



Northern & Western
Regional Assembly

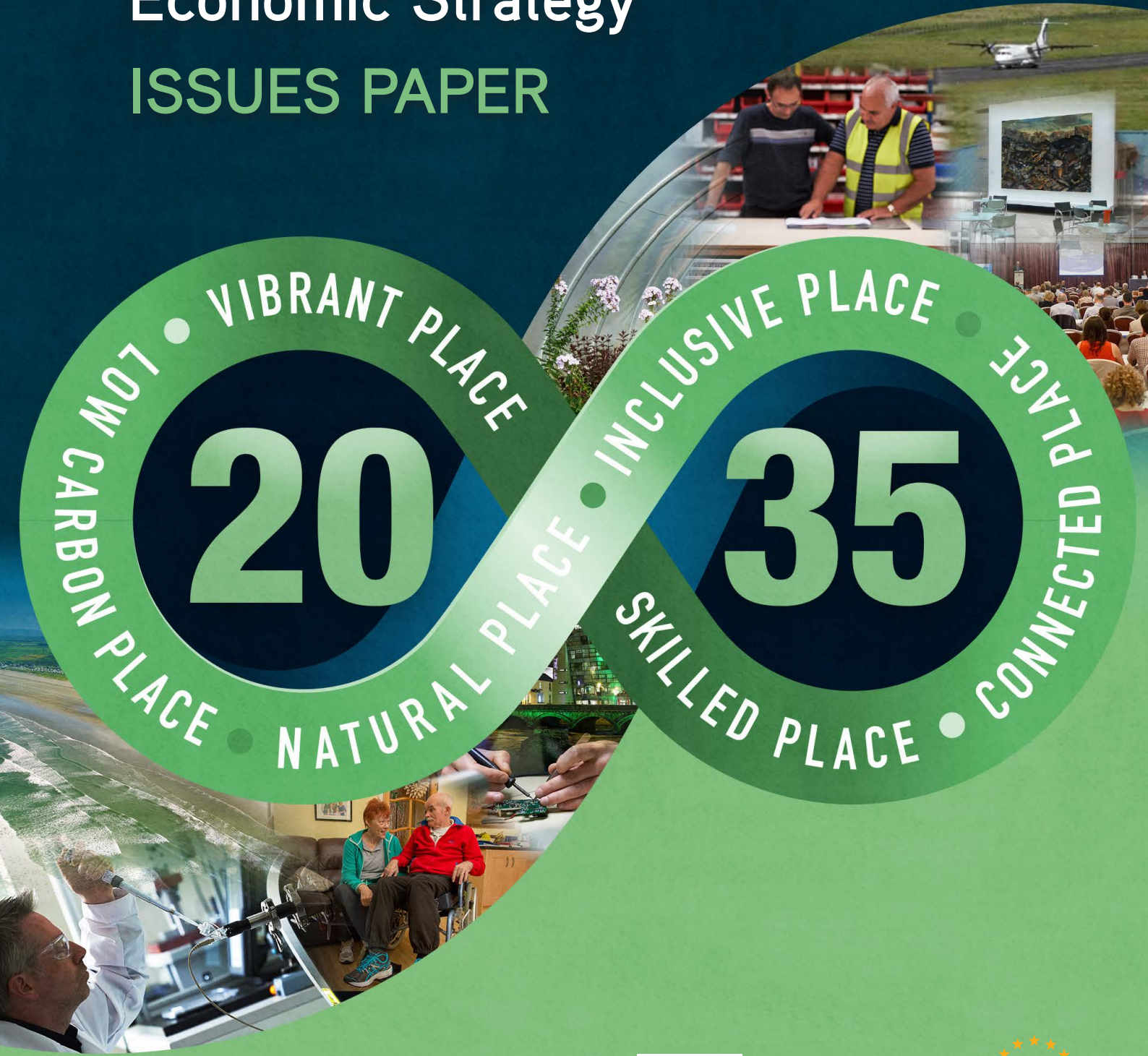
Ireland
2040
Our Plan



NATIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK

Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy

ISSUES PAPER



 Ireland's European Structural and Investment Funds Programmes 2014-2020
Co-funded by the Irish Government and the European Union

 **European Union**
European Regional Development Fund



This is a diverse region with distinct spatial patterns and diverse geographical propositions. Historically these patterns reflect the variation in the endowment and scale of human, physical, natural and capital resources

This 'Issues Paper' is the first step in the development of a new Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy. It looks at the elements that have shaped the region in the past, the trends that are expected to shape our 'Places' in the future, and how we can **facilitate and manage growth in a sustainable manner to the benefit the entire region and country.**

Rather than make assumptions on what people require from our cities and rural places, the Issues Paper allows us to connect our decisions to the needs and desires of the people who live and work in this growing Region. Our Region.

Joint Foreword – Connected

Cathaoirleach Cllr Patsy O’ Brien and Director, David Minton

What if we lived in the most ‘**Connected**’ region in Europe?

This Issues Paper aims to commence a dialogue on our region’s future. Our vibrant, evolving and growing region. It also sets out our approach and underlying principles.

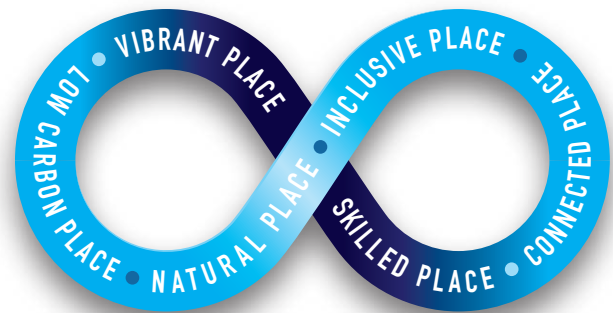
Although not equipped with all the answers yet, the Assembly is committed to crafting a future that encapsulates existing best practice whilst also challenging the consensus and committing to innovation.

The time to show we were **smart enough** to shape that future, when we had the chance, is now. Our region boasts some incredible propositions, captured in our economic catchments, clusters, sectors and our communities. The NWRA simply aims to ‘Connect’ these strengths, and craft a vision that enables a:

- › Vibrant Place
- › Low Carbon Place
- › Natural Place
- › Inclusive Place
- › Connected Place
- › Smart Place

The Northern and Western Regional Assembly is a region with eight counties, one of the fastest growing cities in Europe and over 80,000 3rd level students within its catchment; with nearly 900,000 residents enjoying an enviable lifestyle in an area of great natural beauty, environmental assets and natural resources.

We know that as the Region’s population and economy continue to grow, so too will its economic significance nationally. This growth will place new pressures on the existing settlement patterns – particularly housing supply, jobs growth, roads and transport, water supply, utilities and other essential services.



That’s why we welcome the new **National Planning Framework** prepared by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government. We welcome its commitment to ‘Effective Regional Development’ and the subsequent publication of Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies. These strategies will reflect the differing needs and potential held within each of Ireland’s three regions.

We need to supply the right housing, infrastructure, jobs and services where and when our communities need it. We need to enable our regional specific strengths. Thus we need to ensure our strategy is **responsive and resilient**.

We can really only take advantage of these strengths if we get the basic land use planning right. We need to provide more housing and new housing choices and we must integrate our land use planning with the Capital Investment Plan so that new housing, transport and infrastructure supports growth across this region.

We also need to manage these changes while protecting our environment and our quality of life. We also need to adapt to international trends – **digitisation, globalisation and urbanisation**.

We need your assistance in getting the answers to a set of challenging questions. We invite your feedback, commentary and observations. Lets open the discussion.

Why Think and Plan Regionally

The new Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for our region will be based on a partnership, focusing on place-based regional economic development and effective regional planning. The Strategy will be responsive to international trends, population trends and cognisant of our community needs. Most importantly it will capture the ambition of our people. No easy task.

The conversation is only commencing but we are committed to engaging as widely and effectively as possible. The Strategy will promote timely, evidence-based and coordinated delivery of regional planning & economic development. The NWRA is open to engaging with policy bodies, individual experts and emerging talent in order to attain the most effective and achievable strategy.

Our intention is to promote existing best practice, foster innovation and ultimately connect it. The Assembly's commitment to this process is set out below.

Transition: Planning hurdle to Implementation phase

Once the regional strategies are adopted, each Regional Assembly will be required to put in place effective implementation and monitoring arrangements. This will also include liaising with the Office of the Planning Regulator. To assure consistent monitoring across regional assemblies and all relevant public bodies, RSES monitoring will be based on an agreed set of key indicators. This transition will require new organisational and system structures.

Current planning legislation requires each local authority within the regional assembly area, and each of the public bodies prescribed in the legislation, to prepare and submit a report to the assembly every two years setting out progress made in supporting objectives. **Furthermore**, in tandem with and as part of the RSES process, arrangements will be put in place to enable the preparation of co-ordinated Metropolitan Area Strategic Plans (MASPs) for our urban locations.

➤ Create a shared understanding about regional economic development across all levels of government sectors and our citizens.

➤ Establish an agreed process for regional economic development activities, particularly where activities are place-based.

➤ Facilitate cooperation and collaboration between Local & Regional Government structures, communities and sectors.

➤ Integrate and align National Planning Policy with Local Economic & Community Plans and Local Development Plans.

➤ Promote an innovative, competitive and productive region that enhances our GVA and contributes significantly more to national competitiveness.

➤ Manage shifts in population trends, population movements and employment locations.

KEY QUESTIONS

1. How do we enable the Regional Assembly implement these ambitious strategies and what structures should be put in place?
2. What should be the guiding principles of the RSES?

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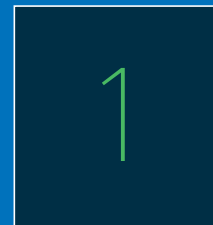
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What We Do



The Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA) has a simple ambition to play a transformative role in the success of our region. To achieve this we focus on three objectives: **BETTER PLACES**, **COMPETITIVENESS** AND **COLLABORATION**.

1

The Regional Assembly is intent on adopting international best practice in planning & development in order to create **BETTER PLACES**.



2

Underpinning this approach is the commitment to enhancing **COMPETITIVENESS** through policies that build resilience and sustainability, working with our stakeholders to utilise EU & Exchequer funding.



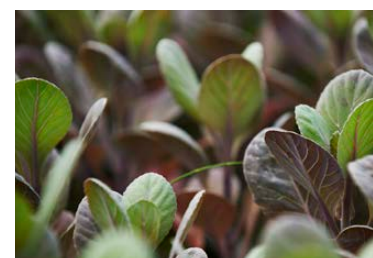
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Achieving this will be done through a dedicated and principled approach to **COLLABORATION**.

