

chapter 3



Regional Development

Regional Development

Introduction

Balanced regional development means supporting the economic and social development of all regions in their efforts to achieve their full potential. This Plan aims to promote the development of all regions in Ireland within a co-ordinated, coherent and mutually beneficial framework. Balanced regional development is, accordingly, central to the investment strategy of the Plan. The promotion of regional development will be implemented through:

- A major programme of investment under the Plan in infrastructure with a particular focus on addressing deficits in the various National Spatial Strategy Gateway areas;
- Implementation of integrated spatial planning frameworks at Gateway/Regional Authority level which will address appropriate land use at regional and Gateway levels; and facilitate and complement the Plan investment in infrastructure;
- Investment in Enterprise and Human Capital development of the Regions, including rural areas — Chapter 4 sets out the strategy for the rural economy in more detail; and
- The establishment, initially for the period 2008-2010, of a Gateway Innovation Fund on a competitive basis and as a mechanism to bring about better co-ordination in Gateway development supporting distinctive and innovative projects in Gateway areas which are contributing to the development of the Gateways and their wider regions.

The objectives of these interventions can be summarised as:

- Ensuring that each Gateway region maximises its potential for economic and social development;
- Achieving a better balance between the regions in terms of economic and social development; and
- Fostering enhanced co-ordination in the development of the Gateways and their regions and between planning and investment at local, regional and national levels.

Strategic Context

Economic development in all countries, including Ireland, invariably occurs at a different pace in different regions. The rate and location of regional economic development reflect many different factors, some of which can be directly influenced by Government policy, some of which reflect the inherent characteristics and potential of different regions and some of which reflect the natural growth of the private sector. Regional economic development can also have a close relationship with population distribution. Strong clusters of population can themselves be a driver for regional development while in turn being the result of economic expansion in the related regions.

All regions (defined in terms of the 8 Regional Authority areas) of Ireland have enjoyed spectacular economic and social progress over recent years. Population decline has been halted and reversed. Employment has increased significantly whilst unemployment has been reduced to very low levels by

historic and EU standards. The NDP 2000-2006 has seen a major enhancement of regional infrastructure throughout the country. The gaps between Irish regions and their EU counterparts have been reduced and in some cases eliminated. Some parts of Ireland are, in terms of economic activity, in the first rank of the European Union.

Nonetheless, a pro-active and focused approach to balanced regional development continues to be necessary. The growth of the Greater Dublin Area (GDA), comprising the four Dublin councils and the counties of Kildare, Meath and Wicklow, has been dramatic in terms of population and economic output. While the economic success of the GDA has made a major contribution to the success of Ireland as a whole, it has also brought challenges, particularly in the area of infrastructure. The GDA has experienced heavy pressures in the areas of transport, housing and environmental services. In response, there has been considerable investment in infrastructure in the GDA under the NDP 2000-2006 and NDP 2007-2013 will build on and intensify this.

The development of Ireland outside the GDA must also be pursued intensively. Such regional development will not only help fulfil the economic potential of the regions outside the GDA, it will also ease the pressures still evident in the GDA. Promoting the economic development of the regions outside the GDA will assist the objective of a more balanced distribution of population in the country as a whole.

The role of investment policy under the Plan will be to build on the existing strengths of all the regions and address their particular development deficits (particularly in the area of infrastructure). Public investment policy and regional planning will reinforce the inherent strength of individual regions and direct investment to compensate for regional weaknesses. Plan investment policy will promote a coherent and co-ordinated approach to regional development which assists the development of individual regions in a complementary and mutually-supportive manner.

The National Spatial Strategy

The National Spatial Strategy (NSS) sets out the vision and strategic framework for achieving sustainable and balanced regional development in Ireland. The NSS was launched in 2002 and embodies a 20-year spatial framework to achieve more balanced regional development in Ireland. The vision underlying the NSS is a better balance of social, economic, physical development and population growth between regions. The NSS envisages thriving Gateway centres driving the development of their wider regions, including surrounding towns, villages and rural areas. The NSS summarises balanced regional development as:

***“Developing the full potential of each area to contribute to the optimal performance of the State as a whole — economically, socially and environmentally”.*¹**

Accordingly, this Plan will particularly focus investment around the NSS, especially around the network of the nine Gateways² identified in the Strategy. The Plan will also support the concept of an urban-rural partnership by linking the focus on the Gateways with support for other urban centres and rural areas.

Implementation of the NSS has been on-going since the launch of the Strategy in 2002. Public investment under NDP 2000-2006 has funded many significant investments in areas such as transport, housing, water services, broadband, urban renewal, and the higher education and research sectors. New investment programmes announced since the publication of the NSS, such as the Government’s 10-year *Transport 21 Programme*, have also emphasised the importance of supporting regional development and facilitating the development of the NSS Gateways and Hubs. This investment is playing an important role in the impressive economic growth being experienced by all regions.

¹ National Spatial Strategy Government of Ireland 2002 p.11.

² Dublin, Cork, Galway, Limerick/Shannon, Waterford, Sligo, Dundalk, Letterkenny/Derry, Athlone/Tullamore/Mullingar

The programme of Decentralisation of 8 Government Departments and a range of agencies will also have significant positive effects in fostering balanced regional development. The impact of decentralised offices will be quite significant in many of the smaller towns in which they will be located. The decentralisation process is a direct instrument that will strengthen, in particular, the hub, smaller town and rural structure and complement the key and dynamic role to be played by the Gateways.

At regional level, the NSS has been further articulated through the adoption of Regional Planning Guidelines (RPG) by the Regional Authorities, setting the strategic policy agenda for Local Authority development plans at city and county level. These Guidelines will be the template to secure good alignment between public investment plans at national level and physical planning at regional and local levels. At local level, strategic planning initiatives for most of the Gateways (Dublin, Cork, Galway, Limerick, Waterford, Dundalk, Sligo and Midlands) have been put in place. Work on a strategic framework for the Northwest Gateway (Letterkenny/Derry) is advancing and will be completed in early 2007.

Significant progress is already being made in matching strategic plans at regional and local levels with new public and private investment. In Dublin, housing output has increased substantially with key new developments such as the Adamstown and Hansfield Strategic Development Zones being facilitated through major investments in public transport. In Cork, major new developments will come on stream in the docklands area and along the Cork-Midleton rail line which is being re-instated to facilitate a key aspect of the Cork Area Strategic Plan. At other Gateway locations, new approaches to planning are leveraging significant new private investment.

