



**WESTERN  
DEVELOPMENT  
COMMISSION**

# WDC Submission to the NDP Consultation Review to Renew

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An Organisation – Western Development Commission.

The Western Development Commission is a statutory body with a remit to promote and encourage economic and social development in the Western Region (counties Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Mayo, Galway, Roscommon and Clare). The WDC operates under the aegis of the Department of Rural and Community Development.

The WDC welcomes the opportunity to submit its views on the NDP Review to Renew. As requested, it has set out its response below in answer to the questions set. If there are any queries please do not hesitate to get in touch, [deirdrefrost@wdc.ie](mailto:deirdrefrost@wdc.ie)

## 1. Is the overall level of public spending on capital investment correct?

The purpose of the capital investment programme is to aid in the delivery of the Project Ireland 2040 objectives. It is the efficiency of investment in meeting these objectives in addition to the overall level of spending that is of tantamount importance. It is important to consider how best to optimise the utilisation of *future* infrastructure as well as the *existing* infrastructure. The central aim of capital spending should be to provide the conditions for regions to grow and realise their full potential and to support broader societal goals to underpin the objective of “sustainable development of the regions”. The WDC thus argues that infrastructure development should focus on the most efficient investments to deliver 1) economic growth and 2) long-term societal issues such as environmental quality, climate and housing.

Since the publication of the National Development Plan (NDP), the significant impacts of COVID-19 and Brexit have occurred, both of which have particularly strong negative impacts on the Western Region and wider Atlantic Economic Corridor (AEC).<sup>1</sup> [Lydon and McGrath \(2020\)](#) as well as the [WDC Timely Economic Indicator Series](#) have demonstrated that our region is more vulnerable to the shock of COVID-19. Our region also contains comparatively high levels of employment in those sectors more highly exposed to potential Brexit shocks ([WDC, 2019](#)) as identified by [Daly & Lawless \(2020\)](#). The WDC considers therefore that the overall level of capital investment should reflect these additional objectives with short-medium term targeted supports.

The National Development Plan remains the key mechanism through which the objectives of Project Ireland 2040, including the ambition to achieve 75% population growth in the regions, can be achieved. Therefore, it is vital that the Government focuses NDP investment on areas that will positively contribute to achieving this objective, whilst also addressing the impacts of Covid-19 and Brexit. Investment needs to be prioritised to key regional projects that will drive regional employment and enterprise growth, which in turn will drive population growth.

In particular, projects within the Atlantic Economic Corridor are seen as key in delivering the Project Ireland objective of Enhanced Regional Accessibility and need to be accelerated. *The lack of high quality connectivity between the regions within the AEC has been a major impediment to its development as a counter-balance to Dublin and the East coast. The improvement of regional connectivity along the Western seaboard, linking together the major urban areas to allow the AEC achieve its potential, is a major priority.* (NPF. 2018, p.41).

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<sup>1</sup> The Western Region is defined under the Western Development Commission (WDC) Act 1998 as the seven counties of Clare, Donegal, Galway, Leitrim, Mayo, Roscommon, and Sligo. The AEC is set out in Ireland 2040 as an initiative to drive balanced regional development and encompasses the Western Region as well as Kerry and Limerick.

The WDC argue that Infrastructure, the '3Es' (Enterprise, Employment and Education) and Innovation are the key levers for effective regional development as detailed in [WDC \(2010\)](#) and [WDC \(2011\)](#). When these three areas complement and support each other, they drive regional growth. Public investments of a 'national' nature which are mainly located in the Capital contribute strongly to its economic growth and primacy. The relocation of some of these 'national' investments outside of Dublin and/or decisions to locate new 'national' investments outside the Capital, would help ease congestion, bottlenecks and contribute to the counterbalance to Dublin's growth sought by the National Planning Framework (NPF). Public investment can either reinforce the 'business as usual' scenario or be used as a tool to achieve the priorities of the NPF for more effective regional development.

It is critical that investment is focused where it provides the best value for money, is viable and affordable. Low borrowing costs mean that capital expenditure can be sustained in the medium to long-term but only as economic growth outpaces interest rates. Consequently, strong economic growth is the most viable way to ensure the sustainable re-financing of debt issued today and thus should be considered when assessing capital investment plans. Research suggested that core infrastructure investments in roads and transport have high output effects.<sup>2</sup> Research by the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council concluded that capital spending has a stronger initial impact on activity though the fiscal "multiplier effect" compared to other types of government spending<sup>3</sup>. The impacts were found to be greater over the shorter term with limited evidence of a long-term multiplier effect.

