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**23<sup>rd</sup> January 2019**

**Re. Submission by Fáilte Ireland to the Draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midland Region**

A Chara,

This submission has been prepared by Fáilte Ireland, the National Tourism Development Authority, in response to the public notice seeking submissions in relation to the published Draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the whole of the Eastern and Midland Region for the period 2019-2031.

As part of our original submission on the Initial Public & Stakeholder Consultation Issues Paper and through engagement via the Technical Working Group (TWG) we set out the importance of tourism to the Irish economy, the policy frameworks surrounding tourism and requirement to incorporate tourism factors into spatial planning. We also identified where possible and appropriate, a number of recommendations to support, grow and underpin tourism within the Draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midland Region.

This submission sets out Fáilte Ireland's comments and recommendations to Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly on the Draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy. This submission is intended to support the preparation and delivery of an effective RSES for the Eastern and Midland Region. Additional specific comments are provided in Appendix I (Specific comments on sections of the Draft Plan).

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## 1 Tourism in Context

Tourism is one of the largest and most important sectors of the economy, providing employment for approximately 260,000 people, an economic contribution of €8.4 billion, and exchequer revenue of €1.78 billion, which helps fund other key public services.

The Eastern & Midlands Region is an extremely important region that attracts international visitors – in terms of visits and accommodation. It combines tourism and visitor activity in Dublin – whilst the Region also contains more ‘conventional’ tourism assets – coasts and uplands in the east, lakes, bogs and rivers in the west and south and cultural as well as historic and sporting amenities of international stature throughout the region

This region plays a critical role in sustaining and improving an activity of economic and social significance of national importance. Three of the four Fáilte Ireland’s regional tourism brands are based in the Region: Dublin – Surprising by nature, Ireland’s Ancient East and Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands. These brands are making a significant impact on tourism across the east and midlands delivering increased visitor numbers and spend, season extension and creating jobs.

A successful tourism sector also creates significant benefits for many other sectors such as agriculture, food and drinks, transport and retail. Furthermore, tourism makes important contributions to the ‘betterment’ of many factors that give rise to Quality of Life that is one of the important attractors for regional and local development, rural renewal as well as Foreign Direct Investment into Ireland.

The marketing of tourism and the resultant awareness-raising and good will are key components to the renewal and dissemination of ‘Brand Ireland’ – both directly and through the recruitment of related creative activities such as literature, music and movie-making [Star Wars, Vikings].

For these reasons, it is critical that the Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midlands Region gives a central place to tourism.

Tourism is a particularly important activity for planners to accommodate because it is an ‘enabler and multiplier’ for many other sectors and actors. Making provision for tourism provides ‘betterment’ that gives settlements and communities key ingredients that improve quality of life – which, in turn, is a key factor in attracting Foreign Direct Investment as well as sustaining local enterprise economic activity, particularly in rural towns and villages. Tourism also plays a key role in encouraging consumption and brand awareness for the food and beverage sector – which in turn benefits the agri-food sector.

Tourism is also important as an economic factor for regional development – often delivering full time and seasonal income into peripheral areas where employment opportunities are either scarce – or which constitute a suite of mixed activities throughout the year. Tourism-related activities can be an important source of finance for the capital investment needed to support

development and maintenance in areas of low population. It can play a key role in ensuring the continued economic viability in more peripheral rural areas – with important consequences for both cultural and social continuity as well as better utilization of capital investment in sparsely populated areas.

## 2 Key requirements for Sustainable Growth

For the tourism industry to deliver sustained growth, there are certain requirements for goals to be achieved. Some of these critical factors are outlined briefly below.

### **Airline and Airport Capacity**

- To accommodate increased tourist numbers, airline and airport capacity would have to grow significantly. The challenge will be to grow this air capacity in a way that it is sustainable based on a higher passenger mix of overseas originating passengers than the current levels.

