

# **Southern Regional Assembly Submission to the National Recovery and Resilience Plan**



**February 2021**

## **Introduction**

The Southern Regional Assembly (SRA) welcome the preparation of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) and the opportunity to make a submission on this important initiative. The SRA support the joint submission by three Regional Assemblies of Ireland on the investments and reforms (below) that warrant inclusion in the NRRP to support effective regional development in Ireland. This submission frames the joint submission by three Regional Assemblies of Ireland to the priorities evident in the Southern Region and the statutory context of the Regional Spatial Economic Strategy for the Southern Region (RSES) published in January 2020.

## **Recommendations by the three Regional Assemblies of Ireland**

### **Green Transition**

- Support the Just Transition in the Midlands.
- Invest in the electricity transmission and distribution network.
- Improve energy efficiency in the built environment.
- Strengthen biodiversity, green and blue infrastructure.
- Enhance water supply, flood relief and coastal defence infrastructure.
- Deliver sustainable and active modes of transport.

### **Digital Transformation**

- Support the delivery of the National Broadband Plan.
- Enhance the use of smart technologies in public services.

**Smart, sustainable, and inclusive Growth including economic cohesion, jobs, productivity, competitiveness, research, development and innovation, and a well-functioning single market with strong SMEs.**

- Deliver enterprise infrastructure that supports Smart Specialisation and Clustering.
- Reform funding mechanisms of the Project Ireland 2040 funds.
- Support sustainable sectors in rural economies.
- Ensure there is a regional approach to Smart Specialisation Strategies.
- Enhance human capital levels across our Regions.
- Support and expand the network of co-working hubs in Ireland.

### **Social and territorial cohesion**

- Invest in infrastructure and services to build socially inclusive communities.

**Health, and economic, social, and institutional resilience including with a view of increasing crisis reaction and crisis preparedness.**

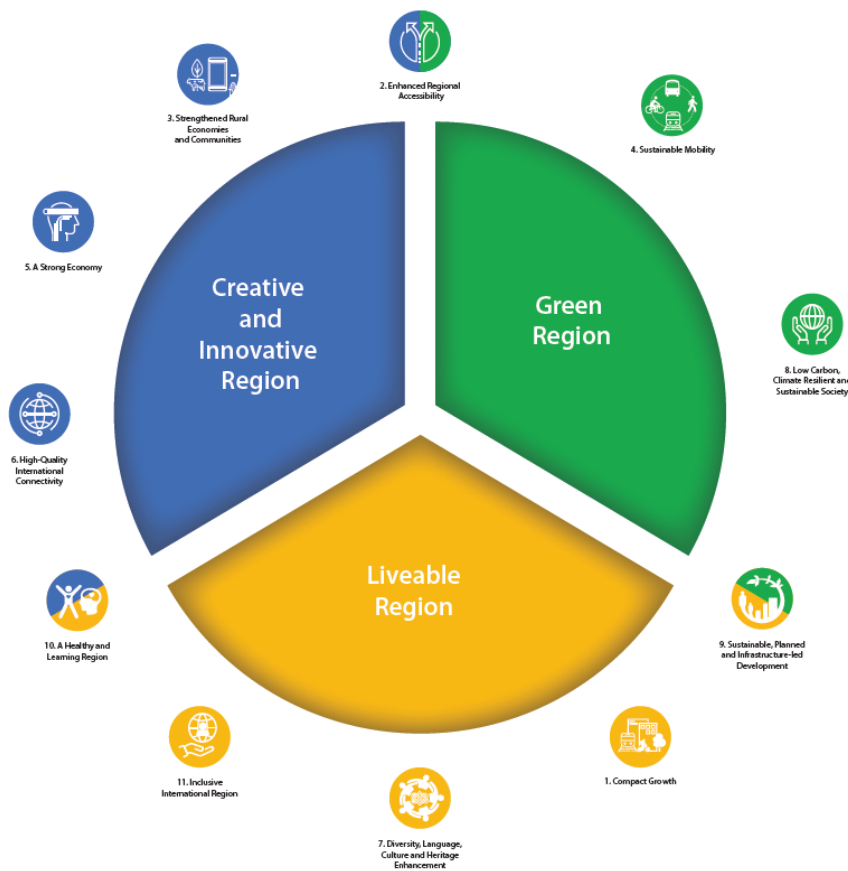
- Deliver investment to enhance the health and wellbeing of our citizens.

