



Input to the National Planning Framework Final Consultation

Ireland 2040: Our Plan

November 2017

Building on *Ireland 2040 Our Plan: Issues and Choices* (February 2017), the All Ireland Smart Cities Forum welcomes the publication of the draft National Planning Framework (NPF) for final consultation. As noted by Minister with responsibility for Digital Development, Sean Kyne T.D., at the recent inaugural conference of the All Ireland Smart Cities Forum, “The increasing use of digital technologies is impacting on every aspect of our lives: from transport to education to leisure and entertainment, to health services, and beyond”, and that the increasing use of these technologies is “impacting on everyone – on individuals, on families, on businesses, on community” (13th September 2017). The digital revolution will strongly influence how our society and economy functions in the 21st Century.

A thematic objective of EU Cohesion policy 2014-2020 has been to increase access to, and the quality of, ICT products and services. Indeed, the creation of a fully functioning Digital Single market has been a core objective of the EU since 2014, with a strategy adopted in 2015 to support the growth of the digital economy. ESPON, its latest policy brief¹, notes how “Design tools and solutions are transforming public services amid how governments respond to citizens’ needs” (2017:2). The way we conduct business, interact and engage with each other has changed dramatically over the past two decades; with some commentators arguing that we have only touched the beginning of a digital change that will transform our societies. Having a long-term vision for the growth of Ireland is, therefore, essential – particularly as the country emerges from recession and there are already signs of significant pressures on existing infrastructures.

2040 is a long timeline in the context of technology innovation. Over the past decade, the disruption to traditional business models has been dramatic, including how we book accommodation (Airbnb), the sharing of cars (Uber), growth in video on demand (Netflix), the consumption of music (Spotify). Banking, government and cities are next in line for disruption as technology allows non-traditional models of service delivery emerge.

Key ‘Smart’ Messages from Draft NPF

The final draft National Planning Framework notes the growth opportunities stemming from the digital / knowledge economy in urban areas; with improved connectivity required to broaden the spatial reach of these opportunities – that is to grow smart regions, and smart towns and villages. Digital connectivity is seen as an instrumental tool in strengthening and diversifying rural towns; with the delivery of such connectivity dependent on a range of community, commercial and institutional bodies (p.21).

Broadband is an enabling infrastructure. The recognition of the opportunities for remote working and new enterprises stemming from digital infrastructure, and the innovation this generates, is welcomed; part. in context of the diversity it can bring to the rural economy – from e-farming and agri-tech, tourism, transport, bio-economy, multi-media and the creative industries – and the e-services it can generate (e.g. e-commerce, e-lawyering, e-health, e-governance, etc.).

The Forum welcomes the identification of a strong digital economy as a strategic outcome of the NPF; with such an economy being promoted and grown through the roll-out of the

¹ ESPON (2017). “*The territorial and urban dimensions of the digital transition of public services*”, Policy Brief, October 2017, Luxembourg: ESPON.

Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP), developing cities as 5G demonstrators and promoting the state as an international base for data centres.

The acknowledgement that transitioning to a low carbon, sustainable energy-based economy requires further investment in smart energy systems and electric transport fleets is positive. This agenda, which is gathering pace at both a European and international level, has implications for how we plan for future service and infrastructure needs. This requires more focused discussions at all levels of government, and with industry; and a coordination of policy.

Further Considerations

The smart agenda has a key role to play in connecting people and places; particularly in areas where investment in physical infrastructure has been poor over the past two to three decades. Digital infrastructure, for example, is key to delivering better connected services and a diversification in economic growth. High-speed broadband is one aspect of this key infrastructure requirement (sustainable transport being the other) – and we urge the Government to speed-up the roll-out of broadband infrastructure, specifically the NBP. Broadband is not only essential for businesses but increasingly for schools and higher education institutes, but for health and welfare service delivery, smart energies and changing mobility patterns.

As in its original submission, the All Ireland Smart Cities Forum notes that the NPF envisages that the population of Ireland will increase by one million; with effective regional policy being to direct this growth to regional cities as a way to balance economic and social growth. This is understandable as cities have always been the engine for regional economic prosperity, as cities prosper so does the region in which they serve. The Forum contends that a greater use of information and communication technologies is one part of the solution to effective regional development in that it will (i) allow for greater interaction with citizens, (ii) be the basis for new data-driven urban services and, (iii) be that basis for the efficient management of city assets, i.e. smart cities. But this is not to say that there is no role for Smart Towns, Smart Villages or Smart Regions. Such concepts should not be set against each other; but seen as mutually complementary – supporting and reinforcing each other. Indeed, the European Commission is currently progressing an EU Action for Smart Villages, central to which is overcoming the digital divide. In finalising the NPF, the Forum recommends:

- Reference be made to the Smart Villages initiative in Chapter 4, 'Planning for Diverse Rural Areas'
- Reference be made to the Wifi4EU scheme currently being offered by the EU to improve internet connectivity in local communities on a geographically balanced basis
- Consideration be given to the management and storage of all the data generated by smart instruments
- Cities own or control a myriad of assets, such as lamp-posts and buildings, which are essential to the implementation of smart services. Policies that regulate and simplify the use of such assets needs to be drafted
- Commitment of greater supports and resources to Councils so they can build the competencies needed to manage this complex ecosystem; the success of Smart Dublin and Cork Smart Gateway, as local authority-led initiatives being demonstrators of what can be achieved when resources are dedicated to the 'smart' agenda.

