



**Minutes of the Northern & Western Regional Assembly Meeting
held on 15th of September 2023 at 11am in Roscommon Chamber.**

Present:

Cllr. Enda McGloin	Cllr. Patrick McGowan	Cllr. Jimmy McClearn
Cllr. John Caulfield	Cllr. Declan Bree	Cllr. Joe Sheridan
Cllr. Orla Leyden	Cllr. Clifford Kelly	Cllr. Niall McNelis
Cllr. Donal Gilroy	Cllr. Justin Warnock	Cllr. Declan McDonnell
Cllr. Jack Murray	Cllr. Donal Lyons	Cllr. David Maxwell
Cllr. Enda Stenson	Cllr. John Naughten	Cllr. Jarlath Munnelly
Cllr. Brian McKenna	Cllr. Áine Smith	

Presided: Cllr. John Naughten (Cathaoirleach)

Apologies: Cllr. Michael Crowe, Cllr. Frank McBrearty, Cllr. Tim Broderick, Cllr. David Collins, Cllr. Christy Hyland

Officials: Northern & Western Regional Assembly:

Mr. Denis Kelly (Director)
Mr. Gerry Doyle (Assistant Director)
Mr. Frank Flanagan (A/Assistant Director / Senior Planner)
Mr. Brendan Mooney (A/Assistant Director)
Mr. Conall McGettigan (Senior Executive Planner)
Mr. John Daly Policy Research Officer
Mr Barry Guckian (Programme Executive)
Ms. Carmel Carrick (Auditor)
Ms. Elayne Sinclair (Clerical Officer)

1) Adoption of the Minutes of the Meeting of the Northern & Western Regional Assembly held on 21st July 2023 (Circulated):

Proposed by: Cllr Clifford Kelly

Seconded by: Cllr Orla Leyden

And unanimously resolved that:

"That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Northern & Western Regional Assembly held on 21st July be adopted".

2) Matters Arising

The Cathaoirleach welcomed Cllr. Brian McKenna back after an extended absence.

3) Draft Annual Financial Statement 2022

Mr Gerry Doyle, Assistant Director gave a short presentation on the Draft 2022 Annual Financial Statement (AFS) which was circulated in advance of the meeting. He stated that the Draft AFS would be subject to an audit by the Local Government Audit Service at the end of October and the final statement should be available for consideration of the members at the November meeting. Mr Doyle recognised Carmel Carrick, Auditor for her efforts in completing the Draft Annual Financial Statement. Mr. Doyle stated that the Draft shows that the Assembly continues to be in a solid financial position.

Cllr. Naughten thanked Mr Doyle and Ms Carrick for their work on the Draft Annual Financial Statement and stated that there would be an opportunity for members to review the audited statement at our November meeting.

Comments from Members:

Cllr Leydon questioned as to what progress was being made on finding a long term solution regarding offices in Ballaghaderreen.

Cllr McGowan stated that the Assembly had appointed a subcommittee previously to examine this issue.

Cllr. McDonnell stated that he felt the headquarters should remain in Ballaghaderreen and that the NWRA needed to reestablish its identity.

Cllr. Leydon proposed that the previously appointed committee reconvene and address the issue. She agreed that the headquarters should remain in Ballaghaderreen.

Cllr. Maxwell stated the committee had convened during his year as Cathaoirleach, He proposed that the Assembly should purchase a permanent office in Ballaghaderreen or in the surrounding area if feasible.

Cllr. Mc Cleary stated he had never thought the old location was suitable and he felt it would be difficult to bring that premises up to standard. He stated that the Assembly needed offices that met modern standards.

Responses:

Denis Kelly, Director advised the Assembly that he was in contact with the landlord's agent about future options and officials had also met a local community group with regard to another potential option. He agreed that it was important for the NWRA to keep all its options open regarding its HQ in Ballaghaderreen and they would continue to consider options. Mr. Kelly stated he was happy to reconvene the previously appointed Committee and welcomed contributions from the Members in this regard.

4) Study Visit Update

Gerry Doyle, Assistant Director updated the members on the options for proposed study visits.

One of the preferred options discussed at the July 21st Assembly meeting was the Interreg NPA annual event in Skelleftea Sweden in November. Mr Doyle reported that this trip was logistically difficult and expensive.

An alternative option was a visit to Copenhagen from November 20th – 23rd. Mr Doyle reported that he had been in contact with the NPA secretariat who would give a presentation to Councillors and were assisting him in sourcing some other events for Councillors to attend as well.

Comments from members:

Cllr. Mc Gowan agreed that Copenhagen was a good venue and suggested that the presentations should be kept short, interesting, and realistic.

