

# **Future-proofing Ireland**

## **A response to the National Planning Framework**

Richard Logue

## **Introduction**

The Central Statistics Office predicts that the State's population will increase by 1.7 million over the next 30 years. Unless the State is proactive and plans ahead for this significant increase in population we will be faced with even more unbalanced development than we already have.

John Moran, the former Secretary of the Department of Finance has proposed that a counterweight to Dublin be established in the West in order to deal with the issue of population expansion. This idea should be given very serious consideration. At present nearly all significant development in the State is focussed on the Greater Dublin Area. We have a stark choice facing us for the future of Ireland; we can either allow Dublin to grow out of control or we can re-invent some of the most deprived and remote parts of Ireland for a brighter future in an uncertain world.

Richard Logue

London, March 2017.

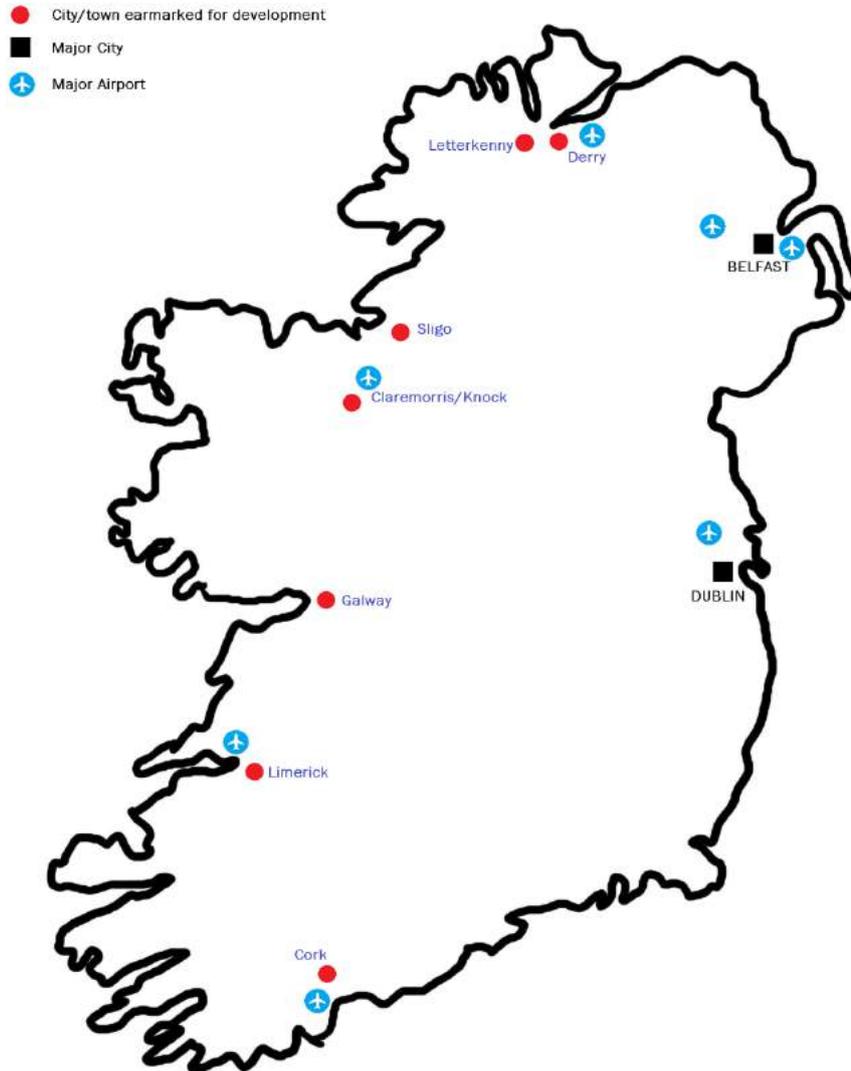
### **Biographical note**

I started working for London Underground in 1989 and since then have worked on a variety of major rail projects including the Jubilee Line extension, the Thameslink Programme and more recently for Network Rail's Anglia route. My projects include the Crossrail project, Step Free Access at Stations, and the new Lea Bridge and Cambridge North stations. I am from Quigley's Point in County Donegal and have lived in the UK since 1985.



