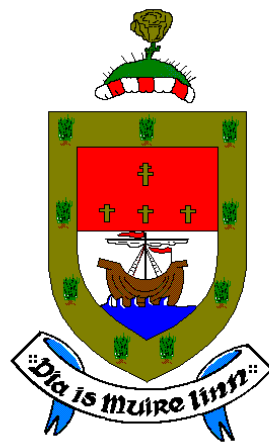

MAYO COUNTY COUNCIL

Submission in Response

To

**Ireland 2040 - Our Plan
National Planning Framework
Issues and Choices**



March 31st 2017

Submission on NPF – Issues and Choices

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Submission on NPF – Issues and Choices

1.0 PREAMBLE

Mayo County Council welcomes the opportunity to respond to the National Planning Framework (NPF) consultation document '*Ireland 2040, Our Plan, Issues and Choices*'.

This submission sets out the views of the council regarding the future role of county Mayo towards achieving shared national development goals in a way that will ensure positive outcomes for Mayo, the Northern and Western Region and the country as a whole both, both in the short term and also the longer timeframe of the NPF.

The views set out in this document are derived, *inter alia*, from internal and external consultation within the authority and the elected members, members of the Oireachtas, the Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA) and with Mayo Industries Group. (See Appendices)

2.0 INTRODUCTION

Fifteen years ago the first national spatial plan for Ireland, the National Spatial Strategy 2002 – 2020 (NSS) was launched. It sought to achieve a better balance of social, economic and physical development through the identification of 'gateways' and 'hubs' to be built up to a critical scale and mass to provide a focus that would influence wider regional development. It is now accepted that the NSS has not succeeded in its aims to achieve balanced regional development, nor has it influenced the spatial pattern of development throughout Ireland in the way anticipated.

It is a sobering fact that many of the points made by this authority in its submission to the formulation of the NSS, particularly in terms of critical enabling infrastructure, remain as valid today as they were fifteen years ago. Regrettably the NSS has not had the desired outcome for Mayo as articulated in that submission or for the country as a whole.

3.0 EFFECTIVE REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT.

If the concept of '*effective regional development*' espoused in '*Ireland 2040, Our Plan, Issues and Choices*' is to be successful, the NPF must address the continued bias of investment in both the Eastern and Southern Regions which has created an imbalance and disparity between Regions, particularly in the Northern and Western Region. The NPF should therefore focus on ensuring that investment is targeted in the Northern and Western Region to develop a Region that can counterbalance the dominance of the Greater Dublin Area and the Southern Regions and thus securing a sustainable balance of economic, social and physical development between the Regions. Investment opportunities should be weighted in favour of the Northern and Western Region to positively contribute to the overall performance of the state.

The NPF should prioritise infrastructural developments relating to road, rail, air, high speed access to the internet; energy, and water services, which should in turn see an increased investment in economic opportunities based on the improved infrastructure capacity of the Region. The NPF should focus on ensuring that the Region can compete on a level playing field with the other regions and therefore contribute to the sustainable development of Ireland as a whole.

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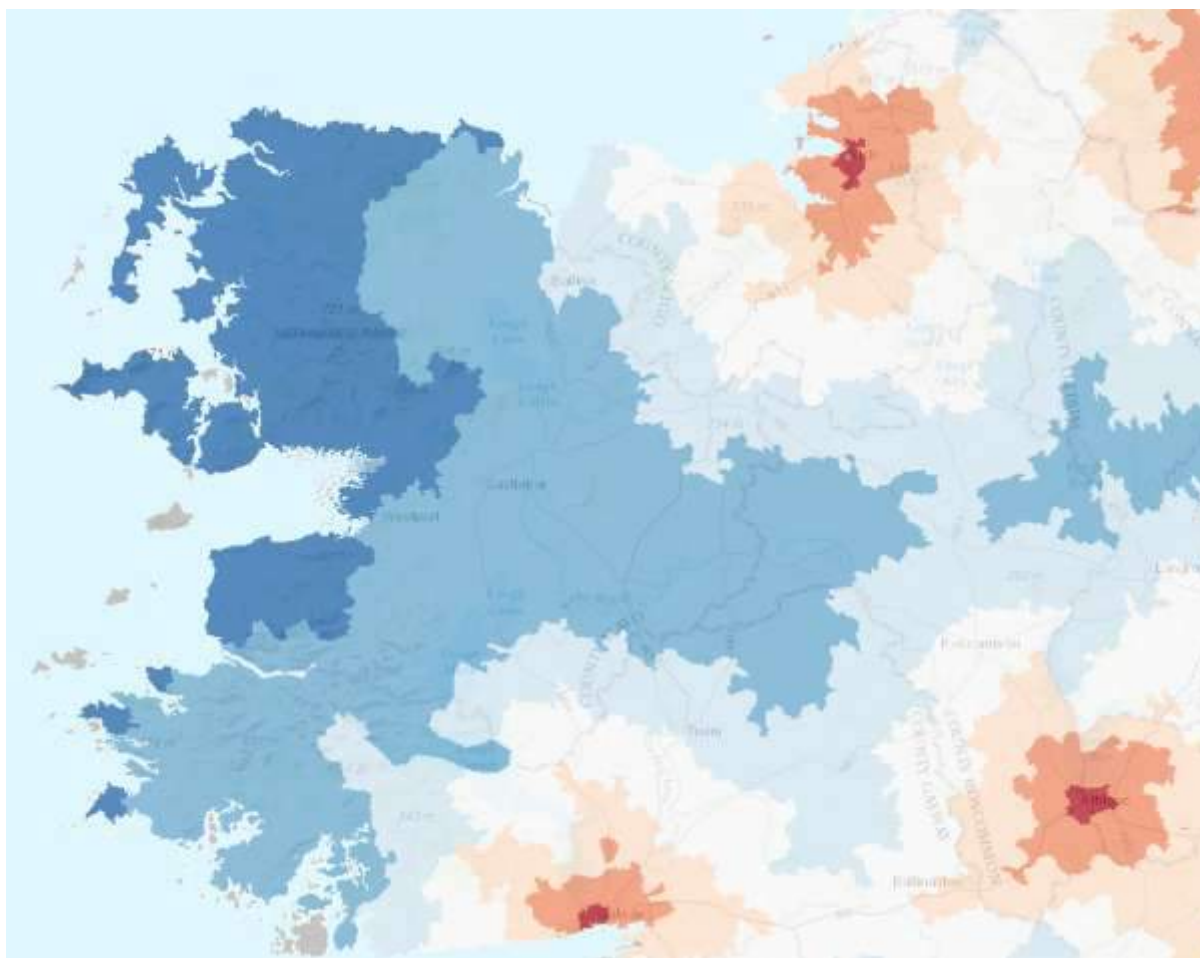
As the consultation paper points out, other countries have bridged developmental gaps as a result of bespoke policies targeted at their “lagging” regions and it is submitted that the NPF incorporate the principle of 'preferential status' or 'priority investment status' to counties such as Mayo and other counties which lag behind in terms of economic development.

This is particularly true in the case of Mayo, where lack of investment over several years in critical infrastructure has prevented it from capitalising on spatial development opportunities that exist in abundance within the county – the development of which could enable Mayo to fulfil its potential in contributing to the overall prosperity of the Northern and Western Region and country as a whole.

