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Transport Infrastructure Ireland

TII Publications



Project Appraisal Guidelines Unit 2.1 - Project/Programme Outline Documents

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Update to bring into compliance with the Transport Appraisal Framework (June 2023) and updated approaches to PMG Phases

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1. Context

This Unit of the Project Appraisal Guidelines (PAG) provides guidance on the structure and content of a Project/Programme Outline Document. This updated PAG Unit supersedes PAG Unit 2.1 – Strategic Assessment Report.

1.1 Project/Programme Outline Documents

The Project/Programme Outline Document (POD) was introduced by the Department of Transport (DoT) as part of the Transport Appraisal Framework (TAF), which replaced the Common Appraisal Framework for Transport Projects and Programme in June 2023. The POD is the first deliverable of Phase 0 (Scope and Strategic Assessment) under the TII Project Management Guidelines (PMG) project phases.

A POD is required on all projects/programmes in excess of €15m (total costs incl. VAT). For projects/programmes with an estimated cost between €15m and €200m, the POD must be reviewed and approved by the relevant Approving Authority before the project can proceed to Phase 1 (Concept & Feasibility).

TII are the Approving Authority for national road and various active travel and greenway projects/programmes with costs under €200m. For projects/programmes with an estimated cost in excess of €200m, the Approving Authority must submit the POD to the relevant investment or policy division in the DoT for review. As set out in TAF, the review of the POD is not a Decision Gate in the project lifecycle but its purpose is to give the Approving Authority (and the DoT, where relevant) knowledge of forthcoming schemes, and give Sponsoring Agencies feedback on proposals.

The requirement to produce a POD is applicable to all public capital projects and programmes in the transport sector. This PAG Unit therefore translates the generic requirements of the POD as outlined in Module 3 of the TAF into requirements for TII projects and programmes and provides guidance on the type of information and level of detail required. For additional guidance on preparing a POD for active travel and greenway projects, please refer to PE-PAG-02041 PAG Unit 2.2 – Project/Programme Outline Documents for Active Modes and Greenways.

1.2 Project and Programme Outline Document Structure

TAF Module 3 sets out the areas that must be covered in a POD. The relevant areas for TII projects and programmes are:

- Summary of the Proposed Scheme
 - Project Need (also referred to as “Investment Rationale”)
 - Strategic Alignment with National and Local Policies
 - Objectives
 - Preliminary Demand Analysis
- Modal and Service Delivery Options
- Costs and Affordability
- An Appraisal Plan
- An Outline Governance Plan

Each one of these areas is separately addressed in this PAG unit in relation to the level of detail required.

Under the previous version of PAG Unit 2.1, the Strategic Assessment Report (SAR) was the main deliverable at Phase 0. The POD replaces the SAR as the main Phase 0 deliverable although several elements of the SAR are retained. However, the POD is expected to be a more streamlined deliverable which provides a high-level summary of a proposed project or programme.

The POD is therefore a concise summary of the Strategic Assessment process. As a guide, it is recommended that a POD report should not exceed 30 pages in length. If a POD report submitted by a Sponsoring Agency is considered excessive in length and detail by the Approving Authority, it will be returned and recommended that it is reproduced to an appropriate level of detail and length before it is reviewed.

The basic details captured in the POD can be subsequently elaborated upon as part of the Phase 1 Feasibility Report deliverable. The Feasibility Report is produced at Phase 1 (Concept & Feasibility) under the TII PMG and PAG. The Feasibility Report produced at Phase 1 can therefore build upon the basic information provided in the POD and refine the details of the project/programme as further information becomes available.

TAF guidance notes that PODs should avoid referencing a specific modal solution within their title. Project or programme titles at this initial stage of the project lifecycle should reflect the rationale for a proposed intervention. For example, the Sponsoring Agency should avoid the POD title "Town X western relief road" and instead refer to the project as e.g., "Town X congestion relief project". This is to avoid setting expectations around the delivery of certain outputs and potentially biasing the option selection process in later stages of the project lifecycle. It is only after a preferred modal option has been identified in the Preliminary Business Case (PBC) that project titles should reference a particular modal intervention.

2. TII Phase 0 (Scope & Strategic Assessment)

The lifecycle of a TII capital project is split into 8 defined project phases (Phases 0 – 7) as illustrated in Figure 2.1.2. Phase 0 (Scope & Strategic Assessment) is the first phase of the project lifecycle as set out in the TII PMG and this phase aligns with the ‘Proposal Initiation’ stage of DoT’s Transport Project Lifecycle.

