Preface

This is third time I have found myself writing about the European infrastructure. These previous works (co-written with a now retired colleague) were very much set within the context of the Trans-European Networks (TENs) policy initiative. Throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s, TENs seemed to be the ‘big idea’ emanating from the European Commission. Initially this was a complement to the Single Market and – more latterly – as a catalyst for the EU’s comparatively lethargic economic growth. In between, the ambitions of the programme expanded along with the expansion of the EU to include the former Soviet satellite states of Central and Eastern Europe. However reflecting upon TENs after more than 20 years it is evident that the hype heavily outstripped the reality of the process, with its efficacy (as a supranational initiative) directly curtailed by the inability/unwillingness of states to fund the TENs projects, and also of the lack of available finance available from other sources. This trend has been especially evident in transport (see Chapter 2). In other sectors, whilst more diverse and commercial sources of finance have been available, these have not always resulted in TENs being developed as envisaged (see Chapters 3 and 4). Nonetheless TENs – as a policy programme – remains very relevant to the pattern of infrastructure development across the EU. As such, TENs (and various supporting and flanking initiatives) will form a focal point of analysis within this book. However – as will also be evident throughout this book – there are (in practice) a multitude of processes promoting the interconnection of national systems.

Within the context of the expansive literature on regionalism, this work continues the theme of previous works in viewing the development of European infrastructural integration as essentially intergovernmental in nature. This reflects a prevailing perspective that infrastructuring is a territorial strategy deployed by states to assert and reinforce their territoriality. In this context, the core building block of the regional systems is interconnection between what are (normally) mature national systems with supranational bodies operating as forums for co-operation and co-ordination between states. It is through such mechanisms that

national systems adapt to the tension placed upon them by the process of regionalism. It is also evident that this regionalism within infrastructure systems is also fuelled by a desire to use co-operation and co-ordination to address issues of common concern. These processes – as highlighted throughout the work – reflect an emergent overlap between territorial and geo-strategies. However despite such tensions national systems still overwhelmingly evolve to meet national needs due not just to the nature of traffic that flows among/between them but also due to the political economy of how such systems are financed.

The sectoral focus within this work is upon those infrastructures identified within the initial TENs strategy (i.e. transport, energy and telecommunications/information infrastructures). However the degree of policy activism within each of these now varies markedly. In transport and energy, there is sustained activism by the EU (though often through operator-driven programmes). In telecommunications/information, any degree of activism in hard infrastructure has been replaced by the indirect measures associated with the reform of what has become termed ‘soft infrastructure’. The emergence of soft infrastructure as a theme within infrastructure systems reflects not merely a market-driven process in their development but also a need to take holistic views of the development of such systems. Indeed such holism has led to a claim that regionalism needed to extend beyond these ‘classic’ economic infrastructures into water and/or social infrastructure systems. However in both, regionalism seems to be very limited.

The book was written against the background of the UK’s formal departure from the EU. This often meant that statistics included data from the EU that included the UK. I have tried throughout the book to exclude the UK the data sets used. However it was important throughout to look at non-EU Western European states and to include them in the offered analysis wherever possible. Across each of the sectors examined the degree of interconnection between EU and non-EU states in the infrastructural integration process does vary quite markedly. Nonetheless the interconnection across Europe is not simply an EU process, and it is important to include this in the offered analysis. Overall the importance of infrastructural integration in the geographic region of Europe is an important area of study, and one that has direct relevance to other regions. Europe is a region where economic integration has progressed the furthest, and its experience in integrating national systems offers an important exemplar for other regions. Europe’s experience underscores the importance of both formal and informal integration in shaping

the interconnection of national systems. However, arguably of more importance is that Europe's experience underlines just how difficult that process can be as states seek to balance their territorial needs with the desire to adapt to a broader shifting geostrategic context.

Colin Turner
Edinburgh