## 2. What should the capital budget be spent on?

The list below is not a comprehensive list but focuses on those areas of 'hard' enabling infrastructure which will support regional growth. The infrastructure areas of for example education and health in our Region is also vitally important in sustaining and supporting better regional balance.

### **NSO 2 Enhanced Regional Connectivity – Roads and Rail**

#### **Roads**

The commitments stated in the NDP need to be maintained and ideally accelerated where possible. In addition, the following routes, not named/included in the current NDP National Roads Programme 2018-2027 need to be included in the revised NDP.

- Delivering Atlantic Corridor road projects (on the N17/15) should be prioritised to take place earlier (no commitment in current NDP to begin construction before 2027).

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<sup>2</sup> Fitz Gerald, J., McCarthy, C., Morgenroth, E. and O'Connell, P. (2003): The Mid-term Evaluation of the National Development Plan and Community Support Framework for Ireland 2000 to 2006, ESRI Policy Research Series Number 50, October 2003

<sup>3</sup> [Ireland's Spending-Multipliers-Final.pdf \(fiscalcouncil.ie\)](#)

As the NDP notes, *Furthermore, the other major objective is to make substantial progress in linking our regions and urban areas not just to Dublin but to each other. This will be a major enabler for balanced regional development to occur. A particular priority in this is substantially delivering the Atlantic Corridor, with a high quality road network linking Cork, Limerick, Galway and Sligo.* (NDP, 2018, p.40).

- Delivering on the entire N5 – both Westport to Turlough Road and Ballaghaderreen to Scramoge Road.
- The N19 road upgrade and better public transport connectivity to Shannon Airport and key employment locations should be prioritised.
- The N26 linking Ballina to the N5 supporting the development of the NorthWest.

### **Rail**

- Capacity and service level improvements are needed across all lines serving the region; Galway-Dublin, Sligo-Dublin, Ballina/Westport/ Castlebar-Dublin. None are specified in the current NDP.
- Plans for electrification of rail lines in the region need to be progressed at the same time as there is consideration of electrification of other lines<sup>4</sup>.
- The long-term development and growth of Galway city will involve rail services expanding in frequency. There will need to be additional capacity of the Athlone-Athenry-Galway rail line, including the provision of dual tracks and increased service stops. The WDC welcomes the planned study to be conducted in 2021 and supports double-tracking. The evaluation process needs to consider the benefits in the context of both commuter and intercity rail and the need to support the Project Ireland 2040 regional population growth objective for Galway and the region.

### **NSO 3 Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities – National Broadband Plan:**

The Programme for Government has committed to seek to accelerate the roll out of the National Broadband Plan and this is reaffirmed in the recently published National Remote Work Strategy<sup>5</sup>. The NDP needs to ensure that funding enables an acceleration of the rollout.

### **Hub Infrastructure**

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<sup>4</sup> A feasibility study of high-speed rail between Dublin Belfast, Dublin Limerick Junction/Cork and an evaluation of its economic benefits against improvements to existing line speeds will also be carried out against relevant appraisal processes and value-for-money tests required under the Public Spending Code to commence within a year. (NDP. P 41).

<sup>5</sup> [Making-Remote-Work.pdf \(enterprise.gov.ie\) p.19](#)

The development and leveraging of remote work infrastructure is a crucial component to the progression of increased national remote work adoption<sup>6</sup>. Adequate infrastructure must be in place to allow employers and employees to avail of remote working opportunities both at home and in hubs. Ireland's remote working hub infrastructure presents significant opportunities for the development of remote work across the country. Remote working hubs provide a valuable solution for employers and employees seeking to adopt remote working arrangements through a blended combination of home office and local remote working hubs (Hubs and Broadband Connection Points).

The WDC is developing a network of over 100 hubs in the AEC region with a project methodology involving steps that will also form the basis as the framework for a national hub network, see <https://www.atlanticeconomiccorridor.ie/hubs-map/>. The use of remote working hubs can have a transformative impact on local economies and communities supporting more regional employment and population retention and growth and lowering carbon emissions. To capitalise on this opportunity, the standards of the remote working hub facilities need to be improved through a dedicated investment stream.

