



Northern & Western
Regional Assembly

REGIONAL SPATIAL AND ECONOMIC STRATEGY 2020-2032



Rialtas
na hÉireann
Government
of Ireland

Tionscadal Éireann
Project Ireland
2040



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Cathaoirleach's Message

We live in a unique place with distinct communities and diverse landscapes. Our region boasts some incredible propositions; captured in our economic catchments, clusters, sectors, people and our communities. Unearthing it all has been an incredibly illuminating exercise.

At the outset of this process, it was the wish of all our members, across the political spectrum to make our Region a better place to live in, to grow up in, to work in, and indeed to visit. The members of the NWRA were committed to making 'good strategy' by carving out a unique space based on this region's inimitable strengths.

Isolated interventions will not achieve the ambitions of this region, nor will investment in infrastructure alone. There is a complementarity and complexity to regional initiatives that we cannot ignore. We cannot aspire to be a 'Great Place to Live' if we do not manage our natural environment. Equally the region will be hampered in its growth if it does not pursue policies that encourage compact growth and scale. Thus, an integrated Growth Framework to synergise investments and plan for strategic interventions is proposed; in order to maximise returns for our 'People and Place'.

Pursuing growth through a sustainable lens and adopting policies that support a 'Greener' and 'Smarter' future will future proof this region's prosperity. This means we will have to challenge ourselves, our communities, our businesses and individuals to be innovative and design new ways of planning, working, building homes and living.

That is why, as a Regional Assembly, we welcomed the new National Planning Framework. Ireland faces a period of unprecedented change. Time will tell the full impact of new public health measures in response to the Covid-19 outbreak. However, we know the measures will impact socially, economically and spatially but we have constructed a flexible and 'living strategy' that enables policy adaptation and ongoing review.

As a body, the vision of the NWRA is to "Play a leading role in the transformation of this region into a vibrant, connected, natural, smart and a great place to live". This spatial and economic strategy provides the framework to prepare us for the challenges ahead. We now need to move into implementation. I look forward to working in partnership with the wider public, private and community sectors to deliver on the vision that we share for our region.



Cllr Declan McDonnell
Cathaoirleach

Director's View

Globally, there has been a resurgence of interest in the role of “place” in regional development. This resurgence is evident both in the discourse and in the practice of regional development.

Now, more than ever, we need effective regional planning. Not just from a spatial or socio-economic perspective but also through the lens of population health. The Covid-19 crisis reminds us of this and demonstrates the intricacy and inter-connectivity of our ecosystem. It is not only about how we adapt to global economic challenges and climate change, but also how we seize on the new dynamic. This will require a combination of response, design and innovation; in how we do business, deliver homes, build communities and value land-use - creating healthy places and promoting sustainable communities.

Successful places around the world all exhibit key ingredients - innovation, diversity, creativity and tolerance. Our region has these traits in abundance, but it also has the capability to be a leader in sustainability and consolidate its reputation as one of the best places in Ireland to live and work.

Our RSES is built on the strategic assumption that sustainability will be the future differential; a new ingredient in 'Place' success. Sustainability will drive decision making around housing, jobs, investment and the movement of people. So, let's plan for that, meaning that the 'strategic space' open to the region, on the path to 2040, is more urban, more green, more specialised and more smart.

Our RSES introduces the concept of a Growth Framework to achieve this integration, because regional growth cannot be achieved in linear steps. It's a symbiotic process. We recognise the regions weaker urban infrastructure, so have adopted a clear strategy for compact growth.

The focus of this strategy is on the Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (MASP) for Galway and tailored Regional Growth Centre Plans for Sligo, Athlone and Letterkenny - which perform city-like functions. This region is also defined by its strong connection to our rural areas, and rural economies. This requires the careful management and encouragement of development within rural areas, to ensure that they remain and grow as vibrant communities.

This Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) provides a high-level development framework for the Northern and Western Region that supports the implementation of the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the relevant economic policies and objectives of Government. It provides a 12-year strategy to deliver the transformational change that is necessary to achieve the objectives and vision of the Regional Assembly. It has been published in collaboration with all our stakeholders and we are grateful for their contribution.



David Minton
Director



An aerial photograph of a city is partially obscured by a large, semi-transparent blue triangular overlay that points towards the right. Overlaid on the image are several colorful lines (purple, blue, green, orange, red, yellow, cyan) that originate from the right edge and extend towards the top-left corner. Each line has small circular markers at regular intervals. The background shows a cityscape with buildings, streets, and a body of water under a bright, hazy sky.

Context 1

1

Context

1.1 Background

This RSES provides a high-level development framework for the Northern and Western Region that supports the implementation of the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the relevant economic policies and objectives of Government. It provides a 12-year strategy to deliver the transformational change that is necessary to achieve the objectives and vision of the Assembly.

The NWRA is well placed to ensure that the shared vision of the NPF is carried through to a local level, as it co-ordinates not only the physical planning process but also the Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs). In addition, each public body defined in the planning act is required to ensure that their respective strategies, plans and programmes are consistent with the objectives of this strategy, thus enabling alignment to be achieved.

This strategy is about delivering effective regional development for the Northern and Western Region, encompassing Connacht and the Ulster Counties of Cavan, Donegal, and Monaghan.

Figure 1: Map of the Northern & Western Regional Assembly Area

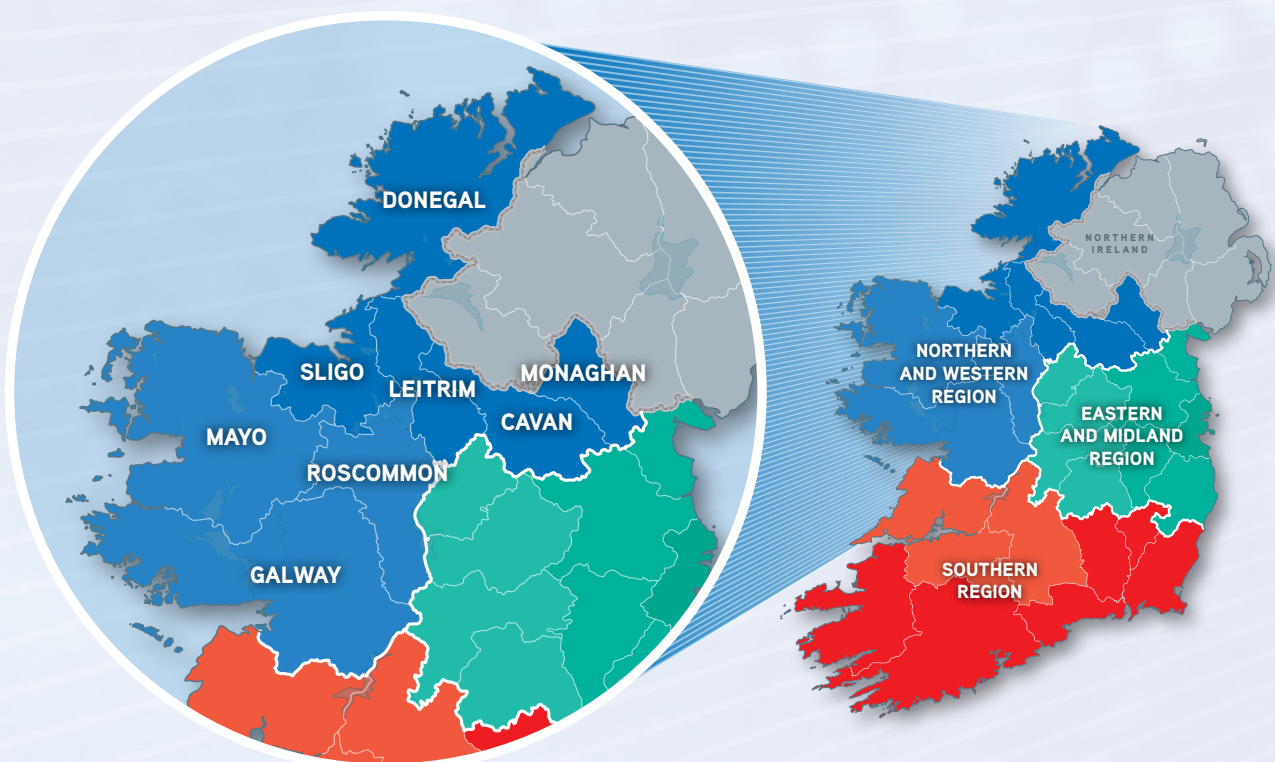
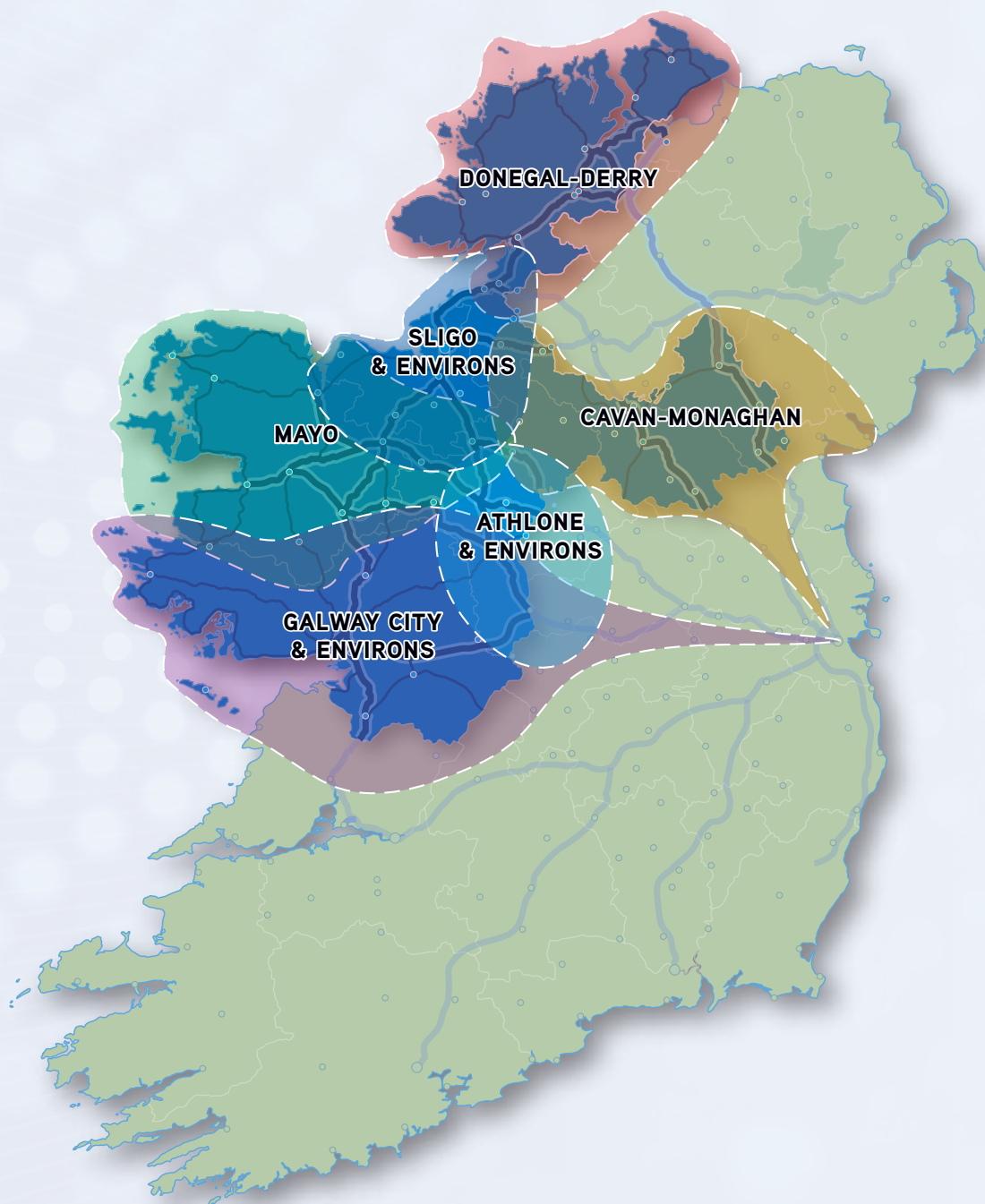


Figure 2: Map of the Northern & Western Regional Assembly Sub-Regions



Effective regional development for all our communities is about understanding their catchments, their potential and enabling each of them. It is about embracing the spatial development opportunities specific to each of our sub-regions (See Figure 2).

Many of the region's key strategic assets, opportunities and challenges are identified in this strategy and policy responses are designed to ensure that people's needs, such as access to housing, jobs, education, healthcare, recreation, ease of travel and overall well-being are met sustainably. The strategy is to connect the strengths of this incredible region and celebrate its unique sense of place.

1.2 Policy Context

UN Sustainable Development Goals

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), otherwise known as the Global Goals, are a universal call to action to end poverty. They recognise that ending poverty is interconnected with strategies that build economic sustainability and address a range of social needs including education, health, social protection and job opportunities while tackling climate change and environmental protection.

The key to success of one will often involve tackling issues more commonly associated with another. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development encourages countries to develop national responses to the SDGs and incorporate them into planning and policy.

The Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment has lead responsibility for promoting and overseeing national implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 SDGs. This is a whole-of-government initiative where all Ministers retain responsibility for implementing the individual SDGs relating to their functions. There is inherent synergy and policy alignment between the UN SDGs and the National Planning Framework.



Figure 3: UN Sustainable Development Goals





EUROPEAN GROWTH STRATEGY

The Europe 2020 strategy is the EU's agenda for growth and jobs for the current decade to 2020. It emphasises smart, sustainable and inclusive growth as a way to overcome the structural weaknesses in Europe's economy, improve its competitiveness and productivity and underpin a sustainable social market economy. Smart Specialisation Strategies contribute to the Europe 2020 objectives and will enable safer, greener, cleaner and more responsive growth for the benefit of all. The NWRA has been incredibly successful in leveraging financial support from Europe and is also playing a pivotal role in influencing European policy post-2020.

The NWRA has fulfilled the role of Managing Authority of the Border Midland and Western Regional Operational Programme since 1999, with structural funds to the value of over €4.5 bn being successfully declared to the European Commission.

It is understood that the EU funding landscape is transforming post-2020, with financial instruments, blended investments and a focus on commercial return. Through the alignment of our Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy with the EU Growth Strategy, there are significant investment and knowledge acquisition opportunities for our region. The Post 2020 Strategy shall focus on 5 priorities (Formerly referred to as thematic objectives in Europe 2020).

P01

A Smarter Europe, through innovation, digitisation, economic transformation and support to small and medium-sized businesses.

P02

A Greener, carbon-free Europe, implementing the Paris Agreement and investing in energy transition, renewables and the fight against climate change.

P03

A more Connected Europe, with strategic transport and digital networks.

P04

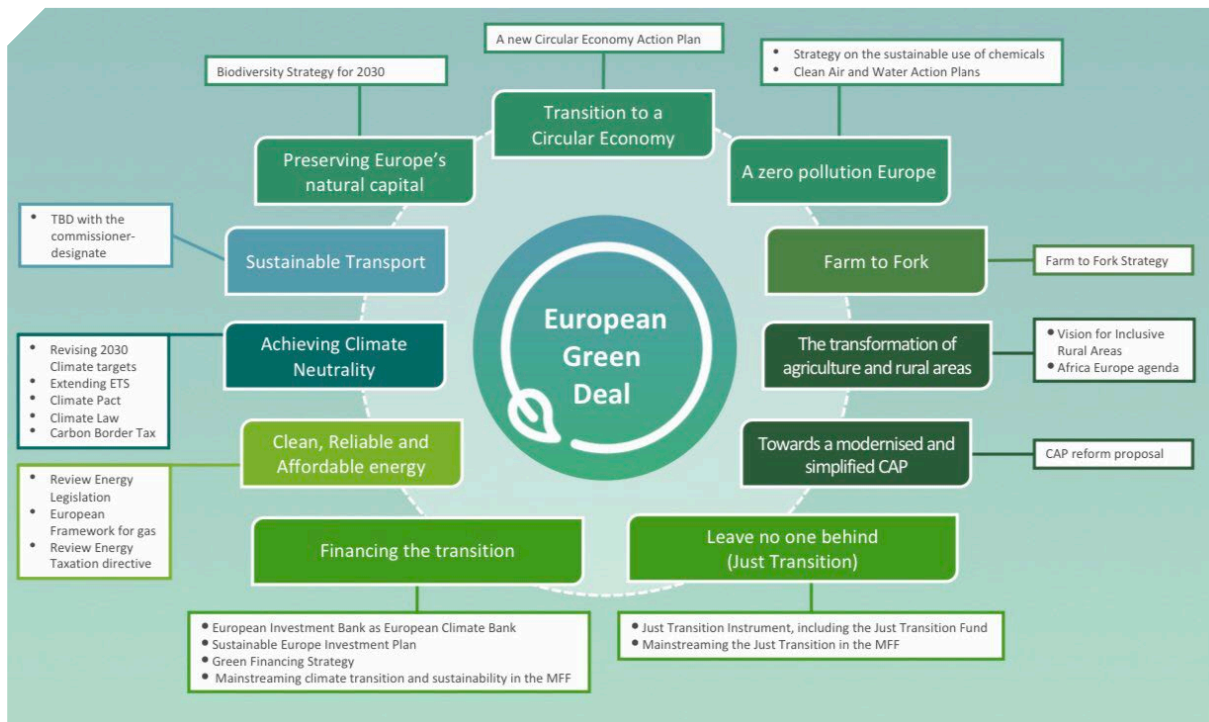
A more Social Europe, delivering on the European Pillar of Social Rights and supporting quality employment, education, skills, social inclusion and equal access to healthcare.

P05

A Europe closer to citizens supporting locally-led development strategies and sustainable urban development across the EU.

It is anticipated that the majority of the European Regional Development Fund and Cohesion Fund investments will focus on the first two objectives.

Figure 4: European Green Deal



EU GREEN DEAL

The EU Commission proposal that Europe become the world's first climate-neutral continent by 2050 is the greatest challenge and opportunity of our time. To achieve this transformational change, the European Commission presented the European Green Deal (December 2019), the most ambitious package of measures that should enable European citizens and businesses to benefit from sustainable green transition. Measures accompanied with an initial roadmap of key policies range from ambitiously cutting emissions, to investing in cutting-edge research and innovation, to preserving Europe's natural environment.

Supported by investments in green technologies, sustainable solutions and new businesses, the Green Deal can be a new EU growth strategy. Involvement and commitment of the public and all stakeholders is crucial to its success. Above all, the European Green Deal sets a path for a transition that is just and socially fair. It is designed in such a way as to leave no individual or region behind in the great transformation ahead.

ALLOCATION OF FUNDING - A REGION IN TRANSITION

The European Commission categorises regions based on their GDP per head of population (per capita) compared to the EU average.

- **Less developed regions** - where GDP per inhabitant was less than 75 % of the EU average;
- **Transition regions** - where GDP per inhabitant was between 75 % and 100 % of the EU average; and
- **More developed regions** - where GDP per inhabitant was more than 100 % of the EU average.

The GDP per capita within the Northern and Western Region has contracted and is between 75% and 100% of the EU average. As a consequence, the European Commission has reclassified the Northern and Western region of Ireland as a 'Transition Region'. This means that for the Post 2020 (2021-2027) funding period, the region will move back from a "More Developed Region" to a "Transition Region", highlighting that this region

has not prospered economically compared to the more Developed Regions of Ireland and is a call to action by Government to positively discriminate in favour of this region.

The implication of this movement within the context of European Structural Funds is that they provide “Positive Discrimination” towards regions that are not within the “More Developed” category, as they are designed to counter any imbalance among regions. This provides the Northern and Western Region greater opportunity through more flexible funding opportunities, better financing rates and greater funding levels Post 2020 to use EU Structural funds as a means to “Positively Discriminate” to help develop our Region, as a Smart, Inclusive, Green and Connected Region.

PROJECT IRELAND 2040

The National Planning Framework (NPF) and the National Development Plan (NDP) are the two pillars of Project Ireland 2040, setting out a shared vision for coordinated planning and investment, linking national spatial development priorities and enhancement of our Infrastructure. Project Ireland 2040 is the government’s long-term overarching strategy to make Ireland a better country for all of us. It is about doing things differently. We have changed how we invest in public infrastructure in Ireland, moving away from the approach of the past which saw public investment spread too thinly and investment decisions which didn’t align with a clearly thought out and defined strategy.

By 2040 it is estimated that there will be almost an additional million people living in Ireland. This population growth will require hundreds of thousands of new jobs and new homes. This region has a targeted population growth to more than 1 million people, 180,000 more than in 2016, and an employment uplift of 115,000 is targeted to bring the total in employment to approximately 450,000.

Project Ireland 2040 is committed to the delivery of the NPF as a blueprint for spatial planning in Ireland to 2040, with the National Development Plan supporting the delivery of the Ten National Strategic Outcomes of the NPF out to 2027. The National Strategic Outcomes (NSO) are the tools which the NPF will use to deliver its goals.

TEN NATIONAL STRATEGIC OUTCOMES

1. COMPACT GROWTH

Carefully managing the sustainable growth of compact cities, towns and villages, will add value and create more attractive places in which people can live and work. Activating centrally located development areas and achieving effective density and consolidation is a top priority.



2. ENHANCED REGIONAL ACCESSIBILITY

A co-priority is to enhance accessibility between key urban centres of population and their regions. This means ensuring that all parts of the region have a high degree of accessibility to Dublin, as well as to each other.



3. STRENGTHENED RURAL ECONOMIES AND COMMUNITIES

Rural areas play a key role in defining our identity, in driving our economy and our high-quality environment and must be a major part of our country’s strategic development. In addition to the natural resource and food sector potential as traditional pillars of the rural economy, improved connectivity, broadband and rural economic development opportunities are emerging which offer the potential to ensure our countryside remains and strengthens as a living and working community.



4. HIGH-QUALITY INTERNATIONAL CONNECTIVITY

This is crucial for overall international competitiveness and addressing opportunities and challenges from Brexit through investment in our ports and airports.



TEN NATIONAL STRATEGIC OUTCOMES (Continued)

5. SUSTAINABLE MOBILITY

In line with Ireland's Climate Change mitigation plan, we need to progressively electrify our mobility systems moving away from polluting and carbon-intensive propulsion systems to new technologies such as electric vehicles and introduction of electric and hybrid traction systems for public transport fleets, enabling our cities and towns to enjoy a cleaner, quieter environment.



6. A STRONG ECONOMY, SUPPORTED BY ENTERPRISE, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

This will depend on creating places that can foster enterprise and innovation and attract investment and talent. It can be achieved by building regional economic drivers and by supporting opportunities to diversify and strengthen the rural economy, to leverage the potential of places. Delivering this outcome will require the coordination of growth and placemaking with investment in world-class infrastructure, including digital connectivity, and in skills and talent to support economic competitiveness and enterprise growth.



7. ENHANCED AMENITIES AND HERITAGE

This will ensure that our cities, towns and villages are attractive and can offer a good quality of life. It will require investment in well-designed public realm, which includes public spaces, parks and streets, as well as recreational infrastructure. It also includes amenities in rural areas, such as national and forest parks, activity-based tourism and trails such as greenways, blueways and peatways. This must integrate with our built, cultural and natural heritage, which has intrinsic value in defining the character of urban and rural areas and adding to their attractiveness and sense of place.



8. TRANSITION TO LOW CARBON AND CLIMATE RESILIENT SOCIETY

The National Climate Policy Position establishes the national objective of achieving a transition to a competitive, low carbon, climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by 2050. This objective will shape investment choices over the coming decades. New energy systems and transmission grids will be necessary for a more distributed, renewables focused energy generation system, harnessing both the considerable on-shore and off-shore potential from energy sources such as wind, wave and solar and connecting the richest sources of that energy to the major sources of demand.



9. SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF WATER, WASTE AND OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

The abundant natural and environmental resources such as our water sources are critical to our environmental and economic well-being into the future. Conserving and enhancing the quality of these resources will become more important in a crowded and competitive world as well as our capacity to create beneficial uses from products previously considered as waste, creating circular economic benefits.



10. ACCESS TO QUALITY CHILDCARE, EDUCATION AND HEALTH SERVICES

Good access to a range of quality education and health services, relative to the scale of a region, city, town, neighbourhood or community is a defining characteristic of attractive, successful and competitive places. Compact, smart growth in urban areas and strong and stable rural communities will enable the enhanced and effective provision of a range of accessible services.



1.3 NPF: RSES

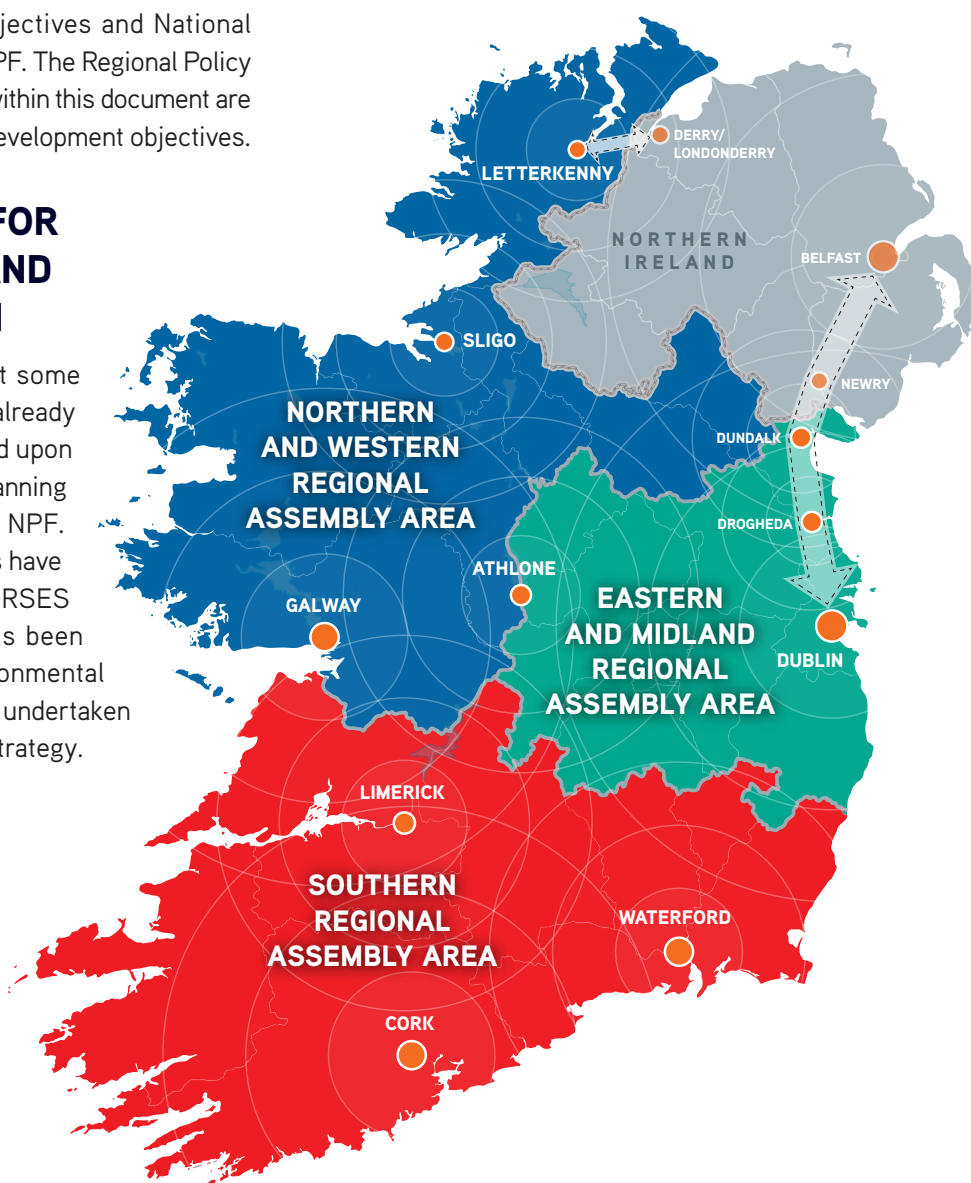
In terms of spatial planning, Ireland is divided into three regions: The Northern and Western; the Southern; and the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly areas. It is the role of the Regional Assemblies to provide leadership and to identify regional development objectives and coordinating initiatives that support the delivery and implementation of national planning and economic policy.

This is primarily achieved through the preparation and implementation of Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES) that are bespoke to the region and provide a focus around the various National Policy Objectives and National Strategic Outcomes of the NPF. The Regional Policy Objectives (RPO) contained within this document are synonymous with regional development objectives.

WHAT IT MEANS FOR THE NORTHERN AND WESTERN REGION

It has to be recognised that some strategic alternatives have already been considered and decided upon as part of the higher-level planning already undertaken for the NPF. These higher-level decisions have set the framework for the RSES to follow and the RSES has been fully informed by the environmental assessments that have been undertaken in the development of this strategy.

Figure 5: Ireland's Regions and Cities



The key issue addressed in the NPF for the three regions is where best to plan for our growing population and employment. It provides for:

- **Ireland's Three Regions:** Targeting a level of growth in the Northern and Western and Southern regions combined, to at least equal that of the Eastern and Midland region.
- **Ireland's Cities:** By 2040, 50% of new homes are to be located within the 5 Cities of Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Waterford and Galway.
- **Compact Growth:** 40% of future housing development is set to be within the existing footprint of built-up areas, making better use of underutilised land and buildings, including infill and brownfield properties. It will use the footprints established in 2016 census as a baseline for measurement purposes.
- **Ireland's Rural Fabric:** Reversing town/village and rural decline, by encouraging new roles and functions for buildings, streets and sites.
- **Ireland's Capital:** Supporting the future growth and success of Dublin as Ireland's leading global city of scale.

Our five cities are not evenly distributed across our three regions and the Northern and Western Region is recognised as having a weak urban structure, with Galway being the only city within our region. However, it is acknowledged that Sligo, Letterkenny and Athlone fulfil city-like roles to a greater extent than elsewhere and that they perform as regional drivers that have the potential to grow as centres of scale. For this region, a regional differentiator is our proximity to Northern Ireland and the opportunity presented through the development of the North West City Region, focused on Derry City, Letterkenny and Strabane. Furthermore, there are several key towns and other locations across the region that present regionally significant opportunities for growth that needs to be identified and unlocked.

STRATEGIC PLANS FOR METROPOLITAN AREAS AND REGIONAL GROWTH CENTRES

All five cities in Ireland incorporate more than one local authority area, with the metropolitan area of Dublin covering all or part of the area of seven local authorities. The multiplicity of plans addressing the individual and specific requirements of local authorities makes co-ordination of strategic development challenging and as a consequence strategic plans for the five metropolitan areas are provided within the three RSESs. As part of this RSES, a co-ordinated Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (MASP) is prepared for Galway Metropolitan area and it provides a framework for development plans and investment prioritisation over the plan period.

In the same way that the NPF requires Metropolitan Area Strategic Plans to be prepared for each of the five cities, a strategic plan that responds to the lead role of each of the Regional Growth Centres is also provided within this RSES. These consolidated plans will address a high-level strategic approach to the future of each centre. Athlone is a Regional Growth Centre that straddles both this region and the Eastern and Midlands Region. Their respective strategies have sought to bring consistency within the Regional Objectives that will inform the development of the town.

1.4 Enterprise 2025 Renewed

Enterprise Policy in Ireland is developed/formulated by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation. Current enterprise policy is provided by 'Enterprise 2025 Renewed'. The policy is based on export-led growth, underpinned by talent and innovation, with the objective of driving resilience in the enterprise base so that full employment is sustainable over the longer term.

The RSES will lead the way the region organises for success in economic development and to shape a sustainably resilient place. It will integrate national policy and sectoral strategy with a unique 'place based' model of development uniquely showcased across this region.

In terms of focus, the enterprise policy is clear in its approach and there are clear objectives that we can leverage across our region:

1. Increasing the emphasis on developing our Irish owned enterprises – embedding resilience in our enterprise base, enhancing productivity and delivering quality jobs – including supporting companies to navigate their way through Brexit.
2. Harness the distinctive characteristics of our foreign and Irish owned enterprise mix through collaboration and clustering.
3. Place a spotlight on innovation and talent and leverage our strengths in disruptive technologies so that we achieve our ambition with more enterprises developing new products, services and solutions to compete effectively against international competition.
4. Realise the full potential of our regions through investments in place-making - developing places that are attractive for business investment and for people to live and work.
5. Develop our international relationships and strengthen economic diplomacy to raise Ireland's visibility, protect Ireland's reputation and provide opportunities for our enterprises supported by the Global Footprint 2025 initiative.

The National Planning Framework (NPF) recognises there is a strong interdependence between good spatial planning and economic growth. Realising the outcomes require a complementary approach in terms of both place-making and enterprise initiatives that tap into distinctive regional strengths. In addition, the NPF promotes place-making as a strategic outcome for a strong economy, through the creation of places (communities, catchments, functional areas, clusters etc.) that can foster enterprise and innovation, whilst winning investment and retaining talent.



VIEW PDF AT:

<https://www.nwra.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/enterprise-2025-renewed.pdf>

1.5 Environmental Assessment

A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), an Appropriate Assessment (AA) and a Regional Strategic Flood Risk Appraisal (RFRA) have been undertaken so that the high-level impact of the proposed Policy Objectives on the environment can be evaluated and used to inform the direction of the RSES.

This ensures that the strategy responds to the sensitivities and requirements of the wider natural environment, ensuring the likely environmental consequences of decisions regarding the future accommodation of growth and development are considered and how negative effects can be reduced, offset or avoided.

The SEA of the RSES has been undertaken concurrently with the preparation of the AA Natura Impact Statement (NIS). There is a degree of overlap between the requirements of the SEA and AA and in accordance with best practice, there was an integrated process of data sharing, including sharing of baseline data and mapping of European Sites, sharing of potential ecological effects of the RSES on European Sites and clarification on more technical aspects of the RSES. These processes have together informed and shaped the development of the strategy. The findings of the RFRA have also directly fed into the SEA Environmental Report.

INTEGRATING ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

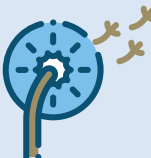



The RSES is a strategic framework document which will result in the tiered development of the region. The methodology outlined above shows the interaction between making the Strategy and environmental assessment. All investment and feasibility studies arising from this strategy should include appropriate environmental assessment as part of any consequential decision making. As detail is developed down through the planning hierarchy, further opportunity for focused assessment will be required to inform decision making at a level of greater granularity. It is therefore important that where other strategies and plans undergo review or changes to reflect the national and regional policy objectives and outcomes of both the National Planning Framework and subsequently the RSES, they should also consider any relevant environmental requirements.

This strategy sets out below overarching environmental objectives which form an integral part of this process.





OVERARCHING ENVIRONMENTAL REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES

1. The Assembly supports the process whereby applications for development consents for projects emanating from any policies that may give rise to likely significant effects on the environment will need to be accompanied by one or more of the following, as relevant:
 - i. An Ecological Impact Assessment Report (EclA);
 - ii. Environmental Report (ER);
 - iii. An Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) if deemed necessary under the relevant legislation (statutory document);
 - iv. Natura Impact Statement (NIS) if deemed necessary under the relevant legislation (statutory document).
2. The Assembly supports the implementation of the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan 2015-2020 and support measures to control and manage the spread of invasive and alien species within the region.
 
3. The Assembly will coordinate the core objectives of the EU Flood Directive and statutory plans across the planning hierarchy, including national guidance on the relationship between the planning system and flood risk management.
 
4. The Assembly supports the use of Environmental Sensitivity Mapping (e.g. EPA ESM Webtool) to investigate optimum and integrated land use management with particular emphasis on cumulative impacts.
 
5. The Assembly supports the integration of biodiversity considerations in a positive, proactive and precautionary way and promotes the protections of the environment and biodiversity conservation as key principles of this strategy.
 

1.6 Regional Profile

What is immediately striking about the region is that it comprises many of the areas that would traditionally be considered 'rural' within Ireland. That is to say, the entire province of Connacht and Cavan, Donegal and Monaghan from the province of Ulster are contained within the region.

Although not all of the region is rural, it is predominantly rural, with some notable exceptions. While this rural nature is common to each of the eight counties within the region, there is also a multitude of differences. For example, the counties of Donegal, Leitrim, Monaghan and Cavan all share the only international border Ireland possesses, something that has its specific challenges. We then have the coastal counties of Galway, Mayo, Sligo, Leitrim and Donegal which lie adjacent to the vast Atlantic Ocean, and all that connection brings with it. While Roscommon, Cavan and Monaghan are landlocked counties that are nestled within the heartlands of the country.

The population within the NWRA area amounts to approximately 18% of Ireland's total. This can be considered a relatively low proportion of the overall population considering the geographical size of the region. This should not be seen as a negative, rather it provides the region with its distinctly rural, and at times remote character which can be advantageous.

Populations are never dispersed evenly across a region or county, there are always locations which attract people to live more so than others. The urbanisation of populations is a global trend that shows no sign of abating and this is evident in our region, but the NWRA region, as a whole, remains a rural region. Each county has a majority living in rural areas, with Leitrim the highest on 89%. Sligo is the most urban county, with 39% of its population living in such areas, however, this is significantly lower than the state average of 62%. In Figure 6 population dispersal is mapped across the region, showing those areas with a higher density than others.

Over the two decades spanning the period between 1996 and 2016, Ireland has seen steady growth in population. This growth rate was approximately 7.5% over each inter-census period. Over the same period, the NWRA region also grew, initially at lower levels of 6.1% between 1996 and 2002, but then surpassing the national average throughout the next two inter-census periods. The period between 2002 to 2006 saw a growth of 7.8% in the region, while the following period between 2006 and 2011 saw a growth of 7.9%. The region, as a whole, had an additional 179,960 persons recorded as living within it as of 2016, compared to 1996.

Figure 6: Population Density Map (Persons per sq.km)

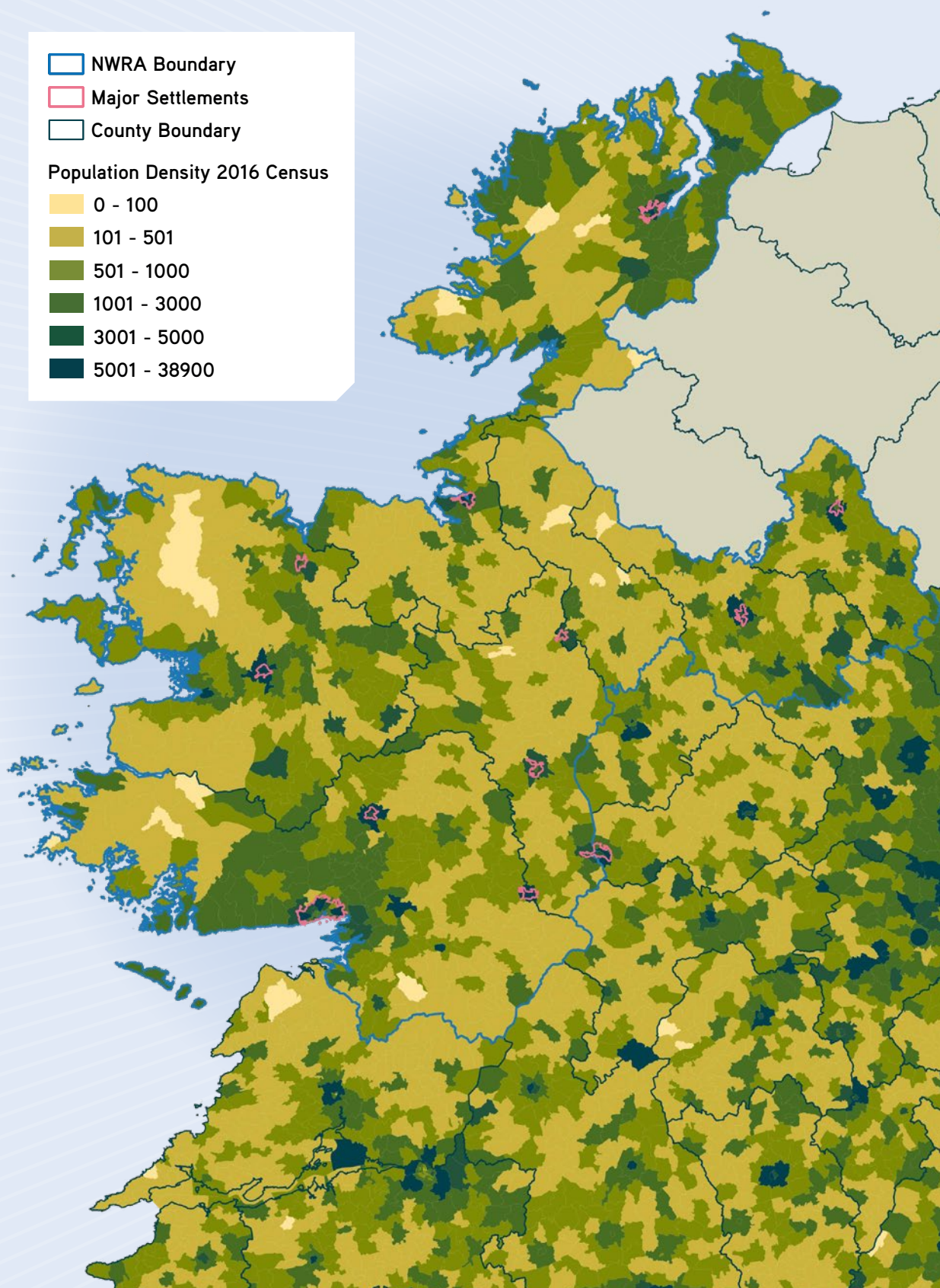
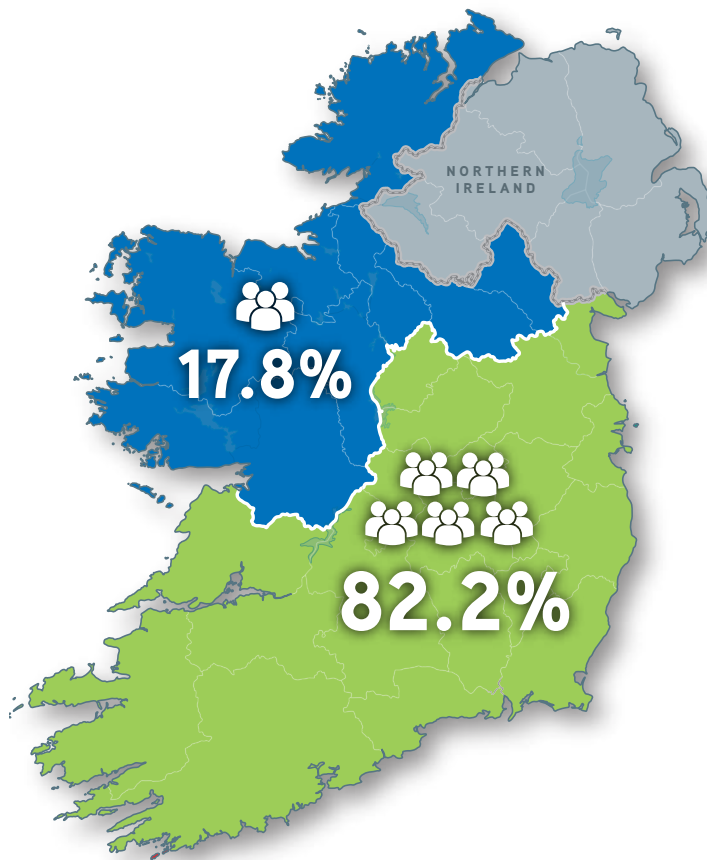


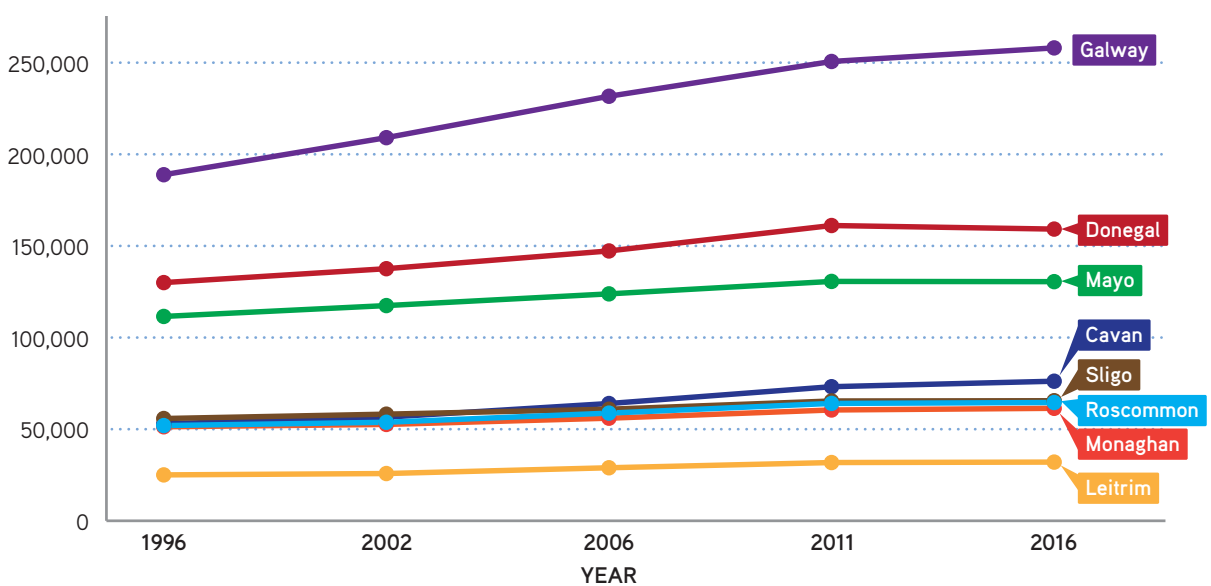


Figure 7: Population of the Northern & Western Region vs Rest of the Country



From the graph below (Figure 8) it becomes clear that Galway has been the primary beneficiary of population growth within the region over the last two decades. It comprises approximately 38% of the total increase or 69,204 persons. Donegal accounted for 16% of the total, Cavan saw 13% and Mayo 11%. Roscommon, Monaghan, Sligo and Leitrim accounted for 7%, 6%, 5% and 4% of the total increase respectively. All eight counties saw their pattern of growth stunted during the 2011 to 2016 period, although perhaps worryingly both Donegal and Mayo recorded decreases in their population during this spell.

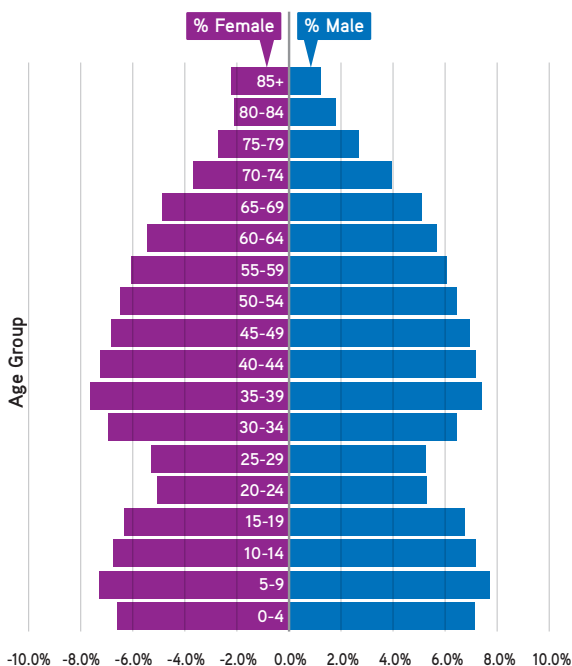
Figure 8: Population of the Region 1996-2016



As is the case in the rest of Ireland, the NWRA has an ageing population. The age cohorts that cover a range between 20 to 44 have seen a decline which can be explained by emigration.

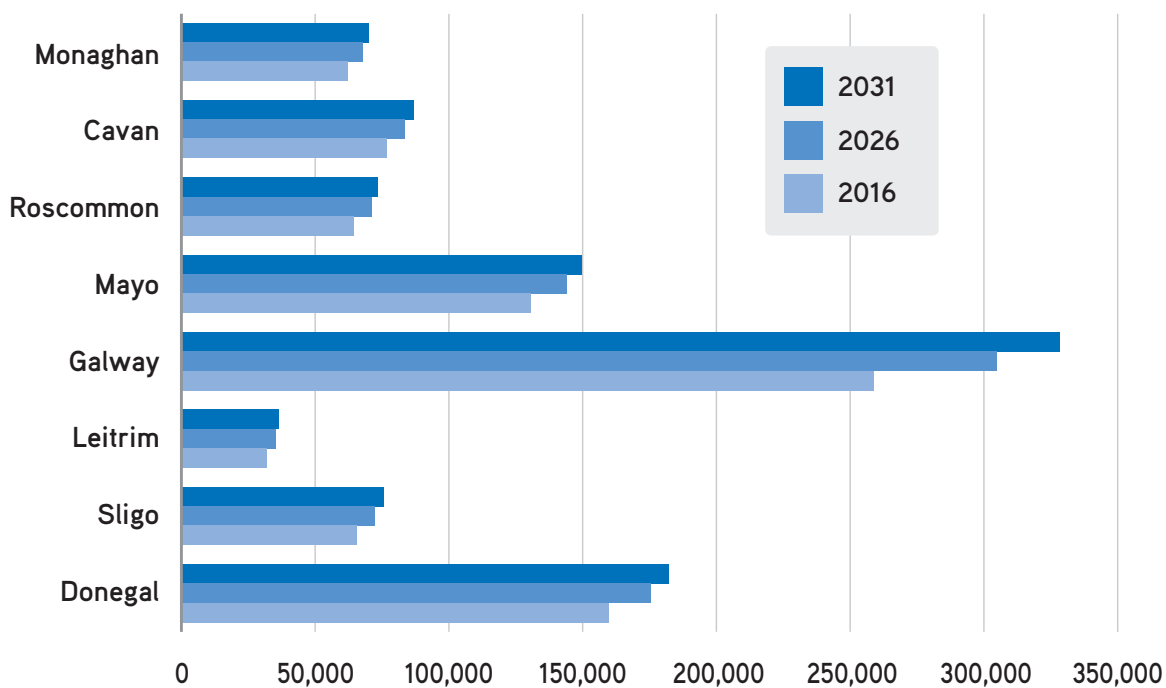


Figure 9: Population Pyramid for the Northern & Western Region



Population loss of these particular cohorts is indeed more pronounced in the region, and this is something that requires mitigation. Younger adults inevitably follow employment opportunities, and with increased numbers of the Irish population undertaking third level education, there is a requirement to facilitate these graduates with professional employment opportunities. The concept of compact growth and the prioritisation of development in our larger urban cores is one such way this can be achieved. If our existing larger urban centres can consolidate their positions and enhance their offerings further, it will attract people back to live and work in the region. Thus, the focus upon placemaking, education, training, innovation and skills will be some of the key enablers.

Figure 10: Projected Population Figures for each County in the Northern & Western Region



By 2040 there will be up to an additional 180,000 people living across this region; requiring an additional 115,000 jobs to be created. An exciting proposition but if we fail to plan for this growth and the demands it will generate on our built and natural environment, as well as on our social and economic fabric; then the financial and lifestyle impact could be significant. To put this in perspective, this region, by 2040 will be servicing an additional population equivalent to that of County Donegal. This puts pressure on public services, housing, education, health and amenities but it also creates tremendous opportunities for sustainable and compact growth that produces significant economic dividend.

Delivering an effective alignment of plans at national, regional and local levels and shifting away from a business-as-usual scenario towards more compact growth, will require a period of transition. Transitional population projections have been provided by the DHPLG in Circular Letter FPS 04/2018 'Implementation Roadmap for the National Planning Framework', which sets out the principles for calculating these figures. It plots a growth trajectory set approximately mid-way between what is currently being planned for constituent statutory County / City Development Plans if projected forward to 2031, and the more likely evidence-based and nationally coherent projected scenario to 2031 and 2040. These 'adjusted' transitional figures will apply to 2026 and will also inform the period to 2031. Figure 10 provides a visual overview of the projected population figures for each County in the region.

To view the Implementation Roadmap for the National Planning Framework visit: <https://www.nwra.ie/rses/>



VIEW PDF AT:

<https://www.nwra.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/npf-implementation-roadmap.pdf>



COMMERCIAL PROFILE

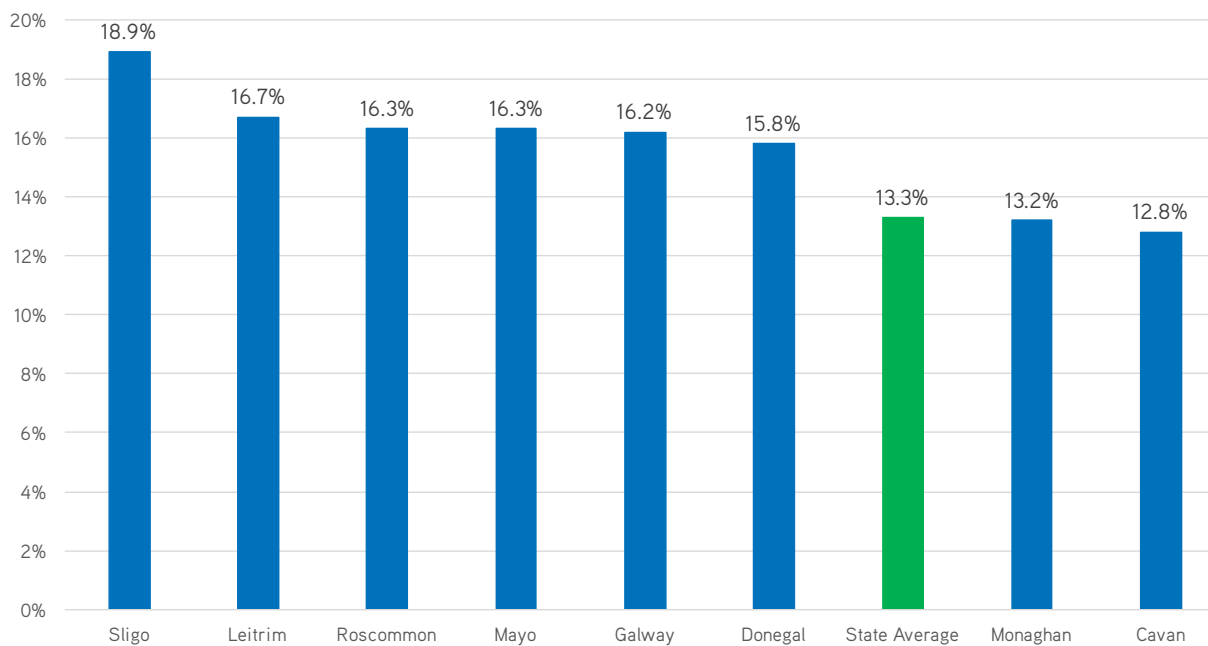
Figure 11 and Figure 12, highlight the latest commercial vacancy rates for the counties and the main towns of the Northern and Western region relative to the national average.

In terms of counties, Sligo recorded the highest commercial vacancy rate in the State, with a rate of 18.9%, which was 5.7 percentage points higher than the national average of 13.2%. In contrast, Meath had the lowest commercial vacancy rate in the State, registering a rate of 10.4% in the quarter. Strikingly, as of Q4 2018, the six counties with the highest vacancy rates in the State were all based in the Northern and Western Region, and this has generally been the case since the GeoDirectory publication began in 2013.

Similarly, commercial vacancy rates in some of the region's most prominent towns were also high with Ballina, Sligo Town, Castlebar, Roscommon Town, and Monaghan Town all registering vacancy rates above 20%. Out of the eleven towns selected for this analysis, only Westport registered a commercial vacancy rate below the national average of 13.2%.

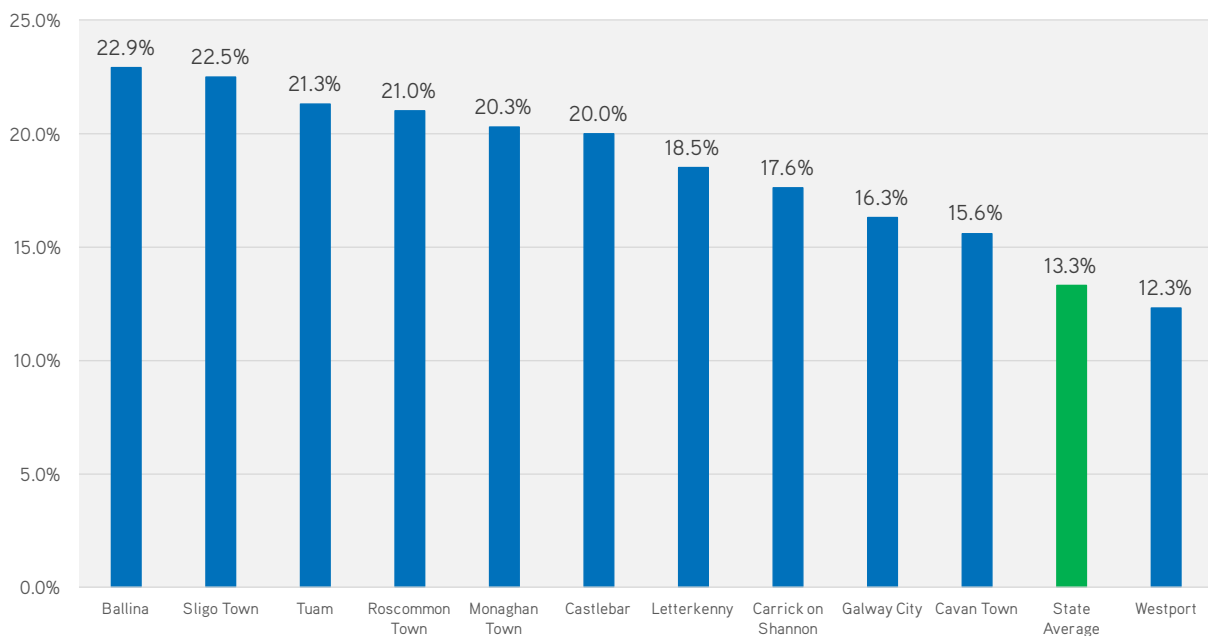


Figure 11: Commercial Vacancy Rates by County (Quarter 2, 2019)



Source: GeoDirectory Commercial Vacancy Report

Figure 12: Commercial Vacancy Rates by Prominent Town (Quarter 2, 2019)



Source: GeoDirectory Commercial Vacancy Report

QUALITY OF LIFE

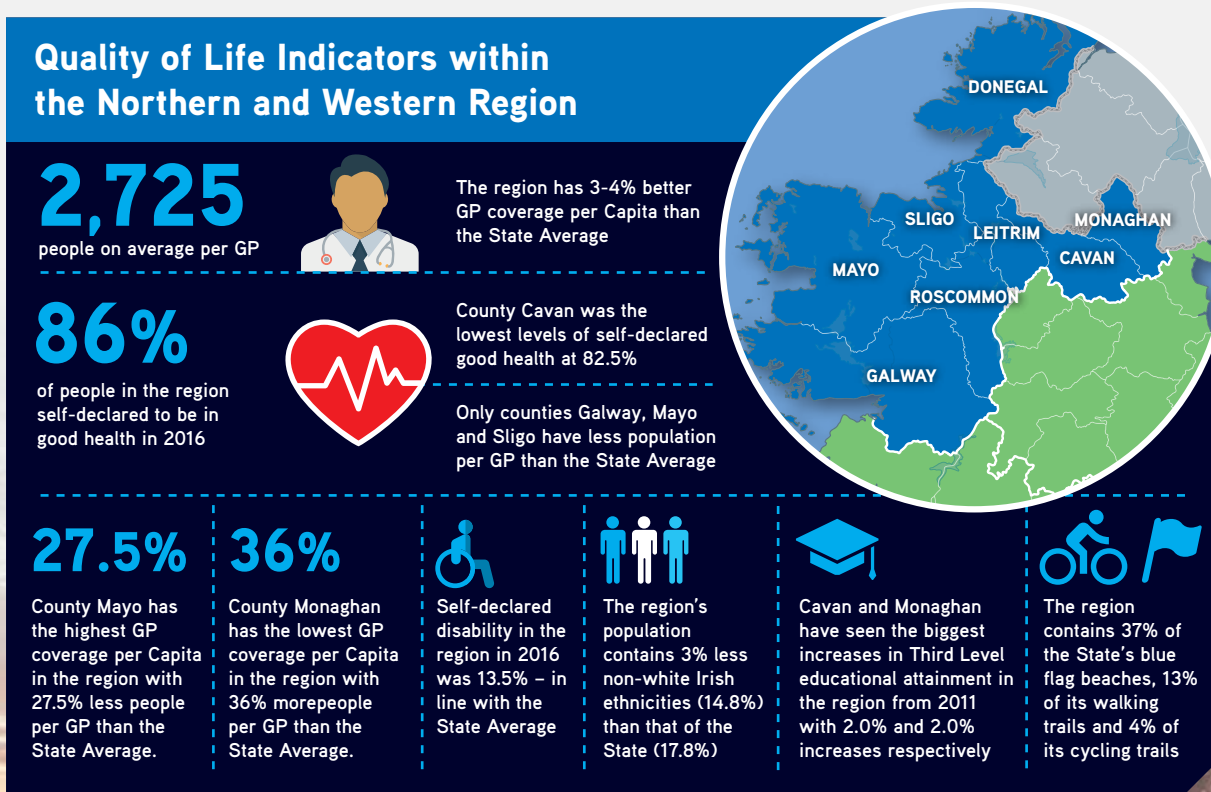
While the region faces challenges for some of the key quality of life indicators, such as access to employment, it is well recognised that residents of the region enjoy high standards, particularly in terms of environmental quality and social capital. There is a growing recognition of the relationship between the environment, quality of life and regional identity and thus a desire to protect these assets for the value they contribute to our lifestyle and the regional economy as well as for their intrinsic value.

The Trutz Haase deprivation index is an indicator of the quality of life that measures relative affluence and deprivation through a range of inputs. It is clear from this index in 2016 that the more urbanised locations are also the most affluent, while the opposite is also true, with the more rural regions in north-west Mayo and Donegal proving to be the most deprived.



Access to quality healthcare is a fundamental indicator that impacts on regional quality of life and successful communities. According to the Health Service Executive (HSE), the region is performing marginally above average in terms of people per General Practitioner (GP) with 3.4% fewer people per GP than the State average. Figure 13 below shows the key regional trends for health, education, diversity and access to walking and cycling trails.

Figure 13: Key Regional Trends for Working, Education, Diversity and Access to Walking and Cycling Trails



EDUCATION

Understanding the levels of educational attainment within a region is important to assess the skills available. The range of educational attainment within the region is broadly similar to national figures. The chart below gives a general indication of the range of educational attainment at the regional level.

Census 2016 reveals that parts of the NWRA region compare favourably with the State average, where we see Galway City lead the way on a total percentage of 41% of its residents with Level 7 degree or above, Galway County follows, while Sligo matches the State average. When we focus on the changes that have occurred since 2011, there is a marked increase in the levels of educational attainment. Focusing on this change provides an entirely different, and wholly positive picture of the trends within the region, where the workforce and population are becoming more educated, and therefore levels of talent are increasing. Areas, where there is a greater proportion of third-level educated persons is around the key regional settlements of Galway, Sligo, Letterkenny and Athlone, where 3rd level institutions are located.



Figure 14: Range of Educational Attainment at a Regional Level





An aerial photograph of a coastal landscape, showing a river or stream flowing through a green valley towards a sandy beach and the ocean. The image is overlaid with a large, semi-transparent blue diagonal shape that divides the scene. Several colorful lines (purple, blue, green, orange, red, cyan, yellow, purple) with circular markers run parallel to the diagonal, extending from the top right towards the bottom left. The text 'Strategic Vision 2' is centered in white on the blue overlay.

Strategic Vision 2

2 Strategic Vision

2.1 Making Good Strategy

Our Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy is based on partnership, collaborative leadership, with a clear focus on place-based regional economic development and effective regional planning.

Strategy is concerned with getting from where we are to where we want to be.

Our vision for the RSES has been stimulated by the desire to achieve something, and that requires creativity and analysis. It also requires leadership to inspire others in the formulation and delivery of the strategy.

This RSES provides a robust strategy to deliver anticipated growth, building upon this region's key strategic assets and opportunities and addressing challenges ahead. It provides Regional Development Objectives that guide policy responses to ensure that people's needs – such as access to housing, jobs, ease of travel and overall well-being – are met, up to 2040 and beyond.



VISION

The vision of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy is

'To play a leading role in the transformation of this region into a vibrant, connected, natural, inclusive and smart place to work and live.'

This shall be achieved by working together to create **BETTER PLACES** by adopting best practice in international spatial and economic development; Achieving **COMPETITIVENESS** by optimising EU and exchequer funding and harnessing the strengths of our 'place', through **COLLABORATION**.



TRENDS

An analysis of current development trends and work undertaken by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) for the NPF in projecting likely future development scenarios to 2040 concluded that if we don't plan strategically and make decisions based on new trends and evidence then this region risks entering a vicious circle of regional economic decline.

The research suggests that there will be:

- a continuation of sprawling growth;
- the ongoing shift of people and jobs to Dublin and the east coast;
- a degraded environment;
- the continuing disparity between where people live and work, with increased commuting times;
- exacerbation of rural and village decline;
- uncompetitive cities and urban areas.

The NPF sets out how we must move away from the current, 'business as usual' pattern of development. This means that it is necessary to disrupt trends that have been apparent for the last fifty years and have accelerated over the past twenty. As we respond to these challenges together, we need to think and act deliberately to grow the region's resilience. We need a strong focus on a vibrant diversified economy and continue to provide excellent opportunities for our people, whilst considering growth and development. Our RSES must also play a strategic role in urban and rural design and protection of our natural and built heritage – protecting the region's unique sense of place.

MITIGATING RISK AND CHALLENGES

Our region is different from the other two regions of Ireland, with historically lower levels of urbanisation, proximity to the border and risks posed by Brexit. The national risk landscape has seen some significant change with developments such as the pending departure of the UK from the European Union progressing and evolving, geopolitical stability, housing, infrastructure constraints and the implications of climate change adaptation.

BREXIT

The NPF acknowledges that Brexit has the potential to significantly change the nature of our relationships with our nearest neighbours. It also presents significant opportunities and challenges that are not fully understood and will be unknown for some time. As with the NPF, further iterations and reviews will present the opportunity to consider the practical ramifications of Brexit.

With the extensive border between this region and Northern Ireland and because of the intricate interconnectivity of services, industry, communities and local economies, the RSES needs to be particularly cognisant of 'risk' associated with Brexit. Analysis and research have continued to improve our understanding of the trade and other risks for Ireland potentially arising from Brexit. Data published in a joint report by Derry City and Strabane District Council and Donegal County Council show that there are more than 326,000 journeys made per week across the Border crossings at Derry/Bridgend, Muff village to Derry and between Strabane and Lifford.



Clearly, some sectors and this region will be harder hit than others. While 13% of total Irish goods exports (€15bn) and 16% of total Irish service exports (€22bn) went to the UK in 2016, for certain sectors and sub-sectors, the figures were much higher. For example, in the agri-food sector, 37% of Irish food and drink exports went to the UK in 2016, and within that sector, exports to the UK accounted for 50% of beef exports, 56% of pig meat exports and 53% of cheese exports.

In addition to trading difficulties, the Irish fisheries sector also faces very significant difficulties in the context of the potential loss of access to UK waters and loss of quota share. 34% of all fish landings by Irish vessels are currently taken from what could become UK waters. The OECD estimates that a 'Hard BREXIT' with trade governed by WTO rules could reduce exports by 20% in some sectors such as agriculture and food.

Research commissioned by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation found that while the Irish economy is expected to grow out to 2030, Brexit produces a dampening effect in all scenarios.

GEOPOLITICAL STABILITY

For the Northern and Western Region, developments in US trade policy, in particular, an increased emphasis on protectionist policies, and the growing threat of a global trade war, have given rise to a further intensification of risks around geopolitical stability. As the US is Ireland's largest trading partner and export market outside the EU, the risks for the Irish economy are therefore significant.

HOUSING

Housing continues to present a significant challenge for Ireland, both in terms of meeting the current demand, as well as a growing concern around the affordability of housing,



in particular in Galway City, Sligo, Letterkenny and Athlone. There are social risks, as well as economic implications for this region's competitiveness and ability to attract foreign direct investment (FDI).





INFRASTRUCTURE

Similarly, risks around infrastructure constraints persist and could impede the Northern and Western Region's ability to attract labour and investment. A range of international benchmarks is available comparing the stock and quality of infrastructure in Ireland with competitors. Ireland's diminished investment is evident in declining and low scores concerning the perception of overall infrastructure quality, with Ireland's score falling over the five years to 2016.



CLIMATE CHANGE

A key issue for the strategy is how climate change will impact on land-use change and increasing demands on natural resources into the future. The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) states that there is now "unequivocal" evidence of climate change. There is marked evidence that Ireland's climate is changing with projections for Ireland indicating that there is a likelihood of a rise in sea levels, changes in rainfall events, increased frequency of storm events, changes to air and soil temperature and periods of increased drought.

These events will directly impact on urban, terrestrial and aquatic systems and the lands' abilities to deal with the potentially extreme weather events and other pressures. Due to the likelihood of such extreme events Ireland is required to address adaptation to manage risks posed by climate change. *The National Policy Position on Climate Action* sets a fundamental national objective to achieve the transition to a competitive, low-carbon, climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by 2050. With the establishment of the *Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015*, there is now a statutory basis on which National Climate Change Adaptation Frameworks and Sectoral Adaptation Plans are to be established.



The *National Climate Change Adaptation Framework* was published in 2018 and includes the national strategy to reduce the vulnerability of the country to the negative effects of climate change and to avail of positive impacts. The policies and measures developed by the Adaptation Framework are likely to focus on infrastructural measures which have the potential to impact on land-use changes which has specific relevance for the RSES. Also, a National Climate Mitigation Plan has been prepared which contains specific measures to mitigate the effects of climate change across the transport, energy, built environment and agriculture sectors.



VIEW PDF AT:

<https://www.nwra.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/national-adaptation-framework.pdf>

Climate change commitments and ever more demanding EU targets mean that power generation, transport and heat increasingly have to be produced from sustainably produced electricity. As an EU member state, as well as a signatory to the UN Paris Agreement, Ireland has committed itself to a reduction of greenhouse gases along with a multitude of other sustainability-related measures. While the majority of direction will come from national government, responsibility will also fall on the NWRA as well as our constituent local authorities (Climate Change Adaptation Strategies) to ensure that targets are being met. How we produce our energy is going to play a major role in determining how successful the country is in tackling climate change targets, especially GHG emissions.

The Northern and Western Regional Assembly needs to strategically prepare for locally-based energy networks enabling locally produced electricity connection to the grid and flexible energy consumption.



There are significant risks for Ireland in terms of failing to implement appropriate policies and provide the long-term pricing signals to encourage investment and behavioural change. There are also significant opportunities for this region through resource efficiency and the commercial application of technology to existing and emerging energy generation sources.



DISRUPTIVE TECHNOLOGY

The pace of technological developments means that this is a risk category which needs to be monitored closely. Disruptive technology trends are continuously bringing new ways of conducting business, manufacturing products and making decisions which could usurp traditional methods and lead to significant job losses in affected sectors. While there are also significant spatial considerations for the distribution and integration of new technologies for effective land-use planning; ensuring our 'Places', both private and public are fully equipped for a smart, modern and connected future.

While no sector will be immune to the impact of disruptive technology, jobs and functions that require greater degrees of cognition, subjective thought and personal interaction will be somewhat cushioned. The acquisition of new skills is vital to keep pace with advances in technology. Similarly, the availability of the right skills is a key enabler of enterprise performance and growth. The region will need to ensure the strategic alignment between national sectoral strategy on education, training, innovation and skills is responding to the place-based demand evident in our Regional Skills Fora and initiatives like the Regional Enterprise Plan. The development and implementation of a smart specialisation strategy is one way of enabling this to be realised.



COMPETITIVENESS

The region also has several historical challenges impacting on its competitiveness and sustainability. Most notably the comparably lower level of investment in enabling infrastructures such as ports, harbours, roads, rail and utilities. The resulting impact has created a profile of a region addressing matters such as:

- Distance and Scale
- Skills retention and development
- Generating Greater Value from Our Knowledge and Innovation System
- Access to Capital to Fund Innovation
- Infrastructure and Accessibility
- Perception of this region and associated narrative moving towards a green environment.

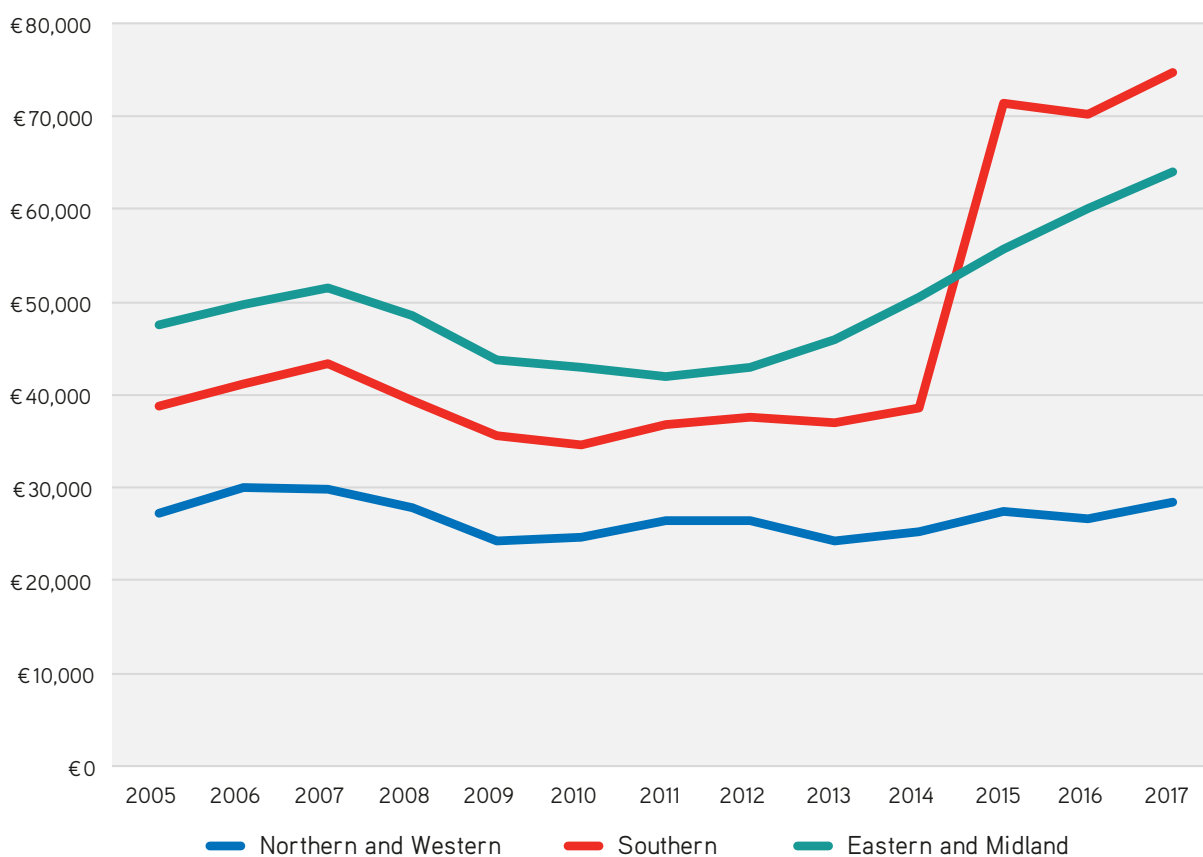


EVIDENCE FOR POSITIVE DISCRIMINATION: REVERSE DECLINE

It has been well documented that the NWRA falls behind many other regions in terms of economic performance. With the exception of the 2011-2012 period when Gross Value Added (GVA) in the region grew more rapidly than any other region in Ireland, it has since fallen back and the gap between it and the remaining regions is widening. In addition, when the latest set of regional GDP statistics are analysed for 2016, they illustrate a rise in regional disparity (See Figure 15). This is contributing to a growing body of evidence supporting a strong 'place-based' approach matched with Government support and 'positive discrimination' for investment to this region.

The reduction in this regions GVA means that the region is now classified by the EU as being a 'Transition Region' for the EU Post 2020 (2021-2027) funding period, thus it has moved back from a "More Developed Region" to a "Transition Region". Whilst this is of concern, it also presents an opportunity to avail of the 'positive discrimination' provided by the European Structural Funds towards regions that are not within the "More Developed" category, as they are designed to counter any imbalance among regions. This means that the region will qualify for greater EU support. It means that the region will qualify for more flexible funding opportunities, better financing rates and greater funding levels Post 2020 to use EU Structural funds as a means to "Positively Discriminate" to help develop our region, as a Smart, Green, Connected Region of the future.

Figure 15: Greater Value Added 2005-2016



2.2 Growth Ambitions

All our risks and challenges need to be addressed through a new way of doing things. Placemaking is a 'new' approach that is a priority for this strategy. Placemaking includes tapping into the economic potential that remains unused to outside agencies, so that all parts of cities and regions can contribute to the quality of life. The overarching principles of placemaking are 'connectivity, concentration to build centres of scale and promoting difference'.

Elements that are understood to inform business location choices include the following;

1. Urban centres with critical mass
2. Connectivity and access
3. World-class economic infrastructure that is fit for purpose
4. Third-level offering (Talent)
5. Availability of property solutions - turn-key; sites; co-working spaces etc.
6. Smart and integrated transport systems
7. Dynamic clustering

Extensive examples of world-class place-making exist across our region. The RSES will adopt policies to further enable it. A concerted response is required to build centres of scale that have fit for purpose infrastructure, quality education, advanced producer services and high-quality of life attributes that are necessary to support informational-type economic activities and businesses in the future.

In the absence of centres of scale that can provide these items, certain economic activities will not operate in the region and specific groups of workers will migrate out of the region. If these resources are lost, the region risks entering a vicious circle of regional economic decline. Thus, the NWRA is concerned with initiatives that focus on achieving higher economic growth from both the existing (or mature) sectors of our economy as well as those that are new or emerging.

Our RSES introduces the concept of a Growth Framework because regional growth cannot be achieved through linear steps. Integrated strategic planning connects the planning function across the region to improve operational alignment (County/

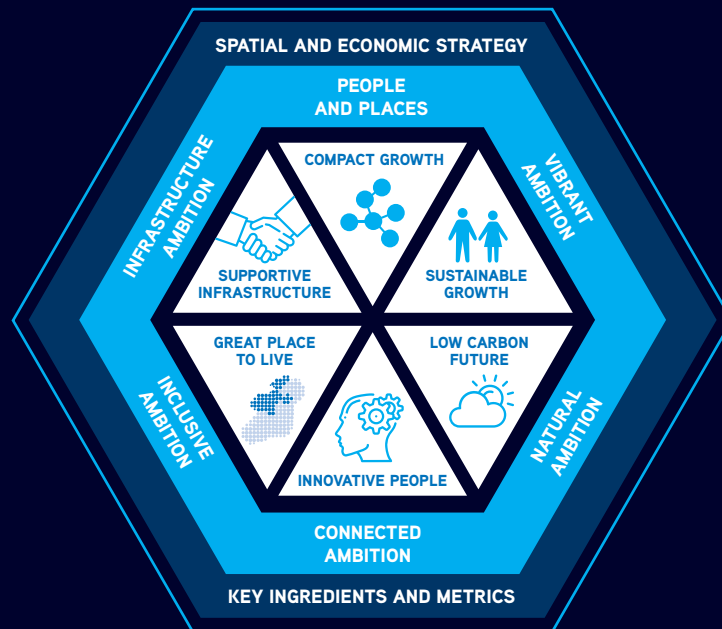


City Development Plans and RSES) and financial investment through Strategic Investment Priorities. The intention is for it to accurately represent a complete model where the region links strategic and operational challenges with prioritised capital interventions.

The Growth Framework aligns existing regional initiatives, identifies future priorities and actions, and considers the resources and partnerships required (Implementation). It is a space that enables positive regional discrimination. Isolated interventions will not achieve the ambitions of this region, nor will investment in infrastructure alone. There is a complementarity to regional initiatives that we cannot ignore. We cannot aspire to be a 'Great Place to Live' if we don't manage our natural environment. Equally the region will be hampered in its growth if it does not pursue policies that encourage compact growth and scale. Thus, an integrated framework to synergise investments and plan for strategic interventions is proposed; in order to maximise returns for our 'People and Place'.

Our ‘Five Growth Ambitions’ define each priority and how they are mutually complementary. Our ambition is for a region that is Vibrant, Connected, Natural, Smart and a Great Place to Live, consolidated by a strong settlement strategy focusing on ‘People’ and ‘Places’. The intention is that it becomes a living framework, which will be supported as required by detailed action plans, investment proposals and delivery partnerships.

Figure 16: Five Growth Ambitions



PEOPLE AND PLACES (PRINCIPLES)

Compact growth will be pursued to ensure sustainable growth of more compact urban and rural settlements, supported by jobs, houses, services and amenities, rather than continued sprawl and unplanned, uneconomic growth.

VIBRANT AMBITION

The NWRA believes that strong economic growth, which creates permanent, sustainable jobs, is best achieved by building a competitive and productive economy. Focusing policies on scale, investing in connectivity and our people whilst aggressively pursuing a low carbon approach to enhance our differentiation.

NATURAL AMBITION

It has been identified that more strategic actions are required to prepare the region for what is to come and highlights the need to create a combined long term vision for the future of both energy supply and our ability to use renewable energy. To address our energy requirements our RSES emphasises the need for coordination, new thinking, investment and skills to implement change. All considerations need to be cognisant of our natural resources, landscape and heritage (natural, social and cultural).

CONNECTED AMBITION

Accessibility and mobility within the region have a direct effect on the region’s economic competitiveness. It also has an effect on the attractiveness of the region as a favourable living and visiting environment. The RSES will support further investment in sustainable transport measures. In addition, to achieve our Vision for the region we need to strengthen our digital network and enable new technologies to work by ensuring that policies and systems are in place that can help people transition to a world much more digitally connected.

INCLUSIVE AMBITION

One of the strongest foundations and emerging propositions this region has to build on is its ‘livability’. The region aspires to be one of the most livable places in Europe with a commitment to sustainable and inclusive growth.

INFRASTRUCTURE AMBITION

Provision and maintenance of economic infrastructure, such as energy, water, and wastewater, are key to delivering compact growth and a connected, vibrant, inclusive, resilient and smart region.



People and Places 3

3 People and Places

3.1 Our Region

Our region has a world-class quality of life, a physical environment of outstanding beauty, a highly-skilled population, healthy communities, and a reputation for creativity and quality events.

These are the strong foundations on which this RSES can act deliberately and decisively to build its future, recognise opportunities, and respond proactively to current and future challenges. The region needs to respond to some big challenges, trends and threats. Like other places it is still recovering from the economic downturn; an ageing population, the need to respond to climate change; increasing resource scarcity; the pace of technological change, and competition to attract skilled and talented people to live and work in our local economies.

Furthermore, and specific to this region is the challenge associated with growth and prosperity and its increasingly concentrated focus on large urban and city-regions. But the potential exists enabled by Objectives contained in the National Planning Framework to unlock the full potential of our 'people' and 'place'. Place matters in strategic regional planning. As do People.

A strong economy will support the Northern and Western Region to meet many of these challenges. Our strategy acknowledges and builds on our achievements and previous successful transformations.



3.2 The Region in Focus

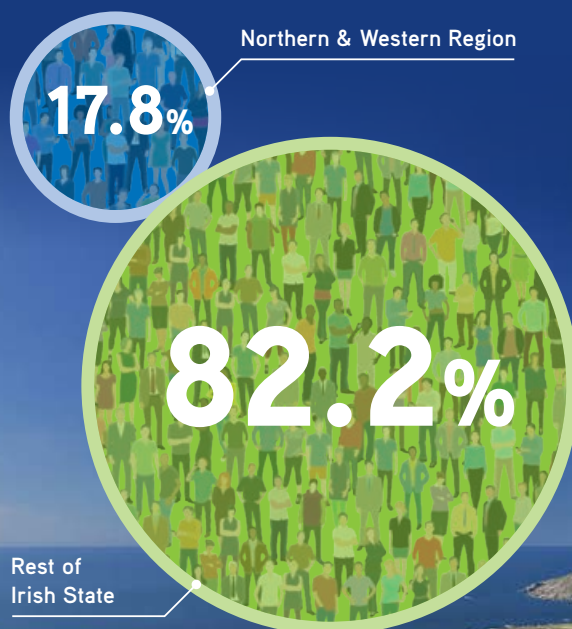
The population of the Northern and Western Region is dispersed unevenly and has historically had a lower level of urbanisation compared to other regions. This weak urban structure is characterised by its location above all five existing cities in Ireland, which are south of a line from Dublin to Galway, and west of the two cities of Derry and Belfast in Northern Ireland.

However, this masks that Galway is the fastest growing city in Ireland over the past 50 years; that Letterkenny and Derry in reality function as a cross-border city region; and that Letterkenny, Sligo and Athlone perform functions not dissimilar to bigger cities, albeit at a different scale.

In 2016 the total population residing within our region was 847,442. This figure represents approximately 17.8% of the entire population of Ireland (Rep.), which stands at 4,761,865 as of 2016.