## Developing the West to its potential

The proposals in this document are a radical re-think of development in Ireland. Ireland's development should take advantage of our good air connections to Mainland Europe, America and Britain. Our western airports offer a good starting point for the re-booting of the West of Ireland, and with imagination and determination to succeed we can re-invent the West.





## Limerick

Limerick city has had bad press for many years; however Limerick offers immense potential to be the third largest city outside Ireland after Dublin and Belfast. Thanks to its proximity to Shannon Airport, the United States is little more than five or six hours away and there are regular flights to London and elsewhere in Europe. Limerick also has a direct motorway connection to Dublin, a direct rail connection to Galway and Dublin, and indirect rail connections to Waterford, Tralee and Cork. Foynes deep water port is nearby. Foynes port has a disused railway connection to Limerick.

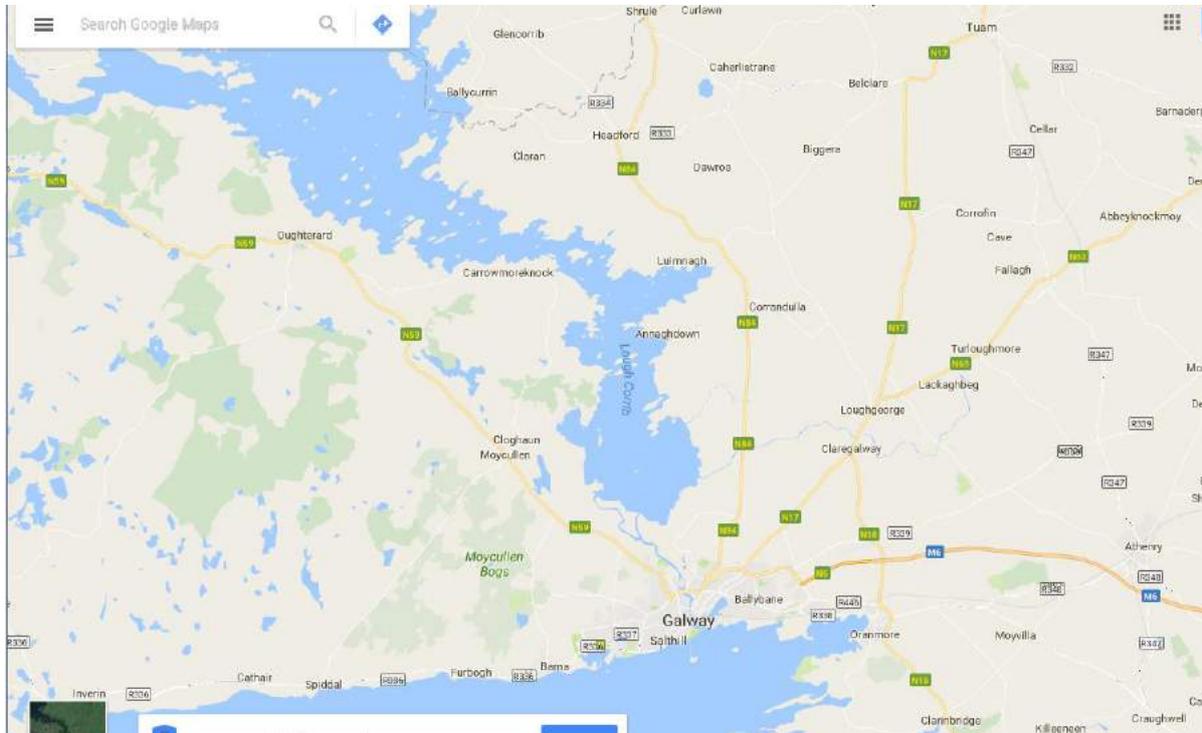


The existing railway line from Limerick to Galway via Ennis bypasses Shannon Airport near Sixmilebridge. The railway line should be diverted to Shannon Airport and continue from there to Ennis. The towns of Shannon, Birdhill and Patrickswell should be developed. The Limerick Junction to Waterford railway line is grotesquely underused due to the deliberate timetabling of the current service. The service could be improved by adding an additional platform at Limerick Junction to accommodate southbound Dublin to Cork trains and remodelling Limerick Junction station to allow additional train paths from Limerick to Waterford direct. Experience elsewhere shows that if a regular and reliable train service is provided at times that people want to travel i.e. Peak commuter times, passengers will use the railway. As mentioned in the Cork section of this paper, a direct train service to Cork from Limerick along a combined rail and motorway link will be of great strategic importance to the future development of the city.

