

The National Spatial Strategy

Indications for the Way Ahead

PUBLIC CONSULTATION PAPER





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Introduction

This is a public consultation paper to stimulate debate and to seek the views of the public on the emerging indications as to how Ireland could be developed in a more balanced spatial way.

The National Spatial Strategy (NSS) has been under development since January 2000. Much progress has been made in two distinct, but complementary, areas.

- (1) A large amount of research has been completed into the way Ireland has developed over the past twenty years or so, and especially in the last decade, giving particular attention to spatial patterns of development.
- (2) There has been a wide range of consultation and debate with the public, Government Departments, public agencies, social partners, regional and local bodies.

Following this research and consultation, the broad elements of a framework for the NSS are emerging. These point the way towards its definitive formulation by the end of this year.

This Paper marks the third phase of public consultation on the NSS. Two previous phases of consultation have taken place on the basis of:

- (1) An initial consultation document “*What are the Issues?* – Consultation Paper No.1”, designed to establish generally what issues people felt the NSS should address.
- (2) Regional roadshows and other events to brief people on progress in preparing the NSS and give them an opportunity to raise issues directly relevant to their own particular areas.

The preparation of the NSS is now at an important juncture. Work on completing the project will be guided by the framework emerging from this Consultation Paper and the responses to it. It is therefore essential that the broad elements of this Paper be discussed and debated as widely as possible.

You are invited to consider the broad concepts and approaches set out in this document. In responding, you are asked to indicate if you are doing so in an individual capacity or as a member of a group or organisation.

Your responses will be used to develop and refine the broad approach on which the National Spatial Strategy will be based and to frame more detailed spatial policies to be included in the strategy.

The closing date for submissions is the 31st October, 2001. Submissions can be sent to:

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This document is available on the National Spatial Strategy website and comments can be forwarded electronically through the website. The website address is: www.irishspatialstrategy.ie

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Section



Purpose of the National Spatial Strategy

1.1 What is the National Spatial Strategy?

The National Spatial Strategy (NSS) is about people and places – the places where people live, the places where they work, and how people move between one and the other. It is also about how we utilise, to best effect, the territory of the State and its land and sea resources, including in the wider context of the island of Ireland. In essence, the NSS is about how we can best influence the relationship between the location of people and these resources to ensure a sustainable and competitive economy, the highest environmental standards and a good quality of life.

There have been many different national social and economic plans in Ireland over the years. However, the formulation of these plans has not normally addressed how social and economic development can affect different places in different ways. By adding a spatial dimension to social and economic planning, a broader understanding of the implications of sectoral policies can emerge.

Over the past few decades, spatial planning has been carried out almost exclusively within the confines of local authorities at city and county level. More recently, a regional dimension to spatial planning has been emerging with the preparation of “Strategic Planning Guidelines” to inform and guide better co-ordination between local authorities.

The NSS is intended to provide for the first time an explicit overall national framework for dealing with spatial issues, within a sustainable national economic and budgetary context and within an island of Ireland perspective, which can contribute to the enhancement of national competitiveness and a high quality environment. In particular, the NSS is designed to improve the effectiveness of public investment in infrastructure and other relevant services around the country.

Public policy alone will not, of course, achieve the objectives of the National Spatial Strategy. The market, through private sector investment decisions and individual choices, will also have a vital role to play, but public policy can influence such decisions and choices.

As its title states, the three defining features of the NSS will be:

- ➔ it will be **National** – the NSS cannot attempt the same level of detail as a local authority land-use plan but it will provide a framework for regional, county and city plans;
- ➔ it will be **Spatial** – the NSS is concerned with patterns of population, the scale and nature of activities and services necessary to influence and create sustainable locational choices, the location of different activities in which people engage and the interaction between these;
- ➔ it will be a **Strategy** – the NSS will deal with the “big picture” and suggest a framework and policy guidance for the long term development of Ireland.

1.2 Why Do We Need a National Spatial Strategy?

Ireland has been economically and socially transformed over the past decade. The scale and speed of this transformation are remarkable. During the 10 years 1990-2000:

- the number of people living in the State grew by 250,000 to nearly 3.8 million; the highest population level since 1881;
- the number at work grew by 500,000 – from a level of just over 1 million;
- cars on the road have increased by 50%;
- waste volumes have increased by 50%;
- annual overseas visitors have doubled;
- the value of annual exports has grown six-fold;
- the paramilitary cease-fires were declared in Northern Ireland and the Good Friday Agreement concluded, providing for new North/South institutions and prompting increased interaction between North and South on the island of Ireland.

Against this background, it is hardly surprising that the systems and services needed to support Ireland's economic and social activity have been coming under stress. There is increasing awareness that economic progress, while a precondition for material well-being, also gives rise to new challenges:

- The Greater Dublin Area¹ has experienced rapid development, which has driven a great deal of the economic success of the past number of years, thereby delivering vital national benefits. However, its pace of progress has placed a particularly heavy burden of development pressures and traffic congestion on the City and its surrounding area. These call for an effective planning and infrastructural response;
- There has been significant development along the Dublin-Belfast economic corridor. While this is very welcome in itself, it has also reinforced the eastwards pull on the spatial distribution of development and population within both the State and the island of Ireland;
- Many other parts of the country have also advanced economically, but the level of growth has not been as high as experienced in the Greater Dublin Area. Many of these areas have yet to reach their optimal potential in terms of offering competitive and sustainable locations for economic activity and a high quality of life. It will be necessary to complement Dublin's critical national and international role and deliver a better spatial distribution of national economic success;
- There are increasingly difficult choices to be made in relation to the protection and use of scarce environmental resources and the location of key facilities – evident in differing views about rural housing, the location of waste facilities and routes for motorways;
- A wide range of job opportunities is only available in a limited number of locations.

If unresolved, these challenges will affect quality of life, our national economic competitiveness and the physical environment. More importantly, the extensive research carried out in Stage 2 of the NSS indicates that some of these challenges could become even more significant given projections and trends such as:

- The population of the State could grow by over 1 million by the year 2020, by which time the population of the island of Ireland could exceed 6 million.
- Over 80% of the population growth in the State could take place in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) with only marginal growth and possibly decline in other areas.