Regional Development Trends in Ireland

The recent 2006 census indicated that the population of the State has increased from 3,917,000 persons in 2002 to 4,235,000 persons in 2006, an increase of 8% (an annual compound rate increase of nearly 2%). The population of all of the 8 Regional Authority areas of the State is growing and at rates higher than for the previous inter-censal period. The greatest increases (% annual growth rates) took place in the Mid-East Region (3.6%), the Midlands Region (2.8%), the South-East Region (2.1%), the West Region (2.1%) and the Border Region (2%). Annual rates of growth were somewhat lower in the Dublin (1.5%), Mid-West (1.5%) and South-West (1.7%) Regions. The population growth in the Dublin and Mid-East Regions, taken together, has resulted in the Greater Dublin Area's share of national population remaining virtually constant at 39.2% between 2002 and 2006.

The CSO's national population forecasts (published in 2004 and therefore before the results of the 2006 census)³ estimate a national population of just over 5 million by 2021. These national forecasts were supplemented in 2005 by the CSO's release of regional population forecasts. Table 3.1 below highlights key findings from these projections, which indicate a high level of overall national population increase (29.4%) and above average increases in the GDA (34.4%) and West (35%) Regions and anticipated lower than average increases in the South-West (21.6%) and Mid-West (20.6%) Regions.

Table 3.1: CSO Regional Population Forecasts

Region	Pop 2002 ('000's)	Pop 2021 ('000's)	% change
GDA	1,535	2,063	34.4
South-East	424	537	26.7
South-West	580	705	21.6
Mid-West	340	410	20.6
Border	423	546	29.1
Midland	225	296	31.6
West	380	513	35.0
Ireland	3,917	5,070	29.4

³ It seems likely that revised population forecasts, flowing from the results of the 2006 Census, will project a national population of 5.3 million by 2021.

Long-term population trends indicate that the economically stronger regions are those that have large urban centres of population and a high proportion of the population living in those urban centres. Table 3.2 below indicates that the urbanised regions (GDA, South-West, South-East) were fast-growing in Gross Value Added (GVA) terms over the 1996-2002 period, while less urbanised ones (Border, Midlands, West) grew at a slower rate, albeit still rapidly by international standards. An exception is the relatively urbanised Mid-West which did not grow rapidly. Also, regions with individual larger and dynamic urban centres grew relatively fast in economic terms.

Table 3.2: Relationship between Regional Economic Growth and Regional Urban Structure

Region	Urban population as % of total Population	Largest urban centre Population size 2002	Largest Urban centre as % of Regional Population	GVA growth at basic prices 1996-2003
Border	33% (6)	Dundalk town and environs — 32,505	7.5% (6)	66.7% (6)
Midland	37% (4)	Athlone town and environs — 15,936	7.1% (7)	82.2% (3)
West	34% (5)	Galway city and environs — 66,163	17.4% (4)	64.5% (7)
GDA*	87% (1)	Dublin — 1,004,614	65.4% (1)	72.7% (4)
Mid-West	43% (3)	Limerick city and environs — 86,998	25.6% (3)	70.4% (5)
South-East	43% (3)	Waterford city and environs — 46,736	11.0% (5)	88.5% (2)
South-West	55% (2)	Cork city and environs — 186,239	32.1% (2)	96.6% (1)
State	60%	—	—	77.3%

*Dublin & Mid-East Regions.

Bracketed numbers are the regional rankings, i.e. 1 to 7.

Source: Census of Population, 2002, 1996 and CSO Data.

Recent population trends and projections therefore suggest that:

- (1) The population of Ireland will continue to grow substantially;
- (2) The population levels of all the regions will increase;
- (3) Regions containing large urban centres with a relatively high percentage of the region's population are performing comparatively better economically;
- (4) Regions with comparatively weaker urban structures will need an enhanced level of critical mass to drive development; and
- (5) The urban-based Gateways are growing at different rates.

Economic Trends

Regional Growth

As illustrated by the table above economic output across all regions has been increasing at substantial rates in recent years. However growth rates vary, with higher rates of growth in the regions in the eastern half of the State compared to the Western, Midlands and Border Regions. The average output level per person in the Dublin, Mid-East, South-East, South-West and Mid-West Regions, as measured by Gross Value Added (GVA), was 10.8% above the State average in 2003 (the latest year for which figures are available). The level of GVA per person in the 5 regions increased by 67% in the period 1998 to 2003. The GVA per person in the Border, Midlands and Western Region increased by 56% during the same period. This is still a very strong performance especially by EU standards. The presence, or otherwise, of a strong urban structure in the different regions and the extent to which higher value-added sectors are present would appear to be important and intertwined factors in this regard.

Disposable Income Per Person

In 2003 the disposable income per person in the 5 Southern and Eastern Regions was 2.9% above the State average while the corresponding figure in the Border, Midlands and Western Region was 8% below the State average. However, the gap between the regions of 10.9% in 2003 has decreased from 12% in 2001. The Dublin Regional Authority Area had the highest disposable income per person of the 8 Regional Authority Areas, being 13.3% above the State average in 2003. The disposable income per person of the Border Region was 9.5% below the State average in 2003 and was the lowest of the eight Regional Authority Areas. The differences in disposable income between the regions in 2003 must be viewed against the background of differing costs of living, income transfers and the varying economic characteristics of the regions. An important dimension in this regard is the impact of house prices.

Employment Trends

The total number of persons recorded at work in the country in 2006 was just over 2 million compared with a little over 1.15 million in 1991. This contrasts with an increase of only 11,253 (1.0%) over the period 1981-1991. Moreover, the increase in the workforce was accompanied by a sectoral shift towards services and substantially increased female participation rates in employment that is mainly concentrated in the larger towns and cities. Some regions, such as the West Region, have seen numbers in employment increase by 21% compared to a national average of 15% in the period. Overall national employment growth has been driven by the strong performance of the services and advanced sectors (pharmaceuticals, IT, R+D etc.). There has also been significant employment growth in the construction sector, which now accounts for 15% of all employment in the Border, Midlands and West Regions. Overall these three Regions have a higher dependence than the more urbanised regions on the more vulnerable manufacturing, natural resource and construction sectors.

Regional employment and productivity trends, therefore, indicate that a key regional development objective for this NDP will be to support the creation of conditions necessary to extend the process of employment and productivity growth in higher value added functions to all the regions.

Transportation Trends

Regional population and economic trends also have implications for transportation. A rapidly increasing population, rising employment and income levels have resulted in car ownership levels in Ireland increasing significantly and converging towards EU averages. Between 1991 and 2002, the total number of cars owned by private households increased from 445,226 to 1,601,619. By 2002, just over 62% of workers travelled to work by car compared to 47% of a much smaller workforce in 1991. By contrast, the percentage usage of public transport (bus or train) decreased from 9.4% in 1991 to 8.7% in 2002 even though the actual number of users increased substantially by 31% from 107,211 to 140,381.

