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From: Caroline Creamer <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Wednesday 23 January 2019 09:04
To: RSES
Subject: ICLRD Submission to the EMDA Draft RSES Consultation
Attachments: RSES Submission - ICLRD - PublicConsultation - Jan19.pdf

To whom it concerns,

Please find attached submission from the International Centre for Local and Regional Development (ICLRD) on the Draft RSES Public Consultation document.

We are very supportive of this process, and congratulate you on the quality and roundedness of the draft RSES.

For further discussions on this submission, please contact the Director of ICLRD, Ms. Caroline Creamer. Caroline can be contacted at caroline.creamer@mu.ie or by telephone on 086 8170436.

Please acknowledge receipt of submission by return email.

Sincerely Yours,

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INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR LOCAL AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT (ICLRD)

**Submission to the Public Consultation on the
Draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy**

Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly

January 2018

The International Centre for Local and Regional Development (ICLRD) welcomes the publication of the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly's Draft *Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy* (RSES). As a new concept in Irish planning, this document plays a key role in setting out the future direction of the region in its own right, but also in terms of its relations with neighbouring Assembly areas and also Northern Ireland.

As the spatial, economic and investment plan for this region over the next twelve years, we broadly agree with the key themes presented in the RSES consultation document; namely:

- The Regional Policy Objectives tasked with delivering effective regional development driven by second tier cities and regional growth centres;
- The identification of regional assets – and opportunities and pressures surrounding these;
- Supporting the future growth of the state's capital, Dublin, by better managing this growth
- Alignment with European policy, thus ensuring that the region can benefit from a convergence of territorial and cohesion policy (vertically and horizontally) and from associated EU investment such as ERDF;
- A commitment to the taking a comprehensive approach to the rural fabric, and promoting the growth of such centres (thus reversing decline) by encouraging new roles and functions for buildings, streets and sites;
- The importance of transitioning to a low carbon/green economy – with the associated implications this has for climate adaptation, growing the renewables sector, and green infrastructure planning.

As noted, the Assembly covers nine counties and twelve Local Authorities, namely: Longford, Westmeath, Offaly, Laois, Louth, Meath, Kildare, Wicklow, Fingal, Dublin City, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown and South Dublin. While it is undoubtedly the primary economic engine for the State as a whole, it can be broken into three sub-regions which are diverse by the very nature of their spatial scale, their economic function vis-à-vis the region as a whole, the rate of population growth being experienced, the quality of life being offered, etc. In demographic terms, the region is young and diverse with a growing labour force which generates a demand for ongoing skill development.

Recognising the fundamental inter-relations between spatial and economic planning is key to realising the potential of places, and the role of placemaking in establishing linkages between planning policy and practice, quality of life and attractive place in which to live, work, visit and invest. With future growth centred on Dublin and only three identified regional centres, there is a concern that the three key principles underpinning this strategy – Healthy placemaking, Climate action and Economic opportunity – will give way to a continuing disconnect between location of (affordable) houses vis-avis location of jobs and, by association, greater car dependency and heightened long-distance commuting, an inability to transition to a low-carbon society, and reduced regional competitiveness.

As Ireland, and the Eastern and Midland region, emerges from a very difficult recession that impacted so significantly on people, place and well-being, there are already warning signs of significant pressures bearing down on existing infrastructures. In planning for the next twelve

years, it is essential that the implications of any development on existing (and planned) infrastructure is considered – together with their associated ecosystems – and that this, in turn, is aligned to the National Development Plan for Ireland.

Given the focus of much of ICLRD’s work in the Irish border region over the past decade, we are heartened to see a chapter within the draft RSES focusing on ‘All-Island Cohesion’ (Ch. 11). Having a long-term vision for the future growth of the region, including the mutual advantages to be gained from working together on economic development, environmental management and social inclusion measures, is core to the achievement of effective regional development. The recognition of the role that the *Framework for Co-operation* (2013) can give to this process is also welcomed.

The following response has been prepared by the ICLRD (see Appendix A for further information). We would be happy to liaise with the Assembly directly on any of the points raised in the following submission via our Director, Ms. Caroline Creamer – see Appendix 1 for contact details.