¹ This refers to the area including Dublin County Borough and all of the Counties of Dun Laoghaire Rathdown, Fingal, Kildare, Meath, South Dublin and Wicklow.

- ➔ The number of cars using our roads is likely to double over the 1996 – 2016 period.
- ➔ Use of sustainable transport modes like walking, cycling and public transport could continue to fall in relative terms.
- ➔ The fact that a large proportion of housing completions is taking place outside towns and villages places greater distance between people and their work, increases dependence on the private car, weakens the justification for service provision and threatens the quality of the rural environment.

Many of these projections and trends indicate that while economic progress has been rapid, its geographical - or *spatial* - distribution will continue to be unbalanced in many respects. This could adversely affect our international competitiveness because of impacts upon the attractiveness of areas, particularly in relation to skilled workforces that are increasingly mobile. A realisation is growing that there is now a need for more “balanced development” – balance across socio-economic groups, balance between economic growth, overall quality of life and the environment, and balance in terms of spatial or geographic locations.

Trends towards unbalanced development were identified in the Government’s policy document, Sustainable Development: A Strategy for Ireland (1997), the White Paper on Rural Development (1999), the Economic and Social Research Institutes document “National Investment Priorities 2000 – 2006” and Development Strategies 2000-2006, prepared for the Southern and Eastern Region and the Border, Midland and Western Regions (1999). In response to these trends, the National Development Plan 2000-2006 (NDP) set, as one of its four core objectives, balanced regional development – recognising the need for a more balanced pattern of development and a reduction in disparities between regions. The draft Regional Strategic Framework for Northern Ireland, *Shaping Our Future*, also recognises the need to achieve a reasonable balance of development across Northern Ireland.

The increasing awareness of the need for a more spatially balanced type of development is not confined to Ireland. It is shared at European level where the development of all parts of Europe in a balanced way, with policy options appropriate to local circumstances, whether at the core or periphery of the EU, is being informed by the European level framework known as the European Spatial Development Perspective² (ESDP).

1.3 What will the NSS Contribute?

The NSS is the means by which Government is seeking to spell out in more detail what could be achieved over the next 20 years through a more balanced form of development and to address the issues necessary to allow this to come about.

The NSS will:

- ➔ Specify broad spatial planning objectives and guiding principles;
- ➔ Select a small number of new gateway centres on the basis of the roles these gateways must be equipped to play if the country is to achieve more balanced regional development;
- ➔ Establish principles of good spatial planning practice to inform how the location of people and employment and the use of environmental resources can best serve national competitiveness, sustainability and a high quality of life;
- ➔ Set a national context for spatial planning at regional and county level, by informing both regional strategic planning guidelines³ and county and city development plans;

² ESDP: Towards Balanced and Sustainable Development of the Territory of the European Union – Published by the European Commission 1999.

³ Strategic Planning Guidelines already exist for the Greater Dublin Area.

- ➔ Provide a framework, in conjunction with the draft Regional Strategic Framework for Northern Ireland, *Shaping our Future*, for the spatial dimension of the development of an island economy throughout the island of Ireland;
- ➔ Inform strategic infrastructure policy decisions, by taking account of and highlighting the relationship between infrastructure and the economy, patterns of development within it, and quality of life;
- ➔ Guide Government Departments and agencies in formulating and implementing policies which have a strong spatial dimension or which may otherwise be affected by spatial considerations, so that all public investment decisions support the achievement of balanced regional development;
- ➔ Guide the private sector in the making of investment decisions and individual choices by offering greater certainty, since public policy alone will not achieve the objectives of the National Spatial Strategy.

The NSS is not an economic and social development plan similar to the National Development Plan (NDP). It will, however, inform implementation of the NDP and the shape and strategies of future National Development Plans as well as complementing other strategies and plans.

1.4 A Guiding Vision for the National Spatial Strategy

As a long term strategy, the NSS must be guided by a vision of what it is designed to achieve. This vision sees Ireland as a place where the following ideals can be increasingly realised over time:

- ➔ Consolidating peace in the island of Ireland and on that stable basis, developing political, economic and social interaction within the island;
- ➔ Continuing national economic and employment growth;
- ➔ Continuing improvement in Ireland's international competitiveness;
- ➔ Fostering balanced regional development;
- ➔ Improving the quality of life for all sections of society; and
- ➔ Maintaining and enhancing the quality and diversity of the natural environment and cultural heritage.

This will permit the pattern of future development to be set within a context which will accord with the Government's overall aims on sustainable development⁴. Sustainable development can be defined in the overall sense of integrating:

- ➔ *Environmental Sustainability* – living within the capacity of natural environmental systems,
- ➔ *Economic Sustainability* – ensuring continued prosperity and employment opportunities,
- ➔ *Social Sustainability* – ensuring greater opportunities to participate in economic success in a way that adds to personal well - being and quality of life.

The vision takes account of the outcomes from the public consultations which have already taken place. A summary of the topics frequently recurring in the course of those consultations is presented in **Box 1**.

⁴ These are set out in *Sustainable Development – A Strategy for Ireland* published by the Department of the Environment and Local Government in 1997.

Box 1 | Frequently Recurring Topics from Public Consultation

(i). Quality of Life

- An overriding concern for many people in terms of its perceived deterioration.

(ii). Transport

- Present systems of public transport insufficient for the growing numbers of users.
- Perception of poor accessibility and availability of public transport in rural areas.
- The inadequate condition of many national road routes.

(iii). Employment Prospects

- Job losses, particularly outside the main cities.
- Employment options in rural areas tending to be confined.
- Large companies are not eager to locate outside of Dublin because of concerns on poor infrastructure and unavailability of skilled staff.

(iv). Declining Populations in Rural Areas

- Linked to poor job prospects, lack of public transport and lack of recreational facilities for young people.
- Long distance commuting from rural areas tending to fragment rural communities.

