NWRA Submission to
Consultation on the
Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport’s
Strategy Statement 2017 - 2019
Introduction

The Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA) welcomes this opportunity to make a submission to the consultation on the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport’s Strategy Statement 2017-2019.

This paper provides a summary background to the NWRA and provides supporting evidence for the identification of objectives for the region in relation to strengthening of the rural economy of the Northern and Western Region.

The Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA) was established on January 1st 2015 covering the 8 county region of Cavan, Donegal, Galway, Leitrim, Mayo, Monaghan, Roscommon and Sligo in Ireland with more than 800,000 citizens. It emerged from the 2014 Government’s “Putting People First” policy paper and the Local Government Reform Act which set out that the then two Regional Assemblies and the eight Regional Authorities were to be reconfigured into three new Regional Assemblies. The NWRA continues the work of the Border, Midland and Western (BMW) Regional Assembly, which existed from 1999-2014.

The NWRA is responsible for:
- Regional Economic and Spatial Planning for the North West region;
- The management of European Regional Development Funding Programme (€320m 2014-2020);
- Developing, implementing and promoting regional development policy and initiatives;
- Acting as the national contact point for EU-funded transnational programmes; and
- Promoting coordinated action to promote effectiveness in Local Government and public services along with promoting transparency between plans, policies and proposals of these organisations.

Map of the NWRA Region, Ireland
The Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport’s Statement of Strategy is a high level strategic planning framework rather than an investment plan with prioritised projects and the Northern and Western Regional Assembly welcomes this opportunity to contribute to its development.

The Assembly consider that the selection of projects for progression and investment over the coming years should be aligned with the overall strategy of the pending National Planning Framework and the pending Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies.

NWRA Regional Social Economic Trends

The latest preliminary release by the CSO of the census 2016 figures, highlight that NWRA regions population has risen by 9512 (1.14%)\(^1\) since 2011 to 846,862 in 2016. This reflects the trend nationally, with an overall increase in population of 169,724 (3.7%)\(^2\) to 4,757,976\(^3\). Cavan county seen the largest percentage increase within the region of 4%, while the largest urban increase was recorded in Galway city, with a 5.3% increase. However, the populations declined in counties, Donegal (-1.5), Mayo (-0.2%) and Sligo (-0.1%).\(^4\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NWRA</th>
<th>Population 2011 (Number)</th>
<th>837350</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population 2016 (Number)</td>
<td>846862</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual change since previous census (Number)</td>
<td>9512</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage change since previous census (%)</td>
<td>1.14%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Net migration within the region, showed an overall decrease between 2011 to 2016, when compared against 2006 – 2011 figures, with Donegal experiencing the lowest at -6,731. However the eastern region of the country seen an increase in its net migration, with Dublin experiencing the largest increase of 7257. Consequently the population of Dublin rose to 1,345402, an increase of 723,333 since 2011. And it is estimated that by 2031 the population of the greater Dublin are will account for 42.3% of the total population of Ireland.

Figures on the breakdown of population by age are not yet available however if we look at the projected figures by the CSO, of working age group population (20yrs to 65yrs) of the NW region (incl. Louth), we can see that the projected figure is 56% of the region’s population, an increase of almost 6% on the 2011 figures.


\(^3\) [http://www.cso.ie/pix/pxeirestat/Statire>SelectVarVал/saveselections.asp](http://www.cso.ie/pix/pxeirestat/Statire>SelectVarVал/saveselections.asp)

Employment national has continued to increase since 2011 to 1,9583 (000) at the end of 2016. However the numbers in employment within the NW region, although reflecting the upward national trend, are not growing at the rate as experienced nationally. Within the Border Region (which includes Louth) the numbers in employment increased to 745.3 in 2014, while the regions GVA grew by 6.94% to 2245, in Qt 4 of 2014. This positive increase is not reflected within the West region where although there was an increase in employment number to 723.7 in Qt 4 2014, this number had fallen substantially from 739.2 in 2013\(^5\). This is also reflected in the GVA of the west region which fell by 2.25% between 2011 and 2014.

\(^5\) http://www.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=QNQ22&PLanguage=0

Figure 1- CSO Quarterly Household Survey 2011 to 2014
When we compare the GVA figures on the NUTS III level (pre 2015) in Qtr 4 of 2015, it clearly show that when compared to the South and Eastern region, the BMW region continues to lag. The GVA of the BMW region increased by almost 7% from 2011 (q4) to 2015 (q4), which when compared to the national figure, is almost on par. However, the gap between the BMW and S&E Region remains significant, with the S&E region accounting for over 74% of the national GVA and the Greater Dublin area accounting for almost 45% of this figure.