The 2002 Census figures also pointed to a trend towards longer distance commuting although almost 60% of the population had to travel less than 9 miles and only 6% had to travel over 30 miles. This trend is likely to have been intensified in the 2006 Census and has implications for spatial planning and environmental sustainability.

Regional Trends and Issues — Implications

The analysis presented above highlights four key issues for the further implementation of the NSS, that public investment outlined in the NDP 2007-2013 will address:

- (1) Ireland's population will continue to grow at high levels, driven by a strong domestic economic performance and strong net migration. Good alignment between the NSS, particularly the Gateways, Hubs and other urban centres identified and public investment under the Plan will be essential to ensure that future growth is anticipated and planned for in a way that supports balanced and sustainable development;

- (2) Regional economic growth is promoted by strong Gateway centres with the levels of critical mass, competitiveness, quality of built and natural environment and quality of life necessary to drive not just their own growth but the growth of the wider Region of which they form part. The NSS Gateways in the regions have considerable potential for accelerated growth, which can be delivered through a collaborative approach between strategic local planning and NDP implementation, prudent national and local investment in the provision of key infrastructure and a dynamic and innovative role for the private sector;
- (3) There are rural areas, including smaller towns and villages, beyond the hinterlands of the Gateways and Hubs that are more remote and are experiencing rapid change within the context of a restructuring rural economy. The Gateways and Hubs approach to balanced regional development needs to be complemented by multi-sectoral policies designed to fully activate the potential of these remoter rural areas and provide local employment and economic opportunities. This issue is dealt with in more detail in the Chapter on development of the rural economy; and
- (4) Increased levels of demand for transport are a direct and normal consequence of improved national economic performance associated with wider economic and social transformation within the economy. The challenge for the future is that, through effective spatial planning at national, regional and local levels, development patterns can be structured so as to facilitate the emergence of effective and attractive public transport services and encourage greater modal shift towards public transport thereby promoting environmental sustainability including meeting international obligations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Regional Development: Strategic Policy Framework

The investment framework and strategy of this NDP will assist and enhance physical and spatial planning. The Plan establishes an ambitious and medium-term sectoral policy and financial framework within which national and local physical planning can be articulated and its strategies advanced. In order that Ireland's future spatial development is structured in a manner that is internationally competitive, socially cohesive and environmentally sustainable, the following investment in support of five key elements of the Government's regional policy framework will be made under this Plan:

- (1) **More efficient Greater Dublin Area:** supporting a strong and competitive GDA in order that it continues to drive its own development and that of the State through improved and more public transport based mobility, development of more compact and sustainable communities and high quality international and domestic transportation connections;
- (2) **Strong Gateways in other Regions:** accelerating the development of strategically placed and national scale urban centres to act individually and collectively in delivering more spatially balanced patterns of economic development and population growth throughout their Regions;
- (3) **Hubs:** linking and extending the capabilities and performance of the Gateways to more outlying and rural areas by supporting the accelerated development of key towns at strategic locations along the transport corridors between the Gateways;
- (4) **County and other town structure:** capitalising on the important regional and local roles of Ireland's network of towns so that they can attract investment and act as engines of local growth within a wider revitalised and diversifying rural economy; and
- (5) **Vibrant and diversified rural areas:** sustaining the continuing process of growth and diversification in the rural economy through enhanced accessibility, communications infrastructure and activation of local development potential in areas such as local enterprise and services, tourism and the natural resource sectors.

Developing the Gateways (2007-2013): Overall Strategy

A key objective is to build on current trends and maintain strong and sustainable growth in each of the Gateways over the period of the Plan with particular emphasis on those with lower populations. Each Gateway therefore needs a clear vision of:

- Its future development strategy;
- The mechanisms to implement the strategy;
- Effective prioritisation of investment, both locally and centrally; and
- Accelerated delivery of critical elements of such investments.

Effective co-ordination across the various Local Authorities that make up each Gateway will be a key element necessary to build on investment under the Plan. This will be underpinned by effective co-operation with key resource and enterprise decision making agencies at Central Government level. The NDP implementation monitoring arrangements (see Chapter 13) will have a particular focus on ensuring requisite levels of co-operation at and between Local and Central Government. This will be demonstrated by the inclusion of regional interests on the NDP Monitoring Committee.

Transport

The Plan provides for some €32.9 billion investment in transport generally. National and international access will be central to the competitiveness of the Gateways. Key priorities will be completion of the major inter-urban routes, the upgrade and enhancement of the public transport network, improved port and airport access and investment in key secondary and non-national roads between and within the Gateway regions. By the end of the Plan, all the inter-urban routes between Dublin and the Gateways will have been completed and many of the key inter-urban routes between Gateways, such as the Atlantic Corridor, will also have been significantly upgraded. Investment in strategic non-national roads within and between Gateways and their immediate hinterlands will also play a key role in improving connectivity, circulation and facilitating the development of strategically placed landbanks.

Investment in transport will also be targeted at improved internal public transport services. While the most pressing needs are in the GDA, the other established cities also face challenges, and over the Plan period, integrated strategies for the delivery of sustainable mobility plans will be in place and in the process of implementation in all the Gateways. Bus-based solutions will offer the most realistic prospect of enhanced public transport services in most of the Gateways with rail being important in Dublin and also, consistent with the *Transport 21* blueprint, in Cork and Galway. Investment in green transport corridors for walking and cycling will also be put in place.

The investment in the 3 State Airports and the continued support for the Regional Airports will play a key role in promoting internal and external accessibility. The investment in the commercial ports will also be important in this regard.

Other Infrastructure

Investment in housing will be targeted both in terms of ensuring the continued supply of private housing to a high standard of quality and improved levels of affordability and in continuing the good progress made under the previous Plan in renewing significant social housing areas. Many of the Gateways contain a significant stock of social housing whose physical and social regeneration is an important aspect of enhancing their attractiveness for investment.

Broadband connectivity is increasingly central to Ireland's continuing transformation towards a knowledge-based and value-added based economy. By 2013, all the Metropolitan Area Networks (MANS) in Gateways and Hubs will have been completed and enhanced backhaul connectivity will deliver much improved and

more cost-effective broadband accessibility in many of the Gateways and their wider regions. Other areas such as investment in environmental services and in energy infrastructure will also play key roles in building an efficient economic infrastructure base both nationally and regionally.

Enterprise Development

The Enterprise Development Agencies have a crucial role to play in promoting regional development, especially in attracting high value industries to the Gateway regions which are lagging behind. IDA Ireland's regional strategy is aligned with the National Spatial Strategy and is designed to support the Gateway approach to regional development. IDA Regional Plans take account of the locational behaviour and requirements of the next generation of FDI projects, infrastructure capacities, the importance of building critical mass and leveraging the advantages of existing sectoral clusters.

