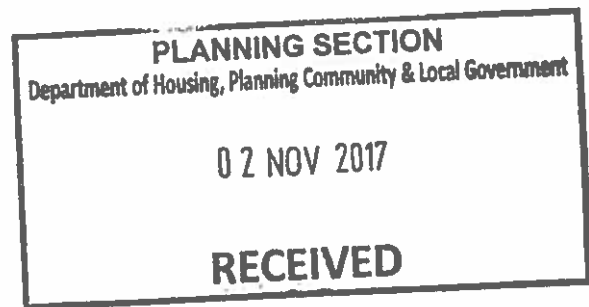


NPF Submissions,  
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Submission to National Planning Framework – Ireland 2040

That a National plan should contain so many big project plans for Dublin, while having so little mention of the “Rest of Ireland” is a damning indictment of the overly centralised state of Ireland today.

The continuous failure of the state to address the infrastructural deficit in rural Ireland (unless they happen to be on a radial route leading to Dublin) has led to the problems the state now faces. Decline of population in rural Ireland, unsustainability of Dublin with a housing and water crises, “group-think” of transport and housing policy and vastly unbalanced representation of Dublin on powerful state boards such as the “National” Transport Authority.

If the state is serious about European Cohesion Policy, it needs to turn aspiration into action, by connecting the 5 of the 6 largest cities on the Island of Ireland, outside of Dublin. Ireland failed to consult the BMW region for the EU's largest infrastructure plan, the TEN-T 2014-2030 and as a result the region's primary north-south route (N17) was removed from the Core TEN.

Ireland made a commitment to revise the TEN-T Core as part of the programme for government to include this route (Page 43 of the Programme for Government states that “in the first three months the new Government will apply to the European Union for the revision of the TEN-T CORE Network, including applying for the reinstatement of the cross-border Western Arc.”). More than a year after the deadline has passed, the application to revise the TEN-T has not happened.

Connectivity is meaningless without the complete build out of the main north-south route M17 Motorway Galway to Derry and the WRC to Sligo to support the growing number of commuters and Ireland's largest rail freight, which originates in Mayo. (Official Ireland said Ireland was too small for rail freight only a decade ago, that claim has been proven to be totally wrong by the rise of Mayo rail freight). The Limerick Galway rail line has also exceeded its business case, despite the very poor service levels provided at launch and the negative spin been put on the line.

Commuter traffic is driving this growth and even with the welcome opening of the M17 to Tuam, Galway now has a very serious congestion problem on the “last mile” into the city, which would not have arisen had the state not stalled on its commitment to continue rebuilding the Western Rail Corridor North of Galway. This congestion was entirely predictable, yet the state in collusion with CIE opted to damage the public perception on this piece of infrastructure, rather than solve the poor services which were provided. The focus of the state should be to ensure that such existing infrastructural assets are rebuilt and then properly operated to address the needs of its citizens, while at the same time reducing Ireland’s carbon emissions in line with EU Policy.

This 2040 report denigrates Decentralisation. Yet where decentralisation is viable, it is exactly the type of initiative which relieves the pressure on Dublin, while helping to revive regions outside of Dublin. Claremorris was the most popular choice for decentralisation West of the Shannon, being massively oversubscribed. The site has been purchased and the lives of those who have already decentralised to Claremorris in the first phase have been greatly improved. We expect the next phase to proceed. Soundbites in a 2040 planning report do not change the fact that the OPW decentralisation to Claremorris has been a success and must be completed.

Claremorris for the past three censuses has been the fastest growing town in County Mayo and one of the three fastest growing towns in Connaught, all of which are on the Western Arc.

Ireland has a huge built housing stock in its towns and villages (over shops and in older on-street townhouses). This can be made available quickly and cheaply in towns like Claremorris, where there is a clear housing need. The state must invest to provide the infrastructure to support this development, so as to enable easy transport for the main towns of the region to Galway, the regional capital, and to Ireland West Airport. At very little and probably zero cost to the state, the state could provide insurance for Credit Unions to lend up to €50,000 secured on a personal guarantee by a property owner who undertakes to bring back this type of built property into residential use. (A reduced interest rate should apply to those properties achieving a BER rating of C or better).

Rather than tackle its stated aims of regional balance, or address the EU priorities of Cohesion and Carbon Reduction, this 2040 plan appears to be more about Ireland accessing European funding and targets to further widen regional divergence.

Management Committee  
Claremorris Chamber of Commerce