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report**

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Accelerating infrastructure delivery

Ireland is at a pivotal moment: our economy is strong, and our population is growing, but infrastructure delivery has not kept pace, writes Minister for Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation Jack Chambers TD.

This current sluggish nature of infrastructure development demands faster action and greater ambition. This government has placed infrastructure delivery at the heart of its ambitions and as minister with responsibility for infrastructure, my focus is on putting in place both the investment and the reforms necessary to grasp this once-in-a-generation opportunity.

Success will require alignment across government, industry, and communities. I am confident, from speaking to individuals, businesses, and political representatives across the country, that there is an understanding of the need to radically transform how Ireland delivers infrastructure, for the current generation and generations to come.

National Development Plan Review

The delivery of essential infrastructure is a key driver in ensuring our economy's competitiveness and resilience. In the past five years, there has been more than €65 billion invested in capital infrastructure projects across our country to improve people's lives through the National Development Plan (NDP), with total capital investment in 2026 estimated at €19.1 billion. This represents the highest annual spend to date in this country.

While this funding has delivered a significant amount of infrastructure including roads, houses, schools, hospitals and more, all of which have improved the lives of the people living in Ireland, the Programme for Government recognised that more investment is needed to address infrastructure deficits.

In July 2025, we reaffirmed that commitment with a revised NDP that will deliver transformational investment to safeguard Ireland's future.

€102 billion is being allocated for the next five years, an additional €33.9 billion on what was previously allocated in the NDP, with a further €100 billion for the period 2030 to 2035. In total, €275 billion of public capital investment is allocated for the period to 2035.

This scale of investment is not simply a matter of upgrading infrastructure; it is about safeguarding the economy, protecting jobs, enhancing competitiveness, and ensuring prosperity for communities at a time of global volatility. In line with the Programme for Government, we are directing resources toward the critical sectors that underpin growth: housing, water, energy, and transport. By investing in these building blocks, we are laying the foundation for Ireland's future.

Key investment allocations to support delivery of our 300,000 new homes target include:

- a total of €3.5 billion in equity has been earmarked for ESB Networks and Eirgrid;
- €12.2 billion for the water sector for water and wastewater services; and
- €24.3 billion for the transport sector, including low carbon transport projects such as Metrolink.

Sectoral investment plans were published by government departments at the end of 2025, providing the construction and built environment sector with a clear and structured pipeline of projects to be delivered over the next five years.

Accelerating infrastructure

Even with the necessary investment and a structured project pipeline in place, the path from planning to delivery remains far from straightforward. Additional expenditure alone cannot address infrastructure deficits. From planning to procurement, from environmental assessment to final approval, the infrastructure development cycle has become increasingly complex and uncertain.

Today's landscape is shaped by successive reforms aimed at addressing regulatory requirements, environmental protection, value for money and public participation. Each of these goals is important and was developed with the best of intentions. However, consideration of the cumulative impact that each additional requirement imposes on the development of infrastructure and the risks of delay this creates has been missing.

There is strong evidence that the development lifecycle for infrastructure is lengthening considerably. Uisce Éireann has assessed that the development time for a small wastewater treatment project in Ireland is seven to 10 years. This is four to five years longer than the delivery timeline for similar sized projects in other EU member states.

ESB Networks notes that the development cycle for a basic electricity substation has now reached five to six years for a typical project, while a more complex development may take 8.5 years. Major road projects can now have a development cycle of up to 15 years. In essence, it appears that development timelines have, in many cases, approximately doubled compared to the development cycles typical of just 20 years ago.

These delays are not abstract problems. They have real-world implications. Each delay translates into higher costs, missed opportunities, and mounting pressure on essential services.

When water and electricity systems cannot keep pace with demand, housing delivery slows. Constraints on secure, affordable, low carbon energy directly affect energy costs, competitiveness, employment, and progress toward climate commitments. And when transport networks lag behind growth, we see greater congestion, higher operating costs, and huge frustration for businesses and communities and more time lost for people.

We also know that the current development cycle, characterised by slow processes and significant delays, demands a step change in both pace and ambition.

The Programme for Government, published in January 2025, was very clear that the ambition was to secure our future with the delivery of critical infrastructure as the key driver of this objective. All government bodies, with leadership from my department, are now tasked with reassessing how they prioritise their work and remit to ensure that they are supporting the objectives of government in delivering critical infrastructure.

“Prioritising the common good, through consistent leadership, clear decision-making, and a shared commitment to delivery, is essential to ensuring Ireland’s infrastructure keeps pace with demand.”

Government launched the *Accelerating Infrastructure Report and Action Plan* in December 2025. This report sets out a comprehensive programme of reforms to break through inertia and accelerate the delivery of infrastructure that our people, communities, and businesses urgently need.

The action plan addresses 12 key barriers that were identified through stakeholder consultation and sets out 30 specific, time-bound actions to speed up the pace of infrastructure delivery in Ireland.

Reform actions are structured around four pillars:

- legal reform;
- regulatory reform and simplification;
- co-ordination and delivery reform; and
- public acceptance.

These measures provide for a whole-of-government approach, with ownership of actions spread across the public service. Taken together, these actions will ensure that the unprecedented levels of capital investment translate into timely, coordinated delivery of the infrastructure essential for our country's long-term growth. My focus is on ensuring that the positive impact of these actions is tangible in communities throughout the country and we build abundance in our economy and society, so we deliver the essential public services, amenities and infrastructure our communities need, at pace and at scale.

Time is of the essence, and implementation of these actions is already underway. Earlier this year, I established the Joint Utilities and Transport Clearing House to provide a structured forum for resolving coordination issues that delay infrastructure projects. Government has also launched a new service through which the National Development Finance Agency will support departments at every stage of major capital projects.

In recent weeks, I updated the Infrastructure Guidelines, which set out the value for money guidelines for the evaluation, planning and management of public investment projects. These updates remove up to 20 weeks from the

approval process for major projects, allowing them to progress more rapidly through the delivery lifecycle.

I have also established the Infrastructure Regulatory Simplification Unit within my department, which will work to examine opportunities for regulatory reform to speed up project delivery.

These actions demonstrate the appetite across government for tangible, impactful change. Work will continue to put in place further necessary reforms over the coming months, as we work to unpick the tangled regulatory web that has made delivery so difficult.

Ultimately we are increasing the risk appetite across our public services, supported by risk appetite statements, so we back decision makers across our public sectors to get projects approved, commenced and completed in the national interest.

There is real momentum across government and industry, and I am committed to driving this forward to deliver meaningful, lasting change. Prioritising the common good, through consistent leadership, clear decision-making, and a shared commitment to delivery, is essential to ensuring Ireland's infrastructure keeps pace with demand.

Closing

Accelerating delivery is not about impatience but responsibility. Families, communities and businesses cannot afford the cost of inaction. By accelerating infrastructure delivery, we will unlock the homes that families need, the transport networks that connect communities, and the energy systems that power our economy and drive our decarbonisation.

There is now a systematic whole-of-government commitment to reform and to the timely delivery of the suite of actions set out in this plan. It demands urgency, collaboration, and accountability at every level and it will happen. The people of Ireland deserve no less, and this government will deliver.



Home truth: Ireland's housing crisis needs a new delivery playbook

Ireland has the will and the funding to solve the housing crisis; now it is about building the delivery machinery to match, writes Ronan Devlin, Central Government Portfolio Director at Jacobs.

After nearly a decade in London working on global infrastructure programmes and large-scale regeneration, I have returned to Ireland. Much has changed for the better. The National Development Plan is channelling unprecedented investment, confidence has returned, and there is a renewed appetite for long-term thinking. Ireland is thinking big again.

Yet the gap between ambition and delivery remains painfully clear.

For me, this is both professional and personal. I have worked on infrastructure programmes that reshaped cities: rail corridors that unlocked tens of thousands of homes, Olympic venues converted into thriving neighbourhoods, new towns delivered at pace. I have seen what happens when ambition meets delivery capability and when it does not.

Ireland's housing crisis is less about resources or intent, and more about how delivery is currently structured. Demographic pressures, returning talent and infrastructure expansion demand a fundamentally different approach. The Government's target to deliver 300,000 homes by 2030, including 72,000 social homes, is ambitious, but achievable if we adapt the best international lessons.

The current arithmetic is unforgiving. Ireland delivered 36,000 homes in 2025, an improvement on previous years, but still 14,000 short of the 50,000 annual average needed to meet the Government's 2030 target. Even

optimistic forecasts project 40,000 completions by 2026. On current trajectory, Ireland will deliver perhaps 240,000 homes by 2030, leaving 60,000 families without the housing promised. Incrementalism is not working. The gap is not closing fast enough.

Moving beyond incremental change: building new towns at scale

Urban development zones, as proposed in the Planning and Development Act 2024, are sensible in theory: focused development, coordinated infrastructure and streamlined planning. In practice, they can struggle to deliver at the pace now required. Fragmented land ownership, limited compulsion powers and complex institutional coordination mean they often encourage development rather than enable it at scale in a timescale that addresses immediate delivery needs. The result is likely to be incremental growth where transformation is needed.

The UK's post-war New Towns programme took a different approach. Dedicated development corporations were given land-assembly powers, long-term funding certainty and a mandate to deliver complete communities: housing alongside transport, utilities, schools, green space and jobs. Milton Keynes, Stevenage, and Harlow were not accidents but planned outcomes that now house more than 2.8 million people.

Ireland now has an opportunity to do something similar. The Land Development Agency has made important progress in the delivery of housing since its establishment, particularly in the area of affordable housing. While well-funded and well-intentioned, its remit remains constrained. The LDA has a focus on state-owned land, has limited compulsory acquisition powers, and operates within fragmented planning structures. Critically, it cannot create entirely new settlements with integrated governance. The LDA has access to the new Housing Infrastructure Investment Fund, with €1 billion committed over five years to unlock enabling infrastructure. This is a significant step but funding alone is not sufficient.

Ireland needs a true development corporation: a body with authority over defined geography, the power to assemble land, and capacity to coordinate utilities, transport and housing delivery with clear accountability and pace. Infrastructure remains a binding constraint. Water, wastewater and grid capacity already limit housing growth. These challenges cannot be solved project by project; they require coordinated, place-based delivery.

