

Sinn Féin Submission to National Planning Framework

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Introduction

The island of Ireland can expect to hit a population of 9 million by 2050. We need an ambitious plan to ensure this expansion of the population occurs in a balanced way across the country.

Dublin 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 has a vision of major cities located across Ireland, each having a substantial contribution to the all-Ireland economy. 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.

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.

We want to heavily invest and develop our transport infrastructure to improve connections to all parts of the island, with the additional benefit of creating thousands of construction jobs. We want to expand the motorway network and develop our rail infrastructure to allow citizens commute easier and provide access to all corners of Ireland, to encourage businesses to locate around the country.

Well planned infrastructure is one of the key determinants of social and economic wellbeing. Our historically low levels of investment infrastructure have been allowed to depreciate further over the last 8 years. The State has the second lowest level of infrastructure in the EU. The result is significant infrastructural gaps which has act barriers to balanced regional development, sustainable economic growth and social wellbeing.

Through increased and dispersed investment we want to encourage people to live and work in major cities and towns around Ireland, and eliminate the need to commute to the capital to find good quality infrastructure and high paying rewarding jobs.

We also want to ensure that this planned growth is socially fair and environmentally sustainable. Too often issues of sustainability and socio-economic equality are relegated to afterthoughts in Government policy formation.

The National Planning Framework provides a unique opportunity to set out an all island plan for the social and economic development that includes balanced regional development, adequate investment in social and economic infrastructure in a manor that addresses geographical and social-

class inequalities while ensuring energy and environmental sustainability in line with our EU and international obligations including those on climate change..

Meeting Demand and Disrupting Trends

The key to resolution is significantly increased investment. This investment should be channelled on the basis of two important objectives. Firstly existing infrastructural demands need to be met. Secondly infrastructure also needs to be built to disrupt current demand patterns and provide for future spatially balanced demand that does not exist currently.

One of the most significant threats to the balanced and healthy development of the state is the ongoing migration of investment and population to the 5 east coast counties of the Greater Dublin Area. This has led to bottlenecks, gridlock and enormous infrastructural pressure in this area with significant depopulation and service shut down in the rest of the state.

Within the Greater Dublin Area infrastructure must be provided to meet demand. But a special formula or weighting mechanism must also be provided for the provision of infrastructure in strategic locations in the rest of the state.

Dublin is a great international city. It is in many ways the economic engine of the state. We must ensure its continued development and growth. However this must happen in a sustainable fashion.

In the North of Ireland similar trends have occurred though less pronounced with Belfast gaining to the cost of communities west of the Bann.

International Cities with Critical Mass

To counteract the over-dominance of Dublin and Belfast on the social and economic development of the island Sinn Féin believes that the National Planning Framework should consider the development of two major international cities in the western sector of the island that have the necessary economic and population mass, to be internationally competitive in their right and to energise its own region. One of these urban centres should be located in the south west and the second in the north west.

The selection of this International Objective City is of course politically fraught and as a result we need to ensure 2 actions are carried out. Its selection needs to be on the basis of an independent competition. The spatial criteria for this competition should be decided upon by international planning experts. Also it must not be zero sum. National Objective Cities also need to have significant and necessary supports to grow in their own right.

Such a project would be radical and ambitious however it has been achieved before. Denmark had found itself in similar demographic distribution difficulties and yet it has achieved its aim of developing Aarhus, a new significant urban centre able to act as a balance to Copenhagen

Regional Development

The NPF will be complimented by more details regional and local plans developed by Regional and Local Authorities. However it is important that the NPF sets out clear criteria for these regional and local plans so that no area is left behind.

We firmly believe that the non Dublin Regions should have an economic development agency in the general form of the Western Development Commission. The regions need also be the target for the four development designations detailed below.

Previous Spatial plans failed due to a number of reasons. Firstly resource allocation was not consistent with the objectives of those plans. Resources continued to be allocated to the urgent objective of maintaining the functionality of Dublin.

