

# ICE evidence to the Treasury Committee on NISTA

June 2026

## About the ICE

The Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE) is a 97,000-strong global membership organisation with over 200 years of history.

It is a centre of engineering excellence, qualifying engineers and helping them maintain lifelong competence, assuring society that the infrastructure they create is safe, dependable and well designed.

Its network of experts offers trusted, impartial advice to politicians and decision makers on how to build and adapt infrastructure to create a more sustainable world.

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## Submission

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This submission sets out the ICE's priorities for the National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority (NISTA)<sup>1</sup> and our analysis of progress against them during NISTA's first year of operation.

The ICE has been strongly supportive of the establishment and first year of operations of NISTA. The positive industry reception of the 10 Year Infrastructure Strategy (10YIS) and the Infrastructure Pipeline are both testament to NISTA's work to date.

However, into its second year of operations and beyond, the ICE's view is that NISTA should be better supported to challenge and act as an objective voice in government on infrastructure policy and delivery. In the context of the current geopolitical and fiscal environment facing the UK, NISTA's role in championing greater certainty in infrastructure decision-making is more important than ever. This will require a renewed focus on NISTA's role in engaging the public on the benefits of infrastructure and rebuilding trust in the UK's ability to deliver major projects.

At present, risks to the delivery of the 10YIS include potential politicisation of major projects and substantial changes to the direction of the strategy. Further risk comes from a lack of delivery and oversight capability across the civil service that risks further erosion of public trust. The recommendations below would provide the tools for NISTA to manage these.

### 1. Provide independent advice and challenge to the government

The ICE called for an independent voice to remain part of NISTA's governance structure, to proactively challenge the government and ensure it does not shy away from difficult questions.

The context in which infrastructure decisions are made is complex and constantly changing. The National Infrastructure Commission's (NIC) independence meant that it could offer impartial advice to decision-makers. When that advice was followed, the UK made progress on its long-term goals. The NIC's National Infrastructure Assessments (NIAs) also provided an objective basis for strategic infrastructure planning.

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<sup>1</sup> ICE (2025) [ICE Insights Paper: what should NISTA's priorities be?](#)

NISTA does not have the same level of independence, but it has set up a Council of Expert Advisers to provide scrutiny and impartial advice to ministers and NISTA's CEO. A year into operation, it is unclear whether this model has retained all the benefits of the former NIC commissioner function, including the value of its independent advice. The NIA function also does not appear to have been carried forward under the new model.

The next year of operation, and the upcoming appointment of the new council members, should serve as a platform for NISTA to consider how this ability to provide independent challenge can be retained.

NISTA says it has a strong mandate to influence how government departments plan and deliver infrastructure – and that being directly accountable to ministers will help achieve better outcomes.<sup>2</sup> However, it remains to be seen if it has the clout needed to compel the required culture change.

One step towards achieving this would be by clarifying and streamlining assurance responsibilities across the Cabinet Office, NISTA and HM Treasury. This would strengthen how major infrastructure projects are assessed and approved and create a clear route by which NISTA can influence major project outcomes and departmental decision-making.

## 2. Enable long-term strategic infrastructure planning

Major infrastructure projects can take decades to plan and deliver. Too many projects are affected by stop-start delivery because they lack long-term commitment. Short-term thinking leads to higher costs, delays and projects that don't address the public's long-term needs.

Long-term strategic infrastructure planning and delivery requires stable policy-making and cross-party and cross-government support.

### Delivering the 10-Year Infrastructure Strategy

The government's 10YIS demonstrates long-term thinking, is technical rather than ideological in its proposed solutions, and is comprehensive rather than focused on just a handful of political priorities.

However, for the strategy to succeed, NISTA must play a role in ensuring the government sticks with its infrastructure plans. Investor, supply chain and public confidence require certainty and stability.

In the context of challenging geopolitical and fiscal circumstances, it is more important than ever that certainty and predictability in infrastructure planning and delivery are prioritised. NISTA has an important role in ensuring that the UK stays the course in delivering the 10YIS. Greater ability to challenge politicisation of projects and long-term planning and to champion the value of infrastructure with the public would benefit NISTA's capacity to deliver on this element of its mandate.