### **Accommodation Capacity**

- Over the period of this strategy a very significant increase in tourism bed stock to accommodate any sustainable increase in tourist numbers will be required. All parties involved in tourism help to create the conditions for all types of accommodation to be developed. We will introduce a coordinated regional and seasonal development plan to facilitate private sector investment in accommodation.

### **Tourist Experiences**

- **Leisure** – For Ireland to become a destination of choice for our target markets, it will be important that new must-see and must-do tourist attractions are available that will capture overseas tourists' imagination and provide them with a clear and motivating reason to travel to Ireland. It will also be important to enhance our existing tourist attractions;
- **Business** – There are great opportunities to enhance our standing as a top-quality destination to host business events. To satisfy demand, there is a need for additional conference and gala venues both in Dublin and in the regions.

### **Infrastructure**

- We have great attractions around the region and to open up regional opportunities it is imperative that visitors can get around the region easily.

### **Visitor Management**

- Tourism is highly visible to the population and has a broader impact on the resident population of a country than economics alone. The presence of significant tourism populations in rural areas often helps drive infrastructural development or the provision of public services that may otherwise be considered uneconomic. Clearly, tourism has many positive impacts, but we must always be aware that, if not properly managed, there is a danger that its effects may be detrimental rather than beneficial to residents' quality of life and the environment.

Fáilte Ireland welcomes that the Draft RSES for the Eastern and Midlands Region has had regard to the above requirements for the most part and acknowledges this throughout the document. Further reference and commentary on the above requirements is provided in more detail in the relevant sections.

### 3 Review and Commentary of the Draft Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy

This section of our submission provides a commentary of the various chapters and sections of the document. As has been outlined earlier in this document, tourism is a unique and vital sector in Ireland, with its contribution to the economy and the employment the sector generates. Fáilte Ireland welcomes that this is recognised in many sections of the document.

There is a fundamental link between tourism and many other sectors which needs to be acknowledged, which should result in an increase in the level of policy cross-compliance and consideration of potential benefits and impacts on tourism in the development of policy. The tourism sector does not directly own or manage the tourism assets which underpin the sector and therefore is reliant on this alignment of policies for the sustainability of the sector.

#### 3.1 Growth Strategy

Fáilte Ireland welcomes the inclusion of a growth strategy for the region which is both asset and evidenced based to ensure sustainable growth across the region, having regard to the parameters as defined by the National Planning Framework. The acknowledgment of key growth enablers for the region is considered vitally important to tourism.

At a strategic level, of note is the importance of key state assets including Dublin Airport and Dublin Port. Given Ireland is an island nation, we rely on high-quality international connectivity as being fundamental to our international competitiveness, our trading performance in both goods and services, and our attractiveness as a location for both foreign direct investment and tourism. These assets are major pieces of tourism infrastructure and whose tourism value and

contribution to the national economy (as a revenue generator and as an economic driver), is significant. The draft plan recognises these assets as a key enabler for the Dublin Metropolitan Area, however, we feel that increasing capacity as well as improving access to these assets is equally important and this should be reinforced the objective.

The Hinterland and Outer Areas of the region have some of the strongest tourist assets in the country. Outside of the main urban areas such as Dublin, tourism in Ireland for the most part takes place in rural areas. These areas are home to rich heritage and immense natural beauty that support a varied tourism offering. We believe that these assets should be explicitly referenced as a growth enabler within the hinterland section of the document.

Tourism services and facilities should be clustered within established settlements as this will serve to protect the quality of the Irish environment. Furthermore, international tourists visiting here expect a high-quality transport system. A good transport system is a key enabler to creating a great tourist experience. Public access and transport are vital to enabling tourist movement and transit to and between our key tourism destinations and heritage attractions

We are therefore supportive of the enablers including the guiding principles of compact and sustainable growth and regional accessibility.

### 3.2 People and Place

The settlement strategy in the draft plan is welcomed and it should provide guidance to local authorities in the preparation of core strategies in their City and County Development plans going forward. The general theme of sustainable compact growth of both urban and rural areas is welcomed and will align with Fáilte Ireland's approach which distinguishes between types of towns, based on their tourism functionality.