For this to change two things need to happen. There needs to be a much increased financial commitment to infrastructural development as a whole. Ireland is second from the bottom of the EU list with regards infrastructure spend. We need a radical increase in order to maintain infrastructural stock, competitiveness and develop for the next generation.

Affirmative Action for Regional Development

The ratio of that spend needs to be weighted in favour of the regional spatial objectives. The regions must attract positive discrimination with regards infrastructural investment. In real terms this reduces the allocation weighting for Dublin but this will be offset somewhat by the increased overall financial spend.

There should be 4 tiers of development designation.

- International Objective City
 - This city should become the default city for the new technology, infrastructural innovations and pilots. 50% of non-Dublin infrastructural resources should be focused on this city and the regional road, rail, air, water, waste, energy and communications infrastructure that supports it.
- National Objective City
 - These cities will act as engines of growth and development. There should be no more than three of these cities selected. 20% of non-Dublin Infrastructural resources should be focused on this category.
- Regional Development City/Town
 - These towns will ensure even delivery of each region and that no region should be left behind. There should be no more than 4 of these cities/towns. 15% of resources should be focused on this category. 15% of resources should be focused on this category.
- County Development Town
 - No county should have face the next 20 years without an opportunity to grow. As a result each county that has not met the criteria of the previous 4 categories will have the urban centre best suited to growth designated as an Opportunity Town. 15% of resources should be focused on this category.

All Ireland

The Irish Border runs for a total of 499 kilometres from Lough Foyle in Donegal to Carlingford Lough in county Louth. The creation of the Border had the effect of cutting off hinterlands from their market towns and cities and creating two separate economic jurisdictions where originally there was one.

Business, enterprise, trade, innovation, employment and service delivery seek two things; demand and the path of least resistance. Many aspects of the Border and the disjointed economic regimes on the island act as resistance to the development of these drivers of growth and prosperity. Logic dictates that in order to improve the economic wellbeing of citizens North and South we have a responsibility to eliminate the barriers to growth and prosperity.

Ireland, North and South is a small island. It has a population of 6.4 million, smaller than many international cities. Yet there exists two separate tax regimes, two currencies and legal systems, two public service systems and two separate competing economies. In order to achieve real success, real economies of scale and real implementation of real benefit we need to plan, fund and deliver together.

- There must be All Island Spatial Planning and Development.
- Develop an Integrated All-Island Investment Strategy
- The spatial planning process in both parts of the island would benefit from the harmonisation and integration of key datasets such as population, employment, transportation, housing, retailing and environmental indicators
- Government Departments in both jurisdictions need to be directed at a statutory level to collaborate and proof development on an All-Island basis
- Local Authorities North and South are responsible for achieving national and regional spatial planning objectives through the delivery of local plans, programmes and projects. The Local Authorities who are responsible for the 11 Border counties need also to be directed on a statutory level to collaborate and proof development on an All-Island basis.
- Both Governments should look at funding a Dublin to Derry motorway and, in particular, the upgrade the upgrade of the A5 and N2 as a matter of urgency
- A cost benefit Analysis of the Sligo to Greenore Port, Dundalk route needs to be undertaken including the 16/A4 (Sligo to Ballygawley) road section.
- The Narrow Water Bridge Project needs to proceed
- The Dublin to Belfast rail route needs to be upgraded to an hourly service and the morning service into Belfast does not allow for citizens to attend 9am meetings in Belfast. This route was contrasted to the Edinburgh to Glasgow route which has a 15 minute service
- Create Memorandums of Understanding between third level education institutes on both sides of the Border. Identify what shared services could be provided for more efficiently and ensure training is not needlessly replicated in small geographic areas;
- Educational Training Boards and Local Enterprise Offices in the South to plan, deliver and accept applicants on an All-Island basis
- Establish a single island wide Agency for the economy and a single agency to drive economic policy and strategy.

