



**DRAFT REGIONAL SPATIAL  
AND ECONOMIC STRATEGY  
FOR THE NORTHERN AND WESTERN REGIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**SUBMISSION  
BY  
SLIGO CHAMBER  
OF  
COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY**

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Tionscatal Éireann  
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**Northern & Western  
Regional Assembly**

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**1 Introduction**

Sligo Chamber welcomes the opportunity to make a submission in relation to the Draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA) as part of the consultation process. Sligo Chamber previously made a submission to the National Planning Framework (NPF) in March 2017, a submission which is directly relevant to the Draft RSES, and which for that reason is included as an appendix to this submission.

Sligo Chamber represents over 260 businesses employing over 7,000 people within the County of Sligo. While most of the companies are based in Sligo, member companies are also located in Collooney, Ballisodare, Ballygawley, Ballymote and Tubbercurry to the south, Strandhill and Rosses Point to the west, Rathcormac, Drumcliff and Grange to the north. Industry and tourism businesses are well networked with many companies being part of the supply chain to other companies and there is a high degree of interdependence on each other.

This submission is presented under four key headings which discuss Sligo's potential in playing a lead role in the future growth and economic development of the NWRA geographical area. These include:

- Sligo's Current Opportunity as a Stimulant for Population Growth
- Boundary of Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan
- Climate Action and Low-Carbon Economy
- Sligo as an Integral Part of the AEC and Ten-T Core Designation

**2 Sligo's Current Opportunity as a Stimulant for Population Growth**

Having been designated as a Regional Growth Centre in the National Planning Framework (Project Ireland 2040), it is Sligo's ambition to unlock the growth potential opportunity now presented to it in response to this designation and stimulated by the enabling infrastructure which is either at construction or will be at construction within a year. These projects include:

- N4 Collooney to Castlebaldwin – Letter of Award has been issued and work is about to start on site
- Western Distributor Road – under construction – this will open up 80 acres (32 hectares) of land for IDA Ireland as well as substantial lands for housing. It will also provide easier access to our member companies based in Finisklin Business Park
- Eastern Garavogue Bridge - to go through tender process with contract award for November / December of this year
- N4-N15 Sligo Urban Improvement Scheme between Hughes Bridge and Rosses Point Junction which will improve traffic flows along the Inner Relief Road – at tender stage, construction to start June 2019
- N17 Collooney to Knock Bypass – 55km route currently at Feasibility, Route Selection and studies necessary to complete Statutory processes which are expected to be complete within a 3-4 year timeframe

- N16 Drumkilsellagh to Lugnagall – CPO and EIAR about to be published
- N59 Corhawnagh to Crockacullion – Route selection process in progress
- Refurbishment of O’Connell Street – work to commence in March 2019
- Repurposing of Stephen Street car park for amenity plaza – designers being procured
- Strandhill Maritime and Surf Centre – procurement stage
- Mountain bike trail at Coolaney – under construction with Phase 1 almost complete
- IT Sligo preparing to make an application for Technological University status during 2020

These infrastructure, educational and public realm / amenity projects will promote increased business and tourism and will provide enhanced links with our neighbouring urban centres within the region such as Castlebar, Ballina, Carrick-on-Shannon and Donegal Town. They will also increase Sligo’s potential as a unique destination.

The recent designation of a Strategic Development Zone in the vicinity of Ireland West Airport will allow for the development of a new centre of increased economic activity within 40-minutes drive of Sligo and the upgrade of the N17 will allow easy economic linkages with Sligo, Collooney and other towns in south Sligo.

In recognition of the potential of Sligo, some 1,300 new jobs were announced for Sligo during 2018. A recent (December 2018) survey was carried out by Sligo Chamber in relation to employment and housing needs among large employers of its member companies. Thirty large companies responded and have planned for an additional 810 jobs during 2019 and 2020. In line with projections set out in the Sligo Chamber submission to the NPF, it is likely that there will be a further 1,000 new job announcements per year for 2019 and 2020. Thus, over the three-year period 2018 to 2020, over 4,000 new jobs are anticipated. While some of these may be filled with local persons, opportunity will be created for people living outside of Sligo to relocate, perhaps from the east coast. Sligo Chamber hosts regular diaspora events in Dublin and London and assists persons enquiring about relocation. During late 2018, Sligo Chamber launched its “Life is Sligo” video which has had over 200,000 reaches on social media and which has resulted in unprecedented interest in persons wishing to move to Sligo for better life balance. The 4,000 potential jobs over a 3-year period will stem the tide of young people leaving Sligo and we consider it reasonable that over half of the new jobs will be filled with people relocating to Sligo. Some of these people could have families such that the anticipated growth in population could be an additional 3,000 people by the end of 2021. The potential 4,000 new jobs will create impetus and the trend is anticipated to continue as the IDA Park at Oakfield gets developed and the improved transport links provide reassurance in terms of connectivity.

