Cork County Council’s response to “Investing in Our Transport Future”

1. Cork County Council supports the broad approach which seeks to make investment in transport a key driver of economic competitiveness. In Cork the County Council has a proven record in enhancing the economic competitiveness of the Gateway through the careful and sustainable planning and delivery of strategic transport investments. The establishment of new port facilities at Ringaskiddy in the 1970’s, the N40 Jack Lynch Tunnel/South Ring Road projects, the N25 East Cork Parkway and M8 Glanmire bypass projects and the re opening of the suburban rail route from Cork to Midleton and the upgrade of services between Cork and Cobh are all considered milestone investment projects that have delivered major uplifts to the competiveness of the gateway.

2. Looking to the future, whilst the private car is without doubt often the most convenient form of mechanised transport for many journeys it is often the most expensive and least sustainable mode. Therefore, Government has rightly sought to refocus investment on the more sustainable modes, particularly for journeys to work/education, where they are often the most economically efficient and can aid the delivery of enhanced competitiveness in the economy. Cork County Council strongly support this approach in the future where investing to support modal shift for critical journeys can deliver increased competitiveness.

3. As part of this general approach, there are a number of issues which can only be addressed at the National level. Amongst these is the barrier to encouraging modal shift which is created by the high fixed costs of ownership for private cars. These high costs are exacerbated by the high levels of transport taxation evidenced in the Department’s consultation document. It is considered that the overall high fixed cost of car ownership creates a significant reluctance amongst car owners to shift to more sustainable and economically efficient modes. They have made the big investment and switching, even occasionally to public transport or another more sustainable mode leaves the car owner with the feeling that he is wasting his investment or even paying twice for his journey. Shifting the burden of transport taxation so as to reduce the capital cost of the asset and replacing it by new taxation that applies to the cost usage (e.g. by replacing VRT with higher taxes on fuel or with charges for the use of roads) will serve to encourage private car owners to use other more sustainable modes where they are available for specific journeys.

4. The fixed costs of car ownership are high in this country when compared to many other European or US locations and this issue on its own may be seen as a competitive disadvantage for Ireland. Furthermore, the US economy unlike most EU economies operates with low taxation levels in relation to transport and this must be a significant competitive advantage for businesses located in the US in that it directly contributes to the reduction of the cost-of-sale of goods and services. Progressively moving the Irish economy away from the traditional European model and positioning it, with appropriate incentives for sustainable and economically more efficient modes, on a closer
alignment closer to that of the US, could deliver significant gains for the competitiveness of the economy overall.

5. At the more local level, the County Council would draw the attention of the Department to the potential for economic growth in the Cork Gateway region which includes Cork City and its environs but also includes the towns of Ballincollig, Blarney, Carrigaline, Carrigtwohill, Cobh, Midleton and Passage West/Monkstown. In addition, key locations for economic development at Carrigtwohill, Little Island, Ringaskiddy and Whitegate are within this Gateway area. Whilst the population of the rural parts of the County outside this Gateway area have remained broadly static over the last 50 years or so, the population of the gateway area has grown steadily over the last three decades. In 2011 the population of this area represented about 6.3% of the population of the State but, based on CSO estimates for the State, this could rise to between 7.2% - 7.6% of the State’s population by 2046. In numerical terms this amounts to a potential for growth in the order of 136,000-228,000 persons.

6. If future investment is to aid economic competitiveness then, against this background of the potential for significant population increases, facilitating efficient movement within the Cork Gateway is critical.

7. The present land-use and transportation strategy for the development of the Cork Gateway area, which stems from the LUTS studies of the 1970’s and 1990’s and the CASP plans of 2001 & 2008, is based on the location of major new development primarily within the corridor served by the region’s rail network so as to offer citizens a choice of travel by rail or other public transport for many journeys. Investment in rail network in the latter part of the last decade has provided the core transport infrastructure and the land-use plans of the County Council are now set to deliver sustained population growth to the hinterland of the rail stations when the upturn in the housing market takes hold.

