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SUBMISSION TO IRELAND 2040 – OUR PLAN.
BY COUNCILLOR MARY ROCHE
WATERFORD CITY & COUNTY COUNCIL, MARCH 2017

During the next 20 years Ireland needs to plan for and invest in serious growth. The failure of the National Spatial Strategy was not in its aspiration but rather in its implementation. Investment did not follow policy and government departments (and indeed politicians) continued to act in a piecemeal fashion with no joined up thinking as if the plan didn't exist at all. This new plan needs statutory backing in order to ensure that policies coming out of all departments are in line with it. If the opportunity to put in place the correct strategies is lost now Ireland may never achieve its full potential. Equally if the plan once in place can be ignored on the basis of Ministerial geography then we may as well not invest in the effort of even providing a National Planning Framework. Ireland needs to grow up and act in a strategic way, in the national interest in order to extract best value for money on every cent that we invest and to provide the best opportunities for our citizens and for future generations.

Primarily, though not exclusively this submission focuses on Waterford City and the South East Region. In June 2016 Drs Ray Griffin and Cormac O'Keefe from the School of Business in Waterford Institute of Technology produced a South East Economic Monitor. You can access it here https://www.wit.ie/images/uploads/News_PDF/South_East_Economic_Monitor_HIRES.pdf and I include it as a part of this submission. This demonstrated clearly the inequity of investment in the South East Region in comparison with other regions. I would like nothing more than, at the end of this new National Planning Framework phase, to be able to read in a future Economic Monitor that the South East had received its fair share of the national pie. If this is to have happened in 20 years, the South East will have transformed from underperforming to becoming a net contributor to Ireland Inc., delivering in terms of jobs, lifestyle and opportunity for the South East region. We will top lists that we are currently bottom of and we will be acting, along with other cities and regions as a functioning counter-balance to Dublin.

Waterford and the South East is the closest region to the Dublin area and it is located in a naturally rich and fertile area of Ireland. It is also the closest geographically to the UK and Europe. We are the only Irish City which can claim to be fully flood proofed. With a fair share of investment and focus Waterford can and will deliver spectacularly for the future of Ireland.

I believe that the South East Region needs to be recognised as an identifiable structure. As should all regions. A unified, recognised, regional structure should then be embedded into every Government Department. When every department - as they do now - uses a different geographical structure it becomes impossible to compare or even hold to account their delivery or lack of it, in comparison to other regions.

For example Waterford & Wexford are now tied together in the ETB set-up; the HSE has Waterford located with Cork and Kerry; Garda regions are structured differently and the IDA have their own geographical areas. It makes consistency of investment, measurement and indeed target setting - which should be on-going requirements of the new NPF - almost impossible. Perhaps the regions used by the Central Statistics Office is the structure that all departments should adopt.

Waterford City has suffered from a lack of joined up thinking and needs a number of higher order investments to allow it to achieve its full potential as a regional (and even national) economic driver. I am sure that Waterford City and County Councils submission will give the detail of specific priorities and more information in terms of numbers and justifications. From my perspective I have always argued that, given the tools, Waterford can and will deliver. Unfortunately, without an arsenal of investment and support (commensurate with other regional cities, no more and no less) it will continue to be unable to fully deliver on the potential of this region for Ireland. The city needs to be facilitated to take a quantum leap

to double in size with the consequent infrastructural, social and environmental investment that this requires.

I am not blind to the fact that prioritising Waterford City in the South East region presents political challenges. The South East region, unlike any other region, is home to substantial population centres that have seen themselves as alternatives to Waterford City (although the largest of these is less than half its' size). The National Spatial Strategy bottled it when it came to this very issue. Perhaps another reason we have not seen the development of the South East region that we should? We need to make brave decisions in order to reap the rewards and I would entreat the drafters not to repeat this fudge. The entire region needs focus and is submitting a regional document as far as I am aware but if Waterford City is not prioritised we condemn the entire South East to further decades of unjustifiable stagnation where we see each other as the competition as opposed to other regions, Dublin and indeed, other countries. We have seen (indeed we live) the results of failing to do so.

As it has already been through a statutory process I will briefly mention the Boundary Extension. I assume I do not need to rehash the arguments other than to say that its implementation or otherwise will demonstrate the seriousness of the Minister and the Department in tackling the spatial and strategic anomalies that will present. The case was made, and against the tide, the case was won. I and others will watch carefully to see what happens on this front. Needless to say I am of the opinion that it should be implemented as recommended by the Independent Commission.

Infrastructurally the PLUTZ along with the recommended 3rd River Crossing needs to be progressed as does the €50m investment required to support the planned €300m development of the North Quays SDZ. This is a gift to the NPF and single-handedly could facilitate the significant growth of Waterford city as well as deliver on aspirations in relation to concentric and balanced growth on the north side of the river along with the potential to deliver 3,000 permanent jobs and 1-2 million tourists annually.

University development is critical to redressing the educational apartheid that the whole South East region has suffered for decades. WIT is crucial to growth across many headings. I (unlike most other submissions I am sure) am not on board with the Technological University status being mooted. It has already cost the region 5 years at least in delays and is an unnecessary and internationally valueless construct in my opinion. But be that as it may, whatever it is called Waterford and the South East needs EQUALITY of third level provision in terms of autonomy and funding across the Teaching & Learning and Research & Development spectrums. A question which needs to be asked is simply, will TU designation mean equality of third level provision for Waterford with other cities? As currently proposed, it will not. I would urge government to get on with the business of University provision. Although, on a negative note, the specific actions of the Department of Education and the HEA in continually undermining the reputation of WIT and starving it of investment and funding in recent years does not give one hope and is a prime example of where strategic national priorities will be required to stand up to departmental bias.