**Policies for the next generation, children, and youth, including education and skills.**

- Deliver education and childcare services and infrastructure that caters for future populations.
- Enhance the capabilities of Higher Education Institutes.

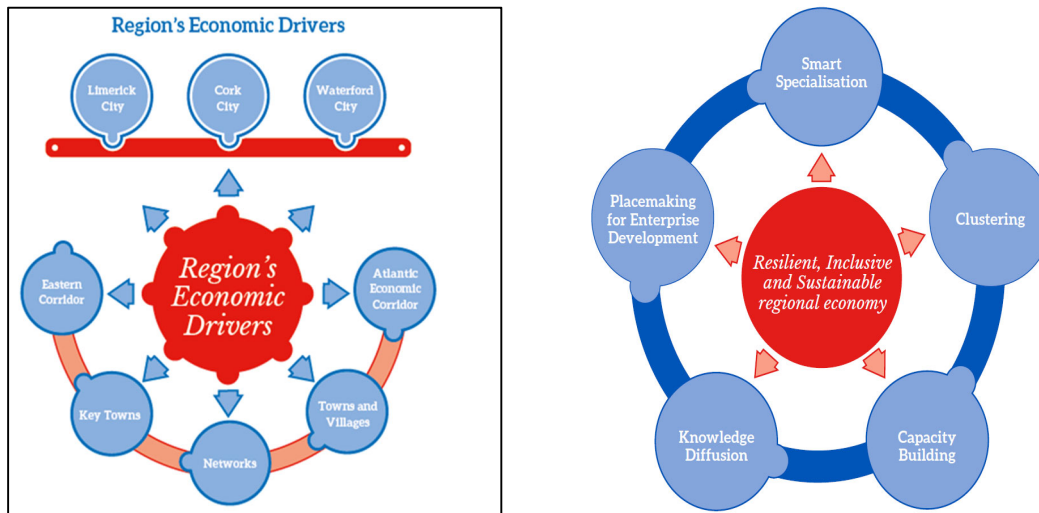
**The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Southern Region (RSES<sup>1</sup>).**

The RSES is the statutory 12-year statutory strategic planning and economic development framework for the Southern Region. The primary objective of the RSES is to implement the programme for transformative change set out in Project Ireland 2040, the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the National Development Plan (NDP- 2018-2027) and to enable a 50:50 distribution of growth between the Eastern and Midland Region, and the Southern and Northern and Western Regions, with 75% of the growth to be outside of Dublin and its suburbs. The RSES is aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the European Green Deal, National Strategic Outcomes of the NPF, existing NDP Strategic Investment Priorities, and provide a strategic planning and economic development framework for the Southern Region to become one of Europe’s most “Creative and Innovative”, “Liveable” and “Greenest” Regions.



<sup>1</sup> <http://www.southernassembly.ie/regional-planning/rses>

A dual track strategy is pursued that builds on our Metropolitan Areas; Cork, Limerick - Shannon and Waterford as significantly scaled (over 50% growth) economic drivers and supports the Region (and each constituent Local Authority) as a strong network of economic corridors (Atlantic Economic Corridor and Eastern Corridor), Key Towns, Towns, villages, and rural areas. The integration of the spatial and economic strategy is summarised as follows:



### What will success for the NDP and RSES look like in the Southern Region?

- Taking the rights steps towards more sustainable travel, energy and bioeconomy to lead on Climate Action in the states transition to a Low Carbon Society.
- Delivering ambitious, unprecedented, and sustainable growth targets for our cities and Metropolitan Areas (50% plus) – Cork, Limerick & Waterford,
- Developing and consolidating our Key Towns, Kilkenny City, Tralee, Carlow, Ennis, Wexford, Killarney, Mallow, Clonakilty, Newcastle West, Thurles, Clonmel, Nenagh, Dungarvan, and Gorey,
- Developing the Cork Docklands,
- Regeneration of Limerick-Shannon, including the Limerick Northern Distributor Route/ Smart Travel Corridor,
- Achieving a balanced 'concentric city' model north of the river in Waterford with development of the North Quays and adjoining lands in Kilkenny.
- Creating an inclusive and Learning Region, building on our higher education institutions including establishing the new technological universities of MTU and TUSE, the TU application by Limerick IT with Athlone IT, a new Learning Region Network and developing a Smart Region.
- Positioning the Southern Region as Ireland's International Gateway through our seaports and airports.
- Making the most of Cork and Waterford Harbours and the Shannon Estuary – our natural maritime assets.
- Improving and protecting the quality of the environment and our rich heritage.