The UK's New Towns Taskforce provides a live case study. Planning up to 12 new communities of 10,000 homes each, its focus is removing delivery friction rather than rewriting policy. New towns succeed when governance matches ambition.



The Ellinikon regeneration where Jacobs is delivering programme and project delivery.

Build housing around trains, not roads

Transit-oriented development is one of the most powerful delivery accelerators available. Concentrating higher-density housing around quality public transport reduces car dependency, lowers commuting costs, tackles land scarcity and supports climate targets.

I have seen this on East West Rail, connecting Oxford, Milton Keynes and Cambridge. With over 100,000 new homes planned along its length, the railway offers more than transport; it is a growth corridor. Stations become anchors for housing, employment and investment.

Ireland has a similar opportunity, particularly along the Dublin-Belfast corridor, home to roughly a third of the island's population. Programmes like MetroLink, DART+ and regional rail investment are transformational. Yet transport and housing still operate in parallel: separate departments, funding models and statutory processes. Rail is delivered first, followed by years of debate about what can be built around stations.

While the Dublin-Belfast corridor is an obvious starting point, given its population density and committed transport investment, the same model applies elsewhere. The Cork-Limerick-Shannon axis and Galway-Athlone-Dublin corridor are both suited to building new transit-led communities. The objective is not to prioritise one corridor over others, but to establish a repeatable delivery model that can be scaled nationally.

Done well, transit-oriented development is not just efficient; it is equitable. It places affordable housing near jobs, reduces the penalty of distance for lower-income households and supports mixed-income communities.

Think legacy from day one

There is an immediate opportunity to rethink 'temporary' worker accommodation for major infrastructure projects. Large programmes require thousands of workers over many years, making dedicated accommodation unavoidable. The mistake is treating it as disposable.

Olympic villages offer another model. Built for short-term use, they are designed from the outset for permanent residential conversion. Stratford's regeneration following London 2012 demonstrates how temporary demand can leave a lasting housing legacy.

Ireland should apply the same thinking to MetroLink and other National Development Plan projects. Where worker accommodation is required, it should be located on transit-accessible land and designed for post-construction conversion into affordable housing. This represents a near-term housing dividend hiding in plain sight.

The same legacy mindset applies to large brownfield regeneration. The Ellinikon, Europe's largest housing project, in Athens, shows how a former airport can be transformed into a mixed-use district delivering housing at scale. Legacy thinking means asking one simple question early: what happens next?

From crisis management to nation-building

Ireland's housing crisis is real, but so is the opportunity. Investment levels are historic, infrastructure pipelines are established and talent is returning.

International experience is clear: housing at scale requires delivery structures that match ambition. That means new town programmes with real powers, transport-led development planned as a system, and infrastructure designed with long-term legacy in mind.

The question is not whether we can do this. The capability exists. What is required now is the confidence to think bigger and the discipline to deliver.

Ronan Devlin is a Central Government Portfolio Director covering the island of Ireland with Jacobs. With a background in architecture and project management, he has spent the past decade working at the intersection of public policy, consultancy and major infrastructure delivery. He has advised government clients in the UK and Ireland on housing, transport and place-based regeneration, with a particular focus on governance, delivery models and infrastructure-led growth.

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Unblocking systematic barriers

The Government has set out 30 key actions aimed at enhancing the State's critical infrastructure, under the aegis of the *Accelerating Infrastructure Report and Action Plan*.

The action plan, published in December 2025 following the Government's landmark *National Development Plan Review 2025*, sets out four pillars aimed at accelerating infrastructure development in light of various barriers to development, as well as challenges with the current consenting process.

Although there has been an increase in infrastructure development in recent years, historically, Ireland has maintained a comparatively modest level of infrastructure stock relative to other high-income European countries. This is primarily due to its relatively recent transition to high-income status. Constrained by limited fiscal capacity throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Ireland's infrastructure stock was almost 50 per cent below the European average by the mid-1990s.

In 2025, the Government invested approximately €17 billion in capital projects, with NDP expenditure projected to reach €19 billion in 2026. This represents more than 5 per cent of gross national income (GNI*), placing Ireland among one of the

highest capital investors in the EU and nearly quadrupling the level of investment recorded a decade ago.

According to the IMF, Ireland's physical infrastructure stock is roughly 32 per cent below that of comparator high-income economies (covering transport, energy, water, etc.), with a 27 per cent quality deficit as well. The Irish Fiscal Advisory Council (IFAC) finds Ireland's overall infrastructure stock is about 25 per cent below the average for high-income European countries.

The consequences of this are most acutely felt in housing provision, where construction levels have consistently fallen short of meeting the needs of a growing population, homelessness is at a record high, and the Government has consistently failed to meet annual construction targets.

The broader societal and economic impacts are also evident in declining quality of life indicators, such as urban congestion. Traffic delays result in significant time losses, with drivers in Dublin losing an estimated 81 hours

annually, 67 hours in Galway, and 51 hours in Cork due to congestion. Public transport users are also affected by this congestion, which also has negative impacts on air quality in towns and cities.

Barriers to development

The *Accelerating Infrastructure Report on Stakeholder Consultation and Engagement with Emerging Themes on Infrastructure*, published in July 2025, forms the basis for the action plan's 12 identified barriers to development. The 12 barriers were categorised into three broad areas:

1. the regulatory environment;
2. planning and legal systems; and
3. internal systems.

Many of the barriers are interconnected and have consequences for other areas of infrastructure development processes. For example, the increased risks associated with judicial reviews have lengthened approval timeframes as environmental assessments expand to react to court

precedents and regulatory decisions become more cautious. The 12 barriers are identified as:

1. **Public acceptance:** Insufficient public awareness of the consequences of poor infrastructure tends to magnify opposition.
2. **Increased regulatory burden:** Multiple, distinct and often overlapping regulatory processes increase complexity without necessarily improving outcomes.
3. **Risk aversion:** Threat of judicial review on procedural matters drives a culture of caution, limiting the scope for coordination and engagement that could lead to improved outcomes.
4. **Increasing judicial reviews:** The increasing number of judicial reviews is contributing to uncertainty, longer timelines and higher cost, driving risk aversion at all other steps.
5. **Consequences of judicial reviews:** Lack of fast track for priority projects; procedural flaws can often significantly delay infrastructure without means for consideration of wider consequences.
6. **Insufficiently co-ordinated approvals:** Limited coordination on licences, consents, and permissions leads to duplication of efforts and sequential processes that could be conducted in parallel, saving time/money.
7. **Slow processes:** Unclear that current procedures on project assessment add value that is commensurate with the time burden imposed.
8. **Inconsistent planning decisions and timelines:** The extent of competing issues can lead to inconsistency and hence drive uncertainty.
9. **Prioritisation and co-ordination of infrastructure:** Semi-state companies and regulatory agencies are often limited in their ability to prioritise and to consider wider societal aims in decision-making.
10. **Procurement challenges:** Current processes are leading to falling competition in public tenders, impacting value for money and incentives for investment in skills/capability.

“There is now a systematic whole-of-government commitment to reform and to the timely delivery of the suite of actions set out in this plan.”

DPER Minister Jack Chambers TD

planning reforms introduced in 2024 yet to be seen, the action plan simply states: “Government is determined to reduce these delivery timelines through the actions set out in this report.”

Pillar one: Legal reform

With judicial review having played a significant role in reducing infrastructure output across all sectors, the action plan contextualises that “the number of judicial reviews continues to rise”.

“2024 saw a 43 percent increase compared to 2023 and already, 2025 has seen a further 30 percent increase in the number of cases brought to the Planning and Environment Court. As of today, An Coimisiún Pleanála is facing 131 individual judicial reviews. The number of judicial reviews has increased to such an extent that the Government’s chief legal advisor, the Attorney General, has branded the proliferation of legal challenges, especially in the planning and environmental areas, as being of significant political and public concern.”

Therefore, the action plan states that there will be reform to the judicial review process which will be in line with the Aarhus Convention standards for affordability, but with a “more efficient courts system”. The plan also states that emergency legislation will be introduced by the Government in 2026, which will streamline the process for development of nationally critical infrastructure.

The action plan also outlines the aim to implement other targeted legislative reforms, progress domestic reforms to environmental assessment in parallel with the EU Simplification Agenda, increase exemption thresholds for critical infrastructure, respond rapidly to precedent, and enact the Civil

11. **Uncertainty of funding and project pipelines:** Uncertainty around the timing and feasibility of government investment plans is limiting interest in the Irish infrastructure market among potential developers.
12. **Construction sector capacity and productivity:** Construction sector capacity and productivity is identified as a constraint.

Current consenting process

A common theme emerging across the three sectors of water, transport, and energy is the significant volume of consents, licences, and permits that an infrastructure project potentially requires.

The action plan explains: “Although the framework that has been developed is compliant and ensures robust environmental and public health protection, it is also fragmented and involves multiple agencies, often with overlapping responsibilities. Multiple consents may be required from a variety of agencies/bodies, many of which are seeking similar information, working off different timelines, often with no prioritisation for critical infrastructure projects.”

The Planning and Development Act 2024 includes a range of reforms intended to enhance the efficiency and predictability of the planning system. A key reform is the introduction of statutory decision-making timelines for ACP, which is expected to provide greater certainty for project developers and support more timely project delivery.

However, the action plan acknowledges that there are linear processes which mean that different organisations are responsible for different infrastructure delivery processes. With the success of

“It is filled with minor tweaks to the existing system, the creation of new working groups and promises to deregulate the planning process.”

Sinn Féin DPER spokesperson Mairéad Farrell TD

Reform Bill to legislate for judicial reviews.

Pillar two: Regulatory reform and simplification

The report identifies that Ireland’s regulatory system has grown significantly over time, with 95 bodies now having some regulatory remit, creating inefficiencies that slow the delivery of critical infrastructure such as roads, rail, electricity, and water networks. While regulation provides essential safeguards for consumers, society, and the environment, it also imposes administrative and developmental burdens that increase costs and timelines. Overly complex legislation, lack of coordination between agencies, and risk-averse interpretations of law have contributed to delays, judicial challenges, and fragmented processes. The report emphasises that regulatory reform should balance the need for protection with efficiency, adopting proportionate, transparent, and consistent measures that facilitate timely infrastructure delivery.