It is vital that this is implemented and supported not only through development plans but also through investment. Tourism services and facilities should be clustered within established settlements as this will serve to protect the quality of the Irish environment; foster strong links to a whole range of other economic and commercial sectors and sustain the host communities; and utilise existing ancillary services and facilities such as water and wastewater infrastructure, power supply etc, rather than creating a requirement for further development in the Irish landscape.

#### Regional Growth Centres

The adopted NPF acknowledges that the influence of the five cities in Ireland cannot, and does not, extend to the entire country, in particular the North-West and Midlands regions.

These regions require their own focal points for investment and employment and, as is stated in the NPF, it is *“apparent that Sligo in the North-West and Athlone in the Midlands, fulfil these roles to a greater extent than elsewhere”*.

Having regard to this, it is welcomed that Athlone, Drogheda and Dundalk are recognised as being critical to the implementation of effective regional development as set out in the NPF. Regional Growth Centres will play a crucial role as tourism hubs for the wider areas and it is vitally important to ensure provision is made for the expansion in accommodation and facilities within these hubs and towns along with supporting infrastructural investment.

### **Athlone**

Athlone is a critical hub and Destination Town in Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands and, as such, it’s proposed status in the RSES as a Regional Growth Centre, with a strong emphasis on the tourism development potential of the town, is welcomed.

The town boasts a strategic location on the banks of the River Shannon and the midpoint of the strategic Dublin to Galway Greenway which forms part of the Eurovelo2 (the Capitals Route) traversing Europe from West to East (Galway to Moscow). Athlone’s strong historic and cultural core, along with its attractive natural environment along the banks of the River Shannon is highlighted on page 45. Fáilte Ireland is working closely with a number of stakeholders to capitalise on its wide range of assets which are recognised in policy objective 4.7.

In addition to the key objectives that the RSES states should be supported by the Joint UAP between Westmeath and Roscommon County Councils, the following additional objectives could also be recommended:

To provide for the implementation of the Shannon Tourism Masterplan which is currently being prepared by Waterways Ireland, in partnership with Fáilte Ireland and the relevant Local Authorities.

### **Drogheda,**

Similar to Athlone, Drogheda is a key tourism hub within Ireland’s Ancient East and has a rich heritage which is evident in the archaeology and architecture within the historic town core. The town along with Navan acts as a gateway to heritage sites outside the town in the Boyne Valley including Brú na Bóinne, and Hill of Tara and a host of other attractions. Fáilte Ireland welcomes the acknowledgment of these assets and the policy objective 4.12 which seeks to promote the town as a tourism destination and the role it plays within the wider region.

### **Key Towns**

It is noted that the key towns will aim to complement the Regional Growth Centres. From a tourism perspective certain key towns and regional growth centres have similar roles in many instances. Namely, that they act as a base or hub for a whole host of activities and attractions within their immediate environs and hinterlands. Therefore, we would again reinforce that it is vitally important to ensure provision is made for the expansion in accommodation and facilities within these towns along with supporting infrastructural investment including transport links, public realm etc.

Fáilte Ireland welcomes the direction that development plans should provide for sustainable growth within town centres with a focus on regeneration of brownfield sites in lieu of developing out of town greenfield sites. This approach will allow tourism services and facilities to be clustered within established settlements as this will serve to protect the quality of the Irish environment; foster strong links to a whole range of other economic and commercial sectors and sustain the host communities; and utilise existing ancillary services and facilities such as water and wastewater infrastructure, power supply etc, rather than creating a requirement for further development in the Irish landscape.

It is noted that the strategy for the key towns of the region highlights tourism as a primary development and economic driver. While this is supported and very much welcomed, it is important that tourism is not seen as ‘fall back’ in the absence of other economic development strengths in some towns. It is crucial that an analysis of the potential for tourism growth in these towns is carried out.

