



Border, Midland & Western
Regional Assembly
Shaping the Region

**Submission to Consultation on the
Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport's
Strategy Statement 2011 – 2014**

August 2011

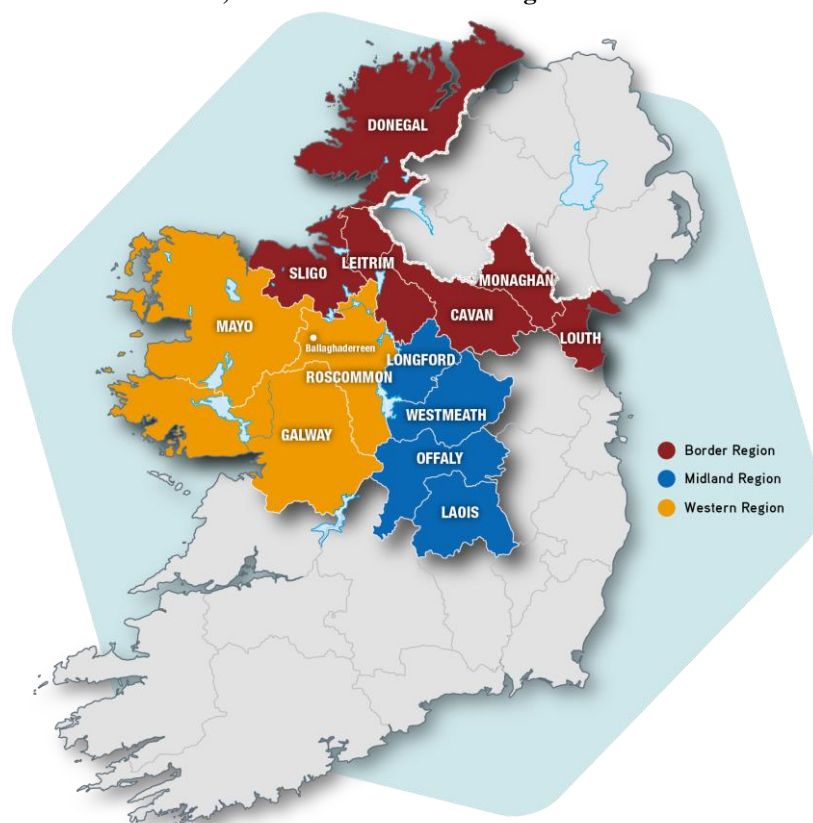
BMW Regional Assembly
The Square
Ballaghaderreen
Co. Roscommon
094-9862970
www.bmwassembly.ie

Introduction

The Border Midland and Western (BMW) Regional Assembly welcomes this opportunity to make a submission to the consultation on the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport's Strategy Statement 2011-2014. This paper sets out the role of transport and tourism in regional economic development and also highlights a number of key issues for the region in relation to balanced regional development.

The BMW Regional Assembly was established in 1999 in order to give effect to the designation of two regions in Ireland for EU structural funds purposes. The BMW Region covers thirteen counties which represents 47% of the land mass of Ireland, 27% of the population and produces less than 19% of Ireland's GDP. The Regional Assembly acts as the Managing Authority for the BMW Regional Operational Programme 2007-2013 which includes significant investment in National 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 and policies take regional issues into account.

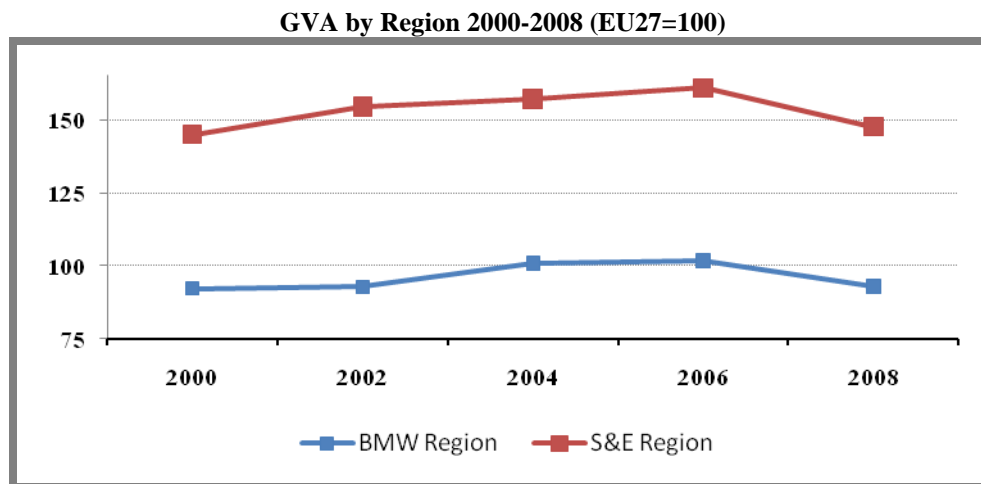
Border, Midland and Western Region of Ireland



It is acknowledged that the Statement of Strategy is a high level strategic planning framework rather than an investment plan with prioritised projects. However, it is important that the projects selected for progression over the coming years are consistent with the overall strategy and with other overarching national strategies, including the National Spatial Strategy. For this reason this submission refers to a number of strategic transport projects that should be progressed by the Department and the agencies acting under its aegis over the lifetime of the strategy.