Consistent with the aims and principles of Regional Development Policy and as set out in the NSS and in this Plan, IDA's approach will be to:

- Pursue a Gateway approach to regional economic development consistent with, and supportive of, the NSS;
- Pursue a strong pro-active role in using IDA property assets as key tools for shaping and promoting regional economic development; and
- Establish a strong regional interaction with regional educational institutions in areas of skills, specialised training, research and development and outreach centres.

This approach will be backed up by the regional focus of Enterprise Ireland, Shannon Development and the more localised focus of the County Enterprise Boards. In particular, Enterprise Ireland's critical activities and regional strategy will focus on growing established companies, driving the creation of new start-ups and providing necessary enterprise infrastructure. These activities have been placed firmly in the context of the National Spatial Strategy. Its implementation will transform a range of locations throughout the country and their broader environs by providing the requisite environment for enterprise development.

Enterprise Ireland will also work with the Universities and Institutes of Technology to maximise collaboration between industry and academia to develop clusters of high technology companies in the Regions. The *Applied Research Enhancement Initiative*, designed to enhance regional research capabilities by supporting projects in Ireland's Institutes of Technology, will continue to be rolled out.

Enterprise Ireland will focus on growing and developing companies throughout Ireland's Regions. Driving competitiveness through in-company R&D and innovation, management development and training will remain a significant area of focus over the course of this NDP. The funding offer from Enterprise Ireland already reflects the need to boost activity in the Regions with a weighting of support in favour of less economically developed Regions. Recent changes in the EU State Aid rules will allow increased flexibility for the development agencies over the course of this NDP to deliver required funding across these critical business functions.

Regional Aid

Regional development over the next seven years will have to take account of the prevailing EU State Aids regime. This will be especially pertinent to the strategies of the Enterprise Development Agencies. The rules governing what regions may receive regional aid (also called investment aid) from the State are agreed at EU level. Regional aid was permissible in all of Ireland for the NDP 2000-2006. However, the increasing prosperity of Ireland's regions will result in a significant restriction of the availability of regional aid for the period of the Plan. Nevertheless, areas covering up to 50% of Ireland's population will remain eligible for regional aid, at varying aid rates, under Ireland's Regional Aid Map for 2007-2013 which was approved by the European Commission on 24 October, 2006. Under the new Map:

- The Border, Midland and West Regional Assembly Region is classified as an “economic development region” and will continue to qualify for regional aid throughout 2007-2013;
- The South East Region qualifies for regional aid throughout 2007-2013 on the basis of unemployment criteria specified by the European Commission;
- The Mid West Region (Clare, Limerick and North Tipperary) and Kerry in the South West Region are entitled to regional aid only for small and medium-sized firms throughout 2007-2013 and for large firms for 2007-2008;
- In the remainder of the South West Region, County Cork is designated for regional aid for small, medium and large firms for 2007-2008. In addition, the docklands area of Cork has been designated as an urban regeneration area and will be entitled to aid for small and medium firms until the end of 2013; and
- Dublin and the Mid-East Region (Wicklow, Kildare and Meath) will no longer be entitled to regional aid after 2006. However, investment aid for small and medium-sized enterprises will remain available in these areas under the EU Regulation on State Aid for SMEs.

The Regional Aid Map governs investment aid only. Other forms of State Aid including aid for SMEs, aid for Research, Development and Innovation, Training aid and aid for Environmental Protection will continue to be available in all areas. Also, from 2007-2013 all areas will remain entitled to award *De Minimis* Aid (i.e. small amounts of aid which, under the EU Treaty, are not regarded as State aid) at an increased level of up to €200,000 per company over a three-year period.

The Enterprise Agencies will proactively utilise the new State Aids Regime to support the Gateway Development strategy of the Plan. This will include the development of tailored strategies for the various Regions whilst also underpinning the horizontal objective of moving Ireland up the value chain in terms of foreign direct and indigenous investment.

Education and Training

Education, skills and innovation investment will also be fundamental to the success of the Regional Development Strategy. Co-ordinated and focused efforts by Third Level Institutions, Enterprise Agencies and Local Government will be vital in accessing funding from initiatives such as Science Foundation Ireland and the Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation. In addition, new priorities will merit attention including non-technological innovation.

Quality of Life

Quality of life will also be key to Gateway growth. These centres must be attractive, not only as a place to work and invest in, but also to live in and visit. Many of them, despite pleasant natural settings, face challenges such as traffic congestion, lack of both pedestrianisation and highly attractive and effective public transport networks, the need for development of high quality urban realms and the provision of amenities such as parks and cultural facilities. The infrastructure investment under the Plan will play a significant role in enhancing their attractiveness. It will also be crucial that the Local Authorities, in discharging their physical planning and land use role, ensure that permitted residential and commercial development can be adequately resourced by existing and prospective social and economic infrastructure.

Land Use

This Plan provides for an unprecedented level of public investment in physical and social infrastructure that has been, and will continue to be, co-ordinated within the spatial policy framework of the NSS.

To maximise the added value of public sector investment, it is vitally important that the relevant regional and local authorities work together, along with the private sector in ensuring that local planning and

development policies and private investment matches and complements public investment policy, maximising its impact. For example, investment in suburban rail services in Dublin, Cork, Galway and the Western Rail Corridor must be matched by a concerted effort to focus new housing developments in these areas around these new rail corridors in order to maximise their usage, encouraging modal shift and promoting environmental sustainability.

More generally, the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, together with the Regional and Local Authorities, will work together to ensure that city and county development plans are set within the context of the NSS and Regional Planning Guidelines. In turn, through the local planning system, effective co-ordination between public investment and the private sector will deliver more integrated and sustainable communities. For example, as well as focusing major new housing development along key public transport corridors, Local Authorities will be supported in working with the Department of Education and Science, other school providers and the private sector in identifying sites for schools and community and recreational facilities as an integral part of the development planning process. In this manner, more attractive and sustainable communities can be created where the provision of housing, employment, transport and community facilities can be integrated, cutting commuting time and enhancing quality of life. For the future, these are the types of places that will be capable of attracting population and growing the Regions in an environmentally sustainable manner.

Planning Authorities that adopt policies that are inconsistent with the NSS and RPGs and which facilitate development patterns such as extensive low density housing, encouraging predominantly car-based transport and poor integration with the provision of essential public and community facilities such as schools, will not be favoured by investment under this Plan. In addition, the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government will as necessary use his powers under the Planning Acts to compel Local Authorities to adopt land use policies that are consistent with the NSS and the RPG's.

Gateways Innovation Fund

The key to development of the Gateway centres and to regional development overall will be the mainstream investment referred to in the Priority Investment Chapters of the Plan. Optimisation of this investment will require pursuit of the appropriate land use policy at local and regional level as referred to above.