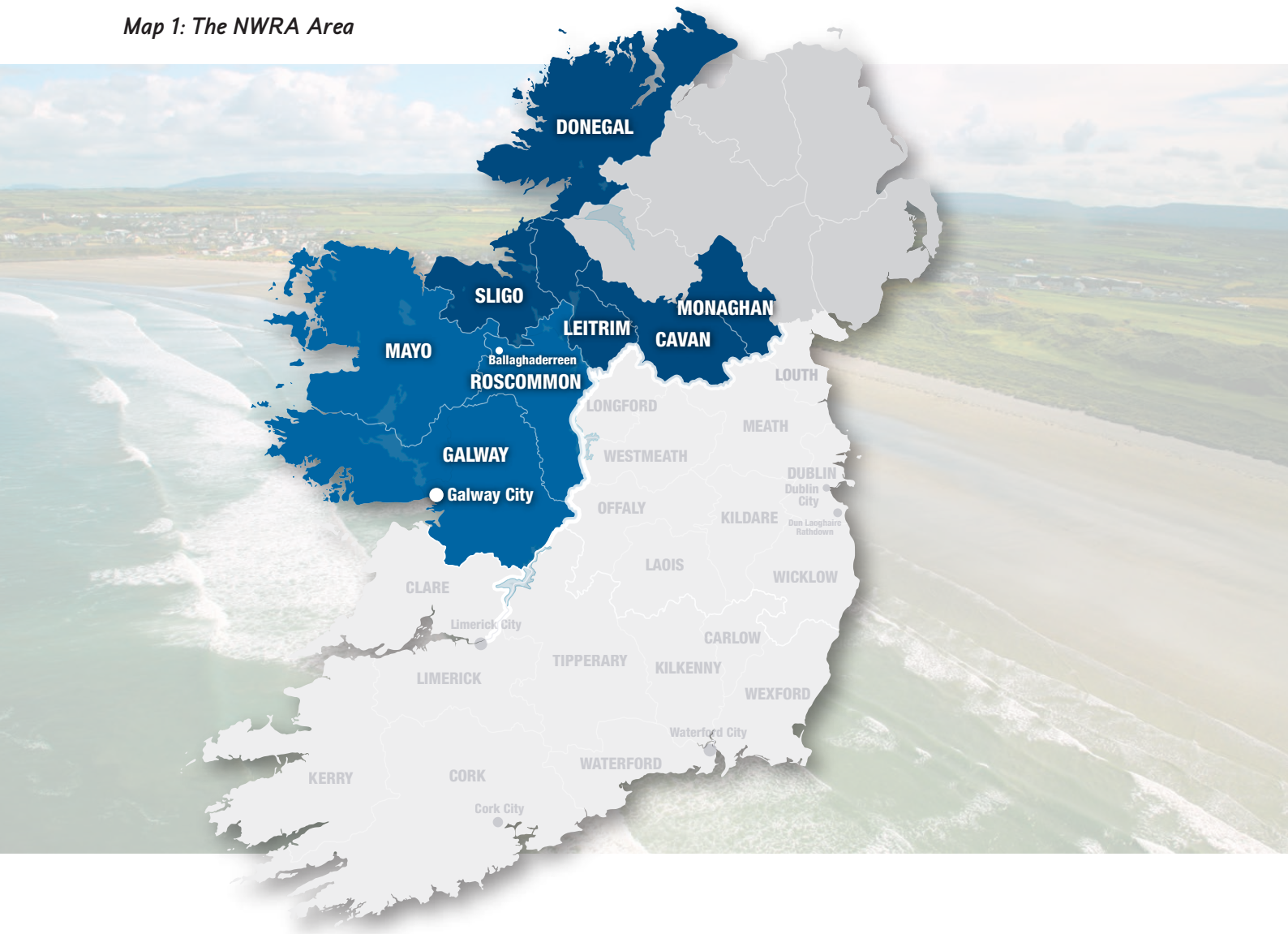


Can we craft a creative, vibrant and resilient regional economy?

Our members and team simply want to ‘connect’ the strengths of this incredible region and celebrate its unique sense of place. Effective regional development for us is **not about** bringing the region together (*see Map 2*). Effective regional development to us, is about applying the principles of regional development for all our communities – understanding their catchments, their potential and enabling each of them.



Map 1: The NWRA Area



1.1 Who we are

The Northern & Western Regional Assembly (NWRA) was established on 1st January 2015. Its predecessor, The Border, Midland and Western Regional Assembly, was established in 1999 as one of two Regional Assemblies established to give effect to the division of the country into two regions for EU Structural Funds purposes.

Under the Local Government Reform Act 2014 a number of changes were made to the regional structures in Ireland. Three Regional Assemblies were established on 1st January 2015 – the NWRA, the Eastern & Midlands Regional Assembly and the Southern Regional Assembly.

Together the Regional Assemblies form a strong regional structure that strengthens the development of Ireland’s regions in a co-ordinated, strategic manner. Further information on the role, function and governance of the NWRA is available on it’s website www.nwra.ie.

The NWRA is comprised of 25 elected Members nominated by the 9 local authorities within the region. The NWRA covers eight counties.

1.2 The Issues Paper – Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES)

This Issues Paper is a consultation document that has been prepared in advance of drafting a new Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the entirety of the Northern and Western Region. Consultation is a critical step in the preparation and drafting of the RSES and this initial consultation seeks to prompt debate and discussion in relation to the future development of the region and the nature of the regions relationship with the rest of the Island of Ireland.

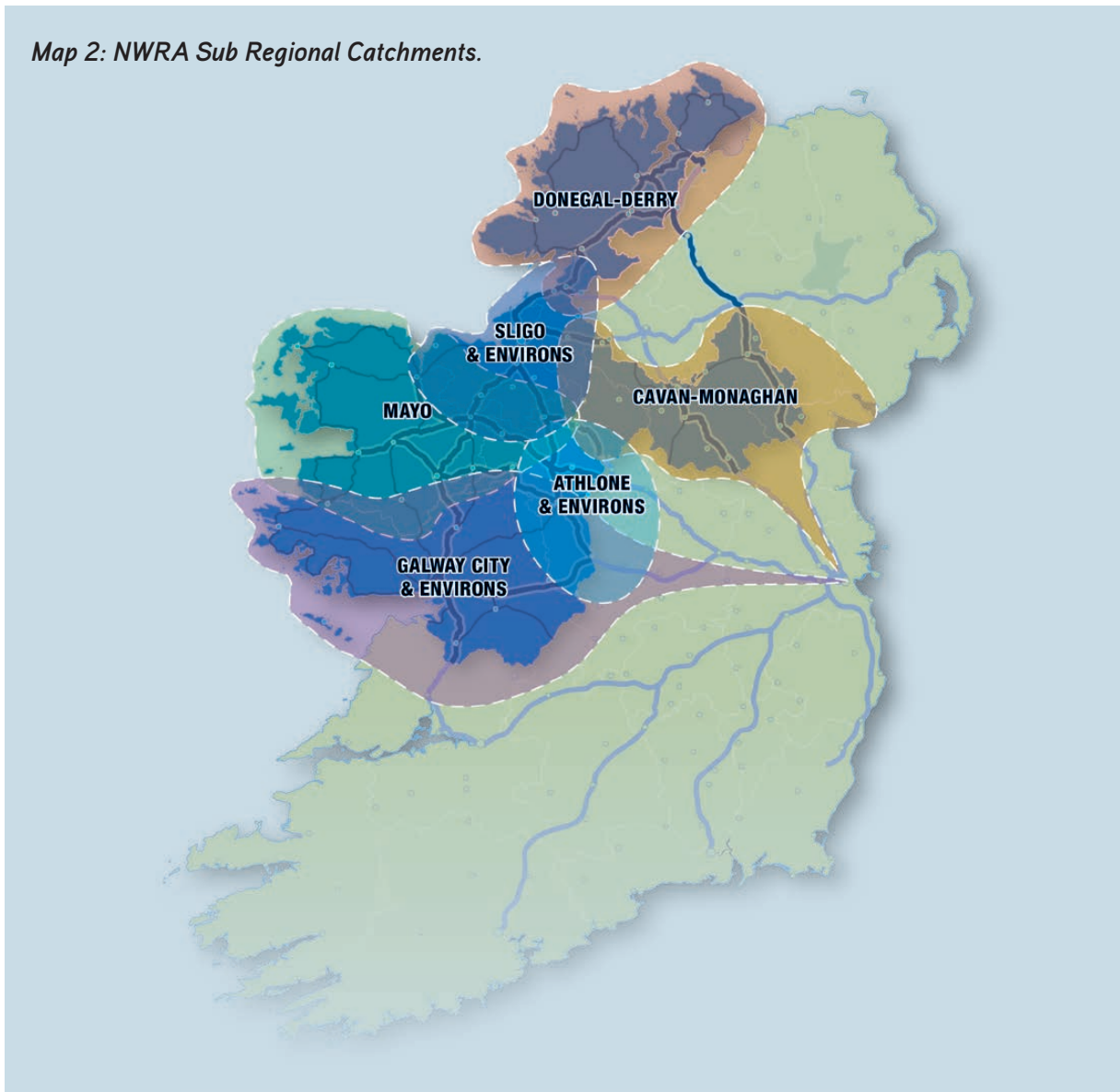
This paper has been designed to provide members of the public and all stakeholders with an overview of some of the main planning and economic issues that affect the region today.

It also provides the opportunity to submit comments and suggestions on the issues raised and other topics that are considered relevant to the RSES and that:

- are strategic in nature;
- are of regional significance; and
- have a spatial (place based) or economic focus.

The Northern and Western Regional Assembly innately believe that the RSES process provides the opportunity to finally exploit the latent potential of our economic catchments, sectors, clusters and communities.

Map 2: NWRA Sub Regional Catchments.



So does this mean we are moving from the model of Balanced Regional Development to Effective Regional Development? What is the difference for you?

Our Region is made up of many catchments that overlap administrative boundaries. It boasts world leading multi-nationals, 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. Our region is also synonymous with the Wild Atlantic Way and Shannon Blueways. Our creative sector is an international benchmark for indigenous success.

We need to build upon these strengths and this preliminary consultation is asking you to say how you believe that the RSES can best implement and amplify the NPF and also shape a strategy for delivering the sustainable development of our region, focusing on the appropriate harnessing of our economic, social, cultural and environmental assets within the region and its hinterlands.

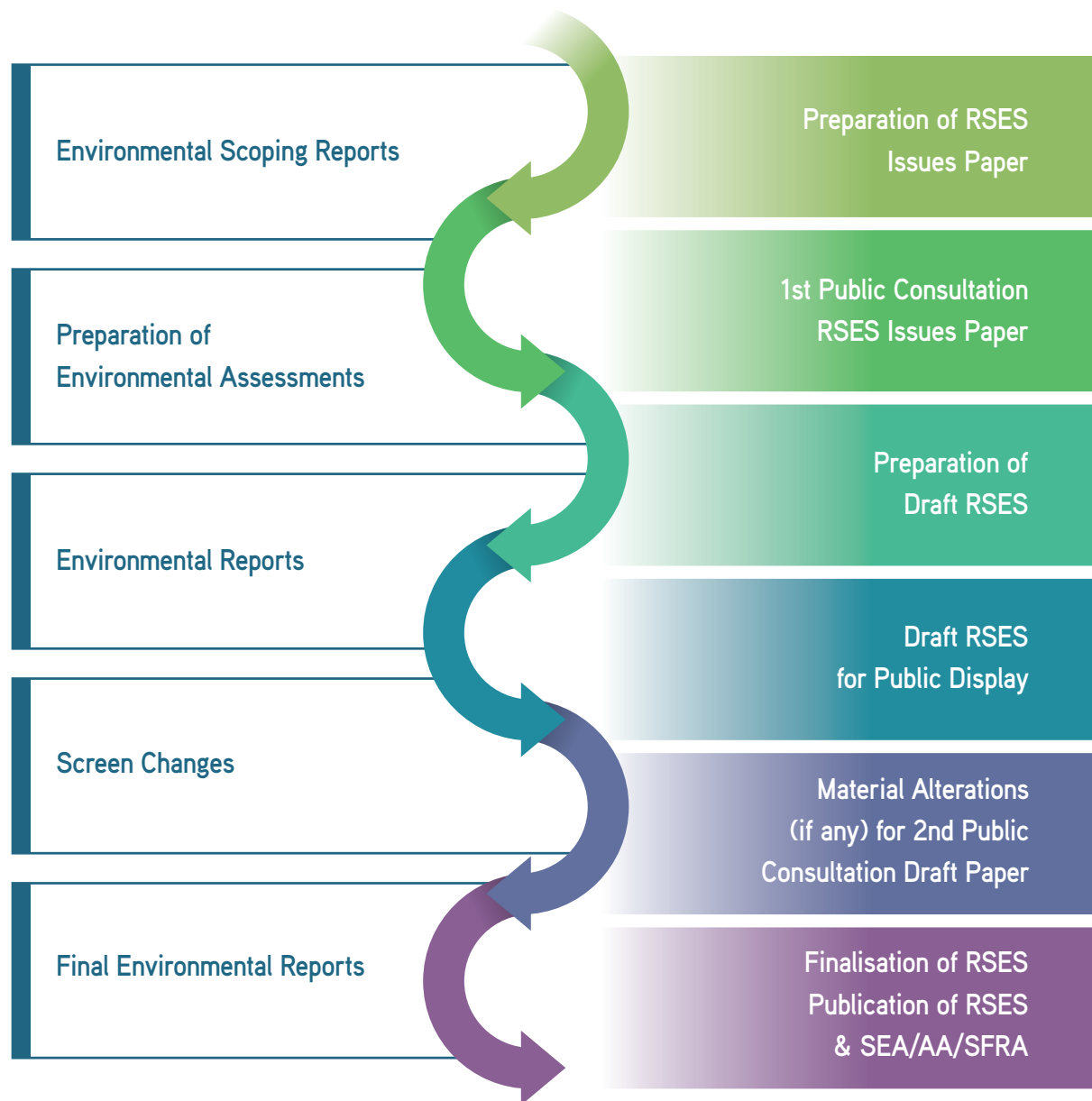
The RSES will include consideration of likely potential environmental implications of the strategy, including compliance with the legislative provisions as they relate to Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), Appropriate Assessment (AA) in relation to protected habitats and to Strategic Flood Risk Appraisal (SFRA).