However, in this strategy, we do not constrain ourselves to the administrative boundaries of the Regional Assembly but rather we perceive our region as one that is made up of many catchments of people and places that overlap administrative boundaries. It boasts world-leading multinationals, indigenous companies with global success, untapped economic sectors, communities hosting titles such as the 'Best Place in Ireland to live', 'the Coolest Place on the Planet', 'European Volunteering Capital 2017', 'European Capital of Culture 2020' and a region that has been awarded 'European Entrepreneurial Region (EER) 2018' by the European Union.

Figure 17: Population of Ireland, 2016





At the interface of the Atlantic Ocean, the coastal counties of the region have a broad range of opportunities from the diverse marine economy and these counties are also synonymous with the Wild Atlantic Way tourism brand. There is the emerging economic value proposition in the Atlantic Economic Corridor, stretching from the northernmost to the southernmost counties on the Island of Ireland.

Another economic corridor extends from Dublin to Belfast and the counties of Cavan and Monaghan have a close relationship with it. Counties Cavan and Monaghan have an easterly focus and the NPF recognises that they comprise part of a North Eastern functional area with County Louth, where the key driver is the Dublin – Belfast cross border network, that influences both these counties. The Cavan/Monaghan sub-region also provides an important connection between the remainder of the Northern and Western region and the Greater Dublin Area. These counties, together with counties Leitrim and Roscommon, are also nestled within the Hidden Heartlands tourism brand that includes the Shannon Blueways providing an important value proposition with counties to complement that of the Wild Atlantic Way.

Additionally, the counties of Donegal, Leitrim, Monaghan and Cavan all share the only international land border Ireland possesses, something that brings its specific challenges and opportunities for communities, which may be magnified by Brexit.

As evidenced in Section 1.6 the global economic downturn has taken its toll on our rural regions, perhaps more so than more urban locations. Although the region in overall terms has grown its population by almost 180,000 over this past two decades, it was Galway that accounted for almost two-fifths of this growth. Furthermore, all eight counties have seen their pattern of growth slow during the 2011 to 2016 period, with counties Donegal and Mayo experiencing a small decline in population. It remains to be seen if this is a blip or the commencement of a trend.

The international trend of urbanisation, where more and more people have decided to move to urban centres to seek employment, among other things, has also impacted. This reinforces the emergence of new thinking about the process of local spatial and economic development. Across the world, local and national governments have moved towards a 'place-based' approach that emphasises the identification and mobilisation of indigenous potential, that is, the ability of places to grow drawing on their resources.

3.3 Placemaking

The new “place-based” approach involves attempts to tap into the economic potential that remains unused and not identifiable to outside agencies, so that all parts of regions, be they cities, towns or their rural hinterlands, can contribute to national development. From an enterprise development perspective, investment in the creation of ‘place’ is key to realising regional potential.

Access to talent is a chief site location criterion for businesses and ‘Quality of life’ is a key factor both in retaining our current population and also attracting more people to the region in the future. It is determined by having an active and successful economy and living in a great place with an excellent education, leisure, transport, planning, housing, medical facilities and strong, safe communities.



Consequently, a community’s ability to compete for new investment is strongly correlated to its attractiveness to talent. This is because communities that can offer a multitude of amenities are the ones best able to attract and retain skilled and talented workers, especially younger workers. Likewise, a community that is attractive to talent will, in turn, be more likely to attract companies. Therefore, enhancing the quality of place amenities such as public realm, arts, culture, entertainment, accessibility, green spaces and landscape is a key economic development priority for this region. Place is a way to help the region to position itself for skills/ talent attraction, business expansion, and creative and innovative economic activity.

Sustainable enterprise thrives in supportive business environments that enhance competitiveness and productivity. Companies are attracted to invest in locations where they can access skills/talent, where people will want to live and work and where the surrounding infrastructures are supportive of business.

It is a combination of factors that deliver efficiencies, economies of scale and wider societal benefits. The overarching critical elements are:

- Connectivity - rural, regional, national and international - enabling the mobility of people and goods and making use of smart technologies to deliver enhanced productivity, competitiveness and quality of life;
- Concentration of developments - building places of scale and internationally competitive locations and connections with wider hinterlands through technologies, community and infrastructures; and
- Celebrating difference – developing distinctive propositions for each region and realising the full potential for enterprise development, job creation and higher standards of living.

However, there may also be locational considerations that influence a business activity or sector to locate in certain places, - for example if natural resourceintensive, utility intensive, knowledge-intensive, internet-based etc. In addition, the Northern and Western Region has experienced considerable emigration over time and there is a growing body of evidence which suggests that our diaspora continue to play a critical role in supporting sustainable development in our region in a variety of ways, including returning to establish new enterprises in the region (including FDI), participating in the development of new networks for our indigenous enterprises abroad and through the transfer of resources, knowledge, and ideas back to this region, thus integrating their place of origin into the global economy.

To deliver for this region, certain elements are understood to inform business location choices and their delivery are key in this regard.

KEY BUSINESS ELEMENTS

1. Development of compact urban centres with critical mass in population; encouraging the revitalisation of urban areas and reinhabitation of urban cores.
2. Provision of connectivity and access (including national and international), enabled by physical and technology infrastructures with capacity resilience and quality especially post-Brexit.
3. Establishment of competitive, smart and integrated public transport networks within and between cities and urban areas.
4. Nurturing of world-class infrastructure and competitive services with capacity, resilience and quality.
5. Growing our third level infrastructures, access to skills and research, development and innovation.
6. Availability of property solutions – including ‘ready-to-go’ commercial properties, ‘landing spaces’, co-working spaces and flexible property solutions and affordable housing.
7. Co-location or dynamic clustering, enabling connectivity and linkages within and between suppliers and purchasers, between enterprises and Higher Education Institutes (HEIs).
8. Development of quality of life factors and sense of Place, including harnessing the social, and cultural dimensions of the living experience of communities, including the unique social, linguistic and cultural dimensions of our Gaeltacht communities.

EFFECTIVE INTEGRATION OF LAND-USE AND TRANSPORT PLANNING

There is a need to significantly improve the integration of Land-use and Transport Planning across our region. The principle of compact growth and the identification and delivery of appropriate development lands within the existing built-up footprint of urban places is a central tenet to the RSES. This commitment to compact growth will be delivered locally through Development Plans and Local Area Plans.

12 Urban Places of Regional Scale are identified in this RSES for accelerated growth. Local Authorities through liaising with the NTA, TII and other stakeholders are to prepare Local Transport Plans (LTPs) for each of these settlements (see 6.3.7). The Galway Transport Strategy (GTS) has already been prepared and it will now be implemented as an objective of the Galway MASP. Other key infrastructural projects are necessary to provide access to and within the region and these critically



enabling projects are listed in *Growth Ambition 3: Connected Region* together with multi-modal transport priorities, including rail, bus, walking and cycling. The output of this approach shall deliver more effective integration of land-use and transport planning for the region.

3.4 Urban Places of Regional Scale

The National Planning Framework includes a suite of objectives that are to be delivered through this RSES, including targets for population, employment and the development of infill/brownfield sites.

The ratio of employment to population targets are set out in the NPF as being 0.66:1.0 and the target is for at least 40% of all new housing to be delivered within the existing built-up areas of cities, towns and villages on infill and/or brownfield sites. This means encouraging more people, jobs and activity generally within our existing urban areas, rather than mainly on 'greenfield' sites and this requires a significant change in the approach historically taken

in many places. It does not dispense with appropriate standards being achieved but rather will require imaginative high-quality architectural bespoke solutions be developed to provide for high-quality desirable places that can attract more people, and generate new employment opportunities within the existing footprint of our cities, towns and villages. The population and employment targets provided in the NPF for this region are set out in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Population Projections via the National Planning Framework

National Policy Objective	Northern and Western Region
1. Growing Our Regions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ +160,000–180,000 people (1m total) ➤ +115,000 in employment (450,000 total)
2. Building Stronger Regions: Accessible Centres of Scale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Galway City and Suburbs: +40,000–45,000 people (at least 120,000 total) ➤ RSES to set out a strategic development framework for the region, leading with the key role of Sligo in the North-West, Athlone in the Midlands and the Letterkenny–Derry cross-border network
3. Compact, Smart, Sustainable Growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 50% of new city housing within existing Galway City and suburbs footprint ➤ 30% all new housing elsewhere, within existing urban footprints



It is recognised that the move towards the full implementation of the NPF shall take time to cascade down through the RSES and Development Plan process. Population projections at Regional, County and Metropolitan level have been provided in the publication of 'Project Ireland 2040 Implementation Roadmap for National Planning Framework, DHPLG July 2018'¹ and they should provide sufficient scope to enable Development Plans to be reviewed, land zonings to be prioritised and Local Area Plans and

planning permissions to be worked through. This allows for agility and ambition to be maintained, as well as facilitating ongoing monitoring and review, as we move towards full implementation of the NPF and NDP. The traditional 'headroom' within land zoning practice is, however, now contained within these transitional figures thus obviating the requirement to zone 50% more land than was notionally heretofore required.

Table 2: Implementation Roadmap Population Projections

Region	2016	2026	2031
Border	394,000	430,000-437,000	444,500-454,500
West	453,000	512,500-524,500	542,000-559,500
NWRA	847,442	942,500-961,500	986,500-1,014,500

Table 3: MASP and Regional Centres Population Targets

	Settlement	Population 2016 census	% increase to 2040 (min)	Uplift to 2040	Proposed 2026 uplift (min)	Proposed 2031 uplift (min)	Transitional Target Population ²
	Galway City	79,900	50 - 55	42,000	23,000	12,000	115,000
Regional Growth Centres	Athlone	21,300	40	8,700	4,800	2,400	28,500
	Letterkenny	19,300	40	8,000	4,400	2,200	26,000
	Sligo	19,200	40	8,000	4,400	2,200	26,000

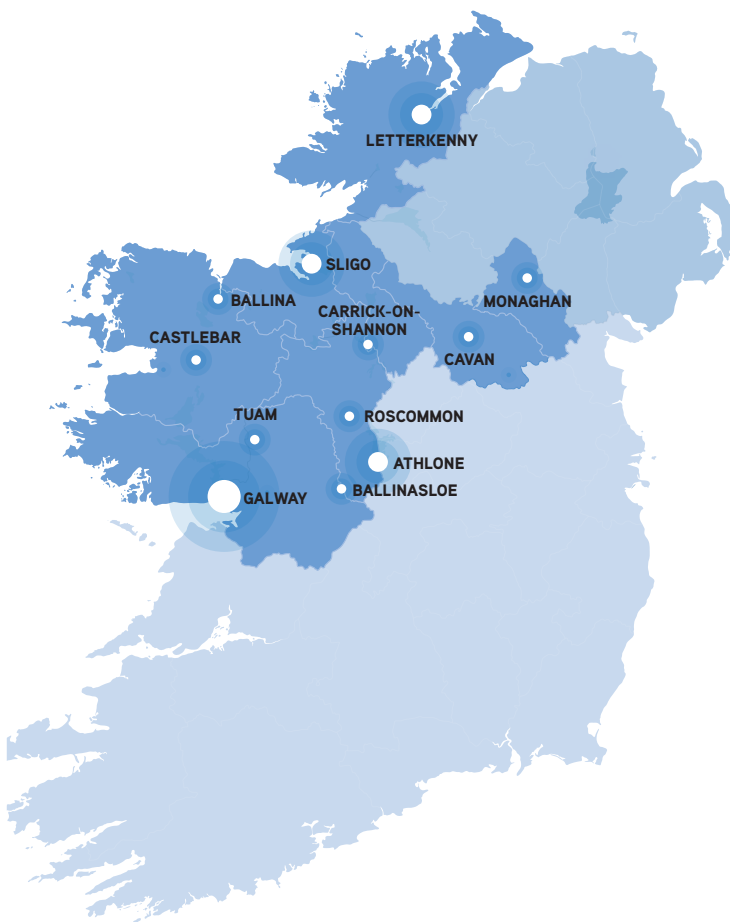
Table 4: Key Town Population

	Settlement	Population 2016 census
Key Towns: (30% uplift)	Ballina	10,200
	Castlebar	12,100
	Cavan	10,900
	Ballinasloe	6,700
	Carrick-on-Shannon	4,100
	Monaghan	7,700
	Roscommon	5,900
	Tuam	8,800

¹ <https://www.nwra.ie/rses/>

² Takes into account Transitional Regional and County Population projection to 2031 as set out in the implementation roadmap for the NPF published in 2018

Figure 18: Map of Region



There is now an opportunity to deliver an effective alignment of plans at national, regional and local levels and shift away from a business-as-usual scenario towards more compact growth. For our region, this means that our strategy must focus on the significant growth of the urban centres of Galway, Letterkenny, Sligo and Athlone (partially within the Northern and Western Region) - see Tables 2 and 3. These places also need to be underpinned by the network of towns that perform a support role in providing regionally strategic employment development of significant scale.

The National Planning Framework provides a target growth rate for Galway between 50%-55% to 2040. This RSES has targeted the Letterkenny, Sligo and Athlone Regional Growth Centres to grow their population by at least 40% to 2040 and the Key Towns to have a targeted growth of at least 30%, relative to Census 2016 (See Tables 3 and 4 respectively).

This shall allow balanced growth elsewhere within each county to be determined locally and based upon the varied growth potential of different places, subject to safeguarding that the growth of the Regional Growth Centres and Key Towns is not compromised. The rationale for this shall be identified within the core strategy of the development plans, which shall take into consideration the level of vacant properties.

REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES

RPO 3.1

Develop urban places of regional-scale through:

- › Delivering on the population targets for the Metropolitan and Regional Growth Centres through compact growth:
- › Delivering significant compact growth in Key Towns; and
- › Developing derelict and underutilised sites, with an initial focus within town cores.

These targets need to be matched by the delivery of critical enabling infrastructure and services, thus ensuring that these places grow as successful significant employment centres and service locations not only for the urban areas themselves but, importantly, for their extensive hinterlands that include smaller towns, villages and rural areas. Further detail in respect of the development objectives of these Cities and Towns is provided elsewhere within this strategy, through Metropolitan Area Strategic Plans (MASPs) and Regional Growth Centre Strategic Plans (RGCSPPs), with specific opportunities and strategic priorities also being detailed for Key Towns. The making of development plans for these and other areas, whilst being informed by this strategy, are primarily a function for local authorities to perform.

3.5 Smaller Towns, Villages and Rural Areas

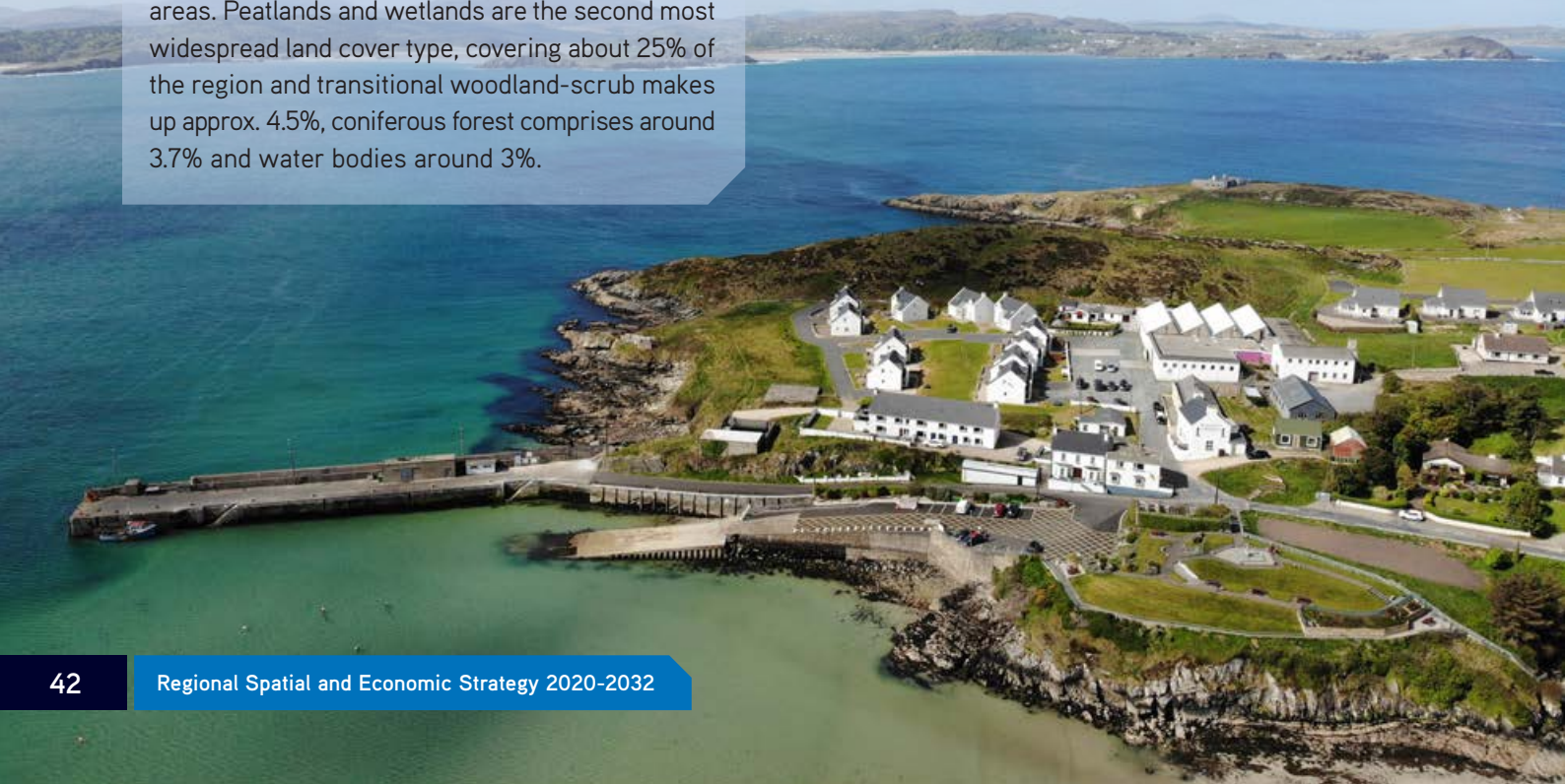
The population living in rural towns, villages and the countryside (i.e. other than the Cities and Regional Growth Centres and Key Towns) are home to almost 80% of our region's population and as such represent a sizeable cohort of the population and land area.

They include settlements in each county that are smaller than Key Towns but play an important role in supporting the social, economic and cultural life within rural communities. The culture of living in smaller towns and the countryside is built upon a strong connection with rural areas. For some, it is both their place of work and their home but for many, the reality is that their place of work and main services are at a distance from their home elsewhere and therefore transport connectivity and telecommunications connectivity is a key issue for accessing employment, education and healthcare lifelines. The issues of connectivity and accessibility are explored in more detail within Growth Ambition 3: Connected Region.

According to Census 2016, the agriculture, forestry and fishing industries have a higher proportion of people employed within them in our region (7.5%) compared to the State (4.4%). There are over 60,000 farms in this region alone, which accounts for approximately 56% of the regional landmass, covering the land type of arable land, pastures, permanent crops and heterogeneous agricultural areas. Peatlands and wetlands are the second most widespread land cover type, covering about 25% of the region and transitional woodland-scrub makes up approx. 4.5%, coniferous forest comprises around 3.7% and water bodies around 3%.



Our islands lying off the western seaboard of Counties Donegal, Mayo and Galway and our coastal areas also contain some of our most vibrant and culturally distinctive communities, with many areas forming part of the Gaeltacht. As a result of their location, they are highly dependent on rural employment within the fishing, agriculture and tourism sectors. The importance of these assets to this region and their potential to be sustainably developed into the future are explored further, particularly under Growth Ambition 1: Vibrant Region and Growth Ambition 2: Natural Region.





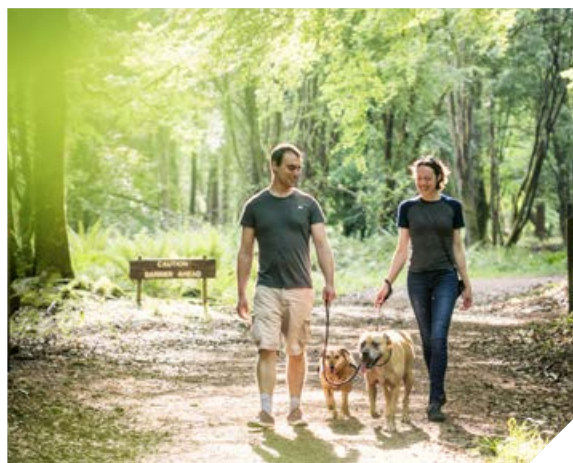
This region is defined by its strong connection to our rural areas, which provide for the economic, social, cultural and environmental well-being of our communities, both urban and rural. This requires the careful management of development within rural areas to ensure that they remain and grow as vibrant communities. Thus, the response required must be informed by the specific attributes of the place, including its role which in broad terms may be summarised as one or more of the following:

- Areas with a clear distinction from urban areas in their character.
- Areas of rural population, rural employment and rural social character.
- Areas of recreation and tourism based on their resources and assets.
- Areas of high environmental quality.
- Areas of agriculture and natural resource development.
- Areas that protect against climate change and areas that can adapt to climate change.
- Working areas that can accommodate renewable energy production.
- Areas of water resources.

VIBRANCY AND VITALITY

Whilst the vibrancy and vitality of our rural areas need to be conserved, so also does the sense of place, culture and the quality, character and distinctiveness of our landscape. It is necessary to make our rural areas more resilient to challenges they are experiencing from urban generated pressures in some locations to a declining and ageing population in others, the structure of the economy and lack of access to quality infrastructure and new technologies in others. One solution does not fit all but areas experiencing declining and ageing population will require careful management, as it is also often the rural areas that have an ageing population, where issues of isolation are more prominent and the economic viability of service provision is most acute.

The management of rural areas is challenging in that some areas have a declining and ageing population whilst others are experiencing urban generated pressure from the demand for houses within the commuter zone of our cities, regional centres and their support towns. The NPF confirms that there needs to be a distinction made between areas under urban influence and elsewhere. It confirms that the capacity to provide for single rural housing should be retained for those that have a demonstrable economic or social need to



live in the area, subject to all other proper planning and sustainable development considerations. The management of these pressures is a matter for individual local authorities through the development plan process, having regard to the provisions of Ministerial Guidelines and other material considerations. This includes, but is not limited to, environmental considerations, the pressure for housing, availability and adequacy of support infrastructure, suitability of soils to treat and dispose of wastewater to appropriate standard, visual and physical impact and the need to provide for house design and orientation that meet current and future energy efficiency demands. The preference would be that all new housing would be designed to high standards of energy efficiency with an emphasis on non-fossil fuel heating systems.

REALISING OPPORTUNITIES

The emphasis of the RSES is on highlighting opportunities for the region arising from the positive assets of rural areas and the diversity of opportunities that differentiates this region, including the quality of life offering and the sense of community that is available. Furthermore, it is well understood that rural employment opportunities are undergoing a fundamental and potentially radical transformation in response to the societal and technological changes of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, through changing capabilities in Artificial Intelligence, automation, digitisation, robotics and nanotechnology. As these global changes gather pace, jobs will be created which currently do not exist or have yet to be imagined, and existing roles of places will be disrupted or transformed.

The fourth industrial revolution presents a significant opportunity for our region and this strategy needs to enable employers to plan for and adapt to these changes, including the provisions of appropriate upskilling and reskilling of employees to meet these new challenges, through investment in infrastructure and education. Through technology and improved connectivity, our rural communities can become better equipped to take advantage of the digital revolution and to overcome the challenge of isolation and population decline. It is these new trends that are creating fresh opportunities for the development of rural areas and the emergence of new rural businesses, as the internet and other digital technologies provide the potential to address the legacy issue of geographic distance and create new forms of proximity to knowledge, markets and people.

Rural areas are also well placed to benefit from new market opportunities that are emerging in sectors such as the food economy, the green economy, circular economy and the bioeconomy. These have the potential for job creation and to attract people to live and work in rural areas. Within our rural areas, the small towns and villages are particularly suitable for and reliant upon SMEs, since their local labour markets are generally too small to supply large firms. These SMEs make vital contributions to the economic and social fabric of their rural communities. The development of these types of small firms will assist in reversing economic decline and achieving more inclusive and sustainable economic growth. There are a variety of government supports available to SMEs and it is important to build greater awareness and enable accessibility to targeted financial incentives and instruments to support their growth and economic competitiveness.



In this context, some of the advantages of rural locations become more apparent, including the likelihood of cheaper land and housing, more space, cleaner air and easier access to the countryside. However, balanced against this is the fact that the vitality and viability of our towns and villages is a significant issue for this region, as we emerge from the economic recession and as the role and function of these settlements evolve. The delivery of the National Broadband Plan will be a critical enabler in this transition.

REGENERATION AND REVITALISATION

The future role and function of our large network of smaller towns and villages across the region need to be re-imagined, addressing economic, physical and social decline issues. The regeneration of our smaller towns and villages is now a major priority action for our region, which provides an opportunity to address legacy issues and to turn around their fortunes. The health of our villages and towns can be significantly influenced through the delivery of new housing through the utilisation of existing buildings, brownfield/infill sites or otherwise. The NPF target for at least 40% of all new housing to be delivered within the existing built-up areas of cities, towns and villages on infill and/or brownfield sites is an important opportunity for our smaller towns and villages to be re-imagined and therefore it is included as a key objective.



The focus needs to be on regenerating the original core and main street areas initially, where traditional retailing opportunities lessen and examine how they can best relate to the expanded town/village. The reuse and regeneration of the existing building stock within the core area, development of brownfield and gap sites and the organic development of these places needs to be considered, to create more liveable places that people want to live, work and spend time in as their place of choice.

The emphasis will change from place to place but in all cases, the approach should be to provide a range of attractive housing choices appropriate to the needs and character of the place, including the provision of serviced sites and to provide for low-density housing demand, as an alternative to living in one-off houses outside towns and villages.

There are many lessons to be learnt from the experience of practitioners in regeneration across the region and the rollout of a peer learning programme shall be developed by the NWRA in collaboration with interested stakeholders, which will be of benefit and may assist in developing collaborative applications for funding, such as the new Rural Regeneration and Development Fund committed to by Government in Project Ireland 2040.

Additionally, given the extent of vacant and derelict buildings within the countryside, it is appropriate to set a target that 20% of rural housing to be delivered on brownfield sites, subject to planning considerations including those outlined above.

REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES

RPO 3.2

(a) Deliver at least 50% of all new city homes targeted in the Galway MASP, within the existing built-up footprint of Galway City and suburbs.

(b) Deliver at least 40% of all new housing targeted in the Regional Growth Centres, within the existing built-up footprint.

(c) Deliver at least 30% of all new homes that are targeted in settlements with a population of at least 1,500 (other than the Galway MASP and the Regional Growth Centres), within the existing built-up footprints³.

RPO 3.3

Deliver at least 20% of all new housing in rural areas on brownfield sites.

RPO 3.4

To support the regeneration and renewal of small towns and villages in rural areas.

RPO 3.5

Identify and develop quality green infrastructure, within and adjacent to City, Regional Growth Centres and Key Towns.

RPO 3.6

Support a coherent and consistent approach in the identification and monitoring of the scale of housing vacancy within the region, identifying vacancy hotspots and informing the setting of actions, objectives and targets in Action Plans and identify how these might best be achieved.

RPO 3.7

The Assembly supports local authorities in identifying and prioritising a program for the provision of serviced sites within smaller towns and villages within 1 year of the adoption of the RSES. A rolling 2-year implementation plan shall subsequently be prepared.

³ built up footprint of settlement is that defined by the CSO





RPO 3.8

Support the design of new/replacement/refurbished dwellings to high energy efficiency standards that fully avail of renewable technologies, maximise solar gain, utilising modern materials and design practices.

RPO 3.11

Local Authorities, DHPLG, OPW, and other relevant Departments and agencies to work together to implement the recommendation of the CFRAM programme to ensure that flood risk management policies and infrastructure are progressively implemented.

RPO 3.9

Identify suitable development opportunities for regeneration and development that are supported by a quality site selection process that also addresses environmental constraints and opportunities.

RPO 3.12

Within Gaeltacht Areas and Gaeltacht Towns, in particular, emphasis shall be assigned to the impacts of proposed developments and their impact on the community of language and the maintenance and development of its socialisation networks.

RPO 3.10

Ensure flood risk management informs development by avoiding inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding and integrate sustainable water management solutions (such as SUDS, non-porous surfacing and green roofs) to create safe places. Development plans should assess flood risk by implementing the recommendations of the Planning System and Flood Risk Assessment Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2009) and Circular PL02/2014 (August 2014).

RPO 3.13

To support the role of smaller and medium-sized towns, which demonstrate an important role in terms of service provision and employment for their catchments within the economic function of the county. Such settlements will be identified through the Development Plan process as part of the Settlement Hierarchy and the Core Strategy.





3.6

GALWAY METROPOLITAN AREA STRATEGIC PLAN

3.6 Galway Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

A key ambition of the RSES strategy is to grow globally competitive urban centres of scale that shall be compact, connected, vibrant and inclusive places for people and for businesses to grow. The primary centre identified for growth in the region is Galway City through its designation as a Metropolitan Area in the NPF. The next tier identified comprises the Regional Growth Centres of Athlone, Letterkenny and Sligo. The RSES amplifies the provisions of the NPF and this MASP sets out the strategic direction the city will grow to achieve compact growth, as envisaged within the first national strategic outcome in the NPF.

The importance attributed to metropolitan areas for the development of the regions requires the preparation and delivery of a Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (MASP). This new focus for national development offers an opportunity to build a new dynamism in residential, commercial, social, educational, recreational and infrastructural development.

The delivery of compact growth will be achieved through collaboration between all stakeholders in the community. The MASP is the template, the ownership of the plan will be taken by the local authorities through their development plans and local area plans which will provide the fine grain for the detailed development for all areas in the MASP.

As the only MASP Galway has a pivotal function in the development of the region. Its immediate influence is illustrated in Figure 20, which is based upon the 15% commuting area for the city, (west to Clifden, north past Tuam, east near Ballinasloe and south past Gort). Galway is not alone however at a national level and it is one of five MASPs in the country, the others being Dublin, Cork, Limerick/Shannon and Waterford. There is a willingness at regional level that the cities outside Dublin cooperate and collaborate with each other to foster and grow a collective urban alternative to Dublin. The policy below encapsulates these ambitions.

REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVE

RPO 3.6.1

It is an objective to establish a collaborative approach between the Regional Assemblies (NWRA & SRA), the local authorities and other stakeholders to enable all their metropolitan areas to collaborate to harness their combined potential as an alternative to Dublin.

Figure 19: Galway Metropolitan Area Boundary

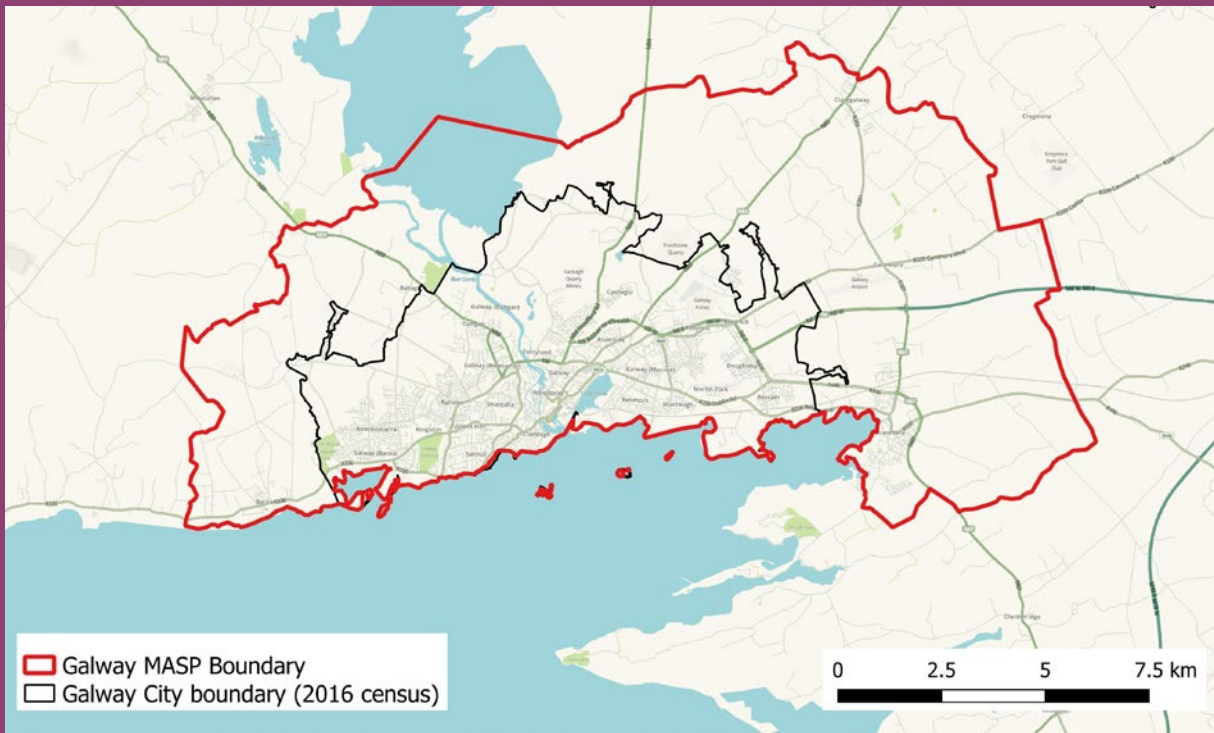
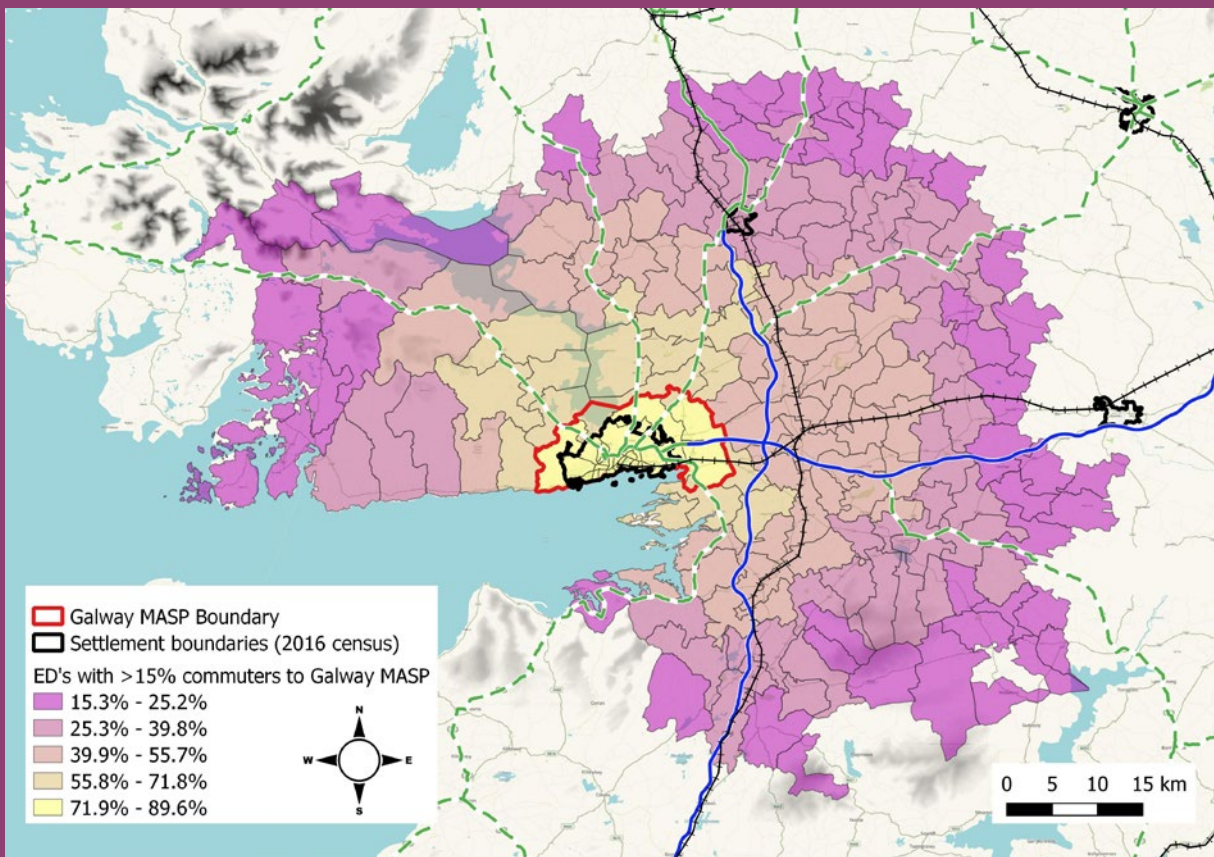


Figure 20: Galway Commuting Catchment





VISION FOR MASP

The MASP provides a strategic focus on the City and environs and sets out how it is envisaged the NPF will be implemented in the regional context of the RSES. The vision for Galway is that it will be a leading European city renowned for its quality of life, its history, its culture and its people. It is and will be a place that embraces modern technologies, high standards of education, competitive and sustainable enterprises. The challenges to the city's development will be met by the integrated and timely provision of infrastructure much of which is included in this strategy. The prioritisation of identified projects is included within the MASP using the following notations:

- Short Term (S) 0-6 years
- Medium Term (M) 6-12 years
- Long Term (L) 12-20 years

All of the above will be managed in an environmentally sensitive manner, retaining and protecting the valuable natural assets that are within and surrounding the MASP area, and that contribute to making it the place that is known worldwide.

Galway City has an extensive reach (See Figure 20) and is located at a pivotal location along the Atlantic Economic Corridor, from where the influence of Ireland's southern cities (Cork and Limerick) extends northwards to the Regional Growth Centres of Sligo and Letterkenny in the North West City Region context. It is home to existing internationally recognised world-class clusters in Medical Devices and ICT. It is becoming a major technology hub, particularly around internet and collaborative working technologies. Galway City is home to 9 of the top 10 ICT companies. All of this is supported through third-level institutions embedded within the city, providing for a highly educated and vibrant workforce.

STRATEGIC GROWTH AREAS

POPULATION AND HOUSING

Galway Metropolitan Area has a considerable land capacity that can significantly contribute to meeting the housing demands based on population targets set out in the NPF and the RSES. The targets are that:

1. The population of Galway MASP to grow by 27,500 to 2026 and by a further 14,500 to 2031 with the population of the city and suburbs accommodating 23,000 to 2026 and a further 12,000 to 2031.
2. Deliver at least half (50%) of all new homes that are targeted within the MASP to be within the existing built-up footprint.

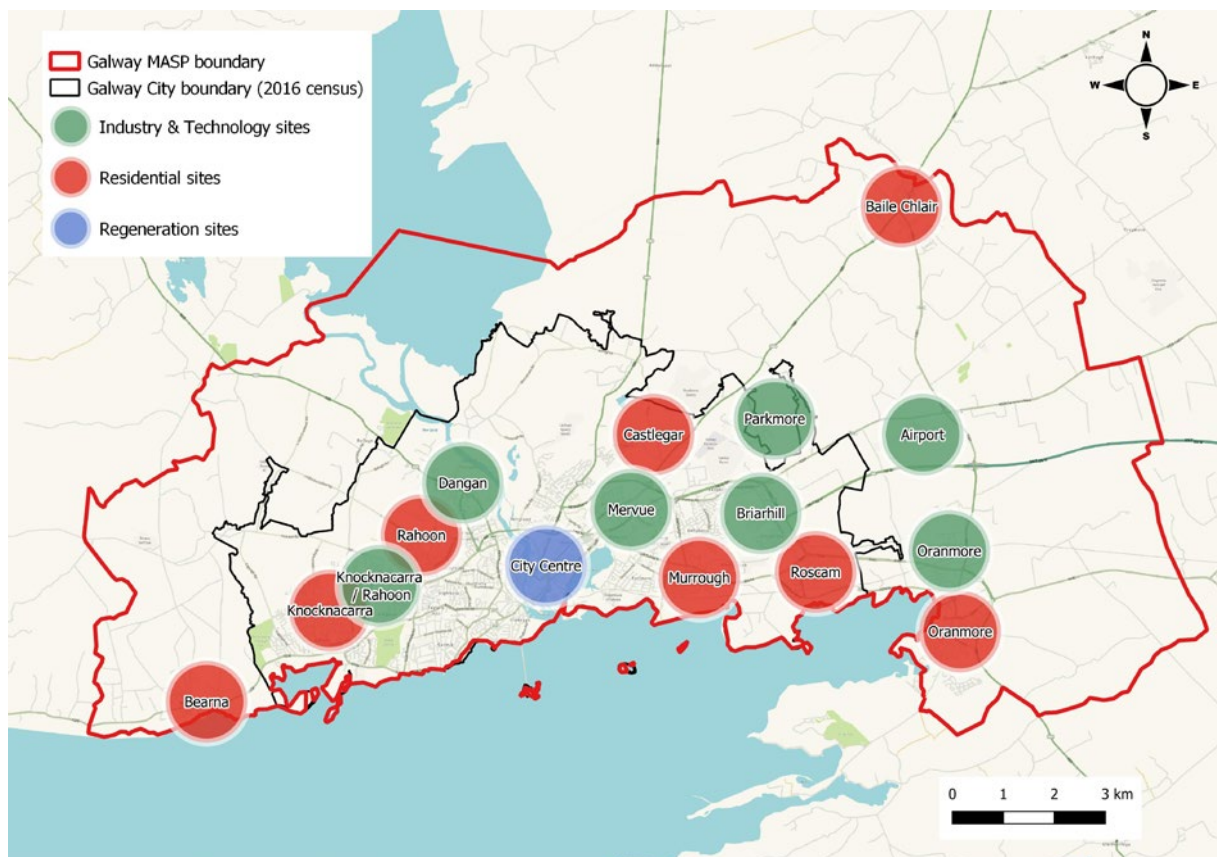
The policy framework is to meet this projected demand through promoting the development of sustainable high-quality neighbourhoods, sustainable densities incorporating high design standards and key urban design principles. The Strategy is to provide for integration of housing with

transportation infrastructure fostering sustainable transport patterns. This provides for a co-ordinated approach with investment and the delivery of essential infrastructure, services and community facilities. It also must promote a range of house types, sizes and tenures suitable for households with different income levels or those who may have specific requirements.

A number of strategic locations have been identified that present the opportunity and capacity to deliver the necessary quantum of housing to facilitate targeted growth, subject to the adequate provision of services. These locations are summarised below and are shown on Figure 21.

- Consolidation of the existing neighbourhoods of Knocknacarra, Ragoon, Castlegar and Roscam.
- Development of Regeneration Lands at Ceant Station Quarter, Inner Harbour and Headford Road.
- Ardaun.
- Murrough.
- Baile Chláir, Bearna, Oranmore and Briarhill.

Figure 21: Galway – Residential, Industry, Regeneration



REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVE**RPO 3.6.2**

The Assembly supports the proposition that 50% of new homes for the population targets will be constructed within the existing city development envelope, 40% of these shall be located on infill and/or brownfield sites.⁴

CONSOLIDATION OF EXISTING NEIGHBOURHOODS - KNOCKNACARRA, RAHOON, CASTLEGAR AND ROSCAM

This is a tenet of compact growth and will have general application throughout the city. Alternative arrangements may pertain to Architectural Conservation Areas and areas with high incidences of protected structures. The existing neighbourhoods of Knocknacarra, Ragoon, Castlegar and Roscam have the potential to develop c.170ha of residentially zoned land suitable for higher density development. The future development plans for the city will prioritise the staged release of serviced lands to meet the population targets referenced above.

REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVE**RPO 3.6.3**

(a) The Assembly supports the preparation of a Building Heights Study, a strategy to guide future sustainable development which takes into account the historic, cultural and infrastructure features of the city. In developing this strategy, areas of high density will target residential density of 50 units/ha. The default rate for other areas will generally be 35 units/ha.

(b) The preparation of a Building Heights Study shall take into account all material considerations including but not limited to, the historic cultural and infrastructure features of the city, urban design, architectural quality, place-making, regeneration and public transport provisions. It shall also take account of the economic, social and environmental issues that need to be addressed so that quality living is delivered. The study should be cognisant of the need to deliver compact growth and density of residential development may be one metric but the quantum of commercial, social and cultural floor space should also be a consideration.

⁴ The baseline for the measurement of this objective is the CSO boundary for Galway and its suburbs as defined in the NPF (footnote 17)



ARDAUN

To the east of the City, Ardaun can accommodate up to 25% of the residential growth anticipated for the city. Ardaun is a highly accessible location and is well placed to link through sustainable transport modes with the City Centre and key employment areas such as Parkmore, Ballybrit, Mervue and strategic IDA sites at Oranmore and Athenry.

Ardaun provides opportunities for high-density residential development structured and coordinated with essential services and community facilities. It has currently a Local Area Plan which sets out a framework for development and is a designated Major Urban Housing Delivery Site under Rebuilding Ireland. It also has potential for a high level of connectivity, to the National Motorway Network and close to the mainline station at Oranmore (Garraun).

The Ardaun area comprises 2 main development phases. Phase 1 which is the lands south of the M6/ N6 including 29 hectares of residentially zoned lands and 20 hectares of urban village centre zoned lands which will have significant residential content.

Phase 2 is the lands to the north of the M6/N6 comprises 61 hectares of residentially zoned lands. In the longer term, it is envisaged that Ardaun will develop eastwards.

Table 5: Galway City – Land Bank Capacity

LAND CAPACITY - LANDS AVAILABLE FOR HOUSING	APPROXIMATE LAND AREA
City Residential zoned lands – high density	172 ha
Regeneration Lands – min 30% residential content	10 ha
Ardaun LAP Phase 1	49 ha
Ardaun LAP Phase 2	61 ha
Murrough LAP (one-third mixed-use)	11 ha
Eyre Square East Quarter	2 ha
Baile Chláir	7 ha
Bearna	14 ha
Oranmore	33 ha

MURROUGH

The LAP lands at Murrough, although primarily designated for recreation and amenity purposes, will also sustain mixed-uses including residential uses. The total area of these lands is 34ha, one-third of which will be reserved for residential and other uses (11ha).

BAILE CHLAIR

Baile Chlair is located to the north-east of the metropolitan area, within Gaeltacht na Gaillimhe (County Galway Gaeltacht). It supports many local shops, commercial/business units, hotel accommodation and significant residential accommodation. The village remains a desirable residential location benefiting from its accessibility to commute to work in the larger urban centres of Galway City and Tuam, as well as the industrial area of Parkmore.

Recent infrastructure investment include drainage works to alleviate flooding, a new bridge, secondary school and a new wastewater treatment plant, which have provided additional capacity to meet the current and future needs. The development of the village requires ongoing careful management whilst recognising its natural, built and cultural heritage assets. The implementation of the GTS will be influential in ensuring the sustainable development of the town.

BEARNA

Bearna is located to the west of the Metropolitan Area, at the gateway to the Gaeltacht na Gaillimhe (County Galway Gaeltacht). It has experienced significant growth in and surrounding the village and is serviced through the Mutton Island Wastewater Treatment Plant. Its location favours future growth that should have a focus that includes the consolidation of built-up areas of the village and the provision of supporting community infrastructure and services that are easily accessible by walking, cycling or public transport. The built, archaeological and cultural heritage of Bearna are important assets that should be conserved appropriately, including the Pier Road Architectural Conservation Area. While there is currently circa 14ha of residential phase 1 lands identified in the Bearna Local Area Plan that can accommodate growth in the short/medium term, there are additional lands available to facilitate further growth. The identification of such



lands shall be a matter for the statutory plan-making process and shall have regard to environmental considerations, including flood risk and climate change.

ORANMORE

Oranmore is located to the east of the Metropolitan Area and is serviced by the Galway-Dublin/Limerick rail service, with the rail terminus at Garraun serving it. It is also within proximity to the motorway which makes it a strategic location for residential development of scale. There are circa 33ha of lands identified for Residential Phase 1 use in the Oranmore LAP and additional residential lands shall need to be brought forward to supply future demand. There is potential for Oranmore to accommodate an increase in population allocation and it is serviced through the Mutton Island Wastewater Treatment Plant. That plant has in recent years been upgraded to ensure population growth can be achieved while at the same continuing to protect bathing water quality. The East Galway Main Drainage Scheme shall be a key enabler for the larger area of Oranmore and Ardaun to the north, which shall enable the strategic potential offered by the rail terminus at Garraun.

STUDENT ACCOMMODATION

It is important to specifically refer to the student population of the city as it comprises a significant quantum of the city population (over 24,000 students attend third-level colleges in the city) and there is a particular demand for student niche accommodation in the city to meet their needs. The objective of the MASP is to support the provision of purposebuilt student accommodation both on and offcampus at appropriate locations. Delivery of this type of accommodation can be met on a variety of mixed zoned sites and is beneficial in freeing up existing private housing stock within existing housing developments. This type of accommodation also has the potential to meet tourism accommodation demands outside term time.



DEVELOPMENT OF REGENERATION LANDS CEANNT STATION QUARTER, INNER HARBOUR AND HEADFORD ROAD AREA

Regeneration Lands at Ceannt Station Quarter (circa 6ha), Inner Harbour (circa 9ha) and Headford Road (circa 15ha) present opportunities to develop a significant quantum of residential development and importantly present scope for significant employment generation.

The Ceannt Station and the Inner Harbour offer a sequential solution to the expansion of the city centre, linked with a transportation hub, reinforcing the prime role of the city centre in both the city, the Metropolitan Area and the wider region.

The Headford Road area is also a key enabler for expansion of the city centre. It has considerable potential for the intensification and increased retail floorspace and commercial office type floorspace that can facilitate further employment opportunities. It also has the benefit of having a large publicly owned site with development potential (Dyke Road surface car park).

Expanding the city-centre incorporating these Regeneration Lands not only responds to future commercial floorspace demand but it also can, with good design solutions, enhance the image of the city, its regional tourism function and allow for an expansion to a scale commensurate with that envisaged under the National Planning Framework and this RSES.

There are also smaller city-centre sites at, for example, Nuns Island and Eyre Square East which can contribute to regeneration.

REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVE

RPO 3.6.4

The Assembly support the regeneration and development of city centre sites at Galway Harbour, Ceannt Station and Headford Road (S/M).

ECONOMY AND EMPLOYMENT LOCATIONS

Galway city plays an important regional role in providing for a diverse range of economic activities, services and employment opportunities and has considerable potential for further development and capacity for new enterprises.

The economic development strategy for the city is to focus on City Centre Regeneration and strategically located industrial /enterprise lands throughout the city.

CITY CENTRE

A primary objective of the MASP is to present a strong policy focus to preserve and enhance the city centre as the primary commercial area within the city supporting a range of retail, commercial, tourism, social and cultural activities.

This together with protection and enhancement of the historic core and making improvements to the city centre public realm, will contribute to the vitality and vibrancy of the city centre and reinforce the positive image of the city as a place to live, work, visit and shop. The historic core captures the character of the city and its continued health is of the utmost importance.

While there is scope for infill development and refurbishment of existing commercial space, the city centre is constrained being located in the historic core and cannot easily meet significant future commercial floorspace demand. The Regeneration Lands are ideally placed to meet these future demands.

INDUSTRIAL AND COMMERCIAL LANDS

Current land-use zoning is anticipated to meet the projected employment increase forecast within the MASP and at locations that are integrated with the strategy for sustainable transportation and coordinated with the settlement strategy. Outside of the city centre, the focus is to prioritise investment and expansion in high tech manufacturing, research and development at existing strategic key locations at Mervue, Parkmore, Briarhill, and Dangan. These areas have a strong FDI presence which is reflected in the manufacturing industries including the medical technologies sector and the internationally traded ICT services and software sectors.

These areas have the potential for additional employment opportunities with good opportunities for expansion through densification and re-organisation. There are also opportunities for growth in the general manufacturing and commercial/ trade sectors on these lands.

In Knocknacarra/Rahoon, lands are available for a significant level of employment opportunities which will focus on the technology/office-based industries thereby providing potential employment close to this large residential neighbourhood linking land use and transport requirements sustainably. Development on these lands will complement the existing commercial/ community developments associated with the designated Knocknacarra district centre. There is also the capacity for job creation within Ardaun as part of a coordinated development strategy for this area.

Significant land supply is also available on the IDA lands at Parkmore (38ha) and Oranmore (27ha) which have huge potential to accommodate future large scale employment. These lands also benefit from being easily accessible due to the improvement of the wider road network in the form of the M6 and M17/M18 motorways.

The Galway Airport Site is also a key opportunity site in the ownership of Galway City and County Council with significant development potential. It is identified in the National Planning Framework as a growth enabler and the objective of this MASP is to unlock the potential of this part of the metropolitan area over the lifetime of this strategy. Options for its future use could emerge from a feasibility study.



Proposals that emerge from this process will be further developed in due course and as part of a future development plan process.

REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVE

RPO 3.6.5

Support the delivery of lands for employment uses at Knocknacarra/Rahoon, Mervue, Dangan, Parkmore, Briarhill, Airport and Oranmore.

RPO 3.6.6

The Assembly supports the preparation of a masterplan for the Airport Site and developed lands (including associated lands) in its immediate hinterland (on both sides of the R339) for residential, community and employment uses. The preparation of the masterplan may be prepared on a phased basis if this is considered appropriate.

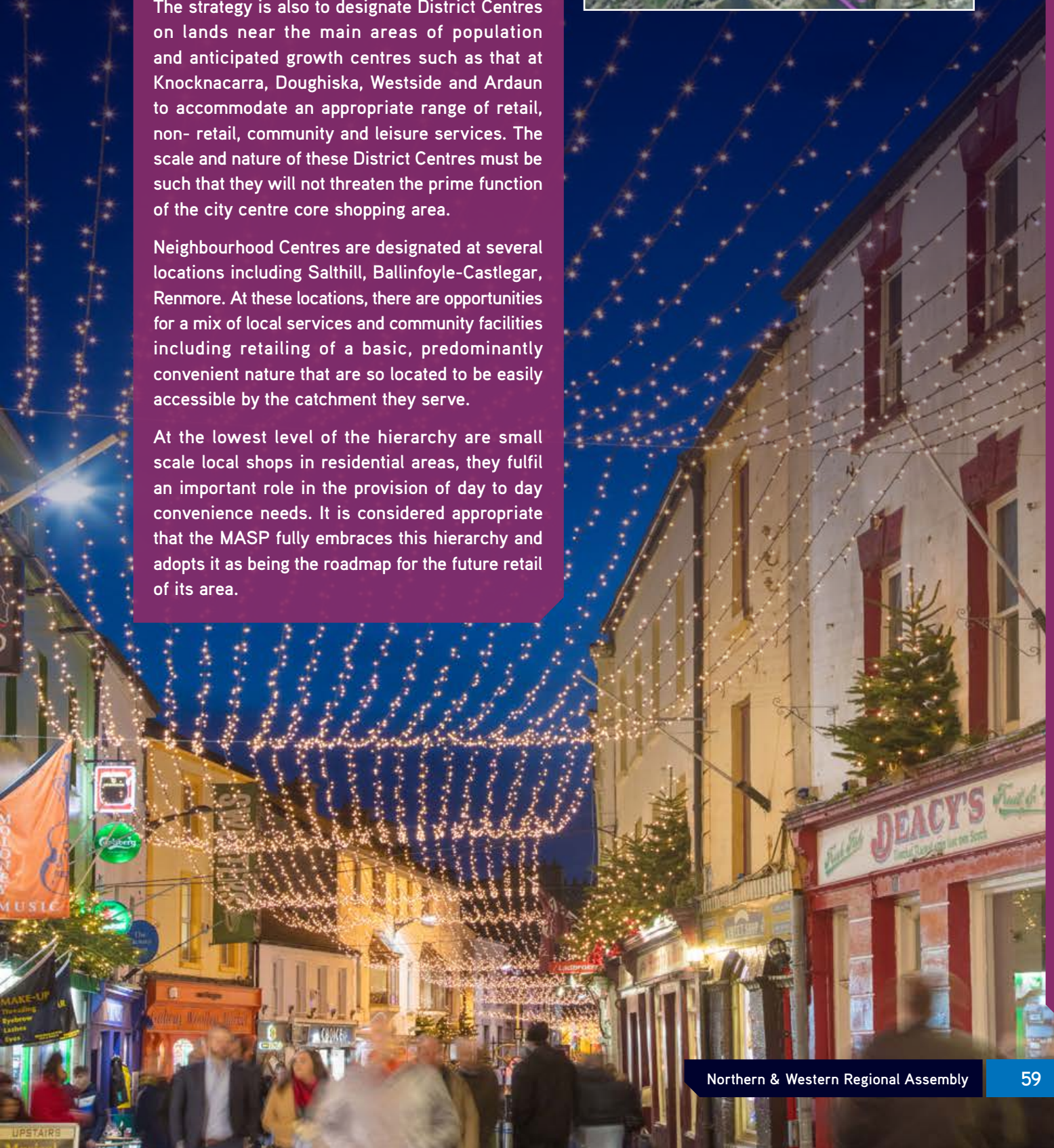
RETAIL

The retail strategy for the Metropolitan Area is to protect and enhance the city centre, designated as the most important shopping area in the city and county and to facilitate a mixed expansion of services including high order comparison retailing in conjunction with service retailing, cultural and entertainment facilities through appropriate and sensitive redevelopment, infill and the development of the Regeneration Lands.

The strategy is also to designate District Centres on lands near the main areas of population and anticipated growth centres such as that at Knocknacarra, Doughiska, Westside and Ardaun to accommodate an appropriate range of retail, non- retail, community and leisure services. The scale and nature of these District Centres must be such that they will not threaten the prime function of the city centre core shopping area.

Neighbourhood Centres are designated at several locations including Salthill, Ballinfoyle-Castlegar, Renmore. At these locations, there are opportunities for a mix of local services and community facilities including retailing of a basic, predominantly convenient nature that are so located to be easily accessible by the catchment they serve.

At the lowest level of the hierarchy are small scale local shops in residential areas, they fulfil an important role in the provision of day to day convenience needs. It is considered appropriate that the MASP fully embraces this hierarchy and adopts it as being the roadmap for the future retail of its area.



TOURISM

Policies to promote and support tourism in the Metropolitan Area recognise the range of economic activities and employment opportunities associated with the tourism industry in the city. There is huge potential to develop tourism and extend bed nights as a gateway to the North and West Region with potential to further develop urban, culture/heritage/food tourism. The location of the City midway along the Wild Atlantic Way is also an opportunity for expansion of the tourism product.



The success of Galway as a festival City is a significant tourism product, sustaining services and ensuring year-round bed nights with the Galway Races, the Arts Festival, the Film Fleadh and SeaFest being significant revenue generators. The designation as European Capital of Culture 2020, will raise the profile of tourism in Galway and will give opportunities for the development of cultural infrastructure and enhance and diversify tourism in the MASP area.

The unique environment of Galway City and County also plays an important tourism role. The extensive coastline, Lough Corrib, River Corrib, waterways and the city canal system are unique assets in the MASP area. Silverstrand and Salthill beaches which have blue flag beach status and Salthill promenade are part of a range of important coastal amenities within the city. Rinvilla Park and adjacent Galway Bay Sailing Club (just outside the MASP) play an important recreation and tourism role for Galway.



MARINE SECTOR

Galway has a strong maritime culture and tradition being located in an area with a long trading history. This is reflected in policy support for the sustainable growth of enterprise activities associated with the Marine Sector. Galway Harbour is ideally placed along the western seaboard to tap into emerging marine enterprises in particular, in the sustainable energy sector and offshore renewable energy. The harbour is an important facility serving the City and wider region. The proposals for redevelopment and extension of Galway Harbour includes for commercial quays, a deep water docking facility, fishing quays and provision of marina and water-based sports facilities. Improvement of harbour facilities is of strategic importance and has the potential to contribute significantly to the economy of both the City and the region, increasing connectivity and contributing to the tourism, enterprise and offshore energy sectors.

There is also considerable scope for marine diversification into new applications for health, medicine and technology. Marine research at the Marine Institute in Oranmore, linked with the environmental, marine and energy research at the Ryan Institute NUIG, are key players in the future growth of this sector in the Northern and Western Region. The Socio-Economic Marine Research Unit (SEMURU) in NUIG and Marine and Freshwater Research Centre (MFRC) in GMIT also play an important role.

There are also significant amenity benefits within the marine sector with a range of beaches, open spaces and walkways offering tourism and leisure opportunities and enhancing health and well being. Biodiversity and environmental benefits are significant also, with high-quality bathing waters, and a rich and diverse range of habitats and species reflected by the presence Galway Bay Special Area of Conservation and the Inner Galway Bay Special Protection Area.



CREATIVE/CULTURE SECTOR

Culture and creativity is at the heart of life in Galway City and it has a global reputation as the home of Druid Theatre Company, Galway International Arts Festival and Macnas. There is also a vibrant community arts sector that gives a strong cultural identity to the city and the county.

The strength and potential of the creative sector is evidenced in particular by designations such as the UNESCO City of Film and European Capital of Culture 2020. There is considerable scope for the establishment of the metropolitan area as a hub for the Creative and Cultural Industries, building on the distinctive culture and creative legacy in Galway. The development of film, media and entertainment, design and craft has the potential to add significant value to the overall economy and strengthen the identity of the MASP area.

A significant area of the MASP has Gaeltacht status - parts of the city, Bearna and Baile Chláir - and Galway is a bilingual city and is a service centre for the Connemara Gaeltacht. The use of the Irish language is part of everyday life in Galway and the drive to achieve official status for the City as 'Bilingual Capital of Ireland' reflects the strong Gaeltacht culture and identity within the City.

The culture strategy for the city 'Everybody Matters the Culture Strategy Framework for Galway 2016 – 2025' sets out the type of investment required (both capital and operational) to provide the infrastructure needed to improve the creative and cultural sector to meet the identified needs of the city and county.





STRATEGIC INFRASTRUCTURE

CONNECTED CITY

Inter-urban and inter-regional connectivity has progressed in recent years. The completion of the M6 motorway considerably reduced travel times from Dublin to Galway and has made the City more accessible nationally.

The completion of the M17/M18 Gort to Tuam motorway has significantly reduced travel time to Shannon Airport and has made considerable time savings between the City and IWAK. It also adds to the accessibility of the City and improved strategic linkage within the whole region. The objective within the lifetime of the MASP is to continue to improve the road network around the city and in particular to support the delivery of the Galway Transport Strategy (GTS) including the N6 Galway City Ring Road (N6 GCRR).

Galway city has a significant commuter population. This reflects the important regional economic role of the City and demonstrates that people are willing to travel long distances to access education and employment in the City owing to the quality and range of job opportunities. It also indicates the synergies that exist between the City and its hinterland. However, commuter travel patterns indicate a heavy dependence on car usage, in particular travel to work and school trips. These patterns give rise to significant congestion on the road network particularly during peak times which negatively impacts on the economy and the experience of the urban environment.

GALWAY TRANSPORT STRATEGY (GTS) AND CITY CENTRE TRANSPORT MANAGEMENT PLAN (CCTMP)

Within the Metropolitan Area, the promotion of integration of land use and transportation is reflected across all plans and strategies, including in particular the Galway Transport Strategy (GTS) which is a joint Galway City Council and County Council 20 year strategy prepared in partnership with the National Transport Authority.

The GTS supports opportunities that will reduce congestion and car dependency through increased capacity of reliable and sustainable public transport and the promotion and facilitation of cycling and walking, which in turn promotes the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

The strategy includes traffic management, giving priority to walking, cycling and bus movements, modifications to the traffic network, management of parking activities and heavy goods vehicles, improvements to the public realm and use of 'smarter mobility'.

As part of the GTS a detailed, City Centre Transport Management Plan is being prepared and will provide for the implementation of a city centre access network with measures for bus priority routes, bus-only routes, cycling and pedestrian links through and within the city centre with opportunities for the enhanced public realm. The development of park and ride facilities on the approaches to the city is an important part of improved connectivity.

Key Transportation Components for MASP

1. N6 GCRR

- The provision of a new N6 Galway City Ring Road (N6 GCRR) represents a key priority for the metropolitan area. This road is classified as part of the TEN-T road network in Ireland functioning in accordance with the European Unions (EU) TEN-T transport policy, which aims to create connectivity between regions, remove bottlenecks that hamper access to markets and promotes a sustainable multimodal network.
- The N6 GCRR will support the economic and social development of the region and improve connectivity and accessibility to the city and areas west of the city. It also will focus on supporting trips that cannot be facilitated by measures such as city-bound, cross-city and cross county movements. This will relieve congestion in the city and, in turn, improve the quality of the city environment and increase opportunities for reallocation of existing road space for sustainable transportation.

2. PUBLIC BUS TRANSPORT

- Development of a cross-city network of bus services which can serve the major trip attractors with five core bus routes to provide a minimum 15-minute frequency service during the peak periods and sustain a high-frequency service throughout the day.
- Provision of the Tuam Road Bus Corridor and Dublin Road Bus Corridor.



3. CYCLE NETWORK

- Provision of a core, secondary and feeder cycle network which includes segregated cycle routes, on-road cycle lanes and /or wide bus lanes to cater for both buses and cyclists along the same route.
- Provision of a primary network of cycle routes comprising of two greenways connecting into the county settlements – the Oranmore to the City Centre and onwards to Bearna Greenway and City Centre to Oughterard Greenway.
- Provision of additional primary routes including cross-city routes to the north of the city and some key north-south links.
- Develop a secondary cycle network that will comprise connections from residential areas and areas of employment to the primary network accessing key destinations.

4. WALKING

- Provision of measures to reduce traffic volumes in the city centre core, additional pedestrianisation and pedestrian priority, improvement of pedestrian facilities, in particular safe crossings, improvements to the public realm and use of universal design.
- Provision of new river crossings - a new bridge adjacent to the Salmon Weir Bridge, a new link from the Headford Road area to NUIG campus via a bridge on the piers of the old rail line and a new crossing linking Newtownsmyth with Gaol Road.
- Improvements to permeability within suburban residential areas, improving the pedestrian networks and increasing connectivity and permeability within and to places of employment, in particular, the business and technology parks on the east side of the city at Parkmore and Ballybrit.

5. PARK AND RIDE

- › Provide for Park and ride facilities on the periphery of the city linked in with the bus network to reduce the amount of commuter traffic entering into the city.

6. RAIL

- › The City is a significant rail destination with direct intercity services to Dublin via Athlone and to Limerick via Ennis. It also provides a valuable commuter service to towns such as Ballinasloe, Athenry, Craughwell and Oranmore. It is envisaged that the long term redevelopment of Ceannt Station Quarter as a new major multi-modal transport interchange will involve rail services expanding in frequency where there is sufficient passenger demand and usage.
- › The potential for double tracking of the railway line from the City to Athlone, or a more limited accommodation of stopping bays and the provision of a rail freight service from Galway harbour are also strategic projects that will enhance accessibility and connectivity in the region to 2040.

The increased use of public transport will become a feature of living in a low carbon society. Reverse commuting will be a practical manifestation of efficient use of public services and can simultaneously reduce congestion in overcrowded areas and bring much-needed vitality to areas with unused capacity.

REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVE

RPO 3.6.9

The Assembly supports the provision of a dual railway track between Galway and Athlone (M/L).

The prioritisation of individual projects which comprise the GTS will emerge during the lifetime of the RSES and can be included in the relevant statutory plans as timelines become definite. The delivery of these projects because of their nature and extent include many individual public realm works.

REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES

RPO 3.6.7

The Assembly supports the delivery of the infrastructure projects outlined below to develop the MASP:

- › Galway City Ring Road (S)
- › Galway Transport Strategy (S/M/L)

RPO 3.6.8

The Assembly will support the concept of reverse commuting to encourage the increased and efficient use of resources particularly public transport.

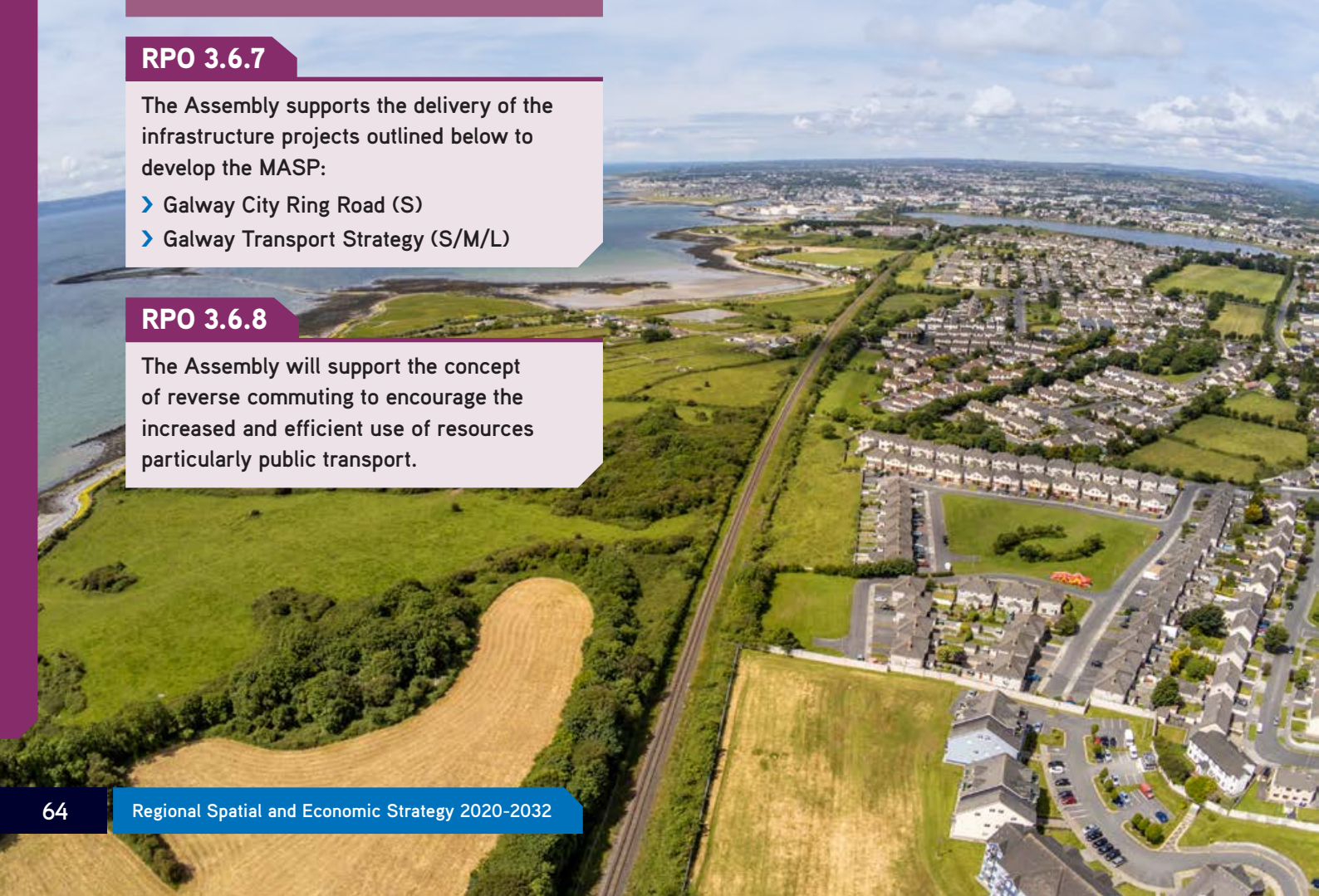
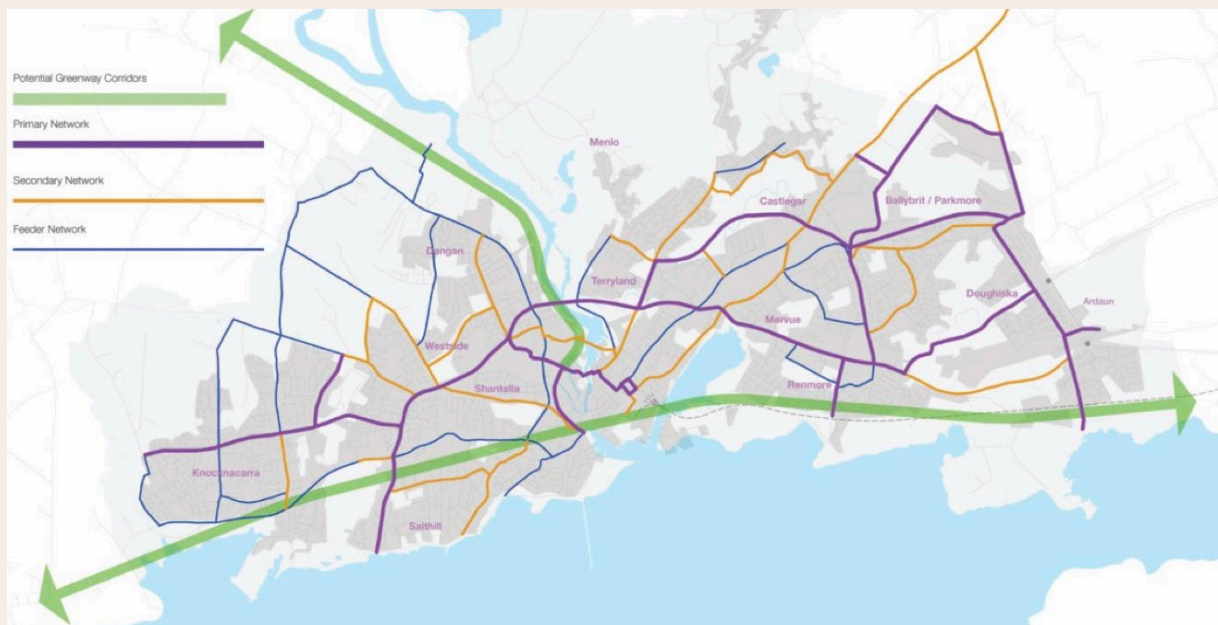


Figure 22: Galway – Core Bus Routes



Figure 23: Galway – Proposed Cycle Routes





HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Galway City is a member of the World Health Organisation (WHO) European Healthy Cities Network since 2006. The Galway Healthy Cities Project recognises the tangible benefits to health that come from living in a good quality and clean environment and ensures that health and well being is incorporated into the policy framework of local agencies in the City. Other initiatives in the City which include Child Friendly City, Age Friendly Galway and the Sports Partnership all have enhanced health and well being as primary goals. The designation of Galway as European Green Leaf City 2017 also reflects the quality of the environment in the City and these initiatives are to be supported.



HEALTH

A significant element of employment in the city is concentrated in hospitals. Galway is a centre for regional health care services for the whole region with Galway University Hospitals (Merlin and UHG) providing a secondary, regional and supra-regional service in respect of cardiology and cancer services. They are also one of eight major academic teaching hospitals in Ireland. The Bon Secours and the Galway Clinic are also important private health care providers. The capacity for hospital expansion through intensification and re-development of their existing sites and/or buildings needs to be supported. There are sufficient undeveloped lands in the Merlin Park Campus with the potential to deliver a 21st Century facility to serve the MASP and increased population planned for the region.

REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES

RPO 3.6.10

Support the provision of Childcare, Education and Health Services within the same timeframes as the residential and employment uses outlined above.

RPO 3.6.11

It is an objective of the Assembly to support the delivery of an enhanced regional healthcare service, including a modern hospital at Merlin Park that will serve the Metropolitan Area and its catchment (M/L).

EDUCATION

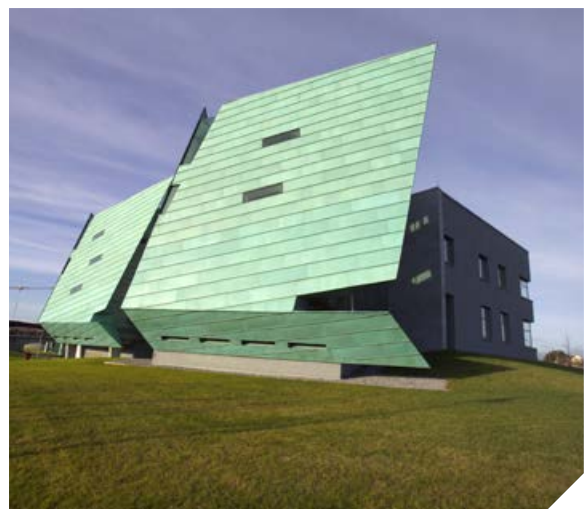
Within the city, there are 31 primary schools, 12 second-level schools and three third-level colleges and there are also several private colleges and language schools. In recent years, four new schools and several extensions to existing schools have been accommodated. These schools serve wide catchments well beyond the city boundary and even beyond the MASP area which has an impact for commuting and travel into the city. Policy to support the improvement and expansion of the educational sector in the city recognises the significant city, regional and national role played by this sector.

Within the MASP there are currently zoned lands that are suitable for additional new schools where required. To accommodate emerging populations on the east of the city, lands are available at Ardaun to accommodate schools.

The National University of Ireland, Galway (NUIG) and Galway Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT) are huge assets to the city, with the latter having the potential to develop as a Technological University as part of the Connacht /Ulster Alliance. They add significant value to Galway in terms of being a significant employer, playing a major role in education provision and through the development of a knowledge economy. Both NUIG and GMIT have collaborative research and training roles with industry which is supported also by national investment research programmes such as REMEDI and GMedTech. Research competencies have been growing particularly in the life sciences area in NUIG and also in the medical technologies research group at GMIT.

Having third-level institutions of such calibre in Galway is a key factor for companies choosing to locate in Galway as they have access to a very highly educated and skilled workforce. They are also responsive to the research demands of the industry. The presence of a third-level student population of over 24,000 is also a significant contributor to the local economy and adds to the vibrancy of diversity of the City and this needs to be built upon.

The objective below is to support the continued expansion of all city education facilities in particular third-level institutions engaged in fostering the innovative knowledge-based economy of the region



REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVE

RPO 3.6.12

The Assembly supports the designation of a technological University in the region which will be partially located in Galway; to complement existing third-level educational facilities and to foster the innovative knowledge-based economy of the region.

The delivery of other projects in this and the following subsection will be desirable and will improve the quality of living in the city. Their completion will complement the health and education projects specifically identified.

GREEN NETWORK

The Metropolitan Area also has a rich diversity of natural resources including Galway Bay and an extensive coastline, woodlands such as Merlin Park, Bearna Woods and Terryland Forest Park and waterways such as the River Corrib and the canals. The City Council’s Recreation and Amenity Needs Study (RANS) 2008 provides a coordinated framework for future planning and management of recreation facilities and activities within the city. Galway, through the extent and protections offered to its Green Network, fits well as a Natural Place (Urban) with the Growth Ambition 2 – Natural Place developed later in the Strategy.

A fifth of the total land area of the City is designated as protected habitats, recreation and amenity open space and agricultural land and comprise a green network within the city. These spaces are a vital part of everyday urban life in Galway and this high-quality environment contributes to the attractiveness of the area and the health and well being of the population. As such, there is strong policy support to protect and enhance recreation and amenity space.

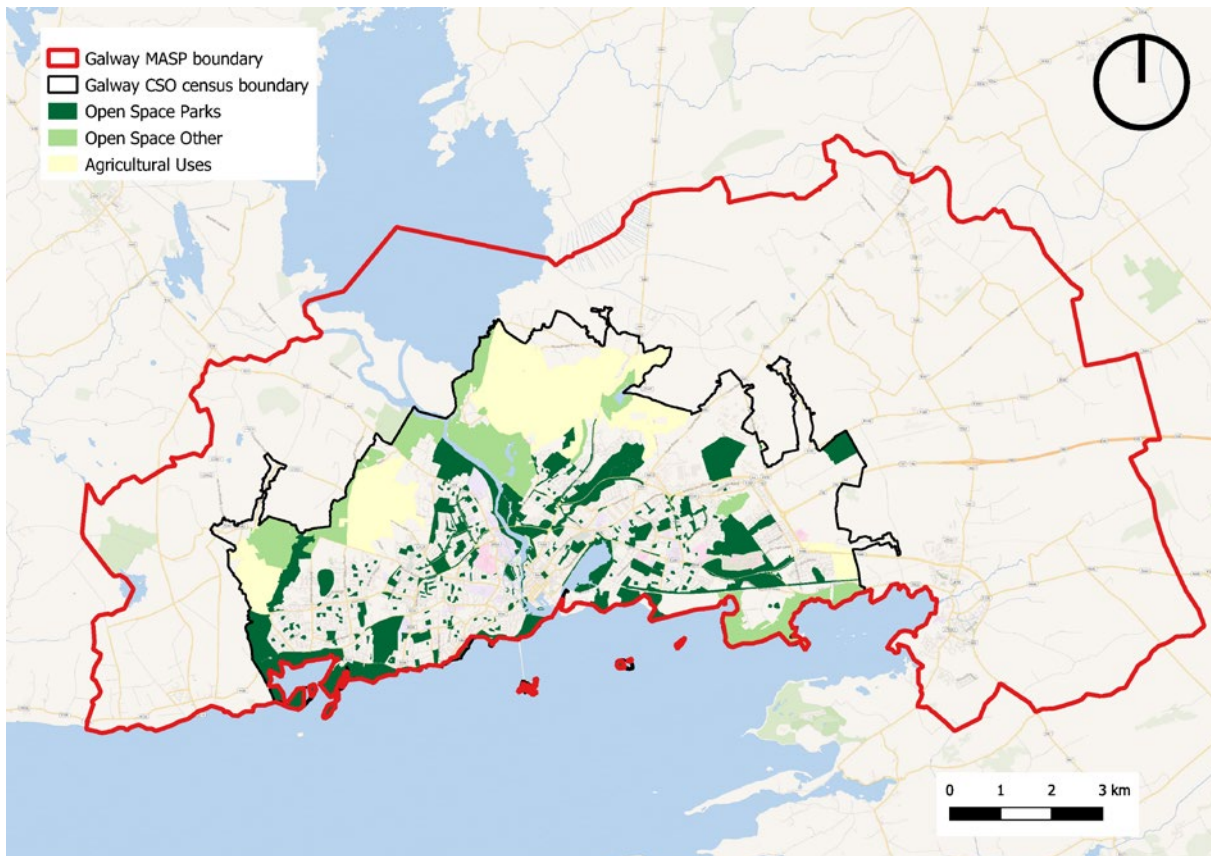


REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVE

RPO 3.6.13

The Assembly supports the delivery of a strategic Greenway Network for the GTS to include National Dublin to Galway Cycleway, Oranmore to Bearna Coastal Greenway and the Galway to Clifden Greenway (S/M).

Figure 24: Galway – Open Space and Recreation



ENVIRONMENT

LIVING ENVIRONMENT BUILT HERITAGE

Galway has strong links with the past which are evident in the built form, architecture and archaeology of the area, in particular, the historic City Core, and which are significant elements in the definition and experience of the urban environment and engender a strong sense of place. The designation of Architectural Conservation Areas, Protected Structures and archaeological monuments including the remnants of the medieval town wall reflect the importance of the built and archaeological heritage in the city. These are part of the experience that is Galway.

PUBLIC REALM

Investment in public realm adds to the attractiveness of the city and contributes to the quality of life of those who live and work in the city. The development of a Public Realm Strategy for the City Centre shall be undertaken and used to inform the future management and use of the public realm in a manner that complements measures set out in the Galway Transport Strategy. It should set out the details of phased co-ordinated projects that will enhance and improve the way the city functions on a day-to-day basis, resulting in long-term socio-economic, cultural and environmental benefits.

