



**An Roinn Iompair
Turasóireachta agus Spóirt**

**Department of Transport,
Tourism and Sport**

**Investing In Our Transport Future: A Strategic Framework for Investment in
Land Transport**

Background Paper Twenty

Spatial Planning and Transport Policy

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Spatial and Transport Policy Interaction

The National Spatial Strategy (published in 2002) describes spatial planning as being focused on people, on places and on building communities and that through a closer matching of where people live with where they work, different parts of Ireland will for the future be able to sustain:

- a better quality of life for people;
- a strong, competitive economic position; and
- an environment of the highest quality¹.

Transport policy seeks to ensure that the travel and transport needs of the country are met in a way that is safe, effective and efficient through prudent investment, regulation of transport activities and by influencing key policy sectors, including planning, that can affect the level and nature of demand for travel.

In the preparation of this strategic framework, it is therefore appropriate to briefly assess the nature of the interrelationships between planning and transport policy in Ireland.

Intrinsically, land use and transport are symbiotic, development density and location influences regional travel patterns, and, in turn, the degree of access provided by transport can influence land use and development trends. Urban and community design can promote use of a wider choice of travel modes, a connected system of streets with higher residential densities and a mix of land uses more easily facilitates travel on foot, by bicycle, and by using public transport, in addition to or instead of the private car. Conversely, dispersed land development patterns underpin car dependency and reduce the viability of other travel modes. Using spatial planning more efficiently is at the heart of the challenge to achieve sustainable mobility. However the effective integration of spatial planning and transport has proved difficult to achieve in practice.

¹ National Spatial Strategy Government of Ireland 2002 page 10.

Background – development of national and regional planning policy

By way of background, it is fair to say that the historical relationship between spatial planning and transport policy in Ireland before the year 2000 was quite weak. Spatial planning was conducted predominantly at the level of 34 City and County Councils with no overarching national or regional co-ordination and there was little or no broad cross-modal planning for investment in transport. A fragmented approach ensued, which, coupled to low levels of population density and urbanisation by western European standards has tended to reinforce a high dependence on transport by car. In addition, outside of the main urban areas and certain inter-urban corridors, public transport usage is low. Approaches to road design in urban areas centred on facilitating car usage coupled to rising affluence and low fuel costs tended to hold the numbers of persons travelling on foot or by bicycle at low levels by European standards.

Nevertheless, the policy and regulatory framework for planning in Ireland has developed rapidly since the introduction of the Planning and Development Act 2000, which was followed in quick succession by the National Spatial Strategy in 2002 and the first set of regional plans, the Regional Planning Guidelines in 2004, which were framed in the context of the NSS.

Rapid development in the so called celtic tiger era led to sustained pressure on the planning process, with landmark legal decisions² and a spate of Ministerial Directions curtailing local authority zoning in excess of regional planning guideline allocations leading to a range of amendments to the 2000 Planning Act through the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2010.

This Act significantly strengthened legal requirements around the integration of national (NSS) regional (RPG's) and local development plans (DP's) through a new requirement for the incorporation of a Core Strategy within the local authority development plan which would set the framework for the quantum and distribution of land to be zoned for future development requirements, following the lead of the NSS and RPG's.

² McEvoy vs Meath County Council

The influence of the 2010 Act on local authority planning has been profound with for example the total quantum of land zoned for future housing development reducing from in excess of 44,000 hectares in 2009 (capable of sustaining an additional population of 2.5m) to around 10,000 hectares today, still enough to cater for a population increase of .5m.

Further reform is underway through the restructuring of local government, reducing the number of planning authorities from 88 to 31, including the amalgamation of city and county councils in Limerick and Waterford and the reduction from 2 regional assemblies and 8 regional authorities (2 of which cover the Greater Dublin Area) to 3 new regional assemblies.

Legislation is being prepared for the creation of an independent Planning Regulator in accordance with the recommendations of the Mahon Tribunal, which regulator will be responsible for an independent assessment of local authority plans as regards consistency with national policy including the NSS and RPG's, which in turn are to evolve into more broadly based regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (SES) (timeframe for this).

Role of transport investment in land use planning

The influence of transport policy over the planning process has been growing too in recent years. The Dublin Transportation Authority Act 2008 established an iterative process between the preparation of the then proposed Transport Strategy for Dublin and the 2004 Regional Planning Guidelines for the Greater Dublin Area and vice versa which morphed into the functions of the National Transport Authority in this regard.

More widely, a raft of national and thematic policy documents have emanated from a variety of sources attempting to establish a clearer link between the decision making processes for both planning and transport investment including:

- **Transport 21**, a €34bn investment package in transport infrastructure;
- **Smarter Travel**: A sustainable transport future 2009 - which envisaged a closer matching between future development with sustainable compact urban and rural areas that discourage dispersed development and long distance commuting;

- **National Cycle Planning Policy Framework** 2009-2020, aimed at increasing the numbers of people cycling to work every day by 125,000 to 160,000 persons or 10% of all journeys;
- **Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas** (2009) which promote settlement patterns that minimise transport-related energy consumption;
- **Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidelines for Planning Authorities** (2012) which ensure that planning policy and road network planning are aligned to guide development to the most suitable locations;
- **Retail Planning Guidelines**, which contain a general presumption against large out-of-town retail centres, particularly those located adjacent or close to existing, new or planned national roads/motorways (except in the case of large-scale retail warehouses subject to criteria).
- **Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets** (2013) which radically revises design standards for roads infrastructure in urban areas to place the highest priority on catering for streets as living places and the needs of pedestrians, cyclists and public transport.

