



# Road to nowhere: Britain's infrastructure problem

By *Dr Mann Virdee*

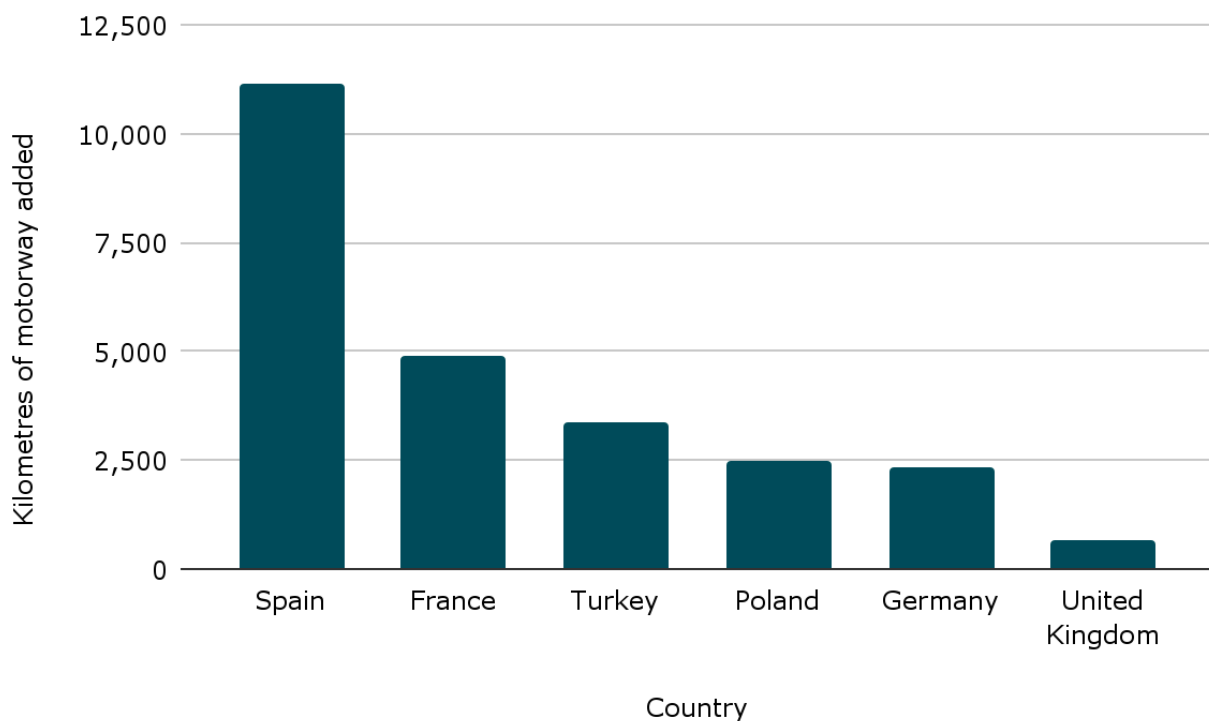
## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The United Kingdom (UK) consistently struggles to build major infrastructure projects (such as roads and railways) quickly, at scale or cost-effectively. This hinders Britain's national objectives, economic growth and prosperity.
- The UK's overly complex and slow-moving planning process, along with frequent legal challenges, has made delivering infrastructure projects both expensive and time-consuming.
- Recent government efforts, such as the Planning and Infrastructure Bill and a 10 Year Infrastructure Strategy, aim to speed things up. However, in order to address these challenges, His Majesty's (HM) Government should go even further by introducing strict consultation deadlines, setting ambitious targets for physical and digital connectivity, regularly benchmarking project performance internationally and mandating construction material supply audits for major projects.

**H**ere is a statistic you might have missed: Britain added just 105 kilometres of motorway to its road network in the last *decade*. But that number – from the Department for Transport (DfT) – may be unintentionally inflated because of a discrepancy resulting from the way Ordnance Survey calculates distance. The actual figure is likely closer to 39 kilometres – all of which are simply replacements to existing routes rather than providing new connectivity.<sup>1</sup>

It’s difficult to understand what this means without context. But, by comparing the United Kingdom’s (UK) motorway construction record since 1990 to peer nations, it reveals that Britain’s sluggishness seems to be in a league of its own. Over the last 35 years, the UK added only about 680 kilometres of motorway, a mere fraction of what peer nations achieved over the same period (see: Graph 1). In that time, the British population has increased by over 11 million people.<sup>2</sup>

GRAPH 1: KILOMETRES OF MOTORWAY ADDED SINCE 1990, SELECTED COUNTRIES<sup>3</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Jim Pickard and Gill Plimmer, ‘UK adds just 65 miles of motorway in 10 years’, *Financial Times*, 04/05/2025, <https://www.ft.com/> (checked: 30/06/2025).

<sup>2</sup> ‘United Kingdom population mid-year estimate’, Office for National Statistics (ONS), 08/10/2024, <https://www.gov.uk/> (checked: 30/06/2025).

