ACE Scotland Manifesto:

Delivering Infrastructure 2050

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ACE CEO Foreword

Milda Manomaityte, *Chief Executive Officer, ACE and EIC*

In transport, energy, water, and the built environment, Scotland faces a multi-faceted challenge. On the one hand, we must maintain and upgrade an existing asset base that is increasingly old. On the other, we must deliver new, transformational infrastructure that will underpin a net zero, nature-positive, and digitally connected economy. This is to be delivered in a context of constrained public finances, skills, and an increasingly high-risk climate. This means that we need be more focused than ever on the issues of strategic thinking, long-term planning, and delivery certainty.

ACE Scotland is a strategic partner for any government in Holyrood to deliver this. We are the representative body for the engineering and consultancy companies that design, plan, and deliver the infrastructure that Scotland needs every day. Our members have the technical knowledge, international expertise, and delivery record that is required to meet the challenge. Most importantly, they are involved at the very beginning of the process, when the decisions have the greatest impact on cost, risk, and outcome. This is often when the expertise is brought in too late in the process, when the options are already limited and the risk of delay and cost overrun is high.

The Scottish Government's Infrastructure Delivery Pipeline is a step in the right direction. More transparency and a clearer vision of future investment go some way to evoking confidence and reinforces the key role infrastructure has in economic growth and job creation. Scotland must double down on attracting private sector investment, improving supply chains, and addressing the increasingly acute skills gaps – to achieve this requires a clear, long-term Infrastructure 2050 strategy that extends beyond the electoral cycle and provides certainty for investors and businesses.

This Manifesto is our industry's solution to this challenge. It identifies three key priorities: utilising infrastructure as an enabler of economic growth; speeding up delivery through planning, procurement, and governance reform; and enhancing energy security while regenerating nature. In each of these pillars, the focus is on translating ambition into action with a cleat focus on delivery.

Our vision for Infrastructure 2050 delivery will require strong public-private partnership. There must be a more collaborative, outcome-driven approach among government, public sector bodies, regulators, and industry and our sector is a ready and willing strategic partner to government in driving delivery.

Chair's Foreword

Sarah Peterson, *Chair, ACE Scotland*

From the central belt to our rural and island communities, the growing pressures on Scotland's infrastructure are increasingly evident. Road congestion and capacity constraints, fragile transport connectivity in the Highlands and Islands, the condition and age of local roads, and limitations in electricity grid capacity—particularly as Scotland accelerates its transition to net zero—are all signs of systems under strain. These challenges have real consequences for productivity, access to employment, and investor confidence.

As Chair of ACE Scotland, I see a regular pattern of delivery difficulties. Projects are often shaped by short-term funding certainty, limiting confidence in long-term delivery. Specialist expertise is sometimes introduced late in the process, and too often after key strategic decisions have already been taken. Procurement processes can be complex and inconsistent, increasing cost and delay without delivering better outcomes. And while Scotland ambitions are rightly high, they must be matched with the funding certainty, skills capacity, and delivery frameworks required to realise them.

Scotland's recent Infrastructure Delivery Pipeline is a positive step forward, providing greater visibility of planned investment and emphasising the need to maintain and renew our existing assets. But its limited long-term certainty reflects a wider structural problem: infrastructure systems must be planned over decades but are instead too often determined by annual budgets and parliamentary cycles. This misalignment erodes confidence in our supply chains and makes it more difficult to invest in skills, innovation, and long-term capability in Scotland.

Skills shortages present an immediate and growing challenge. Across transport, roads, energy, and asset management, there are shortages of engineers, planners, technical and digital specialists. These shortages hinder progress, raise costs, and add further pressure on public sector clients. To overcome this problem, it is necessary to act in a coordinated way so as to link long-term pipelines with skills planning, education, and development. This approach would ensure that Scotland can develop and retain the skills it needs to deliver on its ambitions.

There is also a distinctively Scottish imperative to ensure that infrastructure supports place-based growth and regional equality. Greater empowerment for city regions and local authorities, alongside clearer frameworks for infrastructure delivery, can enable more responsive and integrated decision-making. Meanwhile, national programmes must better serve the needs of rural and island communities, where resilience, connectivity, and maintenance may be more important than expansion.

