

**Regional Planning Directorate**



Department for

**Infrastructure**

An Roinn

**Bonneagair**

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22 January 2019

Dear Sir/Madam

**RE: EASTERN AND MIDLAND REGIONAL ASSEMBLY: DRAFT REGIONAL SPATIAL AND ECONOMIC STRATEGY**

The Department for Infrastructure (NI) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy.

As previously noted, there is already a positive joint working between the planning authorities here in Northern Ireland and the national, regional and local planning authorities in the Republic of Ireland. I would be keen to see this co-operation continuing and want to reaffirm DfI's commitment to working collaboratively.

The Draft Strategy recognises the potential of the Dublin - Belfast corridor to unlock further economic growth. Strengthening the corridor would appear to be imperative as we think strategically with 2040 in mind. You will be aware the Department's Regional Development Strategy 2035 aims to grow the population of Belfast and enhance its role as the regional capital. Developing the Dublin - Belfast corridor has an important role to play in helping to achieve this, but also crucial to the corridor will be the growth of Newry, designated as a Main Hub in the Regional Development Strategy and its links and relationship with Dundalk and Drogheda. As a Department we are keen to see Newry grow sustainably, clustering with Dundalk in particular to the benefit of both towns, their catchment areas and the wider Dublin - Belfast economic corridor itself.

I recognise the far reaching benefits a high speed rail link between Dublin and Belfast would bring. In principle, this has the potential to provide a transformational step change to journey times which could only be of economic benefit to both cities and the entire Dublin - Belfast corridor.

Related to that, the Draft Strategy highlights the need for targeted investment in transport infrastructure and services in connecting major urban centres and international gateways. The Regional Development Strategy complements this by aiming to strengthen the gateways for regional competitiveness, providing high quality connections to and from the air and sea ports. Such improvements will benefit the entire Dublin - Belfast corridor. Two such examples would be the proposed Belfast Transport Hub 'Weaver's Cross', a modern transport interchange in the heart of Belfast (which would form an vital part of any future high speed rail link) and the proposed Newry Southern Relief Road which would link to the Eastern Seaboard (A1/N1 Belfast-Dublin) Key Transport Corridor, which includes road and rail links between Larne (via the Belfast Metropolitan Area) and the border at Newry, facilitating onward travel to Dublin and improving access to other regional gateways.

The need for collaboration and co-ordination across boundaries, sectors and organisations is emphasised in the Draft Strategy. With this in mind DfI will continue to co-chair the Cross Border Development Plan Working Group attended by planning officers from local authorities and the two Regional Assemblies that share a border with Northern Ireland and will continue to look for further opportunities for collaborative working.

You will be aware that DfI is currently preparing proposals to put to an incoming Minister for Infrastructure for the development of a Regional Infrastructure Delivery Plan for Northern Ireland. The development of this Plan would bring a new long term spatial focus to planning and delivery of 'hard' infrastructure including transport, water, energy, telecommunications, waste and flood defences. This will provide an opportunity for dialogue and collaboration on future infrastructure investment.

The Department welcomes the support for all-island tourism initiatives and would again highlight the potential for cross border walking and cycling routes that would benefit the tourism economy on both sides of the border. There may be scope to link in with DfI's own strategic greenway strategy published in 2016: 'Exercise, Explore, Enjoy – A Strategic Plan for Greenways'.

In terms of the sustainable management of water, I note that the Draft Strategy references OPW's Flood Risk Management Plans. My Departmental colleagues in DfI are continuing to liaise with the office of Public Works during the second Floods Directive cycle.

As I previously outlined in DfI's response to the Draft Strategy Issues Paper, many opportunities exist to work more closely for mutual benefit. I look forward to continuing to work co-operatively with EMRA to address our shared challenges in spatial planning and infrastructure development.

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Should you have any queries in relation to my comments or prefer to meet to discuss, please contact my Personal Secretary [REDACTED] [angus.kerr@infrastructure.ni.gov.uk](mailto:angus.kerr@infrastructure.ni.gov.uk)  
Telephone [REDACTED]

Yours faithfully



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