



Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce

Response to Draft Scottish Infrastructure Strategy Consultation

Chapter 3 - Scope and role of the infrastructure strategy

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

Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce supports the proposed scope and intent of the Infrastructure Strategy. A clear, long-term approach to infrastructure is essential to support economic growth, attract investment and enable Scotland's transition to a lower-carbon economy.

This reflects the Chamber's consistent position, including in its 2026 Manifesto, that infrastructure must be treated as a **strategic economic enabler**, not simply a policy or spending category.

The Chamber's Investment Tracker (<https://agcc.fra1.cdn.digitaloceanspaces.com/files/Investment-Tracker-2025.pdf>) highlights the significant scale of planned and potential investment across the North-east, particularly in energy, infrastructure and commercial development. It demonstrates strong investor interest and a substantial pipeline of opportunity. However, realising this pipeline will depend on infrastructure being in place and decisions being taken in a timely and coordinated way.

Experience in the North-east demonstrates the difference new infrastructure can make:

- The Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route (AWPR) has significantly improved connectivity and business confidence;
- The expansion of Port of Aberdeen South Harbour, a £420 million investment and one of the largest marine infrastructure developments in the UK in recent years, has positioned the region to take advantage of offshore wind and wider energy transition activity;
- However, ongoing uncertainty around key transport corridors such as the A96, A90, A947 & A952 and the absence of rail network on the east coast north of Aberdeen, continues to constrain connectivity and long-term planning confidence.

The Strategy should clearly position infrastructure as a tool to unlock investment at scale, particularly in regions like the North-east that are central to Scotland's economic future. With the right infrastructure decisions, the North-east can continue to be one of Scotland's strongest engines of growth, supporting jobs, exports and long-term competitiveness.

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?

The proposed framework is a positive step towards more consistent long-term planning.

However, the Chamber's core message, reflected strongly in our 2026 Manifesto, is that Scotland's challenge is not identifying priorities, but ensuring **delivery**.

The Investment Tracker demonstrates that there is a strong pipeline of potential investment in the North-east. To convert that pipeline into delivered projects, businesses need confidence that infrastructure will be delivered in a timely and reliable way.

Examples across the region highlight the importance of certainty:

- The A96 corridor remains a key economic route, but prolonged uncertainty affects long-term planning and investment confidence
- The CNER Buchan Rail proposal reflects strong regional ambition to improve connectivity for both passengers and freight, supporting sectors such as energy and food and drink
- Energy transition projects are advancing, but depend on supporting grid, transport and port infrastructure and timely decision-making.

In contrast, the AWPR has demonstrated that major infrastructure projects, once delivered, can have a transformational impact.

The North-east provides other examples of projects where success is tempered by ongoing challenges. The Aberdeen South Harbour project, a £420million investment, has significantly strengthening the region's capacity to support offshore wind, decommissioning and international trade; however, the associated link road, estimated to cost around £25 million, has been subject to prolonged planning and delivery challenges and remains incomplete. Similarly, upgrades to onshore grid infrastructure required to connect Scotwind have been subject to consenting delays. This contrast highlights a recurring issue - major investments are delivered, but the supporting infrastructure needed to maximise their value is too often delayed.

Also with regard to transport, the Aberdeen to Central Belt rail enhancements, part of the Aberdeen City Region Deal agreed in 2016, were intended to improve connectivity and journey times. A decade on, progress has been limited, reinforcing concerns around delivery pace and long-term follow-through on committed projects.

To strengthen the framework, the Strategy should include:

- A clear, prioritised pipeline of infrastructure projects
- Greater certainty on delivery timelines
- Regular public reporting on progress
- A strong commitment to follow-through once decisions are made

Infrastructure confidence is built through delivery, and providing that confidence will be critical to ensuring that the scale of opportunity identified in the North-east is fully realised.

Chapter 4 - Infrastructure governance principles

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

Yes - particularly the **planning and consenting stage**, which is consistently identified by Chamber members as a major barrier to progress.

Feedback from businesses across energy, construction, housing and transport sectors highlights:

- Lengthy planning timelines
- Multiple and overlapping approval processes
- Inconsistent decision-making
- Capacity constraints within planning authorities (at both national and local level).

These challenges are especially relevant in the North-east as the region undergoes a major transition from oil and gas to renewable energy.