This Manifesto is grounded in Scotland's needs and realities. It recognises fiscal constraints and builds on existing policy commitments. But it also asks us to think and act differently, to harness this sector's expertise earlier, to secure delivery certainty, and to think of infrastructure as a strategic, long-term investment.

ACE Scotland and its members are committed to being part of the solution. We look forward to working with the next Scottish Government, local authorities, and public bodies as trusted partners, to turn ambition into action and ensure that Scotland's infrastructure is fit for the next generation.

Key Asks

ACE Scotland is recommending to:

Drive economic growth through infrastructure by reforming procurement, delivering the infrastructure pipeline through private investment, creating a digital and interactive infrastructure pipeline, and establishing Scottish city-region mayoral combined authorities.

Accelerate infrastructure delivery by strengthening early supplier engagement across sectors to reduce risk and capture innovation, standardising public sector client requirements, providing early regulatory and ministerial certainty to enable Scottish Water to front-load investment, mandating enforceable build-out schedules with annual reporting and strengthened “use it or lose it” powers to ensure planning permissions deliver homes rather than land banking, and launching a national engineering recruitment campaign.

Place energy and the natural environment at the heart of infrastructure by supporting robust low-carbon power alongside renewables, actively engaging with Great British Energy, and integrating natural capital, ecological connectivity, and marine recovery into infrastructure planning to achieve net zero, resilience, and long-term economic and environmental value.

Infrastructure as a Driver of Economic Growth

Infrastructure investment over the long term is one of the most effective ways for governments to stimulate economic growth and productivity and job market growth. However, despite the Scottish government's ambitious commitments, challenges in delivery continue to limit economic outcomes.

The Scottish Government's Infrastructure Delivery Pipeline 2026 outlines particular capital investment plans of around £11.1 billion over the next four years (2026-30) in transport, housing, energy, and NHS investment. This is a significant step towards greater visibility and planning certainty but also reflects the constraints of a fiscal envelope. The Infrastructure Delivery Pipeline 2026 includes projects over £5 million and programs over £20 million, including the A9 Dualling Programme and the Rail Services Improvement & Decarbonisation Programme, reflecting the priorities of connectivity and decarbonisation.

Procurement Reform: Divergence as a Barrier

Procurement is one of the most significant economic levers available to the Scottish Government, influencing markets worth approximately £15 billion annually. Although procurement can be a driver of innovation, skills, and infrastructure delivery, the growing divergence between the Scottish procurement regime and the UK is now causing significant barriers to value, competition, and delivery.

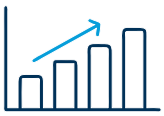
From 2025, England, Wales, and Northern Ireland will be governed by the UK Procurement Act 2023, whereas Scotland will largely remain governed by its current framework, creating a dual-regime system that will further complicate the landscape for both public sector bodies and suppliers. For suppliers, especially Scottish suppliers operating within the UK, this divergence means higher bid costs, increased administrative complexity, and a decreased willingness to compete for Scottish contracts, particularly among SMEs. From a strategic perspective, it also undermines Scotland's attractiveness as a stable market for investment and undermines efficient supply chain planning, with unclear procurement activity and disjointed digital infrastructure hindering future investment in skills and capacity. The underlying procurement principles in Scotland are good, but more convergence with the new UK framework, where it can be shown to deliver cost, complexity, and risk reductions, would improve competition and delivery outcomes.

The increasing complexity and divergence of procurement frameworks creates disproportionate barriers for specialist engineering consultancies and SMEs. Higher bid costs, inconsistent requirements between public bodies, and misaligned evaluation criteria reduce the ability of firms to compete effectively, particularly where projects require specialist sustainability, environmental, or technical expertise. Procurement reform should ensure consistent, proportionate requirements and place greater emphasis on quality, whole-life performance, and early technical input rather than lowest upfront cost. This would enable greater SME participation and improve long-term infrastructure outcomes.

The Scottish Government's plan to investigate access to aspects of the new UK framework should be accelerated, with a strong emphasis on the benefits of interoperable systems, decreased duplication for suppliers, increased transparency, and improved forward procurement pipelines.

