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# 1: Introduction

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. 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.

These Regional disparities, across a number of key indicators, including Value Added Employment and Household Income, are reflective of 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 2020 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 extends to 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) and the intra urban routes between these centre’s to be enhanced, and journey reliability, and certainty increased, with the ultimate goal of significantly reduced average journey speed’s.

The NWRA note the NIFTI: Ireland 2040 paper as outlining the hierarchy of Transport Investment priorities, and broadly agree with the measures therein. However, given the infrastructural deficit which applies to our Region, it may not be equitable, or proportionate to apply this framework in assessing all future investment across transport projects.

The NWRA call, for positive discrimination in favour of the Northern and Western Region, is a call that many respondents to the NDP Review to Renew consultation have endorsed (See Phase 1 Report - Review of the National Development Plan). The context and background section of the Draft Framework would benefit from reflecting the need to redress legacy underinvestment and the unintended consequences for Ireland.

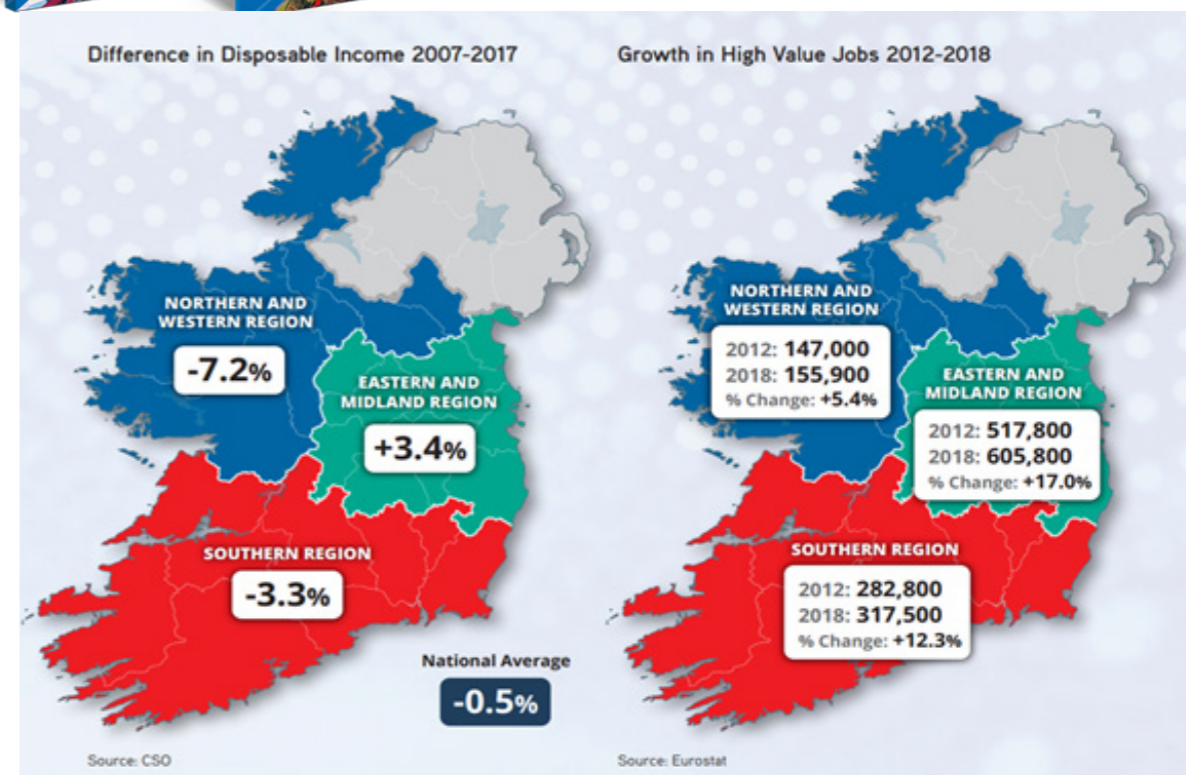


Figure 1: image from NWRA – Region in Transition, the Way Forward – Regional Trends

## 2: The RSES – Policy Priorities for Transport

### Investment:

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 well as seeking to significantly grow our Urban Centres 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 a number of key infrastructural areas, including, critically, all elements of Transport provision.

