Western Development Commission

Submission on

Southern Assembly Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy Issues Paper

February 2018

Western Development Commission (WDC)

Key issues

The following is a summary of the key points made in response to the questions in the Southern Region *Issues Paper* for the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy and especially as they pertain to County Clare (within the WDC region). It should be noted that in this submission many references are made to the draft *Ireland 2040* the National Planning Framework (NPF) and its contents, targets and objectives. However as the draft *Ireland 2040* is expected to be revised before publication (after the completion of this submission), any comments made in the WDC submission, in relation to the NPF are provisional.

Our Cities and Towns

Labour catchments and their geographic reach provide important insights into the roles of urban centres and their hinterlands and consideration of these should inform the RSES.

Lack of employment opportunities will be the key barrier to achieving the Draft NPF targeted levels of 20-25% growth. The employment centres of Ennis and Shannon in particular are key and ensuring that these centres attract and retain employment opportunities will be a key determinant in the achievement of the targets.

The key challenges and barriers to the sustainable economic and population growth for towns and rural areas is out-migration and a lack of employment opportunities. It is important that the Strategy is focused on creating real opportunities for the people who live in the regions, whether in cities, towns or rural areas. However, to create employment we need to focus on the enablers of employment including infrastructure, as well as developing enterprises and entrepreneurship, education and skills.

Towns of all sizes should be centres for the provision of local services, including health and education services. Access via good transport links, to larger centres with a greater range and more specialist services is vital.

Our Rural Areas

Rural areas are already supporting national economic growth, climate action objectives and the development of local communities but a greater focus on rural development and in developing rural regions would increase the contributions made by rural areas.

To sustain viable rural communities we need to stimulate growth and employment, address issues of out migration and demographic change, provide innovative and practical public service solutions and make better use of their rich natural resources while ensuring they are protected for the future.

There are parts of County Clare which are underdeveloped and/or in decline. These are identified in the Clare Rural Development Strategy, *Realising Clare's Rural Potential* along with innovative actions to address the decline. The RSES needs to align with the Clare Rural Development Strategy.

Poor public transport and often a low quality road network create difficulties in accessing employment opportunities and services. Improved public transport services and next generation broadband are also infrastructure priorities.

It is essential that the Regional Strategy dovetails with the Action Plan for Rural Areas to ensure they work in a coherent manner to provide a strong policy and strategic basis for regional and rural action

and so are doubly effective. It is also essential to ensure that national goals align with regional strategies and county and local plans and across all sectors.

The natural rural environment is a key asset of County Clare and therefore it needs to be protected, and enhanced, both for its value to the economy and society and also for the potential it brings to local economic development. It is therefore important that the environment is protected and managed appropriately in a sustainable manner.

A Sustainable Economic Future

County Clare has specific strengths which should be leveraged further including Shannon Airport, Shannon Free Zone, the tourism sector and its prime location between the cities of Galway and Limerick.

If the goals and priorities of sectoral agencies are not aligned with RSES then implementation will be difficult if not impossible. Successful implementation requires that investment and policy decisions across State and semi-State organisations are in line with the RSES. While RSES strategic spatial planning may be considered an ideal, it is sectoral planning and policy that, for the moment and for the foreseeable future, is the real driver of regional development.

Critical Enabling Investment and Infrastructure

Investment is required in telecommunications, transport and energy infrastructure and towns and villages will benefit from the planned investments outlined in the Action Plan for Rural Development.

Any strategy to reduce transport carbon emissions must include initiatives to increase bus usage and reduce car dependency. There is a range of investments needed to improve patronage levels on public transport services including investment in facilities and rolling stock and better timetabling and increased frequencies.

Shannon airport and Shannon Foynes Port are very important economic drivers for the Southern part of the Western Region, with their influence extending beyond Co. Clare and into Co. Galway and beyond. Improved services at Shannon airport are needed. Shannon Foynes Port has an ambitious development strategy which should be supported so as to develop to serve regional growth more effectively.

Ensure the National Broadband Plan NBP (i) is implemented fully (ii) can deliver on planned future EU target speeds by deploying future proofed infrastructure.

The Implementation Group of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce needs to ensure that actions to provide immediate solutions to the broadband/phone coverage deficit in rural Ireland take effect at the earliest opportunity.

Implementation and Monitoring

For successful implementation it is important that the Regional Assembly has very clear responsibility for the delivery of the RSES and that there is a designated budget to help achieve its implementation. There needs to be policy consistency through national, regional and local levels and alignment with sectoral policy.

Measuring the successful implementation of the RSES will need focus on measuring outcomes at a regional and sub-regional level and indicators need to be devised and used to benchmark and

monitor progress. The case for monitoring and measuring outcomes at regional and sub-regional levels is even more important where investment has been spatially targeted.

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The Western Development Commission (WDC) welcomes the publication of *Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy: Issues Paper* by the Southern Regional Assembly.

The preparation of the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the RSES is a landmark in Irish public policy and it is hoped that it will provide a realistic basis for effective regional development and balancing of development throughout Ireland.

In this submission, the WDC addresses the specific questions posed in the *Issues Paper*, in the order they appear. County Clare is the only county within the Southern Assembly region that is also under the remit of the Western Development Commission, therefore this submission largely focuses on the questions as they pertain to County Clare.

About the Western Development Commission

The WDC is a statutory body established by government to promote, foster and encourage economic and social development in the Western Region. It operates under the aegis of the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD). The WDC works in co-operation with national, regional and local bodies involved in western development to ensure that the Western Region maximises its full development potential. It does this by:

- analysing economic and social trends and making policy recommendations;
- promoting the Western Region through the LookWest.ie campaign;
- supporting the rural economy through facilitating strategic initiatives (e.g. renewable energy, creative economy, rural tourism); and
- providing risk capital to businesses through the WDC Investment Fund.

One of the functions of the WDC is regional policy analysis. The WDC seeks to ensure that government policy reflects the needs and maximises the potential of the Western Region in such areas as infrastructure, natural resources, enterprise and rural development. It also tracks the implementation of policies and recommends adjustments as appropriate. This means that the organisation has a well thought out approach to regional development and issues for rural regions which has informed the preparation of our submission.

Contact Details

We are pleased to have the opportunity to make this submission and would be happy to expand on any points made if the Assembly or RSES team requires more information, supporting data or clarification. For queries please contact:

- Ms Deirdre Frost, Policy Analyst deirdrefrost@wdc.ie
- Dr Helen McHenry, Policy Analyst helenmchenry@wdc.ie
- Ms Pauline White, Policy Analyst paulinewhite@wdc.ie

Western Development Commission
Dillon House
Ballaghaderreen
Co Roscommon
Ireland
F45 WY26
Tel: +353 (0)94 986 1441
www.wdc.ie

3. Our Cities and Towns

What must the RSES do to facilitate the cities and Metropolitan Areas of Cork, Limerick and Waterford in achieving their full potential at international, national and regional level and to act as the main "engines" of economic growth in our region?

> **Key Points:**
> Labour catchments and their geographic reach provide important insights into the roles of urban centres and their hinterlands and consideration of these should inform the RSES.