1. Regional Socio-Economic and Transport Context

The latest regional output data which is from 2008, shows that the BMW Region produced output levels equivalent to just 93% of the EU27 average – down over eight and half percentage points compared to 2007 and returning to output levels last experienced during the early part of the millennium. The BMW Region’s economy continues to demonstrate low levels of ‘value-added’ activity and this is borne out by the fact the Region contributed just 18.7% of national output despite employing 25.7% of Ireland’s workers in 2008.



Source: CSO 2011>. County Incomes and Regional GDP. February 2011.

The scale and speed of the economic decline has seen a sharp rise in unemployment. Unemployment has risen to 14.1% in Ireland by the 1st quarter of 2011¹ compared to 4.6% in the 1st quarter of 2008. The rates of unemployment in the BMW Region have been consistently higher than the S&E Region and this remains the case. As at the 1st quarter of 2011, unemployment stood at 14.9% in the BMW Region compared to 13.8% in the S&E Region.

In our submission to the previous strategy (2007) we highlighted the fact that to be competitive in regional locations, enterprises must have access to infrastructural facilities that are at least on a par with their competitors. It is acknowledged that 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 spatial trends that emerged during the economic ‘boom’ of the previous decade were clearly unsustainable. Economic activity and the ability to access employment largely determines settlement patterns. Recently released Census data² illustrates the rapid expansion of Greater Dublin Area’s (GDA) commuter belt in recent years which 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 (GDA).

¹ CSO 2011. Quarterly National Household Survey: Quarter 1 2011. June 2011.

² CSO 2011. Census of Population 2011: Preliminary Results. June 2011.

Between 2002 and 2011 Ireland's population has grown by 17.0% and by 19.6% in the BMW Region, however this pattern of growth has been concentrated upon the Dublin Commuter belt areas, Meath (37.3%), Kildare (28.1%), Wicklow (19.0%) and by the wider commuting counties which are part of the BMW Region including, Laois (36.9%), Louth (20.65%), Westmeath (19.6%), Longford (20.6%), Cavan (28.9%) and Offaly (20.6%). However while high growth levels were experienced in the Midlands, this has not been accompanied by a corresponding increase in economic activity.

In comparison counties in the BMW Region such as Mayo (11.2%), Sligo (12.1%), Monaghan (15%) and Donegal (17.0%) experienced growth on or below the national average. Strong growth was experienced in Galway (19.8%) reflecting its strong economic performance in a range of sectors, (e.g., Medical Devices/Software Sectors) which has attracted workers who also enjoy the quality of life that can be experienced in Galway. While growth was also strong in Leitrim (23.2%), it remains the least populated in Ireland.

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.**

Population by County, Region and State 2006 - 2011

	2006	2011	% Change 06-11
BMW Region	1,134,316	1,241,338	9.4%
S&E Region	3,105,532	3,339,931	7.5%
Ireland	4,239,848	4,581,269	8.1%
Border Region			
Cavan	64,003	72,874	13.9%
Donegal	147,264	160,927	9.3%
Louth	111,267	122,808	10.4%
Leitrim	28,950	31,778	9.8%
Monaghan	55,997	60,495	8.0%
Sligo	60,894	65,270	7.2%
<i>Border Region</i>	468,375	514,152	9.8%
Midland Region			
Laois	67,059	80,458	20.0%
Longford	34,391	38,970	13.3%
Offaly	70,868	76,806	8.4%
Westmeath	79,346	85,961	8.3%
<i>Midland Region</i>	251,664	282,195	12.1%
Western Region			
Galway	231,670	250,541	8.1%
Mayo	123,839	130,552	5.4%
Roscommon	58,768	63,898	8.7%
<i>Western Region</i>	414,277	444,991	7.4%
Key: On or above national average growth			

Source: CSO. Census of Population 2011: Preliminary Results

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 its 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.

Emanating from the rural character of the BMW Region, it has a widely dispersed population and settlement pattern, commuting in the region generally involves relatively longer distances, in many instances along poorer quality non-national roads. Moreover, such travel is mainly conducted by means of private transport because of a lack of satisfactory regional and local public transport systems. The BMW Region's reliance on private transportation as the primary means of transport thus leads to higher emission levels and a greater dependency on imported fossil fuels. This also renders the BMW Region more vulnerable than other regions to rises in oil prices and fiscal incentives which penalises the use of private transport.