4.0 MAYO IN THE CONTEXT OF THE NATIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK.

Mayo County Council is concerned that, if the indications in *“Ireland 2040 Our Plan - Issues and Choices”* are correct, the NPF will focus on the “city regions” of Galway, Limerick, Cork and Waterford as drivers of growth and economic development on a regional scale.

The council’s concern is based on the fact that most of the county and certainly the area of largest population (Castlebar, Ballina and Westport) lie between three large urban catchments, Galway and Sligo and to a lesser extent Athlone. It cannot be assumed that development of key cities or city regions equates with effective regional development – as evidenced by the lack of influence that Galway has had on the socio-economic development of Mayo as envisaged by the NSS.



County Mayo has derived very little benefit by way of economic “trickle down” from the city region of Galway. This is in spite of Galway, as *“Ireland 2040 Our Plan - Issues and Choices”* points out, having population growth 31% higher than the national average in the period 1996-2016 and substantial expansion of employment opportunities and the economy of the Galway “city region”. The same applies to a lesser extent to Sligo.

The failure of Galway and Sligo to impact on Mayo is due, in part, to the accessibility of those cities from the county. The travel time catchments above are not a true reflection of the current situation.

Current (2017) Travel Times

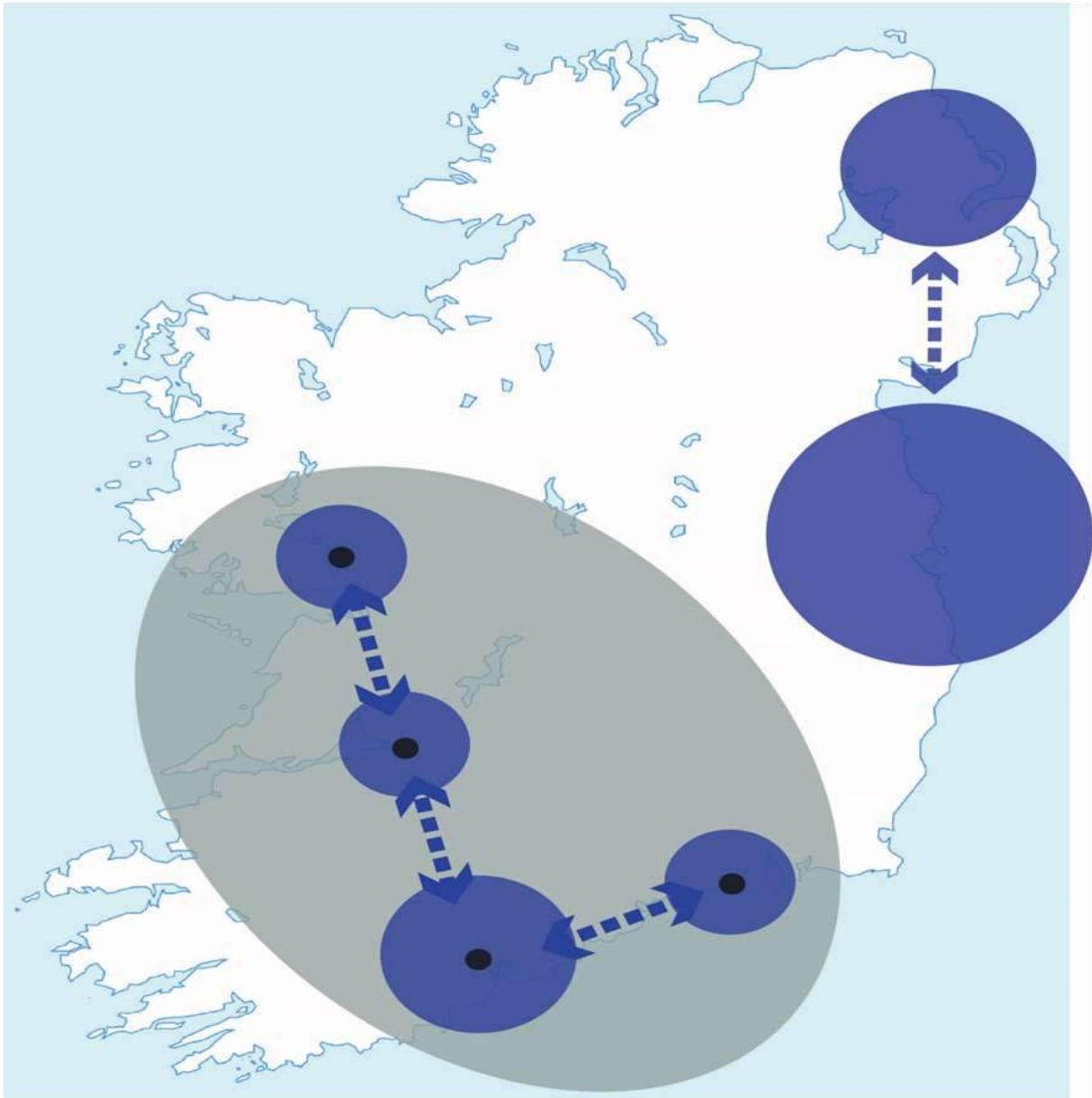
	Galway	Sligo	Athlone
Belmullet	2hr 19mins (via N84)	1hr 45mins (via N59)	2hr 38mins (via N5)
Castlebar	1hr 17mins (via N84)	1hr 8mins (via N5 and N17)	1hr 38mins (via N5 and N61)
Westport	1hr 21mins (via R330, R334 and N84)	1hr 23mins (via N5 and N17)	1hr 55mins (via N5)
Ballina	1hr 49mins (via N84)	52 mins (via N59)	1hr 48mins (via N5 and N61)

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The council notes that “*Ireland 2040 Our Plan - Issues and Choices*” makes little or no mention of Sligo as a city while it plays a significant role in the urban structure of the north-west and has the potential to drive the development of Ballina and north-east Mayo. The council suggests that the key position of Sligo city is addressed in the NFP in terms of its role as a key city in the Region (Sligo City Region).

Mayo County Council is of the view that the only real prospect of the Dublin city region maintaining its competitiveness and attractiveness as an international capital capable of drawing enterprise, investment and influence, is to expand the role of our second tier cities and their regions, including the major towns within their regions, as an alternative development sphere within the country.

