

National Infrastructure Summit 2025

7th May 2025

Good morning everyone.

It's real pleasure and privilege to be able to join with you all for the National Infrastructure Summit here this morning.

I would like to thank Ivan for that very generous introduction, most of which was accurate. I regularly meet Ivan at events like this and the introduction seems to get longer and certainly more colourful each time!

I want to thank the Business Post for the invitation to address today's summit. Now in its fourth year, this occasion provides an excellent forum for dialogue between policy makers, the construction sector and private investors, as well as an opportunity to look forward to delivery of infrastructure to serve our country in the years and decades ahead.

I think attendees are in for a really interesting and enlightening conference with contributions from so many individuals from public and private sectors, directly involved in delivering infrastructure and those who interact with our deliver systems.

As Minister for Infrastructure, I want to acknowledge the domestic and international delivery partners, government and delivery agencies here today and to acknowledge the ambition that is in this room to significantly increase delivery in the coming period.

The Swiss architect Peter Zumthor said: Construction is the art of making a meaningful whole out of many parts. Buildings are witnesses to the human ability to construct concrete things.”

That is the unique skill and expertise of the people in this room: to bring together all the components, material and human and to build and construct the infrastructure we as a society cannot live without.

I believe that unlocking your ambition and turning it into delivery is central to my role.

Today Ireland is facing into many challenges beyond our shores. Tariffs, geopolitical tensions, war in eastern Europe and the repositioning of supply lines and markets are just some of those uncertainties.

As one Financial Times author has described it, certainty is now a scarcity.

In the face of those uncertainties, we must control what can be controlled, and to me, that means investing in and reforming our processes for the delivery of infrastructure.

Infrastructure is the silent backbone of our economic prosperity not just for the short term but for the long term.

A single bridge arching across a river can link markets for decades.

Tiny fibre cables draped across the seabed have opened new worlds, new horizons and arguably disrupted the modern economy more than any other single piece of infrastructure since perhaps the Suez Canal or the first transatlantic cables.

The first phase of motorway expansion completed 25 years ago has defined the industrial heartlands of Dublin while the further regional network completed in the decade following has shaped the development of our regions on an unprecedented scale.

What we build in the coming decade will set a wider direction for many decades to come.

This government believes that investing in infrastructure in Ireland is an absolute, time-sensitive necessity.

Total capital investment in 2025 will be almost €15 billion. This amounts to the highest annual spend to date in this country, four times the level of investment only 10 years ago. Work is ongoing on the Review of the National Development Plan which will be completed by July.

Officials in my department have started work identifying the objectives, priorities and critical milestones for the review of the National Development Plan.

The review will cover all public capital investment to 2035 and use a range of funding sources, including the Apple escrow funds, the Infrastructure, Climate and Nature Fund, and proceeds of the AIB share sales. This amounts to €20 Billion in additional investment.

The review offers an opportunity to increase investment levels in housing and will support critical infrastructure delivery, especially in areas of energy, water, transport and health digitalisation.

The focus of the review is to prioritise the infrastructure to deliver 300,000 additional homes by 2030 and to support international competitiveness. To that end, individual departments have now been asked to identify their priorities for the coming years.

In making requests for funding, departments will be required to demonstrate that projects will be delivered on time and budget, with evidence of appropriate cost estimates while also achieving value for money.

To ensure that the review reflects the viewpoints of the people it affects, interested stakeholders will be invited to make submissions on the review through a public consultation, which will launch in the coming weeks.

It would be easy for me to say today that additional investment alone will yield the outcomes we need in infrastructure, but I don't believe it will.

I've met with the delivery agencies, infrastructure delivery partners, construction sector representatives and experts in the field. The feedback is clear.

Additional investment alone is just one element of the reform we must undertake.

When thinking about infrastructure delivery over the coming years, this government's priority is to support three key areas:

- the stable, long-term delivery of essential infrastructure that is not affected by fluctuations in the economy,
- a sustainable pipeline of projects that allow the construction sector to ramp up capacity to ensure delivery, and
- strategic prioritisation of projects that is aligned with national priorities.
- To support these priorities, Government is making significant changes to its structures.

