



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Infrastructure

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Ministerial Advisory Panel on Infrastructure

11 November 2020

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Miss Michelle McIlveen (Chairperson)
Mr David Hilditch (Deputy Chairperson)
Ms Martina Anderson
Mr Roy Beggs
Mr Cathal Boylan
Mr Keith Buchanan
Mrs Dolores Kelly
Ms Liz Kimmins
Mr Andrew Muir

Witnesses:

Ms Kirsty McManus	Institute of Directors
Ms Jenny Green	Institution of Civil Engineers
Mr Craig McGuicken	Northern Ireland Environment Link
Mr Richard Johnston	Ulster University Economic Policy Centre

The Chairperson (Miss McIlveen): We are now having a briefing from the Ministerial Advisory Panel on Infrastructure. Hansard will be recording. All the witnesses will be attending by StarLeaf.

I welcome Kirsty McManus, director of the Institute of Directors (IoD), Jenny Green, director of the Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE), Craig McGuicken, chief executive of Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL) and Richard Johnston, the assistant director of the Ulster University Economic Policy Centre (UUEPC). You are all welcome to the meeting this morning. I apologise profusely that we ran so late and kept you waiting during the earlier part of the meeting. You will appreciate that we are under time pressures today, given the nature of the day, and we have to leave the room by 12 noon.

Thank you for your presentation. Kirsty, would you make some opening remarks? We will follow up with some questions.

Hello, Kirsty? We have no sound. Can anyone hear us?

Ms Kirsty McManus (Institute of Directors): Yes.

The Chairperson (Miss McIlveen): OK, if you would like to make some opening remarks, we will follow up with questions.

Ms McManus: Chair, thank you for the opportunity to present to the Infrastructure Committee this morning. If I may introduce my independent colleagues who have joined me this morning. We have

Jenny Green, director of the Institution of Civil Engineers, Craig McGuicken, chief executive, Northern Ireland Environment Link and Richard Johnston, deputy director at the Ulster University Economic Policy Centre.

As we all move into the recovery phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, infrastructure will have a key role to play in boosting Northern Ireland's long-term competitiveness and raising standards of living and societal well-being. It will support the vision for our society and economy as we strive to build back better and emerge from this very difficult period. The challenges that existed pre-pandemic will, no doubt, be exacerbated by the COVID restrictions. That makes investing in all our futures even more important than before.

For that reason, back in June the Institution of Civil Engineers called for the formation of an independent body for infrastructure in Northern Ireland. With expectations that financial resources will be further stretched by COVID and that austerity measures may return in the longer term to repair public finances, we will need to unlock better value and better social and economic outcomes and address shared global challenges in a sustainable way.

On the back of the ICE report, the independent Ministerial Advisory Panel on Infrastructure was established in August by Minister Mallon. We were tasked with considering how an infrastructure commission might support more effectively the long-term planning and development of relevant infrastructure in Northern Ireland. The panel is made up of independent members from a range of sectors and experts, and over a six-week period, we consulted over 100 key infrastructure stakeholders from construction, banking, utilities, investors and infrastructure commissioners across the globe. We surveyed stakeholders and held more than 40 online consultations with a range of experts, both locally and globally. The evidence, based on the collective views of over a hundred key stakeholders, demonstrates that there is overwhelming support for an infrastructure commission in Northern Ireland.

The Infrastructure Committee is well versed on the issues with large-scale capital projects that have been well articulated, not only by the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) report last December but, more recently, by the Public Accounts Committee's (PAC) report on major capital projects. We also note that the PAC report called for an independent body to provide oversight to strategic capital projects. We feel that this is one of the roles that a commission could play in Northern Ireland.