(v). Access to Health/Education Facilities

- Good access to hospitals and universities via private or public transport is required.

(vi). Fitting the NSS in with other Plans and Programmes

- Will the NSS fit in with county and city development plans and other strategic plans?
- How will different programmes work along side each other and in the process, how will the objectives of the NSS be translated into results on the ground?

(vii). Scope of the NSS

- Less developed areas may not be given as much priority as areas that are better developed economically.
- On the other hand we must not become diverted from sustaining present growth in areas which are doing well.

1.5 Guiding Principles for the NSS

The task of realising the ideals of the vision requires the setting out of a series of common broad and strategic guiding principles which will provide a context for more detailed policies. Ten Guiding Principles are put forward and are shown in **Box 2**.

Box 2 | Guiding Principles for the NSS

- To provide an integrated spatial framework for policies progressing economic and social development and enhancing quality of life.
- To optimise and sustain the overall economic performance of the country by affording all areas of the country the opportunity to develop to their potential.
- To facilitate and underpin the development of an island economy in the island of Ireland and accompanying social and human interaction, in the interests of yielding benefits for the whole island.
- To manage our natural environment and cultural heritage in a sustainable manner.
- To emphasise the special and distinctive attributes of rural society and ensure the vitality of rural areas.
- To seek to create new development opportunities in the BMW region and the structurally weaker areas of the S&E region.
- To counteract the population drift to the Greater Dublin Area by promoting appropriate employment opportunities in other parts of the country as well.
- To consolidate and enhance the international competitiveness of Dublin and the other main cities.
- To prepare and respond to the likely structural economic and social changes developing from the information age society.
- To ensure that the NSS is capable of effective and realistic implementation at national, regional and local levels.

These principles may appear to be somewhat abstract. The NSS must ultimately be about people, their prospects and quality of life. To translate some of these principles into what they might mean in practice for people and their families, some important and desirable outcomes of an NSS would be:

- bringing people and their jobs closer together, reducing the commuting distances which have emerged over the last decade;
- reducing the level of migration of young people towards the East coast, by providing them with education and employment opportunities nearer the regions they come from;
- helping people from North and South in the island of Ireland to move back and forth within the island and thus to meet and interact more;

- providing a wider variety of employment and leisure options for the smaller urban centres and for rural areas;
- improving accessibility to facilities and services;
- lower levels of congestion in the major urban areas;
- a higher quality environment in both urban and rural areas.

Having set out the purpose, vision and principles of the NSS, the following chapter sets out suggestions for the approach it could take to achieving balanced regional development.



Balanced Regional Development
An Approach

Section 2

This section sets out:

- Important *lessons* from the work to date on the NSS in terms of (a) the types of broad spatial trends that are apparent and (b) what is driving these trends;
- Key *concepts* arising from this work that point to the critical constituents of balanced regional development; and
- The broad basis of an *approach* which could be used to deliver balanced regional development in a way that best suits Irish conditions.

2.1 What We Know Now – Spatial Trends and Issues

A frequently held view of spatial trends in Ireland is one of “Dublin versus the Rest” - a perception that Dublin is gaining most of the benefits and that the rest of the country is losing out. While the balance issue is accepted, it must be equally acknowledged that Dublin is a vital national asset and that its current problems must be solved both for the benefit of Dublin itself and for the wider country which has Dublin as its capital city. Dublin’s success has much to do with its population, scale and the mix and clustering of the types of labour pools, education, transport links and informal networks of people and enterprise which have enabled rapid economic progress and inward investment to take place.

Another view sees urban and rural areas as separate entities. Again, consistent with emerging thinking at European and international levels, it is essential to avoid urban rural dichotomy and to see the urban and rural sectors as interdependent. Cities and towns are important not just for themselves, but are also vital for the suburban and rural hinterlands. The NSS will be about urban and rural, not urban versus rural. It will, therefore, have a strong focus on whole areas, not just on particular cities or towns.

One of the reasons the NSS requires a substantial period of preparation is to ensure that spatial policy is based on a thorough understanding of how and why Ireland is functioning and developing as it does in a spatial sense. Work undertaken in the preparation of the NSS gives the following overall indications of what has been happening spatially:

- Dublin is rapidly developing, expanding and delivering vital national economic benefits, particularly in terms of attracting internationally mobile investment and sustaining a strong level of indigenous activity. However, the nature of Dublin’s rapid development and expansion (particularly westwards), in contrast to the comparative weakness of other areas, is tending to encourage long-distance and mainly car-based commuting, which in turn is worsening traffic congestion and reducing the quality of the environment.
- Rapid growth of the other four main cities and their regions (Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford) points to their possible role in driving the development of their extensive hinterlands and their potential to provide a strong counterbalance to Dublin.
- Dynamic development is occurring along the Dublin-Belfast economic corridor, under the stimulus of the cease-fires in Northern Ireland and the stability brought about by the Good Friday Agreement.
- Some urban and rural areas are characterised by the presence of strong and sometimes linked towns and are showing signs of growing economic strength, a diversifying employment base and a developing range of infrastructure.

- Some high amenity rural areas are attracting strong levels of tourism and recreational usage and in many cases high levels of non-farming residents moving into these areas. These areas are experiencing some population increases, a diversifying employment base and certain development pressures, particularly in coastal or lakeshore areas.
- Other towns, though often quite close to one another, are relatively independent. This tends to weaken the overall urban structure of the area concerned, since no single, individual centre emerges with the necessary strength to compete for major investment and jobs for the region. The challenge here is to find a way of planning for these towns and their associated rural hinterlands to allow stronger centres to emerge, while also building on the successes of the existing structure.
- In many rural areas, the combination of a high dependency on a changing agricultural base, a scarcity of alternative employment opportunities (such as in tourism, industry and services), and the resultant out-migration, has weakened their demographic, economic, social and physical structure. These areas tend to coincide with the parts of the country where the urban structure is weakest.
- In areas along the border with Northern Ireland, economic and infrastructure links affected by the Troubles in Northern Ireland over a period of thirty years are being restored, with increasing momentum, under the impetus of a range of regional cross-border bodies and the new North/South Institutions.