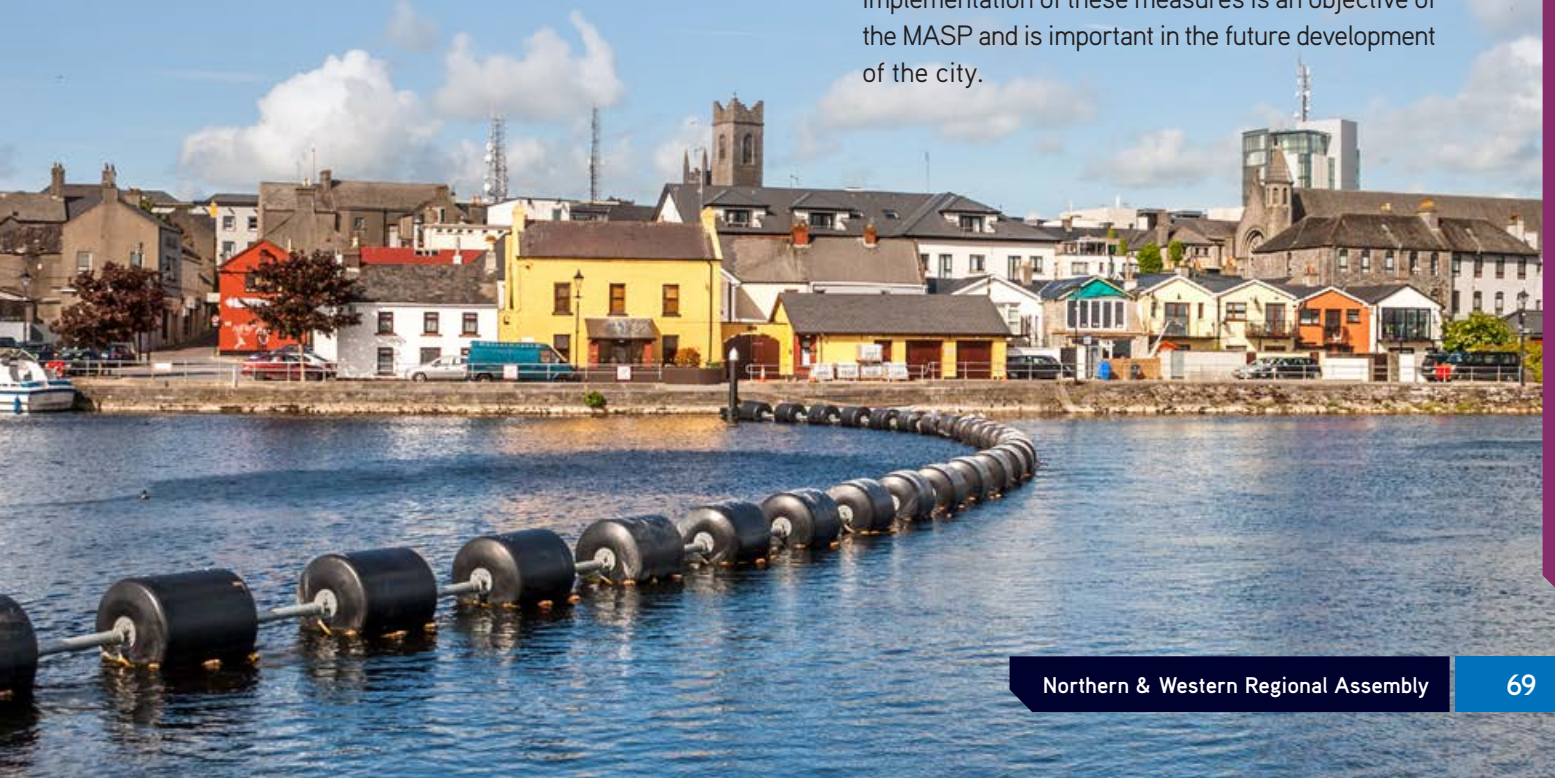
COMMUNITY AND CULTURE

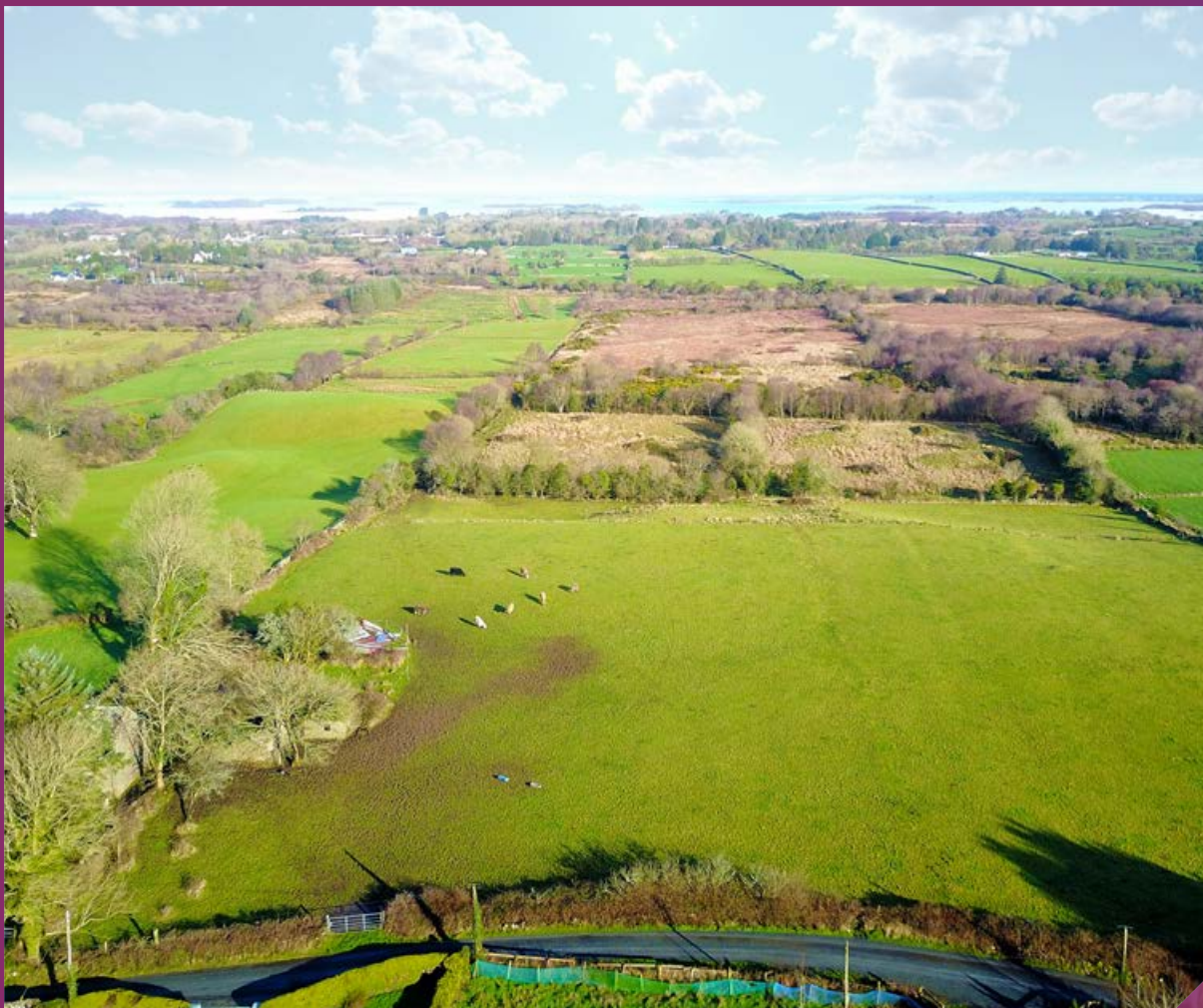
The strong tradition of organised community and cultural activity with an array of structures and initiatives within the city contributes it being a successful place. The image of Galway, paralleled with an inclusive community, local distinctiveness and attractive lifestyle, is a critical asset for sustaining communities and good placemaking as well as for the attraction of inward investment. The Cultural Sustainability Strategy 2016-2025 highlights the uniqueness of Galway culture and its richness and diversity and its importance to the future of the City and County enhancing the lives of those living and working in Galway and the surrounding region. The implementation and further development of this strategy is a key objective of this MASP.

CLIMATE CHANGE RESILIENCE

Climate change represents a significant challenge for the city and the reduction in our carbon footprint must be embedded through, for example, the delivery of sustainable land use patterns, sustainable transportation initiatives, protection and enhancement of the green network and enhancement of biodiversity, promotion of renewable energy technologies and Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems.

The metropolitan area is vulnerable to the harmful effects of climate change, in particular, sea level encroachment and extreme weather events. The CFRAMs study has set out a Flood Risk Management Plan for parts of the metropolitan area which identify a range of measures to manage flood risk. The implementation of these measures is an objective of the MASP and is important in the future development of the city.





REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVE

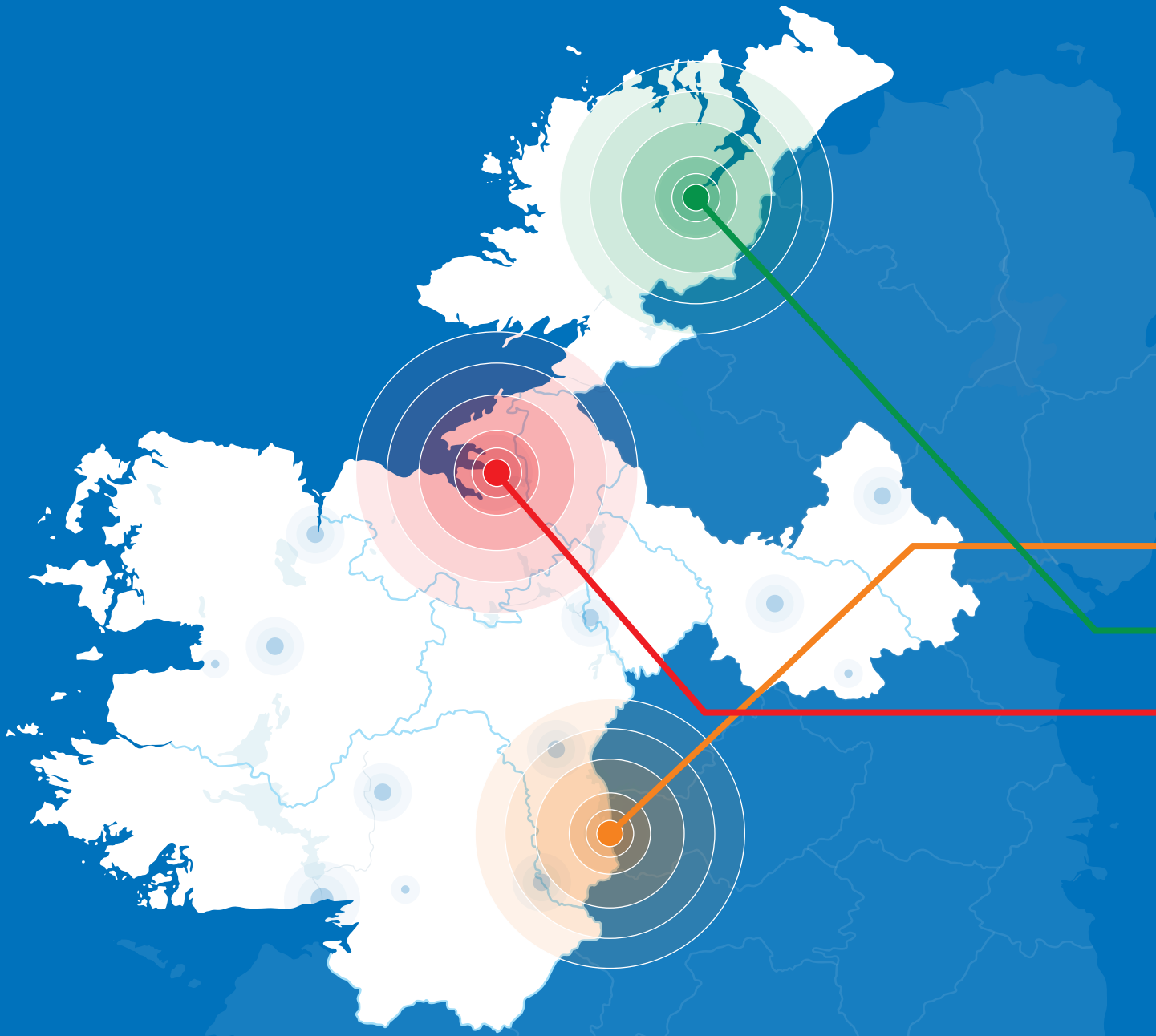
RPO 3.6.14

The Assembly supports the retention of existing agricultural land within the MASP boundary for that purpose unless it is subject to objectives for the zoning of lands for particular purposes (whether residential, commercial, industrial, recreational, as open space or otherwise in a statutory plan). Only in exceptional circumstances would it support the development of new residential, industrial or commercial uses on unserviced greenfield sites and these shall be defined through the statutory plan-making process.

The delivery of the infrastructure projects outlined below are essential for the development of the metropolitan area. The Assembly will support their delivery and will collaborate in the preparation of Implementation Plans by respective Local Authorities and other stakeholders:

- Galway East main Drainage Wastewater Treatment Plan (S/M)
- Galway Drainage Area Plan (S/M)
- Galway City Water Supply Scheme (S)
- Galway City Main Rehabilitation Contract (S)





3.7

REGIONAL GROWTH CENTRES

3.7(a)

Athlone Regional Growth Centre Strategic Plan

3.7(b)

Letterkenny Regional Growth Centre Strategic Plan

3.7(c)

Sligo Regional Growth Centre Strategic Plan

3.7(a) Athlone Regional Growth Centre Strategic Plan

CONTEXT AND VISION

The National Planning Framework (NPF) identifies Athlone as the Key Regional Growth Centre in the Midlands. It is one of five towns nationally that have been designated as a Regional Growth Centre, on the basis that it functions similarly, but at a different scale to the bigger cities.

The NPF has identified the urban structure within the Northern and Western Region to be weak. As a means to addressing this weak urban structure, this RSES targets at least 40% population growth in the Regional Growth Centres of Letterkenny, Sligo and Athlone, with a further 30% population growth target (minimum) targeted for the Key Towns. This RSES provides a Regional Growth Centre Strategic Plan for Letterkenny and Sligo and whilst Athlone is substantively within the EMRA area, a joint approach has been taken to identify shared Key Regional objectives for Athlone within the respective Strategies. Notwithstanding, this strategy provides additional context through this strategic plan for Athlone, reflecting that it is a regional driver in the same way as Sligo and Letterkenny are regional drivers for their respective catchments.

This RGCSP delivers a roadmap for the continued development of Athlone as a key enabler of regional growth and prosperity across its hinterland. It will be the regional flagship for industry, retail services, educational facilities, tourism and residential development in the Midlands. A new joint unitary plan shall be developed for Athlone by Westmeath County Council and Roscommon County Council which shall add further detail to the objectives of this RGCSP.

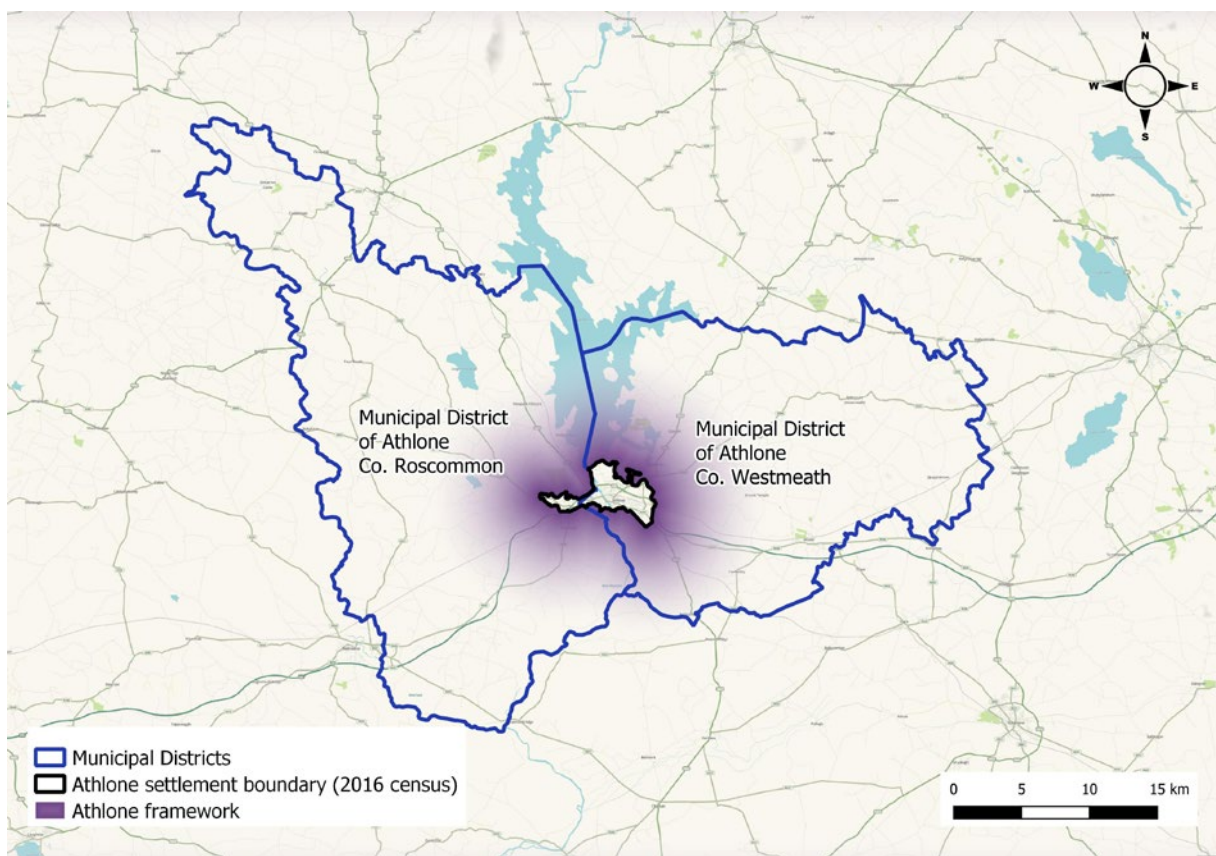




Figure 25 below is a depiction of existing administrative boundaries and the CSO boundary for the town based on the 2016 Census. The joint plan will also recognise the potential of Athlone's community, culture, heritage and landscape to generate an excellent quality of life for future generations. Athlone has direct national connectivity to Dublin and within a one-hour drive is Galway City

and towns such as Longford, Mullingar, Maynooth, Portlaoise, Ballinasloe and Roscommon. The proximity of these settlements provides Athlone and its hinterland with potential to develop residential and employment uses which will place and maintain Athlone at the forefront in the goal to develop a modern resilient example of integrated development in 21st century Ireland.

Figure 25: Athlone – Spatial Definition





STRATEGIC GROWTH AREAS

HOUSING AND REGENERATION

The RSES for the Eastern and Midlands Region envisages a population target of 30,000 for the entire settlement of Athlone up to 2031. This includes lands within the combined functional area of the two Local Authorities of Westmeath and Roscommon. The preparation and adoption of a Joint Development/Local Area Plan shall be a priority for Westmeath and Roscommon County Council. In the event that a legislative basis for the preparation of a Joint Urban Area Plan (JUAP) emerges, the Assembly will support its preparation as an alternative that shall implement and provide further detail to the Athlone RGCSF.

The plan under agreement of both local authorities is the appropriate mechanism to determine the functional urban area and plan boundary along with the distribution of population which should be generally in proportion to existing population levels in each local authority area, subject to agreement of each local authority and both Regional Assemblies and ensuring that the proportion enables the other minimum population growth targets stipulated for settlements within the RSES for the Northern and Western Region to be achieved. Having regard to the population targets outlined in section 3.4, it will translate to targets of at least 1,500 by 2031 and 1,800 by 2040 for the areas in our region.

In determining the extent of the plan boundaries, the following criteria should be considered:

- The principle urban area of Athlone, as defined by the CSO defined town boundary, including any existing areas with a dense concentration of population, employment or service provision that is contiguous to it.
- Inclusion of those areas where >60% of the workforce commute to the defined principle urban area of Athlone.
- The principle urban area population of Athlone should account for at least 75% of the total population of the regional centre plan area.
- The existence of environmentally designated areas in the vicinity.
- The existence of transport strategies.
- The existence of future development opportunities, including phasing and prioritisation of development infrastructure.
- Physical features and compact growth.

The delineation of Athlone as a regional growth centre should be ambitious and consider incorporating the satellite villages, such as Hodson Bay and Glasson, which may be considered to operate as part of the regional centre and are the nearest fully serviced and zoned areas to the town. These may provide alternative residential and employment options but the main growth driver will remain the principal urban area of Athlone, to support the achievement of compact growth targets with a minimum of 30% of new homes to be built within the existing built-up area, supported

by the planned delivery of existing Local Area Plan (LAP) lands at Curragh, Lissywoollen, Cornamagh, Cornamaddy and Monksland/Bellanamullia.

REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVE

RPO 3.7.1

A cross-boundary Joint Plan shall be prepared by Westmeath County Council and Roscommon County Council in collaboration with the two Regional Assemblies to provide a coordinated planning framework for the future physical, economic and social development of Athlone. The plan shall identify Athlone's functional urban area and adopt a boundary for the plan area in addition to the identification of strategic housing and employment development areas and infrastructure and investment requirements to promote greater coordination and sequential delivery of serviced lands for development, to realise Athlone's status as a Regional Growth Centre.

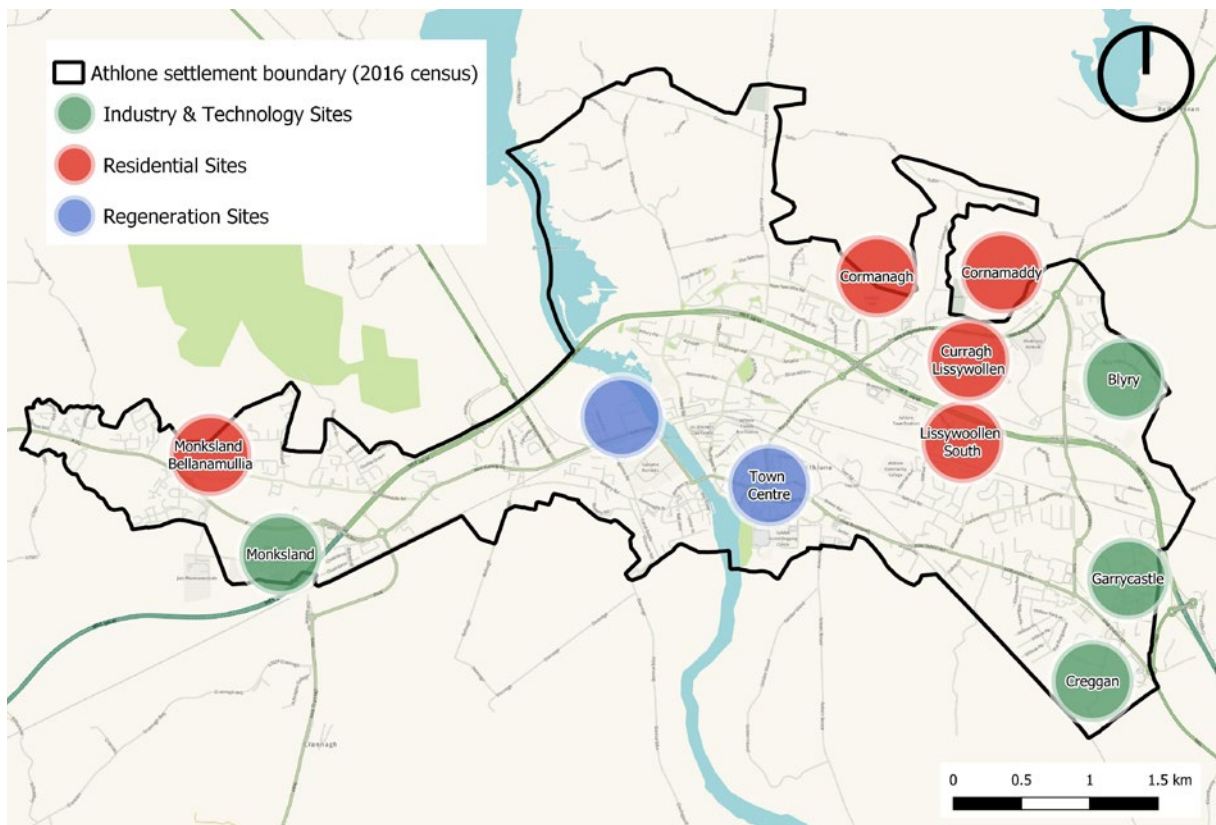
The areas outlined above and those residential opportunity areas outlined in Figure 26 have the capacity to deliver on the population growth targets referred to above. The joint plan for the Regional Centre will provide additional refinement and prioritisation on the release of service land. In addition, regeneration areas in St. Mels and Loughanaskin are identified for mixed-use development. In light of promoting and delivering the concept of compact development an objective to prepare a Building Heights Strategy for Athlone would be opportune. It will consider inter alia the appropriate mix and scale of uses as well as residential density.

REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVE

RPO 3.7.2

Support the regeneration of underused town centre and brownfield/infill lands along with the delivery of existing zoned and serviced lands to facilitate significant population growth and achieve the sustainable compact growth target of 30% of all new homes to be built within the existing built-up urban area.

Figure 26: Athlone – Location of Growth Areas





ENTERPRISE AND EMPLOYMENT USES

Athlone already has significant administrative, retail, industrial, tourism and services employment. In order to cater for the employment demands arising from increased population targets discussed above, there are four specific areas identified. These are:

1. IDA Park/Garrycastle
2. Blyry
3. Creggan
4. Monksland

These areas comprise over 300 Hectares of undeveloped land and rather like the residential lands referred to above a prioritisation process for development and release of serviced areas may need to be considered for inclusion at joint plan level.

Athlone has a track record in manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, medical devices, telecommunications and ICT. The consolidation and expansion of these areas will build on the success of Athlone.

These industries employ upwards of 5,000 people, many of them of high economic value and highly skilled. The qualities of life in Athlone is an attraction that needs to be nurtured and improved to give these industry groups the impetus to attract more highly skilled people to the area.

In tandem with these quality of life goals the delivery of the infrastructure projects outlined later in this section is imperative to maintain the towns progress, potential and presence as the lead centre in the midlands.

Athlone is a regional growth centre for convenience and comparison shopping. This position has been retained through the economic downturn. There are

many town-centre sites that have the potential to maintain the retail status of the town, these include inter alia Station Road, Loughanaskin and Lloyds Lane.

A retail strategy for the town has been prepared jointly by Roscommon and Westmeath County Councils in 2019. This will be of benefit in preparing the joint strategy required in the retail planning guidelines. The concept of compact growth and how this will influence future retail facilities is a feature that needs to be considered. The availability of existing floor space especially in vacant premises that could meet much of the future demand. Retail is the largest employment type (25% of jobs) in the town and its importance to the regional economy is therefore significant.

REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVE

RPO 3.7.3

Promote Athlone as a key location for regional economic development supporting the provision of increased employment through the expansion of the existing enterprise ecosystem in Athlone and creation or expansion of distinct industrial specialisms that have developed through collaboration with the relevant enterprise agencies including the IDA, Athlone Institute of Technology and the Midlands Innovation and Research Centre and support the provision of physical infrastructure and zoned lands to realise the phased delivery of strategic employment lands in central accessible locations.

STRATEGIC INFRASTRUCTURE

HEALTH AND EDUCATION

Athlone is the only designated regional centre that does not have a hospital or a hospital in close proximity. The provision of a new hospital would complement the status of the town as a regional centre and an attractive urban area in which to live. The Assemblies support an investigation of the feasibility of providing a modern hospital in Athlone which would serve the needs of the over 130,000 population which reside within the one-hour drive catchment.

A new primary care centre has operated in Athlone over the last few years, this is an addition to the various GP practices in the town. Athlone also has St Vincent's Hospital which operates primarily as a care facility for the elderly.

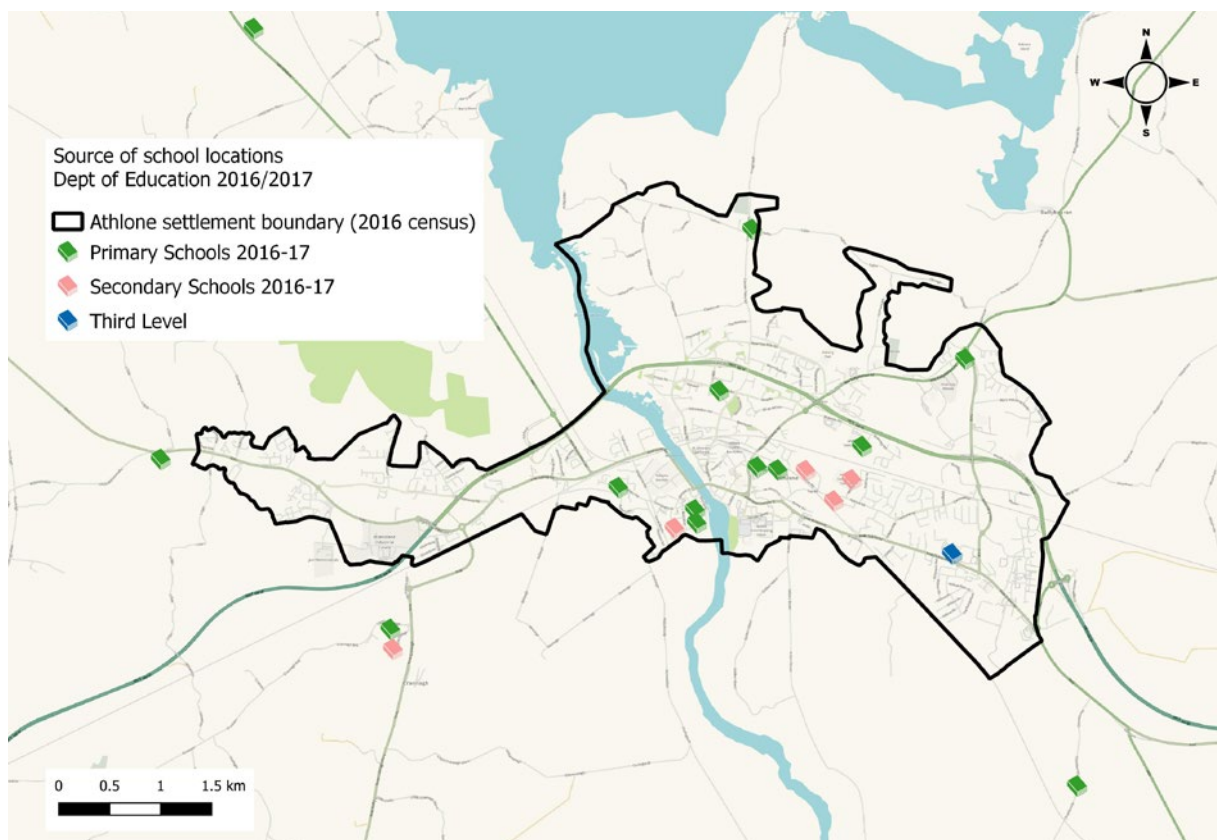
Athlone has the leading third-level institute in the midlands, Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT). There are over 5000 students (full time and part-time) presently attending/participating in courses. It is not surprising, therefore, in terms of educational attainment, that Athlone contains more graduates as

a percentage of the population than other areas in the midlands. AIT serves many of the surrounding counties and outside of Roscommon and Westmeath, students from Offaly, Galway and Longford form a significant portion of the student body.

It is a strategic goal of stakeholders to make AIT a technological university, this is fully supported by both Assemblies. AIT is an important community asset, the number of part-time and mature students is indicative of its reach into the community. The institute has research capability in materials, bioscience and software, these are complementary to many of the industries in the Athlone area and is a strength that can be built on.

Athlone is also a regional centre for 2nd level education. Nearly 3,000 students attend the four secondary schools in town, recent consolidation resulted in a reduction of schools from five to four. A Local Transport Plan for Athlone should be taken as an opportunity to improve sustainable travel patterns and infrastructure, the various schools throughout the town would be good starting points for the delivery of better and healthier ways of life and travel.

Figure 27: Athlone – Education Facilities





TOURISM

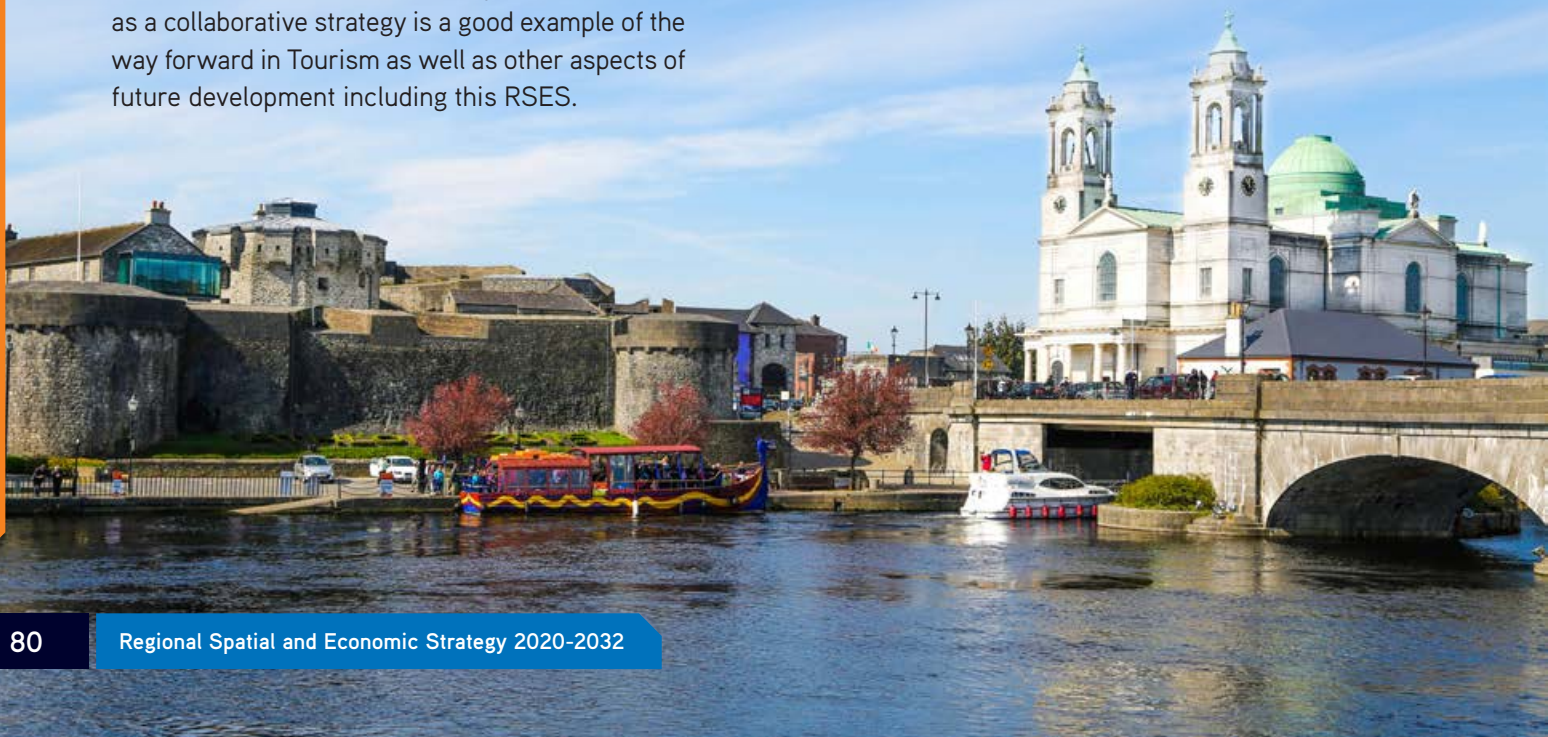
Athlone is at the centre of Ireland's latest tourism experience. It is a more than suitable location to begin the exploration of Hidden Heartlands, being at the end of Lough Ree which opens into one of the country's most scenic waterways and also having its urban heritage and culture which can itself deliver a worthwhile visitor experience.

The range and scope of Athlone's attractions and its links to attractions within its hinterland, for example, Clonmacnoise and Rindoon, to name but two, make it an obvious regional centre for tourism development. This potential is recognised inter alia in the Lakelands Destination Development Plan which as a collaborative strategy is a good example of the way forward in Tourism as well as other aspects of future development including this RSES.

REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVE

RPO 3.7.4

Support the development of a cross-sectoral approach to promote Athlone as a key tourism destination in the midlands, building on Fáilte Ireland's Hidden Heartlands brand and the forthcoming Shannon Tourism Masterplan to develop the recreation and amenity potential of waterways including the River Shannon and Lough Ree and the development of a greenway network including the Galway to Dublin Cycleway.



TRANSPORT

The national goal of having more compact growth generally and within MASP and Regional Centres, in particular, will increase the need and importance of providing more sustainable forms of transport and transport infrastructure in our urban centres. There is an overarching objective within the RSES to prepare Local Transport Plans in our cities and key towns, with Athlone identified as one of the priority locations for this to be implemented.

Athlone is well serviced by the national road and rail networks and this position makes it easily accessible to over 130,000 people (within 1 hours travel time). In order to improve this basic connectivity emphasis initially on links to cities of Dublin, Galway and Limerick and the regional centre of Sligo should be targeted, this applies to both road and rail infrastructure.

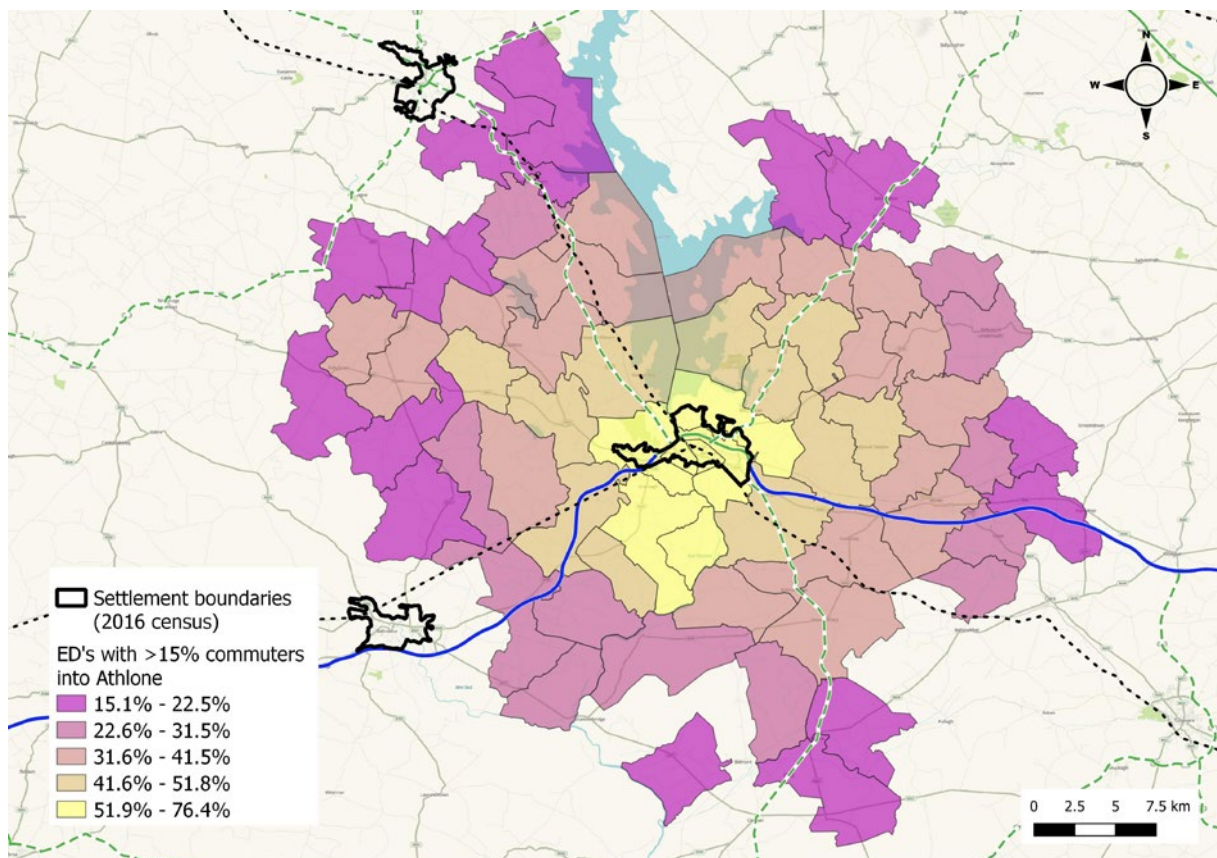
The improvement of public transport links within the town and its hinterland commensurate with the projected growth in population should be a key objective for the town. This approach is fully supported by the Assemblies. The promotion of



walking and cycling within and through the town is also at the forefront of sustainable development. In this regard locally a new pedestrian/cycle bridge over the Shannon would be imperative for safe east/west accessibility within Athlone. An attractive value proposition for Athlone would be to inter-connect local walking/cycling infrastructure within the town with both the sustainable travel infrastructure along the canals and the proposed Dublin-Galway greenway.

There are several strategic infrastructure projects whose delivery is necessary to service the growth targets discussed above. The integrated delivery and prioritisation of projects is necessary to ensure that Athlone will reach its ambitions within the timeframe of the RSES.

Figure 28: Athlone – Commuting Catchments



The necessary projects include, but are not limited to, those that are set out below.

REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES

RPO 3.7.5

Support the phased servicing and development of lands identified in the RSES for residential and employment uses.

RPO 3.7.6

Support the proposal to make AIT a Technological University and for the development of a 'smart cities' approach to drive research, innovation and EU funding opportunities in Athlone.

RPO 3.7.7

Support the integrated provision of the infrastructure projects identified in this section.

RPO 3.7.8

Support the promotion of Athlone as a destination centre for the development of Hidden Heartlands including the development of a Wilderness Park Project based around Lough Ree.

RPO 3.7.9

Support the preparation of a joint retail strategy as set out in the Retail Planning Guidelines 2012.

RPO 3.7.10

Support the provision of integrated signage to promote Athlone as a single, clearly identified entity.

RPO 3.7.11

Support the implementation of the Athlone Waterfront Strategy. Support to provide for public realm and amenity enhancements and tourist-related developments along the waterfront.

RPO 3.7.12

Support the development of an Open Space Strategy with provision for a public park in Monksland with sustainable transport links along the Cross River and connections to the remainder of the Regional Centre. The strategy to include the provision of sustainable transport, recreation and amenity spaces to support existing and future populations.

RPO 3.7.13

Support the upgrading of the Water Supply System and the Sewage Treatment System (including a Drainage Area Plan) to meet the growth targets set in this strategy.

RPO 3.7.14

Promote Athlone as a sustainable transport hub, of national and regional importance. The regional centre shall become a fulcrum for multi-modal transport facilities and services.

RPO 3.7.15

Support the regeneration of underutilised town centre, brownfield and infill sites identified in the strategy, with a target of 30% of all new homes to be constructed within the existing built-up urban area.

RPO 3.7.16

Promote Athlone as a sustainable transport hub, of national and regional importance and support the preparation of a joint Local Transport Plan between Westmeath and Roscommon County Councils in collaboration with transport agencies and key stakeholders to improve sustainable mobility in the town.

RPO 3.7.17

The Assembly supports the preparation of a building heights study, a strategy to guide the future development of the regional centre. The study will take into account the historic, cultural and infrastructural features of the area. In developing this strategy, areas of high density will target the minimum density rates of 50 units per hectare (in the town centre area) and a default rate of 35 units per hectare otherwise.

ENVIRONMENT

Athlone is close to many European designated sites (Natura 2000) and some of these are shown on the constraints map below. Their protection is inherently supported by the Assembly and the growth envisaged for the Regional Centre will take these and flood risk areas fully into account. The overarching environmental regional policy objectives in section 1.5 of the RSES apply fully.



REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES

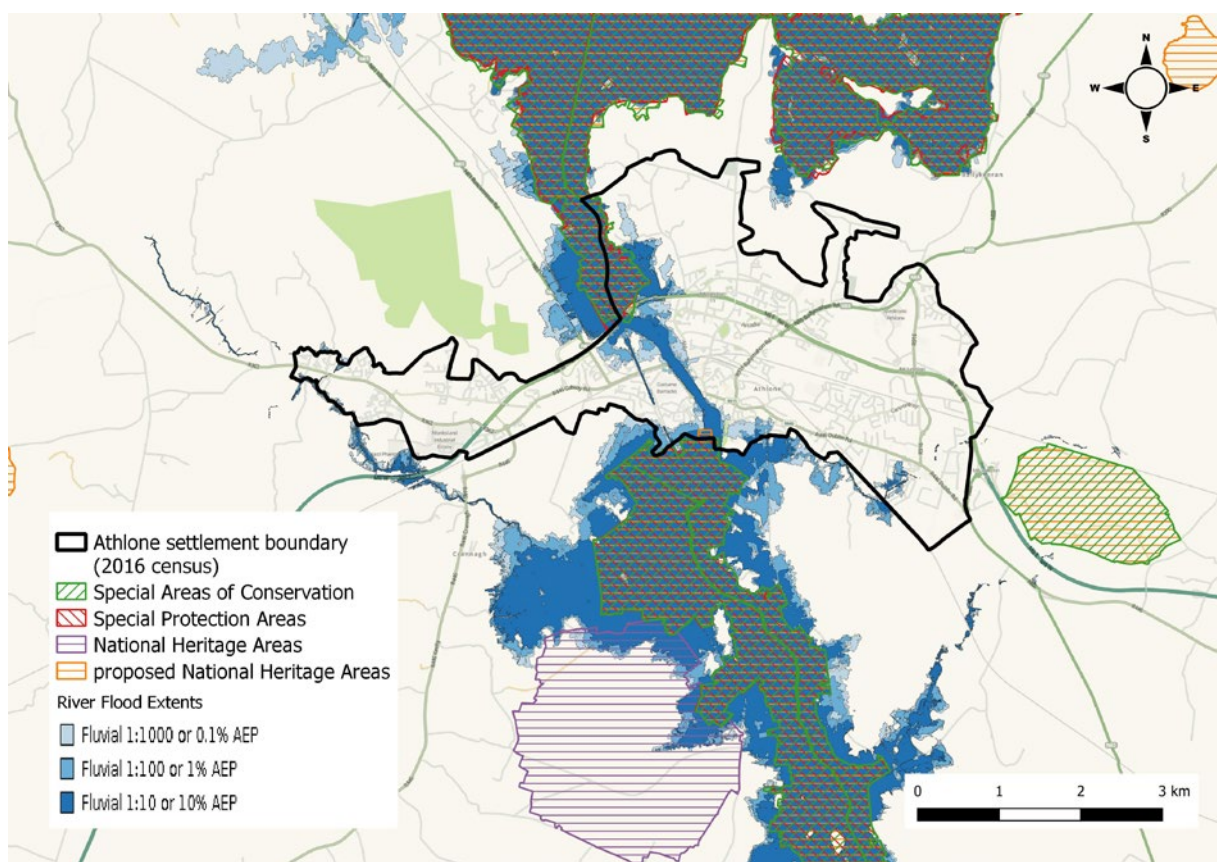
RPO 3.7.18

Support ongoing implementation of flood risk management and flood protection measures to facilitate the growth of Athlone subject to the outcome of appropriate environmental assessment and taking account of the proximity of sites of international nature conservation interest.

RPO 3.7.19

The Assembly supports the retention of existing agricultural land within the RGCSPP boundary for that purpose unless it is subject to objectives for the zoning of lands for particular purposes (whether residential, commercial, industrial, recreational, as open space or otherwise) in a statutory plan. Only in exceptional circumstances would it support the development of new residential, industrial or commercial uses on unserviced greenfield sites and these shall be defined through the statutory plan-making process.

Figure 29: Environmental Designations Around Athlone



3.7(b) Letterkenny Regional Growth Centre Strategic Plan

CONTEXT AND VISION

LETTERKENNY AND ITS ROLE WITHIN THE NORTH WEST METROPOLITAN CITY REGION

This Strategic Plan for Letterkenny provides a framework for growth and investment to build its function as the primary urban centre in Donegal. It is also part of a Cross Border Network - the North West Metropolitan City Region (Letterkenny/Derry/Strabane). This network is identified in the National Planning Framework (Ireland 2040) as being a key enabler of Regional growth and prosperity across Donegal, Derry and Tyrone.

The co-ordination of further growth across jurisdictions is the subject of ongoing work between both Donegal County Council and Derry City and Strabane District Council and is being advanced through a Growth Partnership. This Metropolitan Area includes other significant settlements within Donegal, including Buncrana, and Ballybofey/Stranorlar.

The Framework for the North West Metropolitan City Region is elaborated upon within chapter 10 - All Island Cohesion. It is centred on four key strategic outcomes – closely aligned with the national strategic outcomes and priorities of the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the eight strategic aims of the Regional Development Strategy (RDS) 2035.

Those outcomes are:

- Building Inclusive and Compact Places;
- Investing in Connected and Accessible Places;
- Planning for a Vibrant Economy and Nurturing Communities; and
- Creating Resilient Places and Low-Carbon Infrastructure.



Figure 30: North West City Region Catchment

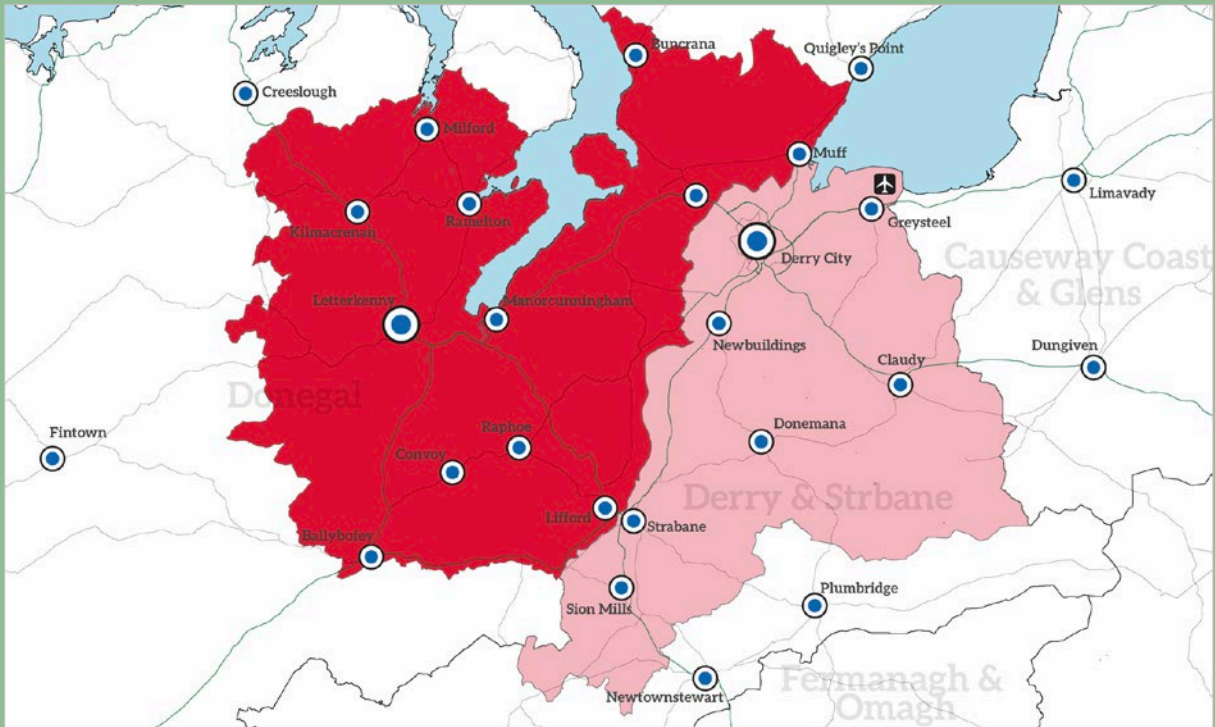
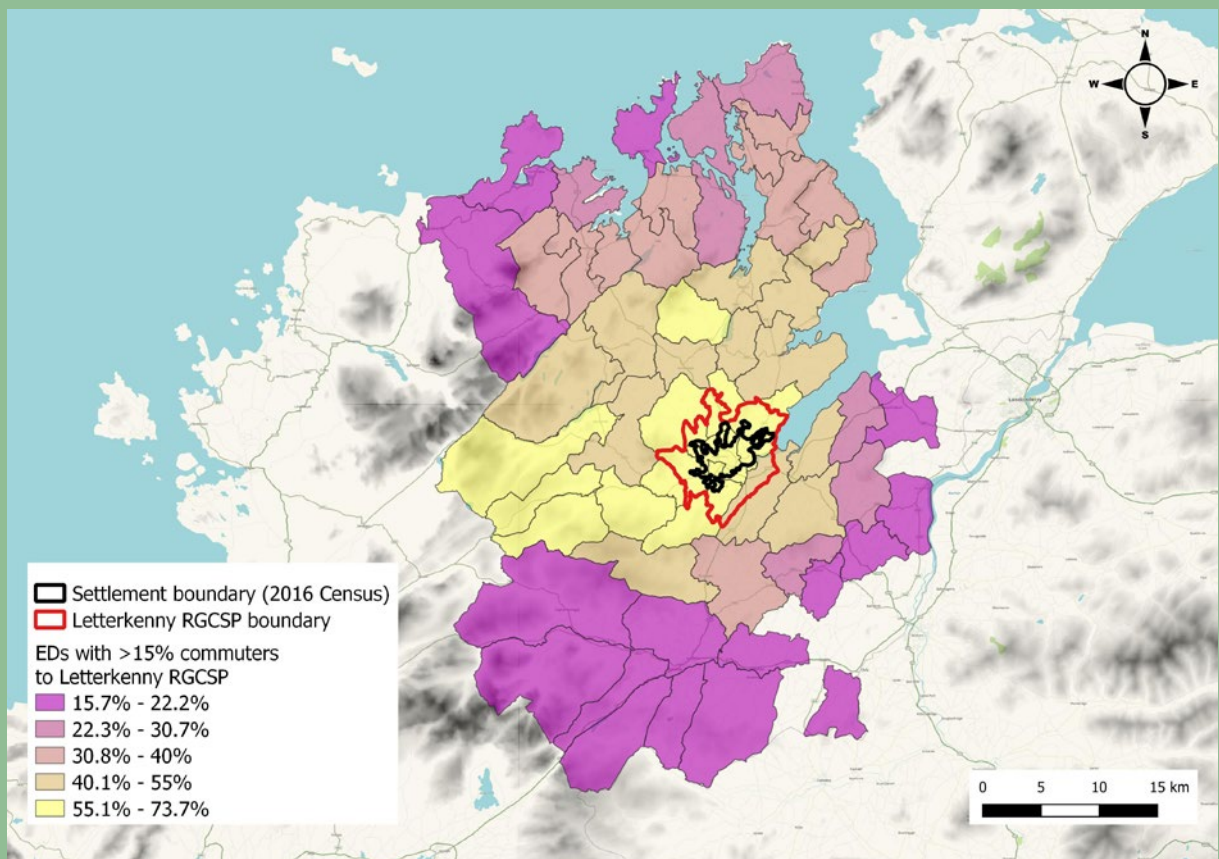


Figure 31: Letterkenny Commuting Catchment





LETTERKENNY – REGIONAL DRIVER FOR DONEGAL

Regional Growth Centres have been selected in the NPF because they are significant large towns that function in their areas in a similar manner, but at a different scale to the bigger cities. In the same way that the NPF requires Metropolitan Area Strategic Plans (MASP) to be prepared for each of Ireland's five cities, a Strategic Plan that responds to the lead role of each of the identified Regional Growth Centres is also required, with a similar focus.

This Strategic Plan for Letterkenny provides a framework for the strategic growth and investment in Letterkenny to deliver its function as the primary urban centre within Donegal. It will chart the future growth of Letterkenny with an ambition to grow the population by 8,000 to a minimum of 27,300 by 2040. It will also ensure that commensurate employment growth is enabled, through appropriate investment in critical enabling infrastructure and support services, with a strong emphasis upon the placemaking principles, as set out within the RSES. The goal is to ensure Letterkenny is a centre that offers sustainable choices in housing, employment, transport, and in the area of quality of life, health and well-being. This Regional Growth Centre Strategic Plan shall act as an instrument that enables this to happen.

The investment in Letterkenny is also vital to the future growth and development of its hinterland, which includes all of County Donegal and extends cross-border into Derry and Tyrone, as part of the North West City Region.

The existing employment provided in the public sector, retail, and major sectors such as Engineering, and ICT indicate that Letterkenny is already well placed to underpin the growth of this part of the north-west. The successful growth and expansion of Letterkenny can be realised through increased, and significant capital investment in critical infrastructure, which will improve services, and accessibility, into and around the urban core, and provide a focus on enhancing the quality of life for all its inhabitants.

VISION

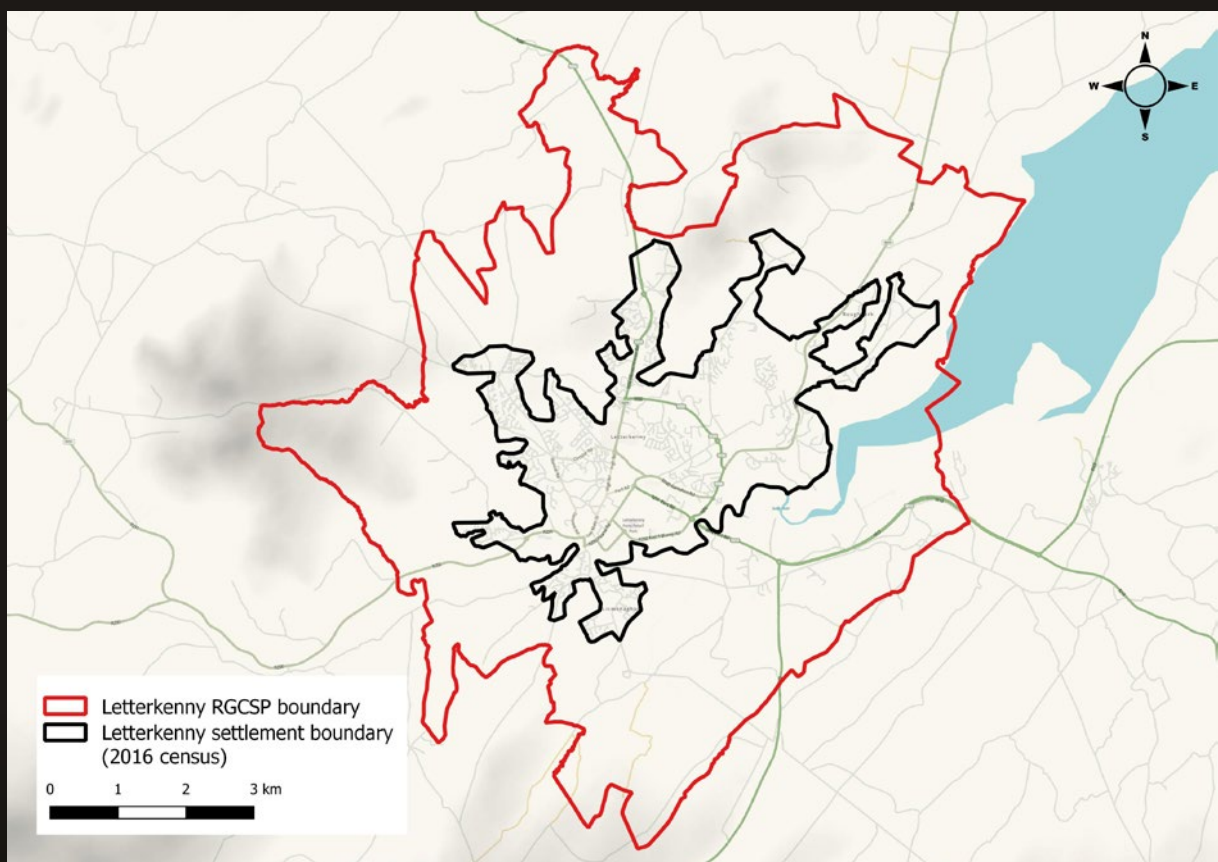
Between 2020 and 2040 Letterkenny will grow to a centre of at least 27,300 people, and will encompass all the key characteristics of a future city, with an expanded employment base, an additional 4,000 houses, together with an expanded offering in education, public services, civic spaces, and a Regeneration and reconfiguration of the Town Centre. Letterkenny will offer sustainable choices in housing, employment, and will be a centre that is pedestrian friendly, well served by public transport, with an emphasis on well-being, supported by a healthy environment, and quality spaces in the public realm.

DEFINING LETTERKENNY'S REGIONAL STRATEGIC PLAN AREA

The boundary of the Regional Growth Centre Strategic Plan has been informed by identifying the main population and employment locations of the settlement that define the Principle Urban Area and those areas on the periphery with high commuting patterns. Geographical features and environmental considerations also inform the strategic plan boundaries. The boundary of the Letterkenny Regional Growth Centre Plan includes the Town Boundary as defined by the CSO, as well as incorporating additional small areas which are

considered urban in character and accord with CSO small area boundaries. The boundary incorporates all main residential areas, employment, and education facilities. The surrounding towns/villages within the zone of influence of Letterkenny (e.g. Drumkeen, Ramelton, Kilmacrenan) will retain their role in offering housing, and other activities. The Growth Centre Strategic Plan is focused on Letterkenny and its current, and future role as an economic driver for the whole of Donegal.

Figure 32: Letterkenny Strategic Plan Area



STRATEGIC GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

COMPACT GROWTH AND DELIVERY OF RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT FOR AN EXPANDING REGIONAL CENTRE

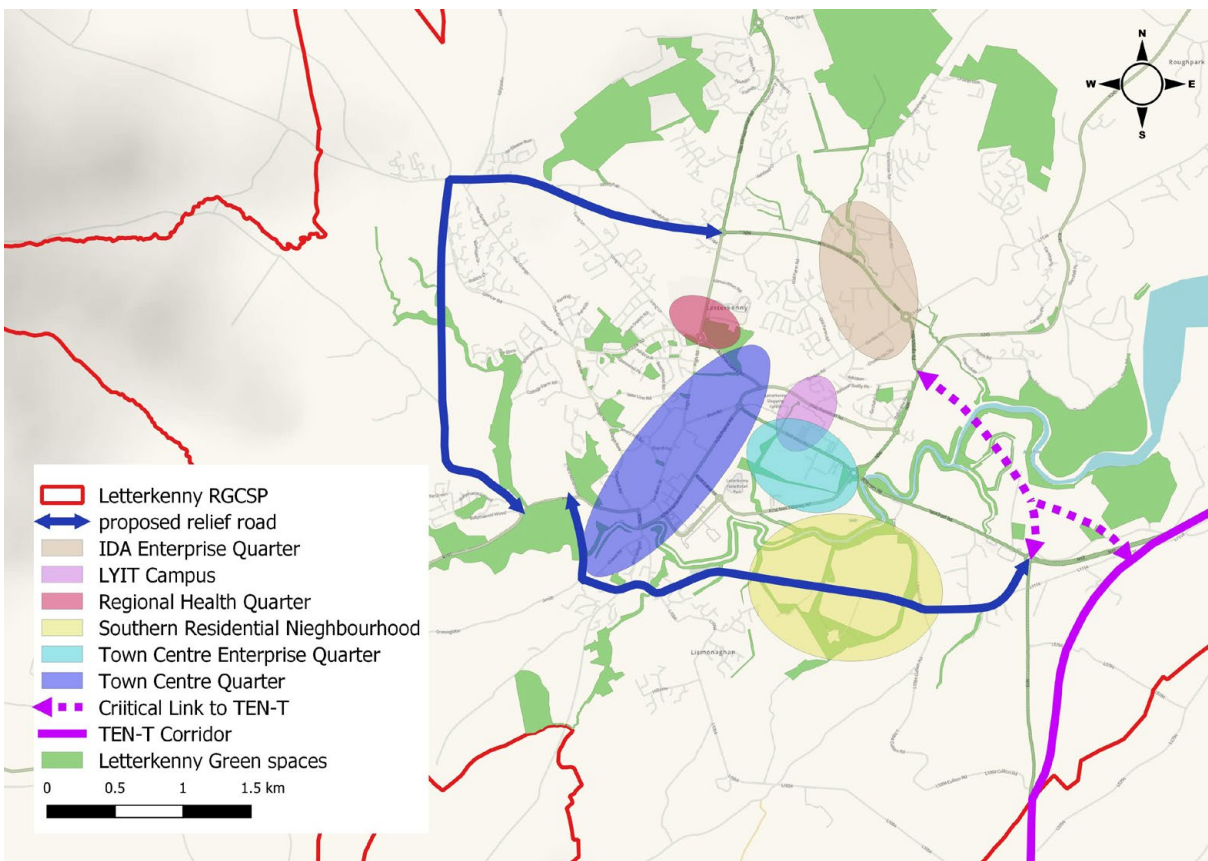
Letterkenny’s population currently stands at 19,300 (CSO, 2016). The total number of jobs within the town 11,400 (Powscar 2016), is almost 30% of the overall jobs within County Donegal. The growth targets set out for Letterkenny are an overall growth in the population of 40% to a population of approximately 27,300 by 2040. In tandem to this growth, it is anticipated that employment numbers

will also increase by approximately 5,000 – 6,000 additional jobs, bringing the overall number of jobs within the region of 17,000. Accordingly, the Letterkenny RGCSPP needs to include all the elements to provide for this growth, including additional housing, employment lands, retail offer, a high-quality of life offer, and community, social and recreational attractions.

Table 6: Letterkenny Projected Population Growth

Letterkenny 2016	Letterkenny uplift 2026	Letterkenny uplift 2031	Letterkenny 2040
Population: 19,300	4,400	2,200	Population: 27,300

Figure 33: Letterkenny – Core Projects





NEW PLAN FOR LETTERKENNY

This RGCSP shall provide the framework for local policy development through the County Donegal Development Plan and a local plan for Letterkenny. It will provide for the detailed development for all areas in the RGCSP, including identification of zoning priorities, phasing of zoning, and detail on the regeneration and town centre design framework to be delivered over the lifetime of the RSES.

REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES

RPO 3.7.20

To grow Letterkenny to a Regional Centre to a minimum of 27,300 residents by 2040.

RPO 3.7.21

To grow the number of jobs in Letterkenny to approximately 17,000 by 2040.

RPO 3.7.22

To ensure that at least 40% of all newly developed lands (Residential, Enterprise and Employment) are within the existing built-up urban area of Letterkenny.

RPO 3.7.23

To provide an additional 3,000 - 4,000 residential units within Letterkenny to facilitate the growth as set out in RPO 3.7.20, above.

RPO 3.7.24

The Assembly supports the retention of existing agricultural land within the RGCSP boundary for that purpose unless it is subject to objectives for the zoning of lands for particular purposes (whether residential, commercial, industrial, recreational, as open space or otherwise) in a statutory plan. Only in exceptional circumstances would it support the development of new residential, industrial or commercial uses on unserviced greenfield sites and these shall be defined through the statutory plan-making process.

RESIDENTIAL GROWTH

Since 2006, the population living within the Town has increased by almost 10%. The ambition in the coming 20 years is to significantly advance upon this growth giving Letterkenny many of the future requirements to build on its function as a regional centre of scale in its own right. Letterkenny has several established neighbourhoods with the potential to develop new ones.

Established neighbourhoods:

- Glencar
- Kiltyoy
- Lisnennan
- Lismonaghan
- Mountain Top
- Ballymacool

Potential new areas for Residential Development:

- Leck/Scibley
- Windy Hall
- Killylastin
- Carnamuggagh

To cater for projected growth, it is likely that at least an additional 3,000 - 4,000 new homes will need to be provided between now and 2040. The phasing of this growth in residential units will have to be done in tandem with the growth figures outlined in Table 6.

Central to this future growth will be the delivery of 40% of future homes are within the built-up envelope of Letterkenny. Achieving this will require the identification of lands which are already within the built-up envelope of the town and can be located close to potential public transport corridors, or within accessible walking distance of the town centre.

Neighbourhoods: There are six distinct and recognised neighbourhoods and the forthcoming Letterkenny Plan presents an opportunity to re-examine them and to deliver further measures, such as neighbourhood centres, and additional consolidation measures, depending on the extent of projected future growth of other places.

In addition to the established neighbourhoods, there are many areas where there are opportunities to provide infill and/or consolidating development that would assist in expanding the growth of the Town, without significantly extending the overall urban footprint in an outward manner, such as greenfield lands between Carnamuggagh and Lisnennan, and between Windyhall and Glencar.

HOW CAN THIS BE ACHIEVED?

Delivering 4,000 new homes – measures include:

1. Ensuring the Zoned Lands are delivered sequentially on a phased basis, providing for compact and inclusive places.
2. To ensure that within the Town Centre area, that a mix of residential accommodation is included within mixed-use developments, which cater for a wide variety of needs, including students, and smaller family units/single occupancy apartments based upon the housing needs of the town.
3. In the medium term to ensure the Southern Relief Road enables a greater extent of new residential growth to the South of the River Swilly, with enhanced links to the Town Centre, through a new crossing of the Swilly, and a new neighbourhood focal point.

REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES

RPO 3.7.25

To develop a Town Centre Living Scheme within 3 years of the adoption of the RSES, and to ensure the main findings of this Scheme are implemented by 2025.

RPO 3.7.26

To deliver a Masterplan, in Urban Regeneration and Linkages between the Main Street Area, and the New Retail Park within 4 years of the adoption of the RSES, ensuring this Masterplan is delivered and implemented by 2025.

RPO 3.7.27

The Assembly supports the preparation of a building heights study, a strategy to guide the future development of the regional centre. The study will take into account the historic, cultural and infrastructural features of the area. In developing this strategy, areas of high density will target the minimum density rates of 50 units per hectare (in the town centre area) and a default rate of 35 units per hectare otherwise.

RPO 3.7.28

To expand Letterkenny's bed-night capacity, and overall Tourist Offer as a Destination Town serving the Northern Headlands of the WAW.

RPO 3.7.29

To consolidate existing neighbourhoods (hereinunder listed) through a series of targeted measures. Town Centre, Glebe/ Kiltoy, Lisnennan, Carnamuggagh, Glencar Scotch, Glencar Irish, Ballymacool and Oldtown.

**REGENERATION AND RENEWAL PROJECTS****KEY REGENERATION OPPORTUNITIES/ RENEWAL SITES**

There are several regeneration opportunities which have the potential to transform the town's centre.

1. Town Centre - Urban Regeneration Masterplan and Strategic Design Framework.
2. The former ESB site (Town Centre).
3. Church Lane/Market Square (Cathedral Quarter) – Continued Regeneration and Restoration.
4. Lower Main Street.
5. Opportunity Sites:
 - i. Donegal Creameries site
 - ii. Gortlee Site
 - iii. Unifi lands
 - iv. Lands at Port Bridge
 - v. Former Mart at Sentry Hill.

Each of the opportunity sites represents brownfield development within the Town, and the re-use of these sites would represent a key element of achieving the Compact Growth objective which is a central pillar of the NPF. The Letterkenny Plan will set out further detail with respect to these sites, and the parameters within which they can be redeveloped.

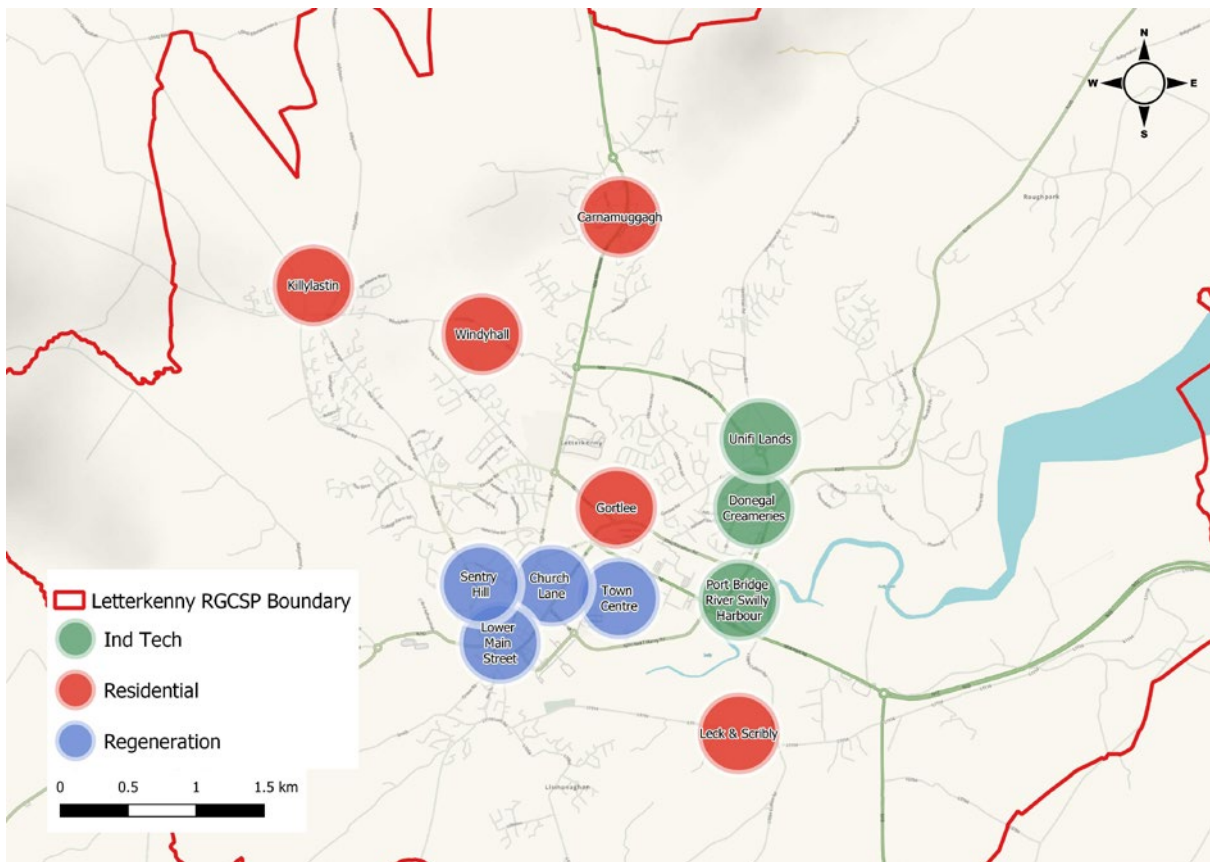
INTER-LINKAGES ACROSS TOWN CENTRE

Creating a more coherent, and inter-linked town centre has been recognised for a long time as a key strategic goal for Letterkenny. The achievement of an improved inter-connectivity between the original Town Centre (Main Street Zone) and the new Retail Centre, including the Retail Park, and the Area surrounding Letterkenny Community Centre is equally important. The advancement of this should include prioritisation of pedestrian friendly linkages, with identified walkways, crossing points, and traffic lanes and improved route availability for

cycling. The Letterkenny Plan together with the Urban Regeneration Masterplan will present an opportunity to set out further detail in respect of these sites, and the parameters within which they can be redeveloped.

The Social Enterprise Centre, (on the Neil T Blaney Road, and linking onto the proposed Joe Bonar Link Road) will not only provide a landmark building on a key site, but will serve to improve access to and open up lands in this area for regeneration, and potential large scale, mixed-use projects.

Figure 34: Letterkenny – Locations for Growth and Regeneration





INDIGENOUS EMPLOYMENT AND FDI

Letterkenny is the economic driver of County Donegal. There are currently (CSO 2016) 11,400 Jobs in Letterkenny, which comprise approx. 28% of the overall jobs figure for County Donegal.

In tandem with the targeted population growth of at least 8,000 additional people expected to reside in Letterkenny by 2040, the National Planning Framework (Ireland 2040) anticipates that employment growth will occur at a ratio of approximately 2:1 (people to jobs), this will equate to (a minimum) additional 4,000 - 5,000 workers employed in the Town over the period to 2040. To ensure this expansion is realised, it will be necessary to secure adequate provision of zoned land for a mix of enterprise and employment uses.

- General Employment.
- Commercial Use.
- Established Employment use.
- Town Centre/Retail.

Employment growth in Letterkenny has continued apace over the last decade. In addition to expanded retail, and service employment. The emergence of the 'Letterkenny Cluster' in ICT includes multi-national and indigenous companies. This cluster includes Sita, Kirchoff, Optibelt, Pramerica, Zues, Optum, United Health. Paremerica alone employs over 1,400 people, and there will be an opportunity to expand this cluster, with Donegal County Council, IDA and Enterprise Ireland the primary stakeholders tasked with delivering further sustainable employment for this part of the North West Region.

The targeted Areas for General Employment will include additional lands adjacent to and within the IDA Business Park along the N-56 Link, and the former Unifi lands at Kilttoy/between Carnamuggagh/Lisnenan.

The Mountain Top (Pinehill) supports approximately 40 business operators at present, and there is scope to introduce incremental environmental improvements which could enhance the general appearance of the area, and better separate pedestrian, and vehicle use.

RETAIL

Letterkenny functions as County Donegal's primary retail and shopping destination. The retail area within Letterkenny can be defined in a number of zones:

- The traditional Town Centre.
- Paddy Harte/Loop Road Retail Park.

A multi-purpose open/civic amenity space within the heart of the Town would assist in helping the balance struck between vehicles, and pedestrians/cyclists, it would also encourage additional uses relating to events/activities.



In addition to the above, the incremental improvement of the Towns retail offer will include

- Enhancing sustainable links between the 2 retail areas.
- Providing public facilities at Letterkenny Retail Park.
- Targeting reuse of vacant retail floor space.
- Emphasis on high-quality urban design within the Town Centre, and key strategic approach roads. Further detail in this regard will be set out in the forthcoming Letterkenny Local Area Plan. (LKLAP).

CRITICALLY ENABLING STRATEGIC INFRASTRUCTURE FOR LETTERKENNY

To achieve the population growth and economic development discussed above and advancement of the overall offer to citizens, Letterkenny has several key projects which must be delivered over the next 10-15 years, and indicative timeframe is attached for each, applicable from 2020:

CONNECTED LETTERKENNY: ENABLING PROJECTS:

1. **TEN-T Projects:** The key infrastructure needs of Letterkenny and Donegal are set out in the RSES (Sec 6). The delivery of the TEN-T improvement schemes, including the provision of the strategic N56 link, with a crossing over the River Swilly via the N-56 Bonagee Link and the significant upgrading of the road network approaching the Town from the South (Southern Relief Road). The combined significance of these investments, including reduced travel times to Letterkenny from the Atlantic Economic Corridor N13/N15 from Sligo and to Northern Ireland will directly impact upon the Town, allowing for multi-modal access across Letterkenny, and providing more effective long term traffic management beyond 2040.
2. **Regional Transportation Hub (RTH):** Letterkenny currently does not have a multi-purpose transportation point. There are multiple Private Operators transporting patrons around Donegal and across the island of Ireland on a daily basis, and the stop adjacent to the Oatfield Roundabout does not have sufficient capacity to cater for growing demand. The provision of a Transportation Hub within the Town Core, and within walking distance of LYIT is a priority piece of infrastructure to increase accessibility and connectivity. Whilst a specific site has yet to be identified, the RTH is a critical priority.
3. **Cycle Lane and Urban Greenway/Central Linear Park:** Easy and safe cycling and walking facilities will form a key priority for Letterkenny's Centre, and Neighbourhoods over the next two decades. Secure cycling and dedicated lanes for bicycles are recognised as a direct incentive for people to travel to school and work without being dependant upon the private car. A cycle route network will be prepared in the next 2-3 years, and this will include a Greenway along the River Swilly and oriented around the Central Linear Park Project as well as a full Landuse and Transportation Strategy to establish several key priority cycle routes which traverse the Town. Provision shall also be made for the Letterkenny – Burtonport Greenway, along the Former Donegal Rail Line, and onto the Cycle lane being provided along the newly realigned Section of the N56 at Illistrin/Coolboy.
4. **Public Transport Linkages:** A Local Transportation Plan (LTP) will be prepared in the short term for Letterkenny, the LTP should examine the current lack of alternatives to the car and land-use patterns which can better effect a modal shift to public transport, as well as walking and cycling. A new Regional Transport Hub shall form a central part of this vision, as well as the potential of Bus corridors, Park and Ride facilities and neighbourhood services.

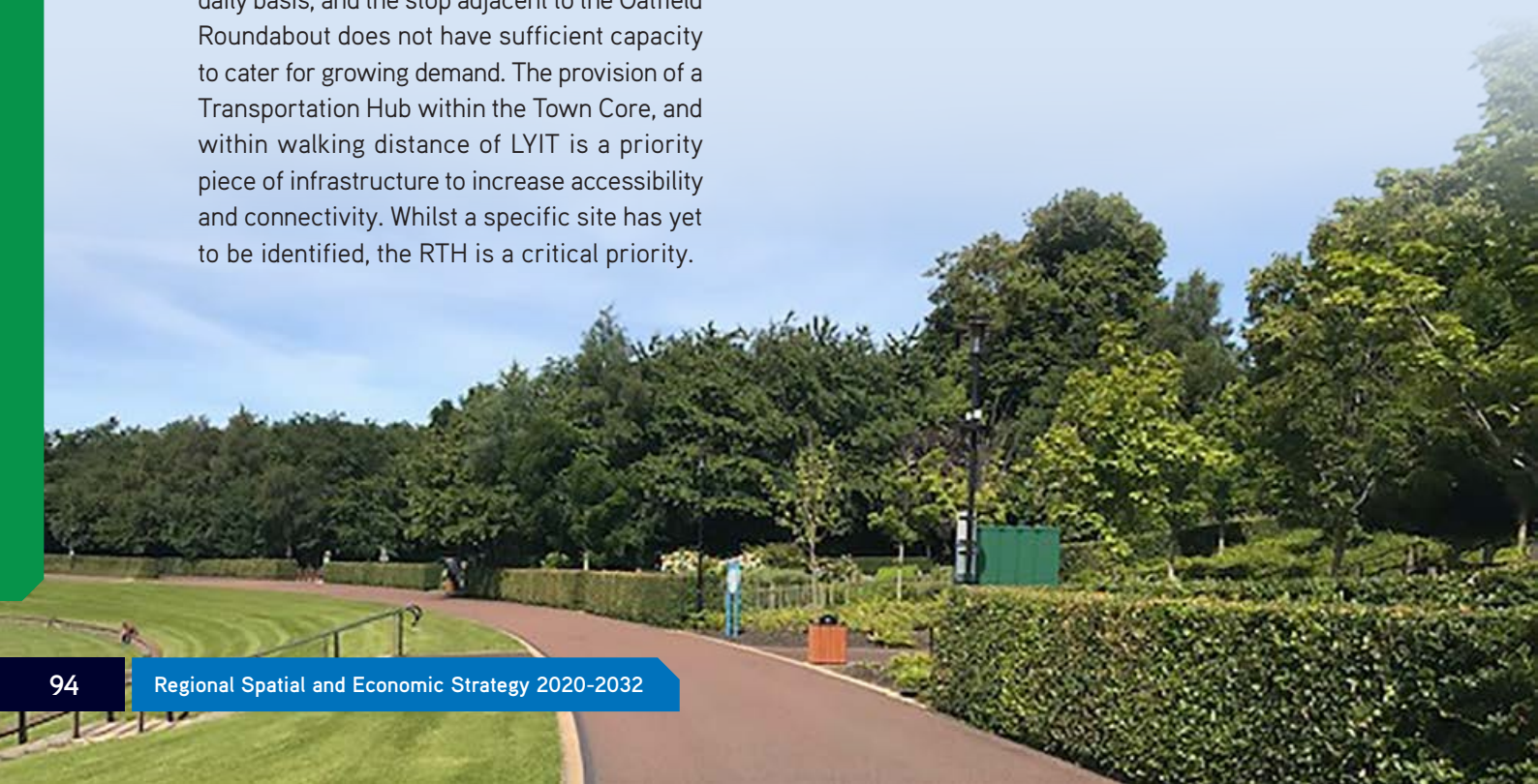
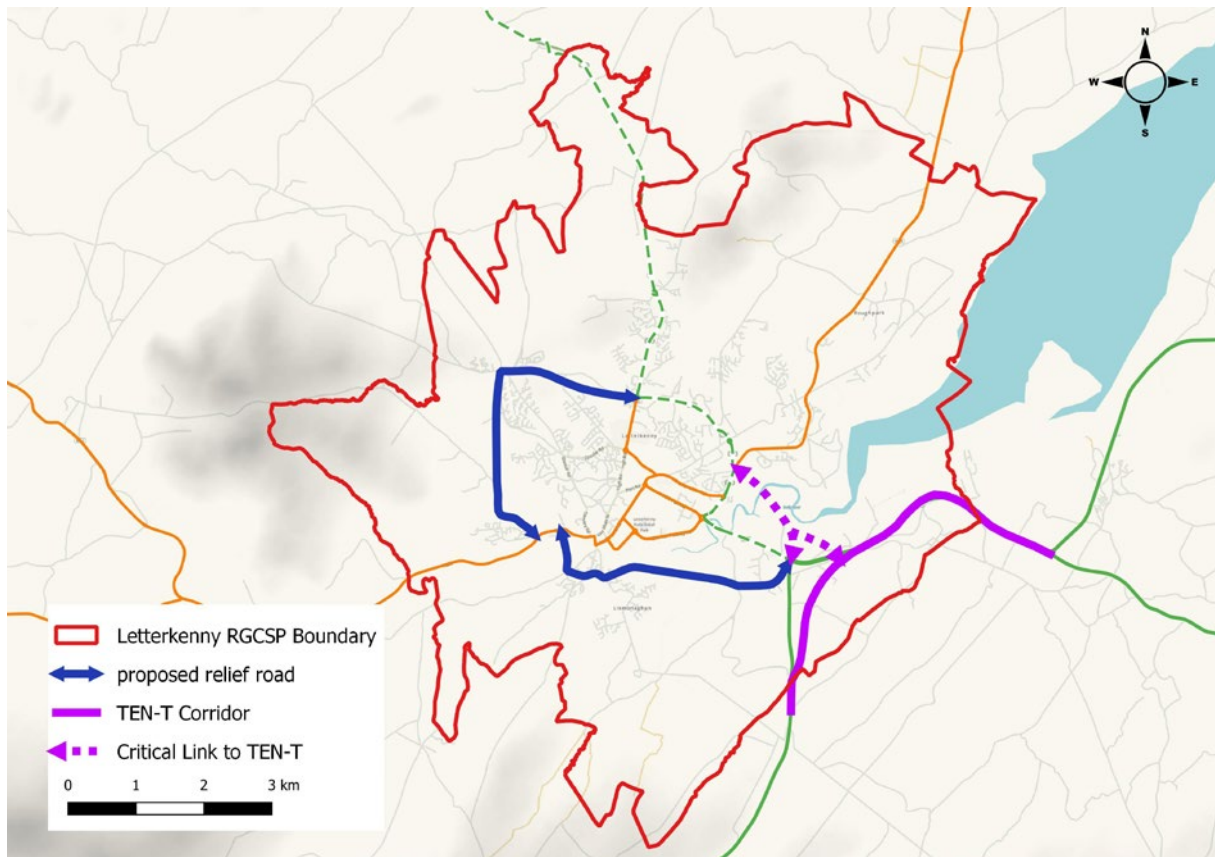


Table 7: Critically Enabling Projects for Letterkenny

Critically Enabling and Transformative Projects for Letterkenny	Indicative Timeframe Delivery (Short – 2026 / Medium – 2031 / Long – 2040)
1. Donegal TEN-T Improvement Scheme's. Strategic Regional Connectivity (N-13, N-14, and N15) including the N-56 strategic link across the River Swilly	Short/Medium
2. Letterkenny Urban Design and Masterplan for Town Centre	Short
3. Regional Transport Hub for Letterkenny	Short
4. LYIT Campus Extension	Short/Medium
5. Urban Greenway/Central Linear Park Development within Letterkenny, integrating with the Letterkenny – Burtonport, River Swilly Greenway	Medium
6. Development of Letterkenny Social Enterprise Centre	Short
7. Creating a 'Smart' Regional Centre	Short
8. Town Centre Living Scheme: Regeneration of Derelict and Vacant Sites	Short/Medium
9. Development of Town Centre Enterprise Quarter	Short

Figure 35: Letterkenny Strategic Road Schemes





REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES

RPO 3.7.30

To deliver the TEN-T priority route improvement for Donegal and Letterkenny by 2028, including the N-56 Link, and also progress the Southern Relief Road (Leck Road), the N-14 Manorcunningham – Lifford and N-13 Letterkenny – Ballybofey.

