

From: Claremorris Computer Services Limited <eolas@claremorriscomputerservices.ie>
Sent: Wednesday 6 February 2019 18:59
To: rses
Subject: Draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy Submission

6th February 2019

Dear Assembly Members,

This submission refers to the Draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy.

Thank you for your advocacy, on behalf of this region, and preparing this report.

I run a small business in County Mayo. The website banner “What if we lived in the most connected region in Europe” strikes a particular chord with me. I’d like that to be the case but.....

I would liken the broadband and rail infrastructure in this country to the nerves, veins and arteries in the human body. If these are damaged, or pathways broken, the extremities suffer. They do not function, they do not grow. The body has evolved to have appropriate connectivity to its extremities.

I think of this analogy when the term “critical population density” is constantly thrown about, mostly by lazy journalists, and media attention hungry economists. It’s not economic for you people to have this, we’ve decided, they say. Anyone in a densely populated area, and here the usual candidates apply, is entitled by economies of scale. So, in the body of Ireland, perhaps we’ll just cut off a hand because it’s too far away from the heart. It’s not economic to run veins and nerves there, and to pump the blood to it. Yet the hand when supplied with blood and electrical stimulation, is a most versatile appendage, and more than repays the effort, in its contribution to the body as a whole.

I was involved with a project which brought fibre to the building broadband to the town I live in. This set out to give internet access to SME businesses at speeds in the 100s of Megabits per second (Mbps). Five years after the inception of this project, the overall picture for the roll-out of broadband nationally is mired in, the all too familiar, games of petty fiefdoms of existing network owners resisting any competition, by any means available. This resistance is aided by a lack of impetus, and effective management, from Government.

A National Broadband Plan, worth the name, would have initially identified the appropriate technologies, for each home or business type, by geographical position in the country, and sought to complete that, in each case. Instead, around the town I live in, some of the businesses now have an inappropriately high technology solution, via the project previously mentioned, while others still have to get by with a copper-based dribble in terms of internet connectivity. In my experience, one size fits all, does not work. This is a microcosm of the whole country. Many of the remainder of the National Broadband Plan subscribers, unsupplied as yet, are in this part of the country. You might wonder if any of those at the helm have a clue about what to do next, and when it might happen. Given the haphazard roll-out to date, any building onto this will suffer from its historic failures of planning.

The rail infrastructure in this area is also currently inappropriate for the support and growth of commerce, tourism and commuting. Fortunately, there already exists part of a rail infrastructure which could be re-used to enable all three of these activities, given the will to do so.

I support the Objectives 115 (a) and 115 (b) of the draft RSES Report which refer specifically to the re-opening of the Western Rail Corridor from Claremorris to Athenry and northwards from Claremorris to Sligo. Here's something that would be an appropriate technology, with all three activities, enabled together, fulfilling both environmental and economic needs for the future growth of this area. I would certainly use this railway linkage if it were available, both for business trips and leisure.

It seems obvious that, especially in the current world economic and political churn, we as a country, need to make use of all of our resources, gateways and infrastructure, when trading routes, and partners, may change, quite drastically, from one day to the next.

Yours faithfully

Colin Barton
Claremorris Computer Services Limited