Within these spatial development patterns, what, in particular, are the factors at work in an area which is economically successful?

- (1) Concentration of economic performance in Dublin and the other main cities has been driven by factors such as the availability of very large and skilled workforces, capacity for innovation and learning, role of transport hubs giving international access and an attractive and dynamic physical, social and business environment.
- (2) Outside the main cities, areas which display economic strength tend to have at their heart strong urban centres. The capacity for development of business at the regional level is driven by benefits derived from exchange of information, collaboration, innovation, adoption of best practices and mobilisation of finance and skills, which collectively can be termed entrepreneurship. This develops with particular success in urban centres, particularly those that are at least medium sized. The presence of such centres, within a complementary and well linked hierarchy, allows this to flourish. However, in many parts of the country such an urban structure is not present.
- (3) The rural areas which are diversifying have developed activities such as tourism and other rural business activities, often exploiting local resources such as attractive landscapes, with smaller towns and villages also playing a vital role.

More specifically research has shown that the vital factors linked to an area's economic success include:

- Entrepreneurial spirit.
- Enthusiasm of key economic, political and social interest groups to act together in moving forward.
- Presence of a certain level of population;
- Presence of a certain level of resources - economic, social and environmental;
- Ease and cost of access to domestic and foreign markets;
- A modern telecommunications network at a level which has the capacity to support the area's likely development;

- ➔ Back-up research and technology infrastructure accessible to enterprises in all sectors;
- ➔ A high quality environment;
- ➔ A well developed educational system;
- ➔ A highly qualified and skilled work force;
- ➔ High quality physical infrastructure, including inter-urban transport and energy transmission systems;
- ➔ An adequate supply of housing;
- ➔ A good overall quality of life.

The presence of these factors in a concentrated area, or areas that are linked by good transport, supports a strong and sustainable economic performance, which in turn can drive development in the wider urban and rural hinterlands. Typically in the most successful areas all of these factors will be present. These are the larger urban areas or combinations of urban areas such as the Limerick-Ennis-Shannon corridor. As the work done to date for the NSS also tells us, these factors, in terms of the appropriate combination and scale required, can only be assembled in a small number of places at the same time. This has implications for future policy.

2.2 Pointers for an Approach

In looking towards balanced regional development, the foregoing analysis suggests a targeted approach based on the focussed strengthening of a small number of urban centres. This small number of stronger urban centres will be the key to:

- ➔ energising the contribution different areas can make to balanced regional development;
- ➔ facilitating the development of North/South interaction;
- ➔ counterbalancing the eastwards pull of the Greater Dublin Area and the Dublin-Belfast corridor;
- ➔ supporting complementary roles for urban and rural areas; and
- ➔ lifting the level of development of entire areas.

Such a targeted approach will depend for its success on a number of important concepts such as:

- ➔ *Areas* that are defined in terms of the relationship between places,
- ➔ *Potential* of areas in terms of developing economic and other resources, and
- ➔ *Critical mass*, the prime means of developing this potential
- ➔ *Gateways*, and means of creating critical mass, and
- ➔ *Linkages*, in terms of the critical importance of access.

These concepts are now examined and explained.

2.3 Important Concepts

(1) Functional Areas

Ireland is normally viewed, in a spatial sense, in terms of two jurisdictions (the State and Northern Ireland), counties and provinces or regions, which have legal or administrative boundaries. Such boundaries can often mask the ways in which different places relate to each other - the social, economic and spatial relationships such as patterns of journeys to work and catchments for shopping, social facilities and amenities or schools.

The work completed to date for the NSS suggests that spatial trends and patterns of activity and development in Ireland can be seen in terms of distinct areas containing cities or towns and their hinterlands that are loosely defined in terms of boundaries. Typically, these are areas that tend to share common characteristics and issues, where people live their working, schooling, shopping and leisure lives, and with which many can identify. This sense of identification spans the urban/rural divide and frequently extends across county boundaries. Over the past decade, as violence in Northern Ireland has tapered off, such identification has also begun again to span the border between the State and Northern Ireland.

Some of these areas, where there is a strongly dominant characteristic, such as the commuting catchment of a major city, are easier to identify than others. Another noteworthy feature is the merging of the various areas at their edges. All these areas also contain an urban centre or a number of centres, which are central to the economic functioning of that area. There is also a recognised interdependence between the urban centre or centres and other parts of the overall area.

Patterns like these suggest the delineation of twelve such *Functional Areas*, as shown in the Map in Appendix 1. (This view of the way Ireland functions spatially might be considered to contrast with the 8 regions for NUTS III⁵ purposes, which are based on aggregated county units. However, the identification of 12 Functional Areas, while important for the purposes of the NSS, is not necessarily intended to require adjustment of existing NUTS III or any other regional administrative boundaries).

Viewing the State in terms of Functional Areas provides a way of:

- Understanding the relationship between different places as a starting point for seeking ways in which the potential of areas might be developed, and
- Helping to maximise the impact of a targeted approach.

This leads into the other central concepts for the NSS – *Potential, Critical Mass, Gateways and Linkages* – and in turn to a possible approach to *Balanced Regional Development* itself.

(2) Potential

What is potential? The types of economic activity in an area, the nature of its urban and rural areas, its people, skills and resources, all comprise potential for economic and social progress and development. Potential might be defined therefore, as:

The capacity which an area possesses for development arising from its endowment of natural resources, population, labour, economic and social capital and location relative to markets.

Different areas have differing types and degrees of potential. The NSS must explore how the level of potential that an area is capable of sustaining can be strengthened and built upon. Critical mass is an important concept in achieving this.

⁵ See Glossary

(3) Critical Mass

Critical mass is:

The size, concentration and characteristics of population that enable a range of services and facilities to be supported and which, in turn, can attract and support higher levels of economic activity.

This in turn tends to enlarge the population and so further supports a strengthening of services and facilities. It represents the achievement of a state of development that permits the beginning of a chain reaction of onward growth and development.