The WDC region extends into County Clare within the Southern Assembly region. As such the cities within the Southern Assembly region are outside the remit of the WDC region. However the WDC has recently conducted analyses of Labour Catchments and Travel to work areas[1] which provide insights into the travel to work patterns of residents of County Clare and also the labour catchment of Limerick city.

This analysis shows the influence of Limerick city as a place of work for many residents of southern and eastern Clare and this has shown an increase since a similar analysis was done based on Census 2006. Just under 10,000 (9,647) workers live in that part of the Limerick city labour catchment which extends into Co. Clare, illustrating the importance of Limerick city as a place of work for residents of South-East Clare.

These insights illustrate the importance of labour catchments in helping define functional areas and the need for the RSES to examine these labour catchments. This will inform their consideration of their strategies and defining the boundaries of the Metropolitan Area Strategic Plans as they exist and extend beyond local authority boundaries.

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[1] Travel to Work and Labour Catchments in the Western Region (forthcoming) analysis by AIRO for WDC based on POWSCAR Census of Population 2016.

Larger Urban Centres

What are the potential barriers to achieve the Draft NPF targeted levels of 20-25% growth for larger centres (with populations in excess of 10,000) and how can the RSES address these barriers?

> **Key Points:**
> Lack of employment opportunities will be the key barrier to achieving the Draft NPF targeted levels of 20-25% growth. The employment centres of Ennis and Shannon in particular are key and ensuring that these centres attract and retain employment opportunities will be a key determinant in the achievement of the targets.

After Kilkenny, Ennis is the largest urban centre outside of the cities and is the fifth largest urban centre in the Southern Assembly region. While the Southern Assembly region contains thirteen towns with a population greater than 10,000, just one of these – Ennis is located in Co. Clare.

Larger regional towns such as Ennis which are quite close to cities (Limerick and Galway) can benefit from good connectivity and economic spill overs. In the case of Ennis, proximity to Shannon as an employment centre is also a driver.

Lack of employment opportunities will be the key barrier to achieving the Draft NPF targeted levels of 20-25% growth. The employment centres of Ennis and Shannon in particular are key and ensuring that these centres attract and retain employment opportunities will be a key determinant in the achievement of the targets.

Ennis
Forthcoming analysis by the WDC identifies the Ennis labour catchment in which the influence of Ennis extends over a large area but is predominately contained within county Clare. While the labour catchment extends to large parts of the county it excludes south western areas which are more influenced by the Kilrush labour catchment to the West and the Galway City labour catchment to the north (which extends into north-west Clare in areas close to Fanore and Ballyvaughan). Ennis is still the dominant labour catchment for parts of east Clare (Tulla and Feakle) but east of this area is mainly under the influence of Limerick City which acts as a major destination for residents of south-east Clare.

Shannon
The WDC considers that Shannon should also be considered in this category (larger centre with population in excess of 10,000) as its resident population of 9,729 is just below the threshold used, but furthermore it is a more significant employment destination than its resident population would suggest. The CSO identifies the 'daytime population'[2] which includes those travelling into work and study there as well as those that are normally resident there and who do not travel to work or study. It is clear from the significantly larger 'daytime population' that Shannon attracts a large influx of people to work there, both at the airport and among the 100+ international firms located there.

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[2] http://census.cso.ie/p11map41/

Towns with populations of less than 10,000 people
What are the key challenges and barriers to the achievement of sustainable economic and population growth for towns less than 10,000 population and rural areas?

> **Key Points:**
> The key challenges and barriers to the sustainable economic and population growth for towns and rural areas is out-migration and a lack of employment opportunities. It is important that the Strategy is focused on creating real opportunities for the people who live in the regions, whether in cities, towns or rural areas. However, to create employment we need to focus on the enablers of employment including infrastructure, as well as developing enterprises and entrepreneurship, education and skills.

The nature and role of the smaller towns must be considered in more detail in the RSES and in County Development Plans, but it is important to be aware, in the context of the Strategy that these towns as well as being important drivers of their local economy are also essential to those living in other even smaller, or less serviced towns, in villages or in the wider countryside. The connection of these towns into local infrastructure is very important, with good road access, bus services and leisure facilities all essential to the local population.

The population of towns is a simple measure to use when designating their status or importance but other factors are also very important. If a large town (over 10,000 population) is in the vicinity of a city it will have far fewer functions and activities than a similar sized or significantly smaller town which is distant from a city or large town.

The key challenges and barriers to the sustainable economic and population growth for towns and rural areas is out-migration and a lack of employment opportunities. Out migration has been a concern in rural parts of Clare in past decades. It usually involves people of people of working age, depriving the region of potential and available workers and in turn depriving it of their earning and spending contribution to the local economy. At the same time the dependency ratio of the area is increased, with more older and younger people dependant on fewer people of working age which has significant impacts on both the economy and on the service needs of the area.

Employment opportunity is key to maintaining and growing population. It is the availability of employment which will reduce out migration and attract people to live in the region. It is important that the Strategy is truly focused on creating real opportunities for the people who live in the regions, whether in cities, towns or rural areas. However, to create employment we need to focus on the enablers of employment including infrastructure, as well as developing enterprises and entrepreneurship, education and skills.

As migration is the key cause of rural population decline, the focus should be on enterprise and employment and education opportunities in the region both to reduce outmigration and attract people to live in the region.

Western Development Commission (WDC)

How should we define the hinterlands or functional areas of towns with populations of less than 10,000 people?

Several types of functional areas can be broadly defined:

From a labour supply perspective, 'travel to work catchments' is one option. Towns draw on a large supply of well qualified rural dwellers. Within Co. Clare, apart from the Ennis, Shannon and Limerick city catchments, there are smaller labour catchments such as the Kilrush labour catchment (2,871 workers living within this catchment)[3].Towns should be recognised as a resource with access to a well-educated labour supply drawn from a 45 minute catchment, largely engaged in non-manual and lower professional occupations, often within the public sector. Policy needs to support towns' existing employment base as well as supporting diversification where possible, for example into small scale manufacturing and international services.

Other types of hinterlands or functional areas can be defined depending on the purpose, for example health services and education services at primary, secondary and tertiary levels.

What are the most suitable criteria for determining the range of services which would be necessary for towns of between 1,500 and 10,000 people?

> **Key Points:**
> Towns of all sizes should be centres for the provision of local services, including health and education services. Access via good transport links, to larger centres with a greater range and more specialist services is vital.

Towns of all sizes should be centres for the provision of local services, including health and education services. For example, good access to primary, secondary and tertiary health services is very important. Local GP services need to be a focus of health planning, and access to secondary and tertiary health services needs to be well designed to take full account of the needs of those who are distant from the service. An increase in the number of tertiary clinics held away from the main centres should also be considered, so the services travel to the people rather than the other way around.

