

**INFRASTRUCTURE 2050**

# **The Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland**

Draft Consultation Document

**RNIA** Rural Needs Impact Assessment

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**Northern Ireland  
Executive**

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**Investment  
Strategy**  
Northern Ireland

# Rural Needs Impact Assessment of the Draft Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland –“Infrastructure 2050”

## Section 1 – Defining the Activity Subject to Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Action (Northern Ireland) 2016

1A. Name of Public Authority

Strategic Investment Board for Northern Ireland

1B. Short Title to Describe the Activity being undertaken by the Public Authority that is subject to section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016

Publication of a draft Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland entitled ‘*Infrastructure 2050*’

1C. Category the Activity Specified in Section 1B Relate To

Developing a	Policy <input type="checkbox"/>	Strategy <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Plan <input type="checkbox"/>
Adopting a	Policy <input type="checkbox"/>	Strategy <input type="checkbox"/>	Plan <input type="checkbox"/>
Implementing a	Policy <input type="checkbox"/>	Strategy <input type="checkbox"/>	Plan <input type="checkbox"/>
Revising a	Policy <input type="checkbox"/>	Strategy <input type="checkbox"/>	Plan <input type="checkbox"/>
Designing a Public Service	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Delivering a Public Service	<input type="checkbox"/>		

1D. Official Title of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service Document relating to the Category Indicated in Section 1C

‘Infrastructure 2050 – The Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland’ Consultation Document January 2022

1E. Details of the aims and/or objectives of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service

The policy being reviewed is the “*Infrastructure 2050 - the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland*”. The strategy outlines the importance of investing in the maintenance, upgrading and expansion of our infrastructure to support sustainable economic growth and enhance Northern Ireland’s attractiveness as a place to live, work, visit and invest for the years ahead. It outlines that providing a high quality physical and digital infrastructure provides the vital foundation for a modern high-performing competitive economy and a fair and just society. It

highlights how infrastructure investment underpins quality of life, promotes economic and social prosperity and helps to protect our environment for the future. Transport networks, healthcare facilities, schools and colleges, homes and community facilities, water and utilities, communications networks, justice and community safety facilities and environmental and heritage assets are some of the essential components of Northern Ireland's infrastructure that contribute to a fulfilling life for citizens in both urban and rural areas.

1F. Definition of Rural the Public Authority is Using

Population Settlements of less than 5,000 (Default definition).	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Other Definition (Provide details and the rationale below).	<input type="checkbox"/>
A definition of 'rural' is not applicable.	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Section 2 – Understanding the Impact of the Policy, Plan or Public Service

2A. Is the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service likely to impact on people in rural areas?

Yes

2B. Explain how the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas

People living in rural areas have the same economic and social needs as other people, but sometimes those needs have to be met in a different way in rural areas due to rurality, low population density, distance from urban service centres and the different economic structure of rural areas.

The vision for the Draft Strategy is

“We have the infrastructure that enables everyone to lead a healthy, productive and fulfilling life; supports sustainable economic growth and protects our environment.”

The Strategy has five objectives

1. To decarbonise our economy and society;
2. To strengthen our essential services;
3. To build a strong, connected and competitive region;
4. To enhance our communities and places and
5. To maximise the benefits from new technology and innovation.

The Investment Strategy is one of the Executive’s key strategies that support the delivery of the Programme for Government (PfG) and the 2020 New Decade, New Approach Agreement (NDNA).

The Draft Strategy is consistent with and supportive of the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs proposed Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland, which has objectives

- To create a rural society where innovation and entrepreneurship flourish
- To maximise the contribution that sustainable rural tourism makes to rural society and to the wider economy and environment
- To reduce loneliness and social exclusion in rural areas, to minimise the impacts of rural isolation and to promote the health and wellbeing of rural dwellers
- To increase employment opportunities available to people living in rural areas, and

- To improve connectivity between rural and urban areas.

The Draft Strategy will promote investment to further the objectives of the Rural Policy Framework.

The proposed Draft Strategy has been informed by a wide range of research, including consultation and engagement with organisations and individuals representing civil society, including rural organisations. All Northern Ireland Departments have been engaged in the preparation of the Strategy, which has been endorsed by the Northern Ireland Executive as a basis for public consultation.

This Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA) is being published in parallel with a detailed Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) which contains extensive analysis of the likely impact of the draft strategy on equality of opportunity and good relations.

In particular, the EQIA analyses the impact of the draft strategy across 8 thematic areas of

- Transport
- Housing
- Health and Social Care
- Education
- Communities and Places
- Justice
- Economy, including Skills, and
- Environment.

The EQIA assesses the potential for inequalities across these 8 thematic areas for each of the groups specified in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, i.e., for

- persons of different religious belief;
- persons of different political opinion;
- persons of different racial groups;
- persons of different age;
- persons of different marital status;
- persons of different sexual orientation;
- men and women generally;
- persons with a disability and persons without; and
- persons with dependants and persons without.

As there is a high degree of intersection between rural population needs and the defined Section 75 groups, the analysis of the EQIA is not repeated in this RNIA and reference should be made to the EQIA which is available, along with the RNIA, at <https://consultations2.nidirect.gov.uk/dof/infrastructure-2050-consultation-document>.

This analysis has shown that the Draft Strategy has the potential to impact on people who live in rural areas, people who work in rural areas, people who operate businesses in rural areas and people who travel to rural areas for the purposes of tourism or leisure through the implementation of investments promoted under the Strategy and its proposed, more detailed, Investment Plans.

2C. If the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas differently from people in urban areas, please explain how it is likely to impact on people in rural areas differently

As noted in Section 2B., people living in rural areas have the same economic and social needs as other people, but sometimes those needs have to be met in a different way in rural areas.

This is likely to be particularly the case in an infrastructure strategy when physical investments must take place in a specific place to provide the required service.

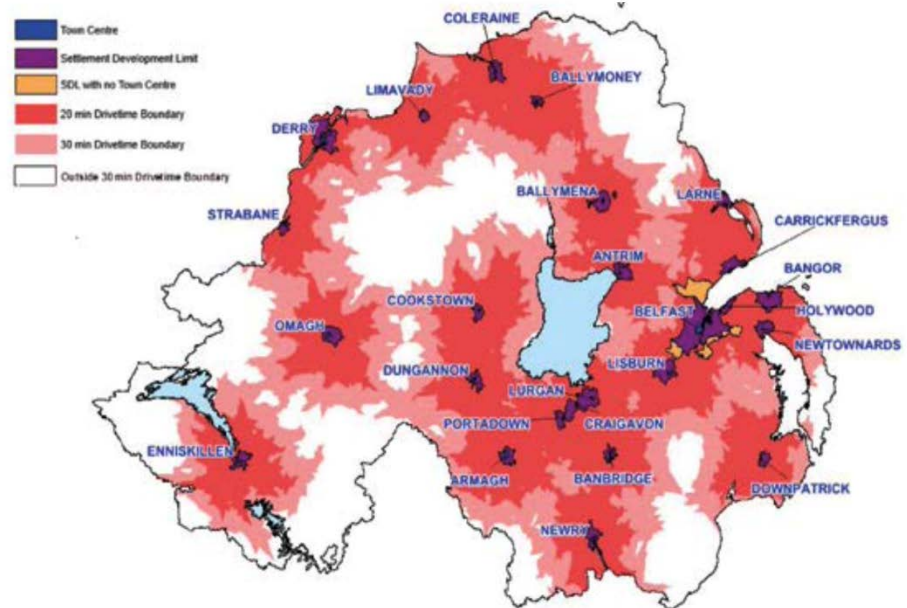
The vision of the draft Investment Strategy is that we have the infrastructure which *“enables everyone to lead a healthy, productive and fulfilling life; supports sustainable economic growth and protects our environment.”* This clearly applies fully in rural areas as in urban areas. But the way in which it will be applied will vary depending on the service to be provided.

Some infrastructure services (such as water, electricity, broadband) must, by their nature, be supplied to each participating household or business while others (such as court services, education, health and social care and elements of economic and housing services) require a degree of centralisation to be sustainable. A third category is transport services which not only provide the link between rural areas and their urban service areas, but also provide the link from those urban areas to the regional capital and through ports and airports to the wider world.

