

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

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European Semester 2023 & the National Reform Programme

The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA) welcomes the opportunity to assist in the development of Ireland's National Reform Programme 2023.

The Assembly notes that the National Reform Programme 2023 will be used to inform the European Semester Process in the framework for integrated surveillance and coordination of economic and employment policies across the European Union. While integrating the continued implementation of the EU Recovery and Resilience Fund¹ (RRF) and the adoption of REPowerEU², the central aim of the National Reform Programme is to outline the major economic, employment and social challenges facing Ireland, and the Government responses, in particular policies to boost jobs and growth, along with how Ireland is addressing the Country Specific Recommendations contained within the Country Report for Ireland published by the European Commission in May 2022. The National Reform Programme, along with the analysis of the European Commission, will inform the development of new Country Specific Recommendations which will be made to Ireland in summer 2023.

The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA) are responsible for the preparation and implementation of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midland Region. The EMRA's Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) outlines the spatial, economic and climate policies for the Eastern and Midland Region within the context of an investment framework, and as such is fundamental to the formulation of the National Reform Programme 2023.

As requested within the letter of invitation from the Department of the Taoiseach dated 19th January 2023 and subsequent to EMRA attendance at the stakeholder consultation on 1st February 2023, this submission outlines the EMRA's views on:

- the major economic, employment and social developments and challenges for our region.
- Ireland's most recent Country Specific Recommendations.

This submission does not specifically address Ireland's progress towards the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, but instead integrates reference to these considerations throughout the submission. Accordingly, the submission is structured to include an overall context (detailing the role and function of the Regional Assembly

¹ established to support the Union's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic

² the EU's plan to rapidly phase out dependence on Russian fossil fuels and accelerate the clean energy transition

and the importance of the RSES), a response to the key points above, and supporting appendices that includes a profile of the Region drawn from the recently launched Regional Development Monitor.

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1.0 Overall Context

1.1 Role and Function of the Regional Assembly

The EMRA is part of the regional tier of governance in Ireland. It is primarily focused on driving regional development through the formulation, adoption and implementation of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES), oversight and coordination of County Development Plans and Local Economic and Community Plans, management of the EU Just Transition Fund, EU project participation, implementation of national economic policy, and additional functions working with the National Oversight and Audit Commission.

Along with the three-fold ambition for the Region as stated in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) of healthy placemaking, economic opportunity and climate action, EMRA will also work towards the strategic goals in our Corporate Plan to grow the profile of the Region and to drive the regional agenda at home and abroad, working with our stakeholders to shape policymaking and to enhance local, regional, national and EU coordination.

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.

1.2 The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midland Region

The RSES for the Eastern and Midland Region (EMR) was made in June 2019. The overall vision of the Strategy is to create a sustainable and competitive Region that supports the health and wellbeing of our people and places, from urban to rural, with access to quality housing, travel and employment opportunity for all. The vision is supported by 16 Regional Strategic Outcomes (RSOs) that are framed around three key principles of Healthy Placemaking, Climate Action and Economic Opportunity.

A primary statutory objective of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) is to support the implementation of the National Planning Framework (NPF), the NDP, and thus Project Ireland 2040. The RSES is of critical importance for the delivery of Project Ireland 2040, given that it is the succeeding tier of policy delivery in Ireland.

It is essential for the delivery of same, that the National Reform Programme 2023 is aligned to economic and spatial planning decisions. The RSES captures these decisions for the Eastern and Midland Region to provide a meaningful planning and investment framework for the Region.

2.0 Consultation Point 1

1. What are the major economic, employment and social developments and challenges for Ireland?

The RSES of the EMRA clearly articulates areas of prioritisation for investments and reforms, and is strongly aligned with the draft outline for Ireland’s National Reform Programme 2023 as presented at the stakeholder meeting on 1st February 2023. Accordingly, the following sections identify the investment and reform priorities of the Region as defined by the RSES, under the following headings:

1. Housing
2. Climate and Green Transition
3. Labour Market
4. Equality, Inclusion and Poverty Reduction
5. Regional Balance
6. Long-Term Sustainability & Sustainable Development Goals
7. EU Funds

2.1 Housing

Placemaking is an essential link between spatial planning, improved quality of life and creating places that are attractive to live, work, visit and invest in. Along with demographic change, housing is a key issue to consider when seeking to promote and create healthier places. The EMRA Region contains some of the fastest growing communities in the country. One of the challenges facing the Region is the continued growth rates of household formation coupled with a shortage of housing stock, resulting in housing supply and affordability pressures in both sale and rental markets, particularly in Dublin and urban areas but affecting the whole Region. The long-term trend is for residential development moving further outwards from Dublin, with significant growth in many of the small towns and villages in the peri-urban area surrounding the city leading to an increase in car-based long-distance commuting. At the same time, an overall lack of adequate housing supply to meet a growing population has resulted in affordability issues and increasing homelessness (See Section 2.5 Equality, Inclusion and Poverty Reduction), with a resulting negative impact on quality of life and regional competitiveness.

The EMRA growth strategy calls for better alignment of housing and strategic employment locations and strengthened local economies (See also Section 2.6 Regional Balance). The Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (MASP) for Dublin, a key element of the RSES, calls for the delivery of strategic development areas, located at key nodes along high-quality public transport corridors in tandem with the delivery of infrastructure and enabling services to ensure a steady supply of serviced sites and to support accelerated delivery of housing.

Regional Policy Objective (RPO) 3.3. requires Local Authorities, in their core strategies, to identify regeneration areas within existing urban settlements and set out specific objectives relating to the delivery of development on urban infill and brownfield regeneration sites in line with the Guiding Principles set out in the RSES and to provide for increased densities as set out in planning guidance documents including: ‘Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas’, ‘Sustainable Urban Housing; Design Standards for new Apartments Guidelines’ and the ‘Urban Development and Building Heights Guidelines for Planning Authorities’. In addition, the RSES sets out an asset-based approach to the strategic location of residential development in the Region, targeting significant population growth in Dublin and the Regional Growth Centres, supported by balanced population and

employment growth in Key Towns and a limited number of economically active Self-Sustaining Growth Towns. Other towns will require targeted ‘catch-up’ investment to enhance local employment and services, for example in rapidly growing commuter towns or to promote regeneration in rural towns and villages. In applying a tailored approach to the location of new housing and urban development, investment needs can be linked to the NPF/NDP Urban and Rural Regeneration and Development Funds.

Facilitating housing is paramount to ensuring the sustainability, vitality, and viability of the rural places of the Region. Support for housing and population growth within rural towns and villages will help to act as a viable alternative to rural one-off housing, contributing to the principle of compact growth. The availability of serviced sites, in tandem with schemes such as the Irish Water Scheme for Small Towns and Villages, will help to enable this. Local authorities’ rural housing planning policy should be evidence based and accommodate rural generated housing consistent with the settlement framework contained in this Strategy and the DEHLG Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines, 2005, or any successor thereof, and should be accommodated within the Housing Needs Demand Assessment, reflecting the housing needs of the county as a whole.

2.2 Climate and Green Transition

Climate change is a global challenge which requires a strong and coherent response at national, regional and local level. Scientific observations show that Ireland’s climate is changing in terms of sea level rise, higher average temperatures, changes in precipitation patterns, more frequent weather extremes, the spread of invasive alien species and increased risk of wild fires, for example upland gorse fires. These changes are projected to continue over the coming decades. Climate change will have diverse and wide-ranging impacts on the Eastern and Midland Region’s environment, society and economic development, including managed and natural ecosystems, water resources, agriculture, food security and bioeconomy, human health and coastal zones.

The RSES provides a Climate Action Strategy to accelerate climate action, ensure a clean and healthy environment and to promote sustainable transport and strategic green infrastructure. This Climate Action Strategy, broadly aligned with the Climate Action Plan for 2023, aims to enhance climate resilience and to accelerate a transition to a low carbon society recognising the role of natural capital and ecosystem services in achieving this.

RSO 6: Integrated Transport and Land Use - Promote best use of Transport Infrastructure, existing and planned, and promote sustainable and active modes of travel to ensure the proper integration of transportation and land use planning.