Access via good transport links, to larger centres with a greater range and more specialist services is vital. Some rural areas also face infrastructure and service deficits such as poor public transport and a low quality road network creating difficulties in accessing healthcare and education services beyond the primary and secondary levels. Similarly, public transport is also key. Access to the rail and intercity bus network is essential. It is important to ensure that intercity routes continue to stop at towns regularly. Further development of rural bus services would be welcome, providing links between communities and allowing people access to their local towns but it is important that transport services are integrated with each other.

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[3] Travel to Work and Labour Catchments in the Western Region (forthcoming) analysis by AIRO for WDC based on POWSCAR Census of Population 2016.

4. Our Rural Areas

What are the key infrastructure priorities (physical and social) to address to achieve tangible population and employment growth in rural areas, in particular to assist vibrant regenerated town and village centres which are competitive and attractive locations of choice for living and working?

> **Key Point:**
> Poor public transport and often a low quality road network create difficulties in accessing employment opportunities and services. Improved public transport services and next generation broadband are also infrastructure priorities.

Key infrastructure deficits include:

Transport

Poor public transport and often a low quality road network create difficulties in accessing healthcare and education services beyond the primary and secondary levels. Similarly, public transport is also key. Access to the rail and intercity bus network is essential. It is important to ensure that intercity routes continue to stop at towns regularly. Further development of rural bus services would be welcome, providing links between communities and allowing people access to their local towns but it is important that transport services are integrated with each other.

Telecommunications

Modern ICT infrastructure is a prerequisite for economic and social development in rural areas. It can improve accessibility and link rural areas with each other and with urban markets, provide educational, healthcare and business opportunities as well as making rural areas more attractive as places to live, work and visit. High speed broadband should be available to all and be an asset of each town, alongside other key communications infrastructure including excellent mobile phone coverage at 4G and 5G levels.

Service Levels

Towns of all sizes should be centres for the provision of local services, including health and education services. Some of these services can be provided on a weekly basis to smaller towns. However it is important that access, via good transport links, is integrated with these. Although smaller towns, in particular, can face significant challenges they also have key assets such as cultural heritage, historic buildings, local businesses and high levels of social capital. These all provide opportunities for diversification and adaptation of the town and its social network to adapt and embrace future opportunities, whether it is improved tourism product, attracting people to live there, or developing knowledge and sectoral clusters such as creative industries. Exploiting the strengths of each town, while addressing its deficits, is the way to sustain viable communities.

The Action Plan for Rural Development has a number of important actions for the development and revitalisation of rural towns under its first Pillar on supporting sustainable rural communities. These include:

- Action 1: Support over 600 towns and villages through an enhanced Town and Village Renewal Scheme, with funding of up to €12 million per annum, to support their revitalisation, boost their potential to support increased economic activity and improve the living and working environment of rural dwellers.

- Action 2 Develop and pilot an initiative to encourage increased residential occupancy in town and village centres.

- Action 3 Complementing the Town & Village Renewal Scheme, roll out the National Town Centre Health Check Programme in selected rural towns across Ireland to maximise the contribution of important facilities and assets within rural towns, in particular heritage resources

- Action 4 Finalising and implementing the recommendations of the Framework for Town Centre Revival to assist with the regeneration of rural towns.

- Action 5 As part of Rebuilding Ireland, the Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, support all local authorities to respond to the needs of their communities and deliver 47,000 new social homes which should also stimulate construction and other economic activities on a local and regional basis.

- Action 6 Review planning legislation to allow the change of use of vacant commercial properties in cities, towns and villages, including vacant or under-utilised areas over ground floor premises, into residential units without having to go through the planning process.

- Action 7 Increase delivery of small housing schemes in towns and villages as an alternative to one-off housing.

When these are implemented in a coordinated way there will be significant benefits for towns in the Region.

Clare Rural Development Strategy
Realising Clare's Rural Potential, Clare Rural Development Strategy 2026, was published in 2016. It details a range of actions designed to target a reversal of population decline across parts of Rural Clare. The strategy aims to deliver 4,000 jobs in rural areas over 10 years and challenges the presumption that urban living is the only model for growth. Focussing on community development and community run social enterprises, development will take a partnership approach with communities and agencies working together.

The RSES and NPF should actively support the Clare Rural Development Strategy and local, regional and national government will need to support the local communities to deliver on this plan. There are useful insights into innovative approaches to rural development which could benefit other rural communities across the Southern region.

How can the RSES support growth and diversity in rural economic sectors which are successfully embedded in our region, particularly agriculture, marine, forestry, tourism, energy and the green economy? What are the examples of other emerging sectors that will further drive the rural economy and what are infrastructure requirements that will assist their success?

Key Points:
Rural areas are already supporting national economic growth, climate action objectives and the development of local communities but a greater focus on rural development and in developing rural regions would increase the contributions made by rural areas. To sustain viable rural communities we need to stimulate growth and employment, address issues of out migration and demographic change, provide innovative and practical public service solutions and make better use of their rich natural resources while ensuring they are protected for the future.

It is essential that the Regional Strategy dovetails with the Action Plan for Rural Areas to ensure they work in a coherent manner to provide a strong policy and strategic basis for regional and rural action and so are doubly effective. It is also essential to ensure that national goals align with regional strategies and county and local plans and across all sectors.

Rural areas are already supporting national economic growth, climate action objectives and the development of local communities but a greater focus on rural development and in developing rural regions would increase the contributions made by rural areas. To sustain viable rural communities we need to stimulate growth and employment, address issues of out migration and demographic change, provide innovative and practical public service solutions and make better use of their rich natural resources while ensuring they are protected for the future. We need to be aware of the cost of doing nothing, of not investing in making rural areas more sustainable. These are not just the economic costs of higher unemployment and under employment and the associated social welfare, they include the human costs of social exclusion, poverty and isolation.[4]

It must also be remembered that rural areas are often attractive places to live, and have lower housing, childcare and other costs than many urban areas. Therefore, by working to improve employment opportunities and develop and support a culture of enterprise and entrepreneurship this will help to improve the viability of rural communities.

Rural areas depend on their natural resources for much of their economic activities, indeed this is one of the key differentiating characteristics of a rural economy. Making the most of these assets, for enhancing quality of life, attracting people to live, work and visit and provide employment opportunities in a coordinated way can all help to sustain rural communities alongside the natural environment. There are significant opportunities in the development of the green economy and bio economy, in areas such as renewable energy, new forms of food production and agricultural output all of which can take advantage of more concentrated urban markets, particularly when the 'story' of local sustainable production is integral to their sale and value.

It is essential that the Regional Strategy dovetails with the Action Plan for Rural Areas to ensure they work in a coherent manner to provide a strong policy and strategic basis for regional and rural action and so are doubly effective in their focus on improving economic opportunities and social well being and thus quality of life for people living in rural communities. It is also essential to ensure that national goals align with regional strategies and county and local plans and across all sectors.

- **Renewable energy**: **Renewable energy is an area where the Region holds substantial resources in wind, ocean and biomass, which can be developed for regional and national benefit.** The

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[4] Social Justice Ireland, 2016, Socioeconomic review: chapter 12 rural development

WDC is actively involved in a number of projects to develop the region's renewable energy capacity. Currently the WDC is a partner in three transnational projects in this area – Generating Renewable Energy Business Enterprises (http://grebeproject.eu/), Re-Direct and LeCO. These projects concern developing renewable energy businesses in the region, promoting the efficient use of natural resources / materials by converting residual biomass into carbon products, and community energy respectively.