To address these challenges, the report outlines a comprehensive action plan, including the development of national planning statements, establishment of a regulatory simplification unit, rationalisation of legislation, and reform of agency processes. Key measures include standardising licensing and consenting procedures, implementing statutory timelines, enabling developer-led infrastructure projects, and strengthening coordination on EU legislation. Additional initiatives focus on improving the role of the Office of the Planning Regulator, integrating digital data systems, and promoting best practices in planning. Together, these reforms aim to reduce consenting timelines by up to 12 months, lower administrative burdens, provide

greater certainty for investors, and accelerate the delivery of energy, water, and transport infrastructure while maintaining societal and environmental safeguards.

Pillar three: Coordination and delivery reform

Pillar three focuses on transforming Ireland’s infrastructure delivery from a fragmented, slow, and risk-averse system into a coordinated, efficient, and outcomes-driven framework. With the ambitious National Development Plan allocating €102.4 billion for 2026-2030, the Government aims to convert funding commitments into tangible infrastructure outcomes, particularly in electricity, water, and transport. Historical delays caused by siloed responsibilities, sequential approvals, and judicial reviews have extended project timelines, impacting housing, renewable energy, and environmental compliance. To address these challenges, Pillar three emphasises stronger programme governance, integrated planning, clearer decision rights, and a culture that balances risk with timely delivery, ensuring that infrastructure supports both societal needs and national objectives.

The pillar outlines a suite of actions to achieve these goals, including publishing sectoral investment plans to create predictable project pipelines, enhancing DPER’s coordination function, introducing risk appetite statements, improving utility coordination through a joint utilities and transport clearing house, and increasing construction sector capacity through workforce expansion and modern methods of construction. Additional measures target faster project approvals, expert support for major projects via the NDFA, and procurement reforms to streamline processes, promote competition, and reduce administrative burden.

Pillar four: Public acceptance

The action plan asserts that public opposition to infrastructure projects often arises when projects affect local communities or landowners, causing delays, legal challenges, and higher costs. Building trust through transparent communication, early engagement, and practical measures like land access is described as essential to reduce resistance.

Key actions include requiring state bodies to make land available, strengthening leadership support at national and local levels, improving government communication on infrastructure benefits, and establishing a benefits realisation framework to quantify societal value. These measures aim to minimise opposition, streamline approvals, and create a coordinated environment that supports efficient project delivery.

Commentary

In his ministerial foreword, Minister for Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation Jack Chambers TD says: “There needs to be a fundamental reappraisal of the balance between the competing pillars of the protection that regulation affords and the timely provision of infrastructure that benefits all of society. I believe that there is a clear need for judicious and targeted deregulation.

“There is now a systematic whole-of-government commitment to reform and to the timely delivery of the suite of actions set out in this plan.”

Sinn Féin spokesperson on Public Expenditure and Reform, Mairéad Farrell TD, describes it as “a squandered opportunity to address the crises in critical infrastructure and housing”.

“The so-called ‘action plan’ announced today, involves very little action at all. It is filled with minor tweaks to the existing system, the creation of new working groups and promises to deregulate the planning process; a heap of announcements from this do-nothing government in the hope they can sit back and let big developers fix their problems.”



Pictured are partners Garret Farrelly, Mary Liz Mahony, Conor Blennerhassett, Ruadhán Kenny and Maeve Delargy.

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Delivering the future

Mike Healy, Programme Director for Strategic Projects in Uisce Éireann, talks to *eolas Magazine* about two of the largest infrastructure projects in the State's history: the Water Supply Project and Greater Dublin Drainage.

As Ireland prepares for the next generation of strategic water and wastewater infrastructure, Uisce Éireann is advancing two of the largest projects in the State's history: the Water Supply Project Eastern and Midlands Region (WSP EMR) and the Greater Dublin Drainage (GDD) project.

Mike Healy discusses how these transformational projects are progressing, why they matter, and what lies ahead.

As an architect by profession, Healy has built his career on the core principle of safe delivery. He is focused on getting projects safely delivered, on time, to a high standard, and with real and lasting legacy.

"Our job is to deliver," Healy says. "These projects matter to communities, to the economy, and to the country's future, and delivery is how we make the difference."

It is an approach shaped by an impressive portfolio. Before joining Uisce Éireann, Healy worked on some of the UK's most high-profile engineering undertakings, including London 2012, Heathrow Terminal 5, and London Bridge Station. He also spent nearly a decade in the water sector, working with Thames Water and later leading Affinity Water's capital programme.

Healy first collaborated with Uisce Éireann in 2013 as part of the national domestic metering programme and joined the organisation five years ago.

The desire to deliver as quickly as possible is supported by key stakeholders. Building on the initiatives of the Accelerating Infrastructure Taskforce, the Government is very supportive in removing the numerous barriers to these projects.

For Healy, the focus remains firmly on progress: securing contractors, building

market confidence, maintaining the project's current momentum, and realising benefits. The goal is not just to deliver infrastructure, but to unlock housing, enable economic development, and ensure resilient services for decades.

The Water Supply Project

The Water Supply Project is the largest and most strategically important water infrastructure project in the history of the State. Its purpose is to deliver a new, sustainable, secure and climate resilient water source for the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) and the wider Eastern and Midlands Region, with the capacity to support the water supply needs of up to 50 per cent of Ireland's population.

Water supply across the GDA is on a knife edge. Almost 85 per cent of the region's drinking water currently comes from a single source (the River Liffey) and the two major treatment plants at Ballymore Eustace and Leixlip are operating at or near their maximum sustainable capacity.

Without a new source, the region faces increasing risks of water restrictions, supply outages, and an inability to support housing and economic development.

The WSP will provide the first major new water source for the region in 60 years. A new abstraction point will be developed at the Parteen Basin on the River Shannon (using a maximum of 2 per cent of long-term average flow).

The project will deliver a new water treatment plant near Birdhill, County Tipperary and a 172km pipeline transporting treated water through Tipperary, Offaly, and Kildare to a new termination reservoir at Peamount in South Dublin. This will create capacity for future regional offtakes, enabling supply to communities in Tipperary, Offaly, Westmeath, and increased resilience for Meath, Kildare, Carlow and Wicklow.

In December 2025, the planning application was submitted to An Coimisiún Pleanála (ACP) after extensive non statutory public consultation. ACP's statutory seven week public consultation closed on 25 February 2026.

Nearly 80 per cent of landowners have already signed voluntary wayleave agreements, while dedicated community clinics continue throughout 2026.

“Building trust with landowners and communities is essential. Their cooperation and insights are shaping this project.

“Stakeholders view WSP as critical national infrastructure, central to housing, climate resilience and economic growth. Engagement is strong, informed and increasingly proactive. While community level concerns remain, we want to work with those communities and we have a Community Liaison Officer appointed to give information to them throughout the process,” Healy says.

A planning decision is expected within 48 weeks. If granted and if there is no legal challenge, construction is scheduled to begin in 2028, with water entering supply in 2032.

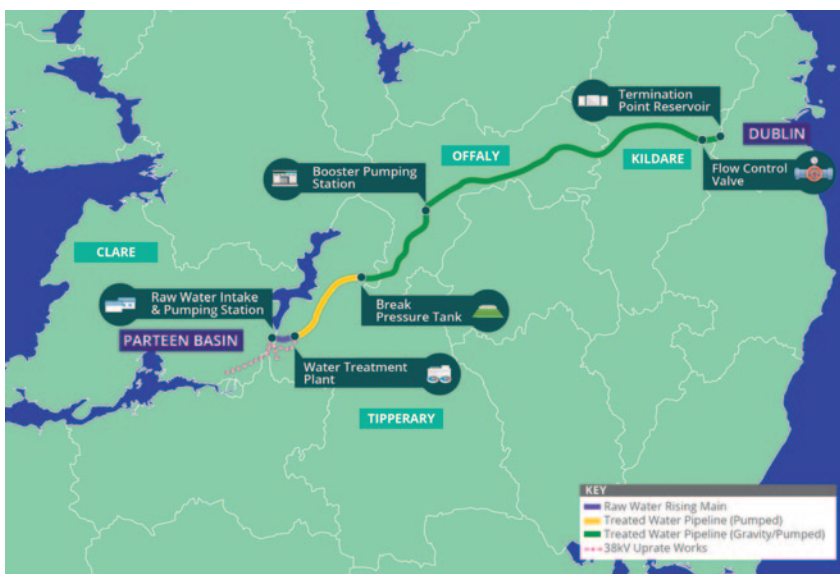
Greater Dublin Drainage: Moving into delivery

The Greater Dublin Drainage (GDD) project is another one of Uisce Éireann’s most significant national infrastructure programmes. Its purpose is to provide a new regional wastewater treatment facility and supporting network infrastructure in Clonshaugh to serve north Dublin and parts of Meath and Kildare, addressing longstanding capacity constraints across the Greater Dublin Area.

Demand for wastewater services in the GDA is rising sharply due to population growth, economic expansion and climate pressures. Wastewater volumes in the region are projected to increase by over 50 per cent by 2050. Existing treatment infrastructure, particularly the Ringsend Wastewater Treatment Plant, which currently treats 40 per cent of all wastewater nationally, is operating at capacity. Without GDD, new housing and economic development could face restrictions as soon as 2028, due to insufficient treatment and network capacity.

Once operational, GDD will have the capacity to treat wastewater for the equivalent of up to 500,000 people, relieving pressure across the wider network and enabling growth across the region.

Following its planning milestone in December 2025, the GDD project is now entering its next critical phase. Preliminary construction works are scheduled to commence in late 2026 or early 2027.



Construction is expected to take approximately three years once commenced, with the project required to be operational by 2032 to avoid network and development constraints.

A unified vision for Ireland’s water future

While the Water Supply Project and GDD serve different technical functions, Healy sees them as complementary pillars of the strategic national infrastructure long term plan. “When you step back, both projects are about ensuring Ireland has the essential water and wastewater infrastructure needed for the next century,” he explains.