As part of our six-week consultation process, we investigated the role and value of infrastructure commissions across the globe. The panel found that they operate successfully across the globe. Our report looks at eight infrastructure commissions, including those in Australia and New Zealand and the National Infrastructure Commissions for the UK, Wales and Scotland. All but one is independent, and one is advisory. The commissions' objectives include improving well-being, equality, opportunity, sustainable economic growth, and encouraging engagement in democracy. Their budgets range from £1.5 million to £6.6 million, but many deal with infrastructure projects that are on the scale of billions of pounds, which, often, provide another level of insurance, or, more importantly, provide investor confidence on project delivery. The time horizons of the commissions are, on average, 30 years.

The commissions have a range of reporting structures, whether that is reporting directly to Treasuries, Ministers or the public. All include hard infrastructure plus energy and digital. Some include housing, education and health. Many have a separate project-delivery agency, which would be equivalent to the Strategic Investment Board.

Where do we see the gap that a commission could fill in Northern Ireland? For us, there is, quite clearly, a gap in longer-term vision setting and infrastructure planning that looks beyond the 10-year remit that has been set by the Strategic Investment Board. Society needs a vision for Northern Ireland that can help to deliver infrastructure; facilitates a larger, digitally connected population; achieves net zero-carbon by 2050; and looks to the next 30 years. The current systems of one-year Budgets, political cycles, Government plans and existing strategies, are, by their nature, short-term in focus. When we benchmark ourselves against international infrastructure commissions, we can see that they are all aligned to infrastructure vision, with infrastructure life cycles and evidence-based needs assessments of society.

The panel believes that an infrastructure commission for Northern Ireland could provide a permanent structure that looks beyond budgets, political cycles and strategies and supports us in addressing our longer-term needs and, more importantly, allows us to catch up with our competitors in Scotland, England, Ireland and Wales and beyond.

As I previously said, the evidence that has been presented by an informed stakeholder base was overwhelmingly supportive for the establishment of an infrastructure commission in Northern Ireland. If I may, I would like to paint a picture of the evidence as to why people feel that it would be valuable for Northern Ireland. Stakeholders told us that they felt that a commission could raise the quality of life and well-being of citizens. The commission would maintain independence from Government but report directly to the Executive. Stakeholders told us that that could help them to plan with longer-term vision — that 30-year vision — strategic oversight, monitoring and reporting on progress, as has been highlighted by the PAC report. They said that it should look at all forms of infrastructure, including hard, energy and digital — so beyond the DFI portfolio — and, more importantly, look for synergy across the entire infrastructure landscape. It could help us to deliver a step change in our environmental performance to address climate change and meet 2050 net-zero-carbon targets. It could advise on how speed and efficiency could be increased in planning and procurement processes and apply best practice from commissions across the globe. It could encourage collaboration, engaging relevant stakeholders and communities early in the process with key infrastructure projects. More importantly, stakeholders told us that they thought that it could drive economic growth and competitiveness, address our subregional imbalances and the rural/urban divide, make the most of digital opportunities and, more importantly, help to address our digital divide.

The recommendations of the independent panel are, therefore, that an infrastructure commission should be established as soon as practically possible. We believe that that would deliver longer-term independent infrastructure strategy formulation and decision-making. That focus on longer-term planning is already in place in Scotland, Ireland and England, and it is in progress in Wales. We face a competitive disadvantage and cannot afford to miss key economic opportunities. It would deliver renewed and relentless focus on what matters to society in the long term: the well-being of communities, climate change, digital opportunities, competitiveness and inclusion. It would add internationally respected expertise to the role of the infrastructure commission and, more importantly, better use of infrastructure spending, which would improve value for money and free up resources for other projects in health and education.

It is also about collaborating and learning internationally, east-west, North/South and internally. It is also about bringing parts of government closer together and breaking down silos. It will be a highly respected, trusted and professional organisation that engages all in society. It can identify and work with stakeholders to identify solutions to bottlenecks, such as in planning and procurement and how we finance infrastructure investment in the future. We would like to see it charged with all aspects of infrastructure beyond the DFI portfolio, looking for synergies and opportunities to exploit across the entire infrastructure portfolio.

