



WDC Insights

*providing insights on key issues for  
the Western Region of Ireland*

# Southern Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy Issues Paper

Summary of the Submission by the  
Western Development Commission



February 2018

## Western Development Commission Submission

The Western Development Commission (WDC) welcomes the publication of *Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy: Issues Paper* by the Southern Regional Assembly.

The preparation of *Ireland 2040* the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the *Issues Paper* for the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) are landmarks in Irish public policy and it is hoped that it will provide a realistic basis for effective regional development and balancing of development throughout Ireland.

The WDC is a statutory body established by government to promote, foster and encourage economic and social development in the Western Region (Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Roscommon, Mayo, Galway and Clare). It operates under the aegis of the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD). This WDC submission considers the *Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy Issues Paper* from the perspective of the Western Region, the needs of the region, the opportunities its development presents for Ireland's economy and society as a whole and the choices, investments and policy required to achieve regional growth and resilience.

The following is a summary of the key points made in response to the questions in the Southern Region *Issues Paper* for the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES). County Clare is the only county within the Southern Assembly region that is also under the remit of the Western Development Commission, therefore this submission largely focuses on the questions as they pertain to County Clare. It should be noted that in this submission many references are made to the draft *Ireland 2040* the National Planning Framework (NPF) and its contents, targets and objectives. However, as the draft *Ireland 2040* is expected to be significantly revised before publication (after the completion of this submission), it should be remembered that any comments made in the WDC submission in relation to *Ireland 2040* are provisional.

## Key Issues for Southern Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy

### *Our Cities and Towns*

Labour catchments and their geographic reach provide important insights into the roles of urban centres and their hinterlands and consideration of these should inform the RSES.

Lack of employment opportunities will be the key barrier to achieving the Draft NPF targeted levels of 20-25% growth. The employment centres of Ennis and Shannon in particular are key and ensuring that these centres attract and retain employment opportunities will be a key determinant in the achievement of the targets.

The key challenges and barriers to the sustainable economic and population growth for towns and rural areas is out-migration and a lack of employment opportunities. It is important that the Strategy is focused on creating real opportunities for the people who live in the regions, whether in cities, towns or rural areas. However, to create employment we need to focus on the enablers of employment including infrastructure, as well as developing enterprises and entrepreneurship, education and skills.

Towns of all sizes should be centres for the provision of local services, including health and education services. Access via good transport links, to larger centres with a greater range and more specialist services is vital.

### *Our Rural Areas*

Rural areas are already supporting national economic growth, climate action objectives and the development of local communities but a greater focus on rural development and in developing rural regions would increase the contributions made by rural areas.

To sustain viable rural communities we need to stimulate growth and employment, address issues of out migration and demographic change, provide innovative and practical public service solutions and make better use of their rich natural resources while ensuring they are protected for the future.

There are parts of County Clare which are underdeveloped and/or in decline. These are identified in the Clare Rural Development Strategy, *Realising Clare's Rural Potential* along with innovative actions to address the decline. The RSES needs to align with the Clare Rural Development Strategy.

Poor public transport and often a low quality road network create difficulties in accessing employment opportunities and services. Improved public transport services and next generation broadband are also infrastructure priorities.

It is essential that the Regional Strategy dovetails with the Action Plan for Rural Areas to ensure they work in a coherent manner to provide a strong policy and strategic basis for regional and rural action and so are doubly effective. It is also essential to ensure that national goals align with regional strategies and county and local plans and across all sectors.

The natural rural environment is a key asset of County Clare and therefore it needs to be protected, and enhanced, both for its value to the economy and society and also for the potential it brings to local economic development. It is therefore important that the environment is protected and managed appropriately in a sustainable manner.

### *A Sustainable Economic Future*

County Clare has specific strengths which should be leveraged further including Shannon Airport, Shannon Free Zone, the tourism sector and its prime location between the cities of Galway and Limerick.

If the goals and priorities of sectoral agencies are not aligned with RSES then implementation will be difficult if not impossible. Successful implementation requires that investment and policy decisions across State and semi-State organisations are in line with the RSES. While RSES strategic spatial planning may be considered an ideal, it is sectoral planning and policy that, for the moment and for the foreseeable future, is the real driver of regional development.

### *Critical Enabling Investment and Infrastructure*

Investment is required in telecommunications, transport and energy infrastructure and towns and villages will benefit from the planned investments outlined in the Action Plan for Rural Development.

Any strategy to reduce transport carbon emissions must include initiatives to increase bus usage and reduce car dependency. There is a range of investments needed to improve patronage levels on public transport services including investment in facilities and rolling stock and better timetabling and increased frequencies.

Shannon airport and Shannon Foynes Port are very important economic drivers for the Southern part of the Western Region, with their influence extending beyond Co. Clare and into Co. Galway and beyond. Improved services at Shannon airport are needed. Shannon Foynes Port has an ambitious development strategy which should be supported so as to develop to serve regional growth more effectively.

Ensure the National Broadband Plan NBP (i) is implemented fully (ii) can deliver on planned future EU target speeds by deploying future proofed infrastructure.

The Implementation Group of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce needs to ensure that actions to provide immediate solutions to the broadband/phone coverage deficit in rural Ireland take effect at the earliest opportunity.

### *Implementation and Monitoring*

For successful implementation it is important that the Regional Assembly has very clear responsibility for the delivery of the RSES and that there is a designated budget to help achieve its implementation. There needs to be policy consistency through national, regional and local levels and alignment with sectoral policy.

Measuring the successful implementation of the RSES will need focus on measuring outcomes at a regional and sub-regional level and indicators need to be devised and used to benchmark and monitor progress. The case for monitoring and measuring outcomes at regional and sub-regional levels is even more important where investment has been spatially targeted.

## Contact us

For further information please contact us:

- Ms Deirdre Frost, Policy Analyst [deirdrefrost@wdc.ie](mailto:deirdrefrost@wdc.ie)
- Dr Helen McHenry, Policy Analyst [helenmchenry@wdc.ie](mailto:helenmchenry@wdc.ie)
- Ms Pauline White, Policy Analyst [paulinewhite@wdc.ie](mailto:paulinewhite@wdc.ie)

Western Development Commission  
Dillon House  
Ballaghaderreen  
Co Roscommon  
Ireland  
F45 WY26  
Tel: +353 (0)94 986 1441  
[www.wdc.ie](http://www.wdc.ie)