



Tionól Reigiúnach Oirthir agus Lár-Tíre Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly

3ú Urlár ó Thuaidh | Ionad Cathartha | An tSráid Mhór | Baile Munna | Baile Átha Cliath 9
3rd Floor North | Ballymun Civic Centre | Main Street | Ballymun | Dublin 9



Consultation on the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment Statement of Strategy 2020-2023

The Assembly welcomes the publication of a new Statement of Strategy, which will set out key objectives, outputs and related strategies of the Department over a three-year period. Through its agencies and offices, the Department's remit covers a range of areas including enterprise and employment, foreign direct investment, trade, employment rights, and working across government and with EU and international partners to achieve progress, including Brexit. The actions of this strategy will also support delivery of Project Ireland 2040 – National Planning Framework (NPF) 2018-2040 and National Development Plan (NDP) 2018-2027 as part of a 'whole of government' approach.

In this regard, it is suggested that the Statement of Strategy should consider the key function of the Regional Assemblies and role of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES) as the next tier of spatial policy in Ireland, which will support the implementation of the spatial, economic and climate policies of the government, including 'Enterprise 2025 – Renewed'. The RSES for the Eastern and Midland Region 2019-2031 provides a framework for investment in the Region, with a core principle being the creation of suitable conditions and opportunities to sustain economic growth and employment. The RSES identifies 3 Key Principles of Healthy Placemaking, Economic Opportunity and Climate Action and 16 Regional Strategic Outcomes (RSOs), to support achievement of the National Strategic Outcomes (NSOs) of the NPF and aligned with UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The attention of the Department is drawn in particular to RSOs that support sustainable settlement patterns; urban regeneration and placemaking; rural development; integrated transport and land use; that build climate resilience and transition to low carbon; a strong economy supported by enterprise, innovation and skills; and international connectivity and regional accessibility in the Region.

Role and Functions of the Regional Assemblies

The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA) is part of the regional tier of governance in Ireland. It is primarily focused on the formulation, adoption and implementation of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES), oversight and coordination of Local Economic and Community Plans,

management of EU Operational Programs, EU project participation, implementation of national economic policy, and additional functions working with the National Oversight and Audit Commission.

EMRA was established in 2015 and has entered its second mandate in 2019. The Assembly is composed of 42 elected members, 35 of whom have been nominated by their constituent local authority the remainder is made up of members of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR), who are de facto members of the Assembly. During its first five years, EMRA has achieved a number of key milestones:

- Establishment of a new organisation, headquarters, corporate structure and functions, and employed a full complement of workforce staff.
- Adoption of the first Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midland Region on the 28th June 2019, the first of three regional strategies to be adopted in Ireland.
- Adoption of the first Metropolitan Area Spatial Plan (MASP) for Dublin as part of the RSES and establishment of a governance structure and Implementation Group to drive delivery of the MASP.
- Oversight of City and County Development Plans and Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs) in our Region, which are required to be reviewed following the adoption of the RSES 2019-2031
- Participation in Regional Operational Programmes and INTERREG monitoring committees ensuring EU funding is directed towards projects offering European and territorial added-value
- Providing the secretariat to the Irish delegation to the Committee of the Regions
- Supporting implementation of projects and investment priorities, and providing policy providing supports and resources for local authorities and stakeholders to leverage funding and EU programmes that achieve identified strategic outcomes in our Region.
- Participating in, and in some cases leading on, EU and Nationally funded projects which are delivering on the implementation of the RSES.

Along with our three-fold ambition for the Region– healthy placemaking, economic opportunities and climate action – EMRA will also work towards the strategic goals in our Corporate Plan to grow the profile of the Regions and to drive the regional agenda at home and abroad, working across government and with our stakeholders to shape policy making including the next round of EU 2021-2027 programmes and to enhance local, regional, national and EU co-ordination.

EMRA has statutory functions providing oversight on Local Authorities City and County Development Plans and Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs) and ensuring consistency between the spatial, economic and climate policies of the government. As a strategic policy body EMRA also participates in the consultation processes of other relevant strategic plans and policies including the Review of IDA Ireland’s Strategy Winning: Foreign Direct Investment 2015-2019.

