

What are the Infrastructure Guidelines?

The [Infrastructure Guidelines \(IGs\)](#), published in December 2023, [replace](#) the **Public Spending Code (PSC)** requirements for capital expenditure outlined in 'Public Spending Code: A Guide to Evaluating, Planning and Managing Public Investment, December 2019'.

The IGs set out the value for money guidelines for the evaluation, planning, and management of public investment projects, including purchase or acquisitions of assets or shareholdings, in Ireland. The arrangements set out in the IGs apply to all public bodies and all bodies in receipt of Exchequer capital funding.

The requirements of the IGs apply to all new public investment proposals from 1 January 2024 onwards. For public investment proposals which are already progressing through the project expenditure lifecycle, Sponsoring Agencies and Approving Authorities should ensure that these comply with the requirements in the updated guidance as they move forward and, in particular, as they reach the next relevant Approval Gate (AG), or in special circumstances when it is agreed with the NTA as Approving Authority.

The purpose of this summary brief is to set out the key changes¹ in the new IGs from the previous PSC.

Main Changes from PSC to IGs

Most of the changes seen in the IGs are in line with the interim update to the PSC communicated through the [Circular 06/2023](#) from the Department of Public Expenditure, National Development Plan Delivery and Reform (DPENDR).

The IGs comprise of six separate, but interrelated, documents. The first provides an overview of the IGs whilst the remaining 5 detail each project lifecycle stage as outlined in Table 1.

Project Lifecycle Stages and Approval Gates (AGs): The number of stages of the project lifecycle has been condensed from 6 to 5 as shown in Table 1. Four PSC Decision Gates (DGs) have been reduced to three IG AGsⁱⁱ.

Deliverables: The deliverables required under the IGs are broadly comparable with those expected under the PSC. However, there are some subtle differences making it imperative that the IGs documents are consulted when preparing deliverables. For example, the Strategic Assessment, equivalent to the Project Outline Document in the Transport Appraisal Framework (TAF), is now required to establish and assess the long-list of options. The Strategic Assessment requirement threshold has been raised from €10 million to €20 million. The Detailed Project Brief and Procurement Strategy has been replaced by the Detailed Business Case, Project Execution Plan and Procurement Strategy.

Climate and Environmental Performance: To better capture the carbon and environmental impact of proposals, further guidance on climate considerations is given in the IGs. There is a new requirement for a specific section in the Preliminary Business Case (PBC) necessitating a review of climate related outcomes attributable to the project. The IGs also require the climate resilience of the project to be assessed.

Major Projects: The IGs seek to reduce the administrative burden in delivering major capital projects. Government is no longer the Approving Authority for major projects, instead the relevant Approving Authority should seek Government consent at AG1 and AG3 stages and Ministerial approval must be sought at AG2 before proceeding to tendering.

- The general threshold for major projects to undergo the External Assurance Process (EAP) review and Major Projects Advisory Group (MPAG) review is increased from €100 million to €200 million.
- The EAP and MPAG reviews will be formalised as a requirement for major projects (over €200 million) at the PBC stage, prior to Government consent. Major projects are not usually required to be submitted for EAP review or to MPAG prior to future AGs, however if there are outstanding

issues or concerns around the proposal that the MPAG feel need further scrutiny before tendering, MPAG may request in their review report at the PBC stage that the proposals be submitted to them again at the pre-tendering stage prior to AG2.

Programmatic Approach: A definition of what constitutes a programme is provided and an approach to programmatic appraisal is included. Allowance is made for the submission of a single programmatic approach provided all the necessary and required information of all the constituent projects are captured within it.

Where a programmatic approach is taken the IGs require the following:

- A rationale for undertaking a programmatic approach.
- Screening of potential projects for a programme as part of the Strategic Assessment process.
- Identification of a single Sponsoring Agency for a programme.
- Appraisal of a range of programme level options, which examine different prioritisations and combinations of constituent projects, at optioneering stage.
- An assessment of risks at project level within a programme.
- Post Completion Reports at both project and overall programmatic level.
- Ex-Post Evaluation to be conducted for the overall programme but incorporating an assessment of each of the constituent projects.

Within the IGs there is an acknowledgement that taking a programmatic approach requires multiple deliverables, which depend on the progress and implementation of individual projects throughout their lifecycle.

Table 1 IGs Approval Gates and Deliverables vs PSC

Infrastructure Guidelines				Public Spending Code		
Stage	Deliverable	Approval Gate	Stage	Deliverable	Decision Gate	
1	Strategic Assessment ⁱⁱⁱ and Preliminary Business Case	AG1	1	Strategic Assessment	Strategic Assessment	DG0
			2	Preliminary Business Case	Preliminary Business Case	DG1
2	Pre-tender: Project design, planning and procurement strategy	AG2	3	Final Business Case	Detailed project brief and procurement strategy	DG2
	Project Execution Plan Procurement Strategy				Tender documents	
3	Post-tender Final Business Case	AG3			Final Business Case	DG3
4	Implementation		4	Implementation	Monitoring Reports	
5	Post Completion Review and Benefits Realisation		5	Review	Project Completion Report	
			6	Ex-post evaluation	Ex-Post Evaluation Report	

Next Steps for IGs Adoption by Sponsoring Agencies

- Progress all projects and programmes in line with the requirements of the IGs from 1 January 2024.
- Ensure that a section on Climate and Environmental Performance is included within the business case deliverable.
- Sponsoring Agencies should be aware that the NTA will publish updated Project Approval Guidelines (PAGs) to take account of relevant aspects of the IGs and related updates to Transport Appraisal Framework (TAF).
- The IGs are heavily aligned with Capital Works Management Framework procurement, therefore further consideration will need to be given to how non-standard procurement approaches align with the new guidance.

