

The Infrastructure Forum

How can the 10-Year Infrastructure Strategy tackle barriers to delivery in the UK

The Infrastructure Forum's (TIF) network brings together investors, operators, constructors, lenders and professional advisors involved in the development of Britain's critical national infrastructure.

For many years, the Forum has actively engaged with both the National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) and the Infrastructure & Projects Authority (IPA). Each has made a significant contribution to the sector, bringing invaluable expertise through their leadership and wider teams.

The Forum welcomes the Government's intention to create The National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority (NISTA). The idea of combining the two activities of strategy and delivery was of course considered as one of the options in the original review which recommended the establishment of the NIC.

Bringing together the NIC's focus on assessments of long term economic infrastructure needs and the IPA's advice and monitoring functions has the potential to benefit UK infrastructure development and streamline processes, if it is set-up effectively.

NISTA must focus on the priorities, costs, and benefits of projects within the National Infrastructure Strategy (NIS) to help the Government assess their relative merit, affordability, and investment requirements. The NIC has provided expert and independent assessments in forecasting infrastructure needs and shaping delivery strategies. TIF hopes that the essence of this independent, evidence-based approach will be preserved, with an expert board.

NISTA must also continue IPA's work supporting the selection of optimal contractual and financing mechanisms, assurance, and enhancement of project management training and progress monitoring. The IPA's *Getting to Green* programme must be preserved, as it plays a vital role in supporting struggling projects. NISTA should be empowered as a strong, proactive force with the ability to intervene and bring projects back on track when needed. Additionally, the IPA's role in coordinating and strengthening public sector management of PFI expiries must be retained within NISTA to ensure effective oversight in this area.

Clarity in government policy and development of project pipelines are essential for boosting confidence in the infrastructure sector. It is crucial that market participants comprehend the Government's future direction, plans, and priorities for infrastructure development. A ten year NIS will therefore be very important in providing certainty to industry and investors. What is important is that it is not constantly reviewed every two to three years. Major infrastructure

typically takes ten to fifteen years to develop and deliver, and therefore a rolling ten year strategy with only minor changes is required.

But, the strategy itself is just the start. It will only be meaningful if it is properly costed, well managed and there is a strong focus on delivery at the most senior levels of government.

The Infrastructure Forum stands ready to provide any assistance from its experts across investors, owners, operators, professional advisers and regulators of UK infrastructure. TIF would be happy to bring together a suitable team to discuss the points made in this submission further.

Question 1 - Are the principles and focus areas for the Strategy the right ones to prioritise?

1. A gap exists between the assets the UK has today and the ones we will need in future to support economic growth, net zero and resilience.
2. The NIC' second National Infrastructure Assessment remains consistent with the government's missions and should be the foundation for the ten year infrastructure strategy.
3. The objectives of *enabling resilient growth, delivering the clean energy superpower mission, and ensuring social infrastructure can support public services* are all positive, as are the guiding principles also set out in the working paper.
4. The government should be honest about the choices and challenges facing the UK. Given the numerous challenges across the infrastructure sectors, trade-offs are inevitable and should be communicated to the public.
5. In an environment of limited resources, prioritisation has become crucial - a suitable balance will need to be found in meeting the demands of the public, boosting growth and reaching environmental targets.
6. Making sure that the Infrastructure Strategy is a success requires ambition, talent and strong decision-making.

Question 2 - Which functions of a spatial strategy are most important for you?

7. It would be positive if the strategy supports a more spatial approach to infrastructure planning. Spatial plans, supported by an aligned industrial strategy, would maximise the impact of infrastructure investment.
8. Spatial plans should recognise that there will be a need for different regions to focus on different industries and sectors, as has been recognised for CCS and Hydrogen.
9. It is important to plan housing where it is needed, supported by transport and other infrastructure, not just arbitrarily spread across the country.
10. Additionally, there must be alignment between the various different plans e.g. Strategic Spatial Energy Plan and the Land Use Framework

Question 3 - Of the types of pipeline – which are the most important features to industry?

11. The current National Infrastructure and Construction Pipeline lacks in detail. The pipeline must outline clear investment opportunities and remain stable. Investors would benefit from greater detail on prioritisation and investment and delivery models for example.

12. Regardless of the pipeline 'type', the industry seeks certainty and stability. This requires secure funding and a reasonable expectation that necessary approvals will be obtained. Additionally, stakeholders need clarity on estimated costs, timelines, and the proposed delivery model.

Question 4 - How best can the government provide greater certainty for industry? Including the role of the Strategy, a pipeline, and departments?

13. Industry and investors need clarity, certainty and longevity. But, for a very long time, organisations have been working within a high degree of uncertainty.
14. The challenges presented by uncertainty are exacerbated by long lead times and the long lives of infrastructure assets
15. The supply chain has not had the confidence to invest in skills and materials, with skills now a huge issue as the government tries to boost infrastructure development.
16. Moreover, the UK has also been missing the efficiency benefits of a more programmatic pipeline
17. The role of government in setting clear strategic direction is key to addressing many of the challenges facing UK infrastructure.
18. The creation of a 10 year strategy and of NISTA can start to provide greater certainty for industry if the government gets it right.

