

Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport in Ireland

Discussion Paper on the Proposed National Planning Framework

Introduction

The 2016 Programme for a Partnership Government promises to complete a new National Planning Framework to replace the existing National Spatial Strategy by the first quarter of 2017. It proposes to undertake a “root and branch” review of the planning system to reduce the uncertainty and length of the planning process.

The purpose of this paper is to provide some background information and to raise some issues to assist the Institute in developing a policy position on national spatial planning in Ireland and drafting a submission in response to any public consultation.

We would welcome the views of members on the paper and particularly on the provisional conclusions.

What is the NPF?

The Department published a short scoping paper in December 2015 entitled *Towards a National Planning Framework* which stated that the NPF would provide a long-term 20 year strategy for the spatial development of Ireland that would promote a better quality of life for all, with sustainable economic growth and an environment of the highest quality as key underlying principles. It also identified a range of matters which would be addressed in the NPF, including:

- identification of national strategic development requirements for the growth of and investment in cities, towns and rural areas in terms of employment, future population change, housing and commercial development;
- identification of national infrastructural priorities to address the above strategic development requirements;
- promotion of sustainable settlement and transportation strategies in urban and rural areas to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate change;
- conservation of the environment;
- co-ordination of development between the land and marine sectors.

The NPF will also take full account of the Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland.

The NPF is expected to be different from the 2001 National Spatial Strategy in a number of ways:

- It will be a shorter, higher level and strategic document.

- It will place greater emphasis on the environment and climate change.
- It will consider the marine as well as the land sector and the interaction between them.
- It is likely to place a greater focus on practical delivery on the ground.

The NPF is intended to be one of a suite of policy documents which together guide the spatial development of Ireland and will be complemented by:

- Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies prepared by the three Regional Assemblies. These will replace the current Regional Planning Guidelines which expire in 2016. The plan is to develop these Regional Strategies in tandem with the NPF and to have an iterative process between them, one influencing the other (top down and bottom up) The Department proposes to establish three Consultative Forums for the Regional Assemblies to facilitate this iterative process.
- Local authority development plans and local economic and community plans.

What about Spatial Planning in Ireland?

The 2001 National Spatial Strategy (NSS) was Ireland's first real attempt at articulating a national spatial planning policy. There were a few earlier attempts at setting out regional development policy, with the publication of regional policy statements in 1969 and 1972. However they were largely aspirational in character and gained little or no traction. Regional Development Organisations were established and they did some useful work, including the production of development of regional strategies for each of the nine regions. However the RDOs were abolished in the late 1980s as part of an earlier repair of the public finances. Ireland was considered to be one region for the purposes of EU regional policy and funding but there was pressure from the EU Commission for some form of regional governance structures which led to the establishment of the eight Regional Authorities. They were subsequently mandated to prepare Regional Planning Guidelines which would steer spatial development in a manner which was consistent with the NSS. The Regional Authorities have since been rationalised into three Regional Assemblies (Southern, Eastern and Midland and Northern and Western) which have been mandated by law to prepare Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies.

What did the NSS have to say about Spatial Planning in Ireland?

The NSS set out a spatial policy which was intended to lead to:

- a strong and internationally competitive Greater Dublin Area (Dublin, Kildare, Meath and Wicklow) driving both its own regional economy and national development;

- strategically placed larger urban areas which would act as gateways for delivering a more spatially balanced Ireland and driving development in their own regions;
- medium to larger sized towns which would act as hubs linked to the gateways but also reaching out to surrounding rural areas;
- strengthened county and large to medium sized towns;
- diversified and vibrant rural communities contributing to and benefitting from the development of the gateways and hubs.

The NSS divided the country into five zones and set the following broad objectives for them:

- consolidating the Greater Dublin Area (GDA);
- strengthening the South, South West, West and Northwest to complement the GDA;
- revitalising the West and South West;
- reinforcing the central parts of Ireland and the South East;
- co-operating in an all-island context.

