



*Border, Midland & Western*  
Regional Assembly  
*Shaping the Region*



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## **Submission to Consultation on the Department of Transport Strategy Statement 2008 – 2010**

**September 2007**

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## 1. Introduction

The Border Midland and Western (BMW) Regional Assembly welcomes this opportunity to make a submission to the consultation on the Department of Transport Strategy Statement 2008-2010. This paper sets out an overview of transport provision in the BMW Region and also discusses a number of key issues for the region in relation to balanced regional development for Ireland.

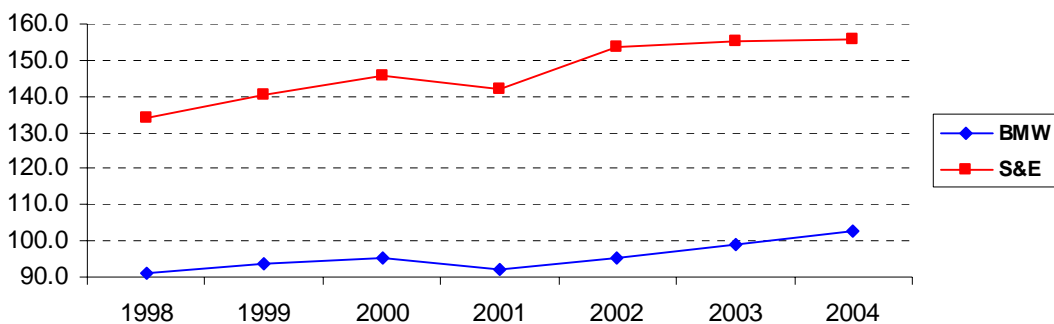
The BMW Regional Assembly was established in 1999 in order to give effect to the designation of two regions in Ireland for structural funds purposes. The BMW Region covers thirteen counties which represents 47% of the land mass of Ireland, 27% of the population and produces 19% of GDP. The Regional Assembly acts as the Managing Authority for the BMW Regional Operational Programme under the NDP 2007-2013 which includes some investment in National Secondary Roads and Public Transport. The Assembly also monitors the expenditure and impact of NDP and EU funds in the region and seeks to ensure that national programmes take regional issues into account.

## 2. Background

### 2.1 Regional Disparities

The recent unparalleled growth in the Irish economy has had a negative spatial impact which has contributed to the widening of regional imbalances. Despite a convergence between the BMW Region and the Southern and Eastern Region (S&E) in recent years in terms of lower levels of unemployment and higher labour force participation, stark regional disparities exist when levels of Gross Value Added (GVA) per person are compared. Figure 1 illustrates that the BMW Region is not catching up with the S&E Region in terms of its share of national output, this can be accounted for by the fact that a higher proportion of the employment in the BMW Region is in low value-added industries due to the relatively fewer high value industries in the region.

Figure 1: GVA per person at Basic Prices 1998-2004 (EU 27=100)



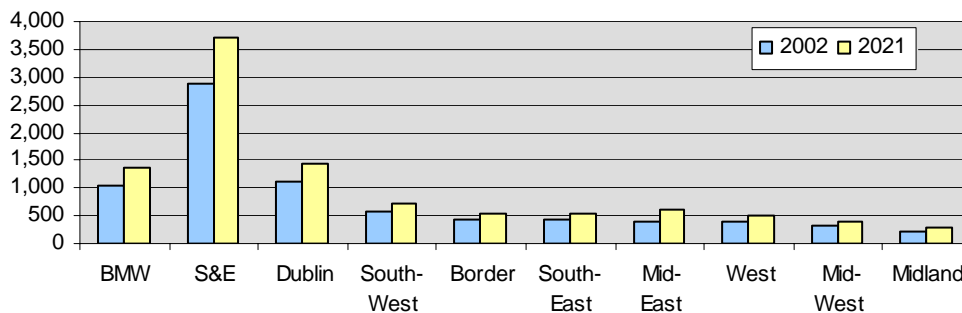
Source: CSO (2004) County Incomes and Regional GDP

Data on disposable income reveal similar patterns of divergence, with the BMW region having an average disposable income of 93.2% of the state average in 2004 while it was 102.5% in the Southern & Eastern (S&E) Region. Regional disparities have also widened in terms of capacity to attract inward investment, the share of ownership of higher value-added economic activities and the abilities of indigenous industries to grow. The existence of wide disparities between regions which arises from the region's poor infrastructure endowment is not conducive to attaining national or regional competitiveness.

## 2.2 Population Migrations and Projections

The most recent CSO regional population projections (Figure 2) predict that population growth will be concentrated in Dublin and the Mid-East, and that increases in these regions will account for 45% of population growth nationally. This pattern will be driven by, and in turn will drive the distribution of economic activity. The rapid expansion of Greater Dublin Area's (GDA) commuter belt in recent years has been in direct response to the greater concentration of economic activity in the East coinciding with the provision of radial transport networks and public transport investments in the Greater Dublin Area.

