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National Transport Authority,
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10th December 2021

**Re: Submission to BusConnects Cork: Draft New Network Consultation
SRA File Ref: 03/NS2021**

A Chara,

The Southern Regional Assembly (SRA) welcomes the publication of the Draft Network for BusConnects Cork and the opportunity to make a submission in support of implementing this project.

BusConnects is a key enabler to the ambitious sustainable growth targets in the Cork Metropolitan Area (CMA), identified under the National Planning Framework (NPF) and National Development Plan (NDP).

The implementation of the project is important to achieve land use and transport planning integration and sustainable mobility objectives of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Southern Region and the Cork Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (MASP).

The SRA collaborated closely with the NTA in the development of the RSES and MASPs for Cork, Limerick-Shannon and Waterford, including the Regional Transport Strategy under RSES Chapter 6 Connectivity.

The SRA and NTA continue to co-ordinate closely in the implementation of the RSES and MASPs, including as key stakeholders for the preparation and implementation of the Metropolitan Transport Strategies.

This submission is intended as a high-level support for the BusConnects Cork process, confirming alignment of the project with the objectives of the RSES and Cork MASP.

1.0 Context of the RSES

The Region's priorities for investment are identified in the RSES and MASPs for Cork, Limerick-Shannon and Waterford which came into effect on the 31st January 2020. In line with the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the National Development Plan (NDP), they set a 12-year statutory strategic planning and economic development framework for future economic, spatial, and social development of Southern Region.

The Southern Region has the State's most significant proposition to achieve the aim of Regional Parity fundamental to the Project Ireland 2040 process. The NPF and RSES targets our three cities to grow

by over 50% to 2040 as part of a structural realignment away from the Greater Dublin Area with a 50:50 distribution of growth between the Eastern and Midlands region and the Southern and Northern and Western Regions.

These are extremely ambitious targets which have never been accomplished in the State's history. Their achievement requires a structure change in the scale and nature of investment to the Regions and the Metropolitan Areas of Cork, Limerick- Shannon, Waterford and Galway.

The settlement strategy builds on the Region's three cities and metropolitan areas as engines of growth supported by a network of fourteen strategically located Key Towns. Regeneration and growth across our Region's Cities, Key Towns and further through its network of towns, villages and rural communities are supported to build an economically resilient, competitive and growing region. The economic strategy equally builds on the Region's settlement structure, with the cities and metropolitan areas at the top of the hierarchy as our Region's principal economic drivers.

By 2040, the population of the Region is projected to rise to almost two million, requiring new homes and jobs. RSES Appendix 1, page 347 sets out Local Authority population projections to 2031, which combined deliver a projected uplift between 280,000 to 343,500 in the Region to 2031. The Cork Metropolitan area is targeted to grow by an additional 104,600 persons to 2031 (75,000 of which is in the city and suburbs). Additional jobs in the CMA are targeted to grow by at least 65,000 by 2031.

At least 50% of all new homes that are targeted in the region's three metropolitan areas are to be delivered within their existing built up footprints and a corresponding target of at least 30% within all other settlements.

Achieving such ambitious targets will require effective land use and transport planning integration and an equally ambitious alignment in funding priorities and service delivery. Transport infrastructure is fundamental to underpin this growth.

It is this regional policy context that strongly supports the delivery of transport infrastructure for our Region including BusConnects Cork.

References to the final published RSES and the MASP for Cork can be obtained through <http://www.southernassembly.ie/regional-planning/rses>

2.0 Implement Metropolitan Area Transport Strategies

The SRA is consistent in advocating for structured regional investment in pursuit of balanced regional growth. We seek support from Central Government to deliver ring fenced funding and investment to deliver transport projects, including the Cork Metropolitan Transport Strategy (CMATS). Examples of this support include our submissions to the National Economic Recovery Plan, NDP Review and National Investment Framework for Transport in Ireland. Our submissions can be viewed at the below link:

<https://www.southernassembly.ie/regional-planning/sra-consultation-submissions>

Transport investment, with a focus on sustainable and active travel within our cities and metropolitan area for daily activities, is a key enabler for each city and metropolitan area. From the regional perspective, the preparation, implementation and follow through investment in delivering metropolitan transport strategies cannot be over-stated.