This approach needs, however, to be supplemented by a new targeted strategic intervention that can stimulate and reward joined-up thinking at local and regional level. This Plan therefore provides for the establishment of a Gateways Innovation Fund (GIF). This Fund will operate broadly on the basis of a lead Local Authority on behalf of a Gateway bidding on a competitive basis for central funding for projects that give added value to the Gateway development, with significant other public sector co-funding and private sector investment. The bid will be evaluated centrally to assess independently that the proposals will leverage accelerated and co-ordinated Gateway development.

A detailed scheme for the operation of the new Fund will be worked out early this year but illustrative examples of areas likely to qualify would include the following:

- Key local economic infrastructure not funded from mainstream central or local capital programmes;
- Integrated physical and socio/economic regeneration projects designed to rejuvenate important or significant parts of the Gateway;
- Transport initiatives, additional to the *Transport 21* programme, with an emphasis on encouraging significant modal shift from the private car towards public transport, cycling and walking; and
- Quality of life investment, e.g. major pedestrian schemes, the enhancement of public open spaces and recreational amenities; and investment in cultural or sporting infrastructure.

Management and Operation of the Fund

The GIF will be managed by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. It will establish a GIF Management Committee drawn from the Department of Finance and a small number of other relevant Departments, reporting to the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and the Minister for Finance. The Fund will operate initially on a pilot basis for the period 2008-2010. Subject to an evaluation of its effectiveness in 2010, as part of the overall evaluation of the Plan, it will continue over the rest of the Plan period. The Plan, therefore, includes an initial Exchequer allocation of €300 million to cover the operations of the new Fund over the period 2008-2010. This amount will be designed to leverage significant matching funding from the public and/or private sectors.

Strategy for Individual Gateways

The following section describes the 9 Gateways identified in the NSS, current development issues and characteristics and a general outline of the overall investment priorities within each Gateway that will be a focus for the investment to be funded under the five Priorities set out in Chapters 7 to 11 of this Plan. Some of the projects will involve private sector funding. The projects indicated are seen as key to the development of each of the Gateways. However, there will be many additional programmes and projects funded under the Plan which will play an important role in the economic and social development of the Gateway regions including the Hubs, county towns and rural areas of the Regions. In general, broadband access is not an issue for the Gateways but is for certain of the Hubs, county towns and rural areas.

The Dublin Gateway

Dublin is the international Gateway to Ireland, the capital city and the island's largest urban area. The Dublin Gateway embraces the city and county of Dublin, together with parts of the surrounding counties of Meath, Kildare and Wicklow, and had a population of just under 1.2 million people in 2006, having grown by 5.3% in the period 2002-2006. It is a major port and contains the country's largest and busiest airport. The Greater Dublin Area contains four universities, together with the Dublin Institute of Technology and other major third-level institutions.

The Dublin Gateway is thus, in terms of scale and national and international significance, on a different level to that of the other Gateways. Dublin has spearheaded the growth of the Irish economy. Factors that have contributed to its recent success include the development of the International Financial Services Centre and the wider Docklands regeneration, resurgent urban tourism, strong performance of its universities and R&D facilities, development of its high-tech employment base and strong cultural attractions.

The rapid expansion in the performance of the Dublin Gateway has occurred despite significant infrastructural constraints. These include major increases in the cost of housing, traffic congestion and high reliance on car transport and long-distance commuting. The NSS recognises the international and national economic importance of Dublin and the need to enhance its competitiveness and quality of life. It envisages the continued development of the GDA but in a more compact and sustainable manner, anchored through higher density development around a strengthened public transport grid. Population growth and housing development being driven by the Dublin economy is occurring well beyond the boundaries of Dublin and in neighbouring counties and Regions, encouraging longer distance commuting and diminution of quality of life. A critical issue for the Dublin Gateway, therefore, is that the range and quantity of housing options and transport and social infrastructure is such that the population increase, and the consequent increase in housing demand, is accommodated within the Region and its key development centres served by high capacity public transport.

The Dublin Gateway will therefore be the focus of significant investment under the Plan to ensure that it can improve its position as Ireland's international Gateway. To maintain the economic competitiveness and help meet the NSS vision for the Region, key investment priorities over the period of the Plan will include:

Implementation of the key public transport elements of *Transport 21*, including the completion of Metro North to the Airport and Swords, a major extension of the lightrail network, enhancement of suburban rail and DART services, the provision of additional bus services and further development of the Quality Bus Corridors;

Major investment in suburban rail including the Kildare line and the opening of a rail link from Dublin to Navan;

Completion of the M50 upgrade and completion by 2010 of all Major Inter-Urban routes between Dublin and other Gateway centres. These improvements will also greatly benefit the counties in the Region adjoining Dublin;

Feasibility and planning work on the Eastern Bypass and on a new Outer Orbital Road to serve the Gateway;

Enhancement of the capacity of Dublin Airport;

A comprehensive study of the role of Dublin Port, taking account of locational considerations, in the context of overall ports policy on the island of Ireland;

Further Investment in Environmental Services Infrastructure to facilitate the consolidated development of the Greater Dublin Area;

Development of tourism, sport and cultural facilities on a PPP basis (such as the National Conference Centre, the new National Theatre and the new National Concert Hall) or by direct grant (Lansdowne Road Stadium);

Provision of social, community, cultural, sporting and amenity facilities throughout the Gateway Region to match rapidly developing residential development;

Strengthening the international status and STI capacity of the Gateway's higher education institutes; and

Continuing investment in urban renewal and enhancement of the physical fabric of the Gateway e.g. the regeneration of Ballymun.

The Cork Gateway

Cork is the second city of Ireland with a population of 186,177 in 2002 in the city and its immediate environs. It is also the largest urban and economic centre in the South-West Region. While the population of the central area of the city dropped slightly from 123,062 in 2002 to 119,143 in 2006, outlying areas recorded strong growth. Cork's strengths include: its status as the largest city in the State outside of Dublin; its scale (which is equivalent to the combined populations of the other regional cities of Galway, Limerick and Waterford); a strong economic base with extensive FDI in dynamic sectors such as ICT and pharmaceuticals; strong third-level education facilities; a modern airport with recent significantly enhanced capacity, significant port facilities, a tradition of good strategic land use planning; a large hinterland with regionally important towns and an outstanding natural setting.

