

Ireland 2040 – National Planning Framework

Submission by Social Democrats March 2017

The Social Democrats wish to make the following preliminary submission to the first public consultation phase of the National Planning Framework. We intend making a more detailed submission at the next stage of public consultation following a period of consultation with our membership.

The Social Democrats are supportive of setting out a National Planning Framework with a target date of 2040. Indeed, we would favour such a long-term approach to planning to be adopted right across all Government Departments and activities.

We believe there is an onus on us all to learn fully from the recent past in order that mistakes made are not repeated. The 2002 National Spatial Strategy was not successful. It lacked the kind of ambition needed to achieve more sustainable and better balance in development. Part of the failure arose from the lack of focus on implementing the plan but also because it coincided with the market-led Celtic Tiger development era. The National Spatial Strategy lacked the institutional underpinning needed in key areas and also citizen-led initiatives that would have helped to take ownership of the changes outlined in the strategy and inspire others into action.

A key concern of the Social Democrats is for a plan that achieves better regional balance. The plan must recognise Dublin as a key economic driver in our country but also promote a significant counter-weight(s) so that the pressures on our Capital city are relieved and so that economic growth and sustainability is spread right across the State.

Better regional balance will only be achieved by initially focusing on a small number of areas as the primary drivers of this. There should be no more than two or at most three of these.

A critical mass of population is required to drive a city region - building on what is already there in a small number of locations with the potential to grow sufficiently within the time-frame of the framework. Those areas will require a tier one status with a particular focus on transport, industrial and other enterprise-related infrastructure. This does not mean that other parts of the country are ignored. They simply require a different focus.

Dublin Transportation Initiative – A Case Study

It is useful also to look at the Dublin Transportation Initiative as a case study and how to learn lessons from past mistakes. There was a very deliberate focus in this initiative on matching land use and transportation planning. The footprint of the plan extended into the surrounding counties of Kildare, Meath and Wicklow. It was intended to be an integrated plan rather than a piecemeal approach as had been the case previously. The 1994-1999 National Development Plan was informed by it. A short term plan in 1998 was followed by Platform for Change (Strategy 2000-2016)

The initiative was prompted by an increase in congestion in the city centre and the need to address this by both land use and transportation planning. A number of population growth scenarios were tested, including increasing heights and densities of buildings within the city. While aspects of the proposed transportation infrastructure was or is currently being delivered, some major components such as Dart underground/Interconnector and Metro North remain at planning stage. However, the population changes below show that essentially the plan failed. The “do nothing” scenario is what prevailed and the problem with city centre congestion and demands on road infrastructure into and around the city continue. If anything they have become worse. New road investment demands have arisen, insurance costs have increased, there is a continued loss of productivity, and we are creating future liabilities in relation to our climate commitments because of the unsustainable transport patterns.

Below are the percentage change in population in Counties included or partly included in the DTI between 1996 and 2016

Dublin City	Dun Laoghaire	Fingal	South Dublin	Kildare	Meath	Wicklow
13%	13%	43%	22%	39%	44%	28%

The population of the three outer counties of Kildare, Meath and Wicklow now exceed the population of Dublin City and are set to grow further in the coming years and decades.

The green field site on the periphery of the city was preferred which created new demands on public services including car based transport resulting in a less sustainable approach to development. City facilities were also under-used. The growth scenario saw the Dublin-focused East coast become much more dominant.

Linking land use and transportation planning is critically important but not enough on its own. Influencing greater numbers of people to opt for city living requires much more than this. The DTI lacked public buy-in and any democratic legitimacy. It needed to go way beyond land use and transportation planning and towards the creation of living environment that was sufficiently attractive to draw a critical mass if it were to succeed. It

also needed a clear Budget line with a detailed implementation plan, time-bound targets, and absolute clarity as to which agency was responsible for which action. The Ireland 2040 plan should not make the same mistakes.

Setting out a National Planning Framework is welcome. The ingredients for delivering this are critically important and must be underpinned by a set of goals such as building sustainable communities; enhanced citizenship; transparent and flexible democratic institutions and fostering genuine growth.

We look forward to the completion of the first draft of the plan and we will respond in fuller detail at that point.

