



# Section 6

Implementing the  
National Spatial Strategy

### Main Points:

- Structures and mechanisms are being put in place to ensure that the NSS will influence the spatial aspects of public sector planning, policies and programmes, including future decisions on investment priorities.
- The Minister for the Environment and Local Government will lead the Strategy's implementation.
- The support of regional and local authorities will be engaged through the preparation and adoption of statutory regional planning guidelines.
- Integrated planning frameworks will be put in place to set the foundations for the process of strengthening, consolidating and developing new and existing gateways and hubs.
- A communications strategy to promote support for and provide information on the NSS, and a Monitoring Committee representative of key interest groups, will be put in place.
- Implementation of the National Spatial Strategy will fall into three phases.
  - (1) 2003: The foundations for implementing the NSS will be laid.
  - (2) 2003-2006: The process of mobilising local interests and integrating the NSS approach into various plans and programmes will be completed.
  - (3) Post 2006: The implementation process continues with the benefits of the Strategy in regional development terms becoming increasingly apparent.

The activities of many organisations in the public and private sector whose policies, programmes and decisions significantly influence spatial development must be integrated in order to achieve the NSS objective of more balanced regional development.

These organisations include

- Government, including government departments
- agencies of Government, particularly those involved with development promotion and physical or social infrastructure provision, i.e. the enterprise development agencies, National Roads Authority, Higher Education Authority etc
- regional assemblies, regional and local authorities and city and county development boards (CDBs)
- the private sector, including infrastructure providers in that sector.

Integrating the activities of the various organisations will require

- the establishment of a clear driving force at Government level to bring those involved together to implement the NSS
- integration of the policy approach of the NSS into the plans and programmes of various public bodies, giving them clear targets and responsibilities
- the development of reliable systems of monitoring, communication and support to underpin the implementation process
- early preparation of regional planning guidelines which will be crucial in ensuring the implementation of the Strategy.

Plans setting out the actions needed to deliver more balanced regional development must be agreed and they must specify what needs to be done, when it must be done and who will do it.

## 6.1 What Must be Done

There are a number of overall priorities in implementing the NSS.

- (1) Implementation of the current National Development Plan will be a key step towards balanced regional development.
- (2) The gateways identified in the National Development Plan have an established dynamic that is driving development in their associated regions and needs to be supported. The land use and transport frameworks that have been put in place in Cork and that are being put in place in the other gateways of Galway, Limerick and Waterford must be implemented.
- (3) Partnerships between local and national government and the private sector should be established to facilitate planning for the future roles of the new gateways proposed by the NSS.
- (4) Local and regional authorities have a key role, with the support of government and the private sector, in activating the roles identified for hubs, other towns, villages and rural areas in achieving balanced regional development. They must arrange for the timely preparation and implementation of regional guidelines, development plans and integrated spatial planning frameworks that are consistent with the NSS.

Taking these overall priorities, the specific actions that need to be put in train arising from the Government's decision to implement the NSS are set out below.

### 6.1.1 Establishing a Driving Force

Establishing a driving force behind the NSS means (a) Government underpinning its status and mandating its full implementation, (b) embedding it in the programmes of all relevant departments and agencies, and (c) assigning clear responsibility for supporting its delivery. Specifically, the Government has made the following decisions.

- Relevant public sector policies and programmes will have to be consistent with the NSS and will be required to demonstrate such consistency.
- The Cabinet Sub-Committee on Housing, Infrastructure and Public Private Partnerships will monitor the implementation of the NSS.
- Government departments and agencies will put structures and mechanisms in place to support the NSS and ensure it is embedded in their policies and programmes. They will report to the Cabinet Sub-Committee as required.
- The Minister for the Environment and Local Government will be responsible for leading the implementation of the NSS, through establishing and supporting the necessary interaction, monitoring and other mechanisms to ensure consistency between the NSS and the spatial aspects of relevant public policies and programmes.
- The Department of the Environment and Local Government will establish a Committee representing all relevant departments to support implementation of the NSS.
- The Department of the Environment and Local Government will establish a clearly identifiable contact point for other departments, agencies and the private sector to access information regarding this Strategy and to service the implementation process.
- The NSS will be given any statutory support it requires. The Minister for the Environment and Local Government will, therefore, consider the need for legislative provisions to support the NSS itself, to require consistency between the NSS and other relevant plans and programmes, and to supplement current provisions in planning legislation. As a first step, the provisions of the Planning and Development Act 2000 will require that this Strategy be integrated with regional planning guidelines and county and city development plans.

