Infrastructure – Foundations for Growth
The Civil Engineering Contractors Association represents the companies that construct and maintain the infrastructure that enables economic growth and supports quality of life in the UK.

Our members range from the largest construction firms in the world to among the smallest in the sector. Through CECA, civil engineering contractors speak with a unified voice and common purpose to government, the industry’s many clients and to the media.

To contact CECA, visit www.ceca.co.uk

Every day we depend on infrastructure from roads, railways, ports and airports to power stations and wind farms, sea and flood defences, dams and utility networks. Infrastructure is essential for the UK to be competitive and is the foundation of our quality of life. It allows businesses to prosper, provides clean water, reliable energy and ensures freedom of travel.

Civil engineering contractors are the construction firms with the capability, skills and expertise to deliver, maintain and enhance this infrastructure.

This booklet highlights the importance of infrastructure and the role that civil engineering contractors play in constructing and maintaining it. It also sets out how a strategic approach to planned investment in essential infrastructure and would ensure delivery of sustainable, world class construction projects.
The UK’s economic growth has been driven by the development of its transport infrastructure. Today, transport remains at the heart of economic prosperity and social mobility. Whether by air, sea, road, rail or on foot people and goods in the UK make millions of journeys every day.

In partnership with clients such as the Highways Agency, Network Rail and local authorities, civil engineering contractors construct, improve and maintain all means of transport infrastructure. This includes the streets outside your front door, to the motorways and rail networks which connect our cities and towns, to the harbours, sea ports and airports providing domestic and international links.

Through investment in transport infrastructure, civil engineering contractors can deliver solutions. From the increasing problem of congestion on the road and rail networks to constructing the great transport projects of today and tomorrow, such as Crossrail, high speed rail and the Replacement Forth Crossing.

Reliable and secure energy depends on energy generation and distribution networks which are constructed and maintained by civil engineering contractors. Energy is essential to power the economy and to provide light and warmth in schools, hospitals and homes.

But the UK’s energy network is old and will soon be unable to keep pace with demand. With some estimates suggesting the country faces power shortages as early as 2016, there is a pressing need to develop new sources of energy generation.

Energy consumption also has an impact on the natural environment. Nuclear power will play a large part in the production of our energy in future, along with renewable sources such as wind and wave energy, as the UK seeks to reduce its CO2 emissions and consumption of fossil fuels.

10 of the UK’s aging nuclear power stations will close by 2023 – two in 2010 alone. A mix of new sources of energy generation must be a priority for the UK.
Clean water is taken for granted yet its provision requires huge investment in the water networks. It is equally important that waste water is removed and treated as quickly and efficiently as possible. Any failure of the system would have a catastrophic impact on public health.

Civil engineering contractors deliver the infrastructure that collects and supplies clean water, the sewers that collect and transport our waste and the sites where waste water is treated. Working with water companies and developers, UK contractors construct projects on the scale of the Thames Tideway tunnel down to the pipes and drains serving domestic, commercial and industrial buildings.

Civil engineering contractors create and protect the spaces in which communities live.

Where investment enables the regeneration of contaminated land, civil engineering contractors can treat it so that it is safe to build, live and work on, bringing it back into community use. This work enables communities to make use of ‘brownfield’ sites for development in towns and cities across the UK and recently created the Olympic Park in East London for the 2012 Olympic Games.

Civil engineering contractors also protect the spaces around the communities by creating defences against flooding and encroachment by the sea. With sea levels rising and the climate potentially becoming more volatile, civil engineering contractors play a key role in protecting property and safeguarding communities.
The UK needs a strategic approach to the way it plans, invests in and develops the country’s infrastructure.

Making sure infrastructure keeps pace with demand requires substantial investment over a long period of time, delivered through major construction projects for both private and public sector clients.

There is a responsibility to deliver these projects in a way which is both environmentally sustainable and cost effective. A strategic approach is a route to achieving value for money.

This strategic approach must reflect both the demands that will be placed on our transport, water, energy and community infrastructure in the decades ahead and the role we want it to play in our economy and society. It must also focus on the role infrastructure will play in our low carbon future.

Consistent investment and a visible programme of works would give the construction industry confidence. This is the most effective route to high quality, environmentally sustainable construction and will encourage the industry to invest in skills and technology, delivering the innovative and sustainable solutions that drive a world class construction industry.

Confidence and innovation also means contractors can better tackle some of the current issues that arise in the development of infrastructure. For example a strategic plan will mean consistently high standards of environmental management, an overall focus on low carbon construction and further gains through the reduction, reuse or recycling of construction waste.

This strategic approach should be based on:
- Planning Reform
- A strategic infrastructure plan
- Innovative means of securing finance for major projects
- A workable structure for industry and government dialogue
The UK needs a planning system that does not delay development of important infrastructure.

For decades the planning system has been an obstacle in the way of major projects, imposing delays and increasing costs.

Speeding up the planning process would increase confidence in the investment and delivery of major projects and would support a strategic infrastructure plan. Planning reform need not reduce the democratic element of the process, but improve it to reflect the national significance of infrastructure.

Clearly setting out government policy in all areas of infrastructure and simplifying the process of implementation through independent professional judgment is the basis of a fast, fair and effective planning system.

A Strategic Infrastructure Plan

The basis of a strategic approach must be the creation of a strategic infrastructure plan based on a vision for the role that infrastructure will play in our economy and in our communities. It must be based on projected demand, reflecting population increases and demographic changes.

Setting out a 5-50 year horizon of need is the approach that civil engineering contractors believe is a necessary first step to creating this plan. Achievable targets can be set in a realistic timeframe if there is a clear vision of what is needed and when.

With this vision in place it will be possible to create, for the first time, a strategic infrastructure plan for the UK – a clear programme of projects will help meet the UK’s future infrastructure needs.
A strategic infrastructure plan would need sustained financial commitment beyond the level that a government may feel it can reasonably provide. There is a clear need to be innovative in how government can unlock potential sources of investment capital in the private sector and how it can bring this together with public funds in the most productive and effective way. Government must be prepared to consider and utilise a variety of means of providing sustained financial backing for a strategic infrastructure plan.

Transport, water, energy and public health are sectors that span several government departments and agencies and are the responsibility of both public and private sector clients.

A strategic approach to infrastructure investment will need to be supported by the whole industry, by clients and by government.

There needs to be a strong and coherent working relationship between all parties, recognising that government will play a pivotal role in delivering a strategic plan.

A workable dialogue between the industry and government is central to a strategic plan for infrastructure.
The Way Forward

Through planning reform, a strategic infrastructure plan, innovative ways of sustaining long term finance and improved dialogue between government and the construction industry, the conditions for a fully strategic approach to infrastructure would be in place. A strategic approach to infrastructure must be:

**Clear** – any plan must clearly set out what will be constructed and when

**Consistent** – investment must be steady and sustained, not stop/go

**Continuous** – the objectives of the strategic plan should be regularly reviewed and rolled forward.

Only through a strategic plan can government and civil engineering contractors strive for sustainable, value for money delivery of essential infrastructure.

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