The NSS identified nine Gateways for development (Dublin, Cork, Galway, Limerick, Waterford, Dundalk, Sligo, Letterkenny/Derry and Athlone/Mullingar/Tullamore) and nine Hubs (Navan, Ennis, Kilkenny, Mallow, Monaghan, Tuam, Wexford, Ballina/Castlebar and Tralee/Killarney).

What did the NSS say about Transport?

The NSS had quite a lot to say about transport, recognising its importance in underpinning spatial policy. It set a number of objectives for Ireland's transport networks to support balanced regional development:

- build on Ireland's radial road and rail networks connecting Dublin to the other regions by developing an improved mesh or network of roads and public transport services;
- minimise increases in energy demand and CO₂ emissions through building up the capacity and effectiveness of public transport networks;
- allowing internal transport networks to enhance international access to all parts of the country by facilitating effective interchange possibilities between the national transport network and international airports and seaports;
- addressing congestion in major urban areas by increasing the use of public transport.

The NSS identified a number of components of Ireland's future transport network:

- **strategic radial corridors:** *North* (Dublin-Belfast), *South West* (Dublin-Cork), *Mid West* (Dublin-Limerick/Shannon/Shannon Estuary), *North West* (Dublin-

Letterkenny/Derry), West (Dublin-Galway/Mayo/Sligo) and *South East* (Dunlin-Waterford/Wexford)

- **strategic linking corridors:** *Western* (Cork-Derry via Limerick, Galway and Sligo and particularly between Cork and Galway), *Southern and South Eastern International Access* (providing access for Gateways and Hubs to Shannon and Cork Airports, the Shannon Estuary and the southern and south eastern ports), *North Western International Access* (providing road access internationally to Border areas and *Central Spine*(north/south axis through Dundalk, Athlone/Mullingar/Tullamore and Portlaoise to Rosslare).

The NSS then went on to spell out the implications of the above strategic network for individual transport modes. It identified the following messages for **road development**:

- Achieving a more spatially balanced pattern of development would need improved interaction between the Gateways which in turn would require enhanced road links between towns and cities, with a primary initial focus on better connections between Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford.
- Regional roads would need to be supported in their key role of linking the main national transport corridors to wider rural areas and smaller towns and villages.
- The connections between the towns in the linked Gateways and Hubs (for example Athlone/Mullingar/Tullamore) would need to be improved.

The following messages were set out for the development of the **public transport network**:

- Rail should continue to offer a realistic alternative to road travel on key intercity routes (Dunlin to Belfast, Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford).
- There should be better interconnection between Cork and Galway (via Limerick).
- Services to other Gateways and Hubs should be enhanced.
- Cities and large towns, particularly the Gateways and Hubs, require well-developed and effective internal public transport networks supported by bus priority measures, appropriate demand management and complementary land use policy and practice. Bus would be the principal means of providing these public transport services outside the GDA.
- The development of strong towns and villages would enhance the viability of rural public transport services.

In relation to **goods transport**, the following were the key messages:

- There needed to be a new approach to freight transport and goods distribution taking account of the various interdependent links in the supply chain – road, rail and ports.

- Effective goods distribution strategies should be implemented in major urban areas.
- The future role of rail freight in the Irish economy should be decided.

The following were the key policy observations on **international air access**:

- Dublin Airport is the key international air access point and expanding the range of services to an even wider number of destinations is essential to underpin the country's international competitiveness. However in a liberalised aviation market this would depend primarily on the anticipated level of demand. The national and regional benefits of expanded services through Dublin Airport could be enhanced by improved connections with an improved GDA public transport network, the national road network and regional airports.
- Shannon and Cork Airports would also need to expand the range of air connections serving their population catchments, both commercially viable international services and links via Dublin. They would also require improved private and public transport connections to bring additional population centres within about one hour's travel time.

In the case of **international maritime access**, the following were the principal messages:

- Dublin Port is vital to both the national and regional economies and faces a shortage of capacity that needs to be addressed. Alternative locations for some current Dublin Port activities, such as transit and storage of petrochemicals, bulk goods and cars, might be considered. More port business through other nationally strategic ports could be considered.
- Developing shipping facilities at ports other than Dublin would need to be supported by improved access so that transit times and costs would be competitive with Dublin.
- There was also a need to identify critical interventions abroad which would improve Ireland's international access and reduce time and cost penalties. Upgrading of land transport links through Great Britain to the European mainland was identified as a priority.