In order to redress the geographic imbalance which has emerged, the National Planning Framework sets out a series of ambitions to boost critical mass in a number of centres and enhance access to the regions, these include:

**NPO 2b** – The Regional Roles of Athlone, Sligo & Letterkenny will

be identified and supported in the RSES.

**NPO 2c** – Access to the North West of Ireland and between centres of scale will be significantly improved.

**NPO 3c** – Deliver 30% of all new homes (outside of the 5 Cities) within the existing footprint of settlements.

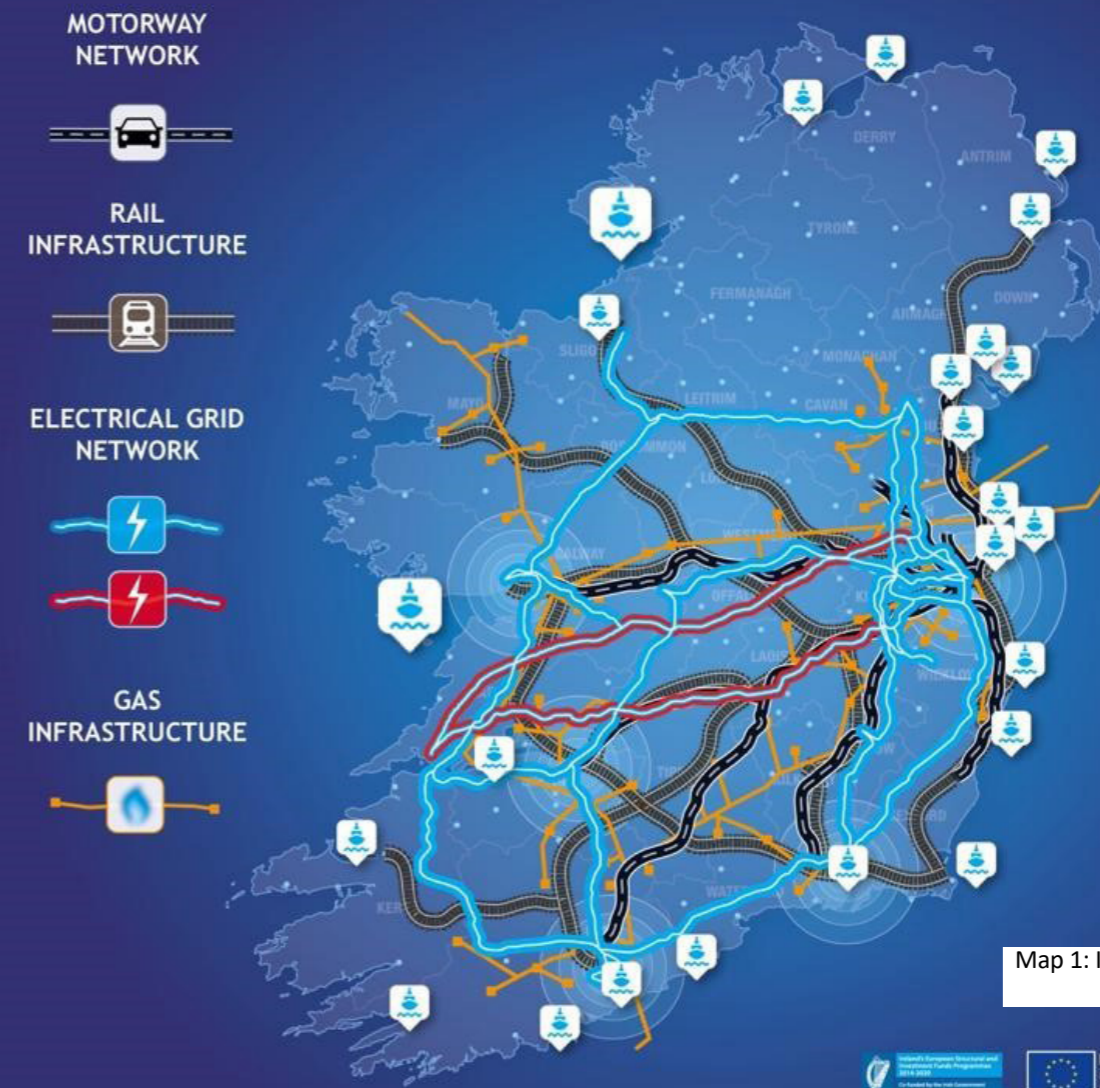
**NPO 46** – In co-operation with Departments in Northern Ireland enhanced Transport connectivity between Ireland and Northern Ireland.