For the regions to succeed, our cities and metropolitan areas must be prioritised for investment in transport infrastructure projects and projects such as BusConnects need to be delivered.

3.0 Support for the Scope of the Cork BusConnects Network

The SRA strongly support the scope of the BusConnects Network redesign to deliver:

- A redesign of the bus network across the CMA.
- Build a new network of bus corridors and cycle lanes.
- Implement state of the art ticketing systems and simpler fare structures.
- Deliver new bus stops, shelters, signage and passenger information.
- Deliver new Park and Ride sites at key locations.
- Transition to a zero-emission bus fleet.
- Increased frequency of service.

Further, the SRA also support the following principles of the draft network:

- Greater access to strategic employment areas across the CMA.
- Increased access to schools.
- More frequent services closer to more homes and jobs.
- Extended coverage of routes across the City and County.
- Preparing towards the delivery of the Cork Light Rail Corridor.
- More seamless multi modal transport interchange.

4.0 Alignment with the RSES and Cork MASP

The following sections and Regional Policy Objectives (RPOs) of the RSES and Cork MASP, as examples, are supported through the implementation of the Cork BusConnects Network and supporting measures:

- RPOs 7-9 Investment and Delivering Infrastructure in the Metropolitan Areas
- RPO 10 Compact Growth in Metropolitan Areas
- RPO 35 Support for Compact Growth
- RPO 62 Locations for Employment Development
- RPO 68 Regional Investment
- RPO 91 Decarbonisation in the Transport Sector

Under RSES Chapter 6 Connectivity

- RPO 151 Integration of Landuse and Transport
- RPO 152 Local Planning Objectives
- RPO 159 Role of Transport in Enabling Access for All
- RPO 160 Smart and Sustainable Mobility
- RPO 161 Smart Mobility
- RPO 162 Multi-Modal Travel Integration
- RPO 164 Metropolitan Area Transport Strategies
- RPO 165 Higher Densities
- RSES Section 6.3.6.3 Transport Priorities for the Cork Metropolitan Area
- RPO 171 Bus
- RPO 174 Walking and Cycling
- RPO 176 10 Minute City and Town Concepts

Under the Cork MASP

- Cork MASP Policy Objective 1 Cork Metropolitan Area
- Cork MASP Section 4.0 National Enablers and Policy Objective 6 National Enablers
- Cork MASP Policy Objective 7 Integrated Landuse and Transport Planning
- Cork MASP Policy Objective 8 Delivering CMATS
- Cork MASP Section 7 Housing and Regeneration Areas
- Cork MASP Section 8 Employment Growth

- Cork MASP Policy Objective 12 Infrastructure for Strategic Employment Locations.

Climate Action

The SRA welcome the projected outcomes and improved accessibility levels to public transport that will encourage modal shift to public transport and active travel. A good example is the mid-week PM peak, where the percentage of residents within a 400m walking catchment of public transport will increase from 23% to 32%. The percentage of jobs within 400m walking catchment will increase from 37% to 42%. These outcomes are needed if we are to meet our national climate action targets in reducing carbon emissions from the transport sector by 51% by 2030 and setting a clear path towards a zero net-emissions scenario by 2050.

Conclusion

The SRA welcome the continued engagement with the NTA in the implementation this project, other projects under CMATS and further initiatives for sustainable mobility in our Region.

Busconnects Cork will be transformative for the CMA. The proposals support land use and transport planning integration for the economic, social and environmental development throughout the CMA and Region. The project will assist the transition of the Region to lower carbon transport emissions, greater levels of sustainable mobility and a higher quality of life for all in our society and we encourage appropriate actions to implement the project and deliver on its sustainable outcomes.

Mise le meas,



David Kelly,
Director