Finally the NSS identified a number of particular priorities based on the earlier analysis:

- As well as completing the main inter-urban road links identified in the National Development Plan (primarily our current motorway network), the NSS highlighted the need to improve radial corridor access to Letterkenny/Derry, Sligo and Mayo.
- Improved road and public transport connections between the Gateways were require to achieve balanced regional development, with the priorities being

improved connections between Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford and enhanced north/south linkages through the Midlands.

- The role of Dublin, Shannon and Cork Airports should be enhanced through efficient terminal facilities and effective access by road and public transport.
- Alternatives to Dublin Port should be promoted, including ports in Northern Ireland, the Shannon Estuary and along the east and southeast coasts.

Was the NSS a Success and What Conclusions can be Reached regarding its Successor NPF?

In some ways the very existence of a national spatial policy is itself a success. Earlier attempts in 1969 and 1972, and later in the 1970s, to articulate regional policy were doomed to failure as soon as they saw daylight. They faced major political problems. While the areas favoured for development kept quiet, those who lost out were loud in their condemnation. To a large extent those earlier attempts at articulating any form of spatial policy were stillborn, with the possible limited exception of a series of regional industrial plans produced by the then Industrial Development Authority which set out job creation target for each of the planning regions.

The NSS was far from perfect, but at least it got published as official Government policy. Reasonable attempts were made by Government Departments and agencies to align their policies and investment plans with it. The Department of Finance was a strong supporter and sectoral policies, like the short-lived Transport 21 investment programme were aligned with the NSS. Regional Planning Guidelines were published for each of the regions which were broadly consistent with the NSS and these in turn were reflected in local authority development plans.

The paragraphs which follow look at a number of specific issues which point to lessons to be learned.

Alignment of Spatial Policy and Investment Policy

The NSS was published after the National Development Plan 2000-2006 so it was not possible to fully align the investment policy it contained with the NSS. However the Department of Finance did make substantial efforts to include a spatial and regional policy perspective in the Plan and a number of the Operational Programmes to implement the NDP were published late enough to take some account of the NSS policies.

The National Development Plan 2007-13 was much more fully aligned with the NSS but it very soon fell victim to the collapse in the economy and the public finances. The Public Capital Programme was severely cut and during the period from 2009 onwards there was little or no investment to align with the NSS. The absence of public investment also made it more difficult to successfully pursue NSS policies. An indication of the scale of the cutbacks is that Exchequer funding of transport

investment fell from €3 billion in 2008 to under €900 million by 2013. It is about €940 million in 2016 and it will be 2021 before transport capital spending comes close to €2 billion.

In the absence of public investment it is very difficult to progress key spatial policies. If Gateways and Hubs are to be drivers of development they require investment in economic and social infrastructure to make them attractive places in which to live and work. For example, if we want to encourage higher density urban residential development, we have to be able to provide an adequate public transport system to service that development. There is no point in creating new jobs if appropriate housing is not available for the new workers in the right location. The attractiveness of a place is about much more than transport, housing and water infrastructure. It is also reflected in wider quality of life issues such as good hospitals and schools and quality recreational facilities.

PROVISIONAL CONCLUSION 1: Spatial policy and public investment policy have to be aligned. Adequate public investment in economic, social and environmental infrastructure and efficient and quality public services is needed to support and influence the direction of spatial policy.

Alignment of Spatial Policy and other Government Policies

The NSS was holed below the waterline very early in its existence by the decentralisation announcement in the December 2003 Budget. The NSS was only two years old when the Minister for Finance announced the decentralisation of 10,300 public jobs to 58 locations, widely dispersed throughout the country. Only 12 of the 58 proposed locations were either Gateway or Hub towns and less than a quarter of the decentralised jobs were allocated to these locations.