- **Creative industries**: The creative industries of arts, crafts, design and media is another area of regional strength with **many creative entrepreneurs attracted to the Region by its high quality of life**. It has been estimated that close to 11,000 people in the region are engaged in this sector, characterised by sole traders, micro-enterprises and freelancers. The WDC is the lead partner of a transnational project called 'a creative momentum project' supporting the development of the sector, including expanding export markets.[5]

- **Tourism**: Cultural heritage, outdoor recreation, experiential tourism and the 'silver market' are some of the tourist areas of potential growth. **The Wild Atlantic Way initiative is an example of a regional approach driven by the public sector and strongly supported and developed by the private sector in these areas.** Developing the tourism assets that exist beyond the Wild Atlantic Way and in areas which are not traditional tourism 'honeypots' is an area of substantial growth potential.

- **Agri-food**: Agri-food is one of the most regionally dispersed sectors nationally and plays a central role in the rural economy. **Given the nature of agriculture in the region, opportunities in value-added meat processing, organic production, functional foods and artisan products are potential areas of growth**, in some cases linked to the tourism sector. In general however the region's agricultural and agri-food sector is of a smaller scale than that elsewhere and also plays an important environmental stewardship role.

- **Marine**: The Western Region's many valuable marine assets are relatively under-developed. **The region is in a position to take advantage, in a sustainable way, of potential in seafood products, tourism, amenity and ocean energy. Other innovations in the use of marine assets are also likely in lifesciences**. Our extensive ocean resource and the existence of research infrastructure and a research orientated FDI and SME base, offers potential for developing the blue economy while preserving the ecological stability of the marine environment.

Infrastructure requirements

Infrastructure assets can both reflect and influence the viability of a region. At the most basic level a good road network is essential to allow people to travel to work, and distribute goods to market, to access services and to make the area accessible. Access to the rail and intercity bus network is essential but it is important that transport services are integrated with each other.

Modern ICT infrastructure is a prerequisite for economic and social development. Quality online access is a pre-requisite for participation in modern economy and society and a lack of access is a significant barrier to small business in particular. Improved ICT also supports self-employment and entrepreneurship as well as promote alternative forms of work and remote working, which can all help sustain rural economies.

Quality energy networks will also be essential to regional growth.

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[5] www.mycreativeedge.eu

Western Development Commission (WDC)

How can the RSES strengthen protection of the rural environment and rural resources in tandem with objectives for sustainable growth in the rural population and employment?

The natural rural environment is a key asset of County Clare and therefore it needs to be protected, and enhanced, both for its value to the economy and society and also for the potential it brings to local economic development. It is therefore important that the environment is protected and managed appropriately in a sustainable manner.

The natural rural environment is a key asset of County Clare and therefore it needs to be protected, and enhanced, both for its value to the economy and society and also for the potential it brings to local economic development. It is therefore important that the environment is protected and managed appropriately in a sustainable manner.

The high number of environmental designations and especially the Burren, should be viewed as key assets on which we can build. Areas of potential include niche eco tourism, developing an identity for the region associated with high environmental quality and developing tourism options for those with an interest in the area. It is also an important area for the development of research and environmental management expertise and specialisms.

The natural habitat of the County also lends itself to the development of a regional recreation and activity brand, with businesses providing these options for tourists and people from other parts of the island, as well as attractive opportunities for people who live here. This can contribute significantly to the attractiveness of the region.

The Clare Rural Development Strategy recognises the need to protect and enhance the natural environment and environmental quality is a key performance indicator in the Strategy.

6. A Sustainable Economic Future

What are the existing strengths of the region's economy, particularly the specialisms that distinguish the region nationally and internationally as an economic location?

> **Key Points:**
> County Clare has specific strengths which should be leveraged including Shannon Airport, Shannon Free Zone, Tourism and its prime location between the cities of Galway and Limerick.

County Clare has specific drivers which should be supported and leveraged to drive further growth. In particular:

Shannon Airport: international air access including the US for business and tourism and access, logistics and aviation maintenance associated activities.

Shannon Free Zone: cluster of 100+ firms ranging from long standing manufacturing firms such as Element Six (De Beers Industrial Diamonds) to more recent investments such as Jaguar and medical device company Zimmer biomet.

Tourism: The Wild Atlantic Way, Bunratty, East Clare and Lough Derg based water activities among other specific sites

Location and access: County Clare is bounded by two of Ireland's five cities, Galway at its northern border and Limerick to the south. It has a recently completed motorway extending from Limerick to Tuam in County Galway. It is planned that this motorway will extend from Cork. Shannon International airport and Shannon Foynes Port (located across the Shannon estuary) are both very significant infrastructural assets of national importance.

How do we maximise opportunities in the emerging sectors of the economy for the benefit of the region as a whole and what can we do to address those sectors that are in decline?

See Section 8 for specific detail on Infrastructure developments are needed to maximise opportunities in the emerging sectors.

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What needs to be done to ensure that the benefit of increased economic activity in our cities and larger urban centres is transferred into the rest of the towns, villages and more rural parts of the region?

> **Key Points:**
> Rural areas are already supporting national economic growth, climate action objectives and the development of local communities but a greater focus on rural development and in developing rural regions would increase the contributions made by rural areas.
>
> To sustain viable rural communities we need to stimulate growth and employment, address issues of out migration and demographic change, provide innovative and practical public service solutions and make better use of their rich natural resources while ensuring they are protected for the future.
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> It is essential that the Strategy dovetails with the Action Plan for Rural Areas and the Clare Rural Development Strategy to ensure they work in a coherent manner to provide a strong policy and strategic basis for regional and rural action and so are doubly effective.

Rural areas are already supporting national economic growth, climate action objectives and the development of local communities but a greater focus on rural development and in developing rural regions would increase the contributions made by rural areas. To sustain viable rural communities we need to stimulate growth and employment, address issues of out migration and demographic change, provide innovative and practical public service solutions and make better use of their rich natural resources while ensuring they are protected for the future. We need to be aware of the cost of doing nothing, of not investing in making rural areas more sustainable. These are not just the economic costs of higher unemployment and under employment and the associated social welfare, they include the human costs of social exclusion, poverty and isolation.[6]

It must also be remembered that rural areas are often attractive places to live, and have lower housing, childcare and other costs than many urban areas. Therefore, by working to improve employment opportunities and develop and support a culture of enterprise and entrepreneurship this will help to improve the viability of rural communities. Good quality of life is also an asset of our rural areas so it is important that they are in a position to attract people of working age. This is in part by being appealing places to live with attractive small towns and also though good connectivity allowing multiple forms of working.

Rural areas depend on their natural resources for much of their economic activities, indeed this is one of the key differentiating characteristics of a rural economy. Making the most of these assets, for enhancing quality of life, attracting people to live, work and visit and provide employment opportunities in a coordinated way can all help to sustain rural communities alongside the natural environment.