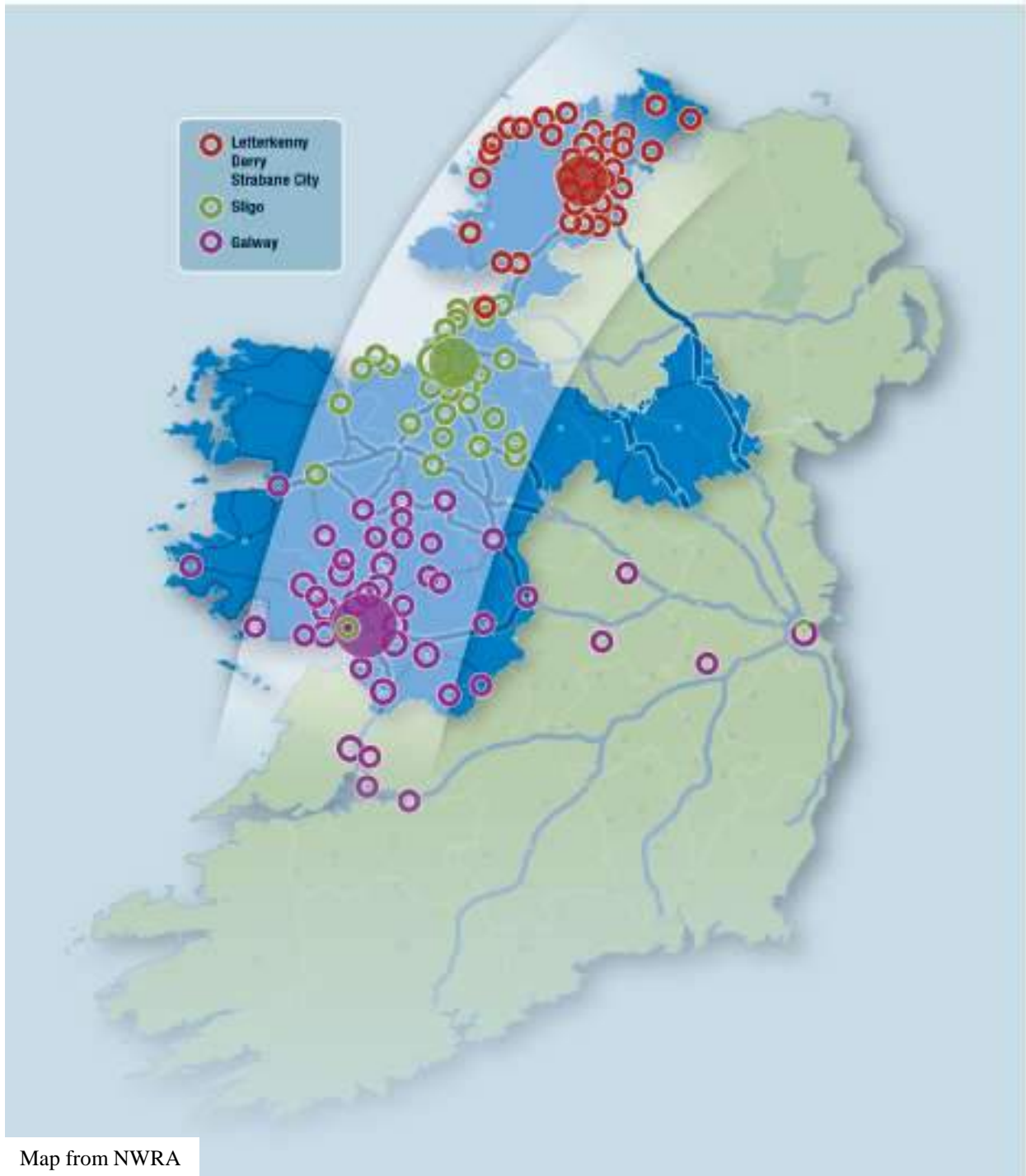
The four recognised second tier cities of Galway, Limerick, Cork and Waterford could form the basis of a strong alternative spatial development model – that of an Atlantic Corridor. However simply to focus on those four urban centres and their regions is to ignore needs of large areas of the country to the west and north-west and indeed the significant sub-regional urban centres of Sligo and Letterkenny.



Linear City.

In this regard, the Northern and Western Regional Assembly is advancing the concept of the Atlantic Corridor from Letterkenny to Waterford as, in effect a “Linear” City (see concept map over).

While the concept of a “Linear City” should be considered, it is the council’s view that it will work best if, outside the regional Cities, focus is maintained on the major towns rather than the large number of settlements of all sizes shown on the map overleaf.



The concept of developing either the Atlantic Corridor or the “linear city” as a counterbalance to the Dublin city region will require cities of scale and density that are connected and with functions that are complementary rather than competitive.

All the major towns and a significant proportion of the rural area of the county could be included within the corridor. However the Atlantic Corridor will only work for Mayo if there is good connectivity to/from the county.

Role of Larger Towns.

Whatever model the NPF puts forward, city regions or “linear city”, it is essential that it establishes a role for the larger towns in the regions. The NPF should facilitate the development of a real urban hierarchy emphasising the development of complementarity of the cities and larger towns within city(ies) region, including Castlebar, Ballina and Westport, the larger towns in Mayo.

In the context of Mayo, given its size and geographical characteristics, and its location in relation to Galway and Sligo, it is considered that the combined strengths of the three towns of Castlebar, Ballina and Westport should be harnessed to drive development from within the county as **highly connected** 'complimentary urban centres' or similar concept rather than relying primarily on the 'trickle down' effect from outside the county.

Role of Smaller Towns and the Rural Area.

From a spatial perspective one of the overarching ‘realities’ of Mayo is the demise of rural towns and village centres. Commercial vacancy, dereliction and a lack of vitality and viability in such towns and villages is prevalent.

The role of retail use and other urban functions, in terms of economic development opportunities and the revitalisation of town and village centres, should be clearly articulated in the NPF; not just for the 2nd tier towns (Castlebar, Ballina and Westport) but also settlements below this level, given the geographical spread of the county and the location of many of its settlements outside the sphere of influence of the Regional Cities of Sligo and Galway.

5.0 MAYO’S POTENTIAL

Sustainable development of an area is dependent on having a multi-faceted economy rather than a dependence on any one economic activity. This allows the economy of an area to absorb shocks and allows the potential of new economic activities to develop.

Enterprise & Employment

In 2013 Mayo County Council’s Enterprise & Investment Unit commissioned a review and analysis of the key Emerging Economic Sectors in the county, and associated investment and employment opportunities in Mayo over the coming years. The resulting report now forms a roadmap for sector based employment opportunity in Mayo and informs policy and practice towards shaping future economic development in the county.

The key emerging sectors and opportunities identified for Mayo are:

- Tourism (Job estimation short-medium term (<3 years) – 1000+ jobs)
- Energy (Job estimation long term (5+ years) – 500+ jobs)
- Food & Agri (Job estimation short-medium term – 200-500+ jobs)
- ICT & Creatives (Job estimation medium-long term (3-5 years) – 200-500+ jobs)
- Supply Chain

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With 5 guiding principles:

- Quality of Life
- Connecting
- Creativity & Innovation
- Investing in our Future
- Active Communities

It is also vital that Mayo retains its existing Foreign Direct Investment and Indigenous industries within the county and provide enabling infrastructure that underpins their retention and growth, and in affect additional nett job creation.

There are 18 well dispersed IDA-supported companies in Mayo employing almost 4,000 people. The county has become synonymous with some internationally established large brands and employers. Key employers include Allergan Pharmaceuticals in Westport who employ over 800 people; Baxter in Castlebar with similar numbers; and Ballina Beverages (Coca Cola) employing over 500. Mayo industries create 10-15% of total Irish Exports across the Globe.

Indigenous industry across the county is also a major employer with a number of manufacturing facilities particularly in the areas of textiles, agriculture and engineering - employing a significant number of people collectively.

In 2016, 348 new businesses were registered in Mayo.

Energy/Marine Potential

Mayo County Council is of the view that Mayo's expansive coastline and central position constitutes a significant and strategic resource, the developmental potential of which should be clearly recognised in the NPF. A Marine Unit will be established within the Council in mid 2017 with a particular emphasis on economic development, communication and technology.

It is submitted that the Marine Sector presents a major economic opportunity for the county and region, which can be harnessed to the region's benefit.