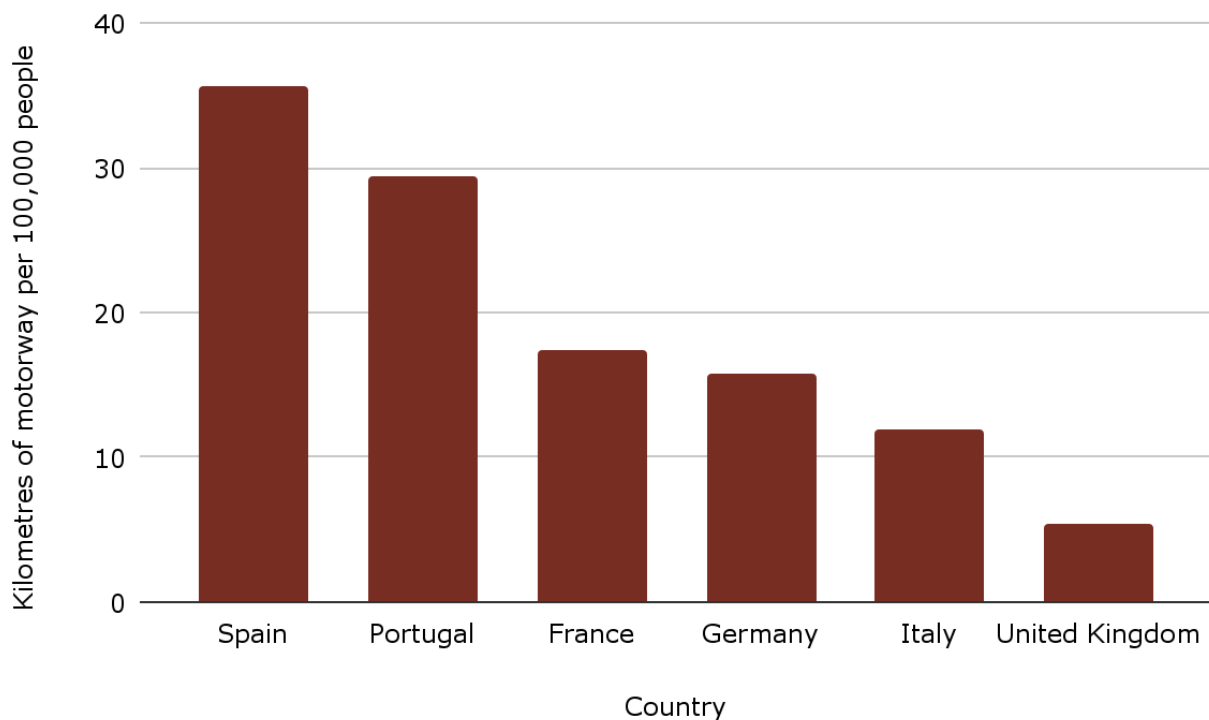
<sup>3</sup> Jim Pickard and Gill Plimmer, ‘UK adds just 65 miles of motorway in 10 years’, *Financial Times*, 04/05/2025, <https://www.ft.com/> (checked: 30/06/2025).

You might wonder whether this is even a problem. That is, you might assume that perhaps Britain’s existing motorway network is so *good* that there is no longer a need to add to it. Indeed, according to one DfT official:

The UK’s motorway system was more “mature” than other much larger European countries, having grown rapidly in the 1950s and 1960s and therefore less in need of expansion.<sup>4</sup>

We can examine this claim by comparing the combined length of motorways, land area and population of similar European countries (see: Graph 2 and Graph 3). It shows that regardless of whether you look at kilometres of motorway by population or land area, Britain fares poorly compared to its European counterparts.

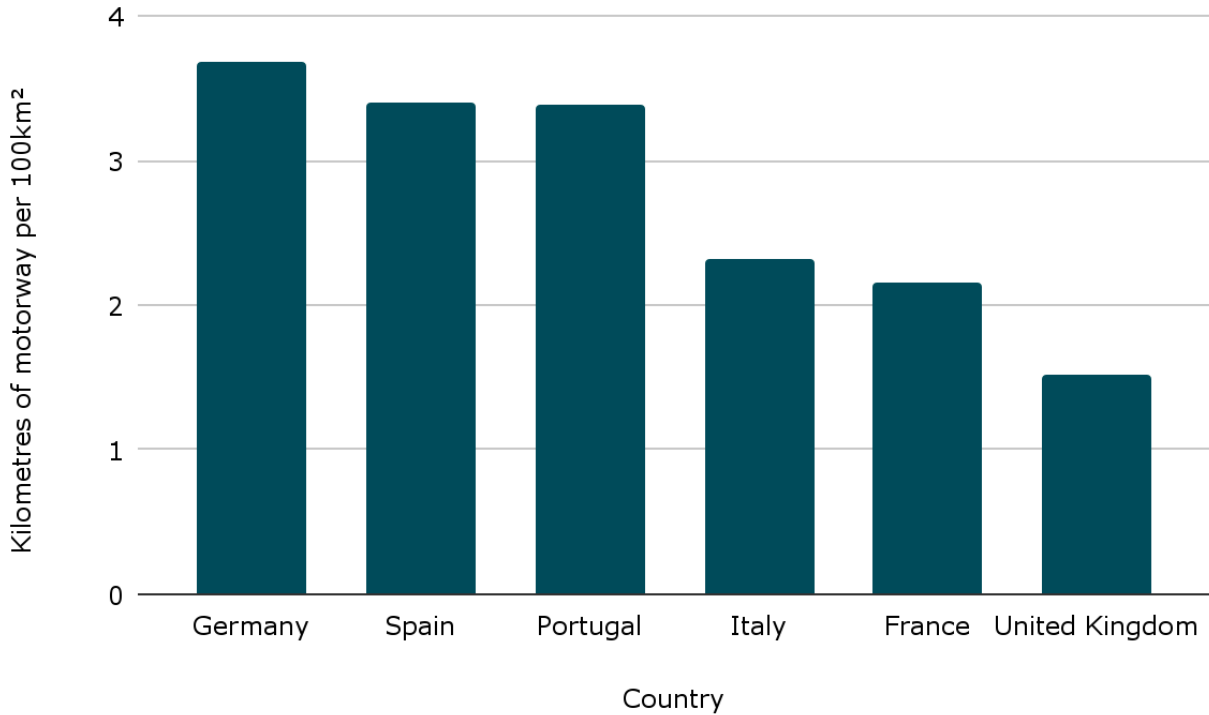
GRAPH 2: KILOMETRES OF MOTORWAY PER 100,000 PEOPLE, SELECTED COUNTRIES<sup>5</sup>



