

# The State of Ireland 2014 – A Review of Infrastructure in Ireland by Engineers Ireland

## Briefing Note on the Transport Aspects

Engineers Ireland recently published its 2014 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 (C) and communications (B+). The only rating to change from 2013 is waste which is down from B-.

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 2013):

- Motorways **B-** (down from B in 2013)
- Other roads **D**
- Rail **D**
- Airports **B**
- Seaports **C-** (down from C in 2013)
- Sustainable transport **C** (new in 2014).

According to the review, the inter-urban **motorways** are new, in good condition and on a par with networks in Europe They are well maintained and are capable of meeting demand. All the motorways provide links 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 is not immediately apparent why the rating of the motorways has been reduced given the quality of the network and the release of some important projects to construction.

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. 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 decade and the impact of recent severe weather. The review calls for the implementation of a road management system to manage deficiencies in road surfaces and to manage roadworks and excavations.

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 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 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.

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.

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 its pricing.

The review argues that further investment in rail is needed to get people out of their cars and that this investment should attempt to link up existing rail facilities, particularly in Dublin. The system also needs further development to improve links between major population centres. It notes that the cross-city Luas line is the only major rail project currently underway. 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 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. While acknowledging the impact of the economic crisis on Irish Rail's recent financial position, 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.

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.

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. 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 probably not in the short term. The completion of the motorway network has put pressure on air travel within Ireland. The review suggests that regional airports are crucial for foreign access to peripheral areas and are vital for foreign investment but offers no evidence to support this view. The reality is that the recently completed motorway network has improved access to Dublin Airport as our key international gateway. Despite some improvement in traffic and its new independent status, the future of Shannon is not yet assured. It would have been helpful if the review had considered how this might be addressed and whether continuing development of regional airports is the right strategy.

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. The volume of port traffic has stabilised following a decline in recent years. Changing market conditions and developments in the logistics sector indicate an emerging need for new or expanded deep water facilities. 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, though it is not clear what particular issues are of concern for ports in this regard. The connectivity of ports in the overall transport network needs to be prioritised. The capacity of the public road network connecting to ports can be maximised through demand management and charging regimes can be used to disincentivise shipping and truck movements at times when the road network is under pressure, such as at peak commuting periods.

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

Although the review has a newly introduced rating for **sustainable transport**, there is no specific narrative on the topic.

The review makes a number of **general recommendations**. In the short term, it calls for the development of initiatives to change commuter behaviour and encourage a shift from cars to other modes in urban areas. It also calls for the starting of construction on the M17/18 Gort to Tuam motorway project. The first sod on the project was in fact turned on 9 May and it should be completed in 2018. The review also advocates that ways be found to fund delayed national road projects.

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 and agreement on technical standards for integrated traffic systems to enable information sharing.

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