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**RE: Draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midland Region**

A Chara,

Further to your correspondence, the Southern Regional Assembly (SRA) sets out below its observations on the Draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midland Region.

The observations of the SRA are issued in accordance with the role of the Southern Regional Assembly as set out under the Local Government Act 1991 (Regional Assemblies) (Establishment) Order 2014 (S.I No 573 of 2014).

**Consistency Between the Draft RSESs for the Eastern and Midland and Southern Regions**

The SRA welcomes the Draft RSES and considers that it represents a strong body of work with a clear plan structure and demonstrates consistency with Project Ireland 2040: The National Planning Framework.

Co-ordination between the Assemblies and the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government has ensured a consistent approach across thematic chapters, including the economic strategy and connectivity.

The SRA have published the Draft RSES for the Southern Region (public consultation runs until the 8<sup>th</sup> March 2019).

Complementarity between both strategies is evident. The SRA note and welcome the following:

- Complementary visions and priorities are demonstrated in both Draft RSESs. The EMRA Draft RSES places a strong emphasis on improving Quality of Life and transition to a low carbon society. The strategy is underpinned by three cross cutting themes of Healthy Placemaking, Climate Action and Economic Opportunity. These themes are complimentary to the strategic vision and eleven points of the SRA Draft RSES (Section 2.2).
- Settlement strategy with an emphasis on consolidation and achieving compact and employment led growth of Dublin City and Suburbs and settlements in the Dublin Metropolitan Area. The SRA Draft RSES priorities the three city and suburbs and metropolitan areas of Cork (State's second city and largest metropolitan area outside Dublin), Limerick-Shannon and Waterford, improved inter-regional connectivity to Galway and their collective strengthening as a compliment to the role of Dublin to achieve regional parity.
- The central pillars to the economic strategy for both regions are underpinned by smart specialisation, clustering, skills development, alignment of strategic employment growth locations with the settlement hierarchy and placemaking qualities.
- The Dublin Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (MASP) places a strong emphasis on the sustainable integration of land use and transportation planning, which is a similar approach to the MASPs for Cork, Limerick-Shannon and Waterford.
- Both strategies integrate strategic cross regional economic corridors as key enablers for economic growth. The Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor on the eastern coast is complemented by the Atlantic Economic Corridor on the western coast which extends across both the Southern and Northern and Western Regions.
- The potential to strengthen economic interaction between the South East and the Dublin -Belfast Economic Corridor is recognised. Section 3.8 of the SRA Draft RSES sets out the potential for networks of settlements, across Local Authority and Regional boundaries.

This section should be noted by where it supports the development of ***“connections to the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor in consultation with the Eastern and Midlands Regional Assembly and other relevant public bodies with a view to an Extended East Coast Corridor from Rosslare Europort to Larne which would include Gorey, Enniscorthy and Wexford as strategic locations on the Corridor”***.

Implementation stages of both RSESs provide the opportunity for the SRA and EMRA to co-ordinate between shared stakeholders on growing such initiatives through our regions.

- The settlement of Carlow, with a boundary shared between both regions, is designated as a Key Town in both RSEs. RPO 4.49 of the EMRA Draft RSES identifies Graiguecullen, Co. Laois as a Key Town and supports a Joint Urban Area Plan (UAP) with Carlow. This provision complements RPO 19 in the SRA Draft RSES which seeks to strengthen transport infrastructure (including rail services), public realm, town centre renewal and the Technological University of the South East (TUSE) as key enablers for growth. The SRA will welcome future collaboration with the EMRA to strengthen the role of Carlow/Graiguecullen in a Key Town in both regions.
- Emphasis on improved inter-regional rail connectivity and the potential for high speed rail between Belfast, Dublin, Limerick Junction and Cork (EMRA Draft RSES Table 8.2).
- RPO 8.14 supporting the TEN-T Network to strengthen access routes to ports including the N11/M11 improving connectivity to Rosslare and improvements to the Dublin-Wexford rail line.
- Section 8.5 International Connectivity supports the TEN-T Network which is cross regional. SRA Draft RSES RPO 135 International Connectivity and RPO 136 Regional Freight Strategy also support this network.

The SRA consider connectivity and interactions between ports and airports across all regions as State assets. SRA Draft RSES RPO 137 and 143 refer to strengthened roles nationally for the Southern Region's Tier 1 and Tier 2 ports, state and regional airports. Such investment will balance and complement the economic role of Dublin and the East (including ports and airports) in our national drive towards greater regional parity.

- SRA Draft RSES RPO 159 identifies an upgrade of the N80 Enniscorthy to Carlow, Portlaoise and the Midlands route as a strategic road investment to enhance regional accessibility. This strategic corridor is shared across both our regions.

## Conclusion

The SRA support the content of the EMRA Draft RSES. Continued co-ordination across the three Regional Assemblies to strengthen the role of the regional tier in the planning hierarchy will be supported.

The implementation stages of both RSEs will benefit from continued close collaboration to progress shared RPO's between shared stakeholders.

Examples of focus areas between our two assemblies during the important implementation stages will include:

- Enhanced inter-regional connectivity, shared strategic corridors including the TEN-T.
- Optimising digital infrastructure and developing networks of Smart Cities and Smart Towns across our regions.
- Improved public transport networks connecting our cities and key towns, shared rail network and bus corridors.

- Efficient movement of freight, regional freight strategies.
- Strengthened role for all our State port and airport assets across the regions.
- Extension of economic interaction between the SRA, Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor and other clusters of specialism across regions.
- Strengthening the role of Carlow/Graiguecullen as a shared Key Town.
- Encourage Local Authorities to strengthen networks of settlements sharing economic assets including settlements across regional boundaries to strengthen our rural areas.
- Sharing initiatives and good practice in our transition to lower carbon society and regions (shared boundaries under Regional Climate Action Offices).
- Shared renewable energy assets and integration of renewable energy with the national grid (Regional Solution for the strategic energy grid).
- Shared strategic water supply projects (Water Supply Project for the Midlands and Eastern Region will also supply towns in the SRA).
- Co-ordination in the monitoring and implementation stages, including consistency of approach (use of consistent Key Regional Indicators) and co-ordination with shared stakeholder agencies.

Collaboration during the implementation stages will also ensure on-going monitoring of growth and investment in achieving NPF targets. Regional co-ordination will help assess performance towards achieving greater regional parity, especially in the compact and sustainable transport led growth of our cities and metropolitan areas.

The assets of the Southern Region, as demonstrated in the SRA Draft RSES, are well positioned to help achieve this goal.

Platforms for exchanging good regional practices between our regions and encouraging innovation in approaches to addressing challenges and implementing RPO's, across cities, smaller towns and rural areas, will be encouraged by the SRA.

The SRA trust the above comments will be of assistance in the preparation of the final RSES. We are available to assist and discuss any of the matters raised in this submission.

**Mise le meas**



David Kelly

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**Director, Southern Regional Assembly**