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).

The Draft Framework correctly identifies the critical role of the five cities in accommodating growth. However, it fails to appropriately reflect the importance given in 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 called out by the NDP for significant investment to redress the weak urban structure in the northern half of the country. The Draft document needs to reflect this strategic position more robustly.

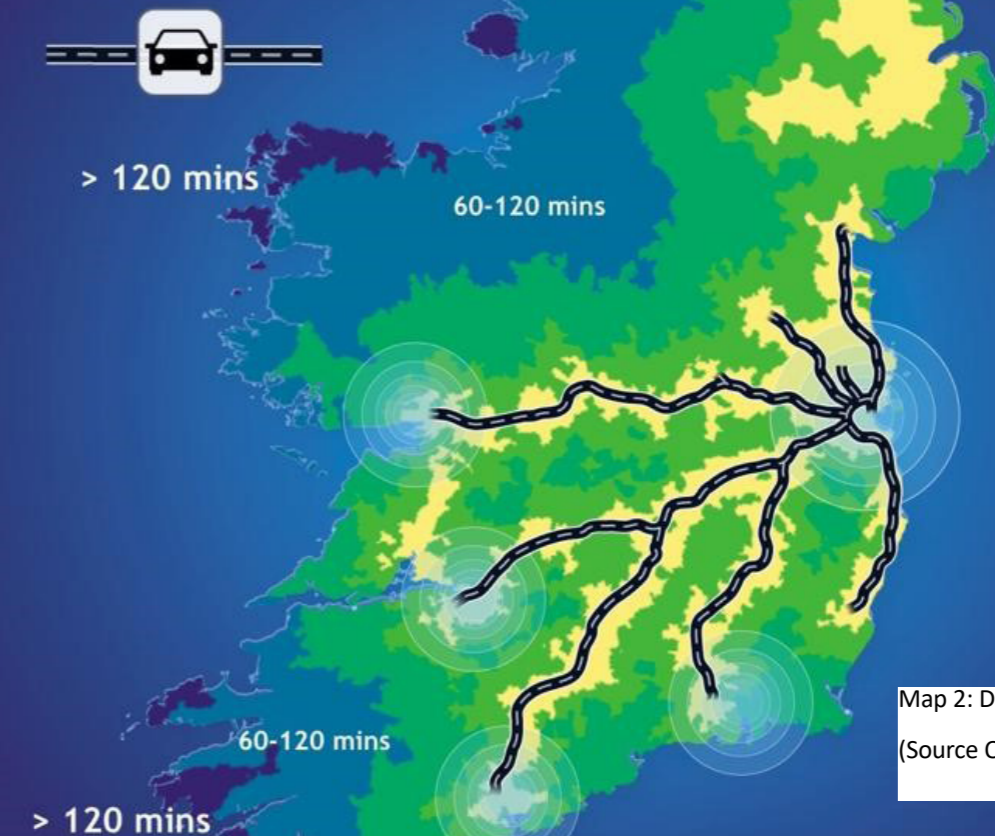
	Settlement	Policy Framework within RSES	Forecast Demographic Growth Ambition
<b>City</b>	Galway	Galway MASP (3.6 of RSES)	50% 140,000
<b>Regional Centre</b>	Sligo RGCSP (3.6 of RSES)	Galway MASP (3.6 of RSES)	40% to 26,000
	Letterkenny RGCSP (3.6 of RSES)	Sligo RGCSP (3.6 of RSES)	40% to 26,000
	Athlone RGCSP (Sec. 3.6 of the RSES)	Athlone RGCSP (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)



Map 1: Infrastructure Provision

### MOTORWAY NETWORK



Map 2: Distance from Motorway Network (Source Q1 2017)

## 3: Transport Investments – Addressing the National Infrastructural Imbalance:

### 3.1. RSES Policy Context:

The RSES identifies a suite of Regional Development Objectives (RPOs) that are necessary to implement the vision of the RSES and the NPF. These include a suite of RPOs that relate to transport investments that:

1. Support the delivery of compact growth in our towns and cities
2. Enhance regional accessibility
3. Strengthen rural economies and communities
4. Deliver sustainable mobility and encourage modal shift
5. Support high-quality international connectivity via our ports and airport
6. Help us to transition to a low carbon and climate resilient society.

