



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

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### **Department of Transport – Statement of Strategy 2021-2023**

The Assembly welcomes the publication of a new Statement of Strategy, which will serve as a framework for the work of the Department of Transport over a three-year period across its main functions including Public Transport, Transport and Climate Change. The actions of this strategy will also support the implementation 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 the new 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 and provide a framework for investment in Irish Regions.

The primary statutory objective of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) is to support the implementation of the National Planning Framework (NPF). The RSES identifies 3 Key Principles of Healthy Placemaking, Economic Opportunity and Climate Action and 16 Regional Strategic Outcomes (RSOs), which will 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; compact growth and urban regeneration; strong healthy urban and rural communities and economies; integrated transport and land use; that build climate resilience and transition to low carbon; and promote 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 in our Region, which are required to be reviewed within a specified time following the adoption of the RSES 2019-2031
- Participation in Regional Operational Programmes and INTERREG programmes 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 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 Authority Development Plans and ensuring consistency between the RSES and the National Transport Authority (NTA) Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area (GDA). As a strategic policy body EMRA also participates in the consultation processes of other relevant strategic plans and policies including the public consultation on the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport Review of Sustainable Mobility, also engaging with the Department on the development of the Policy Planning Land Use and Transport Outlook – PLUTO 2040.

### **Observations on Consultation – Key Programming Areas**

#### **Delivery of 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 for the Region 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 includes a place-based economic strategy which identifies sectoral opportunities for key locations including the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor and sets out Guiding Principles for the location of strategic employment growth in the Region. The strategy also includes a Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (MASP) for Dublin, which identifies a number of strategic development areas to be delivered in co-ordination with key public transport and projects in the metropolitan area.

The adoption of the RSES sets the context for each local authority within the Region to review their Development Plans to ensure consistency with the NPF and RSES regarding a number of matters including; promoting regional development; planning for the best use of land having regard to location, scale and density of new development to benefit from investment of public funds in transport infrastructure and public transport services; integrated planning for transport and land use, and the promotion of sustainable transportation strategies in urban and rural areas, including measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate change.

### **Integrated Land use and Transport Planning**

With the adoption of the NPF and RSES, key state agencies and sectoral bodies will also need to consider their strategies to ensure consistency of the NPF and RSES such as the National Transport Authority (NTA) in their upcoming review of the Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area (GDA). The RSES is required by legislation to be consistent with the NTA Transport Strategy for the GDA likewise the NTA Transport Strategy for the GDA is also required by legislation to be consistent with the RSES. The overall hierarchy of transport and land use plans and policies are set out in Table 8.1 of the RSES below;

<b>Table 8.1 Hierarchy of Plans and Policies</b>	
<b>International</b>	The Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T)
<b>National</b>	National Planning Framework, Smarter Travel – A Sustainable Transport Future, Planning Land Use and Transport Outlook – PLUTO 2040
<b>Regional Level</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2016-2035.</li> <li>• Transport Plans for Athlone (multiple regions), Dundalk (cross border) and Drogheda (multi county)</li> <li>• Dublin- Belfast Economic Corridor.</li> </ul>
<b>Metropolitan Area</b>	Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2016-2035.
<b>County Level</b>	Development plans, county cycling and walking strategies.
<b>Settlement level</b>	Settlement walking and cycling strategies, local area plans, Local Transport Plans, Local Link Rural Transport Programme, Mobility management plans.

The success of planning in meeting societies needs requires close integration of transport investment and land use planning, to ensure the best distribution of residential and employment development to meet projected growth in the Region. In order to give local expression to the regional Transport Strategy in the RSES, EMRA will work with the NTA and relevant local authorities to prepare Local Transport Plans (LTPs) for selected settlements in the Region and to input into the upcoming review of the NTA Strategy for the GDA. EMRA also welcomes the opportunity to further engage with the Department as part of this process of policy alignment from national, regional to local, in the formulation of policy, the implementation of plans and in the alignment of funding to implement these plans.