### 3.3 Dublin Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (MASP)

The MASP is aligned with a number of Regional Strategic Outcomes in the draft RSES which include managing the sustainable and compact growth of Dublin, the regeneration of cities and better use of under-used land, integrated transport and land use and the promotion of Dublin as a global city region. Fáilte Ireland will work with the assembly to ensure its implementation.

Dublin welcomed almost 6 million overseas visitors in 2017, spending €2 billion. Dublin is currently experiencing unprecedented hotel occupancy rates. The additional tourism for Dublin City is to be welcomed because it is generating much needed revenue and employment, however, there is a major threat to its future because of the acute shortage of hotel bedrooms in city centre.

Fáilte Ireland considers there to be a significant opportunity to improve the level of usage of sustainable transport by visitors not only nationally but also within the Dublin region which will also result in a significantly improved visitor experience.

In this regard, we welcome policy objective RPO 5.3 which has a focus on increasing the share of public transport use and creating a safe attractive street environment for pedestrians and



cyclists. However, we feel this objective should go further and seek greater legibility and navigability of the public transport system. Legibility for tourists unfamiliar with Dublin and looking to explore the city and county on public transport is currently poor and should be enhanced. Fáilte Ireland is developing a Visitor Orientation Strategy for Dublin in conjunction with a number of stakeholders including the local authorities and transport providers. The aim of this project is to help visitors move around Dublin by foot, bike and public transport with ease and confidence to allow them to explore Dublin and experience all that our capital has to offer.

### 3.4 Economy and Employment

Fáilte Ireland notes that a number of agencies have a responsibility for enterprise development who play a key role in the implementation of the strategy. Fáilte Ireland role is to support the tourism industry and work to sustain Ireland as a high-quality and competitive tourism destination. It provides a range of practical business supports to help tourism businesses better manage and market their products and services.

In this regard we feel that it would be appropriate to acknowledge the key role we play in providing supports along with the other agencies highlighted. Fáilte Ireland should be included in the overview of agencies listed in appendix c (i).

The strategy sets out the region's economic engines and their sectoral opportunities. It is clear from this section of the document that tourism as an industry plays a significant role right across the region with the potential for growth in all areas. As outline earlier in this submission, tourism in Ireland for the most part takes place in rural areas.

The Rural Areas section aims to protect and promote the sense of place and culture and the quality, character and distinctiveness of the Irish landscape that make Ireland's rural areas authentic and attractive as places to live, work and visit. Any future development in rural areas should be considered in this context and is key to the sustainability of the tourism sector.

We therefore welcome policy objective 6.8 which supports the development of rural economies through initiatives to enhance a number of sectors. However, tourism is not one of the sectors recognised. We feel that given tourism is so intrinsically linked to rural areas and the link between tourism and the other sectors e.g. Agriculture and forestry, this link needs to be highlighted in a revision to the wording of this objective.

Fáilte Ireland is pleased to see that the tourism sector is duly recognised as being a significant sector within the region and the inclusion of a number of tourism specific regional policy objectives which reinforce this. We know that a key motivator for our visitors in choosing to come to Ireland is our landscape and scenery, and access to this is imperative to support the work that Fáilte Ireland, tourism stakeholders and the industry is undertaking to both maintain and grow the tourism sector in Ireland. Therefore, we very much welcome the policy objectives

to increase access to the countryside and coastal areas and to enhance access to state lands and attractions managed by stage agencies.

### 3.5 Environment

The protection of Ireland's natural environment calls for a sustainable and balanced approach to successfully growing our tourism sector. The recent success of tourism has brought many benefits to Ireland but also some challenges for the future. Any decline in visitor satisfaction or environmental quality will inevitably damage our tourism reputation.

As the tourism sector continues to grow it must do so within a framework of sustainability. This approach underpins our approach in the development and delivery of our strategies.

