Media Statement

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National Infrastructure Plan is a step forward – but value for money must now be the focus

New Zealand infrastructure is at a critical turning point, and the release of the National Infrastructure Plan is a serious and substantial contribution to the discussion, Infrastructure New Zealand says.

Chief Executive Nick Leggett welcomes the release of the NIP 2026 by Te Waihanga, saying it'll help Aotearoa plan and fund infrastructure over the next 30 years.

The NIP rightly highlights the pressures facing the system – ageing assets, rising construction costs, fiscal constraints and growing natural hazard exposure. It confirms that New Zealand has invested heavily in infrastructure over the past two decades – around 5.8 percent of GDP annually – yet continues to rank near to bottom for efficiency and value for money.

"That is the central issue," Leggett says. "We probably spend enough. But we do not consistently get the return we should. Improving productivity in infrastructure delivery is the challenge we must now solve."

However, while a list of projects and a forward pipeline is much needed, no funding is attached.

This plan will only work if the current and future governments fund projects, so some hard choices about what politicians will and won't fund.

However, Infrastructure New Zealand cautions against allowing fiscal constraints alone to define national ambition.

"There is an implicit sense in this plan that New Zealand must limit its aspirations because we are a small or relatively poor country. That mindset risks becoming self-fulfilling," Leggett says.

“Infrastructure is not simply a cost. It is an investment in prosperity, productivity and resilience. Over time, well-planned infrastructure enables higher incomes through growth, stronger public finances and better living standards.”

New Zealand faces significant exposure to natural hazards, with central government spending at least $33 billion responding to and addressing hazard events between 2010 and 2025. Building resilient infrastructure and investing in climate adaptation is not discretionary - it is economically rational risk management.

Similarly, accelerating investment in electricity to support decarbonisation and net zero is not a luxury. It is central to future competitiveness and energy security.

The Plan provides a useful framework on sustainable investment levels and a clearer picture of the $275 billion infrastructure pipeline. But many of its reforms remain high-level.

“We need practical reform of procurement, delivery models, financing tools, market structure and institutional accountability. We need to understand precisely where costs are being lost in the system and fix them.”

Infrastructure New Zealand believes the next step is to align the infrastructure plan with a clear national vision and economic strategy.

“A 30-year infrastructure plan cannot sit in isolation. It must connect to a coherent view of population growth, productivity, regional development, housing, climate adaptation and energy transition,” Leggett says.

With a general election approaching, Infrastructure New Zealand says political parties now have an opportunity to fill in the missing pieces. That includes how to improve value for money, lift system performance and ensure infrastructure genuinely supports long-term growth and resilience.

ENDS

Note to editors:

Infrastructure New Zealand agrees with several core messages:

- Assets are ageing and maintenance has been deferred for too long.
- We cannot afford every project in the pipeline.
- Maintenance and renewals must come first – up to 60 cents in every dollar of capital spending should go to looking after what we already have

- Prioritisation and sequencing matter more than ever - as does allocating funding early for must needed projects

Infrastructure New Zealand is the nation's leading infrastructure member association. Our core purpose is to advance best practice development of world-class transport, energy, water, telecommunications, and social infrastructure for all New Zealanders. We do this through research, advocacy, and public and private sector collaboration. Our membership is comprised of over 150 organisations, including central and local government agencies, consultants, contractors, financiers, utilities, and academics – collectively employing approximately 150,000 people in infrastructure-related roles. Together, we are committed to creating a better New Zealand through outstanding infrastructure.

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