Observations on Consultation – Key Programming Areas

The RSES provides a framework to better manage economic development in Ireland’s fastest growing region, a framework which will aide the Department when determining the spatial and sectoral alignment of infrastructure, enterprise and investment opportunities throughout the Eastern and Midland Region as set out in the RSES and summarised below.

Delivering the Spatial Strategy in the NPF and RSES

The NPF sets out that the population of the Eastern and Midland Region is to increase to 2.85 million in 2040. To manage this projected growth, the RSES settlement hierarchy sets out key locations for population and employment growth, with a focus on the delivery of compact growth in Dublin, the Regional Growth Centres of Athlone, Drogheda and Dundalk and Key Towns across the region. The RSES Settlement Hierarchy is set out in Table 4.2 below.

Settlement Typology	Description	Areas		
		Metropolitan	Core Region	Gateway Region
Dublin City and suburbs	International business core with a highly concentrated and diversified employment base and higher order retail, arts, culture and leisure offer. Acts as national transport hub with strong inter and intra-regional connections and an extensive commuter catchment.	Dublin City and suburbs		
Regional Growth Centres	Regional Growth Centres are large towns with a high level of self-sustaining employment and services that act as regional economic drivers and play a significant role for a wide catchment area.		Drogheda	Athlone Dundalk
Key Towns	Large economically active service and/or county towns that provide employment for their surrounding areas and with high-quality transport links and the capacity to act as growth drivers to complement the Regional Growth Centres.	Bray Maynooth Swords	Navan Naas Wicklow-Rathnew	Graiguecullen (Carlow) Longford Mullingar Tullamore Portlaoise

For the first time a statutory plan - the Dublin Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (MASP) – has been prepared as part of the RSES, for the sustainable development of the Dublin Metropolitan Area, to grow to 1.65 million population by 2031. The MASP supports the phased delivery of strategic residential and economic development areas in the city centre and at key nodes along high-quality public transport corridors, existing and planned. An Implementation Group has been established to provide a forum for collaboration between local authorities, infrastructure providers and enterprise agencies (including IDA and Enterprise Ireland) to address key infrastructure constraints and ensure the continued competitiveness of Dublin, which is a key economic driver for the Region and the state.

The RSES also identifies sectoral opportunities for key locations in the Region including the Dublin Metropolitan Area, the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor, Regional Growth Centres, Key Towns and Rural Areas, and which are set out in Chapter 6 – Economic Strategy of the RSES. The strategy sets out guiding principles for the location of strategic employment development, that include access to; suitable locations, serviced sites, strategic connectivity including access to international markets, proximity to labour force and skills development, and local strengths including a diverse sectoral mix, economic assets and clusters and an attractive living and working environment.

The adoption of the RSES sets the context for each local authority to review their Development Plans and Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs). Other state agencies and sectoral bodies will also need to consider their strategies and investment plans to ensure consistency of the NPF and RSES.

Delivering the Economic Strategy in the RSES

This is the first time that Irish planning is required to deliver an economic strategy intrinsic to a regional spatial plan. To this end, the EMRA worked closely with the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (DBEI), the economic agencies (Enterprise Ireland, IDA), Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) and Regional Skills Fora in the preparation of the RSES. The economic strategy promotes smart specialisation and clustering policies to develop a strong economic base in the Region, underpinned by orderly growth in our settlement strategy and investment in ‘placemaking’ to create places that are attractive to live, work, study, visit and invest in.



Given the importance of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in achieving economic development and employment growth, IDA Ireland has a significant role to play in accommodating future employment opportunities for planned population growth. While it is recognised that Dublin will continue to be at the forefront of competition for FDI, there should be targeted investment to meet enterprise needs in all of the key locations in the RSES settlement hierarchy settlement strategy, in order to support more balanced and effective regional development. In particular our Regional Growth Centres possess key characteristics to attract FDI including strategic locations, relatively cheap property, high valued clusters, access to education and skills and a good quality of life offer.