This decision sent out a very damaging message for the NSS. While Government officials continued to be supportive of the NSS policies, it was clear from a very early stage that politicians were not. If spatial policy is to be successful, it will have to be supported by other Government policies and this will have to be demonstrated in a practical way across all areas of government. One way of ensuring this is to underpin national spatial policy with legislation which requires Government Departments and agencies to demonstrate that their policies and investment programmes are consistent with it – perhaps a type of statutory spatial impact assessment based on similar principles to those used for environmental impact assessment.

The challenge of aligning spatial and other Government policies should not be under-estimated. It will impact on a range of policies which are potentially very controversial such as rural policy, housing policy, hospitals policy and education policy. There is strong resistance to some policies affecting rural areas such as once-off housing but spatial policy requires the strengthening of towns and villages to become engines of development for their hinterlands. Gateways and Hubs need high quality social infrastructure like hospitals and educational institutions but we

have seen the political difficulties that arise when proposals are mooted to develop medical centres of excellence in certain locations.

PROVISIONAL CONCLUSION 2: Other Government policies should be closely aligned with spatial policy and this requirement should be underpinned by legislation. Government Departments and agencies should be statutorily required to demonstrate that their policies and investment programmes are consistent with national spatial policy.

Alignment of National Spatial Policy with Regional and Local Spatial Policy

It is probably self-evident that regional and local spatial policies need to be aligned with national spatial policy. However this presents challenges too. Every region and local authority wants to maximise its development potential by growing both population and employment in its jurisdiction. However spatial policy involves the allocation of geographical targets for residential population and employment growth and guidance on where that growth should take place. In the absence of a proper alignment of spatial policies we would potentially see local and regional authorities setting population and employment targets which, in aggregate, were well in excess of forecast national growth and potentially inappropriately located.

Section 63 of the Local Government Reform Act 2014 requires that Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies must be consistent with (i) national economic policy and (ii) national planning policy as set out in the NSS or its successor. In turn local authority development plans must be consistent with the relevant Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy.

PROVISIONAL CONCLUSION 3: National, regional and local spatial policy should be aligned and this requirement should be underpinned by legislation.

An All-Island Context

It is critically important that the NPF is developed in an all-island context and that there is, as far as practicable, a coherent approach to the future spatial development of the island as a whole. A lot of good work was undertaken during the preparation of the 2001 NSS to align it with the relevant policy framework for Northern Ireland, as currently articulated in the Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland. This was reflected in a number of ways in the NSS, including for example the designation of a Letterkenny-Derry Gateway.

The Dublin-Belfast economic corridor will continue to be of major significance to the future development not only of this state but of the island as a whole. However it will also be important to counter-balance this in an all-island context by for example strengthening the spatial links in the northwest between both jurisdictions and by facilitating appropriate spatial interaction all along the border area to overcome any negative boundary impacts. This would take on even greater importance in the event

of a Brexit decision by the people of the United Kingdom which would see the land border taking on a new and negative significance.

The Institute should consider opening a dialogue with CILT (Northern Ireland) on the development of the new NPF.

PROVISIONAL CONCLUSION 4: There should be a coherent all-island spatial perspective which includes provision for the development of the Dublin-Belfast corridor, counter-balancing links in the northwest and appropriate spatial interaction all along the border area.

The Importance of Integrated Development and Delivery

It is not enough simply to align spatial policy with investment strategies and wider Government policies. We have to ensure that we take an integrated approach to the development and delivery of policy. This is something we have been very poor at in the past though we have improved in recent years. There is little point in developing a new residential area if at the same time we do not provide the supporting economic and social infrastructure in terms of public transport services, schools, shops and so on. There have been examples in the past of new residential areas that did not have such basic items as footpaths or proper bus stops. Some areas have had to wait as much as twenty years for a lot of the supporting infrastructure.

As important as the correct timing of delivery is the adoption of an integrated approach. For example do public transport services adequately serve the local hospital, schools, business park and other important generators of demand? Is there provision for interchange between services to widen the transport catchment and facilitate users? Is there adequate permeability through the area to enable easy pedestrian access to public transport or to facilitate cycling or walking? These are very specific examples but they illustrate the importance of integrated thinking, integrated development and most of all integrated delivery.