Whilst a range of renewable energy options are to the forefront of Mayo's carbon neutral plans, the authority particularly recognises the central platform that marine energy can play in energy production from an economic perspective, for renewable energy in the region and in Co. Mayo in particular, given its expansive coastline.

Additionally with respect of marine energy potential, a marine testing site has been identified in which will be further developed as a National Wave Energy Test Site. The potential of marine energy, albeit off-shore wind or wave energy, is a huge opportunity for County Mayo and indeed for the entire region, given its spatial maritime context and its position on the Atlantic seaboard. This advantageous position needs to be exploited through the NPF, as a spatial development opportunity, for the county and the entire region.

From a trans-regional spatial perspective, Mayo is strategically positioned approximately mid-way between the furthest point north of the island and the furthest point south of the

island. Additionally, it also has the spatial disposition and advantage of being located at a central coastal location within the Northern and Western Region itself. Therefore, from a centrality and potential connectivity perspective, it is considered that a more strategic role must be identified and articulated for Mayo in the NPF.

Agriculture

Agriculture is a key industry in Mayo and the bedrock of many families and communities. The NPF must ensure that it sets a policy framework for the development of opportunities for sustainable agriculture, for example, organic farming combined with cooperatives and other practical methods, to enable a fully market-driven agricultural sector capable of adapting to modern day needs and circumstances.

There is significant potential in relation to the development of regional food hubs to promote and assist the county and this should be built on in the NPF. Furthermore, it is considered that the agriculture sector has a significant part to play in achieving a carbon neutral economy.

Options with respect of renewable energy production for the agriculture sector should be articulated in the NPF.

Tourism

Section 4.4.10 of the *Issues and Choices* Paper, refers to the importance of the Tourism Sector for economic development. It is considered that Mayo has a hugely unique offering in terms of economic development opportunities across many sectors including but certainly not limited to tourism. However with regard to the important sector of Tourism in Mayo, whilst the Wild Atlantic Way is a significant and undisputed asset to the county, Mayo's tourism offering far exceeds the Wild Atlantic Way alone, as it is a robust, multi-faceted, all-inclusive sector offering wide and varied types of tourist pursuits and destinations. *Destination Mayo – A Strategy for Tourism Development in Mayo 2016-2021* clearly sets out the diverse tourism experience which Mayo has to offer.

Potential for Large Scale Tourism

In addition to the many, varied and well known natural and cultural assets of County Mayo it is considered that, from a large scale 'Religious Tourism' perspective, the role of Knock Shrine should be recognised. Knock Shrine is a leading religious tourism destination in Ireland and in Western Europe. It is the second largest Marian Shrine in the world.

It surpasses all of Fáilte Ireland destination sites at a national level in terms of footfall and attracts in the region of one and a half million tourists visit Knock Shrine each year. Accordingly, it stands to reason that there is significant potential for harnessing this footfall to the County, by way of creative exploration of and interlinking to a range of complimentary tourist activities.

A collaboration of different types of tourism activity would be required to link the 'Religious Tourism' footfall into Knock with associated opportunities for complimentary leisure activities in the County, including, *inter alia*, biodiversity and heritage trails .

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One such option which has been proposed for some time and which is included in the policy document *Destination Mayo – A Strategy for Tourism Development in Mayo 2016-2021*, is the creation of a pilgrimage route from Knock through Ballintubber Abbey to Croagh Patrick. The potential of linking this route with Burriscarra Abbey, the Monasteries of the Moy and other similar sites, such as Oghillees Mass Rock site and loop, should be explored in the context of it becoming a world cultural route. This pilgrimage trail would be on par with the world renowned Camino de Santiago in Northern Spain, which has been designated as the first European cultural route by the Council of Europe and is also a designated UNESCO World Heritage Site. This would anchor Knock within the vast pilgrimage heritage of Co. Mayo and would also meet the growing demand for long distance and spiritual trails, offering a unique pilgrimage, cultural and historic experience in addition to world class land and seascapes.

Cultural Tourism

Islands & Gaeltachtaí Mhaigh Eo

Additionally, the presence of *na Gaeltachta* in Co. Mayo and its inhabited islands present a most significant Unique Selling Point (USP) in the county and region from the perspective of cultural tourism.

Mayo's inhabited islands have a particular and distinct culture as island communities. The Gaeltacht areas, which are located in the more remote parts of the County, face the challenge of retaining their special linguistic and cultural heritage. These communities are both very fragile in terms of their ability to sustain themselves due to weak demographic structures, lack of social and economic infrastructure, peripherality and employment opportunities.

The unique characteristics of the Gaeltacht areas depend on the preservation and promotion of the Irish language as a living daily-use language. Gaeltacht communities must therefore be supported, in order to strengthen and expand the social networks that nourish Irish as the community language.

The issue which the NPF must address is 'How to ensure that the population on the Islands and Gaeltacht areas is stabilised and increased so that they remain viable communities, retaining their uniqueness of culture and language'.

6.0 UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL

Mayo County Council has identified a number of USPs for the county

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• IWAK & SDZ• Wild Atlantic Way• Western Rail Corridor• Atlantic Economic Corridor• Knock Shrine (1.5 million tourists per annum)• Strong Agriculture base/Food hub potential	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Innovator/Start-up Success Record• Authentic Tourist Experience• Outstanding Natural Beauty/Natural Heritage/Biodiversity• Quality of Life/Living Communities• Na Gaeltachta agus Na hOileáin.
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In order to develop the identified emerging economic sectors and retain and assist the growth of existing industry and enterprise in Mayo, it is crucial that we continue to improve the county's connectivity in terms of movement (i.e. transport infrastructure) and technology (i.e. mobile phone service and broadband) through the provision of priority infrastructural projects. These include completion of N4/N5 motorway (Mullingar to Westport); supporting and investing in Ireland West Airport Knock; retention of existing rail services (as a minimum); supporting and investing in the Atlantic Marine Energy Test Site; investment towards strategic tourism projects (e.g. marinas); investment in broadband and telecommunications.

Linked with economic growth is the ability to provide a skilled labour force. Therefore it is considered that the retention of Galway Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT) within the county is essential to the development of a vibrant economy in Mayo and the Region.

Role of GMIT

The role of 3rd level education in attracting investment, particularly those with a strong focus on innovation and research, is well recognised. Therefore, GMIT in Castlebar and its research and development and innovation role should be rigorously supported and promoted as a key element in attracting investors into the County.

Connectivity

Notwithstanding the OECD's view that infrastructure is '*a necessary but not alone a sufficient condition for growth*' and also its contention that '*regional policy has often focused too much on physical infrastructure, particularly transport*¹', it is submitted that the effective functioning of city regions, including major urban centers within them, as a key component of effective regional development, will very much depend on the availability of a high standard of infrastructure.

It is still generally accepted that the level of economic activity of an area and its success in attracting FDI and, in Mayo's case, retaining and expanding existing FDI and indigenous manufacturing, are both related to the quality of its physical infrastructure i.e. roads, rail, airports, ports, telecommunications/broadband, energy etc. This is likely to be the case for some time, notwithstanding that technological changes arising from the 4th Industrial Revolution will render factors such as peripherality less relevant in the future.

Given that the role of city regions, including interactions between settlements, is emerging as a key element of the NPF, Mayo County Council considers that a high standard of infrastructure is an overarching lever for effective regional development.