### 3.2. RSES Transport priorities:

The RSES for the Northern & Western Region (Sec. 6.3) details the Regional priorities in the following Transport areas: (a list of the relevant RPO's has been attached as an Appendix to this submission for ease of Reference)

1. **National and Regional Road Network investment, Key Projects**
2. **Rail Network ambitions**
3. **The Region's Ports / Harbours (See also Sec. 4.4. Marine & Blue Economy)**
4. **Bus Network ambitions and**
5. **Rural Transport priorities (underpinned by the NTA's Local Link Strategic Plan)**

The combined aims of these Investment Priorities can be summarised as follows:

- Enhance the inter-regional and intra-regional national road network that connect the key settlements of the region
- Maintain and enhance the regional and local road network of the Northern and Western Region
- Upgrade and expand the rail infrastructure of the Northern and Western Region
- Enhance the reliability and connectivity of inter-regional and intra-regional bus services that connects the key settlements of the region
- Expand the Local Link Rural Transport Programme throughout rural communities in the Northern and Western Region
- Enhance the cycling and pedestrian infrastructure of the Northern and Western Region
- Increase the deployment of EV charge points in the Northern and Western Region
- Enhance the use of smart transport technologies in the region

- Enhance the infrastructure and services of the Ireland West Airport Knock (IWAK) and Donegal Airport
- Improve the infrastructure and capacity of the seaports and harbours of the Northern and Western Region

### 3.3 Modal Shift:

As already outlined at 2, above, the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy of the Northern & Western Regional Assembly recognises the importance of our "Regional Growth Centres" and "Key Towns" in developing the region's overall urban structure. Developing these geographical areas to urban centres of scale will be an important component in revitalising the economic wellbeing of the region.

In conjunction to such urban development, it is instrumental that an accessible, efficient and low carbon public transport network is delivered, with the view of acting as a vital link between urban economic hubs themselves, as well as their respective rural hinterlands. This should ensure that the previously mentioned benefits of agglomeration can also be felt not just in our region's urban centres but also in their surrounding rural communities.

Such a public transport system should also facilitate access to the region's airports and port infrastructure, as well as its key tourism and cultural assets. Failure to implement an efficient and accessible local transport infrastructure will mean that our designated Regional Growth Centres and Key Towns will suffer from high levels of congestion, increase housing costs and environmental degradation, ultimately reducing the regions offer of a high quality of life. In addition to this, the region should strive for the implementation of electric vehicle infrastructure given that it will be a key infrastructure requirement in the coming years. Such infrastructure has the potential to help workers in our rural communities to reduce high cost of travel to work, a factor consistently noted as one of the biggest barriers to employment in rural communities.

### Journey Comfort and Regular Services (Journey Frequency):

The inadequacy of the National Road Network across much of our Region means the NPF ambition of Inter-Urban Routes having a standard of 90kmph average speed is simply not currently achievable. The potential for commuters and the public to move towards Modal Shift is further reduced in the North West given the complete absence of a Rail Network across Cavan, Monaghan, Donegal.

The Assembly believe the expedition of the Improvement Schemes set out in the RSES, as provided here via an Appendix are fundamental to the attractiveness of Modal Shift towards Public Transport.

Improved Road Network will reduce journey times, increase certainty around journey duration on public transport, and give increase overall average speed on Inter-Urban Routes.

Furthermore, the expansion of our Urban Centre's of Scale, as already documented should be complemented by the addition of facilities which should include urban cycleways and Regional Transport Hubs.

**Life-Line Routes:** The Assembly note the NIFTI – Project Ireland 2040 Paper details the role of Life-Line Routes, in certain cases, where there are a few alternative routes serving communities.

The further examination of the identification of these routes would be welcome, and additional consideration as to how such routes can be enhanced, and operability maximised would be worthwhile.

