

The State of Ireland 2013 – A Review of Infrastructure in Ireland by Engineers Ireland

Briefing Note on the Transport Aspects

At the end of February 2013, Engineers Ireland published a review of infrastructure in Ireland. It first produced such an independent analysis in 2011. The review divides infrastructure into five categories:

- **A** well maintained, good condition, appropriate capacity and planning for future development
- **B** acceptable standard, properly maintained, able to meet demand, investment needed over next five years
- **C** inadequately maintained, unable to meet peak demand, requiring significant investment
- **D** below standard, poorly maintained, frequent inability to meet demand, requiring immediate investment to avoid adverse economic impact
- **E** unacceptable condition, insufficient capacity, already impacting on economy.

It rates five categories of infrastructure: energy (B), transport (C), water (C), waste (B-) and communications (B+).

The rest of this note looks at the transport section of the review.

The following ratings are given to the various modes of transport:

- Motorways **B**
- Other roads **D**
- Rail **D**
- Airports **B**
- Seaports **C**.

According to the review, the inter-urban **motorways** are in good condition, well maintained and have appropriate capacity capable of meeting demand. All the motorways provide links Dublin but the road links between other cities are much less impressive.

The review notes a significant difference between the motorways and **other roads**, with the remainder of the network in very variable condition and incapable of fully meeting demand. It points to the lack of investment at present and notes that the non-motorway network has deteriorated and has only been repaired on a patchwork basis. There has been insufficient expenditure on maintenance, with a 40% reduction over the last five years. The recent severe Winters have damaged many roads.

The review concludes that our national secondary and regional roads are in need of substantial overhaul and that priority should be given to the secondary roads which connect the national primaries. It calls for improved maintenance regimes for national and regional roads and says that the Atlantic Road Corridor should be developed as financial resources permit. It also argues for substantial investment in urban areas to move towards a low carbon model – bus lanes, cycle lanes and facilities for pedestrians and mobility impaired people. It also calls for the development of a national Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS) strategy to derive the maximum benefits from IT applications.

Turning to **rail**, the review says that, although the Luas, DART and intercity trains are fully utilised at peak times, they are usually capable of meeting demand. The rail infrastructure is generally well maintained and the investment which has taken place to renew assets, increase speeds and augment capacity needs to be continued. The light rail network also appears to be well maintained. It notes that a number of projects designed to increase capacity (DART Underground, Navan line and Kildare Phase 2) have been deferred. The main deficit in both light and heavy rail in Dublin is connectivity, though it notes that the cross city Luas line is likely to proceed.

The review states that the Irish rail infrastructure is not geared to address environmental and low carbon concerns. It is not designed to take people out of their cars because it not a sufficiently attractive alternative. The dispersed population makes it difficult for rail to compete with the car and there is criticism of the level of park+ride and its pricing. It argues that further investment in rail is needed, that it needs better inter-connections and that the system needs further development to improve links between major population centres. It calls for a DART link to Dublin Airport to be accelerated. An alternative view can be put forward in response to this latter proposal. The potential impact of the airport rail link on suburban services in the northern corridor and its commuting and peak congestion benefits need to be carefully assessed. It might also be counter-argued that, in a period of scarce financial resources, priority should be given to bus investments as a way of delivering faster and more wide ranging public transport improvements in the capital.

The D rating for the railway seems a little harsh, notwithstanding the valid criticisms made by the review. There have substantial improvements to infrastructure, rolling stock and service frequency, reliability and quality in recent years. Capacity has been increased substantially in Dublin, arising from suburban rail and Luas investments and new lines have been opened to Midleton and Pace and between Limerick and Galway.

Dissapointingly the review includes no commentary on the bus network which carries the vast bulk of public transport journeys and is a critical part of the overall public transport infrastructure.

The review says that Irish **airports** and air traffic control systems are well maintained and that the relevant authorities continue to invest to maintain safety and security. There are plans for a second runway at Dublin Airport but probably not in the short term. The completion of the motorway network has put pressure on air travel within Ireland. The new terminals at Dublin and Cork mean that the airports are well positioned when growth resumes. Regional airports will continue to face pressure as road travel times improve, but the review argues that these airports are crucial for foreign access to peripheral areas and are vital for foreign investment.

Commenting on **ports**, the review says that the commercial ports are generally well maintained and that there has been significant investment in the larger fisheries harbours, but that many smaller harbours and quays around the country are in need of repair and replacement. There is an emerging need for new and expanded deep water facilities to cater for larger vessels and hinterland connections to ports need to be prioritised for improvement.

The overall D rating for ports also seems a little harsh given that there are no major criticisms of the ports of major economic importance to the country and no evidence is adduced of a failure to plan for the future.

The review makes a number of general recommendations. Over the next 12 months, it calls for the development of a replacement to the recently shelved National Spatial Strategy, the publication and implementation of the new national ports policy and the restoration of transport investment to at least 2012 levels. The Minister for the Environment has already made it clear that the present National Spatial Strategy continues in force until replaced, probably in 2014. The new ports policy was published in March.

Over the next five years, the review calls for accelerated prioritisation of investment in infrastructure projects to increase competitiveness and address unemployment, investment in cycling infrastructure and agreement on technical standards for integrated traffic systems to enable information sharing.