From a county Mayo perspective, there are significant infrastructural deficiencies which must be fully and comprehensively addressed in the NPF to enable Mayo contribute to and benefit from effective regional development.

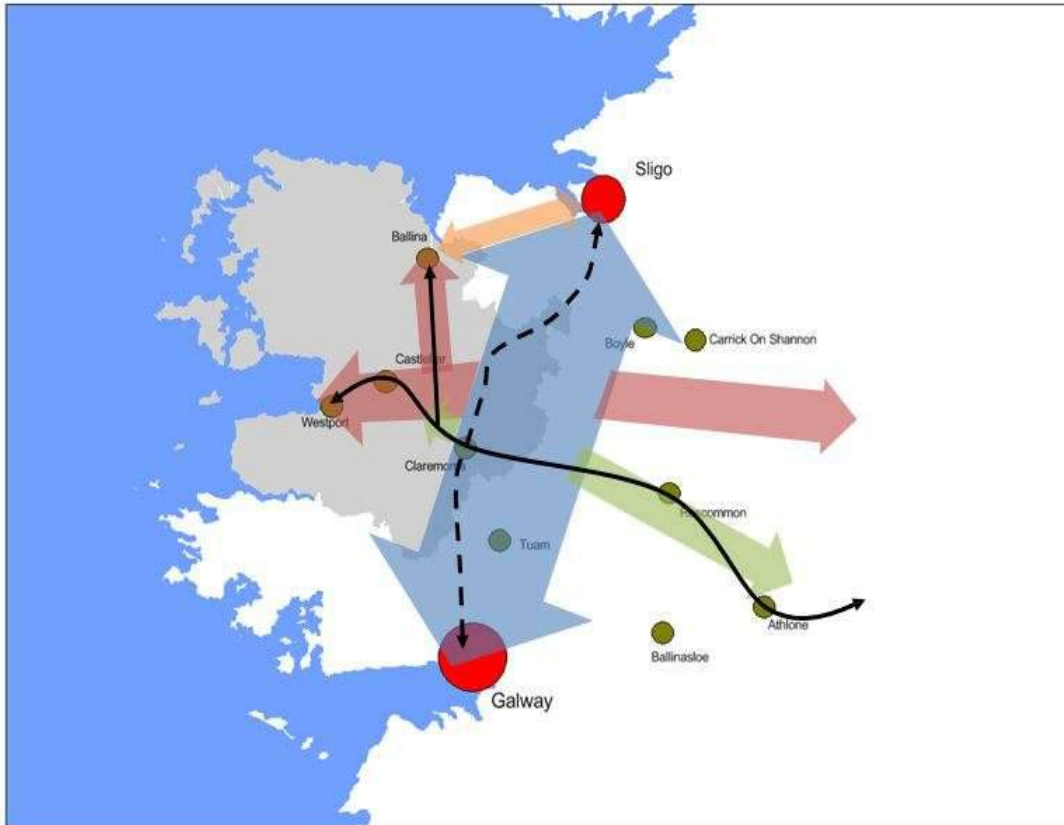
If Mayo is to benefit and indeed contribute to "*effective regional development*", under either of the two scenarios above and, given the fact that most of the county and the three main

¹ *Ireland 2040, Our Plan, Issues and Choices'*

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towns are (a) in the interstice between Galway, Sligo and Athlone or (b) off the central spine of an Atlantic Corridor, then **accessibility**, of Mayo's goods and services, both inwards & outwards to the regional cities and eastwards to Dublin and just as importantly, access within the county, is the critical, single-most factor to allow Mayo to unlock its potential, thrive and play a significant role in the future spatial development of the region and country.

Accordingly, it is imperative that the capacity of Mayo for sustainable development or its spatial development opportunities will not be restricted or limited by inadequate infrastructure both physical and social.



Critical Enabling Infrastructure

Roads

Key access routes to/from Mayo are the N5 and the N17 which link the county E-W and N-S to the country's major cities, ports and harbours. The council stresses that the N5 in particular is a critical piece of road network infrastructure within Mayo and the region as a whole and is fundamentally the most direct route into/out of the county and is essential to the future economic development of County Mayo.

The N17 forms part of the Atlantic Economic Corridor through the county from Sligo through Charlestown, Knock and Claremorris to Galway. This route is of strategic importance in linking the county to Galway, Shannon, Limerick, Cork, Waterford and Rosslare.

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Accordingly, critical, enabling road infrastructure projects in the county which are in need of accelerated advancement in order to achieve the expectations of the Atlantic Economic Corridor/Linear City as an effective counter-balance to Dublin include:

- Upgrading of the N5 from Westport along its entire length beyond the county boundary through Roscommon to Longford to a Ten-T 'High Quality road';
- Upgrading of the N17 (Sligo-Galway) to a Ten-T 'High Quality road' standard/motorway;
- N26/N58 linking Ballina and the north-west of the county to the N5.

The National Secondary Routes (medium distance routes connecting the larger towns and linking to the national routes) play a major role in terms of inter regional linkages. All of these are in need of upgrading, however of particular relevance are the N60, N59 and N84. The N60 from Castlebar to Claremorris forms a critical link to the N17 (Atlantic Economic Corridor) and is also a prime access linking Castlebar with Ballyhaunis and on to Roscommon and Dublin. The N59 (Ballina-Sligo and Ballina to Bangor-Erris, Newport, Westport and on to Clifden) is a major artery through the most scenic areas of the county and is therefore significant in terms of tourism and connectivity from Ballina to the N17.

Rail

Mayo County Council is also mindful of the need to meet and respond to the challenges of climate change including the provisions set out in the *Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015* and various policy documents, including *Smarter Travel: A Sustainable Transport Future – A New Transport Policy for Ireland 2009-2020*, which is a response to the fact that continued growth in demand for road transport is not sustainable.

Rail transport is unquestionably one of the most sustainable options for public transport and freight transport. Accordingly, the NPF must ensure that the potential of this valuable item of transport infrastructure is utilised in the interests of effective regional development and as a sustainable response towards meeting national and international obligations with regard to climate change issues.

Mayo County Council notes that rail freight from Mayo is one of the most significant freight corridors on the island. Also that renewal plans for a rail freight line into Shannon/Foynes Port are currently being prepared for approval. This opens the possibility of a longer term re-configuration of freight movement from Claremorris to Shannon/Foynes in the event of increased congestion in and around Dublin. Re-opening of the Western Rail Corridor (WRC) would ensure Mayo exports have a fail-safe route to international markets, either eastwards through the ports of Dublin and Waterford or southwards through Foynes and Cork.

Utilisation of the untapped potential of the significant, transport asset in state ownership which runs through the county i.e. WRC should be prioritised in the NPF. Although disused, it constitutes a potentially highly sustainable and strategically important public transport infrastructure asset for County Mayo and other counties through which it runs. Re-opening of the WRC would provide important north-south rail connectivity along the west, linking the main cities and towns within or in close proximity to the AEC, thereby strengthening the

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functionality of the AEC/Linear City concept as an effective counter-balance to the Dublin region.

Provision of a commuter service between Ballina, Castlebar, Westport and Claremorris on the existing line and on to Galway and Sligo via the NWR, with a spur link to IWA Knock, would create a high level of sustainable connectivity which will be essential in order to ensure that county Mayo benefits from its location in relation to the Galway and Sligo Regional Cities.

