



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

PRESS RELEASE

BMW Assembly Deputation meets An Taoiseach

A deputation from the Border, Midland and Western Regional Assembly met with the Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern TD, and senior Government Officials, in Government Buildings on Tuesday the 18th of November 2004 to discuss a number of issues of concern to the region and to the Regional Assembly and to present the Taoiseach with a submission on balanced regional development in the BMW Region

The Taoiseach complimented the work of the Regional Assemblies in the management of the structural funds and stated that they were making a valuable contribution to the development of the country.

The seven member deputation, led by Leas-Cathaoirleach, Councillor T.P. Smith, acknowledged that while good progress is being made in some areas of investment, the significantly higher levels of investment in the BMW Region anticipated under the National Development Plan had not yet materialised.

The deputation called for a clear implementation plan for the National Spatial Strategy and a stronger commitment to infrastructure in the regions, if the strategy is to be an effective instrument to achieve greater regional balance. The deputation proposed that road and rail links between the designated gateways and hubs should be prioritised in current investment programmes and called for continued investment in telecommunications, energy and cultural and sports infrastructure in the region.

The Taoiseach was informed of the low level of technological innovation and research and development activity taking place in the BMW region and was asked for an increase in Government expenditure in this area, in order to stimulate economic growth in the BMW region. The Regional Assembly deputation also called for a

stronger regional dimension in the plans and policies of state support agencies in order to increase the innovation and productive capacity of the region.

The Assembly recommended that the Regional Assemblies should play a greater role in the drafting and implementation of future EU co-funded programmes and that these programmes should be managed regionally in partnership with Government. The Government was also asked to support the case for the retention of 'objective 1 in transition' status for the BMW region post 2006.

In response to the issues raised, the Taoiseach stated that he was conscious of the concerns expressed and he recognised the need for Government to take these concerns on board. He stated that the current mid-term evaluation of the National Development Plan and of the Operational Programmes provided an opportunity to review the strategies and programmes in place and to make adjustments where necessary.

In relation to the low level of research in the region, the Taoiseach agreed that it is an important issue and that increasing the percentage of the GDP spent on research and development is a national as well as a regional priority. He also agreed that some simplification of the current structural funds structures in Ireland would be desirable, but that the future of funding post 2006 will depend on the overall EU financial situation at the time.

The Director of the BMW Regional Assembly, Mr. Gerry Finn stated that this second meeting with the Taoiseach had provided an opportunity to raise strategic regional issues with the Government 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 EU cohesion policy.

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EDITORS NOTE

The members of the deputation were as follows:

Councillor T.P. Smith (Cavan) Leas-Cathaoirleach of the BMW Regional Assembly

Councillor Matt Loughnane (Galway)

Councillor Hugh Lynn (Roscommon)

Councillor John Flannery (Mayo)

Mr. Gerry Finn, Director, BMW Regional Assembly

Mr. Kieran Moylan, Assistant Director

Ms. Louise Kinlen, Policy and Research Officer