PROVISIONAL CONCLUSION 5: Spatial policy and all other Government policies and investment strategies should be developed and delivered in an integrated way.

Dublin as a Key Driver of Ireland's Future Development and Prosperity

Dublin, or more accurately the Greater Dublin Area (GDA), is our only city of international scale and significance. Ireland has been very successful at attracting foreign direct investment but it is important to understand that Dublin is often the only Irish location which can compete for such investment. This is not to diminish the attractiveness or development potential of other areas, but simply stating a fact that Dublin has the scale, the level of services and facilities and the track record that some mobile international investors perceive as being required.

In other words, in many cases Dublin is competing for investment not with other Irish cities and towns but with urban areas across the world. If Dublin is to continue to be successful in that market, it needs to be competitive across a wide range – from high quality transport networks to world class educational facilities and cultural institutions.

There is a continual tension between meeting Dublin's development requirements and those of the rest of the country. Dublin argues that it does not get the share of investment that its population and employment levels justify and all other parts of the country are convinced that Dublin gets the lion's share of whatever is going. Whatever the truth of these counter-arguments, it has to be accepted that Dublin is the engine of the Irish economy. If it is not successful, the rest of the country will suffer. Investment in Dublin is an investment in Ireland.

However this debate is further complicated by the current, probably correct, perception of a two-tier economic recovery – Dublin growing strongly and the rest of the country growing patchily, if at all.

PROVISIONAL CONCLUSION 6: The Greater Dublin Area is a critical driver of the success of the Irish economy.

Can Balanced Regional Development be Achieved?

Accepting Dublin as the engine of the Irish economy does not mean that the rest of the country is condemned to economic stagnation and population decline. The rest of the country also has enormous potential for indigineous growth and suitably targeted inward investment. We have a strong agri-food sector, an attractive tourism product and an underdeveloped maritime industry.

A question that needs to be asked is whether the NSS spatial policy of Gateways and Hubs spread over 22 cities and towns was the right approach and provided an appropriate counter-balance to the Greater Dublin Area. It risked spreading investment too thinly, thereby seriously diluting its impact. It can also be argued that some of the selected urban centres did not have the critical mass to act as engines of development for their hinterlands. For example some of the Hubs had less than a ten thousand population.

An alternative strategy might be that any new spatial policy should be more tightly defined and targeted. One possible approach might be to identify a much smaller number of key development gateways, possibly based around the Cork-Limerick-Galway corridor. This would involve the three cities working together and complementing each other rather than competing with each other. This would involve a polycentric development model of the type described in the NSS involving the linking and integration of the development of a number of urban centres in a way that combines their strengths and celebrates their differences. One question which remains to be resolved is whether linking three cities each around 100 km apart

would work. The polycentric approach in Denmark, for example, involved eight municipalities over a 60 km radius.

It is important to stress that developing this Cork-Limerick-Galway corridor as a counter-balance to the GDA would not be at the expense of the rest of the country. The first thing to note is that strong development in this corridor would benefit the surrounding counties in the same way as Dublin benefits the surrounding counties perhaps up to a 100 km from the capital. As well as this polycentric corridor there would also be scope to target a number of other smaller urban areas as development hubs for their regions.

PROVISIONAL CONCLUSION 7: Any new national spatial policy should be more tightly focussed and identify at least one polycentric development corridor, based on Cork, Limerick and Galway working together to act as a development counter-balance to the GDA.

The Future of Rural Areas

The recently published Programme for a Partnership Government places a lot of emphasis on rural development policy, reflecting the composition of and support base for the new Government. It also presents challenges for the development of a new national spatial policy and it is important that there an appropriate balance is struck between the perceived needs of rural areas and the overall development of the country.