Cllr. Maxwell agreed that Copenhagen was a good option and pointed out that not everyone would be able to make any proposed date. He suggested they settle on a date and book flights and accommodation as soon as possible.

Several Members agreed that Copenhagen was a more feasible option, and they should commit to this as soon as possible.

Cllr Maxwell proposed that any Members who wished go to Copenhagen give their names to Mr. Doyle
Cllr. McClearn requested that information on the study visit be sent to members who were not present at the meeting.

Cllr. Naughten Cathaoirleach proposed the member should adhere to the proposed dates and agenda as set out by Mr Doyle.

5) Planning and Economic Development

(i) Consideration of Material Alterations to the Draft Castlebar Town and Environs Local Area Plan 2023-2029

Frank Flanagan, Senior Planner updated the Assembly on the Consideration of Material Alterations to the Draft Castlebar Town and Environs Local Area Plan 2023-2029. This report is attached as **Appendix 1** to these minutes.

Proposed by: Cllr John Caulfield

Seconded by: Cllr Patrick McGowan

And unanimously resolved that:

“That the Assembly note and agree on the Consideration of Material Alterations to the Draft Castlebar Town and Environs Local Area Plan 2023-2029.”

(ii) Consideration of Material Alterations to the Draft Letterkenny LAP & LTP 2023-2029.

Conall McGettigan Regional Planner updated the Members on the Consideration of Material Alterations to the Draft Letterkenny LAP & LTP 2023-2029. This report is attached as **Appendix 2** to these minutes.

Proposed by: Cllr Jack Murray

Seconded by: Cllr Patrick McGowan

And unanimously resolved that:

“That the Assembly note and agree on the Consideration of Material Alterations to the Draft Letterkenny LAP & LTP 2023-2029.”

Comments from members:

Cllr. McGowan asked if there was a zoning coding system in place so that counties are not allowed to over zone.

Cllr. Sheridan shared a concern they were dealing with in Galway with un-zoned land in the city which is now under judicial review.

Cllr McClearn stated that planning should process control itself. The government should be tracking all land for housing regardless of zoning. He felt councillors were being restricted with a lot of land zoned R1 which will never be built on.

Cllr. Munnelly stated that while he was not from the Castlebar area he was a Mayo County Councillor. He felt that even with the over zoning of Castlebar, they should be slow to curb the desire to zone additional land as more land zoned would facilitate more building.

Cllr. Maxwell spoke of recent land zone packs where farmers have objected to land being rezoned for building. He felt this will become a Local Authority issue.

Responses:

Cllr Naughten (Cathaoirleach) stated this issue should be put on a future agenda.

Frank Flanagan, Senior Planner responded that he felt it was a balancing act as some land is more suitable for zoning than others and the local County Council knowledge was valuable.

(iii) Draft County Donegal Development Plan

Conall McGettigan, Regional Planner provided a presentation on the interim findings on the Draft County Donegal Development Plan.

Comments from Members:

Cllr Mc Gowan asked if Donegal had an extended tier system for their towns.

Cllr. Murray spoke about zoning for temporary accommodation citing a need in Buncrana for a possible 20-30 modular homes for short term housing. He also suggested writing to the Minister to suggest excluding agricultural land from zoning plan.

Cllr. Gilroy commented on the pressure on zoning areas from holiday homes. He referenced an area in Donegal where there were 2500 homes but only 95 residents registered to vote in that area. This influenced the ability of people who work in the area to get planning permission to live there due to quotas.

Responses:

Conall McGettigan, Senior Executive Planner responded the holiday homes did influence restrictions on planning.

(iv) Pre Budget 2024 Submission

John Daly, Economist gave the assembly a brief overview of the pre-budget 2024 submission, outlining three high level priorities. He requested feedback from the Members either at the meeting or in writing. (This is attached as Appendix 3 to these minutes)

(v) All Island Strategic Rail Review Consultation

John Daly, Economist gave a presentation (Appendix 4) on the All-Ireland Rail review and asked for feedback from Assembly Members to be incorporated into a submission on the review.

Proposed by: Cllr Patrick McGowan

Seconded by: Cllr Orla Leyden

And unanimously resolved that:

"The Assembly approve the submission in relation to the All-Island Strategic Rail Review."

Comments from Members:

Cllr Naughton, Cathaoirleach, thanked John Daly and the team for their hard work. He stated that this needed to be a strong submission in order not to be left with a poor rail service as there was already a deficit in road funding for the region.

Cllr Mc Nelis asked how we were going to launch this. He suggested that members from each county should push it in their own region. This is a huge opportunity for big media with no region being left behind. He referenced people working in Galway who could not afford to live in the city and needed to commute.

