

EMRA REGIONAL SPATIAL & ECONOMIC STRATEGY
SUBMISSION ON DRAFT RSES
TULLAMORE & DISTRICT CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
22nd JANUARY, 2019

Tullamore & District Chamber of Commerce broadly supports the draft RSES and gives credit to the authors for the exclusion of quantitative growth limits on Key Growth Settlements (hereafter KGSs). We commend the authors and researchers for recognising the geographically broad and strongly influential role the five Midland KGSs play, in terms of supporting hinterland areas with employment and access to key services. We welcome this final opportunity to submit suggestions for the final draft.

Observation 1: Employment

In respect of the Midlands, we note that the Region is still disproportionately reliant on the indigenous SME sector, Public Sector and Retail for employment; it has the lowest GVA per capita¹ in Ireland. The IDA's own regional employment breakdown throws into stark relief the wholly unjustified regional imbalances which exist in respect of IDA supported employment. Employment resulting from IDA-supported FDI in the Midlands grew by 14% in 2018² which shows that the Region can attract investment. Successfully addressing this imbalance, proportionately to population, would be transformative for the Midland regional economy.

	TOTAL IDA EMPLOYMENT	GROWTH RATE
	2018	2018
DUBLIN	96760	7.00%
SOUTH-WEST	41108	5.00%
WEST	25968	8.00%
MID-WEST	18948	6.00%
SOUTH-EAST	15580	7.00%
MID-EAST	13088	7.00%
BORDER	11885	3.00%
MIDLANDS	5720	14.00%

¹ Action Plan for Jobs Midland Region 2015-2017: Section 3.4, Page 28

² IDA Press Release 03/01/2019: <https://www.idaireland.com/newsroom/ida-ireland-2018-results-highest-number-ever-emp>

Suggestion 1a) Recognise the regional employment imbalance within the RSES document and designate the Midlands as a “Region Within a Region”, in need of special help to address economic and social deficits.

Suggestion 1b) Empower local authorities to seek public and private funding to directly or collaboratively develop capital assets such as business parks or shell and core advance facilities, with a view to attracting FDI.

Suggestion 1c) Figure 3.1 on Page 27 “Growth Strategy” should not exclude KGSs. In effect, it should be the same as Figure 4.2 “Settlement Strategy” on Page 39.

Observation 2: Tourism’s Role in Economic Development

The draft RSES places a lot of emphasis on the development of greenways and blue-ways in and around KGSs such as Tullamore and Longford, as the basis of establishing said settlements as “tourism hubs”. The document appears to suggest the development of these assets will be the primary driver of economic growth in said towns. Tullamore Chamber submits that while investment in such amenities will enhance quality of life for locals, it will not provide enough differentiation to attract enough long-stay visitors, or FDI, to be economically impactful. Instead, it should be incumbent on each KGS to devise a tourism development strategy which leverages their strongest, most differentiating assets.

Suggestion 2a) Cite the potential of whiskey tourism for Tullamore in the Regional Policy Objectives in Section 4.6.

Suggestion 2b) Similarly, cite the development of Durrow Abbey as a Heritage Tourism destination as a Regional Policy Objective in Section 4.6.

Observation 3: Health

We find it curious that the Regional Policy Objectives in Section 4.6 do not mention Midland Regional Hospital, Tullamore in any context. MRH Tullamore is on a development pathway to University Hospital status and has been designated as the Regional Trauma Centre for the Midlands, responsible for a catchment area population of 405,820 (the second largest catchment population assigned to any individual hospital under the plan). Pursuant to the successful implementation of the National Trauma Plan and the policy objectives cited in Section 9.8 of the draft RSES regarding access to key services,

upgrades to north-south intra-regional connectivity are required. Some, such as the N52 upgrade from Tullamore to Kilbeggan, N4 upgrade from Mullingar to Longford and on to Sligo and the upgrade of the N80, already mentioned in the draft RSES, will bring a greater percentage of Tullamore Hospital's catchment population within the < 30-minute travel time area.

Suggestion 3a) Support Tullamore's progression to University Hospital status in the RSES; include this in the regional policy objectives for Tullamore in Section 4.6.

Suggestion 3b) Deliver the upgrade of the N52 from Tullamore to the M6 interchange at Kilbeggan, and deliver the M4 upgrade from Mullingar to Sligo, as already mentioned in Section 8.4 of the RSES.

Suggestion 3c) Join the M6 to the M11 at Carlow by upgrading the N80. Upgrade the N52 from Nenagh to Birr and on to Tullamore. Add these to the list of Significant Regional Road Schemes in Section 8.4.

Observation 4: Infrastructure & Connectivity

Further to our previous observation, Tullamore Chamber fully supports any infrastructural investments which improve labour force mobility and especially north-south regional connectivity. The Midland towns are often characterised as too small to support foreign direct investment, but this ignores the fact that each of the key growth settlements have commutable catchment area populations of circa 400,000.

HOSPITAL	DEPENDENT POPULATION³
CORK	529,571
TULLAMORE	405,820
WATERFORD	402,353
DROGHEDA	395,503
LIMERICK	383,214
GALWAY	254,334
KERRY	178,650
SLIGO	154,030
MAYO	146,988
LETTERKENNY	142,768

The Region is well served by the nominally east-west inter-city motorways but the quality of large sections of north-south national routes such as N52 Limerick to Dundalk, N80 Tullamore to N11 @

³ Source: "A Trauma System for Ireland", Section 5.6 Pg.51



Enniscorthy etc., are sub-standard and not conducive to workforce mobility. This is a significant barrier to regional employment growth and places unnecessary demand on the M50. A planned series of enhancements to said routes, some of which are already cited in the draft RSES would go a long way to improving workforce mobility on the north-south axis. The progressive augmentation of the north-south road network, pursuant to full Eastern & Midland Region interconnectivity would take some pressure off the M50, supporting the continued growth of Dublin and would link several of the KGSs and Growth Hubs in the EMRA. See the adapted map⁴ below, with route upgrades in green.