The key challenge for Cork over the period to 2013 will be to significantly accelerate its rate of development and population growth, focusing particularly on the potential of its central area. The Docklands, in particular,

has the capacity to accommodate an additional population of at least 15,000 people and significant commercial floor space but investment in physical infrastructure to trigger subsequent private investment is necessary. Key development and investment priorities for Cork and its wider environs will over the period of the Plan include:

Completion by 2010 of the M/N8 Dublin - Cork road to full motorway standard and other road and public transport aspects of *Transport 21*;

The development, as part of the CASP Strategy of an integrated public transport system built around the Green Route programme of improved bus priority, the re-opening of the Cork City-Midleton rail service by 2008 and the development of commuter rail services on the Mallow-Midleton corridor;

Introduction of hourly rail services on the Cork-Dublin route;

Roads, water services, port relocation and associated infrastructure to facilitate docklands regeneration;

Improved road and bus-based public transport links to Cork airport;

Enhancement of road links to other Gateways along the Atlantic Road Corridor;

The upgrading of N28 road access to Ringaskiddy Port and its associated industrial zone;

Pedestrianisation and similar urban renewal activity, building on recent progress in this area;

Enhancement of tourism, cultural and recreational facilities;

Lands at Ringaskiddy and Carrigtohill to be developed by IDA Ireland as part of its Strategic Sites Initiative; and

Continued development of the City's R&D capacity such as the recently opened Tyndall Institute.

The Limerick-Shannon Gateway

Limerick-Shannon is Ireland's largest urban centre after Dublin and Cork. Limerick-Shannon constitutes the economic core of the Mid-West Region (County Limerick, County Clare and North Tipperary). Its population grew by 9.7% to 95,559 between 1996 and 2002 and Limerick City and County's population grew by 4.9% to 183,863 in 2006. The Gateway particularly benefits from Shannon Airport, a strong enterprise base and the proven research capacity of the third-level sector in the Region. Progress has been made in the physical renewal of much of the fabric of the city centre area, which has considerable further potential for brownfield development, notably the docks and riverside areas.

The Limerick Shannon Gateway has considerable potential to generate and drive accelerated rates of economic development and population growth. To achieve this it must put in place and implement an overall strategy for its development, focusing on unlocking further development potential in the city centre and docks areas; an effective bus-based public transport system and further diversification of its enterprise base will be important in this regard. Key development and investment priorities over the period of the Plan will include:

Completion by 2010 of the M/N7 Dublin-Limerick motorway, Phase II of the Southern Ring Road and the N69 route to Tralee;

The enhancement of the Atlantic Road Corridor, including links to other Gateways, with accelerated priority going to the completion of the Limerick-Galway section of the N18 to high quality dual carriageway;

Introduction of enhanced rail service on the Limerick-Dublin route;

Improvement of road access to Shannon Airport via the above investment;

Development of the Western Rail Corridor between Ennis and Claremorris;

Creation of an effective bus-based public transport network, including links to Shannon Airport, building on recent fleet investment and widespread bus prioritisation measures;

Significant upgrading of the public areas and streets in Limerick city centre and re-imagining of Limerick through a major urban renewal initiative;

Implementation of the cultural, recreational and public amenity strategy for Limerick and its wider environs;

Strengthening of R&D capacity in the city's third-level institutions;

Implementation of a shared innovation strategy between education providers and the enterprise sector to strengthen the city's third level and enterprise sector;

The delivery of critical physical infrastructure such as water services and local access roads in a co-ordinated manner to enable accelerated delivery of housing and the renewal of docklands areas; and

Development of leisure and technology parks and strategic sites.

The Galway Gateway

Galway is the principal economic and population centre in the West Region. Galway has performed very strongly throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Its population, currently about 75,000, grew by 17% between 1996 and 2002, the highest of any Gateway other than Letterkenny. Galway City and County grew by a further 10.5% to 231,035 persons in 2006. The city's strengths include a good record of economic growth, its third-level education facilities, its existing enterprise base, its strong tourism industry, and its generally attractive location and quality of life. Development challenges include implementing an agreed strategic development strategy for the city and its wider environs to maintain quality of life and competitiveness and tackling traffic congestion, better and more compact urban planning and further renewal of the city centre. Key development and investment priorities over the period of the Plan will include:

Completion by 2010 of the M/N6 Dublin-Galway motorway;

The enhancement of the Atlantic Road Corridor, thereby improving road links to other Gateway centres, with accelerated priority going to the completion of the Limerick-Galway section of the N18 to high quality dual carriageway;

Provision of a new road from Galway to Ros An Mhíl;

Introduction of enhanced intercity rail services on the Galway-Dublin route;

Introduction of a commuter rail service between Athenry and Galway City;

Creation of an effective bus-based public transport network, building on recent fleet investment through widespread bus prioritisation measures;

Development of the Western Rail Corridor between Ennis and Claremorris;

Focused and co-ordinated investment in water services and access infrastructure to open up major new housing and development areas to the east of the city;

Continued support for Galway Regional Airport;

Provision of sport, social and community facilities to match fast developing residential areas;

Strengthening research and innovation capabilities at the city's third-level institutions;

Regeneration of docks area of Galway city;

Conservation and protection of the city's considerable stock of natural and built heritage; and

Development of strategic sites as part of IDA Ireland Strategic Sites Initiative.

The Waterford Gateway

Waterford is the principal city in the South-East Region. Waterford's city and environs population grew by 5.8% to 46,736 in the period from 1996 to 2002 and the city and county increased in population by a further 6.3% between 2002 and 2006. Waterford's strengths include a strategic location, proximity to a major national port, a compact city with a high quality urban fabric and an outstanding estuarine setting, an educational centre of excellence and a fast developing retail and local services sector. Development challenges include enhancing the critical mass of the city, implementing a co-ordinated approach to the development of the various parts of the city and its environs, which cross local authority boundaries. A good deal of the city's priority investment requirements are on-going in various ways, including improved rail services to Dublin and the M/N9 motorway/dual carriageway. Key development and investment priorities over the period of the Plan will include:

Completion by 2010 of the M/N9 Dublin-Waterford road and N25 by-pass;

Creation of an effective bus-based public transport network, building on recent fleet investment through widespread bus prioritisation measures;

Enhancement of road links to other Gateways along the Atlantic Road Corridor;

Enhanced intercity rail services between Waterford and Dublin;

Enhancing port facilities and facilitating relocation of port activities;

Investment in the R&D capacity of Waterford Institute of Technology to underline the importance of education to Waterford as a centre of excellence;

Development of industry/Institute of Technology linkages within the South-East Region;

Renewal and development of the North-Quays;

Development of strategic sites as part of IDA Ireland Strategic Sites Initiative; and

Continued support for Waterford Regional Airport.

