



Ibec/CBI Northern Ireland Joint Business Council (JBC)

Submission to the Consultation Process for the Draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) of the Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA)

Friday 8th February 2019

Summary

- All island cohesion is essential for the successful implementation of the NPF
 - Enhanced connectivity between NWRA and Northern Ireland is crucial to this cohesion
 - The JBC supports the draft RSES plans to deepen further and strengthen these links
 - Post-Brexit this will require considerable 'joined up' investment planning and delivery
 - The NWRA has a key role to play in this long term strategic and complex process
 - JBC supports the urgent provision of necessary post Brexit funding and support
-

Introduction

The all-island market supports greater prosperity and employment through increased flows of people, goods, services, and investment. In the geographic north-west especially, considerable advances have been made in delivering this concept compared to the period before the 1990s.

This progress is evident in the All Island Cohesion section of the draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA). The JBC is aware of and greatly supports the impressive work that has already been done by local authorities on both sides of the border in this region. In particular, Donegal, Derry City and Strabane's work to strengthen, deepen and grow economic activity to create jobs and enhance the well-being of everyone living in 'the geographic north-west' of the island.

Therefore, the JBC very much welcomes and broadly supports the All island Cohesion chapter in the NWRA draft RSES. In particular, the commitment to it being implemented on a joined-up basis with Northern Ireland's Regional Development Strategy endorsed by the Framework for Co-operation on spatial strategy between Ireland and Northern Ireland. This submission offers strategic observations on these proposed plans that help to protect the proven benefits for citizens, business and employment of the all island market, especially post Brexit.

Context

The overarching context within which the RSES will be implemented includes to support:

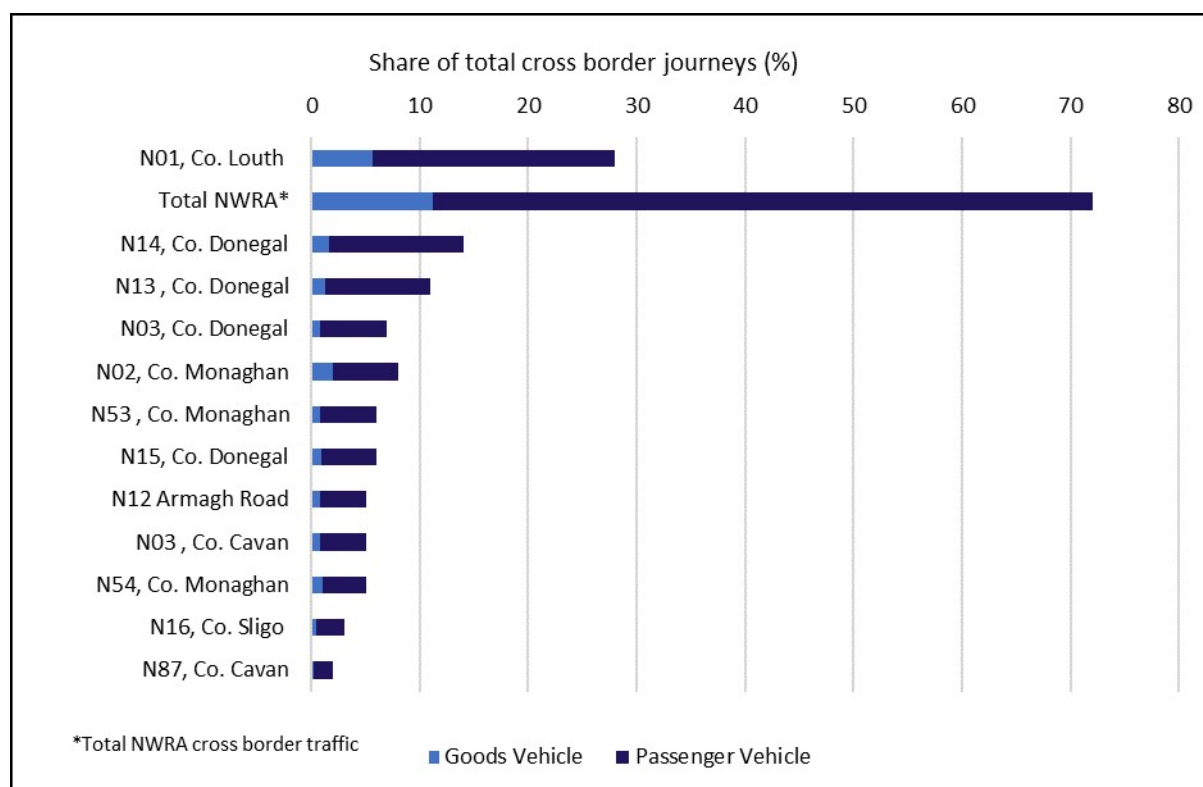
Protecting peace by sustaining prosperity: as part of both jurisdictions response to Brexit there is a renewed and compelling need to accelerate efforts to focus on planning for, and delivering, the island's long term sustained economic development and help embed peace. The UK leaving the EU creates a new shared and immediate challenge to implement cohesive plans to do so.

Optimising Economic interaction: Spatially the NWRA Area is bounded by the vast majority of the border from Malin Head to close to Armagh and then southwards to the Galway/Clare county boundary and most points west of the Shannon. Thus, it is vital that this final NSES is ambitious in what it sets out to deliver on all island cohesion as this is possibly the largest geographic unit in the all island economy.

