

Joint Oireachtas Committee on Infrastructure and NDP Delivery – Oct 2025

Opening Statement from Andrew Brownlee, Chief Executive Officer of the Construction Industry Federation (CIF)

On behalf of the Construction Industry Federation (CIF) and my industry colleagues, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to meet with the Committee to address the extreme economic and societal importance of the delivery of infrastructure under the National Development Plan (NDP) and propose how to accelerate the delivery of critical infrastructure to support housing, FDI and economic competitiveness under the NDP.

The CIF is the representative body for the entire construction industry. The Master Builders and Contractors Association, Civil Engineering Contractors Association, Irish Home Builders Association, Mechanical and Electrical Contractors Association and the Alliance of Specialist Contractors are the CIF's key sectoral associations involved in the construction of infrastructure like water, energy, transport, education, health and public housing. The CIF has a well-established policy committee whose work is focused on the National Development Plan and interrelated National Planning Framework.

The CIF made several detailed submissions (enclosed) as part of the recent stakeholder consultation by the Government's Infrastructure Division. We note the preliminary report from this process sets out 12 obstacles to infrastructure delivery. Much of this statement and our submissions align with the Division's report. However, what is now critical is the publication and implementation of the action plan to address these obstacles, which must be driven by all of Government and underpinned by political will.

It is important to start by assuring the Government that Ireland's construction sector has the capacity to deliver critical major infrastructure of the scale set out in the NDP. But consistent roadblocks mean that for many companies, a reliable pipeline of work is not available in Ireland.

The real capacity constraints being experienced and reported by large construction firms are related to planning and legal issues, delays to enabling infrastructure, lack of multiannual funding to support project pipelines and the unattractiveness of public procurement. This undermines industry confidence, business continuity and certainty. As a result, companies are shifting their focus toward private clients or redirecting their surplus capacity, including skilled workers, to international markets, simply because there is not enough domestic work to sustain them.

For example, over 60% of the Top 50 Irish Contractors are exporting their construction services to the UK, Scandinavia, Central and Southern Europe, US and Canada. Between 2024 and 2025 there was a 33% increase in exports compared to just an 8% increase in domestic business. The CIF quarterly Outlook Surveys have consistently shown a fall in Civil Engineering activity over the last two years.

So what needs to be done to accelerate the delivery of public infrastructure?

First, the centralisation of government communication, coordination and prioritisation of multiannual infrastructure investment is essential to provide certainty for Irish construction firms. It is incumbent on Government and all political parties to communicate to the public the importance of infrastructure to everyday life and Irelands economic and social prosperity.

The CIF believes that improving the understanding and coordination amongst departments on how infrastructure, housing, FDI and economic growth are interrelated can be helped by visually mapping out the processes involved. This will help to identify bottlenecks, critical activities and key stakeholders in infrastructural delivery. We need to remove steps that add no value to the process and only delay it.

State bodies involved in planning, consents and certification should be mandated to engage earlier with each other, as well as collaborate, advise and support other stakeholders in the delivery of infrastructure. These bodies must be required to take into account the commercial, technical and programmic impacts of their decisions on projects. The CRU must play a central role in facilitating this with clear plan for prioritisation linked to the NPF and NDP and where zoned and serviced land are aligned for residential development. This should include environmental considerations being addressed by mitigating against environmental impact rather than “No Harm” criteria, which is almost impossible and therefore very difficult to get over in planning and consents processes.

Second, there is a need for clear commitments to multi-annual investment and a project pipeline. This then provides business continuity and confidence to invest in innovation and people which in turn drives greater productivity. Research by the Irish Government Economic Evaluation Service (IGEES), which looked at labour intensity of public investment relating to the Public Capital programme 2021 – 2030, showed that the number of direct construction jobs per €1 million reduced by 35% (12 to 7.8) between 2015 and 2021. It also highlights that productivity in the industry has increased significantly, and the potential is there to improve even more through multiannual funding and fewer bottlenecks.

Third, Inefficient and mis-aligned Planning and Consents must be addressed. To speed up the delivery of public energy, water and wastewater infrastructure in Ireland, several consents and exemptions from planning and regulations could be considered, like ensuring that consent processes run concurrently rather than sequentially. More streamlining, clearer guidelines, faster assessment timelines, and a more coordinated approach between planning and consent processes and associated agencies should be pursued.

There should be an expansion in the scope of works exempted from planning such as the maintenance, repair, or improvement of existing infrastructure by Utilities, Ports and Transport agencies. We note the Department of Housing has issued a consultation paper on this which the CIF welcomes.

The Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage should also use his power to create regulations exempting certain types of development from planning permission based on their size, nature, or limited impact. For example, create exemptions for larger water and wastewater infrastructure projects by classifying them as Strategic Infrastructure Development.

The Government should develop National Policy Statements or Acts of the Dail specifically for public energy, water and transport infrastructure. These would set out the national need and priorities, potentially influencing planning decisions in favour of these projects.

Fourth, the accelerated reform of public procurement and construction contracts is critical to making public projects more commercially attractive. Almost 67% of Irish Construction Contractors are engaging in low or no levels of public procurement due to administrative costs, bureaucracy, delays, risk transfer, poor quality design, lack of dialogue and uncertainty of pipeline. As set out in the CIF's report, "**Strategy for the Improved Delivery of Public Infrastructure**", the core areas of reform relate to:

- Quality in Award
- Collaboration
- Effective Risk Management
- Design Quality and Sustainability
- Liability

The key is to make reforms that increase early contractor involvement, which supports better quality design, lowers embedded carbon, mitigates risk, reduced disputes, supports collaboration and digital adoption and leads to better project outcomes.

Fifth, the Government must adequately resource the bodies that deliver public infrastructure with the necessary skills and competences in the delivery of public infrastructure. Secondments of experienced Contracting Authorities and the Commercial Skills Academy set up by the OGP could help achieve this.

Their approach should be based on effective risk management where risk is well defined and allocated to the parties best capable of managing it. This means that the procurement of complex assets must consider the timeframes involved in delivering them; and the changes in geopolitics, design, technology, logistics, supply chains and legislation that may occur along the way. The only way to achieve this is through collaboration, underpinned by knowledge, engagement, leadership, systems, processes and incentives to perform. A step in the right direction would be for Public Contracting Authorities to engage with the Enterprise Ireland Build to Innovate programme, which supports Lean Construction and Last Planner thinking.

A further good example of good practice is the Construction Playbook commissioned by the UK Government's Cabinet Office which provides Guidance on sourcing and contracting public works projects and programmes.

These five actions are essential to addressing the many obstacles that blight infrastructure development in Ireland. Without them, we will not deliver the housing targets. We will risk our utilities being unable to meet the demands of our population. We will undermine our economic competitiveness. We will make Ireland unattractive to investors and damage domestic growth, ultimately lowering Irish living standards.

The construction sector is critical to Ireland's economic future and the conditions need to be put in place to ensure it commercially viable and sustainable for the businesses within it, or we risk losing the very capacity we need to build the infrastructure, housing and future our growing country requires.

To conclude, the Government must implement its action plan around:

- Prioritised Multiannual funding at sufficient levels.
- Exemptions to planning for infrastructure and reform of the statutory consents.
- Reform of Public Procurement and Contracts.

Ireland's construction industry has the workforce, skills and proven ability to deliver.

A stable project pipeline and a predictable planning environment, underpinned by zoned and serviced land availability, planning exemptions, removal of consents, faster approvals, and multiannual funding, are essential to attracting construction firms to scale up in Ireland and deliver vital public infrastructure and housing.

I would like to thank the Committee for your time today and look forward to further discussion on this matter.

ENDS.