“That is why we have a joint procurement approach which will be launching soon. We have listened to the market, engaged extensively with industry, and structured our approach to provide confidence, clarity and momentum.

“Delivery of water and wastewater infrastructure and services delivery underpins Project Ireland 2040 and is the backbone to social and economic development,” he says.

Healy concludes: “These projects will define Ireland’s water landscape for generations. It is a privilege to help deliver them and to work with communities, colleagues and stakeholders who share the same commitment to Ireland’s future.”

W: www.water.ie





Enabling infrastructure and construction

The *National Development Plan Review 2025*, published in July 2025, provides €275.4 billion to address the State’s “infrastructure deficit”, increase housing delivery, and enable underlying infrastructure for greater private sector building.

This includes an allocation of €102.4 billion to government departments for capital investment over the period 2026-2030. Almost €24 billion in additional capital funding has been allocated relative to the previous National Development Plan (NDP) 2021-2030 ceilings.

The review aims to facilitate balanced regional development and contribute to climate obligations. Delivery of housing is identified as the “core ambition” of the review.

It identifies prioritisation of housing, energy, water, transport, and health digitalisation as key to the Government’s target of delivering

300,000 additional homes by 2030. The review notes constraints to delivery including the State’s fiscal parameters, labour shortages, timelines for planning, and inflationary pressures.

Additionally, the review asserts that delivery of projects has faced challenges including judicial reviews of successful planning decisions, additional environmental consents, and labour shortages.

Project prioritisation under the review is guided by critical infrastructure investment priorities identified in the PfG; sectors’ capacity to deliver proposed projects; the cost of proposals balanced against conflicting

priorities and capital funding levels; and projects’ alignment with housing delivery and economic competitiveness.

A total of €10 billion has been provided for the period 2026-2030 to support delivery of large projects in the water, energy, and transport sectors including:

- €3.5 billion to ESB and EirGrid in 2025 to fund enhanced energy grid capacity to support the Government’s housing and competitiveness objectives;
- €2 billion to Uisce Éireann to 2025 to deliver 300,000 additional homes to 2030;
- a further €2.5 billion to Uisce Éireann for large scale projects to 2030; and

- €2 billion from the Infrastructure, Climate and Nature Fund for low-carbon transportation such as MetroLink.

For the period 2026-30, the Department of Housing is provided with €35.95 billion in the review. This is split with €7.68 billion provided to water and €28.27 billion provided to “housing and other”. The Department of Transport receives €22.33 billion, while the Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment receives €5.64 billion.

An allocation of €7.55 billion is provided to the Department of Education and Youth for construction of school places in primary, post-primary, special classes, and special schools for the period 2026-2030.

Construction sector analysis

The review states that construction sector employment reached 177,000 in Q1 2025, “the highest level in over a decade”. It adds: “Meeting the scale of the project pipeline outlined in this NDP will require a significant and sustained expansion of the construction workforce.”

The Irish Fiscal Advisory Council (IFAC) estimates that 80,000 additional construction workers will be required to meet existing infrastructure targets including housing and retrofit. However, if construction sector productivity increased to average high-income European levels, 20,000 fewer additional workers would be required, the IFAC estimates.

Construction sector analysis by the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science finds that 10,000 few new entrants would be required if there is widespread adoption of modern methods of construction (MMC).

Delivery to date

The review outlines delivery of projects under the NDP to date including 170km of new roads, over 1,200km of active travel infrastructure, and completion of almost 53,000 new local authority scheme dwellings.

“Our plan to invest in our capital infrastructure and address our infrastructure deficit is the best way to safeguard our economy, drive growth, protect jobs, increase competitiveness and ensure prosperity for our people and communities at a time of growing international uncertainty.”

Minister Jack Chambers TD

Furthermore, it says 100,000 premises have been connected to high-speed broadband through the National Broadband Plan, a new city campus for TU Dublin has been developed, and 800 school building projects have been completed with 300 more under construction.

The review outlines that the Government has allocated over €550 million for shared island projects including the commencement of construction of the Narrow Water Bridge, launch of phase two of the Ulster Canal restoration, and the hourly rail service between Dublin and Belfast.

Minister of Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform Jack Chambers TD established the Accelerating Infrastructure Taskforce to identify barriers to delivery of infrastructure on time. In December 2025, the Department published taskforce’s findings in the *Accelerating Infrastructure Report and Action Plan*.

It outlines four key pillars under which to tackle barriers to infrastructure development: legal reform; regulatory reform and simplification; co-ordination and delivery reform; and public acceptance.

Minister Chambers says: “Our plan to invest in our capital infrastructure and address our infrastructure deficit is the best way to safeguard our economy, drive growth, protect jobs, increase competitiveness and ensure prosperity for our people and communities at a time of growing international uncertainty.”

Sinn Féin spokesperson on Public Expenditure and Reform, Mairéad Farrell TD, says: “We want to see real progress and finally get a handle on the housing and healthcare crisis. But as they say the devil is in the detail, and right now many of those details are still missing.

“We are still left wondering where all this money is going to go, how they will address the current bottlenecks, and whether ‘value for money’ will just be another political cliché.”

Delivering homes through collaboration and partnership

As Ireland accelerates housing delivery under its new national housing plan *Delivering Homes, Building Communities 2025-2030*, approved housing bodies (AHBs) continue to play a central role as trusted delivery partners to Government and local authorities.



Taoiseach Micheál Martin TD with Respond's CEO Aoife Watters at the official sod turning of Respond's large-scale development, Creamfields, Cork.

This recognition provides confidence to delivery partners operating at scale and supports the sustained investment and planning required to maintain momentum.

Ongoing uncertainty in the construction market is a shared challenge across the housing system. Inflationary pressures, capacity constraints, and changing market conditions all affect how housing is delivered at scale.

In this context, managing uncertainty, particularly around cost and timelines, has become central to ensuring that homes are delivered at scale, on time, and with value for money.

Respond's experience in delivering large scale developments provides practical insight into how collaboration and strong delivery partnerships support successful delivery outcomes on the ground.

With 3,458 homes currently in construction, Respond is actively engaged across a range of social and mixed-tenure developments. Delivering at this scale highlights the importance of funding certainty and construction programme discipline in maintaining momentum and managing risk.

Existing funding structures have enabled significant progress in recent years, and the accelerated Cost Rental Equity Loan (CREL) process in particular has supported the expansion of cost rental delivery.

Organisations like Respond, currently delivering thousands of social and cost rental homes, are operating at significant scale within a complex and evolving construction environment.

Broadly, the publication of *Delivering Homes, Building Communities* marks a significant step forward in setting out a clear, long-term framework for housing delivery over the coming years.

The plan recognises AHBs as key delivery partners and acknowledges the scale, capability, and track record the sector has developed in delivering homes and supporting communities across the State.

In 2025, Respond delivered 231 cost rental homes with a further 1,842 currently under construction, providing strong foundations on which to continue building supply.

Delivering housing at scale, particularly mixed tenure developments, requires close alignment between policy ambition and delivery frameworks. From Respond's experience, predictability around funding approvals and timelines play an important role in supporting effective construction programmes and avoiding the cost pressures associated with stop-start delivery.

Where funding streams align well and provide clarity over timeframes, delivery partners are better positioned to plan effectively and deliver homes in a coordinated way.



Respond's large-scale development, Piper's Square, Finglas, Dublin.

Further policy development

Introduced earlier this year, the new single-stage approval process signals welcome reform that reflects the realities of large-scale delivery and supports a more streamlined approach for local authorities and AHBs alike.

Respond looks forward to ongoing engagement as the process is refined, ensuring that it supports efficient delivery in practice and continues to evolve in line with delivery experience.

Alongside this, the new housing plan, the *Report of the Approved Housing Body (AHB) Strategic Forum* provides an important roadmap for the future development of the sector.

Its focus on funding reform, governance, sustainability, and long-term capacity reflects the growing role AHBs play in Ireland's housing system and the need to support that role through clear, coordinated frameworks.

Respond welcomes the publication of the report and looks forward to continued engagement on its implementation as the sector continues to scale responsibly.

At a European level, the publication of the first-ever *European Affordable Housing Plan* signals growing recognition of housing as a shared societal challenge across member states.

While housing policy remains a national competency, increased coordination and collaboration at European level can help support investment, innovation, and delivery capacity across member states.

For delivery organisations operating at scale, this wider policy context reinforces the importance of long-term planning, stability, and partnership.

Reducing uncertainty

A stable and predictable policy and funding environment has proven to be a key enabler of delivery at scale. Where certainty is provided, delivery partners like Respond can plan efficiently, manage risk responsibly, and maintain momentum on complex developments.

As delivery programmes continue to expand, Respond's experience highlights the importance of structured engagement between policymakers and delivery partners, ensuring that front-line delivery insight can inform the ongoing evolution of funding and approval frameworks. Such engagement supports alignment across policy objectives contributing to more predictable delivery outcomes over time.

As a not-for-profit, construction-led AHB, Respond typically acquires land linked to development contracts and funds construction directly, with in-house development professionals overseeing delivery.

This model enables Respond to deliver homes that may not otherwise be delivered, without competing for existing housing stock, while maintaining a focus on asset management, tenancy sustainability, and community sustainability. Operating at scale, this model supports effective risk management and strong oversight throughout the construction process.

As housing delivery continues to scale nationally, Respond's experience demonstrates the value of stable policy direction, collaborative engagement, and delivery-focused frameworks.

