

5<sup>th</sup> March 2019

RSES Submissions  
Southern Regional Assembly  
Assembly House  
O'Connell Street  
Waterford  
X91 F8PC

Dear Sir/Madam

**RE: SOUTHERN REGIONAL ASSEMBLY - Draft regional spatial and economic strategy (RSES) – consultation submission**

Port of Waterford (PoW) welcomes this opportunity to comment on the next stage of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) process, as provided by the Draft RSES Document.

The preparation of the Draft RSES document represents an opportunity to develop an effective policy for the sustainable spatial and economic development of the Southern Region and, as outlined by the National Planning Framework, to provide a more effective balance of growth between the regions. The reorganisation of the regions and the subsequent development of the RSES offers an opportunity to co-ordinate policy, development and action at an effective scale.

## GENERAL BACKGROUND

The National Planning Framework 2040 states that Irish ports are critical infrastructure for international trade, with over 90% of our international trade moving by sea. Ports also serve as logistics and distribution hubs and they must be capable of delivering additional port capacity in a timely manner to maintain economic growth. The NPF refers to the importance of Belview Port which is a Tier 2 port - based on its potential to grow traffic, proximity to key trading partners and strategic transport roles. The Port is designated as a Comprehensive Port on the Ten-T Network.

Belview Port is the centre of operations for Port of Waterford. Located on the south east coast it is the closest multi-modal port to Europe. The Port handles substantial vessels and has excellent inland connectivity with direct access to the M9 motorway and rail freight connections. In terms of throughput, Belview Port currently handles over 1.5 million tonnes of bulk products (mainly agri-related) together with another 100k+ tonnes of break bulk (mainly timber and steel). The Port also operates in the Container/Lo-Lo sector handling 40k TEU annually and it is one of only two ports in the country with operational rail freight infrastructure.

The value of goods through the port was estimated at €1.7 billion in 2017. 2018 delivered growth approaching 30% on the bulk side of the business and over 4% for containers handled. There is substantial latent capacity to support continued growth and expansion, particularly for container traffic.

## **FREIGHT STRATEGY**

RPO 136 recommends the development of a regional freight strategy and notes rail freight in particular. For over 40 years the Port of Waterford has used rail freight for imports and exports. During this time, containerised rail freight to and from Waterford Port served Irish Rail railheads each weeknight at Cork (North Esk, Glanmire), Mallow, Limerick, Dublin (Kingsbridge and North Wall), Dundalk, Belfast, Longford, Ballina, and Sligo eliminating over 150 trucks from the roads each day and reducing road congestion, road traffic accidents, road maintenance costs and local pollution. This solution competitively serviced major companies throughout the island of Ireland until some of the rail freight depots ceased to operate.

Up until May 2018, a twice-weekly service rail freight service operated between Ballina and the Port of Waterford. This carried containerised cargo (to/from Rotterdam) between Belview and Ballina and was the result of an effective collaboration between DFDS, Port of Waterford and Irish Rail. Whilst the service has since ceased, a comprehensive review of Irish Rail's commercial charging structures around rail freight, particularly in relation to track access charges, should result in viable future solutions, particularly when factoring in a wider consideration of benefits that rail freight can offer in relation to CO2 emissions and human health factors in particular.

Rail freight will be most effective over longer distances of travel. Hence rail freight strategy should be 'national' in nature and have the breath to support the freight requirements of all regions. Ideally the regional strategy should identify and map the strategic rail freight routes within and without the region which could identify new options, re-open old routes and protect against over-reliance on Dublin Port.

Similarly, a regional freight strategy should promote, insofar as is practical, the utilisation of Tier 1 and Tier 2 Ports outside of Dublin to deal with regional freight requirements thereby reducing the reliance on Dublin Port, reducing road miles and reducing road congestions in and around the Capital.

The potential for this approach to reduce carbon emissions, improve air quality, address road congestion and improve road safety should be assessed within the Strategic Environmental Assessment being carried out in parallel with the RSES. This should clearly demonstrate the benefits for such an approach.

## **PORT STATUS**

RPO 137 seeks the achievement of Tier 1 status for Rosslare Europort and Port of Waterford. Within current National Ports Policy a Tier 1 port handles at least 15% to 20% of annual tonnage. Tier 2 ports handle at least 2.5% of national tonnage, have the potential to handle higher volumes of unitised traffic and have existing transport links to serve a national marketplace. Port of Waterford handles c 4% of national tonnage, has excellent national connectivity and the capacity for and experience of handling significantly more container volume.

Ireland's Tier 1 ports are Core ports for Ten-T purposes while the Tier 2 ports are 'Comprehensive'. Core ports benefit from more direct access to EU funding and support and the supports available are far greater in scale and scope.

Provision of port infrastructure is highly capital intensive and the State does not provide funding for port investment. EU support can make a critical difference to the delivery of significant infrastructure investment. We recommend policies that promote the provision and expansion of EU supports to Comprehensive ports.

## **MASTERPLAN**

RPO 141 deals with high quality international connectivity. Port of Waterford is working on a Masterplan (due June 2019) which will outline a range of nautical and capacity/infrastructural improvements that can be activated if and as required over the next 25 years. These options are being subjected to extensive environmental, engineering and commercial diligence and the final shape and scope of the options is subject to ongoing consultation processes.

Subject to the processes mentioned above, the options being developed will provide for: -

- Enhanced nautical access thereby facilitating larger vessels, maintaining depths and improving overall navigational safety.
- Capacity expansions for ship berths and freight handling
- The landside developments needed to support port activity

The RSES outlines European Union goals relating to climate change and energy, which targets a 40% reduction in GHG emissions, with at least a 27% increase in renewable energy sources and at a 27% improvement in energy efficiency by 2030. A 2015 report by the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) found that vessel sizes have doubled in size since 1990 and that newer, larger vessels have a much lower Energy Efficiency Design Index (EEDI) value than smaller ships, reflected in the international shipping statistics from 2007 to 2015, which saw a 58% increase in global gross tonnage coupled with a 11-16% decrease in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Implementation of the Port Master Plan to allow access for larger vessels will increase the energy efficiency (i.e. reduce per tonne CO<sub>2</sub> emissions) of port-related trade.

Specific support within RPO 141 for the Port of Waterford Masterplan is requested and we fully support section 6.2 of the Waterford MASP – Development of the Port of Waterford (Belview) as a major International Gateway.

In addition, the development and operation of co-ordinated and efficient consenting structures is needed to help ensure ports can deliver balanced sustainable solutions that meet the requirements of the economy within reasonable timeframes. The NDP, RSES, Marine Spatial Planning and the proposed MAFA legislation all positively contribute to this issue.

## CONCLUSION

In summation, this submission: -

- Welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Southern Regional Assembly.
- Wholly supports the inclusion of **Objectives 135 to 141** and Waterford MASP **Objective 12**.
- Recommends a 'national' approach to freight strategy for rail freight purposes with particular attention on viable track access charges. - **RPO 136**
- Seeks policies that encourage availability and scale of EU supports for Comprehensive ports. -**RPO 135/137**
- Requests specific recognition for PoW masterplan options. – **RPO 141**
  - Enhanced nautical access thereby facilitating larger vessels, maintaining depths and improving overall navigational safety.
  - Capacity expansions for ship berths and freight handling
  - The landside developments needed to support port activity
- Notes the importance of co-ordinated and efficient consenting processes. – **RPO 218**
- Recommends that the Regional Assembly takes a proactive role in promoting the positive environmental benefits of maximising the movement of goods by sea and rail . – **RPO 87**

Yours sincerely