Table 1: RSES – Key issues to be considered

Spatial Issues to be addressed	Economic Issues to be Addressed
Location of development, including employment, industrial, commercial, retail, and housing.	Creating and sustaining jobs.
Provision of infrastructure, such as transportation, water services, energy and communications networks, waste management facilities.	Identifying regional strengths and opportunities.
Provision of educational, healthcare, sports and community facilities.	Augmenting the economic performance of the region across all relevant economic sectors.
Preservation and protection of environmental assets, including archaeological, architectural, natural heritage and landscape.	Enhancing regional innovation capacity.
Promotion of sustainable settlement and transportation strategies, including measures to reduce anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions and address adaptation to climate change.	Identifying regional attributes that enhance regional economic performance and ways to maintain and augment them, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ the quality of the environment; ➤ the qualities of cities, towns and rural areas; ➤ the physical infrastructure; and ➤ the social, community and cultural facilities.

The RSES shall be informed by the SEA/AA/SFRA on an iterative basis and as illustrated in the following diagram.

Figure 1. Key phases and milestones for preparing the RSES



The purpose of this paper is to give the public and all interested parties an overview of some of the main NPF issues that need to be implemented and amplified in more detail within the RSES and importantly to prompt discussion in relation to the future spatial and economic development of the region.

1.2.1 Context – National Planning Framework

Planning policy in Ireland is entering a new phase; the *Department of Housing Planning and Local Government* has just published a draft of The National Planning Framework (NPF) – Ireland 2040, which is the long-term strategic planning framework for our country’s future growth and prosperity over the next 20+ years. The NPF replaces the former National Spatial

Strategy (NSS) and the Regional Planning Guidelines (RPGs), 2010-2022 shall be replaced by the RSES and other local plans and strategies shall subsequently have to be aligned with the RSES. Thus, Ireland 2040 – Our Plan will guide national, regional and local planning opportunities throughout our Republic together with investment decisions for at least the next two decades.

The Minister for Housing, Planning and local Government has directed that the three Regional Assemblies now commence the preparation of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies for their individual regions. A Regional Spatial and

Economic Strategy (RSES) is a strategic plan which identifies regional assets, opportunities and pressures and provides appropriate policy responses. At this strategic level it puts in place policies and recommendations that will better manage regional planning and economic development throughout the region.

A similar RSES consultation process is being conducted by the two other Regional Assemblies for their respective regions and it shall be necessary to ensure that all three RSES's integrate with each other whilst recognising regional variations.

1.3 How can you contribute?

This preliminary consultation process provides an important opportunity to submit comments and suggestions on the issues raised and other topics that you consider are relevant to the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy that are not necessarily referenced explicitly in this document.

The issues and key questions raised within this document are not exhaustive and are presented so as to prompt us to think about these and other issues.

It is requested that submissions are made in writing and relate to matters that:

- are of significance at a regional or sub-regional catchment level and relevant to the NPF;
- are strategic in nature; and
- have an economic and/or a 'spatial' (place-based) focus.



Online: dedicated NWRA website www.nwra.ie/RSES



Email: rses@nwra.ie



Writing: RSES Submissions, Northern and Western Regional Assembly,
The Square, Ballaghaderreen, Co. Roscommon
by 5pm on January 26th 2018.

There will be further opportunities for the public and all interested parties to make a submission on the next stage of the process, which shall be consideration of the Draft RSES.

Please note: Submissions may be published on our website and subject to Freedom of Information. Receipt of submissions will be acknowledged but it will not be possible to issue individual responses.

It is of national importance that our cities and towns are of sufficient scale and quality to compete internationally and to be drivers of national and regional growth and investment. **It is also important that our communities are healthy, sustainable and vibrant.**

The Draft NPF projects that by 2040 Ireland shall experience a growth in population of 1million people and that the population will become more diverse and older, with double the number of people over the age of 65. By 2040 it is estimated that the average number of people per occupied household is likely to reduce from 2.7 people per dwelling to 2 persons per dwelling (Note: Occupancy rate is stated in Draft NPF to be 2.5 persons per house to account for obsolescence). It is also suggested that there will be more people at work than ever before and that the demand for places in third level education will peak in the mid-late 2020s.

The type of place-making is critical to economic prosperity as globalisation continues to have a concentrating effect. This is evidenced through employment trends, which indicate that city regions are increasingly the focal point for internationally mobile investment, where high-value added services are attracted primarily to urban areas. Firms tend to 'agglomerate' in the larger, denser, more skilled labour markets found in urban areas and this trend is likely to continue. Equally this region boasts a unique industrial heritage and has continued to sustain jobs, support growth and win investment.

However, successful urban areas need to also be attractive places, internationally connected and have a stream of local talent and innovation associated with third level research institutions. Therefore, it is both the scale and quality of urban places that is identified as of significance to deliver population and employment growth centres that will be competitive internationally.

The Draft NPF defines 'rural areas' as all areas other than towns and cities with a population in excess of 10,000 people and it seeks to target at a national level:

- 50% of the population and Jobs to be in the 5 Cities and their suburbs (ie. Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Waterford and Galway).
- Approximately 16% to be targeted to large regionally distributed towns.
- 15% population growth target towards rural areas (ie. Towns/Villages with a population less than 10,000, including open countryside).

2.1 Urban Development

The global economy has changed rapidly in the past two decades, becoming more digital and mobile through digital disruption, more competitive through industrialisation, urbanised and more uncertain through the impact of climate change. In years to come, these changes are expected to accelerate, testing our regional and national resilience. Challenges of health care, transportation, housing, jobs and many other global exposures. The trend globally is consolidating in urban / city locations. Is this a push or a pull?

The draft NPF requires that Metropolitan Area Strategic Plans be prepared, as part of the RSES, for each of the cities. It determines that there be a differentiation made between rural areas within the 5 City regions, as defined by commuter catchment of at least 15% of the persons employed (ie. area of Urban Influence), and those outside. This differentiation is also to be applied in respect of those larger towns with a population of 10,000+, and other towns as shall be determined locally. One off rural housing shall be determined upon the core consideration of demonstrable economic need to reside there.

To grow jobs and create accessible, affordable and attractive 'Places', we need to take advantage of the land it has available in our urban areas and hinterlands. Increasing the number and diversity of jobs closer to where people live. Making our urban areas work for us, enhancing our competitiveness.

Within the NPF draft document the Northern and Western Region is recognised as having a weaker urban structure and that towns with a population of 10,000+ population play a more significant role and function than similar sized towns in the other regions. Accordingly, it is considered appropriate that they have a target growth rate of 40%, in order to grow them as regional economic drivers.

A significant underlying issue that the draft NPF raises is that many places in our cities, towns and villages are derelict, vacant and in need of improvement, regeneration and revitalisation. It is

necessary for our settlements to recognise that their role and function has changed over time and a strategy needs to be developed locally and regionally to manage this. The Draft NPF identifies the need to accommodate our changing needs in a way that facilitates growth, improvement and regeneration, to bring new life and vitality to places, while avoiding overdevelopment of rural areas.

In this regard the Draft NPF places a target that:

- 50% of new homes to be located within the 5 Cities and their adjoining suburban areas be within the envelopes of the settlement.
- Elsewhere, 30% of new homes be delivered within the built-up envelope of existing urban settlement boundary.

2.1.1 Metropolitan Area Strategic Plans (MASPs)

The RSES must provide a strategic focus on cities, through the preparation of co-ordinated Metropolitan Area Strategic Plans (MASPs) for Galway and also potentially for other identified urban locations.

Figure 1: The North West City-Region

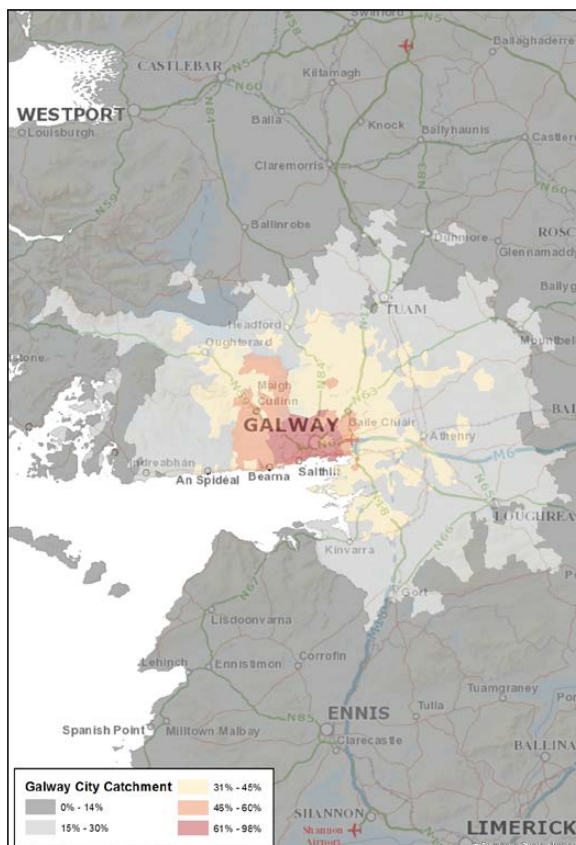


(Source: Donegal County Council & Derry City and Strabane District Council)

These **MASPs** are to be prepared as part of this RSES process and are to be provided with statutory underpinning to act as twelve-year strategic planning and investment frameworks for the city metropolitan areas. Their purpose is to provide high level long term strategic development focus on areas such as the identification of strategic growth areas, infrastructure (particularly transport and water services), regeneration, the location of housing and employment and metropolitan scale amenities such as regional parks and cycle networks.

Defining the appropriate boundaries for the MASPs will be an important step in preparing the RSES and Map 3 below identifies the reach of Galway based upon the commuter catchment of at least 15% of the Galway city workforce. This arises from data collected as part of the 2016 Census.

