

THE NATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE CHALLENGE

Tim Marshall

Department of Planning

Oxford Brookes University, UK

tmarshall@brookes.ac.uk

DOES ANYONE KNOW WHAT THE NATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS ARE?

- An assumed national consensus – built on little evidence or debate.
- Several levels of proper areas of disagreement.
 - Underlying – business as usual, versus economising (demand management), versus cutting back on material and energy use.
 - Mechanisms – use of national strategies, use of project level processes to decide these things, even given a genuine agreement on underlying issues.

FINANCING – THE REAL PROBLEM

- Successive governments have made the financing situation worse in several sectors.
- Little sign that this will improve, in energy, transport.
- This is a government problem, not one for localities and the planning system to resolve.
- Heavily liberalised systems will not generally deliver new investment.
- So, either reduce liberalisation, or choose paths needing little new investment, by economising.

IMPLICATIONS OF THIS ABSENCE OF GENUINE NATIONAL CONSENSUS

- Confusion over projects – from HS2 to each small wind farm.
- What new energy needed where, what new transport capacity needed where – no framework for knowing.
- How are these needs prioritised – NIP has no competent methodology to do this.
- At the moment largely decided by a random mix of commercial convenience, and zones of least resistance (under the ground, far out at sea or under the sea...).

SUGGESTIONS – NATIONAL DELIBERATION SYSTEMS

- Put National Policy Statements on firm basis – with a national spatial framework and clear understanding of needs and possible trajectories.
- Current research projects (especially ITRC) will help with transition understandings.
- Start big nationally managed debates on key issues, like the Grenelle (2007) and Energy Transition Debate (2013) in France. Experts **and** the widest public.
- Then do new, full and integrated set of NPSs.

SUGGESTIONS – GIVE SPACE AND TIME FOR PROJECT DELIBERATION

- Open up the 2008/2011 Acts system.
- Give resources and time to those who are contesting schemes.
- Learn from the techniques developed since the 1990s in France by the CNDP – the national commission for public debates.
- Where possible, debate the need as well as the detail of schemes some years in advance.

PRESENT VERSUS IMPROVED SYSTEM

- Be careful in use of top down instruments (NPSs, NPPF etc) – need to be very fully debated, with some sort of national consensus, not imposed, as has tended to happen in recent years in the UK (for England).
- If projects are the subject of deep disagreement, quite right that they should be given both time and significant public resources.
- Even then, the cost of such deliberation will be a miniscule proportion of the total development costs.

CHALLENGES AND INSTRUMENTS

- First reach some genuine resolution on the challenges.
- Then redesign the financial mechanisms, and the decision making processes, to fit what is needed.
- At the moment, many of the assumptions in planning (as in the NIP and NPSs) are extremely dubious.
- This risks feeding through the system to poorly based decisions.
- 2008/2011 system could work well, but needs much firmer basis and significant revisions.