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A chara,

I am deeply concerned at the astonishing lack of foresight in omitting Drogheda from the draft national planning framework.

Given that this plan will become the sole legal reference for all future discussions on city planning it makes absolutely no sense to omit the fifth largest urban centre in the country from the national framework particularly considering its potential as a major hub with its proximity to both Dublin and Belfast. Ease-of-access and the ability to distribute goods is vital to a region's development and no other regional town can match Drogheda in this respect as it occupies a prime location on the North/South Corridor with air, sea and motorway links within 20 minutes of the town.

Our region is steeped with history and should be acknowledged as such. Drogheda has the potential to be one of the top tourist destinations not only in the North East, but, in the entirety of the country. It amazes me at how underdeveloped the town is and the lack of interest at council and government level to do anything about it. It's hard not to have the mind-set that if Drogheda's attractions, monuments, river, churches and medieval structures where in any other part of the country they would be used to their fullest potential.

Drogheda's young and educated population and the availability of high-speed broadband makes the town an attractive target for FDI which would in turn help create local jobs. But Drogheda needs to be included in the National Planning Framework to accomplish this and we need new thinking to address anomalies such as an almost-empty IDA Business Park which is unable to access BMW (Border Midlands Region) funding because it is in the wrong county. Third-level education is another area that Drogheda could excel in with industry-specific training centres.

Inclusion in the Framework could also address issues like regional transport. No other town in the state is split in half by a toll like Drogheda is. The tolls on the slip roads in and out of the town should be removed. The Port Company, Irish Rail and road hauliers should form a regional transport committee to properly plan the free movement of goods. The Port Access Northern Cross Route, long identified as a vital infrastructure project for Drogheda must finally be actioned and completed.

In local government, Drogheda Borough Council should be reinstated to properly manage this large urban area, with a view to Drogheda gaining city status and having a city council. Drogheda's population has grown at a faster rate than the other five large urban centres. If we are planning into the future, this fast expanding population must be planned for.

The idea of planning is to anticipate events and plan accordingly. If the Minister is serious about balanced regional development, as is mentioned in the foreword to the framework, then Drogheda needs to be reconsidered for inclusion.

Yours,

Damien Kierans