

ACEI Submission to 'Ireland 2040 Our Plan – Draft National Planning Framework'

November 2017

The Association of Consulting Engineers of Ireland (ACEI) is pleased to have the opportunity to be consulted on the above report and welcomes its publication. The report is very welcome at this time, particularly in relation to its goal of seeking to ensure that:

Ireland's many unique assets can be built upon, with an emphasis on improving economic output and stability as well as quality of life, environmental performance and the liveability of Dublin and our cities, towns and rural areas.

The association also welcomes the inclusion of a number of infrastructural projects as priorities in the National Investment plan.

ACEI Background

ACEI is a voluntary, self-regulatory professional body representing the business and professional interests of firms and individuals engaged in Consulting Engineering in variety of disciplines including Civil, Structural, Mechanical, Electrical and others.

As the official voice of the Consulting Engineering profession, it assists in resolving issues of importance for clients and Consultants alike and where possible contributes to the development of relevant public policy through involvement in relevant working groups, Government committees, and the development of model conditions of engagement and policy papers.

The association also sets benchmarks for the consulting engineering profession in Ireland and expects from its members the achievement of high quality cost effective engineering solutions to the benefit of clients and society. ACEI also promotes amongst its members best practices, sustainability and ethical behaviour in the operation of their firms.

The ACEI is a member of EFCA (The European Federation of Consulting Engineering Associations) which represents the professional and commercial interests of engineering consultancy in Brussels and throughout Europe; and FIDIC which represents engineering consultancy worldwide, particularly with lending agencies such as the World Bank.

Main ACEI Feedback Topic

In relation to the Ireland 2020 plan, ACEI believes that priority should be given to the urgent establishment of an Irish Infrastructural Council, or similar, to provide an integrated approach to planning, investment and infrastructure in the country. A key aspect of this should be the involvement of consulting engineers in order to utilise the expertise of ACEI members.

ACEI in a number of fora has previously stated its support for the establishment of a single entity charged with prioritising integrated infrastructure development in this country, namely an Irish/National Infrastructural Council. ACEI firmly believes that this entity should be established on a statutory basis with the remit of providing government with expert, independent advice on infrastructural issues.

Successful examples of such bodies are already in place in the U. K. and in Australia. In defining its reasoning in preparing its Infrastructure Priority List, Infrastructure Australia states that *'defining Australia's infrastructure priorities is important for governments, investors, industry and the community. It guides government decision making on how best to allocate resources, provides transparency on future spending priorities, and supports economic growth. It also provides industry with a clear forward program of works, which helps ensure that Australia retains specialist skills to deliver the infrastructure we need'*.

The U.K. National Infrastructure Commission launched a 15-week Call for Evidence policy paper in October 2016 with the intention of shaping the development of its national infrastructure assessment. All interested parties were encouraged to submit evidence, ideas and solutions. Deputy Chair of the National Infrastructure Commission, Sir John Armitt said that NIA will be a world first in size and scope – and the Commission is absolutely committed to carrying it out in an open, transparent way, engaging with a wide range of stakeholders.

It is vital in Ireland that any increased investment must be the result of an evidence-based discussion about long-term planning. Any single Irish entity in this area should set out a clear, strategic vision along with a priority list for future infrastructure, in order to unlock economic potential and ensure that growth and opportunities are distributed across the country, thus boosting productivity and competitiveness through high-quality infrastructure. This will ensure that the Government is provided with expert, independent advice, from consulting engineers and others, on infrastructure and related issues and set out a clear, strategic vision for the future. Such an entity would also enable the current poor alignment of planning, funding and delivery cycles to be reconciled and, finally, it will go some way towards addressing the often fragile and incomplete political and public consensus around infrastructural needs.