FIGURE 10: ROAD TRAVEL TIMES TO POTENTIAL TRAUMA UNITS

Average speed by road type	
Motorway	110 Km/hr
M50	95 Km/hr
Primary roads	90 Km/hr
Secondary roads	80 Km/hr
Regional roads	75 Km/hr
Minor roads	50 Km/hr
Roads in towns	45 Km/hr

Approximate Travel Time Zones

30 mins

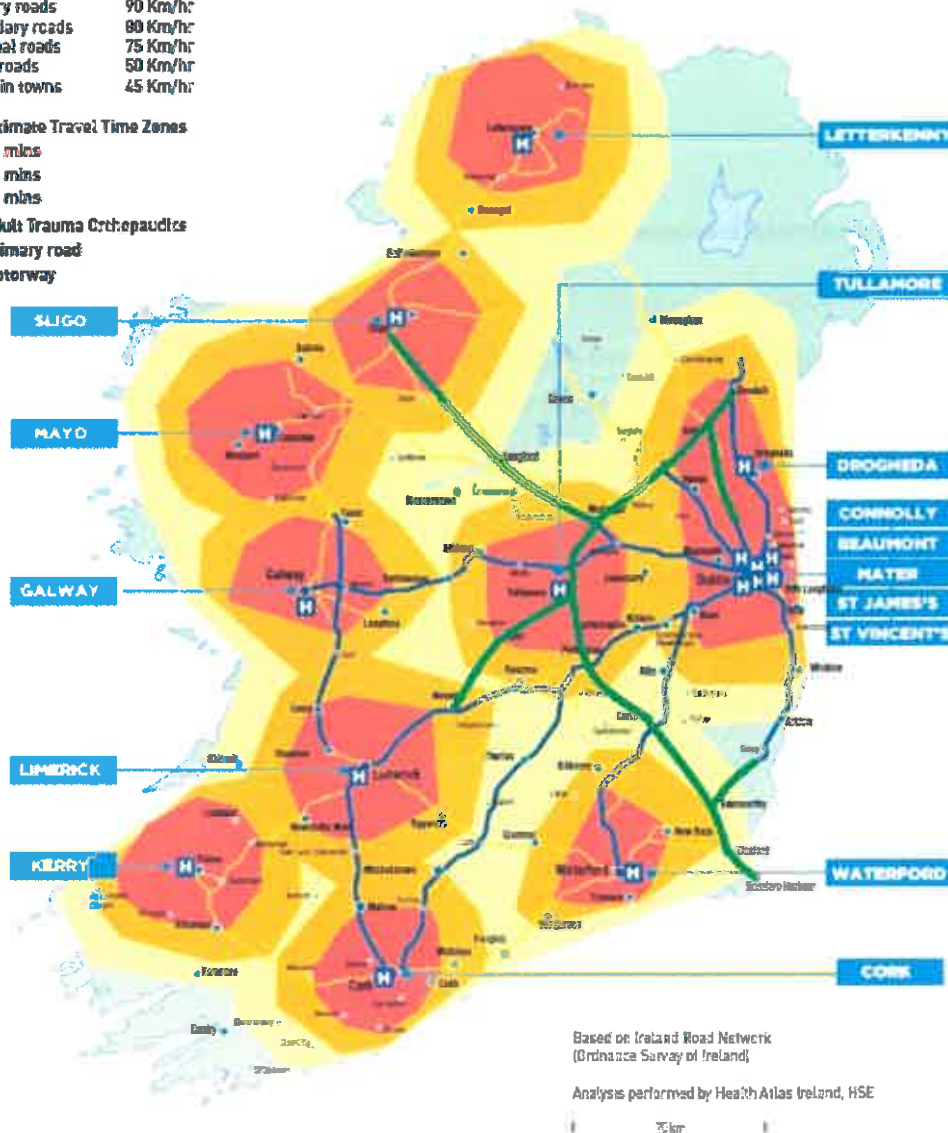
45 mins

60 mins

H Adult Trauma Centres

Primary road

Motorway



⁴ Source: "A Trauma System for Ireland", Section 7.2.2 Pg. 69

The status of inter-city train stations in all KGSs needs to be guaranteed and augmented. Many FDI companies have highlighted to us the growing importance of reverse-commuting to their recruitment strategy. Future high-speed or twin-track upgrades to the intercity rail network must go hand in hand with station upgrades and serve all KGSs and Growth Hubs with higher frequency and more reliable services.

Finally, Tullamore Chamber supports the idea for a new runway and air-freight hub at Tubber, Co. Offaly, subject to the satisfactory completion of feasibility studies and proper planning.

Suggestion 4a) Promote the development of upgrades to north-south road infrastructure to augment the mobility of the Midland's large labour market and link the national motorway network in a north-south direction, away from the M50.

Suggestion 4b) Elevate and guarantee the future status of inter-city rail services at all KGSs and Growth Hubs. Support investment in twin-track and high-speed upgrades to intercity rail network.

Suggestions 4c) Support the development of an air-freight hub at Tubber.