Large-scale infrastructure proposals linked to offshore wind, CCUS, hydrogen and grid development are:

- Complex
- Nationally significant
- Time-sensitive

However, they are often considered through processes that can be slow and fragmented.

Recent experience in the North-east illustrates these issues clearly. While major projects such as Aberdeen South Harbour have been successfully delivered, associated infrastructure such as the link road has faced prolonged delays within the planning and approvals process. This creates inefficiencies and undermines the overall impact of investment.

These challenges are not limited to roads. Strategic rail improvements, including long-standing commitments to enhance connectivity between Aberdeen and the Central Belt, have progressed slowly despite their recognised strategic and economic importance.

The Chamber's position is clear:

There should be a stronger presumption that **nationally significant infrastructure projects are called in and determined at a national level**, rather than being considered solely through local processes which can tend to emphasise localised concerns rather than strategic national or economic interest. Adequate resources should be allocated to support this approach and prevent delays or bottlenecks. Projects must also continue to receive consistent priority and oversight throughout the decision-making process, regardless of location or local administrative boundaries.

This would:

- Improve consistency in decision-making
- Provide greater confidence to investors
- Ensure alignment with national economic and energy priorities
- Reduce delays caused by fragmented approaches

Wider reforms should include:

- Clearer and more predictable planning timelines
- Streamlined consenting processes
- Better resourcing for planning authorities
- A stronger focus on enabling delivery of priority infrastructure

Scotland's ability to compete for investment increasingly depends on the speed and certainty of its decision-making, particularly in regions like the North-east where large-scale transition and investment opportunities are already underway.

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

- Strategic Alignment
- Collaboration
- Funding and Deliverability
- Lifecycle Planning

Governance must support delivery, not slow it.

The Chamber's 2026 Manifesto highlights the need for **clear accountability and fewer barriers between decision and action.**

Key improvements would include:

- Clear ownership of major infrastructure projects
- Better coordination between transport, housing and economic development
- Stronger alignment between regional priorities and national investment
- Simpler, more transparent decision-making structures

In the North-east, infrastructure decisions are closely linked:

- Transport connectivity affects labour mobility and housing delivery
- Energy infrastructure supports jobs, exports and transition
- Ports and logistics underpin supply chains

Governance arrangements should reflect these real-world connections, ensuring that infrastructure investment supports both local needs and national economic priorities.

Chapter 5 - Infrastructure themes and enablers

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?

The Chamber supports the three proposed outcomes but emphasises that in the North-east context, **economic growth is central to unlocking environmental sustainability through the energy transition and central to creating resilience in our communities. Economic growth must be the priority.**

This is a key message in the Chamber's 2026 Manifesto - growth underpins investment, public services and long-term resilience.

The North-east provides a clear example:

- The region is central to the UK's energy system
- It is leading the transition to offshore wind, hydrogen and low-carbon technologies
- It has a globally competitive supply chain

Realising this opportunity depends on infrastructure that supports both existing industries and emerging sectors. Continued investment in the North-east will play a critical role in ensuring Scotland remains competitive while delivering on its net zero ambitions.

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?

The proposed enablers are important but should be expanded to include:

- Planning and regulatory reform
- Skills and workforce capacity
- Delivery capability within the public sector
- Strong regional and national connectivity

Private investment is particularly important.

AGCC's Investment Tracker shows strong interest in the North-east across energy transition and infrastructure sectors. This represents a major opportunity, but delivery will depend on a supportive policy environment and timely decision-making.

Ensuring that these wider enablers are in place will be essential to unlocking investment and delivering sustained economic growth.

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?

Cross-cutting priorities should be embedded through **joined-up planning and decision-making**.

In the North-east:

- Housing growth depends on transport and services
- Energy transition depends on ports, grid, transport infrastructure and workforce
- Economic growth depends on reliable connectivity

Transport connectivity and resilience are critical:

The Chamber has consistently highlighted:

- The importance of the A96, A90, A947 & A952 corridors, including the need to address safety concerns
- The need for reliable connections between Aberdeen, Inverness and the Central Belt
- The role of rail improvements, including the CNER Buchan Rail proposal, in strengthening passenger and freight links

These are not isolated transport issues - they are fundamental to economic performance. Embedding these priorities into decision-making will ensure infrastructure investment delivers maximum economic and social value.