ICLRD's Response to the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly's Draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy

1.0 Settlement and Growth Strategy

- 1.1 A growth strategy recognising the role of the Capital City, the Metropolitan Area, a hinterland/peri-urban area, and an outer – more rural – region is welcomed; as is the asset-based approach to the identification of settlements with the greatest capacity/potential for growth.
- 1.2 The designation of Dundalk, Drogheda and Athlone as Regional Growth Centres is also to be welcomed; noting that the former two settlements are part of the strategic Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor which is the largest economic agglomeration on the island of Ireland. In noting that a growth enabler for this strategic corridor includes driving the linkage between Dundalk and Newry to strengthen cross-border synergies, attention is drawn to the MOU signed by Louth Local Authorities and Newry and Mourne District Council in 2011 to facilitate such synergies.
- 1.3 We would have concerns that the geographical distribution of the identified Regional Growth Centres could lead to (further) spatial growth imbalances. There is a large swathe of the Region's landmass that is not served by a Regional Growth Centre. At the same time a number of the hinterland and outer region settlements are recognised as being settlements of scale that function at a higher level than their resident populations and play a key regional role in providing employment and services for a sub-region – towns such as Navan, Mullingar and Portlaoise. Further consideration must be given to their designation and their role as functional economic areas within the RSES – rather than leaving that to be determined within County Development Plans.
- 1.4 This does not weaken the preferred spatial scenario of promoting growth in a select number of Regional Centres and limited number of towns – in addition to the consolidation of Dublin. Acknowledging that this approach does offer the greatest opportunity to align services with population and economy, the ICLR D calls for a limited number of functional economic areas (which are key towns) to be named and their position as drivers of growth heightened. This, in turn, raises the spatial potential and opportunities for the promotion of smart specialisation and cluster development policies. By strengthening sub-regional economies, this will positively impact on climate adaptation and promotion of low-carbon economies by reducing commuting and promoting well-being.
- 1.5 Ongoing concentrations of population and employment along the Eastern Seaboard corridor is not sustainable. The necessary infrastructure to support such growth is not in place – and the costs to redress this now are prohibitive. As a result, the commuter belt could be regarded as being 'out of control' – stretching as it does to parts of Cavan and Laois. Long commutes ensue, which negatively impact on work-life balance and general health and well-being.

- 1.6 Outside of the Regional Growth Centres and key towns, it is not clear what the potential growth of the medium to large settlements and rural towns and villages are – specifically in terms of population and employment growth allocations; and whether such allocations can disrupt the natural order – part. in terms of growth.
- 1.7 There is also a need to recognise the need for ‘planning for shrinkage’. The word ‘shrinkage’ does not appear anywhere in this document. There are, however, a number of references to rural decline, population decline – generally followed with the objective of arresting this. With an ageing population nationally, there is a growing international recognition of the need to plan for shrinkage – and the Assemblies must grasp this ‘nettle’.
- 1.8 We agree with the argument that treating all parts of the Region in the same way is unrealistic - this will not achieve equality of outcome or contribute to a stronger overall set of regional outcomes. The general principle of ‘effective regional development’ requires, and commits, government to recognise the unique spatial geographies of the various regions across the State, and the requirement for a bespoke approach to regional challenges and opportunities across Ireland. We support the adoption of a diverse approach to different sub-regions, building on the place-based assets of each.
- 1.9 The commitment to placemaking and quality of life within the draft RSES is welcomed, bringing together as it does the roles of planning, design and management of spaces. In adopting a place-based approach to future development and investment, placemaking must acknowledge the functional relationships between places and the movement of people between places.
- 1.10 The inclusion of a Metropolitan Area Plan for Dublin is to be welcomed on the basis that it is not a duplication of the Dublin City Plan and its objectives only. A key element of the MASP is the identification of strategic development corridors vis-à-vis capacity infrastructure and phasing; together with employment generation, noting strategic employment locations.