Policy Recommendations:

- **Reduce unnecessary divergence** by aligning Scottish procurement practice with UK reforms where this improves value, competition and delivery.
- **Lower barriers for suppliers**, particularly SMEs, by simplifying processes and improving consistency across public bodies, and incentivising AI and innovation.
- **Improve procurement transparency and forward visibility**, building on the Infrastructure Delivery Pipeline with clearer, authority-level procurement pipelines.
- **Use procurement strategically**, prioritising quality, social value and long-term outcomes alongside cost.



Delivering the Infrastructure Pipeline Through Private Investment

Scotland has an excellent record in revenue-funded infrastructure delivery through the Non-Profit Distributing (NPD) model, which successfully delivered schools, health, and transport infrastructure while embedding whole-life costing, robust governance, and community benefit. However, a change in accounting treatment means that NPD is no longer considered an off-balance-sheet model, as the public sector is considered to retain too much control. Consequently, Scotland is having to move away from this model, which presents both a challenge and an opportunity to develop a new approach that secures additional investment beyond constrained capital budgets while maintaining value for money.

To secure significant private investment, Scotland must provide the right market conditions. Private investment is attracted to environments that are clear on policy direction, have stable regulation and predictable returns, which are underpinned by transparent pipelines and confident public sector clients. This requires a willingness to engage with innovative funding and blended public and private models, as well as careful consideration of affordability and user charges. Close alignment between government, regulators, and industry is required to reduce risk, secure enabling infrastructure, and crowd in long-term investment that supports Scotland's strategic priorities.

A stable and visible pipeline of infrastructure investment is essential to maintaining a healthy consultancy sector. Greater certainty through mechanisms such as a Scottish Mutual Investment Model and clearer long-term funding commitments would support investment in skills, innovation, and capability within Scotland.

A Scottish approach to the Mutual Investment Model (MIM), based on the Welsh approach, provides a credible way forward. MIM maintains all the benefits of NPD, including competitive procurement, thorough project diligence, standardized contracts, and clear community benefit, while meeting current private sector classification rules. By allowing the public sector to be a minority co-investor, MIM aligns public and private sector interests without scaring off long-term capital, and could, if used selectively, accelerate delivery in priority sectors while protecting the public interest.

Policy Recommendations:

- **Introduce a Scottish Mutual Investment Model** to unlock additional infrastructure investment beyond capital budgets, while retaining strong governance, value for money and compliance with current accounting rules.

Next steps in the Infrastructure Pipeline:
The pipeline announced shows real commitment to long-term certainty for infrastructure, but it would benefit from redesigning its pipeline as a digital, interactive tool rather than maintaining its current format. A digital approach would enable greater flexibility, real-time updates, and clearer visibility across stages of the pipeline, making it easier for businesses and the pubic to understand progress and opportunities.

Limited forward visibility of infrastructure pipelines creates uncertainty for businesses seeking to invest in skills, regional presence, and workforce development. Greater certainty through a detailed, interactive pipeline would allow firms to plan recruitment, develop specialist expertise, and support delivery more effectively. Without this visibility, businesses face increased risk when investing in Scotland's infrastructure market.

Recommendations:

- **Digitise Scotland's infrastructure pipeline** by converting it into a centralised digital platform that provides clear, consistent, and up-to-date information on projects, timelines, and investment stages.
- **Expand the digital pipeline into an interactive map** that allows users to visualise projects geographically and filter by sector, region, value, and delivery phase to support strategic planning and investment decisions.
- **Embed supply chain and economic impact signposting** within the platform to showcase procurement opportunities, domestic supply chain capabilities, and the resulting regional economic benefits.

City-Region Devolution and Combined Authorities

Infrastructure delivery and economic growth are increasingly operating at the city-region level, but the governance framework in Scotland has failed to adapt. Transport, housing, land use, skills, and economic development policies are still dispersed across local authorities, making it difficult to hold anyone accountable and hindering delivery. This is particularly apparent in the Glasgow City Region, where more than half of the working population live outside the city limits, but economic policies for the broader economy are made separately, hampering planning at the level of the real economy.

There is clear evidence from across the UK that mayoral combined authorities provide stronger leadership, long-term funding commitments, and faster infrastructure delivery. Glasgow is the only major UK city that does not have this type of arrangement, although analysis indicates that the Scottish economy could be 4.6 per cent bigger if it were more comparable to international best practice. A combined authority for the Glasgow city region, with a directly elected mayor, would offer integrated strategic leadership, a clear alignment of infrastructure and economic strategies, and a proven route to unlocking growth and improving delivery at scale.