**Figure 2: Population in 2002 and Projected Population for Regions in 2021**



Source: CSO (2005) *Regional Population Projections, 2006-2021*

The consequence of these settlement patterns for the GDA are longer commuting distances/times, higher costs of commuting particularly with rising petrol costs, rising CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from transport, increased levels of congestion, pressure on infrastructure and services, less social cohesion in dormitory towns and a reduced work/leisure ratio. A similar, but less extensive pattern of urban sprawl can be found outside other major urban centres such as Cork, Limerick and Galway.

The spatial trends that have emerged during this period of economic 'boom' are clearly unsustainable. Balanced regional development can counter this by promoting sustainable settlement patterns which in turn avoid urban sprawl and provides people with easier access to employment and leisure facilities within a reasonable distance. To ensure a more sustainable distribution of population it is necessary to enhance economic activity in the regions – transport policy has a significant role to play in this.

## 2.3 Creating Balanced Regional Economic Activity

Excessive concentrations of economic activity and population growth result in diseconomies due to congestion and increased operating costs, all of which compromise national competitiveness. These problems can be offset by ensuring a more even spread of economic activity across regions. This requires that regions themselves be positioned to attract increased inward investment, grow indigenous enterprises and trade competitively in a global environment. In the case of transport services, a disproportionate volume of freight and air traffic passes through Dublin port and airport respectively.

To be competitive in regional locations, enterprises must have access to infrastructural facilities that are at least on a par with competitors. While significant progress in addressing infrastructure deficits in the BMW Region has been made in recent years, there are still vital gaps which inhibit regional competitiveness and hinder the establishment and competitive operations of both indigenous and foreign enterprises.

The major challenge facing the BMW region (and other underdeveloped regions) is to increase the presence in the region of the key drivers of sustainable economic development and particularly productive infrastructure in order to enhance regional competitiveness. Poor regional performance arises from geographic factors (e.g., peripherality) but also from historically low levels of public investment.

It has been recognised that an inadequate transport infrastructure has been one of the major barriers restricting the development of the BMW Region. These deficits create obstacles for inward investment, enterprise development and overall quality of life for people in the region. Quality access to and within the BMW Region via radial corridors, linking corridors and international access points that attracts and promotes inward investment to the region will be a major factor enabling it's future development. Balanced regional development and a convergence in socio-economic terms between the regions are possible provided that strategic investments are made to address transport and other infrastructure deficits.

### **3. Policy Framework and Investment Plans**

#### **3.1 National Spatial Strategy - Framework for Investment**

The Assembly welcomed the publication of the National Spatial Strategy (NSS) 2002-2020, which we believe provides an important over-arching strategic framework, adherence to which would help to alleviate congestion in the Greater Dublin Area and bring about more balanced regional development for the benefit of the whole country. The NSS sets out a hierarchy of urban centres including gateways and hubs, the development of which is intended to serve as a counterbalance to the Greater Dublin area. However since its inception many national policies and investment programmes have been developed and implemented outside the framework of the NSS and have not therefore taken account of the specific needs of regions. The success of the NSS is therefore dependent upon a commitment from all levels of Government to integrate the strategy into all national, regional and local planning.

#### **3.2 Setting Regional Policy Targets**

In order for there to be real impact on regional development in Ireland the Government must establish clear measurable targets for regional policy and prioritise investment in the lesser developed regions with a commitment to invest higher per capita sums in these regions. Therefore not only should clear measurable regional targets be set out but there should also be a real commitment of resources for these targets.

#### **3.3 Project Appraisal**

The economic analysis procedures as adopted by Government Departments can sometimes over-ride broader policy objectives and criteria. The application of narrowly-based cost-benefit analysis whereby only direct monetised benefits of investment are taken into account can lead to a rejection of proposals that meet public policy objectives. Such an approach can lead to a preference for infrastructure

investment in developed regions rather than in under-developed regions. The spatial impacts of transport investment need to be given greater attention. The economic analysis of projects undertaken by or on behalf of the Department of Transport should be reviewed in order to incorporate multiple criteria analysis and wider socio-economic criteria.

### **3.4 Transport 21**

The Transport 21<sup>1</sup> Programme is designed to resolve the problems of backlogs in previous capital investments, while also managing expected growth in transport demand. From 2006 to 2015, capital investment in the Irish transport system will take place under the framework of Transport 21.

This strategy once implemented could improve access to the region, connectivity within the region and enhance the economic contribution of the designated gateways and hubs and maximise the returns to investments made in other infrastructure such as Ports and Airports.

The BMW Regional Assembly welcomes a number of elements of Transport 21, in particular:

- ⇒ The commitment to develop the Atlantic Road Corridor
- ⇒ The commitment to upgrade key national primary and secondary routes
- ⇒ The commitment to the phased opening of the Western Rail Corridor
- ⇒ The commitment to double funding for the rural transport initiative

These commitments and other aspects of Transport 21 will be further discussed later in this submission.