In recognition of an imminent increase in population, Sligo Chamber is engaged with property developers, large land-owners and Sligo County Council in relation to provision of residential property. A strategy is being developed around the refurbishment of existing buildings within Sligo’s urban core and repurposing them for residential (supported by Government initiatives) as well as developing new housing. Emphasis will be on residential development within the Sligo Urban areas (compact growth) in preference to satellite towns and villages, many of which grew significantly during the period 2000-2010. Sligo is well served by utilities such as water supply, waste water facilities and broadband such that there are no barriers to imminent housing development within the urban area.

In reference to Section 3.4, Page 59 of the Draft RSES, Sligo Chamber contends that the Proposed 2026 Uplift figure for population as set out in the Table is likely to be realised by 2021/22 and that the uplift figures for 2026 and 2031 will, at least, be doubled. **We are concerned that the uplift figures will be viewed as a cap on development and submit that either the headings within the Table be changed or the population figures be increased.** There is also a disconnect between the Table on Page 59 of the Draft RSES and the Table on Page 117 which summarizes the numbers of homes to be provided.

In this latter Table, the number of new homes projected totals 8,660. This does not include land near Cranmore which will have access for Local Authority housing as a benefit of the Eastern Garavogue Bridge project, nor does it include the development of vacant town centre sites nor the refurbishment of existing vacant properties and repurposing as residential. Sligo Chamber contends that the number of new homes to be provided will well exceed 11,000 and could support a population increase of well over 20,000 by 2026. The projected figures for the Principal Urban Area (PUA) shown on Page 116 as 23,000 by 2026 and 25,000 by 2031 are, we consider, extremely conservative and potentially limiting as there exists the potential to increase the population by these amounts. **Sligo Chamber considers that the potential for over 11,000 new homes can be realised by 2031 and that the population of the PUA could double to c. 40,000 as a result. There is currently an approximate population of 20,000 people living in the Sligo Town historic borough area, with another 6,000 within the urban area outside the circle and a further 14,000 living within 10km of the Town already, giving the Sligo agglomeration a sizeable total population of 40,000.** The designation of Sligo as a Regional Growth Centre should be reflected in the final RSES **with meaningful ambition for growth.**

### 3 Boundary of Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan

Sligo Chamber acknowledges the inclusion of the satellite centres of Ballisodare, Ransboro, Strandhill, Rosses Point, Rathcormac and part of Drumcliff within the proposed Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan boundary. However, in terms of economic activity, by far the most important satellite town is Collooney. It has three business parks, one either side of the Ballygawley Road (Union Road and Rathrippon Business Parks) and the other at Toberbride.

Businesses within Collooney include Braun, ATS, CMD Training, Ocean Media, Strandvaus Haulage, DPD Logistics, Connollys Mercedes Car Sales, Enda McCarrick Car Sales, Carty Group Contractors, McMullan O'Donnell Windows as well as leisure and childcare facilities. Within the Business Parks, there is scope for further occupancy and enterprise capacity. Collooney acts as the gateway to Sligo as one approaches from Dublin and from Galway and is a key geographical node. Collooney is the fourth largest settlement in Sligo with a population of 1,610 in the 2016 CSO Census of Population.

Collooney has a rail station with service currently provided on the Sligo to Dublin line. It is also the terminal point of a rail link with Claremorris which is no longer used. The possible re-opening of the Claremorris to Athenry railway line is currently being reviewed and, if feasible, opens up the possibility that the line to Collooney could be examined for possible re-opening at a future date. At the date of this submission, the possibility of a "no-deal" Brexit looms and recent political comment postulates that a "hard border" is inevitable. This will have the effect of diverting the transportation of goods to Europe from routes through Dublin and the UK to routes from Foynes and Ringaskiddy directly to Europe. As the ambition in the National Planning Framework in relation to achieving a low-carbon economy develops, a key factor will be sustainable transport. The re-opening of rail lines offering the opportunity to transport goods southwards and then to Europe will become a real possibility and, in this context, in straddling two railway lines, Collooney would be the natural location for logistics associated with industry in Sligo. The upgrading of the N17 will enable transport of goods southwards by road and again, Collooney is strategically placed at the junction of the N4 and N17. Thus, in the context of the development of Sligo, Collooney will become more important as part of the commercial realm of Sligo. For these reasons, **Sligo Chamber submits that the MASP boundary be revised in the RSES and in the accompany Part 2 document to include Collooney.**

Pages 113 to 115 of the Draft RSES discuss Strandhill, Rosses Point and Ballisodare. Collooney should be added.

