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**Sent:** 31 March 2017 11:53  
**To:** National Planning Framework  
**Cc:** Liam Henry; Angela OHara  
**Subject:** Submission to the National Planning Framework

**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged

A Chara,

I refer to the ongoing consultation on the National Planning Framework (NPF) and I wish to make the following points.

The consultation document sets the following challenge

*The National Planning Framework will also be a tool to assist the achievement of more effective regional development. In order to ensure that positive outcomes arising from national growth can be shared by people throughout Ireland, the potential of all areas will need to be realised, relative to their capacity for sustainable development.*

and my remarks are framed in this context. Sustainable communities are possible where there are sustainable employment opportunities and where a basic quality of life can be guaranteed. I accept and support the need for designated growth centres-however other communities cannot be abandoned in this context and must be offered a future. This document is an appropriate opportunity to achieve this and to challenge policy maker and public representatives to do this. My proposals are prescriptive but by no means exhaustive.

### **(1) Linking the NPF review and the Review of the Capital Plan**

Alongside the consultation on the NPF the governments 2015 Capital Plan is being reviewed. There must be alignment between the two reviews. The 2015 Capital Plan is a flimsy document that lacks in any development ambition for the country and in particular for the regions of the country. If the NPF process is to have a chance of success, its priorities must align with the Capital Plan review and appropriate and ambitious budgets placed with it.

### **(2) BREXIT proofing our planning future**

The consequences of BREXIT will be immense for the Irish economy. The NPF proposes to bring us to 2040-as of 2017 BREXIT is the biggest threat to that timeline. The NPF review must concentrate on policies that assist business & communities in dealing with the challenge. The NPF recommendations must recognise the challenge faced by the regions in particular. Investment must be prioritised in regional centres-indeed I submit that counties along the border need a specific focus within the plan in the BREXIT context.

The challenge of BREXIT to our agriculture and food industries will be especially felt in the regions. The NPF review should contain a statement of support and outline a series of principals to sustain and grow agriculture as an economic driver.

### **(3) The West & North West**

We exist!

And we don't want to be just about the Wild Atlantic Way and tourism as suggested by the Minister in some of

his public commentary on the NPF review in January 2017-we are proud to offer some of the best tourism experiences in the world but we are also proud to be an International Healthcare Hub, a location for International Data Storage, a location for Off Shore Energy, be home to some of the strongest third level institutions in the country, home to many of the leading Multinational Companies in the world, home to a burgeoning creative sector, home to a unique food industry and so much more!

The consultation document poses the question as to services and resources that are needed in the context of building sustainable communities-in that context the NPF review should prioritise Mayo, Sligo, Galway, Roscommon & Leitrim in the following ways

- (a)Recommending the Upgrade of the N5 Mayo to Longford road
- (b)Recommending the Upgrade of the N4 from Longford to Sligo
- (c)Recommending the completion of the N26 Upgrade Ballina-Swinford Road as a project that highlight connectivity with the N5 and the N17
- (d)Recommending in the context of regional connectivity and of BREXIT an enhanced North South Transport connection from Derry to Cork utilising public transport assets and new road projects
- (e)Designation of Ireland West Airport Knock as a major Economic driver (see later point)
- (f)Completing and then properly time tabling the Western Rail Corridor as a freight and passenger service offering access to ports and also access to employment, education, healthcare and leisure requirements
- (g)Recommending and been ambitious about the need for Broadband Speeds that allows people to work from regional locations, that allows industry in the region to be at the cutting edge of their chosen field, that allows families to live in rural locations whilst having access to essential services which are increasingly online and demand fast download speeds.
- (h)Recommending & supporting a modern and regionally connected public transport system that involves both stage companies and private operators
- (i)Recommending in the context of the Capital Plan review (see above) and in the context of planning based on inter regional connectivity recommending an upgrade (and an alignment of road expenditure to achieve this) of the Non National regional road network that links key population, employment & service, health zones with smaller populated towns and areas eg the R312 connects Castlebar to the energy and tourism hub of Erris-properly upgraded it offers tremendous sustainable potential to both centres.
- (j)Investment in rail freight facilities and lines including an upgrading of the rail line to/from Foynes port and the enhancing of inter regional rail services

#### **(4) Ireland West Airport Knock**

Ireland West Airport Knock is geographically perfectly located to be an economic driver for the country. The NPF review should highlight the advantages it offers including the access it has to the UK (and through these routes to many other international locations) and the attraction this is for business in particular. Over 700,000 passengers used the airport in 2016 and it employs at peak over 150 people.

- (a)Its location on the N17
- (b)The involvement of all local authorities in the West in it ownership structure demonstrates the abilities of local authorities to work together on a shared economic future
- (c)The public land adjacent to the airport is currently the subject of an SDZ application. This has the potential to be a regional economic hub offering opportunities for developing an aviation hub, an energy hub, data management and call centres.
- (d)The further development of services to and from the airport-including a US service-will allow it to be a vehicle for building a sustainable economic future for the region

#### **(5)Public & Community led transport including the Western Rail Corridor**

The NPF review should support the delivery of a properly funded Public and Community led transport model. The Public transport network should be reviewed and assessed to ensure that it continues to be relate to the living patterns of those it seeks to attract. Bus and rail timetables should be aligned to assist people in accessing employment, education and public services (including health) in the designated growth centres.

The rail service should become an inter regional service as well as an access to Dublin service-for instance properly timed commuter trains to and between Galway, Sligo & Mayo along the Western Rail Corridor will give opportunities for workers, students, for those accessing health appointments etc.

Community Led transport models should be encouraged and funded where other models are not commercially feasible in order to encourage sustainable communities.

#### **(6) Supporting Education & Local Enterprise**

One of the biggest draws of population from the regions to Dublin is education. Students leave their communities at 18 and many will not return.

The development and support for NUIG, GMIT, GMIT Castlebar & IT Sligo are crucial in this regard. They should also be supported in providing Incubation & Enterprise Space both on campus and across the region to encourage the development and growth of an indigenous local enterprise base.

Education facilities and resources at primary & secondary level should be protected.

#### **(7) Supports to sustain and grow local communities & towns (including Gaeltacht & Islands)**

Whilst growth centres will be designated as part of the NPF review this is a National Planning Document and it should outline a vision for all communities. That should involve addressing communication deficits (broadband, mobile phone coverage) road infrastructure deficits, public transport deficits, addressing the deficiencies in primary healthcare provision, deficiencies in childcare provision, the provision of sheltered housing for the elderly and for those with additional needs in order to keep them in their home communities, and a statement of support within the document for local development initiatives such as greenways which are economically and environmentally sustainable in turn encouraging tourism and SME growth.

Our towns are in need of an injection of capital and political support to sustain their future. The NPF should contain a statement of support for our town and should issue a resource and a political challenge to sustain their future.

Our Gaeltacht communities and Island Communities are entitled to support in this review-their future is dependent on a co-ordinated government effort to address their challenges.

#### **(8) Agriculture**

The NPF review should contain a statement of support and outline a series of principals to sustain and grown agriculture and farming as the key economic driver of rural communities.

#### **(9) Healthcare**

As a support for sustainable communities and to reduce the travel burden and the associate transport burden on large urban centres there should be a statement of support for the proper resourcing and development of primary health care services which are locally based. The proper use and resourcing of the existing GP, Pharmacy, District Health Services & the Community hospital network could alleviate pressure on the large regional hospitals, reducing unnecessary journeys and allowing the development of a strong speciality led regional health service.

Best Wishes,

Yours Sincerely

Dara

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