The Northern & Western Region would have a number of such routes serving entire peninsulas, as well as peripheral communities, particularly across the headlands, and peninsulas of the West and North West.

### 3.4 Local Transport Plans

The RSES has identified that Local Transport Plans be prepared for Athlone, Letterkenny, Sligo Town, Cavan Town, Monaghan Town, Castlebar, Roscommon Town, Ballinasloe, Carrick-on-Shannon, Donegal Town, Tuam, Ballina (and other centres as may be determined).

The Assembly are aware that the process in relation to the preparation of these Plans has already commenced in Letterkenny, with a preliminary Public Consultation already having been undertaken.

Any future National Transport Investment programme across the country and specific to this Region should support NTA, TII, Local Authorities and other stakeholders in the preparation and implementation of Local Transport Plans (LTPs). Funding packages specific to each town and plan area, aligned to the infrastructure projects and short term, medium-term and longer-term priorities identified in LTPs should be supported.

### 3.5 International Connectivity:

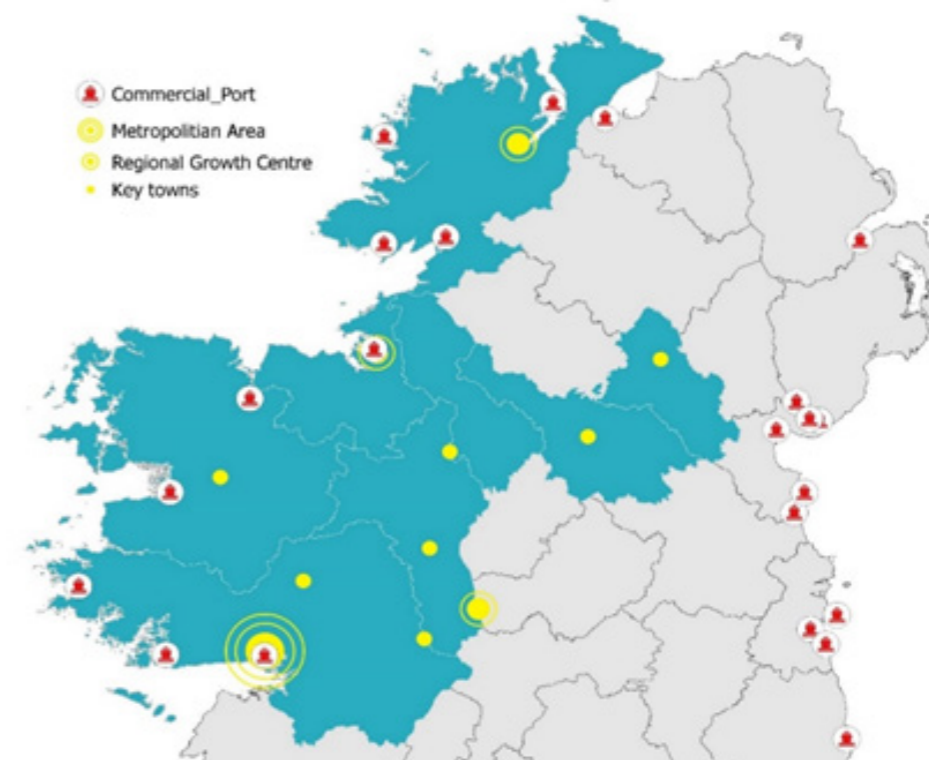
The RSES sets out the Assembly's emphasis on the continued development of the European Ten-T network, Core, and Comprehensive. Within the NWRA Region, the Comprehensive Network incorporates all of the Rail Network, our Airports (IWAK,

Donegal, and Inis Mor), It also includes some of our National Roads.

Our Region is home to Ireland West Airport Knock (IWAK), and a Masterplan to implement the Strategic Development Zone Status (SDZ) at the Airport has been developed by Mayo County Council together with other key stakeholders. The RSES reflects the future ambition relating to IWAK, and RPO's.

