

Submission on the draft Ireland 2040 - National Planning Framework

Seán Kyne TD

As Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development my team and I contributed to the submission to the draft National Planning Framework by the Department. This submission shares some of the themes of that submission but is being made from the point of view of TD for Galway West and Mayo South.

On reading the latest draft of the Ireland 2040 Plan the work and effort that has been invested in it is very clear. The broad thrust of the Plan is sensible and realistic and contains many important objectives which will help ensure our country develops in a more structured and sustainable way and there are many welcome objectives.

However, there are, I believe, a number of areas of concern that need to be addressed in advance of the publication of the final Plan.

I think it is vital that each one of us remembers that the National Planning Framework is for every community and household in the country. The Plan is 'Ireland 2040', not 'Dublin 2040' or 'The Five Cities 2040' and if the Plan is to be successful it must be designed in a way that ensures ownership by all. Language, for example, that states "Dublin is the city that put Ireland on the international map more than any other city" is unhelpful.

The 'National Strategic Outcomes for the National Investment Plan' is the section of Ireland 2040 in which the deficiencies are most visible. The examples and the recommended alterations include:

- **Enhanced Regional Accessibility**

The connection of Cork and Limerick via a new motorway is important and necessary but enhancing, or in some cases, implementing connectivity in the West and North West is equally important if the objectives of Ireland 2040 are to be met.

While connectivity between Dublin and the West and North West is important, of equal significance is connectivity within the West and North West. If one of our objectives focuses on the creation of “realistic alternatives to Dublin” it follows that a related objective is greatly reducing the need for residents of regions such as the West, North West and South West to have to travel to Dublin. Achieving this objective requires investment in connectivity within the regions.

Rail transport has an important role to play but is it not adequately provided for in Ireland 2040. The line “There is potential to develop the existing good quality rail links between Dublin and Belfast and Cork into an island rail spine through line speed and service enhancements” is particularly problematic. The suggestion is that the only areas of focus will be Dublin to Belfast and Dublin to Cork and by implication that other railways will not feature. Rail transport is a crucial component of our efforts to tackle climate change. Rail provides for environmentally friendlier alternatives for the transport of both people and goods. Our aim should be investment which introduces high-speed rail transport across the network and assists our efforts to tackle climate change. In that regard the Western Rail Corridor and its continued development must be included as a key point of ‘Accessibility to the North West’.

- **High Quality International Connectivity**

The contention that: “as an island the effectiveness of our airport and port connections... is vital to our survival, our competitiveness and our future prospects” is indisputable. The strategic development of our airports and ports is crucial for not only our economy but our society. Access to airports is equally important. The Western Rail Corridor, as it stands now,

could, with minor investment, create the first rail-connected airport in the country - Shannon Airport. Similarly, a re-opened railway north of Athenry to Sligo could also improve the connectivity of Ireland West Knock Airport.

On the ports issue, the classification of ports into tiers has not been without its problems, particularly in terms of investment. The importance of Dublin, Cork and Shannon-Foynes is recognised and particularly so for freight traffic. However, other ports, such as Galway and Rosslare, have important roles to play in business terms. Galway, for example, is rail-connected and located in the City which makes it potentially one of the most attractive to the substantial tourism cruise sector as well as an option for freight. The current classification system has resulted in a significant stretch of coastline, for the West and North West, being left without a Tier 1 or Tier 2 port. This situation runs contrary to the objective of regional balanced development but could be rectified by the classification of Galway as a Tier 2 port of national significance.

Furthermore, the development of a deep-water port at Ros an Mhil in Connemara will be significantly beneficial to the marine and aquaculture sectors - which are promoted in other sections of the Plan – and also to the Aran islands.

- **Sustainable Mobility**

In order to alleviate existing congestion, to facilitate growth and to reduce carbon emissions, the development of public transport in cities and towns and rural areas is vital. Bus networks need to be reviewed - including pricing, fleet availability, bus stop and bus corridor infrastructure, route selection and so forth - so that bus transport can adequately serve communities.

Enhancing or delivering other railway projects would provide enhanced commuting options for passengers – for some it would provide new options – and would reduce road congestion.

Similarly, the development of a national approach to greenways would provide a mode of transport that would serve for commuting as well as for leisure and tourism.

- **A Strong Digital Economy**

The introduction and implementation of **local digital strategies** will enable communities across the country to harness the benefits of the National Broadband Plan and the improvements in mobile phone and broadband coverage.

On the issue of 5G technology, Government policy is to promote the roll-out of 5G on a geographical basis rather than a population one. This ensures that all communities can benefit from the technological advancement and avoids the problems associated with previous roll-outs. The relevant ministers have confirmed the geographical approach and have signed declarations on the issue at European level.

- **Sustainable Management of Water and other Environmental Resources**

Investment in wastewater treatment should be targeted at small settlements which are currently not connected to wastewater infrastructure but are well connected by road, rail or both. In Galway, for example, towns and villages like Craughwell, Ardahan, Ballyglunin and so forth have no wastewater treatment facility despite being only a couple of kilometres from a motorway and situated on the railway. Wastewater treatment infrastructure for such centres should be funded by the State separately from Irish Water's capital funding programmes which tend to be driven by connection enquires and demand.

A further priority must be investment to end the discharge of untreated waste which currently occurs at several dozen locations around the country. Targeted investment is needed to fast-track the development of wastewater treatment facilities for these coastal towns and villages.

Galway

The key future growth enablers for Galway should also include the following:

- Progressing the Connacht Ulster Alliance Technological University which includes GMIT, IT Sligo and Letterkenny IT which will enable the institutions to better serve education and research in the region;
- Implementing a plan for the waterways of the City and of the region including canals, rivers and lakes such as Lough Corrib and Lough Mask;
- Investing in transport links as part of the Atlantic Economic Corridor including the M17 and the Western Rail Corridor and also the N59 which is the primary route to and from the western part of the region;
- Facilitating the development of Galway Port to harness the potential of marine-related tourism while also enhancing this alternative method of transport for goods;
- Delivery of UHG's new Emergency Department and the new oncology treatment centre;
- Investment in Merlin Park Hospital for non-emergency treatment and chronic illness management including orthopaedic procedures, treatment for heart failure, treatment for diabetes, and so forth;
- Investment in Primary Care centres, particularly in more rural areas, which should be prioritised as a means of health-care delivery.

My contact details for correspondence are:

Sean Kyne TD

Constituency Office, Spiddal Road, Moycullen, Co. Galway. J91 TY84

Email – sean.kyne@oireachtas.ie

Phone – 091 868 111