Public transport in the BMW Region remains relatively underdeveloped. Strategic investment in public transport is critical to develop and facilitate intra and inter regional access. The National Spatial Strategy complements national policy by giving increased focus to public transport within cities and towns and more rural areas. **The Statement of Strategy should give equal emphasis to regional and rural transport services and not be overly focussed upon transport provision in the Greater Dublin Area – regional and rural transport considerations need to be prioritised in parallel with urban transport needs.**

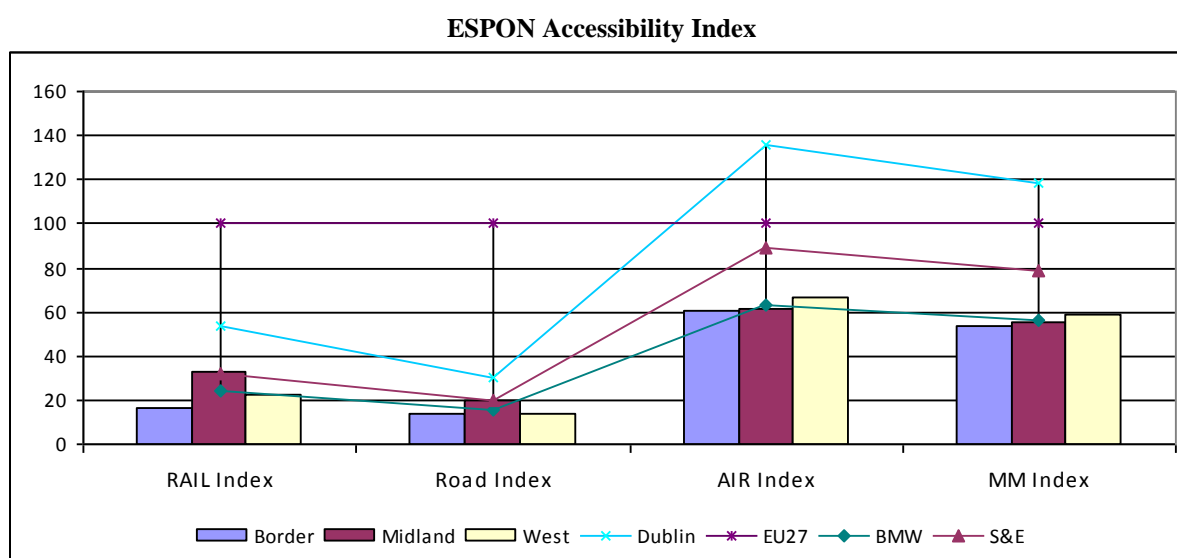
2. Role of Transport in Regional Economic Development

It is widely acknowledged that investment in transport infrastructure endogenously promotes growth by reducing transport costs and delivery times and enabling a more efficient production environment to develop. Improved transport connectivity also attracts inward investment and influences commuting catchments and patterns. Appropriate and strategic transport infrastructure development is therefore essential to enable economic growth in under-developed regions and ultimately increases the attractiveness of such regions as places in which to invest, live, visit and work.

Ireland's regional competitiveness is the key to future economic growth and national competitiveness and how it functions in competitive regional locations. Central to this is the provision of an effective, efficient, sustainable and reliable transport system. The wide disparities in the provision of transportation infrastructure that currently persists between regions in Ireland are not conducive to either national or regional competitiveness. It is important to bear in mind that the competitiveness of the state as a whole is comprised of the competitive strengths of its constituent regions and compromised by their weaknesses. To be

competitive in regional locations, enterprises must also have access to infrastructural facilities that are at least on a par with their competitors, this is not only necessary for regions to be in a position to attract inward investment and but also to facilitate the growth of indigenous enterprises.

These disparities are highlighted by the findings from ESPON's multimodal accessibility index. The BMW Region remains significantly less accessible compared to the rest of the country and against the EU average (BMW Region = 55.8, S&E Region = 78.4, when EU27 average is taken as 100). The Border Region in particular is least connected through rail and is poorly connected with roads and air routes.



Source: ESPON, Territorial Dynamics in Europe: Trends in Accessibility

This data on accessibility indicates that while there has been a significant improvement in the rail network between 2001 and 2006 (BMW Region = 51%, S&E Region = 43%, EU-27 = 13.1%), the improvements in road (BMW = 4.9%, S&E = 5.5%, EU-27 = 7.4%) and air connection (BMW Region = 7%, S&E Region = 12.7%, EU-27 = 7.8%) leaves the BMW Region substantially behind the S&E Region and the EU average.