As already indicated, this has already been seen to some extent in Ireland with the success and rapid growth of the Dublin area in particular. While creating certain challenges for the country spatially, Dublin's experience provides lessons, which are relevant to the achievement of balanced regional development. Dublin's success has much to do with its population, the mix and clustering of the types of labour pools, education, transport links and networks of people and enterprise which provided the scale or "*critical mass*" to enable rapid economic progress to take place.

Critical mass can be achieved in different ways. It will normally require a concerted effort to develop a single town or city to play a larger role and deliver benefits to its wider hinterland. Alternatively, in some cases it might involve providing the right type of support to enable a number of neighbouring towns, possibly including towns or cities across the border with Northern Ireland, to co-operate in order to become stronger.

In some EU countries, e.g. Denmark, spatial planning has been successfully used to identify the strengths of areas and to explore possibilities for linking urban centres through excellent transport and co-operative arrangements in order to establish critical mass and provide effective counter-magnets to larger cities.

The same level of critical mass cannot be achieved everywhere. Concentration of critical mass to achieve stronger centres and thereby the development of associated areas is a crucial dynamic in bringing about more balanced regional development. This will necessarily involve difficult choices of deciding how and where to concentrate efforts. However, concentrating on creating critical mass in particular places will achieve more benefits for their wider hinterlands and for the country as a whole, in terms of enhancing the range of competitive locations for development, than would an approach that attempts to spread efforts too widely.

(4) Gateways, Other Urban Centres and Rural Areas

The National Development Plan has identified Dublin, Cork, Limerick/Shannon, Galway and Waterford as existing Gateways. Gateways are seen as centres which have a strategic location relative to a surrounding area. They possess good social and economic infrastructure and support services and have the ability to energise their surrounding zones of influence through, for example, good transport links, which enable other centres of various sizes and rural areas to play complementary roles.

There are specific attributes common to these centres. Learning from their success and replicating them so as to establish additional nationally and internationally competitive locations for investment could have a vital

role in promoting more balanced regional development. The attributes that characterise the existing gateways include:

- Civic vision and enthusiasm of key interest groups to act together in moving forward, combined with strategies for physical, economic and social development and environmental protection.
- A large population in both the urban centre and its broader functional area,
- Regional and/or national centres of learning,
- Clustering of a large number of businesses and firms with a strong presence of larger firms and those involved in rapidly developing sectors,
- Acting as a focal point for national, regional and public and private transport systems, with easy access to the national rail network, airports with daily scheduled flights and deepwater ports,
- Public and private urban transport systems with improving facilities for pedestrians and cyclists,
- Comprehensive facilities for healthcare and persons with special needs,
- Regional cultural venues such as theatres, galleries, arts and sports centres,
- Extensive zoned and serviced land banks for land uses including residential and industrial development,
- Water supply, wastewater disposal systems and a receiving environment capable of accommodating current water services requirements and major additional requirements into the future,

A key component of the NSS will be to facilitate further development of the existing Gateways. In addition to these Gateways, there are certain emerging larger urban centres which may not yet have all the attributes referred to above, but which nonetheless are showing a capacity to lift the level of development within their respective areas. Centres such as these can play a key role in achieving more balanced regional development by offering locations for investment that are nationally and internationally competitive. The resultant better spatial distribution of economic growth within the country will enable resources to be utilised more effectively and alleviate pressure on the other larger urban centres.

The NSS will apply criteria and development principles derived from the above attributes in selecting a small number of these emerging larger urban centres as additional Gateways.

Looking at Ireland, Dublin⁶ (1996 population: 1 million) is much larger than any other urban centre in the State. The other Gateways, Cork (population 180,000) Limerick (80,000) Galway (60,000) and Waterford (45,000) had a combined population in 1996 equal to 38% of Dublin's population. The Irish towns below 40,000 in population are generally concentrated in the east and southeast and many of these are now part of or very close to the Greater Dublin Area. Four towns in the 10,000 to 39,000 category are located in relatively remoter parts of the country. Two large towns have strong links to towns across the border with Northern Ireland. Centres below 10,000 population and especially below 5,000 in population are more evenly spread.

In contrast with the population levels of the existing Gateways, particularly centres such as Galway, Limerick and Waterford, other towns outside the Greater Dublin Area are much smaller i.e. generally under 20,000 in population. This indicates that such centres would, over time, have to grow by multiples of their present size to take on the characteristics and roles of even the smaller existing gateways.

Developmental prospects for different areas must take account of current levels of potential, critical mass, and the capacity of the local environment to cope with substantial expansion. These factors suggest tailored solutions for different areas with most centres following a more organic rate of growth than the Gateways.

⁶ Dublin refers to the census enumeration area, which includes Tallaght, Lucan, Clondalkin and Blanchardstown but not Swords, Malahide, Portmarnock or Bray.

Taking into account the actual scale of population growth capable of being attracted to the new gateways, the practicalities and investment involved in making new gateways work and the need to ensure a significant contribution to balanced regional development, only a small number, 3 or 4, of new gateways are indicated.

The Gateway approach will help create a dynamic for the growth of the Gateways themselves, the growth of other towns and rural areas within functional areas and this will in turn be integral to the development of the entire State. As part of this process, medium sized towns will not only support and benefit from the national and international roles of Gateways but, in turn, will relate in a similar reciprocal way to the smaller towns and rural areas within their own areas of influence. To underpin this “hub” role, an integral part of the NSS will also be to set out how a limited number of medium-sized towns, well linked to Gateways, could be developed and would best support the development of smaller towns and rural areas in contributing to and benefiting from national economic development. It would appear that the identification of a small but key number of development hubs will be necessary to achieve the objectives of the NSS.

Given the different circumstances of the Functional Areas described earlier, the indications are that appropriate spatial policy options for these Areas will range across the following:

- (1) The continued development of an existing Gateway.
- (2) Selection and development of a new Gateway *(In some situations the appropriate characteristics of a Gateway might be provided through neighbouring, but separate, centres drawing upon complementary strengths).*
- (3) Development of an existing or new Gateway, combined with a hub or hubs, to secure the developmental roles of other major towns in the area.
- (4) Selection and promotion of a development hub.
- (5) Selection and promotion of linked development hubs.