Anything that can achieve faster delivery is on the table.

A new Infrastructure Division in my Department has now been established. A key focus of the work of this new division is understanding what barriers are getting in the way of timely infrastructure development and suggesting high-impact reforms to accelerate delivery.

A team of sectoral experts is being seconded from key agencies involved in infrastructure delivery to support the Division to deliver on its mandate and a new Accelerating Infrastructure Taskforce is currently being stood up.

The membership of the Taskforce, which I will chair, will be finalised shortly and will include the CEOs of critical delivery agencies and a number of external experts with experience in the infrastructure area.

The work programme of the Division over the next three months will focus on a review of international best practice including Common Law jurisdictions, the UK, Australia, New Zealand, some American states and selected EU nations, identification of barriers and engagement with key sectors.

This process will run in parallel to the review of the National Development Plan and an Action Plan will be brought to Government in July.

This Plan will contain a small number of high impact actions that are rigorously focused on addressing the most critical barriers to development that are identified.

I am clear that each action that Government puts forward at that point must meet three key tests.

The first is that they must move the dial. I have no interest in long lists of marginal actions which make marginal differences. We must no longer seek to operate within increasingly multilayered and complex systems and instead we must reform or replace those systems where possible.

The second is that we must reassert the common good over narrow interest. Too many much-needed projects are delayed or blocked for too long because the balance has drifted too far from the core strategic goals.

And thirdly, we need to assert very clear direction from the centre. We cannot allow the varied mandates of various bodies to create delays which undermine the ability of government to achieve its goals.

We need to cut the crap- run parallel processes where required, address immediately conflicting priorities and assert the priorities of government and communities.

Finally, we need to centralise and create a pool of expertise.

In addition, the National Development Finance Agency (NDFA), is in the process of developing a new service to provide additional expert assistance and support on major public capital investment projects. This will include the provision of project management, procurement, planning, commercial and financial expertise to support Departments and delivery Agencies.

In time, this approach will standardise processes and give certainty to the sector when they engage with Government on projects.

A strong sector will lead to strong delivery and work is also ongoing to strengthen the sector.

Many of you will be aware of the Construction Sector Group, which is overseen by my department.

The group is working to progress a number of key policy objectives, including working with industry and government bodies to benchmark and improve productivity and sustainability and modernise public works delivery; considering opportunities for reforms to improve efficiency and deliver value for money for investment; and exploring the supply of necessary skills and measures to enhance capacity.

For example, Construct Innovate, which is Ireland's construction technology centre, is playing a key role in driving innovation to meet the infrastructure demands outlined in Project Ireland 2040.

The research centre aims to make Ireland a global leader for sustainable construction and built environment technology and currently comprises 94 member organisations.

In that vein, increasing the adoption of Modern Methods of Construction (MMC) continues to be a priority for Government, and its progress is monitored via the Construction Sector Group. Research from the Department of Further and Higher Education highlights the

potential of MMC to alleviate labour supply shortages, finding that up to 10,000 fewer new entrants will be required in the construction sector to meet our national targets if there is widespread adoption of MMC.

We are facing into a period of great opportunity where capital expenditure is at all-time high and set to grow.

As we review the National Development Plan, our commitment is clear: to align our priorities with the resources, innovation and expertise of the construction sector to unlock the delivery of 300,000 new homes by 2030.

Government will do its part in setting strategic priorities, allocating funding, removing barriers and driving delivery. But we cannot deliver the infrastructure that is essential to our growth and competitiveness as a country without the participation of a dynamic and innovative construction sector.

The British politician and diplomat Stephen Gardiner said: “Good buildings come from good people”.

I look around me today and I see many good people. We must get on with making good buildings, good energy infrastructure, good water treatment plants, good turbines and good roads.

Thank you for your attention this morning, thank you for your contribution to building our economy and our country, and please enjoy the conference.

Go raibh míle maith agaibh go léir.

ENDS