

## **Submission by Fianna Fáil Senator Lisa Chambers**

**to the**

### **Draft Revised National Planning Framework**

- 1. Support for the regions**
- 2. Ireland West Airport Knock and the Strategic Development Zone**
- 3. Atlantic Economic Corridor**
- 4. Western Rail Corridor**
- 5. Renewable energy and offshore floating wind along the west coast**
- 6. Roads**
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As stated by Government, “The National Planning Framework (NPF) sets the vision and strategy for the development of our country, balanced across all of our regions, towns and cities, out to the year 2040.” The European Commission downgraded the northern and western Region's status from a 'more developed' region to a region in 'transition'. The region is the only one in Ireland to receive this classification. It should be a stated aim of the revised National Planning Framework to address this classification and bring the Northern and Western region back up to the same level of development as other regions in Ireland.

#### **1. Support for the regions**

Balanced regional development is a stated aim of the government, but this has not yet been achieved. The NPF is crucial to supporting the regions with appropriate levels of investment and delivery of large-scale infrastructure. Given that the northern and western region are underdeveloped there is a strong case to be made for positive discrimination towards the region and additional investment, beyond the other regions, to bring the northern and western region up to a “developed” classification.

Galway city is our regional city and Sligo is a regional growth centre, both need to be supported with investment and delivery of infrastructure to ensure they grow to the benefit of the entire region. The Galway ring-road project must be delivered, it is affecting people living and working in Galway and the many thousands of people that travel from Mayo, Roscommon, Sligo and further afield to Galway daily for work, education, healthcare, and tourism. The N17 needs further upgrading and a motorway from Galway via Mayo and into Sligo should be planned in the context of the future connectivity of the west coast.

A key town should be designated in the east of County Mayo and Claremorris is the obvious choice with its location and proximity to Galway and Sligo and the N17. Further enhancement of the Castlebar to Westport connected hub would be of benefit to the region and County Mayo.

## **2. Ireland West Airport Knock and the Strategic Development Zone**

Ireland West Airport Knock (IWAK) is one of Ireland's main international airports and is key to the economic development of the region. For County Mayo and the northern and western region, the importance of Ireland West Airport Knock must be emphasised. The airport is important for tourism and transport in the region but it is also an economic hub with the potential to drive economic growth in the region. The Strategic Development Zone designation at IWAK reinforces its national and regional significance as a critical economic driver within the region.

The provision of critical enabling infrastructure at IWAK SDZ should be included as an 'investment priority' particularly in the context of the region's designation as a "transition region". I want to support the submission made by Mayo County Council that "Ireland West Airport Knock (IWAK) and SDZ be specifically prioritised as a 'signature project' or 'transitional project' in the same manner as the 'Port of Cork – Ringaskiddy Redevelopment and planned investments at Dublin Airport, Dublin Port and Shannon Foynes'. Thereby ensuring

## **3. Atlantic Economic Corridor**

The objective of the Atlantic Economic Corridor is to connect the region by connecting urban centres of scale and investing in large scale infrastructure. There are key projects that must be advanced to achieve this.

- Delivery of the Western Rail Corridor and ultimately rail connectivity right up to Derry
- Extension of the M17 north of Tuam
- Development of a freight hub at Castlebar, Co. Mayo
- Investment in Ireland West Airport Knock and critical enabling infrastructure at the SDZ
- Investment in large scale renewable projects, floating offshore wind off the west coast and upgrade of the grid to accommodate this energy production.

It is a stated objective of the Mayo County Development Plan – "To advance and promote the AEC in order to maximise the advantages of the Western Region links and the development of an All-Island economy. "; and "To work with adjoining counties to secure the Atlantic Economic Corridor, as a model of balanced regional development." The NPF must support this objective with targeted and strategic infrastructural investment in the region.

## **4. Western Rail Corridor**

The provision of rail transport for freight and passengers is of critical importance to the development of the northern and western region. The Western Rail Corridor is a key element of this. The section from Tuam to Claremorris must be a priority, with a further extension of the rail line onto Sligo, Donegal, and Derry. Galway is our regional city and there should be commuter rail services between Mayo and Galway as many people are travelling daily for work, education, and health appointments. This is all part of the ambition surrounding the Atlantic Economic Corridor and connecting the region. It will also greatly assist us in reducing emissions and meeting our climate targets.

## **5. Renewable energy and offshore floating wind along the west coast**

The west of Ireland has the second-best wind corridor in the world. If we are to achieve net zero and reduce our emissions to meet our 2050 targets, then we must harness the incredible wind resource off the west coast. This will require mapping the area, carrying out the necessary environmental assessments and constructing the necessary enabling infrastructure. The planning and investment must start now. Ireland and the west coast have the opportunity to become a world leader in offshore floating wind and transform the region economically. Not only can we meet our own energy requirements, but we can also export to Europe and contribute to Europe's energy security.

## **6. Roads**

There is no motorway network in the northern and western region, except for what is around Galway city. This presents a major obstacle to development and growth in the region and limits the capacity of the region to grow and attract inward investment. The main artery between our regional city Galway and our second growth hub Sligo is the N17 which is wholly inadequate, with a section of the road having twice the collision rate of the national average. The absence of a motorway in the northern and western region is a clear gap in infrastructure and must be addressed. It places the region at a disadvantage compared with other regions and will make it very challenging to address the EU Commission classification of a "transition region" if we do not address this infrastructure deficiency. The surrounding counties of Mayo and Roscommon would greatly benefit from a motorway network connecting Galway and Sligo. A by-pass of Ballinrobe in County Mayo is also urgently needed due to increased traffic volumes from central and south Mayo accessing the M17 via Tuam.

## **7. Marine infrastructure**

There remains huge untapped potential in our marine areas and coastal communities. While we have regular investment in piers and harbours in terms of maintenance there remains a gap in large scale funding provision for marine projects. There is little scope within the Department of Marine to fund new marine projects that are of a large scale. This is a missed opportunity given the size of our marine area and the need to support coastal communities to diversify their industries and income streams. The NPF should identify marine areas for development with the provision of new marinas, piers and harbours and the upgrading of existing infrastructure so we can develop our marine tourism offering and grow our marine industries. In County Mayo there is a need for a Marina in Westport, new piers and upgrade works on existing infrastructure in Achill, Belmullet and Killala but there is currently nowhere to apply for funding of a sufficiently large scale to deliver these projects and local authorities do not have the means to fund large scale marine projects. The situation is the same right along Ireland's coastline. This presents an opportunity for the regions if we develop our marine infrastructure and this should be identified as a priority in the NPF.

Regards,

Senator Lisa Chambers

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