## **4. Roads Policy**

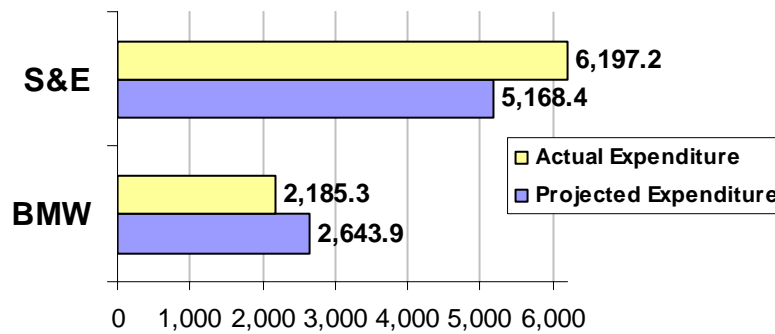
### **4.1 Impact of NDP's National Roads Programme 2000-2006**

Under the ESIOP<sup>2</sup>, expenditure on roads from January 2000-December 2006 has been 106.6% of forecast, which can be broken down as 82.7% expenditure of forecast in the BMW Region and 119.9% in the S&E Region (illustrated in figure 3). This pattern of under-investment in the BMW Region is obviously also reflected in the corresponding physical process, with much fewer road completions and progress in the BMW Region in comparison with the S&E Region. This wide discrepancy is of serious concern to the BMW Regional Assembly and raises questions about the commitment of Government Departments to develop infrastructure in the BMW Region consistent with the full implementation of the NSS, the principle objective of which is to develop regional centres capable of acting as a counterbalance to the Greater Dublin area.

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<sup>1</sup> Transport 21 was launched by the Irish Government on November 1<sup>st</sup> 2005. The investment proposed covers the areas of national roads, public transport and regional airports <http://www.transport21.ie/>

<sup>2</sup> Economic and Social Infrastructure Operational Programme.

**Figure 3: National Roads Priority: Projected & Actual Expenditure 2000-2006, €m**

Source: ESIOP Annual Implementation Report 2006

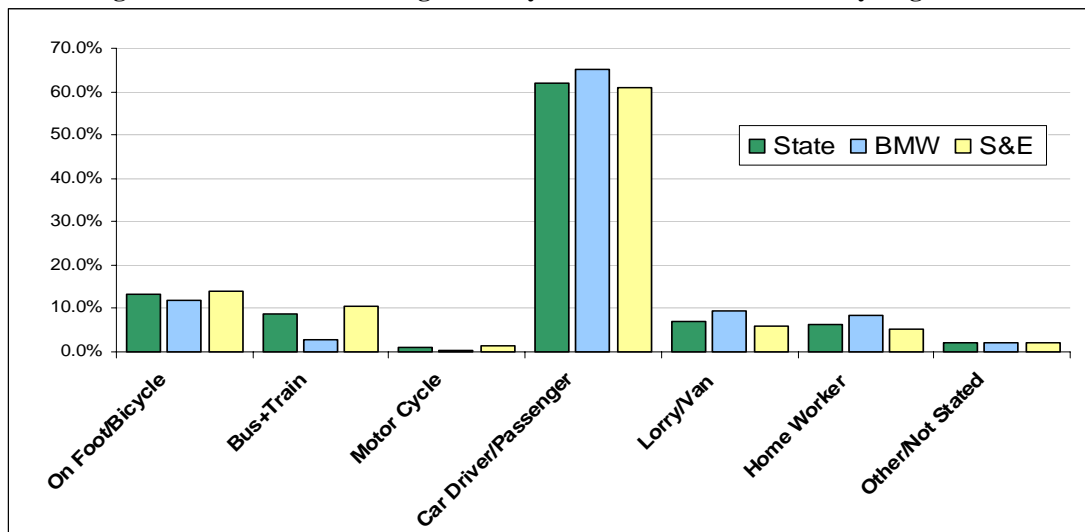
The pattern of investment under the National Roads Programme over the past decade has concentrated on the creation of a radial motorway network out of Dublin. Whilst recognising the importance of relieving congestion in the roads networks in the GDA, this pattern of investment has as a consequence, strengthened the dominance of Dublin and led to increased urban sprawl. On the other hand the BMW Region's under-developed road network has been a major factor in its declining ability to attract investment and in particular high-added value projects. The long-term impact will be to counteract balanced regional development which will act as a constraint to further development and lead to a further decline in the relative economic performance in the BMW Region.

In order to offset these effects on regional development the National Roads Programme should place greater emphasis on the connectivity of gateways other than Dublin and shift emphasis onto strategic secondary routes. This can be achieved by increasing investment in radial networks around the designated gateways and increased investment in secondary networks that link the gateways to each other and to their (predominantly rural) hinterlands. Greater investment is now required to enhance linkages between regional centres including investment in the road network within 'linked' gateways and hubs<sup>3</sup> and between gateways, adjacent hubs and their rural hinterlands. All road programmes under Transport 21 should therefore relate to the NSS as the strategic instrument for guiding future investment in order to enhance regions potential to counterbalance the economic dominance of the Greater Dublin area. The development of roads should be seen as an essential feature of the NSS.