Any spatial policy which concentrates on the Greater Dublin Area and a counter-balancing polycentric development corridor will immediately be open to the accusation that it is abandoning rural Ireland. If it is not handled properly it could be seen as yet more evidence of an anti-rural bias along with the closure of Garda stations and post offices and the downgrading of smaller hospitals. Worse possible it could result in the production of a deeply flawed national spatial policy. Better no policy is better than one which sets the country's spatial development back to where it was before the NSS.

A spatial policy which gives appropriate priority to the development of the GDA and a polycentric development corridor should not be viewed as at the expense of rural areas. If we fail to adopt and implement such a policy, the country as a whole will be the poorer for it. If investment is spread too thinly across the country and does not identify priorities we will achieve little or nothing. It is also important to stress that such a spatial policy will benefit the surrounding region, not just the urban area which is its immediate focus.

The key challenge is how to develop and implement spatial and other policies in a way which enables rural areas, including the smaller towns, to reach their potential. This will require investment in rural roads and an appropriate rural public transport to maintain vital physical communications links. It will also require the implementation

of an effective broadband strategy to ensure that rural areas have high quality virtual communications links. Continuing support for agriculture and fisheries/mariculture will be an essential part of any rural strategy. These policies and others are articulated in the new Government Programme.

A further vital component in an effective rural development will be the provision of financial and other supports that allow rural communities achieve their potential, without being prescriptive about the how and the what. There is a strong argument for giving rural communities much more of a say in how available public funding is spent rather than imposing top-down solutions. Rural areas will not be saved by a scatter gun approach to public investment or by grant schemes designed in offices in Dublin but by tapping into the creativity and enthusiasm of the rural communities themselves. This can be achieved, for example, through the greater use of discretionary Exchequer funding and block grants to local authorities and local development bodies.

PROVISIONAL CONCLUSION 8: Spatial and other Government policies have to be developed and implemented in a way which supports sustainable rural communities without undermining the fundamental objectives of spatial policy.

The Impact of Climate Change on Spatial Policy

While environmental issues were given some prominence in the NSS, they will have to be much more central to the planned NPF. The world has moved on a lot since the NSS was published almost fifteen years ago. We now have EU-mandated national greenhouse gas reduction targets which we have to achieve. The decisions taken at COP 21 late last year in Paris have to be followed through. The impact of climate change is already being felt in terms of more extreme weather events, particularly flooding. This in turn raises questions about the location of residential and other development and the resilience of our infrastructure and these have a bearing on spatial policy. The emissions targets already set already present substantial challenges for agriculture and transport that could in turn have an impact on spatial policy.

PROVISIONAL CONCLUSION 9: The impact of climate change will have to be much more fully addressed in any new national spatial policy.

Transport and Spatial Policy

It is hard to argue with what was written in the NSS about transport. However, very little of what was proposed in it has been achieved. The inter-urban motorways have been completed but they are a double edged sword. While they have vastly improved the road links between Dublin and the other principal cities on the island, they have also strengthened the dominance of Dublin. They have widened the commuting catchment for people working in the capital. They have improved access

to Dublin Airport and Dublin Port and strengthened their position as the dominant access points for people and freight. Some improvements have been made in public transport, both commuter and long distance. These improvements have also to some extent strengthened the dominance of Dublin. What we have seen over the past decade or more is not so much increased urbanisation but increased suburbanisation, facilitated by transport improvements.

There has been a significant amount of transport policy development which will undoubtedly influence the shape of any emerging national spatial policy. It may be helpful to briefly recap on the principal policy developments.

Investment in Land Transport

Investing in our Transport Future – A Strategic Framework for Investment in Land Transport was published by the Government in 2014. It pointed out that present funding levels were not adequate to maintain the existing transport network. It estimated that capital investment would have to be restored to, and retained at, its long run level of 1.1 to 1.15% of GDP in order to maintain the existing transport network and provide for some limited investment to address additional demand. This would equate to an annual spend of over €2 billion based on 2014 GDP.