Whilst the Northern & Western Region boasts a significant extent of the Atlantic Coastline, there is a marked weakness relating to the status of the Region's Ports, and Marine Infrastructure. This clear Regional inequality has become more pronounced, and stark with the spectre of Brexit, particularly a hard Brexit, with the initial absence of a Trade agreement between the UK and EU 27. North of Foynes, in County Limerick, there are no ports of Tier 1 or Tier 2 status along the entire length of the Western seaboard. and Galway Port, Killybegs whilst strategically vital for the Marine economy are classified as Ports of Regional significance – Galway being a Tier 3 port and Killybegs being Ireland's leading fishing port, accounting for over one-third of all fish landings in the country and services other commercial activity associated with the oil and gas industry, the tourism industry and the on-shore renewable energy industry.

There is a unique disconnectedness concerning Ports and the Marine Infrastructure in the North West. In terms of the overall examination of infrastructure, there are 2 key elements to our Marine dynamic, the first are the harbours and ports themselves, and the second is the inter-connectedness with the road and rail network beyond this, including connections to the UK and Mainland Europe. Our Region has a significant disadvantage to the rest of the country in this regard. In a first attempt to tackle this matter, the RSES sets out a roadmap to provide for a feasibility study to examine pursuing the designation of both Galway Port and Killybegs Port as EU TEN-T Comprehensive Ports. This should be acknowledged within the finalised Framework.



Map 3: Urban Hierarchy & Commercial Ports within the NWRA

## 4. Regional Asks:

The Northern and Western Regional Assembly are supportive of the suggested priorities and hierarchies on the proviso that it is enshrined within a Framework that enables the strategic vision of the NPF and RSES for the Northern and Western Region and incorporates the following:

### Regional Ask 1:

The context and background section of the Draft Framework 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. The Framework should not diminish the ability of Government through relevant Departments to approve and progress critical infrastructure projects in the Border & West. These projects are essential to redress the long term and continuing imbalance and inequity in the national transport network.

### Regional Ask 2:

The Draft Framework should give a favourable weighting where the region experiences a legacy of under-investment in the transport network and where there is a deficit in alternative public transport options.

### Regional Ask 3:

The Draft framework should incorporate a weighting that will deliver an efficient transport network that provides for the basic essential transport needs and life-line routes to a region as a priority over projects serving regions that already enjoy a level of service that exceeds the basic level.

### Regional Ask 4:

The Draft Framework should give further consideration to applying a separate funding mechanism to Life-Line Roads, given their key strategic importance to communities.

### Regional Ask 5:

The Draft Framework to 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 NPF for significant investment to redress the weak urban structure in the northern half of the country. The Draft document needs to highlight the strategic role and function of these regional centres more robustly.

### Regional Ask 6:

Very large projects identified in section 3.2 (Context and Background) should include the N2/A5 and Donegal TEN-T project – this project will link the NW City Region with Dublin and is committed to by both jurisdictions. It should also include upgrading of the N17 and N15, which links Galway, Sligo and the NW City Region of Letterkenny/Derry/Strabane.

### Regional Ask 7:

The draft Framework should acknowledge the unique disconnectedness concerning Ports and the Marine infrastructure in the Northern and Western Region with the road and rail network, including connections to the UK and Mainland Europe. It should acknowledge that a feasibility study to examine pursuing designation of both Galway Port and Killybegs Port as EU TEN-T Comprehensive Ports is advocated.

## APPENDIX:

### RSES Transport Objectives:

#### National Roads:

#### RPO 6.5

The capacity and safety of the region's land transport networks will be managed and enhanced to ensure their optimal use, thus giving effect to National Strategic Outcome No.2 and maintaining the strategic capacity and safety of the national roads network including planning for future capacity enhancements.

#### RPO 6.6

In accordance with National Development Plan investment commitments to bring the following schemes through planning/design/ construction, the following projects shall be delivered to an appropriate level of service in the short term and in any case by 2027 having regard to the standard in the NPF of an average inter-urban speed of 90KPH:

- ❑ A5 Road Development
- ❑ N4 Collooney to Castlebaldwin,
- ❑ N5 Ballaghaderreen to Scramogue and Turlough to Westport
- ❑ N6 Galway City Ring Road,
- ❑ N56 Dungloe to Glenties and Mountcharles to Inver,
- ❑ N59 Moycullen Bypass.