#### 4.2 The BMW Region's Road Network

The quality of a region's road network is a critical determinant of its future economic development. This is particularly the case in the BMW Region where there is a greater reliance on road transport due to the rural nature of the region and the lack of critical mass to facilitate viable public transport alternatives. Figure 4 illustrates this reliance on private transport and the lack of utilisation of public transport compared to the S&E Region.

<sup>3</sup> The linked Gateways are Letterkenny/Derry, Athlone/Mullingar/Tullamore, Limerick/Shannon. The linked hubs are Castlebar/Ballina and Tralee/Killarney.

**Figure 4: Persons at Work Aged 15+ by Means of Travel to Work by Region 2002**

Source: Census 2002

The BMW Region's road network is characterised by:

- ⇒ Poor road linkages
- ⇒ Rising travel times/increased traffic volumes
- ⇒ Unpredictable journey times
- ⇒ Single carriageways
- ⇒ Substandard secondary road network and non-national roads

The commitment to develop the Atlantic Road Corridor<sup>4</sup> set out in Transport 21 is one of the most critically important investments for the development of the West of Ireland. Its development will provide a counterbalance along the West coast to the economic dominance of the East coast (which now includes the enhanced Belfast-Dublin economic corridor) and will strengthen the connections to the designated gateways of Galway, Sligo and Letterkenny. It is noteworthy that despite its significant potential to deliver balanced regional development there has been no commitment given as to a timescale for completion of the Atlantic Road Corridor.

Transport 21's commitment to upgrade key national primary and secondary routes will improve the link between the designated gateways, hubs and their hinterlands as envisaged in the NSS. These routes have been highlighted in the Regional Planning Guidelines of the Regional Authorities within the BMW Region. Disappointingly there are no timescales provided for the upgrading of outstanding section of national and secondary routes from 2010 onwards. It is crucial that investment projects under Transport 21 for the BMW Region are prioritised and that a clear timeframe is established.

### 4.3 North-South Linkages

The development of North-South linkages should also be considered in prioritising road schemes and while progress has been made linkages could be improved. The Government has made available funding of €580m for infrastructure investment for

<sup>4</sup> The Atlantic Road Corridor will link Waterford with Letterkenny via Cork, Limerick, Galway and Sligo.

Northern Ireland which includes provision for dual carriageway standard on routes within Northern Ireland serving the North West Gateway of Letterkenny/Derry and on the eastern seaboard from Belfast to Larne. The Government should prioritise the coordination of projects in this area which would benefit the North-West region in particular.

#### **4.4 Nodal & Radial Road Networks**

The ESRI<sup>5</sup> recommended that national investment as a whole should shift away from radial networks towards nodal networks, thus reflecting the objectives of the National Gateway Strategy in the NSS. This introduction of nodal networks would facilitate connectivity within regions, link gateway and hubs and would benefit regional development. Currently a radial network out of Dublin is further strengthening the dominance and spread of the Greater Dublin Area. As a counterbalancing measure the utilisation of radial road networks around underdeveloped gateway towns would facilitate their development. There should be an increased emphasis placed on nodal networks throughout the BMW Region and radial networks around the gateways in order to facilitate the priorities set out in the NSS.

### **5. Public Transport Policy**

Public transport in the BMW Region is relatively underdeveloped. Investment in public transport will play an important role in facilitating intra and inter regional access. The NSS reiterates national policy of giving increased focus to public transport within cities and town and more rural areas.

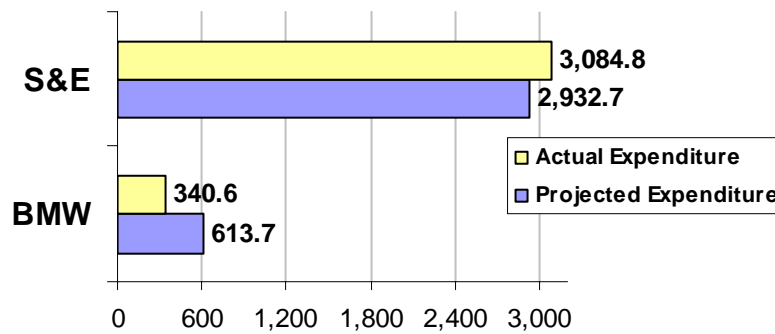
Emanating from the rural character of the BMW Region, it has a widely dispersed population and settlement pattern, therefore transportation is critical. Commuting in the region, whether it is for economic or social purposes, generally involves relatively longer distances, in many instances along poorer quality non-national roads. Moreover, such travel requires private means of transport because of a lack of satisfactory regional and local public transport systems.