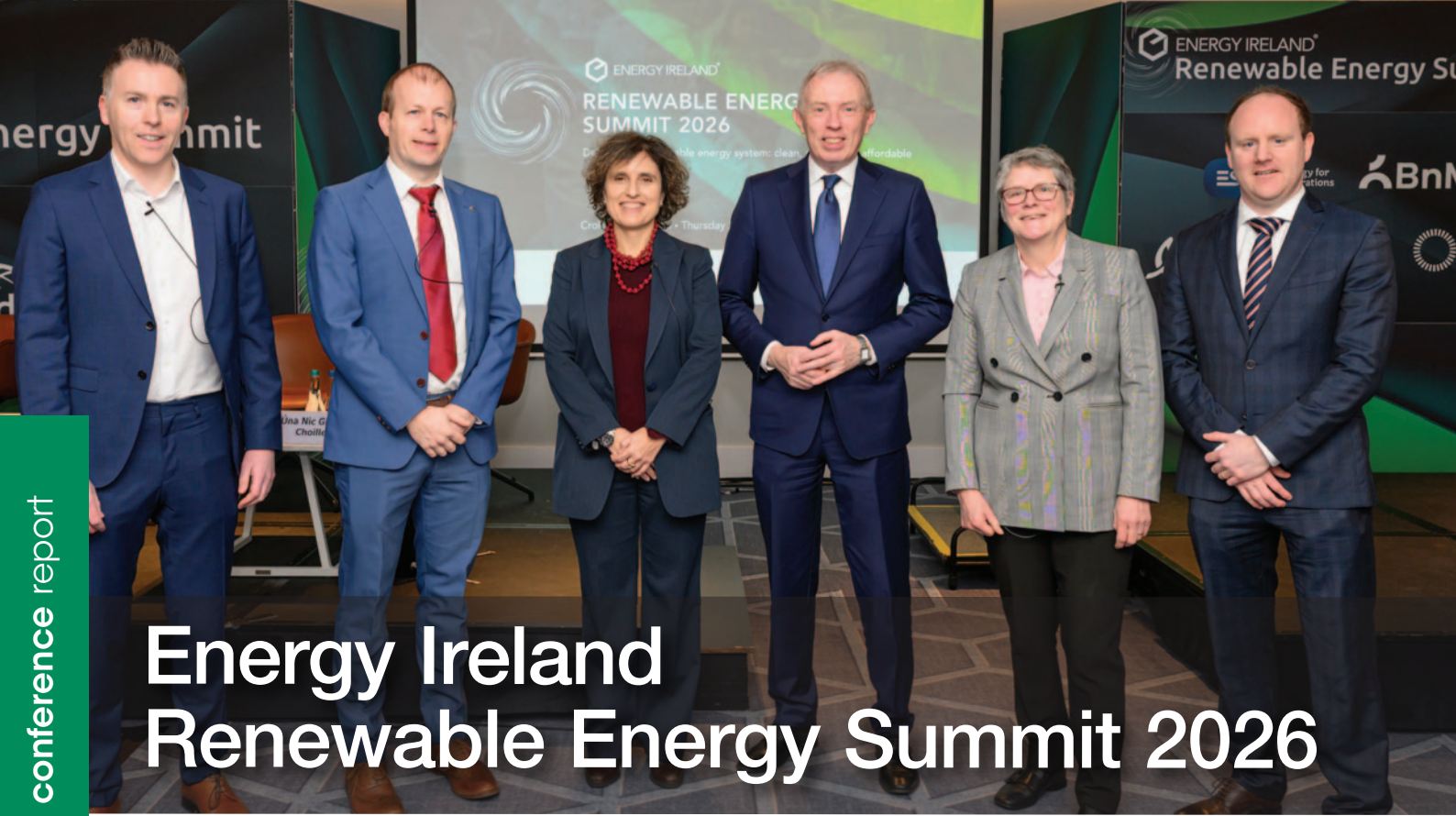
Building on recent reforms and the momentum created by the new housing plan and strategic initiatives, AHBs as trusted delivery partners are well positioned to continue supporting the State in delivery high quality, social and cost rental homes, even in challenging market conditions with support and collaboration at local, regional, national, and European levels.

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Energy Ireland Renewable Energy Summit 2026

Paul Lennon, ESB; Phil Hemmingway, CRU; Paula Rey Garcia, European Commission; Timmy Dooley TD, Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment; Conference Chair, Una Nic Giolla Choille and Brendan Kelly, BnM.

The 22nd Energy Ireland Renewable Energy Summit took place on 5 February at Croke Park, Dublin. Over 200 delegates attended the Summit which was sponsored by ESB, Gas Networks Ireland, BnM, EirGrid and Bord Gáis Energy. Delegates in attendance heard from a top line-up of speakers, both visiting and local, from organisations including the Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment; European Commission; IEA; CRU; The Scottish Government; UCC and E3G.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the 2026 conference sponsors, all speakers, exhibitors and delegates who joined us at Croke Park, Dublin and made the conference a huge success.



Minister of State Timmy Dooley TD addressing the delegates.



Delegate asking the Minister a question.



Paula Rey Garcia, European Commission addressing the delegates.



Kimberley Harris, Gas Networks Ireland and Anne Walsh, FuturEnergy Ireland.



Catriona O'Dwyer, Kevin Goslin and Clodagh Hunt-Sheridan, Commission for Regulation of Utilities.



Michelle Quinn, Scottish Government.



Jack Collen, Robert Gibbs, and Donaldas Castigo, Collen Construction.



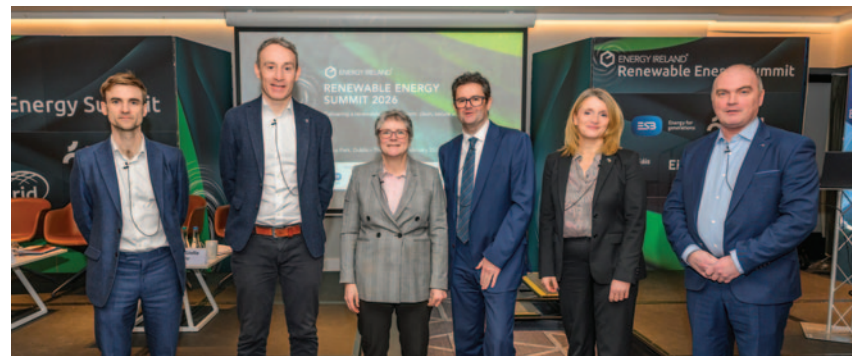
Panel discussion with Philip Newsome, Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment; Muireann Lynch, Economic and Social Research Institute; Eoin Kennedy, EirGrid; Clive Bowers, ESB and Therese Murphy, Cornwall Insight Ireland.



Brendan Kelly, BnM; Minister Timmy Dooley TD, and Phil Hemmingway, CRU.



Delegates listening to the panel.



Thomas Spencer, International Energy Agency; John Dalton, Bord Gáis Energy; Úna Nic Giolla Choille; Richard Rodgers, Department for the Economy, Northern Ireland; Michelle Quinn, Scottish Government; and Errol Close, EirGrid.



Bob Barbour, Centre for Competitiveness talking to Andrew Reeves at the Gas Networks Ireland exhibition stand.



Finbarr O'Neill, Endress+Hauser Ireland asking the panel a question.



Reimagining urban mobility with light rail

Cities across Europe are facing intensifying pressures, rapid population growth, congested road networks, and urgent climate action. With 72 per cent of Europeans now living in urban areas and road transport being responsible for almost 73 per cent of all transport CO₂ emissions, the need for reliable, low-carbon, high-capacity transport has never been clearer, writes Caroline Lewis, Market Director, Amey.

Against this backdrop, light rail has emerged as an increasingly essential mode of urban transport. More than a way of moving people from A to B, it is helping cities adapt to growth, respond to climate targets, and create healthier, more connected places to live and work.

So, what truly differentiates light rail from other modes of transport, and why is it becoming critical to the future of thriving cities?

Keeping people moving

At its core, light rail is defined by its ability to be designed around how people live and move. Unlike buses or other modes of public transport, it creates fixed, high-quality corridors that support reliable, high-frequency services, and provides the capacity needed to move large numbers of people efficiently through growing urban areas.

But its value extends far beyond mobility alone. When planned and delivered well, light rail helps shape urban form, supporting better place-making, enabling walkable, well-connected neighbourhoods, and providing the transport backbone needed to unlock housing and regeneration opportunities along its routes. These corridors become focal points for growth, easing pressure on roads while improving access to jobs, education, and essential services.

Light rail also plays a critical role in improving health and wellbeing. By reducing car dependency, it contributes to cleaner air, quieter streets, and greater encouragement of active travel. Its electric operation and high passenger capacity provide a credible pathway to cutting emissions, easing congestion and supporting long-term sustainability goals.

Taken together, these benefits show that light rail is not simply a transport solution, but a strategic tool for shaping more inclusive, resilient and liveable cities.

Momentum in the UK and Ireland

This momentum is already visible across the UK and Ireland. In Dublin, for example, the Luas light rail system forms a core part of the city's public transport network. Public transport journeys now exceed 343 million annually, with Luas accounting for a significant share of daily travel.



South Wales Metro Depot in Taff's Well.

As the Greater Dublin Area is projected to grow substantially by 2040, Luas demonstrates how light rail can scale alongside population growth, helping cities manage rising travel demand while maintaining reliable, high-capacity services. Its success highlights the role light rail can play in keeping cities moving as pressures on transport networks intensify.

The question now is how other cities can replicate this success, and, crucially, how light rail needs to be delivered to maximise long-term value.

A systems-thinking approach

Delivering a world-class light rail network requires a different mindset altogether; one grounded in systems thinking, where engineering decisions are coordinated and connected across the entire asset lifecycle. As cities look to harness the full potential of light rail, they need multidisciplinary delivery partners who can integrate data and analytics, design and engineering, and operations and maintenance into a truly whole-lifecycle approach.

A clear example of this is the Core Valley Lines (CVL) rail upgrade in Wales where Transport for Wales commissioned Amey to support the modernisation of a network serving communities across the Valleys.

Communities across the Valleys experienced long journey times, infrequent services, and ageing

infrastructure that constrained access to jobs, education, and essential services. At the same time, the network needed to be modernised without the prolonged disruption and cost typically associated with traditional electrification, particularly given the number of historic structures along the route.

While electrifying and re-signalling more than 170km of track, Amey applied a systems-thinking approach that brought together signalling design, overhead line equipment (OLE), track, telecoms, civils, electrification, and operations within a single, integrated design process. Timetable scenarios were modelled early and embedded into the Core Valley Lines Integrated Control Centre, allowing design teams to shape solutions proactively; optimising maintenance access, signal sighting, and driver visibility.

This integrated view also informed a smart, discontinuous electrification strategy, avoiding major civil interventions such as bridge reconstructions, reducing disruption, accelerating delivery, and saving millions in infrastructure costs.