<sup>4</sup> Jim Pickard and Gill Plimmer, ‘UK adds just 65 miles of motorway in 10 years’, *Financial Times*, 04/05/2025, <https://www.ft.com/> (checked: 30/06/2025). The only motorways to open in the 1950s were the Preston Bypass, the M4 Chiswick Flyover, and the M1, M10 and M45. Motorway construction started properly in the 1960s and expanded in the 1970s and 1980s.

<sup>5</sup> Compiled by author.

GRAPH 3: KILOMETRES OF MOTORWAY PER 100KM<sup>2</sup>, SELECTED COUNTRIES<sup>6</sup>



Why is this important? As a country’s population grows, extending motorways is one of the best ways to improve its connectivity and knit together its regions. That is particularly important for countries such as the UK, which struggle to build other forms of transport, such as railways, in a cost-effective manner.

## Road infrastructure and connectivity

### Upgrading the danger road

Another way to improve road connectivity is to *widen* roads. It is true that widening roads and motorways does not necessarily decrease congestion in the long term, and indeed can increase it as a result of induced demand. But roads which repeatedly widen and narrow are prone to bottlenecks, congestion and delay – and these roads are most in need of widening.

This is the case for the A66 between Scotch Corner and Penrith. While sections of it have been upgraded from single carriageway to dual in stages since the 1970s, significant sections remain single carriageway. This makes the route

<sup>6</sup> Compiled by author.



accident-prone and unreliable. Upgrading the remaining single carriageway to dual would help to make the road safer, reduce congestion and improve the connectivity between Cumbria, North Yorkshire, the Tees Valley, and Tyne and Wear.

For decades, successive governments have pledged to dual the A66. In 2002, for example, in an article entitled ‘Danger road to be upgraded’, *The Guardian* reported:

Transport minister John Spellar yesterday announced the end of the notorious single-carriageway “hiccoughs” in the trans-Pennine A66 between the A1 at Scotch Corner in North Yorkshire and the M6 at Penrith in Cumbria.<sup>7</sup>

In the Autumn Statement of 2016, nearly a decade ago, Theresa May’s government announced that it would proceed with the dualling of the A66.<sup>8</sup> Rishi Sunak, then Member of Parliament (MP) for Richmond in North Yorkshire, welcomed the announcement, writing: ‘The A66 route is a vital artery for business, tourism and the residents who live along its length’.<sup>9</sup>

And yet, in May 2025, over 3,000 days after that Autumn Statement, hauliers in North Yorkshire met with Sunak to discuss the campaign to dual the A66 – because it is still under consideration. The project has now been included in a DfT spending review, meaning that its future is once again in doubt.

What is more, the A66 is just one case. Other major intercity or interregional routes, including the A303, A47, A9 and A96, are also in need of upgrade to dual carriageway or motorway standard.

## The cost of congestion

If roads are the arteries of Britain’s economy, they are seizing up. The Road Haulage Association (RHA) estimates that road congestion costs the industry £6 billion a year, the equivalent to 16% of road freight expenditure, while its impact on the broader economy is estimated to be even higher, at £30.8 billion a year.<sup>10</sup> The UK has experienced significantly slower productivity growth than comparable countries since the 2008 financial crisis. As Andrew Jones, former Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, explained:

Whenever a lorry-load of components fails to arrive on time because of congestion, whenever a business chooses not to open an office in a new city

<sup>7</sup> Martin Wainwright, ‘Danger road to be upgraded’, *The Guardian*, 23/08/2002, <https://www.theguardian.com/> (checked: 30/06/2025).

<sup>8</sup> ‘Autumn Statement 2016 transport projects’, HM Treasury, 23/11/2016, <https://www.gov.uk/> (checked: 30/06/2025).

<sup>9</sup> Rishi Sunak, ‘Government says it is to go-ahead with dualling of A66’, Rishi Sunak, 23/11/2016, <https://www.rishisunak.com/> (checked: 30/06/2025).

<sup>10</sup> ‘Infrastructure challenges for road haulage industry’, Opus Business Advisory Group, 20/09/2024, <https://opusllp.com/> (checked: 30/06/2025).



because they know it will mean staff spending hours a day in slow-moving traffic, whenever a client meeting is postponed because emergency repairs have closed the road, that's the effect of our poor infrastructure on our productivity.<sup>11</sup>

This highlights the economic impact of inadequate road infrastructure, and how it directly impacts the nation's productivity and prosperity.