It will work with and report to the Executive but will have statutory independence to ensure a permanent structure and permanent funding. We see this as an infrastructure equivalent to the Office for Budgetary Responsibility that will provide independent and authoritative analysis of Northern Ireland's infrastructure needs for the next 30-plus years and allow Ministers to make better-informed decisions.

We are convinced by the evidence of over 100 expert stakeholders that an infrastructure commission is the right thing to do for Northern Ireland to achieve a greener and more inclusive society. At this point, we are very happy to take any questions. Thank you for the opportunity.

The Chairperson (Miss McIlveen): Thank you very much, Kirsty. I commend you and your team on your report. There are certainly lessons to be learned around this place with regard to the speed with which you were able to present this and the number of people with whom you were able to engage. That is very commendable, so thank you for that.

The panel started off with terms of reference that were limited to the remit of the Minister for Infrastructure. That was not naive, but it was obviously going to be much broader than that, given that so much of what we do here is cross-cutting and involves a number of Departments. At this stage, can you give a synopsis of the engagement that you have had outside the Department of Infrastructure and whether or not that has been positive?

Ms McManus: Yes. As I said, energy and digital came up as an area when we engaged with infrastructure commissions in a global space. All of them were looking at not just the DFI portfolio — that hard infrastructure — but at digital and energy, so we engaged with the team in the Department for the Economy, including the head of energy and the head of telecomms, as part of the consultation process, and we spoke to them about the commission. They saw the value.

I will give you an example. Northern Ireland Water is part of the DFI portfolio and is one of the largest energy users in Northern Ireland, yet energy is managed by the Department for the Economy. The nature of how our Civil Service operates in silos kept coming up over and over again, and it means that we are missing opportunities, synergies and connections between what is happening in the digital space and what is happening in hard infrastructure. For us, the case was very clear, and the Department for the Economy was very receptive to the idea of a commission having that bird's-eye, holistic view.

As you know, we also engaged with OECD, and, again, it saw this as a very successful model that has been used primarily in Anglo-Saxon countries and is particularly beneficial. As we look to the next 20 or 30 years, digital, in particular, will have much more impact than hard infrastructure. The previous evidence session was with Wrightbus and Ryse Hydrogen, and, as you can imagine, hydrogen came up quite a lot during our consultation, and we feel that a commission can provide that independent, thoughtful, expert view of the potential for hydrogen in Northern Ireland for the next 20 or 30 years.

The Chairperson (Miss McIlveen): You presented a number of international models for the commission. Does the group have a preferred model?

Ms McManus: I will bring my colleague Jenny Green from ICE in.

Ms Jenny Green (Institution of Civil Engineers): I hope that I am unmuted.

Ms McManus: Yes.

Ms Green: OK. That is good.

When we looked at all the evidence, it became quite apparent to us that there is not a one-size-fits-all model, so we have not said, "Repeat this one because we think it is right". We are aware that, given the time frame that we had, there is more work to be done and more consideration to be given, and it certainly was not for the panel to get into that level of detail. We were trying to take an overview approach on how this could help rather than going as far as saying, "This is exactly what we believe you should do".

Having said that, as part of our recommendations, we have lifted best practice from a number of those other bodies and from what is happening across the world. One of the key stakeholders that we spoke to, which gave us quite a lot of good advice and offered further support in the future, was the Global Infrastructure Hub. It looks at best practice and what is happening around the world, and it was a very useful tool for us in trying to see how we could go about deciding what is appropriate here. Its representatives told us that there is nothing that we can lift off the shelf and copy. The issues and challenges that we have are unique to here, and we will have to work up something that works for here. There is a table in our report that sets out our recommendations and lifts best practice from various sources.

The Chairperson (Miss McIlveen): OK. Thank you.

Ms McManus: Chair, to pick up on that, Jenny spoke about the Global Infrastructure Hub. Its representatives said that they would be happy to look at international secondments to support Northern Ireland in the establishment of an infrastructure commission. We also got the same support from the OECD, Infrastructure New Zealand and the UK's National Infrastructure Commission. The one thing that we took away from it is that there is so much best practice that we can galvanise and tap into, but we are not doing that currently. There is very willing support from infrastructure commissions across the globe to help us if that is the right thing for Northern Ireland to do politically.