Skills, Enterprise and Innovation

The RSES recognises that a strong future economy is underpinned by skills, innovation, and enterprise development. In the face of emerging global challenges, such as Brexit, tax and trade developments, climate change and disruptive technologies, the RSES seeks to sustain what we have in the immediate term, transform our enterprise base for longer term resilience, and build on our strengths in international trade while managing potential external risks.

This is supported by 'cluster' policies to strengthen networks between key sectors, to capitalise on economies of scale and develop a favourable ecosystem for innovation and entrepreneurship, with enhanced collaboration between foreign and Irish owned enterprises, and 'smart specialisation strategies', which promote stakeholder engagement and collaboration between public bodies, industry and research institutes to identify the strategic assets and potential of places and drive the commercialisation of science and technology innovation.

The RSES also supports the Smart Dublin and the All Island Smart Cities Forum and the further development of smart cities programmes in the Regional Growth Centres of Athlone, Dundalk and Drogheda, to drive the smart green economy and leverage EU and national funds, including NPF Disruptive Technologies and EI 'Small Business Innovation Research' (SBIR) programme.

The central enterprise policy hierarchy, that includes the RSES, is supported by and informs the works and strategies of the Enterprise Agencies and national initiatives including Future Jobs Ireland, Regional Enterprise Plans (REPs) and funding allocation through the Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REF) and the Project Ireland 2040 funds. To this end, EMRA will work with key stakeholders to promote skills and entrepreneurship and to develop human capital in the Region around the following priorities;

- The role of the Institutes of Technology (ITs) in Athlone and Dundalk as centres of excellence and the Wicklow County Campus Rathnew (in association with IT Carlow) as a media hub;
- The development of multi-campus Technological Universities to drive research and innovation;
- The development of sites for high-tech and high potential start-ups (HPSU29) in conjunction with Enterprise Ireland (EI), ITs and HEIs;
- The development of a network of co-working spaces and digital hubs in collaboration with the Regional Assemblies, DBEI and the enterprise agencies
- The role of REPs, LEOs, Regional Skills Fora, Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) and Education Training Boards (ETBs) in addressing skills shortages and lifelong learning
- The role of community and adult education providers targeting disadvantaged groups to increase participation and progression into further education and employment;
- Ensure sufficient levels of funding to HEIs in the Region including Trinity College Dublin, University College Dublin, Dublin City University, Technological University Dublin and Maynooth University.

Effective Regional Development

To support inclusive growth across the Region, particularly in deprived or underperforming areas that have a higher risk from disruptive technologies, the RSES sets out policies to diversify local and rural

economies and support SMEs and indigenous enterprise to create quality jobs that ensure a good standard of living for all. The EMRA recognises the role played by the LEOs and the LECs in stimulating a pipeline to sustain growth including support for start-ups, SMEs and social enterprises. As noted above, the adoption of RSES requires a review of Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs).

The Action Plan for Rural Development 2020 promotes investment and the diversification of rural economies. The RSES supports investment in rural broadband and the provision of serviced sites and co-working/incubator space in towns and villages of all sizes in order to develop the potential offered by improved connectivity and digitisation and drive innovation and enterprise development in all parts of the Region. Key opportunities for the diversification of rural economies include the development of agriculture, eco-tourism, food, forestry, marine, renewable energy, bio economy, circular and low carbon sectors. The development of greenways can contribute to unique tourism offerings that support rural job creation, as well as protecting and promoting natural assets and biodiversity.

The RSES acknowledges that the region will need to shift from its reliance on using fossil fuels - including Bord na Móna peat-fired stations in the Midlands – however this presents a significant challenge to the local economy. The RSES supports a ‘Just Transition’ in the Midlands; recognising the need to improve skills and to ensure a just transition for the future use of Bord na Móna peatlands, while leveraging clean energy and green economy opportunities. To achieve this, supports should be provided to the education and training boards (ETBs) to promote upskilling, and to the Just Transition Fund for the Midlands including stimulus measures to develop clusters of renewable energy infrastructure, research and expertise, to support start-ups and incentivised strategic energy zones/ hubs.