RSO 7: Sustainable Management of Water, Waste and other Environmental Resources - Conserve and enhance our water resources to ensure clean water supply, adequate waste water treatment and greater resource efficiency to realise the benefits of the circular economy.

RSO 8: Build Climate Resilience - Ensure the long-term management of flood risk and build resilience to increased risks of extreme weather events, changes in sea level and patterns of coastal erosion to protect property, critical infrastructure and food security in the Region.

RSO 9: Support the Transition to Low Carbon and Clean Energy - Pursue climate mitigation in line with global and national targets and harness the potential for a more distributed renewables-focused energy system to support the transition to a low carbon economy by 2050.

RSO 10: Enhanced Green Infrastructure - Identify, protect, and enhance Green Infrastructure and ecosystem services in the Region and promote the sustainable management of strategic natural assets such as our coastlines, farmlands, peatlands, uplands woodlands and wetlands.

RSO 11: Biodiversity and Natural Heritage - Promote co-ordinated spatial planning to conserve and enhance the biodiversity of our protected habitats and species including landscape and heritage protection.

In terms of addressing the future challenges of climate change, EMRA works closely with the Dublin Metropolitan Climate Action Regional Office (run by the four Dublin local authorities assisted by Codema) and the Eastern and Midland Climate Action Regional Office (run by Kildare County Council). These CAROs are responsible for planning and actions regarding Climate Change mitigation and adaptation in their regions and ensure coherence and coordination with the RSES when formulating regional climate change adaptation plans.

The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly is committed to the Region becoming a low-carbon and circular region. Under the Green Transition Pillar, the EMRA RSES has identified the following areas of prioritisation;

2.2.1 Delivery of a Targeted Low Carbon Just Transition for the Peatlands of the Wider Midlands

Ongoing and tailored investment is required to deliver a just transition for the wider Midlands area of the EMR following the cessation of peat cutting and closure of the ESB's Shannonbridge and Lanesboro Power Stations. See also 2.7 EU Funds.

2.2.2 The Transition to a Competitive, Low-Carbon, Climate-Resilient, Circular and Environmentally Sustainable Economy

Investment is required in the region to advance the creation of sustainable green jobs, sustainable food production and enhanced energy security. See also 2.8 EU Funds.

All projects should be assessed for their climate impact, including that they are planned, designed, built and operated in a way that anticipates, prepares for, and adapts to changing climate conditions. The ESPON QGasSP Project (Quantitative Greenhouse Gas Impact Assessment for Spatial Planning Policy) on which the EMRA was lead stakeholder provides an example of a method for quantifying and forecasting the relative GHG impacts of alternative spatial planning policies, with pan-European applicability, which could be tailored for this circumstance.

2.2.3 Enable the Decarbonisation of Energy Production in the Region

Investment is required into the development of Strategic Energy Zones, district heating opportunities, renewable energy sources (including exploring the bioeconomy and offshore wind power), capacity renewal, and future technology. EMRA sits on the Renewable Electricity Spatial Policy Framework (RESPF) Steering Group and are engaging with the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications to prepare Regional Renewable Electricity Strategies to facilitate a consistency of approach by planning authorities in identifying areas suitable for renewable energy development.

2.2.4 Invest in the Electricity Transmission and Distribution Network

Deliver a strengthened electricity transmission and distribution network to facilitate planned growth and transmission of renewable-energy focused generation across the major demand centres, supporting the Region's population. Key priorities include the Celtic Interconnector, The North-South Interconnector, reinforcement of the Greater Dublin Area between Dunstown and Woodland 400 kV substations to increase the capacity of the often congested and highly loaded Dublin transmission

network, the installation of additional transformer capacity and increased circuit capacity to meet Dublin demand growth, and The Laois-Kilkenny Reinforcement Project.

2.2.5 Invest in an Energy-Efficient and Climate Resilient Built Environment

Invest in sustainable patterns of development, including compact growth, and provide mechanisms to enable low energy buildings, including continued retrofitting of current housing stock. Investment should also acknowledge the ambition of settlements to realise low carbon goals, including, for instance, Portlaoise as a Low Carbon Town.

2.2.6 Deliver Necessary Flood Relief and Coastal Defence Infrastructure

A number of flood relief schemes should be prioritised to enable the sustainable development of the region. This includes prioritising the Athlone, Dundalk, Drogheda and, Carlingford and Greenore Flood Relief Schemes whilst progressing the minor works schemes, delivered directly by Local Authorities nationwide that provide local solutions.

2.2.7 Provide a Strategic Network of Connected Green Infrastructure Routes

Prioritise the delivery of the National and Regional Greenways, including the Dublin-Galway Greenway, whilst providing investment to enable a national and regional connected network of greenways, blueways and peatways. This serves a wide variety of important functions, including but not limited to; provision of habitat, increased biodiversity, ecological corridors, climate change adaptation and mitigation, water treatment, water retention, local amenity provision, air quality improvement, cultural and heritage preservation, a mentally restorative environment, flood mitigation and tourism potential.

2.2.8 Environmentally Sustainable Public Transport

The RSES identifies the importance of environmentally sustainable public transport through the inclusion of Regional Strategic Objective 6 (RSO 6), which advocates for integrated transport and land use through promoting the best use of Transport Infrastructure, existing and planned, and promoting sustainable and active modes of travel to ensure the proper integration of transportation and land use planning. This is underpinned by RSO 9, which seeks to support the transition to low carbon and clean energy, and, RSO 15 which advocates for enhanced strategic connectivity. See also 2.7 EU Funds.

The following RSES priorities should be included as part of the National Reform Programme 2023;

- **Deliver transport infrastructure that is aligned to the spatial priorities of the RSES and the Dublin Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (MASP):** To deliver the MASP for Dublin (including RPO 5.2), an adequate level of investment should be deployed to deliver on the transport priorities of the Dublin Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan in a manner that facilitates sustainable travel patterns. Resources should have a particular focus on increasing the share of active modes (namely walking and cycling), creating a safe street environment for pedestrians and cyclists while improving the use of sustainable public transport modes. In this regard, the EMRA supports appropriate sustainable public transport projects in the Dublin Metropolitan Area that are outlined below and in Tables 8.2, 8.3 and 8.5 of the RSES³. Simultaneously, resources should also aim to deliver the NTA Greater Dublin Area Cycle Network Plan inclusive of key commuter routes and urban greenways on the canal, river and coastal corridors.
- **Support sustainable public transport infrastructure projects that will be outlined in Local Transport Plans in the Region:** An adequate level of investment should be deployed to deliver forthcoming Local Transport Plans, to be prepared in tandem with the NTA, that facilitate sustainable travel patterns within key settlements of the Eastern and Midland Region. For

³ Subject to the outcome of appropriate environmental assessment and the planning process

designated settlements, resources should have a particular focus on improving the share of active modes, namely walking and cycling, while creating a safe street environment for cyclists and pedestrians. Such resources should also aim to enhance the use and infrastructure of bus services within these key settlements while also enhancing the connectivity between these geographical areas and the Dublin Metropolitan Area, with relevant priorities outlined in Table 8.3 of the RSES.

- **Develop rail projects that will enhance the connectivity and accessibility of the Eastern and Midland Region.** The EMRA supports the delivery of rail projects which will enhance the connectivity and accessibility of the region. Specific projects and relevant reviews have been outlined in Table 8.2 of the RSES, as included below. Furthermore, the EMRA supports the delivery of a higher-speed rail connection between Belfast, Dublin and Cork.