Rural communities can face particular challenges due to the demographic composition of their communities, the structure of their economies and their access to and ability to adopt new technologies. However, it is important to recognise that all rural areas and rural communities are not the same. There are differences in remoteness and accessibility, in the influence of large urban centres and their connections to it and in the natural resource assets and in their access to infrastructures.

It is essential that the Strategy dovetails with the Action Plan for Rural Areas and the Clare Rural Development Strategy to ensure they work in a coherent manner to provide a strong policy and

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[6] Social Justice Ireland, 2016, Socioeconomic review: chapter 12 rural development

strategic basis for regional and rural action and so are doubly effective in their focus on improving economic opportunities and social well being and thus quality of life for people living in rural communities. It is also essential to ensure that national goals align with regional strategies and county and local plans, across all sectors not just in the areas of planning and land use.

Are there parts of the Southern Region that are notably underdeveloped? What reasons are there for this and what can we do to overcome such blockages?

Key Points:
There are parts of County Clare which are underdeveloped and/or in decline. These are identified in the Clare Rural Development Strategy, *Realising Clare's Rural Potential* along with innovative actions in response. The RSES needs to align with the Clare Rural Development Strategy.

The Clare Rural Development Strategy, *Realising Clare's Rural Potential* has identified distinct areas within Co. Clare that are underdeveloped and suffering decline. The Strategy identifies an innovative approach where neighbouring towns and villages would cooperate more closely and support each other in delivering services to their communities., For example some towns such as Kilrush and Ennistymon have the resources of a traditional 'service town' while adjacent centres such as Kilkee and Lahinch are renowned leisure and recreation centres. If these adjacent towns and their respective hinterlands work together there will be a greater basis for attracting private and public sector investment.

The RSES and the NPF will need to fully align with and support such local strategies to ensure they are successful.

7. Environment, Natural Heritage, Coastal Areas and the Marine

Given the high level of emissions from agricultural activity and the transport sector, what are the key changes that need to be made to bring these sectors into line with national targets?

> **Key Points:**
> People living in rural areas in County Clare and elsewhere throughout the Region are more reliant on car based transport, they have less available public transport and tend to travel greater distances. A significant switch to electric vehicles along with electricity generation based on renewables, will help contribute to a decline in rural emissions.

People living in rural areas in parts of County Clare and elsewhere throughout the Region are more reliant on car based transport, they have less available public transport and tend to travel greater distances. Clearly rural dwellers' transport demand patterns need to be central to planning for climate change mitigation. In addressing this issue it is important to consider the underlying presumption that employment will be concentrated in cities. There are opportunities for employment to be more dispersed, in line with current population patterns. Towns, smaller centres and rural areas provide a variety of opportunities as locations for employment across many sectors (not just agri-food and tourism). Commuting travel demand, fuel use and time spent can also be reduced if employment is more dispersed, in line with current population patterns. In 2011 61% of rural dwellers (excluding farmers) worked in towns or rural areas rather than cities, illustrating the potential to stimulate employment closer to where people live.

It can be argued that better spatial planning, with more concentration in population centres, will provide more concentrated transport demand which can be better served by public transport with lower per capita emissions. However, in addition to planning for future development, there is a need to manage current and historic settlement patterns. People will continue to follow historic patterns and it should not be assumed that land use planning can radically alter Ireland's historically dispersed settlement pattern, especially in rural regions. Finally, should there be a significant switch to electric vehicles, and if electricity generation is mainly renewable by 2040, then rural emissions will fall considerably.

Given the strategic location of the Southern Region's ports the region could become even more important strategic gateways to continental Europe after Britain leaves the EU, what are the steps required to realise the potential of our key ports?

> **Key Points:**
> Shannon Foynes Port is a hugely important infrastructural asset as a transport hub for distribution into the Region. It would be important to ensure the maximum potential drawdown of EU TEN T funding is facilitated along with very good surface transport links connecting the port to its hinterland.

Shannon Foynes Port is a hugely important infrastructural asset as a transport hub for distribution into the Region. It is a deepwater port and is designated a Tier 1 Port of national significance under the National Ports Policy (2013) and is the only Tier 1 port on the west coast. Shannon Foynes Port has an ambitious development strategy which should be supported so as to develop to serve regional growth more effectively.

- In particular it would be important to ensure the maximum potential drawdown of EU TEN T funding is facilitated.
- Ensure excellent road and where relevant rail connectivity from Shannon Foynes Port to the wider region.

What are the key economic and environmental issues to be addressed for our coastal and marine areas and how should we develop an integrated approach to support our coastal and marine areas?

In order to develop the maritime economy, land based infrastructure development is essential. Some of the areas with greatest potential for maritime activity are among the most remote parts of Ireland and have, historically, poor infrastructure.

- Our ports and harbours are a hugely important infrastructural asset with many functions;
    - ➢ as transport hubs for distribution of into the Region, e.g. Shannon Foynes
    - ➢ Coastal tourism sites such as Lahinch, Spanish Point and Kilkee among others
    - ➢ Smaller harbours and inland marinas for berthing smaller fleet.

- Improvement in broadband and mobile phone connections is essential to the development of our offshore economy and coastal communities, in the same way as they are for other rural and less developed areas. It would support the development of local enterprises and community connectivity both in high-tech, high value added opportunities in the marine sector as well as in tourism, amenity and recreation and more traditional fishing, marine farming and foraging enterprises.

8. Critical Enabling Investment and Infrastructure

How can the RSES seek to improve the coordination and governance of public investment?

What role can the Regional Assembly play in more explicitly aligning the investment plans of State Owned Enterprises with Government objectives

Key Points:
If the goals and priorities of sectoral agencies are not aligned with RSES then implementation will be difficult if not impossible. Successful implementation requires that investment and policy decisions across State and semi-State organisations are in line with the RSES. While RSES strategic spatial planning may be considered an ideal, it is sectoral planning and policy that, for the moment and for the foreseeable future, is the real driver of regional development.

If the goals and priorities of sectoral agencies are not aligned with RSES then implementation will be difficult if not impossible. But achieving this alignment, and at the same time achieving strategic spatial goals, will be complex. Such organisations have other responsibilities and are dealing with other issues in terms of their service and investment plans. They may find that what is appropriate for their function is not in line with the RSES. If the RSES is to succeed there needs to be a mechanism for resolving or considering such conflicts to ensure that they are not ignored, and so that appropriate decisions are made by the responsible organisations.

Successful implementation requires that investment and policy decisions across State and semi-State organisations are in line with the RSES rather than operating in opposition to it. While it is important to consider how implementation will work it is also important to recognise that while RSES strategic spatial planning may be considered an ideal, it is sectoral planning and policy that, for the moment and for the foreseeable future, is the real driver of regional development.

More Autonomy for Regional Offices
The development of the RSES by the three Regional Assemblies provides a key opportunity to build regional alliances and collaboration. However for these to be effectively implemented, greater autonomy for local and regional actors is needed.