The RNIA (and the associated analysis in the EQIA) has shown the clear need to include responding to rural social and economic needs as a prioritisation criterion in developing the detailed Investment Plans which the draft Investment Strategy envisages will be developed over the 30-year period of its application.

As the accompanying map (extracted from DAERA's Guide to the Rural Needs (Northern Ireland) Act 2016) clearly shows there are significant areas of Northern Ireland which are remote from urban service centres and which will need careful consideration in the more detailed implementation of the draft Investment Strategy, depending on the nature of the infrastructure services to be provided.

**Map 2: Comparison of 20-minute and 30-minute drive-time boundaries**



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2D. Indicate which of the following rural policy areas the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to primarily impact on

Rural Businesses	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Rural Tourism	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Rural Housing	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Jobs or Employment in Rural Areas	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Education or Training in Rural Areas	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Broadband or Mobile Communications in Rural Areas	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Transport Services or Infrastructure in Rural Areas	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Health or Social Care Services in Rural Areas	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Poverty in Rural Areas	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Deprivation in Rural Areas	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Rural Crime or Community Safety	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Rural Development	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Agri-Environment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Other (Please state)	<input type="text"/>



## Section 3 – Identifying the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas

3A. Has the Public Authority taken steps to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas that are relevant to the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service

Yes

3B. Methods or Information Sources used by the Public Authority to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas

Consultation with Rural Stakeholders	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Published Statistics	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Consultation with Other Organisations	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Research Papers	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Surveys or Questionnaires	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Other Publications	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Other Methods or Information Sources (include details in Question 3C below).			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

3C. Details of the methods and information sources used to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas including relevant dates, names of organisations, titles of publications, website references, details of surveys or consultations undertaken etc.

Data used included data from the DAERA RNIA of the Rural Policy Framework

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/consultations/rural-policy-framework-northern-ireland-consultation>

Urban- Rural Stats on Health and Social Care Inequalities in Northern Ireland of relevance to HSC Investment theme of ISNI

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/health-and-social-care-inequalities-northern-ireland-urban-rural-statistics>

DfI - Cycling in Northern Ireland 2019/2020- Findings from the Continuous Household Survey 2019/2020

<https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/system/files/publications/infrastructure/cycling-in-Northern-Ireland-201920-report.pdf>

Active travel – walking and footways greenways,

DfI - Walking and cycling to and/or from work in Northern Ireland 2018/2019 - Findings from the Northern Ireland Continuous Household Survey 2018/2019

<https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/system/files/publications/infrastructure/walking-and-cycling-to-and-from-work-in-northern-ireland-2018-2019-report.pdf>

Delivering Social Change – What Matters Most? Published by NISRA in March 2016 and updated in August 2019

<https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/ofmdfm/dsc-our-population-what-matters-most.pdf>

DfC – Engagement in culture, arts and sports by adults in Northern Ireland - Findings from the Continuous Household Survey 2020/21

<https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/system/files/publications/communities/engagement-culture-arts-and-sport-by-adults-in-northern-ireland-202021.pdf>

Experience of volunteering by adults in Northern Ireland – Findings from the Continuous Household Survey 2019/20

<https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/system/files/publications/communities/experience-volunteering-by-adults-northern-ireland-201920.pdf>

LGBTQI+ Strategy Expert Advisory Panel – Themes and Recommendations – December 2020

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<https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/system/files/publications/communities/dfc-social-inclusion-strategy-lgbtqi-expert-advisory-panel-recommendations.pdf>

From a qualitative data perspective, a focus group was held with the Rural Community Network (RCN) as part of the ISNI Call for Evidence (CFE) Process.

3D. Details of the social and economic needs of people in rural areas which have been identified by the Public Authority

As a result of the analysis and consultation undertaken during the period of preparation of the Draft Strategy the following were among the main rural economic and social needs identified

- a need to address poor broadband and mobile phone coverage;
- a need to address poor road and transport networks;
- a need to improve access to quality job opportunities;
- a need to find innovative ways to deliver public services; and
- a need to reduce the impact of geographical isolation.