The Chairperson (Miss McIlveen): OK. Thank you. I am conscious of the time and that other members want to come in, but I have a further question about the current barriers to investment. We are aware of the issues with budget, but there are also concerns about our procurement processes and judicial reviews (JRs) and the impact that they have on major projects. What engagement did you have on procurement and JRs that perhaps influenced what you have recommended?

Ms McManus: We engaged with a range of stakeholders, particularly those in the investment community, and the perception that Northern Ireland has a low bar for judicial reviews came up again and again. The issue of procurement was also evidenced clearly in our surveys. We did not engage

with the Central Procurement Directorate (CPD). We were keen to engage with it, but, unfortunately, that did not happen. However, we engaged with the Strategic Investment Board. We engaged with various construction industries, so we had a good feel for procurement issues.

Procurement is an issue that is experienced by all infrastructure commissions globally, and the contribution that a commission can make is to provide industry expertise, oversight, monitoring and a look at best practice, as well as accountability. I will bring in my colleagues on the panel and ask whether they want to say anything additional in support of that.

Mr Richard Johnston (Ulster University Economic Policy Centre): Procurement and planning both came up quite a lot in the surveys. Around two thirds or three quarters of the responses mentioned planning and procurement as frustrations. The responses said that they wanted to see more speed and efficiency in how those decisions were made and taken forward. Largely, it was driven by those frustrations.

The responses were broken down across a range of skills and sectors and came from engineers, construction companies, utility companies, stakeholder groups and federations. There was a pretty-broad cohort in the 58 survey responses and 45 consultations that we undertook.

The Chairperson (Miss McIlveen): It is hugely disappointing that there was no engagement with the CPD, given the challenges that there are with procurement.

Ms Green: It is worth saying that we were asked to look at it from a high-level and strategic point of view. It is obvious that the issues with procurement are very complicated and beyond the scope of what the report could get into detail on. It is also worth saying, for everyone's sake, that it is obvious that the issues that we have here are not unique and happen all over the place. That feeds into the case to be made for taking a strategic view and having an expert independent body that can help to shape the strategy of what we are trying to do and where we are trying to go. You would like to believe that, as part of the outcomes, you would start to see some improvements in those processes because things have been assessed and thought about at that strategic level before they start to move into the pipeline of projects that are coming through and being procured.

Mr Boylan: Thank you very much for your presentation, and you are very welcome. I have a couple of questions. The Chair mentioned this, and the report indicates that a commission should work at Executive level. With regard to cross-departmental issues, what have you learned from the work of other commissions that you looked at? How would a commission pull all that together? I ask because most of the things that you mention are cross-departmental; broadband is a major infrastructure piece, but it lies outside DFI in this case. Also, how would this body be constituted?

Ms McManus: Jenny, do you want to pick up the first question, and I can answer the second question.

Ms Green: It is a big question, but I will try. The evidence that we gathered told us that, because it is cross-departmental — it is across pretty much all the Departments — it needs to be a body that, by whatever mechanism, can be made to work and sits in, reports to, is answerable to and works with the whole of the Executive. As Kirsty referenced, that is simply by nature of departmental silos that are looking for funding within their own Departments. A commission needs to sit at that bird's-eye level, which is why we have made that recommendation, which is based on the feedback and evidence that we gathered. In other jurisdictions, commissions operate in different ways, which comes back to my previous point: there is not a one-size-fits-all solution. We need to look at what will work here within our political and Executive structure, and across Departments. That is the nature of politics here, so it needs to be thought about. Obviously, we did not have the time or, indeed, the expertise to understand how it would work mechanically within the political framework in order to set it out in more detail. If this is to be taken forward at a later date, that must be considered. However, that sets out the reasons — I hope that it covers what you were getting at — for a commission being at Executive level rather than sitting with a particular Department. That is our view and that of our stakeholders.