A high proportion of investment in the past decade has been used to construct and re-enforce ground transport radial networks into Dublin. Such an investment pattern has contributed to urban sprawl by facilitating longer distance commuting. While this is consistent with Dublin's role as an international gateway, it failed to promote another objectives of the National Spatial Strategy, namely to counterbalance the economic dominance of the Greater Dublin Area. This would imply significant improvements in the connectivity of the designated gateways to each other, to the designated hub towns and to their regional hinterlands and not just their links to Dublin. A study by Dall'erba and Le Gallo³ (2003), found that investment in transport infrastructure that is increasingly composed of hub-and-spoke interconnections, "do not systematically benefit the region where they are

³ Dall'erba, S., and J. Le Gallo (2003) 'Regional Convergence and the Impact of European Structural Funds over 1989-1999: A Spatial Econometric Analysis' *European Union Studies Association Biennial Conference*, March 2003.

implemented,” and that such networks exacerbate disparities between regions. This point is apposite to the recent investment programmes supported by the Department of Transport. Similarly, Rosik⁴ (2006) finds that richer regions benefit proportionately better from improved inter-regional transport networks, and that such investment may in fact widen disparities, while providing overall efficiency gains.

The Statement of Strategy should recognise that the existing transport infrastructure is not just a legacy of previous investment and economic activity, it is also an important determinant of future economic potential. **The spatial implications of all investment decisions should be taken into account, consistent with all of the objectives of the NSS and not just selected objectives.**

3. Role of Tourism in Regional Economic Development

Tourism is an established and important labour-intensive economic sector and offers huge potential for growth, in restoring visitor numbers to previous peaks, from all market sources. It also complements efforts to raise the quality of life of regions and their attractiveness to skilled labour and investment.

Existing tourism strategies are based upon taking advantage of the compelling assets that each region possesses such as outdoor activities, water sports and internationally known events. Each region possesses unique assets, heritage attractions and landscapes and host well known attractions. While there are established tourism products in each region and there has been considerable investment in some products, e.g., waterways, golf courses, major events (e.g., Volvo Ocean Race, World Rally Championship), the tourism product remains relatively underdeveloped across Ireland and some areas benefit more than others from tourism revenue and visitor numbers.

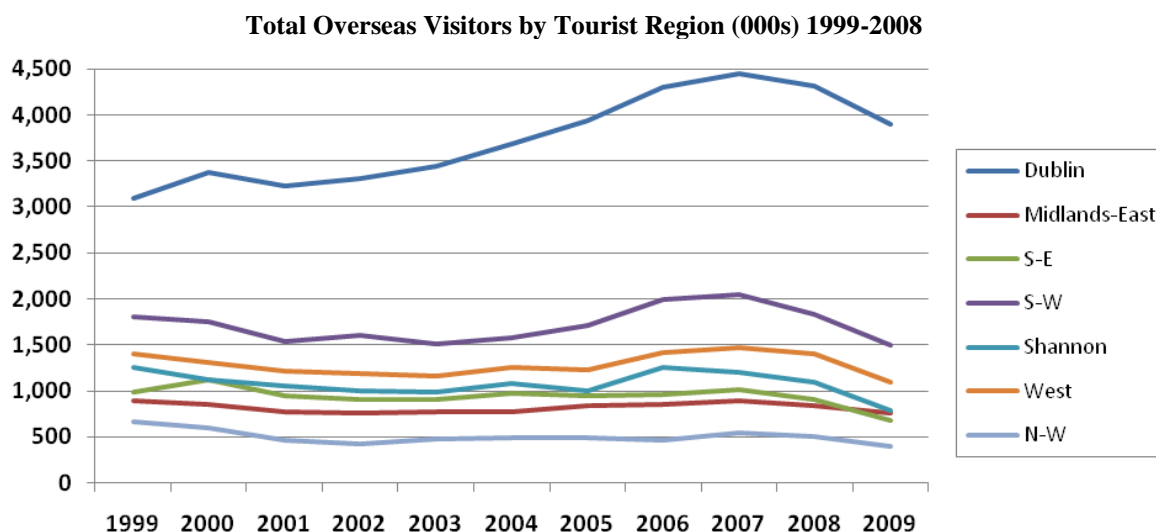
By examining the county visitor figures from Fáilte Ireland against the latest county populations based on the preliminary figures from the 2011 Census we are able to get a clearer picture of how each county is performing using this ratio. The counties in the BMW Region are performing well below the level of those in the S&E Region, a regional analysis finds the ratio to be 1.59 in the BMW Region compared to 2.32 in the S&E Region. In other words for every 1 person living in the BMW Region the Region receives 1.59 overseas visitors each year, whereas the S&E Region receives 0.73 more visitors per resident. From the table below only 3 counties from the BMW Region (highlighted in green) rank in the top 12 most visited counties.

