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National Infrastructure Commission
1 Horse Guards Road
London
SW1A 2HQ

Email:

northernevidence@Infrastructure-Commission.gsi.gov.uk
londonevidence@Infrastructure-Commission.gsi.gov.uk
energyevidence@Infrastructure-Commission.gsi.gov.uk

Unite note to National Infrastructure Commission Calls for Evidence

This note is submitted by Unite the Union. Unite is the UK's largest trade union with over 1.4 million members across all sectors of the economy including manufacturing, transport, energy and utilities, construction, metals and foundries, information technology, food and agriculture, financial services, health, local government and the not for profit sectors.

Unite is unable to respond to the three separate calls for evidence, not least on account of the tight timescale given - effectively eight weeks including the Christmas period. This is not a suitable consultation period.

However, we do want to make an important general point to the Commission.

The current crisis in the steel industry has highlighted the need for British steel to be at the heart of major infrastructure projects.

European rules give EU governments the capacity to award procurement contracts based on 'buying social', a principle which Unite supports. This allows governments to consider the social impact of contracts through the 'most advantageous economic tenure' in the award procedure which will enable governments to put more emphasis on quality, environmental considerations, social aspects and innovation, whilst taking into account the price and life cycle costs of goods being procured.

Government has amended procure guidelines, but the impact of these changes will not be apparent for a considerable time.

We note that this is a point picked up by the House of Commons Business, Innovation and Skills Committee in its report into the UK steel industry published just before Christmas 2015.¹ The Committee calls on the Government to “actively champion the use of domestic steel in large public infrastructure projects.” More specifically, it recommends that:

“the National Infrastructure Commission looks closely at how the interests of UK steel industry and its supply chain can be considered in relation to large scale procurement decisions.”

We believe that major infrastructure projects should use British steel to support steelmaking and manufacturing in the UK, a key component of the UK economy.

Harish Patel
National Officer for Metals and Foundry
Unite

Unite the Union
Unite House
128 Theobalds Road
Holborn
London WC1X 8TN

[email address redacted]

Contact:
John Earls
Head of Research
Unite the Union
[email address redacted]

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¹ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201516/cmselect/cmbis/546/546.pdf> (page 16, paragraph 20)