

Submission

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To: The Scottish Government

Cc: NFU Scotland Members

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Strategic Infrastructure

1. NFU Scotland (NFUS) is the leading agricultural organisation in Scotland. Representing more than 9,000 farmers, growers and crofters, our members provide and support thousands of jobs and deliver significant economic, social and environmental benefits across Scotland.
2. Agriculture is the lynchpin of rural Scotland and is an important part of Scotland's booming food and drink industry. Scottish agriculture generates a gross output of £4.6 billion annually. The farming and crofting sector is committed to sustainable food production, enhancing biodiversity and helping to tackle climate change.

Overarching Points

3. We would like to see recognition of food production, and the critical role that related infrastructure plays in safeguarding food security. There is no mention of this currently in the consultation document. Vital primary processing and storage must be included in our strategic infrastructure strategy to ensure recognition and resilience in our supply chains and food system. Current geopolitical instability has once more demonstrated how fragile our food system is. It is critical that Scottish Government takes steps are taken to ensure that necessary infrastructure is available to help safeguard our supply chains in the future.

4. There are significant moves afoot to decarbonise national infrastructure. Projects such as investment in high voltage power lines fit into strategic infrastructure planning. We understand that such projects are in the national interest, however there must be recognition and consideration of the costs and impacts on farming businesses who must host apparatus. Unless farm businesses can remain viable, food production will be compromise; a balance is necessary.
5. We welcome the inclusion of ferries as strategic infrastructure. Island communities are known to be more fragile, and these lifeline services have failed to provide the level of service necessary to ensure agriculture and these communities can thrive. Reliability and resilience of the ferry fleet must be significantly improved to allow island communities and businesses to function and grow. Lessons must be learned from recent failed ferry projects to ensure that this cannot happen again. It is critical that better monitoring is put in place and that there are meaningful sanctions where projects such as this don't meet delivery expectations. Community engagement is a welcome inclusion in the consultation. Farmers and crofters must have the opportunity to be consulted on national interest projects such as upgrades to electrical and road infrastructure. This will ensure a good balance of rights between individual business owners and the national interest.

Do you agree with the scope and role of the Infrastructure Strategy?

6. We agree with the role of the strategy as forward planning for a set of long-term assets that enable the country, cities and communities to function effectively. We see a real role for competent and planned infrastructure investment in helping to counter socio economic challenges that our members report in rural areas.
7. We have some concerns to flag about the scope of the strategy. It is disappointing that there is no mention of food production. It is critical that food production, and thus food security, is recognised. We would like to see important facilities such as abattoirs, processing and storage for all commodities, to be prioritised for investment. We would welcome strategic investment in growth opportunity sectors, such as in the poultry sector. This is a significant gap in the current consultation which must be addressed.

Do you think the proposed framework, linking the 30-year Needs Assessment, 10-year Infrastructure Strategy, Spending Reviews and annual Budgets will support improved strategic planning and delivery? Are there any further improvements you want to suggest?

8. We welcome the strategic approach which is underpinned by the 30-year Needs Assessment. We don't have any specific improvements to suggest just now.

Do any elements of the infrastructure lifecycle need to be strengthened to promote more effective infrastructure planning and delivery?

9. The elements of the cycle are welcome as they show a clear pathway for delivery. We would welcome more emphasis on the evaluation and learning section. Our members have experienced ongoing issues with strategic infrastructure such as ferries where investment has not gone as planned and best value has not been achieved. As a result, members who rely on these lifeline services have experienced significant disruptions to their businesses. It is vital that lessons learned from projects such as this are fully understood and embedded into future investment. Resilience of these services as well as strategic forward-planning must be properly considered, such as when a ferry is due to come to the end of its service life and how that will be replaced in a timely manner to ensure minimal disruption.

In what areas could changes to governance or planning processes across the public sector improve the impact of the investment hierarchy?

10. No specific comments here.

Do you agree that enabling net zero and environmental sustainability, driving economic growth, and building resilient places continue to be the right outcomes to guide infrastructure investment over the next decade?

11. Yes, we support all these outcomes to guide effective delivery. Consideration should be given to the hierarchy of these outcomes, and if these should apply nationally or if more local consideration should be prioritised. Whilst these are high level aspirations, it is possible to foresee that achieving a balance between them could be tricky.

Are the three proposed enablers, public assets, place-making and private investment, sufficient to deliver the Strategy's outcomes? Are there other enablers we should consider instead/additionally?