Limerick offers something unique in Ireland; it is literally at the crossroads of Europe and America. Future development must take advantage of this.

## Galway

Galway is Ireland's fastest growing city at present. The Galway region is an attractive and lively place to live in; however the City is suffering from from developer-led planning that leaves much of the City in traffic gridlock from Spiddal out to Ballybrit. Much of the business and industrial development in the City is along the main roads but not near the railway station.

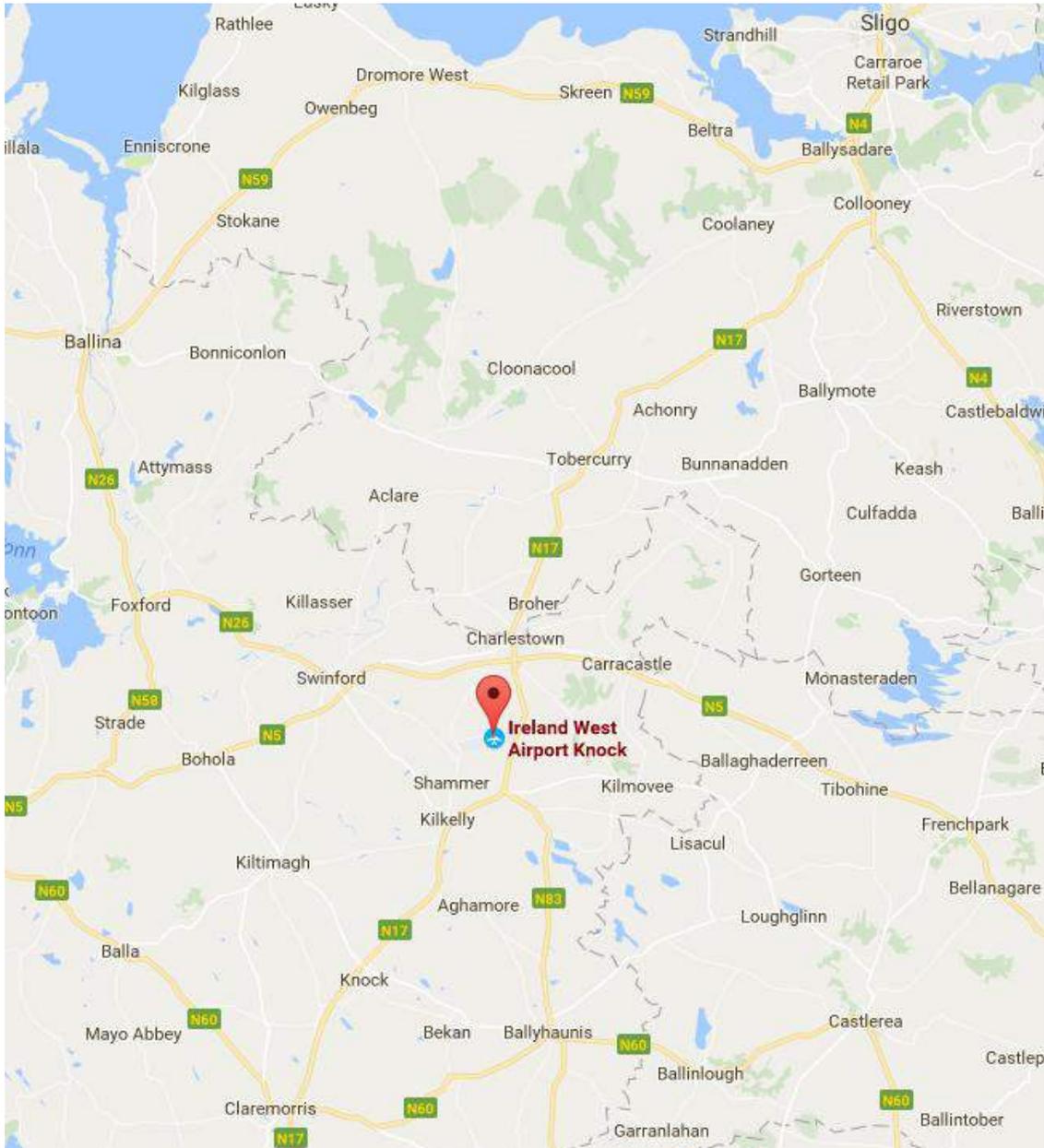


Development needs to be encouraged along the railway lines connecting Galway to Athenry and Tuam. The mothballed railway link between Athenry and Tuam/Claremorris must be brought back into service. This line is of major strategic importance; calls for this line to be ripped up in favour of a cycle path are made largely just to stop the railway from being developed at all costs. The railway line from Galway to Tuam and Claremorris offers the potential of a direct rail service to Ireland West airport at Knock.

A motorway standard bypass is vital for Galway city. An extensive Bus Rapid Transit system for the city connecting the City Centre to key locations such as Spiddal, the University and Ballybrit should be planned.