Allied to the policy developments and shifts above, rising fuel and transport costs as well as a range of Government initiatives have begun to increase the numbers of persons travelling by sustainable modes, particularly cycling, but mainly in the main urban areas, noticeably in Dublin.

Future Interaction

The establishment of a Planning Regulator is likely to be a significant future influencer on the way in which local authorities incorporate transport considerations into their decision making processes at policy level.

However, effective integration is a two-way process and certainty in the investment planning process is a key mechanism to ensure that planning and transport processes are

aligned. There is a case for a more structured process of interaction between the strategic planning cycles for both spatial development and transport investment.

In the water services area, the Water Services (No.2) Bill 2013 proposes the formulation by Irish Water, a new publicly owned national water utility of a 10 year+ Water Services Strategic Plan (WSSP) coupled to rolling 5 yearly Capital Investment Plans, which plans will both be required to be consistent with the National Spatial Strategy, Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies and an assessment of infrastructural need arising out of statutory local authority plans. In turn, the WSSP and capital investment plans will become a determining influence on the spatial planning process. Cumulatively, the integration of water services and spatial planning processes will build around each other, an essential requirement for an infrastructure as essential to the development process as water services.

Moreover, whereas there is a transport strategy for Dublin, similarly developed in an iterative and consistent with land use policy manner, no similar mechanisms are in place for the other cities or for that matter, their wider regions.

Furthermore, development of capital investment proposals for transport infrastructure outside of the Greater Dublin Area and regional cities investment allocated and co-ordinated by the National Transport Authority has initially been a matter for other mode specific bodies such as the Rail Procurement Agency and National Roads Authority (being amalgamated) leading perhaps inevitably to the development of mode-specific proposals rather than a more integrated approach.

The challenging economic conditions anticipated in the years ahead will demand very prudent allocation of scarce resources and for maximum national and regional effect.

Similarly, planning processes at regional assembly and local authority levels demand high degree's of certainty that planned investment will actually materialise if the Core Strategy approach in the Planning and Development Act (2010) is to continue to perform effectively. The knowledge that the infrastructure investment will be delivered at specific locations and not at other less suitable locations can be a powerful influence on the planning process.

Accordingly, mirroring the water services arena, there is a case for the preparation of Regional Transport and Investment Strategies by the National Transport Authority. These strategies could either act as stand-alone strategies or as a key input to the proposed regional Spatial and Economic Strategies proposed in the Government's Action Programme for the reform of local government "Putting People First" and to ensure that what investment can take place into the future has maximum effect.

Role of institutional framework in effective implementation

The key interface between the delivery and monitoring of transport investment in line with this Strategic Framework and the planning process will be at the national level? and specifically through the National Spatial Strategy. ?

The current NSS was published by the Government in 2002. Taking account of experience in the implementation of the current strategy, changed economic circumstances since 2002 at national and regional levels and wider policy and legislative developments, proposals will be advanced during 2014 for the development of a new spatial strategy to succeed the NSS.

A new national spatial strategy will also be required to set a strategic and national context for the proposed new regional Spatial and Economic Strategies to be prepared by the three new Regional Assemblies as replacements for the RPG model. The new SES's will need to be prepared in time to replace the existing RPG's whose statutory effect expires at the end of 2016.

Accordingly, the preparation of the new NSS is anticipated to run through 2014 into mid 2015, with the new SES's being prepared after the publication of the new spatial strategy to come into statutory effect as soon as practical thereafter, probably in early 2017.

As per the current NSS, the next spatial strategy will set out a strategic policy framework for overall national and regional spatial development, including matters relating to internal and external connectivity, the key transport corridors and nationally and regionally significant infrastructure requirements in that context, which will inform the role of An Bord Pleanála

in its capacity as the planning authority for strategic infrastructure and certain other public authority infrastructure consent processes.

The SFILT will be a key input to the new spatial strategy, informing and thereby strengthening the practical underpinnings of its transportation aspects by providing a reference framework for the determination of strategic priorities from a spatial development perspective.

While detailed arrangements for the implementation of the next spatial strategy will be a matter for Government decision at a future date, it is likely that the regional spatial and economic strategies will, as with the previous RPG model, again play an important part in translating the broad national level spatial planning objectives into more actionable development objectives and requirements at the level of the local authority statutory development plan processes.

In that context, proposals concerning the interface between spatial and transport policy formulation and implementation at the regional level are highly relevant and specifically the need for the practical outworking of the rationale in this framework through the preparation of such regional transport strategies, including the Greater Dublin strategy, as are necessary to inform the SES process.

In turn, with a reasonable level of certainty about the provision of transport infrastructure and services at a regional level, local authorities will have a much higher degree of clarity within which to plan future development to both capitalise on past and any future investment and avoid giving rise to demand for travel patterns not capable of being serviced in the medium-term and not in line with regional plans.

The Office for Planning Regulation (OPR) proposed in a 2014 Planning Bill would in turn ensure that having set an integrated framework of fresh national (NSS 2), regional (SES) and local plans, there would be independent scrutiny of local authority plans such as to ensure effective implementation.

Some discussion questions

To what extent has the previous spatial planning and transport investment framework been successful?

What can we learn from that?

Internationally, are there successful models that have proven effective over 30 year timeframes?

Is it enough that the research, modelling and investment principles will inform and guide the development of the spatial strategy nationally or is a more regional or local implementation focus more likely to succeed?

Where should that focus be to be most effective - regional or local? And then what are the mechanisms?

How do we frame all this into a SFILT principle?