Fáilte Ireland welcomes the recognition of the rich maritime underwater cultural heritage with the draft plan. However, we feel that the numerous maritime villages and towns in the region also play an integral part of the region's built and cultural maritime heritage. Maritime heritage plays an important role in tourism branding of coastal areas. This is especially prevalent within both the Ireland's Ancient East proposition. An attraction such as the Dunbrody Famine Ship Experience is an example which promotes our maritime heritage. Providing enhanced access to the coastline and to cultural, built and natural heritage improves appreciation and the value of these important assets. Having regard to the above, we recommend that a new policy objective be inserted.

Fáilte Ireland acknowledges the recognition in the draft to the development of greenways, blueways and peatways and the opportunities to develop a number of flagship projects. The potential economic benefit is considered the greatest for the 'iconic' national greenways, which can be promoted internationally and deliver a multi-day experience for visitors, motivating people to come to Ireland for this experience. These flagship routes have the potential to link and extend to regional routes which will encourage visitors to stay in an area longer or to overnight in order to cycle the greenway.

The development of Blueways provides valuable opportunities for rural communities to attract more visitors. These values lie not only in the recreational opportunities that they offer but also in their potential to stimulate local businesses and regenerate local areas. A blueway can be defined as *"a network of approved and branded multi-activity recreational trails and sites, based on and closely linked with the water, together with providers facilitating access to activities and experiences"*.

While it is recognised that the majority of blueways may be developed on inland waters, there is potential to develop coastal blueways for activities such as kayaking and snorkelling also. In this

regard, we feel that the current reference in the draft plan to blueways is limited to inland waterways only. The potential for coastal blueways should be acknowledged.

### 3.6 Connectivity

A well-managed, maintained and connected network of both public and private transport systems in Ireland is a key enabler of the continued growth of the tourism sector.

Transport in existing strong tourism areas needs to be supported and consolidated. In addition to this, we need to achieve a greater regional spread of tourism to all areas. As part of Fáilte Ireland's strategic 'regionality' objective to achieve this, we need to expand our transport infrastructure throughout the EMRA region.

From a tourism perspective, we believe that the strategic priorities for transport should include;

- Highlight the importance of sustainable transport for the successful operation and continued growth of tourism.
- To provide a wider range of targeted public transport options for tourists who wish to travel from urban areas to rural based tourist attractions and amenities. Possible delivery mechanisms to be explored would include the extension of the Rural Transport Network to include tourism objectives and key tourism sites.

To this end, we are pleased to see the inclusion of priorities for transport investment across all modes of transport. A key priority is improving the tourist experience. To do this, improvements are needed in the existing road network for example to remove bottlenecks and increase and improve connectedness to and between key tourism destinations. It is reassuring that a number of strategic and regional road schemes are to be supported and progressed during the lifetime of the strategy.

One area where we feel there is huge potential to increase connectivity is in rural areas and smaller towns. Many of these areas have either very poor tourist numbers for the quality of the asset or have traffic problems at peak tourism times. This can lead to tourists having a poor experience or, worse, not visiting at all if word of mouth is unfavourable. Public transport has a key role to play in addressing these issues and opening up access to the abundance of natural assets.

We welcome policy objective 8.11 which supports the Local Link Programme, however we consider that this policy should be further enhanced to include the extension of the programme to include tourism objectives.

As outlined under section 3.1 Growth Strategy, the importance of Dublin Airport to growing the tourism sector in Ireland cannot be underestimated. The challenge is to grow air capacity in a way that is sustainable based on a higher passenger mix of overseas originating passengers than the current levels. The objectives supporting the second runway, improved terminal facilities and improved access to Dublin Airport is supported by the authority.

The objectives to support commercial development and expansion of ports are welcomed including the investment by ports in infrastructural development will have a positive impact on the tourism sector by providing additional berth capacity to grow cruise tourism. Cruise tourism plays a significant role as part of the overall tourism sector. Cruise business in Ireland has been growing significantly in recent years. In 2017, Dublin Port handled 127 ships and 210,000 visitors, up from 109 cruise calls in 2016 and 93 the previous year.

