new body would be better suited.

### **Best practices**

NIE Networks believe that Scotland has moved ahead of NI and other UK nations at aligning economic and infrastructure development with the goal of net zero. Aligning these two objectives makes sense as well as delivering for society and what they need. The Scottish model is therefore a very suitable comparator to consider.

The Republic of Ireland is certainly ahead of NI on climate action, but broader infrastructure planning remains heavily in the political domain and therefore not fully independent.

The New Zealand model also looks appropriate and one to consider in terms of best practice review.

### **The impact of COVID-19**

Going forward COVID-19 has created a new uncertainty which is something that the Commission needs to take it to account. There is now an opportunity for greater regional rebalancing as more people may choose to work from home so there may be greater dispersal of the population and a move away from urbanisation creating new demands on infrastructure. There may be less growth in urban areas, but it is too soon to say for definite what the trend swill be in this respect. The economic impact of COVID-19 also creates the need to urgently stimulate the economy and infrastructure delivery can play a key role in that, as part of a 'green recovery'.

## **Net zero carbon**

Integration of infrastructure is required to meet the low carbon model and interdependencies are become much stronger, for instance you can't look at decarbonising transport without considering energy infrastructure, and both have a dependency on digital. There are huge interdependencies across sectors which need to be addressed, the current model is very siloed which is not effective.

Political leadership is required on climate change however so that the Commission is not operating in a vacuum and to ensure that all sectors are aiming towards a common goal. Government needs to set the overall goal and reflect that in a Climate Change Act. A Commission could then provide the knowledge and expertise to determine the infrastructure needs to achieve that goal, integrated across the different sectors and government.

While the terms of reference of the Ministerial Advisory Panel provide that its scope will reflect the "hard" infrastructure that falls within the remit of the Department for Infrastructure, NIE Networks believes that it is essential that energy and digital infrastructure are also included within the scope of any Infrastructure Commission. Otherwise it will be ineffective and miss the opportunity to provide integrated long term infrastructure planning that is so badly needed.

## **Consultee: Alice Charles, World Economic Forum**

### **Is an Infrastructure Commission the right solution for NI?**

It was suggested that NI is perhaps not ready to decide on whether an Infrastructure Commission is the best option, as more research needs to be done to understand what the optimum solutions are for the local context. There needs to be focus on setting up the right enabling environment. The challenges that NI faces in terms of limited utilisation of technology in the design, procurement, delivery and operation of infrastructure and slow and inefficient planning permission system was highlighted. The opportunity to leverage digital twin technology was highlighted, in order to digitise land use planning and the opportunity to leverage algorithmic zoning to take politics out of land use planning, thus ensuring a strategic and sustainable approach is taken.

At present what is in progress is simply replicating what has been done in Scotland, which is not suitable for direct replication in NI, without having considered the unique local context.

It was flagged that PPPs are not necessarily the best instrument to deliver infrastructure. They tend to take an extensive period of time and the industry is renowned for 'low balling' in terms of price and have access to experienced legal expertise, who can insert legal loop holes that enable the contractor to seek additional funds post signing of the contract. The National Children's Hospital in Dublin was cited as an example of a mega infrastructure project with significant cost over runs, which highlights the need to legal expertise to assist government delivery.

Due to NI's small size it was suggested that infrastructure needs to be addressed on an all island basis if economically viable infrastructure is to be delivered. It was suggested that a transboundary approach needs to be adopted to the deliver of infrastructure. For instance, the Dublin-Belfast M1 motorway and dual carriageway has been delivered as two separate projects and on the northern side this poses road safety and capacity challenges – this roadway should have been delivered as one transboundary infrastructure project. It was highlighted that most development on the island of Ireland will occur on the Dublin Belfast corridor, which will require strong connections between the two cities. The need for a high speed rail link between the two cities was flagged and this should be considered as one infrastructure project. However, NI presents political risk which does put investors off. There is also the East-West dimension that needs to be considered, particularly in relation to connections between Belfast and London. Overall NI is competing with the South who will attract investment first so NI needs to address how it can be part of their pipeline of projects.

Any future Infrastructure Commission also needs to be realistic as there is a lack of institutional capacity in NI, and issues to consider include how would the Commission work with local authorities. Unfortunately, it was felt that there are weak local authorities in NI apart from Belfast which can make infrastructure projects difficult, it was suggested that steps such as directly elected mayors could ensure more effective local authorities.

### **Political risk too great in NI**

Transparency needs to be a key factor as there is also huge corruption risk associated with infrastructure projects, which combined with political risk puts investors off. Therefore, transparency and dispute resolution mechanisms need to be built in from the beginning. Project Eagle was cited as an example that provides a negative reputation for NI. It was expressed that the political risk of doing business in NI is continuing to deter investors. Other issues also continue to be off-putting such as fewer direct flights to NI and so internationalisation of the airports is needed. To remove political risk, NI needs to develop a long terms vision for Infrastructure (at least a 50-year plan), which is bought into by all political parties. This will provide NI with a costed pipeline of projects and with cross party buy in, it would get rid of political risk.



## **Engagement with society**

The MAP needs to consider how a Commission would engage with civil society, academia, the community and business. It was flagged that where there is a failure to engage civil society, academia, the community and business early on, innovation is not leveraged, and citizen concerns are not factored in.

## **Best practices**

Australia and Canada are the G20 countries that are the best at designing, procuring, delivering and operating infrastructure. In relation to Canada, the Ministry for Infrastructure & Communities Smart City Challenge was highlighted as best practice. The Ministry launched the Smart Cities Challenge to promote forward looking innovative thinking to address various challenges that cities and communities are facing in Canada and how technology could be used as an enabler to solve these challenges. This enabled villages, town and cities to develop a new vision for their community and enter a competition to potentially secure some funds to deliver this vision. If a village, town or city did not win they still any additional sources of funding and Canada's Ministry for Finance doubled its infrastructure spend and also established Canada's Infrastructure Bank. It was considered that the UK will need an infrastructure bank, particularly as it no longer will have access to the European Investment Bank post Brexit. Investors will not invest in risky infrastructure projects, so these types of projects will require government support. If NI needs to borrow through the markets for infrastructure projects, it will be important to consider the debt to GDP ratio and the ability to borrow without impacting the credit rating. Now is the opportune time to borrow for infrastructure investment as interest rates are low and infrastructure investment will provide a vital stimulus. It was recommended to speak to the G20's Global Infrastructure Hub, which is led by Marie Lam Frenco.

## **Funding**

Overall, it was suggested that NI is not ready to decide on whether an Infrastructure Commission is the best option, as more background work is needed. It was also pointed out that the Ministry of Infrastructure and Finance need to be closely working together to develop and cost and finance a pipeline of projects. There also needs to be a clear understanding of the ability to borrow in order to fund infrastructure, there need to be plans for retrofitting aged infrastructure, climate and resilience infrastructure, social infrastructure and digital infrastructure, as well as a vision for every village, town and city to provide a whole NI vision which will allow for effective planning and organisation of finances. The private sector, civil society and academia needs to be engaged in this process early on.