Map 3: Galway City Catchment – Travel to Work



2.2 Rural Growth

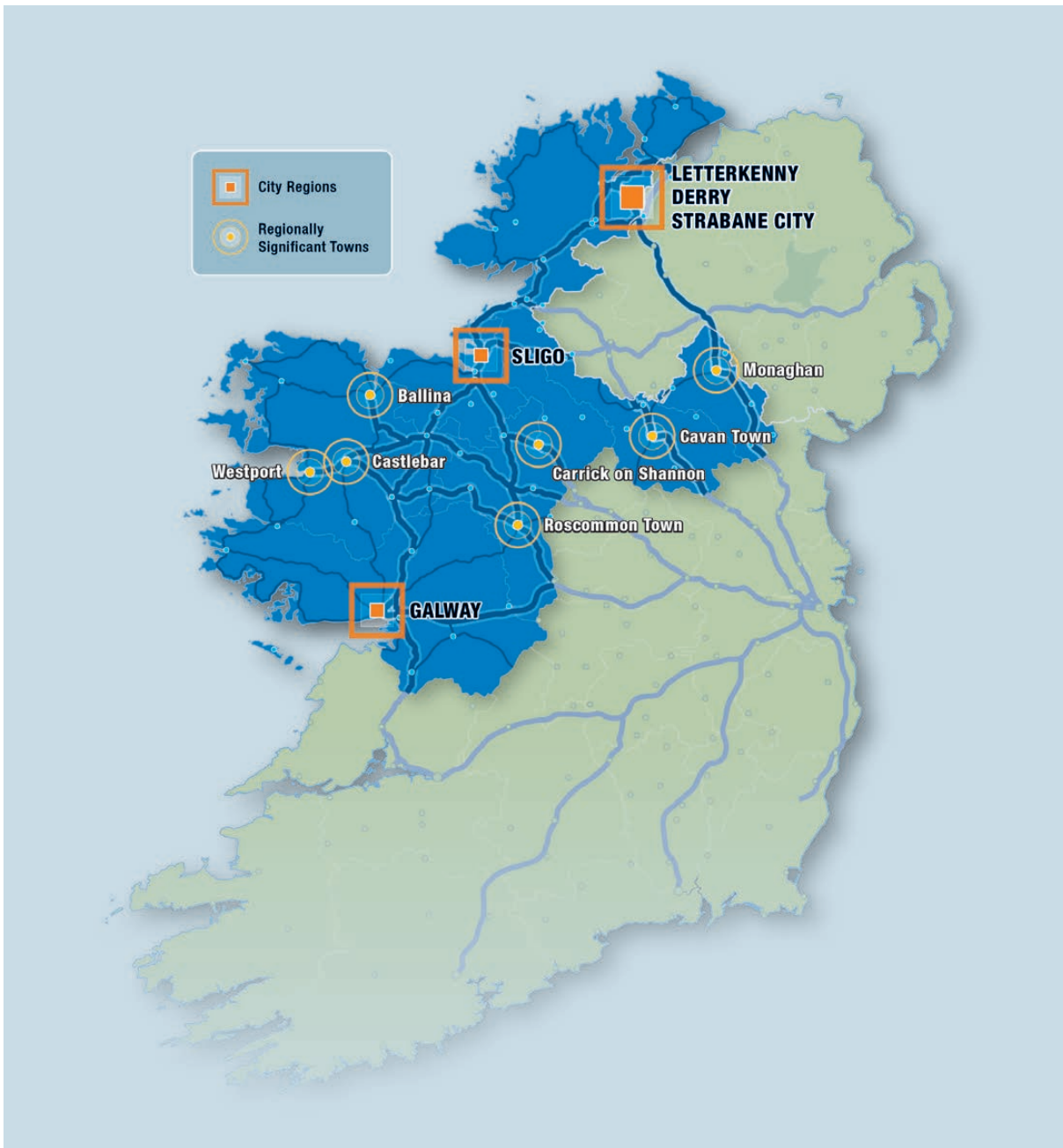
Rural land has played a historically significant role in the settlement and development of communities in the Northern and Western Region. These rural areas will continue to have significant value associated with their economic productivity, social and cultural heritage, scenic amenity, recreational value, rural production role, current and future tourism opportunities and rural living opportunities. Appropriate development of rural areas in our region can contribute to the character, economy and social fabric of the Region and revitalise rural communities.

However, these areas are also subject to many competing and potentially conflicting pressures that have the potential to damage some of their most valuable and irreplaceable attributes. Inappropriate rural residential development has the potential to conflict with agricultural activities, reduce agricultural viability and increase environmental damage. These developments also impact on the viability and sustainability of the wider region.

Rural areas are defined as all towns / villages of less than 10,000 population, as well as the open countryside. However, it is recognised that not all rural areas are similar and that a differentiation should be made between those rural areas that are within areas of ‘urban influence’ and those that are outside it. Areas within ‘urban influence’ are said to include:

- Areas within the 5 City regions, as defined by commuter catchment of at least 15% of the relevant city workforce (ie. area of Urban Influence).
- Areas within larger towns with population of 10,000+, as defined by commuter catchment of at least 15% of the relevant town workforce.
- Areas of Urban Influence of smaller towns to be identified locally.

Map 4: The Urban Hierarchy – City Regions & Regionally significant towns.



Where single one-off housing is proposed in the countryside then it will be necessary that it be based on the core consideration of demonstrable economic need to live there.

The draft Framework presents extensive areas of the Northern and Western region as a rural area in its entirety. The exceptions to this are Galway as a designated city and the large urban towns

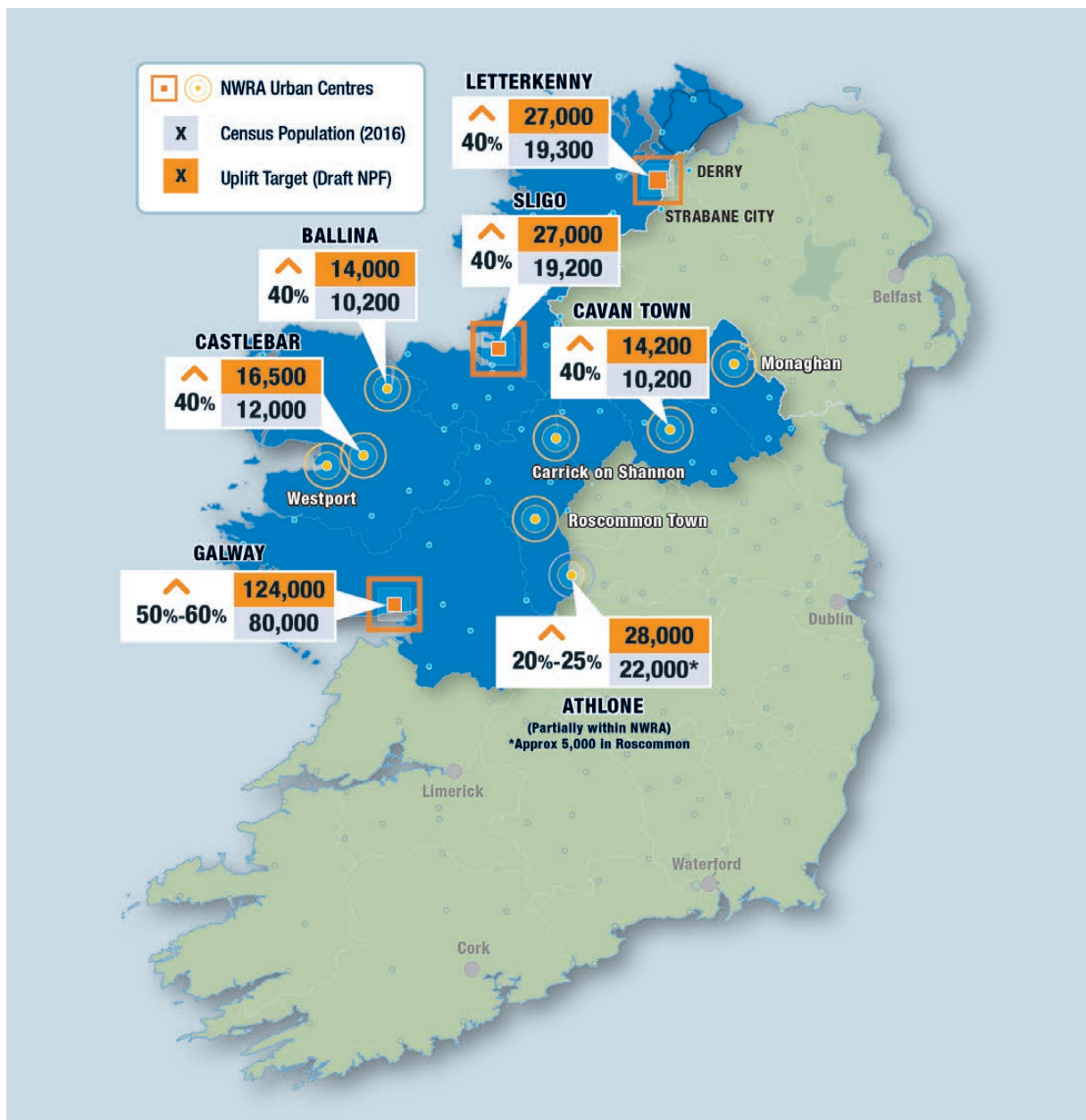
with a population greater than 10,000 population of Letterkenny, Sligo, Ballina, Castlebar and Cavan (the area of Athlone in Co. Roscommon would also fall into this category). This means that a number of 'County Towns' are defined as rural within the Draft NPF, whilst their role and function may be of significance to their hinterlands and also at a regional level.

2.3 Northern & Western Region – considerations for People and Place

The Draft NPF provides the broad parameters for the region, which RSES must make provision for and some of the key provisions include the following:

- Accommodate a population increase of between 150,000 and 175,000 people up to 2040
- Create 110,000 new jobs to support the projected population increase, with total of 450,000 jobs necessary within region.
- Population and jobs growth to be aligned to occur within the same functional area and to a limited number of larger and regionally distributed centres.
- Galway City and suburbs population increasing by 45,000 additional people (an increase of more than 55%)
- Towns of over 10,000+ population (Large Towns) identified for significant uplift of 40% to 2040.

Figure 2: Cities and Large Towns – Growth Targets



KEY QUESTIONS

Population & Employment

1. How do we achieve our population ambitions? How do we encourage population and employment growth to the City Regions and Large Towns, to enable them to perform as key national and regional economic drivers? How can they be addressed and by whom?
2. Can we identify propositions within cities, urban areas, or, well connected towns that are suitable for strategic employment growth? What are the barriers to their delivery and how can barriers be removed?
3. How do we ensure population, housing and employment targets align with the sustainable growth needs of the region and remain aligned with the NPF?
4. Are there towns below the population threshold of 10,000 that have a role and function that represent potential regional growth drivers? Where are they located? Explain why you consider that they exhibit these attributes and how the RSES could best offer support to them.

Regional Initiatives

5. Is there an opportunity to develop this region as a SMART Region and how can this be best achieved and by whom?
6. (i) Where are the regionally significant locations for investment concentration? Where are the most suitably available development lands, strategic site and commercial properties, taking consideration of matters including:
 - a. Employment location, density of workers
 - b. Locations for expansion of existing enterprises
 - c. Serviced and ready sites(ii) How can competitively priced development lands be provided
7. How can the Atlantic Economic Corridor (AEC) be developed as a value proposition for the region? Who are the drivers for its development and what barriers may exist that need to be negotiated?

Rural Matters

8. How can rural towns and villages best be revitalised within the Region? Are there local, national or international best practice models that can be replicated and endorsed through the RSES that can revitalise the social, economic, cultural and heritage value and vitality of settlements?
9. How can one-off houses in the countryside be best managed so as to maintain it as a living and lived in landscape whilst protecting its environmental qualities and supporting the revitalisation of rural towns and villages?

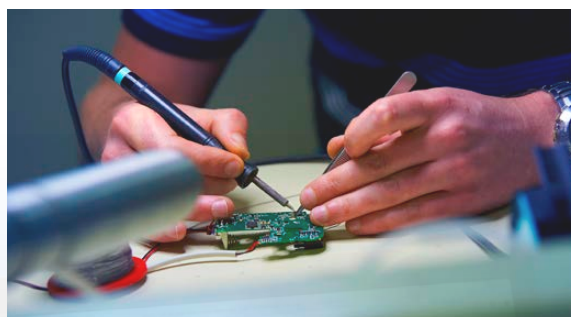
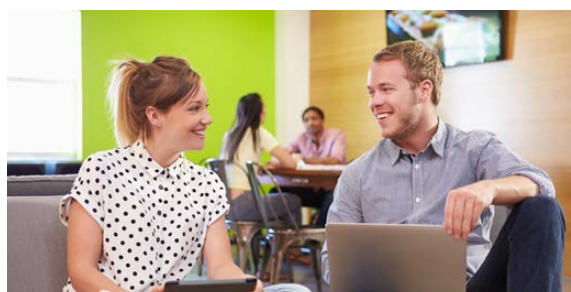
Our Vibrant Place

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The RSES is tasked with not only creating a Spatial and Economic Strategy for the 8 counties & 1 City within our Region, but for the first time, the RSES must also include an economic element which should focus on our value propositions, particularly having regard to the very significant changes which will impact society with the advent of the digital age, and the '4th industrial revolution'. We also need to adapt to international trends – **digitisation, globalisation and urbanisation**.

The terms of reference assigned to the RSES process enables us to achieve this. Specifically;

- To enable conditions to create and sustain jobs
- Enhance Regional Performance, by identifying Regional strengths, and opportunities, having regard to economic and employment trends within the Region.
- Proposals for augmenting economic performance in the region, in all sectors, enhancing research & development capacity, in particular, links between third level education & enterprise.
- Identifying Regional attributes – (and improve / augment these attributes):
 - i. Quality of Environment / Landscape.
 - ii. Quality of towns / rural area's.
 - iii. Physical infrastructure
 - iv. Social, community, cultural assets..
- Enhancing Research & Development Capacity, in particular, links between third level education & enterprise (up-skill & re-skill)



- Identifying Regional attributes – (and improve / augment these attributes):
 - i. Quality of Environment / Landscape.
 - ii. Quality of towns / rural area's.
 - iii. Physical infrastructure
 - iv. Social, community, cultural assets.

