

**Introduction:** This discussion document proposes the formalisation of a Galway-Limerick City Region as a major initiative in the development of the West and Mid-West Regions. It invites the discussion and development of this proposal by the main stakeholders in this region and their full participation in the creation of a successful Galway/Limerick City Region.

**Enterprise 2025, the National Enterprise Policy 2015-2025, states that "We will develop competitive, dynamic, sustainable and globally connected City Regions". This document proposes the creation of the Galway /Limerick City Region now as part of that policy.**

The 2015 Eurostat Report "Being Young in Europe To-Day" reminds us again that Ireland has the youngest population in Europe. It has the highest proportion both under 15 and under 30 and the lowest median age. If advantage is to be taken of this unprecedented fact through enabling these young people to exploit their talents in Ireland, then greatly increased employment opportunities through new initiatives, need to be created. This proposal is intended to contribute to such employment creation. Young Irish people, including graduates, who emigrate from the West and Mid-West Regions largely do so to cities.

**Employment data, as shown in Table 1, show the West Region having, by far, the poorest record in recent employment creation with the Mid-West Region as the second lowest. The Table compares employment in Q4 2015 with the regional lowest point. At the average national growth rate since the Q1 2012 national low point the West should have 16,000+ more employed now and the Mid-West 6,000+. The proposal of a formalised Galway-Limerick City Region seeks to increase significantly the employment creation and the investment and talent attraction capacity of the entire West and Mid-West Regions.**

**Table 1: Recent Employment Change by Region: Regional Low Point to Q4 2015**

Midlands	Border	South-E	Dublin	Mid-East	South-W	Mid-West	West
+18.8%	+13.7%	+13.3%	+12.7%	+08.8%	+07.3%	+06.0%	00.9%

QNHS

**Background:** There is an unprecedented move by the global population to cities. Whereas now about 55% of the global population live in cities it is predicted that by 2050 about 70% of the increased population will then be in cities.

The EU has 345 cities with population greater than 100,000, all greater than Galway or Limerick City. In the UK major City Regions are being advocated in the North of England and Wales. A major Bristol-Swansea-Cardiff Alliance is being advocated. All of these, and cities globally, compete for investment and talent, including Irish talent.

The world's economy is being driven by dynamic cities. The 2012 Welsh Report on City Regions states that "City Regions with a population of more than 500,000 are strong drivers of economic growth, those with 1 million often produce the fastest growth". Ernst and Young in their 2015 Winter Report state "By their nature, Cities attract talent and investment, and can reap the rewards of first rate infrastructure and cluster dynamics in a way regional areas cannot".

The EU 2011 Report "Cities of Tomorrow" states "the administrative boundaries of cities no longer reflect the physical, social, economic, cultural or environmental reality of urban development and new forms of flexible governance are needed".

A City Region consists of a City (or Cities) and its (their) actively economically linked hinterland. One definition says that a City Region is "a core City, or a network of Cities, linked by functional economic and social ties". Essentially it includes a City (or Cities) and the hinterland from which, and to which, people can conveniently commute daily for work, trade and services. It is the de facto City. City Regions can be bipolar, with two cities, or multipolar.

The City Regions of Galway and Limerick have always strongly overlapped. With the pending completion of their linking motorway, built to change the economic landscape, they will merge. The proposal to create the Galway-Limerick bipolar City Region is to formalise this and to fully exploit it through collaborative planning, actions and advocacy by the Chambers of Commerce, Industrial Sectors, Universities and Institutes of Technology, Research Centres, Local Authorities, Development Agencies, Cultural Agencies, and the Enterprise Towns and ETBs of the region.

It is obvious, and the literature bears this out, that a bi-polar City Region such as the one proposed here cannot fully succeed unless it is understood and strongly supported and promoted by the its major stakeholders.

It is important to note that a City Region is not just a city – the towns, villages and rural areas of the economic hinterland are fully part of the City region and their development is a primary goal in the formalisation of a City Region. The word "region" in City Region is very important. Enterprise Towns, that is dynamic towns with twenty first century enterprises, can play a vital role in the success of City Regions.

