



Northern & Western  
Regional Assembly

Submission to

# EIRGRID'S CONSULTATION – SHAPING OUR FUTURE ELECTRICITY GRID

11 June 2021

# Contents

<b>1: Introduction The Northern &amp; Western Region – Lagging Region:</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>2: The RSES – Policy Priorities for Urban Centric Growth:</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>3: The RSES – Policy Priorities for the Electrical Grid Network</b> .....	<b>4</b>
Key Projects – 10 year Window: .....	4
Low Carbon Transition Advancement: .....	4
<b>4: Regional asks &amp; Conclusion:</b> .....	<b>5</b>
Conclusion.....	5

## 1: Introduction The Northern & Western Region – Lagging Region:

The forthcoming review of the National Development Plan (NDP), together with the National Investment Framework Transport for Ireland, the furtherance of Ireland’s Rural Future, and implementation of the Government’s commitment to Regional Development will, in combination, be instrumental in tackling the substantial challenges facing the Northern and Western Region. The future enhancement and augmentation of the National Energy Distribution Grid via EirGrid will also be pivotal to any Regional economic recovery for Connacht / Ulster.

These challenges if left unaddressed as the Country emerges from the Covid-19 pandemic, could notably enhance regional inequalities that exist in Ireland and undermine the delivery of the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the Programme for Government.

### Regional Challenges – Northern & Western Region:

- Gap in Regional GDP
- Relative lack of value-added jobs
- Failure to retain sufficient third level graduates
- Low levels of Investment in Research & Development
- Low Levels of Household income
- Pronounced infrastructural deficits in Transport, Education and Healthcare

The growing geographical gulf in socio – economic terms, across the island of Ireland is reflected in the European Commission’s decision to downgrade the Northern and Western Region from a “More Developed Region” to a “Transition Region” post-2020 – the only region in Ireland to hold such a status.

Furthermore, the European Parliament’s Committee on Regional Development has categorised the region as a “Lagging Region”, which is a region characterised by extremely low growth which is divergent from the rest of the country.

In 2019 the NWRA undertook an analysis of legacy investment trends in Ireland and published its findings in its publication “Region in Transition – The Way Forward” [www.nwra.ie/publications](http://www.nwra.ie/publications) This research has confirmed that the decline in our region’s economy has been accompanied by long-term underinvestment in the region’s communications infrastructure, National roads, Regional and local roads, Health Infrastructure and third-level education and research infrastructure. The analysis also suggest that this region can be expected to experience a more complex and long-term recovery from the current Covid-19 pandemic crisis.

The Assembly therefore believe that it is imperative at a National Level that measures are urgently taken to redress the widening disparities. Such steps must include the consideration of positive discrimination in terms of investment into the Border & Western Region, to enable in particular our Urban Centre’s (as earmarked below) to develop scale / agglomeration. Additionally, the RSES identified a Low Carbon Region can be one of the sectors of opportunity in Connacht / Ulster, and this ongoing focus on Renewable Energy, via Onshore, and Offshore Renewables, will propel a growth in associated services, which could include:

- Research and Development,

- Educational programme’s including apprenticeship’s
- Engineering and Marine Engineering inc. Maintenance
- Manufacturing