## Mind the gap

This Primer has so far focused on roads and connectivity, but Britain's malaise is not limited to this – it can be seen across the nation's infrastructure. What makes this so important is that such infrastructure is the bedrock upon which national prosperity and progress are built. Or, to put it another way, infrastructure development is not only a desirable aim, it is also a strategic enabler for nearly every major national ambition, from facilitating the energy transition, to digitalisation, to supporting research and development. Indeed, His Majesty's (HM) Government's 'Plan for Change' explicitly links infrastructure delivery to national priorities, such as kick-starting economic growth and making the UK a clean energy superpower.<sup>12</sup>

## The bigger picture

Other cases exemplify the scale and extent of the challenge. Britain's High Speed 2 (HS2) rail project has repeatedly been scaled back, with significant portions of the project having now been cancelled. It means that HS2 is now a mere shadow of the original intention, which was fairly modest anyway.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, other countries are showing the scale of their infrastructure ambitions. Spain's high-speed rail network is the longest in Europe at nearly 4,000 kilometres – the second longest in the world after the People's Republic of China (PRC).<sup>14</sup>

Heathrow's third runway is still unbuilt, despite having been in the works for decades; meanwhile, the PRC has built, on average, seven new airports *every year* since 2012.<sup>15</sup> The UK has not built a new potable reservoir since 1992, despite the British population having increased by almost 20% since then.<sup>16</sup> The Elizabeth Line

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<sup>11</sup> Andrew Jones, Speech: 'Productivity means building more roads', Department for Transport, 09/07/2015, <https://www.gov.uk/> (checked: 30/06/2025).

<sup>12</sup> 'Plan for Change: Milestones for Mission-Led Government', 10 Downing Street, 05/12/2024, <https://www.gov.uk/missions> (checked: 30/06/2025).

<sup>13</sup> Graham Atkins, 'High Speed 2 costs', Institute for Government, 29/01/2020, <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/> (checked: 30/06/2025).

<sup>14</sup> María Ramírez, 'Spain's high-speed trains aren't just efficient, they have transformed people's lives', *The Guardian*, 11/10/2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/> (checked: 30/06/2025).

<sup>15</sup> 'China Airport: Number of Airport', CEIC Data, 12/2023, <https://www.ceicdata.com/> (checked: 30/06/2025).

<sup>16</sup> Rob Hakimian, 'The challenge of building more reservoirs to ensure UK's water resilience', *New Civil Engineer*, 01/09/2022, <https://www.newcivilengineer.com/> (checked: 30/06/2025).

became operational four years late and £4 billion over budget.<sup>17</sup> The UK’s most recently built nuclear power plant, Sizewell B, became operational 30 years ago. The Hinkley Point C nuclear reactor is both delayed (until about 2031) and over budget.<sup>18</sup> As Table 1 shows, these examples are matched by several others.

TABLE 1: SELECTION OF RECENT LARGE INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS IN THE UK, INCLUDING COST OVERRUN AND DELAY IN DELIVERY<sup>19</sup>

Type	Name	Original budget	Current or final cost	% increase	Late
<b>Rail</b>	HS2	£37.5 billion	£110 billion	193%	<u>London-Birmingham connection:</u> 7+ years (from 2026 to some time after 2033)  <u>Connections beyond Birmingham:</u> Indefinite (connections beyond Birmingham scrapped)
<b>Energy</b>	Hinkley Point C	£18 billion	£46 billion	155%	4 years
<b>Road tunnel</b>	Lower Thames Crossing	£5.3 billion	£9 billion	70%	2 years
<b>Sewer</b>	Tideway tunnel	£3.5 billion	£4.5 billion	29%	9 months
<b>Rail</b>	Elizabeth Line	£14.8 billion	£18.9 billion	28%	3.5 years

<sup>17</sup> See: Euan O’Byrne Mulligan, ‘How much the Elizabeth Line cost, when work began, and delays in its opening explained’, *The i Paper*, 25/05/2022, <https://inews.co.uk/> (checked: 30/06/2025) and Ross Lydall, ‘Elizabeth line’s “staggering achievement” with 300m journeys made since opening’, *The Standard*, 13/02/2024, <https://www.standard.co.uk/> (checked: 30/06/2025).

<sup>18</sup> Ian Johnston and Rachel Millard, ‘UK’s Hinkley Point C nuclear plant yet to attract new investors, says EDF boss’, *Financial Times*, 21/02/2025, <https://www.ft.com/> (checked: 30/06/2025).

<sup>19</sup> This table was compiled by the author. For the Lower Thames Crossing, see: ‘Lower Thames Crossing’, Britain Remade, No date, <https://www.britainremade.co.uk/> (checked: 30/06/2025) and ‘Lower Thames Crossing project delayed by two years’, BBC News, 09/03/2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/> (checked: 30/06/2025); for the Tideway tunnel, see: Greg Pitcher, ‘Tideway tunnel cost grows again to £4.5bn’, *Construction News*, 26/04/2023, <https://www.constructionnews.co.uk/> (checked: 30/06/2025) and ‘Thames Tideway hit by nine-month delay and cost hike’, *Construction Management*, 26/08/2020, <https://constructionmanagement.co.uk/> (checked: 30/06/2025).