#### **NSO 4 Sustainable Mobility - Bus**

There is very limited investment in environmentally sustainable public transport in the Western Region. While models of public transport may differ from more urban regions, and may operate at a smaller scale, it is a key area of investment to enable the low carbon transition. This needs to be prioritised in the Refresh.

There is a need to review and invest in bus services within and between settlements, including the rural transport programme, to provide for enhanced and more connected provision. Enhancing the reliability and the level of service within and between key settlements is needed. Rural public transport needs to service a variety of needs, as well as an important focus on social inclusion and accessibility, it also needs to provide services to access employment and education.

Bus routes which are currently unattractive to private operators should be a key investment priority. There is a need to incentivise more private bus development. Bus services provided by private operators are more significant in the Region than elsewhere. However, these services need to be better integrated<sup>7</sup>, for example the operators often have different bus stop locations to those of Bus Eireann and this increases the difficulties of moving from one service to another.

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<sup>6</sup> [Expert-Group-Remote-Working-Report-2020.pdf \(westerndevelopment.ie\)](#)  
[Remote Working National Survey Phase 2 Report Oct 2020 Final \(westerndevelopment.ie\)](#)  
[Remote Working National Survey Report May 2020 v3 \(westerndevelopment.ie\)](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Transition-to-a-Low-Carbon-Region-WDC-Main-Report\\_FINAL-August-2020-1.pdf \(westerndevelopment.ie\)](#)

There is a need to provide new transport hub interchange facilities, and enhanced bus waiting facilities and preferably real-time passenger information, utilising smart technology in appropriate circumstances.

The investment needs to look beyond greenways and include other areas of active travel and an enhanced public transport system with central hubs in towns where different public transport services can link up.

It is important when planning transport investment to note the extent of rural-urban linkages and the need to invest to support these. Rural areas provide much of the urban workforce and urban demand. Rural-urban interlinkages, including travel to work patterns, need to be given greater consideration. It is also worth noting that focusing on 'infrastructure corridors will not work in all circumstances and areas distant from such 'corridors' risk further disadvantage.

There are fewer projects and lower spend in the Region but to achieve goals of NPF and to compensate for historically lower levels of investment this needs to increase significantly and in areas which have had least investment, for example in Public Transport and cultural heritage.

#### **NSO 6 High Quality International Connectivity: Airports and Ports**

The NPF notes that investment in airports is in line with sectoral priorities already identified in the National Aviation Policy<sup>8</sup>. However, the National Aviation Policy (2015) predates the development of the National Planning Framework, with its objective of moving away from 'business as usual' and aiming to rebalance population and employment growth towards the regions. Notwithstanding Covid-19, there is ever greater concentration of traffic at Dublin Airport, indicating that the National Aviation Policy needs to be revised.

This concentration of traffic is further compounded by Brexit and the need to ensure several strong airports supporting the development of new trading routes and supply chains, across Ireland. The Irish Exporters Association argues that *the connectivity shortcomings from the north-west to the south-west of Ireland must be a strategic Government priority to support economic growth and regional competitiveness*. One of the reports' key recommendation is to *Address the connectivity shortcomings from the north-west to the south-west of Ireland* noting that *Further growth, however, is hampered by limited accessibility to high-class transportation infrastructure*. It notes the importance of Shannon airport in serving the mid-west<sup>9</sup>.

#### **Shannon**

Airports are critical to the economic development of regions and are key to the expansion of enterprise and enabling international tourism in their regions. In the current NDP there is

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<sup>8</sup> NPF p. 14.

<sup>9</sup> [IEA-Draft-Transport-Paper.pdf \(irishexporters.ie\)](https://www.irishexporters.ie/IEA-Draft-Transport-Paper.pdf)

reference to investments in Dublin Airport along with the regional airports programme, but no reference to any investments elsewhere.

Covid19 has very detrimentally impacted the aviation sector. The aviation sector is facing unprecedented financial and commercial risk arising from the pandemic. This impact has led to calls for EU authorities to loosen state aid rules<sup>10</sup>. Within Ireland, airports have experienced a disproportionate impact from the current crisis, with overall passenger numbers at Shannon down 96% in December and down circa 80% for 2020 as a whole<sup>11</sup>.