3.1 Economic engine

Given the well-established strengths of the region, and the evolution of the Atlantic Economic Corridor and its potential, the NWRA contends that our region presents the most significant potential for the development of an effective counter-balance to the Greater Dublin Area, driven by our emerging sectors, underinvested latent potential and the potential return on investment.

When analysing regional potential there are key factors that should be considered, such as: private capital (including FDI), human capital, skills matching, infrastructure, innovation, natural resources, available technology, innovation capacity, level of research and development, social capital, geography (remoteness, topography), land availability (green field, brown field), level of competition in input and output markets, labour market efficiency.

The country is currently experiencing an economic recovery from the post Celtic Tiger

crash which saw unemployment rates rise to a peak of 15% at the end of 2010. The economic growth rate here is projected to be the highest in the EuroZone for the 4th year in a row in 2017, forecast at between 4% - 5% in 2017. However, despite the positive trends, it is widely acknowledged that the economic recovery has taken hold in Dublin, and possibly several of the other major urban centres, but this has not yet fully filtered out to the rest of the Country, particularly the more peripheral counties, as evidenced by the out migration statistics revealed in the Census 2016 for Counties Mayo, Sligo & Donegal. However, despite some disparities, job growth is occurring in every Region & County.

The Action Plan for Jobs is the current government strategy targeting economic recovery across the regions, which was first launched by Government in 2012, and it has proved to be a successful collaborative approach, which is now held up as an international best practice model. An updated, Action Plan for Jobs is scheduled to be published by the Dept. of Business, Enterprise & Innovation in early 2018.



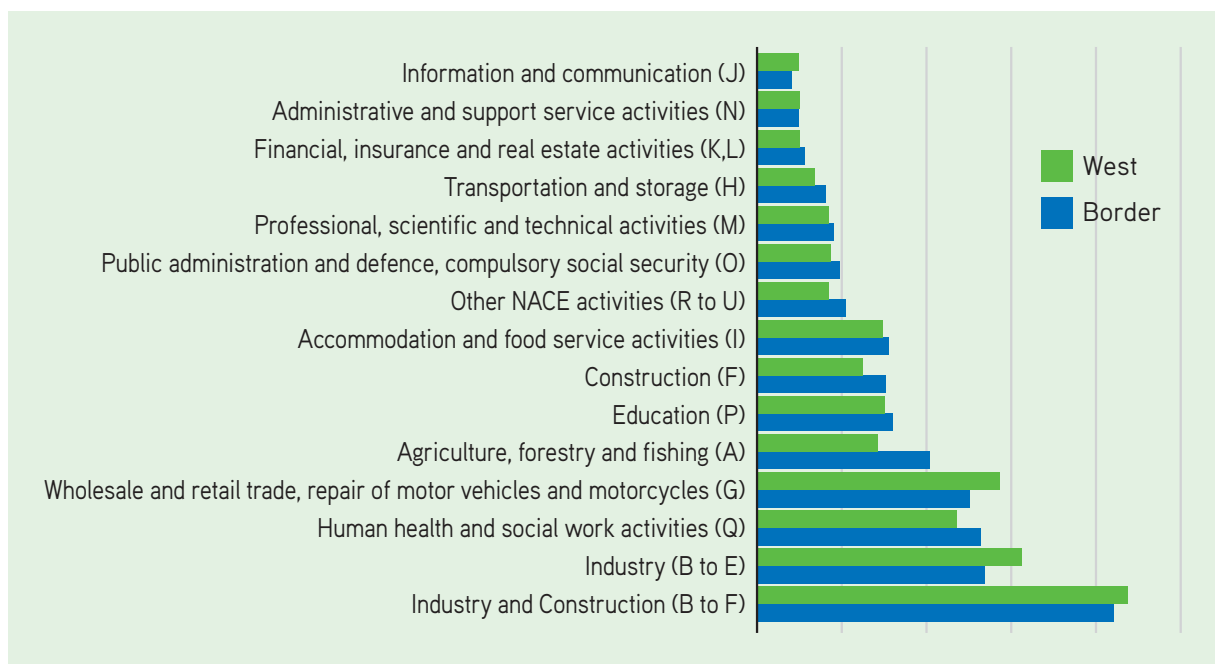
In general terms, the Northern and Western region has remained economically resilient, and continues to perform very strongly in European Regional terms. There are a number of at a glance statistics which illustrate some of our strengths:

- There are over 140 FDI multi-nationals supported by the IDA in our Region.
- Their operations employ in excess of 26,000 people.
- In 2016, our top 15 multi-national companies exported over €10bn. of products and services.
- The Region has in excess of 45,000 businesses in the region, and the strength of SME's is evidenced in the fact that we have been awarded European Entrepreneurial Region by the for 2018.
- Additionally, there are indigenous global success stories companies operating in our Region, some of which are world leaders in their fields. CombiLift, Portwest, McHales Agri, Aerogen and thousands more.

The agri-food sector is also a very important potential growth sector for the Region, with it accounting for almost 36% of the national Agriculture output. The agri-food sector encompasses primary production (agriculture or farming), forestry, fishing, food and drinks (excluding tobacco) and wood-processing. Exports of Food and Beverages nationally increased by over 50%, since 2009, to €12bn and by the end of 2015. The Agri food sector accounted for 7.6% of national GVA, exporting to the UK, US, China and France.

The agri-food sector is the largest cross-border trading sector on the island of Ireland and in 2016 there were some 35,000 persons in this region, over the age of 15 years, employed in Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing (see Fig below).

Figure 3: Persons aged 15 years and over in Employment (Thousand) by Region (West and Border) Qtr 4 2016 CSO



3.2 Potential Disrupters

Brexit

Brexit, and the countdown to the UK leaving the European Union in Quarter 1 of 2019 looms large on the horizon. It is acknowledged that the full implications of Brexit cannot yet be determined, and thus the opportunities and the threats that they present are not yet fully understood. However, it is clear the impacts of Brexit will be most acutely felt along the Border and within certain industries where Ireland is currently experiencing continued growth, Agri-Food is one such example.

The Draft NPF does indicate that the Framework will be reviewed when the full implications and impacts of Brexit are known. The RSES will require similar review and in the NWRA submission to the Draft NPF consultation it advocated the setting up of a Brexit fund which should be ring-fenced specifically to assist the border counties most impacted by Brexit. Such a fund could be utilised to help mitigate potential threats which may arise as a result of the UK leaving the Single Market (as one example).

The 4th Industrial Revolution

The World is now in a historically important period of industrialization, what is now accepted by the World Economic Forum as the 4th industrial revolution. New options for growth are focusing upon Artificial Intelligence (Ai), robotics, and the interface between the two. The ongoing development of biotechnologies principally in genetic engineering, and neuro-technologies, present new opportunities, but will also bring disruption to existing services and goods impacted by such developments. The internet of things, and the advancing of 3D Printing will also cause upheaval to existing industries and service sectors. **The Northern and Western Regional Assembly in partnership with the WDC and Insight Centre aim to integrate policies into our RSES to take cognisance of this.**

New skills are required particularly the ability of people to understand and advance data literacy. Regions which can build and advance these skills platforms (in converging a digital society and biotech) will underpin their sustainable future development, and quality of life for its citizens. Regions which do not adopt well will see their development lag behind.

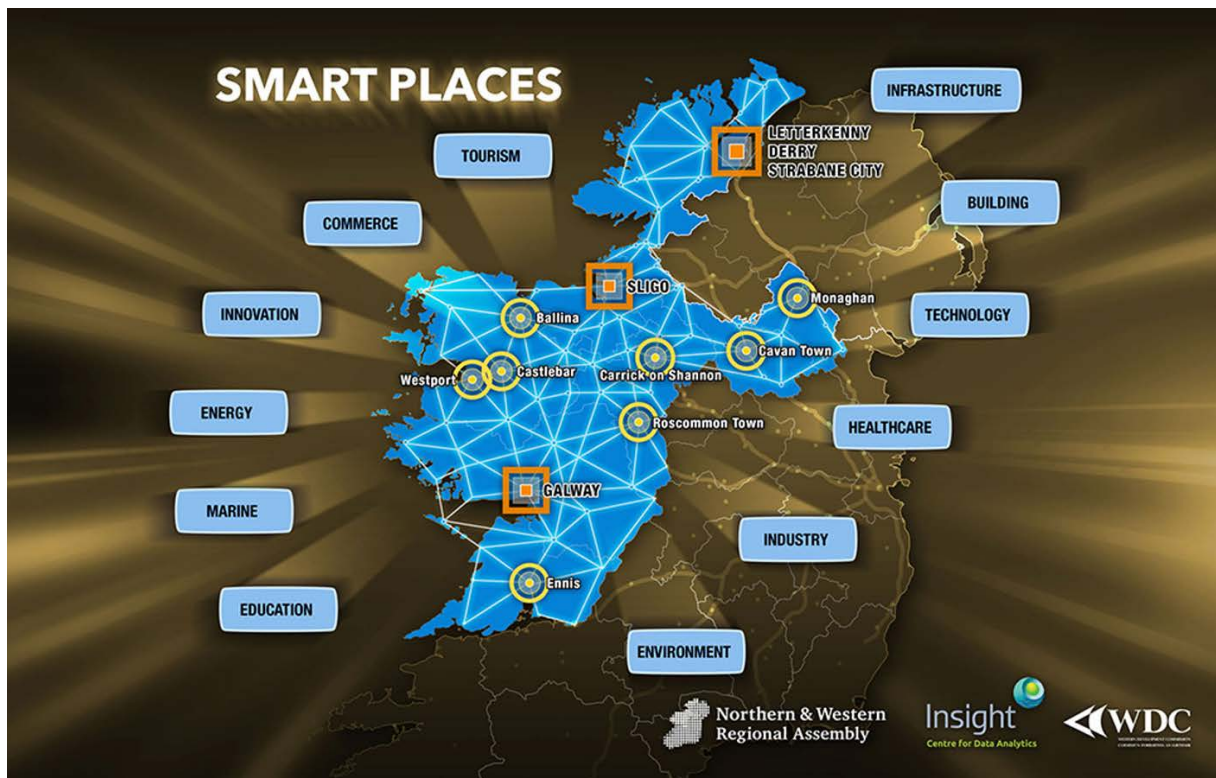
3.3 Emerging Sectors

The Draft NPF seeks to a large extent to align jobs to population growth, the ratio as set out in the Draft is approximately 66% (i.e. 660 jobs for 1,000 extra people). ESRI is predicting that an additional 660,000 jobs will be created in the Country between now and 2040. National Policy Objective 1c within the Draft NPF targets 110,000 jobs for our Region in that period, bringing the Region's total workforce up to a projected 450,000.

In this context, it is vital the RSES captures the value propositions of the NWRA, and to identify sub regional strengths and opportunities, as well as established, and emerging industrial clusters and catchments. Examples would include the Life Sciences and BioTech employers based in the Galway City Region, or large employers in Letterkenny such as Pramerica (Financial Services).

Emerging sectors in our region could include the following sectors for RSES

- Energy
- Marine
- Life Sciences
- Engineering
- Creative Economy
- Tourism
- Agri – Food / Agri – Innovation
- Creative Economy.
- Advanced Manufacturing



Smart Places – NWRA, WDC and Insight Centre (NUIG)

A project to build the responsiveness of our regional economy to modern, new and transformative global trends. Utilising our strongest resource in our people, to construct a resilient, dynamic and adaptive community. This region can lead Ireland into new industries, sectors and opportunities. What does this mean? What are the attributes of a Smart Region?

Some of the world's most innovative solutions exist in our region, across energy, healthcare, industry, commerce, communities etc. Our entrepreneurs are globally recognised for research, innovation and technology. Convergence between industry, government and state bodies illustrates numerous examples of 'smart solutions'. Our intrapreneurs within sectors are applying innovation to traditional industries and practices with transformative affect.

