

Press Release: Tuesday 18 July 2017

## 'Time for an integrated and long-term approach to infrastructure planning,' says Engineers Ireland

***Engineers call on Government to establish a single infrastructure unit to embrace fresh ideas in infrastructure policy***

*New Engineers Ireland 'The State of Ireland 2017 – A Review of Infrastructure in Ireland' - report finds:*

- *Increasing the allocation of capital investment in transport infrastructure required*
- *Development of Metro North and M20 Cork to Limerick motorway must be accelerated*
- *M50 variable speed limits and multi-point tolling needed to tackle congestion*
- *Communications infrastructure needs to be supported by stringent service levels - broadband should be considered an essential service similar to electricity and water*
- *National Broadband Plan (NBP) contract should be awarded without further delay, creating 2,600 direct and indirect jobs*
- *The development of the 'Internet of Farm' will support prosperity of the rural-agri sector*
- *Water supply and wastewater infrastructure shows improvement from 2016*
- *Deploying a fully operational eHealth platform could benefit economy by over €1 billion*

The President of Engineers Ireland, **Dr Kieran Feighan**, has called on the Government to establish a single infrastructure unit as soon as possible to support the new 10-year capital spending plan and the forthcoming National Planning Framework.

Speaking at the launch in Dublin of 'The State of Ireland 2017' report, Dr Feighan said Engineers Ireland strongly welcomed the Government's Summer Economic Statement to invest an additional €500 million in infrastructure in each of the years 2019-2021, and also called for the establishment of a single infrastructure unit as soon as possible to ensure effective delivery and long-term return on this investment.

Dr Feighan said: "While progress has been made in terms of increasing capital investment and quickening of project delivery, there are still some frustrating delays with infrastructure. To ensure it can meet its infrastructural goals, the Government must address how we deliver our capital projects and Engineers Ireland strongly believes a single infrastructure unit is required to plan investment in key areas such as housing, transport, education, health, energy, water and the digital economy.

"As things stand, planning and delivery in these areas are spread across Government departments, each competing for finite funding, with multiple layers of decision-making and little central oversight. A single infrastructure unit, as in the UK and Switzerland, could work collaboratively with external experts (such as engineers, planners and economists) to identify priority infrastructure projects as part of an integrated and long-term vision, speed up project delivery, and explore innovative financing and funding mechanisms."

The State of Ireland 2017 report is an example of expert-led recommendations for priority infrastructure projects which will be pivotal for the country's prosperity, connectivity and sustainability.

The report, now in its seventh year, was launched by **Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise and Innovation, Frances Fitzgerald TD** at Engineers Ireland offices on Clyde Road, Dublin 4 today, with the event also involving a roundtable discussion with: Dr Stephen Kinsella, Department of Economics, University of Limerick; Tony Hanway, Virgin Media Ireland CEO; Caroline Spillane, Director General, Engineers Ireland; and President of Engineers Ireland, Dr Kieran Feighan.

**The Tánaiste, Frances Fitzgerald TD**, said: “This Engineers Ireland report is an expert and timely contribution to the Government’s capital planning. Last week’s Summer Economic Statement reaffirmed our commitment to increase investment by an additional €500 million in each of the years 2019-2021, further developing our economic and social infrastructure and supporting national competitiveness. In fact, capital spending in 2021 will be up 85% relative to 2016. Building a modern capital infrastructure that underpins economic growth, raised living standards and a sustainable environment is vital.”

**Dr Kieran Feighan** added: “The Government has faced fiscal restraints in recent years and a lack of investment, specifically in land transport, has resulted in bottlenecks and congestion which are beginning to impact on the day-to-day lives of Irish people. To ensure we can meet our ambitions as outlined in the new National Planning Framework, we must substantially increase capital spend in the long-run to meet ever-increasing demand.”

