



South East Action Plan for Jobs

Submission on

**Ireland 2040 – Our Plan: National
Planning Framework (Stage 2)**

Nov 2017

1. Introduction

This submission is presented on behalf of the South East Action Plan (SEAPJ) for Jobs. The SEAPJ has set itself the strategic ambition to close the gap that exists between the south east and the rest of the country in terms of wealth and employment. In particular, the main objectives of the SEAPJ are to:

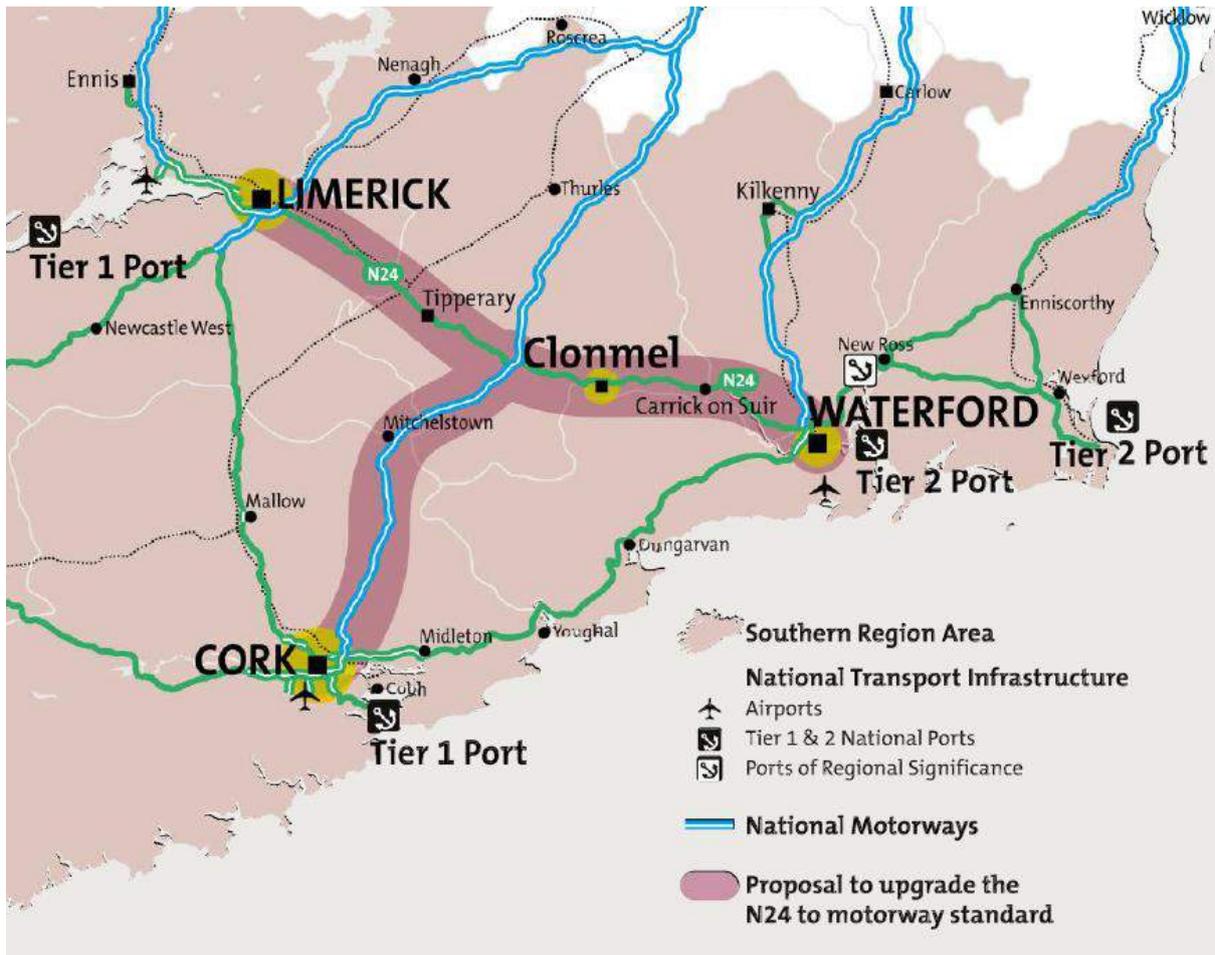
- Boost job creation (i.e. support creation of 25,000 net new jobs by 2020. 13,000 new jobs have been created in the region since Q1 2015 – base year); and
- Reduce the unemployment rate (i.e. to within 1% of the national average by 2020. The national average is currently 6.4%, whereas the latest regional unemployment figure is 8.1% - second highest in the country).