Ms McManus: I will take the second question. To go back to the evidence, there was overwhelming support that it has to be the collective responsibility of the entire Executive. However, the statutory side is also really important. Under direct rule, a similar organisation existed in 2004, which was stood down in 2006. In order to create such a permanent structure and funding, we and the stakeholders felt that the right and appropriate mechanism for that was statutory. Such a permanent structure would then allow us to attract internationally renowned experts to be part of the commission and to help us to drive things forward. The idea is to give independence, accountability and drive. However, more

importantly, a key piece of work that a commission can bring is engagement with communities and the general public, which is instrumental and valuable. In New Zealand, for example, that worked with the public around congestion charges, which was a very toxic issue, and brought people along on that journey. It was also about allowing the public to have a voice on what they need from an infrastructure perspective for the next 20 or 30 years. That is really valuable. It is also about being able to crowdsourcing solutions, whether on how we fund our future infrastructure needs — maybe NI Water is an example — and how we can galvanise and build capacity in the public on the importance of infrastructure. The way in which we make those key decisions is also very important.

Mr Boylan: I will allow other members to ask their questions.

Mr Hilditch: You are very welcome, folks, to the Committee this morning. There are quite a lot of questions here. I am a member of the Public Accounts Committee, and the PAC report was quite damning, particularly on overspends and the cumbersome way in which infrastructure projects are progressed here. How much cognisance did you pay to that report? Was it helpful? How do you view the outcome of the report?

Ms McManus: We engaged with the Northern Ireland Audit Office and, obviously, read its report. We had an online consultation on the report. The report came up over and over again at our stakeholder engagements, whether through surveys or online consultations. There were discussions about the underutilisation of financial transactions capital (FTC) and not really leveraging our block grant and planning for the long term. I think, more importantly, it was about whether we were doing enough to attract private-sector investment. If we are talking about green recovery and achieving net zero, it will be really important for us to be able to galvanise that private-sector investment, whether that is in renewables or, for example, in hydrogen, if that is an opportunity. If we do not have that confidence from investors that, if they invest in Northern Ireland, the projects will have a seamless transition through planning and procurement, there will be a potential competitive disadvantage for Northern Ireland in attracting that investment. I thought that the PAC report was very welcome, and it certainly aligned with our recommendations. We certainly support the recommendation for an independent oversight body and feel that an infrastructure commission could play an active role in that oversight. That would be really important. I will bring in Craig, if he wants to add to that.

Mr Craig McGuicken (Northern Ireland Environment Link): Thanks, Kirsty. Morning, everyone. The only thing that I will add to what Kirsty said is that, by the very nature of infrastructure and the survey that we undertook, it is cross-cutting. I was interested in things around climate change and environmental issues, and it came out time and time again with the consultees that they feel that this underpins everything. I thought that that was a really important part of the consultation process. A lot of people said that, if we want a competitive edge going forward — for example, in the case of an infrastructure company — you need to know where you are going. You need to know about things like climate change and net zero, so the infrastructure commission will be a way to set those long-term objectives and get the right building blocks in place.

Mr Johnston: To add to that point, one of the other perspectives in this discussion is around value for money (VFM), and that, quite rightly, is what the Audit Office brought out. In this context, an infrastructure commission could cost £5 million, £6 million or £7 million per annum and could help us to deliver those billion-pound projects much more rapidly and effectively. You would like a commission such as this to more than pay for itself over time. It is important to be cognisant of the value-for-money perspective in that conversation.

Ms Green: I would like to come in, please, to reinforce some of the points that have just been made. It is obvious from reports that this is not new and that there are issues that need to be resolved. We can all accept and understand that, but there is an opportunity in setting up a body like this. As Richard said, it can be set up in terms of value for money. Our recommendation is that it will be a pretty lean organisation. We have recommended a chair and six or seven non-exec commissioners, so it is not a huge thing. Our vision for it is quite streamlined so that it could gather evidence and make recommendations fairly swiftly.