Air

Numerous policy documents, including the NPF's predecessor, the National Spatial Strategy, Regional Planning Guidelines and Mayo County Development Plan recognise IWA Knock as a significant piece of critical infrastructure in the region.

The airport is strategically located on the Atlantic Economic Corridor at the intersection of two national primary roads – N5 and N17 and acts as an International Gateway to the West of Ireland, North-West and Midlands. In this context it is well positioned within the region to serve a catchment area of close to 1 million people, with large urban areas such as Galway, Athlone and Sligo, located within a two hour commuting distance from the airport.

IWA Knock has the potential to create spatial development opportunities which would define a wider strategic role for the airport as a hub of commerce, business and enterprise with air access to Dublin and abroad. As validation of the strategic regional significance of IWA Knock within the north-west region, Mayo County Council, along with six other local authorities in the region, purchased a 17.5% equity stake in IWA Knock in 2015 under the leadership of Mayo County Council.

The creation of a Strategic Development Zone (SDZ) at the airport would support the strategic role of IWA Knock as key enabling infrastructure and driver of economic activity within the Northern and Western region.

Energy, Broadband & Telecommunications

A secure and efficient electricity network is essential to the county, particularly with regard to the utilisation of Mayo's natural resources for renewable energy. However it will not be possible to utilise Mayo's natural resources for renewable energy (or efficiently produce energy from conventional sources) without essential upgrades to the national grid.

In this regard securing the provision of a 400kV line and associated infrastructure in the County will be a priority for Mayo County Council as set out in the Mayo Renewable Energy Strategy.

The development of high speed fibre or wireless technology broadband throughout the entire NWRA region, including Mayo, is now a necessary requirement as acknowledged in the National Broadband Plan. The council reiterates the view of the WDC that rollout under the National Broadband Plan should start in counties with the lowest broadband speeds. Mayo falls into this category.

E-Working

It is considered that the whole concept of e-working must be unequivocally positioned within the national policy framework under the NPF. Reference is drawn to the recently published policy briefing document by the Western Development Commission (WDC) entitled: ‘*e-Working in the Western Region - A Review of the Evidence*’. Under this policy briefing document, the evidence presented denotes that e-working for even as little as one day can have significant benefits including:

- Improved productivity of workers living in rural areas and commuting to jobs in urban areas (estimated at €1,342 per worker per annum).
- Individual households benefiting from journey time and fuel cost savings (estimated at €89.00 per household per annum).
- Reduced transport demand, improving congestion and lowering transport emissions – important benefits for climate change mitigation.
- Better employee work-life balance.

The council wishes to echo the view of the WDC that rollout under the National Broadband Plan should start in counties with the lowest broadband speeds, for example, Mayo, Leitrim and Roscommon in order to increase e-working in peripheral areas.

Quality of Life

With the future impacts of the 4th Industrial Revolution on the horizon, the NPF must fully acknowledge that the economic environment in which the NPF is to be implemented is going to be fundamentally different from that currently in place. It must therefore be prepared so that Ireland in general is positioned to take advantage of the considerable shift in economic perspective and industrial/service sectors over the coming decade and longer.

In this regard, the NPF must recognise that counties such as Mayo now have a considerable locational advantage due to the lack of environmental degradation, congestion and pollution generally.

Mayo – A designated ‘Strategic Energy Zone’

With reference to Section 2.1.6 of ‘Issues and Choices Ireland 2040’ which refers to (a) the need to *adapt to climate change and meet targets for emissions reduction, energy efficiency and renewable, with a view to a low carbon and climate resilient sustainable Ireland by 2050*, and (b) the creation of objectives that harness the planning system in order to maximise its role in relation to climate change and renewable energy obligations, it is considered that in order to capitalise on our natural resources and in creating spatial development opportunities in Co. Mayo, two sectors which have the potential to expand rapidly are those of the Marine and Renewable Energy.

Mayo is particularly well positioned on the edge of the Atlantic Coastline (and having the longest coastline in Ireland), which has optimum conditions for wind and wave energy. In this light Mayo offers enormous potential to fuel not only local or national demand but to

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export energy also. With respect of renewable projects the following innovative projects already under way in Mayo are outlined:

- The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI), Ireland’s national energy authority, is overseeing the Atlantic Marine Energy Test site (AMETS) off the coast of Belmullet, used for testing and demonstrating new wave energy conversion technologies before they are commercialised.
- A new wave energy test site, at Blacksod Bay, is being developed in partnership between Mayo County Council and the Irish Wave Energy Development Association and will be open for testing soon. It will offer realistic testing conditions for wave energy converters product makers.
- Oweninny Windfarm
- Other flagship projects include Mayo Renewable Power, a 50mw Combined Heat & Power (CHP) plant at Killala which will be Ireland’s largest independent biomass power plant.

Accordingly it is submitted that Mayo is already striving towards becoming a world class hub for sustainable energy production and export.

Therefore with regard to the foregoing and with reference to Section 5.3.7 of the Issues and Choices paper, which refers; *At a national level, it may be an option to create Strategic Energy Zones or Corridors, similar to Strategic Development Zones, as areas of national priority for renewable energy investment, as well as to provide a test bed for new technologies and developing solutions for carbon storage and capture*, it is considered that Mayo is already clearly advanced on this route and it is also well resourced both in natural resources and sector specific innovation skills, to be designated as a ‘Strategic Energy Zone’. Therefore the NPF should identify Mayo as a national priority location for renewable energy investment.

Taking all of the above into account a definite and clearly defined role must be ascribed to Mayo within the remit of marine and terrestrial spatial planning.

7.0 Conclusion.

Mayo County Council considers that the prime outcome for the county from the NPF is that it will outline a path by which the full potential of Mayo, in terms of its population, its towns and villages, rural communities, natural resources, cultural and natural heritage and infrastructure can be developed to the fullest extent possible. In order to do so the NPF must create the optimal conditions for delivering economic, social, cultural and physical development throughout the county in a manner that is consistent with the principles of sustainability so that everyone, irrespective of where they live in Mayo have equal opportunities to share in the benefits of such development in a high quality environment.

Appendices

Submission on NPF – Issues and Choices

Appendix 1

Ireland 2040 Our Plan Issues and Choices

Draft Submission

Mayo Industry Group

Submission on NPF – Issues and Choices

Introduction

The Mayo Industry Group, established late in 1980's represents both Foreign Direct Investment and the indigenous SME sectors in County Mayo. Among their members are leading international companies such as Coca Cola, Baxter, Allergan, Lionbridge, Hollister and Shell along with leading Irish export led companies including McHale, Pell International, Carraig Donn, CMS, Fort Wayne metals. **Combined the Group employs over 3,000 people in Mayo and export equivalent to 10-15%² of total Irish Exports across the Globe.**

The Mayo Industry Group, through the Mayo Economic Office, retained an independent facilitation to consider the Ireland 2040 Issues Paper and the following is the opinion of those contributing to the Workshop which took place in Lough Lannagh, Castlebar on 7th March 2017.

Key Issue 1

Effective Regional Development: What does it mean for Mayo?