Given this heavy reliance on private transport it is disappointing to note from the latest ESIOP<sup>6</sup> implementation report that investment in public transport in the BMW Region continues to lag behind forecast expenditure in comparison with the S&E Region, where spending has exceeded forecasts. This is illustrated in the figure 5.

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<sup>5</sup> Fitzgerald, J., Kearney, I., Morgenroth, E. and D. Smyth (1999) National Investment Priorities for the Period 2000-2006 Policy Research Series No. 33 Economic and Social Research Institute Dublin

<sup>6</sup> Economic and Social Infrastructure Operational Programme. Annual Implementation Report 2006.

**Figure 5: Public Transport Investment: Projected & Actual Expenditure 2000-2006, €m**

Source: ESIOP Annual Implementation Report 2006

## 5.1 Rail Policy

Strategic investment in the provision of rail services along with road infrastructure can significantly reduce the geographic marginalisation of the West of Ireland. Rail is a more energy efficient method of transport than road-based alternatives, has a better safety record and has the potential to reduce congestion costs. In parallel to this investment adequate provision of park and ride facilities will encourage the use of rail as an alternative means of transport.

### 5.1.1 Strategic Rail Review

The Strategic Rail Review provided another example of a lack of regard to the NSS. This review is written ‘with the broad philosophy of the NSS in mind’<sup>7</sup> rather than adhering to any precise recommendations of the NSS. Disappointingly, this was a further example of a Government-funded policy review which did not fully incorporate the objectives of balanced regional development. This review continued the over-emphasis on the transport needs of the GDA, to the detriment of other regions.

### 5.1.2 Western Rail Corridor (WRC)

The commitment to reopen the WRC<sup>8</sup> from Ennis to Claremorris and to preserve the alignment from Claremorris to Colloney is welcomed by the Assembly. The WRC will bring enormous advantages to the BMW Region in terms of stimulating economic activity, tourism potential, relieve traffic problems on the heavily congested N17 and N18 routes and provide important rail linkages to the airports of Shannon, Galway and Knock. In the context of a National Spatial Strategy the WRC will be very valuable as it would link gateways and hubs along the route.

Having considered the significant benefits to the BMW Region of the WRC we are disappointed by the length of time required for the re-opening of the Athenry to Tuam Section (2011) and the Tuam to Claremorris section (2014). There are few obstacles to working on existing disused lines compared to a new line and therefore these projects should be proceeding sooner.

### 5.1.3 Linking Regional Centres: Athlone-Mullingar

<sup>7</sup> Department of Transport (2003). Strategic Rail Review. p.20.

<sup>8</sup> “Western Rail Corridor” refers to the possible rail passenger and freight route from Sligo or Ballina through to Limerick with onward connections to the south-west and the port of Rosslare.

Along with the development of the Western Rail Corridor there are elements of the national rail network, no longer in use but still intact, which could link hubs and gateways throughout the country. There are opportunities to re-open connections linking regional centres and possibilities to investigate the potential for commuter rail services to serve the regional gateways and hubs which are located on the existing rail network.

There is also a strong case for the re-opening of the Athlone-Mullingar lines on social, sustainability, transport planning and spatial balance grounds. This route should also be given a greater priority, especially if the Midland Triangle is to function effectively as a gateway. There should also be a link to Tullamore, with commuter services between the three towns. The Athlone-Mullingar route would not only serve to connect these two midland towns, but would also provide an important national linkage, by integrating the two main westerly rail lines this would allow trains from Galway and Mayo to depart from and arrive in Connolly station, thus freeing up the lines out of Heuston Station.

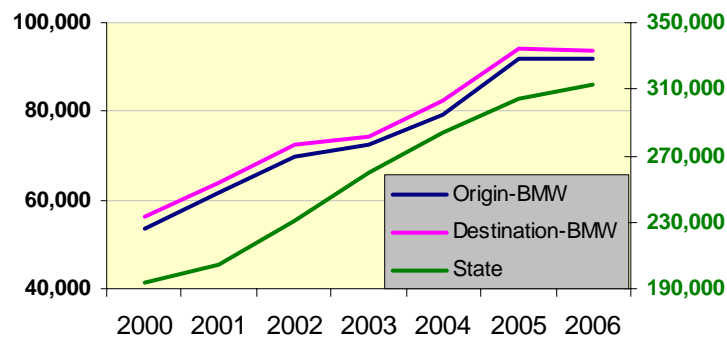
This route was identified as a potentially important project in the Strategic Rail Review and in the Regional Planning Guidelines for the Midland region. This was not included as a Transport 21 project and should be addressed. The opening of the Athlone-Mullingar line should be pursued as a priority.

### **5.1.3 Linking the North-West**

The North-West region of Ireland is not served by rail and this has a considerable impact on the region in terms of accessibility and economic activity. A feasibility study should be undertaken to examine the potential to extend the Western Rail corridor beyond Sligo to Letterkenny, and into the feasibility of extending the Belfast-Derry train line on to Letterkenny, a designated gateway under the NSS.