Key transport infrastructure investments in the metropolitan area as set out in national policy include:	
<p>Dublin -Belfast Economic Corridor</p> <p>The Strategy supports the development of the Dublin - Belfast Economic Corridor through targeted investment in transport infrastructure and services complementing and maintaining its function as part of the EU TEN-T core network. See Chapter 8 Connectivity for further information.</p> <p>Rail;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DART Expansion Programme - new infrastructure and electrification of existing lines, including provision of electrified services to Drogheda and 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 • New stations to provide interchanges with bus, LUAS and Metro network including at Kishoge, Heuston West, Cabra, Glasnevin, Pelletstown and Woodbrook • Implement 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, including underground extensions to UCD and Knocklyon from Charlemont • LUAS Green Line Capacity Enhancement in advance of Metrolink • Appraisal, planning and design of LUAS network expansion to Bray, Finglas, Lucan, Poolbeg, Hazelhatch, Booterstown and Blessington • In principle there is a need to carry out an evaluation of underground metro routes within the M50 	<p>New and Enhanced Park and Ride</p> <p>New Park and Ride locations at Swords, Finglas, Dunboyne, Liffey Valley, Naas Road, Carrickmines, Woodbrook, Greystones</p> <p>Bus</p> <p>Within the Dublin Metropolitan Area, investment in bus based public transport will be delivered through BusConnects, which aims to overhaul the current bus system in the Dublin metropolitan area, including the introduction of Bus Rapid Transit.</p> <p>Roads</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • M4 Maynooth to Leixlip • M11 from Jn 4 M50 to Kilmacanogue • N3 Clonee to M50 • M50 Dublin Port South Access

Table 8.2: Rail Projects for the Region	
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 improve DART services on the South-Eastern Line as far south as Greystones	Reappraisal of the extension of the Dunboyne/M3 Parkway line to Navan during the Mid Term Review of the GDA Transport Strategy.
Provide for an appropriate level of commuter rail service in the Midlands and South-East	Complete construction of Metrolink from Swords to Sandyford and consider underground extensions to other locations from Charlemont.
Complete the construction of the National Train Control Centre.	LUAS Green Line Capacity Enhancement in advance of Metrolink.
New stations to provide interchange with bus, LUAS and Metro network including Kishoge, Heuston West, Cabra, Glasnevin, Pelletstown and Woodbrook.	Undertake appraisal, planning and design of LUAS network expansion to Bray, Finglas, Lucan and Poolbeg.
A feasibility study of high-speed rail between Dublin Belfast, Dublin Limerick Junction/Cork will be carried out.	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.

- Expand the local link Rural Transport Programme throughout rural communities in the Eastern and Midland Region:** As advocated through RPO 8.13 of the RSES, the EMRA supports the expansion of the local link Rural Transport Programme, and additional capital expenditure should aim to further integrate this service with other public transport services, improve linkages of services between towns, villages and rural communities, ensure fully accessible vehicles operate on all services while improving the overall customer experience.
- Expand the cycling and pedestrian infrastructure of smaller towns and villages in the Eastern and Midland Region:** Investment and reform should aim to provide safe cycling routes in small towns and villages across the Eastern and Midland Region. At the same time, such funding should also aim to enhance pedestrian facilities in all rural communities based in the Region.
- Enhance the use of smart transport technologies in the Eastern and Midland Region:** Transport infrastructure of the region should aim to embrace the “Smart Regions” concept, which from a transport perspective, involves a systematic integration of ICT in the planning, design, operations, and management of transport services in the Region’s cities, towns and villages.
- Expand the number of publicly available EV charge points in the Eastern and Midland Region:** Facilitate and encourage an increase in the use of electric vehicles by developing more recharging facilities in the Region. Prioritisation in this regard should aim to develop EV “Fast Charge” points or EV “High Powered Charge”⁴ points in strategic and accessible locations across the Region. See 2.8 EU Funds.

2.3 Labour Market

Within the RSES, the vision for the Region is a growth that is sustainable, competitive, inclusive and resilient. This requires the development of a strong economic base that is supported by enterprise, innovation and skills. The aim is for a vibrant and diversified enterprise base with strong and healthy clusters bringing disruptive technology innovations to national and global markets, with a responsive

⁴ Fast chargers can get an 80 percent charge to most EVs in 30 minutes, while high powered chargers can give a charge of 100km in as little as six minutes. Data provided by the ESB

and efficient labour market. The RSES seeks to achieve this vision through the following economic principles;

- Smart Specialisation
- Clustering
- Orderly Growth
- Placemaking
- Future Proof and Risk Management

As expressed in the economic strategy of the RSES, the availability of labour force demographics, skills matching, and talent attraction policies to develop employment opportunities is crucial for the development of a thriving labour market.

The Economic Strategy of the RSES seeks to promote the creation of quality jobs that support a decent standard of living and afford economic security. With immediate challenges emerging such as global issues and potential vulnerabilities within Ireland's enterprise base, this RSES adopts a threefold approach:

- Sustaining what we have in the immediate term
- Transforming our enterprise base for longer term resilience, and
- Building on our strengths to be successful in international trade while managing potential vulnerabilities.

The following specific sectors- as labour intensive economic activities - are of particular importance to the Region, given their sensitivity for job creation, maintenance, and sustainability:

- Retail
- Town Centre Renewal
- Tourism
- Marine
- Low Carbon Economy and Circular Economy
- Agriculture

Education and skills are closely related to employment opportunities. The level of third level educational attainment can be seen as an indicator of the economic potential of a place as the proximity of a suitably skilled labour force is a key determinant for the location of businesses. The total population with a third level education residing in the Region is nearly 37%, above the State average (33%), however there are clear regional differences between the Midland (26%) and Dublin counties (41%). EU 2020 set targets of at least 40% of 30-34 year olds completing third level.

2.4 Equality, Inclusion and Poverty Reduction

2.4.1 Diverse and Inclusive Region

Social Inclusion is a key objective at national and local level. It refers to the way in which all persons in a community are integrated in an equal manner by reducing barriers to social inclusion for example belonging to a jobless household; being a lone parent; having a disability; being homeless or affected by housing exclusion; and belonging to an ethnic minority.

Additional social inclusion measures are required to ensure that everyone can benefit and access economic opportunities across the Region.

RPO 9.1: Local authorities shall ensure the integration of age friendly and family friendly strategies in development plans and other relevant local policy and decision making, including provision for flexible housing typologies, buildings and public spaces that are designed so that everyone, including older people, disabled people and people with young children can move around with ease, avoiding separation or segregation.

RPO 9.2: Support local authority and sectoral initiatives to increase active participation and social integration of minority groups, including non-Irish nationals and Travellers.

2.4.2 Childcare, Education and Life Long Learning

The RSES emphasises the important role that social infrastructure plays in developing strong and inclusive communities. Under this Pillar, the EMRA identifies a number of reform and investment priorities, particularly relating to education and skills.

The EMRA, through the RSES, support the provision of high-quality childcare, education and training provision, including the allocation of sufficient sites and the development/enhancement of childcare facilities, schools, colleges and universities in appropriate locations to cater for population growth targets under the RSES, to provide for greater educational choice and research capability to facilitate improvement in skills, economic development and to assist in tackling disadvantage. Whilst all facilities and services are of extreme importance, one pertinent issue at present is ensuring full financial and legislative support for the TUS Athlone campus to support its continued development, thus supporting Athlone's role as a Regional Growth Centre serving the wider Midland catchment.

RPO 9.20: Support investment in the sustainable development of the Region's childcare services as an integral part of regional infrastructure to include:

- Support the Affordable Childcare Scheme.
- Quality and supply of sufficient childcare places.
- Support initiatives under a cross Government Early Years Strategy.
- Youth services that support and target disadvantaged young people and improve their employability.

RPO 9.21: In areas where significant new housing is proposed, an assessment of need regarding schools provision should be carried out in collaboration with the Department of Education and Skills and statutory plans shall designate new school sites at accessible, pedestrian, cycle and public transport friendly locations.

RPO 9.22 To support the role of Higher Education Institutions and Educational Training Boards in addressing skills shortages and life-long learning needs in the Region, and to support the further development of multi-campus Technological Universities to drive research and innovation.

2.4.4 Provision of Health Services

RPO 9.23: Facilitate the development of primary health care centres, hospitals, clinics, and facilities to cater for the specific needs of an ageing population in appropriate urban areas in accordance with RSES settlement strategy and core strategies of development plans.