The selection and development of a new Gateway or development hub will in appropriate circumstances be linked closely with a counterpart centre in Northern Ireland.

The selection of one of these options for each functional area will also strengthen rural areas given their linkages with urban areas in terms of employment, services and settlement patterns.

The above approach seeks to utilise the complementary elements of city, town, village and country in establishing the types of supporting and distinct roles all these types of centres and areas can play in achieving balanced regional development.

(5) Linkages

This document refers at various stages to linkages between places or areas. This is a vitally important concept, which relates to the means of moving people and goods, energy and information that is essential to:

- ➔ Accessing and developing the resources of areas and therefore their potential;
- ➔ Allowing access to critical markets for the economic output of areas;
- ➔ Enabling the complementary strengths of areas and places to be combined in developing critical mass;
- ➔ Facilitating the national policy to promote the development of a single island economy;

2.4 The Approach to Balanced Regional Development

All of the above analysis provides a basis for defining the concept of balanced regional development itself and summarising the central components of the National Spatial Strategy as it is now emerging.

Balanced regional development is central to the National Spatial Strategy. The discussion of the concepts of Functional Areas, potential, critical mass, gateways and linkages permits certain conclusions to be drawn as to what balanced regional development itself means and how it might best be secured.

The work done to date for the NSS has brought a better understanding of the patterns of spatial development in different areas arising from factors such as demography, the economic base of an area and the nature of an area itself. In addition, different areas will be suited to different types of activity - whether industry or tourism or natural resource development - in line with their different types of potential. The degree to which this potential is harnessed will depend on the presence of the factors critical to development, described in section 2.1. For these reasons, the most appropriate approach to balanced regional development is one which is based on looking at the State in terms of **Functional Areas** and seeking to realise:

- The optimal development of different levels and types of **Potential** of those Areas,
- The achievement of an appropriate level of **Critical Mass** within areas and,
- The clear identification and utilisation of the **complementary roles** cities, towns villages and rural areas can play in line with their potential.

This leads to an approach that sees Balanced Regional Development as:

Developing the potential of each area as fully as possible so as to contribute to the optimal performance of the State as a whole – economically, socially and environmentally.

Alternative approaches to balanced regional development might attempt to distribute population, economic activity and infrastructure equally across the country or suggest the enlargement of a very wide range of centres. These approaches would be unlikely to achieve the Government's objective for balanced regional development since they would:

- be economically unrealistic in requiring a level and spread of major infrastructural investment beyond the resources of Ireland's economy.
- fail to substantively enhance potential.
- fail to establish the necessary critical mass to counterbalance Dublin.

The NSS Approach - Summary

Taking the broad concepts described previously and considering the types of challenges different areas face there are six central spatial policy issues that the NSS must address:

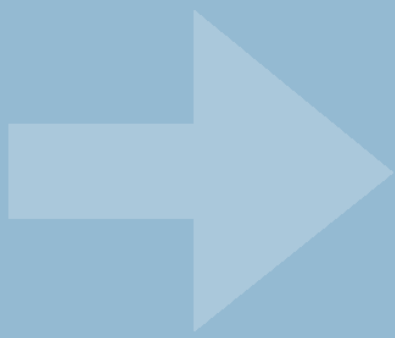
- How to plan for Dublin and the rest of the country so that Dublin can continue to play its vital national and international role, balanced by the development of other areas in a way which draws positive lessons from Dublin's experience and success.

- ➔ How to facilitate and promote the development of the other major cities of Cork, Galway, Limerick/Shannon and Waterford as existing Gateways so that individually and collectively, they can help counterbalance Dublin and also enrich the various towns, villages and rural areas in their own hinterlands.
- ➔ How to facilitate and promote dynamic cross-border development that will promote an island of Ireland economy and thus the size of home market needed as a springboard for a range of indigenous industry sectors.
- ➔ How to promote a limited number of strategically placed centres, that already display the capacity to achieve strong and sustainable economic growth driven by the interplay of market forces, location and accessibility, to act as additional Gateways.
- ➔ How to strengthen and develop a number of medium-sized towns as development hubs with the ability and capacity to support economic activity in themselves in co-operation with Gateways, other towns, and wider areas.
- ➔ How to exploit the capacity of smaller towns, villages and rural areas to offer attractive locations for employment and places for people to live and therefore contribute to the Government's policy for maintaining vibrant communities in more rural parts of the country.

The NSS will have to address these questions within a sustainable macroeconomic and budgetary framework. This reinforces the need for a focused approach.

The foregoing suggests in summary that the approach to achieving balanced regional development has three dimensions:

- (1) ***Targeted policies and supports to enable a small number of centres to assume enhanced roles, including advance provision of key infrastructure ahead of actual need where appropriate.***
- (2) ***All areas should be facilitated in terms of developing their potential based on their resources, in a way that is economically realistic, spatially balanced, competitive in the marketplace and environmentally sustainable.***
- (3) ***Good planning, management and investment will be necessary to ensure that development of the potential of areas, including the strengthening of centres, is economically, environmentally and socially sustainable into the future.***



Indications for Spatial Policy

Section 3

The previous sections have outlined the broad purpose of the NSS and the concepts central to it.

A number of policy indications follow. These have been grouped under four themes of economic activity, access to social infrastructure and services, the environment and implementation. Together with the broad concepts outlined in Section 2, they will be used to establish the basis from which the form of the National Spatial Strategy will emerge. This section should therefore be a particular focus for responses.