RPO 3.7.31

To facilitate the expansion of the LYIT Campus.

RPO 3.7.32

To prepare (within 2 years of the adoption of the RSES), a Local Transport Plan (LTP) for Letterkenny, which will include a multi-modal focus, and Public Transport roadmap.

RPO 3.7.33

To develop a dedicated and integrated cycle network around Letterkenny, including the creation of a Greenway along the line of the River Swilly and oriented around the Central Linear Park Project to offer residents a viable alternative to car-based journeys.

RPO 3.7.34

To deliver a multi-purpose Public and Private Regional Transport Hub within the Town Core of Letterkenny to serve County Donegal and the wider region.

RPO 3.7.35

To carry out a feasibility study which investigates the potential and viability of a Rail Link between Letterkenny and Derry in future decades.

RPO 3.7.36

To deliver the Letterkenny Social Enterprise Centre and associated improved access to lands to the West of Neil T Blaney Road, as part of a wider Urban Regeneration project.

ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC REALM

LIVEABLE LETTERKENNY

Letterkenny is already well served with many outstanding public realm facilities, which include An Grainan Theatre, the Regional Cultural Centre, Aura Leisure Centre, Ballymacool Park at the Southern edge of the Town and Bernard McGlinchey Town Park. The challenge in the coming years is enhancing sustainable connectivity to some of these facilities. To ensure Letterkenny becomes a less car-dependent large town, dedicated cycle networks are key to enabling more sustainable modes of transport across the Town. In tandem with such provision, will be a need to provide adequate cycling facilities at the aforementioned locations, as well as several other identified strategic sites.



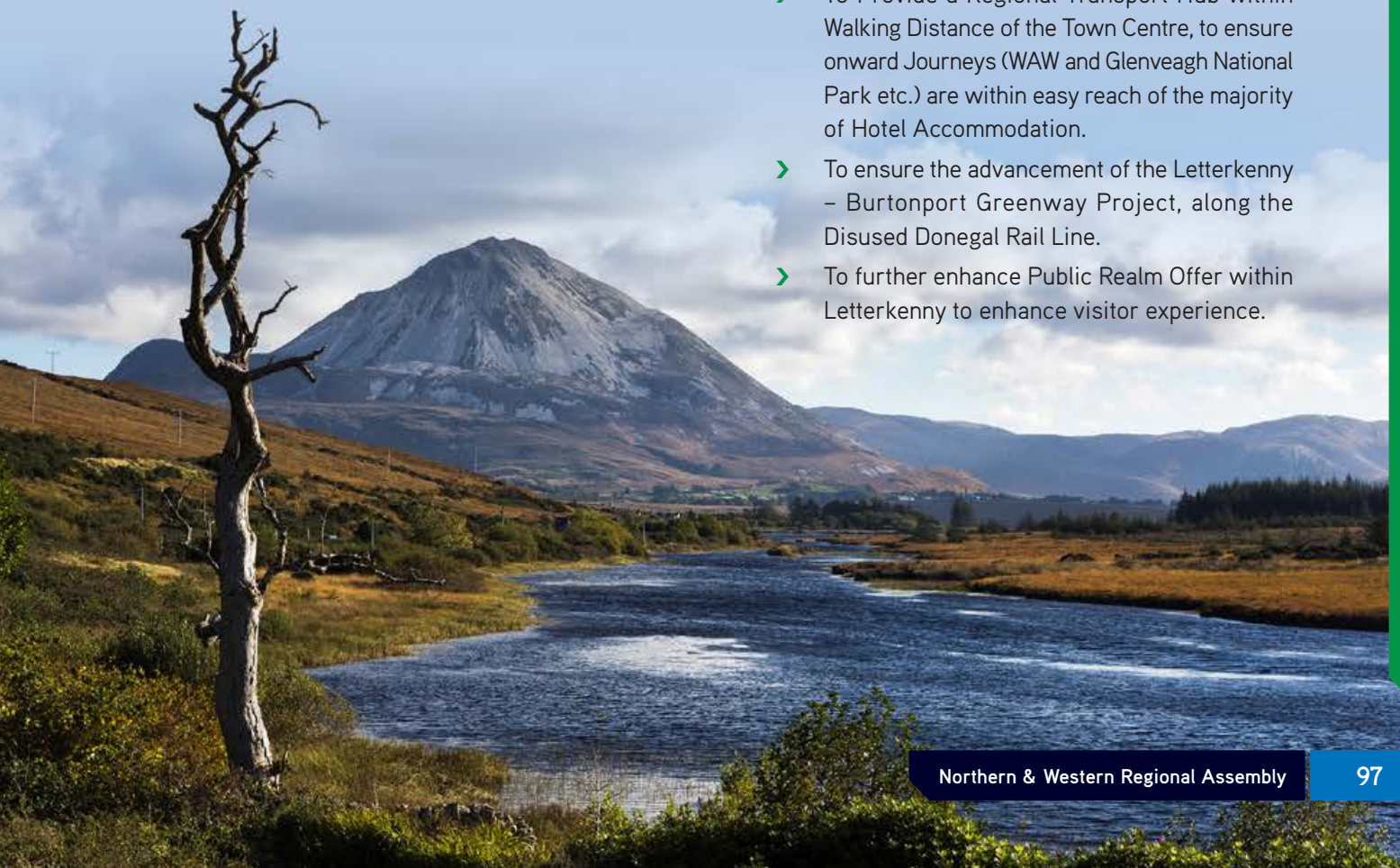
TOURISM

Letterkenny has been identified by Fáilte Ireland as a Destination Town (always on) owing to many factors.

- Bed Night Capacity (Approx. 4,200)
- Proximity to Wild Atlantic Way (Donegal Headlands, including Discovery Points such as Malin Head and Fanad Lighthouse)
- Proximity to Glenveagh National Park, Grianan of Aileach and Derryveagh Mountains.
- Ability to offer attractions in its own right, including a range of pubs, restaurants, and nightlife.

It will be vital that given the significant growth in Tourist numbers visiting Ireland, and the potential to grow significantly the figures travelling on the Northern Half of the WAW, that Letterkenny continues to grow its offer as a Regional Centre of Scale to host, and support visitors across all of North Donegal. To do this, many objectives need to be progressed in the short to medium term:

- Provide sufficient zoned lands to ensure additional Hotels, and Tourist Accommodation can be accommodated within walking distance of the Town Centre.
- To Provide a Regional Transport Hub within Walking Distance of the Town Centre, to ensure onward Journeys (WAW and Glenveagh National Park etc.) are within easy reach of the majority of Hotel Accommodation.
- To ensure the advancement of the Letterkenny – Burtonport Greenway Project, along the Disused Donegal Rail Line.
- To further enhance Public Realm Offer within Letterkenny to enhance visitor experience.





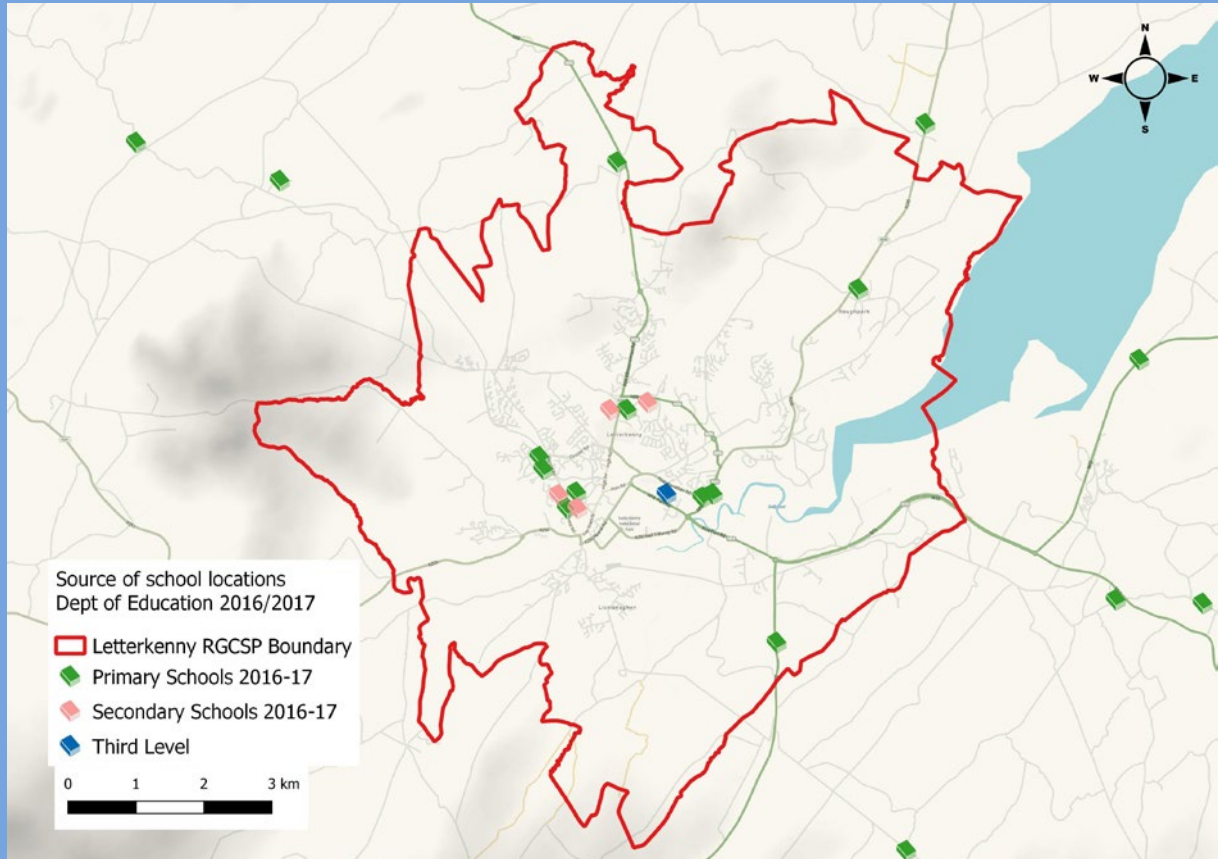
EDUCATION

LYIT has approximately 4,000 students and has expanded by 40% in enrolment numbers in the last 10 – 15 years. The IT has in recent years secured a significant site on the Southern side of the Port Road, opposite their existing campus, which will enable future expansion without the fragmentation of the student facilities. It is one of the key strategic aims for Letterkenny over the next two decades that this expansion is realised, and the range of courses, and the number of Under Graduates, as well as Post Graduates are increased incrementally between now and 2040. This expansion is expected to take place in tandem with University status for LYIT, as part of the Connacht/Ulster Alliance, where talks remain ongoing with Sligo IT and GMIT. In addition, there is an opportunity to further develop cross border and international collaboration with other Universities.

Facilities at Primary School Level extend to seven Schools. Three of these Schools (the 3 largest) are located outside the Letterkenny CSO (2016) boundary (Woodlands, Lurgybrack and Ilistrin). The provision of the new Educate Together Campus in 2018 has brought additional capacity to the Primary School system. The future provision of a significant residential neighbourhood to the South of the River at Leck/Scribley and the Southern Relief Road may require an additional Primary School in this area.

There are four Secondary Schools in the Town, with Donegal County Council communicating with the Dept. of Education in relation to additional provision should the need arise. The re-development and enhancement of the St. Eunan's Secondary School Campus is a priority in Educational infrastructure provision.

Figure 36: Education Provision in Letterkenny



3.7(c) Sligo Regional Growth Centre Strategic Plan

CONTEXT AND VISION

The National Planning Framework recognises Sligo's potential to serve the North West as an accessible centre of employment and services, which can be a focal point for investment and have the widest possible regional influence. Sligo is thus identified as a key Regional Centre, capable of leading the development of the surrounding region. Over the next 15 – 20 years it is therefore critical that the North-West region is served by several centres of scale, which are accessible centres of employment and services, which can be focal points for investment and have the widest possible regional influence.

Located at the point where the Western Region meets the Border Region, Sligo is one of the largest urban centres in the North-West, serving as an administrative, employment, commercial, health and education centre for a significant hinterland that is substantially larger than the hinterlands of other towns with similar populations in either the Southern Region or the Eastern and Midlands region.

Sligo's functional area extends far beyond the County boundaries, as demonstrated by the thousands of people who travel daily for work from Mayo, Donegal, Roscommon and Leitrim. It has been estimated that the daytime population of Sligo RGCSP can be as high as 40,000.

The presence of strong employment sectors such as Pharma and Engineering, Higher Education Institutes (HEIs), cultural institutions and health services indicate a latent capacity for Sligo to enhance its regional role.

This can be achieved through building critical mass of the population and further employment, in tandem with enhanced accessibility and quality of life. Given the importance of regional interdependencies, this must be done in partnership with a variety of institutions. Therefore, Sligo has the potential to serve this part of the north-west as an accessible centre of employment and services which can be a driver for investment and growth of regional scale and influence.



VISION

Sligo's Vision is to be:

An enterprising, inclusive, resilient and environmentally sustainable place, which values and celebrates its unique landscape and rich culture and heritage, and where the wellbeing of future generations is central to everything we do.

STRATEGIC PLAN AREA

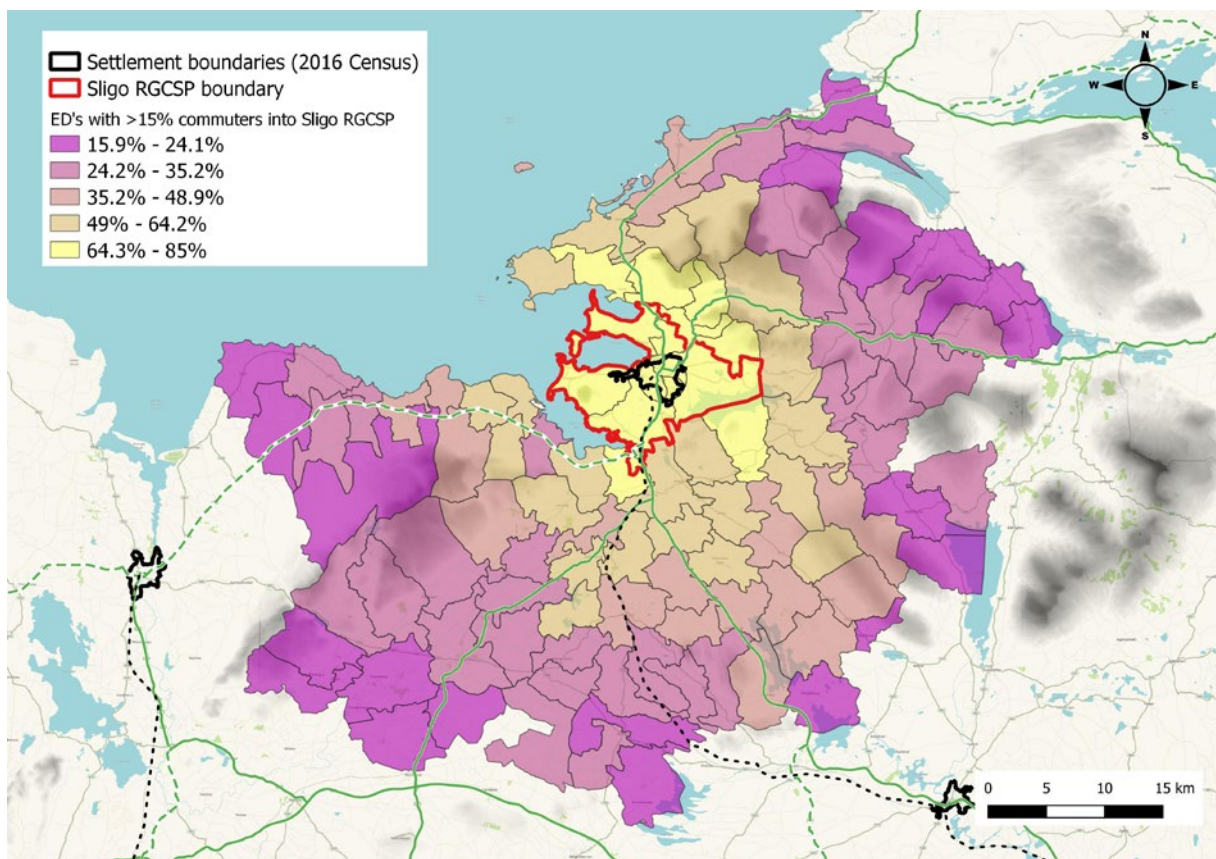
Regional Growth Centres have been selected because they are significant towns that function in their areas in a similar manner, but at a different scale to the bigger cities. In the same way that the NPF requires Metropolitan Area Strategic Plans

(MASPs) to be prepared for each of Ireland's five cities, a strategic plan that responds to the lead role of each of the identified regional centres is also required with a similar focus.

The Strategic Plan Area is home to 28,465 people, of which 19,413 (68%) reside within the Sligo PUA (Principal Urban Area)

The boundaries of the Sligo RGCSA are based on the CSO's Small Areas, which were selected to include all major employers and educational institutions, in addition to Sligo and its closest satellite villages of Ballysadare, Strandhill and Rosses Point. Together with providing homes and local services for a combined population of 3,986 persons, these villages offer a variety of jobs but are heavily reliant upon Sligo for employment. Strandhill and Rosses Point have additional tourism functions with corresponding employment opportunities.

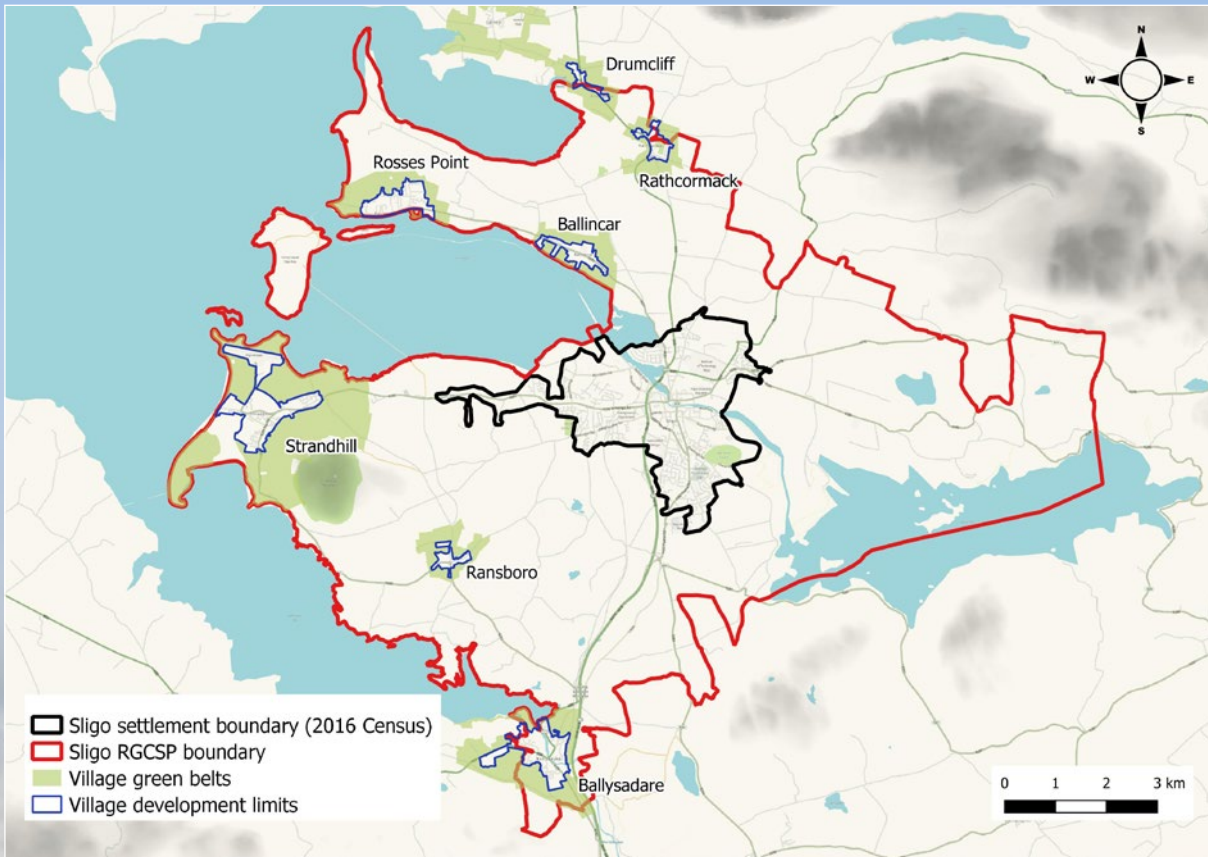
Figure 37: Commuter Catchments in Sligo



STRATEGIC GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Successful countries have vibrant cities at their core, driving economic growth across regions. Sligo has the vision, and capacity to be a Regional Growth Centre of scale, and the vision for Sligo can be realised through the implementation of the following strategic goals and the ensuing strategic plan objectives.

Figure 38: Sligo Regional Centre Boundary





STRATEGIC GOAL - COMPACT GROWTH

Communities will be supported by creating compact urban quarters, with mixed-use developments built at appropriate densities, complementing the historic urban fabric. Regeneration, consolidation and the redevelopment of brownfield sites will provide homes for new residents. Links between the town centre, new and existing neighbourhoods shall be adapted for a range of transport options.

REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES

RPO 3.7.37

Support population growth in the principal urban area of Sligo to a level of at least 27,200 persons by 2040.

RPO 3.7.38

Facilitate the provision of 3,000 to 5,000 residential units to accommodate the additional population envisaged by 2040.

RPO 3.7.39

Ensure that at least 40% of new residential and employment-related development in the Regional Growth Centre occurs within Sligo's existing built-up urban area, through regeneration and consolidation on infill and brownfield sites.

RPO 3.7.40

Enhance intra-urban access by providing an additional north-south connection through the Eastern Garavogue Bridge and Approach Roads Scheme, to be completed by 2021.

RPO 3.7.41

Kick-start development to the south-west of the urban core by completing the Western Distributor Road by 2020.

RPO 3.7.42

Prioritise new residential and employment-related development on greenfield sites in the areas served by the Western Distributor Road at Caltragh and Oakfield, and at Ballinode, which will be served by the Eastern Garavogue Bridge and Approach Roads Scheme.

RPO 3.7.43

Improve urban circulation by increasing junction capacity along Sligo's Inner Relief Road (N4/N15) and provide new link roads, as necessary, to complete the "ring route" around the town centre.

**RPO 3.7.44**

The Assembly supports the preparation of a building heights study, a strategy to guide the future development of the regional centre. The study will take into account the historic, cultural and infrastructural features of the area. In developing this strategy, areas of high density will target the minimum density rates of 50 units per hectare (in the town centre area) and a default rate of 35 units per hectare otherwise.

RPO 3.7.45

The Assembly supports the retention of existing agricultural land within the RGCSB boundary for that purpose unless it is subject to objectives for the zoning of lands for particular purposes (whether residential, commercial, industrial, recreational, as open space or otherwise) in a statutory plan. Only in exceptional circumstances would it support the development of new residential, industrial or commercial uses on unserviced greenfield sites and these shall be defined through the statutory plan-making process.





HOW CAN THIS BE ACHIEVED?

THROUGH REGENERATION AND CONSOLIDATION

Of the 43 hectares of land currently zoned for residential and mixed-use development in the Sligo and Environs Plan, mostly consists of infill sites within the built-up urban area. These sites have the potential for 1,000 new dwellings in a variety of types and sizes, adapted to the specific locations.

The Docklands, an industrial brownfield area, is available for redevelopment right on the edge of the town centre. It has the potential to accommodate at least 1,000 new homes, as well as other compatible uses, including business and enterprise.

In Sligo East, the Cranmore and Environs Regeneration Masterplan, launched in 2016, is expected to achieve a transformative impact locally and in the wider community.



THROUGH PLANNED EXPANSION

Within a short walking distance of the urban core, there is an opportunity to create sustainable communities in Caltragh and Ballinode, on greenfield lands with a total capacity of over 7,000 new homes (on a phased basis). These areas are expected to develop following the construction of key roads (see below) that would link them into the existing urban fabric.

THROUGH IMPROVED MOBILITY

The Eastern Garavogue Bridge will provide the necessary additional river crossing to serve the new Ballinode community.

The Western Distributor Road will service the Caltragh area and link the planned IDA Business Park at Oakfield into the overall transport network.

Urban Traffic Control (UTC) systems will optimise traffic flow along Sligo's Inner Relief Road, thus reducing delays. Another key aspect of improving the circulation system is the provision of a link road between the junction of Burton Street/Pearse Road to the junction of Mail Coach Road/Connolly Street.

**STRATEGIC GOAL -
ENTERPRISING SLIGO**

Local businesses and national or global firms located in Sligo need to be supported by fostering innovation and entrepreneurship, expanding education opportunities and providing a skilled workforce to the industry.

Substantial amounts of serviced land are or will be made available for further business and enterprise development in the Regional Growth Centre. Transport links to Dublin, Belfast and along the Atlantic Economic Corridor will be improved, to support business activity.

Local heritage and culture will be promoted, to deliver high-quality cultural and tourism products of regional and national significance.



REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES

RPO 3.7.46

Facilitate the development of a new IDA Business Park at Oakfield, to the south-west of the urban core.

RPO 3.7.47

Promote Local Heritage and Culture to deliver high-quality cultural and tourism products of Regional and National significance.



HOW CAN THIS BE ACHIEVED?

BY SUPPORTING HIGHER EDUCATION

The emerging Connacht-Ulster Alliance Technological University (Galway-Mayo IT, IT Sligo and Letterkenny IT) is a collaborative network approach to regional development extending throughout the North-Western region as a whole. This initiative is supported by all relevant local and regional bodies. Future graduates should be able to remain in the region and take up high-quality jobs created by existing and new enterprises.

BY SERVICING NEW BUSINESS AND ENTERPRISE ZONES

With only limited capacity available at Finisklin, the IDA intends to develop a new Business Park at Oakfield on the south-western edge of Sligo Town. The area will be served by the Western Distributor Road.

In the interest of spatial balance, further new enterprises will be encouraged to locate at Ballytivnan and Rathbraughan, north of the urban core, on lands served by planned national roads, including the N16 and a planned link to N15, in the vicinity of Abbvie's pharmaceutical plants.

BY INVESTING IN TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE

To take full advantage of the opportunities offered by the Atlantic Economic Corridor, it will be necessary to pursue the enhancement or upgrading of national roads N15 (to Letterkenny) and N17 (to Galway), as well as the strengthening of connections to the east coast via N4 (to Dublin) and N16 (to Dundalk and Belfast).



THROUGH THE SMART CITY INITIATIVE

Investment in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has become fundamental to the social and economic development of urban centres. Cities that combine modern communication infrastructure with investment in human and social capital are referred to as 'Smart Cities'.

Sligo County Council is in the process of preparing a roadmap to the development of Sligo as a 'Smart City'. It will be essential to secure further investment in this process and in the infrastructure and equipment needed to bring Sligo fully into the digital age.

BY PROGRESSING TOURISM PROJECTS

Sligo's landscape and culture are unique assets that can define a special tourism destination. The County is strongly associated with the poetry of William Butler Yeats and boasts a rich archaeological heritage. The development of a County Museum and Yeats Interpretative Centre could showcase Sligo's heritage and act as a flagship attraction.

Strandhill and Rosses Point are coastal settlements that play an important tourism role, which could be strengthened with improved facilities such as the planned new Maritime Centre, to be developed on the promenade of Strandhill.



STRATEGIC GOAL - LIVEABLE SLIGO

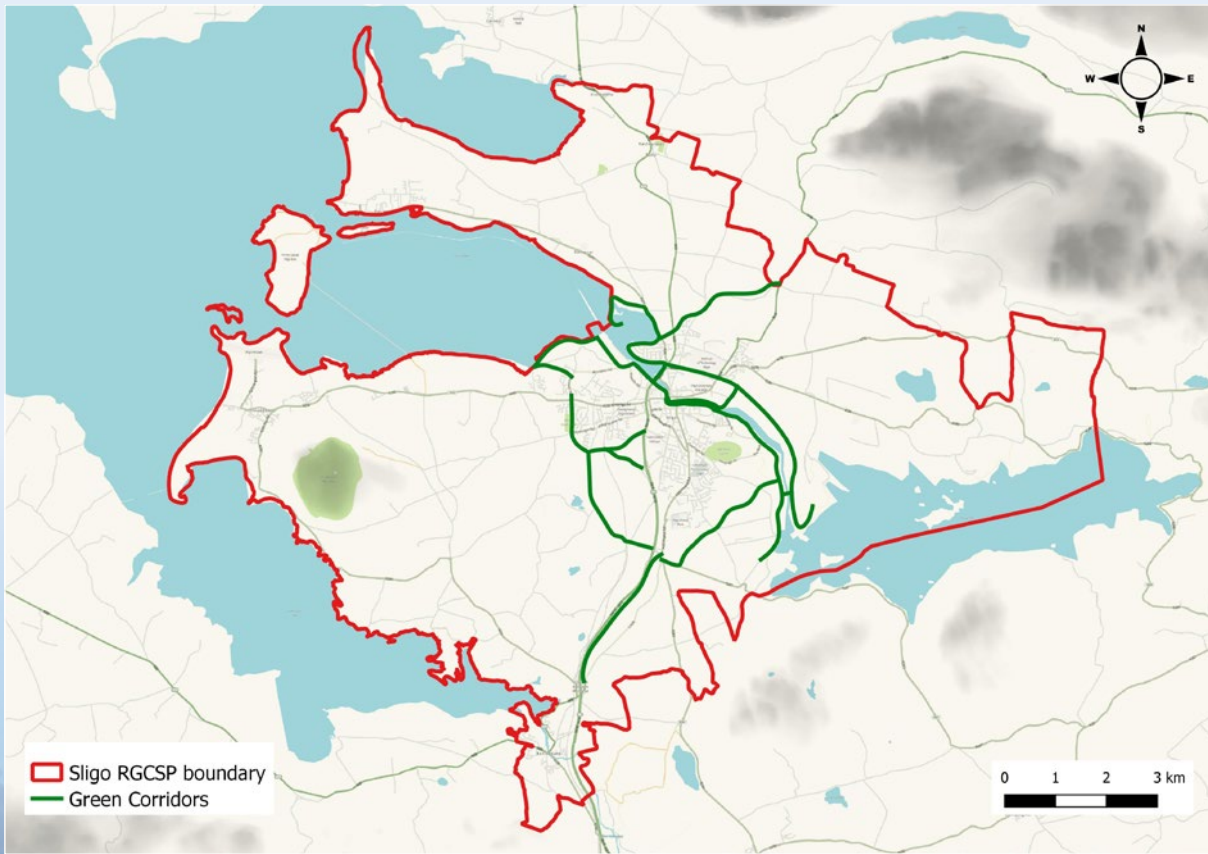
Sligo’s vision is to be an inclusive place, with a human-scale urban fabric and a vibrant core, attractive streets, friendly and safe for the young and old. People should have easy access to affordable homes, education, healthcare, culture, leisure and recreation. They should enjoy multifunctional public spaces that can regenerate civic engagement, attract tourists and support adjoining businesses.

While the built environment – particularly the town centre – will be enhanced and upgraded, the usage



of open spaces and the natural environment will be maximised by providing traffic-free walking and cycling opportunities within and around Sligo Town.

Figure 39: Sligo Green Corridors





REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES

RPO 3.7.48

Upgrade the town centre environment through focused interventions in O'Connell Street, Stephen Street and car park, Rockwood Parade, Market Cross, Old Market Street and Quay Street car park, followed by gradual improvements of streets adjoining the centre.

RPO 3.7.49

Prepare/commission and implement a new masterplan for the Centre Block (Wine Street car park).

RPO 3.7.50

Complete the remaining phases of the major recreational complex planned at Cleveragh Estate and Doorly Park, adjoining the Garavogue River.

RPO 3.7.51

Continue the expansion of cycleways and walking routes throughout the urban area and outwards to the satellite villages of Ballysadare, Strandhill and Rosses Point, linking into established and planned recreational trails such as Union Wood, Knocknarea etc.





HOW CAN THIS BE ACHIEVED?

BY IMPLEMENTING SLIGO'S PUBLIC REALM PLAN (2018)

The Public Realm Plan identifies specific areas and proposes their refurbishment, redesign or even major transformation, (See detail under 'Key liveable projects' below). The Plan provides the template for future improvements to be carried out in other public spaces, in order to make Sligo more attractive to its residents and visitors.

BY BUILDING THE CLEVERAGH LEISURE TRAIL

Following the completion of Zone 1 of Cleveragh Regional Recreation and Amenity Campus, three more zones are planned, one of which includes water-based recreational facilities.

It is envisaged that Cleveragh Leisure Trail will be developed eastwards from the town centre to Cleveragh, across the Garavogue and back along the northern river banks at Hazelwood-Ballinode (with links to Hazelwood House and Demesne) westwards to the Mall. The project involves a multi-functional network of linked spaces with a variety of landscapes and recreational opportunities.

BY EXPANDING THE "GREEN NETWORK"

A total of 23 green corridors have already been identified in the Sligo and Environs Plan. The existing network of cycleways and walking routes are gradually being expanded throughout the town and outside the built-up area.

A short distance south of the Regional Park at Cleveragh is Cairns Hill. It is intended to further develop this area, to incorporate its visually prominent and sensitive lands into the open space network.





Vision for Sligo Cultural Plaza

KEY LIVEABILITY PROJECTS

SLIGO'S PUBLIC REALM PLAN 2018

Seeking a single, coordinated vision for Sligo's public realm, Sligo County Council has commissioned a public realm plan for Sligo, which was completed in 2018. The Plan proposes improvements to Sligo's public spaces, designed to enhance the town and make it a more attractive place to live, work and visit.

Interventions are envisaged in O'Connell Street, Stephen Street and car park, Rockwood Parade, Market Cross, Old Market Street and Quay Street car park. The Public Realm Plan identifies two other areas in need of redevelopment, namely Wine Street car park and the area surrounding The Abbey.

The Plan proposes a palette of materials to be used in all future street refurbishments streets, to ensure consistency in the look of public spaces. It also establishes a framework for the continued management and development of the built environment.

O'CONNELL STREET ENHANCEMENT

O'Connell Street is the main shopping street in Sligo. The opportunity to enhance this street and correct the balance between cars and pedestrians will significantly improve the public realm and living environment of the town centre. The enhancement project is expected to set the benchmark of quality for all future public realm projects in Sligo.

STEPHEN STREET CULTURAL PLAZA

Sligo lacks a large multi-functional public open space in the heart of the town, capable of hosting a variety of events. Such a space is considered essential if Sligo is to become a place that people want to visit and spend time.

The area currently occupied by the Stephen Street car park has the potential to be the central, animated square which Sligo needs. The car park has been previously used occasionally for events such as concerts, festivals, markets and public screenings.

The Assembly supports the intention to redevelop this space into a high-quality public plaza for all residents and visitors of Sligo to use and enjoy. This will help promote Sligo as a tourist destination and provide the opportunity to host a wider range of events and activities.

GREEN LINK SOUTH TO POTENTIAL FUTURE GREENWAYS

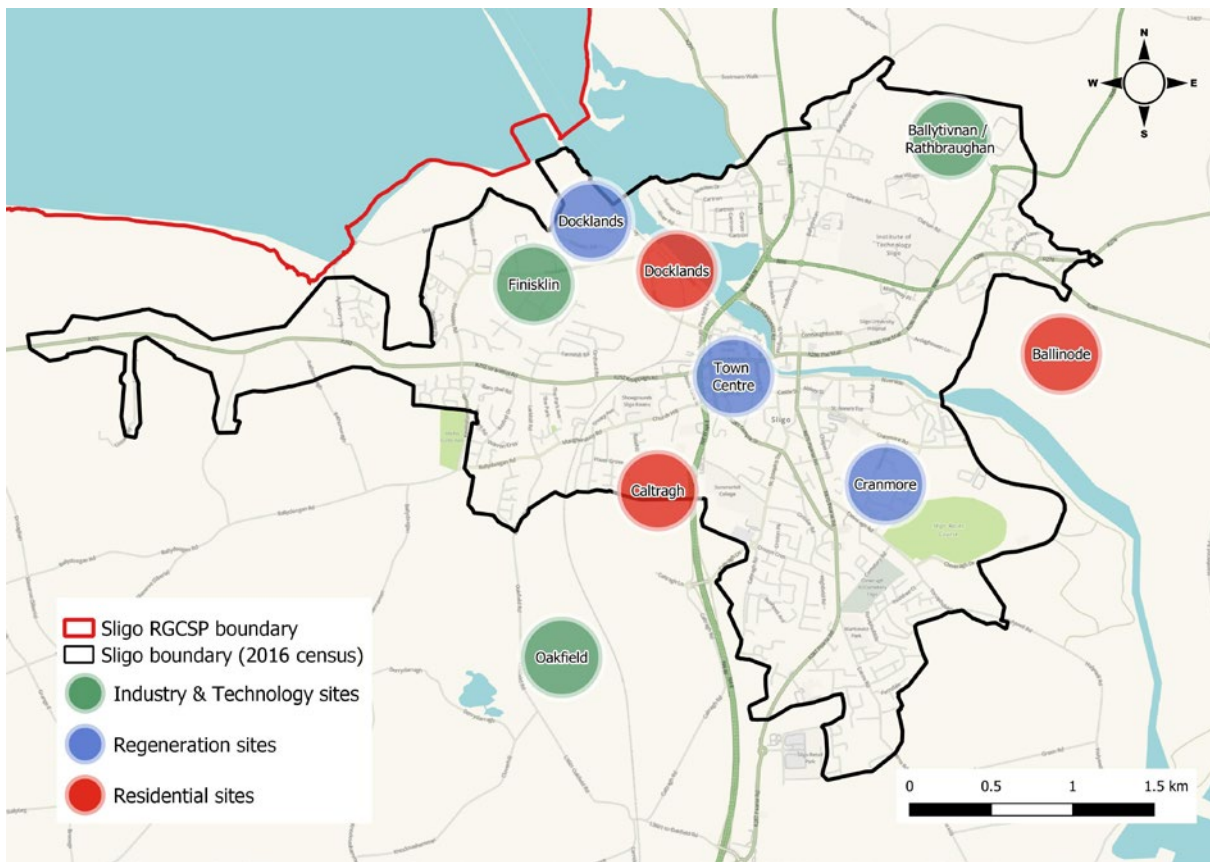
There is potential for a walkway/cycleway connection from Collooney to Sligo which can also serve as a Smarter Travel commuter route. There would be a potential for this piece of infrastructure to link into similar regional scale greenways on closed or abandoned railways in the vicinity such as along the abandoned railway line to Enniskillen (SLNCR).

STRATEGIC GROWTH AREAS

STRATEGIC SITES FOR EMPLOYMENT AND HOUSING

Business location choices are informed by the availability of property solutions and this makes Sligo an attractive proposition. It has the potential to deliver the quantity, quality and distribution of land necessary to meet the level of demand for a broad range of business proposals that may emerge over the lifetime of this strategy. This strategy identifies strategic areas that have significant growth potential and where critical support infrastructure exists or is planned.

Figure 40: Regeneration Sites in Sligo



IDA BUSINESS PARK AT OAKFIELD

The existing IDA Business and Technology Park at Finisklin is approaching maximum capacity and there is a clear need to provide new business/enterprise parks within the Sligo urban area.

In this context, the development of Oakfield Business Park is considered to be of strategic importance for the economic future of Sligo. This 32 hectare Park will be served by the Western Distributor Road and is also close to the railway line (where a future transit stop could be provided).

BALLYTIVNAN/RATHBRAUGHAN

Abbvie currently operates two separate biopharmaceutical manufacturing plants to the north of the Town, at Ballytivnan and Manorhamilton Road. The plants employ over 200 workers and recent expansion announcements at the Ballytivnan facility will result in an additional 100 jobs.

Surrounding lands are considered appropriate for further business/industrial expansion due to their potential connections to the existing and planned transport network, as well as the potential to build strong relationships with the nearby IT Sligo facilities.

The lands would provide an appropriate counterbalance to the IDA Oakfield lands to the southwest of the Town, thereby contributing to the creation of a compact sustainable urban form.

DOCKLANDS

The notional extent of the Docklands area includes a total of circa 60 hectares of land zoned as BITP (business, industry and technology park), consisting mostly of IDA's existing Finisklin Business Park.

The consolidation and expansion of this employment base is encouraged, supported by improvements in transport, communications and environmental infrastructure.

The remainder of the Docklands is largely under-utilised and consists of piecemeal industrial and warehousing development. A redevelopment framework is needed for the area and should be supported by a strong enterprise and employment base.

The Dockland's established 'working landscape' lends itself to the accommodation of significant industry and enterprise investment. There is also the potential to transform many former industrial/warehouse buildings into creative clusters in a similar way that many other European cities have experienced.

BALLINODE

Located on the northern shores of Garavogue River, the Ballinode area is relatively close to the town centre, to the Institute of Technology and the University Hospital Sligo. These large employers generate significant demand for residential accommodation and local commercial services.

A local area plan adopted in 2004 aimed to create a high-quality urban extension, including two new neighbourhood centres. It was estimated that the LAP area could accommodate between 4,000 and 7,200 new residents.

Much of the land in Ballinode has since been placed in the Strategic Land Reserve, but the anticipated construction of the Eastern Garavogue Bridge and approach roads would provide much-improved connectivity and would help unlock the development potential of the area.

Whilst development of the scale previously envisaged would not be viable, it is considered that some lands could be released from the Strategic Land Reserve to accommodate planned expansion to the north-east of the town centre.





CALTRAGH

The Caltragh quarter, the south-west of the town centre, comprises large amounts of undeveloped lands adjoining established residential areas. To the south-west of Caltragh lies a 32-hectare IDA landholding which has been earmarked for the construction of a new IDA Business Park.

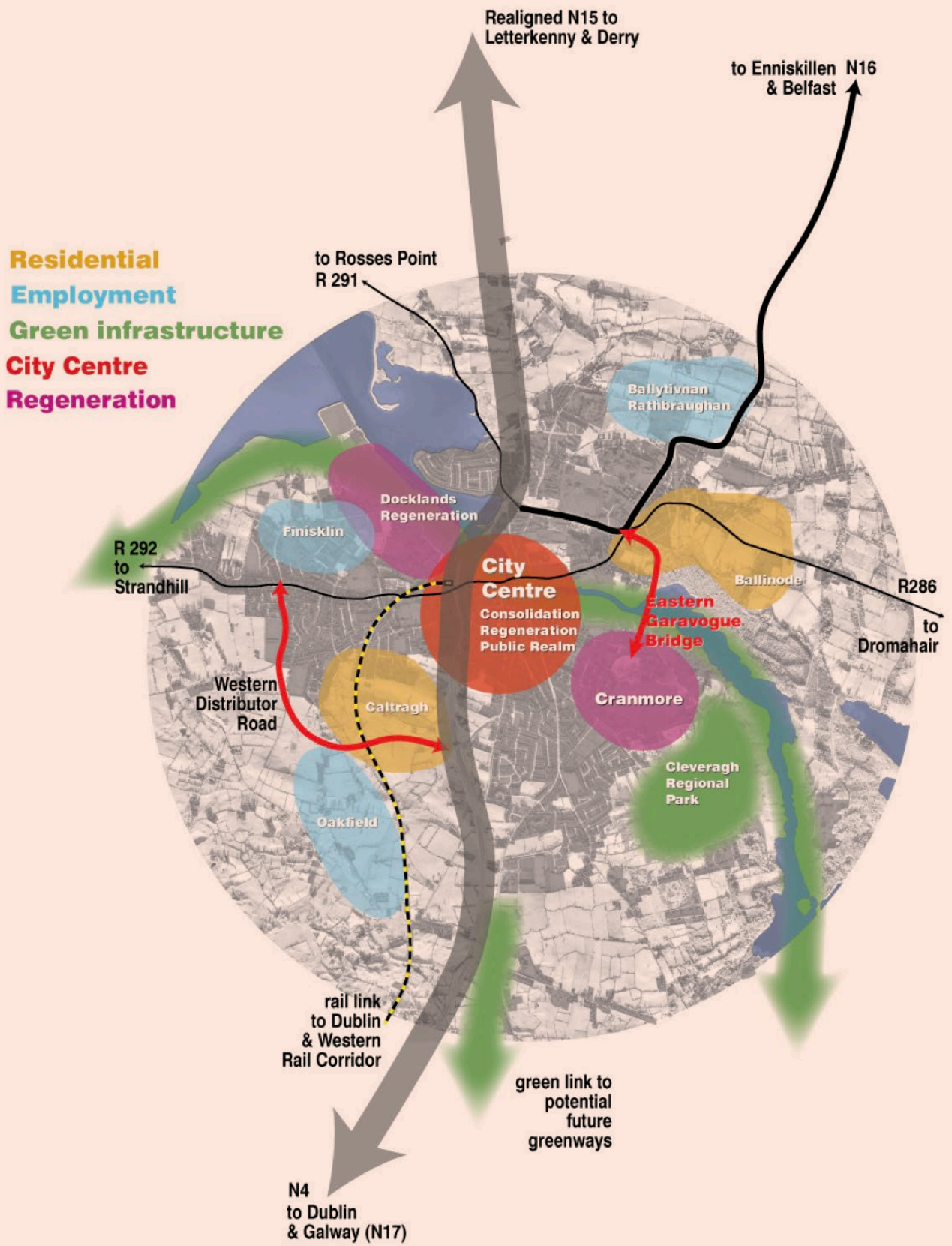
Caltragh is traversed by two major transport links – the Inner Relief Road (which effectively forms Sligo’s ‘economic spine’) and the Sligo-Dublin Railway line.

The Sligo and Environs Plan (2010) estimated that the larger Caltragh-Carrowroe area could accommodate an additional population of over 11,000 people, depending on the construction of the Western Distributor Road (WDR).

With the WDR set to be completed in 2020, Caltragh lands can be considered for release from the Strategic Land Reserve. Their development potential will be supported by the upgrading of the water and wastewater infrastructure in the area.



Figure 41: The Growth Centre Vision for Sligo



REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES

RPO 3.7.52

Promote the consolidation of the existing IDA business Park at Finisklin and the possible expansion of other business and enterprise activities into the Northern Docklands area.

RPO 3.7.53

Encourage new companies to locate on lands zoned for business and enterprise at Ballytivnan and Rathbraughan, to the North of the Urban Core.

RPO 3.7.54

Strengthen physical connectivity by improving National Road links to Dublin (N-4), Galway (N-17), and Letterkenny (N-15) as well as the cross-border link to Enniskillen/Belfast (N-16).

RPO 3.7.55

To give effect to the infrastructure needed to transform Sligo into a 'Smart City', able to provide advanced digital services to citizens and businesses.

RPO 3.7.56

Support the development of a major tourist attraction in Sligo Town, as well as further expansion in the tourism functions of villages Strandhill and Rosses Point.

RPO 3.7.57

Seek an increase in the number of jobs in the Regional Growth Centre to 17,000 by 2040.

STRATEGIC SITES FOR REGENERATION

CENTRE BLOCK/WINE STREET CAR PARK

The area bounded by O'Connell Street, Wine Street, Adelaide Street and John Street is known as the Centre Block. In 1999, a masterplan was prepared for this area, to provide a framework within which developers, traders and retailers could invest with a clear knowledge and expectation of the intended land use of adjacent sites.

Given the current challenges facing the retail sector, there is a need to review the extent of viable retail floorspace for this site. A larger proportion of residential floorspace would help to address the housing shortage problem, as well as regenerating and enlivening the Town centre. A suitable mix of employment and enterprise space could also accommodate a growing demand for town centre office-based businesses.

DOCKLANDS/SLIGO PORT

The Docklands, encompassing an undefined area around and including Sligo Port, has been the subject of piecemeal development over the years consisting of port-related and non-port-related uses. It has become evident that such an approach is neither desirable nor sustainable.



The area can be characterised as an under-utilised industrial/warehousing area with lower-value, lower-intensity uses that should be relocated elsewhere. This would enable the area to be re-developed for residential, commercial and community development.

A redevelopment framework should be prepared for the area focussing on:

- The retention of the Port as a valuable piece of commercial/industrial infrastructure;
- Remediation of the former landfill and other potentially contaminated lands;
- Revised street/road layout and improved connectivity with Sligo centre;
- An improved mix of uses, including community, commercial and residential;
- Enhanced provision of open space in the form of linear parks and cycle/pedestrian routes;
- The provision of a cultural landmark building;
- The re-use of former industrial buildings for creative enterprises and the new community uses.

CRANMORE

The Cranmore Regeneration project came about as a result of a consensus between elected representatives, officials, local community representatives and public service providers that concerted action needed to be taken to reverse the social, environmental and physical decline in the area.

In December 2016, the Sligo East City (Cranmore and Environs) Regeneration Masterplan was formally launched. The social, economic and physical strategies of the masterplan can achieve a transformative impact for this part of Sligo. The masterplan highlights key sites as assets to be promoted and developed, with a focus on how they can help to meet regeneration objectives, including new homes and jobs for the area.



COURTHOUSE BLOCK

The slow migration of retail activity to the town centres north and west has resulted in a pressing need for regeneration of the south-eastern area. The Courthouse Block, delineated by Castle Street – Teeling Street – Old Market Street – High Street – Market Street, has significant potential to address this problem. The area has retained much of its historic fabric and character. Its proximity to the town centre should make it attractive for a wide range of uses.

QUAY QUARTER AREA

The Quay quarter, defined by Wine Street, the Inner Relief Road, and the Garavogue River is situated close to Sligo's main Bridge (Hughes Bridge). It is highly visible, and one of the most prominent sites encountered when entering the Town from the North.



The under-utilised site has strong commercial and retail potential. A landmark building could also act as an urban design gateway on entering the town centre from the north.

A key element of the intended regeneration of the site is the creation of a public square replacing the existing Quay Street Car Park, and the improvement of the pedestrian realm along the waterfront.

STRATEGIC INFRASTRUCTURE

In order to achieve the population growth and economic development property solutions discussed above, there are several key projects that need to be delivered.

EASTERN BRIDGE AND APPROACH ROADS

This key project will facilitate the regeneration and development of eastern areas of Sligo town. The crossing will follow the strong north-south desire line to the east of the city centre. Access roads to this crossing will be built as urban streets, capable of linking communities on either side of the river.

The new crossing will assist in relieving traffic congestion and delays on the eastern side of the town centre. The scheme will also provide an important public transport link, a cycling and pedestrian way across the river, connecting similar routes on opposite river banks. It will open up public access to the northern shore of Lough Gill, as well as the development potential of lands at Ballinode.

WESTERN DISTRIBUTOR ROAD

The Western Distributor Road will begin at the Caltragh Interchange on the Inner Relief Road and links to the existing network of roads north of the Strandhill Road via Maugheraboy, Oakfield and Ballydoogan.

The road is seen primarily as a route to access and facilitate development in western parts of Sligo. The functions of the Western Distributor Road include:

- To provide access to the newly approved IDA Business Park at Oakfield;
- To improve access to the existing IDA Business Parks at Finisklin;
- To improve access to residential lands in the southwestern quarter of Sligo (i.e. Caltragh);
- To improve access to Strandhill;
- To divert traffic away from the centre.

Construction has commenced on the road, with an expected completion date of early 2020.





INNER RELIEF ROAD

Sligo's Inner Relief Road (IRR) is a strategic transport corridor providing access to the town centre and linkages to the surrounding areas, including the Port and Docklands. These linkages need to be maintained and improved, and a key to this is the ability of the junctions along the IRR to cater to existing and predicted increases in traffic flows.

The junctions at John Street, Lord Edward Street, Lynns Place and Hughes Bridge need to be improved to increase capacity and maintain the ability of the IRR to provide direct access to the centre and the surrounding areas.

At the same time, by its very nature and design, the road has created a definite edge to the west of the Town centre. As Sligo develops it is imperative to re-examine the design and relationship of this road with adjoining lands to soften the 'boundary' effect and integrate the road with surrounding development.

MAIL COACH ROAD – BURTON STREET LINK ROAD

The mobility strategy for Sligo discourages through traffic from crossing Sligo centre, by adopting a circulatory system that directs traffic around the centre on an inner- "ring route". A key aspect of improving this circulation system is the provision of a link road between the junction of Burton Street/ Pearse Road to the junction of Mail Coach Road/ Connolly Street.

Although short, the link would be a significant improvement to the existing route and would be another important step towards the creation of a pedestrian-friendly town centre. The link road would also assist in the further regeneration of the adjoining town centre lands.



N15 NATIONAL PRIMARY ROAD REALIGNMENT

The N15 forms part of the Atlantic Economic Corridor which connects Waterford, via Cork, Limerick, Galway, and Sligo to Letterkenny. It is proposed to realign and upgrade this road from Hughes Bridge on the N4, continuing north along the N15 to the Sligo/Leitrim county boundary.

It is proposed to realign and upgrade the portion of the N15 within the Sligo towns environs to an urban dual carriageway. This will include the upgrading and reorganisation of all junctions to accommodate projected traffic volumes, and to provide facilities for cyclists and pedestrians.

N16 NATIONAL PRIMARY ROAD REALIGNMENT

It is proposed to realign and upgrade the existing N16 Sligo-Enniskillen Road from Sligo to the Sligo/Leitrim county boundary. The existing road is deficient in terms of alignment and surface condition, resulting in slow journey times and hazardous traffic conditions.

On a strategic level, it is important to develop a cross-border core east-west route and this is best served through a Sligo - Enniskillen - Dundalk corridor as referenced within Chapter 6.3. of the RSES.



THE PORT

While the significance of the Port in national terms is relatively low, it remains important in the local and regional economy, supporting local industry and providing a sustainable transport mode for imports and exports. Capital and maintenance dredging is required within the harbour, to enhance the use and longevity of the Port.

WASTEWATER NETWORK

Sligo's main urban area is well-served in terms of overall capacity, but some network 'bottlenecks' remain. It is essential to address these issues to accommodate the further development of Sligo. In particular, adequate capacity should be ensured in areas Caltragh and Ballinode, where significant expansion is envisaged.



Within the Strategic Plan area, there are deficiencies in the Rosses Point, Ballincar and Cregg, requiring appropriate solutions.

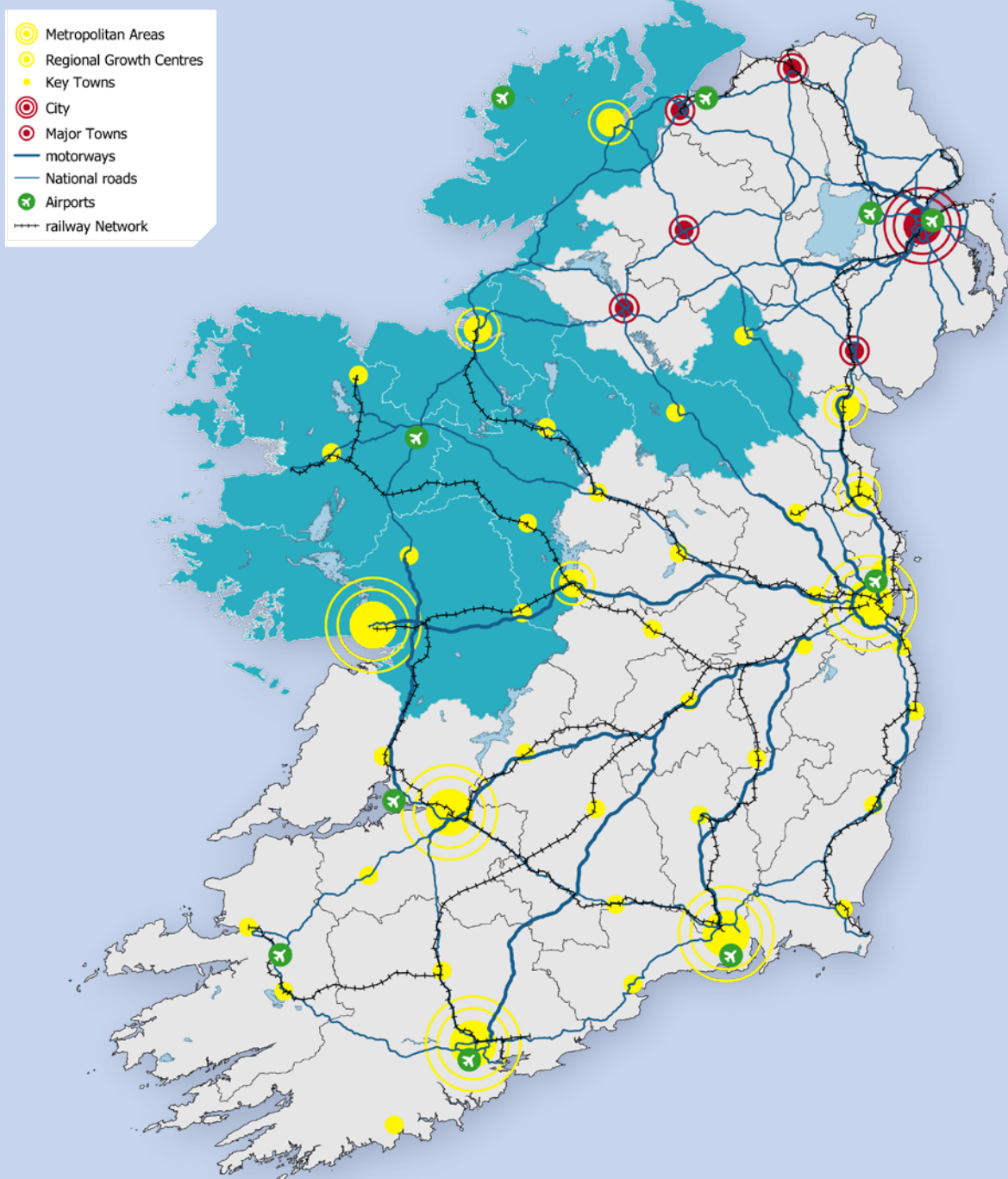
GAS

While Sligo is not served by gas infrastructure at present, Bord Gáis has identified Sligo as a "Phase 3: town being considered for connection to the distribution network" and part of north Sligo towards Donegal has been identified as an "Area location for consideration". The extension of the natural gas pipeline to Sligo would be a significant boost to the economic growth of the region and is a widely agreed strategic ambition across public and private sectors.

A short term alternative may be available using Compressed Natural Gas (CNG). The principle is that a local gas network is developed, independent of the national network but to the same engineering standards, largely to supply existing and future industrial zones. This local network can be fed with compressed gas delivered by road to a decompression station and could ultimately be connected to the national network. The gas can be supplied from traditional sources but in future could be provided by low carbon renewable gas sources from the surrounding area.

3.8 Key Towns

Key Towns are those regionally strategic employment centres of significant scale that can act as regional drivers that complement and support the higher-order urban areas within the settlement hierarchy (ie. Regional Growth Centres and Galway Metropolitan Area). They also have the potential to accommodate a significant level of growth in population and employment through appropriate investment in infrastructure, support services and placemaking initiatives. Key priorities have been identified for these Key Towns and some other rural areas that present opportunities of regional scale.



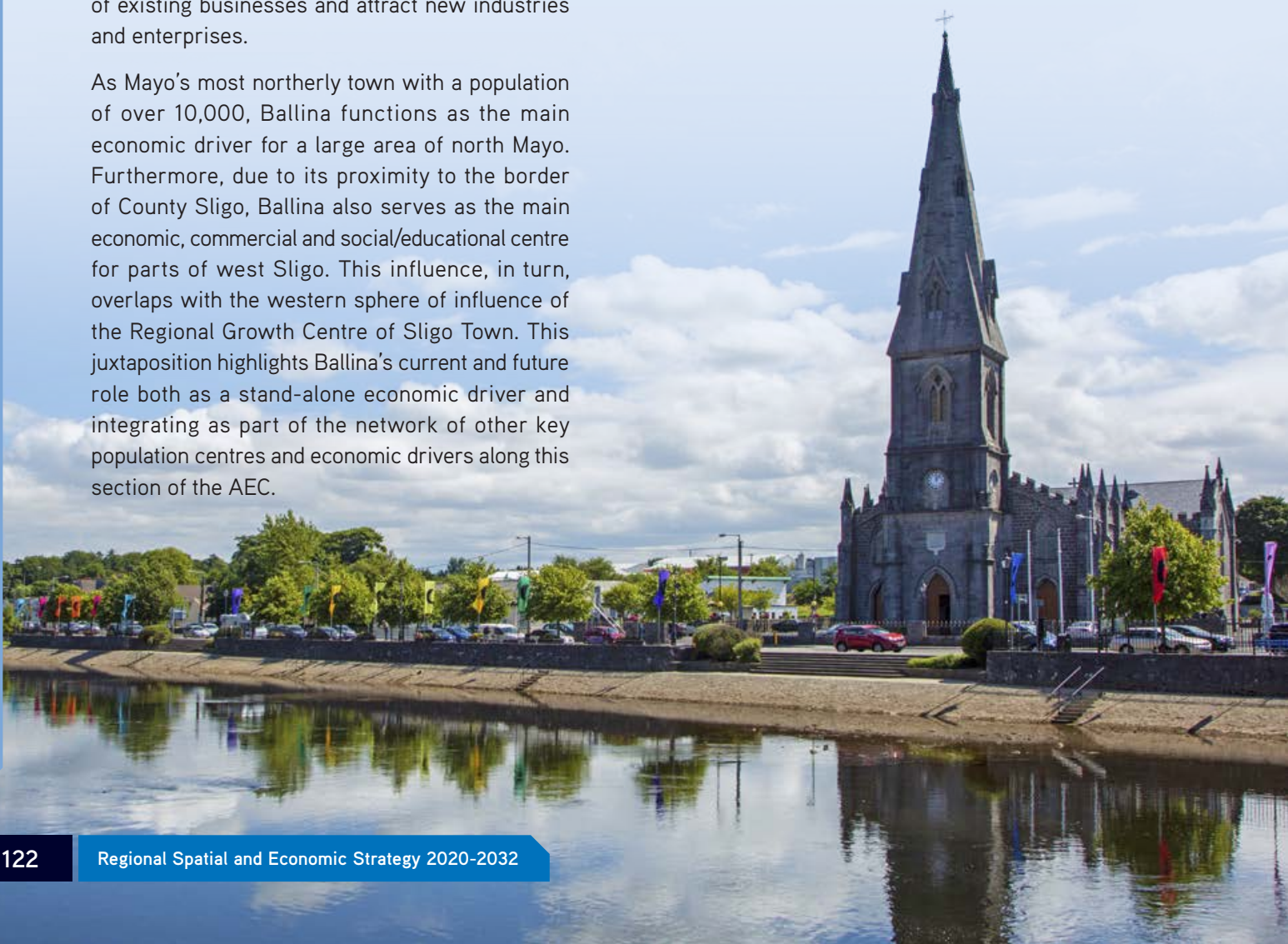
KEY TOWN: BALLINA

Ballina has a population of 10,200 (CSO 2016) and is the second largest town in Mayo. The town has a strong focus on commerce and manufacturing with servicing and retail being the town's second principal function. The town also has an administrative function including Government Departments and national bodies as well as Mayo County Council. The town also serves a public health function provided by the district hospital. Ballina has nearly 5,000 jobs and a jobs/resident worker ratio of 1:36.

It has a strong town centre which has maintained its vibrancy through the location of supermarkets in the town centre minimising out of town retail development. The town has attracted significant single enterprises including Ballina Beverages, Lionbridge and Hollister. There is significant potential for regeneration within the town core particularly in the Market Square/Military Barracks area as well as potential riverside amenities along the River Moy. There is capacity in public and private commercial/business parks and industrial estates situated within the town to cater for the expansion of existing businesses and attract new industries and enterprises.

As Mayo's most northerly town with a population of over 10,000, Ballina functions as the main economic driver for a large area of north Mayo. Furthermore, due to its proximity to the border of County Sligo, Ballina also serves as the main economic, commercial and social/educational centre for parts of west Sligo. This influence, in turn, overlaps with the western sphere of influence of the Regional Growth Centre of Sligo Town. This juxtaposition highlights Ballina's current and future role both as a stand-alone economic driver and integrating as part of the network of other key population centres and economic drivers along this section of the AEC.

The town has rail connectivity to Dublin, as well as to the south should the Western Rail Corridor be realised. Ballina has the most significant rail freight activity outside of Dublin, providing a vital service to commercial/industry in the town and beyond and supports the transition to a low carbon region. The proximity of Ireland West Airport Knock to Ballina benefits the town and significantly broadens the transport network capacity to an international catchment.





KEY FUTURE PRIORITIES

- Build on Ballina's strong enterprise and associated skills base, strong infrastructural base in terms of connectivity, Metropolitan Area Network (MAN) and proximity to the Atlantic Europe Connect sub-sea telecommunications cable, Ireland West Airport Knock and the Atlantic Economic Corridor (AEC).
- Build on the significant tourism potential of Ballina through investment in tourism related infrastructure, including Monasteries of the Moy Greenway from Beleek to Killala, incorporating EuroVelo1 Atlantic Coastal Route, Mountain Biking Trail via Ballina connecting the Wild Nephin Ballycroy National Park to the National Mountain Bike Trail at Coolaney.
- Regeneration within the town core particularly in the Market Square/Military Barracks area and regeneration of the riverside along the River Moy is crucial to facilitate an enterprise-led regeneration of the town centre.
- Promote and support the uptake of under-utilised industrial and commercial space and expand upon the capacity of business parks/ industrial estates in the town.
- Removal of barriers to development through enhanced road and rail connectivity to and from Ballina including:
 - i. Priority upgrade of the N26/N58 linking Ballina and the north west of the county to the N5;
 - ii. Enhanced rail services (thereby supporting the transition to a low carbon region) to Dublin and commuter services between Ballina, Castlebar, Westport and Claremorris with connectivity to Galway and Limerick Metropolitan Cities and major international ports such as Shannon/Foynes, should the Western Rail Corridor be realised;
 - iii. Continued investment in rail freight facilities at Ballina.
- To support and grow the role of Ballina as the key economic driver in the north-west of the county and for a cluster of smaller towns in its catchment, capitalising on its designation as a Key Town within the context of the Sligo Regional Growth Centre and its location in relation to the Atlantic Economic Corridor, in order to facilitate long-term economic growth within the context of a high-quality environment supporting a wide range of services and amenities, thereby making it attractive as a place to work, live and invest in.

KEY TOWN: BALLINASLOE

Ballinasloe is a key county town which provides an anchor for employment in east Galway. On the border with Roscommon, the town has strong links with Athlone. Ballinasloe is located within one of the County's Strategic Development Corridors. The town has been recognised as an attractive place to work, live and do business, with benefits such as the M6 Motorway, rail, ICT, hospital and gas infrastructure as well as its strategic location which provides for the creation of sustainable enterprise. The town is the main economic driver for the east of County Galway.

KEY FUTURE PRIORITIES

- Realising the town's potential as a 'County Town, ensuring a balance of development in the town centre of Ballinasloe and providing for compact growth and brownfield development, revitalising Dunlo Street, Market Square, Society Street and Main Street, and to reduce vacancies and support the vitality and vibrancy of these core shopping streets/side streets and the town centre.
- Promoting the town's heritage as an important Market town supporting the future delivery of a regularised outdoor market/farmer's market at a suitable location.
- Promoting sustainable land use and transport solutions, whilst capitalising on the opportunity presented by the railway service and the M6 Motorway, so that sustainable travel, including walking and cycling, and integrated land use and transportation become central to the development of new neighbourhoods and the future development of Ballinasloe.

- Support the delivery of sustainable transport solutions including the improvement of rail facilities and services serving Ballinasloe, including any future expansion of the railway station for passengers and freight as required.





- Facilitating the provision of a range of facilities, amenities and supporting services to serve the needs of the town, including educational, recreational, religious, social, community and civic requirements for children, youths, adults and older persons to serve a growing community.
- Fostering economic development and employment creation by optimising the potential of the town's strategic location and enhancing Ballinasloe as a place of employment through the provision of a positive and flexible framework for the creation of new employment opportunities.
- Encourage and facilitate the sustainable development of the tourism potential of Ballinasloe and its environs in a manner that respects, builds on, protects and enhances the cultural, built and natural heritage of the town and the local amenities within the plan area including natural heritage and biodiversity.
- Encourage and support the development of a series of cycle and pedestrian routes in the Ballinasloe area and in accordance with the Galway to Dublin Cycle Route and the Townspark Relief Road where feasible and in a sensitive manner, incorporating the streams, rivers, woods, and canal. Indirect impacts on built heritage, natural heritage and designated conservation areas arising from such recreational activities should be duly considered and addressed as part of any proposal.



- The development of the disused and underutilised St. Brigid's Hospital complex in Ballinasloe is an opportunity to re-imagine the town and bring vibrancy to its core. It has the potential to be a multi-use space, with an amalgam of cultural, commercial, educational and residential uses possible.
- Promote Ballinasloe as an attractive investment location, aided by the IDA Business Technology Park on the northern aspect of the town and the availability of a variety of suitable lands - including lands located at former Industrial land at Pollboy, Brackernagh, at Deerpark and undeveloped Retail Warehousing and Commercial/Mixed-Use zonings at Dunlo that may support a range of business and enterprise uses and provide attractive approaches into Ballinasloe.

KEY TOWN: CASTLEBAR

Castlebar is the county town with a population of 12,100 (CSO 2016). It is the principal retail town in Mayo with a real vibrancy within the town centre. Castlebar attracts shoppers throughout the county and provides a counterbalance, albeit at a lesser scale, to Galway.

Castlebar is the main administrative, public health, education and commercial centre in the county. The town provides over 9000 jobs, with a jobs/resident worker ratio of 1.920 (CSO 2016).

At a more strategic level, Castlebar is intrinsically linked to the nearby town of Westport, and the imminent upgrading of the N5 will also reduce the commuting time between Westport and Castlebar. This will further enhance the existing strong economic, commercial and social links and interdependencies between the two towns. The increased connectivity between both population centres will also strengthen the urban structure of the region by creating a critical mass. From a regional perspective, this will provide urban places of scale located between the Galway Metropolitan Area to the south and the Sligo Regional Growth Centre to the north, thereby contributing to the realisation of the AEC.



Castlebar has significant tourism potential, as home to a nationally significant tourism attraction - National Museum of Ireland Country Life, Lannagh Holiday Village, greenway link to Westport. Castlebar has a broad range of public amenity, sports and recreational facilities. The town has significant potential to build on ongoing investment in a national outdoor pursuit's facility and to position Castlebar as a location for sports tourism. Mayo County Council recently acquired lands adjacent to Lough Lannagh Holiday Village, which it is proposed to develop, as part of an overall Sports Tourism Development Plan.





KEY FUTURE PRIORITIES

- To support and grow the role of Castlebar, in tandem with the town of Westport, as a driver of economic development for the County and region, building on the dual capacity, and combined strengths of both towns in terms of population, established commercial, social and cultural links and proximity, thereby strengthening the urban structure of the region and enabling the realisation the Atlantic Economic Corridor.
- Build on Castlebar's strong enterprise and associated skills base, strong infrastructural base in terms of road and rail connectivity, Metropolitan Area Network (MAN) fibre optic with proximity to the Atlantic Europe Connect sub-sea telecommunications cable, proximity to Ireland West Airport Knock and the AEC, which position the town as a location for further inward investment.
- Support the continued development of Galway Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT), Castlebar Campus in its ambition to become part of a Technological University in the region.
- Utilise and expand upon the capacity that exists within commercial/industrial estates and the business and technology park with an emphasis on developing a facility similar to Westport's Leeson Centre.
- Improve cycle and walking tourism/recreational infrastructure and connectivity of the Great Western Greenway at Castlebar to Westport and Wild Atlantic Way and other tourism related infrastructure.
- Deliver on the potential for regeneration within the town core particularly the old Military Barracks as well as significant tracts of land directly adjacent to the main streets.
- Remove barriers to development through enhanced road and rail connectivity to and from Castlebar including:
 - i. Upgrading of the entirety of the N5 to a TEN-T 'High-Quality Road'
 - ii. Upgrade of N60 from Castlebar to Claremorris (critical link to the N17(AEC and Ireland West Airport Knock and SDZ)



KEY TOWN: CAVAN

Cavan Town performs a regional function, being the largest town within the Cavan/Monaghan/Leitrim sub-region and being the town which experienced the largest growth within the past 10 years. It has strategic facilities such as an acute hospital, Cavan Institute, Local Authority Headquarters, Agricultural College, Cathedrals and Sports Stadium.

The Cavan Institute provides a range of Level 5 (Certificate) and Level 6 (Advanced/Higher Certificate) courses in the fields of Accountancy, Architectural design and technology, digital marketing, software development and animal care. Cavan well positioned to deliver the principal strategic function within the sub-region in terms of housing, job delivery and education.



KEY FUTURE PRIORITIES

- Build upon its excellent Jobs to Resident Workers ratio of 1.388, clearly demonstrating the important regional function that Cavan Town performs.
- Promote Cavan Town as an attractive investment location for the County, utilising Cavan County Economic Forum and building upon the towns proven track record as an excellent investment location, which is aided by the IDA business park in the town.
- Promote the delivery of third-level education in the Cavan/Monaghan sub-region, building on the foundations and success of the Cavan Institute.





- Promote the development of the Abbeylands Cultural Quarter to regenerate this important town centre site with vibrant town centres uses, new pedestrian street and public spaces.
- Develop a regional standard multi-sports facility to service the current and future needs of the town and wider county.
- Support the development of Cavan General Hospital as the regional centre for this sub-region.
- Build on the development of Cavan Town as a tourism destination capitalising on its location as a link between Ireland's Ancient East and Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, including the regional flagship destination of Killykeen forest park which attracts circa 80,000 visitors per annum.
- Support the delivery of Cavan Town Digital Hub that aims to attract and safeguard investment in the digital and technology related sectors, create jobs through entrepreneurship, stimulate digital start ups and innovative enterprise and develop a 'Digital Cluster' ecosystem.
- Support the implement the Cavan Town Transportation Plan to ensure infrastructure enables the organic growth of the town
- Support the delivery of additional economic development lands in Cavan Town recognising the lack of suitably zoned lands.
- Support the actions set out in the Cavan Town Revitalisation Plan including the prioritisation of projects having regard to Cavan being listed as an Urban Priority Region by the EPA.

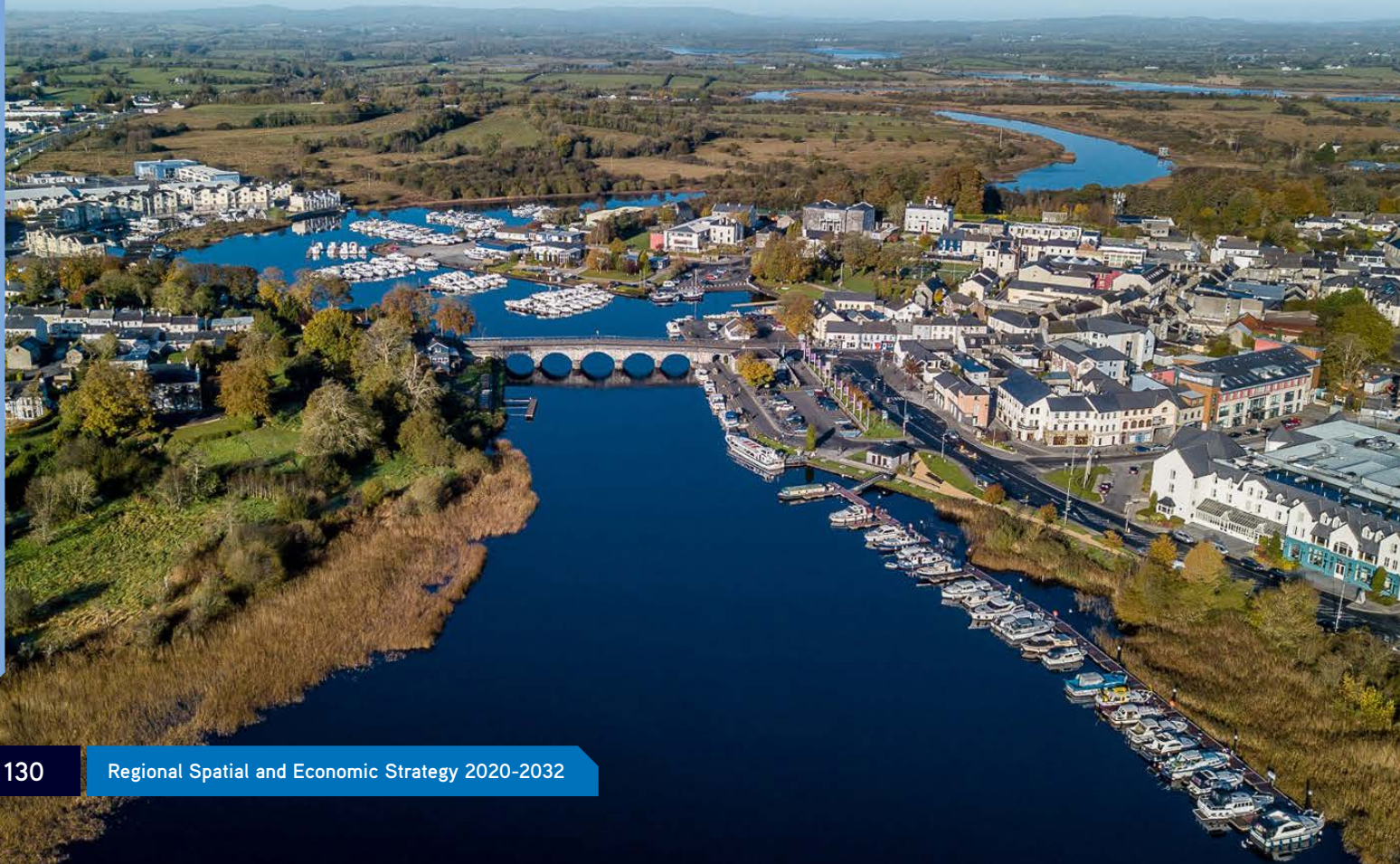


KEY TOWN: CARRICK-ON-SHANNON

Carrick-on-Shannon is Leitrim's County Town and whilst it is the smallest of the Support Towns it plays a strategic role in the region. Carrick-on-Shannon is considered to punch well above its weight and size and it has more than 2,500 employees working in the town and has a jobs to resident workers ratio of 1.7.

KEY FUTURE PRIORITIES:

- Develop and expand the potential of the Carrick Business Campus, and explore the opportunity to attract people intensive use of the modern existing buildings.
- Deliver support to existing businesses in Carrick-on-Shannon to ensure their continued existence and expansion.
- Promote research and development opportunities, building the capacity of the region.
- Promote the potential of the Metropolitan Area Network fibre optic cable managed by eNET. This provides Next Generation Access Fibre Network that offers speeds of up to 100Mbps.
- Progress the sustainable development of the serviced strategic employment land that is available to the east of the town.
- Development of the tourism offer and the thriving Purple Flag Status of the town that supports a variety of support enterprises in the surrounding countryside.
- Deliver on the Blueway development under the Upper Shannon Erne Future Economy project (USEFE); It will develop tourism in the rural areas of Cavan, Leitrim, Longford and Roscommon, connecting 22 towns and villages located alongside the River Shannon and the Shannon-Erne Waterway. Influence and assist with the broader economic development and job creation in the region. Carrick-on-Shannon is strategically located within this Blueway.





- Prepare a joint Local Area Plan with Roscommon to deliver an integrated framework for the future development of the urban area within 3 years of the adoption of this strategy.
- Support the development of the N4 By-Pass of Carrick-on-Shannon.
- Support the development of a regional multi-sports facility in the town.
- Pursue the sustainable development of the new regionally significant opportunity site to the east of the Town and contiguous to the existing land use zoning envelope for use as a data centre or alternative regionally scaled employment use following a feasibility study. Access would potentially be from a National Primary Road (outside of reduced speed limit zone) and careful consideration of options is required. In terms of Power Supply, it is considered this site is well placed, given the proximity of Flagford (220kv) and represents a regionally significant opportunity, which by its nature would be appropriately located outside an urban area, but adjacent to existing strategic employment lands.

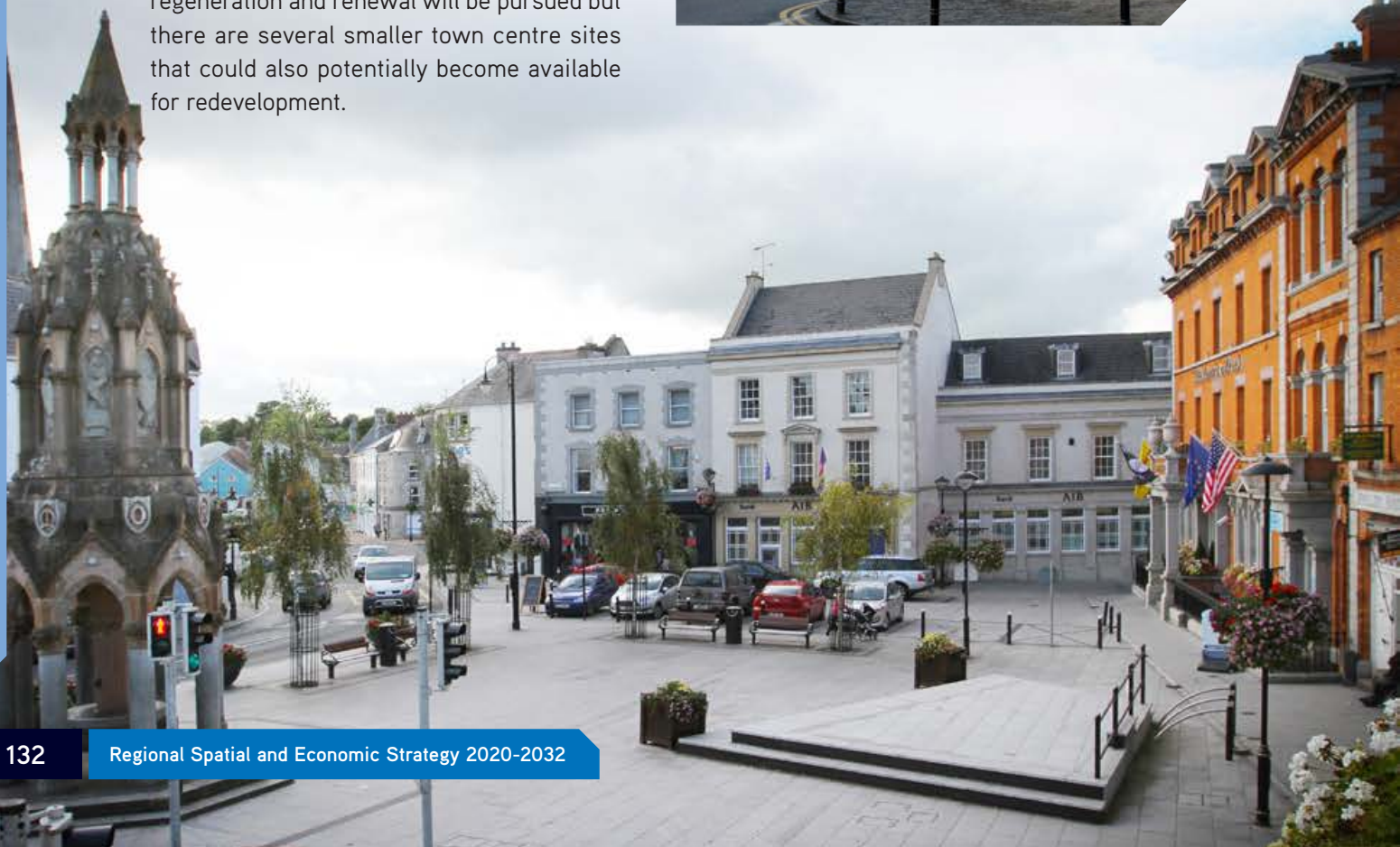


KEY TOWN: MONAGHAN

Monaghan Town occupies a strategic border location along the Dublin to Letterkenny/Derry City corridor, and adjacent to the Dublin/Belfast eastern economic corridor.

KEY FUTURE PRIORITIES

- Industry, Enterprise and employment lands in the North East of the town. These lands could be connected to the national road network and their development should be integrated with the population growth and are of strategic importance for future employment in the town.
- Enterprise and employment lands to the west of the town have similar characteristics to those referred to above and their development should be similarly phased.
- The development of the Ulster Canal Greenway, which provides a direct sustainable transport mode of regional benefit to healthy living and economic benefit through the development of the tourism offer.
- Deliver 20% of projected growth through regeneration and renewal of a significant area of the town centre. There are four specific target areas within the town centre whereby regeneration and renewal will be pursued but there are several smaller town centre sites that could also potentially become available for redevelopment.