So, what should be taken from all this? It shows that infrastructure projects in Britain are too slow, overly bureaucratic and plagued by uncertainty. International competitiveness rankings reflect this challenge, with the UK's infrastructure standing falling in recent years.<sup>20</sup>

## A unique problem?

There is, however, a big caveat: Britain is sometimes unfairly singled out as having infrastructure challenges. The reality is that most countries face problems in building infrastructure. Based on a study of over 1,600 infrastructure projects (including roads, dams, bridges, railways, power plants and bus rapid transit) across more than 100 countries, the average cost overrun is about 40%.<sup>21</sup>

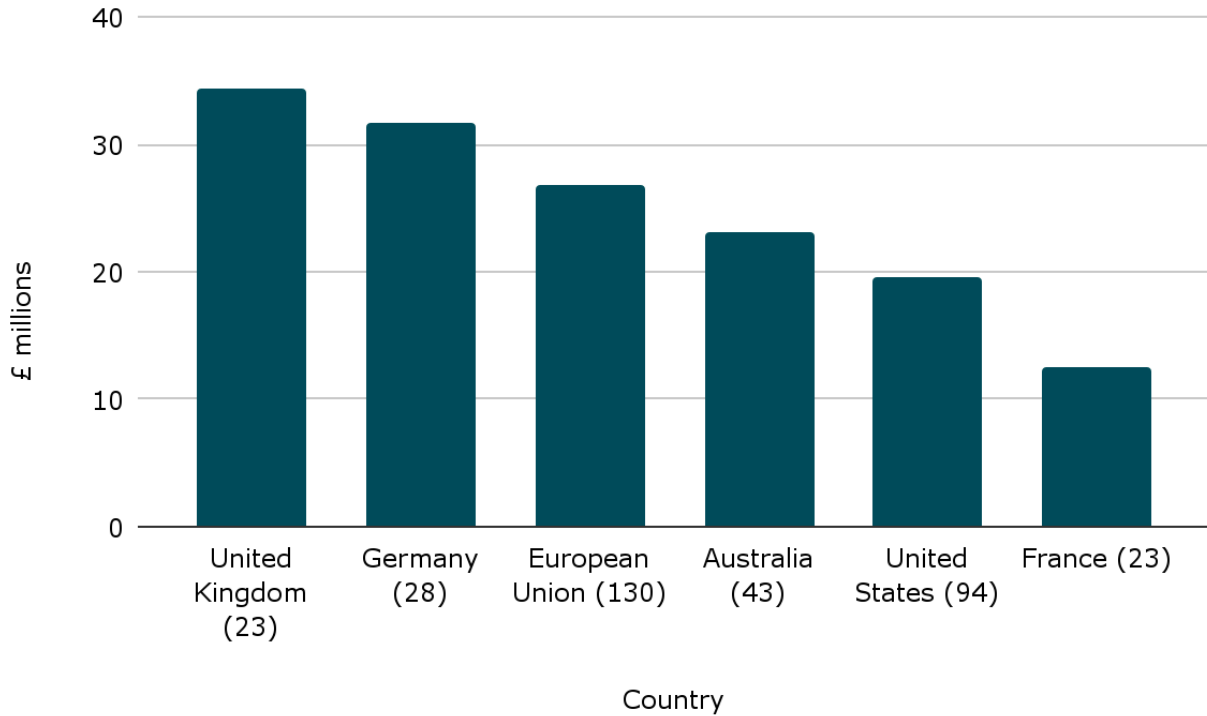
So the question which arises is this: what *unique* challenges does the UK face when building infrastructure? Britain has higher project costs for infrastructure projects such as rail and road compared to peer nations, but performs about average on social infrastructure projects such as schools, hospitals and prisons (see: Graphs 4, 5 and 6).

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<sup>20</sup> Tone Langengen and Jeegar Kakkad, 'Building the Future of Britain: A New Model for National-Infrastructure Planning', Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, 19/06/2023, <https://institute.global/> (checked: 30/06/2025).

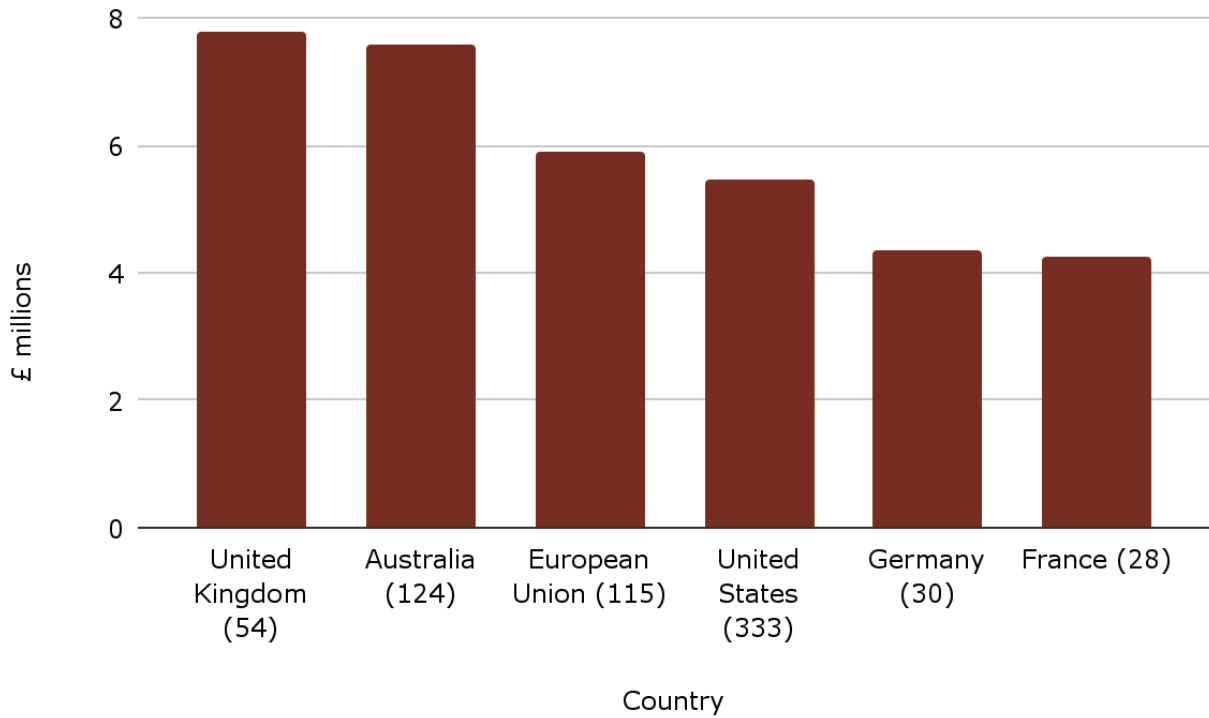
<sup>21</sup> Bent Flyvbjerg and Dirk W. Bester, 'The Cost-Benefit Fallacy: Why Cost-Benefit Analysis Is Broken and How to Fix It', 2021, *Journal of Benefit-Cost Analysis*, 12:3 (10/2021).

