

**From:** Cllr Sinead Burke (MCC Navan MD) [REDACTED]  
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**Subject:** National Planning Framework submission

**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
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Sinn Fein (Meath CoCo Group) submission to the National Planning Framework (Ireland 2040)

Meath's Spatial Needs.

Meath is a great county with great energetic people. Meath has suffered significantly from the lack of spatial planning and development over the last 20 years. Meath has been assigned the role of a dormitory county of Dublin.

The population of Meath is increasing fast. There are now nearly 200,000 people living in Meath and that's likely to increase to ¼ of a million people in the next 30 years. This has led to significant pressure for housing in the county with 4,000 people on housing waiting lists many for as long as 8 years. Rent is increasing in Meath at a higher rate than any other local authority in the state.

Meath has a disproportionately young population: while the county accounts for 4% of Ireland's population, 4.6% of the children of the south of Ireland lived in Meath in 2011.

Despite these findings, Meath remains one of the most poorly funded counties in terms of youth service provision. For example, as noted previously Meath receives just €2.89 per child from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, as opposed to a national average of €22.31. Meath County Council has the lowest income per capita, the lowest expenditure per capita and the lowest staff numbers per capita.

In most metrics funding in Meath has not kept pace with population growth and as a result in most areas per capita funding in Meath is near or at the bottom of the list.

However Meath has not kept pace in terms of job creation and now more Meath workers leave the county every day to go to work than work in Meath. Meath is the only Local Authority area in the state where this is the case. Meath receives less enterprise investment than Louth, Kildare or Wicklow,

Meath was the ninth most affluent county in the south of Ireland in 2011 however Meath has dropped three places since the 2006 census, where Meath was sixth. The 2011 deprivation index notes that: Meath has massively been affected by the economic downturn after 2007, reflected in the drop in the absolute deprivation score compared with the rest of the state.

Meath has seen one of the strongest declines in economic stability in the country in recent years. In the period between 2006 and 2011 Meath has dropped three places in terms of relative affluence among counties.

This was due in part to the over exposure to the housing boom and the lack of alternative work in the county.

Train

Meath people commute further than any other county. At rush hour the traffic is at a crawl at the Meath Dublin border which is miles out from Blanchardstown. Yet Navan is the largest town in the state without a rail line and there is no plan for one any time before 2045.

The only line that is actually operational in central Meath at present is the Tara Mines to Drogheda line. It is estimated that each train removes the equivalent of 40 HGVs from the road network. The NTA have refused to transform this back into a passenger line despite the fact that it would allow for transport from Meath to Belfast as well as Meath to Dublin.

In rush hour the return commute from Navan to Dublin now often takes 3 hours a day. This is an equivalent to 90 days work unpaid a year. From Oldcastle, Athboy or Trim this often rises to 4 hours a day. This is equivalent to 120 days work a year unpaid.

For Mothers and Fathers this means that 720 hours in the case of Navan and 960 hours in the case of the west of the county away from their families. If a person is living in Kells and working in Tallaght they will pay €2,352 on tolls a year. This does not include the €4,052 it costs to run the average 3 year old car a year.

There is of course a significant familial and economic cost to this transport dysfunction. Time spent in cars is time away from families. Time spent in vans is cost to product and a barrier to investment. But there is also an environmental cost. Ireland likely to be fined up to €610 million by 2020 for missing greenhouse gas targets. Ireland could face fines of up to €5.5 billion by 2030 if it fails to bring forward measures to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions in line with EU targets. It is expected that there will be between 10% and 16% increase in CO2 emissions in the transport sector before 2020. Global temperatures are expected to increase from between 2.6 to 4.8 °C by the end of the century leading to untold environmental damage and deaths.

#### Reroute Dunboyne-Navan rail line

The Dublin-Dunboyne railway should be extended to Navan in such a way as to maximise its use for residents from Dunshaughlin, Ratoath and Ashbourne. The currently proposed route south of Dunshaughlin is wrong.

#### Regional Hospital

The building in a suitable location of the planned Regional Hospital in Meath must be a priority. In the meanwhile, every effort must be made to protect current hospital services in Navan until the new hospital is up and running.

In 2008 the HSE under Professor Drumm commissioned a report to identify the optimum location for a new regional hospital for the mid north east. The report stated that Navan was the most logical location. Due to a lack of funding at the time the hospital was not built. In February 2011 the 6 FG candidates in the county stated that it was government policy to build the new Regional Hospital.

Navan remains the hub of the mid north east and due to the massive population increase logic dictates that Our Lady's Hospital remain a fully function hospital with a 24/7 ED until a the HSE build a new Regional Hospital in the Navan area.

#### Boyne Greenway

Meath is blessed with one of the most significant internationally recognised tourism resources in the country. The 70 miles of the Boyne Valley is littered end to end with internationally recognised historic and heritage sites.

Unfortunately Meath is grossly under exploiting this resource. Most tourism in the county consists of a day tripping bus arriving from a Dublin hotel to visit Trim Castle and Newgrange and then returning to Dublin for dinner and to spend the night.

Walking and cycling tourism are booming internationally despite the down turn. The Camino de Santiago de Compostela in northern Spain is an example of a tourist attraction growing in popularity every year. The Western Greenway has proven to be a shot in arm of the economy of Mayo.

A walkway and cycle way from the source of the Boyne to estuary needs to be developed in the coming years in order to provide a valuable tourism product in the county that will bring thousands of tourists into the county for up to 10 days.