⁴ Rosik, P. (2006) ‘Transport Infrastructure, Public Capital and Regional Policy – Review of Studies’ Paper presented at the Regional Studies Association Conference Shaping EU Regional Policy: Economic Social and Political Pressures, Leuven, Belgium 8th-9th June 2006, Regional Studies Association: UK.

		Overseas Visitors 2009	Population 2009	Visitors to Population Ratio
1	Kerry	784	145	5.41
2	Clare	432	117	3.69
3	Galway	879	251	3.50
4	Dublin	3,881	1,270	3.06
5	Mayo	314	131	2.40
6	Sligo	142	65	2.18
7	Kilkenny	206	95	2.17
8	Cork	1,001	518	1.93
9	Waterford	214	114	1.88
10	Limerick	350	191	1.83
11	Wicklow	212	136	1.56
12	Wexford	166	145	1.14
13	Westmeath	96	86	1.12
14	Carlow	59	55	1.07
15	Donegal	161	161	1.00
16	Cavan	72	73	0.99
17	Tipperary	141	158	0.89
18	Leitrim	27	32	0.84
19	Kildare	158	210	0.75
20	Roscommon	48	64	0.75
21	Louth	89	123	0.72
22	Meath	127	184	0.69
23	Longford	25	39	0.64
24	Offaly	48	77	0.62
25	Laois	47	80	0.59
26	Monaghan	32	61	0.52

Source: Fáite Ireland

Access to the region remains a vital driver of visitor numbers. The provision of air access is also a prerequisite for developing a thriving international tourism sector. The following figure provides a breakdown of the regional share of overseas tourists between 1999 and 2009 (it should be noted that the tourism regions do not follow the NUTS definitions).



Source: Fáilte Ireland

It is noteworthy that the strong economic performance of the Dublin and South West Regions is also reflected in the tourism sector. The Dublin Region in particular made significant gains (taking due note of the decline that has taken place since 2008) in terms of its share of overseas tourist which grew by almost 8% in the period under consideration. This shift can be attributed to the growing popularity of short-break urban holidays and the significant expansion of low-cost air access to Dublin Airport. **The increased volume of low-fare air services now available at the three State Airports is having an adverse spatial impact on tourism. This can be rebalanced by expanding air access to regionally located airports via new air services.**

There also is a strong relationship between the point of entry of transatlantic flights and the propensity for North American tourists to visit that region. In 2009, 892,000 North Americans visited Ireland and contributed €621m to the Irish economy. Just 7.8% visited the North West compared to 33.2% for the South West Region⁵.

IWA, Knock Airport is the only airport in the BMW Region that currently has the capability to handle transatlantic jets. During 2007 the airport demonstrated that there was a demand for this service when Flyglobespan operated flights to the US with a 93% load factor on New York and 86% on Boston scheduled flights and approximately 63% of total sales stemmed from the IWA, Knock routes specifically (these flight routes were Glasgow-IWA, Knock - Boston and Liverpool-IWA, Knock -New York). IWA, Knock 's US routes achieved 3% of total Irish market share in 2007 and generated an estimated 10,000 inbound US passengers, which contributed €3.85m to the West and North West Regions⁶.

Shannon and Dublin Airports have become the first full pre-screening U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and pre-clearance airports in Europe. Flights from Shannon and from Dublin to the U.S. are now treated like domestic flights in the US which means passengers will have no need to undergo further time consuming checks in any US airport. All customs, US immigration and agriculture clearance will now be completed before

⁵ Fáilte Ireland (2008). Tourism Facts 2009.

⁶ Data Source: IWA, Knock Airport.

passengers leave Ireland. In order to compete and deliver future transatlantic services to the BMW Region, IWA Knock Airport will need to be in a position to offer the same level of customer service facilities as are on offer in other airports in Ireland. This would also be an important aid to developing lucrative private aviation business between Ireland, Europe and the US e.g., as a refuelling stop of convenience.

In this regard, the withdrawal of support for air routes into the region by the Department of Transport is not a helpful development. Intra-regional connectivity is also an issue and public transport provision is poor especially in some of the more attractive but remote areas. Consideration should be given to seasonal 'tourist bus services and the opening up of more dedicated cycle routes.

The trend towards eco-tourism, wellness breaks and sustainable management of tourism resources require a shift towards low carbon tourism offerings and sustainable travel options for visitors.

We welcome the fact that despite the dissolution of the Regional Tourism Authorities, Fáilte Ireland still operates on a regional basis in terms of product development and home market promotions. This should continue.