**GRAPH 4: MEDIAN RAIL INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECT UNIT COST PER TRACK KILOMETRE, SELECTED COUNTRIES. FIGURES IN £ MILLIONS, NUMBER OF PROJECTS IN SAMPLE IN BRACKETS<sup>22</sup>**



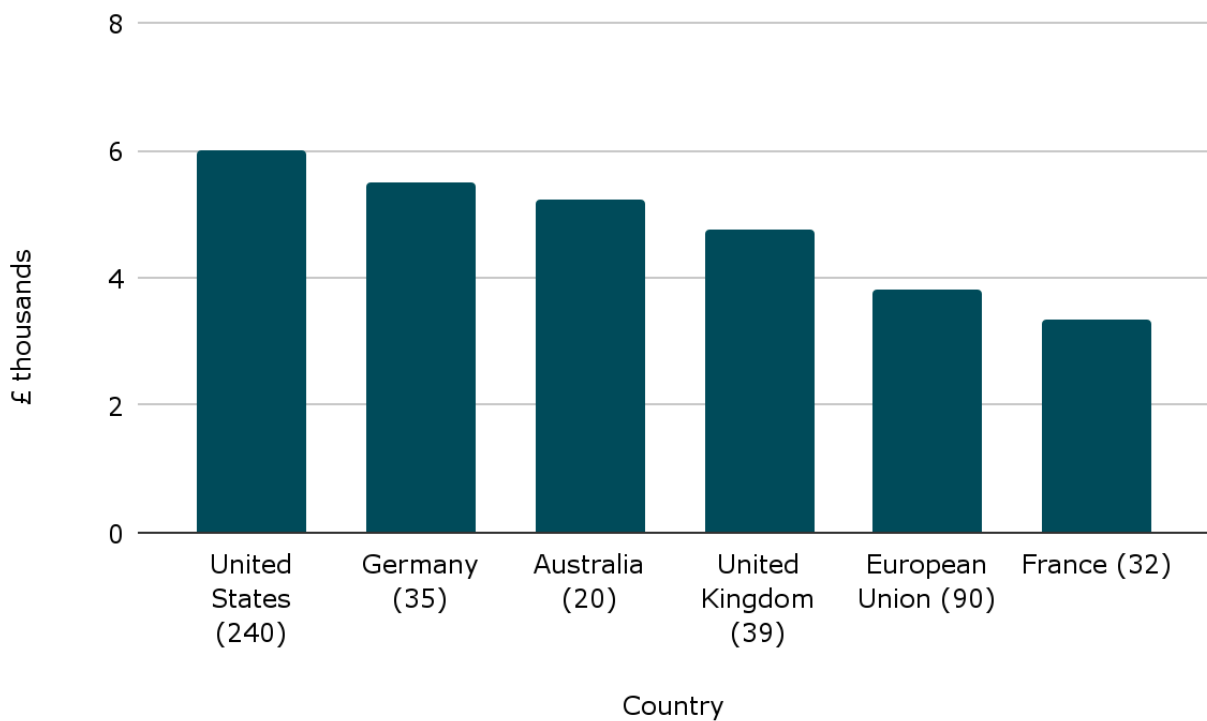
<sup>22</sup> Raoul Ruparel et al., ‘Reshaping British Infrastructure: Global Lessons to Improve Project Delivery’, Boston Consulting Group, 07/02/2024, <https://www.bcg.com/> (checked: 30/06/2025).

GRAPH 5: MEDIAN ROAD INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECT UNIT COST PER LANE KILOMETRE, SELECTED COUNTRIES. FIGURES IN £ MILLIONS, NUMBER OF PROJECTS IN SAMPLE IN BRACKETS<sup>23</sup>



<sup>23</sup> Raoul Ruparel et al., ‘Reshaping British Infrastructure: Global Lessons to Improve Project Delivery’, Boston Consulting Group, 07/02/2024, <https://www.bcg.com/> (checked: 30/06/2025).