Capturing and utilising these skills is essential both to the future of our region but also in continuing to attract global and national investment. <http://smartplaces.insight-centre.org/>

KEY QUESTIONS

Disrupters

1. What do you believe to be the potential disrupters in our regional / national economy and what strategy will be necessary as a consequence?
2. What are the potential opportunities and threats presented to businesses in the region by Brexit and how can our RSES mitigate these threats?

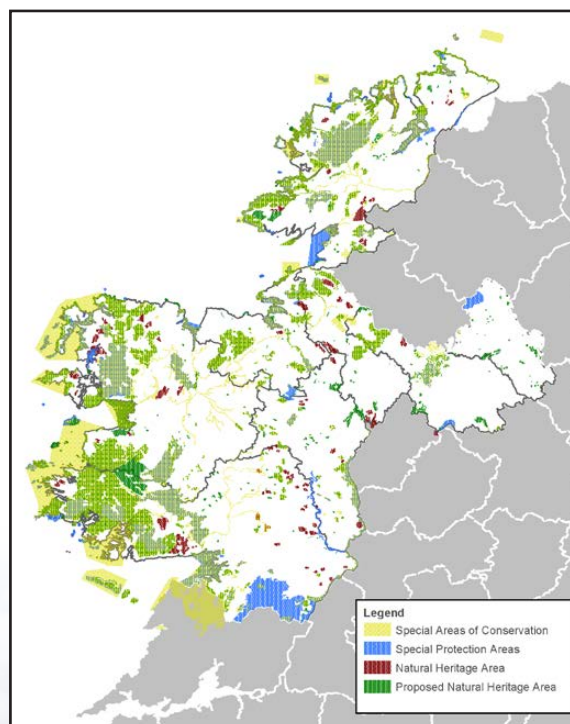
Growth

3. How do we continue to sustain jobs in the region and what strategies should we pursue to grow job numbers?
4. What in your view are the regional emerging sectors? What would you identify as a strengths, and opportunity for this region?
5. How will new technologies and digital / mobile technology impact on our settlement patterns?
6. How do our rural and peripheral communities (<10,000) remain sustainable and create job and population growth?
7. Are there additional or specific value propositions which have been omitted above, and which are likely to emerge in the coming years, even if specific to a particular Sub-Region?

Our Natural Place

Our region boasts outstanding landscapes, and internationally important environmental assets, including designated sites. 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 challenge ahead in formulating an effective policy under RSES is to take account of multiple policy frameworks already in effect, and chart a path towards a region which embraces the low carbon transition for our society, and economy. To unleash the further potential of our Region through the enhancement, co-ordination and promotion of our environmental, heritage & cultural assets, which are now acknowledged as world class in the field of tourism.



MAP 5: Natura 2000 Site Designations within our Region.



4.1 The Current Policy Frameworks

There are a range of publications that will inform the RSES in respect of Environmental considerations, and some of these are listed below:

Climate Change – Mitigation & Adaptation: The Government has in 2017 published A National Mitigation Plan & A National Adaptation Framework, which aim to tackle the causes, and the effects (respectively) of climate change.

Water Framework Directive: The Draft River Basin Management Framework, 2018 – 2021 seeks to ensure full compliance with the Water Framework Directive.

Irish Water Investment Programme: The RSES will set out the Urban Hierarchy collaborative capacity assessments for the Region, and it will be critical that the Irish Water investment programme is aligned with this Framework.

Harnessing our Ocean Wealth (2012): A strategic Government framework for the Marine Sector

CFRAMs (Catchment Flood Risk Area Management): Flood Risk Management is now an established policy tool for decision makers, and local authorities. Flooding in particular and extreme weather events in general have increased in frequency in recent years. These events only reinforce the importance of ensuring that future investment priorities, and settlement growth is planned, and avoids flood risk through co-ordination of a programme of measures for designated growth areas.

In addition the RSES shall be informed by the Strategic Environmental Assessment / Appropriate Assessment / Strategic Flood Risk Assessments that shall be undertaken in parallel with the formulation of this strategy.

4.2 Transition towards a Low Carbon Economy

The Draft National Planning Framework identifies the sustainable future the country should strive to achieve. Intrinsic to this is improving our water quality, dealing with & enhancing air quality in urban areas, improving waste water infrastructure and accelerating our actions as a nation on Climate Change. Transitioning to a low carbon economy shall best include the advancement of a broad spectrum of renewable energy types and the Draft NPF acknowledges that in meeting the challenge of transitioning to a low carbon economy, the location of future national renewable energy generation will, for the most part, need to be accommodated on large tracts of land that are located in a rural setting, while also continuing to protect the integrity of the environment. The Northern & Western Region is:

- A significant contributor of green energy to the National Grid, with County Donegal currently ranking the third highest County in terms of wind energy output.
- Boasts consistent & high wind speed
- Has a huge expanse of Atlantic coastline, with wave, and tidal energy potential which is at present largely untapped.
- Has an energy transmission network with many deficiencies in the North and West.
- Is at the inter-face of exporting energy to Northern Ireland, as part of an All Ireland energy grid.

The RSES will have to focus upon all areas of policy response in the area of Energy supply & Climate Change, and this will have to be done in a manner which underpins the whole of Government approach on Climate change, and the transition to a low carbon economy. Part of this approach shall include the utilisation of brownfield sites and the target set in the Draft NPF is that at least 40% of our new housing should be built on brownfield sites within envelopes of our towns and villages. It also advocates the

circular & bio-economy, the reuse of materials is a growing sector, with the European Commission proposing a recycling rate of 65% by 2030 for the Circular Economy Package.

Energy has been identified as an opportunity across all LECP's, within the region, ranging from energy efficiency first, harnessing the energy resource through a variety of low carbon energy sources within the northern and western region, infrastructure development and the development of associated innovative technology. These are all significant areas of activity that have the potential to deliver climate change/ low carbon solutions for Ireland and importantly improve the economic, social and economic well-being of communities.

The transition will require a cultural step change in the approach to Green Energy Development and provides an opportunity to create sustainable communities by the region also becoming a net exporter of Green Energy. Within the Irish economic context, significant investment in Renewable Energy in the region could contribute to Ireland complying with the EU Commission roadmap targets and potentially becoming a net exporter of energy.

KEY QUESTIONS

1. How do we integrate sustainable policy and practice into our RSES so that they add value and not just regulate our practices?
2. Would the development of a co-ordinated approach to supply chain development in the forestry/ biomass sectors have the potential to deliver regionally significant dividend to the region through innovative renewable energy solutions for businesses and communities, together with the adoption of energy efficient technology? What would this look like and what barriers exist and how can they be resolved?
3. How can the RSES assist local authorities and other stakeholders in addressing its climate change responsibilities and targets?

4.3 Marine

Our ocean is a national asset, supporting a diverse marine economy, with vast potential to tap into a €1,200 billion global marine market for seafood, tourism, oil and gas, marine renewable energy, and new applications for health, medicine and technology (Rf. *Harnessing Our Ocean Wealth: An Integrated Marine Plan for Ireland (2012)*). It also supports our coastal communities and provides essential non-commercial benefits, such as amenity, biodiversity and wellbeing. With a Marine Territory of 220m acres, the potential of our coastline, and our Atlantic Ocean resource is a value proposition which is set to grow significantly in the coming decades. ‘*Harnessing Our Ocean Wealth*’ targets that Ireland double its GDP from marine by 2030. The RSES can play a significant role in how this is to be achieved, with this in mind, there is the need to enhance the role played by our ports and harbours, and other landside facilities and services.

There is significant interdependency between land and maritime, such as the requirement of land landing facilities for the fishing industry waste from land may impede shellfish aquaculture development and the development of the vast and sustainable off-shore energy resources requires land based infrastructure to capture, store and transmit energy. In addition the offshore developments associated with the



MAP 6: Our Region within the Real Map of Ireland

above have potential to be of concern to coastal communities and therefore needs to be plan led. Offshore developments are essentially outside the remit of the RSES but new legislation is pending and this may change. In time the Marine Spatial Plan may also have implications for the review of the RSES and perhaps the NPF.

As referenced above, the Marine Economy is a significant growth area, and is currently expanding at 4% per annum. The Region can build upon its key coastal assets, Galway Port (and future plans), Killybegs Harbour, Ross a Mheal, Greencastle in conjunction with the Wild Atlantic Way Tourism brand. Value can be added to sub sectors such as Cruise Tourism, Marine Tourism & Heritage, and Nautical Tourism. There are other facilities such as Sligo Port which with appropriate upgrade could provide significant Regional spin offs in the aforementioned fields.

KEY QUESTIONS

1. Ireland's marine economy (Our Ocean Wealth) has an ambition to grow from 0.9% of GDP to 2.4% by 2030. How can our region, our communities reap dividend from the unprecedented growth of our blue economy?
2. How can the region extract the maximum sustainable benefit from the potential of key maritime assets such as Killybegs Fishing Port, Galway Port, north Mayo coastline, the BIM Maritime Educational Facility (Greencastle) and other key Infrastructural assets?
3. How do we as a region strengthen our maritime identity and increase our awareness of both the commercial and non-commercial benefits of engaging with the sea in support of harnessing all its extensive coastal hinterland. How and where can we best capture these benefits and what barriers need to be negotiated?

4.4 An Gaeltacht

Under the auspices of the Gaeltacht Act (2012), some 26 Local Plans will be prepared by local community organisations across the different Gaeltacht districts working in close collaboration and on a partnership basis with key public sector stakeholders, (such as Udaras Na Gaeltachta, and Local Authorities).

The RSES will enable these local plans as a key component in the overall planning hierarchy. These plans are to set out a range of development interventions and investment measures which needs to be managed to ensure the viable and sustainable development, in economic, socioeconomic and sociolinguistic terms, of the Gaeltacht communities.

KEY QUESTIONS

1. How can the RSES best support Gaeltacht communities to retain a strong social & cultural and linguistic identity?
2. Can the RSES play a role in broadening employment base and enhance productivity within our Gaeltacht communities?
3. What and where are the regionally significant opportunities within the Gaeltacht and how can the RSES enable them to be realised?

4.5 Landscape, Environmental Assets & Heritage: Our Shared Assets

The Landscapes of the West and Border Regions are nationally, and internationally renowned. The Region boasts a number of National Parks:

- Glenveagh National Park, Co Donegal.
- Connemara National Park, Co Galway.
- Ballycroy National Park, Co Mayo.
- Marble Arch Caves Geo Park, Co Cavan & Co. Fermanagh.

In addition to the recreational, and outstanding amenity value these Parks present, there are multiple other attractions, such as 34 Blue Flag beaches along our coast, our world class golf courses, our Blueways and Greenways. A small number of these attractions are already well established (the Great Western Greenway), and



the visitor experience is being enhanced on an ongoing basis, such as the development of the WAW signature points.



