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Message:

I attach herewith my submission in regard the Ireland 2040 draft plan

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Submission re Ireland 2040 Draft Plan

Overall Assessment

The draft plan is comprehensive in that it sets out a broad framework for planning Ireland's future over the coming years. However, it is extremely vague on how the targets set are to be realised. Most disappointingly, it fails entirely to include any specific objectives aimed at redressing regional imbalance, the continuing decline of peripheral regions and the unrelenting growth of Dublin. The High Level Objectives do not even mention of regional development or regional imbalance.

Failure to address Regional Imbalance

While the draft document outlines at some length the need to develop the regions outside of the Dublin/East/Midlands region, it fails to put forward any policy suggestions which would address this issue. Instead of attempting to redress the imbalance in growth between Dublin and the regions, the draft plan merely sets a target of achieving "a level of growth in the country's Northern and Western and Southern Regions **combined** to match that projected in the East and Midland Region (which includes Dublin)." In other words, the draft accepts that Dublin and the East/Midlands will continue to grow at a rate equivalent to the entire rest for the country! The document target (National Policy Objective 1c) even sets a job creation target for Dublin and the East which is identical to that set for the entire rest of the country. For a plan that was intended to address regional imbalance, this is an extraordinary objective.

The document justifies the failure to tackle regional imbalance by stating that "Seeking to grow the Northern and Western and Southern regions significantly more than the Eastern and Midland region would demand some level of constraint on the growth and development of Dublin" and contending that "This, together with the comparatively much smaller size of regional cities, could result in diminishing the scale of overall national development." It does not substantiate this view and, even if it did, what is wrong with some constraint on the growth and development of Dublin? Furthermore, is the possibility of some diminution of overall national development, in itself, sufficient reason not to take positive action to promote development of the regions even if it must be at the expense of Dublin? Is that not what addressing regional imbalance is all about? In addition, no indication given of how the proposed level of growth in the peripheral regions is to be achieved without policy change given that Dublin and the East/Midlands region is already so far ahead in terms of economic growth and development.

Neglect of Sligo and North West

The draft plan envisages the growth of Waterford, Cork, Limerick and Galway. Incredibly, despite the glaring need to encourage economic development in the North West, the document does not envisage the development of any city north of a line from Dublin to Galway! Specifically, and, without explanation, it does not see the potential for Sligo to develop as a major growth centre for the North

Connaught/Donegal region. This area contains some of the most disadvantaged parts of the country and is badly in need of a major growth centre which would encourage inward investment and job creation. Sligo has a relatively small population base compared to the other cities targeted for growth but it has the ingredients necessary for expansion including two third level educational facilities and proximity to Ireland West Airport. Road access from Dublin, and along the western corridor, is in urgent need of upgrading. Even on this important matter, the draft plan is extremely weak referring only to “Incrementally improving access to the north-west from Dublin in the east and from the other cities to the south”. Road access to both Sligo and North Mayo needs to be improved as a matter of urgency. It is strongly suggested that Sligo should be included as a proposed growth city to help counter balance the growth of Dublin and to promote economic development of the North West.

Vincent Roche

10 November, 2017