The following priorities and recommendations for the National Planning Framework are aligned to these objectives and are presented by the South East Action Plan for Jobs to assist the advancement and economic growth of the South East region.

2. Roads Infrastructure and Connectivity

The draft of Ireland 2040 – Our Plan document has identified that the development of our Regional Cities is critical in complementing the role of Dublin, whilst providing effective regional development and a counter pole to Dublin’s growth. The cities of Limerick, Waterford and Cork in the Southern Region will be instrumental in this new vision as each are major centres in their own right. A key issue for regional growth in the South East will be the ability of these City Regions to connect with each other in support of the economic growth of the wider Southern Region, and with the major international access ports and airports.

Cork, Limerick and Waterford cities are currently connected to each other by the national road network (namely the N24, N25 and the N20). This current roads transport network is not fit for purpose. Despite its importance to the region the N24 suffers from slow journey times, is sub-standard in its design and alignment and is congested where it is routed through a number of towns and villages, including Clonmel, Carrick on Suir and Tipperary Town.



A motorway on this route would reduce the urgency for the construction of new direct motorways between Limerick and Cork and Waterford and Cork, saving significant amounts of public monies, maximising existing public infrastructure and creating key connectivity across the Southern Region and between its City regions. The viability of the ports in the South East (Rosslare, Belview/Waterford), the Mid West (Foynes/Limerick) and the South West (Cork) to act as import and export centres with the EU and the UK are dependent on high quality and direct land routes within the region. The success of the proposed city regions in the South will rest heavily on their ability to connect with each other, with the key centre of Dublin and with the supporting network of towns.

Recommendations:

1. It is recommended that an objective to upgrade the N24 to motorway standard is included in the NPF in support of national parameters for maximising land transport networks and to provide critical connectivity between the Cities in the Southern Region.

3. Development of Regional Greenways and Blueways

The South East region has identified Greenways/Blueways as a significant opportunity for developing a recreational tourism product that has the potential to attract overseas and domestic visitors, generate a return on investment and make a positive contribution to rural development and revitalisation of the towns and villages on the routes of these greenways.

The region has all of the key components required for the development of an economically viable and sustainable recreational infrastructure that will benefit tourism and the towns, villages and rural communities in the region:

- Natural beauty and a variety of environments required for attracting tourism;
- Access to overseas and domestic visitors through links to the greater Dublin areas and to Rosslare Euro Port;
- International and national tourism attractions and sites and links to Ireland's Ancient East that can be serviced;
- The capacity to accommodate and service tourists;
- Strategic positioning as corridor for Euro Velo 1.

The Region has recognised its potential for the development of an integrated network of greenways as an international tourism feature and acting under the auspices of the South East Action Plan for Jobs, a dedicated regional project office to develop an economically viable regional network of key greenway projects has been established.

The region is committed to the development of a network of greenways that will open up the region to recreational tourism. This network will take the form of a primary network of greenways linking Dungarvan in the West to Rosslare in the East with a connection to Carrick on Suir and Clonmel and on to Cahir by Blueways; and running north - south from Dublin through Carlow, Kilkenny, Wexford and onto New Ross and Waterford. These primary greenway routes will open up access to the natural and varied landscapes of the region including coastlines; rivers; countryside, parkland and rural towns and villages and provide a link to numerous national and regional tourism sites and experiences including key sites that are part of Ireland's Ancient East.