- Regional and local authorities will be required to implement the NSS, especially through regional planning guidelines and local development plans and strategies, which will have to be consistent with the NSS and will be required to demonstrate such consistency.

These measures reflect the strong commitment by Government to the NSS. This commitment, together with the greater certainty of direction provided by the Strategy, establishes a basis for the private sector to participate fully in achieving the objectives of the Strategy and to respond to it in bringing forward its own investment proposals.

### 6.1.2 Integration with Other Plans, Policies and Programmes

To support and develop the approach set out in the NSS, the following actions will be taken.

Government departments and agencies will establish mechanisms to ensure and demonstrate that their policies and plans are consistent with the NSS.

Regional authorities will immediately commence the preparation of regional planning guidelines under the Planning and Development Act 2000 to give effect to the NSS at regional level. These guidelines will draw on relevant local plans and strategies such as city and county development board strategies. This will offer an opportunity for further consultations with all relevant parties as to the basis on which NSS policies are elaborated at regional level. The Department of the Environment and Local Government will support regional authorities in this work.

Implementation of the NSS will be an important factor in the prioritisation by Government of capital investment, and in allocations by Ministers of the sectoral levels of investment decided on by the Government.

The NSS will be a key input into the 2003 mid-term review of the National Development Plan, focusing in particular on the development of the identified gateways. The NSS will also be a key element in the identification of investment priorities in the post-NDP period and in the development of any future investment frameworks.

Integrated spatial planning frameworks, including land-use and transportation elements, will be prepared and adopted by the local authorities or combinations of authorities responsible for the development of new gateways and hubs. Integrated spatial planning frameworks for existing gateways that are in the course of preparation will be completed and adopted.

The Government will take full account of the NSS in moving forward the progressive decentralisation of Government offices and agencies.

The Department of the Environment and Local Government will co-ordinate and pursue the cross-border spatial co-operation aspects of the Strategy's implementation. Relevant departments and agencies will pursue the implementation of these cross-border aspects within the co-ordination context provided by the Department of the Environment and Local Government.

The test for consistency between relevant plans and programmes and the NSS will rest on the extent to which they support and foster balanced spatial development. This includes the achievement of critical mass in the gateways and hubs to lead the drive towards more balanced development.

### 6.1.3 National Spatial Data Infrastructure

A National Spatial Data Infrastructure (NSDI) is generally recognised to consist of the technology, policies, standards, human resources and related activities necessary to acquire, process, distribute, use, maintain and preserve spatial data. The Government has committed to developing a National Spatial Data Infrastructure in its *New Connections Action Plan on the Information Society* (section 3.2.10).

The benefits of an NSDI are seen as being

Facilitating the efficient collection, sharing and dissemination of spatial data amongst all levels of government institutions, as well as the public and private sectors, to address issues affecting the State's physical, economic and social well-being.

Improving the quality of spatial data through ensuring a co-ordinated approach for developing spatial data standards applying to collecting, maintaining, distributing, using and preserving data.

Enabling cost effective public and private policy development, management and operations through the use of consistent standards.

The establishment of the National Spatial Data Infrastructure will support the implementation of this Strategy by enhancing the collection, availability and usability of spatial information.

#### 6.1.4 Role of Regional and Local Authorities

This Strategy sets out an overall national spatial framework. In addition to providing a framework for the actions of government, its agencies and the private sector, the key to its implementation lies in the actions of regional and local authorities. Successful local implementation will depend on the putting in place by these authorities of the necessary planning guidelines, development plans and local plans, including joint plans where appropriate, based on the legislative provisions contained in the Planning and Development Act 2000. These guidelines and plans must support the NSS in a way that is consistent with the Strategy and demonstrates such consistency.

#### 6.1.5 Communications

A communications strategy to promote support for the NSS, provide information on progress in its implementation and promote participation by public bodies, interest groups and the general public in achieving the objectives of the NSS, will be developed and implemented by the Department of the Environment and Local Government.

#### 6.1.6 Consultation, Participation and Monitoring

A Monitoring Committee representative of key interests, including government departments and state agencies, the social partners, the private sector, regional and local authorities and other relevant bodies, will be put in place by the Department of the Environment and Local Government. This committee will facilitate consultation with and participation of relevant interests in monitoring progress on the implementation of the Strategy.



Monitoring arrangements for the NSS and appropriate performance indicators will be developed by the Department of the Environment and Local Government in consultation with relevant bodies such as the NDP/CSF Evaluation Unit of the Department of Finance, CSO, ESRI, NESC and Forfás. Periodic reports to Government will be prepared in relation to progress being made in the implementation of the NSS.