4. Transport 21

The strategic framework for investment in transport infrastructure was provided in the 'Transport 21' investment plan 2006-2015, which was launched by the previous Government in November 2005. The aims of Transport 21 were to increase accessibility, sustainability, capacity, usage and quality (Department of Transport, 2008). It proposed to create an enhanced roads network that will promote regional and national competitiveness, the upgrading of the public transport system, particularly in Dublin, and the further development of airports and ports. The total planned investment was €34bn over a 10 year period, accounted for a significant part of the NDP 2007-13.

From a regional perspective, there was a commitment to upgrade key national primary and secondary routes; a commitment to the phased re-opening of parts of the Western Rail Corridor from Ennis to Claremorris by 2014; a commitment to develop the Atlantic Road Corridor, consistent with the development of an Atlantic Gateway; a commitment to increase funding to the regional airports in order to enhance international access to the regions; and, a commitment to double funding for rural transport initiatives. Much of this was informed by the National Spatial Strategy.

The Transport 21 strategy prioritised the completion of the five major inter-urban routes⁷ and an upgrade of the M50 Dublin ring road up to 2010, but did not set out a clear work programme and timescale for the upgrading of the outstanding sections of other national routes, including strategic cross-radial routes thereafter, nor was there a timescale to complete the Atlantic Road Corridor (Letterkenny/Derry to Waterford). This prioritisation strengthens accessibility to Dublin from the regional cities, while inter-gateway connectivity is of secondary importance, thus further consolidating the radial transport network emanating from Dublin. The public transport provisions continue to be weighted heavily in favour of

⁷ The five major inter-urban routes are the: M1 Dublin to Belfast; N6 Dublin to Galway; N7 Dublin to Limerick; N8 Dublin to Cork; and the N9 Dublin to Waterford.

investment in the Dublin area and apart from this, there is a limited commitment to public transport within the other designated gateways.

5. Public Transport

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 National Spatial Strategy (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.

A public transport strategy should be developed for each region to identify where demand/gaps currently exist and where there are opportunities to provide services on a more comprehensive efficient basis, subject to current budgetary constraints. In some areas, demand for public transport could be stimulated, if it were to be provided.

Evidence from the 2006 Census provided an insight into the travel to work patterns experience in Ireland (see the table below). These findings have demonstrated, the distances travelled to work by members of the labour force are broadly similar. The distances between 2-4 and 5-9 km are the most frequent distances travelled, and this is also the case in the S&E Region, with approximately 30% of workers in each area travelling between these distances.

There is, however, a significant difference in the percentage of the population who travel 50 kilometres or over to work in the BMW and S&E Regions. 8.1% of workers in the BMW Region travel this distance, as opposed to only 4.3% in the S&E Region, resulting in an overall State average of 5.3%. This difference stems mainly from the Midland Region, where nearly 12% of the workforce travel long distances to work. This statistic highlights the fact that the BMW Region is a predominantly rural area, resulting in longer travel distances to urban city areas for a large number of the labour force. It also highlights the unsustainable over-spill of Dublin-based commuters into the Midlands Region.

Area	Total Working Population	Distance Travelled to work as a Percentage of Area Population								
		0km	1km	2-4 km	5-9 km	10-14 km	15-24 km	25-49km	50km and over	Not Stated
Border	194,957	1.2%	8.0%	15.9%	13.1%	9.8%	11.7%	10.7%	7.6%	22.0%
Midland	109,903	1.3%	7.0%	14.4%	10.5%	9.5%	11.5%	11.1%	12.0%	22.6%
Western	178,058	1.1%	7.6%	15.1%	13.6%	10.2%	12.3%	12.2%	6.3%	21.5%
BMW Region	482,918	1.2%	7.6%	15.3%	12.7%	9.9%	11.9%	11.4%	8.1%	21.9%
S&E Region	1,409,869	1.0%	6.7%	15.5%	16.3%	12.0%	12.9%	10.0%	4.4%	21.2%
State	1,892,787	1.1%	6.9%	15.4%	15.4%	11.5%	12.6%	10.3%	5.3%	21.4%

Source: CSO Ireland, Census 2006 of Population

Rail Services

Strategic investment in the provision of rail services along with road infrastructure can significantly reduce the geographic marginalisation, particularly in the West and North 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.

The commitment of the previous Government to re-open the Western Rail Corridor (WRC) from Ennis to Claremorris and to preserve the alignment from Claremorris to Collooney was welcomed by the Regional 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. It should be progressed without further delay.** 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 being taken to progress the re-opening of the Athenry to Tuam section (scheduled for 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 proceed immediately.

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. **The Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport should support the proposed feasibility study to 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.

