

The need for a co-ordinated approach in order to plan for the future economic and social development of Ireland is obvious. I hope the Ireland 4040 National Planning Framework fulfils that need and delivers a better place to live and work for everybody.

The pre-draft document is welcome and the opportunity for interested parties to give their views is important.

This submission covers a few broad areas and are as much about emphasis as new thinking.

My first point is to agree with the need to create a counter balance to the over-concentration of development and investment in the Eastern Corridor.

Business as normal will give us more of the same – increased investment, population, demands for infrastructure, congestion, long commutes, pressure on families and lifestyles in the East vs.

Patchy development on the Western Seaboard with Galway/Limerick advancing and the remainder of the region losing momentum, stagnating or in full economic retreat.

The Atlantic Corridor, stretching from Cork to Letterkenny/Derry will not be developed within the timeframe of this plan or even the next but the vision should be put in place to, piece by piece create the framework on which to build a sustainable island, as much for the benefit of the East as the West.

The key elements of this framework are:

- Road, Rail, Air and Sea connectivity The development of the Cork/Limerick motorway, the upgrade of the Tuam-Sligo road
- Rail north of Athenry, further improvement to connectivity of Knock and Shannon airports
- Development of the Ports network on the West Coast
- The provision of high speed Broadband is a necessity
- Investment in Education facilities, building on the excellent foundations which exist already at all levels. Support further initiatives like CURAM which creates a platform for Research and Development in the medical device industry.
- Strengthen economic, infrastructure and shared service links between Sligo / Letterkenny and Derry
- Careful consideration should be given to a suite of measures in the tax relief / incentives, PPP's co-funding of projects to encourage developments in towns.
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The Role of Sligo

Sligo is the natural capital of the Northwest and should be given the status of a regional capital in the same way as any of the others.

The Northwest region shouldn't have to "make its case". It has a significant land area, population and potential. It needs a centre of investment and activity to create the "cascade effect" into a hinterland which is suffering population decline and needs revitalisation.

Sligo fulfils the role. It has third level education, a significant industrial base, a regional health centre and its transport links are present if needing upgrading.

The Region needs population growth and a labour pool with new skills. There are significant threats from a decline in the economic impact of agriculture and Brexit.

There is an urgent need to "shore up" economic and social development, to improve accessibility, to invest in education and to boost rural enterprise.

A stronger Sligo Town would be an engine to deliver this role.

**Rural Ireland** faces many challenges and opportunities and I wish to emphasise the importance of the rural areas and their need for support and recognition of their role in the Ireland of 4040.

"Rural" is everything outside the greater Dublin, Cork, Galway, Limerick, Waterford and Sligo centres.

Many areas of Rural Ireland are suffering population decline and lack of both public and private investment. The knock on loss of services like buses, Post Offices, Garda Stations, small shops and in some cases small schools is leading to a circle of decline.

These are the areas which are also most vulnerable to an inevitable decline in agriculture due to a weakening in world prices and farm incomes relative to the income of the general population. Brexit poses further challenges to agriculture which must be met. It is an unhealthy reality that the farming community depend overwhelmingly on direct EU/Irish Government payments to sustain itself.

To depend on what is effectively a subsistence form of agriculture on which to build a World Class food industry is therefore subject to huge risks. To further depend on the same industry to drive rural regeneration is folly. It will play its part but Rural Ireland must be provided with a range of options and opportunities.

In many areas of Ireland, farming is now in the hands of "conscience farmers" who do it not for the returns but because previous generations did it. This feature is fast dying out and there won't be a next generation will to carry on. This will lead to (a) bigger holdings of largely leased land or (b) unused / under used land. Neither result is good for the vibrancy of

Rural Ireland. Bigger farms units will result in empty rural houses, empty classrooms and further rural decline.

To counteract this we must concentrate on the towns and villages which up to 40/50 years ago fulfilled the pre-eminent role in the lives of rural dwellers

1. We must be proud of them, they must be attractive places to live and work in. Public realm must be of a high quality
2. We must use financial instruments to encourage and incentivise development - Commercial Rates, Development Contributions Schemes, Property Tax, etc. all must be used to incentivise business and living in town centres.
3. Rural Transport initiatives can play a significant part in directing business towards local towns and villages instead of the larger centres.
4. Rigid Planning / Zoning Matrixes do a dis-service in restricting business in half-dead rural towns. A more general zoning would serve such small towns better.

I wish the architects of this plan well in their work. The result will hopefully shape a better, more sustainable Ireland.

Peter Feeney