More decision-making autonomy for the regional and local offices of national agencies and institutions e.g. Enterprise Ireland, HSE, to allow them to fully engage in local and regional alliances and collaborations, tailored to the specific circumstances of the regions, is required for implementation of the RSES. A 'one size fits all' approach is not going to be effective and the only way to avoid this is to provide increased autonomy at local and regional level to state agencies and government Departments.

Certainty of Funding and Investment
The primary source of funding for achieving regional development will be the National Exchequer. The only way that the RSES can be successfully implemented is for Departmental and State and Semi-State Agency expenditure decisions and allocations, including the National Investment Plan, to be fully aligned with the spatial priorities outlined in the RSES. In the absence of alignment of Exchequer funding with the NPF and RSES, they cannot succeed.

Western Development Commission (WDC)

What key infrastructural investment is required to facilitate the development of the towns and villages in the Southern Region?

Key Points:
Along with the required investment in telecommunications, transport and energy infrastructure, towns and villages will benefit from planned investments outlined in the Action Plan for Rural Development.

Telecommunications, Transport and Energy infrastructure are all critical and detailed below.

Towns and villages will also benefit from the planned investment contained in The Action Plan for Rural Development. The first Pillar on supporting sustainable rural communities has a number of actions for the development and revitalisation of rural towns including:

- Action 1: Support over 600 towns and villages through an enhanced Town and Village Renewal Scheme, with funding of up to €12 million per annum, to support their revitalisation, boost their potential to support increased economic activity and improve the living and working environment of rural dwellers.

- Action 2: Develop and pilot an initiative to encourage increased residential occupancy in town and village centres.

- Action 3: Complementing the Town & Village Renewal Scheme, roll out the National Town Centre Health Check Programme in selected rural towns across Ireland to maximise the contribution of important facilities and assets within rural towns, in particular heritage resources

- Action 4: Finalising and implementing the recommendations of the Framework for Town Centre Revival to assist with the regeneration of rural towns.

- Action 5: As part of Rebuilding Ireland, the Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, support all local authorities to respond to the needs of their communities and deliver 47,000 new social homes which should also stimulate construction and other economic activities on a local and regional basis.

- Action 6: Review planning legislation to allow the change of use of vacant commercial properties in cities, towns and villages, including vacant or under-utilised areas over ground floor premises, into residential units without having to go through the planning process.

- Action 7: Increase delivery of small housing schemes in towns and villages as an alternative to one-off housing.

When these are implemented in a coordinated way there will be significant benefits for towns in the Region.

Other useful models are:

The Heritage Council's Policy Proposals for Ireland's Towns (2015)
http://www.heritagecouncil.ie/content/files/policy_proposals_irelands_towns_2015_5mb.pdf

Western Development Commission (WDC)

Carnegie Trust "Searching for Space: What place for towns in Public Policy 2017 (covering both UK and Ireland) https://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/carnegieuktrust/wp-content/uploads/sites/64/2017/11/Searching-for-Space-What-place-for-towns-in-public-policy.pdf

Other interesting information on market towns, their role and development in relation to the Northern Powerhouse is available here:

- Download: The Northern Powerhouse - where do market towns fit in? (PDF, 1MB)
- Press release: What can market towns offer the Northern Powerhouse debate?

What are the key infrastructure investments needed to support sustainable connectivity (including modal shift to sustainable transport modes) throughout our region including infrastructure between our large urban areas, within our metropolitan cities, towns and villages?

Key Points:
Any strategy to reduce transport carbon emissions must include initiatives to increase bus usage and reduce car dependency. There is a range of investments needed to improve patronage levels on bus and rail services including investment in facilities and rolling stock and better timetabling and increased frequencies.

Any strategy to reduce transport carbon emissions must include initiatives to increase bus usage and reduce car dependency. As the most important mode of public transport (70% of all public transport journeys in 2015 were by bus and all forms of bus transport had increased journeys in 2015, National Transport Authority), and in the context of an ageing population and the need to achieve Ireland's climate and energy goals, infrastructure investments in bus transport must be central to modal shift from car to bus transport must be central to capital investment over the longer term. Any strategy to reduce carbon emissions must include initiatives to increase bus usage. Increased frequency of services, integration of services and Quality Bus Corridors will all be needed to increase modal shift to bus. Opportunities for the use of biogas in bus services is another route to improved sustainability. Furthermore, many parts of the Region do not have access to rail services.

Bus transport services, as well as being used by commuters, are extensively used by younger and older age groups, those with a disability, recent immigrants and other relatively socially disadvantaged groups. Bus transport contributes to social inclusion and can be particularly important in a rural context to address social isolation and facilitate access to services. Bus transport is an important element in ensuring equitable development.

To improve take-up in relation to Bus services the key priorities are detailed below.

Bus stations: The standard and quality of facilities at a number of public bus stations, and notably the central Bus Station (Bus Áras), is extremely poor and in some cases entirely unacceptable. Sub-standard facilities at bus stations discourage the use of bus transport and create a very negative impression. A planned schedule of refurbishment and upgrading of bus stations, including provision of adequate free or competitively priced car parking, based on an assessment of current conditions should be included in the Capital Investment Plan.

New transport hubs: As well as current bus stations, a review should be undertaken of the entire public bus network to identify strategic locations for the creation of new, high quality transport hubs with convenient and free or competitively priced car parking facilities, which would facilitate passengers to easily switch between services.

New and replacement buses: A scheduled programme of fleet renewal and expansion for the public bus companies should be clearly set out in the Capital Plan to provide for new and replacement buses to maintain fleet quality and safety. This programme should be set out up to 2021 and is also important for the long term capital plan to 2028.

Timetabling and ticketing: A key challenge in expanding bus transport is increasing frequency of services, improved timetabling and smart ticketing to increase the integration of services. Current timetabling often does not facilitate passengers to transfer between services and reduces the attractiveness of bus as a mode of transport. As well as facilitating residents to access health, education, recreation and other transport services in urban areas, integration and timetabling are important for increased bus usage by tourists visiting regional and more rural locations.

Rural transport services: In 2016 the Rural Transport Programme was consolidated into seventeen Transport Co-ordination Units (branded as Local Link) nationally. An estimated 1.765 million passengers accessed rural transport services in 2016 and the seventeen Local Link offices manage approximately 1,000 public bus services in local and rural areas which are a combination of scheduled services and door-to-door services. The Rural Transport Programme is particularly important to older, younger and socially disadvantaged groups living in rural areas providing access to services in their local town or larger centre. With an ageing population, the demand for such services is likely to continue to grow. They can also contribute to increased sustainability by reducing car dependence in rural areas. Maintenance of current services and increased investment should be included in the Capital Plan.

PSO services: PSO services are socially necessary but financially unviable routes. The current financial difficulties at Bus Éireann will place increased pressure on the provision of services on PSO routes. As these services have a public service element, and are an important connection for rural residents to access services in urban centres or connect with inter-city public transport, the Capital Plan should clearly support continued public subvention of rural PSO routes.