12. Yes, we support these enablers as delivery mechanisms for the Strategy outcomes. We recognise the potential that private investment can have in reinforcing public funding. There is an ongoing conversation in the rural sector about how private finance can enable activities such as nature restoration and landscape scale collaboration. Whilst we recognise the potential role it can play, we want to underline that any conditions of funding must be fully considered before it is integrated further.

What mechanisms or approaches should the Infrastructure Strategy adopt to ensure that critical cross-cutting priorities, such as housing delivery, regional economic development, and natural infrastructure are systematically embedded in investment planning and decision making?

13. Nothing specific to add here.

Are there any findings from the Scottish Future's Trust (SFT) Needs Assessment (perhaps from drivers of change, cross-cutting themes or enablers) that we should more fully integrate into this 10-year Infrastructure Strategy.

14. Nothing specific to add here.

Do you support the proposal that infrastructure investment is more directly driven by the priorities of places across Scotland?

15. Yes, we support making the issues that are important to local people being more important in decisions around strategic infrastructure. However, engagement must be meaningful and not limited to a small selection of individuals who may have specific agendas. Farmers and crofters are very reliant on infrastructure as primary producers; they must be encouraged and enabled to participate wherever possible.

Are the proposed principles, national spatial priorities and place partnerships, the right ones to guide a place-based approach? Are there other principles we should consider?

16. Yes, we support targeting investment to local needs but also to areas where it has potential to offer significant economic opportunity. This will be very helpful for local areas that are struggling with complex issues around accessibility and depopulation.

Do you agree with the Scottish Government's proposed to empower communities to play a more active role in infrastructure decision making? What mechanisms would best support meaningful community involvement and help to maximise local social benefits?

17. We support the principle of local people having a say in decision making for their local area. However, this needs to be carefully balanced so that it is managed in a way that does not slow down decision making or delivery. Farmers and crofters are the backbone of rural Scotland and have often lived in the same community for generations. In recent years there has been a significant increase in the rights of communities and how much they feel entitled to have a say in how land is owned and managed. Their expectations need to be carefully balanced alongside the rights of those who are running a commercial business on the land.

Do you believe that the current landscape of local and regional partnerships (e.g. Community Planning Partnerships, Regional Economic Partnerships, Regional Adaptation Partnerships) provides an effective framework for delivering place-based infrastructure investment? Please explain your answer.

18. The concept of having these mechanisms is sound, however, the very nature of having so many options is a barrier to engagement. There could be merit in considering if streamlining is possible so that where there is a desire for local engagement, it is clear how to go about this. This will also help in managing expectations around engagement.

Are there additional sectors or opportunities that should be considered for strategic investment to support economic growth and maximise opportunities for longer-term growth?

19. Yes-as noted earlier in the consultation, there is a need for investment in food and drink processing capacity in Scotland. We believe that by investing in our processing ability, we will be able to deliver significant economic growth, underpinning our food and drink sector which adds £7 billion in GVA to the Scottish economy¹.

To make the most of the strategic opportunities in renewables, housing, and natural capital, what will the economy need from our infrastructure to grow and thrive up to 2037?

20. Infrastructure needs to be future proofed to ensure that it offers long term resilience and delivery. In some cases, this will need dedicated government funding to stimulate development. It will also need underpinning policy to act as an enabler to ensure that it is possible to deliver what is needed and to ensure that projects be attractive to private finance.
21. We recognise the potential role that private finance must play in supporting what cannot be funded by government alone. However, it is important that there are clear investment principles to underpin this to ensure that best value is achieved and that communities are safeguarded.
22. Natural capital markets must work alongside the domestic production of food. So, there must be the opportunity to compliment and improve the sustainability of food production systems.
23. The markets must have clear rules and standards, to allow farmers and buyers to participate with confidence. These markets are emerging, evolving, and complex. Farmers need to know what they are expected to deliver, so clear and consistent standards and rules are needed, whoever the private market provider.
24. The markets must also be accessible across a range of farm sizes, tenures, and business structures, to cater for tenants as well as landowners.
25. Increasing renewable energy generation is something we support. However, this needs to be done in consultation with landowners to ensure best practice and reduce the risk of prime agricultural land being taken out of production. Members are also keen to improve their own energy resilience, and we would want to see support for on-farm renewables projects as well as improved ease of access to the grid, and reduced costs, for such projects.

¹ <https://foodanddrink.scot/our-industry/news/scottish-food-and-drink-sector-now-worth-record-19-billion/>

26. This strategy needs to consider and align with other policies around land use such as the Land Use Strategy, Climate change plan and National Islands plan to ensure that there is cohesion across policy areas.