Galway city is the largest centre of concentrated economic activity in the BMW Region with growing numbers of commuters. The BMW Regional Assembly supported the proposal submitted to the Gateway Innovation Fund by the Galway Gateway Authorities to upgrade the rail track to a double track between Ceannt Station and Athenry. This would not only facilitate the development of further options and services for commuters to the city, but it would also facilitate the development of the WRC.

Bus Services

Given the dispersed nature of the population in the BMW Region the provision of a high frequency and consumer centred bus service remains crucial for the region. The on-going and prospective improvements in the BMW Region's road network provide further opportunities to develop a greater inter-urban service within the region.

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.

In order for public transport to offer a faster, reliable and alternative form of transport, it is essential that more Quality Bus Corridors (QBCs) are put in place in cities and gateway towns. We therefore welcomed the commitment in Transport 21 to the introduction of QBCs to Galway City and indeed, one of the key investment projects prioritised i.e., the creation of a transport corridor along the Seamus Quirke/Bishop O'Donnell Road, is ERDF co-financed under the BMW Gateways and Hubs Fund.

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.

Rural Transport

We welcome the mainstreaming of 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. Continued development and expansion of the RTI is central to tackling the issue of rural isolation particularly among older people.

6. National Roads

The ESRI⁸ recommended more than a decade ago 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 and also leading to more sustainable settlement patterns. 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 commuter catchment of the Greater Dublin Area and is contributing to the urban sprawl that exists. The completion of the five major inter-urban (MIU) motorways out of Dublin are further exacerbating this trend, with increased population growth along these corridors feeding into the Dublin Region, as evidenced by the preliminary findings of Census 2011. This unsustainable pattern of urban sprawl is starkly highlighted by the fact that⁹ *‘Dublin will soon occupy the same surface area as Los Angeles but with less than a quarter of its population’*

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.

As a counterbalancing measure, the establishment 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.**

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 and between gateways, adjacent hubs and their rural hinterlands. All road programmes under Transport 21 and/or its successor 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.

⁸ 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.

⁹ Urban Forum (2007). A Better Quality of Life For All.

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.

The commitment to develop the Atlantic Road Corridor 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. **A clear timescale should be set out in the Statement of Strategy 2011-14 for the 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 were no timescales provided for the upgrading of outstanding section of national and secondary routes from 2010 onwards. **It is crucial that roads investment projects for the BMW Region are prioritised and that a clear timeframe is established.**

7. Aviation Policy

One of the key objectives of the previous Statement of Strategy was to ensure the sustainable development of the State and Regional Airports, with the implementation of investment programmes in regional airports set as a key performance indicator. The recent decision to withdraw the PSO subsidy from a number of regional air routes does not appear to be consistent with this objective and is contrary to the objectives of the National Spatial Strategy.

The Irish Government is responsible for supporting economic and tourism development in all regions. **It is vital that a long-term Irish Aviation policy be developed that meets regional development needs and national development priorities. It should set out a clear role and establish targets for all non-DAA airports,** taking account of the particular role for the City of Derry Airport in the context of national policy, the NSS and Regional Planning Guidelines. It should outline the mechanisms through which these developmental targets can be achieved. By seeking to establish a flexible and transparent air transport policy for Ireland it will allow regional economies to take full advantage of opportunities arising in the changing operating environment and it should also ensure that bottlenecks and constraints do not restrict opportunities for enhanced accessibility to and from Ireland.

Dublin airport accounts for a disproportionate share of air journeys, developing routes out of airports at Cork, Shannon and Knock will reduced the unsustainable traffic volumes to and from Dublin airport. 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 who in turn will enable an increase in services. This will bring benefits for inward investment, indigenous enterprise

and tourism. **The government should develop an Air Access Strategy and National Aviation Policy to address existing problems and imbalances.**

8. Sustainable Transport

The spatial settlement patterns that emerged in Ireland as a result of rapid economic growth in the previous decade are unsustainable, whereby excessive concentration of economic activity has occurred along the east coast. The associated settlement patterns and population concentration that have emerged have led to:

- Massive growth in the use and ownership of private cars for transport and as a consequence increasing levels greenhouse gas emissions;
- Longer commuting distances/times; and
- Greater levels of congestion leading to reduced efficiency and increased operating costs for businesses.

A transport system with patterns of travel that is sustainable requires the implementation of **balanced spatial planning**, whereby settlement patterns are determined by a framework of spatial foresight planning and focused public investment that builds the capacity of regional centres, integrated with a transport system that delivers less motorised journeys, shorter travel distances and utilises more sustainable transport modes.

The persisting environmentally damaging urban sprawl and development patterns stemming from car dependence have led to the increasing isolation of residents in outlying suburbs, and an escalation in the distances travelled to carry out daily tasks. A poorly integrated transport system is also reducing employment opportunities and access to essential urban services. This policy seeks to increase the use of sustainable modes, and would see a reduction in air and noise pollution, curb development sprawl and see the enhancement of public space in our cities and regional centres.

