



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

PRESS RELEASE

BMW Assembly Deputation meets An Taoiseach and Government Ministers

A deputation from the Border, Midland and Western Regional Assembly met with the Taoiseach, Mr. Bertie Ahern T.D., along with Ministers John Gormley T.D., Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, and Éamon Ó Cuív T.D., Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs in Government Buildings on Wednesday the 14th of November 2007. The eight member deputation, led by Leas-Cathaoirleach, Councillor Andrew Boylan, presented the Taoiseach with a submission on *'More Effective Implementation of Regional Policy'* which outlined a number of issues of concern to the region.

The deputation acknowledged that while good progress is being made in some areas of investment in the region, the region faced several challenges. These challenges include the continued disparity in regional economic performance, the brain drain of graduates and the region's poor performance in research and innovation, the region's relatively poor infrastructure endowment, the need to address environmental issues and to increase the production and consumption of renewable energy.

The delegation called for a stronger commitment to infrastructure in the region, including investment in strategic road corridors such as the Atlantic Road Corridor and the East-West link from Dundalk to Sligo, greater road and public transport linkages between the gateway centres, investment in regional airports and bringing forward the completion of the Western Rail Corridor. The deputation also highlighted the importance of attracting continued foreign direct investment to the region and of extending broadband services to all areas in order to enhance the region's

competitiveness. The deputation called for increased investment in applied research to be achieved by the ring-fencing of research funding and a commitment to raise the research capacity of the institutes of technology in the region. The deputation also called for a better spread of investment in tourism attractions, highlighting in particular the reduction in the share of visitor numbers to the region.

The investment proposals from the region's gateways under the Gateway Innovation Fund were supported by the deputation. The deputation raised concerns with regard to the high level of local funding required in order for water and waste water projects to proceed and the difficulties arising from the proposed change to the funding of community childcare facilities. Specific issues being experienced in Gaeltacht areas due to an under-investment in water treatment, the decline in the fish processing industry and the budgetary pressures on Udarás na Gaeltachta were also raised.

Finally the deputation called for a more coherent regional policy framework with clear policy targets, the re-introduction of investment forecasts at regional level in order to monitor the regional impact of the new NDP, a stronger role for regional bodies in national investment planning, better co-ordination of regional policy across Government and a greater emphasis on regional competitiveness.

The Taoiseach welcomed the Regional Assembly's submission and acknowledged that balanced regional development is every Department's responsibility and to everybody's benefit. Mr. Ahern highlighted the significant investment that had taken place in public infrastructure across the state in recent years, citing the roads programme, tourism investment and investment in regional airports. The Taoiseach also informed the deputation that the Government had committed additional resources to childcare provision and wished to subsidise childcare costs for parents that needed additional supports.

Minister O'Cuiv informed the deputation of the planned investment under the LEADER and CLÁR Programmes and the progress made in relation to providing access and facilities for walking routes. He also referred to the Western Rail Corridor, approval of the Ulster Canal project and the roll-out of the National Broadband Scheme to address the remaining areas not served by broadband. Minister

O’Cuiv also stated that the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food was aware of the present difficulties in the fish processing sector and stated that his Department had committed resources to address infrastructure deficits in the Gaeltacht and Islands.

Minister Gormley emphasised the need for a sustainable transport policy going forward and the need for greater exploitation of wind resources. He acknowledged that continued investment in water services was needed and would review the local funding requirements for this. Mr. Gormley also informed the deputation that he would look at enhancing the role of his Department in regional policy.

The Director of the BMW Regional Assembly, Mr. Gerry Finn stated that this meeting with the Taoiseach and senior cabinet Ministers had provided an opportunity to raise both strategic regional issues as well as specific issues concerning the implementation of regional policy and he expressed his intention to seek similar meetings with the Taoiseach and with Ministers in the future, particularly on issues concerning investment in the region and on the future of Irish regional policy.

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EDITORS NOTE

The members of the deputation were as follows:

1. Councillor Andrew Boylan (Cavan) Leas-Cathaoirleach of the BMW Regional Assembly
2. Councillor Pádraig Coneely (Galway City)
3. Councillor James Daly (Laois)
4. Councillor Tony Ferguson (Leitrim)
5. Councillor Seosamh Ó Cuaig (Galway)
6. Mr. Gerry Finn, Director, BMW Regional Assembly
7. Mr. Kieran Moylan, Assistant Director
8. Mr. Adrian O’Donoghue, Policy and Research Officer