The "City Effect": Economists seeking to identify the causes of the success of dynamic cities cite reasons which include the following: Scale, Information Infrastructure and Exchange, Clusters of Successful Enterprises (including high technology clusters), Skills Availability/Graduate Availability, Entrepreneurial Environment, Distinctiveness and Cultural Life, Education/ Higher Education, Life Style. The primary objective of formalising a Galway-Limerick City Region is to provide an increased level of scale and critical mass and to present the characteristics of dynamic cities to enterprises, investors, entrepreneurs and people of talent.

Ernst and Young's 2015 Winter Report states "As a starting point, there must be recognition that Cities are the primary drivers of overall economic competitiveness and can deliver major spillover benefits to the regions. To rebalance growth, policymakers must avoid the well intentioned actions that could damage national prosperity. Similarly, scatter-gun approaches such as ROI's abandoned decentralisation programme are unsustainable".

Scale and Clusters: The Galway-Limerick City Region has a population well in excess of 500,000. This would make it, after the Dublin City region, the second City Region in the State – a potential powerhouse of Western development. This affords a scale that should enable it to compete for much larger inward investment projects and multi-locational projects. It provides a larger and more efficient labour market. It provides a larger connected market for goods and services. It potentially enables a greater exchange of knowledge, ideas and innovation. The combined high technology

enterprises in the Galway-Limerick City Region provide formidable clusters by international standards in areas such as Medical Devices, Pharma and ICT. A larger connected population facilitates enterprises that may wish to scale up rapidly. The recent Action Plans for Jobs for the West and Mid-West overlap further in their common reference to areas such as tourism, food production, marine resources and renewable energy.

**Transport:** Transport defines a City Region and is key to its economic functioning. The cities of Galway and Limerick are soon to be fully linked by motorway, skirting Ennis, with Shannon Airport located near that motorway. The Galway –Ennis-Limerick rail link has been upgraded. Galway and Limerick are also both linked by motorway to Dublin and Dublin Airport. Improving public transport links and services within the City Region improves its connectivity, labour market and economy. A prime objective of the City Region has to be the significant improvement of public transport and its use. Prof John Fitzgerald writes that "good transport is an area where Irish cities lag well behind their European counterparts".

**Green Cities:** The literature on City Regions describes their potential in the promotion of a low carbon economy. Improving public transport has the additional advantage of enabling major reductions in carbon emissions. The Galway- Limerick City Region should seek to have itself included amongst the Green City Regions, by promoting in a variety of ways the actions and research that will enable the increased use of renewable energy. Renewable Energy is one of the sectors recommended for development in the national Rural Development Report.

**Distinctiveness and Cultural Life:** Both Galway and Limerick have been recently shortlisted for European City of Culture status. In his recent article "Cities also need Culture" Prof. John Fitzgerald states that "In to-day's world, the workforce is highly mobile, well-educated and seeks a cosmopolitan life style". Young people, he says, who have worked abroad in attractive locations seek "a similarly diverse cultural and social life". He attributes Galway's faster growth to Waterford's to the "quality of the lifestyle and varied cultural offerings" which make Galway a "desirable place to live". He speaks of that city's "buzz". Limerick's role in the 2014 City of Culture, he suggests, could be an important investment. A Galway- Limerick City Region could collaborate to the mutual enrichment of cultural life and that of the region through, for example, shared writers and musicians in residence and shared live theatre and musical seasons. In the attraction of talent, the extent the scale and the diversity of the region should enable a variety of interests.

**Social Cohesion:** Cities globally have higher concentrations of graduates and post-graduates. This is true in Ireland and in Limerick and Galway. Cities also can exhibit social polarisation and segregation. Modern economic development has led to increased inequality. Cities do provide a range on lower skilled service occupations. The AEC Charter sets as a principal that "the AEC will promote social cohesion and equality by promoting productive employment opportunities". A distributed region may promote social cohesion. The Galway-Limerick City Region should set as a defining objective the promotion of social cohesion, educational access and equality of opportunity.

**Organisational Arrangements:** If the formalisation of the Galway-Limerick City Region is agreed then formal organisational arrangements between its major stakeholders are needed to give it effect. Resourced arrangements to promote the region and enable the full cross regional collaboration by its major stakeholders are required. The promotion of major new investment into the region and increased entrepreneurial activity within it are prime objectives.

**The four Dublin local authorities have begun publishing a quarterly Dublin Economic Monitor tracing Dublin's progress using 15 key economic indicators. A similar initiative by the local authorities of the Galway-Limerick City Region would inform its participating stakeholders.**