

## Engineers Ireland & MaREI Centre

# Submission on ‘Draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Northern and Western Region’

Friday 8 February 2019

For the attention of the Northern and Western Regional Assembly

### Highlights

- Draft RSES is a welcome step in the implementation of the National Planning Framework
- The report is too long and should be made more concise
- The draft RSES does not indicate how it helps Ireland (and the region) achieve climate, sustainability and similar targets.
- The RSES should have an overall vision supported by a robust framework such as the One Planet Living sustainability framework. In its current format, the plan lacks vision in many areas and may exacerbate existing problems.
- Spatial planning and investment must be aligned for delivery of regional policy objectives

## 1. Introduction

This submission is informed by a series of ‘Engineering our Regions’ workshops held in Dublin, Cork and Galway at which Engineers Ireland members and other stakeholders raised their priorities for the RSEs and more generally overcoming the challenges facing our regions to 2031. Based on these discussions, our publications and other research, we have developed a series of recommendations for the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies, grouped as follows: People and Place, Environment, and Connectivity & Infrastructure. We would firstly like to make some general recommendations.

Engineers Ireland and the MaREI Centre welcomes the publication of the draft RSES for the Northern and Western Region. We believe this process is an important step in the implementation of ‘Ireland 2040 Our Plan – National Planning Framework’ (NPF). It is now vital that the Regional Policy Objectives (RPOs) and the Metropolitan Area Strategic Plans (MASPs) are implemented through the forthcoming local authority development plans and aligned with the allocation of investment. A robust timeline for delivery of major initiatives and clearly costed investment structure is needed that aligns with the strategy to ensure that adequate resources are available to implement the strategy, including a plan to deal with potential post-Brexit scenarios.

All planning authorities should prepare masterplans up to, and preferably beyond, 2040 for their own functional areas detailing how the projected increase in population and employment will be accommodated in their cities, towns and villages and demonstrate how those masterplans will achieve social, environmental and economic sustainability.

The strategy is devoid of vision. There is a lack of coherency around how we build on the strengths of the region. Furthermore, there is a need for differentiation – a regional economy and society that is distinct and different from rest of the country. Without a vision it will be status quo.

The draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Northern and Western Region is too long and should be made more concise. The draft would benefit with the inclusion of an executive summary which could draw out the key issues. The main document is 300 pages and supported by 5 other reports (Socio-Economic Baseline Report Part 1 and 2, SEA Environmental Report, Flood Risk Assessment, Natura Impact Report) and also has 6 other resource documents. Furthermore, it was felt that the framework adopted doesn't differentiate between strategic objectives enough. For example, there is no clear section for RPO's on decarbonisation/green energy. There are many policies in this category, but they are scattered throughout the report. A more suitable framework could be used such as the One Planet Living framework, which has been used by Engineers Ireland West Region (a sub-group of Engineers Ireland representing counties Galway, Mayo and Roscommon) ~~in the past~~ when analysing the need of the region in the 'Engineering the West to 2020 – Reinventing our Region' report<sup>1</sup>.

The One Planet Living sustainability framework was developed by Bioregional and the World Wildlife Fund to enable people and organisations to live and work within a fair share of our planet's resources<sup>2</sup>. The main aim of One Planet Living is to encourage and enable people to live within an ecological footprint that can be supported by the planet. There are 10 core guiding principles to achieve this aim:

1. Health and happiness – Encouraging active, sociable, meaningful lives to promote good health and wellbeing.
2. Equity and local economy – Creating safe, equitable places to live and work which support local prosperity and international fair trade.
3. Culture and community – Nurturing local identity and heritage, empowering communities and promoting a culture of sustainable living.
4. Land and nature – Protecting and restoring land for the benefit of people and wildlife.
5. Sustainable water – Using water efficiently, protecting local water sources and reducing flooding and drought.
6. Local and sustainable food – Promoting sustainable humane farming and healthy diets high in local, seasonal organic food and vegetable protein.
7. Travel and transport – Reducing the need to travel, and encouraging walking, cycling and low carbon transport.



<sup>1</sup> <http://www.engineersireland.ie/EngineersIreland/media/SiteMedia/groups/regions/west-region/EIWR2020The%20Bookev10.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bioregional.com/one-planet-living>

8. Materials and products – Using materials from sustainable sources and promoting products which help people reduce consumption.
9. Zero waste – Reducing consumption, reusing and recycling to achieve zero waste and zero pollution.
10. Zero carbon energy – Making buildings and manufacturing energy efficient and supplying all energy with renewables.

