Press release – Irish Academy of Engineering (IAE) MacGill Summer School 2026 - Embargo until 00.01 Friday 24th July 2026

The Irish Academy of Engineering (IAE or the Academy) is pleased to again support this year's McGill Summer School held in Glenties Co Donegal from 23 to 25th July 2026.

On July 24th, Academy President Sean Finlay introduced a Panel of distinguished speakers to discuss **"Can Ireland Deliver on Its Big Infrastructure Ambitions "**in the context of this year's Theme - "The New World Disorder ".

To some extent, this question was addressed at last year's MacGill when Sean Finlay referenced some successful projects delivered in Ireland, including the 1995- 2010 National Roads Programme which delivered over 900km of Motorways and the current National Broadband Rollout to over 500,000 premises and 1.1m persons. On a smaller scale, but still critical, we have witnessed the successful roll out of coherent waste management policies since the last 20 years or so. However, he noted that there was a widespread recognition that barriers to the delivery of infrastructure must be addressed as a matter of urgency and that there was a growing acceptance that the common good should prevail.

The creation in May 2025 of the Accelerating Infrastructure Task Force by the Department of Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation (DPER) has led to a significant change in the public narrative on Infrastructure, with a focus on the common good. The swift production by December 2025 of the Infrastructure Action Plan included many of the recommendations proposed by the IAE, Engineers Ireland, the Association of Consulting Engineers, IBEC and the main semi- state utilities, TII, Eirgrid and Uisce Eireann. IAE proposals at McGill 2025 were summarised as follows;

"Ireland has commercial semi -State companies TII/Eirgrid/Uisce Éireann which have the capacity, knowledge and experience to deliver game changing projects by ***providing them with multi annual funding and political support to deliver."***

A year on, it is encouraging to note significant progress. While there is yet no statutory guarantee of multi-year budgets, **Multi Annual Funding** is dealt with by the revised National Development Plan which set 5 year capital ceilings for departments together with multi-year commitments for Uisce Eireann and Eirgrid ; €2Bn in new equity for UE and Eirgrid's €4Bn + Business plan to 2030 are examples of these arrangements.

Political support is evident from Strong Legislative Reforms, including:

- The creation on an Infrastructure Division in DEPR
- The Critical Infrastructure Bill, signed into law in June 2026.
- The cap on Environmental Scale of Legal Fees came into force in May this year
- Planning and Development Amendments Bill published

- EIA Reform - Department of Housing has published the public consultation on reforming and simplifying the process of Environmental Impact Assessments.
- The General Heads for the 'aligning of road and rail consents' was approved by Government in mid-June.

These changes have attracted broad cross-party support, although some have been challenged in the courts. Constructive cross- party engagement is also evident from the Joint Oireachtas Committees on Infrastructure and Energy. Political support was also evident to expedite the Greater Dublin Drainage (GDD) project for which planning has been recently granted and for the Water Supply Project (WSP) Eastern and Midlands Region. A welcome reduction in the number of Judicial Reviews is also evident.

Process streamlining and coordination is also progressing.

- The Infrastructure Guidelines (IGs) have been streamlined to remove the External Assurance Process which has resulted in savings of 26 to 52 weeks for several projects in water and transport.
- Procurement reform has seen a Derogation waiver, digitalisation of pre-qualification questionnaires and skills academy relaunch.
- MARA is implementing administrative changes, including the designation of Uisce Éireann and Local Authorities as 'fit and proper' to eliminate repeated clarifications for different projects.
- A 30% improvement on Maritime Area Consent timelines for Uisce Éireann and Local Authorities as there is no requirement for a financial or technical capability assessment.
- ESB have reported on faster decision timelines within An Coimisiun Pleanala (ACP), well ahead of the 48-week statutory limits.
- A joint Utilities Clearing Committee "JUTCH" is meeting regularly to remove identified bottlenecks. For instance, solutions are being put in place to streamline application process for abnormal loads and replace multiple applications by one portal for all Local Authorities.
- There has been direct engagement with the EU Commission on regulatory simplification and partnering with like-minded EU countries in raising these issues at key EU meetings in Q1.
- Quicker Court dates - The judicial review hearing date for the Greater Dublin Drainage project was scheduled within three months of the challenge being lodged, which facilitated settlement being reached in December 2025, enabling Uisce Eireann to commence the procurement process for the construction contractor in February 2026.
- Metrolink - Withdrawal of Judicial Review has sped up this project, tunnelling and PPP tender documents are already launched ahead of schedule.

However, one major disappointment has been that ACP has advised that a decision on the Water Supply Project WSP will not emerge until July 2027. This long heralded critical project is not particularly difficult from an engineering viewpoint. It is to be hoped that project planning and procurement will proceed at pace in the meantime.

Today's Panel at McGill 2026 will examine in detail our ability to deliver "Big Infrastructure." **With significant changes underway and planned for delivery issues, the challenges remaining are significant**. Turner & Townsend recently reported that **skills shortages** are identified in 70% of 112 construction markets in over 40 countries, with forecast **construction cost inflation** rising to 4.5% and Ireland ranking as an expensive location with building costs averaging € 3,800 per sq meter.

A further issue is the apparent gold plating of environmental regulation. In 2022, Ireland experienced 250 EIAs compared to 8 in Denmark. Examples of delays resulting in what a recent Irish Times editorial referred to as "procedural fetish" include Dublin's Bus Connects and a cycle path on a canal. The same editorial summed it up well in stating "Common sense dictates that we protect the environment but get things done". As a consulting engineer, I participated in over 40 such EIAs, but often wondered if some were formulaic box ticking exercises.

A third and perhaps more complex issue is the ability to improve the collaborative approach of state and semi state agencies at operational levels. The continuation of the Infrastructure Task Force- perhaps on a statutory basis - is worth considering, as this body has demonstrated clearly the benefit of remaining in place to monitor the delivery of the Action Plan and it has acted to maintain momentum of the Plan- a very worthwhile and welcome development.

I am pleased to hand over to Sean Keyes of Progress Ireland who will moderate the discussion on Big Infrastructure Delivery with Prof Bent Flyvbjerg of Oxford University, Maria O'Dwyer of Uisce Éireann, Robert Watt of the Dublin Regeneration Authority and Dr Frances Ruane of the Northern Ireland Civil Service Board and the Board of IDA Ireland.

NOTES FOR EDITORS

About the Irish Academy of Engineering

The Irish Academy of Engineering (IAE) is dedicated to advancing the wellbeing of the island of Ireland by marshalling the expertise and insights of eminent engineers to provide independent advice to policy makers on matters involving engineering and technology. The IAE regularly publishes research and guidance on matters relating to engineering, technology, and the development of Ireland. Recent Reports on Energy Security have spurred debate and brought continued reliance on fossil fuels into sharp focus.

The Academy is a member of the European Council of Academies of Applied Sciences, Technologies and Engineering (Euro-CASE) which is an independent non-profit organisation of national academies of Engineering, Applied Sciences and Technologies from 23 European countries. **The Euro CASE Annual Conference for 2026 on the theme of Infrastructure Resilience will be co-hosted by IAE and the Royal Academy of Engineering in Belfast in November.**

IAE is also a member of the International Council of Academies of Engineering and Technological Sciences (CAETS) with member Academies from 33 Countries.

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