To ensure a more sustainable distribution of population it is necessary to enhance economic activity in the regions – transport policy has a significant role to play in this by providing people with easier access to employment and leisure facilities within a reasonable travel distance.

![Figure 2 GVA - 2011 to 2014 (CSO)](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Persons aged 15 years and over in Employment (Thousand) by NUTS 2</th>
<th>2011Q4</th>
<th>2015Q4</th>
<th>Percentage Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Border, Midland and Western</td>
<td>462.5</td>
<td>494.4</td>
<td>6.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern and Eastern</td>
<td>1385.2</td>
<td>1488.6</td>
<td>7.46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>1847.7</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>7.32%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Role of Transport in Regional Economic Development**

It is acknowledged that investment in transport infrastructure promotes growth by reducing transport costs and enables more efficient production environment. Improved transport infrastructure also attracts inward investment and influences commuting catchments, which have a direct effect on the population dispersal of an area and its hinterland. The development of a strategic and sustainable transport infrastructure is therefore essential to enabling economic growth in lesser-developed regions such as the NWRA and ultimately increases the attractiveness of such regions as places in which to invest, live, visit and work.
The wide disparities in the provision of transportation infrastructure which currently persists between regions in Ireland are not conducive to either national or regional competitiveness. To be competitive within regional locations, enterprises require access to infrastructural facilities, to attract not just inward investment but also to facilitate the growth and maintenance of local indigenous enterprises.

Of the 289,581 persons who travel to work each day in the NWRA region, 72.86% travel, as driver or passenger, in a vehicle, with 18.21% of them traveling for an hour and a half or more per day. The provision of quality infrastructure is necessary to reduce travel to work time.

In our submission to the 2011 strategy the Assembly highlighted the fact that to be competitive in regional locations, enterprises must have access to infrastructural facilities that are at least on a par with their competitors. It is acknowledged that while significant progress has been made in recent years, there are still gaps which inhibit regional competitiveness and hinder the establishment of competitive operations.

The IDA reported in 2014 that within the West Region, IDA clients companies employed 18,652 people in leading companies such as ICT, Life Sciences and the services sectors. While within the Border area (incl. Louth) IDA client companies employed 9,734, these include companies in the Engineering, Life Sciences, Financial and Services sector. As part
of the IDA’s Winning: Foreign Direct Investment 2015-2019 strategy, the IDA is targeting a minimum 30% to 40% increase in the number of investments for each region outside Dublin.\(^6\)

The absence of significant investment in the transport infrastructure of the region, especially the roads network, will inhibit the achievement of this FDI target. Presently there is no motorway north of the Dublin-Galway M6. The Assembly welcomes the investment in the Tuam- Gort By pass which is ongoing and set for competition in 2018. The suspension of many roads projects after the downturn in the economy 9 years ago, now needs to be revisited. Projects such as the upgrading of the N2 and A5 roads linking Dublin and Derry, N5, N4, N56, N59 and the Galway City By pass, which are at planning stage need immediate investment and commitment to completion dates. While those projects which were suspended (N17, N15, N14, N13, N84, N60, N59, and N 83) all need to be revisited\(^7\), with a view to delivering a timetable of estimated commencement and investment.

**Rail**

Rail within the Northern and Western Regional Assembly region falls under the Athlone division and the transport of freight via rail continues to increase with a rise to 578,000 tonnes in 2015. This increase in freight transport gives encouraging signs for Irish Rail’s target of a 4% share of surface freight traffic in Ireland by 2020.

Three of the four rail freight services operated at present start or finish in the Western Region of Ireland - Ballina and Westport in County Mayo\(^8\). No rail system operates into the north west or border region of the country (Donegal/Cavan/Monaghan) and presently there is no proposal to develop the network. The commitment by previous governments to invest in the Western Rail Corridor is to be re-examined. In the 2011 Review “2030 Rail Network Strategy” commissioned by Irish Rail and carried out by Goodbody, the development potential of all Irelands rail networks potentials were examined and it was recommended that the Western Rail Corridor be recognised as one of the 9 Development of investment Options “taking account of the performance of Phase 1 of the Western Rail corridor between Ennis and Athenry, the Athenry-Tuam line, while not receiving a convincing score offers some potential for reinstatement and should be subject to further review in light of the patronage experience of Phase1 of the Western Rail Corridor”\(^9\).

The Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport should support the proposed review to be undertaken to examine the potential to extend the Western Rail Corridor.