8. In order to secure the delivery of this integrated land-use/transportation strategy, there is a clear need to protect the investment in the Cork Gateway Suburban rail network from the National pressures to curtail rail operations referred to in the Department’s consultative document. Given the scale of population growth possible in the Cork Gateway area over the coming 30 years or so, it is considered that the rail infrastructure is critical to the delivery of economically efficient and sustainable transport in the future. Without this rail infrastructure, Cork will almost certainly need to address major new road building in the coming years if it is to accommodate the level of population growth that national projections suggest. Avoiding or deferring major new road building programmes through planned investment in the regions suburban rail network in tandem with the land use strategy already set out in development and local area plans will deliver an economically efficient and sustainable transport system for the Gateway.

9. In term of further investment in the Cork rail system, in addition to progressive capacity and service frequency improvements, there is a need to fund and develop new stations as the need arises and
to continually improve interchange facilities at Kent Station with a long term goal to deliver seamless public transport on the Midleton – Cork City Centre – Ballincollig corridor. Initially this can be achieved by developing a high quality bus corridor from Kent Station to Ballincollig along the lines outlined in the 2008 CATS study.

10. Maximising the return from existing and planned investment in the suburban rail system in Cork also requires supporting investment to enhance access to the core rail system. These measure are generally consist of low cost investments in infrastructure to support the use of sustainable modes (mainly walking and cycling but also some bus based public transport initiatives) to facilitate easy and convenient access to rail stations from residential and employment areas. In particular, the County Council are keen to invest in local road and sustainable transport infrastructure to support the development of the Station hinterlands on the Cork-Midleton rail route. It is envisaged that this expenditure would ultimately be recouped from Development Contributions but there may be a requirement to initiate this investment from public funds.

11. Notwithstanding the foregoing with regard to Gateway issues and the associated public transport investment, there continues to be a need to invest in Road infrastructure in Cork so as to protect and secure the economic viability of the region:

   a. Priority National Road Schemes:
      i. Dunkettle Interchange Upgrade
      ii. N22 Ballyvourney to Macroom Upgrade
      iii. N28 Cork to Ringaskiddy Upgrade
      iv. N20 Cork to Limerick Motorway Scheme including N72/N73 Relief Road at Mallow
      v. Cork North Ring Road
      vi. N25 Upgrade (Carrigtwohill to Midleton)
      vii. N71 Upgrade (West Cork)
      viii. N73 Upgrade (Mallow – Mitchelstown)
      ix. N72 Upgrade (Fermoy – Rathmore)

   b. Priority Local and Regional Roads:
      i. There is a pressing need for investment in the Regional and Local Road network throughout the County
         1. Pavement Renewal and Surface Dressing are a particular urgency, with a view to improving the pavement on at least 5% of the road network annually and surface dressing 10%.
         2. Additional investment is required on bridge rehabilitation and safety schemes.
         3. Significant priority needs to be given to investment in the Regional and Local Road network throughout the County if the national targets under Food Harvest 2020(specifically adequate access for primary producer to processor and market access) are to be met.
         4. A programme of investment in Local and Regional Roads is also necessary in terms of widening and road safety measures to serve housing development areas both past and future (e.g. Lehenaghermore, Cork City Environs)
5. Investment is also required so as to service the need of the growing Tourism sector.

ii. There are a number of high priority Regional Roads which are required to deliver the access and mobility requirements of planned development. The most significant of these are:

1. Carrigaline Inner Relief Road
2. Access Road to Cork Science and Innovation Park, Curraheen
3. Douglas East-West Link Bridge
4. Mallow Park Road extension to N20
5. Midleton (Waterock) access road and rail bridge
6. Upgrade of access routes serving Monard
7. Cobh Road R624 linking Cobh to N25 National Primary Road
8. Midleton Northern Relief Road
9. R586 Bantry to Bandon
10. R572 Glengarriff to Castletownbere
11. R630 Midleton to Whitegate
12. R 600 Fivemile Bridge to Kinsale
13. R613 Ringaskiddy to N71

End of submission