### **5.1.4 Freight Transport**

The Strategic Rail Review could have placed a greater emphasis on the role of freight transport. Road freight transport has grown significantly in recent years. This trend is illustrated (in tonnes carried) in figure 6. This shows that Ireland has experienced an increase in tonnage carried of 54% between 2000 and 2006. The equivalent figure for freight with a final destination in the BMW Region grew by 54% and by 57% for freight which origination in the region. Given the increasing levels of freight transported by road the use of rail could provide an energy efficient and effective method of transporting bulk and heavy goods and in turn help alleviate traffic congestion. There should be a drive to increase the levels of freight that is transported by rail.

**Figure 6: Freight Tonnes Carried by Road by Origin & Destination BMW & State 2000-2006**

Source: CSO Road Freight transport Surveys 2000-2006

## 5.2 Bus Services

Rail is not the dominant form of public transport in the BMW Region and until there is a comprehensive and efficient rail service, the majority of public transport journeys will be made by bus. Whilst the overall coverage of towns and villages in the BMW Region is relatively comprehensive, the timing and pricing structures act as a constraint to increased usage. The service for commuters is relatively poor and there are few buses leaving sufficiently early to bring people to their place of work/education. There is potentially a greater role for bus services given the on-going and prospective improvements in the road network. Improvement and expansion of the national bus network, the introduction of integrated ticketing, and improved pricing and timing structures would improve existing services and act as an incentive to commuters.

### 5.2.1 Quality Bus Corridors (QBCs)

In order for public transport to offer a faster, reliable and alternative form of transport, it is essential that QBCs are put in place in cities and gateway towns. QBCs could be utilised by taxis as well as buses but they could also be used as part of a broader policy to encourage car pooling. We therefore welcome the commitment in Transport 21 to the introduction of QBCs to Galway City however once again we find a commitment without a timescale. Consideration should also be given to the feasibility of QBCs in other gateway towns such as Sligo, Dundalk, Letterkenny, Tullamore, Mullingar and Athlone should also be considered. The timeframe for the implementation of a QBC for Galway City should be prioritised and delivery of QBCs to other gateway towns should be examined.

### 5.2.2 Rural Transport Initiative

We welcome the commitment to mainstream and increase the funding for the Rural Transport Initiatives (RTI). In rural areas, where there is not sufficient critical mass to sustain a regular bus service the RTI has made an important impact in terms of increasing the levels of independence and reducing isolation for the mostly excluded residents who use its services<sup>9</sup>. Continued development and expansion of the RTI is central to tackling the issue of rural isolation particularly among older people.

<sup>9</sup> External Evaluation of the Rural Transport Initiative. Area Development Management Limited. July 2004.

### 5.2.3 Sustainable Energy and Public Transport

In the BMW Region there is a higher dependency on private cars as the primary means of transport, thus leading to higher emission levels and a greater dependency on imported fossil fuels. Government policy should not only be focused on reducing car journeys, but should include specific targets and strategies for the development of the bio-fuels sector. One simple mechanism could be to make it mandatory for all public service vehicles to be run on green energy.

Such schemes are already in operation in by Cork and Galway City Councils. This scheme should be further developed in partnership with Sustainable Energy Ireland and mainstreamed to all local authority areas.

## 6. Aviation Policy

Airports are recognised as important generators of economic activity and as loci for international services provision; such is the case for Dublin airport. The situation for regional airports is slightly different and as they act as facilitators rather than generators of economic activity. Aviation doesn't create regional development, but rather it facilitates other development processes<sup>10</sup>. Greater air access does facilitate growth in foreign direct investments and indigenous enterprises.

Table 1 shows the increase in passenger numbers passing through Irish airports. From a regional perspective it is worth noting the strong growth experienced by Knock Airport. This escalation in passenger numbers is making a significant contribution to the development of tourism in the region and along with Galway airport, has the potential to play a significant strategic role as a gateway for business to the region. In addition, there is a need to support the continued development of Sligo and Carrickfin (Donegal) Regional airports. These provide important daily commuter services and should continue to be supported. The role of Shannon airport is also critically important to the West of Ireland and its continued developed will have positive spill-over effects for the BMW Region as a whole.