The support to airports announced on 10 November 2020<sup>12</sup> which provides for funding in 2021 is very welcome. However, there is a need to support Shannon Airport beyond the short-term and with regard to Capital expenditure. The current NDP contention that investment in the State Airports lies with the State-Owned Enterprises does not recognise the new reality facing airports. The aviation sector at a regional level is likely to be heavily reliant on direct exchequer support to navigate their way out of the current crisis.

The National Development Plan needs to be adjusted to ensure that direct grant funding support is provided to the smaller State-Owned Airports for essential capital projects which is in line with current EU State aid rules<sup>13</sup>. This could be developed as a 'Covid Response Scheme' which could be extended depending on the timelines for recovery of the aviation sector and in line with current and any future EU State aid rules.

### **Ireland West Airport Knock and Donegal airport**

Ireland West Airport Knock operates as an international airport serving a catchment of 1.1 million. Under the Regional Airports Programme 2021-2025 both Ireland West Airport Knock and Donegal will need additional supports into the medium term to allow recovery from the impact of Covid. The additional operational funding announced in November 2020 is welcome, but recovery of the sector will take longer and additional medium-term support will be required to ensure that the airport will be able to resume operations and support regional recovery through enabling international access for business and tourism<sup>14</sup>.

Donegal and Ireland West Airport are additionally important in the context of Brexit, ensuring connectivity from the north west of Ireland to the UK and Europe.

There is a need to expand the Regional Airports Programme as well as continuing the 90% funding for safety and security Capital Programmes as well as the extension of the derogation for a period of at least 10 years. The inclusion of landside Capital infrastructural

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<sup>10</sup> [European airports urge EU to loosen state aid rules \(irishtimes.com\)](https://www.irishtimes.com/news/economy/european-airports-urge-eu-to-loosen-state-aid-rules-1.4611111)

<sup>11</sup> A recent Economic Impact study of Shannon Group highlighted the major role it plays in the region, supporting: 46,500 jobs generating €1.16 billion in tax revenue and €3.6 billion in GVA.

<sup>12</sup> [gov.ie - €80 million support package for Aviation Sector \(www.gov.ie\)](https://www.gov.ie/en/news/2020-11/e80-million-support-package-for-aviation-sector/)

<sup>13</sup> In line with European Commission rules on State Supports to Airports i.e. all airports with fewer than three million passengers are deemed eligible for capital expenditure support.

<sup>14</sup> [Ireland West Airport](https://www.gov.ie/en/news/2020-11/ireland-west-airport/)

projects in the Regional airports programme will allow for continuing investment to support the return to growth post Covid-19.

There is a need for continued support the development of the SDZ at IWAK to make it attractive for aviation related industries to be created and prosper.

### **Sea Ports**

As with Aviation Policy, the National Ports Policy (2013) was devised well before consideration of the National Planning Framework and Brexit. Dublin Port accounts for most of Ireland's ports traffic. In the context of both improving regional balance and Brexit there is a need to support other ports and the recent developments and growth in traffic at Rosslare are welcome in this regard. Additionally, as noted by the Irish Exporters Association in 2019 before Brexit, *With Dublin Port operating at or near capacity, further upgrading and diversifying Ireland's export gateways must be a strategic Government priority. We call on the Government to further develop Ireland's regional seaports to provide exporters across the island of Ireland with viable, cost efficient and accessible alternatives to Dublin Port*<sup>15</sup>.

In the context of the development of the marine, offshore energy, Brexit, and fisheries, there is a need to revise and improve supports for the ongoing upgrade and improvement of the Region's harbours and ports. For example, there exists over 70GW of offshore renewable energy potential around the island; with the majority (80%) of this existing along the west coast<sup>14</sup>. There is an emerging consensus among the Region's ports that a collaborative approach is more likely to realise the full potential of this resource and early stage development supports, with the involvement of utilities and other key stakeholders will be important during the lifetime of this plan.

The full outcome and implications of Brexit on these sectors are unclear but are likely to create serious challenges for sectors which are particularly important in sustaining rural coastal communities. The commercial and fishing ports of Killybegs, Greencastle & Ros a'Mhíl among others will need additional support.

