

**Submission on
Ireland 2040 Our Plan National Planning Framework
by Cllr. Laurence Fallon**

Introduction

I welcome the concept of this long term plan and I see this as a road map for the development of Ireland between now and 2040. I welcome the fact that it indicates a substantial growth in population and in the economy which will benefit Ireland generally.

The plan may be well meaning but if it is implemented as proposed the effect will be that the stronger regions of growth will continue to grow dramatically and the weaker regions will continue to become much weaker creating a two-tier Ireland.

Since this plan is being given legislative support it is critical that the parameters are right at the start as changing this plan may prove very difficult into the future.

I disagree with the thrust of the plan which suggests that we have five areas designated for substantial growth and disagree fundamentally with the fact that these are five coastal towns or cities which will result in infrastructural difficulties due to the fact that on one side they are surrounded by sea water which will be of no benefit for infrastructural purposes.

I also disagree with the idea that we would continue to grow Dublin city dramatically, by over 250,000, at a time when there is a serious infrastructural deficit, with a huge cost of living and great difficulty in accessing work. The idea that we would increase the size of the area by 250,000 makes absolutely no sense when we have other regions of the country with adequate space, adequate infrastructure and which could be expanded much more easily.

A plan for the country

I believe if we are going to have balanced regional development we must re-examine this plan and make it a plan for the entire country and not just for the coastal towns.

I am enclosing a map (figure 1) which indicates what the plan is proposing, namely substantial benefits for the five coastal towns named and their hinterlands (40-50km).

On analysis this map shows large tracts of Connacht, Ulster and the Midlands have not been included for any substantial growth. The effect of this is that the young population will move out of these areas into the greater areas of Dublin, Cork, Galway, Limerick & Waterford; into areas which are already over-crowded while also creating substantial de-population in the affected areas further adding to rural decline.

The recently published Pobal report confirms what was already known by many, that the peripheral regions have been more affected by the recession and have been slower to recover while Dublin and the other major towns were less affected initially and are recovering much quicker. It is safe to assume, taking this report into account along with information already available, that the five greater cities will develop naturally even without this plan.

Therefore the thrust of this plan should be refocused to look at where the main problems are – lack of jobs, retention of the young workforce in their areas and balanced sustainable growth of the regions - and that is the peripheral regions.

The thrust of this plan also needs to identify a number of other growth centres so the general population is within commuting distance of a substantial growth area.

The case for Athlone

In this instance Athlone is a prime location with unlimited space available for growth on all sides of the town with infrastructure by road supplied by a motorway from Dublin to Galway, with other significant access routes going north and south of the town. Also it is one of the few towns that has two train lines converging in the town centre with the Westport and Galway lines continuing to Dublin.

I believe it is critical that we include Athlone as a growth centre and in so doing it would re-direct significant numbers both from the east and west of the town in the direction of Athlone and away from the over-crowded city of Dublin and the severely congested city of Galway.

The issue of the future of our country with regard to the environment is going to be paramount going forward and it is most likely, if not a certainty, that by the implementation of this plan that Bord na Mona peat harvesting will have ceased. That will lead to a significant loss of job numbers therefore it is absolutely essential that we expend Athlone to accommodate those people as well as many others.

The North West

While including Athlone, as the map (figure 2) will show, substantially changes the percentage of people now within the catchment of significant growth centres I also firmly believe that in the wider context the North West still remains with no significant growth centre in this plan. Therefore I would suggest that this plan would include Sligo as a second additional growth centre also.

Taking Sligo as the centre point (figure 3) would then embrace parts of Sligo, Leitrim, Donegal and Mayo as catchment for the town. This would reduce the level of outward migration of the young educated workforce which is currently happening due to the lack of significant employment.

For the benefit of the entire country of Ireland it is important we try to develop growth centres in areas with adequate capacity to expand and build because the cost of trying to expand areas that already have infrastructural constraints is much greater and if we pursue this as the plans appears to be doing it will mean the cost of investing in Ireland by outside multi nationals, taking into account office space and housing accommodation, will leads to Ireland being seen as uncompetitive relative to other countries.

Conclusion

The aim of this plan should be to have balanced regional focus, to reduce as far as possible the two-tier Ireland where growth in some areas is very high and other areas is very low, and to position Ireland where it is seen as a place where you can live in comfort, expand your business successfully without creating significant infrastructure problems and position Ireland as a place where the world sees us as well educated, well trained and an environment that is competitive both from an infrastructure point of view and a wage point of view compared with the rest of the world.

The plan as envisaged will not serve the stated aims of the Government of balanced regional development. It will lead to substantial over-crowding and to people living a long way from their place of work, which will not help our carbon footprint. A number of changes could go a long way towards creating the balanced economy that we all should aspire to.

I submit two maps of Ireland indicating that I believe making Athlone a regional growth centre comparable to the other five centres and adding in Sligo would give a much greater outcome with regard to balanced regional development.

Cllr. Laurence Fallon

Ballagh

Knockcroghery

Co. Roscommon

Figure 1

Ireland county map



Figure 2

Ireland county map



Figure 3

Ireland county map