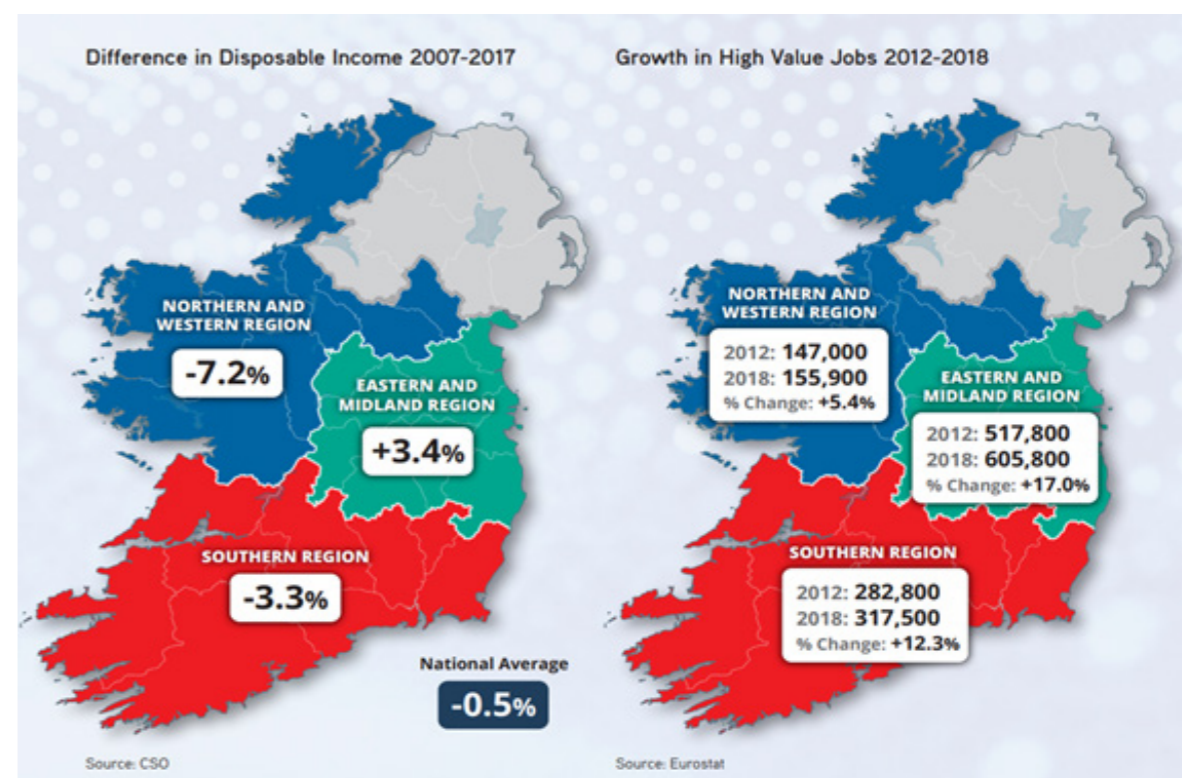


Figure 1: image from NWRA – Region in Transition, the Way Forward – Regional Trends

The NWRA note the EirGrid position paper – Shaping Our Electricity Future envisages 4 potential scenarios for the Future Development of the network, i.e. (1) Generation Led (2) Developer Led (3) Technology Led (4) Demand Led.

It is the view of the Assembly that none of the 4 scenarios outlined are appropriate for our Region.

It is further the position of the Assembly that there should be some recognition of the relevant 10 National Strategic Outcomes of the National Planning Framework (Ireland 2040) within the EirGrid Strategy, namely:

- Enhanced Regional Accessibility
- Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities
- Sustainable Mobility
- A Strong Economy supported by Enterprise, Innovation and Skills.
- Transition to a Low Carbon Economy
- Sustainable Management of Water & other Environmental resources.

In the absence of a coherent Regional vision, it is the view of the Assembly that EirGrid should re-examine the potential scenarios, and amend the chosen scenario to include a clear commitment to enable the potential of this Region to grow its contribution to the National Grid through emerging Renewable Technology, which can capture both onshore, and offshore potential.

The NWRA call, for an element within the EirGrid strategy which provides for significant Regional strengthening across the Northern and Western region. Such an approach is a call that many respondents to the NDP Review consultation have endorsed (See Phase 1 Report - Review of the National Development Plan).

The context and background section of EirGrid’s paper would also benefit from reflecting the need to redress legacy underinvestment, particularly in our Region and the unintended consequences for Ireland.