The outcome was a safer, more efficient upgrade programme that reduced rework, improved delivery certainty, and enhanced the passenger experience. Investment in a new £100 million depot and control centre has created hundreds of long-term skilled jobs and laid the foundations for reliable, future-ready operations.

By viewing the railway as a connected system rather than a collection of isolated assets, the programme embedded resilience, maintainability, and performance from the outset; demonstrating how delivery choices directly shape long-term social, economic, and operational outcomes.

Scaling impact and acting now

For cities across the UK and Ireland, the opportunity is clear. As populations grow and pressures on transport networks intensify, light rail will play an increasingly important role in shaping sustainable urban mobility.

The challenge now is not whether to invest in light rail, but how to deliver it. By embracing partnerships that combine integrated engineering, digital insight, and whole-lifecycle thinking, cities can unlock the full potential of light rail; creating transport networks that support growth, resilience, and prosperity for generations to come.

W: www.ameygroup.ie





All-island rail project priorities

The *Rail Project Prioritisation Strategy* has set out how major rail schemes across the island could be sequenced and delivered over the coming decades, with upgrades and line reopenings in the North and on cross-border corridors placed at the forefront of the programme.

The strategy, developed to support the *All-Island Strategic Rail Review* and launched in December 2025, identifies which projects outlined in the review should be progressed first, which can be delivered in the short term, and which will require sustained investment over the medium to long term.

In doing so, it places particular emphasis on improving connectivity between Belfast, Derry, and Dublin, while also restoring rail access to parts of Northern Ireland that have been without services for decades.

The strategy sets out a wide-ranging programme of upgrades across the State, including electrification, line speed improvements and capacity enhancements on key intercity routes such as Cork-Dublin, Galway-Dublin, and Waterford-Dublin. One of the most

critical bottlenecks identified is the Hazelhatch-Portarlinton section west of Dublin, where capacity constraints affect services across much of the national network.

A notable cross-regional project is the proposed reinstatement of the Claremorris-Athenry line, which would restore a missing link on the Western Rail Corridor. This would enable new passenger services between the west and south of the island and support the development of rail freight, particularly in conjunction with port connectivity.

Decarbonisation underpins much of the strategy. Around 750km of track are identified for electrification, including major intercity and cross-border corridors. This would enable the majority of long-distance passenger services to operate using electric

traction, reducing emissions while also improving performance and operating efficiency.

The strategy adopts a phased delivery approach, with smaller, lower-cost interventions designed to unlock capacity and resilience in the short term, and more complex, capital-intensive projects sequenced over longer timeframes. All projects remain subject to detailed feasibility studies, environmental assessment, and the securing of funding and statutory approvals.

While the document does not commit governments to specific delivery dates, it provides a clearer roadmap than previously existed, indicating how the vision set out in the *All-Island Strategic Rail Review* could be translated into a sustained programme of investment.

If delivered, the prioritised projects would significantly reduce journey times between major cities, improve service frequency and reliability, and extend rail access to communities across Northern Ireland and the border region. More broadly, the strategy positions rail as a central component of future transport policy on the island, supporting economic development, regional balance, and long-term decarbonisation goals.

Projects in the North

Among the most significant projects identified is the upgrade of the Belfast-Derry line, which has long suffered from slow journey times and limited frequency. The strategy prioritises capacity and frequency enhancements alongside line speed improvements, with the aim of delivering faster, more reliable services, and supporting regional economic development in the northwest. These works are identified as a major project to be delivered in phases, subject to further appraisal and funding.

The Belfast-Dublin corridor, the island's busiest cross-border rail route, is also prioritised for further enhancement. Building on the Enterprise Fleet Replacement Programme, the strategy identifies electrification and line speed improvements as key next steps. These interventions aim to support journey time reductions, improve reliability, and significantly reduce carbon emissions on a corridor that plays a critical role in cross-border mobility and trade.

Beyond upgrading existing routes, the strategy places renewed focus on rail reinstatement in Northern Ireland, with several long-closed lines identified for progression. The reopening of the Lisburn-Antrim line would reintroduce a strategic link within the Northern Ireland network, improving flexibility and resilience while also enabling, in the longer term, a rail connection to Belfast International Airport.

The Portadown-Armagh line is also identified for reinstatement, reconnecting Armagh city to the rail network for the first time since the 1950s. Armagh is the only city on the island of Ireland with no railway station.

RAIL REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS

Decarbonisation recommendations	
1.	Develop and implement an All-Island Rail Decarbonisation Strategy that includes an electrified intercity network.
2.	Develop plans to invest in the skills, supply chains, and rolling stock to deliver decarbonisation.
3.	Procure hybrid and electric rolling stock in the medium term.
Intercity recommendations	
4.	Upgrade the cross-country rail network to a dual-track railway (and four-track in places) and increase service frequencies.
5.	Upgrade the core intercity railway network to top speeds of 200km/h (125mph).
6.	Develop short sections of new railways on congested corridors.
7.	Develop a cross-Dublin solution.
Regional and rural recommendations	
8.	Provide more direct services between Ireland's West and South Coasts.
9.	Ensure regional and rural lines have at least one train per two hours.
10.	Increase line speeds to at least 120km/h (75mph).
11.	Upgrade Limerick Junction and the Limerick Junction -Waterford line.
12.	Reinstate the Western Rail Corridor railway between Clarendon and Athenry.
13.	Extend the railway into Tyrone, Derry~Londonderry, and Donegal.
14.	Reinstate the South Wexford Railway.
15.	Develop the railway to boost connectivity in the North Midlands.
16.	Integrate bus service and rail service timetables to connect communities where direct rail access proves to be unviable.
Sustainable cities recommendations	
17.	Connect Dublin, Belfast International, and Shannon Airport to the railway and improve existing rail-airport connections.
18.	Extend double tracking in the Belfast area.
19.	Segregate long-distance/fast services from stopping services.
20.	Explore the case for developing new stations in the Belfast, Cork, Derry~Londonderry and Limerick -Shannon city regions.
Freight recommendations	
21.	Develop a sustainable solution for first-mile-last-mile rail access for Dublin Port.
22.	Reduce Track Access Charges for freight.
23.	Strengthen rail connectivity to the island's busiest ports.
24.	Develop a network of inland terminals close to major cities on the rail network.
Customer experience recommendations	
25.	Continue to invest in initiatives that deliver a seamless customer journey.
26.	Continue to benchmark and monitor service quality and deliver continuous improvement.
27.	Ensure future rolling stock specifications are aligned to the infrastructure-led interventions outlined in this Review.
28.	Invest in improving integration within rail and between rail and other transport options.
29.	Deliver 'clock-face' timetable calling patterns.
30.	Develop cross-border structures to improve the effectiveness of cross-border infrastructure and rail service planning.
31.	Invest in a rolling programme of accessibility improvements, including step-free access.
32.	Review and update the All-Island Strategic Rail Review once a decade, taking account of latest policies and developments.

Source: Department of Transport

In addition, the strategy highlights a reinstated and partially new corridor from Portadown to Derry via Letterkenny, which would create a new cross-border rail spine serving the northwest and linking into the wider all-island network.

Taken together, these projects would significantly expand rail accessibility in Northern Ireland and strengthen cross-border integration, addressing long-standing regional imbalances in transport provision.

While the strategy focuses on major projects over the medium to long term, it also identifies a series of early interventions to be delivered by 2030.

On the Belfast line, these include the reinstatement and increased use of passing loops, which would support hourly Dublin-Belfast services and improve reliability in the shorter term. A new spur at Portadown station is also proposed to future-proof the route for onward services towards Derry.

Minister for Transport Darragh O'Brien TD says: "I welcome the publication of this strategy which provides a way forward for faster rail services, improved frequency, and greater accessibility and connectivity across this island. I look forward to the progression of the rail projects in the years ahead."

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Molecor: Innovation and technology for a more sustainable water infrastructure



Water management has become a global challenge, and with World Water Day approaching on 22 March 2026, it serves as an annual reminder of the importance of thinking about the role that infrastructure plays in protecting this essential resource.

In this context, Molecor, a Spanish company with 20 years of experience and a presence in over 30 countries, has established itself as an international benchmark in water supply, contributing to the modernisation of networks and the development of more efficient, safer and sustainable infrastructure.

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Its technological leadership is based on molecular orientation technology, used to manufacture the world's widest range of PVC-O pipes, from DN90 to DN1200 mm, TOM® pipes. The manufacturing process is continuous and fully automated, which ensures the maximum product reliability and a quality control pipe to pipe for 100 per cent of the production.

TOM® is manufactured in Class 500, the highest level recognised by ISO 16422, which guarantees superior mechanical properties: greater resistance to internal pressure, high ductility and exceptional performance in the event of impact and deformation.

In addition, Molecor launched the first PVC-O fittings on the market, ecoFITOM®, available from DN110 to DN500 mm, which allow for more continuous systems and perfect

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These fittings optimise the use of raw material and use less energy during their manufacture, obtaining a product with higher hydrostatic resistance and higher resistance to impact than fittings of other materials.

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These Molecor solutions provide key benefits for hydraulic infrastructures: large hydraulic capacity, high impact resistance, excellent hydrostatic resistance, great ductility, high resistance to water hammer and total watertightness.

Another key aspect is its exclusive genuine air system, which replaces the use of boiling water with air throughout the entire orientation process, optimising energy efficiency and reducing environmental impact. Among other features, this technological development allows Molecor's PVC-O solutions to stand out for their excellent performance against corrosion and chemical agents, guaranteeing the highest quality of the water transported.

TOM® and ecoFITOM® are 100 per cent recyclable and contribute directly to more efficient, resilient and environmentally friendly infrastructure, aligning with global objectives for responsible water management and current sustainability demands in the sector.

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Record number of passengers using Irish airports

In spite of the now scrapped passenger cap at Dublin Airport, more than 50 million passengers passed through Irish airports in 2024, the most recent year for which data is available.

In 2024, around 41 million passengers travelled through the five airports in the State, while an additional 9.3 million passed through the three commercial airports in the North.