**Table 1: Passenger Numbers 2002-2006<sup>11</sup>**

Airport	2002 (000s)	2003 (000s)	2004 (000s)	2005 (000s)	2006 (000s)	% Change 2002-06
<b>DUBLIN</b>	16,114	16,870	18,127	19,654	22,249	38.1%
<b>SHANNON</b>	2,215	2,250	2,268	2,520	2,839	28.2%
<b>CORK</b>	1,584	1,890	1,959	2,384	2,541	60.4%
<b>KNOCK</b>	199	248	373	530	633	218.1%
<b>KERRY</b>	170	305	382	383	392	131.1%
<b>GALWAY</b>	110	137	225	253	249	126.1%
<b>WATERFORD</b>	35	35	61	74	83	139.8%
<b>DONEGAL</b>	24	38	43	48	57	135.8%
<b>SLIGO</b>	26	30	41	40	34	30.4%

Sources: CSO and Department of Transport

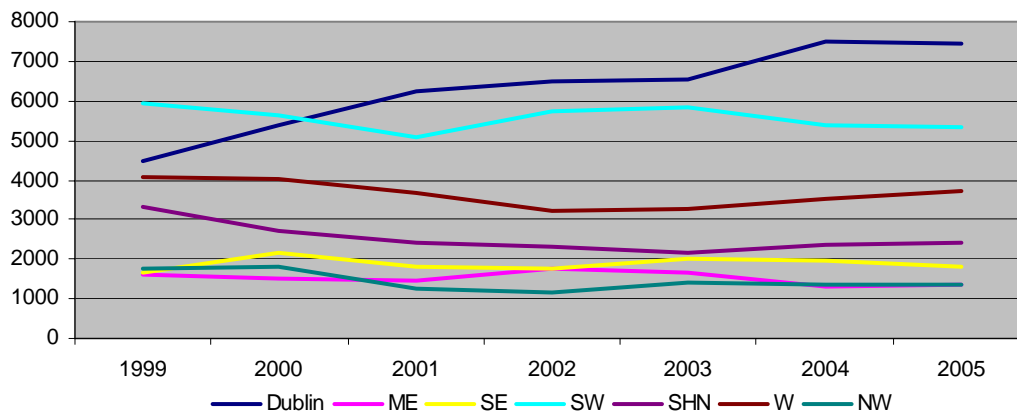
The region however faces challenges if aviation is to advance regional development:

<sup>10</sup> Oxford Economic Forecasting and Airport Strategy and Marketing (2002). The Northern Ireland Air Service Study. Oxford: OEF & ASM.

<sup>11</sup>

- (i) To sustain all year round services to key hubs that give world-wide connectivity to the BMW Region
- (ii) To attract all year round transatlantic services: the region needs to be strategically positioned to offset the impact of the 'Open Skies' Agreement<sup>12</sup> on the West of Ireland. This agreement will result in 'irreversible changes in the pattern of US holiday behaviour in Ireland'<sup>13</sup> and will likely lead to a drop in US demand and expenditures in the West of Ireland.
- (iii) To attract more inbound rather than more outbound traffic to the region, this will offset the drop in the region's share of visitor numbers currently being experienced despite the continued growth in tourism nationally. This decline has been attributed to the growing popularity of short-break urban holidays, and the significant expansion of low cost air access to Dublin.<sup>14</sup> This trend becomes apparent when the number of bednights taken up by overseas holiday visitors is examined in figure 7.

**Figure 7: Regional Distribution of Overseas Holidays Bednights (000s) 1999 – 2005<sup>15</sup>**



Source: Irish Tourist Industry Confederation (2006). *Regional Distribution of Holiday Bednights*

In order to offset these challenges we recommend that:

- ⇒ The Government should develop an overarching regional air connectivity policy and provide revenue to implement it: such a policy should be focused on enabling existing airport capacity to work better, allowing greater throughput rather than investing in new 'greenfield'
- ⇒ Regional airports should receive targeted investment in order to accommodate potential growth: this can be achieved by supporting the development of Knock and Galway airports in particular. Knock International Airport, the only major international airport in the BMW region, presents an excellent opportunity in this capacity, particularly since the region suffers from a lack of direct international access.
- ⇒ Provision should be made to improve the transport links serving existing airports in terms of bus, road and rail, including the WRC: this can effectively extend their respective catchment areas and provide greater choice for passengers which in

<sup>12</sup> EU-US Air Service Agreement March 2007

<sup>13</sup> Irish Tourist Industry Confederation (2007). Projected Short to Medium Term Impacts of Open Skies for Ireland.

<sup>14</sup> Irish Tourist Industry Confederation (2005). How Tourism in Ireland is Changing: Regional Distribution.

<sup>15</sup> Irish Tourist Industry Confederation (2006). Regional Distribution of Holiday Bednights-Update.

turn will enable an increase in services. This will bring benefits for inward investment, indigenous enterprise and tourism.

### **7. Maritime Transport Policy**

The BMW Region has a number of fishery harbours and commercial ports. The fishery harbours in particular are a major contributor to the economy of its hinterlands and are important sources of economic benefit to often disadvantaged coastal communities. Through the improvement of structures, operational efficiency and safety at Killybegs, Clogherhead, Rossaveal and Greencastle will enable them to reach their full potential as economic drivers for the regional hinterlands. The BMW Region also has 3 commercial ports in Drogheda, Dundalk and Galway. The development of both the fishing industry and commercial ports will contribute to a more balanced socio-economic development throughout Ireland, take pressure off of Dublin Port and prevent further rural depopulation and deprivation.