The place-based approach is supported by regional policies to develop key labour-intensive sectors including retail, tourism, agriculture and the marine, and which are facing key challenges in meeting climate obligations and addressing the impact of external shocks. EMRA will work with enterprise agencies, LEOs and other stakeholders to address the impact of Brexit and CAP reform on the agri-food sector and on internationally traded goods and services. Additionally, the retail, tourism and leisure sectors are significant employers that play a key role in creating attractive places, but have experienced significant economic disruption caused by measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and will require targeted economic interventions such as Enterprise Ireland COVID 19 Funding Supports.

COVID-19 Regional Economic and Co-Working Analysis

The three Regional Assemblies of Ireland have undertaken a ‘COVID -19 Regional Economic Analysis’¹ which identified geographical areas most likely to be negatively impacted as a result of COVID-19 measures. “COVID-19 Exposure Ratios” have been developed for each of Ireland’s regions, sub-regions, counties, cities and settlements, based on the total number of its commercial units operating in the sectors likely to be worst affected, as a proportion of its total commercial stock as of Q2 2019. These

¹ <https://emra.ie/dubh/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/CV19-Regional-Economic-Analysis.pdf>

include construction, mining, wholesale and retail, accommodation and food, arts, entertainment and recreation, childcare, hairdressing and personal services, that generally require human interaction.

The analysis found that coastal and rural areas are more likely to be severely impacted. Of the 9 counties in the Region, 7 recorded above average exposure, with the highest (over 50% of commercial units) in Westmeath, Meath and Longford. Relative exposure is likely to be lower in urbanised areas that have a more diversified economic base including finance, ICT and professional and technical services, which are capable of operating remotely. Nevertheless Dublin – in absolute terms – had the highest number of 14,360 commercial units in the sectors likely to be severely impacted. Targeted business supports and placemaking investment is required to combat declining footfall and vitality in our town centres as a result of COVID restrictions, significant job losses, a rapid shift to remote working, reduced international tourism, and the challenge to traditional on street retailing from online shopping.

Further to the above, the three Regional Assemblies also prepared a ‘Regional Co-working Analysis’ report² to assess the potential of remote working to open up new economic and environmental opportunities for all our regions. The analysis found that as of Q2 2020 387,000 private-sector workers are capable of operating remotely in Ireland, with nearly two thirds or 253,600 of those based in the Eastern & Midland region and just over 186,000 based in Dublin. There are 158 co-working hubs in the region by local authority area, and these include 75 in Dublin city; 17 in Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown; 11 in Fingal, 8 in South Dublin and 7 in Kildare. The joint analysis shows 4 in the Meath local authority area, 10 in Wicklow, 9 in Louth, 4 in Westmeath, 9 in Laois, 4 in Offaly and none in Longford.

Among the report’s recommendations is the safeguarding of funding for the National Broadband Plan to allow for the delivery of up to 300 “Broadband Connection Points”, providing remote working opportunities across Ireland. The report highlights the need for further consultation with private firms and a nationwide survey on the current capacity of co-working hubs – both privately and publicly owned – in consultation with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Enterprise Ireland, the Regional Assemblies and the Local Enterprise Offices. It is also recommended to increase funding to the “Regional Enterprise Development Fund” (REDF) to deliver more co-working hubs in our region, within or in close proximity to our Metropolitan Areas and key locations in the RSES Settlement Strategy. Resources from the European Regional Development Fund should also be considered.