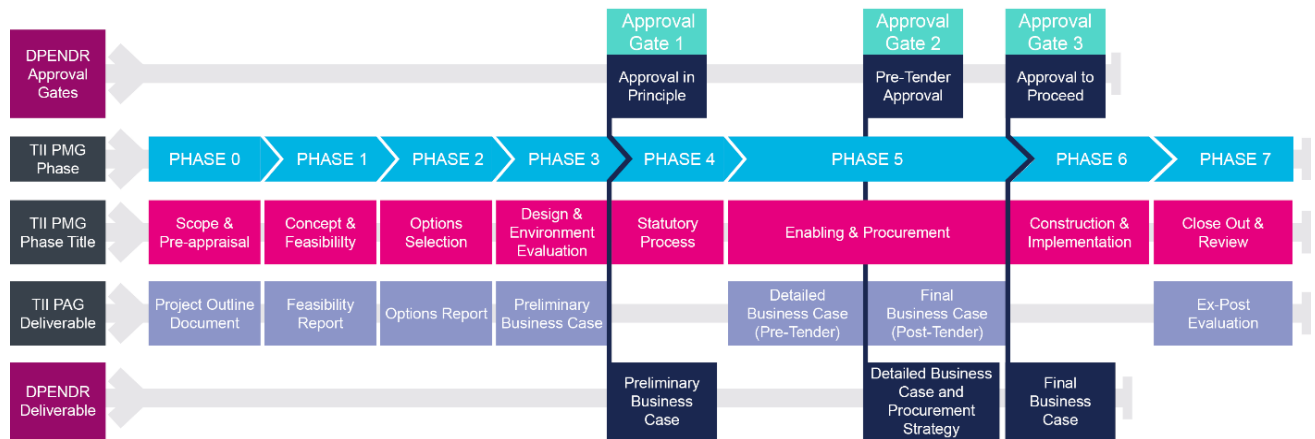


Figure 2.1.2 TII National Road PMG Project Phases

At Phase 0 (Scope & Strategic Assessment), there will be limited information available to inform the POD. The type of TII project or programme which require a POD will vary greatly. However, the POD should aim to provide a concise overview of the proposal and allow for more detail regarding the project or programme to be captured in later phases and associated deliverables.

Projects or programmes with capital costs in excess of €15m will require a POD to comply with the TAF. This PAG Unit is therefore structured to provide guidance on the level of detail to be included in the POD for these projects or programmes.

3. Contents of the Project/Programme Outline Document

The following sections provide details of the structure and content of the POD for TII projects and programmes. As outlined in Section 1.2 of this unit, it is important that the POD is developed as a concise document and the content described below should be reported on a high-level / summary basis in the POD.

3.1 Summary of the Proposed Scheme

The POD should provide a summary of the proposed project or programme. This summary should include:

- An introduction to the proposed project or programme
- The project need
- A high-level demand assessment
- A summary of how the proposal aligns with policy
- An outline of scheme objectives

3.1.1 Introduction

The introduction should provide a high-level overview of the proposed project or programme and outline that the document is compliant with the requirements of the TAF for a POD. Items to consider as part of the introduction to the proposed scheme include the geographical setting of the planned investment and information on the existing transport network within that geographical setting. It may also be beneficial to outline demographic and socio-economic conditions such as employment and income levels within the context of the proposed scheme.

3.1.2 Project Need

The project need should summarise at a high level, the need to address current and projected issues with the existing transport infrastructure and/or services. This should be supported by a high-level analysis of available information. With evidence, this should demonstrate current and potential future problems and their underlying causes.

This should include, but is not limited to, existing/potential future issues in relation to safety, journey time, the environment, journey time reliability, accessibility and social inclusion, severance, connectivity, employment, socio-economic factors, etc. It is important to note that not all these headings will be relevant to every scheme and that other issues may be relevant.

It is also important to consider if there are opportunities to make a potentially beneficial intervention. Opportunities in a transport investment context include encouraging more sustainable travel patterns or developing the local tourist market.

3.1.3 High Level Demand Assessment

Where possible a high-level estimate of current and future travel demand arising from the proposed transport investment should be provided. The demand for travel forms part of the Project Need, as such any available information that can be used to provide context on the current and potential future demand and details of the source of this information should be provided under this section of the POD.

Information on existing travel demand may be available from recent surveys (traffic, public transport, active modes etc.) or the latest base year TII National Transport Model or National Transport Authority (NTA) Regional Model.

