

SUBMISSION TO THE NATIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK

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This is a short submission in my role as T.D. for Limerick City addressing issues in relation to Limerick and the Mid-West. I have sent a separate more comprehensive submission on behalf of the Labour Party.

I wish to fully support the detailed submission from the combined Local Authorities in the Mid-West, public, representative and higher education bodies and the Shannon Airport Authority who have come together to make a strong case for much more ambitious targets for the region with the development of Limerick City at its centre.

To make any meaningful change in the highly unbalanced nature of the population of Ireland there has to be a shift to growing other cities at a faster pace than Dublin. The ambition in the NPF to double the populations of all five cities is positive. However, by growing Dublin at the same rate as the other cities and keeping each of the 3 regions with more or less the same percentage of the population, we are going to end up with the same regional imbalance we currently have.

Limerick has placed itself in a position where it has the real potential to grow in both population and economic activity on a scale that can make it a major urban centre similar to the description of Cork, not simply a regional centre.

It is well positioned in the country, very close to an international airport that has spare capacity that can be developed (without the significant challenges faced by Dublin Airport) and the first point I would make is that this potential should be specifically referenced and underpinned in the NPF.

It is also well-positioned with regard to road and rail and has a deep estuary port that also has undeveloped potential. The commitment to upgrading the M20 between Cork and Limerick to motorway grade with the on-going route to Galway links the 3 biggest cities outside of Dublin which can be a real counterbalance to the Dublin region. The plan should have a specific commitment to complete the M20 and also the Northern Distributor Road which is an important peripheral route.

Better regional balance would be good for Dublin as well as for the rest of the country. I doubt if there is any other European country where the town (Maynooth) that has the same number of people living East and West of it, is half an hour's drive from the East coast.

This can only be changed with more ambitious targets for a city like Limerick, and the means to reach those targets.

Limerick has 3 very successful Higher Education institutions (UL, LIT and Mary Immaculate) all of which have growth plans; a City and County Council with a strong strategy that includes redesigning the City Centre, a property portfolio with huge potential for economic, social and cultural development and land on which homes for a growing population can be built. Industrial development has been strong in areas like high-tech, medical and financial operations, linked to the Higher Education sector and all the indications are that that will continue to grow with the support of the Council, IDA and Enterprise Ireland.

Limerick is pitching itself for major growth; this is not just an idle hope. It is grounded on careful planning and real solid foundations as I have outlined. The various bodies in the region have come together and are working in unison and will do into the future to deliver on the potential. I and other public representatives are fully supportive.

We require the National Planning Framework to reflect and support the ambition Limerick has for itself.