

## **Address by ICBAN CEO, Shane Campbell, to NI Policy Forum Conference on ‘Priorities for Transport Infrastructure in Northern Ireland’, 20 February 2018**

Not everyone is born in the city.

Not everyone lives in a city area, and not everyone wants to live there.

Not all of the best businesses in NI are located in our largest towns and cities.

Our economic, transport and regional development strategies are not just about the largest population centres on the island.

But I’m not here to bash city living or city development. Far from it. I am here to impart on behalf of our cross-border partnership, that rural communities must receive their equitable share of infrastructure investments, to ensure our economies reap their full potential. That’s why many of us argue for balanced regional economies.

Take areas such as Fermanagh, Armagh, Monaghan, Mid-Ulster, Cavan. These areas make highly significant business and economic contributions, indeed disproportionately to the economy compared against lower levels of investment there. These are also areas battling against cuts in local services, and are areas dependent on roads based transportation.

However, these areas which ICBAN represents aren’t being invested in to the same extent. We are a local authority-led cross-border group and our Council membership includes the NI District Councils of Armagh City Banbridge and Craigavon, Fermanagh and Omagh, and Mid Ulster, as well as the Irish County Councils of Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Monaghan and Sligo. Border connectivity through transport and broadband infrastructure have been key issues for our group of Councils.

These maps show the continuing levels of under investment in the area we know as the Central Border Region.

We can see the absence of both roads infrastructure,



**Strategic Roads Network for the island of Ireland, showing gap in the North West Quadrant of the Island**

overlaid with an absence of rail infrastructure,



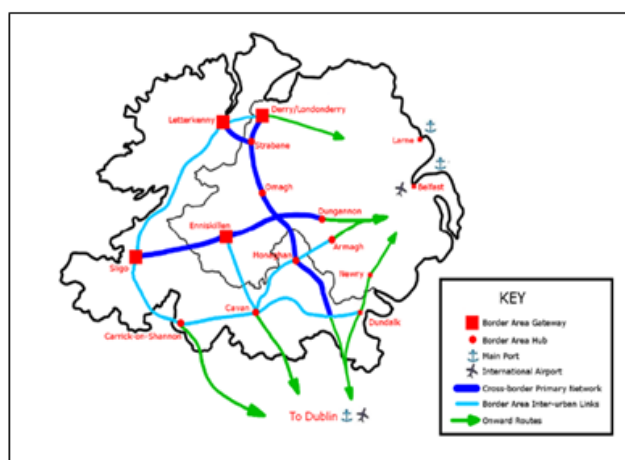
**Map showing the Rail Network for the island of Ireland**

Map courtesy of Monaghan County Council



and finally a map showing the key arterial routes for the area.

## Map of the North West Quadrant of the island



Border regions suffer from under investment often because policy-makers and deliverers consider these to be at the periphery. Yet these areas for the communities they serve are not the periphery, they are their Centres. There maybe aren't enough people for us to make what some may consider to be *the* compelling case when decisions are primarily based on head count numbers.

But what could these areas not achieve if they received the requisite investments in infrastructure that have been called upon, for many years?

There must be an equality of service for all of us irrespective of where we are born, or live, or find our optimum business location. That is what a modern economy does. That is what a future-proofed economy is, in meeting the needs for future generations. Towards the end of this year government departments and agencies must therefore follow the lead of local authorities in Rural Proofing investment decisions.

### **Key Infrastructure Projects:**

There are key roads infrastructure projects needed in the Region, including:

The entire delivery of the A5/N2 key strategic corridor linking the North West to Dublin.

The A4/N16 running east to west from Sligo and via Enniskillen to Belfast.

There is the A29 in Mid Ulster. Improvements to that road and the by-passes to relieve bottle-necks in Cookstown, Dungannon and Enniskillen will help these areas realise their industrial and tourism potentials.

These of course need recognition and tangible commitments in national strategies, and in funding supports such as in the Confidence and Supply Agreement, if they are to be delivered.

***Roles of Local Authorities:***

Local authorities & cross-border partnerships have played major roles in advancing improvements for the A5/N2 and A4/N16. Consistent and collective lobbying and highlighting of the safety and economic issues have helped promote these cases. Local authorities play key roles in planning, land acquisition and works delivery. They want to be and should be regarded as important strategic and funding partners, in co-designing and co-developing with government and others.

Local authorities appreciate the values of future-proofing and joining-up needs through their various Development and Community Plans, helping ensure that adjacent Greenways projects and ducting for fibre optic cables won't be forgotten.

Responsible government stakeholders need to recognise the role Local Authorities can play in communicating and delivering major infrastructure projects.

***And finally a few words on Brexit:***

It's accepted that Brexit indeed is a challenge and will be for cross-border access. There are many unknowns about Brexit still. However, the border region stands to be the area most disproportionately affected.

The 'Bordering on Brexit' report completed between ICBAN and Queens University Brexit points out, that to local communities in the region, Brexit means the Border! Brexit threatens an access to services, including health and education, which many in non-border areas can take for granted.

We on this island must therefore embrace our uniqueness of an island border with 300 crossing points, serving inter-linked communities going about their daily commutes.

There is a risk of returning to back-to-back border development, ignoring that roads run through a border. An example of Fermanagh and Cavan illustrates this shouldn't be the case. It wasn't until after the Belturbet bypass in County Cavan was completed that residents of Fermanagh were able to appreciate just how important this development was in opening up their County to the south of the island.

An all-island economy exists and will exist post-Brexit. There is a need for a cross-border infrastructure dividend to lessen any negative effects from any hard border and that will have to be funded by the governments responsible for all on this island, and working together.

Thank you.