- Population growth within Monaghan shall be targeted at delivery of compact growth and also at the cohort of the population that have historically sought to build individual houses in the countryside. Thus, a mix of housing densities and plot ratios shall be targeted and consideration shall be given to the difficult drumlin topography of Monaghan Town.
- Support sustainable travel including the provision of cycling, walking and smart travel initiatives set out in the Monaghan Land Use and Transportation Study.



KEY TOWN: ROSCOMMON

Roscommon Town is the principal town and administrative centre of the county. It is a vibrant urban area with strong retail and commercial base, displaying strengths in the service sector in particular whilst also having an industrial sector which has the potential for significant further growth.

The town is strategically located in terms of the Galway MASP and Regional Centres and has the potential to develop further and have a continued positive influence and impact on its hinterland and the overall county. Important and established residential, employment and service functions give the town a status that should be reinforced and extended, providing ongoing interaction with Athlone and its catchment.



KEY FUTURE PRIORITIES

- Deliver residential growth in a more compact form within the existing built-up core area, looking at the town centre and public transportation corridor capacity, existing vacancy and opportunities to utilise the built heritage opportunities within the town. This shall include the facilitation of 30% of projected growth on brownfield/infill sites in the town, through the identification of infill and regeneration opportunities that incorporate innovative design solutions, including the potential amalgamation of properties.





- Identify opportunities to benefit from investment in recent times in modern incubation and innovation infrastructure for ICT and related companies. This will build upon the success of a desk-incubation facility established in the town to facilitate entrepreneurial activity. Roscommon Town is ideally placed to benefit from further expansion opportunities of this nature, with potential to provide further knowledge-focused incubation units, in various forms, to accommodate enterprise start ups and growth. Roscommon Town has further potential in the area of ICT development, subject to adequate timely provision of high-speed broadband.
- Pursue the development of interlinkages between third-level institutions and off-campus locations in Roscommon Town.
- Pursue the delivery of infrastructure improvements on the transport network, particularly the upgrading of the N61 national route between the Regional Centre of Athlone and Boyle Town and also potential improvements in public transport linkages, both bus and rail, between main urban centres linked to Roscommon.
- Ensure availability of suitably zoned and serviced land as an important resource for further employment generation, including through the further expansion of existing enterprises, and the attraction of new enterprises. The location of the existing industrially zoned lands includes the IDA Business and Technology Park.
- Good regeneration opportunities exist on various blocks of land close to the town core, including in the vicinity of Circular Road.
- Highly visible lands fronting onto the N60 (Racecourse Rd) approach to the town represents a redevelopment opportunity capable of facilitating new enterprises at an easily accessible and prominent location.



KEY TOWN: TUAM

The town of Tuam is 33 kilometres from Galway City centre. The recent opening of the M17/M18 motorway has brought Tuam in direct connection with Ireland West Airport Knock (40 mins), Shannon Airport (1 hr) and Limerick (1hr 15 mins), further connection to the M6 via the M17 links the town to Dublin in 2hrs 20 mins.

The motorway has also provided a bypass for traffic traversing the Strategic Atlantic Economic Corridor that links the main Urban Centres of scale within the region, namely Letterkenny/Derry, Sligo, and Galway.

Unemployment within the town according to the 2016 census was 12% which is higher than the national average of 8%. Tuam has strong potential to accommodate the projected growth of 30%, the town is primed in terms of available zoned employment and residential lands. As well as being a centre of education, the town centre provides a focus for commercial development as well as a variety of existing shops, restaurants and services for the local population offering a good quality of life.

The Town currently has an even split in the numbers of people employed in the main industries. Approximately 25% of those working are employed in manufacturing, 20% within commerce and 21% of the population identify themselves as being professional. Only 10% of the total population of Tuam and its environs are employed in traditional rural economies of agriculture, forestry or fishery.

The main sites for development are at:

- The Tuam Business Park and Enterprise Centre on the Weir Road.
- The IDA Industrial Estate on the Dunmore Road.
- The former sugar factory on the Ballygaddy Road at Airglooney.
- Surrounding Steeltech Sheds premises on Galway Road.
- Land North of N83 at Mountpotter.





KEY FUTURE PRIORITIES

- To develop Tuam as the focus for future development in North Galway providing the infrastructure and services for its surrounding small towns/villages and rural lands.
- Ensure existing businesses are supported in their continued growth in a planned and cohesive manner.
- Promote Tuam as a destination for business, growing the economy to a scale appropriate to its strategic location capitalising on its enhanced connectivity and role as Support Town within the context of the Galway Metropolitan Area, Athlone and Sligo Regional Centres.
- Address deficiencies in the existing pedestrian/cycling network, promoting walking/cycling and broader Smarter Travel initiatives, along with reducing car dependency, are other key considerations.
- Support the development of Tuam in a sensitive manner which conserves and protects the historic core, recognising the towns cultural and historic built environment as a valuable asset, whilst harnessing the economic, social and cultural value that it presents for current and future generations.



- Capitalise on the compact urban form of Tuam town centre by encouraging greater connectivity for new development which promotes and encourages walking and cycling ensuring that principles of sustainable transportation along with practical design measures become central to the development of new neighbourhoods.
- Support the provision of a sports facility including athletics track serving the town and its hinterland with associated recreational facilities, changing rooms and amenities as part of an integrated mixed-use sports development in an appropriate and sustainable location that is convenient to the town, transport networks and future public transport.

3.9 Other Places of Strategic Potential

It should be noted that a relatively large proportion of enterprises are located in a variety of towns, villages and rural areas that shall be addressed through individual County Development Plans and strategies.

This strategy seeks to anticipate and plan for jobs growth and economic development of regional scale and it is accepted that several locations other than within the Cities, Regional Growth Centres and Key Towns exhibit specific characteristics that warrant specific focus where strategic development potential of a regional scale exists.

There will also be scenarios where new and unexpected opportunities for enterprise development are likely to arise for particular locational reasons that do not arise elsewhere and these shall be addressed through the local development plan process and reviewed in any subsequent RSES, as provided for within the NPF.

The following locations with strategic development potential of a regional scale have been identified as set out below.



WESTPORT

Westport's large industrial base, its enterprise economy and the strength of Westport's tourism industry, as well as its potential marine resources, enables it to be a regional driver within the context of the RSES. Westport provides important administrative, service, and economic roles and functions to its hinterland and has a reputation as being one of Ireland's premier visitor destinations.

There is the capacity to facilitate significant additional developments in both public and private commercial/industrial estates that are situated within the town and Westport Harbour presents opportunities to harness the maritime potential of the area.

Rail connectivity is available from Westport to Dublin and the potential to provide rail connectivity to the south would further enhance connectivity to Ireland West Airport and its associated SDZ which is nearby and represents a value proposition for the region. The upgrading of the entirety of the N5 to a TEN-T 'High-quality Road' and the provision of relief roads to north and south of the town would enable the potential of the town and remove service barriers.

The future strategic regional development potential of Westport is best achieved by building on the existing economic, commercial and social links with the nearby Key Town of Castlebar, links that will be further strengthened by the imminent upgrading of the N5, which will reduce the commuting time between both towns. From a regional perspective, this will provide urban places of scale located between the Galway Metropolitan Area to the south and the Sligo Regional Growth Centre to the north, thereby contributing to the consolidation of the AEC.

ATHERNY

Athenry has easy access to the mainline railway and motorway networks, providing easy access to Galway, Athlone, Limerick and Shannon. It has existing access to broadband infrastructure thus ensuring the town/IDA park is an attractive place for industry to invest. Athenry has the opportunity to provide appropriately zoned land with adequate infrastructural services to accommodate enterprise e.g. Economic Corridor from Oranmore to Athenry.

Economic corridors particularly industrial corridors such as the Oranmore – Athenry Strategic corridor must be developed/promoted and serviced to high international standards to attract further Foreign Direct Investment and indigenous industries/businesses, building on strategic location and infrastructure. This corridor should be promoted sustainably as a centre for major national and international enterprises in a manner that shall be further defined in local planning policies.



SDZ - IRELAND WEST AIRPORT KNOCK



VIRGINIA/CARRICKMACROSS



Virginia and Carrickmacross perform important sub-regional functions for employment, housing and services, with Virginia as the hub for east Cavan and Carrickmacross for south Monaghan. They are the main economic drivers for wider highly populated catchments, where commuting out of the counties is an issue that needs to be addressed by providing employment and support services. Both towns are strongly positioned to attract businesses, that need access to the Belfast/Dublin corridor, available talent, quality of life and housing.

The strategy for the development of our Rural and Urban areas is not intended as a one size fits all, nor is it intended as a complete suite of actions. Instead what has been determined, through the consultation engagement is that the strategy for our region shall consider how best to deliver for this region six distinct growth ambitions and those ambitions shall transcend both rural and urban areas, as appropriate.

The presence of an airport in the region acts as a magnet to draw people and investment to the region, driving economic activity in the form of business and investment as well as tourism and travel. The Airport acts as an international gateway to the West of Ireland as well as the North, North West and Midlands areas. The Northern and Western Region is home to many world-leading multinationals, local companies with global success as well as yet untapped economic sectors. Together with the high-quality of life offered in the West and North West, the region has much to offer with the ability to expand and grow based on its resources. In this regard, the concept of the place-based approach which requires tapping into the inherent potential of the area is central to the future growth of the region. In terms of business and enterprise, investment in the creation of 'place' is important to realising regional potential and to position itself to attract skills/talent, to grow businesses and to embrace the creative and innovative economic activity.

The National Planning Framework includes High-Quality International Connectivity as a National Strategic Outcome and recognises the crucial role that the provision of high-quality international connectivity has for overall international competitiveness and addressing opportunities and challenges from Brexit through investment in our ports and airports, in line with sectoral priorities already defined through National Ports Policy and National Aviation Policy. The development of the EU TEN-T designation is desirable for international connectivity and integrated performance of road, rail and air. The reopening of the Western Rail Corridor would present an opportunity to provide integrated rail linkage to IWA Knock SDZ, thus providing rail linkage with other centres of population and to provide alternative sustainable travel opportunities to that of road based options.

The regional and international connectivity provided by an airport significantly broadens the transport network capacity of a region, providing catalytic as well as direct, in-direct and induced economic and social benefits. In this regard, Ireland West Airport Knock plays a significant role as an economic driver for the region and has a major impact on the social and economic infrastructure of the surrounding area.

The Planning scheme for IWAK Strategic Development Zone came into effect in October 2019 and it represents an opportunity to harness the potential of Ireland West Airport as an economic driver for the region. The SDZ offers a spatial planning approach to the future development and expansion of the airport and surrounding lands.

The Strategic Development Zone at Ireland West Airport represents a shared outlook for the future economic development of the West/North West region and represents a significant gamechanger for the region and the Atlantic Economic Corridor. As we are currently entering a period of renewed growth in Ireland, Ireland West Airport is well placed to expand its share of economic development. The Planning Scheme and implementation framework of the SDZ will provide a clear blueprint for development offering certainty to potential applicants, developers or investors which is time-saving and in turn beneficial to economic development. The SDZ will also play an important role in the delivery and implementation of higher level infrastructure for the area.



REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES

RPO 3.8.1

To promote and support the strategic role of IWA Knock SDZ as a significant regional economic driver and to promote the SDZ location as regional economic business and enterprise hub.

RPO 3.8.2

To support and promote the implementation of the approved Planning Scheme for the designated SDZ at IWA Knock (including the mitigation measures of the statutory environmental assessment carried out for the planning scheme), which provides the framework for the expansion of the Airport in terms of its transport and business operations and as a new business and enterprise destination.

RPO 3.8.3

To support the development of the SDZ in tandem with the required infrastructure for both the expansion of the Airport and in the delivery of the regional business and enterprise hub.

A vibrant night street scene with a blue overlay and colorful lines. The scene shows a cobblestone street lined with buildings, some with warm lights and festive decorations. A large blue triangular overlay covers the left side of the image, containing the text. Several colorful lines (purple, blue, green, orange, red, yellow) with circular markers run diagonally across the image, creating a sense of movement and energy.

Growth Ambition 1:
Economy and Employment
– Vibrant Region

4

4

Growth Ambition 1: Economy and Employment – Vibrant Region

4.1 Our Approach

This Chapter focuses on further improving the solid foundations for success, creating opportunities for individuals, businesses, the community and future generations. It also addresses the challenges that might otherwise limit the region's potential growth.

Our RSES must equip this region with enabling objectives to encourage innovation, commercialisation and investment. Uniquely this region can be a leader in 'Place-Based Development' because we have a strong existing foundation in partnership, collaboration and success.

There are considerable challenges ahead when we consider 'Risk, Trends and the current Evidence' of regional performance. Technology is transforming industries, the nature of work is changing, we have to support an ageing population and transform our public services to meet changing needs. There is also a huge opportunity.

Our regional economy has long-standing strengths in agri-food, life-sciences, RTDI, engineering, retail, manufacturing, service sector, energy, creative sector, tourism, marine and many more. These give us durable foundations upon which to build our future. The region boasts over 140 FDI multinationals supported by the IDA employing over 26,000 people. Enterprise Ireland support SME's employing over 20,000 people in the region, and Údarás Na Gaeltachta support enterprises that employ almost 6,000 people in Counties Mayo, Galway and Donegal.

Encouraging diversification of indigenous economic activity will help enable greater economic development. A more diversified economy that is increasing the proportion of activity in knowledge-intensive, high-value businesses will be more resilient to shocks.





An economy that is built on a broad base of economic activity can also be more inclusive and can contribute to our environmental goals by increasing the location and type of economic activity and shifting towards activities with less impact on the environment.

The Growth Ambition to be a Vibrant Region builds on the broad economic themes in the National Planning Framework and Enterprise 2025 Renewed and takes into account contemporary economic challenges.

It acknowledges the importance of engagement with identified priority sectors and delivering outcomes through new and existing partnerships, such as the Regional Enterprise Plans Action Plan for Jobs, Atlantic Economic Corridor, Ireland's Ocean Wealth and the Action Plan for Rural Development amongst many more.

Key determinants for maximising long-term economic development have been identified through extensive public and industry engagement; and include:

1. Human capital, particularly education and skills.
2. Sustainable communities (economically, environmentally and socially).
3. Access to markets (international, national and regional).
4. The comparative advantage of industry sectors, products or services and business competitiveness.
5. Effective cross-sectoral and intergovernmental partnerships, including through place-based approaches so widely evident in the region.

4.2 Potential

The region has historically been perceived as a peripheral region but this has made the region more resilient and an attractor to a broad range of industries. The region's talent pool supported by our 3rd level offering and education providers delivers world-class graduates.

With over 60,000 students studying within the region and an increasing number choosing entrepreneurship as a career, the region needs to understand the proposition of its talent better. This can only add to the 45,000+ businesses operating across this region. This has been assisted by the availability of active mentoring through the work of Enterprise Ireland and the Local Authorities Local Enterprise Offices, Údarás na Gaeltachta and through the availability of technical infrastructure in urban areas.

The overall ecosystem has benefited from incredibly adaptive strategies in Enterprise 2025 Renewed published by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation.

The focus should be on maintaining favourable conditions for existing vibrant sectors as a priority action. For those sectors of the economy that are considered to have significant untapped potential, the focus and attention should be to unlock this latent potential.



This will require an approach that uses carefully selected policy actions to remove obstacles, be they, for example, policy barriers such as excessive regulations, or market challenges such as data/information gaps, inadequate physical infrastructure, or shortages in skills.



Figure 42: Regional Research Facilities



At a macro level, our RSES will have the following underlying objectives encouraging our places, catchments, urban and rural centres to:

- Harness its export capacity by promoting trade and global opportunities.
- Be vibrant and distinctive, where our communities act as a spur for quality of life, creativity and innovation.
- Be attractive for innovators, investors, business, visitors and all residents.
- Lead in pursuit of a low carbon focus.



The focus is on things that are important at the level of the region, concentrating on:

- Place-based assets.
- Sectors and Clusters.

The RSES is about the delivery of regional goals, priorities and actions and promoting more effective co-ordination of activities. The delivery of these actions will be carried out at the most appropriate level - CDP, LECP, REPs etc, inspired by the National Strategic Outcomes and aligned with criteria resourced by the National Development Plan and its priorities. This strategy is also aligned to the objectives of Enterprise 2025 Renewed and the EUROPE 2020 strategy, including its focus upon Smart Specialisation.

4.3 Place-Based Assets

Enterprise 2025 Renewed (DBEI) recognises there are differences in the enterprise structure and occupational profiles of the enterprise base across regions. The Government's enterprise approach aims to realise the full potential of our regions through investments in place-making - developing places that are attractive for business investment and for people to live and work.

Our RSES sets out the goals, priorities and actions that apply to all parts of the region, with particular reference to specific issues of regional significance. Achieving the vision for the whole region also means acknowledging its diversity in terms of place, people and parts of the economy as well as how the region operates in the national and international arena.

The Northern and Western Region comprises six different sub-regions; these subregions are based not only upon physical geography but by other socio-economic factors, such as access to county and local services in healthcare, education, and retail.



The six sub-regions within the NWRA can be summarised as follows (see Figure 43):

1. **Galway Catchment** – incorporating the Metropolitan Area Strategic boundary and Galway County, extending into Shannon, South Mayo/South Roscommon.
2. **Sligo Catchment** – extending into South Donegal, Leitrim, North East Mayo, North Roscommon and as far as Enniskillen.
3. **Letterkenny and Derry** – including the Growth Centre Area of Letterkenny/Derry/Strabane extending across County Donegal and the Derry City and Strabane District Council area.
4. **Mayo Catchment** – covering the urban centres of Castlebar, Ballina and Westport, extending across the county and into northern parts of County Galway and western parts of County Roscommon.
5. **Monaghan/Cavan Catchment** – with a wider reach into the M1 corridor to the East and extending into the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) but also critically reaching into parts of Northern Ireland, and counties Westmeath, Meath and Longford.
6. **Athlone Catchment** - extending into a significant area of Mid and South Roscommon, East Galway and parts of Offaly, Westmeath and Longford.

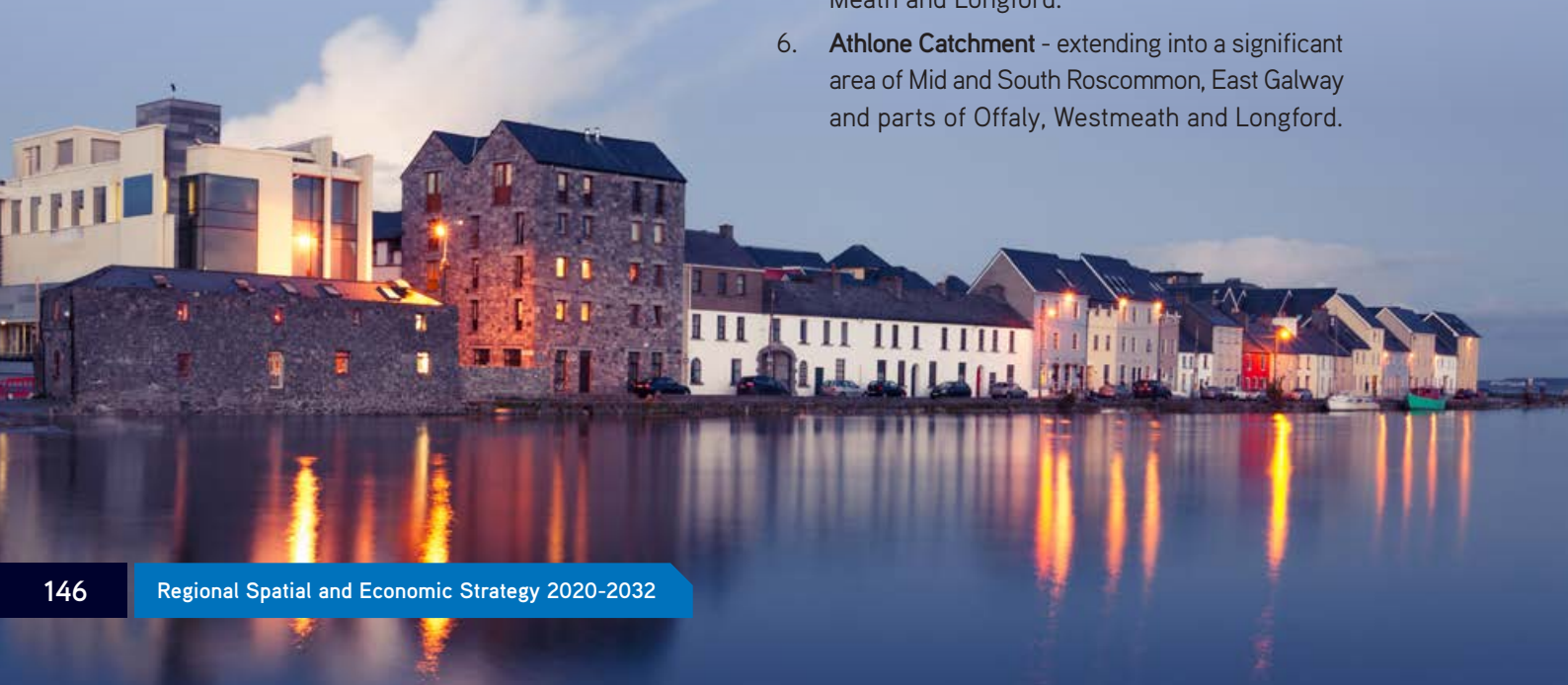


Figure 43: The Six Sub-Regions of the NWRA



Employment trends indicate that increasingly, city and urban regions are the focal point for internationally mobile investment. High-value-added services are attracted primarily to urban areas, and cities are competing with other cities internationally.

Through the objectives, actions and policies of this RSES, our cities, towns and villages must become more attractive, 'liveable' and offer a quality of life that more people are willing to choose in the years ahead. There is a need to encourage population growth in towns of all sizes that are strong employment and service centres, where the potential for sustainable growth exists. Places that are attractive to talent are known to be more likely to be attractive to employers and to deliver economic prosperity, with globalisation continuing to have a concentrating effect.

For our rural areas, the emergence of new technologies and improved infrastructural connectivity provide opportunities for diversification into new employment sectors and to build on the

success of many Irish and foreign-owned companies supporting employment in more remote areas. Across all of our catchments there is evidence of thriving sectors and emerging clusters across many areas, but primarily:

- Tourism
- MedTech and Life Sciences
- Agri-Food and Agri-Engineering
- Manufacturing and Engineering
- Construction
- Healthcare, Education and Public sector
- Marine and Energy
- Creative and Cultural sector including heritage

Several regionally significant place-based networks reflect the desire by communities, business, industry, agencies and local government to collaborate in unlocking the potential of this region. The RSES supports the further development of these and similar place-based networks.

ATLANTIC ECONOMIC CORRIDOR

The Atlantic Economic Corridor (AEC) is driven by business representatives and communities and supported by national, regional and local government and State agencies. The AEC is defined in the NPF as one of the shared goals in the National Strategic Outcomes. It is a key enabler of economic growth.

The initiative seeks to consolidate and align the State capital investment programme with the potential investment of the private sector to strengthen this part of the region's economic contribution and make it a better place in which to live and work.

Figure 44: The Atlantic Economic Corridor



It provides an opportunity to create an accelerated, more responsive pathway for regional development in Ireland. Improved connectivity will be vital to unlocking the economic and social potential of the Atlantic region. That includes physical improvements in road, rail and other transport infrastructure but also the digital connectivity that has the power to transform and energise rural areas. These opportunities are outlined explicitly in National Strategic Outcome 2 of the NPF and implicitly in the delivery of the National Broadband Plan.

The AEC aims to build and increase collaboration that maximises its assets, attracts investment and creates jobs and prosperity. The overarching objective of the AEC concept is to maximise the Atlantic region's assets and connect the economic hubs, clusters and catchments of the region to generate a value proposition of scale which will attract investment, support job creation and improve quality of life for those who live in the region. Specifically, the AEC proposal seeks to:

- Increase Gross Value Added (GVA) through the creation of high value-added jobs.
- Develop a well-skilled labour pool, which will attract both Irish and foreign-owned enterprises to the region.
- Increase the competitiveness of the region to support economic growth.
- Get the best from the region's existing and potential economic infrastructural assets (e.g. roads, gas networks, ports, rail, broadband, etc.).
- Ensure that enterprise property in the region is available and fit for modern investment.
- Drive research and innovation in the public and private sector to increase opportunities for the region.
- Involve communities in delivering growth in the region.
- Retain and increase the share of the national population settling in the Atlantic region.
- Improve the quality of life for the people of the region.

GATEWAY TO GROWTH

New collaborative structures have been co-designed by both Donegal County Council and Derry City and Strabane District Council which place a strong emphasis on the principles of place-based leadership, namely:

- the North West Strategic Growth Partnership involving senior Central Government Officials, both North and South.
- the North West Regional Development Group involving senior management and elected representatives from both Council areas.

*gateway
to growth*

IRELAND NORTHWEST
ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT
INITIATIVE

It is the aim of this partnership to promote a coordinated approach and collaboration with regard to the economic, social and cultural development, on a cross border basis in the North West of Ireland. It aims to promote cooperation and collaboration in the context of the Letterkenny/Derry as recognised in the NPF, NDP and RDS and also in the context of former NSS's North West Gateway Initiative as promoted by the two governments North and South.

UPPER SHANNON ERNE FUTURE ECONOMY (USEFE)

The USEFE project is a joint initiative between Bord na Mona and ESB with Cavan Leitrim, Longford and Roscommon Local Authorities. The purpose of this initiative is to show how business led regional development can lead to economic growth and job growth across Leitrim, Roscommon, Cavan and Longford.



UPPER SHANNON ERNE
FUTURE ECONOMY PROJECT

• CAVAN • LEITRIM • LONGFORD • ROSCOMMON

WESTERN DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION (WDC)

The WDC adds value and regional focus to the work of national bodies, and actively engages with regional interests to initiate projects that build on the regions strengths and addresses its weaknesses.

Some primary functions include;

- Operating the Investment Fund
- Managing the LookWest.ie website
- Policy development and research



4.4 Sectors and Clusters

A sector approach provides a means of segmenting the regional economy to focus engagement with businesses, develop policy interventions and undertake strategic planning with stakeholders and the private sector.

Sectors are categories of businesses in the same industrial group and can be described as having similar development needs. Many of the region's most important sectors have characteristics normally associated with clusters, meaning they are geographically concentrated and include a tailored supply chain that services the industry.

The process of developing the RSES has highlighted the importance of certain sectors and classifications of companies that are of growing importance for delivering the region's vision. It provided a growing understanding of the dynamics of the region's key sectors, as well as a clearer view of how different organisations can use and work with sectors in complementary ways.

Based on this, the following sections set out current thinking on the emerging sectors and clusters that are of most importance to the region.

TOURISM



RENEWABLE ENERGY AND LOW CARBON FUTURE



MARINE AND BLUE ECONOMY



ICT AND DIGITAL ENTERPRISE



LIFE SCIENCES (MEDTECH, PHARMA, BIOTECH, HEALTHCARE)



AGRI-TECH AND AGRI-FOOD



RETAIL



ADVANCED MANUFACTURING AND ENGINEERING



TOURISM

CORE ASSET: INDIGENOUS ENTERPRISE AND INNOVATION

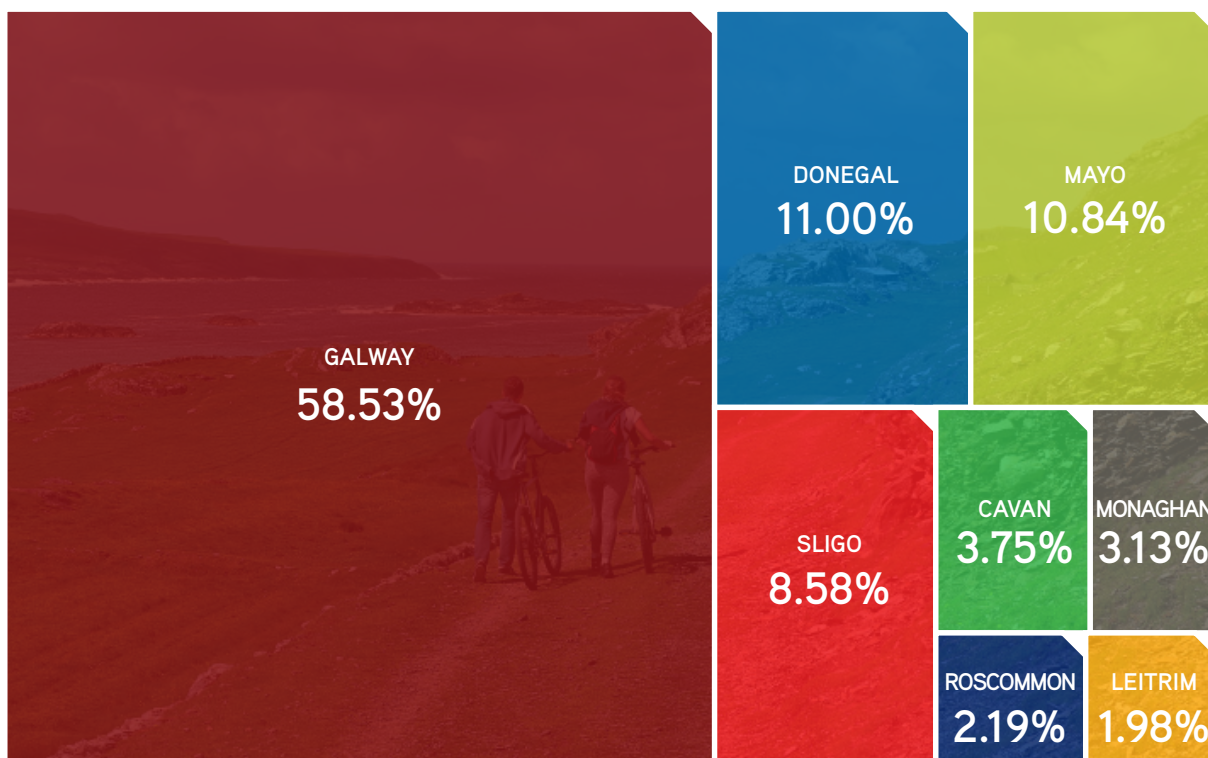
The sustainable development and promotion of a successful well managed tourism industry is critical to the economy of this region. This strategy takes note of the overall Government policy, as set out in *People, Place and Policy: Growing Tourism to 2025*. In particular, it takes note of the policy proposal that consideration be given to the contribution that sustainable tourism can make to the protection of heritage assets.

While the region boasts destinations that contribute to it being one of the leading tourist places in Ireland, a stronger year-round product needs to be developed. The Northern and Western region is host to some of Europe’s most spectacular and unique landscapes, wildest coastlines, and home to a strong cultural and heritage offer.

Up to now, our region has predominantly hosted domestic tourists, however, the aim is to significantly increase the share of overseas visitors coming into our region over the next decade, and beyond.

Underpinning the new tourism agenda is the concept of Sustainable Tourism, which provides a high-quality product, based on, and in harmony with, a high-quality natural environment. Providing a sustainable framework to tourism development will ensure adverse impacts upon local communities, archaeology, built heritage, landscapes and habitats are minimised while at the same time ensuring economic benefits accruing to local economies are maximised.

Figure 45: Share of Tourists by County (Source: Fáilte Ireland Key Facts, 2019)



RURAL TOURISM

In most rural areas tourism is an integral component of wider rural enterprise and should be developed in an integrated manner whenever possible. Rural tourism involves visits to rural settings or rural environments to participate in or experience activities, events or attractions not readily available in urbanised areas.

These are not necessarily agricultural in nature but are usually closely linked with agricultural activity and are often associated with rural sites of a heritage nature, such as archaeological monuments.

The RSES will support rural tourism initiatives concerned with agri-tourism, rural enterprise and conservation of natural heritage together with sites that are also important for cultural, archaeological or built heritage reasons.

OUR KEY TOURIST ASSETS

There are numerous key assets, which will continue to drive visitor numbers upwards over the coming decades. It is vital that these assets are protected, and where necessary enhanced. The Wild Atlantic Way Touring Route has developed into a Key Strategic National Asset, delivering benefits to the entire western seaboard. The Hidden Heartlands and the Ancient East brands can realise the potential for other parts of the region over the coming years. Along this route, and beyond, there are numerous key strategic assets which will continue to act as tourism magnets and drive substantial visitor numbers across a wider area.

Figure 46: Ireland’s Regional Experience Brands (Source: Fáilte Ireland)



Table 8: National Visitor Numbers

National Visitor Numbers	Numbers Employed: Hospitality and Tourism Sector	Net Worth to the Economy (Approx)
2017: 10.65m	2016: 225,000	€1.78 bn
2028: Growth at 7-8% per annum (estimated 15-20m)	2028: 338,000	€3 bn



The Strategic Priority identified from our RSES engagement process is to ensure across the family of Fáilte Ireland Brands that this region ensures adequate investment in the following areas:

1. **Visitor Experience Development:** Capital investment in flagship tourism products that can create scale.
2. **Visitor Awareness:** Experiences, products and places are appropriately and comparably marketed and that IWAK and our key seaports are promoted as international access points.
3. **Enablers:** Resources, Capital Programme and Capacity Building are three requirements to address the imbalance in tourist visitor numbers.

REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES

RPO 4.1

To support working with relevant landholders and recreational/tourism agencies to increase access to the countryside and our coastal areas, and to ensure maintenance and access to the existing network of trails, paths, ways etc.

RPO 4.2

To support the maintenance of, and enhanced access to state lands, such as National Parks, Forest Parks, Waterways together with Monuments and Historic Properties, for recreation and tourism purposes.

RPO 4.3

To support the preparation and implementation of Visitor Experience Development Plans (VEDPs) within the Northern and Western Region, to underpin the overarching regional tourism benefits and to promote the natural and cultural assets of the region.

TOURISM BRANDING PROPOSITIONS

Visitor Experience Development Plans (VEDPs) will continue to be prepared by Fáilte Ireland in association with a range of stakeholders, including Local Authorities, and members of the Tourism industry. The purpose of these plans is to realise the sustainable economic potential of mature, or developing Tourism areas. VEPD's are built on solid partnership's, and collaboration amongst all parties, public and private.



- Galway, Mayo, Sligo, Donegal and traversing north-west Leitrim.



- East of Cavan Town and Monaghan



- West of Cavan Town, Galway, Roscommon and Leitrim.

Significant regional differences exist in the current movement pattern of visitors to Ireland, and this RSES aims to assist in bringing an increased market share to the Northern and Western Region.

This will include the identification of Destination Towns/Hubs, which will have a specific role in catering for significant additional numbers of visitors. It is noteworthy that despite the outstanding offer of the region, currently of the Top 20 Visitor Attractions in the Country, only two lie within this region (Kylemore Abbey and Glenveagh National Park) (Source: Fáilte Ireland, June 2018).



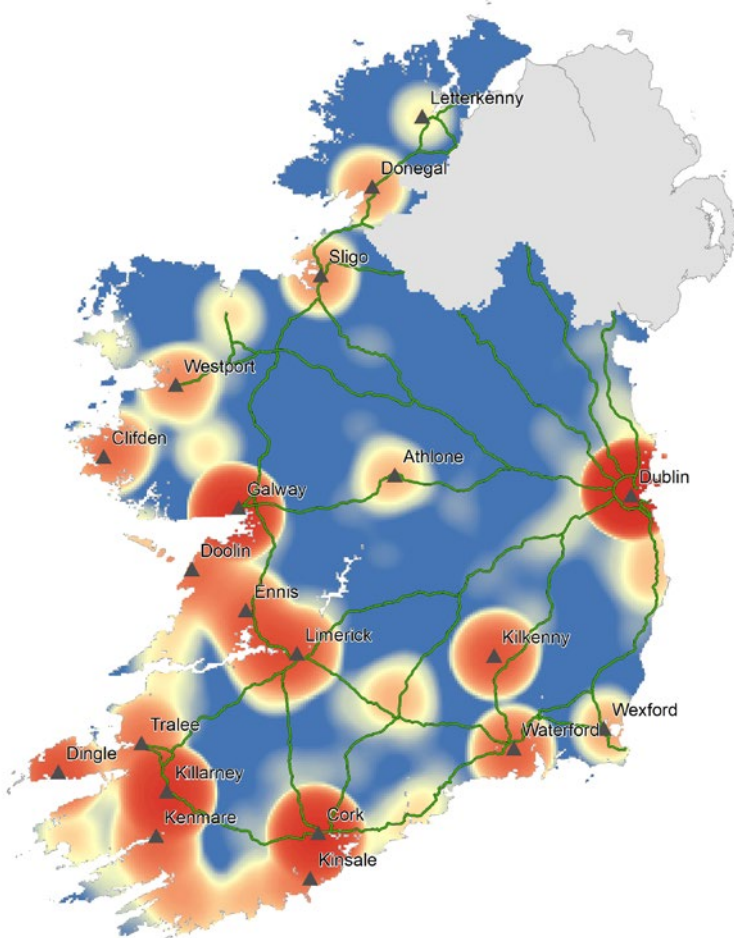
KEY ELEMENTS OF OUR TOURISM STRATEGY

- A tiered hierarchy of Tourism provisions in both rural and urban areas, to support the sustainable development of 'Destination Towns', following Fáilte Ireland's Development Guidelines for Destination Towns.
- Additional tourist supporting leisure and amenity infrastructure in the areas of recreation, entertainment, culture, catering, accommodation, transport and water services.
- Explore shared provision of access, parking, public transport to designated key rural sites for target activities (e.g. walking, cycling, water sports and golf).
- Make the best use of locally distinctive cultural attributes, bringing a unique visitor experience (language, music, crafts, arts, food).
- New proposals for activity tourism, particularly in rural areas, National Park's, uplands, coasts and rivers.
- Proposals for county-based monitoring and management structures. This will allow for the identification of threats/effects on popular sites, and mitigation where necessary.

Galway is the dominant destination within the region, with almost six times the number of visitors compared to the second most visited County - Mayo. The vision for the growth of the Tourist industry over the next ten years, and beyond must seek to extend the region's overall share, and this can be achieved through several specific place making actions, some of which are outlined in other sections.



Figure 47: Overnight Stays in Ireland 2014



CASE STUDY

BALLYCROY NATIONAL PARK, NORTH COUNTY MAYO

Ballycroy National Park is Ireland's 6th National Park and covers an area which includes one of the largest expanses of intact blanket bog's in Europe, is a nationally important habitat for Flora and Fauna, and Natura 2000 site, which extends to 11,000 hectares.

Mayo is home to Ireland's first dark sky initiative spans across an area of 150km². The Dark Skies zone encompasses Ballycroy National Park and an area along the NW Mayo Coast. As well as a recent expansion in the overall area of the park, where 5,000 ha. of primarily forested land was incorporated into the park, in August 2018, a total of €2.1m in funding was announced for Ballycroy NP, to develop a 56km cycle track, which will link with the established Western Greenway, extending Northwards to Ballycastle. This will further enhance the visitor offering in the North Mayo Region and increase amenities within the zone of influence of the Wild Atlantic Way.



OUR TOURISM DESTINATION BRANDING

WILD ATLANTIC WAY



WILD ATLANTIC WAY

SLÍ AN ATLANTAIGH FHIÁIN

KEY DESTINATION TOWNS:

Always On (Year Round):

- Galway, Sligo, Letterkenny, Ballina, Westport, Donegal Town

Seasonal:

- Clifden, Buncrana, Bellmullet, Achill, Bundoran

Our region has several key centres, which act as Tourism Hubs, both in terms of overnight destinations and as onward destinations to some of our key tourist sites.

These towns can be divided into ‘Always On (Year Round)’ and ‘Seasonal’. The towns listed have the available bed-night stock, potential to expand, and are strategically positioned to serve as vacation points to facilitate onward travel to some of the region’s most outstanding assets, and natural attractions.

The tourism industry needs to develop the off-peak season, to ensure a significant number of visitors travel into the region over the shoulder seasons (Easter to May and September to October), to grow its share of annual visitors, which in turn will extend the tourist season across much of the NWRA.



REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES

RPO 4.4

That the Wild Atlantic Way (WAW) touring network and visitor attractions within the region shall be upgraded and improved to cater for the growth in visitor cars, buses, and cyclists using the route.

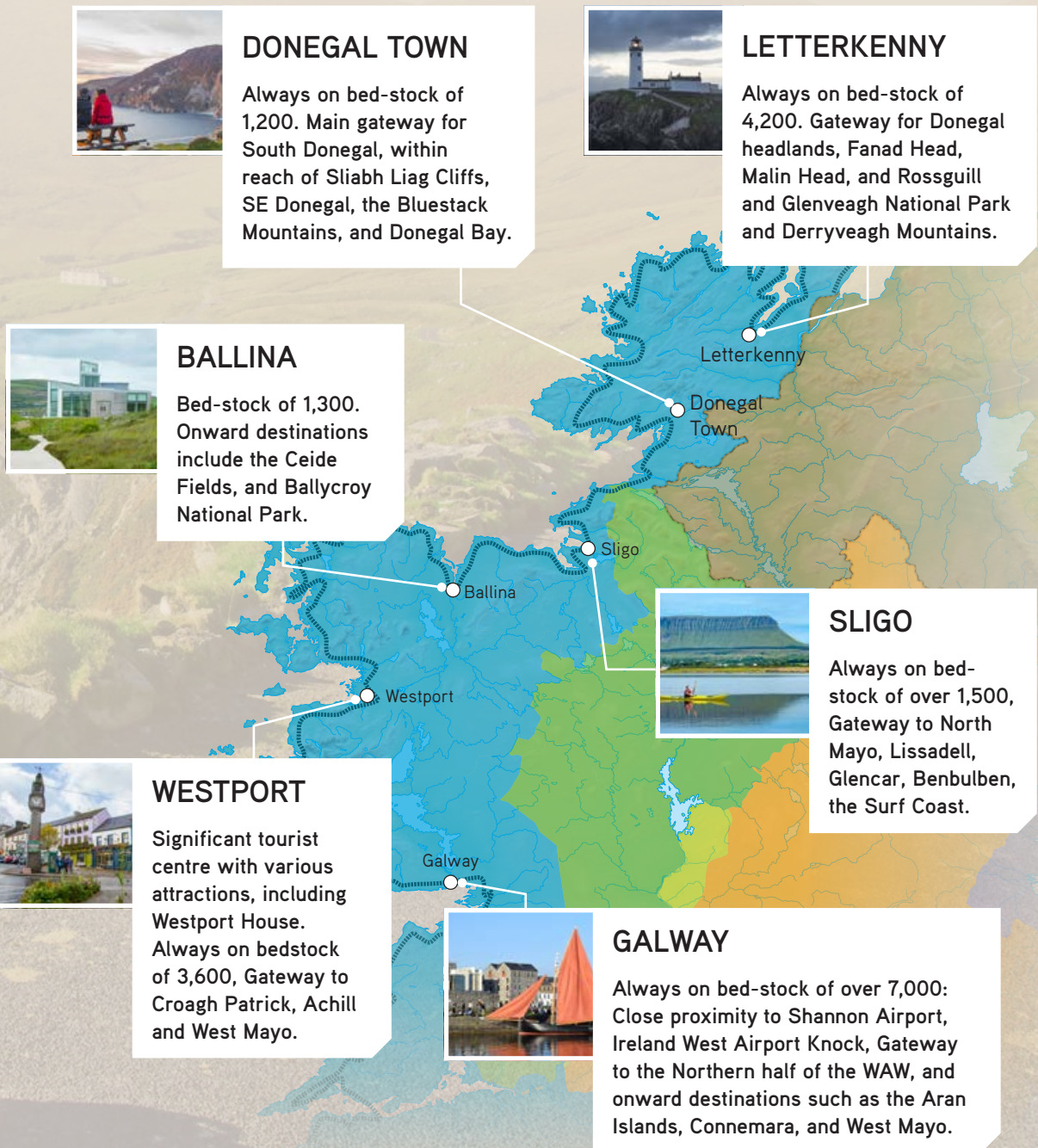
RPO 4.5

To enhance access to our tourist assets, including the development of a Coastal Walking/Cycling Route along the Western Seaboard, which extends generally along the Route of the WAW, and incorporates existing resources, such as beaches, ports, harbours, piers and marinas. This coastal route to be subject to a route option analysis, and feasibility study in Counties Galway, Mayo, Sligo, Leitrim and Donegal. Stakeholders will include Fáilte Ireland, NWRA, the relevant local authorities and the public.





Figure 48: Examples of Always On Destinations



OUR TOURISM DESTINATION BRANDING

IRELAND'S ANCIENT EAST



KEY DESTINATION TOWNS:

› Cavan Town and Monaghan Town

Ireland's Ancient East (IAE) has been developed by Fáilte Ireland as a branded visitor experience encompassing the rich heritage and cultural assets that Ireland has to offer in the midlands/eastern half of the country, providing a counterbalance to the Wild Atlantic Way on the west coast.

Both Cavan and Monaghan Town are within easy travel time from Dublin and this presents an opportunity to build capacity in bed-nights and to develop potential as day trip destinations from Dublin and Belfast. Further to building capacity, there are many cultural and heritage attractions in the mid border region, which are currently subject to upgrade, and investment, these include Breifne Way, Ulster Canal, Castle Saunderson, Cavan Burren, Lough Muckno, and the Patrick Kavanagh Trail.



The next 10 years will see significant growth in tourism numbers, and the continued expansion of this sector requires additional visitor facilities, additional bed-nights (across all categories of accommodation) in our main tourist Destination Towns (i.e. those with the greatest bed-night capacity, and where onward travel to visitor attractions can be easily facilitated). Over the next decade, it is estimated Ireland will have to increase its bed-stock by approximately 50%.

Conditions must be created to ensure this target is met in this region, through appropriate provision of necessary accommodation within Hotels, Hostels, Airbnb, and Camping Facilities etc. at our Tourist Destination Towns. Supporting infrastructural investment will also be necessary, including improvements to the public realm, transport links, accommodation, night-time economy and harnessing our natural and built heritage and developing our cultural infrastructure.





REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES

RPO 4.6

To ensure provision is made for the expansion in accommodation and facilities within Destination Towns. Supporting infrastructural investment will also be provided, including improvements to the public realm, transport links, accommodation, night-time economy and the sustainable development of our natural and built heritage.



RPO 4.7

To establish potential tourist and amenity attractions of scale in the Cavan/Monaghan region, in partnership with Fáilte Ireland and the relevant local authorities.



RPO 4.8

Ensure that ‘Discovery Points’ targeting Irelands Ancient East are included for Cavan/ Monaghan as enablers for increasing bed nights and visitor numbers.



OUR TOURISM DESTINATION BRANDING

IRELAND'S HIDDEN HEARTLANDS



KEY DESTINATION TOWNS:

- › Carrick on Shannon, Roscommon Town, Athlone and Ballinasloe

Fáilte Ireland's newest brand destination presents significant opportunities for counties Roscommon, Leitrim, west Cavan and east Galway rebranding the midlands as 'Ireland's Hidden Heartlands' as a way to boost tourism in the area.

The area extends beyond the northern and western region into County Longford and parts of counties Westmeath, North Tipperary and Offaly.

The River Shannon will be a central focus of the brand, and a 'Shannon Masterplan' is proposed to focus tourism concentration on and around the river and in surrounding towns. It will focus on the River Shannon, the development of new food networks and trails and the creation of new walking hubs are part of the campaign to attract a larger number of visitors. The plan is to entice visitors with the area's walkways and lakes, and the campaign will promote activities like walking, cycling, fishing and boating.

A walkway and trail network, the Beara Breifne Way, will have an extensive reach, with many towns along the route to be identified as "walking hubs."

REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES

RPO 4.9

To ensure provision is made for the expansion in accommodation, and facilities within key destination towns, such as Carrick on Shannon, Cavan, Roscommon Town and Athlone, together with necessary supporting infrastructural investments, including improvements in the public realm, transport links, accommodation, the night-time economy, and sustainable development of our natural and built economy.

RPO 4.10

To ensure Orientation and Information Points targeted at 'Slow Tourism' market are provided at key Towns, such as Carrick on Shannon, Athlone, and Ballinasloe as an enabler for increasing bed-nights, and visitor numbers.

RPO 4.11

To upgrade Public Transport infrastructural facilities in Destination Towns, including the provision of Transport Hubs/Links, and additional accommodation.

RPO 4.12

Develop the water-based leisure sector in the region in a sustainable manner making the best use of existing and planned infrastructure and resources, in a manner that is sensitive to the natural and cultural heritage resources.



RPO 4.13

The Assembly supports the implementation of the Shannon Tourism Masterplan and the securing of adequate resources and investment to achieve this.

RPO 4.14

Promote the development of integrated walking, cycling and bridle routes throughout the region as an activity for both international visitors and local tourists in a manner that is compatible with nature conservation and other environmental policies.

RPO 4.15

To protect and preserve our Coastal Heritage, archaeological and built heritage, and to restore/regenerate our key coastal assets, including those within state ownership (e.g. OPW) as well as Discovery Points and Signature Points along the WAW.



CASE STUDY

CASE STUDY IN RURAL TOURISM: LEITRIM

Slow Adventure in Northern Territories (SAINT) was a 2015-2018 Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme (NPA) project on the development of slow adventure. The project's main aim was to extend the marketing reach of businesses in the slow adventure tourism sector, to encourage more tourists to come to these areas to enjoy and experience the outdoors and engage with remote, wild and nature-rich places.



RENEWABLE ENERGY AND LOW CARBON FUTURE

Energy is needed for economic growth, and access to affordable and reliable energy is an essential development objective. Historically most incremental energy demand has been met through fossil fuels, however in future that energy will have to be low carbon and ultimately zero-carbon. Decarbonisation can and needs to happen and it is an objective of the NPF that Ireland becomes a Low Carbon Economy by 2050. This reflects the Governments 2014 National Policy Position on Climate Action and Low Carbon Development and is also a binding EU requirement.

Ireland's national energy policy is focused on three pillars: sustainability, security of supply and competitiveness. In catering for the growth of this region and a move towards alternative energy sources, increased demand for land is likely to include suitable locations for energy, waste management, food production, forestry and other land services alongside the need to build more houses, schools and other facilities.

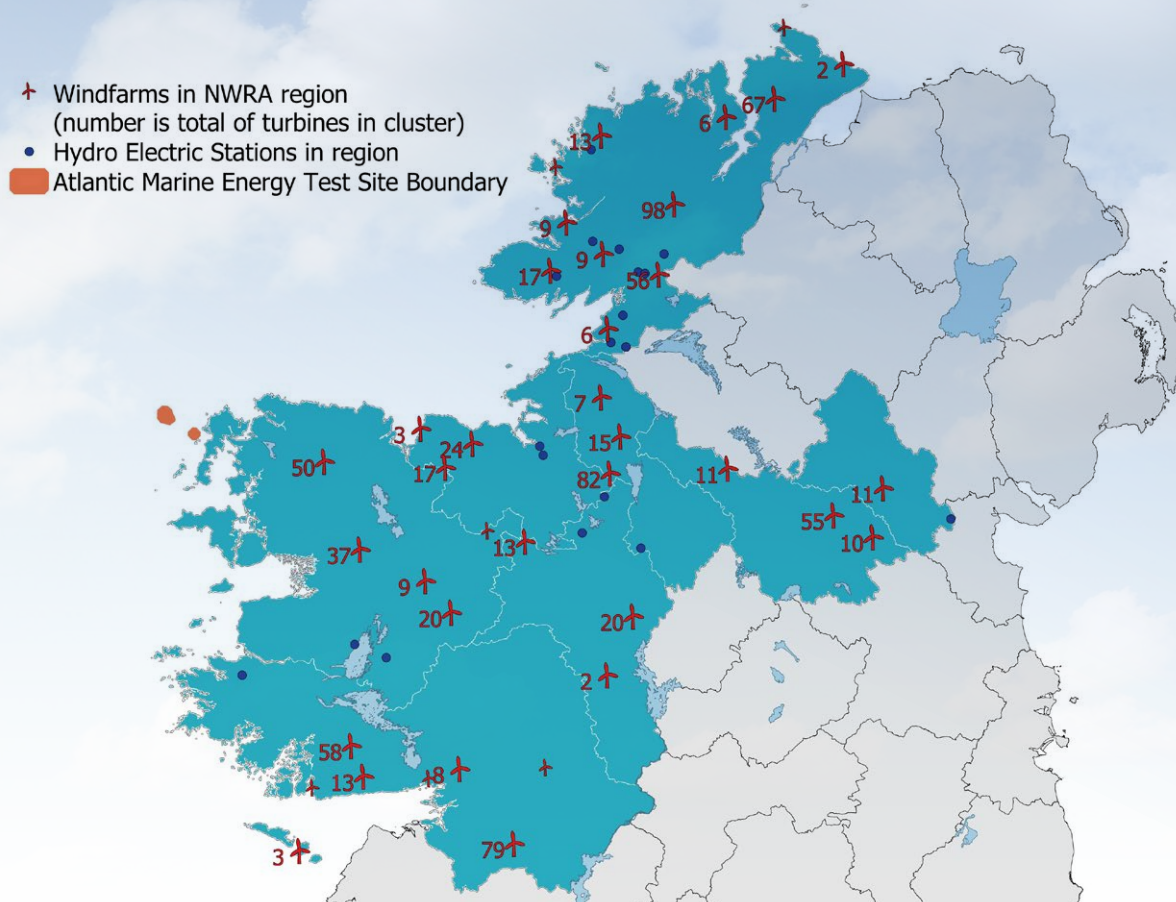
The National Climate Change Adaptation Framework published in 2018 includes the national strategy to reduce the vulnerability of the country to the negative effects of climate change and avail of positive impacts. The necessary policies and measures are yet to be developed and while the majority of direction will come from national government, responsibility will also fall on the NWRA, the Climate Action Regional Officers, and our constituent local authorities to ensure that targets are being met through the Climate Adaption Framework.

In addition, a National Climate Mitigation Plan contains specific measures to mitigate the effects of climate change across the transport, energy, built environment and agriculture sectors.

The National Policy Position on Climate Action sets a fundamental national objective to achieve the transition to a competitive, low-carbon, climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by 2050 through an aggregate reduction in carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions of at least 80% (compared to 1990 levels) by 2050 across the electricity generation, built environment and transport sectors; and in parallel, an approach to carbon neutrality in the agriculture and land-use sector, including forestry, which does not compromise capacity for sustainable food production.



Figure 49: Windfarms and Hydro Stations in the Region



The Climate Action Plan 2019 builds on the policy framework, measures and actions set out in the National Mitigation Plan, Project Ireland 2040 and the draft National Energy and Climate Plan. It sets out a clear ambition to deliver a step-change in our emissions performance over the coming decade, so that we will not only meet our EU targets for 2030 but will also be well placed to meet our mid-century decarbonisation objectives. It provides a coherent set of abatement measures across the five sectors that contribute most to our greenhouse gas emissions: Agriculture, Transport, Electricity, Built Environment, and Industry.

Carbon pricing will play a key role in changing behaviour to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions as we cost-effectively transition to a low-carbon economy by 2050. The Climate Action Plan 2019 signals the commitment to implement a carbon tax rate of at least €80 per tonne by 2030, accompanied by a trajectory of increases over successive annual Budgets. It sends a strong signal of the need to invest in low-carbon alternatives, where possible.

The potential effects of a low-carbon transition are thus manifold and complex. Competition for land resources needs careful management and the nature and rate of land-use change indicate where future environmental pressures are likely to arise.

As an EU member state, as well as a signatory to the UN Paris Agreement, Ireland has committed itself to a reduction of greenhouse gases along with a multitude of other sustainability-related measures, including the development of renewable energy.

Renewable energy can be defined as energy developed from sources that are constantly replenished through the cycles of nature and, unlike fossil fuels, are not finite. It is important that our region sets out its ambitions concerning renewable energy in this context and shows its ability to help contribute to achieving national targets.

This builds on successes to date in the provision of renewable energy from hydropower and onshore wind energy infrastructure. Wind (onshore and offshore), hydro and solar photovoltaic are used to generate electricity, whilst wave and tidal have the potential to do so in the future. Geothermal and biomass can be harnessed to contribute to both heat and electricity. Biomass is particularly useful for the heat sector and can also be used to generate electricity. Biofuels and biodiesel can contribute to the transport sector.

The forthcoming Renewable Electricity Policy and Development Framework will aim to identify strategic areas for the sustainable development of renewable electricity projects of scale, in a sustainable manner, compatible with environmental and cultural heritage, landscape and amenity considerations. The development of the Wind Energy Guidelines and the Renewable Electricity Development Plan will also facilitate informed decision making, in relation to renewable energy infrastructure.

CASE STUDY

BELMULLET/ERRIS TEST OR ENERGY HUB

In terms of renewable energy Ireland has a unique ladder of development and test site infrastructure allowing developers to move from laboratory test facilities at the IIR National Test facility in Cork to a quarter scale test bed in Galway Bay and to a full test facility at the Atlantic Marine Energy Test Site (AMETS) near Belmullet, County Mayo. This is part of an international Regime of test sites including Hawaii, Ireland and Scotland. This international chain of test sites brings devices through the various technology readiness levels which ensures investment in the technology is made on a sound and standardised footing. It also illustrates the unique strategic position Ireland and this region has in relation to offshore renewable energy.

SEAI is developing the Atlantic Marine Energy Test Site (AMETS) to facilitate the testing of full scale ocean energy converters both wind and wave, in an open ocean environment. It is located off Annagh head, west of Belmullet in Co Mayo and will be connected to the national grid, AMETS is an integral component of Ireland's ocean energy strategy and test facilities and is being developed in accordance with the national Offshore Renewable Energy Plan (OREDPP). AMETS will provide for full scale test opportunities in extreme Atlantic conditions and is intended as the ultimate test site for pre commercial stage devices.



The site will be focused on wave energy and will provide two separate test locations at various depths of water to allow for a range of devices to be tested.

It is envisaged that the test site will provide a grid connected national test facility, to which full scale wave energy converters could be coupled during their final stages of pre-commercial development. The test site will comprise of both onshore and offshore components.



This region has the unique natural endowment of ample carbon-neutral, energy supplies that gives us an opportunity of forging and leading the new clean economy of the future. Incorporating this natural endowment in our Growth Framework along with innovation, business-friendliness and vision, coupled with our proximity to the UK and EU markets, the investment in clean technology must not be just seen as an environmental strategy, but an economic growth strategy. An opportunity presents for this region in pursuing a path towards a low carbon future. Focusing on four key pillars:

1. **Growth** - creating scale in the region for the industry to cluster, innovate and commercialise
2. **Resources** - we need a better understanding of the availability and use of our natural resources, technical capability, research and development, and technology commercialisation. A regional Energy Hub could be considered to integrate focus and investment.
3. **Utilisation** - efficient use of energy in domestic, commercial, and industrial applications.
4. **Delivery** - supporting infrastructural investment and regulatory frameworks are essential for unleashing the region's potential.

The shift to a low-carbon energy system has implications for the extent, nature and allocation of investment in the energy system. Zero-carbon energy options (for example wind, solar, hydro etc) tend to require greater up-front capital investments than fossil-fuel using options (eg coal or gas-fired power).

Efficient use of resources is important to all parts of the region and in all sectors of the economy. Many of the companies involved in supplying the enabling advice or technologies operate from within this region. The Northern and Western region is particularly well placed to lead the way in the efficient use of resources and developing a low carbon economy.

Ireland's 2020 renewable energy target is to increase the share of final energy consumption made up of renewable energy sources (RES) to 16%. This target is broken into three key sectors with individual targets for each sector: 40% of electricity supply (RES-E), 12% of heating (RES-H), and 10% of transport (RES-T). Ireland also has a target of a 20% improvement in energy efficiency by 2020.

Importantly, the 2030 EU Climate and Energy Package continues from the base set out in the 20-20-20 Agreement and proposes new targets and measures to make the EU's economy and energy system more competitive, secure and sustainable. Three key targets for the year 2030 are:

- At least 40% cuts in GHG emissions from 1990 levels.
- At least 27% share for renewable energy.
- At least 27% improvement in energy efficiency, with an increase to 30% being currently under negotiation.



The region has a huge potential for growth in renewables, with its diverse and growing environmental goods and services sector, and not least because of the proactivity and drive with which it embraces this agenda. Demonstrating its commitment through the support of test sites, innovative green policies and investing in infrastructure to support a low carbon future. To achieve this, policies must encourage:

- Practices to reduce the production of CO₂.
- Increase in our energy security.
- Reduced cost of electrical power for domestic purposes, and regional development of value-adding of primary production.
- Increased industry development of modern high-efficiency building materials.
- Increased efficiency in the development of renewable energy production.
- Improved efficiency of freight and passenger transport systems.
- Greater protection of areas of high primary production value.
- Greater protection of environmentally sensitive areas.
- Increase cluster of R&D focused on technological application to renewable energy.



REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES

RPO 4.16

The NWRA shall co-ordinate the identification of potential renewable energy sites of scale in collaboration with Local Authorities and other stakeholders within 3 years of the adoption of the RSES. The identification of such sites (which may extend to include energy storage solutions) will be based on numerous site selection criteria including environmental matters, and potential grid connections.

RPO 4.17

To position the region to avail of the emerging global market in renewable energy by:

- Stimulating the development and deployment of the most advantageous renewable energy systems
- Supporting research and innovation
- Encouraging skills development and transferability
- Raising awareness and public understanding of renewable energy and encourage market opportunities for the renewable energy industry to promote the development and growth of renewable energy businesses
- Encourage the development of the transmission and distribution grids to facilitate the development of renewable energy projects and the effective utilisation of the energy generated from renewable sources having regard to the future potential of the region over the lifetime of the Strategy and beyond.



RPO 4.18

Support the development of secure, reliable and safe supplies of renewable energy, to maximise their value, maintain the inward investment, support indigenous industry and create jobs.

RPO 4.19

Support the appropriate development of offshore wind energy production through the adequate provision of land-based infrastructure and services, in line with national policy and in a manner that is compatible with environmental, ecological and landscape considerations.

RPO 4.20

Support and encourage the development of the bio-economy sector, and facilitate its development for energy production, heat, and storage distribution, in particular advocating Combined Heat and Power Units integrated into District Heating networks, in combination with Pyrogenic Carbon Capture and Storage (PyCCS) or Bio-Energy Carbon capture and storage (BECCS) all to be done in collaboration with EPA and other regulators.



RPO 4.21

Promote innovative new building design and retrofitting of existing buildings, both private properties, and publicly owned, to improve building energy efficiency, energy conservation and the use of renewable energy sources following National Regulations, and Policy.

RPO 4.22

Safeguard and support the strategic role and function of existing test and development sites, for example, the Atlantic Marine Energy Test Site (AMETS). The test site forms part of Ireland's Ocean Energy Strategy and is being developed following the Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan.



AGRI-FOOD AND THE BIOECONOMY

The agri-food sector is the largest indigenous industry in Ireland, employing 8.4% of the working population and achieving revenues of approximately €26 billion as of 2015. As an export-orientated industry, and one that is primarily based within our rural regions, the agri-food sector will continue to play an essential role in our rural economy, especially so within the Northern and Western Region.

Agriculture has strong green credentials and maintaining this “green” brand image is critically important to the agri-food sector. The challenge will be to deliver upon the national policy objective of carbon neutrality in a way that does not compromise our capacity for sustainable food production. It will be necessary to change the way we do business to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase carbon-removals whilst enhancing our competitiveness. Industry-wide solutions have yet to emerge on a widespread basis, sustainable agriculture development means solutions need to be incorporated into production practices systematically.



NATIONAL POLICY

Food Harvest 2020 (FH2020) and Foodwise 2025 (FW2025) are two key policy statements at the national level that shape Ireland’s agriculture, food and drinks targets. The tagline used is ‘Smart, Green, Growth’ – act smart by investing in ideas, knowledge and skills, think green by maximising the benefits from our extensive, low-input grass-based production systems and achieve growth through minimising input and distribution costs and increasing our production. Some areas where the region can pursue differentiation and the application of technology and innovation include:

- Improved sustainability and soil resilience.
- Agriculture diversification, developing crops for sectors other than human and animal food.
- Improving the standard of living of farmers and stockbreeders by the development of new business models.
- Development of products with functions related to health.
- Food security utilising rapid and safe techniques.
- Development of the concept of bioeconomics.

However, the importance of sustainability and protection of the environment in reaching these goals is also a key part of the plan. In this manner, the Government aims to grow the agricultural sector sustainably and innovatively.



The three principal growth targets identified under FH2020 are:

- Increasing the value of primary output in the agriculture, fisheries and forestry sector by €1.5 billion (a 33% increase compared to 2007-2009 average);
- Increasing the value-added in the agri-food, fisheries and wood products sector by €3 billion (a 40% increase compared to 2008); and
- Achieving an export target of €12 billion for the sector (a 42% increase compared to the 2007-2009 average).

FH2020 also sets the dairy industry a target of 50% increase in milk production by 2020 from March 2015 when quotas were abolished. This has the potential to increase the need for additional slurry storage capacity should herd numbers increase, with potential impact on water consumption and water quality arising from the consequential increase in land-spreading of slurry.

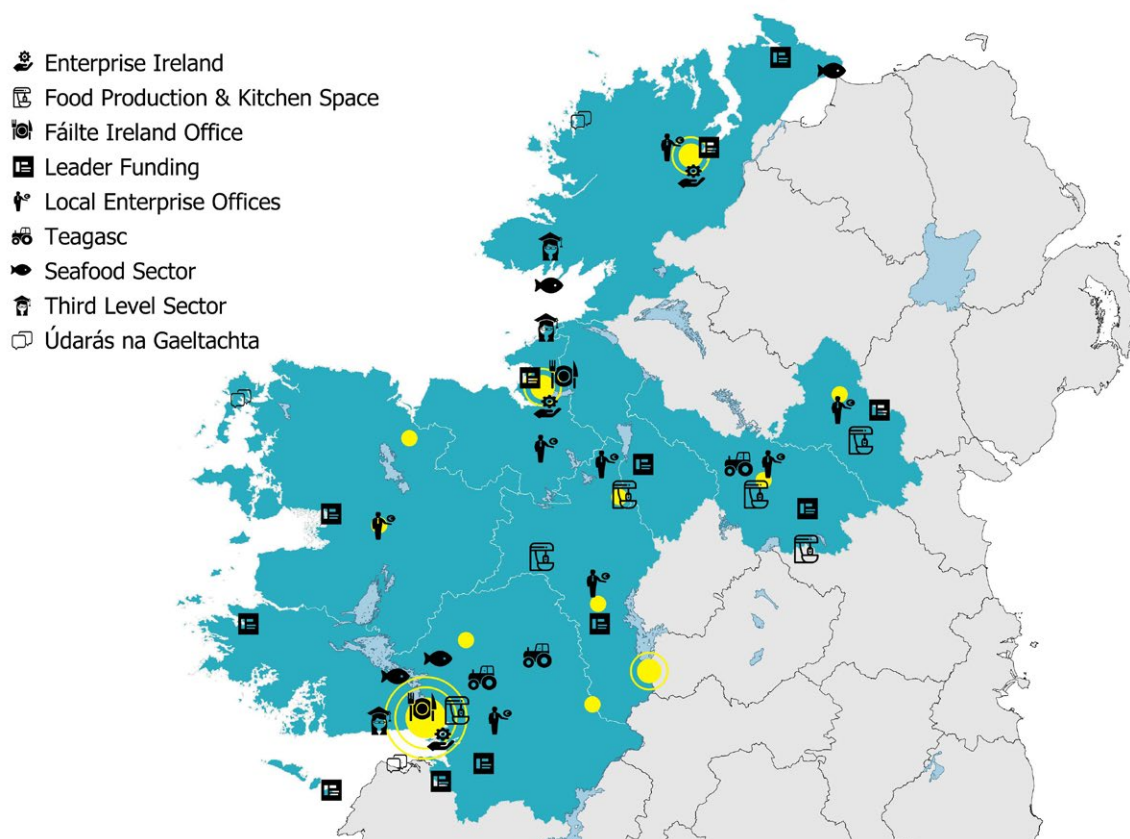


The number of farms has been steadily falling across the state for the last 100 years. However, the number of holdings within this region remains very substantial, currently approximately 60,000 (See Table 9 below). Dairy and beef farming remain a critical part of the rural economy across our region, with multiple businesses associated with these farms and agri-food is a significant and growing element of the production, for domestic, and increasingly overseas markets.

Table 9: Farmholdings
(Source: CSO Farm Survey, 2010)

County	Number of Farms
Cavan	5,300
Monaghan	4,600
Donegal	9,200
Sligo	4,400
Leitrim	3,700
Mayo	12,500
Roscommon	6,300
Galway	13,500
Approx Total	59,500

Figure 50: SME Supports



INNOVATION

The agri-food sector is entering into a period of radical transformation underpinned by smart farming practices, growth in global demand and consumer sophistication. The agri-food sector is undoubtedly a major industry within the northern and western region. It falls predominantly within the broad industrial category of ‘Agriculture, forestry and fishing’, which amounts to 7.5% of the total numbers of persons employed in the region. This is compared to the State average of 4.4%, highlighting the heightened importance of the sector to the regional economy.

The Agri-Food sector is vital to the region and particularly to Counties Monaghan and Cavan. For example, the agri-food industry alone accounts for over 60% of Monaghan’s employment and 90% of the food produced within the county is exported. Whilst the sector is well established in the Central Border Region, there is undoubtedly room for further growth in the area with annual economic growth at 4%. Small and Medium Size Enterprises (SMEs) will provide much of this growth over the next 10 years, and these types of businesses must be

supported. Given the majority of these companies are located outside of our main identified Urban Centres, sectoral expansion in agri-food must be facilitated in our Rural Towns, and Villages, where it is already well established in places such as Bailieborough and Lough Egish, and Virginia with the existing agri-food cluster of Glanbia and AW Ennis feeds.

The work of enterprise agencies and education providers shall play an important role in supporting innovation. Teagasc is the national body providing integrated research, advisory and training services to the agriculture and food industry. They deliver courses through their colleges and local centres, with higher-level courses also being delivered in partnership with third-level colleges. Demonstratable examples across the region include Ballyhaise Agricultural College, which is one of the five Teagasc colleges nationally, and the Athenry campus which provides Research, Development and Innovation support to the sector. These centres are well placed to provide regional food incubation space and new levels of innovation to support employment growth.

CASE STUDY EXEMPLARS

BIA INNOVATOR CAMPUS AT TEAGASC

This region has taken the lead in developing the first and leading food infrastructure project in Ireland to have multi-food sector infrastructure and support at one location, including unique specialisms in meat, dairy, consumer foods and seafoods. It is to be located in the new BIA Innovator Campus at Teagasc, Athenry. This facility represents a step-change project that will transform the food entrepreneurship landscape in our region. It will provide training, innovation and acceleration supports that enable food businesses to grow and upscale.



MONAGHAN BIO-CONNECT INNOVATION CENTRE – MBIC

Project partners Monaghan County Council, Monaghan Bioscience and Monaghan Institute has created a not for profit, Biotech Innovation Centre to service the Central Border Region. The facility will be located adjacent to Monaghan Institute Campus. MBIC will attract local and foreign companies to set up Biotech based Research and Development at MBIC, to drive employment and innovation. Monaghan Bioscience (60 staff) will become the anchor tenant at the facility, with a capacity for 200 biotech professionals. MBIC will provide open access to Lab equipment and space.



Monaghan is already a strong player in agri-food, with Monaghan Mushrooms, Silverhill, Bio-Marine Ingredients, Lakelands, Abbot and Lacpatrick established in the County. In response to Brexit, it will be necessary for Agri based businesses to develop higher-end value-added products. The NWRA Region lacks biotechnology infrastructure, to support start-ups in this area. Existing BioTech incubation centres are in NUIG, UCC and Dublin. Monaghan Bioscience is a subsidiary of Monaghan Mushrooms and specialises in the waste streams from Mushroom production. Moving from bringing mushroom waste from landfill to inputting into higher-value products. This project is operated under Horizon 2020 (EU Programme for Research and Innovation).

REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES

RPO 4.23

To create a stronger and more resilient region by protecting and stimulating gastronomy as part of our cultural heritage and also by identifying new opportunities for economic development.

RPO 4.24

To support the growth of the region's agrifood industry, and its SME's. This includes the expansion of the sector where already established in rural areas, as well as in small towns, and villages, where expansion should be supported.

RPO 4.25

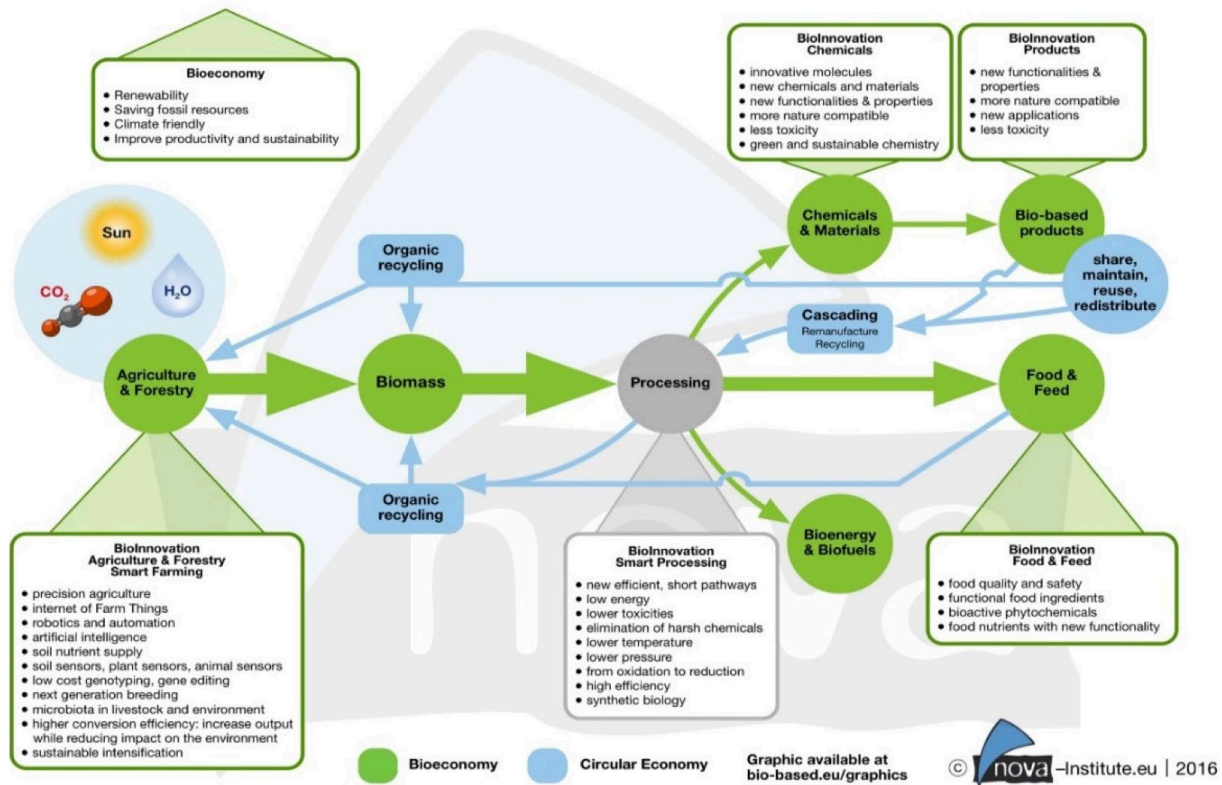
Support the upscaling of businesses, increase exports, and strengthen internal collaborations within the value chain to allow more products from the region to have access to transformation and export processes, and increasing the added value contribution through R&D (in both product and process) and the implementation of advanced manufacturing technologies.

RPO 4.26

Support the further development of AgInnovation clusters in the Northern and Western Region - pushing convergence between farm, research, technology and commercialisation.

Figure 51: The BioEconomy – More than a Circular Economy

Bioeconomy: More than Circular Economy

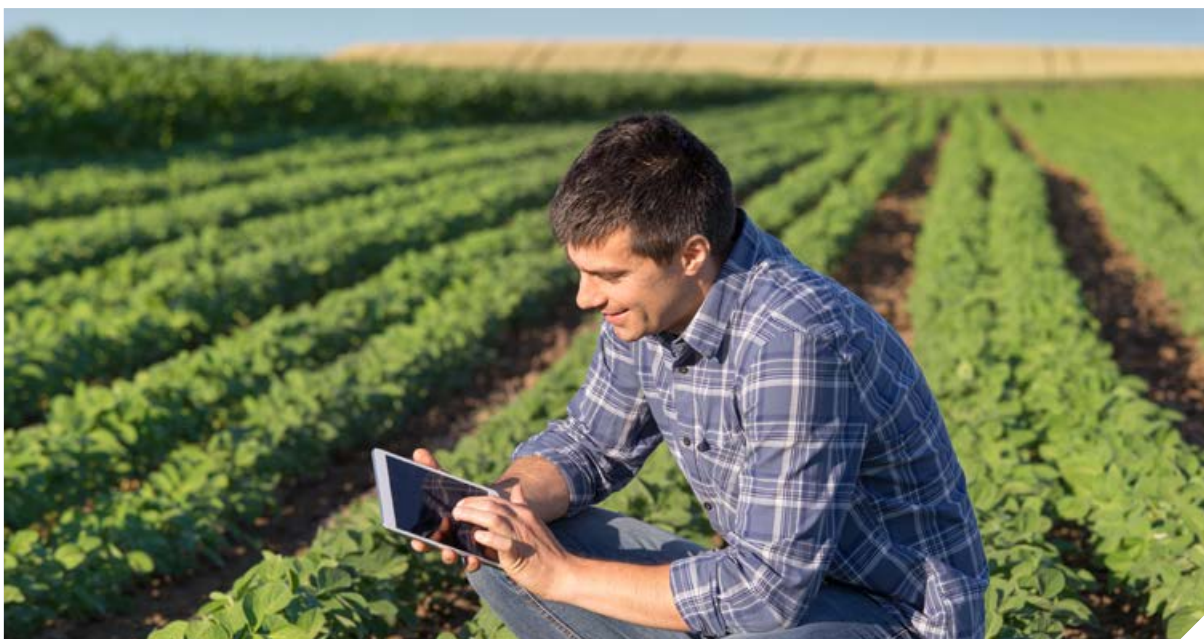


THE BIOECONOMY

The bioeconomy comprises those parts of the economy that use renewable biological resources from land and sea to produce food, feed and bio-based materials and energy. This includes crops, forestry, fisheries, aquaculture, animals and their residues and by-products from processing, industrial feedstock resources such as municipal solid waste and wastewater or novel products such as micro-organisms.



The bioeconomy in terms of science and technology is the application of a range of sciences (life sciences, agronomy, ecology, food science and social sciences), enabling industrial technologies (biotechnology, nanotechnology, information and communication technologies (ICT) and engineering) to relevant primary production and processing sectors to provide for the sustainable production of food, feed, bio-based materials and energy. The Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine launched a National Policy Statement on the Bioeconomy in February 2018, intending to assist in collaboration across several areas in the re-use of residues from food and drink production. With 80% of the bioeconomy positioned in rural areas, it represents a sector of significant opportunity to be harnessed for this region.



REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES

RPO 4.27

It is an objective to support the National Policy Statement on the Bioeconomy (2018), and the exploration of opportunities in the circular resource-efficient economy, including undertaking a bioeconomy feasibility study for this region. This feasibility study will aim to identify (and map) areas of potential growth to inform the National Transition Agenda, enabling a Low Carbon, resilient nation.



RPO 4.28

To support the potential creation of appropriately scaled local multi-feedstock bio-refining hubs across the region as well as potential creation of bio-districts/clusters.



RPO 4.29

The Assembly supports the future-proofing of infrastructure planning to allow for the potential upgrading of existing industrial sites to bio-refining plants while also supporting the use of bio-renewable energy for the sustainable production of bio-based products.



MARINE AND BLUE ECONOMY

The Country's Maritime Territory is almost 10 times our landmass, at over 220m acres under-water. To better protect, and utilise this resource, the Government set out a clear roadmap through *Harnessing Our Ocean Wealth: An integrated Marine Plan for Ireland (2012)* and a National Marine Planning Framework (NMPF) is currently being prepared which will help manage our resources effectively and sustainably.



Some of the primary goals of the NMPF include:

- A clear 20 year vision on how to use, protect and enjoy our sea's
- To act as the key decision making tool for policy makers, and regulatory authorities
- The setting out of Overarching Marine Planning Policies (OMPP's) and Sectoral Marine Planning Policies (SMPP's)
- Reduce and co-ordinate costs across agencies, and improve innovation and research across the Marine Sector.

MARINE SECTOR – CHANGES AND GROWTH

At present, it is estimated 32,500 people are working in the Marine Economy across Ireland (progress Report – *Harnessing Our Ocean Wealth (HOOW)*, 2017), and this figure is growing at above 10% year on year. In recent decades, the Country's fishing fleets have been steadily reduced in number, as a consequence of fishing quotas being implemented under the EU Common Fisheries Policy and as landings are made elsewhere by our regions fleets.

This has led to some of our region's ports and traditional fishing harbours diversifying into other areas of activity. In Killybegs, the Marine Engineering, and Tourism sectors have gradually grown their labour force share, with the number of employee's retained in fish processing reducing due to decreasing quota's and increasing plant automation. Additionally, there has been substantial growth in other areas, such as aquaculture and seafood processing which are critical in some of the region's more peripheral locations along the West, and North West coastline.

REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVE

RPO 4.30

To review, and where necessary amend, the RSES upon adoption of the National Marine Planning Framework (NMPF) to ensure alignment, and consistency between land-use and oceanbased planning, and to ensure co-ordination which supports the protection of the marine environment and growth of our marine economy.

OUR MARINE REGIONAL ASSETS

There are over 250 piers, and harbours along the region's coastline and many centres play a significant role in terms of the marine economy, the main centres are set out below:

GALWAY PORT

The upgrade of Galway Harbour and Port continues to represent a key strategic priority for the Western Region. The ambition to upgrade Galway Port will allow for the facility to serve a dual role as a commercial port for cargo, and also a destination point for cruise tourism.

This upscaling of the facility would increase Galway Ports influence (and spin-off) across the wider region in terms of recreation and delivery of additional visitors into Galway City and beyond. The Marine Institute and Ryan Institute at NUIG are additional key resources in the Marine sector.

KILLYBEGS

The Country's primary fishing port, and deep-water facility, in recent times, it has developed an additional role as a destination point for Cruise Ships. Killybegs has accommodated 13,000 cruise ship visitors in 2018, increasing from 1,300 visitors in less than a decade. A significant marine cluster exists in Killybegs, which serves the North Atlantic Pelagic fleet, and boasts marine engineering expertise, boatbuilding and a further expansion of these activities should be enabled in the years ahead.

PAIRC NA MARA, CONNEMARA

Significant first steps are being taken by Údarás na Gaeltachta in the planning and development of Pairc na Mara a new marine innovation park which is to be developed in Cill Chiarain in the Connemara Gaeltacht of County Galway. The development is located on a brownfield site on the southern edge of the Connemara Gaeltacht situated approximately 72km west of Galway City. The site of approximately nine hectares has the potential to provide infrastructure and facilities to support the establishment and expansion of a cross-section of marine enterprises.

NEWPORT, CO. MAYO

Newport Research Cluster in County Mayo managed by the Marine Institute is involved in ground-breaking research in the marine biotechnology, climate change, and water quality areas. Internationally renowned scientists come to Newport to use their unique data sets and facilities to advance numerous international research projects.

GREENCASTLE

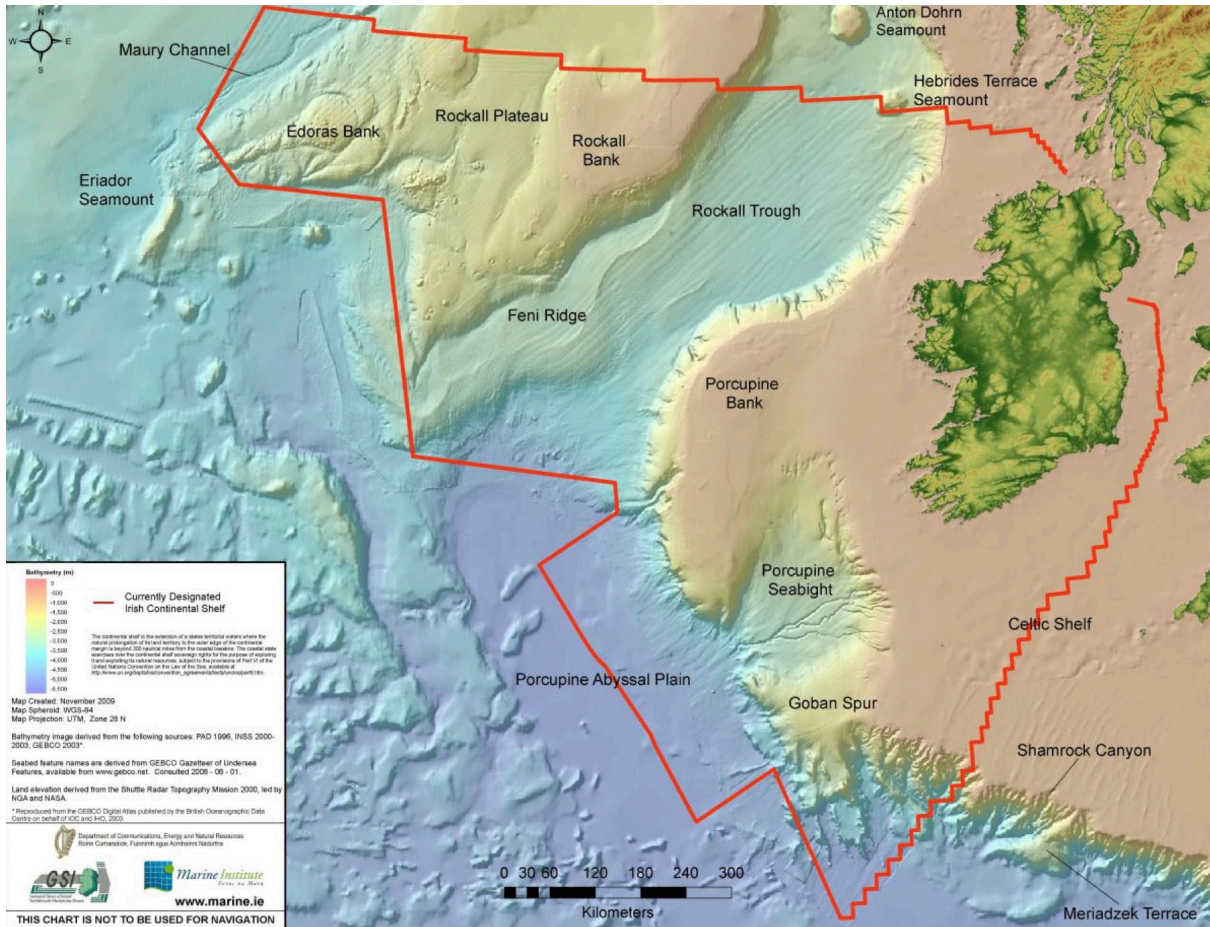
County Donegal is one of two BIM National Fisheries Colleges of Ireland.