- Sustainably developing our tourism and recreational potential along the Wild Atlantic Way, into Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, through Ireland's Ancient East, and along the Blueways and Greenways.
- Revitalising our urban areas and spaces through creative and regenerative place-making, to deliver on Compact Growth and Housing Need, and provide new vitality for City and Town Centres.
- Revitalising Rural Areas through readapting our small towns and villages and increasing collaboration between networks of settlements to seek higher value, diversified jobs for a higher quality of life.
- Connecting our Region – enhanced infrastructure from North to South and East Coast to West Coast, connecting to the Atlantic Economic Corridor & developing an extended Eastern Economic Corridor to Rosslare Europort.
- Creating the Greenest and most Liveable Metropolitan Areas for diverse communities, culture, and enterprise –
- Investing in Public Services to tackle legacies, support planned population and employment growth, providing education, health, transport, community and social services and infrastructure.

While based on a clear long-term strategy the RSES emphasises the need to act in response to unexpected shocks and **Regional Policy Objectives (RPOs) 40 – Regional Economic Resilience** states:

'to sustainably develop and enhance our regional economic resilience by widening our economic sectors, boosting innovation, export diversification, productivity enhancement and access to new markets.

The RSES therefore provides a tailor-made statutory based regional structure that aligns with the aims of NRRP and the six pillars identified:

## **1. GREEN TRANSITION**

The Assembly supports the prioritisation by the NRRP of:

- Supporting climate action and transition to a low carbon economy.
- Support the Just Transition in the Midlands.
- Invest in the electricity transmission and distribution network.
- Improve energy efficiency in the built environment.
- Strengthen biodiversity, green and blue infrastructure.
- Enhance water supply, flood relief and coastal defence infrastructure.
- Deliver sustainable and active modes of transport.

The development of a Green Region is a fundamental pillar of the RSES, and **Strategy Statement 8** calls for the 'development of a Low Carbon and Climate Resilient Society'.

The SRA recognise the transition to a low carbon economy can offer significant opportunities to achieve sectoral diversification in the Green Economy and the need for a Just Transition for employment to a greener future. The SRA supports funding for research and development in Green Economy sectors and support for centres of excellence such as the National Bio-Economy Hub in Lisheen in the Southern Region. The SRA support innovation in the bioeconomy as a major contributor to our indigenous renewable energy resources and as an economic driver for our rural areas. The SRA also support social enterprises and the circular economy within local communities to benefit environmental protection, employment

generation and community development. This priority aligns with and achieves RSES RPOs 56-60.

The SRA support the implementation of national policy on climate change, mitigation and adaptation and actions under the new Climate Action Bill. The SRA seek support for the initiatives of Climate Action Regional Offices in their important coordination with sectoral stakeholders and Local Authorities in delivering meaningful local actions for climate change mitigation and adaptation and the implementation of Local Authority Climate Change Adaptation Strategies. This priority aligns with and achieves RSES RPOs 56, 89 and 90.

**Strengthen Biodiversity, Green and Blue Infrastructure in the Southern Region:** A requirement for strengthened Ecosystem Services approaches, Sustainable Urban Drainage Solutions and Nature-Based Design Solutions for all capital projects and works by Local Authorities and infrastructure agencies is supported. Initiatives for that enhance the biodiversity of the Regions need to be driven. Specifically, the implementation of the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan and National Biodiversity Action Plan are supported. The SRA also support the on-going maintenance, enhancement, and extension to our network of Greenways and Blueways, National Parks, Forest Trails, Mountain Trails, Peatland Trails, and other designated locations for natural habitat, recreation, and enjoyment. This priority aligns with and achieves RSES RPOs 110, 122-128, 200-201 and 218.

**Enhance and expand renewable energy infrastructure in the Southern Region:** The SRA support implementation of the National Energy Efficiency Action Plan and investment to improve energy efficiency, retrofit and future proof our Region's building stock. Support renewable energy generation, specifically the need for significant upgrading of energy transmission infrastructure to integrate increased on shore and offshore renewable sources onto the National Grid to meet our targets. The development of international energy interconnections and upgrading power stations for renewable technologies are priorities for security of energy supply. Support actions through future Regional Renewable Energy Strategy and Regional Decarbonisation Plans. The SRA also support local and community renewable energy networks, micro renewable generation, climate smart countryside projects and connections from such initiatives to the grid. This priority aligns with and achieves RSES RPOs 87, 91-106 and 219-224.