The upgrade of Galway Harbour & Port continues to represent a strategic priority for the Region. The port currently deals largely in liquid bulk, however, the upgrade of the Port would allow it to serve a dual role as a commercial port for cargo, and also as a destination point for cruise tourism. This upscaling of the facility would increase Galway Ports influence across the wider region in terms of recreation and delivery of additional visitors into Galway City and the wider region.

### **NSO 8 Climate Resilient Society**

There is a need to focus on spending on the low carbon transition including energy infrastructure. A recent WDC publication highlights many of the challenges and

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<sup>15</sup> [IEA-Draft-Transport-Paper.pdf \(irishexporters.ie\)](#)

opportunities in the low carbon transition for more rural regions. Key aspects in relation to capital investment are noted here<sup>16</sup>.

The need for climate action is clear and will have diverse and wide-ranging impacts across Ireland, yet there has been very little focus on climate change and emissions issues for people living in rural areas.

Rural dwellers have different energy needs and often have reduced or more costly choices than their urban equivalents. Rural people are thought to have a larger carbon footprint than their urban counterparts and need greater access to cleaner energy choices. At the same time the sources of clean energy for all citizens are largely rural based. Energy and climate action will bring important opportunities to our largely rural region, but at the same time it will bring challenges that need to be addressed for the region to make the transition.

In making the investments for the transition it is important to recognise the need for investments in rural, more remote and less densely populated regions. This means more investment in sustainable and public transport across the country, not just in major urban centres. This will be essential to the low carbon transition.

Investment is needed in services such as EV charging points and CNG fuelling points in rural areas where population is dispersed. Without these services being available and reliable, rural dwellers could be reluctant to adopt the new technologies. Similarly, it could deter visitors who might be concerned about the availability of charging/fuelling points. In the case of HGVs and buses, lack of refuelling options could increase costs of delivery or services in more rural and peripheral regions.

Investment will be needed for energy efficiency retrofitting, the focus of which is likely to be on homes built before 2011. In the Western Region 93% of homes (280,949) were built before 2011. These are likely to require some form of energy efficiency upgrades and fuel switching to complete a move to a low carbon economy.

In addition to this there needs to be investment in the infrastructure necessary to diversify our heating options such as District Heating networks, and funding to incentivise switching of fuels, away from fossil fuels to bioenergy and to local, distributed energy production from solar, wind and other new energy choices which may emerge.

In the context of energy generation, the Western Region already has a significant connected renewable generation; more than half (55%) of the generation capacity in the Region is renewable and the Western Region is currently producing enough renewable electricity to meet 120% of its own demand. This means Region is a net provider of renewable electricity

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<sup>16</sup> [Transition-to-a-Low-Carbon-Region-WDC-Main-Report\\_FINAL-August-2020-1.pdf \(westerndevelopment.ie\)](#)

to the rest of Ireland making a significant contribution to the 2020 RES-E targets and to the target of 70% renewable electricity generation by 2030.

While there is capacity in the current transmission system for more renewable generation in areas of the Western Region including large parts of Co. Roscommon, Co. Clare and Co. Galway, there is concern about the slow pace and scale of development of new transmission circuits elsewhere in the Region. The areas of particular concern for future generation connection in the medium term are Co. Donegal and North Mayo. It is essential that we invest more in electricity infrastructure in places with good wind resources.

### **3. What types of capital investment should be prioritised?**

As noted above the central aim of capital spending should be to provide the conditions for regions to grow and realise their full potential and to support broader societal goals to underpin the objective of “sustainable development of the regions”. The WDC thus argues that infrastructure development should focus on the most efficient investments to deliver 1) economic growth and 2) long-term societal issues such as environmental quality, climate and housing. The WDC argue that Infrastructure, the ‘3Es’ (Enterprise, Employment and Education) and Innovation are the key levers for effective regional development as detailed in [WDC \(2010\)](#) and [WDC \(2011\)](#). In addition to the original objectives, the WDC argues that short to medium term targeted investment is required to deal with the external shocks of COVID-19 and Brexit that have a comparatively large impact on our region.

A detailed set of areas for investment within our region are detailed in response to question 2.

