

## Engineers Ireland

# Submission on ‘Southern Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy Issues Paper’

For the attention of the Southern Regional Assembly

15<sup>th</sup> February 2018

### Highlights

- The RSES Issues Paper is a welcome step in the implementation of the NPF
- The SRA should coordinate with the NWRA to develop the Atlantic Economic Corridor (AEC)
- Compact, sustainable growth should be concentrated in Cork, Limerick and Waterford cities
- There is major potential for the Region to develop wind, wave and tidal energy generation
- Priority projects include the AEC, Broadband, M20, Dunkettle, Port of Cork, renewables etc.

## 1. Introduction

Engineers Ireland warmly welcomes the publication of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) Issues Paper for the Southern 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 agree with identified strengths of the Southern Region (p3), including:

- Three out of four regional cities
- Modern and diverse industrial base with established clusters
- Seven higher education institutes
- Two out of three State airports and two regional airports
- Four out of five Tier 1 and Tier 2 ports
- Clean renewable energy growth potential and marine resource potential

As envisaged in the NPF and the RSES Issues Paper, building on these strengths 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. Effective Regional Development and the Atlantic Economic Corridor

The Draft NPF makes clear the importance of effective regional development and relieving pressure on the Greater Dublin Area. We believe that the Southern Region offers significant potential for development of an effective counter-balance to the Greater Dublin Area. The current targeted population increase (350,000 to 375,000) and new jobs (220,000) – representing 36% and 33% of national increases, respectively – should be more ambitious to act as a counterbalance. The Southern Region population should strive to exceed 2 million by 2040.

According to a recent ESRI report by Edgar Morgenroth<sup>1</sup>, business-as-usual trends will see the region's population increasing by 115,000. To achieve the 'EMR<50%' scenario, where more than half of the population increase takes place outside the Eastern & Midlands Region (EMR), the population of the Southern Region must grow by 450,000-500,000 to more than two million people. This growth should be concentrated in compact urban centres such as Cork, Limerick and Waterford cities.

The Northern & Western Region also offers significant potential and we believe that if an effective counter-balance is to be developed, coordination and not competition will be required between these two Regional Assemblies and should be clearly set out in their respective RSEs. We do not find it helpful that:

- The Southern Region RSES Issues Paper states: *“the SRA contends that the Southern Region presents the most significant potential for the development of an effective counter-balance to the Greater Dublin Area” (p6)*
- Meanwhile, the Northern & Western Region RSES Issues Paper states: *“the NWRA contends that our region presents the most significant potential for the development of an effective counter-balance to the Greater Dublin Area” (p14)*

These statements should be amended for the full RSEs, noting the potential for inter-regional coordination.

In the Southern Region, particular attention must be paid to the growth potential of Cork (emerging international centre of scale), Limerick and Waterford cities. We support the statement:

*“The cities and their functioning metropolitan areas, together with the wider city regions, are envisaged as the building blocks for regional development and platforms for future investment” (p8)*

In particular, we strongly support the SRA's vision of sustainable, compact urban settlements with efficient public transport networks and the provision of essential physical and social infrastructure in tandem with population and employment growth targets.

We believe that both the SRA and NWRA RSEs should focus on developing the Atlantic Economic Corridor to act as the effective counterbalance to Dublin. Both RSEs should examine the 'Atlantic City Regions: Development and Connectivity' report<sup>2</sup> which analyses in considerable detail, both the

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<sup>1</sup> Morgenroth, E. (2018). Prospects for Irish regions and counties: Scenarios and implications. ESRI Research Series Number 70.

<sup>2</sup> Irish Academy of Engineering (2015). Atlantic City Regions: Development and Connectivity.

potential for, and current obstacles to, enhanced growth through improved connectivity across a range of areas including energy, land transport, ports, water/wastewater and complementary employment growth through industry concentration. This should include improved connectivity between Cork, Limerick and Waterford.

### **3. 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 years<sup>3</sup>, making for alarming reading. EPA projections suggest that it is highly 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 Southern Region.

As noted in the Issues Paper (p22), the Region demonstrates significant potential to contribute to renewable energy generation through wind, tidal and wave. Further renewable technologies can be developed through the specialisms of the Region and emerging economic sectors (listed on p17, such as Big Data and 3D Printing) and the marine environment/economy (p23). The integration of policy, planning and investment is vital in this area and the RSES should align with, for example, the National Mitigation Plan and the National Adaptation Framework, both published in recent months. Like the remainder of the country, the Region must also tackle the particular challenges facing the decarbonisation of the transport and heating sectors.

### **4. Capital Investment and 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 welcome the approach taken in the Issues Paper to identifying ‘Critical enabling investment and infrastructure’ (p24-26). Public infrastructure investment is critical to achieve many of the RSES’s objectives, including sustainable mobility, regional accessibility, international connectivity and digital connectivity. Moreover, strategic infrastructure investment is required to support strategic housing development and attracting new residents (p16).

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<sup>4,5</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Environmental Protection Agency (2017). Ireland’s Provisional Greenhouse Gas Emissions 1990-2016.

<sup>4</sup> Engineers Ireland (2017). The State of Ireland 2017: Special focus on Transport and Communications. Available at: [engineersireland.ie/Communications.aspx](http://engineersireland.ie/Communications.aspx)

<sup>5</sup> Engineers Ireland (2016). The State of Ireland 2016: Special focus on Energy. Available at: [engineersireland.ie/Communications.aspx](http://engineersireland.ie/Communications.aspx)

Some of the priority projects we have recommended are:

- Implementation of the National Broadband Plan
- Key road connectivity projects, such as
  - M20 Cork to Limerick
  - N25/M8 Dunkettle Interchange
  - N22 Macroom to Baile Bhuirne
  - N28 Cork to Ringaskiddy
  - N69 Limerick to Foynes
- Bus priority routes, core bus corridors and bus rapid transit routes
- Improvement of commuter rail to urban centres
- Infrastructure to support electric vehicles and alternative fuels
- Redevelopment/investment in the Port of Cork, including infrastructure and facilities to support renewable energy and energy security
- Electricity grid interconnection
- Infrastructure to support 5G information and communications technology
- Implementation of Flood Risk Management Plans
- Specific planning measures to support renewable energy technologies

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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.