South East Map



There is the opportunity for developing further local trails and walks that will link to the primary network routes, bringing users and visitors to other the towns, villages and attractions across the counties. The Greenways will become a catalyst for rural development and regeneration and the region is committed to developing this resource for the economic and social benefit of the State and the people who live in the region.

The draft of Ireland 2040 – Our Plan document does not reflect the enormity of the potential the development of the South East regional Greenway/Blueway strategy has for improving and enhancing the region across a broad range of spectrums including job creation, rural regeneration, increasing foreign and domestic tourists, and improving the health and well-being of residents.

Recommendations:

1. Amend the draft document to reflect the regional strategy that is in place and the potential to network the five counties of the South East by Greenway/Blueway.
2. Ensure funding is available to secure the delivery of these projects for the South East Region.

4. Status of Action Plan for Jobs and Developing Employment Policy for the Regions

There is now a strong foundation of collaboration among the business, industry, local authorities, enterprise agencies and other key stakeholders involved in the region in the APJ, and there is a united desire for a collective effort towards regional development. The local authorities are also financing several regionally focused activities in the region, including: 1. The Project Office of the South East APJ (e.g. hiring and employment of two staff members); 2. The creation of a regional greenway development project office; 3. The development of a regional brand and marketing strategy; and 4. Feasibility and business planning of some of the strategic projects identified by the South East APJ as having the greatest potential for job creation in the region. The regional brand id and tagline 'Closer than you think' will be used by all of the regional stakeholders to promote the region as a first choice location for business, careers, inward investment and visitors.

It is concerning that the draft document 'Ireland 2040 – Our Plan' does not reference the work of the Regional Action Plan for Jobs. Empowering the Regional Action Plans is a critical piece of the jigsaw that can advance regional economic development. Of similar importance is the requirement for policy direction to redress the imbalance in FDI investment in the South East. The South East, at 7%, showed the second lowest growth in FDI employment between 2014 and 2016. The State recorded double that figure with 14% growth over the same period. Other regions fared significantly better, for example, the South West and Mid West recorded growth figures higher than the State's with 19% and 17% respectively. The State's net job creation by IDA clients from 2011 to 2016 was 51,793, while the South East accounted for just 0.88% of this figure. It is accepted that FDI is not a panacea for the economy of the region, however according to the IDA: every 10 FDI jobs support a further 7 jobs in the regional economy. Furthermore, FDI jobs tend to be of higher quality, better paid and provide for much needed graduate employment.

Recommendations:

- 1. Amend the draft document to reflect the importance of the Regional Action Plan for Jobs in creating a strong foundation of collaboration across public and private stakeholders that can now be utilised to drive regional economic growth.**
- 2. Direct national FDI policy to redress the imbalance suffered by the South East.**

5. Support for Strategic Sites

While the IDA plans to develop 2 further Advance Technology Buildings (ATBs) in the region is very much welcome, they will not be adequate to attract and provide for the scale of FDI that the region requires. We have already entered a 2-3 year window of opportunity created by Brexit where office space will be required to take advantage of companies relocating to Ireland. A major blocker identified in securing FDI for the region is the lack of available high quality 'Advanced Office Space' that can be marketed by the IDA as part of their overall package to attract multi-national companies to the region.



The recently announced €270m Saudi Investment for a major urban renewal project in Waterford City is absolutely transformational for Waterford and the entire South East Region. This must be fully supported by government and the necessary state capital investment to enable this must be immediately forthcoming. Each local authority in the region has ambitious and well developed plans to deliver advance office space that will support the IDA strategy for FDI (e.g. Trinity Wharf, Wexford; Creative Quarter, Kilkenny; North Quays, Waterford; Ballingarrane, Clonmel; ATB, Carlow).