GRAPH 6: MEDIAN SOCIAL (HOSPITALS, SCHOOLS, PRISONS) INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECT UNIT COST PER SQUARE METRE, SELECTED COUNTRIES. FIGURES IN £ THOUSANDS, NUMBER OF PROJECTS IN SAMPLE IN BRACKETS<sup>24</sup>



## The planning system

Britain’s planning system is one of the primary barriers to efficient infrastructure delivery. Originally established by the Town and Country Planning Act 1947, the system has since evolved into an overly complex and burdensome framework. There have been reforms, such as the Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIP) regime under the 2008 Planning Act, which aimed to streamline consent for major projects. However, the planning system is still not fit for purpose. As Sir Keir Starmer, Prime Minister, wrote in June 2025: ‘Why does it take so long to build anything in the UK? You can blame our outdated planning system that’s slowing us down.’<sup>25</sup> This can be seen in several ways, including in excessive complexity and bureaucracy as well as in legal challenges.

<sup>24</sup> Raoul Ruparel et al., ‘Reshaping British Infrastructure: Global Lessons to Improve Project Delivery’, Boston Consulting Group, 07/02/2024, <https://www.bcg.com/> (checked: 30/06/2025).

<sup>25</sup> Keir Starmer, ‘Why does it take so long to build anything in the UK?’, LinkedIn, 09/06/2025, <https://www.linkedin.com/> (checked: 30/06/2025).

## EXCESSIVE COMPLEXITY AND BUREAUCRACY

The time required to obtain development consent for NSIPs has increased. Since 2012, the average consenting time has risen by 65%, from 2.6 years to 4.2 years.<sup>26</sup> To add to this, the formal consenting period follows a pre-application phase, which itself averages two years, but can be significantly longer for complex projects. HM Government acknowledges that large projects now take around four years to reach a decision.<sup>27</sup> This sluggishness directly impacts project viability and national timelines for critical goals, such as Net Zero and economic regeneration.

HM Government has also acknowledged that the planning process is burdensome, overly complex and laborious. Developers face extensive requirements for documentation. The planning application for the Lower Thames Crossing, for example, ran to almost 360,000 pages, while the Economic Impact Assessment for Sizewell C was 44,260 pages. To make matters worse, rather than being a productive dialogue, the consultation process is often more of a ‘long and expensive box ticking exercise’.<sup>28</sup>

This has led to some absurd cases. For example, in a 906 page report, planning inspectors recommended against a nuclear power plant in Anglesey in part because of fears it could dilute the Welsh language and culture on the island.<sup>29</sup> Famously, the HS2 railway line included the now-infamous ‘£100 million bat tunnel’ to protect bats from trains, which it turns out may not even be bat-proof – and with a cost now estimated to be £216 million.<sup>30</sup> This tunnel was just one of 8,276 consents required by HS2 from public bodies.<sup>31</sup>

## LEGAL CHALLENGES

The risk and frequency of judicial reviews have increased significantly, reportedly now affecting 58% of all projects, compared to a historical average of around 10%.<sup>32</sup> This heightened legal risk adds uncertainty and delay, often prompting developers

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<sup>26</sup> ‘Nationally Significant Infrastructure: action plan for reforms to the planning process’, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 23/02/2023, <https://www.gov.uk/> (checked: 30/06/2025).

<sup>27</sup> ‘Getting Great Britain building again: Speeding up infrastructure delivery’, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 22/11/2023, <https://www.gov.uk/> (checked: 30/06/2025).

<sup>28</sup> ‘Planning reforms to slash a year off infrastructure delivery’, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 23/04/2025, <https://www.gov.uk/> (checked: 30/06/2025).

<sup>29</sup> Eleni Courea, ‘Planners recommended against nuclear plant in 2019 citing fears for Welsh language’, *The Guardian*, 07/02/2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/> (checked: 30/06/2025).

<sup>30</sup> Gareth Corfield, ‘HS2’s £100m “bat shield” tunnel is not actually bat-proof’, *The Telegraph*, 21/12/2024, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/> (checked: 30/06/2025); Thomas Johnson, ‘HS2 | Construction of bat shed with all associated civils work will cost over £200m’, *New Civil Engineer*, 27/06/2025, <https://www.newcivilengineer.com/> (checked: 30/06/2025).

<sup>31</sup> Louise Parry, ‘Why does it cost £100m for HS2 to protect bats?’, *BBC News*, 11/11/2024, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/> (checked: 30/06/2025).

<sup>32</sup> ‘Prime Minister clears path to get Britain building’, 10 Downing Street, 23/01/2025, <https://www.gov.uk/> (checked: 30/06/2025).

to invest even more time and resources in exhaustive assessments and documentation upfront to mitigate potential challenges later.

Government reforms have tried to limit opportunities for ‘meritless cases’ to progress through multiple court stages. For example, the protest group Transport Action Network led the application for a judicial review of the A66 project. They sought permission for a judicial review of the Secretary of State’s decision to give development consent for the project in March 2024. However, the project had already been through a six-month public examination run by the Planning Inspectorate as well as several subsequent rounds of government-led public consultation.<sup>33</sup>

The complexity within the system seems to be self-perpetuating. The inherent complexity and discretionary nature of the British system generates uncertainty for developers. As a result, faced with the high probability of delays and legal challenges, developers are effectively incentivised to engage in prolonged pre-application consultation and produce exhaustive documentation as a defensive measure. This process contributes directly to the delays and costs it seeks to mitigate.