The Dundalk Gateway

Dundalk is one of three Gateways in the Border Region. Dundalk town's population grew by 5.9% to 29,010 in the period from 2002 to 2006 and the wider town and environs area grew by 7.6% in the period 1996-2002. Dundalk is located mid-way along the Dublin-Belfast corridor and its strengths include this strategic location close to Newry city in Northern Ireland, associated availability of a range of high quality infrastructure such as motorway (M1), airport and port access as well as gas pipeline, broadband and electricity networks, the Dundalk Institute of Technology and a strengthening retail sector. The main development challenges for Dundalk are strengthening and broadening its economic and enterprise structure, continuing to tackle social exclusion and facilitating significant ramping up of housing output in new development areas to the west of the town. Development issues and investment requirements for Dundalk over the period of the Plan include:

Strengthening and modernising the local economic and enterprise structure;

Investment in local roads and water services to facilitate the development of the town's western environs;

Development of a bus-based urban transport system;

Community development and measures to tackle social exclusion;

Investment in social housing;

Provision of recreational and cultural amenities;

Strengthening the research and innovation capability of the Dundalk Institute of Technology;

Pro-active promotion of mutually beneficial cooperation with Newry; and

Development of strategic sites as part of IDA Ireland Strategic Sites Initiative.

Letterkenny-Derry (the Northwest Gateway)

Letterkenny's population grew by 26.9% to 15,231 between 1996 and 2002 with similar growth rates between 2002 and 2006. Letterkenny, linked with Derry, is one of three Gateways in the Border Region and is the critical Gateway for the Northwest. Together the two urban areas have an estimated population of over 100,000. The town of Letterkenny itself is relatively small (15,000) but has a rapidly growing population, an expanding retail and local services sector, the Letterkenny Institute of Technology, an extensive and diversified local enterprise base, and a wide hinterland. Development challenges include finalising and implementing an agreed strategic development framework for the Northwest Gateway, enhancing accessibility in an integrated manner through investment on both sides of the border, development of public services on either side of the border in a complementary manner and of a shared strategy for enhancing research and development capacity in the Northwest, building on the capabilities of the existing third level institutes in both jurisdictions. Key development issues and investment requirements over the period of the Plan include:

Implementation, by the relevant local authorities, of an integrated strategy for the strategic development of Letterkenny as an integral part of the Northwest Gateway;

Enhancement of road links to other Gateways along the Atlantic Road Corridor;

Further improvements on the N2 route, in co-operation with the Northern Ireland Authorities, to greatly improve the road link to Dublin over the period of the Plan;

Further investment at Derry Airport and continued support for Donegal Regional Airport;

Enhancement of the capacity and resilience of energy supply networks;

Strengthening the innovation capacity at Letterkenny Institute of Technology and building on complementary strengths at Magee College in Derry;

Initiatives to deepen the skills base of the labour force in order to facilitate the creation and attraction of higher value-added enterprise functions; and

Improvements to the stock of healthcare and social infrastructure such as regional hospital and specialist care services on a shared basis between Donegal and facilities in Northern Ireland.

The Midlands Gateway

The Midlands Gateway is an innovative concept envisaging the co-ordinated development of the three proximate strategically located and large towns of Athlone, Tullamore and Mullingar in the Midlands Region. The aggregate population of the towns was 45,388 in 2006. The strengths of the Gateway include: its strategic location in the centre of the country; its relative proximity to Dublin on newly completed national road (M/N4/6); the prospect of excellent road connections to Cork, Limerick and Galway when the major inter-urban routes are completed by 2010; upgraded rail links to Dublin; improving social infrastructure, especially healthcare facilities such as the Midlands Regional Hospital; the Athlone Institute of Technology; and a good quality of life within the three towns that make up the Gateway. Development challenges include the relatively small size of the towns and implementing an agreed development strategy for the towns on a shared basis. Key development issues and investment requirements over the period of the Plan to the Midlands Gateway include:

Strengthening the R&D capacity of Athlone Institute of Technology and its linkages to industry/employers in the Region;

Development of enhanced road and public transport links between the three towns in the Gateway;

Development of strategic local roads and water services capacity to facilitate and attract development to the towns in the Gateway;

Enhancement of tourist facilities and amenities, building on the natural heritage of the midlands and the potential of the inland waterways network;

Development of Strategic Sites as part of IDA Ireland's Strategic Sites Initiative;

Further development of the N52, with accelerated priority to the provision of the Tullamore Bypass; and

Implementation of the Strategic Development Framework for the Gateway drawn up by the Local Authorities, including the establishment of a Gateway Coordination Unit.

The Sligo Gateway

Sligo is a Gateway in the Border Region which occupies a point between the West of the country and the Northwest. With a population of over 20,000 people in 2002, it is by far the largest centre in the area. The population of Sligo county grew by 4.6% to 60,863 persons between 2002 and 2006. Sligo's strengths include a scenic setting and hinterland, recent completion of the inner relief road, and various upgrades to the M/N4 road, the Sligo Institute of Technology, Regional Airports in Sligo and relatively nearby in Knock and strong private investment activity, particularly in the retail and leisure areas. Development challenges

principally include implementing measures to bring about increased private housing development and rapid population growth within the Gateway. Key development issues and investment requirements over the period of the Plan include:

- Completion of the remaining sections of the N4 requiring upgrades;
- The development of the Atlantic Road Corridor with consequential enhancement of road links to other Gateways;
- Introduction of enhanced railway services on the Sligo-Dublin route;
- New eastern and western urban distribution road routes to open up strategic land banks for accelerated development of new private housing areas;
- Strengthening the R&D capacity of Sligo Institute of Technology;
- Development of regional sports and recreation facilities;
- Continued development of the emerging cultural and entertainment quarter;
- Strengthening regional research and innovation capacity and third level — industry linkages;
- Continued support for Knock and Sligo Regional Airports; and
- Targeted urban renewal including urban enhancement, pedestrianisation and urban redevelopment of the port area.

Key Gateway Corridors

Previous and ongoing investments in the M1-A1 road and Enterprise rail links between Dublin and Belfast are driving forward the development of the Dublin-Belfast corridor. These transport links will also actively support developments such as the cross-border strategy for the Gateway of Dundalk and the City of Newry. The upgrading of the entire Dublin-Belfast road to motorway/dual carriageway status will ensure that this corridor will form a major axis for economic development on the island of Ireland.

To complement the emergent Dublin - Belfast corridor, the NSS pointed out that strengthening the critical mass of the existing Gateways of Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford, both individually and collectively, to complement Dublin's successful national spatial role, offers the most immediate prospects of spearheading more balanced patterns of development on the island of Ireland. These Atlantic Gateways have the potential through strengthened individual cities, enhanced connectivity and a collaborative approach to planning and promotion, to develop the second major metropolitan corridor on the island of Ireland to complement and counterbalance the strengthening Dublin-Belfast corridor. There is also potential to develop onwards and to incorporate the Gateways of Sligo and Letterkenny-Derry. Investment in key projects such as the Atlantic Corridor, embracing road and rail links under *Transport 21*, will help unlock the potential of the Atlantic Gateways concept. Further collaboration between the Atlantic Gateways in preparing and implementing joint development strategies will also be supported by this Plan.

