

ICE submission to the Department for Transport consultation on the revised national networks national policy statement (NNNPS)

June 2023

Introduction

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4. In your view does the draft NNNPS provide suitable information to those engaged in the process of submitting, examining and determining applications for development consent for nationally significant infrastructure projects on the:

1. strategic road network?

2. strategic rail network?

3. strategic rail freight interchanges?

Explain why, referring to specific sections of the NNNPS in your response.

The NNNPS provides sufficient detail for those engaged in the Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) decision making process.

However, it is noted that there is a “presumption in favour of granting” as highlighted in Section 4.2 if the NSIP falls within the need established in this NNNPS. In theory, this will allow for more focused applications that demonstrate strong levels of collaboration and engagement. With the NSIP regime now over a decade old and the consenting process having slowed in recent years, it is important to ensure the regime can continue to deliver vital infrastructure across the country.

However, not all projects will be suitable and projects which do not meet the criteria for a successful development consent application will require further support if the recent pattern continues of NSIPs of longer timescales and greater complexity (as past offshore wind decisions have demonstrated) and looking ahead, the regime will need to continue to navigate global challenges such as climate change and rapid technological change.

Sections 1.7 and 1.8 on geographical coverage are clear in describing the scope of the NNNPS as nationally significant infrastructure projects in England. An important function of the national networks is that they provide connectivity with England’s national borders and to international gateways (ports and airports). It would be helpful for this section to be clearer on how project benefits and impacts in the devolved nations will be considered in assessing projects that are physically situated within England, such as projects developed to improve rail and strategic road connections to Scotland (HS2 services to Scotland and A1 north of Newcastle).

5. Does the draft NNNPS adequately set out:

1.) the need for developing national networks?

2.) our policy for addressing the need for the development of national networks?

Provide comments on improvements referring to specific sections of the NNNPS in your response.

The need for national networks has been well established within the revised national networks national policy statement (NNNPS). The focus on ‘ensuring the right infrastructure is delivered in the right place and at the right time to support sustainable growth’ is welcome. Reducing carbon and protecting the environment are clearly dealt with within the NNNPS in support of this aim. The focus on ensuring resilience in networks is also welcome. The ICE has recently published [a](#)

[paper on climate resilience](#) focusing on the need to invest in climate resilience and adaptation to mitigate against the existential threat of climate change to the UK's infrastructure systems.¹

However, whilst policy is stated for addressing the need for the development of national networks, there is a failure to deal with priorities and hence trade-offs in specific areas. In section 3.9 focusing on resilience, the NNNPS does not acknowledge that capacity is the basic enabler for resilience. As stated in ICE's paper on resilience, it is imperative first to understand how to better maintain the condition of existing assets, to improve how their resilience can be improved in the future. Knowledge sharing between the engineering community can play a critical role in providing this information. During system stress events, there must be sufficient capacity to meet these demands. Further quantitative assessment can help infrastructure owners understand risks better.

The UK Government's National Infrastructure Strategy indicates that national infrastructure, including energy infrastructure, must be resilient to future climate change and cost-effective mitigations should be incorporated over the whole life cycle of infrastructure assets. In general, nationally significant infrastructure projects take account of flood risk and the impact of climate change on it, but other climate hazards are not always assessed. This information gap must be filled through the development of detailed National Policy Statements highlighting the climate risks affecting our future and how these can be mitigated through specific standards of protection for each scenario, as highlighted in ICE's recent policy paper on climate resilience and adaptation.

Areas of risk that need to be examined include extreme heat in summer months (alongside how the design and implementation of green infrastructure can address this), potential droughts and power outages. By analysing these risks and how they can be mitigated, measures can be put in place to meet the needs of future communities and protect our national critical infrastructure. National Policy Statements should accurately reflect the challenges and prospective mitigations resulting from climate change and set out requirements for necessary action. This would also support meeting the UN SDGs regarding resilience.²

Section 3.46 also refers to "measures to enhance the capacity of the motorway network", however more details around these measures must be provided and are not expanded on within the wider document. Given the debate over hard-shoulder-running, this potential solution may be illusory and more information must be provided about how these measures to enhance the capacity of the motorway network will be implemented and ensure user safety. Otherwise this could be a barrier to progressing road capacity schemes. There is no evident policy on how road capacity should be increased now that the previous policy of Smart Motorway capacity has been formally abandoned. As ICE highlighted in evidence to the Transport Committee inquiry on strategic road investment, asset and maintenance activity must become a priority in the next road investment strategy (RIS3) to ensure the lessons learned from smart motorways are incorporated and any measures to expand motorway capacity are fully planned through in advance of execution.

6. In your view, is there any information missing from the "General principles and considerations" chapter?

7. If yes, provide comments on missing information, referring to specific sections of the NNNPS in your response.

The chapter omits detail around other types of adaptation approaches that respond to other major climate change impacts as well as flooding (there is more information relating to coastal change and marine impacts in sections 5.95 to 5.110 and on water quality and resources in paragraphs 5.243 to 5.259.)