## Initiatives addressing these challenges

HM Government has sought to address some of these challenges. In April 2025, it established the National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority (NISTA), a joint unit of HM Treasury and the Cabinet Office, which combines the functions of the former National Infrastructure Commission and the Infrastructure and Projects Authority. In doing this, HM Government hopes to remove some of the institutional barriers to infrastructure delivery. Moreover, it intends to fast-track 150 planning decisions on major economic infrastructure projects by the end of the current Parliament.

There are two key recent developments on infrastructure: the pending Planning and Infrastructure Bill, and the 10 Year Infrastructure Strategy.<sup>34</sup>

The Planning and Infrastructure Bill aims to accelerate critical infrastructure development by streamlining NSIPs and reducing judicial review opportunities. It also tries to improve planning system efficiency by empowering local communities, as well as unlock land for large-scale investment through fairer compensation in compulsory purchase orders and facilitate cross-boundary strategic planning to address regional development needs. Moreover, the Bill seeks to ‘scrap the specimen-by-specimen, site-by-site approach to protecting nature and replace it

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<sup>33</sup> ‘Judicial review reform “one step” to enabling UK infrastructure development’, Pinsent Masons, 24/01/2025, <https://www.pinsentmasons.com/> (checked: 30/06/2025).

<sup>34</sup> ‘UK Infrastructure: A 10 Year Strategy’, HM Treasury, 19/06/2025, <https://www.gov.uk/> (checked: 30/06/2025).



with one that addresses habitat loss at a higher, more strategic level'.<sup>35</sup> The Bill is currently in the Committee Stage of the House of Lords.

The Infrastructure Strategy seeks to develop a spatial approach to infrastructure planning. Key to this is NISTA's national infrastructure spatial tool, which will bring together strategies, data and tools such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) to identify local infrastructure needs and constraints. These include, for example, energy, water and wastewater, transport, flood risk and digital telecoms for housing, industrial growth and land use scenarios. The intention is to provide granular modelling outputs and insights to strengthen the local evidence base for place-based infrastructure investment decisions. Such a tool could also prove helpful for investors, as it will help them to have a clearer and more comprehensive view of the projects seeking finance.

## Conclusion

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The UK faces entrenched barriers to delivering the infrastructure it needs for economic growth in the 21st century. Failure to address this will harm the British economy, productivity, regional equality and the transition to Net Zero, as well as the nation's overall competitiveness, security and prosperity. One of the central barriers is the UK's planning system, characterised by excessive complexity and bureaucracy. However, the challenges extend beyond planning, and include policy instability and volatile funding, high energy costs and a shortage of construction workers. These barriers are interconnected, creating a cycle of inertia which is difficult to break.

## Recommendations

To regenerate Britain's ability to build the infrastructure it needs to prosper and grow in the 21st century, HM Government should consider the following recommendations:

- 1. Introduce strict deadlines for statutory consultations:** To tackle planning delays and uncertainty, HM Government should introduce strict deadlines for statutory consultations, including the presumption that if no response is received from a statutory consultee within that period, they assent to the proposal. Such a move would prevent protracted and costly consultations which ultimately harm infrastructure delivery and do little to protect the environment.

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<sup>35</sup> Sam Dumitriu, 'The Planning and Infrastructure bill should go further', Notes on Growth, 14/04/2025, <https://www.samdumitriu.com/> (checked: 30/06/2025).



**2. Set bold targets for physical and digital connectivity:** HM Government should set bold targets for expansion and enhancement of the UK's national transport networks, aiming for a more integrated high-speed rail spine which improves journey times and capacity between major economic centres. This needs to extend far beyond Birmingham, ensuring that Hull, Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds, Sheffield, Newcastle, Cardiff, Edinburgh and Glasgow are better connected. At the same time, a focused road network upgrade programme should target the strategic enhancement of principal trunk roads, bringing them to modern dual carriageway standards in a phased approach, and learning from the successes and failures of initiatives such as the 1963 'Traffic in Towns' and the 1989 'Roads for Prosperity' reports. Establishing improved regional connectivity to the primary road network, particularly for cities with substantial and growing populations, is essential to unlock the UK's latent economic potential.

Importantly, Britain should also set bold targets for near-universal next-generation data connectivity across the nation. The UK currently ranks last among 15 developed and developing international markets in 5G internet connectivity.<sup>36</sup> A robust digital infrastructure is as important as physical linkages in the modern economy.

Of course, targets alone are not sufficient, but it is important for businesses to know what HM Government's priorities are.

**3. Conduct regular international benchmarking:** Regular international benchmarking of British project performance against best practices to identify underperformance can help to drive down infrastructure costs. As such, NISTA should conduct regular, detailed international benchmarking, which would help to highlight areas where the UK is lagging behind, such as in 5G internet connectivity.

**4. Conduct audits of construction mineral supply for major projects:** Britain's construction and housing projects depend on a steady supply of mineral products, such as aggregates and cement. However, these are being consumed faster than they are being replaced, resulting in an unsustainable trend driven by an uncertain planning environment rather than a geological shortage. To secure future supplies, HM Government should introduce construction material supply audits for major projects, which would include a National Statement of Need for aggregates as well as measures to support the domestic cement industry and improve the mineral planning system. This proactive approach is crucial for ensuring essential infrastructure and housing can be built.

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<sup>36</sup> 'UK ranks last in 5G internet connectivity league, behind Italy, India, and France', Social Market Foundation, 07/10/2024, <https://www.smf.co.uk/> (checked: 30/06/2025).



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ISBN: 978-1-917893-06-0

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