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

Yes.

Several long-term trends should shape the final Strategy:

- Population and workforce change
- Climate resilience
- Digital transformation
- Regional growth opportunities
- The transition to a lower-carbon economy

For the North-east, the energy transition should be recognised as one of Scotland's most significant economic opportunities. Supporting the region through this transition will deliver national benefits in jobs, investment and competitiveness, reinforcing its role as a key driver of Scotland's future economy. The costs for the region, and for Scotland, should these time-limited windows of opportunity be missed, would be very significant.

Chapter 6 - A place-based approach to infrastructure investment

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

Yes.

The Chamber supports a place-based approach, provided it recognises that some regions are of strategic importance and have **national economic significance**.

The North-east region is of strategic importance to the wider Scottish economy.

Investment in the North-east supports:

- National energy security
- Export growth
- Industrial capability
- The transition to net zero

Place-based policy must reflect this wider role, ensuring that investment decisions support both local priorities and national economic outcomes.

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?

We support the proposed principles but would emphasise:

- Growth and competitiveness
- Connectivity between regions

- Deliverability
- Long-term value

We also caution against unnecessary complexity in governance structures.

The focus should be on clear priorities and delivery, ensuring that infrastructure investment translates into tangible economic benefits.

Do you agree with the Scottish Government's proposal 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?

The Chamber supports meaningful community involvement.

Engagement should be:

- Early
- Accessible
- Genuine
- Constructive
- Focused on improving outcomes

However, it must also support timely decision-making, particularly for infrastructure aligned with national priorities. A balanced approach will ensure that projects can progress while maintaining public confidence. The multi-year delays to the AWPR project provides a salutary reminder of how community empowerment processes can be hijacked by determined activists and politically motivated interest groups to slow projects down and, ultimately, deter investment.

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

No.

The current system can be complex and fragmented.

Businesses often find it unclear:

- Where decisions are made
- How priorities are agreed
- How projects progress

The Chamber's 2026 Manifesto calls for **clearer leadership and accountability**, particularly at regional level.

Stronger coordination across the North-east would support more effective delivery of shared priorities, helping to unlock growth and investment across the region.

The Aberdeen City Region Deal provides a strong example of effective partnership working between the public and private sectors, bringing together UK and Scottish Government, local authorities, industry and organisations such as Opportunity North East to support innovation, infrastructure and economic diversification. This model has helped unlock significant investment and demonstrates the value of coordinated, long-term collaboration in delivering regional economic priorities.

However, the experience of such partnerships also reinforces a wider point: while collaboration frameworks are important, their effectiveness ultimately depends on the speed and certainty with which infrastructure and agreed priorities are delivered. Without this, even well-designed partnership structures risk losing momentum over time.

More broadly, there is a clear view among businesses in the North-east that the pace and visibility of delivery of certain national funding and transition-related programmes has not consistently matched the urgency or scale of regional economic opportunity. While not directly an infrastructure initiative, the Just Transition Fund is frequently cited as an example where deployment has been slower and less impactful on the ground than anticipated, contributing to a perception that the region is not always prioritised in practice in line with its strategic economic importance to Scotland.

Chapter 7 - Private infrastructure investment

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

The Strategy should recognise opportunities in:

- Ports and logistics
- Aviation connectivity
- Energy transition infrastructure
- Digital infrastructure
- Advanced manufacturing
- Food and drink exports

The North-east already has strong capabilities in these areas.

The Investment Tracker highlights the scale of potential investment across these sectors, reinforcing the importance of infrastructure in enabling growth and supporting Scotland's wider economic ambitions.

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?

To unlock opportunities in renewables, housing and natural capital, Scotland needs agreed national and regional infrastructure priorities. Those priorities then need to be:

- Delivered more quickly
- More predictable
- Better connected
- Supportive of private investment

Key North-east priorities include:

- Transport connectivity and resilience (A96, A90, A947 & A952 and rail improvements)
- Energy transition infrastructure
- Housing-enabling infrastructure
- Port and logistics capacity

The CNER Buchan Rail proposal is a clear example of how targeted investment could improve connectivity, support industry and strengthen regional resilience.

Providing this infrastructure with speed and certainty will be essential to ensuring that Scotland can fully realise its economic potential, with the North-east continuing to play a leading role in delivering growth, jobs and long-term prosperity.