As Kirsty said, it is important to keep remembering that the way that this tends to operate in other jurisdictions is through an ability to get expert advice and consult stakeholders, including the public. That is a way to build confidence here in the decisions that are being made, and it also provides a good frame within which you guys, as the politicians and the decision makers, can make those decisions because you have had the ability to tap into that expertise and advice. Again, that was a real theme time and time again in our consultations. If this is to be done properly, the key thing is to put the

right people on that commission, people who are doing it for the right reasons and have real expertise, globally and locally, and the experience behind them to do this, lift it and run with it. That is certainly how it seems to have worked well in other places when it has been done in that way and in that spirit.

Mr Hilditch: Chair, I have another eight questions, but I know that we do not have time.

The Chairperson (Miss McIlveen): Yes, we have only 10 minutes left.

Mr Hilditch: I will cut it, so go ahead with other members.

Mr K Buchanan: Thanks, Kirsty and the panel, for the information and the good report. Members referred to the Strategic Investment Board (SIB) and the CPD. Where do you see the commission fitting into that? Why did CPD not communicate with you?

Ms McManus: We did ask CPD to engage, and, for whatever internal reasons, it decided not to engage. For us, the important key stakeholder was the Strategic Investment Board, with which we did engage and had a very productive conversation. As I said, the Strategic Investment Board is working on a strategy for the next 10 years. More importantly, in other jurisdictions, you have the equivalent of an SIB delivery project implementation agency. You also have an infrastructure commission. In GB, you have the Infrastructure and Projects Authority and the National Infrastructure Commission. It is not unique to have two agencies: one looks at 10 years, and the other looks at 10-plus years out towards 30 years. The commission looks at those mega trends. The commission would also be different from the SIB in that it would very much engage with the public and communities and have an external focus. It could also be a shopfront for private-sector investment.

The SIB predominantly looks at public infrastructure spending and how to leverage our block grant, whereas, a commission can look at both elements and how to attract private-sector investment. We are looking at developing a long-term vision for the next 30 years in Northern Ireland, looking at net zero and the digital space and how we can capitalise on those. It is worth saying that places such as Scotland, England and the Republic of Ireland all have a long-term strategy in place. Wales is working on its strategy. We feel that Northern Ireland is at a competitive disadvantage because we do not have that signal to the market that this is where we see the economy going in Northern Ireland for the next 20 to 30 years, and here are the signals to the market to invest in that. I hope that that answers your question. I would say that the SIB and a commission would work closely together. When we spoke to the SIB, it saw the value of a commission in supporting its work.

Mr K Buchanan: Mr Boylan touched on information in your report on vertical and horizontal projects. Obviously, infrastructure is generally horizontal for prisons and schools etc if you are into that. Does it cut across all sectors and all Departments? Is that where it is going?

Ms McManus: I will bring Jenny in on that one.

Ms Green: It is fair to say that, within the confines of what we were asked to do, this is another issue on which we did not feel that it was necessarily right get to that level of detail. It is certainly considered, to a greater or lesser extent, in other areas. The commission in Scotland, for example, albeit it has a different scope on its lifespan in how it has been set up to date, has a focus on including social infrastructure, which, as you say, plays into the horizontal examples. The commission that predominantly covers England sticks to hard infrastructure, albeit while rolling out into the digital world and energy considerations. That would need to be considered as to what will provide the best value here and to help to inform the right decisions. There were mixed views across our evidence base on that one, which probably boils down to people's perspectives and the organisation that they were representing.

Our view is that it should possibly be considered. The way that it is phrased in other places is that they look at the "interface" between hard infrastructure and social infrastructure areas, which might be an appropriate thing to do here, rather than getting, for want of a better phrase, sucked into the detail of specifics like that. The overall aim of our recommendation is a high-level strategy: what are we trying to get to, and how do we put it in place to make sure that we get there? It is probably wiser not to take in too much at the beginning and maybe see how it develops over time and where there could be scope to add more value to those decisions.

Mrs D Kelly: Thank you, Kirsty and panel members, for your work. I find it very informative.