Placemaking for Enterprise Development

A key regional priority is to ensure urban and rural renewal and enterprise funding is aligned to the spatial policy objectives of the RSES to deliver public realm and quality of life improvements and attract talent and investment to our cities, towns and villages. Guiding Principles for Investment Prioritisation in Placemaking for Enterprise Development are also set out in the RSES Economic Strategy. Regional priorities in this regard include;

² <https://emra.ie/dubh/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Regional-Co-Working-Analysis-16112020.pdf>

- Ensure funding schemes are aligned to the spatial policy objectives of the RSES, with particular focus on Project Ireland 2040 funds, Regional Enterprise Development fund, the Ireland Strategic Investment fund, and support for draw down of EU funds and the European Investment Bank.
- That local authorities, REPs, and LECPs in their preparation of projects to bid for funds, give due regard to the factors identified as enablers of enterprise development, that is availability of human capital, proximity to a third level institution, transport infrastructure, broadband infrastructure, a diverse local sectoral mix and emerging clusters.
- Prioritise locations based on identified assets and capacity. There are opportunities for global services centres, advanced manufacturing centres, the health/well-being sector with new hospitals, and a 'second site' strategy for multinational corporations. Align to national strategy for data centres to ensure the right location for energy use and demand.
- Continued supports for COVID related accelerated measures to provide business supports to the most affected sectors and to improve the public realm and walking and cycling in our cities, towns and villages.
- Delivery of key enabling infrastructure projects set out in Project Ireland 2040 – National Development Plan 2019-2027, including transport, communications network and digital infrastructure, water/wastewater and waste projects to drive the delivery of strategic development areas and serviced sites in key locations to meet enterprise and employment needs in the Region.
- Ensure rural funding schemes are aligned to promote diversification of rural economies and develop the smart green economy, with targeted investment in rural broadband and provision of serviced sites and co-working/incubator space in towns and villages of all sizes.
- Simplified and ring-fenced funding streams - especially for the scale of cities and metropolitan areas - with careful consideration around the need for match funding and capacity building to support Local Authorities, state bodies, stakeholders and communities in bidding for and winning competitive funds nationally and under EU funds. The Regional Assemblies of Ireland can play a key role in this regard.

International Connectivity

High quality accessibility to international gateways, both within and outside the Region, is key for economic competitiveness through investment in the trans-European TEN-T road, rail and port network and to protect the strategic function of national transport corridors. The RSES seeks to protect and enhance land transport connections to the major ports and airports, in line with priorities set out in the National Ports Policy and National Aviation Policy. The RSES also recognises the potential of rail freight to support increased exports and the efficient movement of goods across Ireland, along with the future role of regional ports as strategic marine related assets.

The RSES also recognises the key role of the Dublin-Belfast Corridor as the largest economic agglomeration and national entry point to the island of Ireland, connecting Drogheda, Dundalk and Newry, with major airports and ports in Dublin and Belfast. The RSES supports the improvement of

road and rail links between Dublin-Belfast and Dublin-Limerick Junction/Cork, along with improved connectivity to Rosslare Europort on the Eastern Corridor ensure resilient cross border flows and address opportunities and challenges from Brexit. EMRA supports continued cross boundary collaboration in areas such as economic development, transport, tourism and the environment and to progress key energy projects including interconnection of electricity grids, gas pipeline and fibre communications networks in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Transport and Infrastructure Investment

The success of planning in meeting societies needs requires close integration of infrastructure delivery and land use planning, to ensure the best distribution of residential and employment development and to ensure that investment is targeted in the right locations, in line with the RSES Settlement Strategy and the 'Town Centres First' approach in the Programme for Government. The Climate Strategy in the RSES also promotes integrated land use and transport to achieve more sustainable settlement and travel patterns in the Region and reduce the need for unnecessary private car journeys – and the associated emissions - and to promote a shift to sustainable and active modes of travel.

The RSES supports enhanced rail services on the Irish Rail intercity and commuter lines – the Northern (Dundalk/ Drogheda Commuter) line, the Sligo (via Longford and Maynooth/M3 Commuter) line, the Cork (via Portlaoise and Hazelhatch-Heuston/Grand Canal Dock Commuter) line and the South East (Wicklow Commuter and Greystones/Bray DART) line along with regional and local bus services to ensure regional accessibility and connectivity. The strategy also supports the ongoing management and enhancement of national road networks along with the delivery of key public transport projects 'Bus Connects', DART expansion and LUAS extension programmes, and Metro Link, to provide a fully integrated public transport network in the Greater Dublin Area.