## 6.2 A Timetable for implementation

The NSS provides a robust and realistic framework for achieving balanced regional development. Initiating and consolidating the implementation of the National Spatial Strategy will fall into three phases.

**(1) 2003.** The foundations for implementing the NSS will be laid. This will include

- mobilising regional and local authorities and county/city development boards to support and implement the spatial policies and the spatial structure of the NSS, especially through the preparation of regional planning guidelines
- Departments and agencies taking the necessary action to reflect the NSS approach within the spatial aspects of their own plans and programmes
- deciding if further legislation to support the NSS is needed and if so enacting this legislation
- inputting to the mid-term review of the National Development Plan, with a particular focus on the development of the identified gateways.

**(2) 2003-2006.** The process of integrating the NSS approach into other plans and programmes will be completed, as will the process of mobilising local interests to work with and develop the NSS approach. In particular, this will include

- adopting and promoting integrated spatial development frameworks for the gateways, and local development frameworks for the hubs, to address socio-economic and physical development within the NSS timeframe
- identifying the types of policy priorities and supports necessary to sustain progress towards balanced regional development in the period following the current NDP.

**(3) Post 2006.** The spatial policy approach set out in the NSS will by this time be firmly rooted as a result of the measures put in place in the previous phases. The process of implementation will continue, with the benefits of the NSS becoming increasingly apparent and real, particularly as the Strategy comes to have a major influence on future planning and investment strategies.

## 6.3 Statutory Support

The Government is committed to ensuring that the NSS has any statutory support it requires. The Department of the Environment and Local Government will, therefore, consider the form of statutory support required to ensure that the NSS is fully reflected in relevant plans and programmes of government departments, agencies, regional and local authorities. In considering this, account will be taken of the existing statutory provisions relating to the planning functions of regional and local authorities.

Under current provisions, the Planning and Development Act 2000 provides that county and city development plans will in so far as is practicable, be consistent with such national plans, policies or strategies as the Minister for the Environment and Local Government determines relate to proper planning and sustainable development. A planning authority must also have regard to any current regional planning guidelines when making and adopting a development plan. The Act also provides that a local area plan must be consistent with the relevant city or county development plan.

With regard to regional planning guidelines, the Act gives regional authorities specific powers to prepare regional planning guidelines. It lists issues which guidelines may cover and provides that, when making guidelines, regional authorities must, take account of any relevant policies or objectives of the Government or a Minister of the Government.

Such policies or objectives include any national plans, policies or strategies specified by the Minister for the Environment and Local Government to be of relevance to the determination of strategic planning policies. As a first step, pending consideration of the need for any further legislative provisions, the Minister for the Environment and Local Government will apply the provisions in the Planning and Development Act 2000 to

- specify that regional authorities in making regional planning guidelines must take account of the National Spatial Strategy
- determine that city and county development plans must, as far as is practicable, be consistent with the National Spatial Strategy.

The NSS is a long-term framework. It will take some time to ensure that other plans and strategies are aligned with its overall direction. However, as current plans and strategies of public bodies come up for review and as new plans or strategies are embarked upon, they must take full account of the provisions of the NSS.

The Strategic Planning Guidelines for the Greater Dublin Area were prepared in 1999 before the NSS. The adoption of the NSS means that a review of these Strategic Planning Guidelines must now be undertaken to consider any adjustments necessary to ensure that they are in line with this overarching framework for national spatial development. That review should also evaluate the implementation of the existing guidelines and assess how effective they have been in achieving their stated objectives.

## 6.4 Gateways and Hubs – What Happens Next

The NSS is a call for action by all relevant stakeholders to work in partnership and with enthusiasm to achieve an enhanced role for gateways, hubs and their broader regions. The focus for immediate action must lie in establishing consensus on integrated spatial frameworks for land use, planning, urban design, transport and public service delivery. Such frameworks should allocate specific roles to existing agencies for delivering the aspects of the framework for which they are responsible. Local authorities have primary responsibility for driving the preparation of these frameworks and translating their provisions into statutory development plans that will guide the development process through the planning system.

The strategies should focus on the practical realisation of the gateway or hub. In some cases, more than one local authority may be involved. However, provision has been made in the Planning and Development Act 2000 and in the Local Government Act 2001 for the preparation of joint plans and the use of joint committees between adjacent local authorities to address cross boundary issues, including transportation issues. Regional authorities, in co-operation with the local authorities and city and county development boards in different areas, also have a role to play. An illustration of the key steps to be taken to realise the vision for any particular gateway or hub would include

- mobilisation of the appropriate civic, business and community interests to establish a consensus on the objectives for the gateway or hub and future development issues
- production of the appropriate strategies to guide development under a variety of headings including planning, land-use and transport, urban design frameworks, and business plans
- identification and commitment to key actions, engagement of agencies responsible and agreement on timescales for implementation.