Investing in infrastructure: that is essential to enhance the transport and other linkages needed to retain and improve connectivity. The following table on traffic volumes highlights this. Only the Belfast/Dublin link in the top line has been modernised by a motorway/dual carriageway.

Figure 4 – Northern Ireland to Ireland Traffic Volumes by Route 2016 ¹

Source: Revenue analysis of TII data.



Sustaining the All Island Market: As documented in the recent Ibec/CBI Report ‘Business on a connected island’, the all island market enables additional economic activity and is the third largest in these islands. It employs 2,869,000 people and has a total consumer spend of approximately £60.5b/€72.bn.²

Aiming for a growing population: is an essential goal for the NWRA RSES given parts of the region are continuing to experience the opposite. For all island cohesion to help reverse this situation will require additional in depth cross border coordination, cooperation and collaboration.

¹ Ireland and the UK – Tax and Customs Links: July 2017, Revenue, Statistics and Economic Research Branch <https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/documents/research/ireland-uk-tax-and-customs-links.pdf>

² [https://www.ibec.ie/IBEC/Press/PressPublicationsdoelib3.nsf/vPages/Newsroom~no-deal-brex-it-unthinkable,-says-business-north-and-south-11-10-2018/\\$file/Business+on+a+Connected+Island+-+Ibec-CBI+Report.pdf](https://www.ibec.ie/IBEC/Press/PressPublicationsdoelib3.nsf/vPages/Newsroom~no-deal-brex-it-unthinkable,-says-business-north-and-south-11-10-2018/$file/Business+on+a+Connected+Island+-+Ibec-CBI+Report.pdf)

Response

As a result of the sustained and successful relationship building in the decades since the signing of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, there is strong purposeful and vibrant local cross border interaction within the region. Beyond what is identified and set out in the NSES, this interaction also occurs in a multiplicity of dimensions of day to day business activity and in the lives of those who live work or visit the region. Therefore, coherent, coordinated and effective planning and investment to support and enhance these interactions is vital.

The North/West Strategic Growth Partnership is a key lynchpin of all island cohesion, not least because the Derry/Londonderry/Letterkenny metropolitan area is the fourth largest on the island. Coordinated planning and investment for this city region to reach its objective of achieving a critical population mass of 200,000 and the development of the geographic north west, along with most of the NWR, is of utmost importance.

RECOMMENDATION ONE: Economic infrastructure to support and sustain business and employment as detailed in the draft NSES is essential. Furthermore, the delivery of the projects identified need to be fast tracked if the Growth Partnership is to maximise the regions potential with efficient and coherent transport services to/from/within the region and geographic N/W.

Coordinating investment: To identify and develop shared strategic opportunities must continue to be an urgent priority. This will enhance the environment for business on both sides of the border in a region that is characterised by having alongside several high-profile multinational and large indigenous companies, a high proportion of SMEs engaged in a broad range of businesses from agri-food to service provision and tourism.

RECOMMENDATION TWO: Local business would welcome the final RSES including case studies that illuminate the scale, success and diversity of existing cross border businesses in the region. Additionally, details on how the ambitious development of the Atlantic Economic Corridor is planned to be coherent with the N/W Growth Partnership.

Practical benefits for business: The draft RSES contains numerous high-level goals on digital, energy and tourism etc. However, it lacks practical details immediately relevant to local business and the global investors that the NPF envisages and the Region is seeking to attract.

RECOMMENDATION THREE: The final RSES contains a lot more detail on how the planning and coordination of existing cross border interaction is to be sustained and developed further, irrespective of the Brexit outcome (e.g. on third level education, local clusters and collaboration and research and development projects). The projects must enable companies to add value because they are local, practical, deliverable and designed to enhance current cross border synergies by being jointly progressed (e.g. planning being interlinked, so that policy and its delivery are complementary, mutually supportive along with not competing in the provision of local services).

Transport infrastructure: As the draft RSES highlights, the NWR has a serious connectivity deficit that is in some respects being addressed but considerably more investment is required especially to upgrade road and linkages to, from and within the geographic N/W.

RECOMMENDATION FOUR: Intra-island transport connectivity is also vital and needs to be urgently upgraded. The final RSES should include a list of projects that the NWRA can promote and take action to facilitate their accelerated delivery as it is within their power and/or remit to do so.

Cross Jurisdictional Working Group: should certainly be established as it has the potential to be a vital cog in facilitating cohesive and mutually supportive cross border planning, coordination and delivery of enterprise development projects, such as those that the draft RSES identifies. However, there is scope for its task to be broader.

RECOMMENDATION FIVE: The final RSES expands the suggested scope of a Cross Jurisdictional Working Group. This allows the group to consider relevant, appropriate and/or essential coordination. This includes investment being made under the Derry/Londonderry City Deal or indeed the wider coordinating of local bylaws for a range of services that are relevant to ensuring the activates and facilities listed in the draft RSES remain cohesively linked up.

Consultation with business: From a JBC perspective, there is less detail than would have been anticipated on how precisely the local authorities working together on both sides of the border are going to engage with and consult business in the region on developing, planning and delivering their contribution to all island cohesion.

RECOMMENDATION SIX: The delivery by the final RSES of enhanced support for local cross border business will be significantly helped by more joint/joined up and on-going consultation by the NWRA and its local authorities with their local/regional representatives.

The Ibec-CBI Joint Business Council (JBC) was formed in 1991 and works to promote an optimal business environment on the island and advance competitiveness for the benefit of both jurisdictions working on collaboration with its member companies and strategic Partners.