### 3.7 Quality of Life

This EMRA region plays a crucial role in sustaining and improving tourism which is a significant activity of economic and social importance. Facilities that are used by visitors play an important role in establishing and sustaining both the desirability and the quality of life for residents and visitors alike. Maintaining attractiveness is a key activity for the region's ability to attract the foreign direct investment that is the engine of the national economy. As much of the material assets and infrastructure that sustain tourism – railways, ports, airports, hotels, the entertainment and food and drink sector and of course our natural landscape – these also serve the large resident and business populations of Dublin and wider EMRA region.

A strategic objective of Fáilte Ireland is to ensure that the economic benefits of tourism are spread regionally across the country. Quality visitor experiences and the enhancement and further development of Ireland's recreational tourism offering provide social benefits to local communities. For example, the continued development of our recreational infrastructure will not only support Ireland's developing rural tourism industry but will also provide better recreation options for local people and families for their own enjoyment of the countryside and the associated health benefits.

### 3.8 Infrastructure

The draft states *"High-quality infrastructure is an important element of a modern society and economy, it provides essential functions and services that support societal, economic and environmental systems at local, regional and national levels"*.

The provision and delivery of infrastructure will enhance the quality of the environment and facilitate sustainable economic development. We support investment to ensure resilience of water supply and waste water treatment for the Region. The importance high-quality Waste Water Treatment Plants to ensure treated waste water will not harm or pollute the surrounding environment when it is discharged into it is crucial to protect our coastal areas, rivers and lakes. The quality of bathing waters is also paramount to the tourism sector. In Ireland, we are particularly fortunate to have a varied and beautiful coastline with many pristine beaches that are open to the public to enjoy. To ensure their standard, it is imperative to continue to make strident efforts to protect and improve our waters. In 2018, the EMRA has 9 blue flag beaches in the three coastal counties and one inland Blue Flag marina at Killinure Point in Co Westmeath.

Fáilte Ireland recognises the value and necessity of strengthening, improving and expanding energy infrastructure in the region, and that this in turn supports the growth of the tourism sector. While the Authority is generally supportive of the development of transmission infrastructure and is supportive of the economic benefits associated with its growth and development, potential impacts on landscape and the natural environment (including those on tourism) must be considered. The challenge still lies in striking a balance between the maintenance of landscape character and scenery as a tourism asset and facilitating the development of infrastructure. This puts even greater emphasis on the need for good planning from the very beginning of the process and particularly in relation to site selection, design and pre-planning consultation stages.

Fáilte Ireland is concerned that the guiding principles set out in the energy section of the chapter are not sufficiently robust enough. It is of key importance to Fáilte Ireland as the National Tourism Development Authority, to ensure appropriate protection for our landscapes and our seascapes. Tourism, including its environmental features, must also be considered and assessed appropriately in considering the design and routing of both on and off shore grid infrastructure. It is recommended that a new guiding principle be added (see proposed wording in appendix I) to ensure the above issues are addressed.

## 4 Conclusion

Fáilte Ireland welcomes the publication of the Draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern & Midlands Region. The statutory basis which will be afforded to it upon adoption, will support the implementation of Project Ireland 2040 and the economic policies and objectives of the Government by providing a long-term strategic planning and economic framework for the development of the Regions to 2031 and beyond.

We acknowledge that tourism is recognised as being a significant sector within the region and the inclusion of a number of tourism specific policy objectives reinforce this within the draft strategy. There is also a fundamental link between tourism and many other sectors within the region and the cross-sectoral approach between tourism and these other sectors has broadly been acknowledged. However, there are some areas where we feel this needs to be strengthened particularly in relation to the environment, connectivity and infrastructure chapters.

We therefore recommend that our comments and suggested amendments and additions are addressed in the published strategy, so that the plans which will follow from this strategy, including City and County Development Plans are adequately informed and take due consideration of tourism as one of the most important and indigenous economic sectors in the region and Ireland.

The cross-sectoral approach between tourism and other sectors, and the acknowledgement of the need for integrated policies and strategies is considered by Fáilte Ireland to be positive approach.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any further queries or questions.