Government departments tasked with overseeing, funding and delivering the 10YIS also need to be more coordinated to enable systems thinking rather than siloed activity. This could be achieved by giving the Chief Secretary to the Treasury permanent responsibility for delivery of the 10YIS and future iterations of it as part of their ministerial portfolio and creating a cabinet committee on infrastructure, bringing together the relevant secretaries of state, junior ministers and senior civil servants.<sup>3</sup>

Building cross-party support also remains critical to the strategy's success. NISTA must help develop that consensus for key long-term strategic programmes to survive shorter political cycles.

A key test for the 10YIS's effectiveness will be its 2027 refresh, which NISTA will oversee. This should allow for some scrutiny of progress and the ability to course correct without resorting to short-term, knee-jerk changes. Beyond the 2027 refresh, further mechanisms for monitoring progress remain unclear.

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<sup>2</sup> ICE (2025) [ICE roundtable: what's next for the UK infrastructure pipeline?](#)

<sup>3</sup> ICE (2025) [ICE policy paper: why do major projects take so long and cost so much?](#)

### Whole-life thinking about infrastructure

Long-term thinking about infrastructure includes NISTA championing a greater focus on the maintenance and renewals investment included in the 10YIS. Government and industry tend to focus on capital expenditure over operational and maintenance spend. Cost-benefit analyses often underplay the economic upsides of upgrading or improving existing infrastructure and the downsides of having underperforming assets.

With the huge uplift expected in new construction, it is easy to overlook that the UK already has most of the infrastructure it will use in the coming decades. However, many of those assets are approaching a critical state where they risk compromising the reliability of the services they provide<sup>4</sup>. Maintaining, adapting, upgrading and, where possible, repurposing these existing assets must not be neglected. This is vital in response to the growing risks from climate change; making the most of what we already have can also reduce building-sector carbon emissions and lower the demand for new infrastructure and thus the pressure on the supply chain.

## 3. Oversee a credible pipeline

A credible infrastructure pipeline is a key component of long-term planning. Pipelines enable resource planning, innovation, investment and efficient delivery. Until recently, the UK lacked an up-to-date national pipeline with the required level of detail. The ICE called for NISTA to hold the government accountable for developing and committing to a prioritised, stable pipeline of investible projects aligned with society's needs.

Last year NISTA published a new £530bn infrastructure pipeline spanning economic and social projects. The pipeline is presented via a dynamic online dashboard and a downloadable dataset. A recent update increased the committed spend to £718bn and includes more workforce, skills and regional data – making it easier for the supply chain to plan for future demand.

It is to NISTA's credit that it is listening to what the industry needs. It intends to continue improving and updating the pipeline in six-month intervals to keep it up-to-date, credible and useful.

### Reforming the Government Major Projects Portfolio

NISTA has also reformed and refocused the Government Major Projects Portfolio (GMPP), cutting it from over 200 projects to just over 80. This should ensure the most complex, highest-impact schemes get the central government support they need.

To be in the GMPP, projects must now support a top government priority, cost over £1bn, and clearly benefit from central – rather than departmental – scrutiny.

The reforms are positive, and will allow NISTA to target support where it adds most value, strengthening assurance, improving data use, and supporting projects earlier in their lifecycle.

## 4. Embed best practice and raise capability across government

NISTA has been a useful addition to the government's strategic infrastructure planning system. Looking forward, more focus on embedding best practice and raising delivery capability would further support the infrastructure system.

### Mandating best practice

NISTA must compel departments and delivery bodies to operate more effectively. The ICE, and now the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA), recommend mandating the implementation of the Construction Playbook and Constructing the Gold Standard (CGS).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> National Engineering Policy Centre (2025) [Reviving our ageing infrastructure report](#)

<sup>5</sup> CMA (2026) [Civil Engineering Market Study Final Report](#)

The playbook provides practical guidance to deliver projects sustainably at pace and scale. CGS implements the playbook policies at a strategic level with the support of proven examples. The 24 CGS recommendations were endorsed by government and industry bodies in the 2022 playbook update.

Making playbook and CGS compliance a clear requirement for any NISTA project business case wouldn't require legislation. Doing so would help address many of the issues raised in the CMA's civil engineering study, which flagged that the sector is currently under-equipped to meet coming demand.