The village of Ballygawley is contiguous to Collooney and has two key tourism economic centres, Markree Castle and Castledargan Hotel and Golf Club. As these are part and parcel of Sligo's tourism offering, **Sligo Chamber submits that the MASP boundary be revised to include Ballygawley.**

Our proposed revised MASP boundary is appended as Figure 1. This proposed extension increases the boundary to the south by c. 3km and has a compact spread of c. 3-4km.

#### 4 Climate Action and Low-Carbon Economy

It is an objective of Project Ireland 2040 National Planning Framework (NPF) that Ireland becomes a "Low Carbon Economy" by 2050. This reflects the Government's 2014 National Policy Position on Climate Action and Low-Carbon Development and is also a binding EU requirement.

While Sligo Chamber supports Regional Policy Objectives 187, 189 and 190 in relation to electricity transmission, the grid has little or no capacity for further expansion in the Sligo/ Mayo / Donegal area and the projects listed in Table 1, Page 278 will do little to alleviate potential capacity issues which could become a barrier to economic growth.

In a recent (December 2018) briefing document, the Western Development Commission state:  
*"The Western Region already has a significant connected renewable generation (almost half of the generation in the Region is renewable) and the Region is currently producing enough renewable electricity to meet more than 100% of its own demand. By 2020 there could be 1,760MW of renewable generation connected in the Western Region, consisting of 1,595MW of wind generation and 165MW of hydro generation. By then renewable electricity from the Western Region will provide approximately 15% of the total national electricity demand and make a significant contribution to Ireland's share of the EU 2020 renewable energy targets. Further ahead, to meet European targets for 2030, the new Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) aims to almost double the amount of renewable electricity by 2030 compared to 2020. This provides the opportunity for further development of renewable generation in the Western Region potentially making it a major provider of renewable electricity to the rest of Ireland."*

The document goes on to state:

*"It is important that there is a three-pronged approach to developing the transmission grid in the Region:*

- 1. Upgrading existing transmission infrastructure*
- 2. Implementing smart grid solutions*
- 3. New transmission infrastructure*

*To achieve long term ambitious climate action increased renewable electricity generation will be essential. Therefore, further investment in transmission grid with sufficient capacity for new generation connections is crucial."*

There is a need for EirGrid to produce a new Grid Development Strategy with a timeline out to 2040 so as to address shortcomings in capacity and provide opportunity to connect renewables. Such a timeline is required as the lead in time for delivery of such infrastructure is often 15-20 years. The opportunity to connect renewables will be further enhanced by the future availability (c. 2025) of floating wind turbines which could be deployed in the Atlantic Ocean. Sligo Chamber submits that **the following be added to Regional Policy Objective 188 "The Assembly will promote the preparation of a grid transmission strategy for the Region with a timeline to at least 2040. It is an objective to support the development of a Regional Renewable Energy Strategy with relevant stakeholders."**

Sligo Chamber welcomes the inclusion of Regional Policy Objective 191 in relation to gas supply. We also welcome the inclusion of the short-term initiative in relation to the proposed Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) Network as described in Pages 129 and 181. While the use of gas from the Corrib Gas field would be a step toward a low-carbon economy, such an ambition would be enhanced by the injection to the gas network of biogas generated at anaerobic digester sites using either agricultural waste or domestic organic waste as feed. In future, offshore wind turbines could be used to generate hydrogen which could be injected into the gas network. The lack of a gas network at Sligo would put it at a disadvantage in attracting industry who want to keep their carbon footprint as low as possible. Sligo Chamber submits that **the following be added to Regional Policy Objective 191 “It is an objective to support the sustainable development of the gas network so as to integrate renewable energy sources.”**

## 5 Sligo as an Integral Part of the AEC and Ten-T Core Designation

Sligo Chamber is one of the Chambers which led the initiative in relation to the Atlantic Economic Corridor concept. This was in recognition that Sligo would develop faster economically as part of a networked region than on its own. The AEC is a strategic economic zone which cuts across the NWRA area. It also cuts across the Southern Regional Assembly area.