#### **Rationale:**

The National Development Plan remains the key mechanism through which the objectives of Project Ireland 2040, including the ambition to achieve 75% population growth in the regions, can be achieved. Therefore, it is vital that the Government focuses NDP investment on areas that will positively contribute to achieving this objective, whilst also addressing the impacts of Covid-19 and Brexit. Investment needs to be prioritised to key regional projects that will drive regional employment and enterprise growth, which in turn will drive population growth.

### **4. How can the management and governance of public investment be improved?**

#### **Project management and delivery**

- There is a need for focus on actual and speedy implementation of agreed priorities.
- Continuous improvement in project management is needed with a focus on delivery especially in those projects with a spatial impact designed to support the overarching objectives of Project Ireland 2040 and especially those supporting regional employment and population growth.

- Delivery agencies, such as local authorities, need project management resources to lead delivery. The centralised management of project management resourcing, while offering overall efficiencies, can unnecessarily delay the delivery of projects.

### **Appraisal methods**

- There is a need to consider appraisal methods as there is usually a focus, when examining infrastructure and development, on the benefits which can be brought about by investing in specific regional infrastructure. There are often arguments made against infrastructure investment in less developed regions (such as concerns relating to stranded assets, the opportunity cost of the investment), in comparison to other more densely populated areas, but there is little understanding or method of assessing the costs associated with a lack of infrastructural investment, and in particular the opportunity costs of lack of investment. The WDC has explored potential measures of the effects of lack of infrastructural investment (in terms of opportunity cost) with Prof. Morgenroth of DCU.

Lack of infrastructure investment can impact on regional development in a variety of ways including affecting growth capacity; making it more difficult to attract investment and to access markets and in turn to affecting employment opportunities and reducing productivity of other production factors.

While more difficult the assessment of projects in regions should be adjusted to take account of any potential wider economic and social benefits of a scheme and the potential of a scheme to contribute to regional development objectives. A review of the Capital Plan 2016-2021 notes the importance of the correct methodology<sup>17</sup>.

### **Rationale:**

- If the implications of appraisal methods are not considered in a spatial context and in the context of the spatial balance goals of Project Ireland 2040, then it is likely to concentrate investment to a greater extent in places where population is already concentrated, which means that more rural areas/ regions tend to get less investment, thereby undermining the possibility of realising the goals of Project Ireland 2040.

## **5. How is the NDP affecting your region?**

### **Need for speedy delivery**

If the NDP is aligned to the objectives of Project Ireland 2040 and regional investment projects are 'front loaded' and implemented as early as possible then the possibility of achieving at least some of the goals of Project Ireland, the Atlantic Economic Corridor for

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<sup>17</sup> [Infrastructure-Capacity-and-Demand-Analysis-Full-Draft-01-09-17-Final.pdf \(igees.gov.ie\)](#)

example, could be realised. If this was to occur the impact on the region would be transformative – as Project Ireland 2040 intends.

The NDP is the investment platform and delivery mechanism for many of the objectives of Project Ireland, but to deliver on that many of the regional projects need to be implemented sooner than originally set out in the NDP, for example the N17 road linking the north west to the mid-west. Slow implementation will compound rather than arrest the regional divergence and will not realise the overall objectives of Project Ireland 2040.

Apart from realising the benefits of such investments as soon as possible, the risk of delay and lack of prioritisation is to risk the actual delivery as the economic context can and will change and previous experience suggests that if projects are not committed to they may not happen.

### **Geographic concentration of National projects**

The dominance of investment in ‘National’ projects in the Eastern and Midland region is worrying. Under Culture, Heritage and Sport there are some major national investment projects being located in the Eastern & Midlands region (Abbey Theatre, Chester Beatty Library, IMMA, National Archives, National Concert Hall, National Gallery, National Indoor Arena, National Library, National Museum and a National Velodrome and Badminton Centre) and while they are termed ‘national’ the benefits of the capital investment, the jobs as well as the opportunities to visit these national cultural assets go to the Eastern and Midlands region and largely to Dublin, while the goal of the NPF is to spread growth to other regions. In contrast the investment in this category in the Northern and Western region is in some town libraries and a community centre. To achieve the goals of Ireland 2040 we need to spread ‘national’ projects beyond the capital.