GAS PRODUCTION AND THE CORRIB GAS FIELD

Indigenous gas production from the Corrib, Kinsale Head and Seven Heads gas fields accounted for 70% of the states total natural gas demand in 2017. The Corrib Field commenced production at the end of 2015 and is expected to supply on average up to 57% of the State's natural gas demand. Further gas fields are expected to be discovered and developed in the same area in the future which would create a sustainable secure energy source as we transition to zero-carbon energy alternatives.



Figure 52: Ireland’s Marine Territory



FISHERIES

The European Union’s Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), adopted in 2014 allows for one-third of Irish landings, at present to be taken from British Waters (Primarily off the West coast of Scotland). Brexit and its outcome (uncertain at present) leave doubts as to this arrangement continuing. €125m worth of landings were recorded in Killybegs in 2017, and to ensure the future security of the Irish fleet and the Fishing Industry in our region, our ports, harbours and associated land-uses in several coastal locations must be upgraded, particularly in strategic locations. These ports are Galway, Killybegs, Greencastle, and Ross a Mhil.



REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES

RPO 4.31

To protect, upgrade and expand our key Fisheries Ports of Killybegs, Greencastle and Ross a Mhil, and to ensure adequate continued investment in facilities to ensure their ongoing success.

RPO 4.32

To enable the expansion of our regional assets in the Blue Economy in the following sectors:

- › Marine research and innovation
- › Gas and Oil deposits within Ireland's waters
- › Seafood innovation through Greencastle, Killybegs, Pairc Na Mara and other BIM fishery centres.

MARINE RENEWABLES

The Western seaboard and the North Atlantic is likely to be a key strategic zone for the testing, installation, and continued expansion in the area of Marine Renewables. In the past, the primary focus within the State has been on land-based renewables, with a record 65% renewable loading achieved in April 2018. However, with technology advances in Solar, and Off-Shore wind becoming more cost-effective, this focus is likely to shift during the lifetime of the RSES. Off-Shore renewables will be critically important if the Country is to meet the energy targets set out for 2030.

Wave energy, tidal energy, and offshore wind energy will continue to expand in line with technological advances and subject to feasibility, and environmental assessment. There are already many Marine Energy Test Sites located off the West Coast, including at Galway Bay (Marine Renewable ETS) and Belmullet, Co. Mayo, (Wave Energy Converter to be connected to the National Grid).

It is important to this region that these and similar future projects are supported so that this region can contribute and lead out on Ireland's commitments to Climate Change and reducing the usage of fossil fuels. Such potential projects would also be consistent with the Climate Action Fund, which is aimed at reducing overall emissions, through various projects, and to improve energy efficiency. The RSES will support innovative solutions in Marine Renewables, which will assist in achieving these goals.

REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVE

RPO 4.33

To facilitate where possible Marine Renewable Technology Projects off the West and North West coasts of Ireland, and subject to environmental and amenity considerations (feasibility studies), and where applicable, enable National Grid connection.



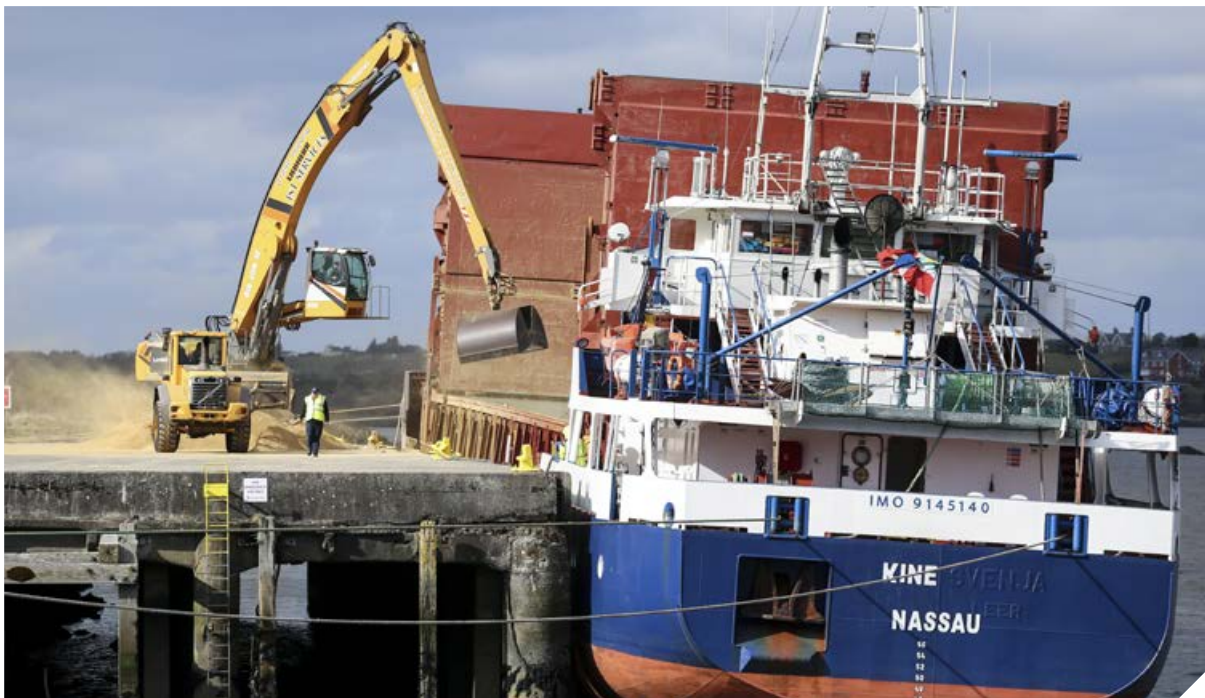
SEAFOOD SECTOR

The seafood sector is especially important in our region's remote coastal and island communities, generating economic activity, and employment across a range of services, including fish farms, processing operations and distribution. BIM in their role has continued to oversee steady growth in the seafood area, and in addition to the ongoing coastal operations, there are several strategic sites, which are likely to witness further development.

REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVE

RPO 4.34

To enable the development (and/or expansion) of a number of strategic Marine Resource Innovation Parks, including locations at Greencastle, Killybegs, Co. Donegal and Cill Chiaran, Co. Galway, (Pairc na Mara), to increase aquaculture and seafood sectoral growth in the Marine Economy.



CULTURAL HERITAGE AND THE MARINE ECONOMY

Our Coastal and Island communities are home to a range of cultural assets, built heritage, archaeological sites, including underwater wreck sites, and iconic buildings, including pier harbours, coastal forts, and lighthouses, some of which are key strategic points along the WAW. The Heritage Council has comprehensively listed these sites by Category, (Marine and Coastal Heritage Directory).

MARINE INFRASTRUCTURE

The Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport published the National Ports Policy in 2013, which highlighted that our region does not have a port of National Significance, at Tier 1 or Tier 2 level. The only Tier 1 Port along the Western seaboard is at Foynes in Limerick, although Derry Port is a significant port along the Border.

Galway Port is categorised as a Port of Regional Significance, (Tier 3), it is designated for transfer to Galway City Council. Beyond that, ports such as Killybegs, Sligo, Greencastle, and Ross a Mhíl perform specific roles.

Notwithstanding the above and the Ports Policy of 2013, there is a unique disconnectedness concerning Ports and the Marine infrastructure in the North West. In terms of the overall examination of infrastructure, there are two key elements to our Marine dynamic, the first are the harbours, and ports themselves, and the second is the interconnectedness with the road and rail network beyond this, including connections to the UK and Mainland Europe. Our region has a significant disadvantage to the rest of the country in this regard.

The Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) Policy represents an instrument that can assist in improving connectivity, as it addresses the development of a Europe-wide transport network that delivers strengthened social, economic and territorial cohesion. None of the ports in our region is designated as TEN-T Ports, but this strategy supports the further examination of the feasibility for pursuing designation of both Galway Port and Killybegs Port as EU TEN-T Comprehensive Ports. It is acknowledged that there are significant nature conservation concerns, particularly around Galway Port and these must be addressed within the feasibility study and any subsequent proposals to ensure compliance with the EU Habitats Directive.

REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES

RPO 4.35

To support the ongoing upgrade and improvement of the region's harbours and ports, and ensure the sustainable development of this infrastructure to enable aquaculture and seafood industry expansion responsively.

RPO 4.36

To support the sustainable expansion and upgrade of Galway Harbour and Galway Port as part of the overall vision to grow Galway as a City Region, subject to visual, transport and economic viability considerations and in compliance with the EU Habitats Directive (which may necessitate consideration of IROPI⁵).

RPO 4.37

To examine the potential of the region's other main ports to expand, and enhance facilities to enable them to become ports with enhanced regional significance in a range of areas, including trade, fisheries, marine tourism and renewables. This will be done in conjunction with all relevant stakeholders, including the relevant Local Authorities, and within the context of the NMPF.



⁵ At the project consent stage if it appears that it cannot be implemented without adverse impacts which cannot be adequately mitigated then the proposals will only make provision for the level and location of development for which it can be concluded that there will be no adverse effect. If this is not possible then negative implications for a European site must meet the requirements of Article 6(4) of the Habitats Directive by demonstrating an absence of alternative solutions and imperative reasons of overriding public interest including those of a social or economic nature, if a consent is to be granted

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) SERVICES AND MED TECH – SECTORS OF OPPORTUNITY

Regions that produce information and knowledge are better equipped to compete in their national economies. Although the ICT and Med Tech sectors will not be the region's only source of growth, and the "Technology / Knowledge & Information" intensive economy includes many other sectors outside of them, creating an environment which is receptive to these type of sectors will be key to developing the region.

ICT SECTOR IN OUR REGION

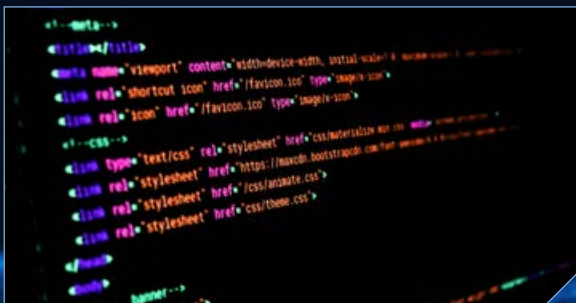
This sector employs over 100,000 nationally and is one of our biggest exporting industries. It is one of the fastest-growing industries in the country and all the world's leading multinationals have a presence in Ireland. The scope of the industry is wide, and activities include hardware manufacturing, software development, digital creative, IT security, cloud computing and data storage.

Dublin has the most concentrated clusters of ICT companies. In this region, Galway is the biggest centre, and there are also significant facilities in Letterkenny and Athlone. The cross-section of new and established companies potentially make Ireland a leading European cluster for ICT services. This concentration, which is particularly pronounced in Dublin, can result in spreading facilities and second facilities to regional cities such as Galway and to other regional locations.



There are over 190 tech companies in Galway, including many leading multi-nationals. It has an innovative start-up environment with initiatives such as Portershed which is a collaborative process between the public sector, private sector and educational institutes. The other designated regional centres have large ICT presence in Pramerica, Overstock and Ericsson.

The ICT sector in Ireland is vibrant from an employment and development viewpoint. There is an ongoing demand for employees with the right skills. The demand is not confined to the ICT sector as it transcends all sectors of the economy and will undoubtedly continue to do so. There is an ongoing recruitment of international workers in ICT and Ireland is seen as an attractive destination for talent.





The future of ICT in Ireland will be built around ‘third platform’ technologies, these include cloud computing, mobile devices and technologies, the Internet of Things (IoT), big data analytics, social technologies, artificial intelligence (AI), robotics, augmented reality, 3D printing and cybersecurity. The totality of the above will result in significant increases in the number of users, the number of devices and the number of applications.

Cloud computing, Big Data Analytics, the IoT and cybersecurity are each distinct areas of ICT. They are however inter-connected and expansion or development in one area often triggers a response/reaction in the others to maintain complementarity. They are and will continue to be part of the commercial infrastructure of nearly all companies and businesses and their continued good health in ICT terms is a pre-requisite for business confidence.

The ICT sector is pivotal in growing a smart region and is pivotal in growing an entrepreneurial region. ICT prospers on ideas more than anything else and in this arena, education is the key ingredient. Nationally we are aware of this and the STEM program and bonus points in maths at second level are stimulants which ultimately provide an opportunity for more students to take on the challenge of studying science, engineering and technology careers. At third-level, there is a concerted effort to increase the number and quality of skilled people by offering conversion courses that will lead to formal ICT qualifications. This is ongoing, and its impacts will come to fruition in the coming years.

To maximise the creation of ICT jobs throughout the region, the delivery and reach of the national broadband scheme (NBS) is key. In tandem with the above will be the development of the education system to facilitate upskilling and primary expertise. This could be achieved with targeted intervention for existing employees and the existence of a technological university for new entrants.

CASE STUDY

PRAMERICA IN DONEGAL

In 2017, Pramerica opened a new €42m Campus at Lisnennan, Letterkenny.

The company has had a presence in Ireland since 2000, starting off with eight staff, growing substantially over the last two decades, where it is now the largest employer in the North West with almost 1,600 employees. The company has shown how global companies can be scaled at a regional level, with the support of the IDA.

Pramerica has recently set up outreach campus's in Gaoth Dobhair and Bunrana, allowing some of their staff from the wider North Donegal area to work closer to home. The company have partnerships with LYIT, and other educational providers locally, and provide a wide range of technology and business services for Pramerica globally.





MEDTECH IN OUR REGION

Ireland's MedTech sector is recognised as one of the top 5 emerging global hubs. Ireland has a very strong sub-supply base with many companies becoming globally preferred vendors of choice for leading FDI enterprises. Medical device companies are a feature of industry throughout the country. Their presence is an indicator of a highly skilled workforce. The Northern and Western Region is to the forefront of the national picture.

Galway is the most important cluster in the country and is by far the biggest centre for employment. Boston Scientific is the largest medical device employer in the country with over 3,000 employees in Galway alone. Medtronic has 1,882 employees in Galway including a large research and development element. Some of the other large companies in Galway include Merit Medical, Creganna, Crospon, Zimmer and Aerogen. There are also large multinational MedTech companies in Mayo such as Baxter and Hollister. Hollister has over 600 employees in Ballina. There are significant sites in Roscommon also which employ hundreds, such as Vention in Boyle and Harmac Medical in Castlerea.

Medical device companies are also significant in Donegal and Sligo, with a series of Abbot facilities throughout both counties. There are many other well-known multinationals in Sligo.



Ireland is one of the leading countries in Europe in terms of exporting MedTech products. It is ranked fifth in Europe; the value of exports is over €9 billion/P.A. with over 27,000 employees nationally. Indigenous companies account for over 60% of the companies in the sector. There is a growing emphasis on research and development in the country and it is a feature in over 50% of companies.



The MedTech industry continues to grow and there is ongoing demand for highly qualified professionals to maintain and grow Ireland's position worldwide. There are opportunities for a wide range of engineers in biotechnology and pharmaceutical related, nanotechnology, ICT, maths, informatics and material science.

This region continues to produce graduates to service the industry, and the shift towards automation will increase demand for professionals. The region needs to keep pace with these demands and the creation and development of a technological university in the region would be an obvious companion for the MedTech industry. The MedTech sector is epitomised by innovation and it is continually investing in research and development, the pace of change is incredibly high resulting in new and improved products being continually introduced. NUIG is recognised as a European hub for research and it has many departments dedicated to this area. There is a very strong partnership base between third-level institutions and the industry, and this is instrumental in maintaining Ireland's global position.

The outlook for the medical device industry is positive in the region - growth in Europe is 4% annually. Demand for products continues to grow with a combination of ageing populations, emerging markets and technological developments.



REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES

RPO 4.38

To support the work of the IDA, Enterprise Ireland and LEOs in providing platforms for the ICT and MedTech industry thought leaders to share knowledge and to identify and advocate the delivery of critical competencies and skills needed to align with emerging business models.

RPO 4.39

Target academic research, training and development of a talent pool to support industry.

RPO 4.40

Encourage the convergence of MedTech with ICT to establish the region as a global destination for connected healthcare solutions.

RPO 4.41

Support the development of mentoring programmes for entrepreneurs.

RPO 4.42

Enable peer learning and exchange platforms to develop business links, address business concerns, exchange views and promote best practice.

RPO 4.43

Support land use designation that will allow for the expansion of MedTech and Associated businesses.

RPO 4.44

To support funding opportunities for indigenous start-ups and growth enterprises, together with the provision of education and research opportunities that will foster their continued success of MedTech industries across our Region.

TOWN CENTRE VITALITY AND RETAIL PROVISION

Retail and Trade employ one in eight people in Ireland and remain vital to our Regional Economies. During the recession, over 50,000 jobs in the sector were lost, and since 2013, numbers are now slowly recovering. A vibrant retail sector supports busy towns, and communities, and helps make places attractive to live in, invest in, and indeed visit.

Towns and villages away from the Greater Dublin Area, in particular, continue to experience high vacancy rates along their main streets, and the exponential rise of online retailing has also had an impact and is likely to greatly influence the retail offer and floor space in towns in the coming years. Nonetheless, the vitality of our Regional Growth Centres, larger towns, and villages remain critical to our societal fabric, and some recent policy documents place emphasis on place-making, town centre renewal, enabling communities to address vacancy and dereliction, and this is achieving results in communities in all counties. Documents include the following:

- Regional Enterprise Plans
- Action Plan for Rural Development
- Project Ireland 2040
- Framework for Town Centre Renewal – DBEI

The Action Plan for Jobs 2017 identifies the renewal of town and village centres as a key objective and sets out an Action Plan and a system of supports for Town Centres. In this regard, our region has many examples of Best Practice which can act as a benchmark for further advancement in counties across the region.

SLIGO BID (BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT)

The key objective of the Sligo BID team is to implement improvement in the trading environment within Sligo Town. Sligo BID is a company which is made up of local businesses and works in conjunction with the Local Authority. Funded by a levy on ratepayers, and funding from Local Authority etc. There are over 700 Local businesses in Sligo contributing to the BID.





ROSCOMMON COUNTY COUNCIL TOWN TEAMS

Town Teams, with County Council staff and Roscommon Leader, work with a range of stakeholders in their towns, retailers, traders, community and voluntary groups, service providers, which set goals to renew, and restore where necessary their towns. Reporting structure goes through Municipal Districts. Action Plans are drawn up for each Town.



CAVAN COUNTY COUNCIL

Town and Village Revitalisation Plans were developed for 20 towns and villages in the County. The Plans were developed with local consultation at the heart and recognise the diversity that exists across the county of Cavan as each plan is tailored for each of the towns and villages individually. The Revitalisation Plans aim to enhance the county's town and village centres, as attractive places in which to live and work, to address the economic and social decline.



Revitalisation Plans for the towns and villages in County Cavan.

One of the primary recommendations from the aforementioned Report (Framework for Town Centre Renewal – DBEI) was that a coordinated approach to Town Centre Renewal and Management should be agreed across Local Authorities. There are many lessons to be learnt from the experience of practitioners in town and village revitalisation and regeneration across the region and the rollout of a peer learning programme shall be developed by the NWRA in collaboration with interested stakeholders, which will be of benefit and may assist in supporting the vibrancy and vitality of the core retail areas of town centres. This includes considerable learning from the experience of stakeholders in the region in town renewal, regeneration and revitalisation, together with significant learning gained through exemplary initiatives by the Heritage Council, including the National 'Pilot' Collaborative Town Centre Health Check (CTCHC) Training Programme, Community-led Village Design Statements Toolkit (for rural and urban villages) and also their Collaborative Public Realm Plan Programme (CPRPP).



RETAIL OFFER

The Retail Planning Guidelines, 2012, set out the framework for plan led retail development within our towns, and villages. The sequential test remains a key component of this approach, and the facilitation of access to retail offer via public transport corridors is a further key element of future trade offer. In the intervening six years since the adoption of the latest Retail Guidelines, the dynamics influencing retail activity in our larger towns, and our villages have changed.

The internet and online retail activity has brought a collision of online and offline retail, which we have never before witnessed, and emerging technology means how we shop will continue to change. Recent data (PWC, Retail and Consumer Report, 2018) show that whilst Irish consumers spent approximately €5bn online last year, 60% of this was spent outside of Ireland, and the challenge for Irish retail operators is to ensure an offer online, which rivals that of some of the Global retail giants in the years ahead.

Notwithstanding online retail growth, growth in consumer spending, product demand, and population growth across the country should ensure that there remains a significant retained requirement for Town Centre stores across many areas, and growth in areas such as tourism will mean that towns and villages in many cases should strive to broaden their retail base, with food, drink and service offer likely to expand.

REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES

RPO 4.45

To support retail in town and village centres through the sequential approach, as provided within the Retail Guidelines, and to encourage appropriate development formats within the town and village centres.

RPO 4.46

To encourage new (and expanding) retail developments to locate close to public transport corridors, to enable sustainable travel to and from our Town and Village Centres, where applicable.

RPO 4.47

To adopt a presumption in favour of the re-use, and restoration of town centre buildings for use as retail space, subject to satisfying other planning criteria and standards.

RPO 4.48

The roll-out of a peer learning programme shall be developed by the NWRA in collaboration with relevant stakeholders. It shall be designed to benefit and be of assistance in supporting the vibrancy, and vitality of the core retail areas of town centres.



Growth Ambition 2: Environment – Natural Region **5**

5

Growth Ambition 2: Environment – Natural Region

5.1 Economic Progress and Environmental Impacts

This strategy outlines how urban places should plan for additional population and employment growth. All places in the region have a role in accommodating growth, using sustainable and environmentally responsible development practices. By setting a clear strategic direction, through Growth Ambition 1, we can ensure that environmental impacts and issues are managed in a considered and holistic way.

Introduced in this Growth Ambition is a unifying vision of the ways those efforts interconnect at the regional level. Justifying the integrated approach under our 'Growth Framework' it is necessary to consider the interdependence of population growth, economic development, resource management and environmental impacts.

Growth and development in this region have caused a wide range of environmental impacts, some irreversible. The region's abundant natural resources have been used for industry and employment. Our land, water, and landscapes have been harnessed to support the growth of national and local settlements, business and industry.

A sustainable future, for the region, is one that ensures the well-being of all living things, carefully integrating human activities with larger patterns and systems of the natural world. This translates into avoiding the waste of energy, water, and raw natural resources. A unifying vision of the ways our efforts interconnect at the regional level would be a valuable contribution to environmental management activities.

A sustainable approach also prevents the degradation of land, air, and water, while creating built environments that are liveable, comfortable, safe and healthy, as well as promoting/accommodating increased productivity.





To have a more sustainable future means that we encourage positive development trends and take action to reverse and avoid negative ones. This requires our combined efforts to achieve the region's vision.



The National Strategic Objectives (NSOs) contained in the National Planning Framework (NPF) are explicit in their commitment to sustainable development and pursuing practices aligned with a low carbon society. Moreover, the recently published Climate Action Plan, 2019 represents a whole of Government approach to adopting a new approach to a multitude of areas in moving towards low carbon. The onus is on the RSES to identify a growth pattern that accommodates future population and employment growth in a way that minimises adverse impacts on the environment and builds on the natural resources this region boasts.

Our RSES provides the framework to unify the region around an environmental, growth management, economic and infrastructural strategy that is efficient, sustainable, and inclusive.

There is a growing understanding of the role the environment and natural landscape plays in the quality of life indices, water quality, economic prosperity, food production, recreational opportunities, tourism visitors, sense of place, and the overall distinctiveness and differentiation. Many of our natural resources are inimitable. First, we must protect them; then leverage them.



There are a myriad of initiatives across the region to improve the environment and increase sustainability. Our environmental authorities strive through education and regulation to improve all qualitative features of our environment. It ultimately, however, falls to individuals to become better resource managers and to improve our collective experience. This region is willing to harness development trends, and changes in public policy, where necessary, to demonstrate our ability to be a leader in pursuing a low carbon strategy.

5.2 Environment and Heritage

Communities across the region and beyond benefit from the goods and services that our environment provides, including food, renewable energy, water purification, flood mitigation and places for recreation, education, creative thinking, health and wellbeing.

Protecting and enhancing this stock of natural capital, which includes our air, land, water, soil, biodiversity, Atlantic Ocean and geological resources is fundamental to a healthy and resilient economy. It supports sectors such as agriculture, forestry, fisheries, tourism, renewables, construction and many other sectors.



In planning for the future, our strategy must embrace the concept of sustainable development as a key principle. It must consider how we can protect, conserve and manage our landscape and its natural, built and cultural assets so that its potential is fully realised for the benefit of all.

Our region has a major opportunity to play a leading role in Ireland's adaptation to climate change through the utilisation of our natural assets and networks. The Northern and Western Region is a natural place that contributes the least amount of CO₂ emissions overall compared to the other regions and it has the highest proportion of carbon sinks, or areas which can remove CO₂ from the atmosphere, such as bogs and large areas of forestry.

REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVE

RPO 5.1

The Assembly will support through CARO and Local Authorities the preparation and implementation of Local Climate Strategies which will, inter alia, address vulnerability to climate risks and provide prioritised actions in accordance with the guiding principles of the National Adaptation Framework.



5.3 Our Landscape

The landscape of the Northern and Western Region is internationally renowned for its Mountain Ranges, dramatic coastline, beaches and inland waterway networks, including the Shannon and Corrib. The region is home to half of the State's National Parks, with many other outstanding assets, including 34 Blue Flag Beaches, Forest Parks, Trails and a growing number of established Greenways and Blueways.

The growth in domestic and overseas visitor numbers to the region's Natural Heritage assets illustrates that there is merit in continuing to develop the potential of these assets while ensuring their intrinsic value is conserved and enhanced.

Ireland signed and ratified the Council of Europe's European Landscape Convention (2000), a treaty that came into effect in 2004. It recognises the importance of all landscapes, and not just exceptional landscapes, as having a crucial bearing on the quality of life and as deserving attention in landscape policy. It established that the general framework for protecting the landscape is the responsibility of the State.

Ireland has since published the National Landscape Strategy for Ireland 2015 – 2025 (Dept. of Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht). It sets out the aim of developing a National Landscape Character Assessment (LCA), which will include guidelines, to be followed by Local Authorities developing Landscape Character Assessments of their local area or at intra local authority level, building on the National Landscape Character Assessment and using the associated Guidelines. It is important that there is a more consistent approach to landscape characterisation and amenity protection measures applied to similar classifications across the region.

REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVE

RPO 5.2

- (a) Protect manage and conserve the quality, character and distinctiveness of our Landscapes and seascapes.
- (b) The Assembly supports co-operation and co-ordination between Local Authorities in determining landscape character along their borders. A targeted review should be undertaken to ensure consistency in classification and policy in adjoining areas of similar character. The NWRA will assist in collaboration and coordination.
- (c) Following the completion of the National Landscape Character Assessment, and any associated statutory Guidelines, the Regional Assembly shall prepare a Regional Landscape Character Assessment to promote improved landscape management and designation.

5.4 Our Natural Heritage

The natural heritage of the region presents significant opportunities that require careful management and conservation of species. It requires a strategic approach to ensure the adequate conservation of habitats where many of our plants and animals live. To succeed in conserving our native species, we need the support of landowners and people who use or visit the land.

Some habitats and species are protected through designation, whether it be a particular area or specified animal. Designation alone, however, will not deliver conservation and protection, it must be accompanied by good management practice and sustainable development practices.

The National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (DCHG) are responsible for the designation of conservation sites in Ireland. A significant area of the region are designated conservation areas, including SACs, SPAs, NHAs or proposed NHAs. It is important that this strategic approach to the management and conservation of our assets is promoted and the benefits to be accrued are harnessed sustainably. These site designations are informed by:

- The Birds Directive (2009/147/EC)
- The Habitats Directive (EU/92/43/EEC)

The region also hosts extensive areas of peatlands, which are of high biodiversity value. This includes a network of raised bogs that present bog restoration potential, which will help Ireland meet its biodiversity targets including targets in the EU Habitats Directive and the National Biodiversity Action Plan. Cutaway peatland has the capacity to develop high biodiversity value habitats with a mosaic of wetlands, heathland, grassland, scrub and woodland. The re-wetting and the development of new wetland habitats also have the potential to reduce Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions from these lands and eventually develop new Carbon sinks, helping Ireland to achieve its GHG emission targets.

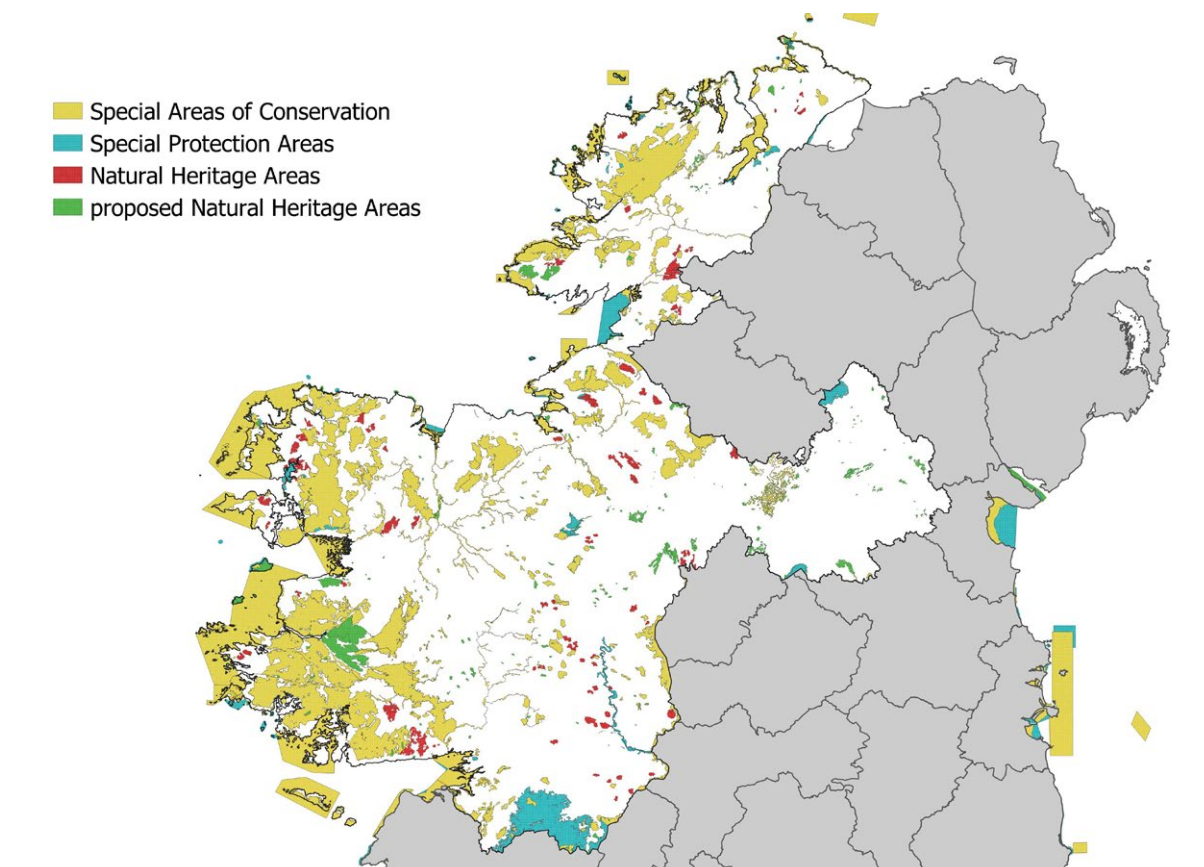




In 2016, the EPA published a report, (Ireland's Environment, An Assessment 2016) which confirms the overall quality of the Country's Natural Environment as 'good' in comparison to most other countries. It also identifies challenges in respect of environmental protection in general and specifically identifies issues within our region, which include air quality, water pollution (including lakes and rivers), and waste pollution.

Locally such issues can have major impacts upon the quality of life of communities and indeed the reputation of the local environment. The environment and our health and wellbeing are inextricably linked and we need to look beyond simply protecting people from threats in their environment to considering how the environment can deliver a much wider range of social, economic and environmental benefits whilst ensuring no net contribution to biodiversity loss.

Figure 53: Protected Sites and Proposed Natural Heritage Areas



5.5 Natural Assets

Our region is host to many of the Country's National Parks, and to some significant sites beyond these Parks. In addition, the region supports a large number of sites designated for nature conservation including 215 Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), 82 Special Protection Areas (SPA), 86 Natural Heritage Areas (NHA), 21 Natural Nature Reserves and 16 Ramsar sites. In addition, there are important stepping stones and ecological corridors which are of importance to wildlife.

There is a diversity of habitats (e.g. woodlands, hedgerows, field boundaries, sand dunes, salt marshes, rivers, streams and associated riparian zones, canals, marine habitats and wetlands) that are not subject to legislative protection although they are of high biodiversity and conservation value and contribute to the concept of "green infrastructure" which can be conserved and utilised for our health and well-being.

There is potential scope to expand the range and remit of our natural assets, and there are some areas within our region which exhibits the characteristics worthy of being considered as potential National Parks/National Recreation Areas. They include: (i) the zone of influence around Benbulbin in North Sligo/North Leitrim, (ii) the area surrounding Lough Arrow and Lough Key in South Sligo/North Roscommon.

REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES

RPO 5.3

The Assembly supports the consideration of the zone of:

- (i) North Sligo/North Leitrim (Benbulbin and its hinterland); and
- (ii) The area surrounding and including Lough Arrow/Lough Key.

as potential National Parks/National Recreation Areas. It supports collaboration in this regard with stakeholders including NPWS, Local Authorities, Dept. of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

RPO 5.4

Encourage the prioritisation of Site-Specific Conservation Objectives (SSCO) for all sites of Conservation Value, designated in EU Directive (i.e. SACs, SPAs) to integrate with the development objectives of this Strategy.





RPO 5.5

Ensure efficient and sustainable use of all our natural resources, including inland waterways, peatlands, and forests in a manner which ensures a healthy society a clean environment and there is no net contribution to biodiversity loss arising from development supported in this strategy. Conserve and protect designated areas and natural heritage area. Conserve and protect European sites and their integrity.

RPO 5.6

Develop awareness and create a greater appreciation of the benefits of our natural heritage, including on the health, wealth and well-being of the region's ecosystem services.

RPO 5.7

Ensure that all plans, projects and activities requiring consent arising from the RSES are subject to the relevant environmental assessment requirements including SEA, EIA and AA as appropriate.



Outside of the National Parks in the region, there is potential to develop additional attractions of scale, building upon a significant number of outstanding natural assets, and existing recreational attractions, which are positioned in all counties across our region. The list below is illustrative of some of the many projects in the region that have the capacity to develop additional visitor offer, and increase footfall.

National Parks:

- Glenveagh National Park, Co. Donegal.
- Connemara National Park, Co. Galway.
- Ballycroy and Nephin, National Park, Co. Mayo.
- Marble Arch Caves UNESCO Global Geopark (Cavan/Fermanagh).

Amenity attractions with growth potential:

- Lough Key Forest Park, Co. Roscommon.
- Glencar Lake and Waterfall, Co. Leitrim.
- Monasteries of North Mayo.
- Moorehall Estate, Carnacon. Co. Mayo.
- Lough Muckno, Co. Monaghan.
- Doe Castle, Creeslough and Errigal Trail, Co. Donegal.
- Dun a Rí Forest Park, Co. Cavan.
- Portumna Forest Park, Co. Galway.
- Killykeen Forest Park, Co. Cavan.

5.6 Cultural Heritage

Our distinctive Cultural Heritage is a key asset that presents a competitive advantage to the region in encouraging economic activity. It has an enviable international reputation arising from the quality and originality of music, theatre, film/video, visual arts, literature, native language, song and dance. This is reinforced through our archaeology, historic buildings and streetscapes, while the considerable infrastructure that has been created to facilitate their enjoyment by the public, such as in libraries, theatres and museums, is a source of employment and enjoyment for many thousands of the region's inhabitants.

National Investment Priorities for cultural heritage and the Gaeltacht are set out in the capital investment plan 'Investing in our Culture, Language and Heritage, 2018 – 2027' which delivers on Project Ireland 2040. The plan includes a commitment to spend €1.2bn over 10 years, which is prioritised in three areas, which are Culture, Heritage and language and the Islands. It is designed with three broad objectives:

1. To greatly enhance cultural participation for all our people;
2. To promote and celebrate Ireland as a centre of cultural excellence, a source of rich natural and built heritage and the home of one of Europe's oldest and richest languages; and
3. To ensure that we reap the economic rewards of our rich resources of cultural creativity.

The protection and enhancement of our culture and heritage are critical in ensuring that our cities, towns, villages and rural areas are attractive and sustainable places for people to live, work and recreate.

Our culture and creativity is a key element in contributing to the region's economic and social development, with arts and culture providing a robust social infrastructure that underpins our sense of well-being. Our heritage plays a major role in creating and sustaining community cohesion, collective well-being, and instilling a deep sense of belonging, whilst our language is fundamental to our identity and our expression of ourselves as a distinct people.

Our region is celebrated for its cultural heritage, influenced by the region holding two of the three largest Gaeltacht Areas in the Country, in Connemara, Mayo and West Donegal where the speaking of the Irish language is most prolific. This presents the region with a unique value proposition that must be protected and conserved through actions such as the development of Language Plans. This is provided for within this strategy and reflects the Governments '20 year Strategy for the Irish Language (2010 – 2030)', with Language Plans for 26 Areas across the country now at various stages of preparation in delivering on this Strategy.



Figure 54: Gaeltacht Language Plan Areas in Counties Donegal, Mayo and Galway
(Source: Údarás na Gaeltachta)

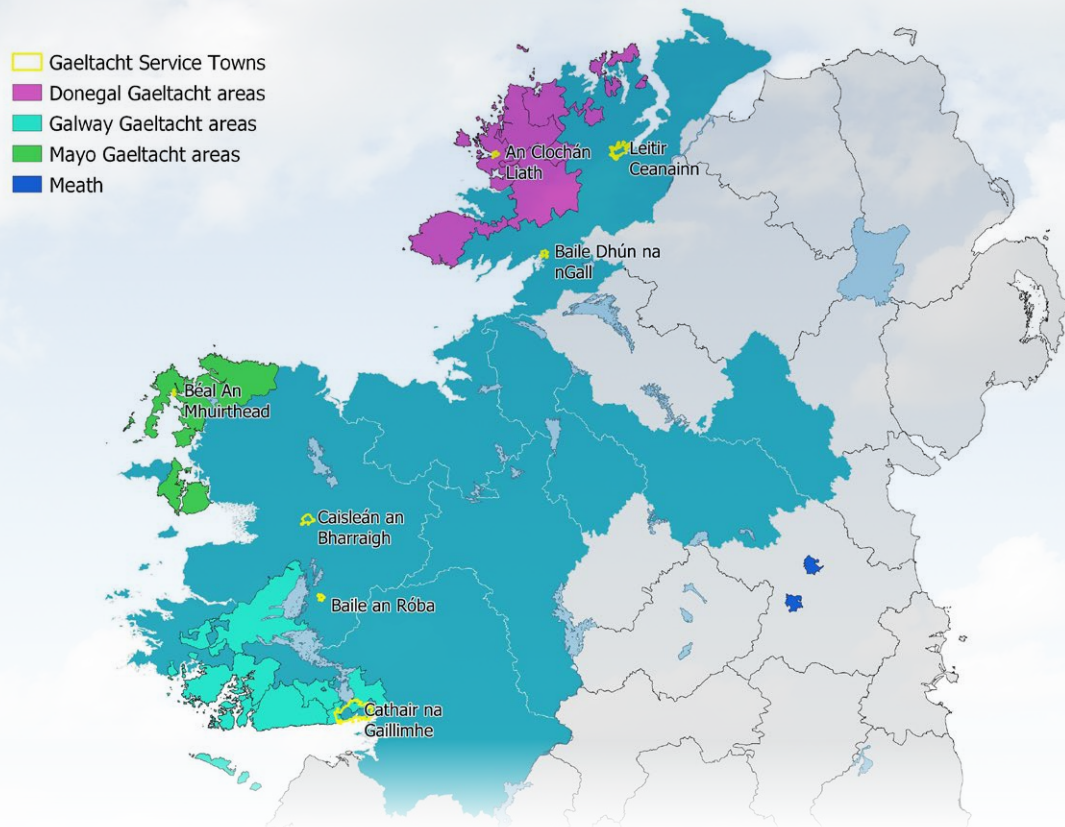


Table 10: Gaeltacht Service Towns

Contae/County	Baile/Town
Dún na nGall/Donegal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Leitir Ceanainn/Letterkenny › An Clochán Liath/Dungloe › Baile Dhún na nGall/Donegal Town
Maigh Eo/Mayo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Béal an Mhuirthead/Belmullet › Baile an Róba/Ballinrobe › Caisleán an Bharraigh/Castlebar
Gaillimh/Galway	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Cathair na Gaillimhe/Galway City

This presents the opportunity across our region to boost the spoken language, both within and outside the Gaeltacht area, and facilitate greater use of the language, through a whole series of interventions in both the community (voluntary) sector and the state sector. It is through the language planning process that support services and facilities will be provided, in a systematic and integrated manner, to the Irish language as the community and family language in

the Gaeltacht. Similar supports will also be provided in areas outside of the Gaeltacht where there exists a strong community support for the Irish language. This will enable the Irish language to present the region with a unique selling point when businesses are attempting to achieve a competitive advantage in the market.



There are seven Gaeltacht Service Towns (see Table 10) within or adjacent to Gaeltachts. They play a significant role in the delivery of public services, leisure, social and commercial amenities to Gaeltacht communities and provide a vital lifeline to them. This status bestows particular recognition to the towns in which services are provided to a Gaeltacht area and require that a language plan be prepared for the town, with the community, the voluntary sector and the public and private sectors all working together to support the Irish language.

REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES

RPO 5.8

Promote, enhance and protect the linguistic, cultural and heritage value of our Gaeltacht Communities. This shall include development and implementation of Language Plans as the key Planning Framework and the development of the Gaeltacht brand as a tool to provide a competitive advantage.

RPO 5.9

Support the provision of low-cost shared workspaces for Cultural and Craft industries, as well as the digital media and communications sectors; Promote the provision of training, education and professional development opportunities across all sectors of employment.



RPO 5.10

Support the provision of adequate broadband capacity that enables the further development of the vibrant film/video and digital media sectors in the region in particular and that facilitates collaboration between cultural sector practitioners - regionally, nationally and internationally.

RPO 5.11

Support the provision and/or upgrade of cultural facilities (e.g. multi-purpose arts centres, theatres, galleries, libraries, museums etc) where the public, and visitors to the region, may enjoy and participate in cultural activities, with particular priority given to the City of Galway, Regional Growth Centres, Key Towns and to Gaeltacht Towns.

RPO 5.12

Support and assist the formulation and implementation of Irish Language Plans through the lead agency Údarás Na Gaeltachta, across the Gaeltacht areas and within Gaeltacht areas and within Gaeltacht service Towns, as defined under the Gaeltacht Act, 2012. All future Development Plans and Local Area Plans shall be consistent with the Irish Language Plans, where applicable.

5.7 Our Built, Architectural and Archaeological Heritage

The region has a rich and varied built heritage that reinforces our sense of identity, contributes to regional landscape character and fosters our sense of place and wellbeing. It includes vernacular buildings, formal architecture (such as elegant country houses and estate buildings), industrial heritage (including old mills and historic bridges), ecclesiastical structures and defining elements of our cultural landscape such as dry-stone walls.

The conservation of our built environment contributes to the retention of a sense of continuity with our history and the attractiveness of our region as a place of choice to live, work and recreate. The Architectural quality of our built environment needs to place emphasis on a holistic approach to quality and sustainable development, having regard to both the environment and urban design.

The Planning and Development Acts provide a mechanism for affording statutory protection to structures of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest. However, not all structures that are of regional significance have been afforded protection under the Act but once protected the owners may be able to seek financial assistance from Government, depending upon the availability of funding programmes. The conservation of our built environment also presents employment opportunities, through training initiatives and employment of skilled and experienced conservation professionals, craftspeople and tradespersons in the repair of the historic built environment.



Where our National Monuments are within state ownership, the OPW has a responsibility to ensure that cultural attractions that are National Monuments continue to be showcased and are maintained and managed appropriately. Fáilte Ireland and the Office of Public Works (OPW) have examined which investment priorities would leverage the potential of National Monuments to benefit Ireland's visitor offer and enhance the experience of all.





The strategic goal in the near and medium-term is to pursue, as a priority, a clustering of National Monument site upgrades within the catchment of our main urban areas and along the Wild Atlantic Way and within the Hidden Heartlands, so as to harness the rich heritage on offer across the region and to conserve our natural heritage. A programme that has been formulated (2016 – 2021) between Fáilte Ireland and the OPW identifies the following Heritage sites for upgrades, facility improvement, access enhancement etc.

- The Ceide Fields, Co. Mayo.
- North Mayo Monasteries, Rosserk, Moyne, Rathfran and Round Tower at Killala.
- Carrowmore, Co. Sligo
- Inis Mor, Aran Islands, Co. Galway.

In addition, the Heritage Council has lead a number of cutting edge initiatives and programmes that invest in the heritage of our region. By way of example, Westport one of three towns that was part of their pilot initiative to invest in Historic Towns and Villages, in collaboration with Fáilte Ireland, thereby maintaining heritage integrity and improving the quality of Westport for residents and tourists. That is a specific project that merits being supported and replicated as an example of best practice.

REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES

RPO 5.13

Protect, enhance and harness the potential of the region's cultural and heritage assets.

RPO 5.14

Support the conservation of the region's National Monuments and built heritage, being structures that are of special architectural, historic, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest that are of Regional Significance or above.

RPO 5.15

The Assembly support a targeted programme of National Monument sites to be developed in a manner that shall enhance the visitor experience to the region and protect the archaeological and architectural integrity and character of such sites. Priority shall be given to potential clusters of sites that are well connected focusing upon supporting the Wild Atlantic Way and the Hidden Heartlands tourism brands.

RPO 5.16

Establish a network of Historic Towns and Villages across the region through a Regional Fora of stakeholders that shall be co-ordinated by the NWRA in collaboration with Local Authorities, the Heritage Council, Fáilte Ireland, the Department of Culture, Heritage and Gaeltacht and other relevant stakeholders. The purpose of the Fora shall be to promote awareness and invest in a regional network of Historic Towns and Villages, thereby maintaining heritage integrity and improving the quality of our historic towns and villages for residents and tourists.

RPO 5.17

Support the adaptation and re-use of heritage buildings and places.

5.8 Our Natural Networks

In recent years, several exemplar Greenway Projects, including Mayo's 42km Great Western Greenway from Westport to Achill, has stimulated the demand for developing a Network of multi-activity recreational trails for locals and visitors alike.

Such facilities will significantly add to the overall recreational offer and present a cultural and socioeconomic dividend, whilst improving the health and well-being of our communities. The success of these networks may best be harnessed by connecting people with places of natural and built heritage, along lakes, canals, railway lines (used, and disused), rivers, forest trails, and scenic routes. In harnessing this potential the importance of these features as ecological stepping stones will be an integral part of their development.



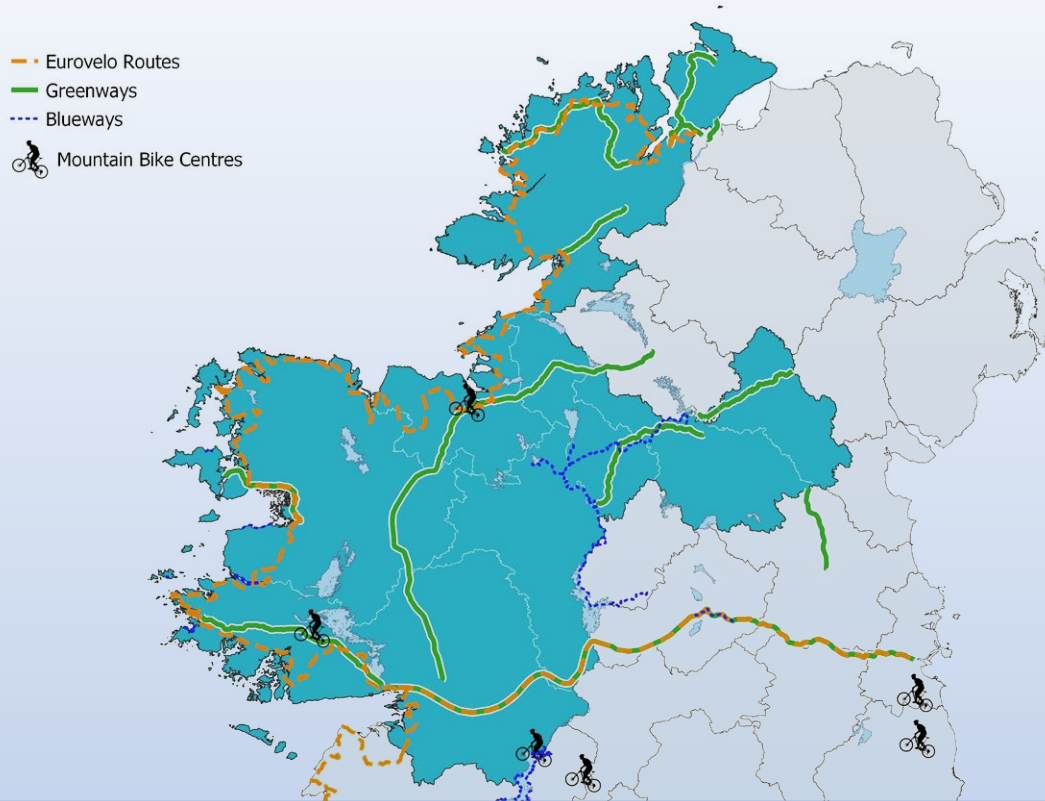
GREENWAYS

A National Greenway Strategy (NGS) has been published by the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (DTTAS). The objective of this Strategy is to assist in the strategic development of nationally and regionally significant Greenways in appropriate locations constructed to an appropriate standard in order to deliver a quality experience for all Greenways users. It also aims to increase the number and geographical spread of Greenways of scale and quality around the country over the next 10 years with a consequent significant increase in the number of people using Greenways as a visitor experience and as a recreational amenity. There is an excellent opportunity now to develop new Greenways in a way which can transform more rural areas around the country, provide a wonderful experience for visitors and locals, and contribute to the health of the region.

The Aim of the 'Strategy for Future Development of National and Regional Greenways' (SFDNRG), published by Dept of Transport, Tourism and Sport, July 2018, is to develop National (at least 100km) and Regional (at least 20km, but preferably 40km or more) trail networks as a unique alternative means for visitors to enjoy rural Ireland, as well as protecting and promoting natural assets.



Figure 55: Our Natural Networks (Greenways and Blueways)



The SFDNRG will provide the framework for the future development of Greenways and enable the best outcomes for state investment in this area. It should be acknowledged that presently there are no dedicated long-distance, or short distance, cycling/greenway routes which link Northern Ireland with the Republic. A Regional and intra-Regional cycleway network would support the expansion of the Western and Northern Region as an attractive destination for tourists, potentially linking and extending several existing Greenway Projects (see Figure 55) that are in operation, or in planning on an All Island basis, which includes the following key projects:

- The Great Western Greenway (Mayo County Council): 42km Westport – Achill. Stage: Operational, Constructed along disused Balfour Railway Line.
- SLNCR (Sligo Leitrim Northern Counties Railway) Greenway.
- Collooney to Athenry Greenway (aka Quiet Man Greenway).
- Boyne Valley to Lakelands (Navan to Kingscourt).
- The Ulster Canal Greenway, (Monaghan County Council, Cavan County Council, Mid-Ulster Borough Council, Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council, Omagh and Fermanagh District Council): 4.2km route open. Work in progress (Phase 2, Smithboro – Middletown, 22km, in progress – Planning Stage).
- North-West Greenway Network (Donegal County Council and Derry County Council): Derry – Bunrana. Stage: At Public Consultation stage (route options). Overall route, 32km via Tooban and Bridgend.
- Letterkenny to Burtonport Greenway, (primarily former rail-line).
- Donegal Town – Ballybofey (along former rail-line).
- Connemara Greenway: 6km of route open, overall route 72km from Galway City to Clifden. Oughterard – Clifden section: Planning Permission granted.
- Cavan and Leitrim Railway Greenway.
- Dublin – Galway National Greenway.
- Eurovelo Routes 1 and 2.

REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES

RPO 5.18

The Regional Assembly shall collaborate with Local Authorities, Fáilte Ireland, Waterways Ireland, DTAS, and other relevant stakeholders in developing an integrated network of Greenways across the region's catchments. To support, and enable the development of sustainable Greenway projects, the NWRA will encourage and promote:

- (a) The advancement and growth of Greenways through several Key National and Regional Greenway Projects, which are high capacity, and which can in the medium/long term be extended and inter-linked across County Boundaries and with Local Greenways, and other cycling/walking infrastructure.
- (b) Prioritisation of Greenways of scale and appropriate standard that have significant potential to deliver an increase in activity tourism to the region and are regularly used by overseas and domestic visitors, and locals, thereby contributing to a healthier society through increased physical activity.
- (c) The appropriate development of local businesses, and start-ups in the vicinity of Greenway Projects.
- (d) The development of Greenways in accordance with an agreed code of practice.
- (e) Collaborative development of Greenways and Blueways, including feasibility and route selection studies to minimise impacts on environmentally sensitive areas.

RPO 5.19

The Assembly supports the further development of Greenways as part of the Outdoor Recreational Plan for Public Lands and Waters in Ireland 2017-2021', as part of an overall improvement of facilities to enhance health and wellbeing across society.

CASE STUDIES

OUR WAY: INTERREG



OUR WAY is an INTERREG project that aims to contribute to conserving, protecting, promoting and developing natural and cultural heritage in using Greenways as sustainable and smart transportation links in rural areas. The NWRA intends to improve coordination among the different key actors; to develop governance systems to manage Greenways; to identify models and good practices for the protection and maintenance of Greenways; to identify financial instruments and funding for Greenways and to promote Greenways and product development.

NATIONAL MOUNTAIN BIKE CENTRE, COOLANEY

National Mountain Biking Centre at Coolaney is currently under construction. When complete it is expected to attract 50,000 visitors annually. If the Mountain Bike Centre is used as a trailhead for the Sligo Greenway, this could benefit all users, as there will be facilities available, including showers allowing for reprieve.





BLUEWAYS

Blueways are natural recreational trails on or alongside our loughs, rivers, canals and coast that provide scenic routes into rural Ireland using multiple outdoor activities to navigate the trails. There are several Blueways established in the region, such as:

- North West Mayo to South Galway: Keem Beach, Old Head, Inishbofin, Killary Fjord and Mannin Bay
- Shannon Blueway: Drumshanbo – Carrick on Shannon – Roosky – Lanesborough.
- Shannon Erne Leitrim: Ballinamore – Ballyconnell - Belturbet.
- Lough Derg Blueway: Portumna – Killaloe/ Scarriff.
- Lough Ree – Lake of Kings.

As well as providing amenity and touring routes, our Blueways provide opportunities for rural development initiatives that sustain rural communities.

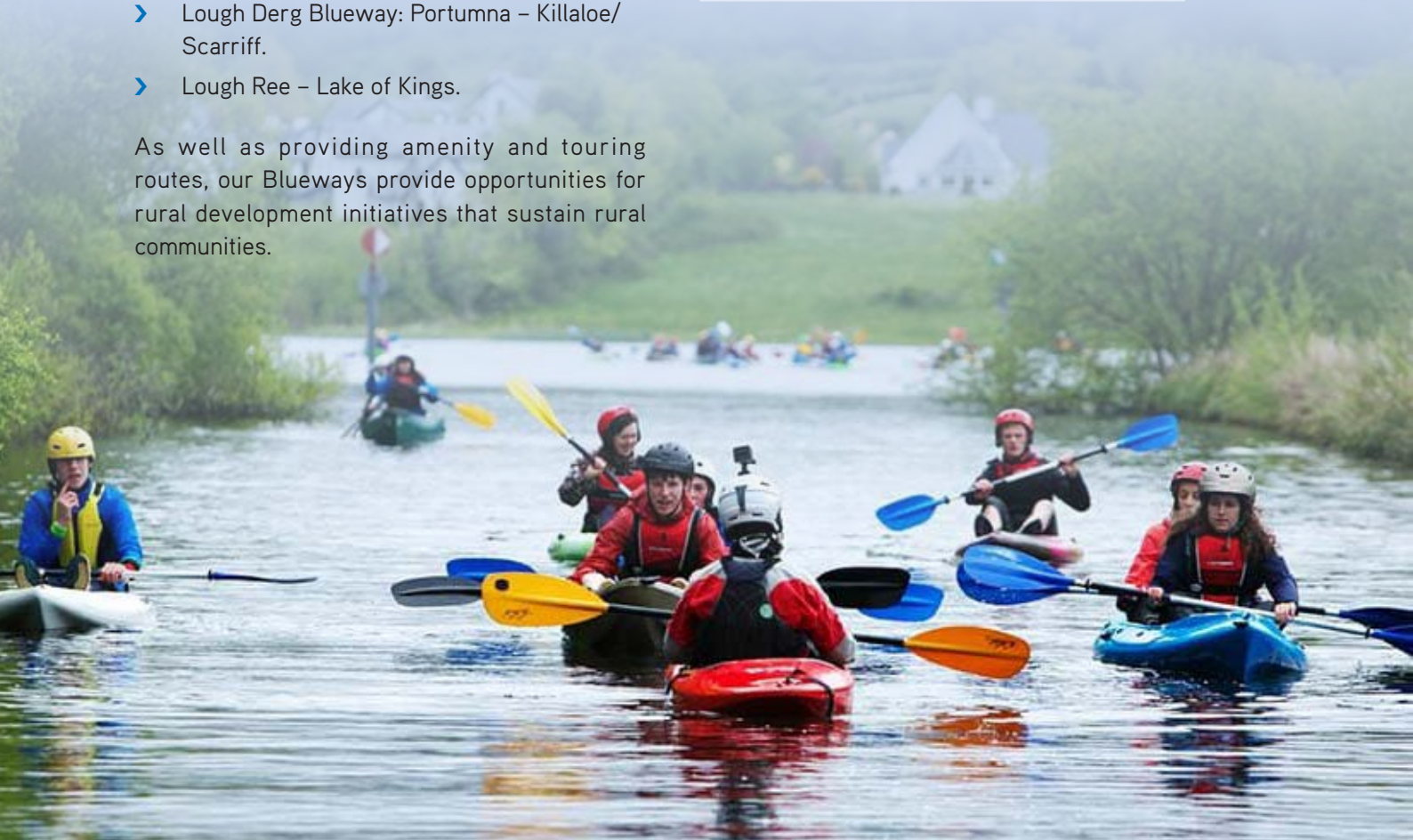
REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES

RPO 5.20

To support and facilitate the continued development of the region’s Blueways along existing waterways and through the reopening of disused waterways, such as the Ulster Canal.

RPO 5.21

To promote, support and enable collaborative networks to realise the economic opportunities presented by Blueways.





OUR BOGS AND PEATWAYS

In addition to our Greenways and Blueways, our region has significant additional assets, through our bogs and peatways. Our Peatlands and wetlands are the second most widespread land cover type in the Northern and Western Region, covering about 25% of the region.

Peatlands and their supporting wetland environs are susceptible to hydrological change as well as water and airborne pollutants (nutrients) that are associated with settlement growth and agricultural intensification. Ammonia deposition presents a potential pathway for impact to peatland habitats, as adverse impacts to peatlands can be driven by changes resulting from activities undertaken at a considerable distance from a site.

The National Peatlands Strategy gives direction to our approach to peatland management including bog conservation and restoration. In addition to the Peatlands Strategy 2015, the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) has also published the National Raised Bog SAC Management Plan (2017-2022) which outlines the approach to be taken specifically for the conservation and management of the raised bog SAC sites.



Our climate is conducive to the widespread development of bogs of different types ranging from the blanket bogs in the west to the raised bogs in the midlands. The biodiversity supported by the different bog types varies considerably and in many cases make them unique within Europe, which presents a unique value proposition for our region. Active bogs also play an important role in combating climate change by removing excess carbon dioxide from the air and placing it into long term storage for thousands of years.

Intact boglands are a habitat, for plants and animals, and many of these sites are currently designated as SACs and SPAs. Bogs are ancient landscapes, that in some areas have remained untouched for thousands of years, and represent a window to our past. Additionally, there are areas not subject to legislative protection although they are of high biodiversity and conservation value and contribute to the concept of 'green infrastructure' that needs to be conserved and utilised for our health and well-being.

There are significant areas of worked out or partially worked out bogs across the region, particularly in Roscommon, Mayo and East Galway.

A number of these sites lie within Bord na Mona's ownership. Whilst the future uses of these sites can be best determined on a site by site basis, some potential uses for worked out bogland are identified in Bord na Mona's publication 'Strategic Framework for the future use of Bogs' as follows:

- Alternative Energy: Wind, Biomass, Solar.
- Agriculture.
- Tourism and Amenity uses.
- Horticulture.
- Forestry.
- Biodiversity, and ecosystem related uses.

A key consideration for our region is to sustainably harness these value propositions to deliver maximum economic, social and environmental benefit to the region and wider afield.

The future growth and infrastructure necessary to harness the potential of our region must be developed in a manner that ensures that the biodiversity of both intact and worked out peatlands is maintained and enhanced. The preparation of feasibility studies will be a key instrument in progressing these propositions. In some cases, this shall require appropriate action to be taken to address illegal dumping of waste material that is often associated with remote and wild areas such as bogs, which can lead to deterioration of these habitats and the unique flora and fauna they support, with obvious social, economic and environmental consequences.



Ireland's necessary transition away from carbon-intensive sources of energy, towards more sustainable, renewable energy sources, will have a significant impact in the Midland counties in particular, including Roscommon. This will have immediate repercussions for the workers in these carbon-intensive sectors, their families, and the wider communities. Government has committed to delivering a whole of Government approach, and to working with local stakeholders, to ensure that a just transition is provided to those impacted by the transition to a low-carbon economy. The NWRA will support the region through the transition.

The Just Transition Fund will initially be targeted at the Midlands and will support retraining and reskilling workers and assist local communities and businesses in the Midlands to adjust to the low carbon transition. The NWRA will engage with local stakeholders, including the Midlands Transition Team, on the application of the funding.

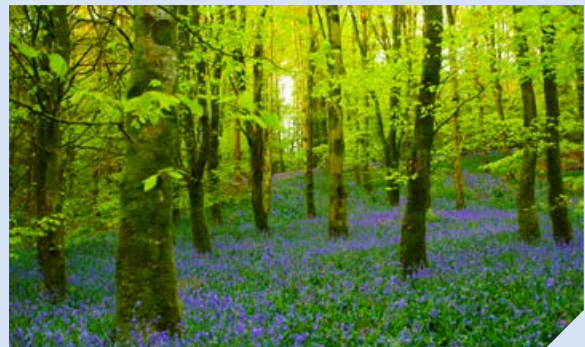


5.9 Forestry and Woodlands

Our forestry is diverse in its make-up and encompasses large areas of native woodland, which are both privately and publicly owned, as well as commercially planted swathes of our countryside. Coniferous forest comprises around 3.7% land cover type in our region, with transitional woodland-scrub making up approx. 4.5%. This is below the national level of 10.7% and substantially below the EU average of 38%.

The region's forests are primarily planted for their economic value but they are also of value in terms of biodiversity and climate change, through the sequestration of carbon in our forests, recreational value and also tourism potential. Ireland's forestry sector is striving to increase forestry cover and whilst there have been forestry practices that have contributed to water quality issues such as the release of suspended solids, acidification of watercourses, flooding, loss and disturbance of riverine habitat, there is growing concern regarding its potential impact upon rural communities.

This includes concern that afforestation is having an impact upon the economic viability of farming practices, as land values increase beyond the economic viability of indigenous farming enterprises; They are seen to be adversely impacting upon community cohesion, with the perception that forestry is resulting in rural communities being isolated and on occasion enclosed by forestry plantations.



These issues are not easily resolved within the land-use planning framework, as afforestation does not require consent under the planning acts. Nonetheless, the issues need to be addressed if Ireland's forest industry is to meet its targets. It is appropriate that the RSES provide a platform for this to be considered, through a Regional Fora/Working Group, thus ensuring that a framework is available to safeguard rural communities, and maximise the potential of forests to add value, through rural jobs, directly and indirectly, and to provide environmental benefits to this region.





REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES

RPO 5.22

To protect and conserve our designated peatlands and bogs for reasons of biodiversity, ecosystem services, carbon sinks, areas of habitat importance, amenity and landscape value.

RPO 5.23

To establish a Regional Fora that shall prepare an audit of worked out bogs and peatlands within our region and to identify strategic sites and propositions of regional value, including but not limited to areas such as renewable energy, tourism, biodiversity, climate mitigation, education, recreation and amenity.



RPO 5.24

A Regional Fora to be established to set out a framework for sustainable afforestation across the region that enables government policy to grow the sector and that addresses community concerns and perceptions.

An aerial photograph of a coastal region, showing a road, fields, and the ocean. Overlaid on the image are several colorful lines (red, cyan, yellow, purple, orange, green, blue, magenta) with circular markers, radiating from a point on the right side of the image. The lines represent data trends or growth trajectories. The background is a blue gradient with a grid pattern.

Growth Ambition 3: **6** Connectivity - Connected Region

6

Growth Ambition 3: Connectivity - Connected Region

6.1 Background

This Growth Ambition focuses on 'Connectivity' and demonstrates how we plan to manage our transport and digital infrastructure over the next 20 years, to support the vision we have for the region in response to our changing environment. The purpose of this chapter is to identify key issues relevant to the provision of transport and digital infrastructure, the key options for addressing those issues, and the subsequent financial implications for the next 20 years.

The provision of prudently managed transport and digital infrastructure is key to delivering our vision. Distinctly in the context of the Northern and Western Region, which has a particularly dispersed settlement pattern and lacks comparable critical mass evident in other parts of the island.

The strategy outlines how we plan to better integrate land-use and transport planning which, in turn, enhances the connectivity of people and places by promoting sustainable transport options for people of all age groups and levels of mobility. It also focuses upon how the digital economy can enable our region, growing exports, innovation, investment and productivity – attained through building new sound partnerships and facilitating mutual connections and collaboration.



6.2 Transport

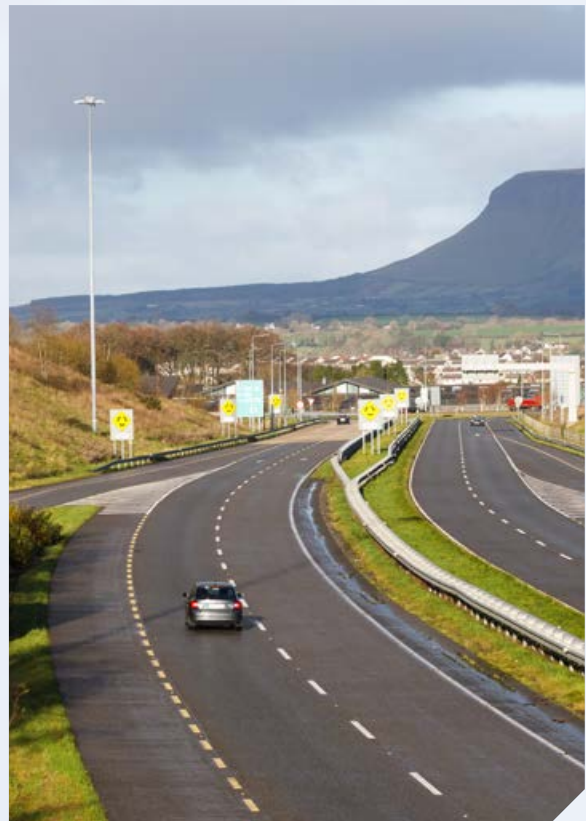
Economic activity is a driver of demand in the regions transport system, whether it be for the local, regional, inter-regional, inter-island or international movement of people and goods. Our landscape and dislocation from cities of scale present challenges of transport connectivity.

People moving to, from or between workplaces, and the movement of commodities and products are important components of the regional economy and how these needs are met has implications for productivity, community wellbeing and will be a catalyst in this strategy being effective.

An attractive, effective transport infrastructure system can also be a key factor in attracting (and retaining) skilled labour to the region, both in terms of the overall amenity of public spaces but also the ease with which people can get around for leisure, education and work purposes. Our demographic profile suggests the attraction and retention of skilled labour to support economic growth will be an important component of the overall strategy to secure the future ambition of this RSES.

This region is highly dependent upon the private car for travel to work and education, with approximately 70% of the population having commuted by private car according to the Census 2016, up from 66% in 2011.

This is reflective of the low level of alternative suitable transport modes available within the region and the dispersed and low level of urbanisation. In addition to this high dependency in road transport travel, there are significant gaps in the quality of the transport network across the region, which require prioritised investment to bring it up to a comparable standard with the rest of the country and this has been highlighted as a key concern throughout the consultation undertaken in developing this Strategy.



KEY CHALLENGES:

1. Maintaining and enhancing accessibility.
2. Managing the Environmental impacts of transport.
3. Providing transport options both within and between our urban/rural centres.
4. Building on this region's freight capacity
5. Utilising our access points to grow domestic and overseas visitors.
6. Integrating NSOs to improve health, well being and work-life balance for our communities.
7. Meeting the transport needs of our peripheral and island communities.
8. Availing of transport opportunities associated with projected population growth.

Transport has a major impact on the quality of life, the level of community interaction, the economic prosperity and the environmental quality of the region. To enable effective regional development, it will be necessary for prioritised investment in roads and environmentally sustainable public transport that will provide for high-quality inter-regional and intra-regional connectivity to places and markets, including international accessibility. The completion of the TEN-T route from Derry, Letterkenny, Sligo to Galway and from Limerick to Cork is an example of how this may be achieved.

International connectivity via port and airport locations within the region and those in the Eastern and Midland and Southern Regions, together with those in Northern Ireland will also be critical to regional development in the Northern and Western Region.

There is also a challenge for the region to navigate the shift towards alternatives to the fossil-fuelled private car and to promote greater efficiency in the use of our transport networks.

As such, it is of fundamental importance that this distribution of activity is planned in a manner which reduces both the impact of the need to travel on people's lives and to enable travel via high-quality transport networks and non-fossil fuelled vehicles, thus contributing to the economic, social and cultural progress of the region and the protection and enhancement of the environment.

SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL

The close integration of transport spatial and economic planning provides the opportunity to deliver improved sustainable transport options for people and reduce dependency on the private car. This includes promoting walking, cycling, public transport, car-sharing and reducing travel time through the use of technology or linked trips. Sustainable travel can have significant benefits for individuals, workplaces and educational facilities in terms of health and wellbeing, costs and time associated with travel. It has the potential to reduce congestion and emissions and to exploit investment in sustainable transport.

A best practice example of where the integration of transport, spatial and economic planning is to be delivered, is the Galway Transport Strategy (GTS). The GTS should be used as a template elsewhere and initially, a similar approach should be adopted as a priority in Sligo, Athlone and Letterkenny (incorporating an overall cross-border Transport Assessment (multi-modal) with Derry).

The GTS provides a framework for the planning and delivery of transport infrastructure and services in the greater Galway City area. It also provides a transport planning policy framework within which other agencies involved in spatial and economic planning, environmental protection, and delivery of other infrastructures such as housing, water and power, can align their investment priorities. The GTS is incorporated into the current suite of Development Plans for both Galway City and Galway County and includes significant investment in both physical infrastructure, public transport. It is a unified plan.



OUR CONNECTED PLACE

The region's use of sustainable modes of transport was 21.3%, which is almost 8% less than the State average in 2016.

Counties Galway and Cavan were the only counties that recorded an increase in the use of sustainable transport modes from 2011 to 2016.



Region-wide there was a decrease of 2.5% from 2011 to 2016 in self-declared commuting less than 30 minutes to work or education – comparing favourably to the State decrease of 4.4%.

Region-wide there was an increase of 14% from 2011 to 2016 in self-declared commuting more than 60 minutes to work or school – comparing favourably to the State increase of 16%.



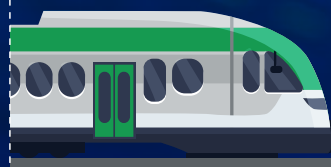
All counties in the region had a reduction in self-declared commuting less than 30 minutes with counties Mayo and Sligo showing the least decreases while County Roscommon and Galway City showing the largest decreases.

+ 60 mins

All counties in the region had an increase in self-declared commuting over 60 minutes with counties Donegal and Mayo showing the least increases while counties Cavan and Monaghan showing the largest increases.

Of the main urban centres in the region, Letterkenny, Cavan and Monaghan are the only towns without a rail service.

Intra-regional public transport is heavily reliant on busses, often using indirect national roads, particularly for north-south travel.



Just over 23% of residents in the NWRA stated they did not have access to broadband in 2016, compared to 18.4% across the State.



THE ROLE OF TRANSPORT

This strategy facilitates the delivery of a more socially inclusive society through the improvement of the built environment through better design, greater integration and accessibility across all societal needs and physical abilities. Transport is one of several key policy areas through which social inclusion can be effectively addressed in this manner. The delivery of co-ordinated and integrated transport, spatial and economic planning, which guides effective future investment decisions, requires clear objectives to be set and guiding principles understood and implemented across the region.

High-level Transport Principles are to:

- Support improved strategic and local connectivity;
- Expand attractive public transport and other alternatives to car transport;
- Recognise the role of the car and cater appropriately for it;
- Reduce congestion; and cater to the demands associated with longer-term population and employment growth, in a sustainable manner.

Given the diverse character of the region and the variation in the range of travel modes available at different places, the region should target a range of outcomes that are tailored to the specific needs of our people and places. The capacity and safety of the region's strategic land, air and water transport networks and how they are managed, enhanced and upgraded are important considerations to be taken, including through the management of travel demand, to ensure their optimal use. Difficult choices will need to be taken for the common good, so that regional, national and international accessibility is enabled.

Thus, the priority core outcomes to be delivered across the region shall include:

- Supporting the achievement of 'compact, smart growth' through the achievement of 'mutual consistency' between land use and transport planning/investment/service provision;
- Promotion of higher development densities in appropriate locations with an associated consideration being given to reduced constraints on building height;
- Strengthening public transport, walking and cycling accessibility/connectivity within Galway City and environs;
- Strengthening public transport connectivity between Galway City, Dublin and the other regional cities with improved services and reliable journey times;
- Strengthening inter-regional connectivity, through the improvement of inter-urban road and rail connectivity, with a particular emphasis on improved connectivity between the largest urban centres and access to ports and airports, for the movement of both people and goods;
- Protecting the capacity of inter-urban road connectivity within and around the largest cities, ports and airports, through effective traffic management and transport demand management;
- Strengthening public transport connectivity between the Assembly Area's city and large towns, and between the large towns, with improved services and reliable journey times;
- Providing public transport infrastructure and services to meet the needs of smaller towns, villages and rural areas; and
- Developing a comprehensive network of safe cycling routes in the three Regional Growth Centres and providing similar facilities in other towns and villages, where appropriate.

6.3 Transport Investment Priorities

Major transport infrastructure investments, identified in the National Development Plan, have an important role in enabling the sustainable and balanced development of the region over the period of the RSES.

High-quality accessibility to international gateways, located both within and outside of the region, for people and internationally traded goods/services is of fundamental importance to economic competitiveness at regional and national levels.

The achievement of this will be contingent on the development and improvement of critical enabling road and rail infrastructure, and public transport services, for the movement of people and goods, as provided and managed through the relevant delivery agencies and service providers, including Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), Irish Rail, local authorities and licensed public transport providers.

The RSES' Transport Investment priorities for the region are presented below, under the following headings:

- International Connectivity
- Road Network
- Rail Network
- Bus Network
- Rural Transport
- Walking and Cycling
- Enabling Plans – Local Transport Plans



INTERNATIONAL CONNECTIVITY

The National Planning Framework includes High-Quality International Connectivity as a National Strategic Outcome and recognises the crucial role that the provision of high-quality international connectivity has for overall international competitiveness and addressing opportunities and challenges from Brexit through investment in our ports and airports, in line with sectoral priorities already defined through National Ports Policy and National Aviation Policy.

The development of the EU TEN-T network is desirable for international connectivity and the integrated performance of the road, rail, maritime and air transport networks. The EU TEN-T network has a dual-layer structure; The comprehensive network provides for connectivity of all regions of the EU, whilst the core network consists of those parts of the comprehensive network that are of the highest strategic importance.

Within this region, the comprehensive network includes all our rail network and our airports at Ireland West Airport Knock, Donegal and Inis Mór. It also includes some of our National Road Network but our maritime ports do not form part of the TEN-T Port network, although the further examination of the feasibility for pursuing the designation of Galway Port and Killybegs Port as EU TEN-T Comprehensive Ports is supported in this RSES. It is acknowledged that there are significant nature conservation concerns, particularly around Galway Port and these must be addressed within the feasibility study and any subsequent proposals to ensure compliance with the EU Habitats Directive (see Growth Ambition 1 - Marine Infrastructure).



AIRPORTS

International air connectivity is provided at Ireland West Airport Knock (IWAK), and Donegal Airport, with other airports being easily accessible at Shannon and Dublin in addition to Derry and Belfast airports in the North of Ireland. Sligo Airport no longer provides passenger flights but continues to operate an important function as the North-West base for the Irish Coast Guard Search and Rescue, with potential to further reimagine its service delivery to the region. The Regional Airports Programme provides financial support towards safety and security projects at Ireland West Airport Knock and Donegal Airport.

The potential of IWAK has been enhanced by the approval of a Strategic Development Zone (SDZ) abutting the airport, which is located along the Atlantic Economic Corridor. The SDZ provides the opportunity to expand as a key employment centre and industrial hub for a large hinterland, encompassing East Mayo, North Galway, Leitrim, Sligo, and North Roscommon. It shall be informed by the Health and Safety Zone for the Airport and shall necessitate the provision of a range of infrastructure services to enable its future development.

REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVE

RPO 6.1

Support the development of the SDZ at IWAK to make it attractive for aviation-related industries to be created and prosper.

SEA PORTS

Ireland's port and shipping services play an important role as enablers of economic growth. The National Ports Policy 2013, reference three Ports of Regional Significance within the region, namely, Galway, Sligo and Killybegs.

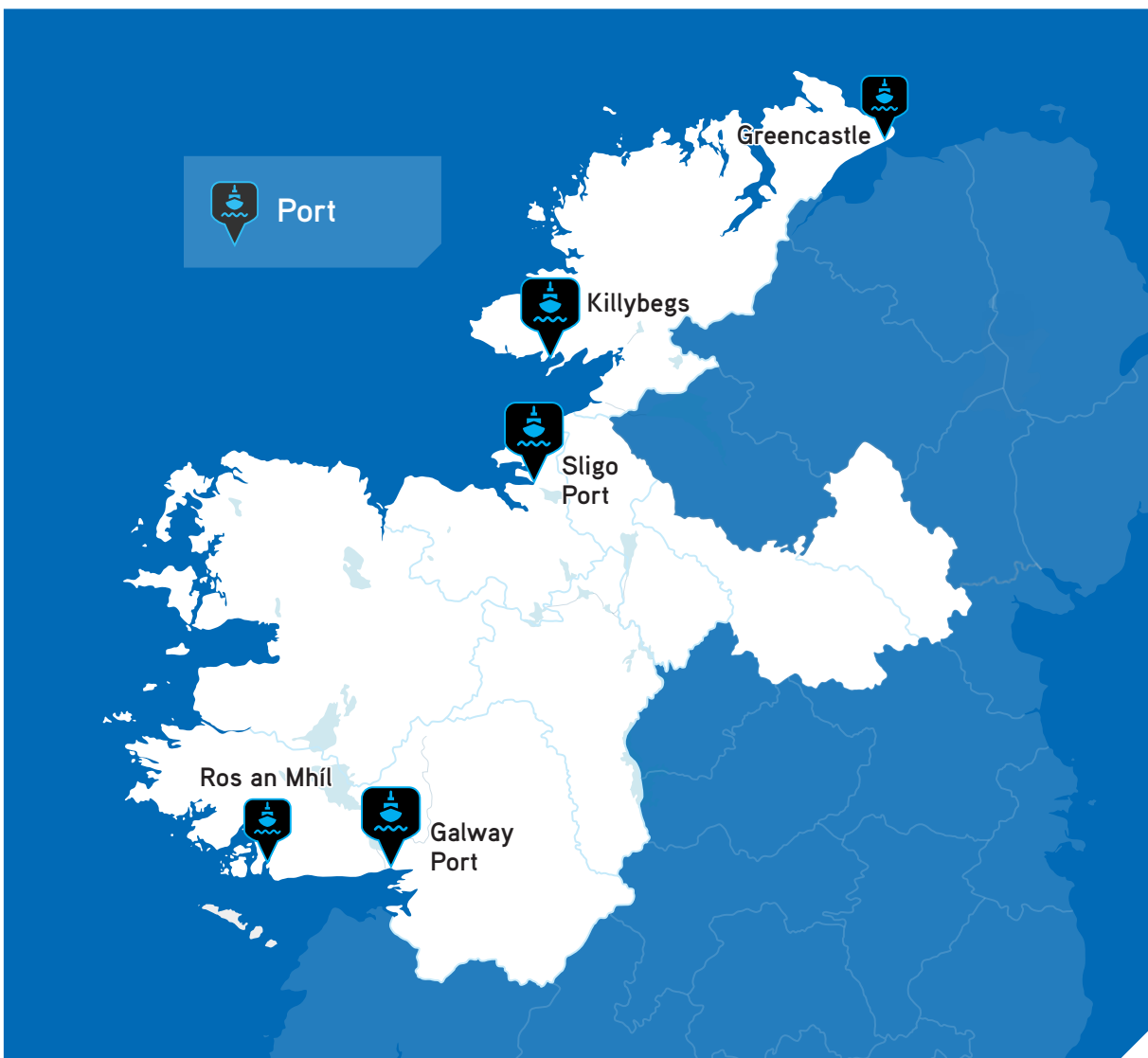
Galway Harbour is a bulk port which caters primarily for liquid-bulk products and it is an important strategic regional hub for petroleum importation, storage and distribution and it serves the expanding tourism industry.

Killybegs is Ireland's leading fishing port, accounting for over one-third of all fish landings in the country and services other commercial activity associated with the oil and gas industry, the tourism industry and the on-shore renewable energy industry.

The significance of Sligo Port in national terms may be quite low but it remains important in the regional and local economy, supporting local industry and providing an import/export transportation facility. The primary cargoes shipped to Sligo Port are coal, slack, timber and fish meal, with metal scrap being the main export.

Although Ros An Mhíl is not identified in the National Ports Policy 2013 as a Port of Regional Significance, it is designated as one of the country's six Major Fishery Harbour Centres and it is an important ferry port for passengers and goods for the Árann Islands. Therefore, it is another of the Key Ports for the region, which are all supported by a range of ports, harbours and piers that play an important function at a county and local level.

Figure 56: Sea Ports



Greencastle, like Ros An Mhíl, is one of the country's top ten ports for fish landings, is an important ferry port to Northern Ireland, and is home to BIM's National Fishery College. It also provides cruise liners with a safe and accessible location for berthage that provides access to the North West Region, including north Donegal and the North West City Region (Letterkenny/Derry/Strabane).

Foyle Port in Derry, lies at the heart of the North West City Region and is a port of regional significance for the North West of Ireland, however, it operates independently of Government. Foyle Port is by far the largest cargo port serving the region, handling over €1 billion worth of commodities annually. It also serves the rapidly expanding international cruise sector, primarily through Greencastle in Co. Donegal and Lisahally in Co. Derry and operates a marina near Derry city centre which provides a hub for water sports activity within the North West City Region as well as a regional base for independent marine tourism.

In terms of our port facilities, National Ports Policy and the national hierarchy or tiering of ports recognise the long-term international trend in ports and shipping towards increased consolidation of resources to achieve optimum efficiencies of scale. This has knock-on effects in terms of vessel size, the depths of water required at ports and the type and scale of port hinterland transport connections. National Ports Policy seeks to ensure that the strategic development requirements of ports and smaller harbours are addressed to ensure their effective growth and sustainable development at a national and regional level.