City-region devolution is not about undermining local government. It is about making it easier to work together at scale, reducing duplication, and aligning infrastructure investment with economic opportunity. Combined authorities would help to deliver more integrated transport systems, spatial planning, skills investment, and faster delivery of major infrastructure projects.

City-region devolution is a delivery necessity for ACE Scotland. Without a governance framework that aligns with functional economic geography, Scotland faces a continued period of underperformance and growing divergence from comparable cities. Combined authorities, with proper powers and long-term funding commitments, have already proven a successful route to unlocking growth, accelerating infrastructure delivery, and improving the resilience of the Scotland economy.

Policy Recommendations:

- **Legislate for mayor-led combined authorities in Scotland**, beginning with the Glasgow City Region.
- **Devolve strategic powers over transport**, housing, planning, skills and economic development to city-region level.
- **Provide long-term, multi-year integrated funding settlements** to support infrastructure delivery and economic transformation.
- **Ensure city-region governance complements**, rather than replaces, local authority roles through clear accountability and collaboration.

Accelerating Delivery

Infrastructure delivery in Scotland too often falls victim to slow planning cycles, late involvement of technical expertise, and resourcing bottlenecks, even where strategic intent is strong.

- Scotland's Infrastructure Delivery Pipeline sets out project pipelines but continues to expose resourcing and business-case bottlenecks: projects move between 'development' and 'delivery' only as business cases clear financial and value-for-money tests.
- Planning and consenting regimes are widely recognised in industry as under-resourced and unpredictable, costing time and investment appeal.

Delaying expert design, programme planning, and supplier input until after funding approval significantly increases both cost and delivery risk. Buildability risks rise when design and procurement are developed in isolation, while cost escalation is most acute before designs are stabilised and supply chains are fully engaged. Embedding expert consultancy at earlier gateway stages—particularly during business case development and options appraisal—would materially improve project predictability, affordability, and overall readiness for delivery.

The late appointment of specialist engineering and environmental expertise remains a significant constraint on delivery quality and efficiency. Early engagement during business case development and option selection is essential to optimise project performance, reduce whole-life costs, and achieve Scotland's net-zero, resilience, and nature recovery ambitions. Delayed engagement limits opportunities to influence fundamental design decisions and can increase delivery risk and long-term costs.

Policy Recommendations:

- **Strengthen early supplier engagement** across sectors to reduce risk and capture innovation.
- **Standardise client requirements** across the public sector for consistency and efficiency.

Accelerating Water Infrastructure

Scottish Water has published its Draft Business Plan for the 2027-33 regulatory period, prior to the Final Business Plan being submitted in early 2026. Within this draft, the company sets out its assessment that approximately £8.3 billion of investment will be necessary over a period of six years to maintain and enhance water and wastewater services, including addressing aging infrastructure, climate change resilience, growth, and regulatory commitments.

This draft business plan reflects Scottish Water's Long-Term Strategy for sustainability and resilience, taking into account the challenges posed by climate change, demographics, and regulatory demands, and underlining the need for continued investment to provide safe and secure water services. Scottish Water currently serves 1.8 billion liters of water per day to 2.64 million households and 161,000 non-household customers, and sets out specific investment plans in relation to growth capacity, infrastructure investment, and service relocations. Prior to the plan becoming formal, it must be assessed and approved through the regulatory determination process led by the Water Industry Commission for Scotland and agreed with the Scottish Government to ensure that the plan meets the needs of affordability for customers, while also ensuring sustainability and resilience.

Policy Recommendations:

- **Accelerate delivery of critical water and wastewater infrastructure** by providing early regulatory and ministerial certainty, enabling Scottish Water to front-load investment that unlocks housing, supports economic growth, strengthens climate resilience, and delivers progress towards Net Zero.

Accelerating Housing Development

Scotland is facing a housing crisis that requires immediate, practical action, not further delay or unbuilt permissions. Even though consent has been granted for tens of thousands of homes, the rate of delivery is still far too low due to market limitations, increasing costs, lack of infrastructure, and a system that too often incentivises land banking over community building.

