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From: Eamonn Cunningham [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday 31 January 2019 17:04
To: rses
Subject: The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the North West Region.

Dear Sir/Madam

As somebody whose business depends to some extent on a thriving tourism sector across the country, I was interested to see the recent publication of the draft RSES document for the North West Region. It is important to develop useful and pragmatic policies for the next decade and your document goes some way towards doing this.

There is however one omission, or more correctly one particular emphasis in parts of the document that does no service to businesses or people who live and work in the Region. I would be obliged if you would accept my submission to attempt to correct this.

The old Regional Planning Guidelines had a heavy emphasis on rail development along the route of the abandoned railway that used to join Athenry with Sligo at Collooney, a line that has seen no trains run since Tuam Sugar Beet factory closed. The northern section of this line, north of Claremorris, hasn't seen trains in my memory, and is unlikely to see any in the future.

These RPGs have been used over the last decade by a small number of County Councillors to block discussion of any potential alternative use for this strip of land, land that belongs to us all and not to a handful of councillors who for reasons best known to themselves are opposed to tourism infrastructure. It would be absolutely crazy to repeat this mistake and lock this land away from any alternative use over the next ten years. It may have a value as a bus corridor, as an energy corridor for gas and electricity, as a route for a broadband trunk line, or some other use that we have not as yet foreseen. In particular, a greenway on the route has been proposed by many people, and the construction of such a trail would not prevent a railway from being built if a case was ever made for it and funding was available.

The draft RSES published on your website makes exactly the same mistake as the old RPGs did in previous policy formation. It effectively closes the door to any use of this land other than for rail; even short or medium term uses with the blessings of Irish Rail can be blocked if the RSES stay as they are in the draft.

I have watched with interest as funding for tourism infrastructure has been hoovered up by other Regions; Waterford is ploughing ahead with extending its successful Deise Greenway, and other counties like Kilkenny, Carlow, Cork and Kildare see the value in extending it in both directions to funnel tourists out of the capital and into remote parts of these Regions. One of the major blockages to similar funding in the North West is the stricture of the RPGs, which seem set to continue with the proposed RSES draft if it is left as is.

Logic would dictate that the new policy document would leave the way open for all and every use of this piece of public land for the benefit of the Region, something that can be done while keeping rail as an objective for the people who seem unable to grasp the reality that rail is probably the least likely use of the land for the foreseeable future.

I trust you will make the necessary changes to the draft.

Yours sincerely,

Eamon Cunningham

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