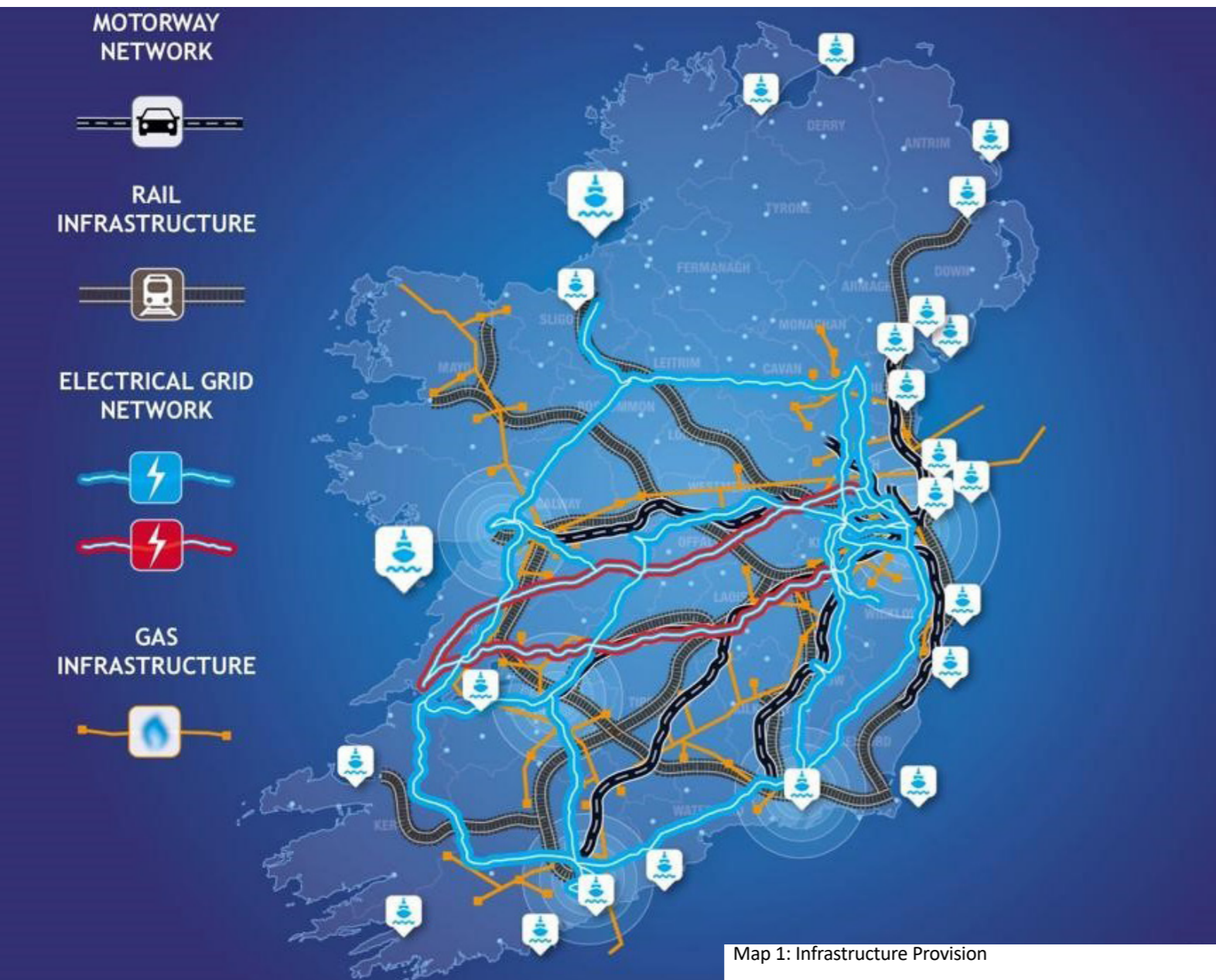
## 2: The RSES – Policy Priorities for Urban Centric Growth:

The Northern and Western Regional Assembly adopted the Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy 2020 – 2032 (RSES) for the Northern and Western Region in January 2020. The Strategy is available on our website [www.nwra.ie/rses](http://www.nwra.ie/rses) It identifies regional development objectives and coordinating initiatives that support the delivery and implementation of national planning and economic policy that are bespoke to the region and which implements and amplifies the National Policy Objectives and National Strategic Outcomes of the National Planning Framework (NPF).