We thank you for your time and consideration of our submission.

Is mise le meas,



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**Shane Dineen**

**Manager of Environment & Planning, Fáilte Ireland**

## 5 Appendix I - Specific Comments on the Plan

### Chapter 3 – Growth Strategy

Page 28 - Bullet point growth enabler referring to Dublin Airport & Dublin Port - increasing capacity as well as improving access is equally important and this should be reinforced.

Page 29 – Hinterland Area – The final bullet point should revise the wording to read “High value tourism assets”

### Chapter 4 – People & Place

Page 46 – Insert new objective “to provide for the implementation of the Shannon Tourism Masterplan which is currently being prepared by Waterways Ireland, in partnership with Fáilte Ireland and the relevant Local Authorities.”

Page 47 – RPO 4.7 bullet point 3 should be amended to remove reference to Lakelands and only reference Fáilte Ireland’s “Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands” brand designation

Page 49 – RPO 4.12 bullet point 3 should be amended to read – Fáilte Ireland’s “Ireland’s Ancient East” brand designation

### Chapter 5 – Dublin Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (MASP)

Page 74 – RPO 5.3, consideration should be given to strengthening this objective to include “*seek greater legibility and navigability of the public transport system.*”

### Chapter 6 – Economy & Employment

Page 97 – RPO 6.8, list tourism as a sector along with the other sectors listed in this objective.

Page 100 - Insert an additional RPO at the beginning of this section: RPO 6.14: To support the sustainable development of tourism in the Midlands in line with the strategic objectives of both the Ireland’s Ancient East and Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands experience brand propositions.

Page 100 – Strengthen RPO 6.16 to read “Support the maintenance of, and enhanced access to state lands such as National Parks, Forest Parks, Waterways, etc., *together with Monuments and Historic Properties*, for recreation and tourism purposes”.

Page 100 – Bottom paragraph left column – remove wording “a breath of fresh air” and replace with the following wording “Surprising by Nature”

Page 100 – RPO6.15 – Add the following text to the objective after the word network “*and to seek to develop and add to the offer where appropriate*”.

#### Chapter 7 – Environment

Page 114 – Insert new RPO within Maritime Heritage section to improve access to the coastline which will improve appreciation of our rich Maritime Heritage including cultural, built and natural assets.

Page 126 – Blueways - The current reference in the draft strategy to blueways is limited to inland waterways only. The potential for coastal blueways should be acknowledged. The definition of a blueway could also be included in the text section.

#### Chapter 8 – Connectivity

Page 152 – RPO 8.11, consideration should be given to strengthening this objective to include the extension of the Local Link Rural Transport Programme to include tourism assets in rural areas.

#### Chapter 10 – Infrastructure

Page 180 – We recommend that a new guiding principle bullet point be inserted which ensures that regard is had to any future National Landscape and/or Seascape Character Assessment in the development planning and implementation of energy networks/infrastructure.

Furthermore, the potential impact upon tourism in the development planning of energy networks/infrastructure must be considered and tourism resources should be protected through the appropriate and sustainable planning and design of transmission infrastructure development.

#### Appendix C - Overview of Enterprise Development Agencies

List Fáilte Ireland as a one of the agencies which support enterprises.

The following text is suggested for inclusion -



*Fáilte Ireland's role is to support the tourism industry and work to sustain Ireland as a high-quality and competitive tourism destination. It provides a range of practical business supports to help tourism businesses better manage and market their products and services. It also works with other State agencies and representative bodies, at local and national levels, to implement and champion positive and practical strategies that will benefit Irish tourism and the Irish economy.*

*Fáilte Ireland promotes Ireland as a holiday destination through its domestic marketing campaign (DiscoverIreland.ie) and manages a network of nationwide tourist information centres that provide help and advice for visitors to Ireland. Fáilte Ireland's website contains information on more than 20,000 Irish tourism businesses including details of accommodation, activities, attractions and events. The database is also geo-coded and map enabled, and includes details of thousands of Irish locations, cities, towns and villages.*