- 1) Industry in Mayo has developed into one of the principal, export led, industrial platforms in Ireland. The State benefits from the high level of investment in employment, taxes and the purchase of a wide range of services which means that Mayo Industry makes a significant contribution to the State in their day to day operations.
- 2) The Group is of the view that the National Planning Framework needs to have a clear focus on the future development of the State having a clear understanding of the impact of advanced manufacturing and other industries in rural areas such as Mayo, notwithstanding the relatively poor infrastructure in the County.
- 3) The future of the planet is one that is increasingly urbanised and this needs to be recognised. The Group acknowledges the need to develop a sustainable Dublin and underpin the city region of Galway.
- 4) The region needs a strong urban centre in the Northwest and clearly this should be Sligo so North Mayo needs to relate to Sligo while South Mayo to Galway, particularly with the M17 opening at the end of 2017.
- 5) Growth of the regional centre in Sligo will complement, at regional level, the development of Letterkenny and Galway. To fully maximise the potential of the region there is a clear requirement to provide enhanced connectivity across the Region, most particularly the development of a motorway standard road from Galway to Sligo and thereon to Letterkenny. The N5 from Westport urgently needs to be developed as well as the N4 from Sligo to Mullingar. The N59 Ballina to Sligo Route is also in need of major upgrading. **As one of the leading export orientated parts of Ireland, the Group requires a clear perspective on the use of added economic value in the determination of priorities in investment in surface transport, particularly given the values being transported on the national road network out of Mayo to our international export markets.**

² Work is currently being undertaken by MIG to determine actual contribution to National GDP but essentially industry in Mayo makes an overall greater contribution to national income than virtually every other county with the exception of Dublin.

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6) The clear lack of investment in many of the above routes is a severe impediment to future investment decisions of many of the Companies in Mayo and is clearly a barrier to new investment decisions by other FDI. The future growth of advanced industry in Mayo is clearly a concern which will in part be mitigated though a pro active investment in the above infrastructure.

7) Retaining existing rail lines and rail freight capacity is critical for many of the export led companies based in Mayo. This also means that the non used line from Tuam to Coolaney in Sligo should be protected with a view to future feasibility for freight.

8) The Group supports the concept of an Atlantic Economic Corridor from Letterkenny to Limerick with a combination of surface based and ICT based networks developed alongside the alignments that will be a necessary aspect of delivery of the AEC.

Key Issue 2

How will implementation of the NPF be measured?

9) Mayo Industry Group is of the view that the County and Region generally needs to benefit from a substantial growth in population over the time frame of the NPF. It would expect that among the monitoring parameters set out in the forthcoming Framework is a relative population indicator that will demonstrate the effectiveness of the policy being implemented.

10) The Region has a very high entrepreneurial level on a par with other leading regions in the world including the often quoted Tel Aviv in Israel. This will provide a critical platform for future development if the necessary infrastructure and quality of life can be sustained and improved. The Group would expect to see levels of entrepreneurialism being an indicator of progress in the NPF.

11) The overall level of employment will also be a useful measure but in particular levels of employment in advanced manufacturing and export led services.

12) The Group call upon the national policy makers to demonstrate that investment in the county and region benefits the whole country, including Dublin, given the trends arising from the impact of the 4th industrial revolution and the need to offer residential choice, a now critical feature in investment decisions.

Key Issue 3

The future for Mayo

13) As noted above the Group require the NPF to keep a focus on the western corridor or Atlantic Economic Corridor and the links from the County to the East. The key infrastructure that will underpin the future of Mayo are the roads, power and communications which should run alongside each other in potential infrastructure networks.

14) The Group is of the view that national level spend per capita needs to be framed in the context of avoiding congestion and related costs in Dublin area and the capacity of the region to take the development load necessary to sustain it and the Dublin region.

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15) The Group would like to see policy direction in regard to key economic sectors in Mayo, particularly given their potential to sustain the County and region generally including, but not limited to:

- Creative industry
- Role of marine in terms of development of national wave energy test centre and the exploration of a deep water port as alternatives to Dublin/Waterford
- Impact of gridwest and ensuring benefits arising if renewable energy is to become a reality of shore
- Food production
- Bio-mass

16) It is the view of the Group that the scale of investment to fully assess the marine potential requires long term thinking and acknowledgement at national level, something which is currently missing. In the short-term the initial low spend initiatives to provide the platform for renewable production of the coast should be undertaken.

Key issue 4

Impact of 4th Industrial Revolution

17) The National Planning Framework is being prepared in a period of unprecedented change in industrial technologies, working methodologies and skills shifting. The NPF has to fully acknowledge that the economic environment in which the NPF is to be implemented is going to be fundamentally different from that currently in place. It must therefore be prepared so that Ireland in general is positioned to take advantage of the considerable shift in economic perspective and industrial/service sectors over the coming decade and longer. If this is not the case the NPF will be a complete waste of effort.

18) In that regard the NPF has to recognise that it is counties like Mayo which now hold considerable location advantage due to the lack of environmental degradation, congestion and pollution generally. Ireland needs counties like Mayo to be available to provide a counter location where disruptive technologies can be tested in reasonably clean environments and uncongested spaces. A failure to understand this will impact negatively overall on Ireland.

Key Issue 5

19) Other points which the Industry Group wish to highlight are

- Potential for smaller towns/villages to be developed rather than one off housing
- impact of e-working with broadband
- Planning for decline in some instances and in public sector employment
- Balance in tourism figures across the region

Conclusion

In broad terms the Group welcomes this very important initiative. As one of the leading export areas in the Country there are clear issues for the members of the Group given the on-going challenge in living with inadequate infrastructure, particularly as investment decisions are being made. Nonetheless the Group is committed to Mayo and the Northern and Western Region generally. It endorses broadly the choices being flagged in the Issues Paper, subject to

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the above which are critical to the Country generally and Mayo specifically. A failure to address the above points will impact negatively on the overall objectives of the National Planning Framework but importantly will have very real consequences for people across Ireland in terms of their social and economic futures.

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Appendix 2

Mayo Enterprise & Investment

In 2013 Mayo County Council's Enterprise & Investment Unit commissioned a review and analysis of the key Emerging Economic Sectors in the county, and associated investment and employment opportunities in Mayo over the coming years. The resulting report now forms a roadmap for sector based employment opportunity in Mayo and informs policy and practice towards shaping future economic development in the county.

The key emerging sectors and opportunities identified for Mayo are:

- Tourism (Job estimation short-medium term (<3 years) – 1000+ jobs)
- Energy (Job estimation long term (5+ years) – 500+ jobs)
- Food & Agri (Job estimation short-medium term – 200-500+ jobs)
- ICT & Creatives (Job estimation medium-long term (3-5 years) – 200-500+ jobs)
- Supply Chain

With 5 guiding principles:

- Quality of Life
- Connecting
- Creativity & Innovation
- Investing in our Future
- Active Communities

It is also vital that Mayo also retains its existing Foreign Direct Investment and indigenous industries within the county and provide enabling infrastructure that underpins their retention and growth, and in affect additional nett job creation.

There are 18 well dispersed IDA-supported companies in Mayo employing almost 4,000 people. The County has become synonymous with some internationally established large brands and employers. Key employers include Allergan Pharmaceuticals in Westport who employ over 800 people; Baxter in Castlebar with similar numbers; and Ballina Beverages (Coca Cola) employing over 500.