The 'Engineering the West to 2020 – Reinventing our Region' report is structured according to the ten-guiding principle of One Planet Living framework. The report contains sixty key recommendations and concludes with the next steps necessary to achieve "an agile and sustainable West Region, benefiting from world class industrial clusters, a vibrant economy and our rich natural and cultural heritage". It could be used as a model for the 'Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Northern and Western Region' in terms of structure. While the SDGs are referenced, there is no indication whatsoever of how any of the Regional Policy Objectives (RPOs) will contribute to the implementation of the Sustainability Development Goals (SDGs), if at all. This should be clearly communicated in the RSES. Furthermore, a full list of RPOs categorised by objectives laid out in the National Planning Framework would be a useful addition and could be included (perhaps in an appendix) in the RSES.

## **2. People and Place**

Ireland is currently facing considerable housing challenges; demographic and economic trends are increasing the pressure on our housing system. While the completion of residential units have improved in recent years, this level is still far below the estimated level of demand for homes based on demographic trends (approximately 35,000 dwellings required per year). The Rebuilding Ireland Plan established ambitious targets for residential unit completions; it is essential that these targets are achieved, emphasising new builds and bringing vacant houses back into productive use.

The growth framework adopted in the RSES of the Northern and Western Region doesn't recognise that we live on a planet with finite resources; this premise is core to the One Planet Living framework. Its adaption by the Northern and Western Region Assembly is strongly recommended. Concerns have been raised that the population growth figures used in the document underestimated growth figures in certain parts of the region. Planning Authorities should proactively engage with the people and communities within their functional areas in developing ambitious and inspiring visions for their cities/counties and towns and villages within their functional areas. The Public Participation Networks, established since 2014, in each local authority's functional area are appropriate mechanisms for community engagement.

As housing supply increases, focus should be placed on the compact growth of urban areas, increasing population density and encouraging infill where possible. More varied residential unit types should also be built which will allow people to transition to suitable homes at different stages in their lives. "Housing" developments should be underpinned by the building of transport infrastructure that priorities walking, cycling and public transport. Such infrastructure must be in place prior to developments being completed so use of private cars is minimised. We are, therefore, supportive of RPOs which seek to implement the NPF's compact growth goal, such as RPOs 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 17.

In line with the implementation of the compact growth initiative a more focused and aligned approach should be taken to the provision of homes, social infrastructure and employment

opportunities. For example, the Bonham Quay area in Galway is being developed to provide office space for an additional 3,500 workers. However, no provision has been made for any homes in this development, in spite of the provision in the City Development Plan that developments in this area must contain a 30% residential element. Developments of this scale and nature should include the provision of homes to reduce the need to travel at all preferably and the dependence on cars and, therefore, emissions associated with the development.

It is of concern that the specific issues of one-off rural housing and homelessness were not specifically addressed within the draft strategy, as they are growing areas of concern in the region, as well as nationally. There should without doubt be specific RPO's on each of these critically important issues. RPO "14. Deliver at least 20% of all new housing in rural areas on brownfield sites" is hugely unambitious. This will enable the continuation of sprawl by facilitating one-off rural housing and will completely frustrate the achievement of sustainability. It is a concern that the entire document lacks any reference to homelessness, given the stark figures for the region.

### **All-Island Cohesion**

We are strongly supportive of an all-island approach to connectivity and growth. We are glad to note Section 9 of the RSES which outlines collaboration in support of an all-island approach. However, RPO 201 is very broad and should be expanded to include areas for practical co-operation such as industrial development and access to employment, ports, airports, road infrastructure, education, communications and energy interconnection as discussed in Section 9 of the report.

While the full economic and social implications of Brexit remain unknown, the draft could usefully address the specific challenges that could arise from Brexit. The NWRA must seriously consider the potential impacts on the Region and, in particular, the border counties. The NWRA should collaborate with the Eastern and Midlands Regional Assembly to identify risks and opportunities for the implementation of the RSES and other regional activities including but not limited to areas of cross-border co-operation.

## **3. Environment**

The latest greenhouse gas emissions accounts show that, in the last 3 years, national greenhouse gas emissions increased by 6.4% or 3.65 Mt CO<sub>2</sub>eq<sup>3</sup>. Ireland will not achieve its 2020 climate targets and the achievement of 2030 targets is highly unlikely even under proposed government mitigation measures. Engineers Ireland believes that each of us have our part to play in the transition to a low carbon economy and that this issue should be prioritised.

Engineers Ireland agrees that significant potential exists for climate action in the Northern and Western Region and we favourably note climate action embedded in RPOs and report such as:

- Adoption of the principles of the circular economy to increase resource efficiency and reduce waste in the region (RPO 195)
- Sustainable land use and management strategies (RPO 20, 21 & 22)
- Transition to a low-carbon energy system through the development of clean technologies such as off-shore wind, local small scale hydro-electric schemes, increased energy efficiency

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<sup>3</sup> Environmental Protection Agency (2018). Ireland's Provisional Greenhouse Gas Emissions 1990-2017. Available at: <http://www.epa.ie/pubs/reports/air/airemissions/ghgemissions2017/>

and increased energy grid infrastructure to support this increase in renewable energy (RPO 39 – 48).