In Dublin, in spite of the government-mandated cap of 32 million passengers per year, which was subsequently scrapped in February 2026, figures from the Central Statistics Office (CSO) show that 34.6 million passengers used the airport, a record since figures were first recorded in 1998. Since figures were first recorded, air traffic has nearly trebled, with 11.6 million passengers having travelled through Dublin in 1998.

The last year at Dublin Airport has also seen the establishment of new

routes throughout the United States, with Aer Lingus now offering services to Nashville, Tennessee; Cleveland, Ohio; and Minneapolis, Minnesota. The airline is also scheduled to commence new routes to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and Raleigh, North Carolina in 2026; and will briefly serve the Caribbean for the first time with a route from Dublin to Barbados in March and April 2026.

While Ireland's route network to the United States and Europe is extensive, long-haul options elsewhere in the world remain limited, with the Government's recently-abolished passenger cap meaning that new routes have been difficult to establish. There remains a route to Beijing, China through Hainan Airways, while Doha, Qatar; and Abu Dhabi and Dubai in the United Arab Emirates are served by Qatar Airways, Etihad Airways, and Emirates respectively.

South America, Oceania, and sub-Saharan Africa remain inaccessible from Dublin Airport.

Cork and Shannon

Cork Airport recorded a record high number of passengers in 2025 (the figures were released by the airport itself rather than the CSO), with just under 3.5 million passengers using the airport in the last year. 2025 also saw Cork awarded with Airport Council International (ACI) EUROPE Best Airport Awards' best European regional airport award.

The airport has also announced a €200 million investment plan that includes a new pier and additional gates, new solar farm, car park extension and new security screening technology. The plan also requires the demolition of the old terminal and air traffic control tower. The upgrade aims to enable the airport to cater for five million passengers per annum.

Although far from its historical numbers, passenger use at Shannon Airport has risen in consecutive years since 2021 and the end of the Covid-19 restrictions. In 2024, two US carriers announced that they would return to using Shannon Airport, with Delta Air Lines flying from New York to Shannon and Chicago, and Newark being served by United Airlines. Aer Lingus continues to offer services to Britain, New York, and Boston, while Ryanair offers a fairly comprehensive route network to the European mainland.

Regional airports

There are five regional airports in the State: Ireland West (Knock), Kerry, Donegal, Waterford, and Sligo.

Ireland West and Kerry have been resounding success stories in recent years. More than 400,000 passengers passed through Kerry Airport in both 2023 and 2024, and the airport is served with routes to Britain, Germany, Portugal, and Spain with Ryanair, as well as a number of small French airports with the French regional airline, Chalcir Aviation. Furthermore, the domestic route to Dublin, which was historically subsidised by the Public Service Obligation (PSO) scheme, is now run on a commercially viable basis by Ryanair.

In Ireland West, nearly 950,000 passengers passed through the airport in 2025, a record high for the airport and the third consecutive year in which a record was set. Ryanair offers a comprehensive route network covering Britain, Spain, Italy, Germany, and Portugal while Aer Lingus offers routes to London Heathrow and Groningen, the Netherlands.

Elsewhere, however, success has been limited. Sligo Airport has not operated commercial routes since the 2008 Great Recession. The same is true for Galway Airport, which has since closed. Waterford Airport, in spite of significant investment for increasing the size of both its terminal and runway, has had no commercial routes since 2016.

Industry experts have cited the potential of the regional airports to subsume the demand being placed on Dublin Airport.

The North

In the North, both airports in Belfast, Belfast International and Belfast City, have recovered well post-pandemic, with the International airport recording a record 6.7 million passengers in 2024 and a comprehensive summer holiday network which offers routes to Mexico, the Caribbean, and the United States, as well as across Europe.

Belfast City Airport recorded 2.4 million passengers in 2024, with a comprehensive regional network serving Britain, and a small number of European destinations being served by KLM, Aer Lingus, and EasyJet.

The City of Derry Airport, however, continues to struggle, with a modest 174,000 passengers passing through the airport in 2024 and a handful of routes in Britain being offered. However, the Government has announced that it will fund a regional route to Derry from Dublin with the PSO scheme, meaning Derry will get a new route. The PSO contract is set to be awarded in Q3 2026.



Gas Networks Ireland

- 300 large projects and 50 high-volume programmes under the organisation's 2025–29 capital works programme
- Approximately 130 standalone capital projects in progress at any one time
- Projects range in scope from low value high volume to €150 million-plus infrastructure builds



Gas to Monksland peaking power plant 'hot tap' connection.

The role of Ireland's €3 billion gas infrastructure

As operators of Ireland's 14,758km gas pipeline and associated infrastructure, Gas Networks Ireland is responsible for a significant programme of capital works to ensure the national gas network is meeting the energy needs of the country today, and into the future.

Gas is the cornerstone of Ireland's integrated energy system, providing approximately 40 per cent of the country's electricity generation, increasing to 90 per cent at times of peak energy use. Gas also plays a critical role in providing security and stability as the country transitions to renewable power sources.

In 2025, the capital expenditure programme was in excess of €200 million and in 2026, that figure is set to rise to €237 million. This body of work focuses on maintaining, upgrading, expanding and decarbonising Ireland's gas network.

The ongoing investment in this €3 billion national asset means Ireland can continue to boast one of the safest and most modern renewables-ready gas

networks in Europe. It also ensures that the 720,000 domestic and commercial customers, as well as the population at large, can rely on the gas network to stabilise the overall energy system while building out renewable capacity.

Gas infrastructure is economic infrastructure. Without gas the country would be unable to support ongoing foreign direct investment and indigenous growth in high-demand sectors such as pharma, tech, and manufacturing. At the other end of the scale, renewable gas is providing new 'green economy' opportunities for the agricultural sector in regional locations as biomethane comes onstream.

This year will mark significant investments in new infrastructure projects for meeting capacity demands

and decarbonising the network. This is in addition to a rolling programme of work which includes connecting new customers, facilitating pipeline alterations/diversions for third-party construction projects, reinforcing the network in response to usage trends and ongoing refurbishments.

Advancing Ireland's renewable gas infrastructure

Gas Networks Ireland's €32 million Central Grid Injection (CGI) facility in Mitchelstown, County Cork is a key project in the expansion of Ireland's renewable gas infrastructure. Delivered in partnership with GMC Utilities Group, the facility will enable large-scale biomethane injection into the national gas network and play a pivotal role in meeting Ireland's climate and energy targets.

Once operational, the Mitchelstown CGI facility will be capable of injecting up to 700GWh of renewable biomethane annually, equivalent to meeting 12 per cent of Ireland's 2030 biomethane



Gas Networks Ireland Above Ground Installation (AGI) site.

production target. This clean energy injection will support a reduction of approximately 130,000 tonnes of CO₂ emissions each year, strengthening Ireland's path toward a fully decarbonised gas network.

The facility represents a major step toward Gas Networks Ireland's vision of a repurposed, resized and net zero gas network by 2045. As demand for sustainable energy solutions increases, infrastructure projects like Mitchelstown will be essential in helping Ireland's largest energy users meet their decarbonisation goals and will provide new economic opportunities for the agricultural sector.

Powering the transition to renewable sources

Gas Networks Ireland is currently delivering on a multi-million infrastructure programme for the provision of high-pressure natural gas connections to 'peaker' power stations. Peakers utilise a type of gas turbine that can quickly be ramped up or down depending on how much power is available from wind and solar at any given time. They operate when electricity demand is especially high, typically on cold days with low wind and low sun, known as 'Dunkelflaute' conditions.

Because peakers are only used when renewable power is insufficient to meet consumption, they reduce reliance on fossil fuels while also ensuring continuity of energy supply in times of peak or fluctuating demand.

Under the Government's *Climate Action Plan*, Gas Networks Ireland has been directed to provide gas connections for two gigawatts of power generation by 2030. To date, construction has been completed on eight out of 13 peakers in counties Dublin, Roscommon, and Westmeath for customers that have been awarded capacity contracts by the State regulator. The remaining five peaker plants are at design and planning stage with one of these due to go into construction in coming months.

Distribution network: The lifeblood of the system

The majority of Ireland's 14,758km network is distribution pipeline, where gas is distributed at medium pressure (4 bar) or low pressure (25 to 75 mbar) suitable for end users' requirements.

As well as completing new connections, Gas Networks Ireland monitors and forecasts gas usage and demand and proactively 'reinforces' the network so that existing customers do not experience any problems with supply. In 2025, approximately 7.5km of new distribution pipeline was installed, 1.4km

of which was to reinforce the network. The remaining 6.1km was laid for various customer projects, mains alterations and internal refurbishment projects. Gas services were installed for 2,100 new customers spanning domestic dwellings and sites, along with small, medium, and large businesses.

There is also a comprehensive maintenance capital works programme to preserve the integrity of the national gas assets. This can include replacements, refurbishments and upgrades for equipment and infrastructure that needs repair, is at end of life or no longer fit for purpose. Last year, over 76,000 high volume replacements and over 850 individual refurbishment projects were completed. A similar volume of maintenance capital projects is due to be carried out in 2026 at locations right across the country.

W: www.gasnetworks.ie





The case for a state construction company

A state builder, if well designed and implemented, could address a number of the structural problems in the market for housing supply, writes Tom McDonnell, co-director of the Nevin Economic Research Institute (NERI).

That we have a housing crisis is well understood. We can see it in rising rents, high house prices, young people stuck in the family home or emigrating, and record levels of homelessness.

The reality is that the housing market has been in some form of dysfunction for fully a quarter of a century if we include the pre-2008 housing boom. Systemic under-building in the wake of the construction sector's devastating boom and bust of the early 2000s coincided with significant pent-up demand from a growing economy and rapid population growth. This led to a major mismatch of supply and demand and to the current crisis.

Our seemingly intractable supply shortfall is caused by a variety of factors including a large deficit of skilled labour, high construction and financing costs, weak productivity, ongoing issues of dereliction and land hoarding, and an extremely cumbersome and unpredictable planning system.

The housing crisis is fundamentally a dysfunction of coordination and of capacity. Supply is burdened by a number of challenging structural problems and a fragmented delivery system.

While there is certainly no silver bullet to end the crisis, it is surely time to at least consider alternatives or modifications to our current approach.