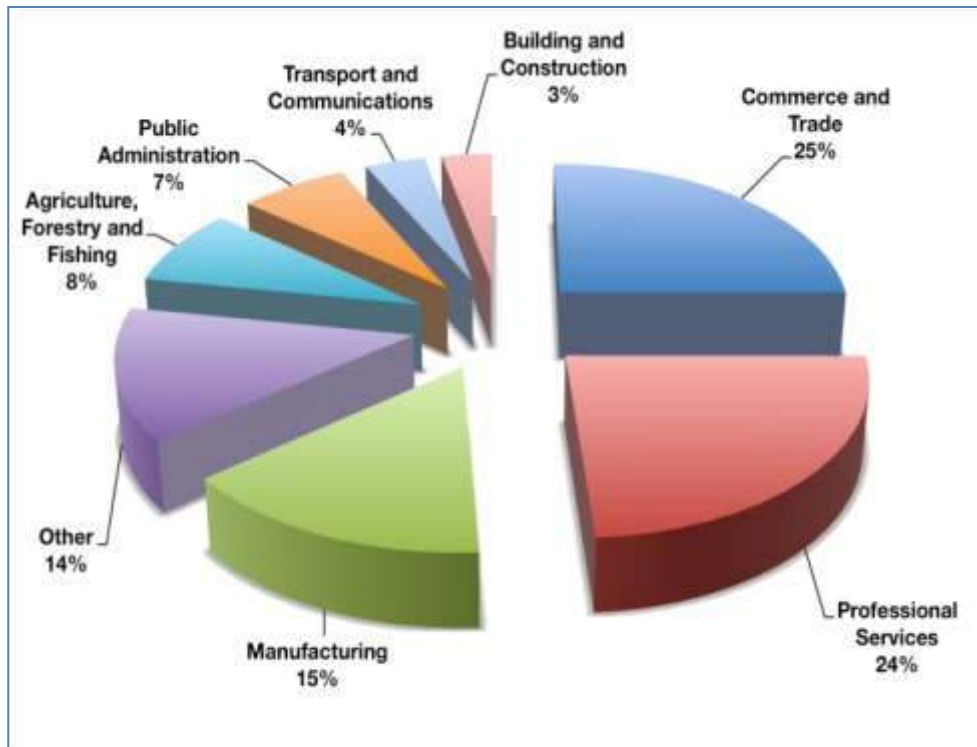
Indigenous industry across the County is also a major employer with a number of manufacturing facilities particularly in the areas of textiles, agricultural and engineering - employing a significant number of people collectively.

In 2016, 348 new businesses were registered in Mayo.

In order to develop the identified emerging economic sectors and retain and assist the growth of existing enterprise in Mayo it is crucial that we continue to improve the county's **CONNECTIVITY** in terms of **movement** (i.e. transport infrastructure) and **technology** (i.e. mobile phone service and broadband) through the provision of priority infrastructural projects including completion of N4/N5 motorway (Mullingar to Westport); supporting and investing in Ireland West Airport Knock; retention of existing rail services (as a minimum); supporting and investing in the Atlantic Marine Energy Test Site; investment towards strategic tourism projects (e.g. marina); investment in broadband and telecommunications.

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Linked with economic growth is the ability to provide a skilled labour force. Therefore it is considered that the retention of Galway Mayo Institute of Technology within the County complimentary to the development of a vibrant economy in Mayo and the Region.



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Appendix 3

Lisa Chambers TD Submission to MCC

GMIT

Sustained effective support for GMIT Mayo campus, recognition of the importance of having a third level institution in the county in order to provide a skilled workforce, offer equality of access to third level for citizens and also the benefit to the local economy in terms of rental income and students spending in the local area in bars, restaurants, cafes and shops. The GMIT forms part of our education infrastructure in the West of Ireland and is of huge importance to citizens in Mayo and further afield.

Quality of life for citizens

There are a number of areas the NPF needs to focus on to improve the quality of life for citizens. We need to endeavour to limit/reduce travel time to work, people need to be able to find good quality employment in their locality. In this regard in order to attract investment and job creation we need to address issues around infrastructure and connectivity. This means addressing quality of roads in and out of the county and around the county. We need to see improvements in rail services with greater frequency and reliability and a connection from Claremorris to Galway city for commuters. We need access to good quality broadband in every home to allow people work from home and create industry locally. The quality of phone coverage in county Mayo is an on-going issue also. Outside of work citizens need to be provided with quality public amenities, the advancement of the greenway network and improved recreational facilities is of great importance. We need to do much better in rural Ireland in terms of the provision of public transport, rural communities are becoming more isolated and less well serviced. Ireland 2040 - Our plan needs to show a strong commitment to the protection of rural communities and a desire to maintain rural life.

The Islands

Ireland 2040 - Our plan should make provision for the support of island communities and their way of life. Recognising the unique challenges facing island communities and their unique needs. Protecting island communities is in Ireland's interest, it is part of our diverse culture and something to be cherished and nurtured. The islands off the coast of County Mayo, Clare Island and Inisturk in particular make a significant contribution to Mayo's tourism industry and are a huge draw for tourists nationally and internationally. They allow Mayo to offer a diverse tourism opportunity and are a proud part of the overall Mayo tourism package.

Ireland West Airport Knock (IWAK)

The development of industry around IWAK must be supported, the airport has huge potential for job creation and is uniquely placed in the North West region to sustain many communities and drive economic activity in the region. The airport needs investment in order to upgrade facilities and compete for new routes, It also needs better road connectivity into the North towards Donegal to fully capitalise on that market.

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Motorway from Galway to Letterkenny via Mayo and Sligo

We have been starved of proper connectivity in the West and North West. In order to fully develop the West and North West we need a motorway from Galway to Donegal with connections through Mayo and Sligo. Industry have told us they need this and citizens want this level of connectivity. The motorway network has been extended to everywhere else, it's time now to put the North West on the map.

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Appendix 4

Points raised in submission to MCC by Senator Michelle Mulherin

- A new urban centre connecting Ballina, Castlebar and Westport should be proposed and pursued with infrastructural investment including creating a connection to Ireland West Airport Knock similar to that indicated by the Minister as an idea for a new urban centre by connecting Athlone, Tullamore and Mullingar in the Midlands.
- The proposition to create a new urban centre comprising the towns of Ballina, Castlebar and Westport is even more feasible as all three already operate under the banner of one county and there is considerable existing cohesion through County identity.
- The sizeable population of 131,000 of the county would justify this proposition.
- Unless something radical is proposed in the NPF for Mayo, fears that Mayo and its main towns will become a commuter belt for the cities of Sligo and Galway which two cities will continue to receive more public and private investment and that the Atlantic Economic Corridor and similar initiatives will simply provide a vehicle for exiting and by passing the County from an economic development point of view with the exception perhaps of tourism. This will result in further migration towards the cities in circumstances where Galway in any event does not have capacity.

Appendix 5

Points raised in submission to MCC by Senator Paddy Burke

- County Mayo should have its own Hub for population and economic growth to be driven by Westport/Castlebar/Ballina growth centres
- Having centres of growth in Galway and Sligo with improved infrastructure will have a detrimental effect on Mayo as a growth centre in its own right. As Westport/Castlebar gravitates towards Galway, Ballina may gravitate towards Sligo
- Mayo has the population; most of the facilities, plus an airport to be a growth centre on its own.