The Framework identified three investment priorities:

- The first priority should be the steady state maintenance of the strategically important elements of the land transport system. The gross cost of this was put at about €1.6 billion per annum, with about €1.3 billion being required each year from the Exchequer.
- The next priority should be to address urban congestion and improve the efficiency and sustainability of the urban transport systems. This would include improved and expanded public transport capacity, improved and expanded walking and cycling infrastructure and the use of ITS to improve the efficiency and sustainability and increase the capacity of existing urban transport systems.
- The third priority was identified as maximising the contribution of the land transport network to national development. This would include improving the efficiency of the existing network (particularly through increased use of ITS applications); improved connections to key seaports and airports; providing road access to poorly served regions, for large scale employment proposals, to complete missing links and to address critical safety issues; and supporting identified national and regional spatial planning priorities.

These three investment priorities would accord very much with the Institute's own priorities as expressed in submissions to successive Government expenditure reviews. However there is an urgent need to increase investment to redress the severe under-investment since 2009 and tackle returning congestion. The new Government Capital Investment Plan *Building on Recovery*, published in 2015,

contains a seven year capital investment envelope for transport of €9.6 billion. However this spending is significantly back-loaded, rising from €939 million in 2016 to €1,927 million in each of the years 2021 and 2022. In other words, about 40% of the total will be spent in the final two years of seven. There is an urgent need to bring forward some of this spending into the earlier years of the Plan. Most of the priorities for investment mentioned in the NSS remain relevant today.

The National Transport Authority recently published its *Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2016-2035*. This has been approved by the Minister as required by law and is consistent with the existing regional spatial strategy for the GDA as expressed in the Regional Planning Guidelines. It proposes a total expenditure of €10.3 billion (excluding VAT) over the 20 year period.

Road and public transport networks should also be considered in an all-island context, having regard to spatial policies in both jurisdictions. There were a number of references to North-South transport projects in the Capital Plan:

- The A5 (Derry) road project is currently under review and once the planning, timing and costs associated with the project are settled the Government will consider the funding implications. The Government gave a financial commitment to the original project under the St Andrew's Agreement but this was set aside at the height of the crisis in the public finances.
- The upgrading of the Enterprise trains on the Dublin-Belfast service is nearing completion.
- The Government remains committed to the concept of the Narrow Water Bridge linking counties Louth and Down.

Greater clarity will be necessary on plans for the future development of cross-border transport links to guide the preparation of the new NPF.

PROVISIONAL CONCLUSION 10: The priorities for investment identified in Investing in our Transport Future are broadly the correct ones and should be used to guide the development of the NPF. However there is an urgent need to accelerate investment in land transport beyond that proposed in the Government's most recent Capital Plan. There needs to be a consistent approach to the development of cross-border road and public transport links based on a coherent all-island spatial perspective.

Ports Policy

The Government published a new Ports Policy Statement in 2013 which updated an earlier one dating from 2005. The new policy document introduced a much more detailed categorisation of the country's principal seaports, acknowledging the commercial realities:

- **Ports of National Significance (Tier 1)** which each handle at least 15-20% of overall tonnage and have a clear potential to lead the development of future port capacity: Dublin, Cork and Shannon-Foynes. Together these ports handle over 80% of total tonnage.
- **Ports of National Significance (Tier 2)** which each handle at least 2.5% of overall tonnage, have a clear demonstrable potential to handle higher volumes of unitised traffic and have existing transport links to serve a wider national market beyond their immediate catchment regions: Waterford and Rosslare.
- **Ports of Regional Significance:** This includes the five other State owned commercial ports of Drogheda, Dun Laoghaire, Galway, New Ross and Wicklow, which between them handle about 3% of total tonnage, and all other ports that handle commercial freight. It also proposed to transfer these five State ports to local authority control.

The new policy document restated existing policy that direct Exchequer funding would not be available for port infrastructure development or otherwise. It endorsed the core principles underpinning Dublin Port's Masterplan and Cork Port's Strategic Development Plan Review. It acknowledged the master-planning work being undertaken by Shannon-Foynes but stopped short of endorsing its then recently published policy document. The policy document went on to state that the continued commercial development of all three ports is a key strategic objective of national ports policy. The Government also committed itself to publishing "a pathway" for the future development of Waterford and Rosslare ports.