3.1 Economic Activity – Its Role in Achieving Spatial Balance

Trends and forces underlying economic activity – where jobs are being established and why – represent one of the more profound influences on spatial patterns. From the work done to date on the NSS the strategic indications for spatial policy as it relates to economic activity are:

- ➔ The maintenance and development of an internationally competitive economy at State, regional and local levels, will be central to the success of the NSS.
- ➔ Business and enterprise activity is more developed in some areas than others. While policies need to recognise these patterns, they must also seek to strengthen a wider range of areas, but not in a way that could weaken the areas already performing strongly.
- ➔ The further development of a single island economy, based on intensification of economic co-operation and interaction between North and South on the island of Ireland is an important factor in ensuring the development of internationally competitive indigenous industry.
- ➔ The nature and characteristics of urban centres, rural areas and how they relate to each other are important determinants of patterns of enterprise, with a particular emphasis on strong urban centres that can justify and sustain the types of infrastructure and other supports that enable growth and development.
- ➔ The best prospects for a more balanced distribution of enterprise, employment and business activity are linked to achieving certain levels of critical mass using the resources of areas, strengthening these and focusing them so as to deliver benefits to the surrounding areas.
- ➔ Differently tailored solutions for different areas should be promoted, within an overall spatial framework, ranging from instances where promoting a single centre might be appropriate, to areas where linking and promoting neighbouring strong towns, including across the border with Northern Ireland, may be the answer. This framework may also need to be supported by prudent provision of infrastructure beyond which current levels of demand might suggest. Such a framework would therefore suggest in economic terms:
 - Optimising and focusing the development of the Greater Dublin Area on what it does best, particularly in developing and continuing an international level capacity for innovation, linked to the European and global economies.

- Enhancing the role of other main cities, to complement and balance Dublin's success and develop onwards to an internationally competitive level by exploring the possibilities for specialisation through clustering of certain types of industry, services and mutually beneficial infrastructural arrangements and capacity for learning.
- Strengthening three or four additional centres and their surrounding areas to become gateways, complement the main cities and achieve more spatially balanced patterns of development with a particular focus on the Border Midlands and Western region.
- Deepening the complementary economic roles that medium sized towns can play as development hubs, complemented by the roles that smaller towns and rural areas can play.
- Exploring the possibilities for strengthening the types of linkages between areas and places as a means of developing potential, accessing markets and enabling complementary strengths to be combined.

Economic Activity: Enhancing External Access and Linkages

Ireland's economy is inextricably linked to the European and Global economies.

Strategic indications in relation to sea access are:

- ➔ Improvement of access through strategies to reduce the pressure and congestion arising on the central sea crossings on the Irish sea between Ireland and the UK and aligning internal transportation corridors with those strategies.

In relation to air access strategic indications are:

- ➔ For Dublin Airport, developing higher levels of services through its role as an international and national hub, linked to regional airports and supporting this through good land side accessibility by public and private transport, from both the Greater Dublin Area and the rest of the country.
- ➔ For the other international airports, to enable them achieve a higher level of service by increasing their population catchments through improved land side access.

In relation to trans-boundary co-operation and in particular linking with the draft Regional Strategic Framework for Northern Ireland, *Shaping Our Future*, and facilitating the development of an island economy in the island of Ireland, strategic indications suggest:

- ➔ Developing the Dublin - Belfast Economic Corridor so that a critical mass of population and economic activities is achieved that will enable the entire area to compete more effectively in European and world markets.
- ➔ Strengthening the Letterkenny - Derry axis as a transportation and development corridor so as to bring about a closer networking of the two centres and their respective catchments.

- Developing co-operative arrangements in economic development and infrastructural provision between urban centres on either side of the Border.
- Extending co-operation in developing tourism based on shared or common resources in areas on both sides of the Border: for example, the inland waterway network.

3.2 Access to Social Infrastructure and Services

Access to social infrastructure and services, is a key determinant of the quality of life of people and as a consequence is also an important factor in attracting investment to an area.

Strategic indications in relation to access to social infrastructure and services are:

- There is a need to strike a balance between concentration of services and good access. This can be achieved through an enhanced range of health, educational and other services provided through a limited number of centres of strength, likely to be associated with Gateways, development hubs, with cross-border co-operation, where appropriate. This needs to be supported by good quality access by public and private transport and targeted measures to facilitate access by the elderly and mobility impaired.
- Other centres could play a complementary role, within a hierarchy of centres, by providing certain services at a level appropriate to the scale of the centre.
- The role of certain types of social infrastructure in centres which are strengthening needs to be defined.
- As a consequence of increasing their size, centres will be able to enhance the range of services available, as the scale of service is linked to population.
- Better access to services can be facilitated through their concentration at key locations, such as in the case of “one-stop-shop” initiatives.
- Population decline in cities, towns and villages can leave many facilities such as churches and schools under-utilised. Targeted regeneration measures, capitalising on this investment can be utilised to strengthen and sustain the social structure of towns and villages, retain critical social and other services and justify continued investment.

3.3 The Environment and Spatial Balance

The wise management of the various inter-related parts of our national and man-made environment can provide a quality of place, together with the sustainable use of these resources for economic and other purposes.

Strategic indications in relation to the environment and spatial balance are:

- Through the appropriate matching of natural and cultural resources with different economic activities in each area, the basis for a more sustainable approach to development can be provided.
- The social and economic strength of our smaller towns and villages and their attractiveness as places to live can be enhanced through investment in public infrastructure, consolidation and revitalisation. This will offer an alternative to the increasing tendency for urban generated housing to be located in the open countryside.
- To utilise existing resources better and diversify rural economies by offering alternative types of employment in rural areas. This can be achieved through tourism and natural resource development such as afforestation, particularly of the broadleaf variety.
- The effective management of the important environmental and economic resources of the coastal zone and related activities is central to the sustainable development of this national asset.
- The realisation of the economic potential of underdeveloped areas in tourism, forestry and natural resource development, over the longer term requires special consideration of impacts on landscape.
- There are opportunities to generate electricity from renewable sources such as offshore wind farms, wind farms in inland areas with lower wind speeds and good grid connectivity and farm wastes in areas of intensive agriculture. This can enable rural land uses such as tourism, agriculture and renewable energy production to co-exist more effectively.