- Departments in both jurisdictions should work actively to remove barriers to trade and develop shared economic projects and trade missions.
- Develop a Border Economic Development Zone. This would drive forward the socioeconomic revitalisation of the Border region
- Develop an Integrated Labour Market Strategy Focused on Job Creation

Infrastructure

Infrastructural investment needs to be delivered on the basis of implementing the spatial objectives as set out above. Another key objective of Infrastructural investment must be to fulfil our responsibilities with regards protecting the environment. Ireland is far off course with regards meeting these objectives. This adds to climate change and to the level of fines this state will be liable for.

Therefore on deciding the hierarchy of infrastructural priorities Ireland must measure each project with five rules; demand, economic competitiveness, balanced spatial development, environmental responsibilities and social cohesion.

Spending on regional projects must not be seen as losses to Dublin but as part of the package of actions which alleviates Dublin's uncompetitive over concentration. Efforts should be made by the state administration to coax the private sector logistics off the roads and onto the rail network. This can be done by the provision of logistics expertise and by initial supports.

The following is a list of important infrastructure projects. It is not exhaustive. It is not in order of priority.

Housing and Planning

The NPF Issues and Choices paper published by the Department highlights a number of key issues for housing and planning into the future. The residential hollowing out of our city centres and of our rural hinterlands along the western seaboard and western side of the midlands is an issue that must be addressed in the NPF.

While residential patterns and housing develop in intertwined with employment opportunities and access to services the NPF must put in place a strategic framework that supports the return to both urban city living and to provide those who chose to live in rural Ireland with real housing options.

There is also a need for the NPF to think strategically about the future expansion of urban areas, the inconsistent and ad hoc approach to one off rural housing and the need to ensure that the planning and delivery of housing, transport links, public services and economic opportunity are coordinated to the greatest possible extent.

This will require greater requirements for Government agencies with responsibility for planning, housing, employment, transport and public service delivery to better coordinate long term plans. The NPF should consider mechanisms for and obligations on these bodies to operate in this way.

Beyond the spatial aspects of housing and planning the NPF should also seek to place ambitious targets on increasing the energy and water efficiency of all future public, residential and commercial developments to ensure that future physical development is designed and built to meet the highest possible standards in terms of our domestic, EU and international environmental and climate change obligations.

Jobs and Investment

SMEs

Recognising the massive contribution SMEs make to the Irish economy should be central in planning ahead. Currently SMEs employ 70% of those working in the private sector. These businesses are the engine of our economy and it is imperative that they must be protected.

Most recent figures show that 919,985 people are employed by SMEs currently, so we must plan to give indigenous businesses the resources they need to expand, to allow them to provide employment opportunities for the increased population in the years ahead.

We also need to work closely with SMEs in the export market, to assist them in diversifying their overseas markets. Obviously Brexit is the most immediate challenge; however now is the time to start work with SMEs to ensure that they, and Ireland, are not heavily reliant on one single export destination. This action will protect against other future shocks, whether it is another member state leaving the EU or a disruption of trade routes for example.

Foreign Direct Investment

As far back as 1917, when Henry Ford & Son Ltd set up a manufacturing base in Cork, Ireland has welcomed multinationals to Ireland. In more recent decades, this welcome has been extended to emerging markets and across an ever increasing range of sectors.

FDI companies are big employers in the state and big contributors to the tax intake. This is welcome; however it should not be taken for granted. Currently there are over 174,000 people employed in foreign-owned enterprises in Ireland, representing almost one in ten workers in the economy. FDI companies can be volatile, moving on to cheaper and more convenient locations as they arise. Therefore we must not become over-reliant on these companies looking ahead, and work to ensure they stay and invest when they locate here.

Similarly we must diversify the sectors of FDI we currently have. For example, Ireland has a large contingent of pharmaceutical companies, however as we've recently seen with statements from the Trump administration in the US about pharma companies, these sectors could be subject to different rules in the future, that may result in major changes in their worldwide operations.

In line with our ambition of spreading out investment and jobs across Ireland, the IDA should be tasked with locating more multinationals in major cities and towns around Ireland, and Údarás na Gaeltachta need to be given the resources needed to attract and locate companies to Gaeltacht regions across the island. The provision of grade A office space in cities other than Dublin is a problem that must be addressed.