Ports across Western Europe are introducing data and insight-driven technology, sensors and the IoT in a shift to becoming Smart Ports. To remain competitive and efficient, it is important that our ports look to adopt new technologies in the transition towards becoming smart ports. Smart Ports provide opportunities for port authorities to reduce costs, operate more efficiently and maximise resources and space. Smart Ports can help automate processes and provide solutions to many of the challenges that ports face such as compliance, growth in size, traffic and Brexit. The introduction of technology means that the threat to cybersecurity is always a risk. One of the key decisions for ports is deciding which system and technology to introduce.

In deciding which systems to use, port authorities must evaluate both their own needs but also the needs of stakeholders such as customs and the transport logistics supply chain.

The town/city and surrounding hinterland in which the port lies is just as important as the infrastructure and facilities in the port. The surrounding region must have a suitable road network and services to accommodate increased traffic. Increasing the size of a port can bring significant economic opportunities to the surrounding hinterland but port authorities need to communicate with and consult with businesses and citizens in the area in the development of the port.

REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES

RPO 6.2

Support, enhance and enable investment in the development and diversification of our network of key Airports and Seaports/ Harbours, providing them with adequate and efficient capacity and ensuring they have high-quality sustainable transport connectivity, including road, rail, cycling and pedestrian infrastructure, as appropriate and subject to environmental considerations.

RPO 6.3

Support the development and the protection of the fisheries harbours in the context of Brexit and its effect on waters available for Irish trawlers to fish.

RPO 6.4

Support the development of utilisation of data and insight-driven technology, sensors and the IoT in our airports, seaports/harbours in their transition towards becoming Smart Ports.

ROAD NETWORK

The quality of the national road network and connectivity to it, has been substantially improved over the last two decades, with many large-scale road schemes, but a lot more needs to be done.

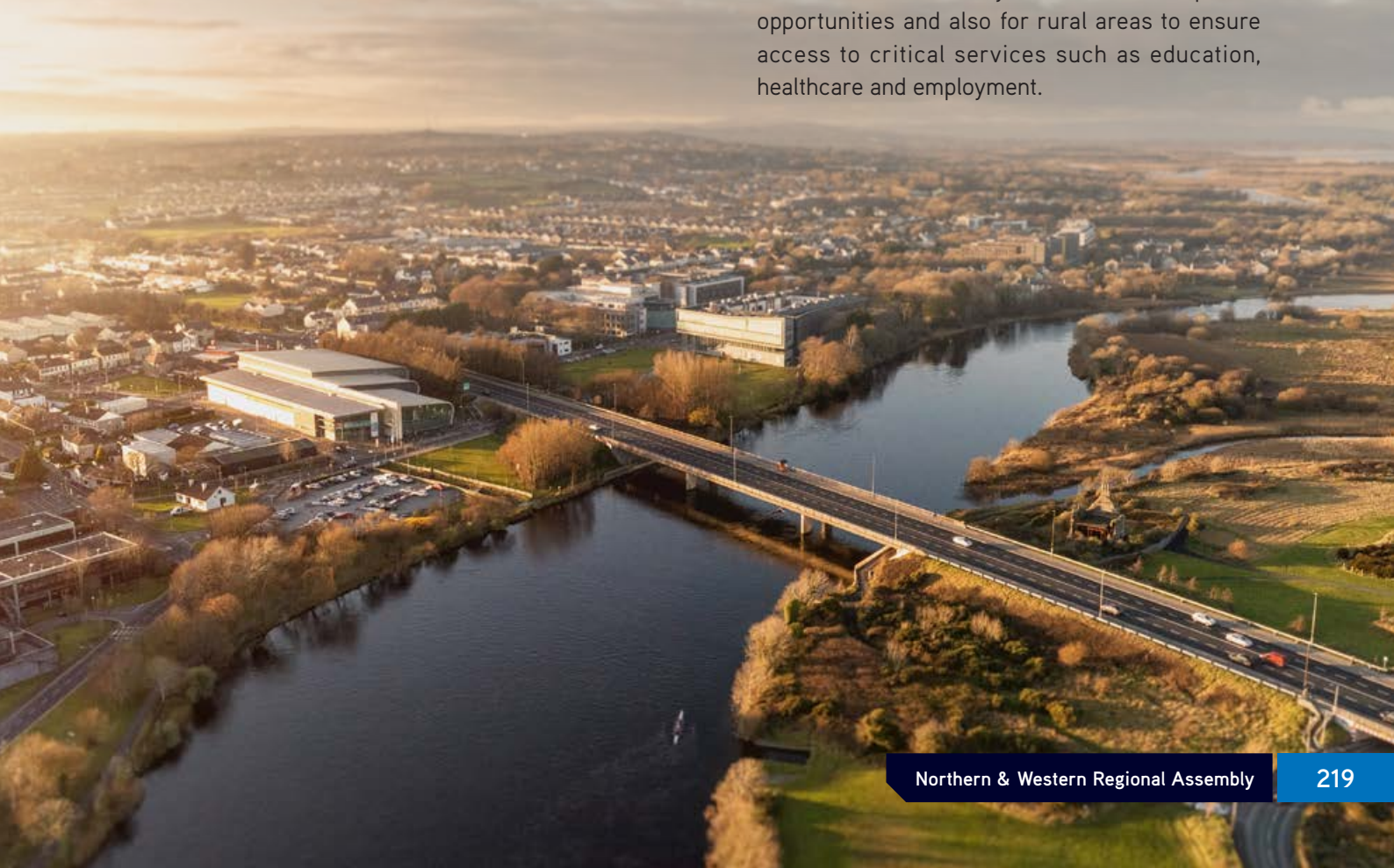
Both the National Planning Framework and the National Development Plan strongly acknowledge that the accessibility from the Northern and Western region of Ireland and between centres of scale separate from Dublin will need to be significantly improved, focused on cities and larger regionally distributed centres and key east-west and north-south routes. Better accessibility will enable improved road safety and unrealised potential to be activated as well as better preparing for potential impacts from Brexit.

The national road network is a critical enabler in facilitating an island-wide sustainable national transport system. A number of the more strategic routes also form part of the EU TEN-T comprehensive network, providing essential connectivity to regions of the EU. Such high-value assets and amenities need to be protected and their use enhanced for the region and also the country as a whole.

This is necessary to support economic and community interaction across a range of sectors in the region and beyond, including providing regional connectivity, addressing peripherality, empowering rural communities and facilitating lifeline links to critical services such as education, healthcare, employment and enterprise.

Improving and maintaining the assets of all national roads is critical and the efficiency, capacity and safety of the existing national road network within the region must be maintained, including the requirement to safeguard the strategic links into urban centres identified as key economic drivers in the region.

The accessibility of our region also depends upon appropriate management and investment in the supporting regional and local roads. They include strategic road improvement projects mainly in urban areas necessary to unlock development opportunities and also for rural areas to ensure access to critical services such as education, healthcare and employment.





Therefore, it is not intended to establish an exhaustive list of schemes for development over the period of the RSES especially concerning maintenance and management of the region's roads network. Instead, it is intended that road relevant legislation and guidelines and in accordance with the objectives and priorities outlined in this strategy. The priorities of the RSES takes account of the current stage that the schemes have been advanced to date.

Furthermore, it is acknowledged that local authorities are planning to progress a wide range of regional and local roads projects across the region and these should be prioritised in accordance with their respective settlement strategies and road safety considerations.

REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES – NATIONAL ROADS

All these projects are integrated with the targeted development of the major urban centres in the region:

RPO 6.5

The capacity and safety of the region's land transport networks will be managed and enhanced to ensure their optimal use, thus giving effect to National Strategic Outcome No.2 and maintaining the strategic capacity and safety of the national roads network including planning for future capacity enhancements.

RPO 6.6

In accordance with National Development Plan investment commitments to bring the following schemes through planning/design/construction, the following projects shall be delivered to an appropriate level of service in the short term and in any case by 2027 having regard to the standard in the NPF of an average inter-urban speed of 90KPH:

- › A5 Road Development
- › N4 Collooney to Castlebaldwin
- › N5 Ballaghaderreen to Scramogue and Turlough to Westport
- › N6 Galway City Ring Road
- › N56 Dungloe to Glenties and Mountcharles to Inver
- › N59 Moycullen Bypass.

RPO 6.7

In accordance with National Development Plan investment commitments to progress the following schemes through pre-appraisal and early planning, the following projects shall be progressed through pre-appraisal and early planning in the short term and shall thereafter proceed to construction and be delivered to an appropriate level of service within the lifetime of the RSES:

- › N2 Clontibret to the Border connecting to the A5
- › N2 Ardee to south of Castleblaney
- › N3 Virginia Bypass
- › N4 Carrick on Shannon to Dromod
- › N13 Ballybofey Stranorlar Bypass
- › N13/N14/N56 Letterkenny Bypass and Dual Carriageway to Manorcunningham
- › N14 Manorcunningham to Lifford
- › N17 Knock to Collooney.

RPO 6.8

The delivery of the following projects shall be pursued, in consultation with and subject to the agreement of TII, through pre-appraisal, early planning and to construction as priority projects to be delivered to an appropriate level of service in the medium-term.

- › N3 North of Kells to Enniskillen, via Cavan and the A509 in Fermanagh
- › N5/N26/N58 Mount Falcon to Swinford, Castlebar East to Bohola Project
- › N13 Manor Cunningham to Bridgend/Derry
- › N13 Stranorlar to Letterkenny
- › N15 Sligo to Bundoran
- › N15 Stranorlar to Lifford
- › N16 Sligo to Blacklion
- › N53 Dundalk to N2 at Carrickmacross
- › N54/A3 Cavan to Monaghan Town
- › N55 Cavan Town to Athlone
- › N56 Inver to Killybegs
- › N59 Upgrade (including the N59 Oughterard Bypass and the N59 Clifden to Oughterard Scheme)
- › N61 Athlone to Boyle improvement
- › N63 Longford to M17 at Annagh (Junction 18).

**REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES
– REGIONAL AND LOCAL ROADS****RPO 6.9**

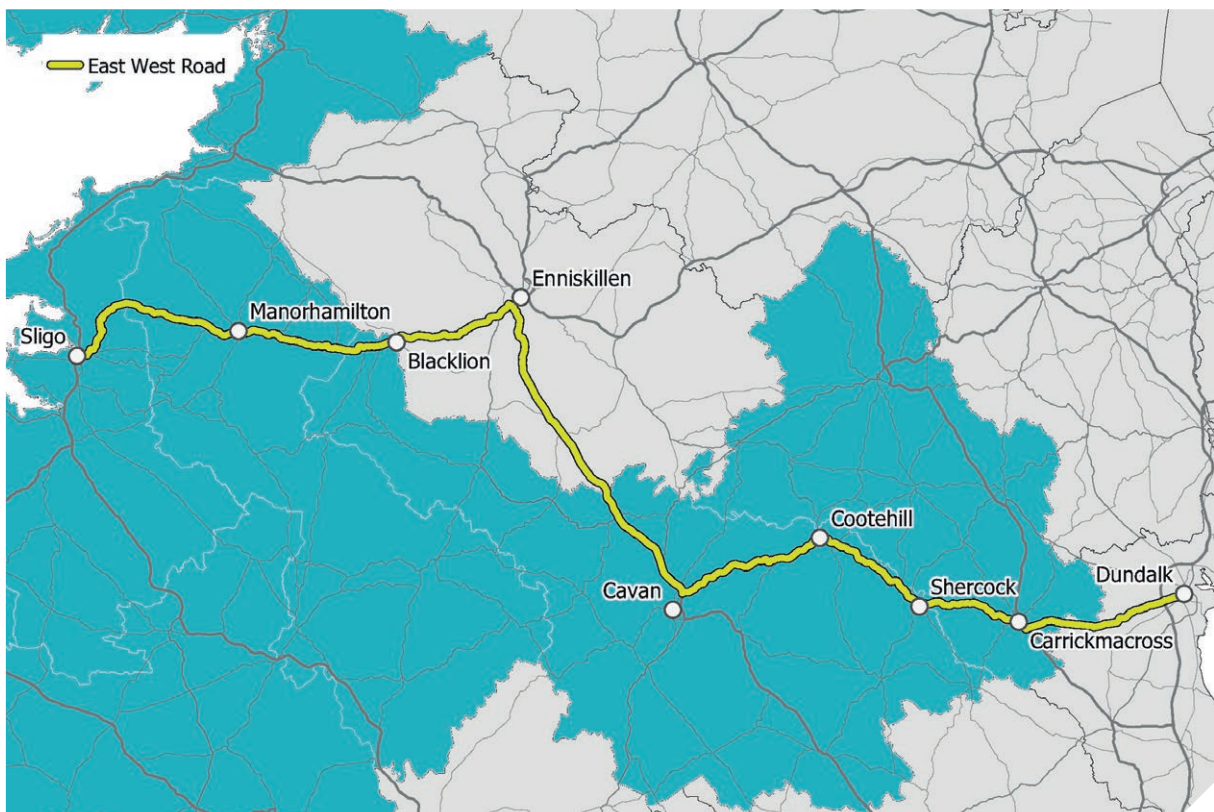
The following regional and local roads shall be progressed to an appropriate level of service in the short-term and in any case by 2027:

- › Garavogue Bridge Scheme, Sligo
- › Sligo Western Distributor Road.

RPO 6.10

The East-West (Dundalk to Sligo) Road will be pursued incrementally in the short and medium term, to be delivered to an appropriate level of service (Dundalk - Carrickmacross - Shercock - Cootehill - Cavan - Enniskillen - Blacklion).

Figure 57: East / West Dundalk to Sligo Road



RAIL NETWORK

Intercity rail services play a key role in offering sustainable travel alternatives for longer distance trips, providing improved interregional connectivity. Related to this, there is scope for further improvements to be made to existing rail services, connecting the Galway, Castlebar/Ballina and Sligo lines to Dublin and the rest of the Irish rail network.

This should be considered in relation to increased service frequencies, travel time reductions and better integration with local transport services. This will be assisted with the delivery of the new National Train Control Centre and through the utilisation of smart technology. Track improvements have to form part of the overall project.

Many gaps exist within the region's rail network and the National Development Plan 2018-2027 confirms that the Western Rail Corridor Phase 2 from Athenry to Tuam and phase 3 to Claremorris could increase passenger, tourist and commercial use.

The Western Rail Corridor is of strategic importance as it represents a piece of key enabling and sustainable transport infrastructure for the region that presents an opportunity to effect 'transformational change' in the realisation of the Atlantic Economic Corridor. It can link the economies of three major centres in this part of the region (Limerick, Galway and Sligo) and IWAK SDZ. It also offers a sustainable alternative to car travel and advancing Ireland's sustainable development goals.

In line with the National Development Plan, an independent review will be undertaken immediately and if the review concludes that the corridor should be reopened, and if that is approved by Government, the project should be prioritised during this plan period. Furthermore, the feasibility of providing a rail service to the North West City Region merits investigation.

REGGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES

RPO 6.11

To seek commencement and completion of the review of the Western Rail Corridor project as a priority for passenger and freight transport.

RPO 6.12

Promote the upgrade of the capacity of the Athlone - Athenry - Galway rail line, including the provision of dual tracks and support provision of increased service stops between Athlone and Galway.



RPO 6.13

(a) It shall be an objective to deliver the Athenry - Tuam - Claremorris - Sligo Rail to an appropriate level of service and to a standard capable of facilitating passenger and freight transport.

(b) It shall be an objective to progress through pre-appraisal and early planning the extension of the railway from Athenry - Tuam - Claremorris - Sligo.

RPO 6.15

Promote enhancement of the capacity of the Sligo to Dublin rail line.

RPO 6.16

Investigate the feasibility of extending the rail network to the North West City region from Sligo and Dublin.

RPO 6.14

Support provision of Smarter Travel infrastructure.

RPO 6.17

Support the development of a Strategy for the electrification of the rail network.

Figure 58: Rail Network



BUS NETWORK

Bus services provide the backbone of the regional public transport system, in particular for those without access to the private car.

Investment in these services will be focused on improving connectivity between regional settlements, including Galway City and Dublin, and enhancing the reliability and the level of service within and between key settlements. Within the Galway City Area, investment in bus infrastructure and services will be delivered through Bus Connects and the relevant parts of the GTS.

Work is ongoing on transitioning buses to alternative fuels, with a commitment in the NDP to stop purchasing diesel-only buses for the urban bus fleet as well as ongoing Low Emission Bus Trials which were launched at the end of 2018. The 'greening of buses' trial aims to help further inform purchasing decisions for new buses over the coming years.



REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES

RPO 6.18

Utilise smart technology to provide for enhanced service experience for customers.

RPO 6.19

Reduce dependency on fossil-fuel powered vehicles.

RPO 6.20

Undertake network reviews for city, regional centres and support towns across the region, to provide local bus services.

RPO 6.21

Review bus services within and between settlements, including the rural transport programme, to provide for the enhanced and more connected provision of public transport service.

RPO 6.22

Provide new interchange facilities and enhanced bus waiting facilities together with enhanced passenger information, utilising smart technology in appropriate circumstances.

RURAL TRANSPORT

The NTA supports rural transport services through the Local Link Rural Transport Programme Strategic Plan 2018-2022. The key priorities of this programme continue to be directed at addressing rural social exclusion and the integration of rural transport services with other public transport services. The programme mission statement is 'to provide a quality nationwide community based public transport system in rural Ireland which respond to local needs'.

The services provided under the programme are therefore intended to fulfil a primarily social function, in meeting the needs of communities outside of defined settlements. In addition to public transport services in rural areas provided by State and commercial transport operators, the NTA provides rural public transport services through the Local Link Rural Transport Programme Strategic Plan 2018-2022.

REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES

RPO 6.23

To provide sustainable travel which will be supported by providing walking and cycling facilities (including Greenway and Blueway projects) as a priority across the region.

RPO 6.24

Support Cross-border sustainable transport, including but not limited to the delivery of the following:

- North-West Multi-modal Mobility Hub
- North-West Greenway
- Ulster Canal Greenway.

RPO 6.25

In addition to the foregoing, specific transport network supports shall be provided for the Islands that shall provide for safe access by sea and include but shall not be limited to the following:

- (a) Improved pier infrastructure on Inis Oír and Inis Meáin in the Aran Islands and at Machaire Rabhartaigh.
- (b) New passenger ferry vessel for Oileán Thoraí.



WALKING AND CYCLING

Facilitating modal shift to more sustainable transport options, including walking and cycling is a key element in promoting healthier lifestyles, better traffic management and assisting in mitigating climate change.

It also provides for enhanced economic development opportunities, especially within the context of Greenways and Tourism development. The expansion of shared-bike schemes can make a positive contribution to sustainable transport and mobility, particularly within the Galway Metropolitan Area, Regional Growth Centres and Key Towns.



REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES

RPO 6.26

The walking and cycling offer within the region shall be improved to encourage more people to walk and cycle, through:

- (a) Preparation and implementation of Local Transport Plans for Galway Metropolitan Area, Regional Growth Centres and Key Towns, which shall encourage a travel mode shift from private vehicular use towards sustainable travel modes of walking, cycling and use of public transport.
- (b) Safe walking and cycle infrastructure shall be provided in urban and rural areas, the design shall be informed by published design manuals, included the Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (DMURS) and the NTA Cycle Manual.
- (c) Development of a network of Greenways.



ENABLING PLANS – LOCAL TRANSPORT PLANS (LTP)

Local Transport Plans (LTP) will be prepared for the Regional Growth Centres and Key Towns, based on the Area Based Transport Assessment (ABTA) guidance produced by NTA and TII. It will support the National Planning Framework objective of compact smart growth and sustainable mobility.



LTPs will be based on a clear set of objectives and will include the transport priorities for each settlement in terms of public transport infrastructure and services; cycle investment; improvements to the pedestrian environment; and road enhancements. The priorities shall be informed by the scale and function of settlements and designed accordingly.

THE ROLE OF TRANSPORT IN ENABLING ACCESS FOR ALL

The planning process allows facilitation and delivery of a more socially inclusive society through better design, greater integration and accessibility across all societal needs and disabilities. Transport is one of several key policy areas through which social inclusion can be effectively addressed. Transport policies and transport investments will also be developed to assist the greatest number of people with mobility, sensory and cognitive impairments in the shortest possible time with a particular focus on meeting the needs and opportunities of an ageing population.

The LTPs shall:

- Maximise the opportunities for the integration of land use and transport planning;
- Assess the existing traffic, transport and movement conditions within the Plan area and in its wider context;
- Plan for the efficient movement of people, goods and services within, to and from the Plan area;
- Identify the extent to which estimated transport demand associated with local development objectives can be supported and managed based on existing transport assets; and
- Identify the transport interventions required within the Plan area and in the wider context, to effectively accommodate the anticipated increase in demand.

The Area Based Transport Assessment (ABTA) guidance note, which was prepared jointly by the NTA and TII sets out a step by step methodology for the assessment and development of local transport policy and interventions. The ABTA process can be used to assess transport requirements at different spatial levels, including the development of Local Transport Plans and it is available on the NTA and TII website:



VIEW PDF AT:

<https://www.nwra.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/abta-advice-note.pdf>

REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES

RPO 6.27

(a) The Assembly supports the collaborative preparation of Local Transport Plans led by local authorities in conjunction with the NTA and other stakeholders, based on Area Based Transport Assessment (ABTA) guidance and alignment with environmental policy, for Athlone, Letterkenny, Sligo Town, Cavan Town, Monaghan Town, Castlebar, Roscommon Town, Ballinasloe, Carrickon Shannon, Donegal Town, Tuam, Ballina and other areas as may be determined. The LTP will inform the urban area plans, development plans, local area plans and other planning framework documents.

(b) Local Transport Plans (LTP) will represent the lowest tier of the NPF's framework for the integration of land use and transport planning and the achievement of the NPF's objective of 'compact smart growth'. They will be subject to further transportation and environmental assessment at local level as appropriate based on guidance available and alignment with environmental policy.

(c) LTPs will be based on a clear set of objectives and the most recent demographic and travel information taking into account the policies and objectives of the local authorities, insofar as they align with those of National and Regional Policy.

(d) Local Link Offices (Transport Coordination Units) will be consulted in the development of LTPs.

RPO 6.28

Policies, objectives and measures which emerge from Local Transport Plans shall be incorporated into Development Plans, Local Area Plans, Strategic Development Zone Planning Schemes. Urban Area Plans and other relevant planning framework documents.



RPO 6.29

The management of space in town and village centres should deliver a high level of priority and permeability for walking, cycling and public transport modes to create accessible, attractive, vibrant and safe, places to work, live, shop and engage in community life.

RPO 6.30

Planning at the local level should promote walking, cycling and public transport by maximising the number of people living within walking and cycling distance of their neighbourhood or district centres, public transport services and other services at the local level such as schools.

RPO 6.31

New development areas should be permeable for walking and cycling and the retrospective implementation of walking and cycling facilities should be undertaken where practicable in existing neighbourhoods, to give a competitive advantage to these modes. Prioritisation should be given to schools and areas of high employment density.

RPO 6.32

Invest in transport networks and services in the region that are socially inclusive and provide a quality of service, connectivity and facilities to meet all societal needs, disabilities (including mobility, sensory and cognitive impairments) and meet the needs and opportunities of an ageing population.



ELECTRIC VEHICLES (EVS)

It is acknowledged that electric vehicles have a shorter range than comparable petrol/diesel vehicles at present. Currently, the electric vehicle charge infrastructure in some urban areas may be sufficient to satisfy existing demand but this is not the experience in many parts of the region and the lack of charging infrastructure can be seen as a major barrier to greater use of electric vehicles. As the number of electric vehicles is projected to grow very quickly in line with experience in other European urban areas, the need to plan for the future demand is key to this strategy. Whilst there is a need for charging infrastructure which is accessible to the public, overnight recharging at home and in the workplace should be provided for.

REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES

RPO 6.33

Reduce dependency on the fossil-fuel powered vehicles and have regard to the National Policy Framework for Alternative Fuels Infrastructure for Transport.

RPO 6.34

Promote deployment of targeted, convenient and safe recharging infrastructure across the region to meet the changing needs of the electric vehicle with particular emphasis in public parking areas and employment locations.



6.4 Digital Infrastructure – Delivering a Smart Region

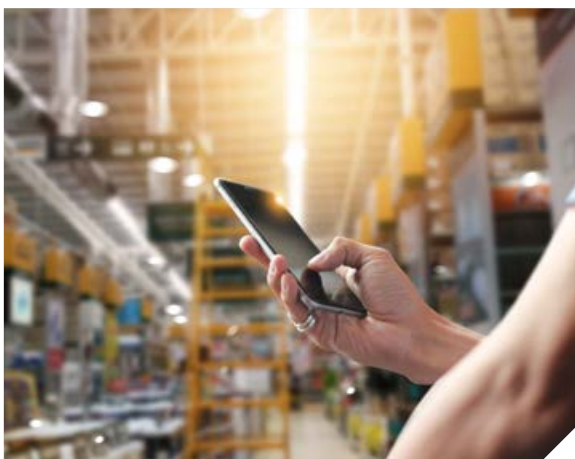
To achieve the ambitions of our region requires a strong and prosperous regional economy that embraces the overwhelming digital trends underway globally. We cannot fully realise any of our ambitions without integrating innovative digital technology into our way of life.

To make these new technologies work better for all, our RSES will need to ensure that policies and systems are in place that can help people transition to a world much more digitally connected. This has significant economic and spatial implications and if not considered strategically could exacerbate current challenges particularly in the more rural areas of the region.

The concept of Smart Region is an extension and the next phase in the development of a Smart City model, which recognises that, for the region to achieve our smart potential future, we need to consider the opportunities, benefits and challenges that smart technologies can offer beyond the traditional applications in a mostly urban context. A Smart Region is a large area, of mixed urban and non-urban use, where smart technologies have been deployed to benefit the economic growth, quality of life and wellbeing of citizens in the territory.

Due to the geography and connectivity within the northern and western region, it is imperative to enable a wholesale smart strategy for all and to take innovations beyond the urban areas, facilitate larger distribution of knowledge and innovation, and cater for the digital enhancement of our communities. A failure to implement a Smart Strategy will exacerbate digital inequality and increase exclusivity investment in innovation, infrastructure and networks is a key enabler to achieve all Ambitions in our Growth Framework.

In general terms, the aim of this Growth Ambition is to produce a high-tech intensive and advanced approach that connects people, information, governance and policies using new and existing technologies to create an efficient, clean, sustainable, eco-friendly, competitive and innovative region with an enhanced quality of life. Focusing not just on intra-connectivity but urban-rural and encouraging policy alignment that enables it.



DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Ireland's communications network is responsible for saving lives, encouraging economic growth as well as providing citizens with access to work, entertainment and social media. Staying connected and competitive in a globalised society is key to economic success. Ireland positions itself as the home of many of the world's leading technology companies and is at the heart of ICT in Europe. However, there is an imbalance in the access to digital services available to the citizens of Ireland versus that available to business. Ireland currently sits in eighth position in the European Commission's Digital Economy and Society Index, which measures connectivity, human capital, use of Internet, integration of digital technology and digital public services.

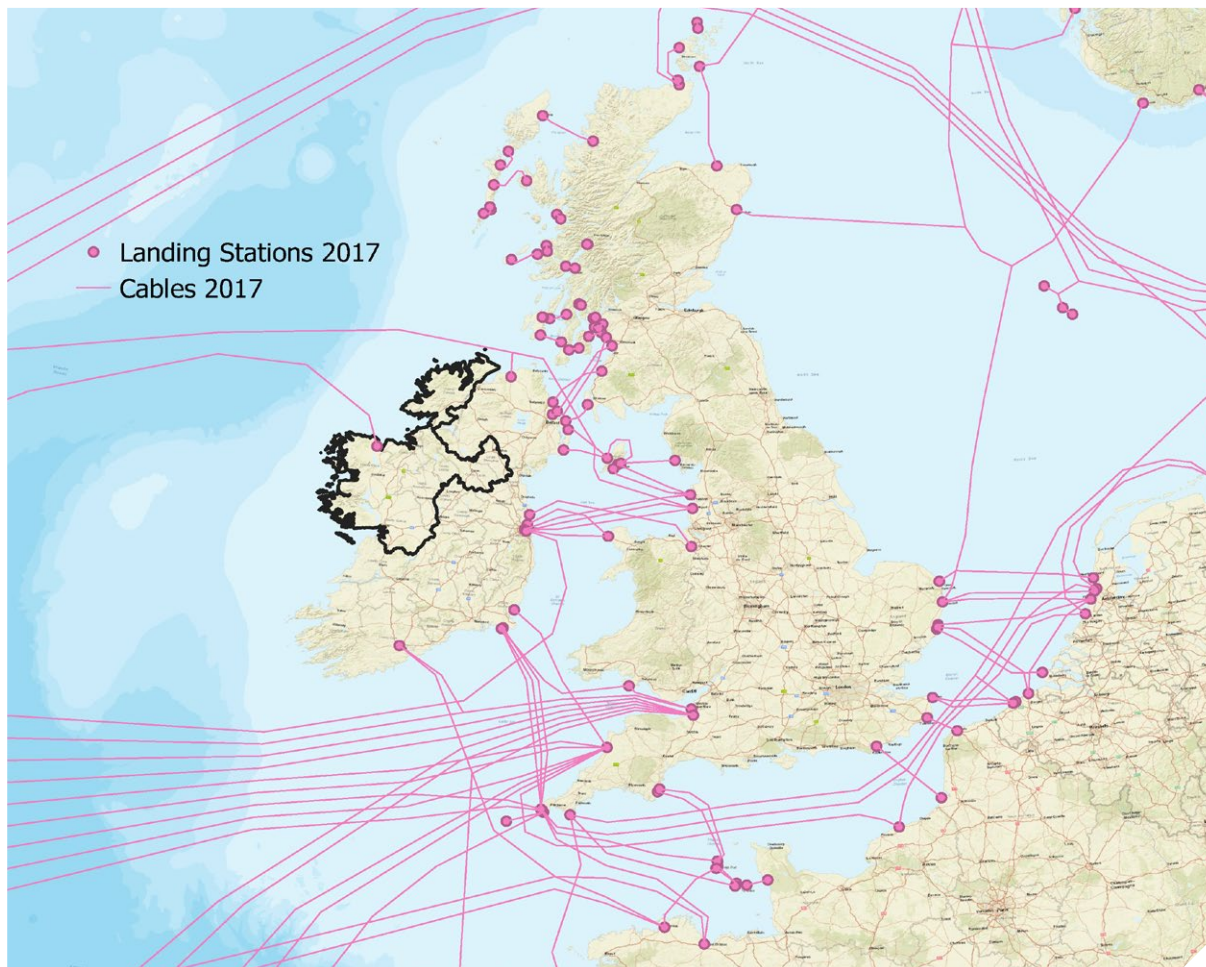
However, Ireland is ranked first when it comes to the Integration of Digital Technology for Businesses. Access to broadband is becoming ever more integral to how businesses operate, meaning it is key to economic performance. Similarly, we are seeing a proliferation of employment opportunities and positions that are less bounded by physical location, such as an office in a particular town, but instead, require fast and efficient internet access. Both of these changes in the economy have seen an increase in people working from home, therefore an understanding of the rates of broadband access across a region are key. The inference being that the higher levels of broadband connectivity, the more opportunities for economic growth.



Our region boasts new digital infrastructure. Aqua Comms laid a transatlantic fibre cable directly from Ross Strand in Killala to Long Island, New York. The subsea fibre optic cable provides a super-fast internet connection and is poised to be a catalyst in attracting major investment. The cable can handle up to one-third of the world's telephone calls and can cover the entire internet traffic of Europe and the US. The system enables 53.8-millisecond transfer speeds across the Atlantic.

Likewise, the Hibernia Atlantic Group connects locations in the North including Letterkenny, Derry, and Strabane, extending onwards to many strategic locations including Monaghan and Drogheda through Project Kelvin. Other initiatives that have provided limited services in this region include the National Broadband Scheme, which provided basic broadband services in areas that could not be commercially served, and the Metropolitan Area Networks (MANS) which provide fibre-based connectivity to towns across the region.

Figure 59: International Cables Serving Ireland



The weakness/absence of high-quality telecommunications infrastructure, which is accessible to all parts of the region, has been a constant refrain to the Assembly in much of the stakeholder's consultation carried out to date. The condition of this infrastructure is cross-cutting among the social, community, commercial and educational interests throughout the region. It is seen by many as an impediment to the current and future development of the region.

REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVE

RPO 6.35

A feasibility study will be undertaken to explore economic opportunities arising from transatlantic cable connectivity through a Regional Partnership approach.

6.5 Broadband Connectivity

Across the State, 70.7% of households have broadband connectivity, while 18.4% do not. Within the NWRA region, we see that 63.6% of households have a broadband connection with 23.3% unconnected. Other forms of internet connection amount to 10.3% of total households in the NWRA region, while a lower 7.8% of households have these alternative internet connections across the State.

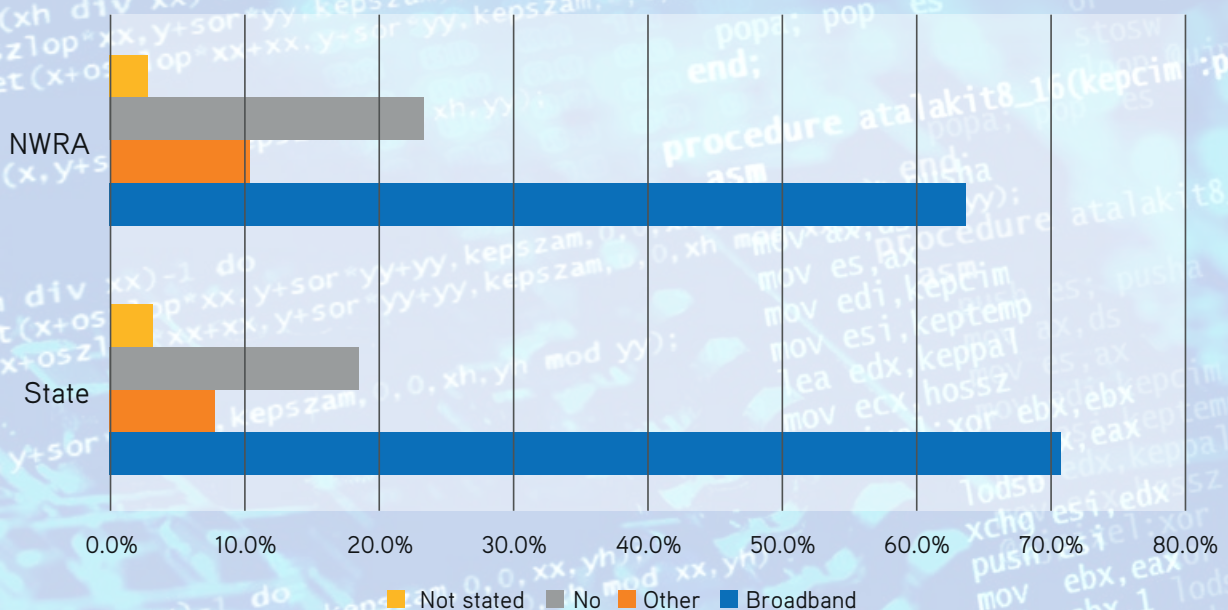
Access to broadband is invariably found to be higher in the more urbanised locations. This is to be expected as operators and providers will tend to concentrate their services in locations containing larger numbers of people. However, the Government has committed to increasing the levels of access all across Ireland, particularly in our rural areas, under the National Broadband Plan.

This plan was originally published in 2012, with an update made in 2015, and it aims to deliver high-speed broadband to all businesses and households in Ireland. The tender process is now complete, and it is expected that when the fibre rollout is complete across the Country, all households and businesses will enjoy speeds of 30 Mb/s.

At present, there are wide swathes of our region, both rural and urban, with little or no access to broadband. Some locations have speeds of no more than 1.98Mbps. Our region is driven by our business and to a large extent our SME's, which are being hindered in their operations and expansion opportunities.



Figure 60: Household Broadband Connectivity

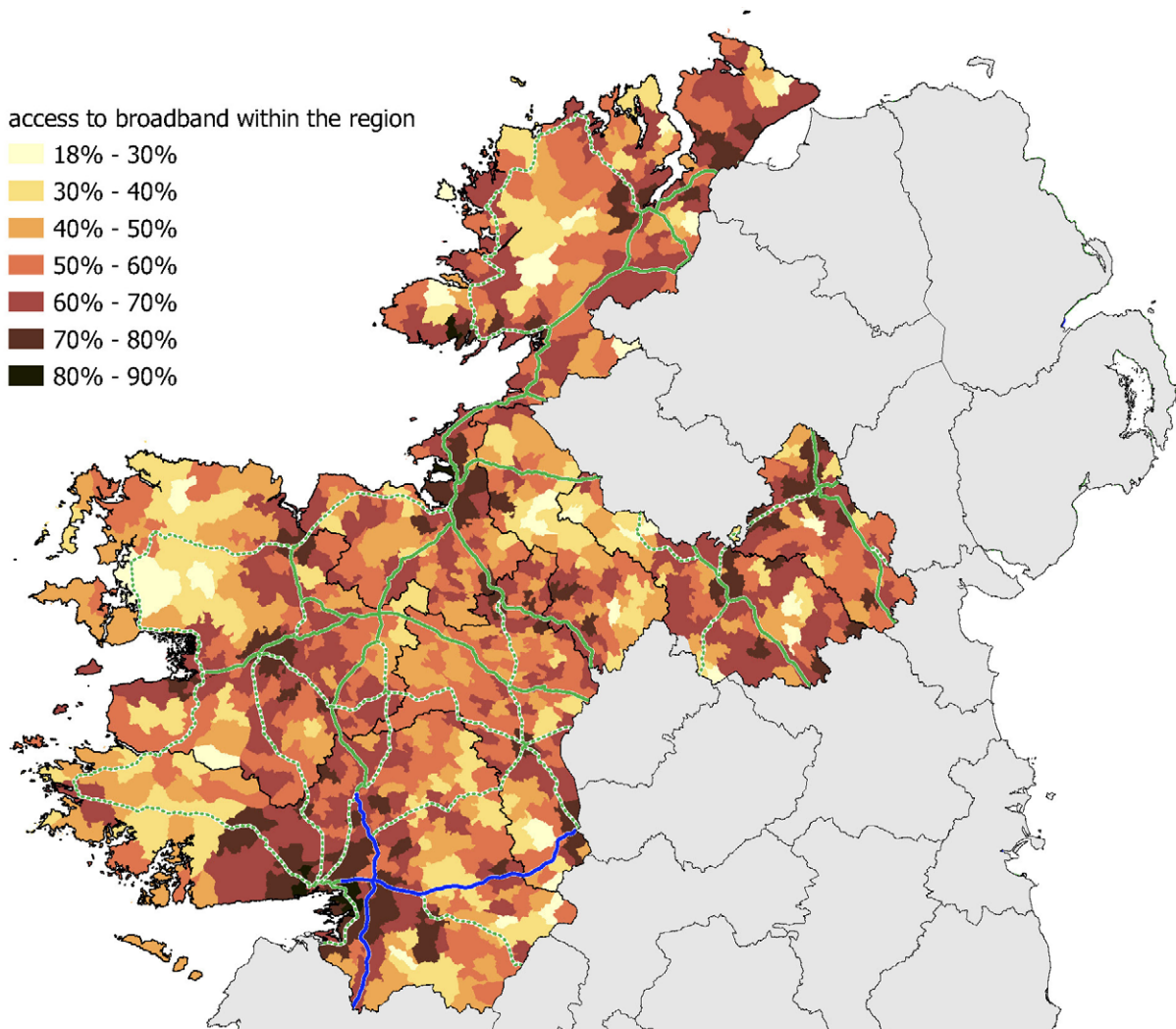




An understanding of the current levels of connectivity is required if these ambitious plans are to be realised and a targeted approach can be taken. The map of Ireland shown below takes an ED-level approach to the identification of broadband access and is taken from Census 2016 data.

The darker shaded areas are those with the highest levels of access, while the lighter ones have the least. The percentages are totals of respondents from within each ED who have stated their level of access.

Figure 61: Broadband Access



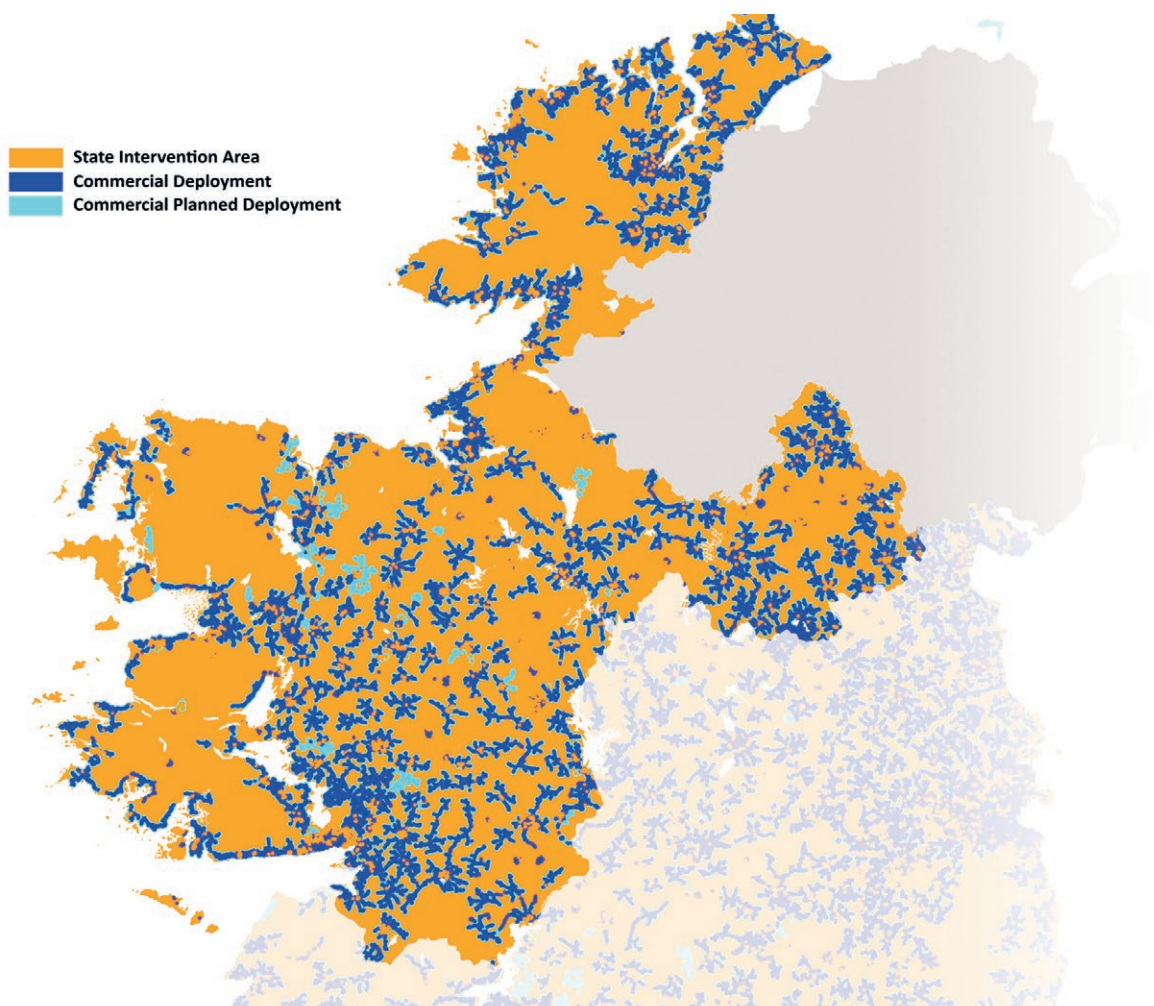
The following map is derived from the Department of Communication, Climate Action and Environment's website. It charts the dissemination of high-speed broadband across the region, with key settlements and road infrastructure highlighted. The areas of dark blue colouring are where "commercial operators are delivering or have indicated plans to deliver high-speed broadband services". The lighter blue areas are those areas where EIR has committed to commercial rural deployment plans to rollout highspeed broadband to 300,000 premises. Finally, the amber areas are considered "target areas for the State Intervention of the National Broadband Plan".

NATIONAL BROADBAND PLAN

The solution to the inadequacy of a resilient and accessible high-speed broadband is contained within the National Broadband Plan (NBP) which aims to ensure that every home, school and business in the country has access to high-speed broadband. In November 2019, the Government approved the construction of the €3bn NBP, which will be rolled out over the next five years. The installation of Ireland's nationwide broadband infrastructure is akin to the electrification of rural Ireland in the last century in terms of scale, ambition and the socioeconomic benefits it will deliver. There is a dual approach to achieving this aim.

- Commercial Investment
- State intervention in those areas where commercial operators are unlikely to invest.

Figure 62: Broadband Map of the Region





The state intervention targets over 20% of the population and workforce, 23% of premises, over 60% of farms, 13% of schools and 4% of business parks. The overall aim of the intervention is to build, maintain and future proof a high-speed broadband network, which can evolve to speeds of up to 1,000 Mb/s.

The vision of a future society with autonomous cars and remote doctors providing medical advice within people's own homes may take time to be delivered but we need to plan for it now. Business, agriculture and the public sector are already becoming more reliant on the Internet as it becomes the main driver behind the delivery of services. By way of example, the farming industry is being supported by technology, enabling it to move from a traditional role of intuitive decision making to analysing data provided by sensors that monitor their land and animals which informs their decisions. The availability of online learning, or virtual classes offered over the internet, means delivery of education through online, means that living in the more remote locations within our region will not present a barrier to accessing education or upskilling. Within the health sector, it is already the case that patients' files and diagnostic imagery can be sent between hospitals and larger health centres, most of which are located in urban areas which are well served by high broadband speeds. This has significant benefits to the convenience of vulnerable people and enables the provision of healthcare closer to the home of patients.

As well as building out the required network infrastructure, wiring for high-speed broadband in all new buildings needs to be provided and the region's existing building stock needs to be retrofitted. Consideration also needs to be given to identifying mobile blackspots and develop initiatives to address these.

The strategy for this region is to fully support the delivery of the NBP and it is imperative that prioritisation is given to this region in the interests of achieving effective regional development.

REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES

RPO 6.36

Support the roll-out of the National Broadband Plan within the lifetime of this strategy and grow the regional digital economy.

RPO 6.37

All new development to provide specific ducting to enable broadband infrastructure.

RPO 6.38

The Assembly supports the provision of Wifi Hotspots at appropriate publicly accessible locations.

RPO 6.39

Provide information to businesses on the opportunities available through broadband connections.

RPO 6.40

Encourage the utilisation and further development of our Municipal Area Networks.

6.6 Smart Region - Integrating Digital Trends

Cities and regions globally are increasingly shifting towards innovation, bringing digitisation and the Internet of Things (IoT) into all aspects of human and business life. This movement is taking place to apply these technologies to addressing challenges while maintaining liveability. Smart places are magnets for knowledge, talent, creativity, high-value jobs and investment.

This enables smart places to attract and retain talent and to grow their economy, while those that do not embrace this change will risk losing key demographics, resulting in economic, environmental and even social decline. The justification for including our Smart Region as a core ambition is that we cannot have a vibrant, connected, natural and inclusive region without harnessing this innovation.

The reality in exploring our region is that we have many technological 'solutions' evidenced across many sectors that can be applied horizontally. In addition, strategy of this nature should be cognisant of the wider international trends and risks. To mitigate these, and particularly 'Strategic Technological Change Risks' identified in the 'National Risk Assessment', the Region needs to plan for critical information infrastructure and networks whilst also ensuring our people are prepared for trends in disruptive technologies.

WHY A SMART REGION?

Globally there is no single definition of a 'Smart Region'. Each place must determine their interpretation and their objectives. Within a region, there are varying stakeholders, cities, institutions, industries and communities moving at different speeds with the application of technology to their challenges.

Smart places are more than just places where technology is overlaid on an urban or rural landscape. They have to integrate with more traditional spatial values of liveability, community, health, sustainability and economic resilience.

Our ambition is to enhance the reputation of this region of Ireland as an attractive place to live, work, visit and do business. We aim to develop a world-



class public infrastructure and regional governance structure using technological solutions that will allow all stakeholders in the region to participate in decision making and enjoy an enhanced environment.

This approach will complement and support the growing number of organisations in the region that are already working with smart solutions to improve our local communities, from localised renewable energy generation to so-called Internet of Things (IoT) sensors and open connected data portals.

WHY DO WE NEED A SMART REGION?

1. Respond to the increasing trend for connectivity and opportunities that will present for aligning policy with funding/resource opportunities to enhance competitiveness in this region.
2. Push the boundaries for promoting innovation and creativity and encourage greater partnership internally and externally.
3. Ensure that systems and institutions across this region respond to a demand for digital inclusion – education; local government; health; public services and industry where applicable.
4. Create a 'Place' recognised as the 'best place to live'.

SMART REGION POLICY CONTEXT

Europe 2020 Strategy is the European Union's (EU) agenda for growth and job creation. It emphasises smart, sustainable and inclusive growth and Smart Specialisation Strategies are recognised as enabling tools.



The Regional Assembly recognise that knowledge discovery takes place in the region's universities and research institutes, public administration, third sector and private companies. In addition, this discovery innovation is witnessed across our indigenous enterprises supported by a network of Local Enterprise Office(s) and Enterprise Ireland.

Data innovation is recognised in Project Ireland 2040 as important being a key issue for the delivery of future growth. Emerging disruptive technology and innovation has the potential to accelerate the delivery of NPF National Strategic Outcomes (NSOs) set out in Project Ireland 2040, in particular, National Strategic Outcome 5 (A Strong Economy supported by Enterprise, Innovation and Skills). The significance of Disruptive Technologies is such that Government is providing €500 million in a Disruptive Technology Fund, for co-funded projects involving enterprises and research partners over the period to 2027.

Proposals will be selected following the submission of bid proposals, which will be expected to address the development, deployment and commercialisation of one or more disruptive technologies to deliver new solutions through investment in the development and implementation of new products and services. Ultimately, it is anticipated that the projects funded will create the jobs of the future.

A further policy announcement which is to have considerable influence on how public services are to engage across our region is the Public Service ICT Strategy 2015, which requires the development of a "Digital First" approach to the supply of services to citizens. This requires a shift in culture so that we think digital first and design digital services around the needs of the end-user.

FOUNDATIONS FOR A SMART REGION

The region already boasts many assets that provide the foundations for it to accelerate its participation in the next economy. With a strong international reputation in CleanTech, Creative Industries, Food and Natural Resources; ICT, Manufacturing, Engineering, Life Science and RTDI, the region not only has the hard infrastructure for growth but also the skills, knowledge and reputation. Notwithstanding this, there are existing network challenges that need to be addressed to ensure participation in a Smart future.

Becoming a Smart Region is a complex process and requires the sustained commitment of many different stakeholders. It is not something that the Regional Assembly can achieve alone. It is recognised that collaboration is critical to success in the smart region endeavour through the establishment of partnership strategies and collaborative approaches. There are already world-class examples of the application of technology across industry, sectors and community in the Northern and Western Region. There are also emerging clusters that can demonstrate that this region can be a world leader in some areas.

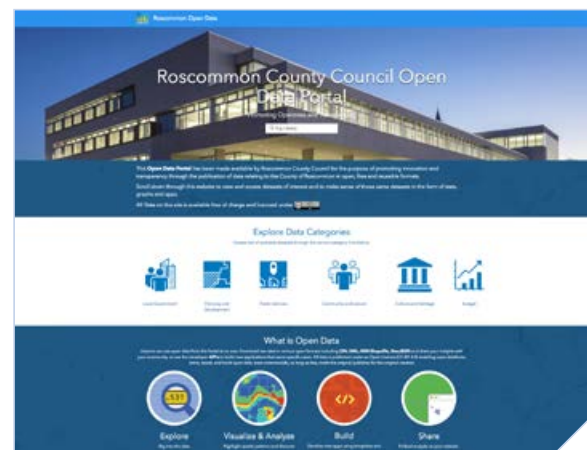
SMARTBAY

SmartBay Ireland supports the national marine test facility for the development of innovative products and services for the global maritime sector. This includes the trial and validation of novel marine sensors, prototype equipment and the collection and dissemination of marine data to national and international users of the facility.



ROSCOMMON COUNTY COUNCIL OPEN DATA PORTAL

This Open Data Portal has been made available by Roscommon County Council to promote innovation and transparency through the publication of data relating to the County of Roscommon in open, free and reusable formats, as well as through statistics, graphs and apps.



AGINNOVATION

The speed of technological advancement is changing the face of agriculture and giving rise to a new generation of agri-tech businesses and entrepreneurs. Galway City and Galway County Council commissioned the Whitaker Institute at NUI Galway to undertake an industrial baseline study to support the development of an economic plan for the city and county. One of its core outputs is Visualisation using Public Data

In an increasingly digital economy and technology-driven age, regions need to look towards new approaches, innovative technologies and smart infrastructure to create an environment that supports community and economic growth.

CONCEPT OF A SMART REGION

The concept of a Smart Region is derived from the similar concept of a Smart City, where a shared technological infrastructure is used to benefit citizens in a particular urban area. It however also recognised that cities do not exist in isolation and that concentrating the deployment of smart technologies to urban areas would be, at best, a missed opportunity.

The concept of Smart Region is therefore much broader and considers smart technologies deployed throughout a larger geographical area, which might encompass our metropolitan, urban settlements, as well as non-urban areas. As such, it also potentially addresses a larger set of sectors than the ones typically addressed by Smart Cities (transport, energy, etc.), as well as collaboration between multiple local authorities.

The Highland Council in Scotland is currently engaged in some projects supporting their cities in becoming smarter and better connected. Designed to use data and technology to enhance the region’s environmental sustainability, its economic development, and the well-being of its citizens, these projects aim to turn Inverness and its region into a smart city and a smart region.

They include the deployment of an open data portal, the use of sensor data to optimise waste collection routes, improvement in the transport network with a focus on smart public transport and the deployment of public wireless networks across the region.

Attributes that this region can focus on include, but are not limited to:



SMART CITY + SMART RURAL AREAS = SMART REGION

CAN OUR REGION BE SMART?

INNOVATION

Technological innovation is not just about robots and driverless cars. Innovation can be as simple as a change of process or a better understanding of when to plant crops derived from data. The Northern and Western Region is the perfect location for innovation and change to be embraced and to provide a collaborative platform for the development of a Smart Specialisation Strategy with stakeholders.

This approach shall be an integral tool in developing the region's innovative capacity to nurture businesses, artists, creatives and innovators, thus generating economic growth in key industry sectors.

Adopting a Smart approach to building our regional innovation system encourages the rapid diffusion of knowledge, skills and best practice. Identified need emerging from our consultation process focuses on four key areas and they align with programmes announced in the National Development Plan 2018.

1. Fostering regional Research and Development and innovation capacities in line with regional economic development objectives. Utilising by supporting industry or technology-specific competence centres, competitiveness poles involving public and private organisations, promoting technology transfer etc. New 'Technology and Innovation Poles' (TIPs) will be developed through Enterprise Ireland and the Industrial Development Authority (IDA) to drive regional and rural development. These TIPs should be considered essential designations for Galway, Athlone, Sligo and Letterkenny.
2. Stimulating innovation in SMEs by promoting 3rd level-enterprise cooperation networks particularly with Local Enterprise Offices and Local Authorities; by supporting business networks and clusters of SMEs, by facilitating SMEs' access to advanced business support services and by improving the effectiveness of these services (networks).
3. Promoting entrepreneurship and new business development by facilitating the economic exploitation of new ideas, by fostering the creation of new business from universities, IoT's and existing enterprises.

4. Working with Third Level sector, Skills Fora and Further Education and Training (FET) to enhance/tailor training to the emerging innovation system.

IMPLICATIONS

This strategy for a Smart region will be augmented through the suite of City/County Development Plans, Local Economic and Community Plans and shall be complemented through a variety of pipeline projects, initiatives and pilots across the region. The strategy is to encourage urban and rural renewal programmes to provide greater economic opportunity, to accentuate smart technology and create enabling environments that add to this regions existing lifestyle advantages.

Our Planning system and policy instruments need to seriously think about smart technologies on a holistic level and start planning for their future today. Updating infrastructure that is already in place is fundamental to success.

With an existent weaker urban infrastructure, weaker utility services and a disconnected transportation system the Northern and Western Region needs to ensure necessary investment is made to address existing infrastructural deficits but equally strive to guarantee that our communities do not become 'doubly disadvantaged'.

Without the right infrastructure, there can be no smart future. The fact that broadband access to the internet is a basic requirement to allow citizens to explore the potential benefits of the digital environment has been recognised by government and to address this challenge, the National Broadband Plan was commissioned. Progress has already been made in rolling out high-speed broadband across

the country under this plan but much work is still ongoing. This is a major priority for the government and recognition that Ireland cannot optimise the benefits it obtains from the digital world until all citizens are connected.

REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES – SMART ENVIRONMENT

RPO 6.41

Promote technology interventions and best practice that enhance sustainability in public places, parks, waterways and building management.

RPO 6.42

Encourage policies that promote effective resource management through the application of new technologies, data and environmental management.

RPO 6.43

Encourage, pilot and collaborate with stakeholders to adopt technologies that improve energy and resource sustainability across the region.

RPO 6.44

Encourage the adoption of digital technologies and service platforms across the region to improve asset management and service delivery.

REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES – SMART ECONOMY

RPO 6.45

Leverage the Smart region approach to secure EU and private financing to accelerate business growth and economic development.

CASE STUDY IN EXCELLENCE

USING TECHNOLOGY TO ADDRESS BREXIT

In July 2017, Donegal County Council and Derry City and Strabane District Council began working with Maynooth University on the development of a North West Regional Dashboard.

As a tool for decision-making, dashboards provide a visual means to organise and interact with data, using maps, graphs, charts, gauges, 3D models and other visual analytics that are dynamic, interactive, and inter-linked (Few, 2006). With the process of the U.K. leaving the EU continuing to generate a great deal of uncertainty, the importance of having access to accurate and up-to-date data for this cross-border region cannot be under-estimated.

The first cross-border Dashboard, the North West Regional Dashboard will provide citizens, public sector workers and companies with real-time information, time-series indicator data, and interactive maps about all aspects of the City Region and wider North West Region. As a tool, it will enable users to gain detailed, up-to-date intelligence about the region that will aid everyday decision-making and foster evidence-informed analysis.

RPO 6.46

Actively develop the regional innovation ecosystem's capacity to nurture businesses, artists, creatives and innovators and generate economic growth in key industry sectors aligned with Enterprise 2025 Objectives and NDP investments.

RPO 6.47

Promote a local and regional 'Open Data' policy and build a Regional Data Infrastructure platform - data is at the basis of the smart approach. Data infrastructure is a shared technological platform where data can be collected, processed, shared and analysed from across the region.

RPO 6.48

To enable Public and Private Sector creation of a digitally connected innovation corridor connecting existing, emerging and new incubation spaces (examples include: Portershed, Building Block etc.) that will attract businesses and industries working in the digital economy and creative industries.

**REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES
- SMART MOBILITY****RPO 6.49**

Develop and deliver strategy and infrastructure to enable the adoption and integration of future modes of transport and mobility.

RPO 6.50

Continue to encourage Active Travel initiatives and where possible leverage technology and digital platforms to enhance the delivery of cycleway and walking infrastructure, particularly in our urban centres.

CASE STUDY**EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE
REGIONS - SMART VILLAGES**

Smart Villages are communities in rural areas that use innovative solutions to improve their resilience, building on local strengths and opportunities.

Digital tools and connectivity are closely associated with the 'smart' concept and innovation. Unsurprisingly, digital technologies are widely used within Smart Villages development, and 'act as a lever' that enables Smart Villages to become more agile, make better use of their resources and improve the attractiveness of rural areas. The NWRA through the Committee of the Regions (CoR) has been promoting the best practice across the region.

During a recent Plenary Session members of the European Committee of the Regions, in Brussels, adopted the opinion on the revitalisation of rural areas through Smart Villages, drafted by European Alliance member and elected representative of Leitrim County Council, Cllr Enda Stenson.



RPO 6.51

Promote values and policies that make it easy to commute between home, work and school across the region in a way that contributes to a healthy, attractive and climate-friendly region.

**REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES
– SMART GOVERNMENT****RPO 6.52**

Understand, advocate for, and facilitate the existing and future infrastructure needs of our urban areas, the wider region and beyond – immediate priorities include access to ultra-fast and rural broadband initiatives.

RPO 6.53

Encourage the exploitation of data and information pertinent to new spatial forms and to consider enhanced infrastructural requirements for a fully connected region.

RPO 6.54

Create and adopt policy frameworks, open standards and information technology platforms to make appropriate city datasets accessible and available to increase productivity and growth.

RPO 6.55

Establish a “Smart Region Hub”: Build on the Smart Places foundation to craft a vision for our sustained and integrated regional Smart future.

**REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES
– SMART PEOPLE****RPO 6.56**

Enable access and utilisation of public data to improve planning, stimulate economic development, encourage people into business.

RPO 6.57

Within 2 years, the Assembly, along with WDC, IDA and other relevant agencies, will construct the principles for the creation of a Digital Skills Platform. This Platform will enable access and utilisation of public data to enhance planning, economic growth and encourage entrepreneurship and business startups.

RPO 6.58

Use digital platforms to enable improved communication and engagement between citizens and local authorities including fostering the capacity for the community to influenced decision-making.

RPO 6.59

With our partners in Local Government/Local Development promote the benefits of high-speed broadband to ensure that uptake and use are as high as possible.

RPO 6.60

To assist in the establishment of New ‘Technology and Innovation Poles’ (TIPs) - encouraged in our Metropolitan and Regional Growth centres.



Growth Ambition 4: 7
Quality of Life - Inclusive Region

7

Growth Ambition 4: Quality of Life - Inclusive Region

7.1 Introduction

How future development in Ireland is planned will continue to be a significant determinant of people's quality of life. Location and place have an important influence on the quality of life that people enjoy. (National Planning Framework)

Strengthening local economies, meeting people's social needs and addressing problems of poverty and social exclusion are central to building sustainable communities. There is clear evidence that employment creation and economic growth in a community do not in themselves necessarily directly reduce unemployment or increase the prosperity and wealth. Achieving economic growth while reducing disadvantage and inequality is a challenge to which the region must rise to achieve its vision. The region needs to embrace inclusive growth principles in the delivery of services, such as housing, education, health and transport investments. How we deliver services to our people shall also need to be adaptable to new ethnic communities and the changing demographic trends, as the region has both an ageing population and people are continuing to live longer.

Over the past several years, a national consensus has emerged on the need for a more socially-inclusive approach to generating economic growth. While the National Planning Framework recognises that it cannot effect change in all of the dimensions that contribute to the quality of life, there are some key elements that it will directly impact on, most importantly 'the natural and living environment'. This is why place is intrinsic to achieving good quality of life - the quality of our immediate environment, our ability to access services and amenities, such as education and healthcare, shops and parks, the leisure and social interactions available to us and the prospect of securing employment, all combine to make a real difference to people's lives.



The NWRA aspires to reflect the OECD definition of 'inclusive growth':

“Economic growth that creates an opportunity for all segments of the population and distributes the dividends of increased prosperity, both in monetary and non-monetary terms, fairly across society”

Our region excels in many important areas – a robust economy, diverse population, abundant natural assets, lower property prices and a variety of distinctive sub-regions and communities. But there are also concerns— some immediate and some longer-term—that we will need to address if we are going to continue being a ‘great place to live’.

The overarching policy framework for social inclusion can be found by following the link below:

VIEW PDF

<https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/f96bb9-social-inclusion-policy/>



WHY PLAN FOR A GREAT PLACE TO LIVE?

If we do not plan to meet the needs of employers through the provision of a skilled and healthy workforce with high levels of participation and housing provision in proximity to employment locations, then we will stifle industry productivity, expansion and retention. If people are unemployed or underemployed, they cannot purchase many of the goods and services the economy produces, hurting small businesses and entrepreneurs. Furthermore, inefficient use of land and infrastructure, including the congestion it can create, hampers job access, limits productivity and reduces property values.

Integrating this growth ambition to our vision is justified through baseline review and extensive consultation detailing:

1. Many of our communities and local economies are disconnected from wider national growth.
2. Work is no longer a guaranteed route out of poverty.
3. The shortcomings of getting people job-ready in a rural environment with neither employment, broadband nor an adequate transport system to enable them to access jobs in urban centres.
4. Inequalities between cities, towns and rural communities in the region are tangible.
5. Increases in poverty and unemployment impact the region’s competitiveness.



To promote inclusion, our objectives must encourage industries that provide good, family-sustaining jobs that raise per capita incomes and enable this region to enhance its national contribution to GDP. Sustainable regional growth needs to improve living standards for all. Having a good place to live means access to education, health, employment, recreation and opportunity. Having a great place to live means our people are capable of taking advantage of education, health, employment, recreation and opportunity.

A strong economy not only means having diverse, well-paid jobs but also being able to attract new types of employment that will keep this region competitive and thriving, providing more opportunities for all to prosper.



7.2 Inclusive Growth

Although sometimes described as a peripheral region, the region boasts urban growth engines and major economic assets including energy (see Growth Ambition 1). However, our workforce is ageing, mobile and our education system is not producing enough workers with appropriate skills to keep pace with the growing and changing needs of the economy. This is draining our skills base. There is also a significant deficit in skilled labour requiring policy and local response to promote 'apprenticeships'.

SPATIAL CHALLENGES

There are concentrations of deprivation in particular areas - typically some urban centres, coastal areas and rural places across the region. However, the pattern of exclusion and deprivation is not only area-based, as certain groups are not always easily identified in statistical indicators which focus on CSO collated data. Some groups may be more susceptible to data gaps, such as minority ethnic communities, travellers, refugees and asylum seekers, people with disabilities, young people and the elderly. These groups are particularly vulnerable and face unacceptably high risks of unemployment or disadvantage which need to be addressed wherever they occur.

HOUSING CONSIDERATION

Housing problems can be acute for disadvantaged groups but they are not confined to those on low incomes and can also be a characteristic of both rural and urban areas. Affordability has a significant economic impact affecting the recruitment and retention of workers in essential public services such as health and education and across the private sector. The lack of affordable housing can undermine the sustainability of communities, as people are forced to either travel longer distances to work or move to new areas, weakening local networks and social contacts.

Continuing the regions economic growth depends on keeping and attracting businesses, creating diverse job choices and providing access to technology to all areas of the northern and western region. Continued success also depends on having a competitive workforce. Early career and technical education, expanded apprenticeships, job training programmes and ETB Further Education programmes will strengthen the employment base and ensure the competitiveness of our local economies.

The availability of a skilled and educated workforce will make our citizens more employable, improve competitiveness and raise incomes, in addition to attracting new businesses.



HORIZONTAL AIMS

The OECD's Framework for Policy Action on Inclusive Growth recommends investing in people and places, supporting business dynamism, and creating more inclusive labour markets, which will contribute to rebuilding trust and strengthening social cohesion.

This strategy adopts an approach that is consistent with the principles of this framework. It embraces an inclusive approach to development and also lays foundations for more sustainable growth.

The RSES focuses on three horizontal aims to integrate 'economic growth' – **People, Place and Resilience**.



PEOPLE

- To ensure citizens within the region play a meaningful role in the design and evaluation of policies that concern them.
- Ensure that equity aspects are enshrined in the design process of regional policy development, ensuring disadvantaged socio-economic groups and geographical areas are taken into account.
- To ensure that the region is a great place to be – as a visitor, worker, entrepreneur or resident.
- Promote public spaces and physical places to engage with each other, particularly in our MASP and urban areas.
- Our people have access to education and training opportunities to allow them to realise their full potential; enhancing this region's ability to retain talent.
- Our people live in safe, healthy communities with transportation options, including walking, cycling, transit and driving.
- Residents are physically and mentally healthy and can lead healthy lifestyles.
- Our region provides choices for individuals and for local communities to fulfil their needs.



PLACE

- To ensure that all firms within the region have the chance to thrive, not just the largest ones.
- To ensure that healthcare and childcare within the region are widely accessible and affordable across the region.
- To ensure that the region is a great place to work remotely/off-site.
- Our RSES coordinates infrastructure, housing, and transportation investments, creating areas of opportunity and enhancing existing city, towns, villages and communities.
- This region offers a range of quality housing choices that meet the diverse needs and preferences of all residents.
- To ensure housing that is affordable, across markets, is widely available, and in particular to sustain and attract new talent.
- Our region efficiently uses, reuses, and conserves its natural resources by managing waste and optimising technologies that promote a circular economy.



RESILIENCE

- To ensure the region's population has the appropriate skill sets to be able to adapt to the future of work, and ensuring that on-going transformations in the world of work do not widen divides.
- To invest in our workforce, particularly our young people, develop our future workforce and ensure all of our people benefit from economic activity.
- Focusing on an outcome that has a diverse economy and skilled workforce that support businesses, innovation, and entrepreneurship
- People have access to job opportunities that support a good quality of life and financial stability.
- Transportation infrastructure promotes effective goods movement and is well-connected to other national and international destinations.
- The region adopts systems, policies and networks that are resilient and adaptive to economic downturns and environmental challenges emerging.
- In this strategy, we have integrated overarching environmental regional policy objectives as goals to be followed throughout the planning process.

TALENT

The region's skills base is a key determinant of its economic performance. Skills development and training in the region need to be more closely aligned with the requirements of businesses and enterprises, taking full account of the future needs of a knowledge economy.

Businesses also need to play a greater role in contributing to the region's schools, colleges and universities, to generate aspirations for the future working population of the region and to encourage interest in the region's growth sectors.

Recent examples of this joined-up approach include innovative approaches by the West and Border Skills Forum and the teams behind Action Plan for Jobs West, North West and North East.

Restructuring in the rural economy presents particular challenges because of the limited range of employment opportunities available to local communities and the urban concentration of learning facilities.



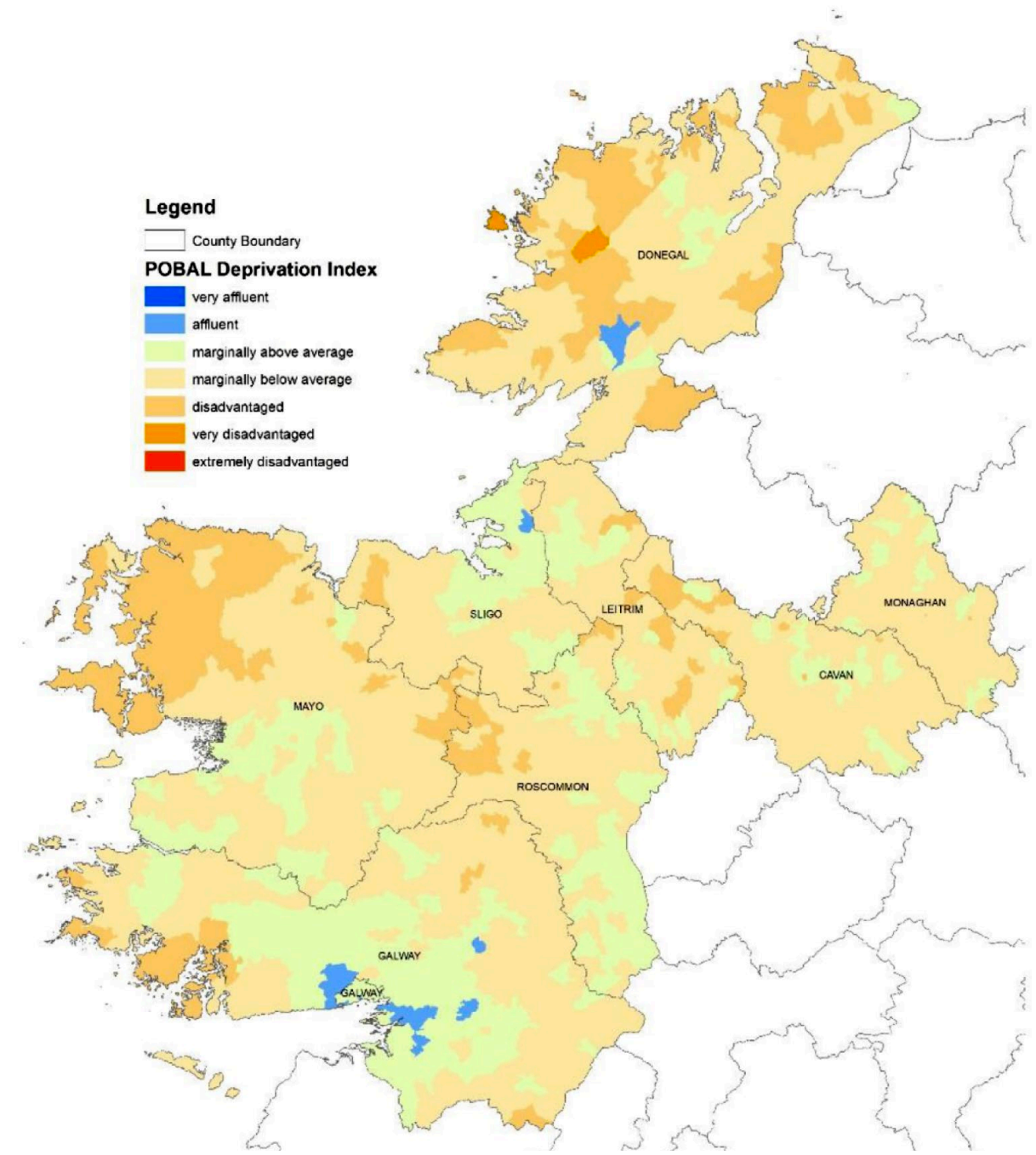
Many of the most educated young people, particularly in the more peripheral rural areas, leave in search of better employment opportunities. Innovative ways of developing learning communities could provide a platform for up-skilling the rural workforce.

Many of the region's coastal communities exhibit similar issues and problems to the rural parts of the region – narrow economic base, the dominance of low skills employment and limited access to training provision. Changing the aspirations of local communities and employers will be necessary to underpin the development of a more dynamic and knowledge-based economy. This is not just about new industries but also about the transformation of the existing economic base, and more importantly the way people think.

This can be useful in that it provides us with an understanding of where precisely those with higher-skilled jobs are located. What is immediately clear, and unsurprising, is that higher concentrations of persons within this cohort are located closer to our larger towns and cities.



Figure 63: Pobal Deprivation Index



CASE STUDY

CONNACHT-ULSTER
ALLIANCECONNACHT-ULSTER
ALLIANCE

The Connacht-Ulster Alliance (CUA) was established by the three Institutes of Technology of Galway, Letterkenny and Sligo in July 2012, through the signing of a formal MoU. It is envisioned that the Connacht-Ulster TU will be a complementary and stabilising factor in the communities it serves. It will be a key producer of work-ready graduates in collaboration with employers; a key partner and driver of research and innovation; and a key attractor of investment to the region and in the retention of such investment. It will build on its current position as the national leader in blended education that combines traditional methods of delivery with state of the art online and distance learning. It will also be a provider of education to more mature learners, a nexus of continuous professional development and the leading centre for life-long learning.



REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES

RPO 7.1

Support the co-ordination of employment skills and support in the region through the alignment of needs as identified by the Regional Skills Fora to include facilities and opportunities for disadvantaged areas and groups in the community.

RPO 7.2

Support disadvantaged communities facing particular barriers to employment, including actively marketing vacancies that are relevant to them.

RPO 7.3

Through constituent LCDCs promote vocational and occupational programmes and pathways for progression to a career.

RPO 7.4

Support the implementation of the STEM program in Irish Education out to 2026.

RPO 7.5

Ensure that the requirements of emerging sectors are reflected in the regional skills needs and resourcing.

RPO 7.6

Support and promote the growth, development and success of the Connacht-Ulster Alliance consortium's ambition towards becoming a Technological University serving the west and north-west.

RPO 7.7

Support the provision of third level education facilities in the Cavan/Monaghan subregion (where the lack of 3rd level education is most pronounced) and in Roscommon and Leitrim.

7.3 Healthy Places

A healthy environment contributes to a healthy population. By taking a whole- system approach to addressing the many factors that impact on health and wellbeing and which contribute to health inequalities, and by empowering and enabling individuals and communities to make healthier choices, it will be possible to improve health outcomes, particularly for the next generation of citizens.

Communities that are designed in a way that support physical activity, such as generously sized footpaths, safe cycle lanes, safe attractive stairways and accessible recreation areas, all encourage people to make healthy choices and live healthier lives. Countries with extensive cycle infrastructure report higher levels of cycling and lower rates of obesity. Healthy places, in turn, create economic value by appealing to a skilled workforce and attracting innovative companies.



Regular physical activity improves our health and reduces our risk of numerous chronic conditions. As children, it supports our healthy development, and in adulthood, staying active may help to reduce physical and mental limitations.

Recreation and amenity facilities contribute to the quality of life of the communities they serve. The provision of facilities that cater to the demands of an increasing population and which are accessible to all sectors and age groups is a key component in the creation of successful sustainable communities.

REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES

RPO 7.8

To support the implementation of the objectives of Sláinte Care, including the development of a Single Tier Health Service, and the advancement of Primary Care Centres in our Urban Places.

RPO 7.9

Promote the provision of high-quality, accessible and suitably proportioned areas of public open spaces and promote linkage with social, cultural and heritage sites and buildings. In this process prioritise access for walking and cycling.

RPO 7.10

Support the Health Service Executive and other statutory and voluntary agencies and private healthcare providers in the provision of healthcare facilities to all sections of the community, at appropriate locations, with good public transport links, parking and accessible facilities.

RPO 7.11

Support the objectives of public health policy including Healthy Ireland and the National Physical Activity Plan and the National Obesity Plan through integration with planning policy.

7.4 Age Friendly

It is important to assess the needs of an ageing community. Equally important is to maintain a good quality of life for people as they grow older by implementing better management of resources to provide facilities required. In tandem with the above, age-friendly also means the younger sections of society.

As more people live longer lives, they will want to stay healthy and independent, live in their own homes and communities and keep to a minimum their use of in-patient and out-patient hospital services. Government policy is to support older people to live with dignity and independence in their own homes and communities for as long as possible. In providing a more seamless and appropriate continuum of housing choices with appropriate supports for older people and a built environment that is attractive, accessible and safe, older people will be supported and motivated to enjoy more active, healthy and connected lives and to age confidently and comfortably in their community.



The 'Age-Friendly Ireland' Initiative provides leadership and guidance in identifying the needs and opportunities of an ageing population and is embedded within the local government system, which, with support from Government, is best placed to respond to change at a local level including the principles of universal design.



REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES

RPO 7.12

Ensure local planning, housing, transport/ accessibility and leisure policies are developed with a focus on meeting the needs and opportunities of an ageing population and people with disabilities and younger persons.

RPO 7.13

Aim to make this region an Age-Friendly one by working with constituent Planning Authorities and recognising the demographic challenges that face the region and ensure the provision of suitable facilities and services at appropriate locations.

RPO 7.14

The Assembly supports the specific designation of lands in development plans for nursing homes and sheltered housing, whilst ensuring these facilities are integrated within the communities they serve.

7.5 Childcare, Education and Life Long Learning

Access to affordable and high-quality childcare is an essential requirement for an equitable society, a thriving economy and sustainable communities and is a critical part of our nation's infrastructure.

Childcare provision in Ireland is reaching capacity and new planning approaches and sustained investment will be required, particularly in areas of disadvantage and population growth, to increase capacity and enable existing services to meet regulatory and quality requirements. Investment in high-quality, affordable childcare (including school-age childcare) and in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is critical both as an educational support for children and as a prerequisite of job creation and labour market participation.

Education has been critical to Ireland's transformation over recent decades. Education, training and life-long learning are key enablers, around which personal fulfilment, a fair society and a successful nation revolve. All are central to sustaining economic success and building strong communities.

In knowledge-based economies, education underpins growth as it is the main driver of technological innovation and productivity. Accessing a high standard of education is a priority now and in the future, having a major impact on people's quality of life. A lack of skills and competencies limits access to good jobs and economic prosperity, increases the risk of social exclusion and poverty, and may hinder a full participation in civic and political affairs.



In the Higher Education sector, the development of Connacht-Ulster Technological University has the potential to deliver a greater opportunity to our students across the region. By creating an institution of scale and strength, the multi-campus technological university will bring greater social and economic benefits to the region and the delivery of a broad range of high-quality education and training in each campus.

REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES:

RPO 7.15

Encourage multi-agency approaches for delivering the health, social care, education and community services needed by growing, diverse or isolated communities.



7.6 Housing – Supplying Homes for Growing Communities

Homes are both the places where we live and the foundation stone from which wider communities and their quality of life is created. We need to promote a better balance between housing supply and demand in the region.

There is a projected total regional requirement to provide housing for between 160,000 and 180,000 additional people to 2040. This will involve not only delivering the number of homes needed, but matching it with high-quality transport, jobs, social and environmental infrastructure and services to make this growth sustainable and fit for purpose. However, in all cases, quality means integration between jobs, homes, other community facilities such as schools and health service and cultural, heritage and leisure assets.

Residential design needs to transition from traditional density led residential development as an indicator to one where integration with other land uses is given weight. Speed and quality of construction are both goals in themselves but they have to be tempered with timely provision of other services which improve quality of life.



The supply and location of jobs and homes must be aligned. This includes providing homes that are affordable and accessible to house the region's labour force, and the provision of land and premises that meet the needs of current and future businesses, including for smart design and orientation that meet current and future energy efficiency demands. Delivery of high-quality places rests with the construction industry, planning authorities and other public agencies working in partnership, and at all times engaging local communities in the development of ideas and plans.





The long-term vision for Ireland's housing future aims to balance the provision of good quality housing that meets the needs of a diverse population, in a way that makes our cities, towns, villages and rural areas good places to live now and in the future.

REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES

RPO 7.16

Ensure that appropriate policies are outlined in development plans to deliver housing in the areas and quantities identified in this Strategy.

RPO 7.17

Ensure that the housing delivered meets the needs of the community in terms of social, affordable, private and sheltered in both urban and rural areas.

RPO 7.18

Support the development of housing to meet the population targets in this strategy using as wide a variety of funding mechanisms as possible including regeneration funds, Part V, direct public funding and Public/Private Partnerships.

RPO 7.19

Support the provision of lifetime adaptable homes that can accommodate the changing needs of a household over time.

RPO 7.20

Increase population living within settlements, through a range of measures including reductions in vacancy, re-use of existing buildings, in-fill development schemes, area or site-based regeneration, service site provision and increased building heights appropriate to the settlement, together with infrastructure provision.





Growth Ambition 5: **8** Infrastructure - Enabling our Region

8

Growth Ambition 5: Infrastructure - Enabling our Region

8.1 Introduction

In this Growth Ambition, we focus on how we plan to manage our critically enabling infrastructure over the next 20 years, to support the vision we have for the region, and how we will deliver and manage our infrastructure assets in response to our changing environment.

The provision of prudently managed infrastructure is key to delivering a connected, vibrant, inclusive, resilient and smart region that places environmental sustainability and quality of life values at the heart of our decisions. The lack of access to the essential benefits that infrastructure provides – such as electric power, clean water, modern telecommunications, and safe and reliable transportation - impede higher living standards and a significant obstacle to economic development.

They prevent private enterprises from succeeding and growing in ways that allow them to create jobs and reduce poverty. How we manage our transport and digital economic infrastructure is considered separately within Growth Ambition 3 and social infrastructure is considered further in Growth Ambition 4. However, they also represent key deliverables in the provision of a smart connected region and are an integral part of our strategic infrastructural enablers.





In developing our RSES, the region formed a view on the type of investment required considering the external changes and trends in our environment, but also existing capacity for delivered public services and the raising of the competitiveness of this region, namely:

- Changes in our population
- Competition for resources at regional and local level
- Increased adverse events and impacts of climate change
- The fast-pace of changes in technology
- Economic growth
- Pressures on land use and the environment

This approach reflects a change from the traditional infrastructural prioritisation determined at a national level. The process has been much more collaborative and strategic; engaging local stakeholders, national agencies and government department expertise in its formulation. The identified objectives are in line with the National Strategic Outcomes (NSOs) and Strategic Investment Priorities (SIPs) announced under Project Ireland 2040.

Considerable asset knowledge has been built during the engagement process, however, this chapter recognises that additional work is needed to better understand the possible impacts of climate change and natural disasters so that this can be incorporated into the regions long term resilience.

The NWRA will encourage as a general principle that when the provision of a new item of infrastructure e.g. road or rail is being considered, then the possibility of incorporation of other services (water, broadband, electricity, gas) within the same corridor should be considered. New roads should essentially be infrastructure corridors.