Other more granular issues were identified through the Rural Community Network (RCN) Call for Evidence (CFE) focus group. Summary statements from the focus group and are outlined *in italics* below.

- *In rural communities – connectivity is one of the main issues. Pandemic opened up new ways of working, which was in some ways advantageous to rural communities, but need to improve broadband connectivity to ensure equality between those working from home in urban vs rural settings.*

- *There is a need to sort out broadband – this is a key investment challenge for small businesses, business development, education and home working in rural areas. Looking out to a 30-year horizon, what is beyond Project Stratum. FTTP is now, but what will be next? This is a key utility for citizens and businesses.*
- *Take account of New and emerging technologies – e.g. hydrogen.*
- *Expand **housing stock in rural areas**. Housing is constrained by supporting infrastructure e.g., waste water, local energy generation. This is existing problem – lack of basic infrastructure is already a problem that will be an increasing problem in the future unless addressed.*
- ***Climate change** - retro fit of housing, especially social housing, to make older homes more heat efficient and reduce carbon footprint. This will require financial support especially for those on low incomes. Also supporting new build social housing that is more energy efficient.*
- ***Service infrastructure** is needed. Need to have the services in place – e.g., banking, access to child-care. Banking withdrawn from rural areas, has resulted in higher levels shop crime as they are holding more cash. Access to safe deposit/secure banking needed in rural areas.*
- ***Climate change bill** and fuel poverty – don't have access to the mains gas network, and alternative technologies are expensive to employ. Fuel poverty is a major problem in the west of the province. There was a view that lots of energy is generated in the west and consumed in the east and as such could there be an incentive for those living in the west, to be able to make use of this energy on a local basis that reduces costs to them*
- ***Physical connectivity** – Issues include traffic into regional towns, changing patterns of commuting, and the idea of locality is changing. A lot of money is put into Park and Ride facilities but these assume a model of working in Greater Belfast. Need a much more dispersed public transport model and one that acknowledges the shift in working patterns due to the Pandemic.*
- ***Active travel** – has to become an option. Needs footpaths and new infrastructure. Need to encourage planning to think about active travel. Healthy Ways required across the country, and walking routes at night-time (safe). Reconfigure what we have by way of assets. There is a demand for cycling and walking.*
- ***Asset based approach** – Focus on the indigenous industry in rural areas. Looked at FDI, but this has been at the expense of local successful business. Have world class organisations in rural areas but hear very little about them. There is a need to grow this capital and investment – they give back in huge amounts in rural areas. We need to grow those and encourage rural entrepreneurship. Change of mindset needed to look at assets rather than deficits*
- ***Wealth building and communities** – there are a lot of public assets and public land in rural areas, old POs, old banks etc – communities need to have interest in these.*
- ***Lough Neagh** – there is an possible opportunity to own this asset; community could do more with this to benefit the local area*
- ***Use of private capital** – housing market in the south is broken and is a large electoral issue, which strikes a note of caution around taking too liberal an approach. May be some scope for wider range of investment but needs to be managed especially as there are such high levels of child poverty. There is a risk of land banking on sectarian basis to prevent/propose development in certain areas and not subject to section 75 duties.*

- **Electricity network** - Hydrogen and potential use; to store energy from renewables. There are big questions re electrification; how this will be generated. Currently, few EV charging points in rural areas, so will limit switch to EVs.
- **Cross border** – There is potential for cross border investment. Lot of cross border investments that could be very attractive. There is a need for **border proofing** to ensure communities do not lose out. There is also potential for shared projects e.g. A5 road, with a need to focus on the wider scope of these e.g., loughs/tourism trails. Many visitors to the island do not see the border and need to capitalise on the border region benefits.
- **Need long term funding strategies.** Medical college – long term, sitting on books unbuilt. **Institutes of Technology in the south** – all contributed to strengthening local areas there – very successful model for local growth hubs with associated education and research. These are graduate level institutes, and a lot of good practice could be gleaned from these examples.
- **Other Funding** - Have Shared Prosperity Fund, Community Renewal, Shared Island Fund – but these are all short-term funding with no long-term planning within them, and very little funding seems to focus on investment or sustaining what we have – always looking at innovation – but not aligned or the most efficient or effective use of resources.”

