

Deputy Dara Calleary T.D.

SUBMISSION:

Draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (NWRA)

As a Public Representative for Mayo, I welcome publication of the Draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA).

I also welcome the opportunity to make observations on the draft report.

I strongly support the broad sentiment of the draft and the growth ambitions for the region as outlined within.

Each will, no doubt, have positive social and economic effects on the future of our region, if as desired and expected, they are delivered upon.

There are specifics of the draft that I wish to focus in on:

Recognition of Ireland West Airport Knock as an economic driver for the region

The draft identifies the existence of an airport as a significantly broadening the transport network capacity of a region with direct and indirect economic and social benefits.

This is certainly the case of IWAK and the establishment of a Strategic Development Zone around the airport will provide a clear blueprint for development and will greatly enhance the long-term future of both Ireland West Airport Knock and the entire North and Mid-west region.

Economic and Employment Growth

TOURISM

The draft identifies Tourism as critical to the growth of the region and lays down very specific goals aimed at underpinning the natural attractiveness of the region to national and international tourist.

Proposals to explore greater use of shared provision of access, parking and transport at rural tourism sites and proposals for activity tourism such as development of National Parks (Specifically Ballycroy Neiphin National Park) are worthy of real and tangible investigation as is the further development of amenity attractions identified as having growth potential such as The Monasteries of North Mayo, Ceide Fields and greater visitor experience development along the Wild Atlantic Way through the provision of Coastal Walking/Cycling routes long the Western Seaboard and installation of Viewing/Access Points at a greater number of locations along the route.

Integrated Walking Routes (Policy Objective 36), and Wild Atlantic Touring Network be improved to cater for growth (27) can greatly assist to drive tourism growth particularly in county Mayo.

Full utilisation of Ireland West Airport Knock must also include a marketing plan for the Shrine at Knock and for enhancing East Mayo as a tourist destination.

AGRI-FOOD

With 12,500 farms in county Mayo, agriculture remains an integral part of the rural economy, not just onfarm employment but through established companies such as Aurivo, Major, McHale, Portwest, Achill Mountain Lamb and others.

I welcome and very much support Policy Objectives 49, 50 and 51 which seek to enable the enhancement of SME's within the Agri-Food industry but also call for specific measures to support local organic food producers.

MARINE/BLUE ECONOMY

It is estimated that there are 1,000 people currently employed in aquaculture and seafood processing in the Gaeltacht areas alone.

The upgrade of the regions key fishing ports is of paramount importance as outlined in Policy Objective 56, 57, 61, 62 and 63.

Marine renewable technology projects off the West Coast must also be supported.

MED-TECH SECTOR

I warmly welcome acknowledgment of the region as a Med-Tech Hub. There are very significant sites in counties Galway, Mayo, Roscommon and Sligo, providing high-end and large scale employment and each of the draft's Policy Objectives in this sector deserve support particularly 71 which seeks to promote the provision of education and research opportunities to support the continued success of Med-Tech companies established in the region.

RETAIL

Despite the advancement of online shopping, retail remains a huge economic driver in the region. It will not survive unless Policy Objective 15 to support regeneration and renewal of small towns and villages receives real resources to bring life into our rural towns.

Connectivity – Connected Region

I have already dealt with the development of IWAK and with the enhancement of our ports in previous sections.

ROAD NETWORK

I am particularly pleased and very supportive of Policy Objectives 108 and 110 which specially refer to the short-term delivery of the N5 Ballagaderreen-Scramrogue and Turlough-Westport and support for the pursuit of the N59 Ballina Relief Road.

However I am shocked and disappointed that the continuation of the N26 Mount Falcon-Swinford has not been highlighted for support through its planning stage.

Ballina and North Mayo needs a fully functioning road network which includes both the Inner Relief Road and the full completion of the N26.

The R312 Linking Belmullet and Erris to Castlebar must be also be included in your plan – this is a third world road linking a Peninsula the size of county Louth to Mayo's county town.

RAIL NETWORK

I strongly welcome and support Policy 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. I believe the redevelopment of this infrastructure to be vital for the future of our region both from an economic and environmental perspective with huge benefits for connectivity, tourism, and freight.

The project will be eligible for CEF Funding from January 2021 and this must be pursued through the appropriate channels.

OTHER TRANSPORT AREAS

I agree that Smart Technology should be utilised on our existing Bus Network to enhance and encourage customer experience and I support the call for a review of the Rural Transport Scheme with a view to enhancing services.

DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURAL

Policy Objective 135 seeks a feasibility study be undertaken to explore economic opportunities arising from transatlantic cable connectivity. This must be undertaken without delay – huge potential exists in places such as Killala, Co. Mayo where access to transatlantic cable connectivity could deliver long-term sustainable jobs.

Provision of WIFI Hotspots and the roll-out of the National Broadband Plan are paramount to development and growth in the Northern and Western Region and have my full support.

Miscellaneous Observations

Objectives 163-169 promoting Talent Identification and Education are all worthy of further discussion and development.

Childcare, Education and Lifelong Learning requires a multi-agency approach to meet the needs of a growing, diverse and in some instances isolation communities.

Policy Objective 197 supports the delivery of flood defence schemes currently planned by the OPW. I am calling for the immediate commencement of flood defence schemes in Ballina, Crossmolina and Foxford.

The continued upgrade of infrastructure to provide for Ireland's growing water-service needs urgent attention and does the Rural Water Programme

Climate Change is becoming a very important factor for agriculture particularly here in the West and the effects on coastal erosion can also not be underestimated. I would suggest specific measures should be incorporated into the report.

In terms of housing and planning, whole I broadly support the Objectives outlined, I am conscious that family member seeking one-off planning on family owned lands should be supported in their efforts.

I thank the authors for this extensive draft report and for the opportunity to share my thoughts on same.

Sincerely,

Dara Calleary T.D.

Pearse Street, Ballina, Co. Mayo