2.4.5 Housing Affordability and Homelessness

Housing affordability and supply issues are impacting upon health and wellbeing, due to overcrowding, with people residing in substandard accommodation and homelessness. There is a need now for accelerated delivery of housing, particularly in Dublin and in identified growth settlements in the Region to ensure the development of high quality and affordable homes located within sustainable communities in order to meet the existing and future needs of a growing population. The slow growth of housing stock compared to rates of population growth and household formation has led to an increase in the average number of persons per household to around 2.8 in the Region, based on the 2016 census, which saw a reversal of the long-term decline in the average household size. There are some regional differences in occupancy rates ranging from 2.5 persons per household in Dublin City to around 3 in the surrounding counties. The delivery of housing in the Region has largely been market driven with people's choice of where to live often driven by affordability. Addressing housing supply and affordability will require a suite of cross sectoral measures that reflect the interplay between land values, building costs and fiscal and planning policies. Local authorities, approved housing bodies and other sectoral agencies should be resourced with adequate skills, support and resources to drive the delivery of high quality social and affordable homes and sustainable communities.

Looking to cities like Vienna, large scale delivery of cost rental can improve national competitiveness and the attractiveness of our cities. The rented home remains a public asset and future rent increases can be controlled to ensure affordability and security for tenants. Cost rental schemes depend on acquisition low-cost lands, including state lands to develop the site and operate on a no profit rental margin. The Land Development Agency (LDA) has a key role to play in facilitating site assembly and achieving objectives for social and affordable housing on public lands.

The issue of homelessness is a critical challenge facing the Region into the future and is the first pillar of Rebuilding Ireland, the State's response to the need to accelerate housing supply. The National Statement on Housing Need and Demand points to the fact that the homelessness problem has been increasing. Although the EMRA does not have an active role in the delivery of housing or in the provision of support services for homeless persons and families, the RSES sets the context for overall housing provision in the Region in the most sustainable locations, within which local authorities and other agencies and bodies will deliver homeless services and accommodation.

RPO 9.3: To support local authorities, approved housing bodies and other sectoral agencies in the provision of a greater diversity of housing type and tenure, including social and affordable housing and exploring new models of low cost rental and affordable homeownership.

RPO 9.4 of the RSES recommends that design standards for new apartment developments should encourage a wider demographic profile which actively includes families and an ageing population.

RPO 9.5: To support local authorities, either individually or combined, in the provision of a Housing Need Demand Assessment that will inform housing policy that provides for diverse housing demand and is in accordance with statutory guidelines. Finally, RPO 9.6 is to support local authorities and other relevant agencies such as the Dublin Region Homeless Executive in relation to addressing the issue of homelessness in the Region.

2.5 Regional Balance

One of the key principles of the RSES is to ensure effective regional development across the Eastern and Midland Region. This includes enhancing cohesion, taking into account local, regional and national disparities, including the rural and urban gaps, thus mitigating territorial disparities.

The OECD's recent work on rethinking regional attractiveness policies in the new global environment highlighted that despite the challenges posed by COVID-19 and the resulting global economic downturn, the Eastern and Midland Region performed well in terms of the digital transformation and has remained resilient in terms of economic attractiveness, FDI and social cohesion, with new opportunities emerging for rural tourism. Certain shortcomings were identified in terms of renewable energy production, balanced employment, road and rail infrastructure, housing/land prices and environmental performance. The report highlighted the need to improve the quality of regional governance through the development of improved multi-level coordination mechanisms. It noted the need to undertake an assessment of current governance structures to determine whether the region is well positioned to meet the challenges it faces in today's less predictable global environment. The OECD acknowledged that there are plans and strategies in place that offer a regional path for coordination, with particular reference to the RSES.

Under the Social and Territorial Cohesion Pillar of the RSES, the EMRA has identified the following priorities;

2.5.1 Delivery of Spatial Strategy (Ensuring Spatial Alignment)

The RSES presents a Spatial Strategy⁵, devised and informed by a complementary Economic Strategy, which provides a framework for future growth, ensuring the delivery of effective regional development through the realisation of viable and vital places. This includes championing the capital city of Dublin as a smart, climate-resilient and global city region; securing Athlone, Drogheda and Dundalk as Regional Growth Centres, acting as regional economic drivers and supports for their wider catchment areas; and promoting a network of large economically active Key Towns⁶ that provide employment and services to their surrounding areas. All of this is supported by Self-Sustaining Growth Towns, Self-Sustaining Towns and a network of multifaceted Rural Places. It is essential that investment and reform priorities reflect this spatial strategy, and the settlement hierarchy presented to allow managed and sustainable growth that enables each place to fulfil ambition and potential.

2.5.2 Delivering Housing and Sustainable Urban Development

The RSES identifies the importance of the delivery of housing and sustainable urban development to provide for the growing population of the Eastern and Midland Region. The RSES ensures a future pattern and location of housing and urban development that provides for more compact and sustainable settlements, including Dublin City, Regional Growth Centres and Key Towns, which will lead the development of the region.

The following RSES priorities should be included as part of the National Reform Programme;

- **Deliver the spatial strategy of the NPF and RSES through focused growth and investment in strategic locations:** The NPF sets out that the population of the Eastern and Midland Region is to increase to 2.85 million by 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 Towns⁷ across the region.

⁵ See Appendix B

⁶ Swords, Maynooth, Bray, Navan, Naas, Wicklow, Longford, Mullingar, Tullamore and Portlaoise.

⁷ Swords, Maynooth, Bray, Navan, Naas, Wicklow, Longford, Mullingar, Tullamore and Portlaoise.

- **Support the delivery of housing and enabling infrastructure on key sites that contribute to compact growth targets in the Dublin Metropolitan Area:** It is essential that at least 50 per cent of all new homes that are to be built within the Dublin Metropolitan Area are to be delivered within or contiguous to its existing built-up area. The provision of capital expenditure should aim to support the delivery of housing developments and enabling infrastructure on key sites in the Dublin Metropolitan Area, which have been outlined in Table 5.1⁸ of the RSES. Furthermore, the provision of capital expenditure in this regard should support the regeneration of underused town centre and brownfield/infill lands while delivering housing on existing zoned and serviced lands in the Dublin Metropolitan Area, with the view of facilitating significant compact growth.
- **Support the delivery of housing and enabling infrastructure on key sites that contribute to compact growth targets in the Regional Growth Centres and Key Towns of the Region:** It is imperative that at least 30 per cent of all new homes that are to be built within our designated Regional Growth Centres and Key Towns are to be delivered within or contiguous to their existing built-up areas. To achieve this, the provision of capital funding for housing developments and enabling infrastructure on strategic sites within these key settlements should, where appropriate, aim to support the regeneration of underused town centres and brownfield/infill lands while also supporting the development of housing on existing zoned and serviced lands to facilitate significant compact growth.
- **A proportion of URDF should be ring-fenced for the Dublin Metropolitan Area, the Regional Growth Centres and Key Towns of the Region:** The third round of URDF funding support, will be specifically designed to address long term vacancy and dereliction across our URDF cities and towns and the acceleration of the provision of residential accommodation. The bidding process for the URDF should continue in a revised form, whereby enhanced and ring-fenced funding is provided for complex and larger regeneration projects in the Dublin Metropolitan Area and the designated Regional Growth Centres (Athlone, Drogheda and Dundalk) and Key Towns of the Region. Increased and ring-fenced funding sources will be instrumental in ensuring urban renewal schemes are adequately utilised in a manner that supports compact growth targets that have been outlined in the RSES. In recent years, it has become clear that the ability of Local Authorities to prepare successful applications under the URDF (and RRDF) have mainly become resource-dependent, with funding being distributed in a manner that is not wholly aligned to the spatial objectives of the NPF and the RSES. It has been noted in discussions with our stakeholders that local authorities may be in a better position to achieve the opportunities available in the national funds if the requisite resources were available to prepare comprehensive applications for funding under the current competitive process.

2.5.3 Rural Development

The RSES identifies the need to strengthen the fabric of rural Ireland, supporting rural towns and communities as well as the open countryside, improving connectivity, and supporting job creation, particularly in a more diverse range of sectors. The rejuvenation of rural towns and villages requires that appropriate job creation can be supported in rural areas. Traditional sectors such as agriculture, tourism, extractive industries and forestry are complemented by diversification in sectors such as food, renewable energy and opportunities provided from improved digital connectivity.