Emerging digital ecosystems will necessitate a rethink in how we plan our settlements, how we work, and how we live on a daily basis. Ireland is currently lagging behind in this debate –and the opportunities it affords. How, for example, are our cities and towns planning for the migration towards electric vehicles? The Forum would welcome further consideration of these shifting agendas, which are growing in terms of global priority and timelines, in the NPF.

While the draft Framework calls for full interconnection between the fibre networks in Northern Ireland and Ireland, there is no discussion on how or when this will happen. This is a key question for the all-island economy, and the rural economies of the border counties. The Forum proposes the development of pilot zones for such integration; these can be centred on existing initiatives such as:

- The 'digital corridor' between Monaghan and Armagh
- Project Kelvin linkages between Derry and Donegal.

As noted by ESPON, the challenges faced by cities, regions and communities in engaging in the process of digital transformation are varied – and can only be addressed through investment, both technological and skills-based. We ask the Government to recognise this in the forthcoming National Investment Plan, and indeed other funding resources such as INTERREG VI.

Ireland's ageing population must be supported with new technologies that empower people to live longer, healthier and happier while also removing some of the constraints on our health system.

The Internet of Things (IoT), or how we connect every-day things to the Internet, offers a real opportunity for cities and countries to deliver more efficient and responsive services while also allowing for much better engagement of citizens. Policy is failing to keep pace with the opportunities presented by IoT – including in the space of spatial planning. It is being suggested that we are on the verge of a fourth industrial revolution; consideration must be given to what this means for the future design of cities, towns and communities incl. the role of tools such as Building Information Management (BIM), development of real time 3-D models, and virtual reality simulations so that citizens can better understand, visualise and respond to the planning process

Possibly a point more relevant to the Regional Assemblies in their development and implementation of Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSEs), supports are required to assist cities, towns and villages in their digital transition and roll- out of actions contained within the respective Digital Strategies of each Local Authority, all of which are to be tailored to the specific needs of each council area.

Concluding Remarks

By taking a considered approach to the smart agenda, and what this means in terms of service delivery, infrastructure investment, economic growth, innovation, and regeneration, central, regional and local government can drive forward the competitiveness of our cities and regions. There is currently a wealth of smart projects upon which to build – there is therefore

an onus to document innovations and experiences to date together with the economic and wider social outcomes of such initiatives.

The World Economic Forum sums up the scale of change that is ahead in the 2015 report: Six technology mega-trends shaping the future of society²: “The developments in digital technology of recent years are truly dramatic and their implications far-reaching. And while no-one understands all the changes these developments will bring, most individuals, many business and governmental leaders, and society as a whole, are not really cognizant of or prepared for the shifts to come”. The speed of various aspects of the transition are hard to predict, but it is not difficult to see that our world will function quite differently 10-15 years from now.

Whether its 2030 or 2040, it is clear that the world as we know it is in for change. Ireland has always positioned itself as an innovation nation/island and as such we need to step up and embrace these future trends to secure the economic future of our Island. We need to be able to attract the right type of talent and to ensure that we have some of the best quality of living conditions in the world regardless of whether we choose to live in a city or a rural part of the country.

The smart agenda will generate opportunities to pursue a more balanced regional economic development approach delivered through new communications and connectivity infrastructures. The All Ireland Smart Cities Forum is committed to supporting Government in this.

In planning for the next twenty years, it is essential that the implications of any development on infrastructure is considered – especially digital ecosystems – and that this, in turn, is aligned to the National Investment Plan for Ireland.

² <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2015/09/6-technology-mega-trends-shaping-the-future-of-society/>

All Ireland Smart Cities Forum

The All Ireland Smart Cities Forum is a community of practice focused on the advancement of cities in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland through the deployment of, and value creation from, technology enabled urban services (i.e. smart programmes). It is characterised by practitioners with a common sense of purpose who agree to work together to solve problems, share knowledge, cultivate best practice and foster innovation. The cities involved in the Forum are:

- Smart Dublin (represented by the four local authorities)
- Waterford City and County
- Cork City and Cork Smart Gateway
- Limerick City and County
- Galway City
- Derry City and Strabane
- Belfast City.

Each city is represented by one senior official from the relevant local authority and/or a representative from their smart city programme office or equivalent.

The use of technology is viewed as an enabler of social and economic good and, as such, city participants will, through this Forum, represent their perspectives irrespective of their own functional expertise. It is recognised that there is a diversity in cities across the island of Ireland in terms of urban and or regional responsibilities.

The main principle of the Forum is to be citizen-focused. All objectives and tasks originating from the Forum will adhere to the principle of: *city users as customers*.

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