---

\(^6\) [http://www.idaireland.com/docs/publications/IDA_STRATEGY_FINAL.pdf]
\(^7\) [http://www.tii.ie/roads-tolling/projects-and-improvements/]
\(^8\) [WDC - Rail freight and the Western Region 2015](http://www.irishrail.ie/media/irishrail_28febfinal_part21.pdf)
Aviation
The region is served by 2 regional Airports – Ireland West Airport Knock and Donegal Airport. Knock is the larger of the 2 airports and in 2015 recorded passenger numbers of over 700,000, while Donegal recorded passenger number of 35,000.

In a recently commissioned *Audit of Non-Aeronautical Services* under the SPARA 2020 project which was undertaken by the NWRA, the importance of these regional airports was highlighted. Donegal Airport is the most peripheral airport in Ireland and provides direct connections daily to Dublin for its locality. With no motorway or rail network within this north-western region, the airport is an important infrastructure asset that enables the provision of access to leisure (including visiting friends and relatives and holidays and short breaks), business centres, and services such as education and health. The airport is “reliant on a Public Service Obligation (PSO) contract with a carrier to survive” and “the successful delivery of the PSO contract is therefore critical to the survival of the airport”. 10

The support of Public Service Obligation (PSO) must be maintained by Government.

Ireland West Airport Knock, is the main airport for the NW region. The airport has seen a +3% growth rate in passenger numbers over the past 6 years and offers a wide range of UK and Europe flights. It is the main provider for air tourist’s into the west region (largely UK tourists) and is centrally located along the Wild Atlantic Way. However public transport to and from the airport is limited with only 10% of passengers availing of public service transport. In addition with the changing shape in aeronautical security additional capital investment is needed to address the airport layout in order to help it to maintain its vital services, which are presently heavily reliant upon its passenger development fee.11

Sustaining these Regional Airports is vital to the economy of the region. Provision should be made to improve the transport links serving existing airports in terms of bus, road and rail, thus providing greater choice for passengers. In the Assembly submission in 2011, we called upon the government to develop an Air Access Strategy and National Aviation Policy to address existing problems and imbalances. We again make this call to the government to develop this Strategy which will set a balanced address on the aviation needs at both national and regional level.

Bus
2014 saw an additional 1 million passengers availing of the national bus service operated by Bus Éireann, with Galway City seeing the largest increase of 12% in Passenger journeys in the NW region. Due to the lack of proximity of many parts of the North West region to rail, it is vital that an appropriate service is provided to the villages and towns of the region. The downturn in the economy at the end of the last decade seen the demise of many Bus routes

---

10 SPARA 2020 - Audit of non-aeronautical services (Donegal Airport)
11 SPARA 2020 - Audit of non-aeronautical services (IWAK)
and these routes must now be re-examined. There is now potential for a greater role for bus services in the provision of transport for both workers and third level students and a feasibility study to address such needs must be examined.

In our 2011 submission, the Assembly recommended a commitment to more Quality Bus Corridors (QBC’s), linking cities and Gateway towns, and we would like to see these QBC’s reevaluated and developed.

Rural Transport

The Assembly welcomed the restructuring of the Rural Transport Programme in 2013, to establish the 18 Transport Co-ordination Units. In many of the rural areas where the provision of this service operates, there is not significant demand to maintain a full regular bus service. However, the service which this Rural Transport Programme provides to the public within these areas, is invaluable in terms of social and personal preservation. Continued development and expansion of the RTI is central to tackling the issue of rural isolation particularly among the older generation, who account for over 20% of the NWRA population.

Cycling/Walking

The changes in lifestyles recreationally and the need to avoid traffic restriction during working hours, has led to more people utilising cycling both as a mode of transport and for leisure. The extension of the City Cycling Planner to include Galway City is widely welcomed, and the Assembly would like to see more towns throughout the NWRA included in this scheme or a similar one.

The topography and scenery of the Northern and Western region offer huge opportunities for the development of cycle ways which are becoming a large visual attraction, especially to the European tourist. The development of cycle tourism presents a particular opportunity to bring the economic benefits of tourism to rural Ireland. Presently however little provision is made to facilitate the carrying of bikes on trains/buses and there are few if any sheltered cycle parking facilities at public transport interchanges.

The propensity to walk is not only influenced by distance but also the quality of the experience. People may be more willing to walk further where their surroundings are more attractive, safe and stimulating. This requires the provision of adequate surveillance and appropriate lighting as well as landscaping factors. The Assembly would like to see the development of schemes to improve the public spaces for walking, within not just the larger urban areas but smaller regional towns also.
Role of Tourism in Regional Economic Development

It is predicted that the direct contribution from Travel & Tourism nationally to GDP will grow to 2.3% by 2025\textsuperscript{12}. 2015 saw an increase in revenue from both international and domestic tourism, to over €7,506.4m, with overseas visitors growing by 13.1% to 8.0m\textsuperscript{13}. When broken down to regional figures in 2015, the West region recorded the third highest visitor numbers of 1283 (m) generating a revenue of €614m. While the North West region recorded visitor numbers of 614 (m), generating a revenue of €121m\textsuperscript{14}.