Commenting on Ireland’s communications infrastructure, Dr Feighan stated that while networks overall were of an acceptable standard, the national broadband roll-out was critical to rural development and overall national competitiveness. “The installation of Ireland’s nationwide broadband infrastructure is akin to the electrification of rural Ireland in the last century in terms of scale, ambition and the socioeconomic benefits it will deliver. The National Broadband Plan (NBP) is a critical part of Ireland’s digital strategy in this respect. Its delivery as soon as possible is crucial in terms of supporting rural connectivity, all-Ireland enterprise and innovation, and would deliver around 2,600 new direct and indirect jobs.”

Key recommendations in ‘The State of Ireland 2017’ report across transport and communications include:

1. Accelerate the development of Metro North, the DART Expansion Programme, M20 and Luas line extensions
2. Incentivise consumers and private car operators to purchase electric vehicles (EVs) and plan for the electrification of the heavy rail network
3. Encourage car-sharing to discourage multicar households and on-street urban parking
4. Improve connectivity of the north-west and the Atlantic Corridor to Ireland’s seaports
5. New housing developments should include provision for infrastructure to support broadband rollout
6. Award the contract for the National Broadband Plan (NBP) without delay and develop the ‘Internet of Farm’ concept and applications to support more efficient farming techniques i.e. deployment of rural broadband to support activities such as soil and crop management (temperature/humidity sensors), autonomous tractors that can plough/sow 24 hours a day; monitor health of livestock remotely
7. Clarify the security implications for the sovereignty of data within the EU domain, post-Brexit
8. Focus on deploying a fully operational eHealth platform that has potential economic benefit estimated at 0.40 - 0.56% of GDP
9. Adequately resource the National Cyber Security Centre to stay ahead of developments in cyber-attacks

10. Continue to research and develop the communications network in anticipation of 5G services

**Caroline Spillane, Director General, Engineers Ireland**, said: “Engineers Ireland is extremely pleased at the announcement of further Government capital investment over the coming years. This is absolutely vital to the country’s sustainability and prosperity, but risks remain and we continue to spend less as a proportion of our GDP compared to the other EU28 States. The 2016-2017 World Economic Forum Global Competitiveness Report examining Ireland’s relative competitiveness has pinpointed our ‘inadequate supply of infrastructure’ as a critical factor in our capacity to compete internationally. The Government has always had a difficult balancing act to play in terms of how to use exchequer funds, but in the run-up to Brexit and after, there badly needs to be an increased emphasis on enhancing the factors driving our competitive performance - and infrastructure is critical in this regard.”

## **ENDS**

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### **About Engineers Ireland**

With over 23,000 members, Engineers Ireland is the voice of the engineering profession in Ireland. Engineers Ireland was established in 1835 making the organisation one of the oldest and largest professional bodies in the country. Members come from every discipline of engineering, and range from engineering students to fellows of the profession. For more information, see [www.engineersireland.ie](http://www.engineersireland.ie).

### **About State of Ireland 2017**

The State of Ireland 2017 is the seventh in a series of annual independent reports, published by Engineers Ireland, on the country’s infrastructure. Engineers with considerable experience in the six key sectors of transport, communications, energy, water supply and wastewater, flood management and water quality, and waste, assign grades based on the status of infrastructure and the ability of those assets to meet current and future demand. The report is marked by both insight and recommendations for action. Contributions to the report this year were garnered from 40 engineering experts including personnel in organisations representing Dublin Bus, Dublin Airport Authority, Shannon Airport Authority, Western Development Commission, Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, ComReg, Google, Virgin Media Ireland, eir, to mention just a few.

*‘The State of Ireland 2017 – A Review of Infrastructure in Ireland’ -*

[http://engineersireland.ie/EngineersIreland/media/SiteMedia/communications/publications/TheStateOfIreland\\_2017.pdf](http://engineersireland.ie/EngineersIreland/media/SiteMedia/communications/publications/TheStateOfIreland_2017.pdf)

*‘The State of Ireland 2016 – A Review of Infrastructure in Ireland’ -*

<http://www.engineersireland.ie/EngineersIreland/media/SiteMedia/communications/publications/engineers-ireland-state-of-ireland-2016.pdf?ext=.pdf>

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