The following RSES priorities should be included as part of the National Reform Programme;

⁸ See Appendix C

- **Deliver serviced sites within rural settlements to enable sustainable housing provision:** A ‘New Homes in Small Towns and Villages’ initiative would augment the delivery of actions by local authorities, Irish Water, communities and other stakeholders in the provision of services and serviced sites to create ‘build your own home’ opportunities within the existing footprint of rural settlements to provide new homes to meet housing demand. This would provide a sustainable alternative to one-off rural housing and provide a mechanism to sustain rural populations.
- **Provide clear and structured mechanisms to sustain and enhance the rural economy:** The RSES identifies the need to support traditional sectors of the rural economy whilst complementing these through diversification in sectors including agriculture and tourism. Accordingly, there is a need to provide mechanisms and supports to rural economies (including agriculture and digital sectors) to enable a just transition.

2.5.4 Delivery and Enhancement of Infrastructure

The RSES identifies the necessity of infrastructure to provide the essential functions and services that support European societal, economic and environmental systems.

The following RSES priorities should be included as part of the National Reform Programme;

The National Road Network

- **Continue to develop the motorway and national road network of the Eastern and Midland Region:** The EMRA supports the appraisal (including necessary environmental assessments) and or delivery of the road projects as detailed in the RSES as follows;

Table 8.4: Road Projects for the Region
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

Water Infrastructure

- **Invest in the Water Supply Needs of the Region:** Priority investment for the EMR includes The Water Supply Project for the Eastern and Midland Region, the Vartry Water Supply Scheme, The Rural Water Programme, and the active leakage control and water mains rehabilitation programme.

- **Deliver necessary Waste Water Treatment Infrastructure:** Priority investment for the EMR includes Greater Dublin Drainage Programme, Ringsend Wastewater Treatment Plan Project, Athlone Main Drainage Project and, the Upper Liffey Valley Sewerage Scheme.

Airports and Ports

- **Invest in the continued development of Dublin Airport:** It is imperative that investment is provided for Dublin Airport using a sustainable approach to airport development which responds to important environmental constraints associated with future development and includes mitigation where necessary and appropriate. This includes, support for the provision of a second runway, improved terminal facilities and supporting infrastructure. It is necessary that this is supported by enhanced access through investment in Metrolink and improved bus services as part of BusConnects, connections from the road network from the west and north, improved cycle access to Dublin Airport and surrounding employment locations, and, in the longer term, consideration of heavy rail access to the Airport would facilitate direct services from the national rail network in the context of potential future electrification.
- **Enable the enhancement of Dublin Port:** This includes investment support for the role of Dublin Port as a Port of National Significance (Tier 1 Port) and its continued commercial development, including limited expansion and improved road access, including the Southern Port Access Route.
- **Provide adequate supports for Regional Ports:** Appropriate levels of investment should be provided to support the role of regional ports as economic drivers for the Region. This includes ports of regional significance located at Drogheda, Dundalk, Dún Laoghaire, Greenore and Wicklow, as well as other regional ports at Arklow, Howth, and Warrenpoint in Northern Ireland.

2.6 Long-Term Sustainability & Sustainable Development Goals

At its core, the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) sets out a settlement and economic growth strategy that seeks to ensure that the needs of the Region's citizens such as access to employment opportunities and services, ease of travel and overall well-being are met. The shared vision and set of outcomes for the RSES have been informed by an extensive public consultation and developed in collaboration with our elected members and key stakeholders, reflecting the Assembly's co-production approach to regional policy formulation. Using a regional collaboration approach the RSES has developed a shared vision, on behalf of our citizens, that sets the strategic direction for where we want our Region to be by 2031 and beyond.

The 16 Regional Strategic Outcomes (RSOs) of the EMRA RSES are aligned to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the EU thematic objectives and national policy including the NPF's National Strategic Outcomes (NSOs) to embed a coherent policy hierarchy and to ensure that future investment is targeted towards identified policy recommendations and goals.

There is significant policy alignment between the UN SDGs and the National Planning Framework's National Strategic Outcomes (NSOs). The development of Regional Strategic Outcomes in the RSES is also closely aligned and supportive of the NSOs.

2.7 EU Funds

The RSES Climate Action Strategy is aligned with ‘A Greener, Low-Carbon Europe’, one of the five main thematic objectives of Regional Development and Cohesion Policy for the 2021-2027 programming period. This focuses on transitioning towards a net zero carbon economy and resilient Europe by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate change mitigation and adaptation, risk prevention and management, and sustainable urban mobility. As Managing Authority for the newly established EU Just Transition Fund (JTF) in Ireland, EMRA is supporting this transition.

The EU Just Transition Fund (JTF) - one of the pillars of the Just Transition Mechanism under EU cohesion policy - aims to mitigate adverse effects of the green transition by supporting the most affected territory & workers and to promote a balanced socio-economic transition. In line with the JTF’s single specific objective, actions supported will directly contribute to alleviating negative impacts of the transition on employment by supporting diversification and modernisation of the local economy in the most impacted territory.

The JTF Territory (the Territory) as defined in Ireland’s Territorial Just Transition Plan (TJTP) was the powerhouse of Ireland, producing fuel & agricultural produce. Bord na Móna (BnM) and the Electricity Supply Board (ESB) were important employers within the Territory, creating communities which were economically reliant on the interdependent sectors of peat harvesting & energy generation. The peat industry provided an anchor to the Territory in terms of economic benefits, knowledge & skills transfer, creating regional attractiveness, and providing a sense of identity.

The accelerated transition away from peat-fired power generation in the Territory presents challenges for a predominantly rural geography that faces a number of socio-economic disparities. The immediate challenge has been the impact on jobs and communities in the Territory – direct, indirect & induced – as the labour-intensive peat industry is wound down and replaced by less labour-intensive industries such as renewable energy, recycling & the provision of low carbon goods and services. This market failure has resulted in an employment deficit which can only be addressed through public intervention in the short to medium term.

The key task for the EU JTF is to provide new employment opportunities for workers and communities that were heavily dependent on peat. This can be achieved by supporting the diversification of the economy of the Territory to enable development and help impacted workers and communities adapt to a changing labour market. By providing opportunities for employment in the Territory, the EU JTF can help to create an inclusive, attractive, healthy & sustainable place to live, work and visit in line with the vision of the RSES for the EMRA region. A focus on inter-generational sustainability, local development, regenerative tourism & building a green and circular economy will be central to achieving this vision.

Country-Specific Recommendations for JTF

As noted in successive Country reports, the transition to a climate-neutral economy is having significant impact on the economy and employment. The 2020 Country Report (Annex D) sets out investment guidance on the JTF for Ireland. With the prospect of around 4,000 jobs potentially being affected by the end of 2020, it identified the need to diversify the regional economy to make it more modern and competitive and to alleviate the socioeconomic costs of the transition. It recommended that actions of the JTF could target upskilling & reskilling of workers; job-search assistance; support to SMEs; investments in R&I, green energy, and the circular economy. The 2022 Country Report identified some factors inhibiting productivity in domestic sectors, such as low investment in R&D,

skills shortages, & lagging digitalisation, with challenges identified in the areas of climate action, the circular economy, regional disparities, digitalisation & skills. It further notes that planned investments in sustainable mobility included in the RRP will not be sufficient to decarbonise public transport. This will be particularly pronounced in the JTF Territory which consistently lags behind on all related measures.

EU JTF Priorities

To achieve the specific objective of the EU JTF, the Programme will address the investment needs identified above via the 3 complementary priorities listed below, which are each cross-cut by the key objectives of supporting research, upskilling and reskilling through investments which build on regional strengths to address the socio-economic challenges deriving from the transition process in the Territory and facilitate the move towards climate-neutrality.

1. Generating employment for former peat communities by investing in the diversification of the local economy by supporting productive investments in enterprise, SMEs and community actions, focusing on sectors and activities which can address the economic challenge of the transition, including a sustainable bioeconomy.
2. Supporting the restoration and rehabilitation of degraded peatlands and regeneration and repurposing of industrial heritage assets to enable the transition towards climate-neutrality while also facilitating the diversification and modernisation of the economy of the Territory.
3. Providing former peat communities with smart and sustainable mobility options to enable them to benefit directly from the green transition by supporting clean, green mobility to build regional attractiveness and support economic development.