The same goes for Health funding (see attached Economic Monitor). It is difficult to juxtaposition the aspirations of Ireland 2040 with the actions of the HSE in continually underfunding and indeed divesting the South East of services. UHW needs to be equal in funding and services with acute hospitals in the other regional cities of Cork, Limerick and Galway. The restructuring of the South East Hospital grouping and its hiving off to other groups in Cork, Limerick and Dublin has not bedded down and has not delivered improvements in leadership or patient care. It should be reversed. It has led to fracturing and indeed an arguable dis-improvement in services and in public confidence for people in the South East region. An exercise in workforce planning and an examination of inequitable resource allocation would be no harm in the HSE and I cite the untenable fiasco of 24/7 cardiac care provision – more precisely the lack of it - and the lack of core funding for the hospice services in the South East region (unique, even in Ireland) as examples that should not be tolerated by central government if the regions are to fairly compete, but pertain nonetheless.

The physical linkage between regional cities needs to be improved. The N25 Waterford to Cork route and the N24 Waterford to Limerick route (which was the number one priority of the disbanded South East Regional Assembly) need to be progressed. The midlands should also be opened up to the South East north of Kilkenny or Carlow with further road improvement from there on to the North West. Needless to say Inter City train services where they are provided should be protected and improved. In particular the train service from Waterford to Dublin needs serious improvement. It is hard to justify a 2 hour 20 minute train journey when the motorway access means a travel time of just 1 hour 50 minutes. Here I also think it

is worth mentioning that the Toll on the Waterford City by-pass is counterproductive and it should be removed, ideally through a buy-out or failing that, it should be relocated away from the by-pass. The development of Waterford Regional Airport with a longer runway would undoubtedly unlock the potential of the entire South East region not just with access outwards but indeed with the development of inward tourist routes. Without a runway extension the Airport as it has in recent years suffers from being an afterthought and the first casualty for regional provision. This in turn leads to a self-fulfilling downward spiral as people abandon flying from Waterford due to constant service breaks. While I would have welcomed the inclusion of the Port of Waterford as part of the Boundary Extension report I accept that this will not happen. Nonetheless the Port has major natural advantages that should be exploited to deliver for the region and the country. I am sure the Port will be making their own submission.

A cruise terminal at the new North Quays (for smaller vessels) should also be provided especially with the emphasis in the new North Quays on a substantial tourism offering of International standard. The delivery of a terminal for larger cruise vessels should be considered at Great Island.

Other effective projects such as aggressive investment in disadvantaged communities, greening of our cities, continued investment in cycling and cycle ways and a substantial rural regeneration programme in association with identified community needs should go hand in hand with the focus on enabling cities to be economic drivers for their regions. Ireland is a small country with incredible potential for all our people. Ireland 2040 represents a real opportunity to deliver a more equitable distribution of our resources and a better future for all citizens.

Apropos of nothing, I would also respectfully suggest that consideration should be given to include the development of our inland waterways. This would help Ireland capitalise on the growth of activity tourism and the opening up of greenways and blue ways. It should be possible, for example, to leave Dublin by barge or boat and travel the Grand Canal, down the Barrow, up the Suir and along the St.John's/George Lane-Fox canal to the seaside resort of Tramore in County Waterford. The St. John's/George Lane-Fox canal was never finished and perhaps now is the time to consider completing it. Tramore could be connected with the west, midlands, east and the North of Ireland through our inland waterways. The entire country – especially the almost invisible midlands – should be opened up to this growth area in tourism.

Finally, what Waterford seeks, in a nutshell, is merely fair play. An equitable share of the cake, commensurate with the investments already made in our sister regional cities. We desire deeply to fulfil our role as a regional driver, delivering for all of the South East. We have achieved much although that always seems to be despite, rather than because of central government. All we are asking for is the tools.

SUMMARY

- A unified regional structure to be embedded in all Government Departments
- South East region to be a recognised unit
- Prioritise development & investment in Waterford City as South East regional driver
- Waterford City Boundary extension to be implemented
- Progress and invest in PLUTZ and North Quays SDZ development
- Deliver University to South East region at Waterford Institute of Technology and partners
- Re-organise HSE regional structures and deliver equity of funding and services
- Improve N25 and N24 Inter Regional City routes
- Open routes to midlands and North West
- Improve rail services
- Eliminate or relocate Toll away from Waterford City Bypass
- Lengthen runway at Waterford Regional Airport
- Invest in Port of Waterford
- Provide berthing facilities for Cruise ships
- Aggressive investment in disadvantaged communities
- Greening of urban areas
- Invest in urban Cycling
- Invest in rural regeneration in conjunction with community needs

- Develop our Inland Waterways
- Target setting and measurement should be embedded in Ireland 2040 plan
- Plan needs to have Statutory authority
- Ensure consistency of investment across regions

Perhaps Ireland 2040 will be the means of releasing Waterford and the South East region from decades of underinvestment and consequent underperformance and will empower us to realise the untapped potential of our City and the Region in the service of our Country.

Waterford is ready, willing and able to respond.

Kind regards,
Councillor Mary Roche

**Sent from
Councillor Mary Roche's Laptop
Waterford City & County Council**



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