There are multiple references to and a number of descriptions of the AEC in the draft RSES. These are welcomed as Sligo is located at a strategic point along the west coast of Ireland.

The recognition and references are indicators of progress towards the delivery of a linked and linear city composed of urban and inter-urban areas each with their own autonomy but with the common ambition to collaborate in new forms of development.

The AEC concept fits with the [European concept of polycentric development](#) which is not about cities making massive investments in order to grow bigger. Instead it is about building linkages and joining forces with neighbouring cities and towns in order to “borrow” size and quality, to ensure positive spill-over effects for the development of wider regions.

To enable the AEC concept to work, effective transport and communication links are required along the corridor. This will be mirrored so as to enable the further development of the tourism initiative of the Wild Atlantic Way.

Page 222 recognizes that the completion of the TEN-T route from Derry, Letterkenny, Sligo to Galway and from Limerick to Cork as a mechanism to prioritise investment in roads and environmentally sustainable public transport as an enabler of effective regional development. Ireland is part of the North Sea – Mediterranean TEN-T Network. The “Core” network runs from Belfast to Dublin to Cork and with a spur to Limerick. While elements of the N4 and N5 routes are designated as part of the “Comprehensive” TEN-T network, many of the routes from Tuam to Letterkenny fall outside any TEN-T designation.

Various gaps will arise in TEN-T Core network as a result of the UK’s decision to leave the European Union and there is opportunity to realign the TEN-T core network so as to ensure Ireland’s continued connectivity with Europe. So as to achieve this objective, sea ports and airports will need to be developed further and enhanced road and rail links will be required along the Atlantic Economic Corridor area. Sligo Chamber submits that a **Regional Policy Objective should be added to Section 6.3 of the Draft RSES as follows “Support the designation of the TEN-T Core Network from Galway to Sligo to Donegal”**. In the context of Sligo, this will facilitate development of various infrastructural elements such as the N15 realignment and Sligo Port which are currently not on any programme.

We welcome the inclusion of the N15 Sligo to Bundoran Road within Regional Policy Objective 109, Page 231 which is not on any current Transport Infrastructure Ireland Programme.

We support Regional Policy Objectives 115 and 118 in relation to rail links to Sligo. Designation of TEN-T Core network as submitted above will accelerate the realisation of these objectives.

## 6 Summary

Sligo Chamber supports the Draft RSES but propose the following amendments so as to secure Sligo's potential as a Regional Growth Centre:

**Sligo Chamber considers that the potential for over 11,000 new homes can be realised by 2031 and that the population of the PUA could double to c. 40,000 as a result. This should be reflected within the final RSES.**

**Sligo Chamber submits that the MASP boundary be revised to include Collooney and Ballygawley.**

**Sligo Chamber submits that the following be added to Regional Policy Objective 188 "The Assembly will promote the preparation of a grid transmission strategy for the Region with a timeline to at least 2040. It is an objective to support the development of a Regional Renewable Energy Strategy with relevant stakeholders."**

**Sligo Chamber submits that the following be added to Regional Policy Objective 191 "It is an objective to support the sustainable development of the gas network so as to integrate renewable energy sources."**

**Sligo Chamber submits that a Regional Policy Objective should be added to Section 6.3 of the Draft RSES as follows "Support the designation of the TEN-T Core Network from Galway to Sligo to Donegal".**

For many years Ireland has not followed the approach of a statutory led regional growth. Growth needs to be rebalanced between the Eastern region and the rest of the country. The Draft RSES represents a unique opportunity to realise more balanced regional growth. This can only be achieved by promoting more ambitious growth targets for the region.

We trust that this submission will be taken into account during preparation of the final RSES and the amendments as proposed herein will be incorporated in the final document.

Aidan Doyle, CEO Sligo Chamber of Commerce and Industry



**APPENDIX 1**

**FIGURE 1 – PROPOSED REVISED MASP BOUNDARY**

**APPENDIX 2**

**“SLIGO – LEADING THE NORTH WEST INTO A MODERN IRELAND”,**  
**SUBMISSION TO THE NATIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK**  
**BY SLIGO CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY**