

# ICE submission to the Energy Security and Net Zero Committee inquiry on the cost of energy

April 2025

## 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 response covers question 3 of the call for evidence.

### Where should the costs of decarbonising the grid lie?

Decarbonising the grid will require significant investment in infrastructure. This will ultimately deliver environmental benefits, greater energy security, and lower bills. However, recent polling commissioned by the ICE as part of a policy programme titled '*Paying for Britain's Infrastructure*'<sup>1</sup> suggests more needs to be done to engage the public about infrastructure investment, including addressing concerns about the cost of infrastructure and increasing understanding of how it is paid for<sup>2</sup>:

- Almost two-thirds of respondents (62%) felt that major infrastructure projects are poorly communicated to them (only 19% believed they are currently well communicated).
- The polling suggested that people were keenest to hear about why projects are being built and what the benefits will be (47%). However, who is paying for the projects (38%) and what it will cost people individually

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<sup>1</sup> ICE (2025) [ICE briefing paper: paying for Britain's infrastructure system](#)

<sup>2</sup> The polling was conducted by Opinium Research and explored the UK public's understanding of and attitudes towards infrastructure planning, investment and delivery. Opinium conducted three virtual focus groups, each with 6-8 UK adults aged 18+, between 14 and 16 January 2025 and an online survey with a nationally representative sample of 2,007 UK adults aged 18+, between 5 and 8 February 2025.

(37%) were the next highest priorities. The cost to individuals was a higher concern than the overall cost of the infrastructure.

- There was also a perception that infrastructure costs too much and takes too long to deliver. Almost half of respondents believed projects are often delayed or go over budget (44%) and cost more than necessary (40%).

The public ultimately funds new infrastructure through taxes, utility bills or user charges. However, Opinium's research suggests people are divided on the fairest way to pay for new infrastructure and many do not understand how infrastructure is paid for:

- People were relatively evenly divided on whether new projects should be funded mostly or entirely by everyone through taxes (33%) or by those who use them (39%).
- When paying for new major infrastructure projects requires either raising prices for service users or raising taxes for everyone, respondents leaned towards raising prices for service users (38%) rather than raising taxes (16%).
- However, the large proportion of people unsure about the fairest way to pay (27%) suggests many people do not understand how infrastructure is funded. This underlines the need to communicate better the costs as well as the benefits of major investment programmes, like the energy transition.

In the focus groups which were run as part of the ICE's public engagement, resistance to taxes was linked to doubts about government efficiency and how the money would be allocated. Concerns about user charges focused on the affordability of services and the risk of pricing people out of essential infrastructure and widening social and economic disparities.

The private sector will play a major role in delivering the infrastructure required for the clean energy transition. Neither the public nor the private sector was seen as transparent and accountable for efficient infrastructure delivery (25% public, 22% private, and 35% neither).

The research found that the public was concerned that private companies would prioritise profit over public good, resulting in poorer service quality, underinvestment in long-term maintenance, and pricing people out of essential services. Trust in the private sector's involvement in infrastructure investment appeared conditional on strong regulation and government oversight.

The polling shows that wherever the costs ultimately lie, people need more clarity and transparency around the costs, trade-offs and potential impacts of net zero choices and net zero investment. While there are high levels of public concern about climate change, that does not necessarily translate into a willingness to pay higher taxes or prioritise the environment over other issues.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> APPGI and ICE (2024) [What are the public behavioural changes required to meet net zero?](#)