An example of this is the Western Regional Audiovisual Producers Fund (WRAP) which is making a submission to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) in relation to the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP). WRAP is a unique initiative of the WDC and Galway Film Centre in association with the local authorities of Clare, Donegal, Galway City, Galway County, Mayo, Roscommon, Sligo and Údarás na Gaeltachta. In the three short years of its pilot phase, the numerous productions supported by WRAP will generate in excess of €20m of local expenditure. The creative industry is estimated to be worth almost half a billion according to a recent study by the WDC<sup>18</sup>. Within the WRAP counties, there are 367 AV companies, employing over 1,200 people generating over €56million annually. The WDC believes this is one example of creative and cultural infrastructure outside the capital which should be supported as part of our national cultural infrastructure.

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<sup>18</sup> [www.westerndevelopment.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Creative-economy-inputs-into-the-West-Regional-Enterprise-Plan-submission-to-the-National-Economic-Plan-2020-1.pdf](http://www.westerndevelopment.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Creative-economy-inputs-into-the-West-Regional-Enterprise-Plan-submission-to-the-National-Economic-Plan-2020-1.pdf)

On a positive note, the N5 Castlebar-Westport road is on track to enter service in 2022. This presents the prospect of the now separate towns being effectively fused into a single unit with a combined population which exceeds some currently designated “growth centres”.

Also, the role of the AEC in helping to deliver regional balance is welcome. The creation and support of AEC officers who work in the ten local authorities in the AEC and who are part funded by Department of Rural and Community Development is a very practical development which helps articulate and focus on the investment needs of the region. The WDC in its co-ordinating role will continue to work with and support the AEC Officers.

## **6. What is your feedback on Project Ireland 2040 communications?**

It is useful to have the breakdown of projects by region and category (Project Tracker) but there seems to be some inconsistency in what is included for each region, for example under climate action in Northern and Western region the only project is the Oweninny wind farm (ESB/ Bord na Mona), while in other regions flood relief is under that category.

There is a need for accuracy in reporting successes and timelines, for example in reporting what projects were actually delivered under this NDP or its predecessor e.g. the Gort-Tuam motorway was completed in September 2017 pre-dating this NDP.

## **7. Is there anything else you would like to add?**

The WDC welcomes the opportunity to submit its views to the Review to Renew the NDP. The NDP is one of the primary tools at the State’s disposal to deliver on the objectives of Project Ireland 2040 which the WDC believes is critical to support national development and growth. Project Ireland 2040 recognises that optimum national growth will be realised through strong growth across all regions.

This is imperative as without such concerted policy action and direction it is likely that many regions will fall further behind. Analyses of regional income and GDP highlights the differences and trends.<sup>19</sup>

While specific NDP implementation is vital, it is also important to recognise that much of sectoral planning and policy has, and will continue, to determine regional resource allocation and development. How the alignment of all these policies and plans will be realised is not clear.

Successful implementation requires that investment and policy decisions across State and semi-State organisations are in line with Project Ireland 2040, rather than operating in opposition to it. As noted, there are a whole range of national and regional policies which determine much of what occurs at a regional level. Regional policy and improved regional balance will not be realised by regional policy and funding alone. While specific ‘regional’

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<sup>19</sup>[How are we doing? Changes and Trends in County Incomes in the Western Region - Western Development Commission](#)  
[County Incomes and Regional GDP 2017 - CSO - Central Statistics Office](#)  
[Recent Trends in Regional GDP - Western Development Commission](#)

policy is important, all government policies have very significant effects on regional development<sup>20</sup>. Good examples of this are the National Ports Policy (2013) and National Aviation Policy (2015), both of which predate the formulation of Project Ireland 2040 and the NDP, but both enshrine and support the strong dominance of Dublin in terms of international connectivity to Ireland. There is an urgent need to review these policies to better support the transport needs of regions<sup>21</sup> and the objectives of Project Ireland 2040.

Ends

WDC, 18<sup>th</sup> February 2021

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<sup>20</sup> [reports-WDC-Policy-Briefing-Why-care-about-regions-July-2010.pdf \(westerndevelopment.ie\)](#)

<sup>21</sup> Irish Exporters Association, 2019. [IEA-Draft-Transport-Paper.pdf \(irishexporters.ie\)](#)