

# The State of Ireland 2015 – A Review of Infrastructure in Ireland by Engineers Ireland

## Briefing Note on the Transport Aspects

### Overview

Engineers Ireland recently published its 2015 review of infrastructure in Ireland which can be accessed at <http://www.engineersireland.ie/communications/publication-archive.aspx>. It first produced such an independent analysis in 2011 and this is the fifth in the series. 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, and/or unable to meet peak demand, and 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 and already impacting on economy.

It rates five categories of infrastructure: energy (B), transport (C), water and flooding (C), waste (C) and communications (B). The only rating to change from 2014 is communications which is down from B+. The only sector to have been upgraded since the first review in 2011 is communications which was rated C that year.

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

The following are the ratings for the various modes of transport (with changes from 2014):

- Motorways B-
- Other roads D
- Rail D
- Airports B
- Seaports C (up from C- in 2014)
- Sustainable transport D (down from C in 2014).

### Roads

According to the review, the inter-urban motorways are relatively new, in good condition and on a par with networks in Europe. They are well maintained and are currently capable of meeting demand, apart from the M50 which is now carrying 27% more traffic than before it was upgraded in 2010. All the motorways provide links to Dublin but the road links between other cities are much less impressive. The review points to the relatively poor quality of the Cork-Limerick road as an example and argues for significant investment in the Atlantic Corridor, especially the road links between Galway, Limerick, Cork and Waterford. It points

out that the funding available to operate, maintain and improve the national road network has been significantly reduced in recent years and refers to a continuing lack of investment.

The review notes a significant difference between the motorways and other roads, with the remainder of the network in very variable condition and not capable of meeting usual demand. It points to increasing congestion, especially in cities and towns as well as at peak periods. It notes that the non-motorway network has deteriorated and has only been repaired on a patchwork basis. Roads that were repaired and strengthened in the 1990s are now due for maintenance. Concern is expressed about the effect of inadequate expenditure over the last eight years and the impact of recent severe weather. Road maintenance programmes have been significantly reduced to unsustainable levels.

The review concludes that our national secondary and regional roads are in need of substantial overhaul. It calls for improved maintenance and rehabilitation regimes for national and regional roads and argues that further work needs to be done to connect the main road network to air and sea ports. It also advocates substantial investment in urban areas to move towards a low carbon sustainable model – bus lanes, cycle lanes, facilities for pedestrians and mobility impaired people and initiatives to attract car users onto sustainable modes of travel. It also calls for the development of a national Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS) strategy to co-ordinate technologies, infrastructure and investment while ensuring values for money.

## **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. However it warns that capacity may become an issue as the economy starts to grow. The heavy 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 the former is now being addressed by Luas Cross-City.

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 does not provide a sufficiently attractive alternative. The dispersed population makes it difficult to develop the passenger rail network on an economic basis and for rail to compete with the car. There is criticism of the level of park+ride and of pricing strategies.

The review argues that further investment in rail is needed to get people out of their cars and that this investment should focus on linking up existing rail facilities, particularly in Dublin. The system also needs further development to improve links between major population centres.

It calls for a DART link to Dublin Airport to be accelerated, not deferred. An alternative view can be put forward in response to this 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. These issues will hopefully be addressed in the Fingal North Dublin Transport Study which is currently underway and which is considering a number of rail, light rail and bus options to serve the corridor from Swords/Dublin Airport to the city.

The D rating for the railway seems a little harsh. There have been substantial improvements to infrastructure, rolling stock and service frequency, reliability and quality over the past fifteen 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. There has been some retrenchment because of financial challenges facing Iarnród Éireann, as a result of a substantial decline in Exchequer support and lower traffic, but the quantity and quality of service offered today is still far better than in the relatively recent past.

Dissappointingly 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.

## **Airports**

The review says that Irish airports and air traffic control systems are well maintained. The new terminal facilities are important assets whose value will be seen in the medium to longer term as air traffic grows. There are plans for a second runway at Dublin Airport but it is probably not required in the short term. The completion of the motorway network has put pressure on air travel within Ireland. The review suggests that regional airports should be maintained because they are crucial for foreign access to peripheral areas and are vital for inward investment.

The short to medium term priority should be to continue to invest in the maintenance of our airports and to protect these assets to support economic recovery. In the longer term we should plan to exploit opportunities that present themselves and rectify weaknesses in our existing infrastructure and travel experience.

## **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. The volume of port traffic has stabilised following a decline in recent years and growth is emerging in some sectors. Changing market conditions and developments in the logistics sector indicate an emerging need for new or expanded deep water facilities, especially as there is an international trend towards larger vessels. Early project planning is essential because of the long lead times for the development of port infrastructure.

The review calls for the development of commercial ports to facilitate larger vessels which can deliver economies of scale and improve national competitiveness. The statutory planning process needs to be streamlined to ensure that infrastructure can be delivered in an integrated and timely manner. It is not clear what particular issues are of concern and if they only apply to ports infrastructure. The connectivity of ports in the overall transport network, particularly for freight, needs to be prioritised. The review urges that projects which are currently at the pre-planning stage should be supported and it mentions in particular the expansion of Cork Port at Ringaskiddy and the proposed new deepwater port in Galway.

The overall C- rating for ports seems a little harsh.

### **General Recommendations**

In the short term (12 month), the review calls for progress on finding funding mechanisms for delayed national road projects nationwide and on the planning of Galway's Eastern Bypass. It also calls for improved road management systems and for the development of a solution for north Dublin and Dublin Airport rail.

Over the next five years, the review calls for accelerated prioritisation of investment in infrastructure projects to increase competitiveness and address unemployment, progress on the planning of developments at Cork and Galway ports, agreement on technical standards for integrated traffic systems (to enable information sharing) and continued integration of public transport services.

**The opinions expressed in this briefing note are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the Institute.**