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Submission to the National Planning Framework, Ireland 2040 – Our Plan

Dear Minister

There are a number of key areas I wish to address that specifically relate to County Mayo, my own constituency and to the wider region of the West and North West. The areas I have addressed are not an exhaustive list but represent what I believe are the key challenges for the county and region I represent.

GMIT

Sustained effective support for GMIT Mayo campus, recognition of the importance of having a third level institution in the county in order to provide a skilled workforce, offer equality of access to third level for citizens and also the benefit to the local economy in terms of rental income and students spending in the local area in bars, restaurants, cafes and shops. The GMIT forms part of our education infrastructure in the West of Ireland and is of huge importance to citizens in Mayo and further afield.

Quality of life for citizens

There are a number of areas the NPF needs to focus on to improve the quality of life for citizens. We need to endeavour to limit/reduce travel time to work, people need to be able to find good quality employment in their locality. In this regard in order to attract investment and job creation we need to address issues around infrastructure and connectivity. This means addressing quality of roads in and out of the county and around the county. We need to see improvements in rail services with greater frequency and reliability and a connection from Claremorris to Galway city for commuters. We need access to good quality broadband in every home to allow people work from home and create industry locally. The quality of phone coverage in county Mayo is an on-going issue also. Outside of work citizens need to be provided with quality public amenities, the advancement of the greenway network and improved recreational facilities is of great importance. We need to do much better in rural Ireland in terms of the provision of public transport, rural communities are becoming more isolated and less well serviced. Ireland

2040 - Our plan needs to show a strong commitment to the protection of rural communities and a desire to maintain rural life.

The Islands

Ireland 2040 - Our plan should make provision for the support of island communities and their way of life. Recognising the unique challenges facing island communities and their unique needs. Protecting island communities is in Ireland's interest, it is part of our diverse culture and something to be cherished and nurtured. The islands off the coast of County Mayo, Clare Island and Inisturk in particular make a significant contribution to Mayo's tourism industry and are a huge draw for tourists nationally and internationally. They allow Mayo to offer a diverse tourism opportunity and are a proud part of the overall Mayo tourism package.

Ireland West Airport Knock (IWAK)

The development of industry around IWAK must be supported, the airport has huge potential for job creation and is uniquely placed in the North West region to sustain many communities and drive economic activity in the region. The airport needs investment in order to upgrade facilities and compete for new routes, It also needs better road connectivity into the North towards Donegal to fully capitalise on that market.

Motorway from Galway to Letterkenny via Mayo and Sligo

We have been starved of proper connectivity in the West and North West. In order to fully develop the West and North West we need a motorway from Galway to Donegal with connections through Mayo and Sligo. Industry have told us they need this and citizens want this level of connectivity. The motorway network has been extended to everywhere else, it's time now to put the North West on the map.

Sligo as a major economic hub for the North West

I fully support this proposal on the basis that the North West must develop a major economic hub with city like status. This hub will in turn drive development in the North West with a priority around connecting this hub with other larger urban centres in Mayo, like Castlebar, Claremorris and Ballina and in Donegal with towns like Letterkenny and Donegal town. We cannot allow the North West be left off the map again as was done with Ten-T funding and the map showing our core network. This map submitted to Europe completely excluded the North West. I expect to see equity and fairness for the West and North West in Ireland 2040 - Our plan.

Rail Network

Rail freight is a strong economic contributor for County Mayo and would benefit from expanded links with Foynes port. Currently we only have one line, if this gets blocked for any reason we are out of business, we need to plan to expand and this requires an additional link to Foynes port. There is also a very strong case for the Western Rail Corridor to reopen with a link from Galway to Claremorris and onto Sligo. This would open up opportunities for commuters to move away from the larger urban centres and live in rural

Ireland with greater access to work further afield. If we are committed to facilitating people live in Rural Ireland then transport and connectivity are key.

Connectivity, connectivity, connectivity!

We are severely lacking in key infrastructure in the West and North West.

- We have a very poor broadband service, with no sign of it improving in the near future, we're being told 2021 which is too long to wait.
- Mobile phone coverage is an ongoing issue and despite talk with mobile phone providers the service is still substandard.
- Our roads are in a bad state of disrepair and the local authority of Mayo by its own admission does not have the money to carry out necessary repairs, I am sure the situation is the same for other local authorities in this region.
- We need proper dual carriageways and/or motorways connecting Mayo, Sligo, Roscommon, Leitrim and Galway. This is basic infrastructure and we are still waiting in the West and North West. It is manifestly unfair to drive ahead with major infrastructure and transport projects in other parts of the country when we haven't even done the basic in the West and North West. The entire country should rise together and we as a region should not be left behind.
- Knock airport is a life line for this region as well as being a major employer it keeps us connected and drives industry in the region. The airport needs financial support and a recognition of the huge strategic important it has for the West and North West.
- Without proper infrastructure and connectivity we as a region will struggle to attract investment and create jobs, without jobs we will not be able to sustain our communities. We are a resilient and enterprising part of the country with the highest rates of entrepreneurship nationally but we need help so we can continue to help ourselves. No matter how enterprising or resilient we are we cannot compete if we do not have proper roads, broadband, mobile phone coverage, rail and air links, it is as simple as that.