There RSES supports the delivery of the *National Cycle Plan* and the *NTA Greater Dublin Area Cycle Network Plan* along with economic opportunities for the development of a Strategic Greenway Network in the Region including the Dublin-Galway Eurovelo Route, the River Shannon and triangular navigation route encompassing the Royal and Grand Canals, the East Coast Trail, the Dublin Mountains and Wicklow Way, the Barrow and Boyne Blueways, the Slieve Blooms and Midland peatways, and urban greenways on the canal, river and coastal corridors in the Dublin metropolitan area. The achievement of a shift to sustainable mobility and electric vehicles (EV) will support transition to a low-carbon region, underpinned by policies to promote compact growth and make more efficient use of urban land along with the decarbonisation of energy, buildings and transport as part of a cross sectoral policy approach.

'Whole of Government' Approach

The RSES is a key policy framework for accessing Project Ireland funds as well as the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund, Enterprise Funding Schemes, EU funds and the European Investment Bank. The Regional Assemblies role in reporting to the Project Ireland 2040 delivery board ensures that EMRA can participate in the delivery and co-ordination of cross sectoral funding and regional investment decisions

in line with the RSES and the NPF. In this regard, the Department should ensure that adequate support and funding is continued to be made available to implement the economic development policies and projects that are set out in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES), with a focus on the key locations in our settlement strategy and the need to promote sustainable growth within the Region.

The Regional Assembly has a statutory role in promoting better effectiveness and coordination in local government. To this end, EMRA takes part in a number of forums, advisory and steering groups which enable a greater degree of coherence between all the initiatives and strategies developed at local, regional, national, and European levels. The establishment of RSES and MASP Implementation Groups provide a forum for cross boundary and cross sectoral co-ordination between Local Authorities, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH) and the relevant transport, infrastructure and enterprise agencies including Enterprise Ireland (EI) and IDA Ireland to ensure that planned growth is co-ordinated with infrastructure and services.

EMRA also provides research and analysis to support evidence-based policy-making and inform our implementation and monitoring function, including recent economic analysis in response to the impact of COVID-19, and analysis of the potential of remote working, which have been undertaken in collaboration with the two other Regional Assemblies and the results of which are highlighted in this submission. In the preparation of the RSES, EMRA also worked closely with DBEI to develop an inventory of economic assets in the region including business incubation centres, community enterprise centres, research and innovation centres with HEIs, technology gateways, and IDA business and technology parks, which informed the development of the spatial and economic strategy in the RSES.

Role in management of EU programmes

EMRA manages the Irish Regions European Office (IREO) which represents the interests of Irish local and regional government in Brussels and supports the Irish delegation to the Committee of the Regions (CoR). EMRA acts as a bridge between local and European levels, ensuring European dimension is incorporated into regional and local decisions and providing advice and guidance to local authorities and other stakeholders in the region on EU funding, with the support and expertise of the IREO.

EMRA is involved in both the implementation and management of European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), including the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) as a member of the current Regional Operational Programmes (ROPs) and European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) programme monitoring committees including the INTERREG and URBACT programmes and the PEACE Plus programme with Northern Ireland. As of next year, the European Union will start its new 2021-2027 programming period and EMRA, through its participation on the Partnership Process Steering Group (PPSG) set up under the aegis of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, will work together with the other Regional Assemblies and the relevant Government Departments and EU bodies to ensure that the next round of ERDF is used to respond to the priorities identified in the RSES.

EMRA is now recognised as a NUTS II region at European level and will have an enhanced role in the management and delivery of EU funding programmes in Ireland post 2020, in line with the other two Irish Regional Assemblies.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Regional Assembly welcomes the opportunity to engage in the process of preparing the Statement of Strategy and looks forward to continuing engagement with the Department and relevant agencies in the further development and implementation of economic development and enterprise policies to drive sustainable job creation in the Eastern and Midland Region.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Jim Conway', with a horizontal line underneath it.

Jim Conway
Director,
Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly

19th November, 2020