3.0 Consultation Point 2

2. Of the Country Specific Recommendations received by Ireland in 2022, which are considered the most relevant for reflection upon in Ireland's National Reform Programme in 2023?

The EMRA recognises the need for the National Reform Programme to address the 2022 Country Specific Recommendations set out. A number of investment and reform priorities that are set out in Sections 1.0 and 2.0 above directly relate to the Country Specific Recommendations, including expanding public investment for the green and digital transition, including by making use of the RRF, RePowerEU and other EU funds; proceeding with the implementation of its recovery and resilience plan; submission and adoption of the EU JTF Programme and Plan and commencement of its implementation; boosting the circular economy, and reducing reliance on fossil fuels.

The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly consider the following Country Specific Recommendations the most relevant for reflection upon in Ireland's National Reform Programme;

3.1 Focus efforts on boosting the circular economy

A circular economy is one where materials are retained in use at their highest value for as long as possible and are then re-used or recycled, leaving a minimum of residual waste. The EMRA RSES supports a move towards achieving a circular economy which is essential if the Region and Ireland more broadly is to make better use of resources and become more resource efficient. The successful implementation of circular economy principles will help to reduce the volume of waste that the Region produces and has to manage.

A key growth enabler for the Gateway Region of the midlands and border area as set out in the RSES is diversification and growth of smart specialisation of local economies with a strong focus on

clustering including sustainable farming and food production, tourism, marine, energy and renewables, bioeconomy and circular economy, with a focus on publicly owned peatlands in the midlands, to support a Just Transition and realise the benefits of green technologies. In line with RSO 9, EMRA supports the plans and projects for climate action from local authorities and the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications Climate Action and Environment aimed at accelerating the transition to a low carbon and circular economy, including the Climate Action Plan 2023.

3.1.1 Bioeconomy

A sustainable bioeconomy is the renewable segment of the circular economy. It can turn bio-waste, residues and discards into valuable resources and significantly cut food waste. Realising this potential requires investment and implementing systemic changes that cut across different sectors (agriculture, forestry, fisheries, aquaculture, food, biobased industry).

The bioeconomy in Ireland has enormous potential which is yet to be unlocked. Development of the bioeconomy is also consistent with Ireland's low carbon transition objective.

Favouring renewable biological resources over fossil fuel based ones through the expansion of the bioeconomy, whilst keeping sustainability concerns to the fore, has the potential to contribute towards meeting Ireland's climate change targets. As the bioeconomy has the potential to grow rural and regional businesses and jobs, it is a useful instrument to embed pro-environmental actions. The bioeconomy extends from farming and the agri-food businesses, marine based industries, forestry, waste management, energy suppliers, and pharma and bio-technology products. Ireland has flourishing firms in all of these sectors but much more can be done to unlock the bioeconomy's commercial potential and its environmental benefits.

3.2 Reduce overall reliance on fossil fuels

Climate policy at global, national, regional and local level will continue to be driven by the need to reduce GHG emissions, replacement of fossil fuels or high embedded carbon products with sustainable alternatives such as biobased products, and also enhancing carbon sinks. Emissions in the EMRA region largely come from energy supply, transport, residential and commercial buildings and industry.

3.2.1 Decarbonising the Energy Sector

The Region will need to shift from its reliance on using fossil fuels and natural gas as its main energy source to a more diverse range of low and zero-carbon sources, including renewable energy and secondary heat sources. Decentralised energy will be critical to the Region's energy supply and will ensure that the Region can become more self-sufficient in relation to its energy needs.

Generating electricity supply from indigenous renewable sources requires:

- facilitating the provision of appropriate renewable energy infrastructure and technologies and deeper cooperation with Northern Ireland and the EU
- expansion and upgrading of the grid with the aim of increasing the share of variable renewable electricity that the all-island system can accommodate
- Onshore wind, bioenergy, solar and offshore energy
- Effective community engagement including support for micro generation
- Moving from carbon intense fossil fuel generation to lower emissions fuels Increasing the use of electricity and bioenergy to heat our homes and fuel our transport
- The need to ensure sufficient electricity to meet increased demand

The EMRA supports an increase in the amount of new renewable energy sources in the Region. This includes the use of wind energy – both onshore and offshore, biomass, and solar photovoltaics and solar thermal, both on buildings and at a larger scale on appropriate sites in accordance with National policy and the Regional Policy Objectives outlined in this RSES. As noted at 2.2.3 above, EMRA sits on the Renewable Electricity Spatial Policy Framework (RES PF) Steering Group. The Framework and Roadmap document to be delivered in 2023 will facilitate a consistency of approach by planning authorities, both in identifying areas suitable for renewable energy development and having regard to potential impacts, inter alia on biodiversity, landscape and heritage. It is also necessary to reflect the advancements in technology, and reflect the need to engage with, and be responsive to the needs of communities asked to host renewable energy infrastructure.

The RSES identifies the need for early stakeholder engagement in relation to renewable energy generation projects. Effective community engagement is essential for building public confidence and to help Ireland achieve a transition to renewable energy. An increase in community participation in renewable energy projects such as community ownership models should be supported in this regard. Optimisation of community benefit from renewable energy projects also needs to be ensured.

District heating offers an efficient and cost-effective heating option using networks from a variety of potential technologies and renewable energy sources, such as combined heat and power (CHP), biomass energy, geothermal or energy from waste. The use of renewable energy solutions to provide heating and hot water to houses and businesses contributes to sustainability as it reduces demand for and consumption of energy while using a renewable form of fuel. Waste heat presents a substantial indigenous resource. Waste heat is the single largest available low-carbon source of energy available in the Region that is not being used. In Dublin City alone, there is enough waste heat to meet the heating demands of nearly half of the city's buildings. These sources of heat are typically used in District Heating systems. Sources of waste heat include data centres. Waste heat is a resource which is too often overlooked and can meet a large proportion of the Region's heat demands indigenously and without fossil fuels. In response, the EMRA RSES seeks to support the micro-generation, geothermal energy, district heating, storage of heat and energy and the role of the electricity transmission and distribution network.

Local authorities should harness the potential of renewable energy in the Region across the technological spectrum from wind and solar to biomass and, where applicable, wave energy, focusing in particular on the extensive tracts of publicly owned peat extraction areas in order to enable a managed transition of the local economies of such areas in gaining the economic benefits of greener energy.

The provision of infrastructure should be supported in order to facilitate a more distributed, renewables-focused energy generation system, harnessing both on-shore and off-shore potential from energy sources such as wind, wave and solar and connecting sites of optimal energy production to the major sources of demand.

3.2.2 Decarbonising Transport

There is an increasing awareness and understanding of the ability of coherent transport planning to contribute towards lowering our national carbon emissions profile, as well as supporting the local economy, facilitating economic development and providing other social and economic benefits to local communities.

Well-planned settlements can ensure that sustainable transport patterns are established by reducing the need for unnecessary private car journeys – and the associated CO2 emissions – and promoting modal shift towards low-carbon travel alternatives such as public transport, walking and cycling.

Clean and energy-efficient vehicles play an important role in reducing energy consumption, CO2 levels and pollutant emissions. Green public procurement policies therefore represent a valuable tool in demonstrating strong leadership, as well as normalising and supporting the uptake of low emission vehicles.

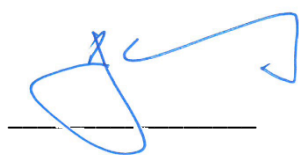
Full electrification of the national car fleet represents a feasible option for Ireland, where supporting recharging infrastructure is developed. Though it is expected that most electric vehicle (EV) recharging will happen in homes with driveways, it is important that charging is available where this is not an option. The roll out of EV infrastructure, in particular EV charging infrastructure must, therefore, be integrated and mainstreamed into spatial and planning policies and supported across all levels of governance to ensure that the charging network will allow us to meet current and future needs in the Region. The Regional Assembly is currently working with the Department of Transport to deliver a regional EV Charging Strategy in line with the Government’s Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Strategy 2022- 2025.