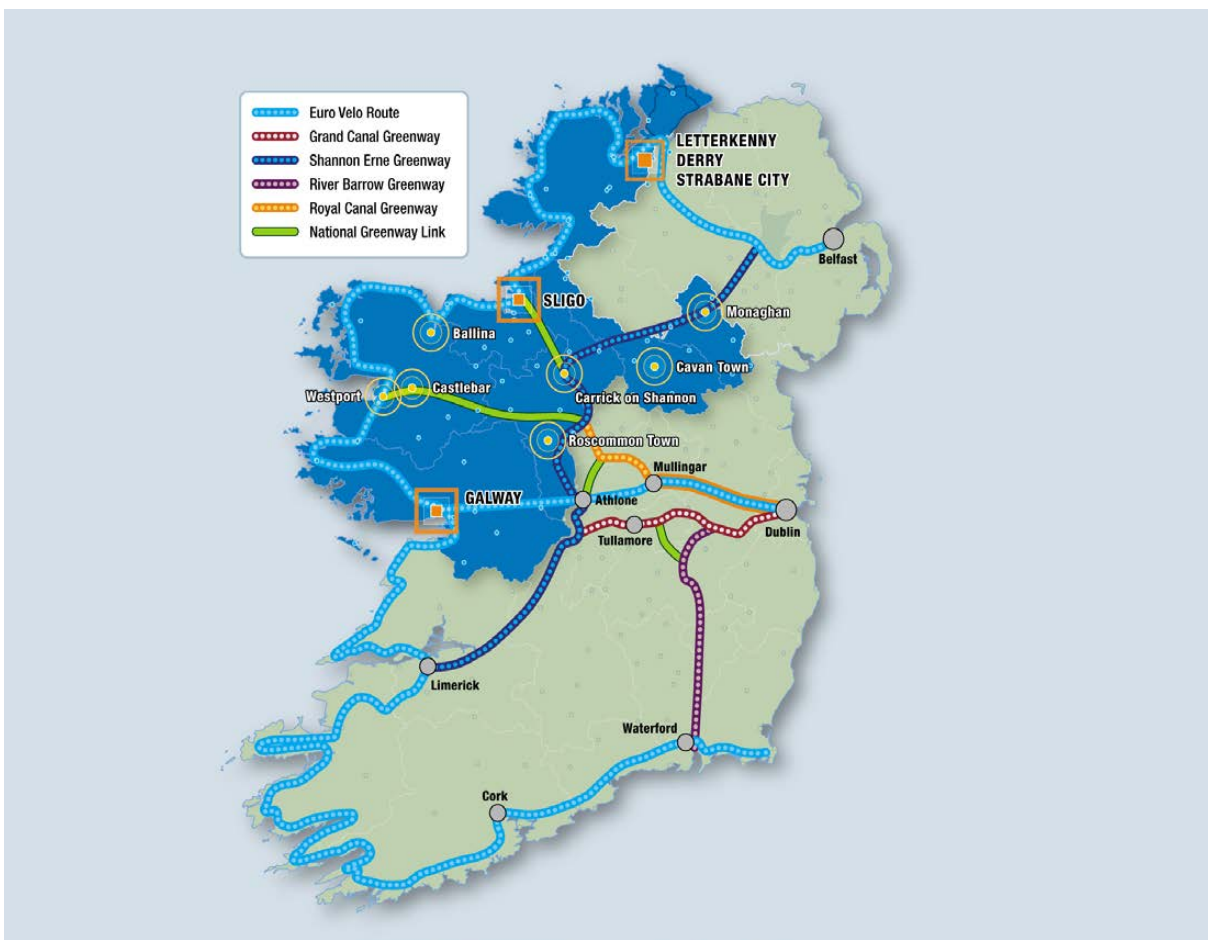
With additional and emerging projects of scale such as the Centre Parks Project in Longford, and the National Geographic accolade for County Donegal as ‘Coolest Place’. There is undoubtedly scope for significant growth in the offer of our region from a Cultural & Heritage viewpoint.

The RSES can play its role in conserving, growing and enhancing the Cultural & Heritage offer, and to do so in tandem with protecting and enhancing our places of environmental value. The RSES can make provision for an integrated approach to the planning, development and marketing of the Tourism offer by the various stakeholders involved in the industry, which could bring added benefit to the region.

Greenways: Greenway infrastructure is being progressed in almost all counties, with a number of projects in the Border & Western Region advancing to planning and construction stage. Examples include the €14m funding for the NW Greenway between Derry & Donegal.

However as can be seen from the map below, further opportunities exist for sustainable mobility and transportation from our Greenway infrastructure. The NWRA has attempted to outline a vision of a completed route system based on pipeline, in development and under construction Greenway initiatives.

MAP 6: Greenway and Cycling Initiatives



KEY QUESTIONS

1. What are the opportunities presented by our natural, built and cultural assets? Where are they located? How can they be conserved and their potential harnessed and what barriers exist that need to be resolved?
2. What should a strategy that provides for the development of Regional Trails look like? Where are these potential Trails and what are the potential barriers that need to be resolved.
3. Are there best practice models for the management and marketing of our tourism assets that can be replicated for our region?
4. Should the RSES provide a platform for regional collaboration on tourism development for this Region.
5. In terms of a Greenways Strategy which crosses County Boundaries, are there priority routes & potential connections which could be achieved within the Lifetime of the RSES?
6. Would such links provide an experience of directing visitors to places of interest, and towns / villages en route?
7. Do you see additional or alternative connections to those outlined above on the NWRA's Draft greenways vision? (See the above envisioned Regional Greenway network, can same be added to or enhanced?).

How future development in Ireland is planned will continue to be a significant determinant of people's quality of life. Location, place and accessibility influence the quality of life that people enjoy. Our health and our environment are inextricably linked. Specific health risks influenced by our physical surroundings and their relative quality include heart disease, respiratory disease, mental ill-health, obesity and injuries.

Decisions made regarding land use and the built environment including transportation affect these health risks in a variety of ways including through influencing air and water quality, traffic safety, opportunities for physical activity and social interactions as well as access to workplace, education, healthcare and other facilities and services such as food and alcohol outlets

Equally, communities mean more than housing. People are central to communities in Ireland, whether in an urban or a rural context. Through their leadership, innovation and collaboration, community groups and organisations across the country contribute to shaping a more sustainable future within their immediate locality. Access to education is vital for healthy and vibrant communities. Promoting and ensuring options to life-long learning is essential.

So too is building on the strengths of our existing education sector. NUIG is ranked in the top 1% of global universities. GMIT, IT Sligo and Letterkenny IT already have international reputations but aligned have the opportunity to create institutions of scale and strength (Technological University). Multi-campus technological university (COU) will bring greater social and economic benefits to our region through a strengthened role in research and innovation and the delivery of a broad range of high quality education and training on its campus.

The formulation of the policies will involve different levels of consultation with all the stakeholders from national service provider bodies through to their regional structures and on to individual members of the public.

5.1 Health

Health is an all embracing concept and relates to physical, mental and social well being. It impacts on all aspects of our lives and the environment in which we live and work. The Draft NPF refers to an estimated doubling of people over the age of 65 by 2040 (13.5% increasing to 23%) and those over 85 years are estimated to increase by 400%.

Additionally, there are some 650,000 people with disabilities (13.5%) who have needs in respect of independent living and access to employment in proximity. This gives rise to the need to consider appropriate strategies to make provision for well-designed lifetime adaptable infill and brownfield development close to existing services and facilities. It also suggests that the type of accommodation stock being delivered needs to cater for downsizing and integrated with more supportive communal and specialist care accommodation.

Currently, at a national level there are approximately 2,500 public healthcare facilities including:

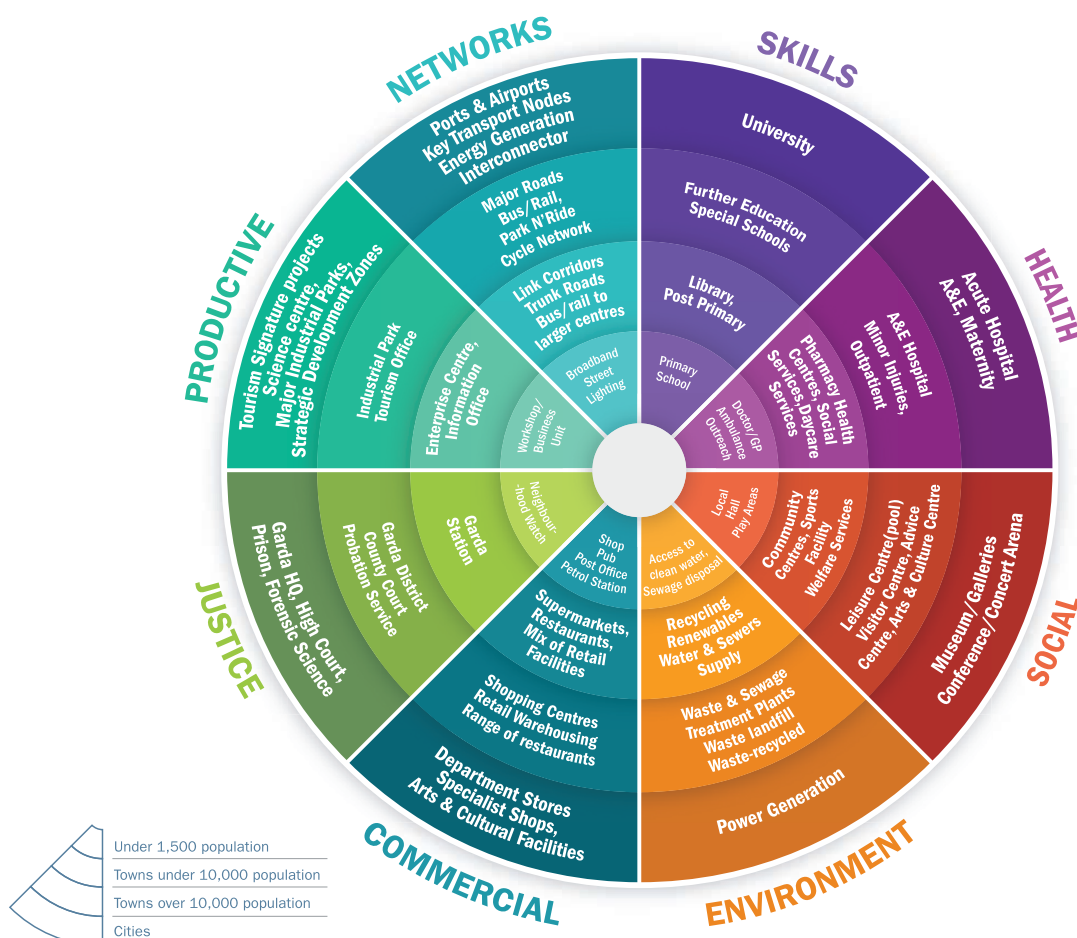
- Acute hospitals
- Residential care facilities
- Primary care centres
- Local health facilities used to provide health and social care services in areas including:
 - Mental health,
 - Disabilities,
 - Older people, and
 - National Ambulance Service.

The focus going forward is on the provision of integrated care into the future and this requires that the model be re-orientated towards primary and community care where the majority of peoples health needs can be met locally.

High quality Acute care is an important component of integrated care wherein emergency and more complex cases are provided in a setting supported by specialist clinical expertise. This presents challenges for a rurally dispersed region such as the North and West and the significance of smart technology and approaches to service delivery can make a difference to sustaining our communities. The opportunity to continue to utilise and expand service delivery on a community and cross-border basis may be appropriately explored within this consultation.

The RSES is also an opportunity to support Objectives of Public Health Policy, including ‘Healthy Ireland’ and ‘National Physical Activity Plan’ (links to both of these are given in bibliography), as one of the purposes of the RSES is to give spatial recognition and outcomes to the overall goal of providing healthy communities.

Figure 4: Hierarchy of Settlements and Related Infrastructure



Source: Derived from Strategic Investment Board Limited, 2008

A challenge for the RSES is how to distil these national goals to a regional level and indeed determine if they are compatible with the published population targets in the Draft NPF, insofar as they relate to this region. The Draft NPF recognises an increased emphasis on Primary Care as the first and ongoing port of call for treatment of 75% of illness at a national level. The delivery of such services may require additional physical infrastructure, on existing, improved and new sites. One of the goals of the RSES is to attempt to categorise and identify the location for the future delivery of services.

There are other aspects of public health that have relevance in the overall context of quality of life such as water and air quality which are examined under the environment umbrella.



The economic foundations for health care provision at a regional level is also of interest and information on the allocation of resources will be important for making integrated development decisions. The co-ordination of spatial and economic planning is a challenge for the new departure in planning that is the RSES.

KEY QUESTIONS

1. Where will our healthcare infrastructure and services need to be located to meet the population projection targets identified in the NPF?
2. Where will public recreational spaces be provided for citizens and what are appropriate levels?
3. How do we enable modes of 'active transport' or 'smarter travel'?
4. How much of the necessary infrastructure is available to deliver smart healthcare in our region?
5. Will this region have the capability to have and retain adequate expertise and human capital to deliver modern healthcare?

5.2 Education

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 and has 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.

The Draft NPF has indicated that the demand for school places is likely to increase up to 2025 and remain constant thereafter. It also identified education as a key enabler for the future success of the nation and recognises the value of technological Universities through National Policy Objective No. 32.