The development of the Wild Atlantic Way (WAW) in 2013, has seen a huge increase in tourism numbers to the western coast, utilising the natural beauty and landscape of the region, along the 2500km from Donegal to Kerry.

In 2014 the WAW attracted 49% of all overseas visitors to Ireland, and 55% of all domestic tourists\textsuperscript{15}. The long term ambition of Fáilte Ireland is that the WAW will become one of the top 10 visitor attractions worldwide. This will offer opportunities for indigenous enterprises and for employment throughout the west and north west region as a result. Capital investment must be secured to enable the development of facilities (including rest areas, toilets, parking, camping) along the Discovery points of the 6 zones of the WAW, together with development of the access points (such as IWAK and Donegal Airport), which will allow ease of accessibility for all visitors and increased visitors to the region.

The proposal under the Department’s Tourism Action Plan 2016 -2018 to develop tourism, including the promotion of food, beverages and marine trails that highlight the very high quality of Irish food and beverages for visitors, is greatly welcomed by the Assembly and will greatly highlight the quality food produces within the NW region.

In 2010 Fáilte Ireland launched the Lakelands and Inland Waterways, which was the 4th Marketing strategy within its tourism plan. This 4th strategy has never been developed and there is now a proposal to include this strategy with the Ireland East Marketing Strategy. The Assembly would like to see that the Lakelands and Inland Waterways continue to be marketed as a separate entity to Eastern Ireland. The North West/ Border region has one of the lowest number of overseas visitors and the development of the Lakelands and Inland Waterways strategy would grow the tourism potential of this region, which will have a hugely positive effect.

\textsuperscript{12}https://www.wtec.org/-/media/reports/economic%20impact%20research/countries%202015/ireland2015.pdf
\textsuperscript{13}Fáilte Ireland Tourism Facts 2015
\textsuperscript{14}Fáilte Ireland Tourism Facts 2015
\textsuperscript{15}Fáilte Ireland – regional Tourism performance in 2014
Sport

Physical activity has long been noted for health and well being benefits from both physically and physiologically for many years. According to the Dept of Health’s Health in Ireland – Key Trends 2015, Ireland’s rate of aging (over 65 yrs) (over 25%) is considerable higher than the EU average (15%). The CSO projection figures indicate that by 2031 there will be an increase of approx 13% in person aged 65 and older living in Ireland when compared with 2011. Furthermore, with the benefits of modern medicines, many more people are living longer lives, but with modernisation come the ill effects of convenience foods and sedentary lifestyles. To reduce the cost on health care services a large campaign is been driven nationally to encourage more people, especially children, to become involved in sports.

Investments by the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport’s in the Swimming Pool Programme and Sports Capital Programme nationally must be maintained. This together with developing the addition cycling and walking routes, as detailed earlier must be a key area within the Departments strategy.

Summary

- The Statement of Strategy should give equal emphasis to regional and rural transport services and not be overly focussed upon transport provision in the Greater Dublin Area – regional and rural transport considerations need to be prioritised in parallel with urban transport needs.

- To ensure a more sustainable population within regional areas it is necessary to enhance economic activity in the regions – transport policy has a significant role to play in this.

- The spatial implications of all investment decisions should be taken into account, consistent with all of the objectives of the National Planning Framework.

- It is crucial that roads investment projects for the Region are prioritised and that a clear timeframe for their completion, is established.

- A public transport strategy should be developed for each region to identify where demand/gaps currently exist and where there are opportunities to provide services in a more comprehensive efficient basis, subject to current budgetary constraints.

- Support the proposed review to extend the Western Rail Corridor.

- The government should develop an Air Access Strategy to address existing problems and imbalances within airports.

- Consideration should also be given to the feasibility of QBCs in other Urban and town area of the NWRA.

- Development of access to the countryside, waterways and coastline to be grown

- Extension of cycling schemes, such as the City Cycle Planner must be considered for regional towns together with the development of additional public spaces to cater for walkers.

- Investment in facilities (including rest areas, toilets, parking and camping) along the Wild Atlantic Way and Lakelands & Inland Waterways must be priorities.

- The economic analysis of projects undertaken by or on behalf of the Department of Transport should be reviewed in order to incorporate multiple criteria analysis and wider socioeconomic criteria, including spatial impacts