Modal shift to public transport or non-motorised transport should be supported through improved behaviour and improved transport infrastructure. This should be supported by increased availability of low carbon fuels/biofuels such as Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) as well as implementation of the National Policy Framework on Alternative Fuels Infrastructure for Transport in Ireland and on Parking.

4.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, the Regional Assembly welcomes the opportunity to engage in the consultation process of the National Reform Programme. We look forward to any further engagement from the Department in this regard in order to address the major economic, employment and social challenges facing Ireland and in particular to boost jobs and support the green transition and sustainable growth within our region.

Regards,



Jim Conway
Director
Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly
17th February 2023

Appendix A: Evidence Base

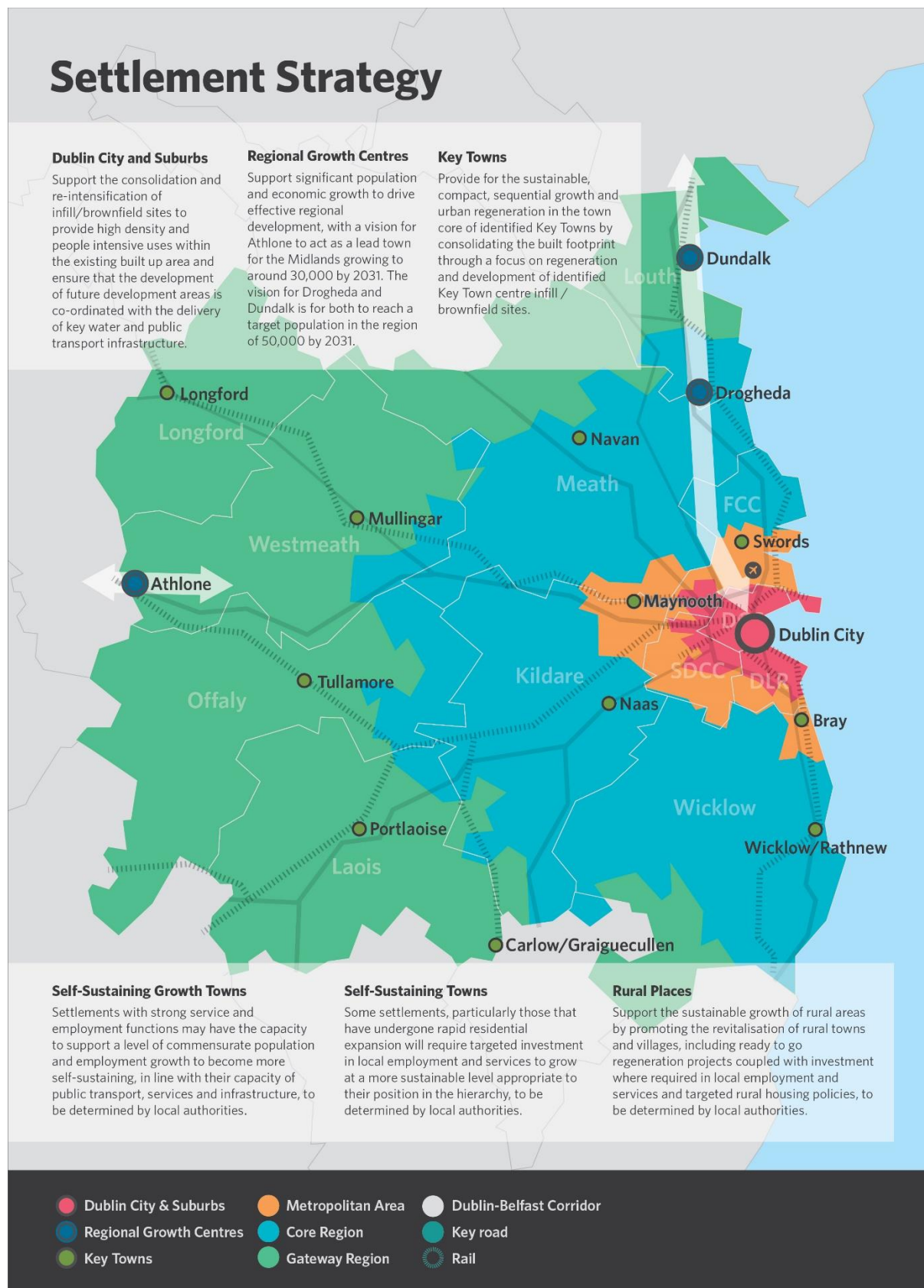
The following content provides a brief profile of the Eastern and Midland Region drawn from the Regional Development Monitor, which has been used to inform the priorities outlined within this submission.

- 1. Population Estimates:** According to the Preliminary Results of Census, 2022, the total population of the Eastern and Midland Region stands at 2.53 million, accounting for just under half of Ireland's population (49.36%)⁹. By 2040, it is estimated that the Region's population will rise to around 2.85 million¹⁰.
- 2. Housing Stock:** According to the Preliminary Results of Census, 2022, the total housing stock of the Eastern and Midland Region is 976,729 units, representing just under 46% of the national housing stock. Of these 6% are vacant compared to a national average of 7.9%.
- 3. New Dwelling Completions:** In Q3 2022, 4,627 dwellings were completed in the EMRA region representing 61.3% of all completions nationally.
- 4. Homelessness:** The total number of homeless adults in the EMRA region in October 2022 was 6,133, with the vast majority (5,558) located in the Dublin SPA.
- 5. Electric Vehicle Charge Points:** In Q3 2022, there were 1,261 EV charge points in the EMRA region representing 8.7 charge points per 100km². While the highest of any region nationally, there is substantial internal variation in provision ranging from 69 charge points per 100km² in the Dublin SPA, compared to 6.3 and 2.8 respectively in the Mid-East and Midland SPAs respectively.
- 6. Number of Windfarms:** In July 2022, there were 27 windfarms in the EMRA region, the majority of which are located in the Mid-East SPA (19). This figure is substantially lower than that for the Northern and Western Region (116) and the Southern Region (170).
- 7. Labour Force:** In Q3 2022, approximately 1,358,000 persons aged 15 or over were participating in the labour force in the EMRA region. This represents almost 51% of the total national labour force.
- 8. Total Income per Person (€):** The EMRA region has the highest total income per person of any region in Ireland at €34,902. However, the Midland SPA had an average total income of €23,203 which is substantially lower than the regional average and also lower than the state average of €31,812.
- 9. IDA Companies in Ireland:** As of February 2022, EMRA is home to 61.9% of all IDA companies in Ireland, with the majority (53.1% of the national total) located in the Dublin SPA. This compares to 6% in the Mid-East SPA and only 2.8% in the Midland SPA.
- 10. Internet Access in Irish Households:** According to Census 2016, 76.4% of households in the EMRA region had access to broadband internet. This is higher than the NWRA (63.7%) and the SRA (66.4%). The figure rises to 80.1% in the Dublin SPA.

⁹ <https://rdm.geohive.ie/pages/b7318eb724fe415b8056b681b1bc841a>

¹⁰ <https://www.esri.ie/system/files/publications/RS111.pdf> <https://npf.ie/wp-content/uploads/Project-Ireland-2040-NPF.pdf>

Appendix B: Settlement Strategy of the EMR



Appendix C: Dublin MASP- Strategic Development Areas and Corridors, Capacity Infrastructure and Phasing (Table 5.1 of the RSES)

