

Summary paper: The fundamentals of designing an integrated infrastructure plan

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This paper summarises the key themes which were discussed at the first knowledge sharing event in the National Infrastructure Commission's 'Next Steps for Cities' programme. This paper has been developed in collaboration with the event speakers and city representatives across the country.

As our cities are increasing in size, there is an important opportunity for us to be proactive in shaping how that growth will happen. Putting in place ambitious, effective strategies for transport, housing and employment in growing and congested cities is essential to ensuring balanced growth across every region of the country. Four key principles for developing an integrated infrastructure plan emerged from the first event which considered 'the fundamentals of designing an integrated infrastructure plan'.

Key principles for developing an integrated infrastructure plan:

1. A key first step must be to know your starting position, and where you ultimately want to be.
 - Decision makers need to understand all the characteristics of the local economy, environment and geography.
 - There is a need to understand your existing infrastructure when developing these plans, and assessing what improvements/maintenance will be necessary. E.g. traffic lighting existing infrastructure in 10-year cycles. > Infrastructure planning is not limited to transport planning.
 - City leaders should implement long term plans for their city-region reflecting their own economic and social priorities, based on their own local knowledge and accountability, and with a clear sense of place. Scenario planning will complement this to help structure thoughts about the future of the city and potential changes
 - There are benefits to developing an understanding of where you want to be as a result of this infrastructure plan, including your financial framework and the value added by investment.
 - Establish the key market failures across your city and the interdependencies which exist. Consider a range of different policy approaches, avoid taking single approach forward while alternatives and details on chosen approach remain uncertain.
 - Understanding your scope early is crucial, as it informs the geography in which you'll be working – for housing and transport that may mean the travel to work area or the housing market area, for example.
 - Infrastructure plans should demonstrate an inspiring vision for how better designed cities can be attractive places to live and productive places to work. The process of setting out a vision for your area can help frame the thinking within the infrastructure plan, and other policy documents, to ensure they align towards the same desired outcome.
 - Consider and be clear on the mechanism to deliver, for example whether intending to develop a non-statutory plan or a statutory Spatial Development Strategy.

2. Relationships with individuals and partnerships are invaluable¹

- Individuals should build relationships with colleagues inside and outside their own organisations, and the value of organisational partnerships in building capability and capacity should not be overlooked. This includes official agencies (e.g. local transport bodies and utilities providers) as well as political engagement (e.g. cross-party co-operation between elections and buy-in for strategies).
- Different places have different governance arrangements, duties and associated legislation. There is a need to manage stakeholders and ensure local government maintains a coordination and leadership role throughout the process.
- An open and transparent relationship with stakeholders about the challenges faced in implementing any infrastructure plan should be maintained throughout the process as it can both keep stakeholders on board, and pre-empt external challenge to any proposals.
- Accountability across stakeholders, both internal and external, is essential to ensure clarity on roles and responsibilities. This can also help towards sharing risk across different organisations, and in some cases across public and private sectors.
- Developing relationships with officials in other cities can be valuable when looking for independent challenge or advice on particular policy areas.

3. Evidence and data are powerful tools to inform plan making

- Securing funding demands credibility, and credibility needs to be built on evidence. There is a need to invest in thorough evidence gathering both in existing assets and in modelling future needs/benefits of intervention.
- Data is a powerful tool for developing these plans, but we need to place greater value on it and make it more accessible if it is to be helpful or meaningful. The tools for data analysis must be transparent across stakeholders to maximise both the extent they are used and enhance the credibility of any evidence produced.
- While it is important to gather evidence, this process should take place without bias or exaggeration, using approaches consistent with standards applied by central government

4. Building evaluation into infrastructure plans should be a central step to improve the process of plan making in the future

- Developing clear methods to monitor infrastructure looking forward will create a richer evidence base which can be used for future plans, helping to identify which interventions have gone well and which have gone less well.
- A degree of flexibility will be required to prepare and monitor plans from the earliest stages. It is important to think ahead in terms of scenarios when planning, but also to revisit them throughout the process to see how the different scenarios compare to real events as they play out. They should be scope built in to re-design certain parts of the scheme whilst in progress.

¹ This is an area which will be covered in more detail across future events.

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- Evaluation is difficult for infrastructure as randomised control trials are very rarely an option – but creating a baseline is still necessary and possible provided the right influencing factors are identified.
- Evaluation should be proportionate to the size of your city and the scale of the challenges faced, specific programmes should be prioritised.