Rail commuter services: When considering priorities for development or areas in which sustainable development opportunities are available, it is important to consider how the location of housing and employment along public transport corridors, such as intercity rail routes, allows significant possibilities. It is important to consider the rail network as an asset with huge potential to enable more sustainable development in the Southern Region.

Western Development Commission (WDC)

How can our airports and ports become economic drivers for the Southern Region?

Key Points:
Shannon airport and Shannon Foynes Port are very important economic drivers for the Southern part of the Western Region, with their influence extending beyond Co. Clare and into Co. Galway and beyond. Improved services at Shannon airport are needed. Shannon Foynes Port has an ambitious development strategy which should be supported so as to develop to serve regional growth more effectively.

From the WDC perspective, Shannon airport and Shannon Foynes Port are very important economic drivers for the Southern part of the Western Region, with their influence extending beyond Co. Clare and into Co. Galway and beyond.

Shannon Airport
Though *Ireland 2040-Our Plan* notes that the main airports of Dublin, Cork, Shannon and Knock are spatially located to serve most of the population, the focus of investment and ever greater expansion in *Ireland 2040-Our Plan* is at Dublin Airport despite the spare capacity at the other three main airports and the ability of these airports to serve their catchments and help drive further development in their regions. The current focus on Dublin Airport only serves the 'business as usual' scenario and militates against each of the other airports fulfilling the role envisaged of them.

Improved services at Shannon airport are needed. This will reduce the need for residents in regional locations to avail of services at Dublin Airport which in turn will reduce journey numbers through an already congested Greater Dublin Area.

The Costs of Congestion
The Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport has undertaken research estimating the costs of congestion in the Greater Dublin Area (July 2017). Estimating the value of time lost due to aggravated congestion[7], the research values the cost at €358 million in 2012 – the base year), rising to €2.08 billion per year in 2033.
These costs are considerable and need to be assessed in the wider context of spatial balance and regional development and the capacity which is available in the regions, such as international air and sea access ports which can help reduce some of these congestion costs.

Better services and increased frequencies at Shannon airport will help drive further investment in the Region. International air access is very important in supporting and attracting both indigenous and foreign direct investment providing speedy and efficient access to global markets, suppliers and staff. Shannon airport has capacity to grow and is proximate to businesses in the Region, providing short reliable journey times.

Improved service levels are needed to allow tourists to access the Wild Atlantic Way directly, especially for those international tourists who are on short breaks and do not want to spend time travelling via Dublin airport.

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[7] Congestion levels above those which would be expected on a properly functioning busy road.
http://www.dttas.ie/corporate/publications/english/cost-congestion-main-report

Shannon Foynes Port

Shannon Foynes Port is a hugely important infrastructural asset as a transport hub for distribution into the Region. It is a deepwater port and under the National Ports Policy (2013), Shannon Foynes is the only Tier 1 port on the west coast.   Shannon Foynes Port has an ambitious development strategy which should be supported so as to develop to serve regional growth more effectively. The draft *Ireland 2040-Our Plan* advocated *A greater concentration of traffic through Tier 1 ports; Dublin, Cork and Shannon Foynes* (p94). There is strong growth in traffic through all Irish ports but there is an increasing imbalance with volumes through Dublin port being disproportionally large while local ports do not put through the volume that good spatial strategy would dictate, according to the Irish Exporters Association[8]. While many exporters would like to use ports in the South and West, the poor interregional connectivity is a militating factor. The further concentration of traffic should be at Cork, Shannon Foynes and the other ports serving the west/north west region. In the interests of competition and security it is concerning if there is to be further concentration of traffic at Dublin port.

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[8] Pre Budget Submission, Budget 2018, Irish Exporters Association p.9, 10. http://www.irishexporters.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/PreBudgetSubmission2018.pdf

Western Development Commission (WDC)

Is digital infrastructure sufficiently prioritised as an essential infrastructure for the economic and social development of communities throughout our region's cities, towns, villages and rural areas? What are the main barriers to the successful implementation of the National Broadband Plan and other digital economy initiatives throughout our region and how can the RSES address this?

> **Key points:**
> Ensure the National Broadband Plan NBP (i) is implemented fully (ii) can deliver on planned future EU target speeds by deploying future proofed infrastructure.
>
> The Implementation Group of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce needs to ensure that actions to provide immediate solutions to the broadband/phone coverage deficit in rural Ireland take effect at the earliest opportunity.

There is a significant imbalance in access to digital services; urban centres are generally well served but rural areas have poorer service levels and limited competition and investment. Just over one third (33.9%) of premises in County Clare are within the Intervention area of the National Broadband Plan[9].

Significant developments in the state intervention in next generation broadband rollout are expected in 2018. However, the withdrawal of one of the two remaining bidders has raised concerns about the completion of the procurement process as originally envisaged. Though the NBP plan was published in 2012, the form of the intervention strategy was not published until 2015. The process to date has navigated a regulatory environment and complied with EU State aid rules to ensure that all potential bidders are treated in a fair and equitable manner. Contracts are to be awarded to telecommunications providers to rollout a high speed broadband network as part of the much awaited National Broadband Plan (NBP). These decisions will influence the nature of telecommunications infrastructure investment in Ireland for the next 25 years.

While the NBP targets include universal access to 30 Mbps download and 6 Mbps upload, there are indications from the EC that new EU targets are being planned. For example there is a draft proposal that all European households will have access to connectivity offering at least a download speed of 100 Mbps by 2025. To ensure we can deliver the speeds of any future EU targets, the use of future proofed infrastructure delivering very high speeds has to be deployed in the planned investment to start in 2018, but will be delivering for the next 25 years.

Recognising that there is some poor 4G coverage and 'blackspots' for mobile voice calls, the Government established a Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce to identify immediate solutions to broadband/mobile phone coverage. The work of the Taskforce is being monitored by an implementation group which needs to ensure solutions are implemented in a speedy manner. Alongside that, it is important that mobile phone coverage, 4G and 5G continues to be improved, as this is a key enabler of business transactions and social networks and many rural areas are at a disadvantage because of patchy or non-existent coverage.

Local Authorities are key stakeholders in the roll out of the NBP. Broadband Officers employed by each Local Authority have been charged with removing barriers faced by telecoms operators in their Local Authority Area. These Broadband Officers liaise with the commercial telecommunications providers in providing access at the local authority level regarding the rollout of broadband infrastructure and mobile phone coverage as well as wider issues including Digital Strategies.

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[9] Department of Communications, Climate Action & Environment. County Coverage Statistics, Q3, 2017

Western Development Commission (WDC)

9. Implementation and Monitoring

What measures need to be put in place at a regional level to ensure full implementation of the National Policy Objectives in the Draft NPF and the more detailed policies and objectives of the RSES?

> **Key Points:**
> For successful implementation it is important that the Regional Assembly has very clear responsibility for the delivery of the RSES and that there is a designated budget to help achieve its implementation. There needs to be policy consistency through national, regional and local levels and alignment with sectoral policy.

