GIRI Working together to eliminate error in construction
Get It Right Initiative
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GIRI's feedback on the Competition and Markets Authority's (CMA) civil engineering market study interim report

January 2026

Context: the impact of error on productivity in the UK civil engineering market

The Get It Right Initiative is a not-for-profit organisation working to eradicate error from the construction industry. Launched 10 years ago at the Institution of Civil Engineers, we represent over 130 of the UK's largest and most significant construction businesses – including civil engineering firms, investors, developers, major government-backed programmes and expert consultants.

The interim report to the CMA's market study identified that a healthy civil engineering market is fundamental to creating and maintaining the roads and railways needed to enable growth and productivity in the wider economy. It also noted that the industry must improve its own productivity to do so.

Avoidable error is a significant obstacle – GIRI's research found that it costs the UK construction sector up to £25 billion each year. That is greater than the total public spending on maintaining roads and railways each year, which the interim report puts at £19 billion.

However, despite being a major burden on productivity, error is not mentioned in the report.

GIRI recommends the CMA reflects the importance of error reduction in its final report, recognising it as a market issue, not just a project level concern. As well as improving productivity, error reduction can help to build confidence among investors. This in turn helps to drive competition in the market by laying the groundworks for more innovative funding models such as private finance initiatives.

Routes to embedding error reduction within the market

The benefits of error reduction are widespread, from improved safety to sustainability, but for the purposes of this response, we wish to highlight three key recommendations for improving productivity within civil engineering, supporting better outcomes.

The first two recommendations relate to **procurement policies and approaches** and have been considered alongside the interim report's findings in this area.

1. **To acknowledge that error reduction training is necessary to improving the health of the civil engineering market**

   - Error in the industry is often unreported, and sometimes covered up. Civil engineering is in need of a culture shift so its workforce has the attitudes and behaviours required to identify error, speak up about it and address it.
   - Training can minimise the need for costly rework when roads or railways are not built right the first time. GIRI has trained over 10,000 individuals in error reduction, and the rate is growing exponentially since the introduction of our Train-the-Trainer scheme, which allows companies to become approved training providers themselves.
   - Error reduction training should be seen as an investment that helps boost competition and raise standards in the market overall.
   - The CMA could recommend that error avoidance should be considered as a procurement priority within its remedy area for the adoption of best practice. Error reduction training should be initiated in programmes where there is public involvement either through direct funding or a PFI-style arrangement. The Get It Right Initiative's members have established prototypes for this model, including at High Speed 2.
   - GIRI has prepared a series of resources, including our design guide, training programme and error reduction framework. We would be very happy to share these to inform the CMA's work.

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2. **To mandate error reporting for public-backed or funded construction rail and road programmes**

- With profit margins already tight in civil engineering, the £25 billion cost of avoidable error represents a serious competitive risk, especially amid rising insolvency rates in the construction industry. But it can be difficult to track.
- We have been working with Cranfield University to develop a methodology through which to quantify error. This works in a similar way to accident frequency reporting (AFR) in the health and safety regime, categorising errors and recording them. We've been trialling it with the Construction Leadership Council but uptake was too low to prove conclusive – reflecting the need for attitudinal change in the industry.
- The report suggests that the National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority (NISTA) should provide further transparency on its Infrastructure Pipeline. GIRI proposes taking this engagement further, and that it mandates that any government-backed rail and road projects, such as those funded through a private finance initiative model, should adopt error-reporting.
- We recommend that NISTA would be an appropriate agency through which to introduce the regime. The top-down influence, especially since the government is UK construction's biggest client, can spur a shift that will otherwise be difficult due to the fragmented nature of the sector. GIRI is already working with the Department for Business and Trade on a productivity PAS to accelerate error reduction through public procurement.

Our final recommendation aligns with the interim report's recommendations on **fast-tracking regulatory approvals for new products and technologies**.

3. **To fast-track regulatory approvals for new technologies that can reduce error, while ensuring AI-enabled products are used with care**

- The interim report recommends that relevant regulators fast-track – where appropriate – approvals for new products and technologies that can substantially improve outcomes in civil engineering.
- GIRI has produced research reports on the use of artificial intelligence (AI) and innovative technologies for error reduction, including successful use cases on highways and railways, and agrees that regulatory reform can support the development of further solutions.
- The sector is increasingly embracing AI to improve safety and enhance productivity, especially in planning and design, project management and quality control and compliance.
- However, it will only be effective if deployed with safeguards in place, to ensure it doesn't introduce new errors. If regulatory approvals on new products are fast-tracked, civil engineering firms must be advised on how to use them in a way that helps productivity, rather than hinders it – whether that's by having a human in the loop or encouraging systems to show their working.

Despite facing challenging market conditions, the UK civil engineering sector has strong pedigree. Chipping away at the cost of error when building roads and railways would free up headroom for businesses, tackling the issues with productivity identified by both GIRI's research and the CMA's interim report. If its suggestions are taken into account, GIRI believes the CMA can influence better outcomes in civil engineering and help to restore confidence and competition in the market.

Cliff Smith, executive director of GIRI, would be happy to discuss these recommendations further. He can be contacted here: ██████████████████████

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Appendix

GIRI Design Guide: https://designguide.getitright.uk.com/

GIRI Research Report: Artificial intelligence and error reduction - the opportunities and challenges: https://getitright.uk.com/reports/giri-research-report-artificial-intelligence-and-error-reduction-the-opportunities-and-challenges

GIRI Research Report: The use of technology to reduce errors in design and construction, a best practice casebook: https://getitright.uk.com/reports/giri-research-report-the-use-of-technology-to-reduce-errors-in-design-and-construction-a-best-practice-casebook