As is clearly acknowledged within the NPF, the Northern & Western Region is recognised as having a weak urban hierarchy, outside of Galway City, and it also has suffered from a lack of investment across a number of areas of connectivity. The RSES seeks to amplify the Aims of the NPF, in significantly growing the Urban Centres of Connacht / Ulster, and central to this ambition is the concept of Compact Growth, with a particular focus on the Hierarchy of Settlements therein: Included within this are detailed plans for Galway City (MASP), as well as Letterkenny, Sligo & Athlone (Regional Growth Centre Plans). Furthermore, the key enabling priorities for the Region’s Key Towns are also outlined within Sec. 3.9 of the RSES, with Transport Investment ambitions embedded therein.

As well as seeking to significantly grow our Urban Centre’s and encourage Compact Growth, and in the process, deliver the National Strategic Outcomes of the NPF, the Regional Strategy at its outset clearly acknowledges the Infrastructural imbalance which has

become pronounced in Ireland over the last 2-3 decades, with the West and Border Regions falling significantly behind in the provision of numerous key infrastructural areas, including Transport and investment in Education and Healthcare. The RSES for our Region has given effect to all of these Objectives, and the Assembly continue to collaborate with our Local Authorities to ensure these key measures and others are conveyed within County Development Plans across our Border, and Western SPA’s (Strategic Planning Area’s).



Map 1: Infrastructure Provision

	Settlement	Policy Framework within RSES	Forecast Demographic Growth Ambition
<b>City</b>	Galway	Galway MASP (3.6 of RSES)	50% 140,000
<b>Regional Centre</b>	Sligo RGCS (3.6 of RSES)	Galway MASP (3.6 of RSES)	40% to 26,000
	Letterkenny RGCS (3.6 of the RSES)	Sligo RGCS (3.6 of RSES)	40% to 26,000
	Athlone RGCS (Sec. 3.6 of the RSES)	Athlone RGCS (Sec. 3.6 of the RSES)	40% to 28,500
<b>Key Towns</b>	Roscommon, Carrick-on-Shannon Cavan, Monaghan, Ballina, Castlebar, Tuam, Ballinasloe	Section 3.8 of RSES	By 30% in each Settlement.

Table 1: Population Targets within Settlement Hierarchy (Sec. 3.4 of the RSES)

### 3: The RSES – Policy Priorities for the Electrical Grid Network

#### Key Projects – 10 year Window:

The Northern & Western Region’s ambitions on Infrastructure are set out within Sec 6 (Connectivity – Connected Region) & Section 8 of the RSES (Infrastructure: Enabling Our Region).

Section 8.2 specifically outlines the Electrical Transmission Network, and there are a number of key projects identified as key to Regional Growth over the next decade. These projects were identified through input from EirGrid during the consultation process. Regional Policy Objectives (RPO’s) 8.1, 8.2, 8.3, 8.4 give effect to the above ambitions, with the objectives reflecting Assembly support for a secure and reliable electricity supply, as well as the necessary integration of the transmission network requirements to allow linkages with Renewable Energy proposals at all levels to the electricity transmission grid.

Additionally, the RSES emphasises that new thinking can be employed in relation to renewable energy sites of scale (Refers RPO 4.16), wherein the Assembly (by 2023) will co-ordinate the identification of potential renewable energy sites of scale in collaboration with Local Authorities and other stakeholders.

RPO 4.22 emphasises the safeguarding of the Strategic role and function of the existing test and development sites offshore, including the AMETS (Atlantic Marine Energy Test Site) which forms part of Ireland’s Ocean Energy Strategy to be developed subsequent to the Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan.