## **Strategic 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, including Dublin Airport, via delivery of Metrolink and to support the development of Dublin Port including proposals for a southern port access route, in line with priorities set out in the National Ports Policy and National Aviation Policy.

The RSES 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 Dublin – Belfast road and rail links, including feasibility for high speed rail between Dublin-Belfast and Dublin-Limerick Junction/Cork, along with improved connectivity to Rosslare Europort on the Eastern Corridor. Continued cross border co-ordination will play a critical role in ensuring effective and resilient cross border flows and addressing opportunities and challenges from Brexit. 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, whilst supporting complimentary economic uses including facilitating offshore renewable energy.

The RSES also supports the delivery of key public transport projects ‘Bus Connects’, DART expansion and LUAS extension programmes, Metro Link and the Greater Dublin Metropolitan Cycle Network, along with the provision of park and rides and improved interchange to provide a fully integrated public transport network to ensure the continued success and competitiveness of the capital city region. An Implementation Group has been established to provide a forum for enhanced collaboration between local authorities, transport and infrastructure providers to drive the phased delivery of development areas in co-ordination with key enabling transport and infrastructure.

## **Transport Infrastructure Investment**

One of the key challenges facing the Eastern and Midland Region is the need for better alignment between population and employment growth and the delivery of enabling transport and infrastructure, in order to reduce the need for long distance car-based commuting and to promote best use of transport networks, existing and planned. The RSES spatial strategy seeks to ensure that investment is targeted in the right locations with a focus on compact growth within the existing built up area of cities, towns and villages in line with the ‘Town Centres First’ approach in the Programme for Government.

The RSES also recognises the role of transport in rural development and providing access to key services while recognising that urban-generated development in rural areas needs to be managed in such a way so as to safeguard the integrity of rural areas. The attention of the Department is brought in this regard to the following Tables in the RSES which support the delivery of strategic public transport and transport projects for the Region.

<b>Table 8.2: Rail Projects for the Region</b>
DART Expansion Programme - new infrastructure and electrification of existing lines, including provision of electrified services to Drogheda or further north on the Northern Line, Celbridge-Hazelhatch or further south on the Kildare Line, Maynooth and M3 Parkway on the Maynooth/
Sligo Line, while continuing to provide DART services on the South-Eastern Line as far south as Greystones
Provide for an appropriate level of commuter rail service in the Midlands and South-East
Complete the construction of the National Train Control Centre.
New stations to provide interchange with bus, LUAS and Metro network including Kishoge, Heuston West, Cabra, Glasnevin, Pelletstown and Woodbrook.
A feasibility study of high-speed rail between Dublin Belfast, Dublin Limerick Junction/Cork will be carried out.
Reappraisal of the extension of the Dunboyne/M3 Parkway line to Navan during the Mid Term Review of the GDA Transport Strategy
Complete construction of Metrolink from Swords to Sandyford and consider underground extensions to other locations from Charlemont
LUAS Green Line Capacity Enhancement in advance of Metrolink.
Undertake appraisal, planning and design of LUAS network expansion to Bray, Finglas, Lucan and Poolbeg
Undertake assessment, and, if appropriate, planning and design of LUAS network expansion to Hazelhatch and Booterstown.
In principle there is a need to carry out an evaluation of underground metro routes within the M50.

<b>Table 8.3: Bus Projects for the Region</b>
Core Bus Corridors comprising 16 radial routes and 3 orbital routes in Dublin
Regional Bus Corridors connecting the major regional settlements to Dublin
Dublin Metropolitan Bus Network Review
Network reviews for the largest settlements across EMRA, with a view to providing local bus services
Review of bus services between settlements
Review of local bus services throughout EMRA, including services to small towns and villages and the rural transport programme
New interchange and bus hub facilities
New fare structures
Enhanced passenger information
Improvements to bus waiting facilities
Integrated timetabling of bus and rail into a coherent national and regional network.