#### RPO 6.7

In accordance with National Development Plan investment commitments to progress the following schemes through pre-appraisal and early planning, the following projects shall be progressed through pre-appraisal and early planning in the short term and shall thereafter proceed to construction and be delivered to an appropriate level of service within the lifetime of the RSES:

- ❑ N2 Clontibret to the Border connecting to the A5
- ❑ N2 Ardee to south of Castleblaney
- ❑ N3 Virginia Bypass
- ❑ N4 Carrick on Shannon to Dromod
- ❑ N13 Ballybofey Stranorlar Bypass
- ❑ N13/N14/N56 Letterkenny Bypass and Dual Carriageway to Manorcunningham,
- ❑ N14 Manorcunningham to Lifford, N17 Knock to Collooney.

#### RPO 6.8

The delivery of the following projects shall be pursued, in consultation with and subject to the agreement of TII, through pre-appraisal, early planning and to construction as priority projects to be delivered to an appropriate level of service in the medium-term.

- ❑ N3 North of Kells to Enniskillen, via Cavan and the A509 in Fermanagh,
- ❑ N5/N26/N58 Mount Falcon to Swinford, Castlebar East to Bohola Project,
- ❑ N13 Manorcunningham to Bridgend/Derry,

- ❑ N13 Stranorlar to Letterkenny,
- ❑ N15 Sligo to Bundoran,
- ❑ N15 Stranorlar to Lifford,
- ❑ N16 Sligo to Blacklion,
- ❑ N53 Dundalk to N2 at Carrickmacross,
- ❑ N54/A3 Cavan to Monaghan Town,
- ❑ N55 Cavan Town to Athlone,
- ❑ N56 Inver to Killybegs,
- ❑ N59 Upgrade (including the N59 Oughterard Bypass and the N59 Clifden to Oughterard Scheme),
- ❑ N61 Athlone to Boyle improvement,
- ❑ N63 Longford to M17 at Annagh (Junction 18).

#### Regional Roads:

#### RPO 6.9

The following regional and local roads shall be progressed to an appropriate level of service in the short-term and in any case by 2027:

- (1) Garavogue Bridge Scheme, Sligo
- (2) Sligo Western Distributor Road.

#### RPO 6.10

The East-West (Dundalk to Sligo) Road will be pursued incrementally in the short and medium term, to be delivered to an appropriate level of service (Dundalk - Carrickmacross - Shercock - Cootehill - Cavan - Enniskillen - Blacklion).

## Rail:

### RPO 6.11

To seek commencement and completion of the review of the Western Rail Corridor project as a priority for passenger and freight transport.

### RPO 6.12

Promote the upgrade of the capacity of the Athlone - Athenry - Galway rail line, including the provision of dual tracks and support provision of increased service stops between Athlone and Galway.

### RPO 6.13

(a) It shall be an objective to deliver the Athenry - Tuam - Claremorris - Sligo Rail to an appropriate level of service and to a standard capable of facilitating passenger and freight transport.

(b) It shall be an objective to progress through pre-appraisal and early planning the extension of the railway from Athenry - Tuam - Claremorris - Sligo.

### RPO 6.14

Support provision of Smarter Travel infrastructure.

### RPO 6.15

Promote enhancement of the capacity of the Sligo to Dublin rail line.

### RPO 6.16

Investigate the feasibility of extending the rail network to the North West City region from Sligo and Dublin.

### RPO 6.17

Support the development of a Strategy for the electrification of the Rail Network.

## Bus Network & Rural Transport:

### RPO 6.18

Utilise smart technology to provide for enhanced service experience for customers.

### RPO 6.19

Reduce dependency on fossil-fuel powered vehicles.

### RPO 6.20

Undertake network reviews for city, regional centres and support towns across the region, to provide local bus services.

### RPO 6.21

Review bus services within and between settlements, including the rural transport programme, to provide for the enhanced and more connected provision of public transport service.

### RPO 6.22

Provide new interchange facilities and enhanced bus waiting facilities together with enhanced passenger information, utilising smart technology in appropriate circumstances.

### RPO 6.23

To provide sustainable travel which will be supported by providing walking and cycling facilities (including Greenway and Blueway projects) as a priority across the region.

### RPO 6.24

Support Cross-border sustainable transport, including but not limited to the delivery of the following:

- ❑ North-West Multi-modal Mobility Hub
- ❑ North-West Greenway
- ❑ Ulster Canal Greenway.