Project Name	Location
North Connacht Project	Roscommon, Sligo, Mayo
Regional Solution Project (series compensation on 400 kV network)	Galway
North South 400 kV Interconnector	Meath, Cavan, Monaghan, Armagh, Tyrone
Bellacorick – Castlebar 110 kV Line update	Mayo
North West Project (study area)	Donegal, Leitrim, Sligo
Bellacorick – Moy 110 kV Line update	Mayo
Cashla – Salthill 110 kV Line update	Galway
Galway 110 kV Station Redevelopment	Galway

#### Low Carbon Transition Advancement:

The North-West is also notably behind when it comes to transitioning to a low carbon society; which is evident across a number of indicators, several of which are outlined below:

- Between 2009 and 2020, 19% of the homes in Ireland – that were audited for a Building Energy Rating (BER) – registered a BER between “A” and “B”, with each of the Local Authorities based in the North-West registering corresponding ratios below the State average.
- As of 2020, there was only 21 ESB EV “Fast Chargers” in the North-West, with each of these chargers having three sockets of different varieties, while there was only 1 ESB EV “High Powered Charger” based in the North-West, with this charger having two sockets of different varieties.
- 8 out of the 9 Local Authority areas in the North-West recorded proportions of their population with below average access to a public transport stop that is served with highly frequent public transport.

The Regional Strategy contains a number of Cross cutting Climate Action goals, which include (1) a commitment to compact growth, whilst significantly expanding our major Urban Centres and Key Towns, and (2) providing enhanced public transport provision therein. (3) RPO 4.27 involves undertaking a Bio Economy feasibility study for the Region. (4) There is a commitment to examine potential renewable energy sites of scale, as well as recognition of offshore renewable potential.

Directly related to this is the ambition to continually expand the range of available services and functions across the Region’s significant Ports, with RPO 4.31 & 4.32 reflecting the same.

RPO 4.33 & 4.34 prioritise the facilitation of Marine Renewable Technology off the West & North West Coasts, and where applicable enable Grid Connections.

There is scope together with other stakeholders including the SEAI, the Department of Agriculture, Food & Marine, BIM and Udaras Na Gaeltachta to develop a number of Marine Resource Innovation Parks at Cill Chiaran, Co. Galway, and at Greencastle, Co. Donegal.

Without appropriate future investment to enable ongoing growth in grid capacity serving this Region, the North & West will struggle to make sufficient progress in these areas; and progress across a number of the aforementioned sectors will be essential to ensure delivery on the Targets / Goals of the Climate Action Plan.

### 4: Regional asks & Conclusion:

#### Regional Ask 1:

The context and background section of the Future Electricity Strategy should clearly reflect the need to redress legacy underinvestment in the Northern and Western region that has resulted in it being identified as a ‘Region in Transition’ and a ‘Lagging Region’ and to reflect that the region is calling for positive discrimination in favour of the Northern and Western region in future investment decisions.

#### Regional Ask 2:

The EirGrid Strategy should give a weighting to the infrastructural deficiencies in the Northern and Western region, this disparity includes clear gaps in the Electricity Transmission system, which contribute to the current socio - economic disparity between this Region, and other areas of the Country as a result.

#### Regional Ask 3:

The Future Electricity Strategy should appropriately reflect the importance given in the NPF and the RSES to the Regional Centres of scale - Letterkenny, Sligo and Athlone (partly within N&W Region), together with Drogheda and Dundalk. These regional centres of scale have been identified in the NDP for significant investment to redress the weak urban structure in the northern half of the country. The future development of the Electrical Grid should document highlight the strategic role as well as the current and future economic and service function of these regional centres.

#### Regional Ask 4:

The Eirgrid strategy should be ambitious in capturing and transferring the potential from the raw material in our region (wind speed) and complementary raw material in our region (solar power) to design an energy system which can meet the needs of the region up to 2050 and beyond.

#### Conclusion

The RSES is a strategic document of particular relevance and public bodies have a statutory obligation to formulate their plans to reflect the contents of the RSES. We ask that Eirgrid embrace this in a positive manner with a view to integrating their strategy with similar long term strategies in order to maximise societal benefits.



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