The Midlands Gateway occupies a central/proximate point on the Dublin/Galway, Dublin/Limerick and Dublin/Cork Corridors. It will in particular benefit from the upgrading of these routes to motorway standard and will also be the focus for road investment to improve links within the Gateway. Together with a significant focusing of development, an emphasis on enhancing the innovation potential of the Midlands and adding more value-added functions will assist in the drive towards more self sustaining development. In this way, the Midlands Gateway can capitalise on its central position and accessibility, linking the East coast and Atlantic Gateway corridors.

Strengthening the Hubs

Development of the Gateways is a central component of the Government's approach to balanced regional development. However, development will not be confined to Gateways and their immediate hinterlands. The Gateway approach is about creating the type of critical mass needed to spur growth both in the Gateways and throughout their wider zones of influence. Within such zones of influence, the NSS has identified nine towns or networks of towns to act as Hubs⁴ for their own sub-regional surroundings and to ensure that the capabilities of the Gateways will be extended and linked to more remote rural areas.

The Hubs provide important regional bases for foreign direct investment projects, indigenous industrial and service activity and the provision of essential local facilities and amenities in areas such as public services, education and healthcare. The Hubs, therefore, are a key economic bridge between the Gateways and wider rural areas. Investment in the Hubs in areas such as improving water services, broadband networks, urban renewal, housing, education and healthcare will be important to support the continued economic and social vitality of more rural areas and restructuring and diversification of the rural economy. Many of the Hubs, as well as other key county and smaller towns, will be the locations for decentralised Government and agency offices and this will have significant local beneficial impacts.

The Hubs identified in the NSS are also generally located on key transport corridors between the Gateways and will therefore benefit from ongoing investments under the NDP and *Transport 21*. To drive the process of strengthening the Hubs, it will be vital that national investment is partnered with local vision and leadership and the attraction of private investment. For example, good local planning added to urban renewal initiatives have transformed the central areas of many Hubs, encouraging significant and subsequent private investment in retailing and commercial activities.

Continuing investment priorities in the Hubs will include:

- Delivery of enhanced connectivity in terms of the roll-out of *Transport 21* in roads, public transport and in further support for regional air services and the continuing roll-out of high capacity broadband under the MANS programme;
- Provision of the necessary water services capacity to both facilitate accelerated growth and achieve high environmental standards;
- Continuing the progress being made in the physical regeneration and renewal of town centre areas through the urban renewal and the social housing investment programmes;
- Strengthening the Hubs as centres for high levels of regional innovation through, where appropriate, the Strategic Innovation Fund, third-level education and life-long learning and to ensure that the Hubs and their wider regions can participate and benefit from Ireland's transition towards a knowledge based economy;
- Developing the already extensive range of social infrastructure in hubs such as healthcare, primary and secondary education and social, sporting and cultural facilities in order to enhance both the competitiveness and quality of life in the hubs;
- Measures to ensure strong linkages between the Hubs and their wider rural catchments through targeted investment for example in strategic non-national roads, rural public transport and rural broadband initiatives; and
- Continuing the programme of investment to upgrade and develop the energy transmission and distribution networks.

⁴ Castlebar/Ballina, Tuam, Ennis, Tralee/Killarney, Mallow, Kilkenny, Wexford, Monaghan and Cavan.

Developing urban areas, villages and rural areas

In addition to the network of Hubs, there are other strategically positioned county towns and other large towns whose continued development must be facilitated so that they play an important role in ensuring that balanced development takes place within, as well as between, Regions. The further development of these and other similar locations will be encouraged through effective local planning and leveraging wider public and private investment.

The regional policy approach will also embrace the role of other smaller towns, villages and rural areas with investment in improvements to access via the non-national roads network and rural public transport initiative, investment in water services, rural broadband, community services, housing etc. so that they can attract development and investment. Towns, villages and rural areas need to be supported in the development of new areas of economic activity such as: local value added enterprise activities; tourism; local enterprise; services; and renewable energy to both complement the surviving elements of a restructured agri-business/natural resource sector and provide new employment opportunities. This approach is elaborated on in the Rural Economy Chapter of the Plan.

Ensuring Delivery of the NSS

A comprehensive framework for monitoring and reporting on NDP investment will be developed (see Chapter 13). This will include the preparation of an Annual Report on NDP implementation. This Report will incorporate appropriate indicators on NSS implementation at Gateway and Regional Authority Level. In addition, a high-level Inter-Departmental Implementation Team, chaired by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government will, within NDP implementation arrangements, take a lead role in the establishment and co-ordination of a data gathering process in the following key areas:

- Regional population, housing and economic trends;
- The performance of the Gateways;
- Development of the Hubs;
- Securing effective urban-rural partnership; and
- Consistency of local and regional land use strategies under the NSS.

Information on regional indicators and Gateway performance indicators will inform the NDP Annual Report Structure and feed into the ongoing allocation at project level of Central Government NDP investment over the period of the Plan.

Accelerated development of the Gateways will be a critical component of the Government's approach to regional development. Investment under the Plan, including the new Gateways Innovation Fund, will play a key role in this regard. In addition, however, the local authorities concerned in each of the Gateways, with other local partners, must develop and reach mutual agreement on key implementation issues including any arrangements necessary for better co-ordination of development and supporting, as appropriate, the delivery of the priority projects and other interventions needed to accelerate development. The land use and planning strategies of Local and Regional authorities must be implemented in a way which complements the NSS and the regional development objectives of the Plan. As indicated earlier, statutory provision will be invoked as necessary to ensure this. Provision will be made for funding to advance strategic land use and transportation planning and co-ordinated development across the Gateways.

An enhanced programme of spatial planning monitoring and research under the aegis of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, as recommended in the NESC report "Housing in Ireland Performance and Policy", will also address issues such as development of a Regional economic model, tracking housing development and associated issues and transportation and environmental quality. This research will also support the establishment of the monitoring framework and outcome indicators

outlined above against which progress towards the objective of more balanced regional development can be measured. The development of a national spatial data infrastructure in line with the EU INSPIRE Directive will also provide a supportive framework on which monitoring can be based.

Conclusion

Under this Plan national spatial planning and national investment planning is now being more fully synchronised. The Plan sets out indicative 7 year allocations at Priority and Programme levels in the key areas which impact on regional development. It also provides for the establishment of a Gateways Innovation Fund. Central and local decision makers will operate within the framework set out in this Chapter in their project selection and physical planning processes. The Plan monitoring arrangements and Annual Report on progress referred to in Chapter 13 will include a focus on regional development. This Plan will, therefore represent a significant step forward in the implementation of the NSS and in achieving the objective of supporting the economic and social development of all Regions in their effort to achieve their full potential.