## Section 4 – Considering the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas

### 4A. Details of the issues considered in relation to the social and economic needs of people in rural areas

The Draft Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland is a long-term framework for guiding the transformational change needed to tackle significant deficiencies in existing infrastructure, both physical and digital in NI. As noted at the outset of the strategy that high-quality physical and digital infrastructure is the foundation of all modern economies and is required for a fair and just society. The ambition for infrastructure investment in ISNI is also required to tackle some of the challenges that lie ahead for NI. Including responding to the climate emergency, the changing requirements of an ageing population, evolving trade relationships in the post Brexit era, and the pace of technical innovation and change. Furthermore, ISNI will deliver on the recognised need to invest in the increased capacity and skills required to deliver such an ambitious investment strategy.

Aligned to the above, ISNI provides the longer-term framework (over a 30-year period) needed to prioritise investment to address these deficiencies and challenges and make the most of opportunities. As a framework it sets out clear funding mechanisms and the strong governance and monitoring arrangements needed to manage delivery and assess the impact of infrastructure investment over the coming 30 years.

The implementation of ISNI will be subdivided into enabling 10-year Executive Infrastructure Investment Plans. This first of these will be supported by a new Medium-Term Infrastructure Financial Plan, which in turn will enable the development of detailed departmental Investment Plans. These plans will result in the publication of a visible pipeline of projects for the construction industry and other sectors and create transparency in the delivery of infrastructure against plans. Each of these investment projects will be subject to equality screening by the sponsoring department and where appropriate and/or relevant, an equality impact assessment. Within this broad framework SIBs role will include a strategic oversight of the equality of opportunity and good relations impacts of the 10-year plans.

As such, the Draft Strategy is a permissive framework for action which recognises the need to balance cost and sustainability issues with equity issue, including an explicit recognition of the differing economic and social needs and circumstances of people in rural areas. The prioritisation criteria for investments in the more detailed Investment Plans will give explicit weight to meeting rural economic and social needs alongside other equality of opportunity and good relations considerations.

## Section 5 – Influencing the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service

5A. Has the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, been influenced by the rural needs identified?

Yes

5B. Explain how the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, has been influenced by the rural needs identified.

The Draft Investment Strategy is a strategic framework which provides a sound basis for the development of subsequent investment plans that can be targeted towards addressing inequalities, including explicitly addressing rural economic and social need. The identification of a visible pipeline of projects (within individual investment plans) and associated performance metrics, suitably targeted to the key inequalities, will unlock the framework's full potential to reduce inequalities and improve wellbeing for all, in both rural and urban areas.

The Draft Strategy provides a significant opportunity to maximise equality of opportunity and good relations and to meet rural economic and social needs has been reflected in the mainstreaming of various relevant constructs within the vision statement – as below.

*“We have the infrastructure that enables everyone to lead a healthy, productive and fulfilling life; that supports sustainable economic development and protects our environment.”*

For instance, this mainstreaming approach is reflected in the focus within the vision statement on **'everyone'** and ensuring that a breadth of infrastructure investment will facilitate healthy, productive and **fulfilling** lives on an inclusive and sustainable basis.

The analysis undertaken and the processes of consultation and engagement have shown the need to be explicit in the Draft Strategy that issues of cost and sustainability have to be balanced by giving appropriate weight to achieving equitable outcomes, including equitable outcomes for people in rural areas who have distinctive economic and social needs and challenges.

## Section 6 -Documenting and Recording

I confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained and relevant information compiled

X

<b>Rural Needs Impact Assessment undertaken by:</b>	Therese Hogg and Colin Stutt
<b>Position/Grade:</b>	Associate Strategic Advisers
<b>Division/Branch</b>	Strategic Investment Board
<b>Signature:</b>	
<b>Date:</b>	17 January 2022
<b>Rural Needs Impact Assessment approved by:</b>	
<b>Position/Grade:</b>	
<b>Division/Branch:</b>	
<b>Signature:</b>	
<b>Date:</b>	

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