One notable policy option we have yet to fully explore is a state builder or state construction company (SCC). There are a number of potential advantages. A state builder if well designed and implemented could address a number of the structural problems in the market for housing supply.

Such an entity could be a completely new body or it could be a transformed Land Development Agency (LDA) given its own direct build capacity. Either way, a state builder would have to eventually employ thousands of direct employees if it were to become a meaningful actor. Crucially, we would want it to provide additional capacity to private builders and certainly not replace them.

The potential advantages include guaranteed minimum output during downturns and restraint during private booms in housing output. This would help smooth the economic cycle and housing output. Secondly, a state builder would lead to less fragmented delivery by providing a single, scalable, and reliable delivery arm for building on state-owned land. Even so, supply would realistically only be gradually ramped up over a three-to-seven-year period with a focus on pilot projects and learning in its earliest years. Third, a state builder could train apprentices at scale and make construction a less volatile and therefore more attractive career prospect by placing a floor on annual construction output. In this way it would help calibrate labour supply and labour demand in the construction sector over the medium term.

Fourth, through removing developer profit margins, through central procurement and bulk purchasing of materials, through investing in R&D and productivity, and through the utilisation of a very small number of standardised reusable designs, it could reduce build costs and bring down prices. Its scale and long-term reliability as a buyer of standardised components would also improve the viability of building one or more large-scale modular factories in Ireland using modern methods of construction.

The state builder could conceivably even own and operate a modular factory itself as part of its supply chain strategy. Finally, working with the LDA and local authorities it could ensure housing is built where it is most needed rather

than where the market decides it is most profitable.

There are of course a number of challenges and risks. Establishing a state construction company of meaningful size would be very expensive. It would eventually have an annual capital spend running into the billions of euro. New legislation would be required either to amend the LDA Act 2021 to expand the LDA's function to provide for direct construction or, alternatively, to enact a new SCC act to establish a new semi-state akin to the ESB.

The state builder's activities and structure and its interaction with public procurement rules would need to be compatible with EU and domestic law. In practice, it would probably be restricted to building on public land as a direct builder for public authorities (mainly local authorities using the Teckal exemption) and even then, only for cost rental and/or social housing. Political interference and bureaucratic sprawl would need to be robustly countered.

In addition, there would likely be significant recruitment challenges in the early years. But even success in recruitment carries its own risks in our current full employment labour market. A major concern is that the state builder might crowd out small builders, particularly those reliant on public contracts. Thus, the establishment and ramping up of a state builder would need to be accompanied by a campaign to nudge new people into construction trades via an expanded apprenticeship programme and via an attractive and well advertised package of terms and conditions aimed at construction workers living outside Ireland.

An SCC is not a panacea for the immediate crisis. Many additional problems need to be resolved including the slow and unpredictable planning process and the infrastructure and utility connection bottlenecks.

The reality is that a state builder would take a number of years to establish itself and its formation would be hotly contested and derided by private developers and vested interests keen to keep away competition. But these drawbacks do not make it a bad idea and we should at least debate its merits and risks.

In my view, if we had had the foresight to set up a state construction company in 2016 we would be in a better place today. Let us hope we do not have the same regrets in 2036.

Addressing the skills shortage head on

Credit: Tideway

Fully-excavated, fully-lined super sewer in Fulham.

Securing the talent to deliver Ireland’s ambitious infrastructure programmes in this ‘decade of delivery’ offers both risk and opportunity.

Over the next 10 years, we will deliver some of the largest and most complex infrastructure projects, many at the same time in our Capital City. This ‘decade of delivery’ is not aspirational; it is funded, prioritised, and already underway. The capital envelopes are in place. The political mandate is clear. The pipeline is published.

Dublin MetroLink, the Greater Dublin Drainage Scheme, the Water Supply Project all commenced procurement for contracting teams in February 2026. Something they all have in common; a need for talented engineers, technicians, ecologists and quantity surveyors to name just a few of the skills. One question looms above all others: who will deliver it?

Ireland is already experiencing acute shortages across engineering, construction management, architecture, planning, environmental science, and specialist trades. These gaps are widening as experienced professionals retire and global competition for STEAM talent intensifies. Without decisive interventions now, our infrastructure ambitions risk becoming bottlenecked not by funding or intent, but by the availability of skilled people.

A missed opportunity hiding in plain sight

One of the most powerful tools we have, apprenticeships embedded directly within construction contracts, is also the one we risk overlooking.

Ireland has an apprenticeship system, with more than 28,400 apprentices and a target of 10,000 annual registrations. Yet uptake remains modest in the very disciplines that our infrastructure pipeline urgently needs: engineering technicians, construction supervisors, planners, ecologists, digital technicians, architectural technologists, environmental scientists.

As we move toward shovel-ready delivery on our biggest national projects, we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to use government procurement, the State’s most powerful lever, to scale technical apprenticeships rapidly and sustainably. But doing so requires action now, before major contracts are signed, not once the

workforce crisis is already constraining delivery. If we act decisively now, we can build a resilient skills pipeline through integrated training that strengthens Ireland for decades.

A proven model just across the water

Ireland is not the first country to face this challenge. The UK confronted a similar crossroads during its own major programme era, and the results are telling. With an ambition for 590 apprentices, the Transpennine Route Upgrade (TRU) programme created the TRU Apprenticeship Academy, providing rotational learning across engineering, ecology, surveying and project management. This helped build capability along the entire route, not just on isolated sites. It is a blueprint ready-made for Ireland's regional spread of water, rail, and energy projects.

London's Thames Tideway Tunnel faced a distinct challenge: a shortage of tunnelling operatives. Instead of competing for scarce labour, Tideway created the UK's first Tunnelling Operative Apprenticeship, achieving between 82 per cent and 84 per cent retention and leaving a lasting capability legacy now used on other megaprojects. This shows how apprenticeships can be strategically deployed to solve deeply niche shortages.

Perhaps the most replicable model for Ireland is Crossrail's use of contractual levers. The project required one apprentice for every £3-5 million of contract value, ensuring consistent delivery across all tiers of contractors and suppliers. This simple requirement generated thousands of skilled workers and created a workforce that has since powered other major UK projects.

The UK evidence is unambiguous: apprenticeships work when they are explicitly required, sufficiently supported, and integrated into procurement. They reduce shortages, stabilise delivery, lower costs, widen access, and create long-term regional capability.

Ireland can and must do the same.

Why Ireland's moment is now

Ireland's major programmes are approaching the point of no return: contracts for enabling works, civils, systems integration, and programme delivery will be signed within the next 24 months. Once that happens, the window to embed meaningful apprenticeship expectations narrows dramatically.

If apprenticeship requirements are not included in early works contracts, and especially in main works procurement, we will lose the chance to scale technical training quickly; the ability to build local capability instead of importing it; the opportunity to support social value and regional employment and the foundation for long-term sector resilience.

We cannot train apprentices retroactively. We must plan for them at the very start. We can make a number of actions without the need for any legislative changes. It is more about a mindset shift.

We could embed apprenticeship requirements into all major infrastructure contracts, mirroring Crossrail. Using the pipeline of programmes to be delivered, there could be increased alignment with the National Apprenticeship Office and SOLAS to expand Level 6-10 programmes in engineering, planning, environmental science, and architecture.

There is the opportunity to establish project-linked apprenticeship academies, following the TRU model, to ensure consistent standards across the supply chain. Consideration on how additional support can be given to contractors with funding, mentoring frameworks, and regional training partnerships, as seen on Tideway. This all requires leadership, coordination, and a willingness to apply procurement levers already available to public sector clients.

A positive path forward

Ireland is already moving in the right direction. The forthcoming Action Plan for Apprenticeships 2026-2030 offers a strong foundation and a clear national commitment to modernising and expanding pathways into technical professions.

Public sector clients can now translate that national ambition into practical action by embedding apprenticeship expectations into project delivery, championing technical pathways, and ensuring the next generation of engineers, planners, architects, scientists, and specialists are trained on Ireland's most important projects.

This is not just a workforce strategy. It is a nation building opportunity.

If we embrace it, our decade of delivery can also become a decade of talent; one that leaves Ireland stronger, more capable, and better prepared for the challenges ahead.

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Launched in 2023, *Better Public Services* is the transformation strategy for the public service aimed at delivering for the public and building trust. The Public Service Transformation Framework is at the core of the strategy and comprises three priority themes: **Digital and Innovation at Scale**; **Workforce and Organisation of the Future** and **Evidence-Informed Policies and Services Designed with and for the Public**.

In November 2025, the Government launched the *Digital Public Services Plan 2030*, which sets out a roadmap for delivering seamless, inclusive, and user-centred public services through digital transformation. The vision is to create an inclusive, digitally enabled and integrated public service provision that meets the needs and improves the lives of the people of Ireland. Real progress is being made. This conference will bring together key stakeholders from across Ireland's public service to look ahead to what's next and how we can deliver transformation at scale.

Confirmed speakers include:



Louise O'Hare
Assistant National Director
**Sláintecare Transformation
and Innovation Office
(STIO)**



Paula Lyons
Head of Service Development
**Department of Social
Protection**



Soulmaz Alavinia
Head of Department
Campus de la
transformation publique
French Government



Caoimhe McMahon
Service Design Course
Coordinator
**DesignLab: Civic, National
College of Art and Design**



Kevin Horan
Head of Digital Design
HSE



Aideen Maguire
Director
ADRC NI

Key themes:

- ✓ *Better Public Services*: Update on delivery;
- ✓ Embedding user centric design across our public service;
- ✓ Engaging with the service user – becoming citizen-centric;
- ✓ Data-driven research to inform policy-making;
- ✓ Designing inclusive and accessible public services;
- ✓ Driving equality, diversity and inclusion within organisations;
- ✓ Innovation in healthcare delivery;
- ✓ Sectoral update: health; justice; education; local government;
- ✓ Best practice case studies.

Full programme coming soon!

Exhibition opportunities available

Join Ireland's leading organisations in partnering with Public Services 2026. There are a small number of high-profile packages available. For further information on how your organisation can benefit, contact us directly on **+353 (0)1 661 3755** or email Sophie.Adair@eolasmagazine.ie