## Claremorris/Knock/Sligo area

The area around Claremorris, Knock, Tubbercurry and Sligo has one major piece of infrastructure, Ireland West Airport. This airport has the potential to be at the heart of a significant redevelopment in the West of Ireland. At present the N17 road passes the Airport and the disused Claremorris-Sligo railway line passes nearby. The full potential of the Airport could be unlocked by earmarking the area for residential and industrial development.



The proposed Atlantic Road and Rail corridor should run from Sligo to Claremorris via Ireland West Airport. This would provide direct rail access to Ireland West Airport from Derry and the Northwest and from Galway, Limerick and Cork.

## Letterkenny and Derry

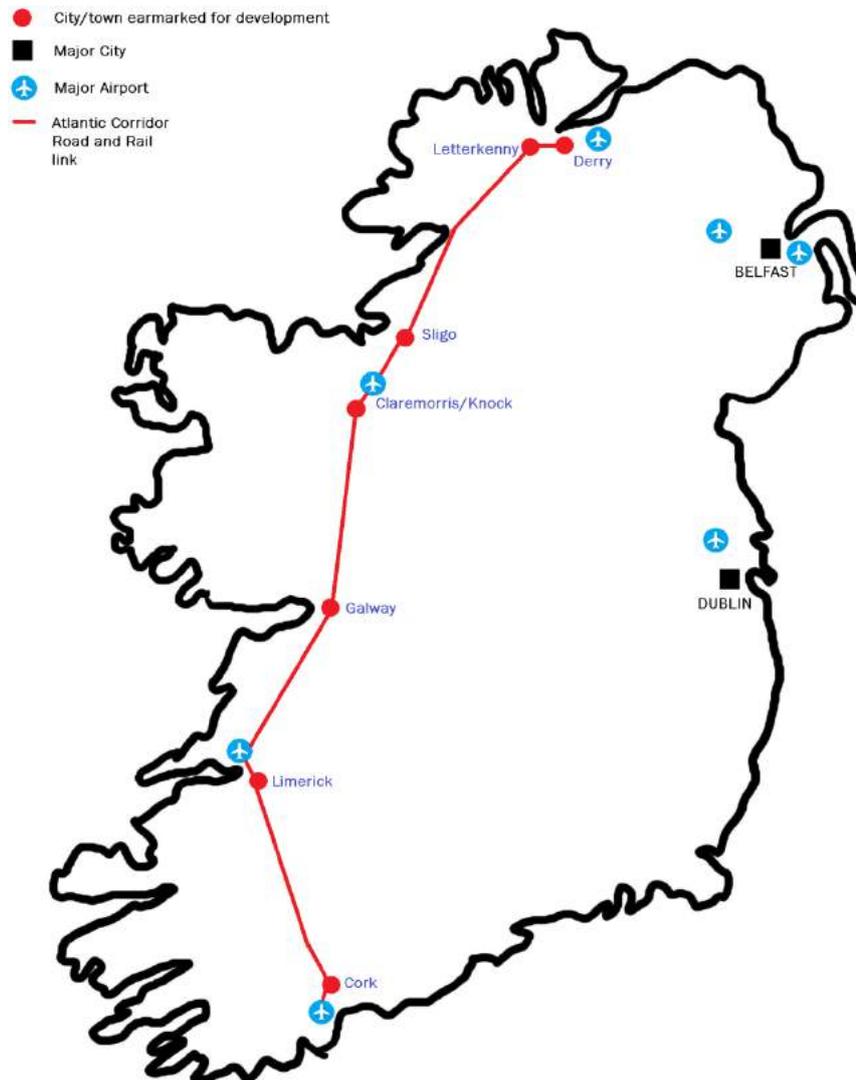
Brexit is a challenge to Ireland but it is also an opportunity. Letterkenny and Derry are already closely connected but transport options to and from these areas are underdeveloped and limited. The City of Derry Airport is a vital piece of infrastructure that not only serves Derry but Donegal also. Funding should be sought from the EU in developing the cross-border connection between Derry and Donegal.