8.2 Electrical Grid Network

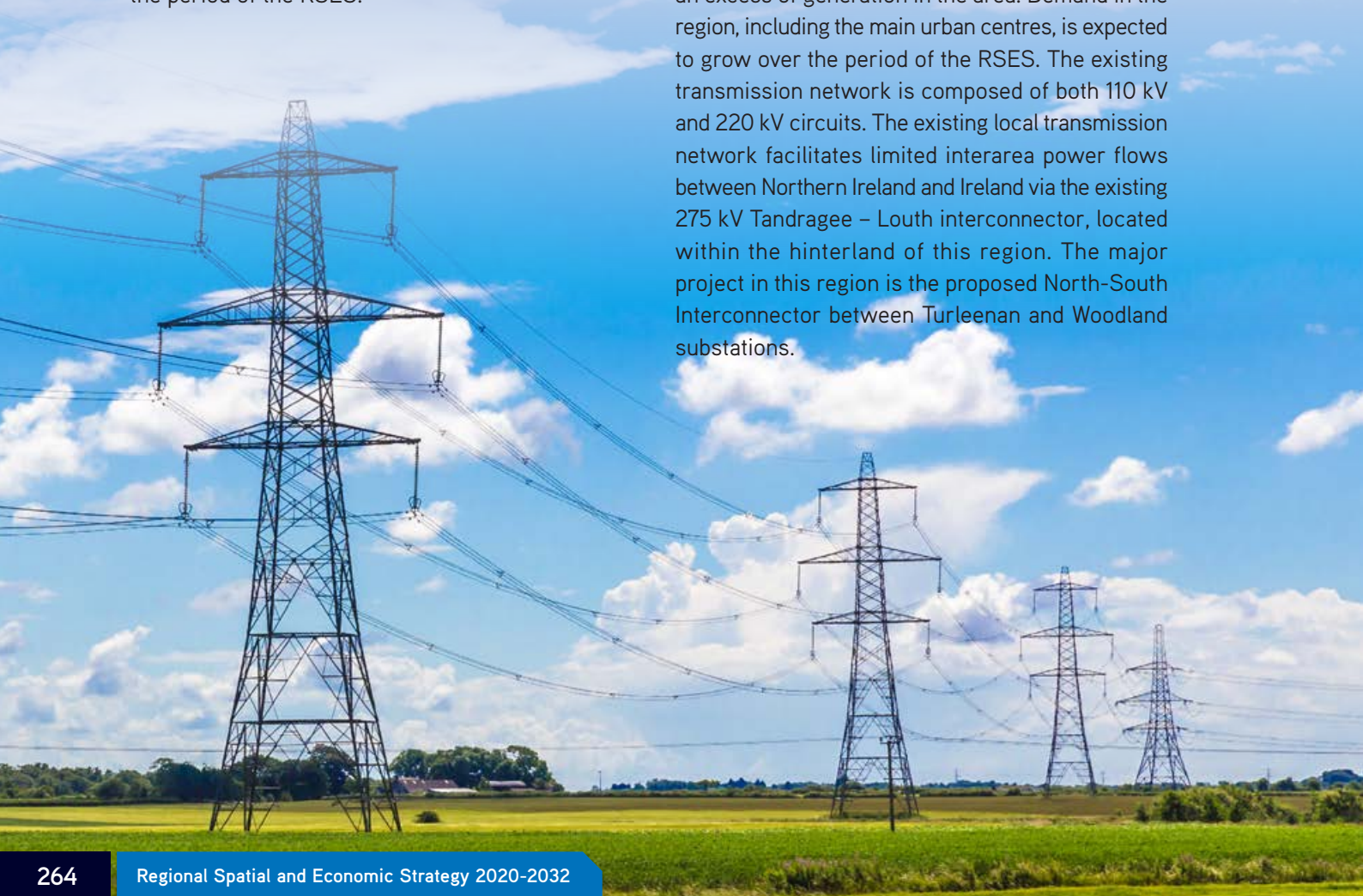
Figure 64 outlines the locations of EirGrid's electricity grid network, including the various electrical lines (110Kv, 200Kv and 400Kv) and the stations that serve each of these differing voltage lines.

Also highlighted in Figure 64 are the locations of the various electricity generating stations, which include hydro, thermal and wind. An understanding of locations of the higher voltage infrastructure is useful, particularly when seeking to identify regional opportunities that may attract industries (e.g. data centres, renewables, etc.).

The West Region is particularly rich in renewable energy resources. These generation sources are dispersed across the region but particularly concentrated along the western coastline. There is also a large conventional thermal generator located at Tynagh substation. The main demand centres are composed of a mix of residential, commercial and industrial demand, which is expected to grow over the period of the RSES.

The existing transmission network is predominantly lower capacity 110 kV with very little higher capacity of 220 kV and 400 kV transmission infrastructure. Developing the grid will enable the transmission system to safely accommodate more diverse power flows from surplus regional generation and also to facilitate future growth in electricity demand. These developments will strengthen the network for all electricity users, and in doing so will improve the security and quality of supply. This is particularly important if the region is to attract high technology industries that depend on a reliable, high-quality, electricity supply.

The Border Region has significant renewable energy resources and supply exceeds demand, so there is an excess of generation in the area. Demand in the region, including the main urban centres, is expected to grow over the period of the RSES. The existing transmission network is composed of both 110 kV and 220 kV circuits. The existing local transmission network facilitates limited interarea power flows between Northern Ireland and Ireland via the existing 275 kV Tandragee – Louth interconnector, located within the hinterland of this region. The major project in this region is the proposed North-South Interconnector between Turleenan and Woodland substations.





The need for reinforcement of the grid in the north-west is being investigated and it is predicated on the level of renewable generation in both Donegal and its hinterland in western Northern Ireland. The solutions, technology and timing of this work are currently being reviewed and is an urgent priority for the region to ensure it has sufficient capacity and resilience.

Regionally we have a pivotal role in delivering a successful transition. There are rich renewable energy resources through wind, solar and wave (to mention but a few) along and throughout the region. The former has manifested itself already and wind turbines are a new feature in our landscapes. There is still significant potential for all new outputs to our grid. There are however some big challenges to overcome. Those include a new regulatory environment in the guise of new Wind Energy Guidelines to replace those from 2006, and secondly, a fit for purpose transmission network able to accept, convert and transmit power to those areas of the country where demand exists.

The country and the region are in a period of economic growth, this naturally increases electricity consumption and such increases are expected to continue up to 2025. This RSES is an appropriate mechanism to integrate and manage network growth and economic growth. There are several principles which inform national policies, and which should inform the energy infrastructure road map for the region. These include sustainability, security of supply and competitiveness. There are also several policy documents which should inform regional infrastructure policies, these include:

- Department of Communications Energy and National Resources White Paper on Energy: Ireland's transition to a low carbon energy future 2015 – 2030
- EirGrid's (2017b) Grid Developments Strategy – Your Grid Your Tomorrow
- EirGrid's (2017a) Tomorrows Energy Scenarios 2017: Planning Our Energy Future



Figure 64 below indicates the location of proposed infrastructure upgrades in the region and the following schedule are the current regionally

important projects. The Assembly fully supports the delivery of these projects.

Figure 64: Electrical Transmission System



(Source: Eirgrid Transmission Development Plan 2018-2027)

The increased use of existing grid will reduce the need for a new transmission network. The total improvements will comprise 200km of a new transmission network and line upgrade of 700km. The delivery of the above projects will ensure that the population growth projections outlined

elsewhere in our strategy will have sufficient electricity infrastructure to service them. The infrastructure improvements will also facilitate the incorporation of known renewable energy generated power into the transmission network.

Table 11: Projects in Northern & Western Region

Project Name	Location
North Connacht Project	Roscommon, Sligo, Mayo
Regional Solution Project (series compensation on 400 kV network)	Galway
North South 400 kV Interconnector	Meath, Cavan, Monaghan, Armagh, Tyrone
Bellacorick – Castlebar 110 kV Line update	Mayo
North West Project (study area)	Donegal, Leitrim, Sligo
Bellacorick – Moy 110 kV Line update	Mayo
Cashla – Salthill 110 kV Line update	Galway
Galway 110 kV Station Redevelopment	Galway

REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES

RPO 8.1

The Assembly support the development of a safe, secure and reliable electricity network and the transition towards a low carbon economy centred on energy efficiency and the growth projects outlined and described in this strategy.

RPO 8.2

Support the reinforcement and strengthening of the electricity transmission network with particular reference to the regionally important projects contained within Table 11.

RPO 8.3

The Assembly support the necessary integration of the transmission network requirements to allow linkages with renewable energy proposals at all levels to the electricity transmission grid in a sustainable and timely manner.

RPO 8.4

That reinforcements and new electricity transmission infrastructure are put in place and their provision is supported, to ensure the energy needs of future population and economic expansion within designated growth areas and across the region can be delivered in a sustainable and timely manner and that capacity is available at local and regional scale to meet future needs. Ensure that development minimises impacts on designated areas.

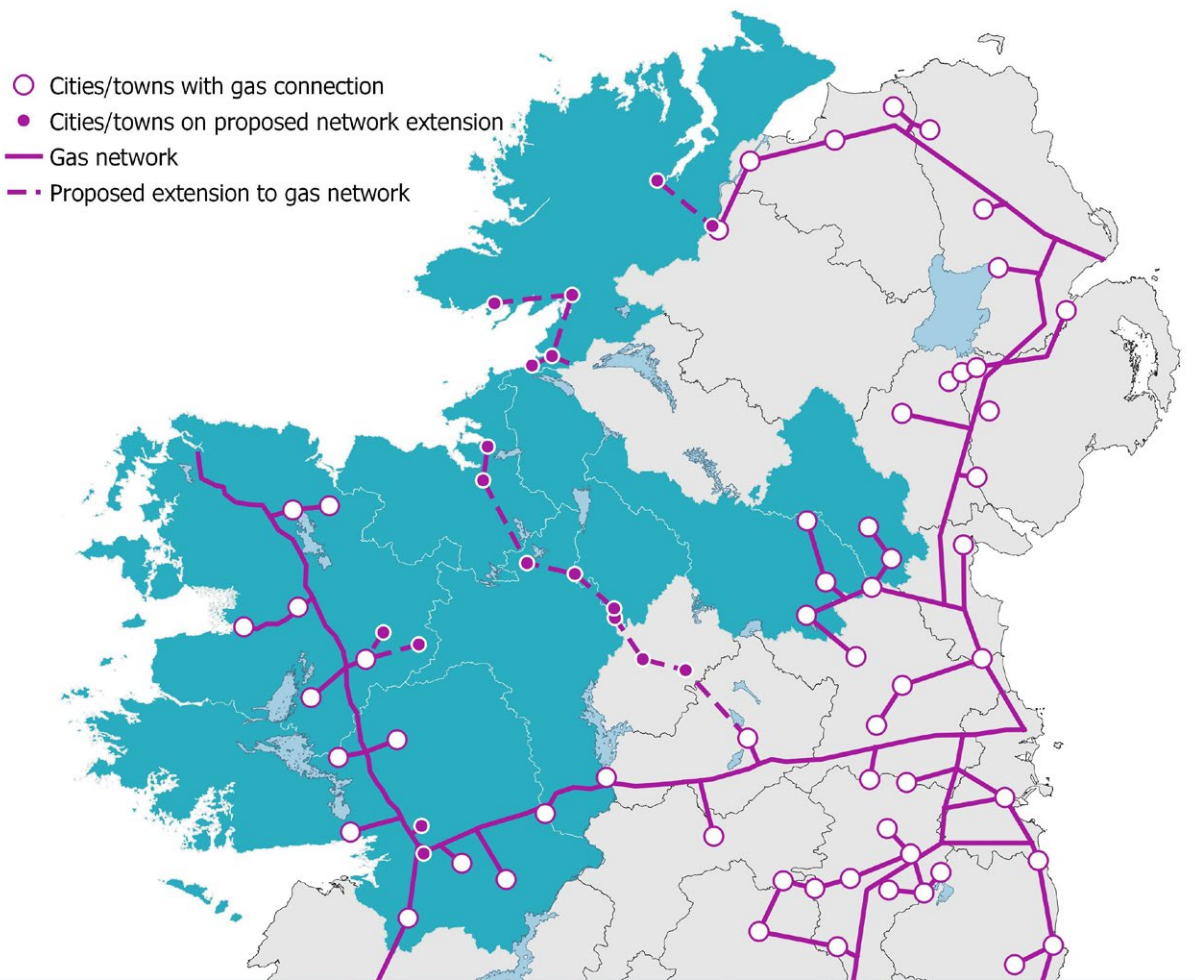
8.3 Gas Networks

The Gas Network operated by Gas Networks Ireland, currently extends into the East and West of our region, but does not cover Counties Sligo, Roscommon, Donegal or Leitrim.

There are currently no network extensions under construction. Within the lifetime of the RSES, it should be the ambition of our region to explore the extension of the network into Counties Sligo, Roscommon, Donegal and Leitrim and in the first instance examine the feasibility and logistics of such an extension to supply potential domestic and business customers in additional locations. In 2016, a Network Development Plan was published in respect of the future plans for the Gas Network.

The Capital Investment Plan element of the network development plan does not reference the network gaps in Counties Sligo, Roscommon, Donegal or Leitrim. However, it must remain an ambition to build out gas supply and that the expansion of the network would bring competitive advantages to the region. The secure supply of natural gas is in itself an important part of the suite of infrastructure necessary to assist in the improvement of regional accessibility generally.

Figure 65: Gas Network / Existing and Potential



CNG can contribute to decarbonisation of high energy usage vehicles, such as heavy goods vehicles (HGVs) and buses, where electricity is currently not a viable alternative to diesel. The conversion of HGVs and buses from diesel to CNG would result in a reduction in carbon emissions and would achieve an immediate improvement in air quality (99% less particulate matter, 70% less Nitrogen Oxide, and 80% less Sulphur Dioxide). The Assembly support the expansion of the Natural Gas (CNG) refuelling infrastructure having regard to the National Policy Framework for Alternative Fuels Infrastructure for Transport which sets a target of 102 CNG refuelling stations by 2030.

REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES

RPO 8.5

To support the build-out of the gas supply network into Counties Sligo, Roscommon, Donegal and Leitrim and in additional locations in the remainder of the region.

RPO 8.6

Facilitate the delivery and expansion of natural gas infrastructure throughout the region and have regard to the location of existing gas infrastructure in assessing potential developments.

RPO 8.7

Encourage and support innovative partnerships extending the gas network in the region, including the potential for gas to grid injection facilities along with anaerobic digestion facilities.

CASE STUDY

SLIGO COMPRESSED NATURAL GAS (SLIGO CNG)

In Sligo, businesses and public sector consider the absence of piped natural gas undermines their competitiveness relative to other parts of Ireland. The extension of the gas network to Sligo is a widely agreed strategic ambition across public and private sectors. A short-term alternative may be available using Compressed Natural Gas (CNG). The principle is that a local gas network is developed, independent of the national network but to the same engineering standards, largely to supply existing and future industrial zones.

This local network can be fed with compressed gas delivered by road to a decompression station and could ultimately be connected to the national network. The gas can be supplied from traditional sources but in future could be provided by low carbon renewable gas sources from the surrounding area. Similar projects have been developed in Europe and USA and it is consistent with the Gas Networks Ireland development of renewable gas injection network. The project has been led by Sligo Sustainable Energy Community (SEC), sponsored by SEAI and housed in IT Sligo. Sligo SEC represents a collaboration between HSE, Sligo County Council, AbbVie, Abbott, PlanEnergy, Aurivo and Sligo Chamber of Commerce. The concept is at feasibility analysis stage and is expected to move to front end engineering design.

8.4 Waste Infrastructure

The main policy guidance for Waste Infrastructure in the region is found in the Connacht Ulster Regional Waste Management Plan (CURWMP) 2015-2021. The area of coverage is coincident with the area of the Regional Assembly. Mayo County Council is the regional lead for the implementation of the plan. The CURWMP records that Municipal Waste Collection in the region is on par with national rates.

Some of the main objectives of the plan are to reduce landfill, increase recovery and increase generation of energy. Investment of up to €650m will be spent on waste treatment infrastructure and waste management activities, this level of investment is almost split equally between the public and private sector. The policies in the plan support the provision of infrastructure for reprocessing, biological treatment, thermal recovery and pre-treatment. These facilities, it is envisaged, will be provided by the private sector. The processes of education, regulation enforcement and remediation will be public sector functions delivered for the most part by local authorities.

The Regional Assembly has a statutory mandate to examine the provision of Waste Infrastructure for the region and to indicate how such provision should be made. The CURWMP outlines the type of Waste Infrastructure that could be needed in the region. These include thermal recovery, biological treatment and reprocessing and recycling. There is currently no thermal recovery capacity in the region. The need for such infrastructure is quantified without giving guidance on the siting of facilities. Siting guidance will of necessity be of a general positive nature and any development proposal will be subject to appropriate in-depth assessments. Facilities should be located as close as feasible to where waste is generated. Lands that are zoned for industrial use are considered suitable for these types of use, particularly in urban areas. In non-urban areas, the principles of proper planning would apply in determining siting criteria.

The provision of waste infrastructure is a necessary component for the future development of the region and can be of equal importance to other infrastructure in securing economic development.

REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES

RPO 8.8

The Assembly supports the implementation of the CURWMP 2015 – 2021 in terms of infrastructure provision.

RPO 8.9

The Assembly supports the requirement that the provision of waste infrastructure is integrated and coordinated with economic development and the planned development of the region as set out in this strategy and the NPF.

RPO 8.10

The siting of waste infrastructure shall in urban areas generally be on lands zoned for industrial use and in non-urban areas shall accord with the principles of proper planning and sustainable development. Environmental constraint mapping can be used to aid this process.

RPO 8.11

The Assembly supports the move towards regional and national self-sufficiency in terms of waste management infrastructure in accordance with the proximity principle and with the circular green economy.

8.5 Water Services Infrastructure

Water is a valuable resource and is essential to sustaining the resilience of this region. The availability of water has influenced the pattern of economic development both nationally and regionally. This is more relevant now than ever, with the establishment of Irish Water. Water is an important input to almost every industry, and equally in sustaining residential settlements and communities. Many of our manufacturing processes and service industries also use water as an essential input.

Adequate water services infrastructure is essential for the region's economic prosperity. Existing water services infrastructure is not in all instances sufficient to deliver the development outlined in this strategy. However, the finite nature of our water supplies does not have to imply reduced economic growth or ongoing environmental degradation. Rather, the fact that water resources are scarce means that water, like other limited inputs to economic production, needs to be used efficiently and allocated to its highest value uses to improve both economic and environmental outcomes.



WATER FRAMEWORK DIRECTIVE

The Water Framework Directive (WFD) (2000/60/EC) aims at improving the aquatic environment and as such it applies to rivers, lakes, estuaries, coastal waters and groundwater. Member states are required to achieve at least good status in all waters and must ensure that status does not deteriorate, with a requirement for water quality management to be centred on river basin districts (RBDs). Ireland published its second cycle River Basin Management Plan covering the period 2018-2021 in Q1 of 2018.

Since the first cycle, there have been new approaches to governance, river basin planning and catchment science. A more integrated approach between key governmental departments, the EPA and local authorities was considered necessary to meet the challenges. The second cycle Programme of Measures will be implemented by the local authorities and have been developed to allow for the protection of good status, or the restoration of good status, for all water bodies.





The provision of adequate water and wastewater infrastructure is pivotal for increased growth and improving quality of life. This region has natural resources in terms of water and Irish Water have strategic plans for its treatment and distribution. Irish Water is developing a National Water Resources Plan (NWRP) which will outline their strategy to secure sustainable supply over the next 25yrs. The region is also well served within its river basins in terms of WasteWater Treatment Plants (WWTPs) and their outfalls.

There is a big challenge for the region to cater to existing and projected population and to maintain and improve the quality of our rivers and lakes. The responsibilities for achieving success in these areas is collective and it will be easier to achieve good results if co-operation and collaboration are hallmarks of how the region works. The RSES will provide a coherent strategy of how to achieve these goals.



WATER INFRASTRUCTURE

Water Infrastructure can conveniently be divided into three parts. These are:

- Potable water supply
- Wastewater treatment and
- Surface water networks

The regulatory system for these services has changed radically and significantly in recent years. The establishment of Irish Water in 2014 brought a new actor onto the stage in terms of infrastructure provision for public potable water supply and wastewater treatment. As a national utility, they have taken over responsibility from the Local Authorities for the provision of public water and wastewater services in the state. There are also private entities operating in this sphere particularly in the supply and treatment of rural water and the operation of private sewage treatment systems. The provision of surface water infrastructure has remained with the Local Authorities.

For the RSES, this section, in common with other sections of the strategy will concentrate on how the major urban areas in the region are currently serviced and if those services need to be upgraded/improved to meet the planned growth in the region. The strategy will include policies and objectives that will have general applicability but the identification and prioritisation of infrastructure for areas outside the identified growth centres will primarily be a matter for County Development Plans and Irish Water.

Within the context of rural development, it is the farming and forestry sectors that present the most likely significant potential to impact upon water quality. Ireland is obliged under the Nitrates Directive 91/676/EEC to prepare a National Nitrates Action



Programme (NAP) to protect water quality from pollution by agricultural sources and to promote good farming practice. The Nitrates Regulations give legal effect to the NAP and directly contribute to the protection of water quality and meeting the objectives of the WFD. Ireland's fourth Nitrates Action Programme came into operation at the start of 2018. In the case of the forestry sector, it is striving to increase forestry cover and historically there have been forestry practices that have contributed to water quality issues, such as the release of suspended solids, acidification of watercourses and the loss and disturbance of riverine habitat.

REGULATION OF WATER SERVICES

The regulation of public water services nationally falls to the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) for economic purposes and to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for quality purposes. Irish Water has, inter alia, prepared the Irish Water Business Plan and the Water Services Strategic Plan which inform their activities in the region. They include strategic objectives concerning customer satisfaction, regulatory, compliance, supporting growth and investment in the future. The WSSP is a strategic plan up to 2040. The business and investment plans prepared by Irish Water are informed by the WSSP, governments water services policy statement and consultation with local and regional authorities. The RSES in its role determining the location of future development in the region will consequently inform Irish Water of the directions they should follow in supporting growth and investment in the region and ultimately alignment will be achieved between strategic ambitions.



EXPANDING SERVICE PROVISION

WATER SERVICES

The National Water Resources Plan (NWRP) will outline how Irish Water will manage its supplies over the short, medium and long term. It will incorporate extreme weather conditions and climate change into its assessments. The population growth proposed in urban areas will require additional capital and operational investment.

WASTEWATER CAPACITY

The sensitivity of the receiving environment, compliance with environmental regulation and impacts of climate change are taken into account when determining the provision of wastewater services to meet the settlement strategy in the strategy.

Irish Water has a Wastewater Capacity Register (see below) which identifies the current situation (i.e. up to 2021) for the treatment capacities in the WWTP servicing the main urban centres in the region. It appears there are sufficient treatment capacities within the region for our urban growth centres up to 2026 and beyond. Irish Water is currently developing Drainage Area Plans for the urban centres in the region. These are necessary to co-ordinate growth and capacity provision and to implement RBMP, UWWTD and discharge licences. The plans are prioritized and currently Galway City, Monaghan and Monksland (Athlone) are in preparation. The issue of dealing with combined sewers and their impacts should be incorporated into the DAP in collaboration with the local authorities. The delivery of DAPs is a critical component of the compact growth models promoted in the NPF and the RSES.

The projects outlined below are necessary to deliver the growth model outlined in the RSES:

- Galway East Main Drainage Scheme
- Merlin Park and Doughiska Wastewater Network Bottleneck Project
- Galway City Water Supply Scheme
- Galway City Mains Rehabilitation Contract
- Athlone Water Treatment Plant
- Sligo & Environs Water Supply Scheme
- Carrick-on-Shannon Water Treatment Plant Upgrade
- Pollan Dam Water Supply Scheme
- Galway City Drainage Area Plan
- Monksland WWTP and Drainage Area Plan
- Monaghan Town Drainage Area Plan
- Roscommon Town Main Drainage
- Lough Talt Water Supply Scheme

SURFACE WATER CAPACITY

The provision of surface water drainage networks is the responsibility of Local Authorities. The design, construction and maintenance of such networks cannot be done in isolation and it is well tried and good practice to provide this infrastructure in conjunction with the provision of wastewater networks. A high level of consultation and co-operation with Irish Water would be an obvious pre-requisite for delivery of optimum solutions. The failure of surface water drainage systems (natural and manmade) can result in flooding with consequent risk to lives, property and environment and economic damage.



FLOOD RISK

This region, along with the remainder of the country has had the benefit of a long and thorough examination of its drainage networks under the CFRAMS process and the potential for impacts on many urban areas. These were considered in detail in the Areas for Further Assessment (AFAs). Seven of our larger urban centres were subject to AFA and the implementation of schemes to address identified problems is ongoing. The implementation of the approved schemes is set out in detail on the website – www.flooding.ie. The process gives confidence to the RSES, that it is making informed decisions in identifying and justifying areas for further growth and development.



REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES

RPO 8.12

To ensure that adequate infrastructure is in place to meet demands from continuing growth and development of the economy and to cater to existing and increased population levels.

RPO 8.13

Support the delivery of flood defence works planned by OPW to be implemented in the short-term.

RPO 8.14

To support the Rural Water Programme, which should be continued and enhanced.

RPO 8.15

Support investment for water and wastewater services in the first instance where existing facilities are insufficient to meet current demands and as outlined above (See: Expanding Service Provision).

RPO 8.16

Water conservation measures should be expanded particularly by rehabilitation and reinforcement of existing water networks.

RPO 8.17

Provide quality water and wastewater services necessary for urban and rural economic development purposes.

RPO 8.18

Ensure the protection and improvement of all waters – rivers, lakes, groundwater, estuaries (transitional waters), coastal waters and their associated habitats and species throughout the region and implement measures to achieve at least Good Status in all water surface bodies.

RPO 8.19

Implement the EC Environmental Objectives (Groundwater) Regulations, 2010 (S.I.No.9); the EC (Good Agricultural Practice for Protection of Waters) Regulations, 2009 (S.I. No.101), the Bathing Water Quality Regulations, 2008 (S.I.79) and EC (Quality of Shellfish Waters) Regulations 2006 and amendment Regulations.

RPO 8.20

Participate in the implementation and promote compliance with the objectives of the 'Water Framework Directive' through the River Basin Management Plans throughout the region.

RPO 8.21

Ensure Drainage Area Plans including investigation on elimination of combined sewers are prepared for Galway, Athlone, Monaghan and Roscommon.

RPO 8.22

Prioritising investment to improve stormwater infrastructure to improve sustainable drainage and reduce the risk of flooding in the urban and rural environment.

RPO 8.23

The Regional Authority will support the achievement of the objectives under the River BMP for the relevant water bodies in the region.





All Island Cohesion 9

9

All Island Cohesion

9.1 Introduction

Ireland is an open and export-based economy and continues to grow its markets in the European Union and beyond. Over the course of the next 12+ years, regardless of the ultimate shape and outcome of Brexit, it will remain vital that the country and this region retains strong links with Northern Ireland, as well as the wider UK.

Working together with our neighbours will be vital for the continued development of our economy, as well as the coordination of economic and social infrastructure, in areas such as energy, healthcare, transport provision, management of environmental assets and co-funding of projects, which will be vital particularly within our Border Counties. Section 8 of Ireland 2040 (Working with our neighbours, National Policy Objectives 43 - 51) outlines the extent of some of the ongoing Cross Border co-operation and shared challenges.



The implementation of the RSES will be supported by the Framework for Co-operation on Spatial Strategies between Ireland and Northern Ireland, which will be updated and reviewed as required. In the context of ongoing North-South cooperation across a wide range of policy areas, there are three key categories of practical co-operation that will be of strategic significance to communities on the Island, namely:

- Working Together for Economic Advantage
- Co-ordination of Investment in Infrastructure
- Managing our Shared Environment Responsibly

9.2 Working Together for Economic Advantage

Collaborative work at a sub-regional level on a cross-border basis is critical to the social, economic, cultural and environmental wellbeing of communities. Working together has resulted in the development of a pipeline of cross-border initiatives and projects that are having a great impact on local communities. The continuation of such collaboration is dependent on adequate resourcing and this is a key strategic priority for the outworking and delivery of the RSES in the border region.

Sectoral clusters, including agri-food, engineering, manufacturing and tourism assets are important to the border region. There is further development potential to expand these sectors as they play a vital role regionally and nationally and for that reason are supported in this RSES.

The border region can largely be viewed as having three interlinked areas of strategic importance in contributing to regional and all-island economic growth, namely the North West City Region (focused on the Regional Centre of Letterkenny, Derry City and Strabane), the Dublin-Belfast corridor in the east and the Central Border Region.

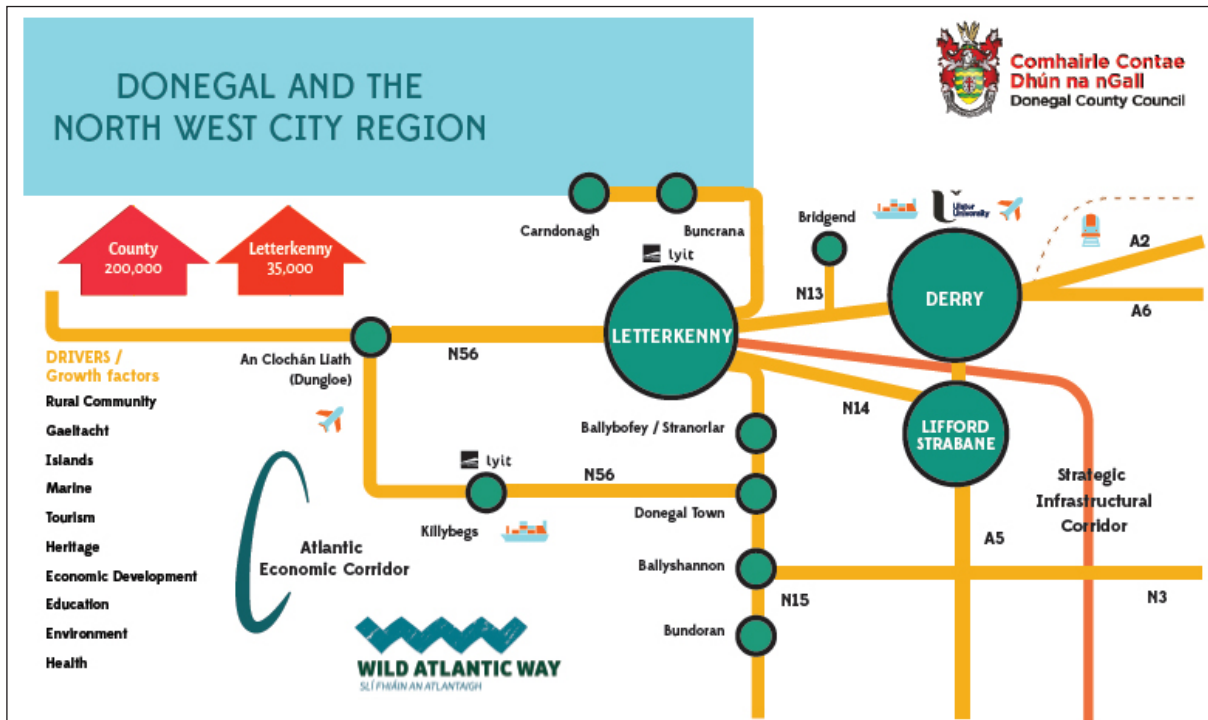
NORTH WEST METROPOLITAN AREA SPATIAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK

The North West City Region (Letterkenny, Derry and Strabane) is the fourth-largest urban agglomeration on the island of Ireland. It is the only functional economic region of such scale on the island which experiences a national jurisdictional border.

It is well recognised across the island of Ireland that while the North West faces many challenges - not least because of its peripherality from Dublin and Belfast and associated lack of investment over many decades - this region is an untapped source of great potential - economically, socially and environmentally. It is widely accepted that the challenges can only be met, and the opportunities pursued, with a consistent and long-term approach to coordinating the development of the region.



Figure 66: North West Metropolitan City Region, Spatial Planning



This new strategic planning framework for the North West City Region Metropolitan Area, which includes the Regional Growth Centre of Letterkenny, is central to that coordinated approach, complementing the regional priorities of the North West Strategic Growth Partnership (NWSGP). Building on the work of the Growth Partnership and its strategic action plan (July 2016), this framework represents the subregional integration of spatial planning, economic and community development and infrastructure investment as part of the RSES. It represents the operationalising of the National Planning Framework (NPF) at the level of the North West City Region (see Figure 66).

The Strategic Planning Framework will play a key role in guiding future growth and trans-boundary investment across the inter-jurisdictional City Region, offering local, regional and national governments the opportunity to take a high-level, and long-term strategic approach to the sustainable growth of the North West City Region.

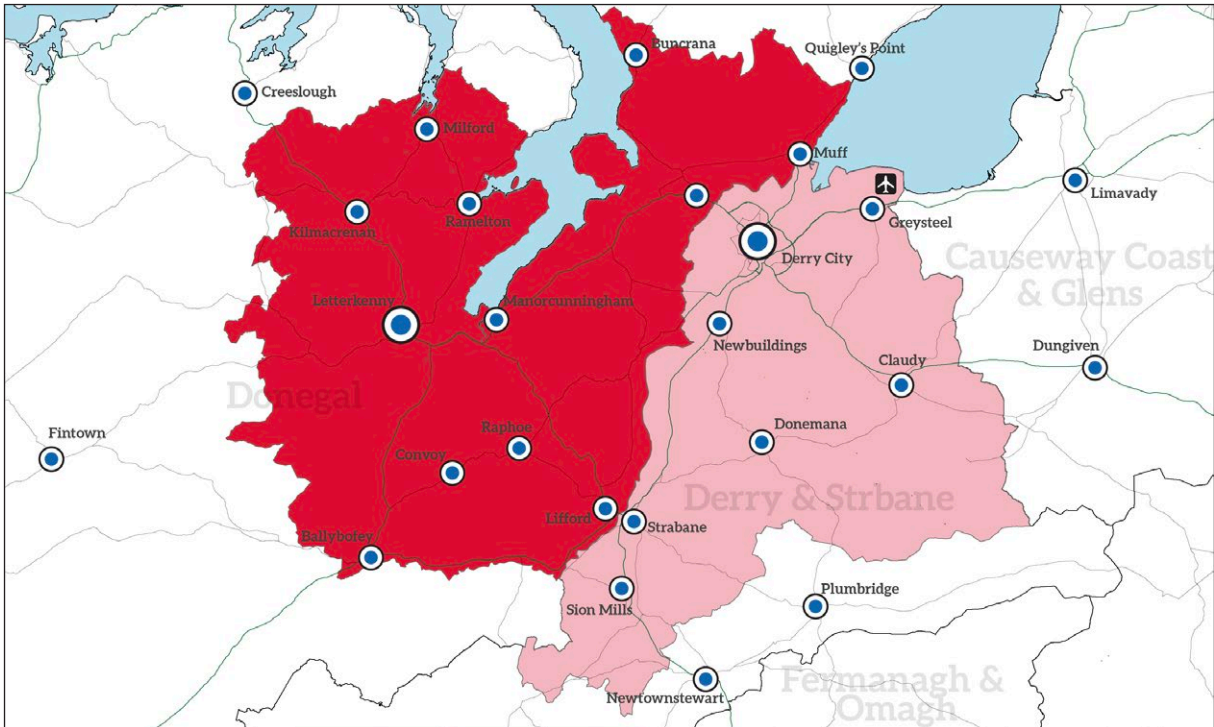
THE NORTH WEST CITY REGION

The North West City Region comprises Donegal County Council and Derry City and Strabane District Council areas covering an area of 2,394 square miles. This Metropolitan Area is defined by the spatial influences of Letterkenny- Derry-Strabane. This functional urban area is characterised by a dense concentration of population, employment, service provision including transport, education and healthcare.

The population of the Metropolitan Area (see figure 67) is 193,106 people while the wider North West City Region and its functional territory comprises a population of circa 350,000 people. The region has over 35,000 in third-level higher and further education. The working population comprises 39% with a level 3 or above qualification rising to 43% when apprenticeships are included.

The City Region is further defined by its rich tourism, culture and heritage offerings, industrial history, breath-taking scenery, its robust maritime tradition, the entrepreneurial spirit and creativity of its people, and its strong sense of community. In recent years, the councils have strengthened their shared approach to the effective development of these shared assets to the benefit of the region as a whole and, indeed, the all-island economy.

Figure 67: North West Metropolitan City Region



STRATEGIC VISION FOR THE NORTH WEST CITY REGION

The strategic vision for the North West City Region Metropolitan Area, incorporating the Letterkenny Regional Growth Centre is:

THE NORTH WEST CITY REGION METROPOLITAN AREA, WHICH INCLUDES THE LETTERKENNY REGIONAL GROWTH CENTRE WILL BE CONNECTED, VIBRANT, RESILIENT AND INCLUSIVE.

This vision centres on managing spatial change and improving people's quality of life. Ultimately, this is about creating a good quality place to live, work and socialise via processes of place-based leadership and place-making. To achieve this vision, there is a recognised need to work collectively and in an interdisciplinary manner.

HOW WILL THIS BE ACHIEVED?

Delivering this vision requires collaborative leadership and working with partners across the private, public and third-level sectors. The achievement of this strategic vision shall be made possible through the new collaborative structures that have been co-designed by both Donegal County Council and Derry City and Strabane District Council, which place a strong emphasis on the principles of place-based leadership, namely:

- the North West Strategic Growth Partnership involving senior Central Government Officials, both North and South, and
- the North West Strategic Growth Partnership involving senior Central Government Officials, both North and South.

In addition, it will be important to build upon those positive working relationships that have been nurtured through the Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) and the Higher and Further Education bodies to facilitate delivery and capitalisation of the key objectives of their Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).



KEY STRATEGIC OUTCOMES

This Strategic Planning Framework is centred on four key strategic outcomes – closely aligned with the national strategic outcomes and priorities of the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the eight strategic aims of the Regional Development Strategy (RDS) 2035. Those outcomes are:

- Building Inclusive and Compact Places
- Investing in Connected and Accessible Places
- Planning for a Vibrant Economy and Nurturing Communities
- Creating Resilient Places and Low-Carbon Infrastructure.

Under this framework, new developments will, to the greatest extent possible, contribute towards the creation of high-quality places across the North West City Region, taking account of Place-making Principles. Under the principles of place-making, development proposals should be based upon a design-led and participative process and should seek to deliver on the six qualities of place – namely, distinctive, safe and pleasant, welcoming, adaptable, resource-efficient and easy to move around and beyond. The following objectives shall form the framework for this and shall guide the development of plans, strategies and programmes at a local level. The NWRA will monitor the implementation of the framework and further details are provided in Section 10.

REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVE

RPO 9.1

Build Inclusive and Compact Places by:

- a) Planning for Inclusive Communities through regional cooperation and collaboration, to support the wider economic and social development agendas of the region and integrating health and wellbeing outcomes across all activities, ensuring that spaces are made available for community use.
- b) Accommodating Growth and Delivering Housing through compact growth where housing opportunities are close to schools, community facilities, health facilities, shopping, and employment; Prioritising the (re-)use of existing underutilised land and buildings, and other infill opportunities.
- c) Accessing Quality Services by maximising the use of transport and digital infrastructure to ensure people can access quality education and health services, building on the quality health and education infrastructure that exists on a cross-border basis and building more shared services and nurturing greater collaboration between actors and agencies in the co-design of new services.
- d) Valuing Cultural Heritage by creating appealing places through attractive and imaginative building design, street layout, civic space and public realm design; Developing new offerings in support of existing ventures in the tourism sector, such as greenways, walking trails and other inter-urban connections, based on the wealth of natural and cultural heritage assets and providing links to the Wild Atlantic Way and the Causeway Coast.



RPO 9.2

Invest in Accessible and Connected Places through:

- a) Donegal County Council, Derry City and Strabane District Council and transport providers working together to deliver programmed and future investment for strategic internal and external transport improvements. This to include consideration of cross-border connectivity – with a particular emphasis on provision of high-quality TEN-T routes, maximising the level of accessibility to the urban core for all sectors of the community and all abilities, with a focus upon supporting a modal shift to walking, cycling, public transport, whilst embracing disruptive technologies to augment the shift to electric vehicles and other modes of transport.
- b) Encouraging active travel with a clear focus on place building and connectivity and promoting active mobility through soft measures including information and awareness-raising campaigns to complement hard investments in routes and support activities, including activity-based recreation resources.
- c) Strengthening Digital Infrastructure by supporting the expansion and investment in third-level education and leveraging cross-border knowledge networks to strengthen access to skills and talents that support a digital economy, nurtures entrepreneurship, anticipates and responds to the demand for innovative services that are socially inclusive, attractive and supportive of the local workforce, and contributes to quality public realm.

RPO 9.3

Planning for a vibrant economy through:

- a) Fostering Enterprise and Innovation by identifying the critical linkages between place-making and business investment, utilising the North West Strategic Growth Partnership in realising the economic potential of the region in priority areas ensuring they are supported by our third level institutes and our R&D institutions of excellence and that further spaces are developed to nurture and catalyse the region's most innovative entrepreneurs with the area's strong network of experienced business leaders and cutting edge research and development institutions.
- b) Nurturing the rural economy through protecting and promoting the sense of place and culture and the quality, character and distinctiveness of the rural landscape, whilst facilitating the appropriately-scaled development of rural enterprise initiatives, including the appropriate development of tourism, delivering business start-up programmes and development support to rural communities experiencing economic disadvantage, whilst also meeting appropriate rural housing need having due regard to all material considerations.

RPO 9.4

Create Resilient Places and Low-Carbon Infrastructure by:

- a) **Managing Natural Resources** through adhering to the principles of the circular economy, monitor air quality through the use of smart technologies, with the overall aim of improving air quality and to protect local ecosystems through the management of our natural capital
- b) **Transitioning to a Low Carbon Economy** through a presumption against development in areas vulnerable to flooding and rising sea levels, continuing to assess the probability of risk from all sources of flooding, and working with relevant stakeholders in both the assessment and delivery of any mitigation responses required; Furthermore, pursue the generation of renewable energies and their local applications through, for example, green infrastructure planning, innovative design solutions, the promotion of energy-efficient buildings and homes
- c) **Diversifying Energy Resources** by promoting and facilitating the development of the wider North West region as a Centre of Excellence for renewable energy and innovation and establishing a sustainable energy strategy for the City Region that pursues continued investment in the resilience and security of electricity networks and infrastructure, and the development of a diverse energy portfolio, harnesses the expertise of technological research and training among the region's institutions of higher education, growing the development of a skilled workforce in all aspects of energy generation including linking employment opportunities in the emerging renewable energy field to workers displaced from other economic sectors.

LETTERKENNY REGIONAL GROWTH CENTRE

Letterkenny is one of the three key urban centres of the North West City Region. Section 3.7 of this RSES, provides a Regional Growth Centre Strategic Plan for Letterkenny, which gives further detail in respect of some of the key objectives to be delivered. Local plans and strategies shall present an opportunity for further detail to be provided.

DUBLIN – BELFAST ECONOMIC CORRIDOR

This economic corridor traverses County Louth, which is within the EMRA area. It is the largest economic agglomeration on the island of Ireland and is identified in their RSES as a regional growth enabler.



The corridor comprises a nationally important spine connecting the two largest settlements on the island of Ireland via the regional centres of Drogheda, Dundalk and Newry. The Corridor is underpinned by a strong presence of transport infrastructure connecting Dublin and Belfast. Drogheda and Dundalk are identified as a Regional Growth Centres in the National Planning Framework, as are Athlone, Sligo and Letterkenny.

The Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor and the Regional Growth Centres of Drogheda and Dundalk have a significant reach into the Central Border Counties, including into South Monaghan, and East Cavan, particularly influencing towns such as Carrickmacross, and Kingscourt within the NWRA area.

THE CENTRAL BORDER REGION

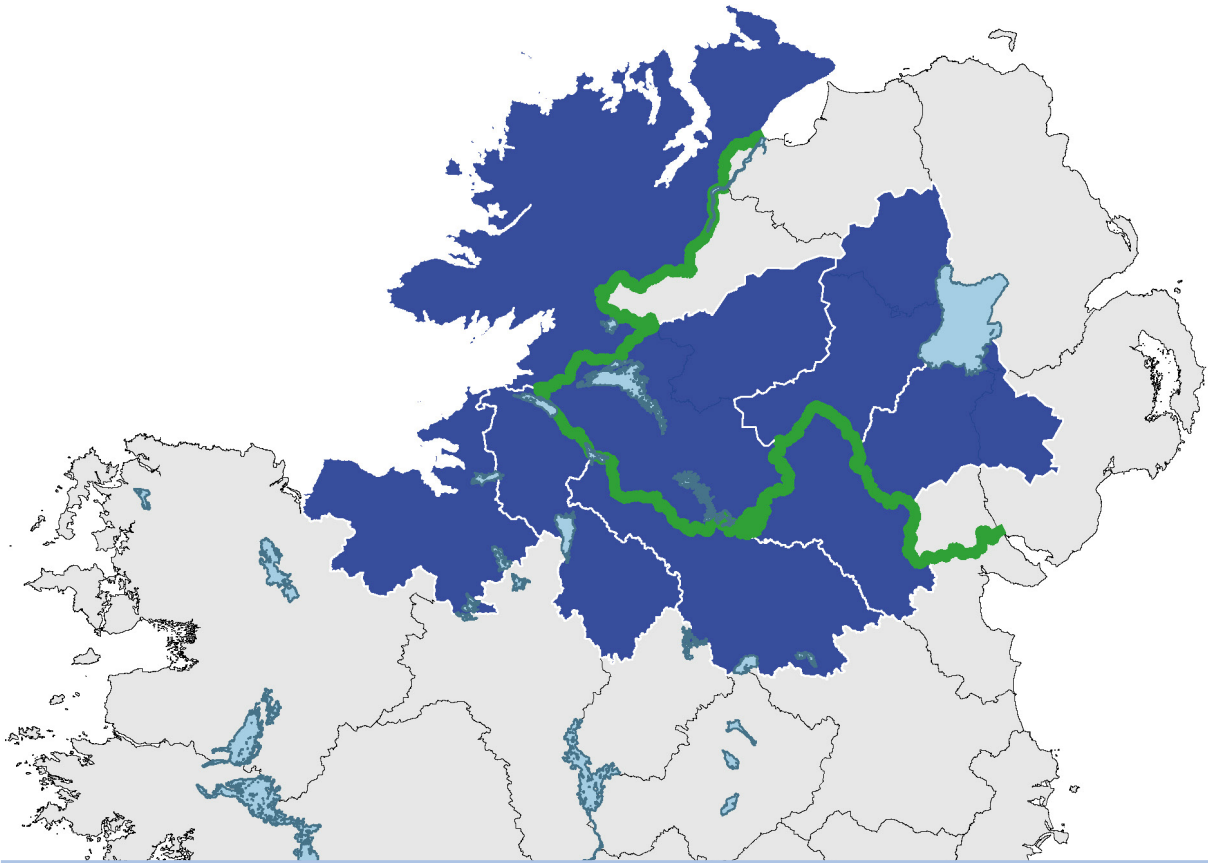
Project Ireland 2040 sets out a clear strategy to develop strong urban centres in the North West and the North East. Within the Central Border Region, it confirms it will be crucial that County Towns and economic drivers such as Monaghan Town and Cavan Town continue to expand seamless cross border links, and these will be aided by the upgrade of the N2 / A5 in the case of Monaghan, and the N3 in the case of Cavan, including the bypassing of Virginia in South County Cavan. The N2/A5 present opportunities for appropriate development at strategic locations along these corridors.

The central border area has the capacity to provide suitable alternative locations for larger employers in comparison to city areas where increasingly, issues like water supply, traffic congestion and lack of housing are acting as barriers to economic development, as well as offering a better quality of life with less drive time etc. There exists the innate opportunity to target such locations as alternatives to the Dublin area.

In this area, the agri-food sector has taken advantage of natural resources and changing consumer demands, whilst enabling progressive increases in off-farm employment. This well-established food production and processing sector offer further development potential that is supported across the RSES. This strategy encourages and supports economic performance by building upon the local strengths to drive growth in employment within this sector. It will be necessary to ensure that appropriate production and processing activities are supported and promoted, ensuring that the potential for further sustainable development is realised.

Many areas including but not limited to Cavan and Monaghan, Mid Ulster and Craigavon, have a longestablished reputation for engineered products produced to meet the exacting needs of an international client base. These range from precision engineering companies, to process control systems designers, to the latest in agricultural machinery and machine tools. These sectors have significant interlinked cross-border trading operations that need to be supported.

Figure 68: ICBAN – Central Border Region





There are several key strategic Cross Border Transport Corridors within the border region that require further investment, and these are identified as part of Growth Ambition 3 and worthy of mention here:

- N2/A5 from Ardee to Derry
- N3/A509
- N12/A3 Armagh to Monaghan
- N16/A4
- N54/A3 Monaghan to Cavan
- The East/West Link from Dundalk to Sligo
- A29 Dungannon to County Monaghan

The Irish Central Border Area Network provides a further platform for collaboration between local authorities north and south. The eight Member Councils of ICBAN are Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon; Fermanagh and Omagh; Mid Ulster and the counties of Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Monaghan and Sligo.



Further collaborative partnerships include:

- Cavan County Council and the Fermanagh and Omagh District Council jointly manage the Marble Arch Caves UNESCO Global Geopark.
- Monaghan County Council is part of the Cross-Border Forum of four councils (Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council, Mid Ulster District Council and Monaghan County Council). This forum has been collectively meeting and working to share environmental planning ideas and has developed a 'Statement of Common Ground' to develop consistency in this regard across the development plans of the four local authorities.

Support for such platforms and collaborative initiatives are key to the success of our strategy.



9.3 Co-ordination of Investment in Infrastructure



MOBILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

The co-ordination of investments in infrastructure will provide economic, social and environmental benefits north and south and are supported within this RSES. This RSES has identified the importance of enhanced transport connectivity, to include cross-border road and rail, cycling and walking routes, as well as blueways, greenways and peatways. Connectivity through the ferry service across Lough Foyle, linking the Causeway Coast with North Donegal and the Wild Atlantic Way is also a significant and important service that is supported by the RSES.



ENERGY

The need for a new interconnector between the electricity grids of Northern Ireland and Ireland has been identified by the EU as a project of common interest and is supported in our RSES. Future enhancement of energy security and resilience to support a population of 8 million people will be supported through the progression of further north-south interconnection of electricity grids, including the resilience of the network within the Donegal/Tyrone sub-catchment area to facilitate future development opportunities is referenced within Growth Ambition 5.

The gas network is also identified as an important piece of economic infrastructure within Growth Ambition 5. It reaches into the western part of the border region near Derry and Strabane. It has no presence in other border counties. There is a need to harness the opportunity that this infrastructure presents and to encourage, support and enable its extension to new areas within the cross-border region.

Enhanced East-West interconnection between the island, wider UK and European gas networks and ongoing work to harmonise gas transmission arrangements on the island are supportive of meeting EU requirements for gas market integration and are supported in this strategy.

DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Growth Ambition 3 of this strategy, recognises that the communications network is responsible for saving lives, encouraging economic growth as well as providing citizens with access to work, entertainment and social media. Staying connected and competitive on a cross-border basis is key to economic success but equally important are the social and environmental benefits that it brings. Digital Infrastructure has the potential to be a gamechanger and presents significant economic, environmental, cultural and social opportunities for people on an all-island perspective.

The Hibernia Atlantic Group connects locations in the North-West, including Coleraine, Letterkenny, Derry, and Strabane, extending onwards to many strategic locations including Omagh, Armagh, Monaghan and Drogheda through Project Kelvin. Other initiatives that have provided services in this region include the National Broadband Plan, and the Metropolitan Area Networks (MANS).



This RSES supports actions to strengthen communications links to develop a stable, innovative and secure digital communications and services infrastructure on an all-island basis and to become a smart region. The enhancement of such links between the North American continent and the island of Ireland and Europe, provide access to international systems. The utilisation and extension of these and similar networks are to be supported, subject to other appropriate considerations including environmental considerations.



TOURISM

Tourism is a key area of opportunity for the cross-border area and extensive networks exist on an all-island basis that needs to be nurtured and grown to meet its potential. All-island tourism initiatives have been supported through relevant tourism agencies and Tourism Ireland. There are many established Cross Border flagships such as the Cavan Burren Geopark, which incorporates the Marble Arch Caves in Co. Fermanagh. Furthermore, there are current exemplar's of amenity projects being progressed, including The NorthWest Greenway Project between Derry and Buncrana, and the Ulster Canal Project from Cavan, via Monaghan to Counties Tyrone and Armagh. These projects have successfully secured a significant level of Interreg funding, and are notable for the involvement of Cross Border bodies such as Waterways Ireland.

There is undoubtedly an opportunity to upscale existing tourism ventures across the region and to develop further attractions of national and international scale. This RSES would support such initiatives.

REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES

RPO 9.5

To reinforce through the RSES the North West Regional Growth Partnership, through the continuation of growth in Letterkenny Regional Growth Centre and its wider hinterland, which includes the North West City Region, and align where possible spatial planning, including Bridgend, Muff and Killea Co. Donegal.

RPO 9.6

To establish a Cross-Jurisdictional Working Group which collaborates on projects such as Blueways, Greenways, Walking/Hiking Trails/Peatways to foster improved local and regional links.

RPO 9.7

The Assembly will work with Local Authorities and other stakeholders in both jurisdictions to identify further potential projects which could benefit cross border communities and in doing so create an inventory of priority projects to be advanced to feasibility studies, and beyond.

RPO 9.8

To ensure the continuation and strengthening of cross-jurisdictional management of River Basin Management Plans and the implementation of the Water Framework Directive.



CASE STUDY

THE ULSTER CANAL

Following the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, Waterways Ireland was charged with conducting appraisals and studies to take forward cross border projects, and if completed, to maintain and manage these amenities.

In 2007, the North-South Ministerial Council approved the restoration of the Lough Erne to Clones section of the Ulster Canal and more recently, (2017), the Irish Government approved the restoration of the Shannon Erne waterway to Castle Saunderson. The funding commitment which attaches to this phase is included in the recently published National Development Plan 2018-2027.

The Ulster Canal Project will assist in boosting the amenity and tourist offer in Cavan, Monaghan, North Armagh and East Tyrone. With the restoration of the waterway, opportunity and spin-off business dividend will deliver growth to towns and villages such as Belturbet, Clones, and Smithborough.

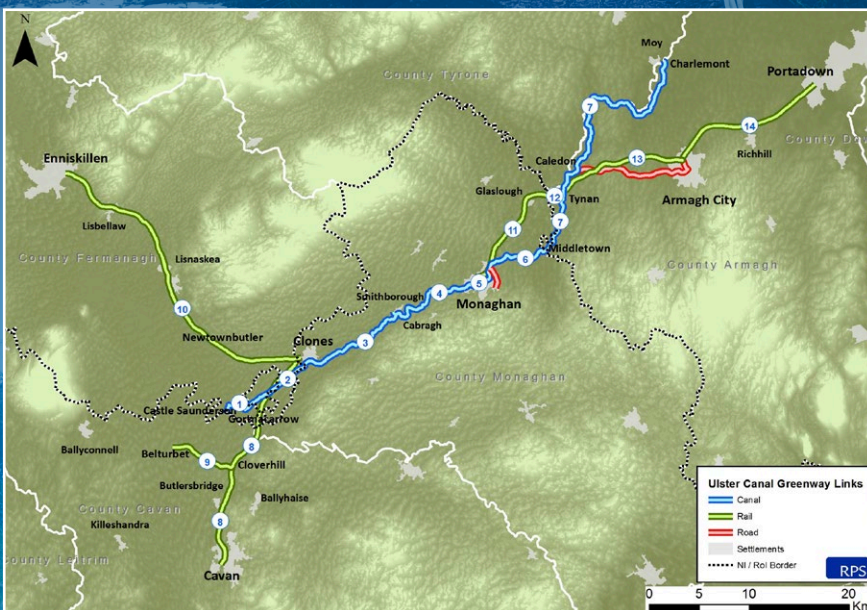
The incremental steps in the Project are outlined below:

- Overall Project, 93km in Length, 26 locks, restore the original waterway, which catered for narrow gauge vessels. The Canal opened in 1841 and closed in 1929.

- Phase 1: Restoration of Lough Erne to Clones (13.5km), Planning Received and with an approximate cost of €46m. Planning Permission extends to 2023. 9km of new canal planned, alongside two marinas and two new road bridges.

- Phase 2: Erne Navigation Extension (to Castle Saunderson): 2.5km stretch from Shannon Erne to Castle Saunderson in Co. Cavan, work on this project is nearing completion, costing €2.5m.

Phase 3: Ulster Canal Greenway. The 22km Cross Border project will connect Smithborough in Co. Monaghan with Middletown in Co. Armagh, the greenway will follow the towpath of the Ulster Canal where possible and funding of €5m has already been secured (through Interreg / SEUPB).



CASE STUDY

MARBLE ARCH CAVES UNESCO GLOBAL GEOPARK (CAVAN/FERMANAGH)

The UNESCO Marble Arch Caves Global Geopark is a borderless Park which is located within the counties of Cavan and Fermanagh. It is managed jointly between Fermanagh and Omagh District Council in Northern Ireland and Cavan County Council in the Republic of Ireland.



The Geopark is one of the principal tourist attractions in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, it is seen as one of the leading environmental education providers in Europe. The Geopark has strong community networks and works closely with local activity and accommodation providers to deliver a strong Geopark brand, which has grown steadily over the past number of years.

The current Geopark boundary encompasses an area over 2,333km² and boasts over 50 sites across Cavan and Fermanagh. Some have been designated for their geological value but many for their aesthetic and environmental value.

In 2015 the Geopark further expanded its boundary into Cavan to encompass some significant tourist amenities such as Castle Saunderson, Killykeen Forest Park and Dowra Courthouse. Several sites within the Geopark have been developed as key flagship sites from a tourism and conservation perspective namely Cavan Burren Park Interpretative Centre and Trails and the Marble Arch Caves Visitor Centre. Combined visitor numbers for both these sites are now more than 120,000 per year. Added to this were the recent developments at Cuilcagh Mountain Park including the installation of a boardwalk to the summit to protect this environmentally sensitive site protected under EU Directive. This has seen another huge increase in numbers visiting the Geopark and across all sites, it is estimated that over 400,000 people visit the Marble Arch Caves UNESCO Global Geopark per annum.



A recent economic study measuring the economic impact of the Geopark with specific reference to Cuilcagh and its hinterlands found the average age of visitors to the region was 38 years – which is in line with the Fáilte Ireland profile of the 'Great Escapers'. Significantly the average spend of day trip respondents was approx €18 per person. The majority of visitors to the area are from the Republic of Ireland (over 50%) with 11% of these visitors staying overnight in the region. It is a key objective of the Geopark to increase overnight occupancy and in turn, spend across the region through ongoing engagement with local trade and interest groups.

There are of course many intangible benefits associated with the Geopark. The Marble Arch Caves UNESCO Global Geopark makes a significant contribution to maintaining indirect employment within the regional tourism industry, providing countryside access for visitors and locals alike, conservation of EU priority natural habitats, raising public awareness through various educational programmes and increasing a sense of ownership of natural places for local communities. As the region continues to develop the Geopark facilitates the sustainable economic, environmental and social growth of this important landscape.

CASE STUDY

CATCHMENTCARE – MANAGING OUR SHARED ENVIRONMENT RESPONSIBILITY

The areas of cross border co-operation and collaboration extend across many areas, including education, health care, water supply environment and the implementation of the Water Framework Directive.

At present there are three international River Basin District Management Plans, which involve bodies from both sides of the Border, they are as follows:

- > Shannon International River Basin
- > Neagh Bann International River Basin
- > North Western International River Basin



The CatchmentCARE project involves multiple partners from North and South and its ultimate aim is to contribute towards improving water quality within three River Basin Catchments (The Finn, Blackwater and Arney Rivers).



Partners Include:

- > Donegal County Council
- > Agri-Food and Bioscience Institute
- > Inland Fisheries Ireland
- > Loughs Agency
- > University of Ulster
- > Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council
- > British Geological Survey
- > Geological Survey Ireland

The project will operate over five years and the overall budget extends to €13.8m. In addition to overall water quality improvement, one of the key aims of the project is to create a project legacy, where the key outcomes can be transferred beyond the three River catchments concerned.





Implementation 10

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Implementation

10.1 Introduction

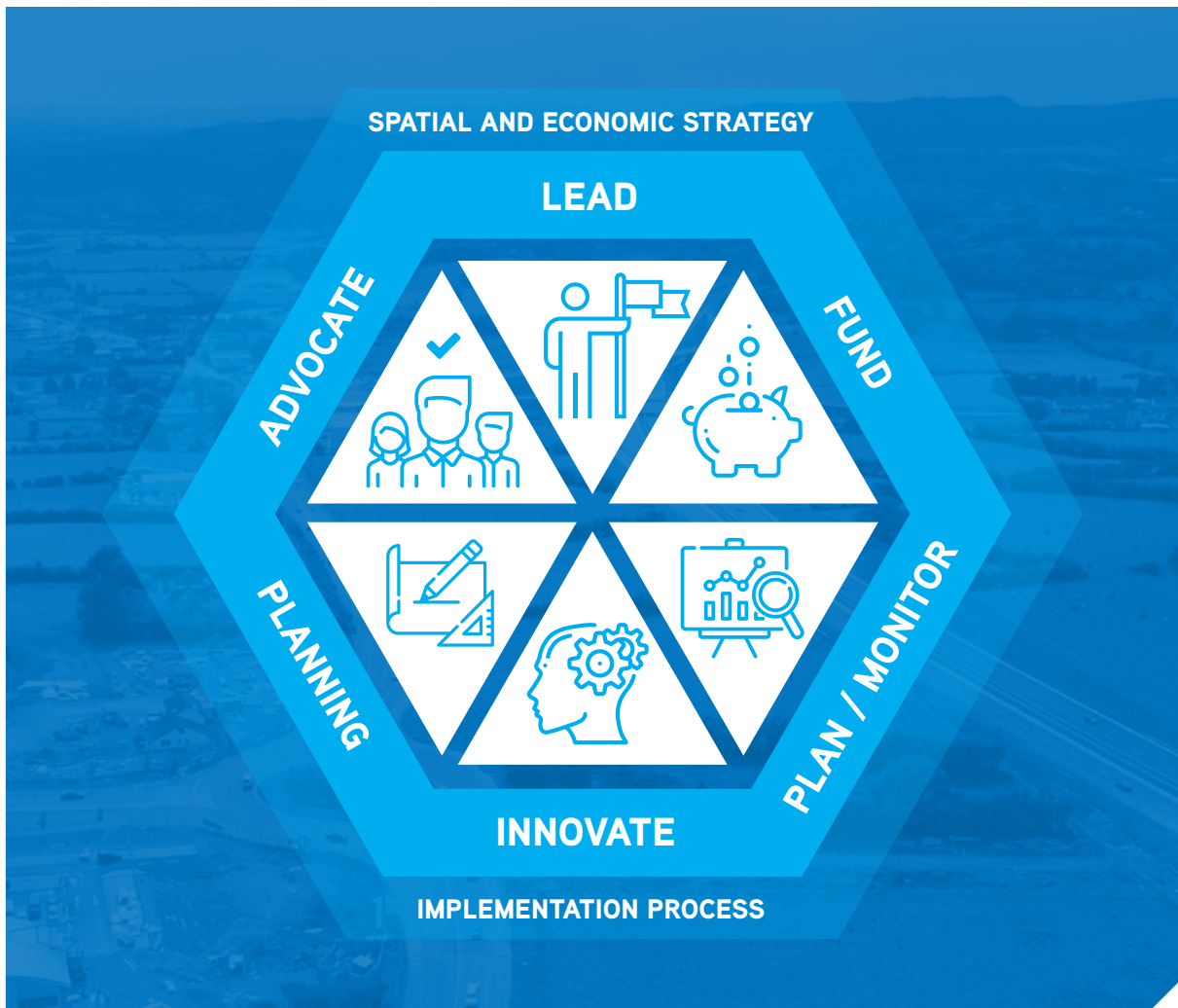
The primary purpose for implementing the RSES is to bring about sustainable change for communities across the region. The Regional Assembly is committed to working effectively to help deliver the long-term directions outlined in this strategy; accelerating our growth towards a greener and smarter future.

There are many ways it will do this, some of which are set out below.

- Lead on the ongoing development and implementation of the integrated growth framework
- Identify a blend of funding instruments to accelerate implementation
- Ensure necessary monitoring and review systems are designed and prioritised
- Through collaborative leadership implement best practice and promote innovative practices
- Promote a consistent and sustainable approach to land-use planning
- Advocate policy or system change necessary to deliver on evidence based regional needs.

The ambitions of this strategy requires alignment and coordination between central and local government, the private sector, institutions and nongovernment organisations and most importantly our communities. It shall require collaborative investments and actions by many parties to achieve the targets and actions outlined in the strategy. In particular, the constituent local authorities and central government bodies and agencies shall play a key role in implementing the RSES, which provides a clear collaborative statement on investment priorities necessary to achieve the 10 National Strategic Outcomes of the National Planning Framework.

Figure 69: RSES Implementation Process



The way ahead will present challenges and will be influenced by a range of factors including an ageing and growing population, urbanisation, climate change, disruptive technology and geopolitical stability. Realising the ambitions of this document will require organisations and people to work together, share their ideas, information and most importantly the pooling of resources.

This will be enabled by public bodies having strategies, plans and programmes that are consistent with the RSES and this shared sense of the direction in which we are travelling will help in growing our region up to 180,000 additional people and creating over 115,000 new jobs.

This shall also be supported and amplified through the delivery of a suite of Local Authority Development Plans, Local Area Plans and Local Economic and Community Plans that are to be consistent with the general policy, ambitions and objectives of the RSES. This will enable alignment of local planning policy with National and Regional Policy.

This part of the strategy explains how the RSES will be integrated, implemented and funded. It sets out how the ambitions of this strategy will be delivered at regional and sub-regional level and how progress is evaluated through monitoring and review of the strategy.

10.2 Legislative Background

The Northern and Western Regional Assembly will be accountable for monitoring and reporting on how the vision and ambitions of the Strategy are being progressed. The Assembly will listen to and work with all stakeholders and the community to make sure that growth is aligned with infrastructure and delivered in the right places at the right times.

Broadly speaking, successful implementation depends on:

- Good relationships among partners and stakeholders.
- Strong alignment in planning and investment.
- Effective coordination and agreement.
- Taking up opportunities to innovate and do things differently.

This will be enabled through a range of new tools that have been progressively introduced into legislation that place requirements on public bodies:

- Under the Local Government Reform Act, 2014, certain public bodies and all Local Authorities within the region are required (every 2 years) to prepare and submit a report to the Regional Assembly which sets out the progress made in supporting objectives within the RSES.
- The Northern and Western Regional Assembly has to prepare a monitoring report every 2 years which details progress made in complying and following the objectives of the RSES. This report will evaluate measures taken in respect of Objectives, and monitoring of specific actions, required by stakeholders.
- The NWRA will submit the monitoring report to the National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC). It is open to NOAC upon review of the report to make recommendations to the Minister of Housing, Planning and Local Government to suggest additional measures (where necessary) to support the effective implementation of the RSES.
- Public and Statutory Bodies are expected to lend whatever assistance is practicable to ensure the RSES objectives are delivered.



The NWRA will infuse the principles of partnership, cooperation and collaborative leadership across all implementation plans and the outcome from this process will be that:

1. Shared investment programmes are developed and underpinned by robust information, evidence, analysis and monitoring of the regions growth and change
2. Initiatives, strategies, and programmes of work will deliver on multiple outcomes wherever possible, linked to the 10 Strategic Outcomes (NPF) and the development objectives of this strategy, to get the best value for money from collective investments
3. We work together to leverage and build on what we can to avoid duplicating effort and wasting resources.



KEY RECENT ENABLERS

LAND DEVELOPMENT AGENCY (LDA)

The LDA has an urgent focus on managing lands which are currently within the ownership of the State, or various State bodies, to regenerate underutilised sites, increase the supply of new homes and boost housing supply. In the longer term, it is envisaged the LDA will assemble strategic landbanks through a mix of public and private lands, and make these lands available for housing in a controlled manner, which brings necessary stability and affordability in the medium and longer-term to the housing market. It will be important that the assets held by the state in this regard are identified, and utilised, particularly in Galway, and our Regional Centres of Athlone, Letterkenny and Sligo.

OFFICE OF THE PLANNING REGULATOR (OPR)

The Office of the Planning Regulator has been established under the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act, 2018. The OPR has a role in monitoring activity, advising the Minister, the DHPLG and the Houses of the Oireachtas on implementation of the National Planning Framework. This will be done through an assessment of the hierarchy of plans at National, Regional and Local Authority level. In the case of the latter, this will include Development Plans and Local Area Plans to ensure consistency with relevant national and regional policies.



10.3 Funding Follows Policy

The RSES is an enabler for investment and a strategy used by regional stakeholders to source and secure much-needed resources. Investment in our region will be leveraged through funding sources linked to;

1. The Exchequer (Project Ireland 2040)
2. EU Investment Programmes
3. Financial instruments
4. Community and Local Authority investment
5. Private financing or public/private partnerships.

As a key enabler to support the objectives of the NPF, the Government has approved four funds, with a total allocation amounting to €4bn over the 10-year period of the NDP, of which €765m is allocated for the next three years.

All four are competitive bid-based funds, to support innovative, collaborative projects which would not otherwise happen, in relation to Urban Regeneration and Development (€2bn), Rural Regeneration and Development (€1bn), Climate Action (€500m) and Disruptive Technologies (€500m), each to be overseen by the relevant Government Department.

A key focus for all four funds will be on collaboration between organisations and sectors, and on projects that will deliver impactful and transformational change. In addition, the EU Commission's 'European Green Deal' and Ireland's Climate Action Plan, (specifically financial supports available through the Just Transition Fund), will present opportunities to enable Ireland's necessary transition away from carbon-intensive sources of energy.

The Northern and Western Regional Assembly is also strategically positioning itself to align with EU priorities post-2020, where the integration of funds could be aligned through NPF, NDP and EU through an integrated funding model.





REGIONAL

The RSES sets priorities and provides a regional direction for planning at County/City level. It focuses on new housing and jobs, and targets growth in strategic centres - Metropolitan Galway and our Regional Growth Centres. Funding will be provided to growth areas for regional infrastructure for transport, housing, health, enterprise and innovation, education and for community/recreational/civic facilities through the recently announced four funds. Priority investment is identified over a period up to 2026 and 2031.

The Assembly will take ownership for oversight in the implementation of the Strategy. It will monitor and report on progress in the achievement of development objectives within the strategy and it shall collaborate with stakeholders to expedite delivery of the development and growth of our urban centres and strategic rural communities. A blend of funding instruments will be identified that enables our sectors, clusters and catchments/ corridors to realise their economic potential.

A primary task is to ensure that all local authority development plans and Local Economic and Community Plans are consistent with the RSES and relevant national policy. Following the preparation of a new draft development plan or a proposed variation to an existing development plan, the Regional Assembly will consider if the draft is consistent with the RSES and can issue formal recommendations to the relevant local authority where necessary. It is intended that a similar process will be applied to the review of Local Economic and Community Plans.



SUB REGIONAL

At sub-regional level, the region can be divided up in many different ways. This strategy identifies sub-regions on a functional economic, rather than administrative, basis. Our RSES commits to ensuring the principles for regional spatial and economic development apply to all our functional areas. In many sub-regions, however, delivery is currently organised based on administrative boundaries. Many of the region's sub-regional economic partnerships are currently county-based. There are also several sub-regional initiatives such as Regional Enterprise Plans, Atlantic Economic Corridor, Upper Shannon Erne Future Economy etc that require support.

The RSES can assist sub-regional initiatives by:

- Formulating and supporting the alignment of sub-regional economic priorities and investments
- Supporting synergies and sub-regional partnerships across LECPs
- Identifying partnerships or strategic opportunities for aggregated focus
- Harnessing support of public and private interests in Place Based Projects
- Identifying opportunities for shared resources or joint bidding
- Supporting the convergence of interest across regional stakeholders (third level, policymakers, industry leaders and public organisation)

10.4 Monitoring

The Assembly will monitor and review progress towards achieving the vision and ambitions of the Strategy. The monitoring framework should, ideally, encourage the continual improvement of policy interventions as a result of experience gained. This means more than just monitoring progress against plans. It is about gaining a better understanding of the effectiveness of policy interventions.

The Assembly will continue to identify those external factors that may have implications for the implementation of the strategy. This will help prioritise government infrastructure delivery and influence policy settings. The NWRA will publish a biennial report that considers indicators available relevant to the overall strategy including GVA, employment figures, population and other demographics. Every five to six years, or as necessary, the strategy will be reviewed and adjusted to make sure the vision for 2040 is realised. Such an ambitious strategy requires a solid evidence base to formulate approaches for future growth but also to measure progress.

The benchmark for monitoring sustainable development is the published 'Socio-Economic Baseline Report'. This report provides an understanding of the current socio-economic conditions across the region. Monitoring over 20 indicators will allow us to measure growth historically but also comparatively nationally, regionally and across EU members states.

The reporting on the progress made in the implementation of objectives with particular reference to projects will be supported by the identification of the implementation timescale for each regional policy objective using the timeframe set out in sample table below:



RPO Ref No.	Implementation Timescale		
	Short (2026)	Medium (2031)	Long (2040)
Project RPO No.			

RSES OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

As identified in the previous section, the Local Government Reform Act, 2014 provides for consultation with key public bodies in the preparation of the RSES, and furthermore, it provides for additional interaction with these bodies in the review of the RSES implementation, including the MASP and the RGCSPs. An RSES Oversight Committee will, therefore, be established within six months of the adoption of the RSES. This Committee will comprise representatives from the following areas:

- The Regional Assembly
- Local Authorities
- Named public bodies
- Bodies representing environmental interests, civic society, social inclusion and economic development.

The Regional Assembly will review the RSES every six years, and this review will if necessary, modify, or revoke objectives should the need to do so arise.



REGIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES

RPO 10.1

Within six months of the adoption of the RSES, a RSES Oversight Committee(s) will be established to ensure oversight of the implementation, monitoring and reporting of progress in implementation of the RSES to the Regional Assembly, as well as identifying opportunities to drive Regional Development, and suggest sources of funding, fostering partnerships/new collaborations.

RPO 10.2

The RSES Oversight Committee will:

- Assess issues that impact upon the effectiveness or performance of the strategy
- Evaluate the progress made across all Regional Policy Objectives, including those of the Galway MASP and the Regional Growth Centre Strategic Plans for Sligo, Letterkenny and Athlone.

RPO 10.3

The Northern and Western Regional Assembly will:

- Every two years prepare a report which monitors the progress in implementing the RSES
- As part of the RSES review process, the NWRA will publish (and update) an infrastructure tracker and progress report every two years. This report will update the status of all major Regional Infrastructure Projects.

RPO 10.4

It is an objective to carry out a review and update of baseline data for monitoring and reporting of progress in implementing the RSES. Said data shall be published on the NWRA website.

10.5 Responsive Strategy

The RSES is a 'living strategy' that will evolve to address emerging or changing issues, as well as reflect updated data and evidence.

As local, national and international conditions and circumstances change and affect the region, the NWRA and partners, will be required to adapt. New and revised data, links to new government or regional-based policy, and examples of delivery programmes and innovative projects will be added during reviews so that it remains up to date and relevant.

This approach of creating a 'living strategy' will not change the strategic direction but will allow it to remain current and relevant. Major issues or disruptions may require changes to parts of the plan, possibly all of it. Any changes to the strategies direction would need formal public consultation.



Glossary

Action Plan for Rural Development

Strategy developed by the Government (Department of Rural and Community Development) aimed at unlocking the potential of rural Ireland through a framework of supports at national and local level.

Agricultural Innovation (Ag Innovation)

Introduction of new processes / technologies to Agriculture in order to enhance efficiency, resilience, and reduce exposure to shocks or events such as climate change.

Bio Economy

Covers all systems relating to the production of biological resources, including animals, plants, micro-organisms, and derived bio-mass.

Blueway

Blueways are a network of multi-activity recreational trails, based on or alongside lakes, canals and rivers.

Blue Economy

The Blue Economy is sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods and jobs, while preserving the health of ocean ecosystem.

Brownfield Site

Brownfield site or Brownfield land may be defined as any serviced land which has been subjected to development, excluding agricultural, forestry and open spaces.

Compact Growth

Concept clearly outlined within the National Planning Framework, whereby 40% - 50% of new development (2020 - 2040) is to occur within the existing built up Urban Footprint of our cities and towns. (Infill lands, and Brownfield sites).

City / suburbs

As defined by the CSO (2016).

County/City Development Plan (CDP)

A County or City Development Plan is a 6 year strategy, prepared by a local authority under Chapter 1 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (As amended), setting out the overall planning strategy and policies for that period.

Destination Towns

Destination Towns are urban centres identified by Fáilte Ireland, which are strategically positioned in proximity to some of the region's outstanding attractions (WAW etc.) and which have significant bednight capacity, ordinarily in the thousands.

Discovery points (Wild Atlantic Way)

Iconic sites (150no.) positioned along the Wild Atlantic Way (WAW) which are notable for their seascape location, natural and heritage assets.

Disruptive Technology

A technology which has the potential to very significantly alter markets and their functioning and significantly alter the way that businesses operate. It involves a new product or process and it can also involve the emergence of a new business model. Disruption is not about technology alone but the combination of technology and business model innovation.

Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund

A €500 million challenge-based fund confirmed in the NDP, which will see investment in the research, development and deployment of disruptive technologies and applications on a commercial basis.

Dublin Belfast Economic Corridor

The largest economic agglomeration on the island of Ireland, with the cities and towns along the corridor home to a population of around 2 million people, exclusive of wider catchments. The corridor links the two largest cities and several of the largest towns on the island by high-capacity road and national rail links and plays a critical role in supporting economic growth and competitiveness. Drogheda-Dundalk-Newry play an important role with growth potential and for regional development.

Dynamic Clustering

The aggregation of SME's across a range of sectors, involved in different process, operating in different markets.

Eco-System Services

The direct, and indirect contributions of Eco-Systems to human well-being. Examples include food, fresh water, medicines, wood, fibers and genetic resources.

Enterprise 2025 Renewed

Ireland's National Enterprise Strategy, published by the Department of Business, Enterprise & Innovation in 2015.

European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)

A European level fund that aims to redress regional imbalances in the European Union.

Europe 2020

The European Union's strategy for growth and jobs, emphasising smart sustainable and inclusive growth as a way to overcome the structural weaknesses in Europe's economy, improve its competitiveness and productivity and underpin a sustainable social market economy.

Gaeltacht Service Town

A town with a population of over 1000 that is situated in or adjacent to Gaeltacht Language Planning Areas and which have a significant role in providing public services, recreational, social and commercial facilities for those areas. They are designated by the Minister under section 9 (1) of the Gaeltacht Act 2012.

Green Roof

A green roof or living roof is a roof of a building that is partially or completely covered with vegetation and a growing medium, planted over a waterproofing membrane. It may also include additional layers such as a root barrier and drainage and irrigation systems.

Green Economy

The green economy is defined as an economy that aims at reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities, and that aims for sustainable development without degrading the environment.

Green Infrastructure

A strategically planned network of natural and semi-natural areas with other environmental features designed and managed to deliver a wide range of ecosystem services' in both rural and urban settings.

Greenway

A recreational or pedestrian corridor mainly for non-motorised journeys developed in an integrated manner which enhances both the environment and quality of life of the surrounding area, more generally associated with cycling.

Greenfield Site

Greenfield site or Greenfield land may be defined as any land within an urban area, which has not been subject to development. Such lands may often not be serviced and does include land that is used for the purpose of agriculture or forestry.

Historic Towns

A town that has significant cultural and heritage assets and has a distinctive sense of place. Historic towns include those of medieval and pre-medieval foundation, plantation towns, planned estate towns and those established around local industries.

Ireland 2040 – National Planning Framework (NPF)

The Government's high-level strategic plan for shaping the future growth and development of Ireland out to the year 2040.

Landing Spaces

High quality serviced office offering for those seeking a base for operations, on a per desk basis. This enables a client to test the labour market, experience the location and build its talent pool, while working locally on a more long term property solution.

Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP)

A 6 year plan prepared at local authority level that sets out the objectives and actions needed to promote and support the economic and community development of the relevant local authority area.

Local Enterprise Office

A Local Enterprise Office is a dedicated team within each local Authority that provides the 'First Stop Shop' advice, information and support to anyone starting or growing a business in Ireland.

National Adaptation Framework

National strategy that was published in 2018 by the Department of Communications, Climate Action & Environment (DCCA) to reduce the vulnerability of the country to the negative effects of climate change and to avail of positive impacts.

National Development Plan 2018-2027 (NDP)

The Government's capital expenditure plan for the period 2018-2027, integrated with the NPF.

National Strategic Outcome (NSO)

10 overarching shared sets of goals that have been identified in the NPF.

Other Planning Criteria

Material planning considerations as outlined in the relevant County Development Plan or Local Area Plan.

Open Data

This is data that can be freely used, shared and built-on by anyone, anywhere, for any purpose, without restrictions from copyright, patents or other mechanisms of control.

Peatways

Recreational and environmental trails through peatland areas.

Quality of Life Factors

Built environment, traffic impacts, access to amenities and public transport, personal safety and health.

Regional Action Plan for Jobs (RAPJ)

An action plan published annually, in the period 2012-2018, by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation aimed at raising employment levels in the regions and facilitating them to achieve their economic potential. They have since been replaced by Regional Enterprise Plans (REPs).

Regional Enterprise Plans

The translation of national policy into the regions by collaborative work from state bodies to aid Enterprise Agencies. Regional Enterprise Plans (REPs) have emerged from a process to refresh and refocus the Regional Action Plan for Jobs (RAPJ).

Regional Policy Objectives

A suite of regional development objectives that provide a long term strategic planning and economic framework for the development of the region.

Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF)

State support scheme for job creation in rural areas (towns and villages with populations < 10,000) using a competitive bid process. The fund is administered by the Department of Rural and Community Development.

Safe Places

Places and infrastructure are designed to minimise and manage risks from flooding.

Slow Tourism

Tourism based on sustainability as regards travel, accommodation, gastronomy and cultural interactions.

Smart City

The use of data to manage assets resources and services efficiently. It uses the internet of things (IOT) to gather and analyse the digital data collected.

Smart Specialisation Strategy

Smart specialisation is an innovative approach aims to boost growth and jobs, by helping public bodies, businesses, education sector and civil society to collaboratively identify and develop a number of the region's competitive advantages through an entrepreneurial discovery process.

Spatial planning

Spatial planning refers to the discipline of guiding the strategic direction of development in a given geographic area and influencing the distribution of people and activities.

TEN-T Network

Trans-European transport network policy directed towards the development of a Europe-wide network of roads, railway lines, inland waterways, maritime shipping routes, ports airports and road- rail terminals.

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

The Sustainable Development Goals developed by the United Nations are a blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. They address the global challenges being faced, including those related to poverty, inequality, climate, environmental degradation, prosperity, and peace and justice.

Urban Regeneration and Development Fund

Stimulation fund for new residential and commercial development in larger towns and cities. The fund is administered by the Department of Housing Planning and Local Government.

Urban Areas / Urban Core

A human settlement with high population density and infrastructure of built environment.

Wild Atlantic Way

Ireland's long-distance touring route along the west coast - stretching from Muff, County Donegal to Kinsale, County Cork.

Acronyms Used

AA	Appropriate Assessment	NHAs	Natural Heritage Areas
ABTA	Area Based Transport Assessment	NPF	National Planning Framework
AEC	Atlantic Economic Corridor	NPWS	National Parks & Wildlife Service
BIM	Bord Iascaigh Mhara	NTA	National Transport Authority
CARO	Climate Action Regional Offices	NWSGP	North West Strategic Growth Partnership
CDP	County or City Development Plan	NWRP	National Water Resource Plan
CFRAM	Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management	NSO	National Strategic Outcome
CTCHC	Collaborative Town Centre Health Check	NTA	National Transport Authority
CRU	Commission for Regulation of Utilities	OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
CURWMP	Connaught Ulster Regional Waste Management Plan	OPW	Office of Public Works
DBEI	Department of Business Enterprise and Innovation	RAPJ	Regional Action Plan for Jobs
DHPLG	Department of Housing Planning and Local Government	RBMP	River Basin Management Plan
DTTAS	Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport	REP	Regional Enterprise Plan
ED	Electoral Districts	RFRA	Regional Flood Risk Appraisal
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency	RGCSPP	Regional Growth Centre Strategic Plan
EU	European Union	RPO	Regional Policy Objective
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment	RSES	Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy
FET	Further Education and Training	SAC	Special Areas of Conservation
FH 2020	Food Harvest 2020	SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
FW 2025	Food Wise 2025	SDZ	Strategic Development Zone
GHG Emissions	Green House Gas Emissions	SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
GTS	Galway Transport Strategy	SEAI	Sustainable Energy Authority Ireland
HOOW	Harnessing Our Ocean Wealth	SFDNRG	Strategy for Future Development of National & Regional Greenways
HSE	Health Service Executive	Sligo BID	Sligo Business Improvement District
ICBAN	Irish Central Border Area Network	SMART	Sustainable Measurable Achievable Realistic and Timely
ICT	Information and Communications Technology	SME	Small and Medium Enterprises
IDA	Industrial Development Authority	SRA	Southern Regional Assembly
IoT	Internet of things	STEM	Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics
IROPI	Imperative Reasons of Overriding Public Interest	SUDS	Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems
IT	Institute of Technology - GMIT ITS LYIT AIT	TEN-T	Trans-European Transport Network
IWAK	Ireland West Airport Knock	TII	Transport Infrastructure Ireland
LAP	Local Area Plan	UFEFE	Upper Shannon Erne Future Economy
LCDC	Local Community Development Committee	UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
LECP	Local Economic and Community Plan	UWWTD	Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive
LEOs	Local Enterprise Offices	WAW	Wild Atlantic Way
LTP	Local Transport Plan	WFD	Water Framework Directive
MASP	Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan	WHO	World Health Organisation
MSP	Marine Spatial Plan		
NBP	National Broadband Plan		
NDP	National Development Plan		

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