This policy will most likely guide the development of the new national spatial perspective. It is notable that the NSS placed some emphasis on finding alternatives to Dublin Port which was then facing capacity problems. There is no such emphasis in the new ports policy and the capacity problems in Dublin now appear to be much less because of the decline in trade during the severe recession and planned capacity improvements at the port itself.

It should also be noted that Belfast and Larne also have a role to play in providing freight access for some Republic of Ireland traffic.

PROVISIONAL CONCLUSION 11: The classification of ports set out in the 2013 Ports Policy is a broadly appropriate basis on which to develop a new NPF. However, there is a need for greater clarity on the future development of Waterford and Rosslare ports. The adequacy of port capacity to meet future economic development requirements should be independently assessed at regular intervals and any conclusions used to guide spatial policy. The role of Northern Ireland ports in servicing the Irish economy should be taken into account in developing the new NPF.

Aviation Policy

The Government published *A National Aviation Policy for Ireland* in 2015. This stated that Dublin Airport would be promoted as a secondary hub airport, competing with other UK and European hub airports for international traffic. The role of Cork and Shannon Airports is as key tourism and business gateways for their regions. Dublin Airport has recently announced that it intends to go ahead with the construction of a second runway and already has a second runway. There are no capacity problems at the other two State airports and,, according to the policy document, there will be a further review of capacity at all three airports in 2018.

The policy document acknowledges the important part that regional airports play in their areas and in regional development. However their future role in a spatial policy context appears to be less clear. The policy document says that Exchequer support for operational expenditure at regional airports will be phased out over a maximum period of 10 years, in accordance with EU Guidelines. Exchequer support for capital expenditure will be limited to safety and security expenditure and that the PSO contracts for Donegal-Dublin and Kerry-Dublin air services will run for a period of two years initially and may be extended for a further year to 2018.

From a national spatial policy perspective, Dublin will continue to be the dominant airport for international access on the island, with Cork and Shannon (and also the two Belfast airports) serving their regional catchments, with a more limited range of international connections. As mentioned earlier, the development of the inter-urban motorways has extended Dublin's catchment even into Northern Ireland. In the future there are likely to be few, if any, internal air services and the regional airports may continue to provide a limited range of international services where the demand justifies this on a commercial basis.

PROVISIONAL CONCLUSION 12: The roles identified for the three State airports in the National Aviation Policy provide a broadly appropriate basis on which to develop the new NPF. However there remains a need for greater clarity as to the future role of the regional airports.

Future Proofing the Framework

The proposed Framework will have a twenty year time horizon. What will the world be like in twenty years' time and how will that shape our spatial perspectives? Twenty years ago would we have accurately predicted the digital revolution and how it has changed our lives?

The preparatory work on the new NPF should give consideration to likely future changes which could have significant spatial impacts. Will the continuing digital revolution impact on how and where we work and live? Will the response to climate change require changes in spatial and land use policies? Will the present trend towards globalised trade continue or will there be some return to more localised markets in response to climate change concerns and impacts? What technological

changes are likely to have spatial impacts? What changes are likely in global and regional supply chains and how will they impact on Ireland's market position?

The other way to future proof the Framework is to ensure that it is regularly reviewed and updated, at least once every ten years and preferably every six years as is currently the practice for regional and local land use planning.

PROVISIONAL RECOMMENDATION 13: The NPF should be future proofed by undertaking some visioning work which seeks to identify future changes which may have significant spatial impacts and by regularly updating the Framework itself.

Concluding Questions

The scoping paper published by the Department in December posed a number of questions as a starting point. The following are the most relevant to the Institute's work and colleagues are invited to consider possible responses:

- Are there good examples of successful, sustainable urban and rural places in Ireland where people wish to live, work invest and visit? Why are they successful, what is needed to sustain successful places and what can be learned from their experience?
- Is there a national or regional infrastructure investment priority that has the potential to significantly change a region or Ireland as a whole (“a game changer”)?
- How can Ireland best accelerate the transition to a low carbon society, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and reliance on imported energy?

August 2016