Investing in New Apprenticeship Schemes

We need to address the current shortage of skills in our workforce, and plan ahead for skills that will be needed in the next 20 years. The record numbers attending third level education is very welcome, but this route does not suit everyone. Across Ireland we lack significant alternative opportunities for young people, particularly to enrol in apprenticeship schemes. This lack of alternative training is also leading to a shortage in skills in various sectors of the economy.

Construction related crafts such as carpentry, electrical, plastering and plumbing have dominated apprenticeship schemes over the years, and our country and others have benefited enormously from this focus. We want to continue this focus to ensure we have highly skilled individuals for our expanding construction sector.

However, we also need to expand our attention to growing areas such as green energy, technology, hospitality, childcare and administration. Working closely with indigenous companies in developing these new apprenticeship routes will help grow Irish produce and equip SMEs for the skills they will need in the coming years. Also partnering with multinationals in developing other streams will allow our young people benefit from international practice and expertise.

The amount of apprenticeships programmes needs to be radically increased from the current 28. Moving forward, there needs to be continuous engagement with industry stakeholders to identify emerging areas early, where new skills will be needed, and to plan for these accordingly.

Investing in broadband

An essential in attracting jobs to locations outside Dublin, is access to fast and reliable broadband. 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. Fast and reliable broadband connections do not now even act as a benefit to a town or city, but are a pre-requisite for employers. We need to stop lagging behind in this area, and substantially invest to make areas outside of Dublin attractive to businesses that require advanced internet connections.

Public Sector

We need a public service that is fit for purpose and not under constant pressure and constraint like the current situation. At the moment we are continuously playing catch-up with problems, being understaffed in most sectors, resulting in overcrowding in hospitals, large class sizes in schools and a slow provision of public services.

Education

Childcare workers provide excellent care and education for our children, all while their sector is hampered by low wages and continuous underinvestment by successive governments. We need to support this industry going forward, providing the assistance needed for providers to expand to

meet future demand and provide for additional training and qualifications. The current ECCE scheme is welcome, providing children with two years of free pre-school places, but this must be built upon to recognise the vital work done by this sector.

Targeted investment in the provision of new school buildings and the upgrade of current premises must be planned to accommodate the fast growing population. Class sizes are already too big across the country and the continued use of prefabs and temporary buildings is a chronic waste of money. Real investment is needed to upgrade schools across the country, particularly to accommodate the projected population increase.

Developing third-level institutes in the major cities outside of Dublin is critical in developing these cities as population hubs. Targeting institutions such as University College Cork, University of Limerick, NUI Galway, Dundalk IT, Letterkenny IT and Waterford IT will result in more opportunities for students to study there. This would lead to an increase in students moving 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, with the potential long-term benefit of many staying on in the city they studied in, to begin their careers and families.

Health

As outlined in our Better4Health document, going forward we want to see proper investment in our health system, and a move away from the fire-fighting tactics that have become the norm. We want to improve access to healthcare for all by investing in primary care, resourcing our acute hospital system and ensuring the employment and retention of staff to deliver that care.

In the coming years we must work to retain our nurses, doctors and health professionals that have been leaving Ireland to work abroad, and reduce the total dependence on expensive agency staff. We must invest in our hospitals to make them attractive places to work for these graduates and to allow for the provision of excellent care for patients.

The number of beds must be increased across the board. There were 862 less hospital beds in 2015 than in 2008. There is a severe shortage in 2017, and with the projected population rise, a radical plan must be outlined to address this. This is not just a bed problem; insufficient staff, exit packages, nursing home beds and homecare packages are contributing factors. The provision of these extra beds and resources must be allocated across the country, to allow for the same high level of care elsewhere as in Dublin.

Workers in public sector

Many of those working in the public sector have been under increasing pressure in recent years due to pay cuts, increased taxes, cuts to allowances and cuts to payment of public sector pensions. Totalling over 386,100, these workers provide the everyday services we take for granted, and they need to be treated fairly in providing services that keep the country running.