Cllr. McGowan asked we could see any possible discrimination to the region and asked what projects were out there. He stated that processes were slow and referenced a 9 million Euro project that had been lost and another 2 million Euro project that was in trouble.

Cllr. Naughten, Cathaoirleach, agreed this was a big issue and that places had not come up with matched funding.

Cllr. Leydon suggested setting up a cohort of TDs and councillors from each county and work together in a regional setting. She felt that as a regional assembly we were not connecting and getting the message across.

Cllr. Gilroy stated that John's report was excellent. He suggested putting some specifications from that into the submission. He also suggested changing the matching funds to 10%. He agreed with Cllr Leydon's suggestion and stated that maps of railway lines and roads and motorways should be included as pictures paint a thousand words.

Cllr. Gilroy asked if updated maps were available stating they were due an update.

Cllr Mc Gowan stated that he had not seen any examples of large-scale discrimination.

Cllr McNelis stated that there was a PR agency in Sligo handling the roll out. He suggested doing a one-page document with points emphasized to share with individual councils.

Cllr McGloin expressed concern that Dublin-Sligo was missing from the timeline. He asked that the NWRA consider making a submission to the timeline on this issue. He also cited the problem of there being an infrastructure deficit citing a single track.

Cllr McClearn stated he felt positive discrimination was needed for rail lines in the region and that all needed to apply pressure. Citing the greenway being built he stated that we needed to push to build a rail network.

Cllr Lyons agreed it was essential to get moving on this issue. He also stated it was unacceptable the way passengers in the west of Ireland were accommodated with short notice of which side of the platform to be on for their train.

Cllr. McGowan pointed out that not everyone had access to rail services and that there was a need to be pushing for improved bus services also. He referenced the need for 20 double decker buses in Donegal. He also stated that even in southern counties where the rail service was sufficient, the motorways were still overcrowded. He added that trains were a viable economic method to transport goods.

Cllr McKenna expressed a concern that when you start looking at the railroads, questions are asked about the need for road improvements.

Cllr Gilroy asked what things would look like in 2050 and felt the problem would still be the same. He mentioned the need for services for students in Sligo. He added that good rail infrastructure was needed to attract industry to the area. He felt the statutory review did nothing for the region as there was more left out than put in.

Cllr Bree stated that it was unfair the way the west of Ireland was treated. He questioned why Collooney was left out of the Claremorris to Athenry plan. He felt regional authorities should be banging on doors.

Cllr Lyons stated a cost analysis was needed for double lines. He felt feasible projects needed to be prioritized.

Cllr. Gilroy requested the draft be sent out to members.

Responses:

Denis Kelly, Director advised the Assembly that time was of the essence and that we were pushing to launch the submission by the middle of the next week, He agreed to reach out to the Oireachtas Members and let them know the assembly would like to engage at a regional level.

Proposed by: Cllr Donal Gilroy

Seconded by: Cllr Declan Bree

And unanimously resolved that:

6) *"That the Assembly approve the submission in relation to the All-Island Rail Review".*

7) **Special Meeting Update**

Mr. Gerry Doyle updated the members on the proposed visit by regional MEPS on September 22nd. Colm Markey can no longer attend on this date. October 27th was suggested as an alternative date.

Motion

Proposed: Cllr Donal Gilroy

Seconded: Cllr. Declan Bree

Unanimously agreed that:

'the Northern and Western Regional Assembly would hold a Special meeting with regional MEPS on October 27th 2023.

Comments and Questions

Cllr. Gilroy requested that Luke Flanagan MEP to be invited to this meeting.

Mr Doyle agreed to invite Luke Flanagan MEP. In addition and he confirmed that an invitation will be issued to Maria Walsh MEP as well as Colm Markey MEP and Chris McManus MEP.

8) **Correspondence**

There was no correspondence to be discussed.

9) **Any other Business**

Cllr McGowan expressed a concern that at a recent AIG conference, he heard that people did not know what the Assembly does. He suggested that the Assembly give an update on their activities every two years.

Cllr Naughten, Cathaoirleach suggested a newsletter format for this update.



Cllr. Gilroy stated that this should become an Agenda item i.e how the Assembly could make themselves more relevant. He felt the Assembly should directly meet with people and explain what we do.

Cllr McClearn stated that there was some confusion over who should attend the AIR meeting on September 29th and proposed that since Cllr Collins could not attend that Cllr McDonnell should take his place.

Denis Kelly, Director advised the Assembly that the Assembly staff had already gone to various Councils and updated Members about the work and vision of the NWRA. He also asked that Members consider advocating for the Assembly within their own Local Authorities and that Officials of the NWRA be invited to provide an update on the work of the Assembly.

Signed: John Aughton (Cathaoirleach)

Date: 20/10/23