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Introduction

The island of Ireland can expect to hit a population of 9 - 10 million before 2050 according to IBEC, so we need an ambitious plan to ensure this expansion of the population occurs in a balanced way across the country.

The imbalance of regional development throughout Ireland needs to be tackled in the new National Planning Framework in order to counteract the problems arising from the dominance of Dublin in terms of population and investment. Dublin has already become overheated, resulting in a shortage of housing, unaffordable rents and severe traffic congestion, so through this NPF, we must ensure this trend does not continue.

Dublin the capital City currently accounts for too big a portion of Ireland's GDP, and regional towns and cities are not reaching their full potential. Sinn Féin outlined their vision of major cities located across Ireland, each having a substantial contribution to the all-Ireland economy through their submission to the NPF. Developing these major cities across the island will take pressure off Dublin and its commuter belt, and spread out infrastructure, investment and job creation fairly to all regions whilst also maintaining the important economic contribution the capital makes to the national economy.

Through this submission we want to highlight the potential Limerick City has to become a major city in Ireland, outline what infrastructure investment is needed in order to make this happen and show how developing Limerick City will benefit the Mid-West and the country as a whole.

Limerick as a major city in the West

Developing Limerick as a major city would allow more people to live and work in Limerick and its surrounds, it will attract more jobs to the region and provide it with excellent transport links to other cities thus enhancing them as well.

Limerick already benefits from an international airport, a port in the city and a major port in Foynes and has well-developed infrastructure and land with the ability to host immediate expansion. Limerick also has the ability to be able to expand on all sides, unlike many cities constrained by the sea.

Investing in Limerick becoming a major city in the mid-west will contribute to easing the pressure on the capital and it's already stretched infrastructure and housing supply. Developing Limerick with proper modern infrastructure will certainly also lead to an enhancement of towns and villages across the 3 counties of Limerick, Clare and Tipperary such as Shannon, Ennis, Caherconlish, Cappamore, Murroe, Castleconnell, Patrickswell, Nenagh. Also because of its strategic location, developing

Limerick as a major city in the mid-west will allow for easy access to and from Cork and Galway, allowing these cities to grow as a result.

Developing the mid-west region as a tourist destination should also be considered in this NPF. We recognise that Lough Derg and the River Shannon are massively important for the future economic viability of the Mid-West, and also have the potential to become important tourist areas. In addition, with Limerick City is located close to the Atlantic coast, proper planning and investment can allow Limerick, Clare and the mid-west region become a major tourist destination in Ireland.

The Limerick 2030 Plan should be incorporated into this National Planning Framework and supported. This plan aims to develop key strategic sites in Limerick City and County that will act as anchors for enterprise and investment development across Limerick.

This plan includes the development of Opera Site, The Gardens International Office, Troy Studios Film Hub & Cleaves Riverside Campus. These projects should be developed as a priority. This plan aims to create 12,000 jobs in Limerick, with 5,000 in the City Centre, and will provide much needed office space to attract FDI, and particularly in the light of Brexit, will help attract companies looking to relocate to Limerick. This plan should also include the proposed relocation of the Revenue Department from its existing location

Current Infrastructure;

Limerick already benefits from significant world-class existing infrastructure; Shannon Airport, Shannon Foynes Port, The Limerick Tunnel, The University of Limerick and University Hospital Limerick.

Developing these in addition to investing in new infrastructure would make Limerick City a very attractive option for multinational to choose as a location, and encourage our indigenous firms to stay local and not feel the need to move to Dublin to access good infrastructure facilities.

Shannon Airport – located only 20km from Limerick City. Providing connections to international destinations and benefitting from US Pre-Clearance this makes doing business in Limerick as easy as Dublin. A rail line should be developed to get passengers into the City as quickly and conveniently as possible and provide increased access to Shannon Airport from the mid-west.

Third level institutes - Already home to some of the leading third level institutes in Ireland, including the University of Limerick, Mary Immaculate College and Limerick Institute of Technology, these have the potential to become even greater, and help create Limerick as a major city in Ireland.

Expanding these third level institutes would result in more opportunities for students to study in Limerick. This would lead to an increase in students moving to Limerick to study, and more than likely stay to work for the duration of their studies.

The benefits of renting local houses, working in local businesses and spending in the local economy are immediate, and there are potential long-term benefits also. As is the case with many students, a large number will stay on in the city they studied in to begin their careers and families. Having a young educated population in Limerick will also be a great incentive for employers looking to locate here.

Shannon Foynes Port Company - Ireland's second largest port operator, runs major ports on the Shannon Estuary. Investing in these could lead to the continued growth of trade through these ports and aim to attract new opportunities, such as attracting major cruise liners to berth on the Shannon Estuary and develop this area as a become a base for exploring the mid-west.

University Hospital Limerick – benefiting from the medical school in UL, this hospital should receive increased investment to provide excellent facilities for current users and to accommodate an increase in population. Continuing to invest in this hospital will allow it to become one of the leading hospitals in the country.

To complement the existing infrastructure Limerick benefits from, new investment is needed to make Limerick a major city not just in the mid-west but in Ireland. Limerick has the potential to be the fulcrum to build and develop the entire Midwest region. What will benefit a developed and enhanced Limerick will complement the areas around such as north Tipperary and Eastern and Southern Clare. Some of the immediate local projects necessary include;

1. Coonagh - Knockalisheen Road.
2. Start the process of building the M20 Cork to Limerick Motorway.
3. Accelerating the building of the road from Foynes port to Limerick.
4. Complete the motorway from Limerick to Galway as part of that strategy.
5. Rail line from Shannon Airport to Limerick City
6. Rail link for freight to Limerick from Foynes.
7. Light rail system in Limerick with stops at Moryoss, Corbally, Annacotty, Mungret and Raheen.
8. We need an enhancement of our public bus service and the development of rapid transit bus lanes to encourage use of public transport.
9. Integrate Park and Ride facilities at the light railway systems, strategic bus stops and at other suitable sites across the region.
10. Distributor roads around Newcastle West and Abbeyfeale.
11. An essential in attracting jobs to locations such as Limerick, is access to fast and reliable broadband.
12. Facilitate the pedestrianisation of parts of Limerick City

An ambitious plan to build a sufficient number of social and affordable housing is needed as a priority to address the homelessness crisis and provide an adequate housing stock for the increased population.

Ireland is already miles behind in terms of broadband connections and speed and we need to address this shortage and substantially invest in the needs that will be required for businesses in the future. We need to stop lagging behind in this area, and substantially invest to make cities and regional towns outside of the capital attractive to businesses that require advanced internet connections.

Limerick City can expand on all sides unlike Cork and Galway which are both constrained by the sea. The City has some substantial existing infrastructure already as well as great sporting facilities, a historic Georgian centre with a Medieval historic core, and therefore with imagination and Government support it can be achieved.

The Government has an opportunity to now do the right thing and make the investment in Limerick and ensure that the new “national planning framework” delivers for the whole of Ireland and particularly the regions.

The Government needs to get creative and needs to be bold. We need a single spatial plan for the Island of Ireland.

Submission from;

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