**Increase the number of publicly owned EV charge points in the Southern Region:** An increased rate of capital expenditure to facilitate and encourage greater use of electric vehicles by developing more publicly owned recharging facilities in the Southern Region. Additional resources in this regard should aim to develop EV "Fast Charge" points or EV "High Powered Charge"<sup>2</sup> points in strategic and accessible locations across the Region. This priority aligns with and achieves RSES RPOs 91, 92 and 160-164.

**Enhance the cycling and pedestrian infrastructure of the Southern Region:** Capital investment should aim to deliver safe cycling routes and enhance pedestrian facilities across settlements of all scale in our Region, with packaged investments to Local Authorities and transport agencies to action cost effective local walking and cycling infrastructure improvements and developing Greenway and Blue Way projects in the short term. This priority aligns with and achieves RSES RPOs 151, 152, 160-165, 174, 176, Cork MASP Objective 7 & 8, Limerick MASP Objective 7, and Waterford MASP Objective 6.

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<sup>2</sup> Fast chargers can get an 80 percent charge to most EVs in 30 minutes, while high powered chargers can give a charge of 100km in as little as six minutes. Source ESB: <https://esb.ie/ecars/how-to-charge-your-ev/fast-charging>, <https://esb.ie/ecars/how-to-charge-your-ev/high-power-charging>

## 2. DIGITAL TRANSITION

The Assembly supports the prioritisation by the NRRP of:

- Support the delivery of the National Broadband Plan.
- Enhance the use of smart technologies in public services including transport.

**RSES Strategy Statement 8** calls for High quality digital connectivity throughout the Region. This pillar of the NRRP accords with RPO 135 High Quality Capacity International Digital Transmission, RPO 136 National Broadband Plan (NBP), RPO 137 Mobile Infrastructure, and RPO 138 Digital Strategies.

It is essential for our economic competitiveness and resilience to provide new and continual re-investment in the quality of our digital infrastructure networks across cities, towns, villages, and rural areas. The implementation of actions arising from Local Authority Smart Cities and Smart Town initiatives, actions under Local Authority Digital Strategies and investment and upgrades under the National Broadband Plan, in fibre technologies, wireless networks, Metropolitan Area Networks and other integrated digital infrastructures will provide a significant economic dividend for our Region. The recent publication by the three Regional Assemblies “Regional Co-Working Analysis” sets out eight key considerations for policy makers to realise the economic potential and benefits of remote working. This priority aligns with RSES RPOs 46, 48 and 133-138 (link to the report of the three Assemblies is at: <https://www.southernassembly.ie/news/news-article/regional-co-working-analysis>)

**Safeguard funding for the implementation of the National Broadband Plan** in communities based in the Southern Region will be a key component in transforming the economic and social wellbeing of the Southern Region, and it is imperative that this digital infrastructure is delivered in a timely and efficient manner. This priority aligns with and achieves RSES RPOs 26, 46, 48, 134, 136 and 138.

**Enhance the use of smart transport technologies in the Southern Region:** Transport infrastructure capital expenditure in the Region should involve a systematic integration of ICT in the planning, design, operations, and management of transport services of the Region’s settlements. Investment should leverage intelligent low carbon e-mobility systems. This priority aligns with and achieves RSES RPOs 157, 160-164, Cork MASP Objective 7 & 8, Limerick MASP Objective 7, and Waterford MASP Objective 6.

## 3. SMART, SUSTAINABLE, AND INCLUSIVE GROWTH INCLUDING ECONOMIC COHESION, JOBS, PRODUCTIVITY, COMPETITIVENESS, RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT AND INNOVATION, AND A WELL-FUNCTIONING SINGLE MARKET WITH STRONG SMES.

The Assembly supports the prioritisation by the NRRP of:

- Deliver enterprise infrastructure that supports Smart Specialisation and Clustering.
- Reform funding mechanisms of the Project Ireland 2040 funds.
- Support sustainable sectors in rural economies.
- Ensure there is a regional approach to Smart Specialisation Strategies.
- Enhance human capital levels across our Regions.
- Support and expand the network of co-working hubs in Ireland.