### Raising delivery capability

Recruitment and training of civil servants able to deliver the 10YIS also remains a priority. Institutional knowledge and the availability of capability are enduring problems for government project delivery. Clients, sponsor departments and those working for them aren't likely to be serial major project deliverers, and the broader civil service system can incentivise generalist skillsets, gained by moving roles regularly, in lieu of technical expertise gained over many years in a few positions. Key skills, like contract management, procurement and negotiation and technical integration, are too thinly spread as a result, despite the establishment of NISTA.

The ICE recommends that NISTA set up a unit of senior infrastructure leaders within government that can support public bodies on project delivery. This roving delivery team could support departments and client organisations by complementing internal capability. Other jurisdictions, including the Netherlands, New Zealand, France and Denmark, provide examples for how the UK could approach establishing such a unit.<sup>6</sup>

## 5. Spatial planning

The ICE is supportive of plans to introduce a focus on spatial planning as part of the 10YIS refresh. As we noted in our submission on the 10YIS working paper consultation, international examples underscore the value of integrating a planning system with a long-term vision and strategy, matched with other institutions within the wider infrastructure system that have a mandate to enforce the delivery of the strategic direction.<sup>7</sup>

Strategic spatial planning has, in the ICE's experience, taken one of two forms globally. One combines strategic infrastructure planning and prioritisation with spatial planning at the national scale. Ireland is a good example of this approach, where they have integrated their national vision, Project Ireland 2040, with their land use plan. It combines the twin pillars of the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the National Development Plan (NDP), which provide crucial integration between land use and infrastructure delivery.

The second takes a more regional approach to support the integration of projects at multiple levels of government. Countries in Latin America, such as Brazil, Chile, and Peru, take this approach to identifying infrastructure needs to better understand what is needed across the country.

What is common across both approaches, however, is a focus on integrating the full hierarchy of spatial plans with a vision and strategic direction for the country, based on a comprehensive needs assessment. In many cases, the success of this approach has been supported by institutions in the wider system which have a mandate to enforce alignment between planning instruments. NISTA will need to be supported to work across government to deliver on this mandate.

## 6. Inform and engage the public

The ICE recommended that NISTA ensure the public understands the benefits of infrastructure investment and that decision-makers understand the needs of infrastructure users.

<sup>6</sup> ICE (2025) [Why do major projects cost so much and take so long?](#)

<sup>7</sup> ICE (2025) [ICE response to HMT's 10YIS working paper](#)

In polling by Opinion Research for the ICE, almost two-thirds of people (62%) said major infrastructure projects are poorly communicated to them. Similarly, in polling by YouGov for the ICE, 78% of the British public said they don't feel that people like them are listened to when infrastructure is planned, funded and delivered in the UK.

This is a problem because infrastructure exists to serve the public, but is being delayed by community pushback and a lack of trust in the institutions delivering it.

For Britain's long-term infrastructure ambitions to succeed, rebuilding that trust is crucial. There still needs to be clearer and more persuasive communication and engagement about infrastructure in the UK. And decision-making must be informed by the needs and wishes of people who use the infrastructure.

The ICE has recommended that both NISTA and Chief Secretary to the Treasury play leading roles in engaging the public. NISTA shouldn't be championing individual projects, but it should articulate the importance of infrastructure investment, help explain the benefits and trade-offs, and celebrate demonstrable successes.

## 7. Engage globally

The ICE recommended that NISTA retain the former Infrastructure Projects Authority (IPA) International function to continue informing and learning from global best practice on strategic infrastructure planning and delivery.

It is positive that this international focus has been retained via NISTA's work as a delivery partner under the Green Cities and Infrastructure Centre of Expertise.

We shouldn't lose sight of the fact that the UK does a lot well. It has established a strong global reputation for strategic infrastructure planning, finance and delivery. There is also a growing appetite among governments for sharing best practice globally, as highlighted by the ICE-convened Enabling Better Infrastructure programme. That international work also helps the UK's international climate and trade goals. NISTA's involvement in supporting and sharing global best practice ensures the UK remains at the forefront of that work.