MAJOR INFRASTRUCTURE – PLANNING APPROACHES

Tim Marshall

Department of Planning
Oxford Brookes University

tmarshall@brookes.ac.uk
The system was reformed 2008-2011: is there scope or need for any further reform in the near/medium future?

If there is a need, what sort of headline approaches might make sense?

Would any of these draw on ideas or examples from elsewhere (particularly western Europe), or should they grow directly from UK challenges and experiences?
The need will have to be clear and somewhat urgent to convince parties of scope for another reform.

This might be because the present system shows itself as incapable of giving consents, whether for a low carbon agenda, or an economic growth at all costs agenda.

That might lead to calls for the creation of a more deliberative and less top down system.

But this will all depend on the developments around key consent areas, not on any outside or academic or professional thinking.
• To suggest that we need in fact very little new infrastructure – switch to massive demand management and retrofitting / micro drive. More or less moratorium on all major infrastructure development.

• NPSs would need rewriting to this effect, NID would be slimmed down, and policy in the key departments (DECC, DEFRA and DfT) would move to the new priorities.
• To propose a planning approach – examples in Netherlands and Scotland. Long term, national, comprehensive.

• From a planning perspective has major gains, but always resisted since 1970s in UK.

• To have full value, needs to be linked to certain shapes of national economic framework…

• Would need to be built around a new idea of long term futures, likely to be too threatening to all major parties.
• To propose a more limited version of above, just reforming the NPSs to be proper spatially coherent and integrated policy strategies.

• This is clearly antagonistic to the political economic preferences of recent governments. It could only be part of a new way of approaching government, but it would be less radical than alternative 2.

• For example, under this model, the NPSs for rail, road, ports and airports would have to be prepared as one exercise, and spatial choices indicated.

• Energy NPSs might incorporate low carbon and hence spatial thinking.
To propose a much more strategic and integrated version of the National Infrastructure Plan,
This might really link planning in with finance and regulation in relation to overall government goals.
No doubt would need to move the making from the Treasury and Infrastructure UK, where the NIP risks being an appendage of Public Private Partnerships thinking, with little strategic capacity.
Strong spatialising CLG input would be needed, alongside the infrastructural sectoral departments, to get more than a projects shopping list NIP.
As a long term ingredient, seek to build up the territorial articulation of England (already occurring with rest of UK), so that decisions automatically take account of regional preferences.

Regional government the obvious way to do this, as in most European countries.

But other mechanisms might be invented, if likely to have less solidity.

Most major infrastructure matters are effectively decided this way by territorial horse trading, in France, Spain and in different modes in Germany (as a federal country).

A valuable second best to other approaches.
To introduce new deliberative, public debate stages into the process of consideration of major projects.

This could copy the French Commission Nationale du Debat Public, which looks at projects early in their development and has no decision making status.

This might be linked to a new Key Planning Decisions process (as in the Netherlands), if NPSs are not reformed to be made adequate. However the NID process might be reformed to be made more articulated with territorial and other responsive elements.
CDG EXPRESS (CNDP CASE)
 Until the system created under the 2008/2011 Acts has had some use, hard to propose this as an urgent area for legislative change.

But, like the rest of the Localism Act content, the system is likely to work poorly for the most important objectives, so reform desirable sooner or later.

We should make more widely known the approaches in the Netherlands and France.

We should note the weak knowledge base on which any wider thinking might be based. Government must (re)build an intelligence arm for its operations in this field. Now there is only the scattering of lobby group statements on various sides.

But - only a massive change in the state project will create space for really valuable reform.
Views very welcome, please write to tmarshall@brookes.ac.uk