This pillar accords with RSES **Strategy Statement 5** to build a competitive, innovative, and productive economy and **Strategy Statement 11** to build an inclusive outward looking

region on the global stage. Chapter 4 sets out a coherent strategy for Innovative and Smart Strong Economy and RSES RPO 133 and 134 relate to the development of Smart Cities and Smart Region and the Southern Region is at the forefront.

**Deliver infrastructure that will support Regional Smart Specialisation and Clustering:** A strong focus on Smart Specialisation and Clustering offering an innovative approach to kick-starting regional economies is supported. The SRA seeks to leverage existing enterprise ecosystems across national, regional, and local level by funding initiatives that drive a regional approach to Smart Specialisation. Strengthened funding for research and innovation sectors and for the actions of enterprise agencies and Regional Enterprise Plans is recommended to support enterprise growth, innovation, and diversity within our Region's sectors of strength. This priority aligns with and achieves RSES RPOs 40, 51, 67 and 75.

**Support and expand the Southern Region's network of co-working hubs:** The degree to which urban and rural communities can capitalise on the potential economic benefits of remote working will depend on a variety of factors including the availability of co-working hubs with high quality facilities and the provision of high-speed broadband within such hubs. Therefore, sufficient capital investment should be provided to deliver more co-working hubs in line with the Region's settlement hierarchy with a focus on cities and Key Towns while delivering an appropriate level of hubs in targeted rural communities/settlements serving a wide hinterland area within the Southern Region. This priority aligns with and achieves RSES RPOs 26, 46, 48, 134, 136 and 138.

#### **4. SOCIAL AND TERRITORIAL COHESION**

The Assembly supports the prioritisation by the NRRP to:

- Invest in infrastructure and services to build socially inclusive communities.

This pillar accords with RSES **Strategy Statement 11** to building an Inclusive Region and supports balanced regional growth and achieving the overarching aim of the national policy to see a 50:50 distribution of growth between the Eastern and Midland Region, and the Southern and Northern and Western Regions, with 75% of the growth to be outside of Dublin and its suburbs.

**Invest in infrastructure and services to build socially inclusive and international communities in our Region:** Growth projections under the NPF and RSES are dependent on welcoming people to live and work in our communities and offering a higher quality of life for all. The SRA support funding to deliver actions under Local Authority Local Economic Community Plans (LECPs), volunteering and active citizenship initiatives, regeneration of disadvantaged areas including RAPID initiatives and implementing Government policy "The Migrant Integration Strategy". The SRA also support disability awareness initiatives and fund initiatives to improve equal access for all through universal design. This priority aligns with and achieves RSES RPOs RSES RPOs 179-183, Cork MASP Objective 22, Limerick-Shannon MASP Objective 22, and Waterford MASP Objective 24.



## **5. HEALTH, AND ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, AND INSTITUTIONAL RESILIENCE INCLUDING WITH A VIEW OF INCREASING CRISIS REACTION AND CRISIS PREPAREDNESS.**

The Assembly supports the prioritisation by the NRRP to:

- Deliver investment to enhance the health and wellbeing of our citizens.

This pillar accords with the overall strategy of the RSES to build a strong resilient, sustainable region. **Strategy Objective 10** states to objective to build A Healthy and Learning Region. The Economic Strategy set in Chapter 4 addresses resilience and the need to Future Proof – Readiness to address emerging challenges.

### **Support Culture, the Gaeltacht, Sports & Recreation and Heritage in our Region:**

**The** SRA support the development of a vibrant cultural and creative sector (measures under Culture 2025 and Creative Ireland Strategy 2017- 22) , our unique Gaeltacht areas (initiatives of Údaras na Gaeltachta under the Gaeltacht Act 2012 , sports and recreation (investments into sports and community organisations through the Sports Capital Programme) and the protection and interaction with heritage in our Region (fund initiatives of Local Authorities, the Heritage Council, local communities, heritage property owners for the revitalisation of historic cores and built heritage). This priority aligns with and achieves RSES RPOs 191-199 and RPOs 203-205.