Derry lacks a direct rail service to Dublin. There is potential for a direct rail service via Coleraine, Antrim and Portadown to Dublin. The A5 dualling scheme must be progressed and indeed parallel provision for rail access to Counties Tyrone and Fermanagh should be made, although this is the responsibility of the Stormont administration.

## Linking it all together

A new North-South connection is vital to link the expanded Western cities. This link must be both road and rail; and connect the region's major airports directly. At the same time direct road and rail connections to Dublin and/or Belfast are also vital. While some of the Atlantic corridor is already in place, such as the M17 between Athenry and Tuam and the Limerick-Ennis-Athenry rail line, new road and rail connections will need to be created. Under these circumstances, it makes sense to construct a parallel road and rail connection. Such transport links are already in place on the Continent and save money as only one right of way needs to be purchased.



Rapid connections with Dublin are still vital for the expanded western cities. While Cork, Limerick, Galway, Claremorris and Sligo already do have road and rail connections with Dublin; Letterkenny and Derry do not. Priority should be given to connecting Letterkenny and Derry by a parallel road and rail link as the first stage of constructing the Atlantic Economic Corridor. Derry and Dublin need the expanded A5 road scheme and in the longer term the NI government should also actively pursue the reconstruction of the Portadown-Dungannon- Omagh-Derry and Omagh- Enniskillen railway lines.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

According to the Central Statistics Office, the population of the Irish State is forecast to grow by over 1.7 million over the next 30 years. If we are to follow current thinking we would expect to somehow place this extra population in and around the Greater Dublin Area. This is not in any way sustainable and would lead to the further marginalisation of the towns and cities outside the East of Ireland. At the same time Ireland is significantly behind achieving EU emissions targets

- Recent speeches by John Moran, the former Secretary of the Department of Finance and by Minister Simon Coveney, in which they propose the future development of Limerick and Cork Cities and elsewhere have highlighted that the rail network outside Dublin not only has to be protected and maintained, but also developed in the longer term to accommodate future expansion of the State's population.
- We have also seen in this paper that the State's current blindness to the potential of connecting our Airports to the Heavy Rail network cannot continue. The ongoing development of Dublin Airport has cemented its place as Ireland's most significant airport. A future Ireland with expanded cities in the West and South will need rapid connections to Dublin Airport.
- One-off housing in rural areas should be no longer encouraged. Instead, the western towns and cities in this proposal should be designated as development areas with land re-zoned for residential and industrial/office use. These towns and cities should be planned around "smart" development principles and must offer strong public transport links and very high speed wired broadband access. Town centres must be developed to be attractive places to work, shop and socialise. Car -led developments must be discouraged.
- Key growth towns such as Letterkenny can no longer be without a rail connection. Already road traffic in these towns is heavier than should be and the anomaly that leaves significant parts of the North West of Ireland without any rail connection should be ended. In the first instance the Navan rail line should be progressed without delay and a long term plan to reconnect Letterkenny to the rail network via Derry should be initiated. Indeed the proposed N2/A5 Dual Carriageway connecting Monaghan, Aughnacloy, Omagh and Strabane with Derry should be designed to make future provision for the reinstatement of the rail link between Portadown, Dungannon and Derry that was lost in 1965. Reinstating this link would reconnect Counties Donegal and Tyrone with the All-Ireland rail network. In addition the State should plan ahead for population expansion and earmark former railway connected towns like Youghal for future railway links.

In conclusion, these proposals are radical in that they actively promote the wholesale expansion of the West and a total rethink away from the managed decline approach. A strong and vibrant west of Ireland is in all of our interests and will allow Ireland to take full opportunity of attracting back lost talent from abroad in the years to come.