- Ensuring clean air and water quality as outlined in Policy 7.1 North West and Metropolitan Area and Letterkenny point 2. This point should be included as a RPO to improve air quality in the region as outlined, again this is an issue of formatting and framework why are there policies and Regional Policy Objectives.
- Addressing flood risk (RPO 21, 22, 197, 206)
- Promotion of low to zero energy structural material in the construction industry and high energy efficiency buildings (RPO 19)
- EV facilities (RPO 134)

Generally, regional policy must combat fragmented and sprawling development with compact and sustainable development and strong climate action. Furthermore, community renewable energy programs should be supported and funded where money generated from such schemes is put back into the community creating support for the scheme (SEAI better energy community schemes). Our region has an abundance of natural resources and by extension it has a key role to play in the transition of our energy system. However references to any plans for community energy projects, plans for decarbonisation (key priorities for most countries in Europe for the coming decade) are largely absent throughout the document. Electrification of cars should be a prioritised objective to reduce emissions as well as developing quality public transportation measures and walking and cycling infrastructure in the region. The link between poor planning and carbon emissions due to transport cannot be ignored.

#### **4. Connectivity & Infrastructure**

Engineers Ireland's members have a wealth of experience in designing, planning and delivering capital projects spanning many decades. Over the past decade, we have reviewed and campaigned on the acute underinvestment in infrastructure and we welcome recent increases in capital investment and, in particular, the move towards long-term investment planning.

We favourably note that many of the priority projects which we have identified in *The State of Ireland* reports are included within RPOs. These include but are not limited to:

- Implementation of Flood Risk Management Plans (RPO 197)
- The bolstering the electricity grid in the region to improve security of supply and capacity (RPO 187, 188, 189, 190)
- Support for the implementation of the National Broadband Plan and continued roll out of broadband in the region (RPO 136, 137, 138, 139, 140)

We feel that delivery of these projects will ensure the economic and social development of the region and improve the quality of life by its inhabitants.

In some instances, the strategy was seen to be reactive rather than proactive. There should be more of a focus on supporting efforts to improve walking and cycling facilities and public transport services and decrease the number of cars in the city/ support periphery office space.

ENDS

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### **Background to Engineers Ireland**

With over 25,000 members from every discipline of engineering, Engineers Ireland is the voice of the engineering profession in Ireland. Engineers Ireland was established in 1835 making us one of the oldest and largest professional bodies in the country. Members come from every discipline of engineering, and range from engineering students to fellows of the profession.

### **Our responsibility is to**

- Promote knowledge of engineering
- Establish and maintain standards of professional engineering and engineering education
- Provide opportunities for Continuing Professional Development (CPD)
- Maintain standards of professional ethics and conduct
- Ensure that professional titles are granted to qualified candidates
- Act as the authoritative voice of the engineering profession in Ireland

### **Our Vision Statement**

Engineers Ireland: a community of creative professionals delivering solutions for society.

### **Our Mission Statement**

Engineers Ireland is an organisation that enables the engineering community to progress their professional development, make an impact on society and encourage and educate the future generations of engineers.

### **Background to the MaREI Centre**

MaREI is a research, development and innovation centre, supported by Science Foundation Ireland, which operates across the fields of energy and the marine. The Centre's activities are motivated by the need to address global challenges such as blue growth, climate action, and the energy transition, resulting in the development of a dynamic research ecosystem that is responsive to the needs of academia, industry, government and society. As a driver of collaboration, the Centre comprises over 200 world class researchers who are collaborating with stakeholders across more than 36 countries, and who have a proven track record in academic excellence, consistently publishing in high-impact journals and participating in major international initiatives.

### **Our Vision Statement**

To make Ireland a global leader in energy and marine research and innovation.

### **Our Mission Statement**

To advance energy and marine research, innovation, and commercialisation to facilitate Ireland's leadership in confronting urgent global challenges, specifically the energy transition, climate action, and blue growth; and to provide the underlying capacity, policy context, industry collaborations, and societal engagement to enable this.

### **List of participants in Galway workshop on 24<sup>th</sup> January 2019:**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
Gerry Carty	RPS Consulting Engineers	Pat Hunt	Westmeath County Council
Eoghan Clifford	NUI Galway	Willie Madden	RPS Consulting Engineers
Mat Cunningham	ESB Networks	Peter McGowan	Ryan Hanley
Aisling Davis	HSA	James McHale	RPS Consulting Engineers
France Fahy	Geography, NUI Galway	Paul Moran	NUI Galway
Eugene Farrell	NUI Galway	Collette Mulkeen	Ryan Institute, NUI Galway
William Finnegan	NUI Galway	Brendan Mulligan	Engineering the West Team
Anna Patriaya Florentino	Ryan Institute, NUI Galway	Ruairi O Ciaran	MaREI Centre, NUI Galway
Jamie Goggins	MaREI Centre, NUI Galway	Indiana Olbert	NUI Galway
Kieran Hoctor	Hoctor Smith		