3.4 Implementation: Achieving the Objectives of a National Spatial Strategy

If the NSS is to be successful, it must have a real influence on the shaping of policy, and the planning and delivery of various programmes and services provided by different public bodies at local, regional and national level. In particular, the NSS must improve the effectiveness of public investment in infrastructure and other relevant services under the current and any future National Development Plans. It must also inform the prioritisation of other investment programmes and provide a reference point for influencing the location of private investment.

The indications for ensuring that the Strategy has the necessary degree of influence are:

- Acceptance that all relevant public sector policies and programmes should be planned and implemented on a basis which is consistent with the NSS.
- There is a need for consistency between the National Spatial Strategy, regional planning guidelines and county/city development plans, in relation to which local authorities have a primary role.
- As is the case with the NDP, a lead role will need to be assigned to some form of Managing Authority at central level to promote and monitor the implementation of spatial policy across all relevant aspects of the public service, including the review and update of the NSS itself.

- The Managing Authority will need to be supported by an Interdepartmental network representing all of the Government Departments involved in developing and delivering policies which impact on regional development, including cross-border development. Other support mechanisms involving various State agencies and infrastructure providers will also need to be put in place to facilitate co-ordinated action towards delivery of the Strategy's objectives.
- The question of a possible role for the North/South Ministerial Council in co-ordinating spatial strategies between the two jurisdictions on the island of Ireland will need to be considered, in conjunction with appropriate authorities in Northern Ireland.
- The role of Regional Authorities will need to be examined in terms of enabling them to co-ordinate the strategic development of their areas through the application of the principles of the National Spatial Strategy in regional strategies and strategic planning guidelines.
- Targeting of particular centres or combinations of centres to play enhanced roles will require that the means of co-operation between particular authorities, or providers of infrastructure, will need to be examined in order to establish new ways of working together to achieve common developmental goals.
- County and City Development Boards may be the appropriate bodies to have responsibility for ensuring that their strategic agenda for integrated development at county and city level, in which all of their participating bodies, including local authorities, are involved, is consistent with the National Spatial Strategy.
- The question of the need for a new legal framework should be considered:
 - (1) To give statutory support to the National Spatial Strategy itself
 - (2) To strengthen the relationship between the NSS and county/city development plans, regional planning guidelines, other land use and planning frameworks, regional strategies, county and city development strategies, and the strategic plans of various other public agencies, and
 - (3) To support the organisational and institutional changes needed to deliver on NSS objectives, where existing legislation does not cater adequately for this.



Conclusion

conclusion

This document has outlined the nature of the State today in development terms. It has identified how a spatial strategy might help in creating and maintaining more balance in our continuing development.

The approach outlined in Section 2 and indications given in Section 3 are based on extensive research, analysis and feedback. However, that is not the whole picture. The perspective of the public and the communities, for whose benefit a National Spatial Strategy is being developed, is also needed.

The final strategy must have that added perspective. Over the next two months, please take the time to focus on the issues around spatial planning that will impact on you and your area. A submission that will help define the future of spatial planning as it affects you would be most welcome.

It will be particularly helpful for responses to focus on the following four basic questions.

Question 1

Do the guiding vision and principles set out in section 1 represent a basis for balanced spatial development to which you can subscribe?

Question 2

Does viewing Ireland in terms of Functional Areas, as set out in this paper, each of which has different characteristics and within each of which different issues arise, provide a useful explanation for the basis on which the country functions spatially?

As a consequence, is it a valid proposition that different kinds of responses will be needed in different areas to achieve more balanced regional development?

Question 3

Will the development of Functional Areas be best served by a spatial planning approach that seeks to energise them by focusing on the strengths of a limited number of places in a way which, at the same time, allows all parts of Functional Areas to realise their potential?

Question 4

Is the range of indications for finalising the form and detail of the National Spatial Strategy appropriate and comprehensive?

These questions are designed to assist you in framing your response to the issues raised in this document, but you are also welcome to comment on any other matters arising.



Glossary of Terms

Glossary

A Spatial Dimension	Relates to the location of development activity - industrial, tourism, residential, retail, leisure, etc. – and the nature of transport connections between locations.
Catchment	The area surrounding a centre of industry, commercial activity or service, where the people involved in that activity, tend to live.
Clusters/Clustering	Close and inter-related grouping of settlements or other economic and social activities.
Diversification	In relation to economic activity, used to describe the process by which communities or regions develop new and varied means of doing business to offset the decline in traditional business.
Economic activity	Business in terms of industry, services, agriculture, tourism, forestry, fisheries and other natural resources.
'Hard' Infrastructure	Roads, rail, energy, communications.
How the country functions spatially	How places relate to each other within an area and how different areas in turn are connected to each other.
Integrated Spatial Framework	A means of combining physical planning for places with social and economic planning.
NUTS III	NUTS is a European system of regional classification of territorial units based on minimum population sizes and administrative units. The purpose of the classification is to ensure the production and publication of comparable regional statistics across Europe. The classifications are also used for other purposes such as eligibility for structural funds.
Settlement patterns	Form and distribution of places where people live.
"Social" Infrastructure	Education, healthcare, culture and leisure facilities.
Spatial Balance	Balance of development between and within various regions of Ireland, which optimises the relationship between economic activity, quality of life and environmental protection.
Stabilisation of populations	No significant increase or decline in share of population.
Structurally weak areas	Areas with weak levels of economic activity and poor transport connections.
Sustainable Development	Sustainable development is about a more inclusive society, which provides for better protection of the environment and use of natural resources, and shares the benefits of economic growth as widely as possible. Its 'bottom line' is to achieve a better quality of life for all, both now and in the future.
Transboundary Co-operation	Co-operation with other countries on spatial issues that straddle borders e.g. – economic development or transportation.
Urbanisation	Growth in numbers of people living in urban areas.
Urban structure	The number and size of urban centres in a given area and the links between them in transport, economic and other terms.

Functional Areas Map



[The National Spatial Strategy | Indications for the Way Ahead]



AN ROINN COMHSHAOIL AGUS RIALTAIS ÁITIÚIL

**DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT
AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

