

**Minutes of the Northern & Western Regional Assembly Meeting held on 16th of April 2021 on Zoom at
11am**

Present:

Cllr. Declan Bree	Cllr. Sean Smith	Cllr. Brian McKenna
Cllr. Tim Broderick	Cllr. Donal Lyons	Cllr. Niall McNelis
Cllr. Jarlath Munnelly	Cllr. Enda Stenson	Cllr. Jack Murray
Cllr. John Naughten	Cllr. Jimmy McClearn	Cllr. Enda McGloin
Cllr. Christy Hyland	Cllr. Declan McDonnell	Cllr. Michael Crowe
Cllr. Orla Leyden	Cllr. Patrick McGowan	

Cllr. David Maxwell **PRESIDED**

Apologies: Cllr. Craig Lovett, Cllr. David Collins, Cllr. John Caulfield, Cllr. Donal Gilroy, Cllr. Frank McBrearty, Cllr. Joe Sheridan, Cllr. Justin Warnock

Officials: Northern & Western Regional Assembly:

Mr David Minton (Director)
Mr Denis Kelly (Assistant Director – Senior Planner)
Mr Frank Flanagan (Senior Executive Planner)
Mr Gerry Doyle (Assistant Director)
Mr Barry Guckian (Programme Executive)
Mr Conall McGettigan (Senior Executive Planner)
Ms Sharon Conway (Auditor)
Ms Catriona Meehan (Clerical Officer)

1. Adoption of the Minutes of the Meeting of the Northern & Western Regional Assembly held on the 19th of March 2021 (circulated):

Proposed by: Cllr. Donal Lyons
Seconded by: Cllr. Enda Stenson

Resolved:

“That the minutes of the Meeting of the Northern & Western Regional Assembly held on 19th of March 2021 be adopted”.

2. Adoption of the Special Meeting of the Northern and Western Regional Assembly – with Representatives of Irish Rail on the 19th of March 2021 (circulated):

Proposed by: Cllr. Brian McKenna
Seconded by: Cllr. Tim Broderick

Resolved:

“That the minutes of the Special Meeting of the Northern and Western Regional Assembly – with Representatives of Irish Rail on the 19th of March 2021 be adopted”.

3. Any Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

4. Planning and Economic Development:

- a) *Presentation by the Department of Transport on National Investment Framework for Transport in Ireland (NIFTI)*

Representatives:

Deirdre Hanlon - Assistant Secretary for Public Transport and Climate Change

Claire Finn – Head of Strategic Analysis Unit

Tomas Campbell – Lead NIFTI Team Member

Mr Denis Kelly thanked the Department Officials for taking the time to meet with the Assembly and to give a presentation on this framework for prioritising future investment in the land transport network. He reflected upon the RSES and the suite of objectives that acknowledge the weak urban structure, the legacy of underinvestment in this region leading to it being defined as a lagging region and a ‘Region in Transition’ He also noted that it had an ageing population. Mr Kelly highlighted that the RSES argues for positive discrimination in investment to unleash the potential of the region. He advised that the RSES addresses areas such as modal shift and promotes socially inclusive transport focusing on connectivity and facilities to meet all societal needs. He also emphasised the importance of Smart Technology and a shift to low-carbon transport which will reduce the reliance on fossil fuels in the transport industry.

Ms Deirdre Hanlon opened the presentation by introducing the team and informed the Assembly that the prioritization of investment is to tie into the National Planning Framework’s (NPF) vision for Ireland with a view to 2040 and beyond. Ms Hanlon stated they were looking for views on documentation that has been produced with thoughts on the way forward for prioritisation of investment in the future.

Ms Claire Finn commented that the consultation period for the framework would conclude on 28th May. Ms Finn stated that the framework had been developed by a cross Departmental team. She highlighted the different phases of the strategy. The Assembly was informed that the phase which ended in July 2019 focused on evidence-based research and analysis and identified key transport challenges. Ms Finn advised that the strategy was now at a phase where these issues were being addressed and where public engagement was being encouraged. She said that the focus was on a higher strategic level which reflects the ambition of the framework and would sit easily alongside the Programme for Government. Ms Finn asserted that the framework does not establish or promote specific projects, but it provides a lens to identify appropriate, sustainable, and cost-effective solutions to transport challenges or needs.

Mr Tomas Campbell gave a detailed presentation (See Appendix 1) outlining the National Investment Framework for Transport Ireland (NIFTI), its Investment Priorities, Implementation, and the next steps.

Ms Claire Finn responded to issues raised and advised that it was not intended as an extra layer but rather to create a link to connect the National Plan down to the local levels. She said that the hierarchies and priorities identified in the NIFTI can be used by individual projects as a lens to look at possible solutions to problems and identify which one suits best.

Mr Thomas Campbell also advised that in relation to Greenways, they have moved from the tourism sector to the transport sector. There is now a move away from seeing only the tourism potential towards looking at these assets to see how they could be integrated with towns to see how they could be used to get children to school etc. With reference to population density and increasing public transport in the west, Mr Campbell confirmed that there are thresholds where towns will get bus services e.g., bus connect. It was advised that NIFTI strongly supports decarbonisation which would lend very well to bus connect. Mr Campbell acknowledged that NIFTI cannot address all issues with rural public transport. With regards to regional rebalancing, it was stated that NIFTI is about realising the NPF which is committed to development outside the Eastern Region, although NIFTI does not get into individual projects the broad parameter for investment in the NPF is 50% of development outside of the Eastern Region. With reference to integration of transport projects with other development projects Mr Campbell stated that NIFTI does not address this but perhaps there is a possibility now that there is one Minister over transport and broadband, that this could be improved, for example that broadband cables are laid while new roads are being put down.