The Scottish Government now needs to provide a vision for a plan-led, infrastructure-first system that puts build-out over speculation, supports small and medium-sized developers, and puts the public interest at the forefront of land and housing policy. This means faster and more robust local plans, proactive leadership from the public sector in land assembly and infrastructure investment, greater use of compulsory purchase and sales, and policies that promote a greater diversity of housing types and tenures to drive delivery. We will cut through inefficiency, confront stalled sites directly, and make sure that planning decisions are made with the pressing need to deliver quality homes in the shortest possible time because consent without construction does not house families, build communities, or meet Scotland's needs.

A change in the housing system to active delivery, rather than passive permission, with strong financial and regulatory incentives to deliver rather than hold land would be accelerate delivery. A tax linked to delivery would help prevent speculation and unlock stalled sites, while build-out schedules and enhanced enforcement powers would improve transparency, accountability, and confidence in the pipeline. Together, these would deliver faster build-out rates, higher turnover of consented land, better infrastructure funding, and a clearer alignment between planning decisions and the need to deliver quality homes.

Policy Recommendations:

- **Introduce a delivery-linked tax**, mindful of SME's, on allocated or consented residential land that is not built out within an agreed timeframe, placing responsibility on landowners and reinvesting revenues into infrastructure to unlock stalled sites.
- **Mandate enforceable build-out schedules** with annual reporting and strengthened "use it or lose it" powers to ensure planning permission results in homes being built, not land being banked.

Accelerating Delivery through Skills

Skills shortages in engineering, sustainability, and technical disciplines are already affecting delivery capacity. Addressing this challenge requires not only investment in education and training but also greater long-term certainty in infrastructure pipelines to support workforce planning and retention.

In Scotland there is now an ever-increasing demand on the road and transport network infrastructure with no apparent or adequate pipeline of workforce to support it. The current workload, with incoming large-scale investments in the water industry, the defence industry, and the energy industry, as well as necessary road developments such as the A9, is creating a demand for engineers that the current system is not providing. Engineering has lost its prestige and security as a career, is not adequately integrated into early education, and lacks clear and attractive career paths. There are also poor connections between education and employment, a suboptimal technical college environment, and a gender imbalance issue.

Countries that have been successful in promoting engineering as a career have done so by minimising financial risk, maximising social status, and ensuring clear pathways into the workforce. In Germany, the provision of free tuition and a highly developed dual apprenticeship system closely aligned with industry has resulted in one of the highest levels of engineering participation in Europe. In Singapore, government scholarships offering guaranteed employment in the public and strategic sectors has made engineering a safe and respected choice. In Finland, engineering projects are embedded in compulsory education, resulting in very high engagement and success in STEM. In Japan, engineers were branded “nation builders,” with the help of excellent corporate career paths and lifelong learning, which has sustained their identity, pride, and mastery in technical disciplines. In all these examples, engineering is framed not only as a career but as a form of national service that is integral to national success.

Policy Recommendations:

- **Implement a Skills Audit:** Scotland must plan and secure its engineering workforce through a national skills audit and strategic workforce planning aligned to transport, roads, water, energy, and defence requirements.
- **Embed Engineering Early:** A clear and funded route into engineering as a career must be established through the integration of engineering into early education, an improved technical college system, and excellent employer-led apprenticeships with secure progression.
- **Develop and rollout a national recruitment campaign for engineering:** The national status and inclusiveness of engineering must be restored through a high-profile recruitment campaign like the Armed Force’s Be the Best Campaign (Be the Best: Build for Scotland), reducing financial risk for students, and actively promoting women in engineering.

Energy Resilience and Nature Regeneration

Scotland's aspirations on climate, biodiversity and energy security are rightly ambitious, but realising them requires infrastructure that is both resilient and growth focused.

Energy Resilience

The Scottish Budget 2026-27 highlights climate action and energy as a key priority, allocating £446 million in the Climate Action & Energy portfolio, including funding for offshore wind, energy transition, and nature restoration, to drive net-zero infrastructure and resilience.

Recent news coverage also suggests that the Scottish Government has committed at least £5 billion to support the net-zero transition in sectors such as transport and clean heat.

Scotland has ambition, but it has a lack of speed in delivery. Structural change is needed to accelerate the delivery of infrastructure projects. Although there is better direction from recent policy frameworks, there is still a lack of consistency in planning decisions, capacity in local authorities, and consenting timescales.

Scotland's ambitions on net zero, climate resilience, and nature recovery present significant opportunities for the engineering consultancy sector. However, inconsistent policy application, planning delays, and delivery uncertainty risk limiting the sector's ability to fully support these ambitions. Addressing structural delivery barriers will be essential to unlocking these opportunities.

Planning Constraints

A robust planning system is critical to unlocking the acceleration of infrastructure delivery. In Scotland, the planning system must become more proactive and strategic in enabling national outcomes, rather than the current reactive and project-by-project approach.

Regional Energy Spatial Strategies (RESPs) can help provide early, place-based insight into future energy infrastructure beyond 2030, thereby reducing uncertainty and conflict at a later date. Their success relies on early engagement, effective communication, and sufficient resource, coupled with strong political leadership that articulates the net-zero vision through local benefits such as energy security, jobs, and cost savings, to build trust and public support in the process.

The adoption of National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) has improved policy support for renewable and net-zero infrastructure, but its benefit relies on consistent application. The future national planning policy must embed this clarity to provide the stable environment required for long-term private sector investment. Statutory consultees and key agencies must also align with the policy change, from risk-averse and slow approaches to proactive pre-application engagement

that addresses issues early. National guidance, through Chief Planner guidance and a national review of decision-making, would help address inconsistencies and give authorities more confidence to make decisions that balance competing demands in line with national policy.

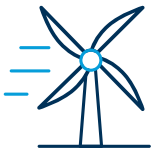
Planning timescales remain a key constraint on delivery. While the 12-month determination for Section 36 and Section 37 applications provides a strong framework, the actual decision times continue to exceed these commitments, eroding investor confidence and delaying benefits. Despite additional resource, performance has yet to improve, and without continued focus on meeting agreed timescales, Scotland risks being left behind in its energy and climate commitments.

Delays and uncertainty within planning and consenting processes have direct commercial and delivery impacts on the engineering consultancy sector. Unpredictable timelines create inefficiencies, increase project risk, and reduce market confidence. Improving planning capacity, consistency, and predictability would strengthen Scotland's attractiveness as a place to invest and deliver infrastructure.

Policy Recommendations:

To support accelerated delivery, the Scottish Government and Parliament should prioritise:

- **Investment in planning capacity**, including long-term funding for recruitment, training and retention, building on initiatives such as the Future Planners programme.
- **Fill capacity and skills gap in LAs planning departments by partnering with the engineering consultancy sector**, to speed up delivery and planning approvals
- **Championing planning as a net-zero enabler**, positioning it as a proactive driver of delivery rather than a regulatory constraint.
- **Expanding digital tools and knowledge hubs**, including enhanced data sharing, digital application platforms and wider use of the National Planning Improvement Hub to improve transparency and efficiency.



Enhancing Scotland's Energy Resilience and Security

Scotland has traditionally been at the forefront of the delivery of low-carbon energy, with a diverse set of generation resources and a highly competent workforce. Facilities such as Torness have been an integral part of the delivery of secure electricity supplies, high-quality employment, and a stable grid for many years. With certain aspects of this existing infrastructure nearing the end of their life, there is now a chance to reflect on how Scotland can ensure that resilience, affordability, and security are maintained within the future energy mix.

There has been a growing trend in recent years of investment in generation outside of Scotland, leading to higher levels of electricity imports and associated price risks. This creates challenges for plans on energy independence, industrial decarbonisation, and system security, particularly within the context of growing demand associated with electrification, hydrogen production, and the development of low-carbon industries.

A balanced approach to future energy resilience might draw on existing Scottish strengths. Scottish firms are already securing significant contracts on major UK infrastructure projects, demonstrating the ability of the home supply chain and workforce. With its existing skills base, engineering expertise, and industrial heritage, Scotland is well-positioned to play a role in the next generation of firm, low-carbon power; whether on a large scale or through new technologies such as Small Modular Reactors.

This would complement Scotland's existing world-leading renewables sector, helping to secure system stability during periods of low wind output, industrial demand, and energy security. Crucially, it would also help to retain investment, jobs, and knowledge in Scotland, ensuring that the benefits of the energy transition are shared across the country.

