

Engineers Ireland

Submission on 'Eastern & Midlands Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy Issues Paper'

For the attention of the Eastern & Midlands Regional Assembly

15th February 2018

Highlights

- The RSES Issues Paper is a welcome step in the implementation of the NPF
- Dublin's competitiveness should be supported through smart, compact development
- The RSES should embrace cross-border collaboration, esp. the Dublin-Belfast corridor
- More detail should be provided on plans for renewable energy generation
- Priority projects include GDA Transport Strategy, Water Supply Project, Broadband etc.

1. Introduction

Engineers Ireland warmly welcomes the publication of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) Issues Paper for the Eastern & Midlands Region. We believe this process is an important step in the implementation of 'Ireland 2040 Our Plan – National Planning Framework' (NPF). It is vital that the RSES is aligned at the national level with the NPF and the National Development Plan and at the local level with Local Economic & Community Plans, City/County Development Plans and, later, with Metropolitan Area Strategic Plans (MASPs).

Firstly, we support the policy priorities highlighted in the Issues Paper (p4):

- Meeting citizens' needs (such as access to employment and services, ease of travel and overall wellbeing)
- Minimising impact on the environment
- Growing healthy and connected communities
- Maximising economic impact across the population

As envisaged in the NPF and the Issues Paper, achieving fulfilling these priorities will require a long-term mindset in the order of 20 years. Engineers are prepared to step up to the challenges of achieving these objectives, drawing on the diversity, innovation and integrity of our profession.

2. Supporting Dublin's competitiveness

As outlined in the Issues Paper (p53), Dublin is facing critical capacity constraints in water, public transport and the road network (especially the M50). The EMRA must plan for continued population and economic growth in the Dublin Metropolitan Area by increasing capacity in these and other sectors through strategic infrastructural investment (see Section 5 of this submission) and effective asset management.

The continuous expansion of the (car-dependent) Dublin commuter belt is unsustainable, is undermining the competitiveness of the city, is straining public services and is seriously impacting the health and wellbeing of the population of the Region. Future residential development in Dublin must be smart and compact – strategic investments should seek to 'unlock' development lands close to the city and to regenerate the city (and other urban areas in the Region).

Engineers Ireland believes it to be important to recognise Dublin's role as a national economic driver, contributing 48% GDP, and we agree with the following statement:

"It is critically important that Dublin's growth is positively managed to ensure the region and country's sustainable growth and competitiveness. As Dublin is competing with other global cities, an artificial constraint on Dublin's growth would not necessarily be to the benefit of other Irish city regions..." (p15)

Rather than artificially constraining Dublin's growth, we would like to see smart, compact development within Dublin as well as the development of attractive city-regions elsewhere in Ireland. We strongly believe that the concentrated population and employment growth in Ireland's other four cities will relieve pressure on Dublin and improve Ireland's competitiveness and the quality of life of all citizens.

3. Cross-border collaboration and Brexit

The Issues Paper (p32) asks how a sustainable regional economy, with strong resilience to external shocks such as Brexit, can be developed. Engineers Ireland is strongly supportive of an all-island approach to connectivity and growth and would like to see significantly improved connectivity on corridors such as Dublin-Dundalk-Belfast and Dublin-Derry/Letterkenny. Such connectivity would enhance the attractiveness of all of these centres, providing focal points for growth throughout and between the regions.

We are supportive of the NPF's areas for practical co-operation between relevant Departments and local authorities in Ireland and Northern Ireland, including the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor (National Policy Objectives 45-53). Further examples for practical co-operation include industrial development and access to employment, ports, airports, road infrastructure, greenways, education, communications and energy interconnection.

While the full implications of Brexit are not currently known, the RSES must seriously consider the potential impacts on the Region and County Louth, in particular. The EMRA should collaborate with the Northern & Western Regional Assembly to identify risks and opportunities.

4. Climate Action and the transition to a Low Carbon Economy

The latest greenhouse gas emissions accounts show a 7.3% increase in the past two years¹, making for alarming reading. As noted in the Issues Paper (p43), it is unlikely that Ireland will achieve 2020 climate targets and this will make the achievement of 2030 targets all the more difficult. Engineers Ireland believes that each of us have our part to play in the transition to a low carbon economy.

We agree that significant potential exists for climate action in the Eastern & Midlands Region (p44), including:

- Adoption of the principles of the circular economy
- Sustainable land use and management strategies
- Transition to a low-carbon energy system
- Sustainable use of marine resources (such as offshore wind)
- Ensuring clean air and water quality
- Addressing flood risk and coastal erosion
- Protection and promotion of built and cultural heritage
- Integration of green infrastructure into regional planning

The Issues paper (p55) notes: “national environmental policies are dictating the wind down of traditional fossil fuel powered stations, such as peat fired plants”. In the RSES, we would welcome more detail on plans for onshore renewable energy generation and sustainable job creation in the Region, particularly in the Midlands Strategic Planning Area (counties Longford, Westmeath, Offaly and Laois).

The RSES should ensure that all plans align with the National Mitigation Plan and the National Adaptation Framework, both published in recent months. Like the remainder of the country, the Region must tackle the particular challenges facing the decarbonisation of the transport and heating sectors.

5. Priority Projects

The membership of Engineers Ireland has a wealth of experience in designing, planning and delivering capital projects spanning many decades. Over the past decade, we have observed 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 agree that high quality infrastructure is an important element of a modern society and economy, supporting societal, economic and environmental systems at all scales (p53). Each year, Engineers Ireland prepares ‘The State of Ireland,’ an independent assessment of infrastructure, recommending two-year and five-year actions in transport, communications, energy, water, wastewater, flooding and waste^{2,3}.

¹ Environmental Protection Agency (2017). Ireland’s Provisional Greenhouse Gas Emissions 1990-2016.

² Engineers Ireland (2017). The State of Ireland 2017: Special focus on Transport and Communications. Available at: engineersireland.ie/Communications.aspx

Some of the priority projects we have recommended are:

- Implementation of the NTA Transport Strategy for the GDA 2016-35, including:
 - Metro North
 - Rail electrification
 - DART Expansion Programme
 - BusConnects
- Variable speed limits and multi-point tolling on the M50
- Second main runway at Dublin Airport
- Water Supply Project for the Eastern and Midland Region
- Wastewater treatment as outlined in the Irish Water Business Plan
- Implementation of the National Broadband Plan
- Improved port infrastructure and facilities to support renewable energy and energy security
- Infrastructure to support electric vehicles and alternative fuels
- Infrastructure to support 5G information and communications technology
- North-South Interconnector to bolster security of supply and reduce cost
- Implementation of Flood Risk Management Plans
- Specific planning measures to support renewable energy technologies

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³ Engineers Ireland (2016). The State of Ireland 2016: Special focus on Energy. Available at: engineersireland.ie/Communications.aspx

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Background to Engineers Ireland

With over 23,000 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.