The challenge of putting spatial definition on the above objective falls to the RSES. The proposal to deliver increased population growth and rates of growth to urban areas will have consequential impacts on the future delivery of education and life-long learning. Ireland already has dispersed education infrastructure, obviously much greater dispersion at primary and less so at third level. The adequacy of the existing physical infrastructure to meet projected population changes needs to be assessed. Similar exercises to those necessary for healthcare provision needs to be carried out in determining where future education facilities will be located and prioritised.

The Regional Assembly ask you to consider the following questions so as to be able to formulate a coherent strategy for future service provision.

National Policy Objective 32

Prioritise the alignment of targeted and planned population and employment growth with investment in:

- The provision of early childhood care and education (ECCE) facilities and new and refurbished schools on well-located sites within or close to existing built-up areas, that meet the diverse needs of local populations.
- The expansion and consolidation of third level facilities at locations where this will contribute to regional development.
- Programmes for life-long learning, especially in areas of higher education and further education and training where skills gaps are identified.

KEY QUESTIONS

1. How will early childhood care and education be provided and who will provide it?
2. How will the education needs of our larger towns and cities be able to meet the population projections in the NPF, is the existing capacity of the sector sufficient?
3. What would a technological University look like in this region?
4. How can 'upskilling' needs be future proofed and through what structures can flexible further education and training be best provided, taking account of the cross-border working practices, e working, communications deficits etc?ee the above envisioned Regional Greenway network, can same be added to or enhanced?).

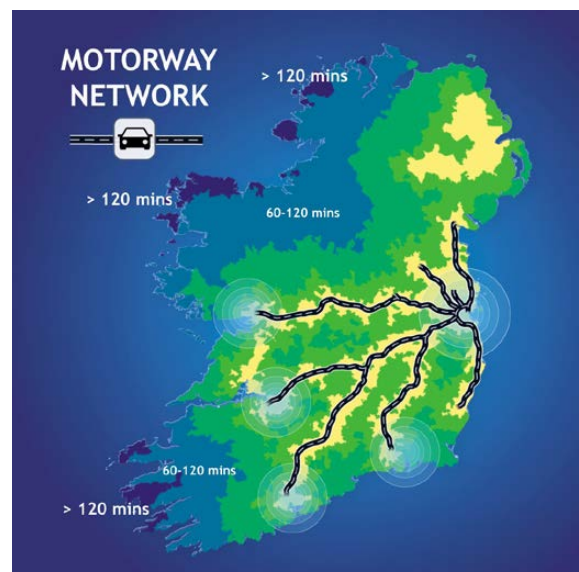
6.1 Introduction

This region has its infrastructural challenges. Notwithstanding this the resilience of enterprise, industry and our people has sustained the prospects of this region so that it stands poised to lead Ireland into 2040.

Specific underinvestment in our motorway network, our regional connectivity, access to the blue economy and the completion of the grid network, ultimately leaves our region at a competitive disadvantage (nationally and internationally). It continually begs the question about potential economic returns should key infrastructural projects be completed.



The Draft National Planning Framework acknowledges the infrastructural weakness of our Region. There are a number of commitments within the Draft NPF to the upgrade of transportation links to and within the Northern and Western region. The infrastructural challenges that pertain to the northern and western region require prioritisation of investment across a range of services throughout the region. But infrastructure is not just about roads. Our utilities, our rail network, our airports and accessibility to emerging regional growth sectors pose critical questions to the sustainability, resilience and adaptability of this region.



6.2 Public Transport

The 2016 Census data (Source: CSO) released in recent months on commuting in Ireland shows that the vast majority of commuters in our Region travel by private car on a daily basis (approaching 70% in many of our counties). With the exception

of the Galway City Region (10% usage), the usage of Public Transport stands at meagre levels in many Counties (1,4% in Donegal, Monaghan and Cavan, and 0.9% in Mayo).

KEY QUESTIONS

1. What policy interventions or initiatives can be introduced to encourage a greater number of people (and commuters) to choose public transport over private cars, and how can these inform the RSES?

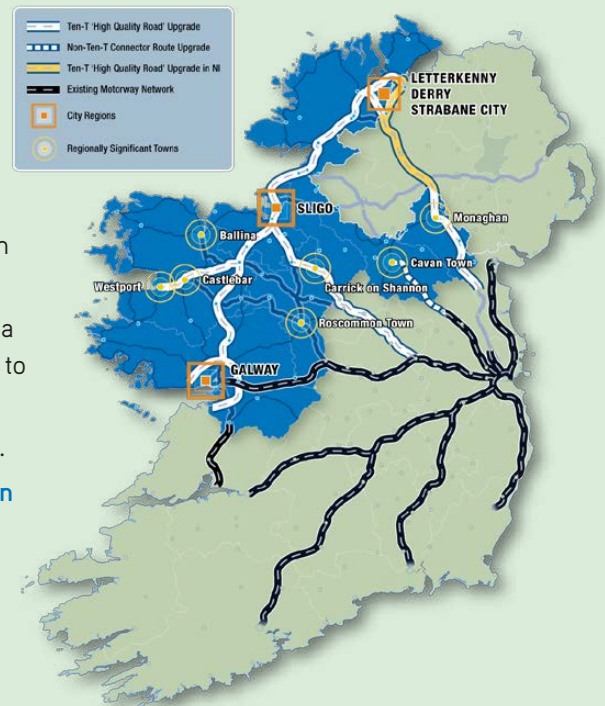
6.3 Roads & Critically Enabling Projects

In addition to the legacy of underinvestment in our roads infrastructure, there are currently multiple suspended National Roads Projects in the Border Region (18no.) and in the Western Region (19no.), Source Tii. Many of these projects were suspended during the economic downturn, and remain stationary.

The NWRA has identified what we consider to be the Critical Enabling Infrastructural priorities for our Region, and see these projects as crucial to the ability of our major urban centres to harness our potential, and act as Regional drivers for the wider area's they serve in role and function. These Critically Enabling Projects are listed below:

CRITICALLY ENABLING INFRASTRUCTURE

- The advancement of the **N2 / A5 / N14** to a Ten-T high quality road standard from the North West (Letterkenny / Derry) to Monaghan, and onwards to the M1 at Ardee.
- The upgrade of the **N4** to a Ten-T high quality road standard from Mullingar – Longford – Carrick on Shannon and onto Sligo.
- The upgrade of the **AEC (Atlantic Economic Corridor)** to a Ten-T high quality Road standard from Letterkenny south to Sligo, and Galway, linking with the new M-17 motorway.
- The completion of the **N6**, Galway City Ring Road Project.
- The full implementation of the **Galway City Transportation Strategy**.
- The upgrade of the **N5**, from Westport east to the N17 at Charlestown.
- The extension of the **M3** from the Meath County Border to Cavan Town (**N3**).



The Government is intending to replace the existing Capital Investment Programme with a National Infrastructure Plan (NIP) 2018 to 2027, and the NIP is to be a document which is aligned to the NPF, and development & investment priorities will be prepared in tandem. This strategy will

see a significant quantum of investment in our 5 City Region's, as identified in the Draft NPF, however, it remains to be seen how the National Investment Plan (NIP) will address structural weaknesses north of the aforementioned Galway – Dublin axis.

KEY QUESTIONS

1. Does the list of seven capital projects (as detailed above) represent the key priority projects within our Region? Are there other projects which are of a regional significance?
2. Outside of major road projects, do you consider any additional capital projects which should be identified as priorities for our region, and in what way would these bring significant added value?
3. Are there examples of soft infrastructure that proved successful, and which could serve as a template for the future?

6.4 Air & Rail Infrastructure

6.4.1 Rail

The Western region is relatively well served with rail connectivity. The freight line out of Ballina (to Waterford) is one of the most successful and effective lines in the country. However north of Sligo and along our border communities there are no services.

The Western Rail Corridor is a long standing preserved corridor, and County Development Plans in Mayo, Sligo & Galway recognise the need to preserve the line, whether for rail (passenger and, or freight), or for an alternative use, such as a Greenway project, or indeed both. The retention and preservation of publicly



owned lines should remain a key public priority, and indeed the railway line in some parts of our Region are already earmarked for trails, whether walking routes, or greenways, or a combination.

KEY QUESTIONS

1. Is there scope for increasing rail activity from the region or into the region?
2. Are there Rail projects within our Region which should be identified as priority, and are there rail-lines which are currently unused which could be utilised for alternative recreational uses?

6.4.2 Air

In the last five years Ireland West Airport Knock's position has been further strengthened as Ireland's fourth international airport with a major increase in the number of passengers using the facility. Ireland West Airport Knock is the main international air access gateway for the West, North West and Midland regions of Ireland. In 2016, passenger numbers exceeded 700k. New European routes are planned to be added, and the recent announcement of a Strategic Development Zone at Knock will further reinforce the growth of the airport.

Equally Donegal Airport has also been the air support base for the offshore oil and gas industry for many of the major oil Companies. It is strategically located for the support of air



services to offshore operations off the West and North West coasts of Ireland. Being located only 45 minutes from Letterkenny / Derry, the airport has also opened up whole new markets to the tourism sector, enabling product providers i.e., hotels, transport providers, golf clubs, leisure fishing etc to promote their facilities to wider domestic and international markets.

KEY QUESTIONS

1. How can we enable IWAK to truly compete internationally and that this region becomes the access point to the Wild Atlantic Way?
2. How can our Airports advance their role in contributing to enterprise and tourist development? What economic opportunities do they provide us?
3. The SDZ designation opens up considerable opportunity for IWAK. Are there emerging sectors / global industries that would be attracted to this region?

6.4.3 Broadband & Telecommunications

The National Broadband Plan is currently at tender stage, and it is hoped that when the fibre rollout is complete across the Country, all households, and businesses will enjoy speed's of 30 megs. At present there are wide swathes of our Region, both rural, and urban with little or no access to broadband. Some locations which do have broadband have speed's 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.

Our region also boasts new digital infrastructure. The Irish owned and operated company Aqua Comms laid a transatlantic fibre cable directly from Ross Strand in Killala to Long Island, New York. The cable provides a super-fast internet connection and is poised to be a catalyst in attracting major investment. The cable has the capacity to 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. In addition, the Hibernia Atlantic Group connects several locations in the North including Letterkenny, Derry, and Strabane, extending onwards to a number of strategic locations including Monaghan and Drogheda.



6.4.4 Tourist Infrastructure

This region boasts an array of titles and awards. In short:

- Coolest Place on the Planet
- Best Place in Ireland to Live
- Adventure Capital
- Midway point Wild Atlantic Way
- Heartbeat of the Wild Atlantic Way
- Shannon Region
- Food Capital of Ireland
- Capital of Culture
- Region of Gastronomy



Tourist numbers in Ireland are increasing significantly year on year (10% annually). However statistics available for this region recorded the lowest overseas visitor numbers (2015). We boasted over 2.5 million overseas visitors with over 50% choosing Galway as their location of choice. The challenge and the opportunity for this region, Failte Ireland and industry providers is to improve access and regional connectivity so that visitors continue to visit Galway but select moving west and north on itineraries. Boosting IWAK and other regional airports as access points will considerably address this challenge.

Our Counties in the Border & North West require improved Air & Road accessibility from Shannon & Dublin Airports, with reduced journey times bringing greater numbers of visitors to the Region. There are a number of tourist capital development projects in gestation that potentially could disrupt the market and we need to fully understand these propositions.

KEY QUESTIONS

1. Are there Tourist Projects of scale which can make a significant difference to the Regional & Sub Regional offer to visitors?
2. Is there an existing network of cultural or historical attractions, which are outside of the WAW, and which could be combined to offer tourists a world class experience in our Region?
3. How can the RSES best harness the exceptional natural resources, culture and environment our Region has to offer, to ensure a greater proportion of overseas's visitors arriving in Ireland travel into the Northern half of the Country?
3. What proposition does this create in our region? Can we understand its potential better?

CONTINUING TO CONTRIBUTE

The issues and key questions raised within this document are not exhaustive and are presented so as to prompt us to think about these and other issues.

It is requested that submissions are made in writing and relate to matters that:

- are of significance at a regional or sub-regional catchment level and relevant to the NPF;
- are strategic in nature; and
- have an economic and/or a 'spatial' (place-based) focus.



Online: dedicated NWRA website www.nwra.ie/RSES



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Writing: RSES Submissions, Northern and Western Regional Assembly,
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by 5pm on January 26th 2018.



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