Clear Roles and Responsibilities

For successful implementation it is important that the Regional Assembly has very clear responsibility for the delivery of the RSES and that there is a designated budget to help achieve its implementation. There must be clarity about the division of roles and responsibilities between the Regional Assembly and the national body with responsibility for implementation of the NPF (Department of Housing, Planning & Local Government or Department of An Taoiseach).

Consistency through National, Regional and Local Level

While the RSES is a regional strategy, its success will very much depend on decisions made at central Government level, on national sectoral policy and the decisions of state agencies and bodies with a national remit, as well as those of private sector investors. Much of the control over its implementation will be at a national level.

Unfortunately the draft NPF contains very little information about the relationship between implementation of the NPF at national level and the RSES at regional level. How will the RSES fit into the Framework? What is the role of the Regional Assembly? Will the three RSES be regarded as separate strategies or integral elements of the NPF?

As well as the relationship between the RSES and the NPF, the RSES also has relationships with county and local plans (County Development Plans, Local Economic & Community Plans, Local Development Plans) and its implementation will be spread from national, to regional to local level (at Local Authority, but also at local community level). This is a challenging position for the RSES and the Regional Assembly, to reconcile national, regional and local objectives. The RSES's relationship with all these elements needs to be made clear.

Alignment with Sectoral Policy and Agencies

As the RSES is a broad strategy, with long term goals and practical implications for regional development, a wide range of organisations, as well as the Southern Assembly, must be involved in its implementation. These include:

- National government – political level
- Department of Finance/ DPER
- NPF lead Department (D. Taoiseach/ DHPCLG)
- Other Government Departments
- Other Regional Assemblies
- Local Authorities

- IDA, Enterprise Ireland, LEOs, Udarás na Gaeltachta
- Fáilte Ireland
- HSE (Tertiary and Community Care decision making)
- Education – 2nd level, higher (IoTs and Universities), further education and training (ETBs)
- Transport providers – national and regional, public and private
- Private sector decision-makers

If the goals and priorities of sectoral agencies are not aligned with RSES then implementation will be difficult if not impossible. But achieving this alignment, and at the same time achieving strategic spatial goals, will be complex. Such organisations have other responsibilities and are dealing with other issues in terms of their service and investment plans. They may find that what is appropriate for their function is not in line with the RSES. If the RSES is to succeed there needs to be a mechanism for resolving or considering such conflicts to ensure that they are not ignored, but so that appropriate decisions are made by the responsible organisations.

Successful implementation requires that investment and policy decisions across State and semi-State organisations are in line with the RSES rather than operating in opposition to it. While it is important to consider how implementation will work it is also important to recognise that while RSES strategic spatial planning may be considered an ideal, it is sectoral planning and policy that, for the moment and for the foreseeable future, is the real driver of regional development.

More Autonomy for Regional Offices
The development of the RSES by the three Regional Assemblies provides a key opportunity to build regional alliances and collaboration. However for these to be effectively implemented, greater autonomy for local and regional actors is needed.

More decision-making autonomy for the regional and local offices of national agencies and institutions e.g. Enterprise Ireland, HSE, to allow them to fully engage in local and regional alliances and collaborations, tailored to the specific circumstances of the regions, is required for implementation of the RSES. A 'one size fits all' approach is not going to be effective and the only way to avoid this is to provide increased autonomy at local and regional level to state agencies and government Departments.

Certainty of Funding and Investment
The primary source of funding for achieving regional development will be the National Exchequer. The only way that the RSES can be successfully implemented is for Departmental and State and Semi-State Agency expenditure decisions and allocations, including the National Investment Plan, to be fully aligned with the spatial priorities outlined in the RSES. In the absence of alignment of Exchequer funding with the NPF and RSES, they cannot succeed.

Sufficient funding must be available for investment in needed infrastructure and facilities to ensure that the areas designated by the RSES can grow. Investments need to be planned over the long term and there has to be certainty that in the medium and longer term the required investments will be made. There will be concerns about both the short and long term availability of funding to ensure implementation and this uncertainty could also affect implementation.

What are the key indicators that could be used to determine the level of success of the adopted strategy?

> **Key Points:**
> Measuring the successful implementation of the RSES will need focus on measuring outcomes at a regional and sub-regional level and indicators need to be devised and used to benchmark and monitor progress. The case for monitoring and measuring outcomes at regional and sub-regional levels is even more important where investment has been spatially targeted.

Measuring the successful implementation of the RSES will need focus on measuring outcomes at a regional and sub-regional level and indicators need to be devised and used to benchmark and monitor progress. The case for monitoring and measuring outcomes at regional and sub-regional levels is even more important where investment has been spatially targeted.

The WDC believes that progress toward achieving the RSES, recognising its multi-dimensional nature, should be monitored by assessing trends across a range of themes, using a range of social and economic indicators. These include demographics (population share and growth), labour market (employment share and growth), economic structure (the sectoral composition of employment), and output and its regional dispersal.

Improved spatial distribution of economic activity is a part of effective regional development but not the only part. Other indicators that are important include income per capita, poverty, unemployment, social inclusion and inequality, educational participation and attainment as well as levels of innovation. Indicators such as access to health services, a quality environment and improved quality of life are also important facets of effective regional development.[10]

The indicator series used in measuring the RSES should cover the key areas that are addressed in the strategy. The indicator series selection should be based on the following criteria.

- **Relevance**: The indicators selected should be chosen because they reflect and measure the ultimate policy objectives of the RSES. They should also command as near to universal acceptance as possible to ensure agreement.
- **Spatial scale:** The spatial unit should be as small as possible, without compromising data quality or accuracy. Data should be available at NUTS3 and NUTS4 (county level) where possible. Of course county data also has its deficiencies, particularly in obscuring urban/rural differences and in this regard Census data is particularly valuable, capturing ED and Small Area level data.
- **Data timeliness**: It is important that the data sources chosen are available at regular intervals and are as up-to-date as possible, so as to provide a current picture. Time series data is also important. The indicators chosen should measure progress over time and between regions.

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[10] Some, such as quality of life indicators are as of yet poorly developed while others such as environmental emissions or noise quality are less relevant in the context of balanced regional development and may be more appropriately analysed in a rural/urban context. Others are omitted because of limited data at a regional level. For example the EU publishes *Regions: Statistical Yearbook* annually, which includes a wide range of regional statistics from demographic data to statistics on health and transport access however these are only at NUTS2 level.

- **Manageability:** Monitoring and measuring outcomes is an important tool but it should not become prohibitive by being too unwieldy. The aim is to provide a snapshot of a particular situation and, with time series data, provide an overview of trends. A limited number of indicators allows for a regular (annual) update, thereby providing a regular assessment of progress on the RSES. Accordingly, the number of indicators should be limited so the exercise is not unwieldy.

The resulting selection should provide an indicator series which most accurately reflects an assessment of the relative performance of the Region compared with the other two Regions (Northern & Western and Eastern & Midland) over time and in relation to each other. Progress at sub-region and/or county level should also be monitored. The WDC believes that regular monitoring using such indicators will allow for a better understanding of progress towards achieving the RSES.