<b>Table 8.4: Road Projects for the Region</b>
M7 Naas to Newbridge bypass widening, Osberstown Interchange and Sallins Bypass
N2 Slane Bypass
N2 Rath Roundabout to Kilmoon Cross
N2 Ardee to south of Castleblaney
M4 Maynooth to Leixlip
M4 Mullingar to Longford (and Sligo)
M11 from Jn 4 M50 to Kilmacanogue
N3 Clonee to M50
N52 Ardee Bypass
N52 Tullamore to Kilbeggan
M50 Dublin Port South Access

<b>The NTA will develop and expand the Local Link Rural Transport Programme</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• seek further integration with other public transport services, including HSE and school transport;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• better linkage of services between towns, villages and rural areas;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ensure fully accessible vehicles operate on all services;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• enhance the customer experience;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• increase patronage among children and young people; and</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• encourage innovation in the service.</li> </ul>

### **Climate action**

The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly is committed becoming a low-carbon region and this is reflected by the inclusion of Climate Action as one of three Key Principles in the RSES. The Climate Strategy in the RSES 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.

This is underpinned by policies to promote compact growth and make more efficient use of urban land along with the development of Green Infrastructure, carbon storing and decarbonisation of energy, buildings and transport as part of a cross sectoral policy approach. The RSES also supports innovations in the freight handling and transport sector including lower carbon fuels and technology and a transition to electric vehicles and electrification of public transport and local authority fleets, in order to achieve reduced transport related emissions and improved air quality.

The RSES also commits to monitor progress in the transition to low carbon and states that EMRA will work with other stakeholders, including the NTA and the Climate Action Regional Offices (CAROs) to carry out an assessment of transport emissions in the region and to agree reduction targets in accordance with agreed national sectoral plans. The RSES also requires that city and county development plans shall undergo assessment of their impact on carbon reduction targets and include measures to monitor and review progress towards carbon reduction targets. To this end, EMRA is leading an ESPON EU research programme (QGasSP) to identify a robust method for quantifying the relative GHG impacts of alternative spatial planning policies, the outputs of which are expected in 2021.

### **Active Travel**

The RSES recognises the importance of the built environment in supporting active lifestyles including walking and cycling, reflected by the inclusion of Healthy Placemaking as one of three Key Principles underpinning the RSES. There RSES supports the delivery of the *National Cycle Plan* and the delivery of the cycle network set out in the NTA Greater Dublin Area Cycle Network Plan inclusive of key commuter routes and urban greenways on the canal, river and coastal corridors, along with the provision of enhanced pedestrian facilities and safe cycling routes in towns and villages across the Region.

The RSES supports achievement of targets in the Government's *Smarter Travel Policy* and sets out Guiding Principles for the Integration of Land Use and Transport in statutory land use plans, to prioritise walking and cycling in new developments, to support investment in infrastructure and behaviour change, and to integrate permeability and accessibility into all settlements in line with the '10 minute' settlement concept, whereby a range of services are accessible by walking, cycling and public transport.

The RSES also supports the development of a Strategic Greenway Network in line with the DTTAS *Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways 2018*. Flagship national and regional greenways in the Region include the Dublin-Galway Eurovelo Route, the Shannon Wilderness Corridor and triangular navigation route encompassing the River Shannon and the Royal and Grand Canals, the cross-border 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.

### **Ensuring funding follows policy**

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 transport 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 more compact 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 agencies including the National Transport Authority (NTA) and Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) 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, which have been undertaken in collaboration with the two other Regional Assemblies. EMRA are currently engaging with the NTA to inform the upcoming review of Transport Strategy for the GDA, which will incorporate a re-examination of travel demand across the GDA based on the most recent forecasts of population and employment distribution and to inform the requirement for investment in transport infrastructure to deliver on the policies and projects 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 INTERREG, URBACT 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, now recognised as a NUTS II region at European level, also aims to have an increased role in the management and delivery of EU funding programmes in Ireland post 2020, in line with the other 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 in the further development and implementation of transport policy in the Region.

Regards,



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Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly

23<sup>rd</sup> October 2020