

From: MR GERARD QUIGLEY [REDACTED]
Sent: 10 February 2017 00:18
To: National Planning Framework
Subject: National Planning Framework submission

My name is Gerard Quigley.

I am not making my submission on behalf of any group or organisation.

I do have a very strong interest in balanced regional economic development and population growth. I have, over the last few years, sent numerous emails to various TD's, Ministers and MEP's, around regional economic development, centred around the M20 Cork to Limerick motorway. As I live in Limerick City, I feel very strongly about the need for the construction of the M20 Cork to Limerick motorway. I have said in these emails how important this project is (in my opinion), to bring about regional economic development. This motorway will link the mid west and south west regions. As the M18/M17 motorway from Gort to Tuam is due for completion by the end of this year, we will have a motorway connecting up the 3 cities of Cork, Limerick and Galway (if the M20 ever gets built). This motorway corridor, I feel, can do the same for the mid-west / South-west regions, as the M1 Dublin - Belfast motorway does for the Mid-East / North-East regions. If you look along this route (outside of Dublin and Belfast), there a number of large towns with populations varying between 30,000 - 50,000, such as Swords, Ballbriggan, Drogheda, Dundalk, Newry & Lisburn. Even towns that are not on this motorway link, such as Ashbourne, Navan & Ardee are close enough to benefit from this connection for the purpose of significant economic and population growth. The fast movement of goods and services between cities entices business' to locate close to this link. Major companies follow (among other things), motorway links between large cities, populations move to where these companies locate, hence the attraction of the mid-east / north-east region. Add to this mix Dublin Airport and a situation exists where it is very difficult to re-direct more and more companies to even consider locating to any other region(s). A good example of this is the Kerry Group (and its not even a foreign company), which chose to locate in Kildare due to the huge number of destinations and hubs that Dublin Airport links to. At 26 million passengers and growing at an incredible rate, there is no international airport on the island that comes anywhere near these passenger numbers.

Going back to the regions, and looking at the "Ireland 2040 Plan", you mention the development of the regional cities of Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford. As I mentioned above, I feel that strong motorway connectivity to link Cork-Limerick-Galway, is a must to encourage investment. However, Waterford has the potential to develop also. Waterford (like Limerick's outer orbital routes and the Shannon Tunnel), has the infrastructure to bring in additional investment as the N25 dual carriageway and cable bridge offer fast connectivity between Cork and Rosslare / South East region). However, there is no high quality dual carriageway connecting Cork and Waterford. Again, if you had this dual carriageway and quicker access from Waterford City to Cork airport, there is an enticement for international / indigenous companies to locate in Waterford. With the construction of the N25 dual carriage way by-passing new Ross and the extension on the M11 motorway bypassing Enniscorthy, Waterford City becomes a more attractive location to locate as journey times to Rosslare harbour are significantly reduced. This too can encourage more families to want to choose to live in Waterford, as, once more, as industries locate in Waterford population growth would follow.

Staying with the South-east, and looking at ways of developing towns and cities in the regions, a town like Clonmel has (in my opinion) big potential for growth. The population of Clonmel (I think, is somewhere just under 18,000). Imagine what it would do for the south-east region if we had a strong population of around 100,000 for Waterford City and Clonmel (just like Drogheda or Dundalk), could reach 40,000. I think one of the reasons why Clonmel hasnt grown too strongly, is problems with flooding in the past. Eventhough strong effective flood control measures have been put in place in Clonmel, a bypass of the town (running north of the N24), thus further away from the river Suir, and forming part of a dual carriageway from Limerick to Waterford, can free up land for development north of the town both for commercial and housing purposes coupled with faster commute times from Limerick to Waterford. A similar bypass of Tipperary town could benefit this town also in the same way.

The encouraging thing about some of these developments, is that many can be in place well before 2040. A positive way of increasing economic development in the regions, is the improved access to our ports, such as the upgrading of the N28 from Cork to Ringiskiddy to a dual carriageway for easier access to the new larger Port of Cork. Also, the proposed new road from Limerick to Foynes and the Port there, are plans that could come to fruition in the not too distant future.

I don't believe that it is possible to help significantly rise the population of most towns in the regions. Your focus on the regional cities (as drivers for growth of the satellite towns), will probably occur, if development away from the mid East can be encouraged on a stronger scale than is happening today.

Eventhough I agree with the need to develop the regional cities to counter the growth in the Dublin/Mid East region, the cities themselves will not help all the regions on their own. One region of the country which (in my opinion) has lagged behind the rest of the country (both economically and in population), is the North West. As evidenced in the 2016 population census (and the alarming fall in population in Donegal), we have a region that is really struggling. Counties Mayo and Sligo had small population declines while Roscommon and Leitrim had marginal increases in population. Overall, at best, the region was stagnant. The North West is too far away from a major centre of population for the region to benefit from. I think the National Framework Plan needs to focus on Sligo Town and its surroundings. Again, if Sligo was a large town / small city with a population of around 40,000 - 50,000, the inticement for companies to set up here could be stronger than what it is now. It wouldnt be strong enough for companies to move from Dublin but would still bring others in. Again, motorway construction, and the completion of the Atlantic corridor from Tuam to Sligo and Sligo to Letterkenny to Derry, you would not only provide quality roadways for shorter journey times in the region, there would also be potential for improved links to a large centre of population, ie Derry. A dual carriageway/motorway connecting Letterkenny to Derry could create a strong population area in North-East Donegal. Towns like Buncrana and Lifford could benefit (population wise), from improved road connectivity with Derry. Naturally, companies would look to Derry first to set up (probably because of its population), but employees may opt to live in commuter towns in East Donegal.