Transport

Motorways

Ireland's motorway network, both North and South, is in need of major improvement. Currently there is a sparse radial motorway network emerging from Dublin, with poor connectivity between areas outside the capital. We want to see a major investment programme in this network, in line with IBEC's €15 billion motorway investment plan, that would see thousands of jobs created in construction, in addition to linking all parts of the island. This could be phased over the lifetime of the NPF plan. With a vision of a United Ireland in mind, this network should aim to link previously unconnected border regions with major towns and cities, and help to better distribute population and economic activity across the island.

Railways

We need to work to improve the quality and service provided on the current rail network, to ensure it is seen as an attractive, fast and affordable way to commute. For example, to travel between the two largest cities on the island, Dublin and Belfast, it costs more and takes longer to travel by train than it does by car. We also need to expand the network to areas not yet served, to try and reduce the amount of cars on the road. Also there is currently a review underway regarding the use of rail for carrying freight, which must be considered.

Regional Roads

After almost a decade of severe neglect regional and local roads are in poor condition. In 2017, funding for these roads is approximately half of what is required to keep roads in a steady safe condition. We need a stable allocation on an annual basis to ensure roads are kept up to standard. Failure to do so will see future costs of maintenance become unsustainable.

Airports & Ports

Spreading our investment in airports and ports is also a consideration this plan should address. We need to look at substantially increasing numbers arriving into Cork and Shannon airports, before talk of another runway or terminal at Dublin is considered. Similarly, developing existing ports around the coast should be considered to allow for the dispersion of goods and tourists arriving and departing by ship.

Environmental Factors

Transport is one of the biggest contributors to emissions in Ireland. Our over-reliance on cars is a huge issue, resulting in severe traffic congestion and increased levels of pollution. This must be addressed. Many commuters choose not to travel by public transport now because it is expensive, unreliable and slow. We need to overhaul our public transport system, to make it attractive to use and to ensure it is environmentally sustainable, efficient, cost-effective and well-funded.

A study of greenway projects, cycle paths, bus lanes and other sustainable transport options needs to be undertaken nationally. In this National Planning Framework, a comprehensive plan must be outlined to ensure our transport system moves away from its almost entire reliance on fossil fuels, to environmentally friendly options, as currently transport is contributing nearly 20% to the national total of GHG emissions, (EPA 2015). Encouraging the purchase of electric cars, the provision of charging points, and the conversion of our public bus and rail systems to eco-friendly alternatives is important both for our environment and for the country to meet its emissions targets.

Energy & Environmental Sustainability

Sinn Féin welcomes the focus in the Departments Issues and Choices paper on the need for the NPF to place environmental sustainability, energy sustainability and climate change at the centre of the plan.

There is a need to ensure that this element of the NPF is not simply set out as a set of discrete objectives but rather it is also integrated into and help shape all other aspects of the plan.

The NPF must move beyond general policy statements and aspirations to include specific time bound commitments in all sections regarding the way in which the implementation and effect of the plan will promote environmental and energy sustainability and assist in meeting the islands climate change commitments.

Spatial Distribution of Socio-Economic Inequality

Socio-economic inequality is spatially located, whether along the western seaboard, the South East or specific inner city and suburban neighbourhoods.

It is unfortunate that the Departments Issues and Choices paper did not map out the spatial distribution of socio-economic inequality in terms of income, un-employment or other indicators such as health or education attainment.

Sinn Féin believes that such a mapping exercise, that is possible thanks to the CSO small area census data, would provide a valuable tool in the development of the NPF. As with the mapping of population or employment it would demonstrate the spatial imbalance and allow a greater targeting of infrastructure, employment or residential development.

Sinn Féin believes that the NPF must have a dedicated section dealing with the spatial distribution of socio-economic inequality and opportunity and as with energy and environmental sustainability the issues raised in that section should be integrated into all other aspects of the plan to include specific time bound commitments to ensure that the implementation and effect of the plan will promote greater levels of social economic equality.