Demographic and population trends such as that outlined in CSO census data¹ should be used in this section to enhance the description of the local area or transport corridor in relation to mode share for education and commuting trips. Information on public transport services in the area under consideration (rail, inter-urban bus, local bus services etc.) should also be provided. In addition to any information on greenways, blueways etc. of relevance should be included.

Where relevant any information on special zones (e.g., Airport or Ports) should be included if relevant to the area or transport corridor under consideration.

A high-level estimate of future year travel demand for the proposed project or programme may be available from a future year TII NTpM, NTA Regional Model or a strategic transport study/strategy.

3.1.4 Strategic Alignment & Policy Context

The alignment of the need for a proposed project or programme with public policy and strategies should be clearly and concisely set out in this section of the POD. In the context of National Roads, the key investment priorities and commitments outlined in TII's National Roads 2040 (NR2040) strategy must be considered. As part of NR2040, TII will incorporate economic, social and environmental sustainability objectives and goals in all decisions, policies, projects and processes. It should be noted that NR2040 is a multi-modal transport policy which encourages use of sustainable travel modes, reference to NR2040 does not imply a bias towards road-based solutions.

In addition to NR2040, the POD should also consider and briefly outline a proposal's alignment with other national strategies and policies including the National Planning Framework (NPF) and its respective National Strategic Outcomes (NSO), the National Development Plan (NDP), the National Investment Framework for Transport in Ireland (NIFTI), and the Climate Action Plan.

The POD should also outline if the proposal is aligned with national and local climate adaptation strategies such as the National Adaptation Framework, Sectoral Adaptation Plan and Local Authority Climate Action Plans.

In addition, any European, national, regional or local policy or strategy context that supports the project need should be highlighted in this section of the POD. Examples of these include:

- Local Area Development Plans
- County Development Plans
- Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES)
- Metropolitan Area Strategic Plans (MASPS)
- National Transport Authority's Metropolitan Area Transport Strategies

It is also important to identify objectives of other agencies, departments and government policies that interact with the proposed project or programme. From the outset of the project, it is important to consider the wider implications of the interventions being proposed and not only ensure they do not impede the objectives of other agencies or local government departments but seek to aid, where possible, their implementation.

¹ CSO Small Area Population Statistics

When conducting a policy review for the Strategic Alignment section, it is important to use concise reporting and focus on the most relevant points to reduce the size of the report. For example, it would be acceptable to create a summary table listing the policy documents reviewed and outline the key aspects of each policy for the project.

3.1.5 Objectives

Based on the project need and relevant policy context, the POD must clearly set out high-level objectives for the project or programme. Objectives should be clearly targeted at addressing the core problems and opportunities identified and should align with local, regional and national government policy as well as any other relevant transport strategies and investment plans. Objectives can be assigned to control the potential of negative externalities that develop over the course of a project including severance, increased social exclusion etc.

The objectives should be identified on the basis of their applicability to the aims of the project and the rationale for intervention. It is not necessary to identify an objective under each of the seven TAF criteria (transport user benefits and other economic impacts, accessibility, social, land use, safety, climate change and local environment). The objectives should cover a broad range of issues, integrating accessibility, sustainable transport, compact growth, social issues, climate change and modal shift into their development to ensure the objectives meet the requirements of NIFTI, TAF and NPF.

Even at this early stage it is understood and expected that the project will aim to avoid and reduce any potential environmental impacts and this approach does not need to be the basis for setting project objectives. Objectives should mainly be based on the transport problem or opportunities. In relation to possible local environmental or climate change objectives, issues such as decarbonisation, air quality and noise emissions can be the basis for objective setting by focusing on modal shift and reducing emissions associated with the use of private motorised transport. Biodiversity net gain opportunities can also be considered at this early stage and further refined as the project progresses.

At this early Phase of the project or programme, the preferred mode for the proposed project or programme will not yet have been confirmed so the project objectives must not be case making or orientated towards a specific mode or service option. Objectives also do not need to be SMART (specific, measurable, attributable, realistic, timebound) at the POD stage. However, Sponsoring Agencies should be aware that SMART requirements will need to be developed for the Feasibility Report at Phase 1. The development of SMART objectives is important in the context that the projects objectives can be used in the initial assessment of options at Phase 1.

Sponsoring agencies and practitioners preparing a POD may find it beneficial to utilise analytical tools such as Logic Path Models to help develop and link objectives with the issues and opportunities outlined in the rationale for investment. Further guidance on developing a Logic Path Model is available in PAG Unit 2.3.