Again, dual carriageway links, from the cities of Limerick and Cork to Tralee / Killarney could help open up parts of these towns for population and economic expansion, in the same way Ennis is benefiting from a Motorway that is linking 2 cities (ie Limerick and Galway).

I know that my submission is focused very strongly on improved roads connectivity, however, I feel that other areas (involving Government Departments), can play a major role. Looking to Limerick, quite a bit of new developments are Education related. UL is expanding its Gluckmann library. In the village of Mungret, which is a couple of miles outside Limerick City, a new secondary school is being constructed. A new public park and playground has recently been open near this new college, and improved road links from the N69 to Mungret college, and a possible new Road from Mungret to the Patrickswell Roundabout near the Raheen industrial Estate roundabout is potentially improving access to the M20. Planning permission for housing has also been submitted for this area. Limerick Institute of Technology has purchased the unfinished portion of Coonagh Shopping Centre on the North side of the City, to develop the site for part of its engineering programmes.

Before I finish up, I would just like to touch on 2 areas. The first is improved infrastructure around Galway and Cork cities and the second relates to an area, which I strongly feel, is a major threat to economic development and rebalancing of population growth to the regions, ie objections to developments (particulairly from An Taisce).

Just briefly touching on Galway and Cork cities development. Galway city and its suburbs are growing at a rate that would be equivilant to Kildare or Meath. However, I think development will be slowed if there isnt a serious look at fast tracking the construction of the orbital road north of Galway city. These plans have been submitted and as far as I'm aware, is awaiting the go ahead.

Regarding Cork city, I believe that the National Planning Framework should look at Cork city and its environs (which currently has a population of between 200,000 and 250,000), and say to yourself, "if Cork was Dublin, what would we do?", in other words, design the infrastructure around Cork City and its environs as though it had a population of around 500,000, or to cope with a future population of this figure. Again, using roads, as far as I'm aware, there are plans to build a dual carriageway/ motorway linking Ballincollig to Blarney (at what will be the M20), and continuing east to link with the M8. Again, freeing up land for future commercial / housing use as well as improving transport around the greater city area.

Finally, An Taisce. I mentioned above how Limerick Institute of Technology has purchased the incomplete shopping centre at Coonagh and submitted plans to redevelop the site with a view to providing new accommodation for part of its engineering department as well as a new sports campus. It successfully got planning permission from Limerick City and County Council (after the council sought additional clarification and adjustment), but An Taisce has just appealed that decision to An Bord Pleananna. I know there is a constitutional right to object but I feel that, any future efforts to re-balance growth in this country, will be seriously eroded when you think of the likes of An Taisce objections being made. Also, there are concerns in Athenry (which too has serious potential for economic and population growth), with regard to the new Apple facility. I even read on social media that someone from Wicklow (who felt that Wicklow was better positioned to position the Apple facility), is one of the objectors. Again, going back to the problem we have at the moment, except this is an effort to take what little there is in the west to go to the East.

We currently have (as part of our planning laws) the option to fast track developments that are in the national interest. If we are to have any hope of re-balancing the country, I think we seriously need to look at our planning laws, and to fine tune them so as to allow developments proceed without needless (time consuming), objection after objection after objection. We also have objections in Limerick submitted to An Bord Pleananna to a 15 story apartment building along Bishops Quay in the city centre, whereby assurances were given by the developer, to residents, to meet their concerns. The City and County Council even sought clarifications for local concerns who still went and appealed the decision to An Bord Pleananna. This, according to the developer, will (at best) put the project back 12 months, and thereby risk losing investors that the developer had signed up. This is an example of a project, which can lead to increased population and economic activity in the city centre, which has been put on hold because of (in my opinion), needless objections. One of the objections was from the Georgian Society of Limerick, eventhough the development is proposed for one of the few areas which is no where near the Georgian part of the city. There is even high rise buildings in the area which would make it a very suitable location overlooking the river Shannon.

If we are to succeed in re-balancing development I firmly believe that we should look to other western European countries, and study their planning laws. From what I understand, not many countries in the western world have the level of red tape and countless objections that we have. If we can do away with needless and time consuming objections (without completely eroding constitutional rights to object), I think we can make a huge step to achieving the goals set out in "Ireland 2040". It would be an absolute travesty, if we succeed in attracting investment in the regions, had public monies to back other aspects of regional developments, to have contracts almost signed, to then have the whole plan put at risk by objections.

Hoping my thoughts can be of assistance to the National Planning Framework.

Sincerely,

Gerard Quigley.