Following on from Mr Hilditch and Mr Buchanan, I was going to ask about the SIB. On the relationship with councils, which also have a fairly significant amount of funding available to them — nobody likes giving up the wee bit of power that they have — how has that relationship been managed? Are there good examples elsewhere? One of the PAC findings, as your report states, was to be:

"able to recommend infrastructure investment free of fiscal remit".

That is defined as "funding guidelines set by government." Is that borne out of some of the frustration experienced by many people and investors in that area of the restraints of government procurement procedures?

Ms McManus: I will pick up on the first question, and Richard can pick up on the second question. I have just gone blank: what was the first question, Dolores?

Mrs D Kelly: It was about local councils.

Ms McManus: Yes, councils. Sorry.

A commission can be a bridge between what is happening in councils with the city/growth deals and what is happening at an Executive level and, again, looking holistically at the opportunities to leverage what is happening at a local level and an Executive level. Certainly, that is what happens in other commissions across the globe. Many stakeholders acknowledged that there is a bit of a gap and that local government is doing a lot on city deals, but are we strategically leveraging that at a Northern Ireland Executive level? That is really important. It was well endorsed by local government that a commission could play an active role. I will get Richard to pick up on your second question.

Mr Johnston: Thank you, Kirsty. On the constraints, obviously, a lot of individuals who operate in that arena are frustrated. First, there is the potential to get more value out of the expenditure that we have by driving more value out of the capital DEL that we already have in the block grant. Secondly, there is a need to look at other sources of funding, so the likes of FTC, which we heard about today in the Wrightbus discussion, the reinvestment and reform initiative (RRI) and other forms of potential charges might be discussed. Those are all things that a commission could consider. Thirdly, there is a need to leverage additional private finance and investment. Across those three things, there are significant opportunities that could enable us to remove some of the constraints on public spending and on the amount that we spend on infrastructure projects across Northern Ireland. Hopefully, that answers your question.

Mrs D Kelly: Thank you.

Ms Green: May I add to that, if you do not mind? I know that I keep doing that, but I keep thinking of little points to make.

The Chairperson (Miss McIlveen): No problem.

Ms Green: The important thing to say, just to be clear, is that — what we know from looking at it and certainly what we have seen around the world — this is not about anybody giving up the power that they have. It is about helping to inform decisions that are being made by publicly elected representatives who are the decision makers. Just so that this is really clear: there is no request, requirement or implicit desire for that to be changed. It is about trying to provide that context and the facility to gather a wide evidence base to help to inform those decisions.

Mr McGuicken: Chair, may I come in on the local government point as well?

The Chairperson (Miss McIlveen): Yes.

Mr McGuicken: The local government point is really interesting. One of the key things in local government is how it connects with people and communities. A key role for an infrastructure commission would be to extend that, so it would really need to work with local government and to talk to communities and members of the public. That would be crucial.

The other area in which an infrastructure commission could help local government is in being able to step back and take a longer-term view — a 30-year view. That should really help local government decision-making processes as well, so it would be a real winner for local government.

Mrs D Kelly: Thank you.

The Chairperson (Miss McIlveen): Thank you, Kirsty. Four more members would like to ask questions, but, unfortunately, I have two minutes to complete the meeting [*Laughter.*] That would be a challenge. If you are content, members will collate some questions and forward them to you and your team —

Ms McManus: Absolutely.

The Chairperson (Miss McIlveen): — and perhaps we can get some more responses.

Thank you all very much for attending this morning. Again, huge apologies for how quickly we have had to move through this. It really does not do justice to the report that you have presented, but, hopefully, we will have an opportunity for further engagement in the future.

Ms McManus: Thank you, Chair and Committee members, for your time. As I said, we are happy to engage with any member on a one-to-one basis. Hopefully, you have seen the passion from the panel members today. We will do what we can to build the case for this in Northern Ireland. We feel that it is the right thing to do. Thank you for the opportunity.

The Chairperson (Miss McIlveen): OK. Thank you very much.