2.0 Economy and Employment

- 2.1 A key Regional Strategic Outcome of the draft RSES is to build a resilient economic base for the three sub-regions. While the Region is at the epicentre of the Country’s economy, it is heavily reliant on the Dublin Region and the Dublin-Belfast economic Corridor. Managing the developmental needs of Dublin with the growth potential of the rest of the Region is a key challenge - and opportunity - for this RSES.
- 2.2 The ICLRD welcomes the Assemblies approach to its economic strategy – smart specialisation, clustering, orderly growth and placemaking. The process of smart specialisation, for example, involves the identification of strategic areas for intervention. While sites have been identified as part of the Dublin MASP, there is a case for the identification of such sites for the Regional Centres and the other limited towns within the RSES.

- 2.3 The links between managing development and infrastructure investment are well recognised. A favourable ecosystem is required to stimulate development - from infrastructure, connectivity, R&D, enterprise supports, etc.
- 2.4 Through the concept of placemaking, there is a need for greater convergence between where people live and work. This is supported by taking an asset-based approach to economic growth and building on the real potential of place. This requires the planning community working closely with other key Departments within Council and relevant external stakeholders
- 2.5 The Smart City Concept offers opportunities for living labs, test-beds and the deployment of disruptive technologies. The four Local Authorities have used the smart city concept effectively under the umbrella of Smart Dublin. Consideration needs to be given to how this concept can support the development of the Regional Growth centres – with links to the local Universities and Research Centres. There is also an emerging Smart Towns and Villages concept being developed by the European Union through the Committee of the Regions which may support the development of ‘smart strategies’ for other key towns and rural areas across the region.
- 2.6 The Smart District – such as Smart Docklands – is an interesting concept that can bring technology providers, citizens and local government together to solve challenges and promote entrepreneurial activity. It supports Innovation 2020, aids in the delivery of the objectives of the Regional Action Plan for Jobs, and can improve service delivery.
- 2.7 Of relevance to the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly is the addition of Newry as a partner to the All Ireland Smart Cities Forum (as of January 2019).

3.0 Environment

- 3.1 This section of the document is very comprehensive, and all encompassing, In terms of a clean and healthy environment, it is striking how smart technologies are currently being piloted to improve air quality, water quality, flood management, etc. – with clear potential there for this to be expanded to noise and light pollution through the SBIR Challenges operated by Enterprise Ireland.
- 3.2 The recording of guiding principles to support the preparation of green infrastructure is to be welcomed. The opportunities to develop greenways, peatways and blueways - both as economic ventures and slow tourism offerings - across the region will benefit the region as a whole.
- 3.3 Climate change is a reality, with diverse and wide-ranging impacts. Becoming a low-carbon economy through the reduction of greenhouse gases, minimising energy demand and waste is key to reducing the effects of climate change. This requires a shift to clean mobility and a reduction in car-demand (commuting). There is enormous potential in the bioeconomy – the region has an active base in

the marine, agri-food and farming sectors which can unlock this potential area of economic growth which will also bring environmental benefits.

4.0 Connectivity and Infrastructure

- 4.1 The impact of connectivity on quality of life cannot be under-estimated. This includes access to a high quality integrated public transport system and digital networks. A major challenge for the region is providing alternatives to the car – a shift that can only be achieved by achieving a better balance in the distribution of activity and ensuring people can live close to where they work. Promotion of the concept of compact growth will go some way to alleviating this over-dependence and encourage more active modes of travel.
- 4.2 The heavy reliance on the car, and long commutes, is impacting on peoples health, economic productivity and air quality. How we design places - buildings, streetscape, public realm – impacts on travel modes used. There is a long-standing issue on densities applies in our towns and cities – with a strong case to be made for the adoption of higher densities – especially when one considers the changing shape and size of households, their priorities and we begin to plan for different life stages (rather than a one fit for whole of life).
- 4.3 Linked to environmental quality, and shifting to a low-carbon economy, is the concept of e-mobility and e-cars. There is a need for a regional conversation on the future of e-mobility in this region, and the provision of the infrastructure needed to enable this shift away from the traditional car. And this is not only about cars – but also public transport, trucks/vans, last mile delivery, etc.
- 4.3 In terms of digital connectivity, questions must be asked around ‘how blue is the ‘blue’? in terms of strength of digital connection within the Dublin MASP. Clarifications continue to be sought on the future of the NBP – and when/if it will be delivered. Such challenges – and solutions for - must be picked up in the emerging new National Digital Strategy.
- 4.4 It is well documented that a sustainable supply of water is a key challenge for the Eastern region, part. in the context of climate change, changing seasons, and the quality of the network. The network will be put under further pressures from envisaged population and employment growth. Key to meeting these needs is the delivery of the Water Supply Project identified by Irish Water.
- 4.5 A resilient supply of energy is also critical for the future growth of the region. The Celtic and North/South Interconnectors are key projects to ensure continued supply for the growth envisioned – and more. There is a dependence on electricity and gas at present, and this needs to be diversified to include renewable energies. The promotion of Smart Grids and Smart electricity management are two initiatives that need to be actioned across the region as a whole. This includes EIR’s Grid25 Project.

