

IAE public statement in response to the draft National Planning Framework *Ireland 2040 Our Plan*

October 2017

The Irish Academy of Engineering is an all-island body, concerned with long-term issues where the engineering profession can make a unique contribution to economic, social and technological development. The Academy published a series of discussion papers in 2016 which were intended to contribute to the preparation of the National Planning Framework, on topics such as the Dublin-Belfast economic corridor, the Atlantic City Regions, climate change, sustainable transport, and broadband (see <http://iae.ie/publications/>).

The Academy is pleased that many of its key recommendations are reflected in the draft National Planning Framework *Ireland 2040 Our Plan*. In particular, the Academy welcomes:

- **The clear policy focus on the role of our five main cities as engines of regional development and centres of research and innovation.**

It is generally recognised that larger cities, by virtue of their population, are attractive locations for both multinational and for many indigenous companies to locate. In order to achieve more balanced regional development, the cities outside Dublin – Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford – have been set challenging population and employment growth targets over the next two decades, which must be underpinned by commensurate investment in infrastructure in the forthcoming National Investment Plan. If these ambitious targets are to be achieved sustainably, the essential infrastructure must be planned and delivered in advance to enable growth and not retrofitted later.

Our regional towns – especially those in the northern half of the country – will play a vital role in disseminating growth throughout the regions, and the Academy looks forward to working with the Regional Assemblies in preparing their Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies.

- **The commitment to a National Investment Plan which will complement spatial planning priorities.**

Ireland already has a substantial infrastructure deficit as highlighted by a range of recent reports. In addition, catering for population growth of up to one million and 660,000 new jobs by 2040 will require substantial investment in infrastructure and services, especially in the metropolitan cities which are to accommodate half of the projected growth in housing and employment. It is critically important that scarce public resources are targeted in the locations where they are most needed to pump-prime development.

- **The recognition of the importance of connectivity within and between regions.**

Connectivity, primarily broadband and transport infrastructure, will play a dynamic and essential role in maximising the potential for economic growth in the island's cities and in spreading such growth across the regions. The recent announcement of funding for the M20 motorway between Cork and Limerick is good news not only for the two cities but for connectivity within the Atlantic economic corridor. The Academy has also stressed the importance of extending broadband to rural areas, to enable SMEs to participate in the

digital economy and to facilitate workers in the IT sector to live and work outside the major towns and cities.

- **The integration of climate change into sectoral planning.**

It is widely accepted internationally that climate change is a reality with potentially significant impacts for countries across the globe, including Ireland. The draft National Planning Framework addresses this reality across a range of sectors – renewable energy, sustainable transport and compact urban settlements, flood prevention, and the management of water resources. The Academy endorses such a holistic approach.

The Academy proposes the following actions to ensure more effective implementation of the National Planning Framework:

- 1. National Infrastructure Authority**

Many major strategic infrastructure projects cross local authority and even regional boundaries, and their delivery should be managed on a national basis. A National Infrastructure Authority could monitor implementation of the National Investment Plan. It could also plan and co-ordinate the delivery of a balanced strategic infrastructure programme out to 2040, including projects in the transport, water and energy sectors. We are greatly concerned that the roll-out of the national broadband plan has been subject to recurring delays.

- 2. Enhancing trade capacity**

As an all-island body, the Academy is particularly concerned with the possible impacts of Brexit. If, as appears likely, the UK exits the EU customs union, we should ensure that alternative trade routes to Europe, which avoid the land-bridge through the UK, are made as attractive as possible for exports and imports. The Academy urges the government to commission a report which would examine the capacity of our ports (including road and rail access), together with options for increasing air freight and the speed and frequency of cargo ships / ferries to the continent. The Academy would be pleased to assist in the preparation of this report.

- 3. Integration of landuse and transport planning**

While the Academy welcomes the proposal to introduce statutory Metropolitan Area Strategic Plans, it is concerned that these should not be divorced from transport strategies prepared by a separate agency. Current approaches in the Greater Dublin Area can be justified having regard to the scale of the region, but are not necessarily appropriate for our other cities; Cork in particular has a long track-record in integrating landuse and transport planning.

- 4. Marine spatial planning**

Ireland 2040 Our Plan notes that there are many shared aims and overlapping areas of co-ordination and activity between land and marine spatial planning. The Academy recommends the publication of Ireland's first national marine spatial plan (required under an EU Directive by 2021) as soon as possible, to identify those synergies and to provide long-term investment certainty for offshore developments, including renewable energy.