A project such as this would be a boon for Hotels and B&Bs, restaurants, bars, shops and activity centres throughout the county. It would significantly increase employment, business and standards of living in the county.

A lot of good work has already been completed. Much of the Boyne has an accompanying path already in existence and great work is underway in paving from the estuary at Mornington as far west as Brú na Bóinne/ Newgrange.

The River Boyne and the River Blackwater offer the potential for the development of Blueway tourism that would augment the proposed Greenway and link the historic locations together.

A greenway (cycle and pedestrian) to connect the Omeath/Carlingford area to the Meath Coastline and along into Dublin should be considered. This could be a joint Meath/Louth project. The project should also take in the Ramparts area in Navan.

This project should include: Clean up and promotion of these areas and River Boyne as tourism centres, working with all stakeholders e.g Inland Waterways, Meath Tourism, Meath CoCo, landowners, Ireland's Ancient East campaign etc.

## Book of Kells

There are 4 volumes of the internationally renowned Book of Kells. All 4 are located in Trinity College in Dublin. 1 of these volumes on view in Kells, Co Meath would deliver an enormous boost to the county with regards tourist numbers.

## Dublin Metropolitan Area

It is crucial that in relation to development and investment, areas Meath such as Julianstown, Ashbourne, Dunboyne and Rathoath be considered part of the Dublin metropolitan area.

## Infrastructure

All current and Infrastructure projects must be considered and planned on an all island basis

Front-load social and community infrastructure The south-east of county Meath has, like many areas within the commuter belt and greater Dublin region, seen exponential increases in population and housing development in the past number of years. The coordination of this development by the various responsible authorities has been severely lacking. Massive housing estates have been built without adequate social or community infrastructure. Schools, roads, water infrastructure, public transport, public green space (the list goes on) were all secondary considerations. This is something that needs to be addressed in the next national planning document. Central government should introduce rules for regarding the commitment to essential social and community infrastructure alongside new houses.

Developers, for example, should not be allowed sell subsequent phases until previous phases are complete. And community infrastructure should be "front loaded".

We must move away from developer led infrastructural development.

#### Green Spaces and play space

Future planning in community spaces, housing, rural and urban areas must incorporate suitable and adequate green spaces and play spaces as per the government National Child Play Policy.

There has been a plethora of research indicating the importance of public greenspace to health and well being. Provision of high quality public greenspace for communities should be of the highest priority and this reflected with necessary legislation, guidelines, rules.

Good planning and investment will lead to Sustainable rural communities Demographic and population projections highlight the potential of a very serious threat to rural communities right across Ireland. The human cost of this, especially for older people, may be very significant. It is essential that the new NPF has tangible measures to tackle this and that there is a whole-of-government response. A Minister for Rural Affairs might be appropriate.

The lack of high quality and high speed Broad band throughout the county and in particularly Rural Meath is costing jobs. The national roll out of broadband must be expedited immediately.

The lack of high quality and safe roads throughout the county and in particularly in rural Meath is costing jobs and compromising rural communities capacity to sustain and encourage development and growth. The Meath rural road network must be upgraded.

#### Urban regeneration

A strategic plan on the regeneration of derelict sites must be drawn up and implemented. Consideration and purpose to this would revitalise urban centre's, prevent anti-social behaviour and encourage dual purpose buildings, encouraging a return to "over the shop" accommodation.

#### Planning and the Environment

That all large developments be compelled, in planning regs, to install sustainable energy measures (eg solar) in new builds - not just state owned. Also RWH systems in each building by installed at build stage. This to operate in conjunction with mains water system

#### Planning for disabilities

Employment of an disability access officer by Meath County Council. This position is a statutory requirement under the disability Act and it is inexcusable that a person has not yet been employed by the local authority. This appointment would help ensure that all future projects both civic and infrastructural would be disability proofed.

#### Business development on East Coast

Approximately 16,000 sq ft, independent of such centres in Drogheda or Navan with the thousands travelling to Dublin to work. (Emer to add)

#### Meath Hierarchy of Settlements

Ashbourne should be elevated in the hierarchy of settlements to reflect its status as co. Meath's second largest town with a population of in excess of 14,000.

#### Tara Mines

A suitable exit plan for Navan, economically, employment wise and environmentally when Tara Mines will finally cease operations. Including a plan to promote original Mine shaft as heritage attraction.

## Food hub

Establishment and promotion of a national Food hub under the direction of Meath Enterprise Centre and with support from Boyne Valley Food project, IDA and Enterprise Ireland.

## Digital Hub

Establishment and promotion of a digital hub under the direction of Meath Enterprise Centre and with support from relevant 3rd level institutions, IDA and Enterprise Ireland.

## Education

With the increasingly high population in East Meath and its surrounding area and considering the lack of a 3rd level educational facility in Meath, a joint educational facility at this level which could serve both Meath and Louth should be explored. This new institution could be run in collaboration with DKIT or a with a Dublin institute/University.

## Youth

As much care, investment and strategic planning must be invested into dealing with youth isolation and opportunities as there will be channelled into assisting our aging population. This younger demographic, especially in rural areas are at just as much risk as the oldest in our county of being marginalised and isolated, suffering mental health and suffering limited structured and supported social supports.

## Brexit

The effects of Brexit and suitable contingency plans must be considered in all future infrastructural and economic planning for both the county and the island.

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Meath County Council.

E-mail: [info@meathcoco.ie](mailto:info@meathcoco.ie)

Web: [www.meath.ie](http://www.meath.ie)

Tel: 046-9097000

Fax: 046-9097001

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