National Infrastructure Strategy

19. The 10-year strategy needs to set out a long-term vision for UK infrastructure and demonstrate how we get there. It should make very clear how and where infrastructure will contribute to meeting government missions.
20. The strategy must learn from the previous two, assess trade-offs, and set priorities
21. It must align with the integrated national transport strategy, strategic energy spatial plan, industrial strategy, and other sectoral plans.
22. For success, the strategy needs consensus, strong leadership, progress monitoring, clear public communication, and resistance to political resets every five years.

Project Pipeline

23. The NIS must be supported by a strong infrastructure pipeline.
24. Everyone in the infrastructure industry would welcome a robust infrastructure pipeline of projects that society supports, helping to put an end to the damaging cycle of stop-go infrastructure planning.
25. Too much reprofiling would be detrimental, introducing uncertainty and delaying delivery.
26. The government should cut unaffordable and undeliverable projects from the pipeline, removing 'zombie projects' that waste financial, human, and technical resources without tangible outcomes.
27. When resources have been committed and ring-fenced, government must respect these commitments rather than, as seen with HS2, penalising companies that have invested based on prior assurances. Large-scale projects like these take years to plan and develop the necessary capabilities, yet the decision to scale back HS2 was made abruptly. Such sudden policy shifts not only disrupt businesses but also undermine international investor confidence in the stability and predictability of the UK's infrastructure policy.

Departments

28. Government departments responsible for infrastructure can operate in silos, hindering the seamless integration of infrastructure policy and delivery across Whitehall.
29. The Office for Investment (OfI) should have a key role to play in improving coordination across government, as should NISTA
30. Therefore, NISTA must have the necessary “clout” with Government Departments and delivery agencies to be able to drive delivery. This will require very visible and active sponsorship from the Chief Secretary, ideally by chairing a cabinet committee for infrastructure and requiring the regular attendance of the Senior Responsible Owners of the major projects.

Investment

31. The government must welcome private finance in all areas of infrastructure development as public funding will remain tight for at least the next Parliament.
32. Treating private finance as an afterthought would undermine the entire National Infrastructure Strategy. Early and meaningful discussions with investors and stakeholders must be prioritised.
33. The government should offer clarity where possible on funding models to encourage private investment.
34. A Tideway-style investment model would attract private finance and ensure private sector involvement in governance. The ongoing uncertainty around Sizewell C financing is a clear example of why a clear approach is needed. Given the government’s stated ambitions, the NIS should place greater emphasis on the key role that nuclear energy is expected to play in the UK energy system.

Programmatic Approach

35. Adopting a programmatic approach would help to make scarce public money go further. It would also help ensure forward program visibility to drive investment in skills and supply chain capacity.
36. Programmes should be structured to leverage repeat builds, benefit from learning curves, and standardise key elements.
37. Costs and benefits across the full lifecycle of infrastructure must be accurately assessed. Often, by year 30 the benefits are so deeply discounted that the ongoing value of the asset to the country is not recognised. Accountability must be built into the process, requiring those responsible to deliver promised benefits. Any changes should go through a carefully moderated process rather than being made arbitrarily or without transparency. A structured approach to altering project parameters should be established to prevent sudden shifts.

Question 5 - Do you have views on the early priorities for NISTA to support the delivery of the Strategy?

38. The first step for NISTA needs to be clearly articulating a route forward. A fit-for-future NISTA will synthesize the independent analysis of NIC, the assurance of IPA into an execution focused organisation with the cover and capability to drive performance.
39. NISTA is an opportunity to address many of the issues with infrastructure planning and delivery, as long as it retains the benefits of the independent expertise provided by the NIC and the IPA’s advice and monitoring functions

- 40. Good policy intentions have too often been swallowed up by departmental complexity within the Treasury. An identifiable body accountable for the success of the NIS will therefore be beneficial.
- 41. NISTA should play a key role in delivering the government's infrastructure-related missions. As the central hub of infrastructure expertise within the government, it must be actively involved in ensuring these goals are met effectively.
- 42. One of NISTA's first challenges will be to improve government departments' planning, procurement, and oversight of infrastructure delivery.

Approvals

- 43. NISTA approval must not become another bureaucratic hurdle. Adding more steps won't speed up or improve project certainty. The government must clarify what NISTA replaces or removes in the current approval process and ensure it is accountable for fast and effective infrastructure delivery. Current processes requiring consents from multiple bodies and departments unduly slow down progress.
- 44. NISTA must be staffed with experts who have the experience and authority to make decisions quickly and keep projects moving forward.

Skills

- 45. NISTA must be equipped with experienced project delivery experts who can be seconded to departments to help shape and execute projects effectively. This could follow a similar model to UKGI, which seeks to combine private sector skills with public sector expertise to provide advice to the government, particularly through the use of secondments.
- 46. It should include experts with real-world experience, ensuring projects are structured for success from the start.

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