5.0 Quality of Life

- 5.1 The acknowledgement of the changing demographic profile of the region – and the implications of this for future housing supply, access to services, building design, public realm, access to transport, etc. – is to be welcomed. Planning for age and families is an increasingly critical objective of the planning system.
- 5.2 The EMR is in the midst of a housing crisis – characterised by affordability, supply, quality, and homelessness. This is resulting in a disconnect between where people live and where they work – resulting in long commuters. It is leading to an over-dependence on the private rental sector – and where demand exceeds supply, costs escalate. This has implications for quality of life and well-being.
- 5.3 Linked to this is quality of the built environment, providing alternatives to cars in the design of streets and public spaces, promoting active travel and providing the relevant infrastructure to support same (cycle lanes, greenways, enhanced public transport routes, etc.. This not only creates healthy spaces but increases well-being.
- 5.4 Creating and maintaining healthy communities is a stated objective of this draft RSES. The emphasis being placed on play policies to address the recreation needs of children and young people is to be welcomed – as is the concept of planning for child-friendly neighbourhoods. There is excellent research by the Heritage Council on kids interaction with nature – and how that is changing; and by researchers in Australia on the involvement of children in the co-design of their play spaces and parks.

6.0 All Island Cohesion

- 6.1 The ICLRD welcomes the dedication of a chapter within the draft RSES to All Island Cohesion and the strong links between the EMR and Northern Ireland. This is particularly evident along the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor. Within the uncertainties resulting from the UK's proposed exit from the EU, the need to work together on a cross-border basis is more important than ever.
- 6.2 There is a strong working relationship between local authorities on both side of the border, higher education bodies and community partnerships. The corridor is also a strategic entry point to airports and ports – thus making it a gateway for trade. There is a need for continued investment in transport connectivity, the interconnection of electricity grids and telecommunications networks.
- 6.3 As natural assets do not adhere to man-made borders, there is a need for continued cooperation on the management of the region's environment – shared landscapes, heritage, water catchments, habitats, etc.

Appendix 1: The International Centre for Local and Regional Development (ICLRD)

The ICLRDR is a North-South-U.S. partnership that has developed out of a unique collaboration between academics and spatial planning specialists from the National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis (NIRSA) at Maynooth University, the School of the Built Environment at Ulster University, and the National Centre for Smart Growth, University of Maryland (replacing the Institute for International Urban Development in Cambridge, Massachusetts as of 1st January 2019).

A central objective of the ICLRDR is to strengthen the policy and operational linkages between central, regional and local policy-makers and among officials and practitioners involved in spatial planning and social and economic development across the island of Ireland. We support central, regional and local government in the achievement of policy alignment, capacity building, citizen engagement, and stronger data analysis in decision-making. We work with communities to support the implementation of government programmes such as town and village revitalisation, identifying functional areas and the economic opportunities generated by these spaces, and promoting activities that place a greater emphasis on recognising and building on the potential of places and their people.

We engage in a wide range of activities that inform policy, support transformative change, build capacity, create networks and promote good practice. This is achieved through:

- action research reports, policy briefings, articles and other publications;
- professional education and capacity building programmes that assist local governments and communities to translate policy into 'on the ground' action; and
- active outreach and networking that includes conferences, workshops and international cooperation and exchanges to identify best practices.

The ICLRDR is a prescribed organisation in respect of nominations to An Bord Pleanála.

For further discussion on this submission, please contact the ICLRDR Director, Ms. Caroline Creamer at details below.

Ms. Caroline Creamer
Director, International Centre for Local and Regional Development

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