¹ ICE (2023) [ICE policy position statement: how can the UK's infrastructure system be made more climate resilient?](#)

² UK Government (2021) [Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals](#)

9. Does the NNNPS support development of:

freight facilities on the strategic road network, including lorry parking facilities?

freight interchange infrastructure that encourages modal shift from road to rail?

Explain why, referring to specific sections of the NNNPS in your response.

Integration between road and rail is inferred throughout the NNNPs through support for rail freight interchanges, and an inferred preference for rail freight over road. But there is no clear policy evident that sets out whether rail should be expanded to handle a greater proportion of certain categories of freight. There is a lack of acknowledgement relating to which commodities are best moved by rail and whether there is a priority for trainload – for example, half a train uses the same capacity as a whole train, while 1 truck uses half the capacity of 2 trucks. Further clarity is needed from an NNNPS around the policy for modal preference and whether it is government policy to drive modal switch from road to rail.

Within the NNNPS, section 3.57 identifies the need to reallocate rail capacity to freight, stating “there will therefore be a need to reallocate network capacity and capability to meet this demand for rail freight, particularly given the need to accommodate this growth alongside changing passenger demand.” However, there is no specific guidance published to the Secretary of State for Transport on the criteria upon which the conflicting demands of passengers and freight should be decided. Section 3.76 also states that there is a requirement for rail development to be balanced against financial sustainability, which could lead to a nil investment when compared to other wider economic priorities.

Therefore, whilst the NNNPS advocates for further freight facilities and freight interchange infrastructure that is fit for purpose, it must take into account that this must not be to the detriment of passengers and that rail development must not be sidelined when it comes to investment.

10. In your view, are the changes to the strategic rail freight interchanges section useful for the NNNPS?

11. Explain why, referring to specific sections of the NNNPS in your response.

Section 3.105 of the NNNPS clearly identifies the need for strategic rail freight interchanges (SRFIs). These are dealt with in some detail and helpfully, except in section 4.8 where there are restrictions on the impact of new SRFIs on existing ones which may be limiting.

12. Does, in your view, the NNNPS adequately address:

1.) carbon considerations in the development of national networks?

2.) wider environmental targets in the development of national networks?

Explain why, referring to specific sections in your response.

The NNNPS adequately addresses carbon considerations and wider environmental targets in the development of national networks. Decarbonising the infrastructure system is cited as a priority within Section 2.3, which aligns with the ICE's focus on decarbonisation as outlined in its pathways to decarbonisation [insights paper](#).³

It is important that the Green Book principles will consistently be followed rather than "normally followed" as highlighted in Section 4.5 in the development of business cases by applicants for road and rail projects to ensure environmental impacts of projects are sufficiently measured.

It is also welcome that the NNNPS highlights that a key part of an environmental assessment carried out as part of an NSIP is the consideration of cumulative effects (as cited in Section 4.11). The cumulative effects of national networks, particularly in terms of carbon impacts, must be assessed and taken into account during the decision making process for projects. However, more detailed guidance in relation to this would ensure that decisions on this basis can be made increasingly transparent by the Secretary of State for Transport in the future.

22. Any other comments?

The ICE encourages the UK Government to keep National Policy Statements up to date as going much beyond 5 years risks delays to projects and negatively impacts on ensuring the public gets the infrastructure they need. The ICE congratulates the Department for Transport on drafting and updating the revised National Networks National Policy Statement and accompanying guidance. As the NNNPS highlights in section 5.261, the modal shift to active travel and public transport is critical if the country is to deliver on its legally binding 2050 net zero target.

Future National Infrastructure Strategies should be published either as, or with, National Policy Statements for infrastructure, and existing Statements should be updated. This would close the loop to ensure strategy drives planning and development, including providing guidance for regulators for price reviews, which is crucial over the next decade. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities published 2021 guidance on reviewing National Policy Statements,⁴ noting that a consideration on whether to conduct a review should be made at least every five years.

A single National Policy Statement for infrastructure, as highlighted by ICE in its previous response to the [2021 Energy NPS consultation](#), could improve the process, with the National Infrastructure Strategy (NIS) serving as the strategic element, or first chapter, of that single NPS and sector-specific annexes developed to add specifics for different infrastructure sectors.

Generally, data sets, especially in the initial sections of the NNNPS, are inconsistent and require further evidence-based verification. Tonnes, tonne kilometres, truck kilometres etc are used inconsistently. This can cause confusion and could by

³ ICE (2023) [Civil engineering insights on pathways to decarbonisation - delivering the UK government's Net Zero Strategy](#)

⁴ DLUHC (2021) [Planning Act 2008: Guidance on the process for carrying out a review of existing National Policy Statements](#)

extension make the document vulnerable to challenge. A single NPS with consistent evidence-based data sets would create more certainty.

Policy for the national rail network also fails to provide sufficient detail relating to the value of high-speed rail investment through connection to the existing network, best use of capacity, and on high speed services to Scotland. Likewise, commitment to delivering the current Integrated Rail Plan and increased clarity around budgets and timelines would contribute to reducing transport emissions in the longer-term and provide a strong framework for delivery of major rail projects in the North and the Midlands.⁵

⁵ ICE (2022) [APPGI and ICE Green Paper: Accelerating the delivery of the Integrated Rail Plan](#)