3.2 Exploring Potential Solutions

Based on the issues and opportunities identified, the investment priorities and commitments outlined in NR2040, potential solutions should be explored, which consider the different types of transport interventions that may address the need for the scheme in respect to the NIFTI modal and intervention hierarchies. Further information on both hierarchies is included in Module 4 of the TAF and Section 4.3 of NIFTI.

There are no Strategic Options created at Phase 0 until the detailed baseline assessment has taken place in the Phase 1 Feasibility Report. No assessment of potential solutions will take place in the Phase 0 POD.

This section fulfils the TAF requirement to look at 'modal and service' delivery options in the PAG Process at Phase 0. As part of the Phase 1 (Concept and Feasibility) appraisal process, the potential solutions considered in the Phase 0 POD will be examined in more detail and contribute to the development of the list of Strategic Options for the Phase 1 Feasibility Report.

3.3 Costs and Affordability

3.3.1 Forecast Cost Range

An indicative forecast range for capital costs for the proposed project or programme is required based on the range of identified options. This will inform the level of appraisal required under TAF. It will also indicate to the relevant Approving Authority the potential scale of the project.

Current market costs and existing information/reference costs should be used where available to estimate which indicative forecast cost range the project is likely to fall into. However, the forecasted cost ranges should avoid anchoring estimates around a single option category. As the preferred option has not yet been identified, indicative costs ranges need to consider, at a high level, the potential range of options i.e. multiple modes or intervention types.

Given cost uncertainty at the outset of a project, a broad estimate of potential forecast cost ranges should be provided, indicating whether the project budget is likely to be under or over €200 million.

3.3.2 Assessment of Affordability

The TAF and investment guidance from the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform (DPENDR) request that an early assessment of affordability and intended sources of funding be provided in the POD. Where a TII project or programme has been identified as part of any national capital investment strategy or investment plan, such as the National Development Plan, this should be referenced in the POD.

A number of TII capital projects have been identified for delivery under the NDP. In addition, there are numerous types of TII projects and programmes of various scale and complexity not specifically included in the NDP (e.g. safety schemes, minor realignments, junction upgrades, maintenance, ITS etc.) but which are vital to the on-going upgrade of the National Road Network and fall under a specific funding stream within TII.

Funding of TII projects/programmes, both capital and maintenance, are classified under the following four funding streams within TII:

- Capital Projects
- Capital Public Private Partnership (PPP) Projects
- Capital Programmes (Total Programme Value)
- Maintenance

In the POD, the project should identify whether it is specified in the NDP or TII capital projects programme for funding, or if there is another funding stream identified.

3.4 Appraisal Plan

The POD must include a brief appraisal plan which indicates the likely appraisal pathway to be used during later phases of the project. There are a comprehensive range of PAG units which provide guidance on the different methodologies which can be applied, this guidance should be applied by practitioners throughout the project lifecycle.

In exceptional cases, non-standard methods will need to be applied to capture the unique benefits of a project e.g. implementing a new technology like variable speed limits.

The appraisal plan should provide a high-level summary of the intended appraisal approach and highlight if there are specific appraisal approaches or methodologies required which deviate from standard PAG appraisal guidance. It may be useful to summarise the detail of the appraisal plan in a table format similar to Table 2.1.2.


Table 2.1.2 Example Appraisal Plan Summary Table

TAF Appraisal Plan Requirement	Relevant PAG Unit
Identification of the Appraisal Study Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PAG Unit 3.0 - Feasibility Report
Data Collection Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PAG Unit 5.2 - Data Collection
Strategic Options Appraisal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PAG Unit 3.0 - Feasibility Report
Detailed Appraisal of Preliminary Options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic Appraisal • (PAG Unit 5.0 - Transport Modelling Overview and PAG Unit 6.0 - Cost Benefit Analysis Overview) • Demand Analysis • (PAG Unit 5.3 - Travel Demand Projections) • Costs Estimates • (PAG Unit 6.2 Preparation of Scheme Costs) • Technical Parameters • (PAG Unit 6.11 - National Parameters Values Sheet) • Financial Appraisal • (PAG Unit 11.0 - Financial Appraisal)
Programme Level Appraisal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PAG Unit 9.0 – Ex-Post Evaluation
Sensitivity Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PAG Unit 6.1 - Guidance on Conducting CBA
Risks and Contingency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project Management Guidelines

3.5 Outline Governance Plan

As part of the POD document, an outline governance plan should be provided that identifies the roles of the Sponsoring Agency, Approving Authority and Parent Department. This will be further developed in the Project Execution Plan at Phase 1 as set out in the TII PMG.



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