One of the core functions transferred to the Department of Transport is maritime transport policy. As provided under the Harbours Act 1996 this includes the transfer to alternative uses under local control of regional ports and harbours that do not form part of the national maritime transport system. In support of this policy the Department provides access to development funds under the Seaports Measure in the Regional Operational Programmes of the NDP.

The investment provided under the Regional Seaports Measure was intended to create opportunities for the development of marine tourism and water-based activities and improve access for coastal and island communities in a manner which will contribute towards a more balanced geographical distribution of economic activity in the Region. In response to this, the Marine Institute<sup>16</sup> highlighted the opportunities that exist to integrate leisure in the continuing development/rehabilitation of small ports and harbours that are outside the mainstream of trade or fishing activity.

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<sup>16</sup> Arthur, Martin & Brady Shipman, Martin. Marine Recreation and the Process of Rejuvenation of Small Ports and Harbours. Marine Institute.

## **Summary & Recommendations**

Whilst some progress has been made in the area of regional transport investment, there are still a number of major transport deficits in the BMW Region, which act as a constraint to its further economic growth and a more balanced pattern of development in accordance with the stated Government objectives for regional policy.

The following is a summary of the main point and recommendations of this paper which we hope will be taken into consideration during the development of the Department of Transport's Strategy Statement 2008-2010:

### **Regional Disparities**

- ⇒ The existence of wide disparities between regions which arises from the region's poor infrastructure endowment is not conducive to attaining national or regional competitiveness

### **Population Migrations and Projections**

- ⇒ To ensure a more sustainable distribution of population it is necessary to enhance economic activity in the regions – transport policy has a significant role to play in this

### **Creating Balanced Regional Economic Activity**

- ⇒ Balanced regional development and a convergence in socio-economic terms between the regions are possible provided that strategic investments are made to address transport and other infrastructure deficits

### **National Spatial Strategy**

- ⇒ The success of the NSS is dependent upon a commitment from all levels of Government to integrate the strategy into all national, regional and local planning

### **Setting Regional Policy Targets**

- ⇒ Clear measurable regional targets need to be set out and there should be a real commitment of resources to achieve these targets

### **Project Appraisal**

- ⇒ The economic analysis of projects undertaken by or on behalf of the Department of Transport should be reviewed in order to incorporate multiple criteria analysis and wider socio-economic criteria

## **Roads Policy**

### **Impact of NDP's National Roads Programme 2000-2006**

- ⇒ All road programmes under Transport 21 should relate to the NSS as the strategic instrument for guiding future investment in order to enhance regions potential to counterbalance the economic dominance of the Greater Dublin area. The development of roads should be seen as an essential feature of the NSS

### **The BMW Region's Road Network**

- ⇒ It is crucial that investment projects under Transport 21 for the BMW Region are prioritised and that a clear timeframe is established

### **North-South Linkages**

- ⇒ The Government should prioritise the coordination of North-South linking which will ultimately benefit the North-West region

### **Nodal & Radial Road Networks**

- ⇒ There should be an increased emphasis placed on nodal networks throughout the BMW Region and radial networks around the gateways in order to facilitate the priorities set out in the NSS

### **Rail Policy**

#### **Strategic Rail Review**

- ⇒ The Strategic Rail Review placed an over-emphasis on the transport needs of the GDA, to the detriment of other regions – this needs to be reviewed

### **Western Rail Corridor**

- ⇒ There are few obstacles to working on existing disused lines compared to a new line and therefore work on the Western Rail Corridor should be proceeding sooner

### **Linking Regional Centres: Athlone-Mullingar**

- ⇒ The opening of the Athlone-Mullingar line should be pursued as a priority

### **Linking the North-West**

- ⇒ A feasibility study should be undertaken to examine the potential to extend the Western Rail corridor beyond Sligo to Letterkenny, and into the feasibility of extending the Belfast-Derry train line on to Letterkenny, a designated gateway under the NSS

### **Freight Transport**

- ⇒ There should be a drive to increase the levels of freight that is transported by rail

### **Bus Services**

#### **Quality Bus Corridors**

- ⇒ The timeframe for the implementation of a Quality Bus Corridors for Galway City should be prioritised and delivery of QBCs to other gateway towns should be examined

### **Rural Transport Initiative**

- ⇒ Continued development and expansion of the Rural Transport Initiative is central to tackling the issue of rural isolation particularly among older people

### **Sustainable Energy and Public Transport**

- ⇒ It should be mandatory for all public service vehicles to be run on green energy

### **Aviation Policy**

- ⇒ The Government should develop an overarching regional air connectivity policy and provide revenue to implement it
- ⇒ Regional airports should receive targeted investment in order to accommodate potential growth
- ⇒ Provision should be made to improve the transport links serving existing airports in terms of bus, road and rail, including the WRC

### **Maritime Transport Policy**

- ⇒ The development of both the fishing industry and commercial ports will contribute to a more balanced socio-economic development throughout Ireland and prevent further rural depopulation and deprivation