TABLE 5.1 Strategic Development Areas and Corridors, Capacity Infrastructure and Phasing			
Corridor	Residential	Employment/ Mixed Use	Phasing/Enabling infrastructure
City Centre within the M50 (Multi-modal) Population capacity Short 35,000 Medium 10,000 Long 15,000 Total 60,000	Docklands build out of North Lotts and Grand Canal Docks with further physical and social regeneration of Poolbeg and northeast inner-city lands	Further development of people intensive high tech and services-based business districts in Docklands and Poolbeg	Short to Medium term Dodder bridge, LUAS extension to Poolbeg, local and wider area water upgrades, waste water upgrades and district heating
	City centre regeneration of older social housing projects (former PPPs), Parkwest-Cherry Orchard, Ballymun, Ashtown-Pelletstown and St James - Heuston lands	Regeneration of Diageo lands, health and education related employment at St James and Grangegorman campus	Short to Medium term Waste water upgrades, social infrastructure Long term Long term capacity supported by DART underground
	Naas Road /Ballymount - significant brownfield lands in South Dublin and Dublin City Council areas, with potential for residential development and more intensive employment/ mixed uses	Re-intensification of underutilised lands including Naas road and older industrial estates, subject to feasibility study	Medium to Long term Multi-modal public transport, new Luas stop, site assembly, waste water upgrades and local area water network upgrades
	Dunsink - major greenfield landbank with long term potential to develop a new district centre	Subject to feasibility	Long term LUAS extension to Finglas, access, site conditions, feasibility
North-South corridor (DART) Population capacity Short 31,000 Medium 13,000 Long 7,000 Total 51,000	North Fringe - large scale urban expansion creating new communities at Clongriffin-Belmayne (Dublin City) and Baldoyle-Stapolin (Fingal)	Completion of mixed-use districts with retail and service provision	Short to Medium term Access to rail station, bus upgrades, new road connections, drainage, parks and social infrastructure
	Donabate - significant residential capacity in this strategically located rapidly growing coastal village	Consolidation of economic and service base in tandem with population growth	Short term DART expansion, distributor road and railway bridge, social infrastructure, local area water network and storage upgrades
	South County Dublin - North Wicklow - development of new residential communities at Woodbrook- Shanganagh and Bray Golf course and Harbour lands	Strengthening commercial town functions in Bray, developing IDA strategic site in Greystones to strengthen economic base in North Wicklow	Short term Access road, new station at Woodbrook - Shanganagh. Access to Bray station and PT bridge.
	Bray Fassaroe* - westward extension of Bray at Old Connaught-Fassaroe (Dún Laoghaire) and Bray -Fassaroe (Wicklow) lands	New mixed use residential and employment district at Fassaroe, west of Bray Greystones Strategic site	Short to Medium term High capacity bus between Bray and Fassaroe, distributor road, N/ M11 upgrades, new bridge to Old Conna. Waste water upgrades. Local and wider area water network and storage upgrades Long term LUAS extension to Bray

Corridor	Residential	Employment/ Mixed Use	Phasing/Enabling infrastructure
North-West corridor (Maynooth/Dunboyne commuter line /DART) Population capacity Short 24,000 Medium 10,000 Long 3,000 Total 37,000	Dublin 15 lands - continued development of Hansfield linked to the future development of Barnhill and Kellytown landbanks to the south and east	Further development of large-scale employment in Dublin Enterprise Zone** and synergies with Blanchardstown IT	Short term Public transport, Clonsilla Station, water network and waste water upgrades.
	Leixlip - strategic greenfield lands near Convey station with capacity for phased development, improve links to Leixlip and adjoining Dublin/Meath lands	Large scale former Hewlett Packard site and Collinstown site to strengthen employment base for North Kildare	Short to Medium term LUAS extension to Maynooth, roads upgrades, community and social infrastructure, waste water and local water network upgrades
	Maynooth - Significant strategic residential capacity at Railpark lands and to the north and west of the town near Maynooth University	New Research & technology Park adjoining Maynooth University	Short to Medium term DART expansion, road upgrades, bridge, Maynooth Outer Orbital Route, waste water and local water network upgrades
	Dunboyne - Sequential development prioritising zoned and serviced lands near the railway station and town centre and at Dunboyne North / M3 Parkway station	Space intensive 'big box' employment at Portan. Mixed use 'live - work' development at Dunboyne North	Medium to Long term Outer Orbital road, distributor road, additional water mains and waste water upgrades
South western corridor (Kildare line/ DART and LUAS redline) Population capacity Short 45,000 Medium 21,000 Total 66,000	Western suburbs - Continued development of Adamstown SDZ and the phased development of Clonburris located strategically between the west Dublin suburbs of Lucan and Clondalkin. New residential community at Kilcarbery near Clondalkin.	Promotion of high tech, manufacturing and research and development in Grange Castle Business Park	Short to Medium term New roads and railway bridge, new rail station, DART expansion to Celbridge-Hazelhatch (Adamstown, Clonburris) Access road and waste water upgrades (Kilcarbery). Public transport and access (Grange Castle). New water network infrastructure to supply Clonburris SDZ and local network upgrades
	LUAS red line - Regeneration of brownfield lands in Tallaght. New district at Fortunestown near emerging town of Saggart/Citywest	Re-intensification of older industrial estates at Naas Road/ Ballymount, intensification of industrial lands and mixed-use development at Tallaght Town Centre/Cookstown	Short to Medium term Brownfield conditions and site assembly waste water upgrades and Citywest junction link at Tallaght/Fortunestown
Metrolink / LUAS Greenline Corridor (Metrolink/ LUAS) Population capacity Short 28,000 Medium 25,000 Long 18,000 Total 71,000	Dún Laoghaire - Rathdown - New and emerging mixed-use districts of Cherrywood and Sandyford. New residential communities in Ballyogan and environs and Kiltiernan-Glenamuck	Continued development of high-density business districts at Cherrywood and Sandyford. New mixed use centres in Ballyogan and Kiltiernan	Short to Medium term LUAS green line upgrades. Public transport and roads upgrades. New road and bridge and N11 junction (Cherrywood) and water upgrades
	Swords - sequential development of strategic residential sites within Swords and development of Oldtown-Mooretown lands	Airport related, commercial facilities and employment linked to development of Metrolink	Short to Medium term Public realm, pedestrian and cyclist provision. Road improvements, BusConnects. Additional runway and improved access (Airport). Waste water upgrades. Local and wider area water network upgrades
	Swords - Lissenhall - new mixed-use urban district on the northern side of Swords linked to delivery of Metrolink	Development of high-tech research and development employment within a campus setting at Lissenhall East	Medium to Long term Improved bus connections, Metrolink, roads improvements and expanded internal road network and waste water upgrades

*Development at Fassaroe will be undertaken in collaboration between Wicklow County Council, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council and the transport agencies **Dublin Enterprise Zone is not directly served by existing or planned rail and will require improve bus connections and demand management measures.

Appendix D: Potential of Strategic Employment Development Areas in the Dublin Metropolitan Area (Table 5.2 of the RSES)

TABLE 5.2 Potential of Strategic Employment Development Areas in the Dublin Metropolitan Area		
Strategic corridor	Strategic Employment locations	Employment potential
Docklands and City centre (Multi-modal)	Docklands, Poolbeg and north east inner city	High tech, financial services and people intensive employment and regeneration of underutilised lands
	City centre (Grangegorman and St James-Diageo lands)	Re-intensification and regeneration of underutilised lands, employment opportunities related to education and hospital campus development
	Industrial lands	Re-intensification of older industrial lands subject to feasibility
North-South corridor (DART)	North County Wicklow (Bray, extension to Fassaroe, Greystones)	Re-intensification of commercial town centre functions and new mixed-use district. Redevelopment of IDA strategic sites at Greystones to strengthen employment base for North Wicklow
North-West corridor (DART/Maynooth-Dunboyne commuter line)	Dublin Enterprise Zone (Dublin 15)	Large scale office, research and development and high tech manufacturing in proximity to Blanchardstown IT
	Dunboyne employment lands	Space intensive 'big box' employment at Portane. Mixed use development at M3/Parkway
	Leixlip employment lands	Large scale former Hewlett Packard site and Collinstown site for regional enterprise to strengthen employment base for North Kildare
	Maynooth Research & Technology Park	New technology and research and development employment related to synergies with Maynooth University
South west corridor (DART /LUAS redline)	Naas Road/Ballymount lands	Potential for intensification of industrial lands and development of new mixed-use district
	Tallaght Town Centre /Cookstown	Potential for intensification of industrial lands and development of a new mixed-use district
	Grange Castle Business Park	Space intensive uses e.g. IT, research, pharmaceuticals in a campus style setting
Metrolink / LUAS Green line Corridor	South County Dublin (Cherrywood, Ballyogan and Sandyford)	Mixed-use districts with significant retail and people intensive employment to complement city centre and docklands
	Swords and Dublin Airport/South Fingal	Future employment locations and airport related and commercial facilities in Swords and Dublin Airport/South Fingal