Recommendations:

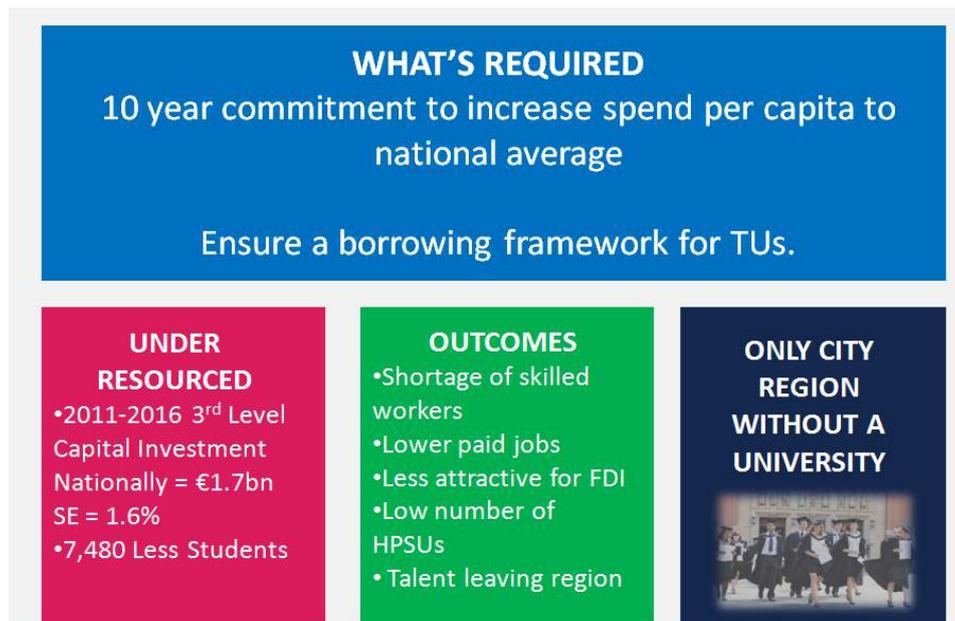
- 1. In Waterford it is imperative that public funds are available in timely fashion for infrastructure works to enable the North Quays development and access to the City Centre.**
- 2. The strategic sites in the local authorities of the South East need to be supported to provide the capacity for FDI and high quality job creation.**
- 3. Expand the remit of the IDA and the Local Authorities to facilitate and finance the development of sites and buildings, supporting key local authority driven developments option for the Irish economy.**
- 4. New initiatives should also be examined at to incentivise the conversion of existing buildings to high quality office standard.**

6. Technological University and Borrowing Framework

67% of students from the region access 3rd level education outside of the South East, with only 40% returning. The SEAPJ contends that this 'brain drain' is a major contributory factor in 2 major challenges faced by the region:

- 1. The continual challenge of a shortage of skilled workers faced by employers in the region, across all of the key sectors including Pharma/Med-Tech, Engineering, and Financial Services; and**
- 2. The very low number of HPSU businesses that have set up in the south east in recent years. While we have some great entrepreneurial case studies (e.g. Eirgen; NearForm; FeedHenry) we simply do not have enough of these. One of the main reasons for this is that a large cohort of our entrepreneurial pool in the region – the people with the 'get up and go' are leaving and not returning.**

The SEAPJ firmly believes that the above challenges can be addressed by delivering upon the commitment for a Technological University for the region. This would undoubtedly increase the human and entrepreneurial capital of the region, while also elevating its educational status making it more attractive for investment.



The establishment of a South East Technological University (TUSE) of excellence, as a strong research and development hub is paramount to accelerate economic growth and development for the region, and needs to be delivered as a matter of urgency. Economic and social indicators portray the South East Region as having considerable potential to develop, and more detailed analysis highlights areas of particular need, especially with regard to the level of educational attainment. The TUSE will provide the competitive advantage and support for technological innovation and creativity for the Region, the State and internationally. There is strong research to show that the development of TUSE on a multi-campus basis has the potential to exert a lasting impact on economic and social development in the region. And if the TUSE is delivered, the South East will be the sole city region in the country with only a TU. Given the restricted ability of a TU to borrow and raise investment finance, the relative capacity to grow will be hampered, so this issue will need to be addressed.

Recommendations:

- 1. Establish as a matter of priority a Technological University for the South East, building on the success of the existing third level institutes.**
- 2. The legal basis for the Technological University for the South East to be on a par with that of other universities e.g. the enabling legislation to provide for a robust borrowing framework.**

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