

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

SUMMIT 2026

Ireland's infrastructure deficit
Insights

Welcome

BUILT ENVIRONMENT
SUMMIT
2026

INTERVIEWEES

SEAN O'DRISCOLL
*Chair of the Economic and
Social Research Institute*

ALASDAIR HENDERSON
*BAM UK & Ireland's Executive Director
of BAM Ireland*

VANESSA BYRNE
*Co-Head of Real Estate
Mason Hayes & Curran*

PANEL 1

Ireland's infrastructure deficit Insights

The government's Accelerating Infrastructure Report and Action Plan details 30 main actions which break down into 138 sub-actions. Each sub-action has a timeline, most of them in 2026, and a named government department with responsibility for delivery. At the recent Mason Hayes & Curran Built Environment Summit, taskforce member Sean O'Driscoll said he was encouraged that all the 46 actions due to be implemented in Q1 2026 have been completed.

"This is happening - that's the message," he said. "There are another 39 actions to be implemented in Q2 and everything is on target for those to be delivered. This won't be successful unless all sub-actions are delivered and I'm very confident that they will be."

On progress to date O'Driscoll instanced the Critical Infrastructure Bill, which is expected to be enacted by mid-June. "The capping of legal fees in judicial reviews was another significant action in the first quarter and that has been done. The legislative actions that are required are all being progressed. We have serious infrastructure problems and we will never fix our housing problem unless we fix infrastructure."



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Measure progress by projects in the ground



Alasdair Henderson, Executive Director of BAM Ireland, leads a company that for decades has been building the country's roads, bridges, hospitals and universities. At the Summit, he suggested that the Action Plan impact should be continually assessed. He called for government and industry to agree on a single metric - the time from procurement launch to construction start on major projects. "Publishing that figure - and holding both sides accountable to it - would do more to focus minds than any further round of reports," he said.

Vanessa Byrne, Co-Head of Mason Hayes & Curran's Real Estate team, agreed that substantial reduction in project timelines will be a key indicator of whether implementing the Action Plan is having an effect. "There will be plenty of measurable metrics available in the short-term to judge whether the actions are actually being delivered upon," she said. "I would also like to see a cultural shift at leadership level in politics and

in the public service, and also a move away from NIMBYism and towards active support for the infrastructure investment being made on behalf of future generations."

Byrne noted that the Infrastructure Report highlighted that regulatory approvals currently operate like a relay race - you go through one set of consenting, then the next, and then another. "What we really need is a parallel process where environmental impact assessments are carried out contemporaneously with the planning authority so that everything is not happening in sequence," said Byrne. "Everyone should be looking at the same data at the same time rather than requesting it in slightly different formats that then require a new report to be commissioned, only for it to be out of date because the previous one was done 18 months earlier. The compound delays that causes are very real."

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Empower public servants to make brave decisions

Alasdair Henderson told the conference that risk aversion among public servants is a material brake on execution. He would like to see ministerial risk appetite statements that give public servants political top-cover; a shift in the culture of scrutiny towards rewarding decisive decision-making; and explicit acknowledgement that the cost of delay is as real as the cost of a decision that turns out to be imperfect. "If you prioritise present-day value for money above everything else you can miss the opportunity cost of inaction. If you do not proceed now you lose the benefit of the thing you need when you need it," he stated.

In the Critical Infrastructure Bill, one of the measures is that agencies will be required to demonstrate how they have cooperated and advanced infrastructure projects. Vanessa Byrne believes that too many statutory bodies worry about one day having to explain their actions to an Oireachtas committee. "When you deal with public agencies it is very obvious that risk management dominates their thinking. Our job is to advise them on risk but there has to be an acceptance that some degree of risk is unavoidable. We can mitigate risk to the best of our ability but we cannot eliminate it."

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Continue the reform agenda



The Summit also heard from Byrne that the single most impactful legal change is reform of the judicial review system. “The Civil Reform Bill as published goes quite far and we are optimistic that once these reforms are embedded in the judicial system and become part of precedent they will start to have a real impact on timelines,” she said.

Alasdair Henderson told conference attendees that contractors should not be required to price risks they cannot manage. The cap-and-collar model he favours is currently being applied on the Metrolink programme in Dublin. “The contractor’s upside is capped at a good but not exceptional return and the downside is limited so that unforeseeable circumstances do not produce catastrophic losses,” he explained. “The state gets a better outcome because the structure attracts more competition from the international contracting community. This model should be the template for major Irish infrastructure investments.”

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Our Built Environment team is uniquely positioned to advise across a full range of legal services.

In tailoring our advice for this rapidly evolving sector, we apply all areas of law that interact with the whole range of human activities affecting the structure, management and use of the built environment.

We work together with our clients to provide a comprehensive suite of services to individuals and companies ranging from shopping centre development and roads to major urban regeneration projects.

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MARKET RECOGNITION

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"The construction team in Mason Hayes & Curran benefits from a deep bench of quality partners and associates. Advice is always practical and commercially considered and we have found the team to be exceptionally responsive."

LEGAL 500, 2026

KEY CONTACTS



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