A sustainable transportation system is one that:

- Allows the basic access needs of individuals and societies to be met safely and in a manner consistent with human and ecosystem health, and with equity within and between generations;
- Is affordable, operates efficiently, offers choice of transport mode, and supports a vibrant economy; and
- Limits emissions and waste within the planet's ability to absorb them, minimizes consumption of non-renewable resources, limits consumption of renewable resources to the sustainable yield level, reuses and recycles its components, and minimizes the use of land and the production of noise.

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.

9. Walking and Cycling

Compared with other European countries Ireland's cycling infrastructure is inadequate and this is reflected in the continuing drop in the number of people using bicycles as their chosen daily mode of transport this is also reflected in a decline in cycling tourism in Ireland. The needs of cyclists have mostly been set aside in favour of facilitating motor traffic.

Cycle lanes in urban areas (not only in GDA but nationally) are poorly planned, stop-start in nature and are often too narrow and too close to other forms of traffic for safe use. Existing cycle lanes are also poorly integrated with public transport, little provision is made to facilitate the carrying of bikes on trains and buses and there are few if any sheltered cycle parking at public transport interchanges. The rolling out of the Mullingar Cycle way network¹⁰, co-financed under the BMW ERDF Gateway and Hub Fund is a positive development that should be replicated in other major population centres across the country.

For the cycling tourist there are few if any traffic free routes to cater for touring cyclists wanting to leave cities to discover the countryside. The development of cycle tourism presents a particular opportunity to bring the economic benefits of tourism to rural Ireland.

The propensity to walk is not only influenced by distance but also the quality of the experience. People may be more willing to walk further where their surroundings are more attractive, safe and stimulating. This requires the provision of adequate surveillance, sight lines and appropriate lighting as well as landscaping factors. The government must agree on and adopt targets that help to develop sustainable communities and neighbourhoods. **The government must develop plans to improve the public spaces for walking in accordance with adopted targets, including infrastructure funding.**

10. Other Measures

EU Structural Funds

Some significant elements of transport investment are included in the Regional Operational Programmes 2007-13, especially in the BMW Region. Two road projects – N52 Tullamore bypass and the M6 Athlone to Ballinasloe motorway are included in the BMW Regional OP along with improvements in rail accessibility, safety and the purchase of railcars serving commuter towns in the Midlands. It is important that these co-funded projects are delivered effectively and that management and financial controls are in place to meet strict EU audit requirements.

Project Prioritisation

During 2009 Forfás prepared a set of Regional Competitiveness Agendas (RCAs) following widespread inter-agency consultation to assess how each region can strengthen its competitive environment in support of enterprise. The RCAs propose specific actions to address barriers to development and focus efforts on realising the potential of each region. These include key transport investments that should be prioritised for each of the NUTS III Regional authority areas. **The Department of Transport Statement of Strategy should have due regard to the prioritised regional investment plans produced by Forfás.**

¹⁰ For further information on this funds see <http://www.bmwassembly.ie/gateways/about.html>

Regional 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.

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 socioeconomic criteria, including spatial impacts**

11. Summary of Proposals

- 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.
- The increased volume of low-fare air services now available at the three State Airports is having an adverse spatial impact on tourism. This can be rebalanced by expanding air access to regionally located airports via new air services.
- The Statement of Strategy should give equal emphasis to regional and rural transport services and not be overly focussed upon transport provision in the Greater Dublin Area – regional and rural transport considerations need to be prioritised in parallel with urban transport needs.
- The spatial implications of all investment decisions should be taken into account, consistent with all of the objectives of the NSS and not just selected objectives.
- A public transport strategy should be developed for each region to identify where demand/gaps currently exist and where there are opportunities to provide services in a more comprehensive efficient basis, subject to current budgetary constraints.
- 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. It should be progressed without further delay.
- The Department of Transport Statement of Strategy should have due regard to the prioritised regional investment plans produced by Forfás.
- The Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport should support the proposed feasibility study to 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.
- 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
- 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.
- It is crucial that roads investment projects for the BMW Region are prioritised and that a clear timeframe for their completion, is established. A clear timescale

should be set out in the Statement of Strategy 2011-14 for the completion of the Atlantic Road Corridor.

- The government should develop an Air Access Strategy and National Aviation Policy to address existing problems and imbalances.
- It is vital that a long-term Irish Aviation policy be developed that meets regional development needs and national development priorities. It should set out a clear role and establish targets for all non-DAA airports
- The Department of Transport Statement of Strategy should have due regard to the prioritised regional investment plans produced by Forfás.
- 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 socioeconomic criteria, including spatial impacts