### RPO 6.25

In addition to the foregoing, specific transport network supports shall be provided for the Islands that shall provide for safe access by sea and include but shall not be limited to the following:

- (a) Improved pier infrastructure on Inis Oír and Inis Meáin in the Aran Islands and at Machaire Rabhartaigh.
- (b) New passenger ferry vessel for Oileán Thorai.

## Local Transport Plans (LTPs)

### RPO 6.27

(a) The Assembly supports the collaborative preparation of Local Transport Plans led by local authorities in conjunction with the NTA and other stakeholders, based on Area Based Transport Assessment (ABTA) guidance and alignment with environmental policy, for Athlone, Letterkenny, Sligo Town, Cavan Town, Monaghan Town, Castlebar, Roscommon Town, Ballinasloe, Carrickon Shannon, Donegal Town, Tuam, Ballina and other areas as may be determined. The LTP will inform the urban area plans, development plans, local area plans and other planning framework documents.

(b) Local Transport Plans (LTP) will represent the lowest tier of the NPF's framework for the integration of land use and transport planning and the achievement of the NPF's objective of 'compact smart growth'. They will be subject to further transportation and environmental assessment at local level as appropriate based on guidance available and alignment with environmental policy.

(c) LTPs will be based on a clear set of objectives and the most recent demographic and travel information taking into account the policies and objectives of the local authorities, insofar as they align with those of National and Regional Policy.

(d) Local Link Offices (Transport Coordination Units) will be consulted in the development of LTPs.

### RPO 6.28

Policies, objectives and measures which emerge from Local Transport Plans shall be incorporated into Development Plans, Local Area Plans, Strategic Development Zone Planning Schemes, Urban Area Plans and other relevant planning framework documents.

### RPO 6.29

The management of space in town and village centres should deliver a high level of priority and permeability for walking, cycling and public transport modes to create accessible, attractive, vibrant and safe, places to work, live, shop and engage in community life.

### RPO 6.30

Planning at the local level should promote walking, cycling and public transport by maximising the number of people living within walking and cycling distance of their neighbourhood or district centres, public transport services and other services at the local level such as schools.

### RPO 6.31

New development areas should be permeable for walking and cycling and the retrospective implementation of walking and cycling facilities should be undertaken where practicable in existing neighbourhoods, to give a competitive advantage to these modes. Prioritisation should be given to schools and areas of high employment density.

### RPO 6.32

Invest in transport networks and services in the region that are socially inclusive and provide a quality of service, connectivity and facilities to meet all societal needs, disabilities (including mobility,

sensory and cognitive impairments) and meet the needs and opportunities of an ageing population.

## Natural Networks:

### Blueways

#### RPO 5.20

To support and facilitate the continued development of the Regions Blueways along existing waterways, and through the reopening of disused waterways, such as the Ulster Canal.

#### RPO 5.21

To promote, support, and enable collaboration networks to realise the economic opportunities presented by Blueways.

### Greenways

#### RPO 5.18

The Regional Assembly shall collaborate with Local Authorities, Fáilte Ireland, Waterways Ireland, DTAS, and other relevant stakeholders in developing an integrated network of Greenways across the region's catchments. To support, and enable the development of sustainable Greenway projects, the NWRA will encourage and promote:

(a) The advancement and growth of Greenways through several Key National and Regional Greenway Projects, which are high capacity, and which can in the medium/long term be extended and interlinked across County Boundaries and with Local Greenways, and other cycling/walking infrastructure.

(b) Prioritisation of Greenways of scale and appropriate standard that have significant potential to deliver an increase in activity tourism to the region and are regularly used by overseas and domestic visitors, and locals, thereby contributing to a healthier society through increased physical activity.

(c) The appropriate development of local businesses, and start-ups in the vicinity of Greenway Projects.

(d) The development of Greenways in accordance with an agreed code of practice.

(e) Collaborative development of Greenways and Blueways, including feasibility and route selection studies to minimise impacts on environmentally sensitive areas.

#### RPO 5.19


The Assembly supports the further development of Greenways as part of the Outdoor Recreational Plan for Public Lands and Waters in Ireland 2017-2021, as part of an overall improvement of facilities to enhance health and wellbeing across society.




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