Ms Deirdre Hanlon welcomed the huge interest expressed in making public transport more relevant to communities and in turn increasing the use of public transport in the region. With reference to bus services Ms Hanlon agreed that certain areas have great bus services and others have inadequate services, advising that the NTA has been working on developing a new approach to bus services throughout the country, called 'Connecting Ireland'. At present they are engaging with Local Authorities and Regional Assemblies about better connections between towns villages and rural areas. The aim is to provide the type of service that would better support communities, society, and the economy throughout the country including areas such as the Wild Atlantic Way. It is hoped this will benefit rural areas and the tourism sector. It was stated that the aim would be to eventually make a considerable investment in the bus and rail systems to allow people make the choice to use public transport. Ms Hanlon emphasized that reliability was key. It was acknowledged that Active Travel is not suitable for all areas and that sometimes cars are the only option. With regards to rail transport, she stated that there are tenders out for additional rail carriages which will be added over the next few years so we can accommodate extra demand. With regards to the lack of parking facilities, a section within the NTA is working on developing more 'Park and Ride' facilities so that people can drive part of their journey and continue the rest of the way by train. It was added that there is soon to be a review of the rail network on an all-Ireland approach.

Cathaoirleach David Maxwell thanked the NIFTI team for their presentation and for answering the members questions.

(b) Local Area Plan Consultations:

- i. ***Notification of Proposed Local Area Plans for Ballina & Environs and separately for Westport and Environs – Issues Paper Stage.***

Mr Frank Flanagan Senior Executive Planner confirmed that separate pre-draft consultations were ongoing in respect of both towns. He outlined that in view of the NWRA's submission to the Draft Mayo County Development Plan where it noted the absence of zoned land in the key town of Ballina arising from the development plan process, the commencement of the LAPs for both towns should be welcomed. He referred to the high level of consistency between the RSES and the Draft County Plan and that it would be reasonable to expect that this will be carried through into the proposed Draft LAPs. He recommended that when the Draft LAPs emerge the Assembly will be able to collaborate with Mayo County Council in ensuring a that a high level of consistency with the RSES is achieved. He recommended that a submission be made to each consultation welcoming the process in these terms.

Proposed: Cllr. Niall McNelis

Seconded: Cllr. David Maxwell

Resolved:

"that the Assembly writes to Mayo County Council and welcome the Issue Paper for Ballina & Environs and also the Issue Paper for Westport and Environs as outlined".

(c) RSES Implementation – URDF and RRDF Investment update

Mr Conall McGettigan Senior Executive Planner presented a summary with regards to URDF and RRDF Investment across the region (see Appendix 2). Mr McGettigan highlighted that there is not one website where the information on projects availing of these funds can be found. He highlighted the level of funding being accessed by projects, which included numerous projects from the region that have availed of URDF and RRDF.

Mr Denis Kelly Assistant Director / Senior Planner said each of the Local Authorities should be congratulated for their successful projects under the schemes. He also advised that a meeting had been held with the NTA regarding the 'Connecting Ireland initiative and an invitation was extended to them to come to an Assembly meeting to give a presentation. Mr Kelly said that Members would be kept informed of any developments in this regard.

Cllr Tim Broderick stated that some local authorities seem to be more adept at sourcing funding from EU funding programmes when compared with other local authorities. He asked whether there were any resources that could be shared with those that were finding it harder to source EU funding.

Mr David Minton Director stated that hard work has been done over the last few years to build internal capacity and address the deficit for key stakeholders in relation to EU funds. There have been many best case scenarios that can be identified across the region, but he acknowledged the complexity of applying for some of these funds. Mr Minton stated that he had recently given a presentation to all the Chief Executives of the Local Authorities briefing them on the new rounds of funds, but he added that there would be benefit in more interaction and consultations. Mr Minton indicated that there was a possibility of the NWRA helping each local Authority in developing their own EU funds strategy.

5. Annual Financial Statement 2020

Mr Gerry Doyle Assistant Director outlined the financial performance of the Assembly in 2020 as included in the Draft Annual Financial Statement circulated to Members.

Proposed: Cllr. Enda McGloin

Seconded: Cllr. Christy Hyland

Resolved:

“that Members adopt the Northern and Western Regional Assembly’s Annual Financial Statement as circulated for the year ending the 31st of December 2020”.

6. AOB

Mr David Minton outlined the status of the region’s application for an EU funded digital innovation hub. He stated that in previous meetings it was outlined that the Assembly was liaising with relevant stakeholders in the region regarding the formation of a group to make an application for at least one of the 200 EU Digital Hubs across Europe to be located in this region. He added that the Assembly believed that it was essential that there was only one collaborative bid for the hub coming from the region instead of many competing bids. He outlined the background of the regions ‘Data2sustain’ application bid. Mr Minton said it was with pleasure that he could announce that the regions bid was one of those chosen to be put forward for the EU selection process. Mr Minton outlined how important this decision was to the achievement of the objectives of the RSES.

This concluded the business of the meeting.

Signed: _____
Cathaoirleach

Date: _____