Policy Recommendations:

- **Embed ecological connectivity into infrastructure planning** by requiring major infrastructure programmes to demonstrate how they enhance landscape- and seascape-scale connectivity, including alignment with catchment management, woodland regeneration and coastal restoration strategies.
- **Integrate marine recovery into infrastructure delivery** by ensuring ports, energy and coastal projects contribute directly to marine habitat restoration, blue-carbon ecosystems and long-term natural capital enhancement.
- **Treat natural capital as strategic infrastructure** by recognising marine and terrestrial ecosystems as assets requiring long-term investment, governance and accountability comparable to built infrastructure.

Nature Regeneration: Embedding Nature in Infrastructure Delivery

The current framework for environmental protection in Scotland is based on a complex mosaic of land and marine classifications, many of which have been established for decades past. Although these have protected valuable sites, they are not necessarily the best vehicles for the level of nature recovery that is now required and may, in fact, limit the process of restoration, innovation, and landscape-scale solutions. With increased investment in infrastructure, Scotland needs to move from a static, site-by-site approach to a more contemporary model that incorporates nature recovery into delivery and focuses on outcomes rather than process.

This means moving from site-by-site protection to ecological connectivity. Nature does not respect administrative boundaries, and infrastructure corridors in transport, energy, and water sectors can be actively supportive of recovery if designed to maximize green infrastructure, restore catchments, and incorporate nature-based solutions. Planning and consenting systems should therefore promote landscape-scale delivery, aligning infrastructure investment with woodland restoration, river restoration, and coastal restoration.

Marine recovery and broader ecosystem drivers also need to be addressed in a more strategic way. Scotland's marine environment is still under-restored, and infrastructure investment in ports, energy, and coastal defense should be directly supportive of habitat restoration and blue carbon ecosystems. Natural capital should be considered as infrastructure assets, in addition to addressing underlying drivers such as unmanaged deer populations, to provide clearer accountability, more resilient ecosystems, and improved long-term outcomes.

Policy Recommendations:

- **Engage constructively with Great British Energy** to identify potential sites in Scotland for future firm, low-carbon power projects, on both large scales and through Small Modular Reactors, to ensure Scotland is well-positioned to benefit from future deployment decisions.
- **Provide clear and consistent policy guidance on the role of firm**, low-carbon power in a renewables-led system, in recognition of its importance to energy resilience, security of supply, and industrial decarbonisation.

Conclusion

Scotland's infrastructure challenge is not one of ambition, but of delivery. This Manifesto is clear that without long-term certainty, early expertise, and a system for pace and quality, investment will continue to fall short of its potential. Infrastructure must be considered a strategic, national asset, planned over decades, and aligned with economic geography, and delivered through stable pipelines that give confidence to investors, supply chains, and the workforce alike.

ACE Scotland's plans are realistic and informed by experience. Through procurement reform, private investment unlocked through a Scottish Mutual Investment Model, power devolved to city regions, and skills and planning embedded at the heart of delivery, Scotland can shift from short-term decision-making to long-term, outcome-focused investment. But alongside this, energy resilience, nature recovery, and net zero must be delivered together, because the reality is that economic growth, environmental protection, and energy security are mutually reinforcing, not competing, objectives.

ACE Scotland and its members are determined to work with government to make this vision a reality. Through the application of expertise in the earlier years, and through collaboration across the public and private sectors, and through relentless focus on delivery, Scotland can deliver infrastructure that drives growth, unlocks nature, builds resilience, and serves communities for generations to come. The challenge is clear; what is now needed is decisive and sustained action.

This report was written by **Ben Brittain, Director of Public Affairs at ACE**.
For all enquires please email: **bbrittain@acenet.co.uk**

Sources: https://www.centreforcities.org/publication/the-missing-piece-in-the-big-cities-jigsaw-why-glasgow-needs-a-devolution-deal/

About Us

The Association for Consultancy and Engineering (ACE) is the business association for the UK's professional consultancy and engineering companies operating in the social and economic infrastructure sectors.

We represent around 400 member companies, large and small. As the leading voice for the sector, we foster collaboration to propel the industry to fulfil its ambitions.

The sector is highly skilled, productive, and forward-looking - employing over 470,000 people and contributing more than £39 billion to the UK economy. It competes on a global stage, exporting over £11 billion, providing solutions to the world's pressing issues and holds the key to a brighter future.

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