### **Deliver investment to enhance the health and wellbeing of our Region’s citizens:**

Investments to deliver actions that promote healthier communities are supported. Gaps in the national healthcare infrastructure need to be addressed to meet this objective. The SRA support funding to implement the healthcare service investment programme, the Sláintecare Implementation Strategy and Action Plan. In response to population ageing, the SRA supports Age-Friendly communities and implementation of the National Positive Ageing Strategy. The SRA also supports funding to implement the Healthy Ireland and the National Physical Activity Plan. Our Region’s three cities are WHO Healthy Cities and form part of the Healthy Cities and Counties Network. The SRA supports such initiatives and funding for Local Authorities to implement healthier cities, towns, villages, and communities. This priority aligns with and achieves RSES RPOs 175, 178 and 182.

### **Deliver infrastructure and services that will grow knowledge diffusion and develop**

**a Learning Region:** Knowledge diffusion is a key enabler to our Region’s economic resilience and growth. Supports to Higher Education Institutes and Education and Training Boards, the Regional Skills Fora and funding actions for life-long learning are needed. The SRA supports Lifelong Learning initiatives as essential components of a strong economy, as exemplified in Cork and Limerick’s attainment of the UNESCO Learning City status and extend the UNESCO Learning City status to Waterford city, to create a regional knowledge triangle. The SRA supports the Technological University for the South-East (TUSE) and the Munster Technological University (MTU). These priorities align with and achieves RSES RPOs 63 and 184-190 in addition to Cork MASP Objectives 10 & 20, Limerick-Shannon MASP Objective 18 and Waterford MASP Objectives 14, 22 & 23.

Lifelong Learning initiatives as essential components of a strong economy, as exemplified in Cork and Limerick’s attainment of the UNESCO Learning City status and extend the UNESCO Learning City status to Waterford city, to create a regional knowledge triangle.

## **6. POLICIES FOR THE NEXT GENERATION, CHILDREN, AND YOUTH, INCLUDING EDUCATION AND SKILLS.**

The Assembly supports the prioritisation by the NRRP to:

- Deliver education and childcare services and infrastructure that caters for future populations.
- Enhance the capabilities of Higher Education Institutes.

**Strategy Statement 7** supports 'Diversity, Language Culture and Heritage Enhancement', and **Strategy Statement 10** states to objective to build A Healthy and Learning Region.

**Strengthen investment and supports for childcare, education, and services for our Region's youth:** The SRA supports the provision and enhancement of facilities and amenities for children and young people, such as childcare, schools, playgrounds, parks, and sports grounds. Provision of quality affordable childcare places is critical, both developmentally for children and as an effective labour market intervention. The SRA supports the existing NDPs commitment to investment for primary and post-primary education services. Locating new school facilities and improving access to existing school facilities to be accessible by active walking and cycling and public transport is critical for healthy communities. The multi-use of school facilities for wider use by communities and co-location of childcare and school facilities is also supported. Education, training, and skills development can tackle legacies due to deprivation. The SRA support funding for actions through Children and Young People's Services Committee Plans to realise the ambitions of our Region's youth. This priority aligns with and achieves RSES RPOs 63, 175, 177, 185-190.

**The SRA supports the existing commitment to investment for primary and post-primary education services.** Locating new school facilities and improving access to existing school facilities to be accessible by active walking and cycling and public transport is critical for healthy communities. The multi-use of school facilities for wider use by communities and co-location of childcare and school facilities is also supported. Education, training, and skills development can tackle legacies due to deprivation. The SRA support funding for actions through Children and Young People's Services Committee Plans to realise the ambitions of young people across the regions.

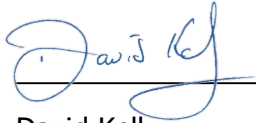
### **Conclusion**

The Assembly welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of the NRRP. Aligning the NRRP investment with our strategic statutory frameworks will be a key component in tackling recovery and the regional imbalances that exist in Ireland, including addressing the 50:50 distribution of growth between the Eastern and Midland Region, and the Southern and Northern and Western Regions allowing the Southern Region to develop critical mass and to fulfil the vision of our RSES, namely, to become one of Europe's most "Creative and Innovative", "Greenest" and "Liveable" regions.

The SRA are committed as a key stakeholder to help drive actions on our regional investment priorities through our own RSES and MASP implementation structures and are a key consultee for the Project Ireland 2040 Delivery Board.

The SRA would welcome the opportunity to engage with the Department on this submission and are available for future consultation and clarities as required regarding this submission.

Mise le meas,



David Kelly,

Director