Key Links

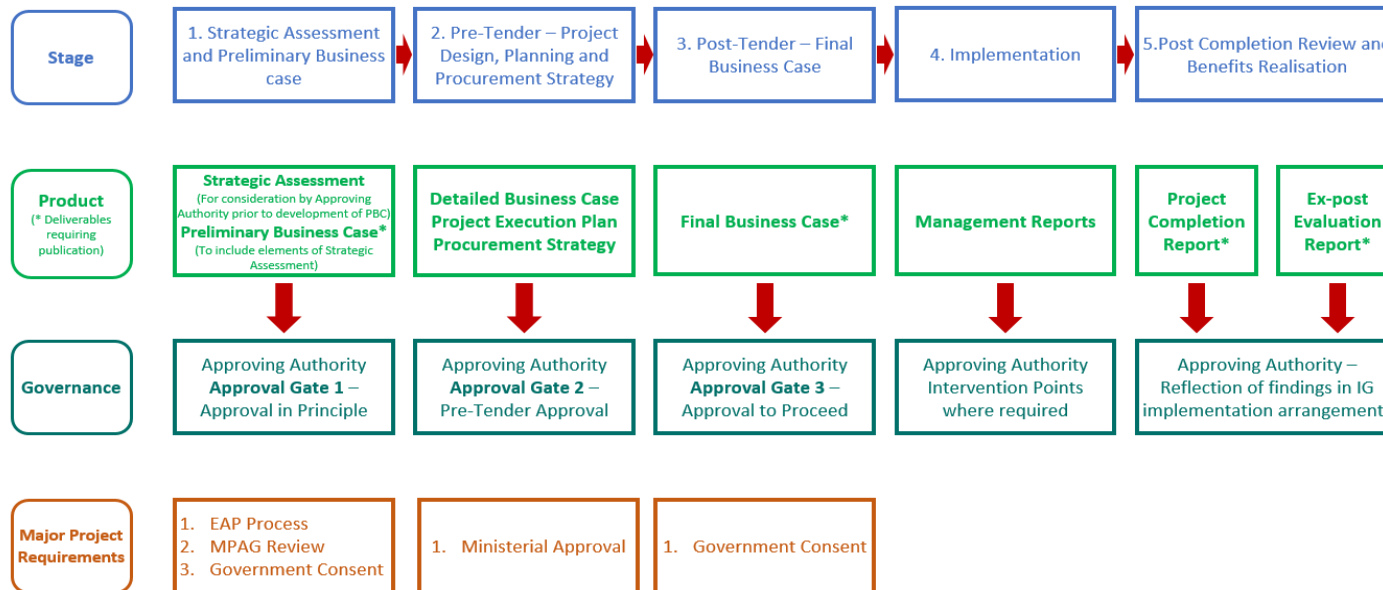
Infrastructure Guidelines (<https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/e8040-infrastructure-guidelines/>)

Transport Appraisal Framework (<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/c9038-transport-appraisal-framework-taf/>)

NTA Project Approval Guidelines (<https://www.nationaltransport.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/NTA-Project-Approval-Guidelines-Document.pdf>)

Infrastructure Guidelines Project Lifecycle

The applicable deliverables, AGs, reviews and approvals required are set out in the 'Infrastructure Guidelines Project Lifecycle' chart below^{vii}.



ⁱ The key changes from the PSC to the IGs, as understood by the NTA Capital Programme Office, are summarised. This list is high level and not exhaustive. As such the detailed guidance which forms the Infrastructure Guidelines should be consulted throughout the preparation of any IGs AG deliverable.

ⁱⁱ For projects with an estimated capital cost of more than €20 million, four PSC DGs have been reduced to three IG AGs. For projects with an estimated cost of less than €20 million only the first and third of these apply.

ⁱⁱⁱ For projects above a €20 million capital expenditure threshold, elements required for the Strategic Assessment (SA) are still required as a separate deliverable for AG1. The SA is submitted to the Approving Authority for consideration prior to the development of the PBC.

^{iv} Projects below the €20 million threshold of Capital Expenditure may commence without the requirement for a Strategic Assessment however, the strategic case, rationale and objectives of the proposal must still be clearly documented within the Preliminary Business Case.

^v The PBC should include elements of the strategic assessment.

^{vi} AG2 deliverables are not required for projects below the €20 million threshold of Capital Expenditure.

^{vii} Based on PowerPoint Presentation issued from the Department of Public Expenditure NDP Delivery and Reform outlining many of the key changes between PSC and IGs.