The development and implementation of future national investment proposals will provide opportunities for local authorities and other partners, such as the private sector and local interest groups, to mobilise around the NSS proposals relating to the development of the gateways and hubs. The process of mobilisation will be critical to establish local consensus and commitment to the integrated spatial planning frameworks for the gateways and hubs.

## Facilitating Urban Networks

To support the effective functioning of two or three towns as a linked gateway or hub, the relevant local authorities at the county and town level with functions in relation to the town will need to collaborate. This will require the integration of their development strategies as they relate to the towns concerned and their surrounding catchment areas to achieve the critical mass needed to drive national and regional development.

The initial focus should be on developing strategies for the complementary development of the towns in the network. These strategies should be developed in partnership between the relevant local authorities supported by the city and county development boards, other agencies as well as business and community interests. The strategies for urban networks should focus on harnessing and extending the strengths of the towns involved, their individual and complementary capabilities and their potential for economic development. The following approach should be used.

Joint development groups of a manageable size should be established between the relevant local, regional and government bodies, in partnership with local elected representatives and community interests.

The development frameworks for the urban network should be prepared on a partnership basis to

- identify the particular strengths and weaknesses of individual towns
- allocate particular development roles to particular towns in terms of employment, housing, entertainment, education, culture and heritage etc
- develop policy for appropriate land uses in the areas between towns taking account of the housing and green structure policies set out in Section 5
- prepare proposals for the complementary physical, economic and social development of the individual towns taking account of their identified roles
- identify the key actions, agencies responsible and timescales for implementation
- prepare proposals for the augmentation of physical and other connections between individual towns and throughout the area concerned, taking account of practical, operational and spatial considerations
- adjust or review local development plans as necessary

The feasibility of putting financial and other arrangements in place which offer real incentives for the relevant authorities to work in partnership for mutual benefit should be explored by those authorities.



The Department of the Environment and Local Government will provide advice and guidance to support the relevant towns in implementing this urban network type model in the Irish context.

## 6.5 Strategies at Regional and City/County Level

### Regional Strategies

Under the Regional Authorities Establishment Order 1993, regional authorities are required to prepare regional reports every five years covering

- a review of the overall development requirements of their regions
- a review of the development plans of local authorities in the region and, where relevant, the development plans of local authorities in adjoining regions
- a review of the provision of public services in, or relating to, or affecting the region.

The regional reports address, from a regional viewpoint, many of the issues which the National Spatial Strategy addresses from a national standpoint. Regional reports were first published in 1996, with the next round due for publication in 2001. The regional reports due in 2001 were postponed, to enable them to take account in particular of the National Spatial Strategy and the strategies for economic, social and cultural development which have been prepared by county and city development boards.

Preparation of regional planning guidelines in 2003, consistent with the NSS, in tandem with new regional reports, should be seen as part of a single process. This provides an opportunity for the regional authorities to draw up the reports and guidelines, taking into account the socio-economic context emerging from the County and City Development Board strategies.

The Government has decided that responsibility for putting in place the regional frameworks necessary to support the implementation of the National Spatial Strategy as it relates to the Greater Dublin Area will rest with the proposed new body for co-ordinating land use and transport in the area. Pending the establishment of the new body, responsibility will lie with the current structures for strategic land use and transport in the Greater Dublin Area.

### The Role of Regional Assemblies

The regional assemblies have a clear mandate with regard to the implementation of the National Development Plan, management of regional Operational Programmes and the co-ordination of regional development policy. The assemblies will provide any support they can to regional authorities in the preparation of regional planning guidelines. The monitoring committees of the regional assemblies will take account of the NSS in their co-ordination role and, in particular, in their mid-term evaluation of the NDP in 2003.

### Plans and Strategies at City and County levels

The emphasis in the arrangements for delivering the NSS is on building upon existing structures rather than creating new agencies.

City and county development plans and strategies are a key point of contact between the NSS at the national level and issues at local level. This reflects the cross-cutting nature of the NSS itself. It also reflects the fact that the City and County Development Boards are integrating the activities of organisations, groups and agencies concerned with socio-economic and other development at the local level. In addition, there is much potential for the co-ordination of the CDB function with the forward planning functions of local authorities under planning legislation. In particular close co-ordination is necessary between city and county development plans setting out the physical development framework, and CDB strategies establishing the socio-economic context.

