REGIONAL STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR THE CENTRAL BORDER REGION 2013-2027

RSF.
### Foreword

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**DISCLAIMER**

The RSF is a non-statutory document. As such it respects both the plans of the European Union and the two Governments of Ireland and Northern Ireland and the plans, policies and strategies of the local authorities and other key stakeholders in the Central Border Region. The RSF is intended to complement these plans and strategies and does not in any way supersede or dilute their authority or relevance. Nothing in this Regional Strategic Framework is intended to impinge on the responsibilities of individual local authorities to plan and implement strategies for their own areas of responsibility or to apply for EU and national funds in their own right. Instead, it proposes to act as a framework for regional cross-border cooperation, within the context of the National Spatial Strategy for Republic of Ireland, the Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland and Europe 2020.
We commend to you the Regional Strategic Framework (RSF) for the Central Border Region of Ireland / Northern Ireland. This is the first such formal initiative of this type developed for the area.

This Framework has been shaped through an 18-month long development process as part of an overall Spatial Planning Initiative. Key to this has been a Data Capture initiative, known as DataCENTRAL, which has drawn on the statistical information from both jurisdictions. The governments of Ireland and Northern Ireland have given the Region the opportunity through this funded initiative to help set out a strategic way forward for the redevelopment of the area. This Framework is the Region’s response to helping realise the ambitions and hopes of the people in our Region, and those served by our Region.

Finaly we would wish to acknowledge and thank the efforts of those who have made this possible. This includes all who have inputted into the development and consultation processes and especially the Spatial Planning Steering Committee members and all who have given their support to the Management Board in overseeing this.

Our ultimate aim is that the Region can become a more competitive and resilient area, that it will be transformed and that it will have a significant role to play in the renewal of both the island of Ireland and the EU. The document captures these ambitions and the means to achieve them.

Many have been involved in the development of the RSF. We now commit this document for the Region, in the hope that key stakeholders, from all sectors, will play an involved role in working together to implement the stated ambitions and aims. Setting up the necessary effective implementation structures will be the next key stage to be embarked upon.

Thank you also to KPMG and their consultancy team for all their work on the project. It is very important to also acknowledge the Special EU Programmes Body and the governments of Ireland and Northern Ireland who have provided the funding for this initiative, under the EU INTERREG IVA Programme.

Finally we will all be aware that our Border Region faces challenges in the times ahead but there are also many opportunities which can be realised too. The period this plan covers, up to 2027, is quite the unknown. It is because of this that we have sought a Framework approach, which can be amended and adapted as times and circumstances change.

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Cllr Pat Treanor
ICBAN Chair
2013/2014

Cllr Jim Cavanagh
ICBAN Chair
2012/2013
Introduction

The Central Border Region of Ireland / Northern Ireland has a population of just under 650,000 people currently (2011 Census) and is expected to grow to over 750,000 by 2022. It accounts for 1/5 of the land area of the island of Ireland and 1/10 of its population.

The area has many strengths and assets. It has an outstanding natural environment and a strong cultural heritage. The area offers a high quality of life, which both residents and visitors greatly value. It has many entrepreneurial and internationally competitive businesses distributed right across the area. There is a network of County and market towns complemented by smaller villages and hamlets, which give the Region much of its distinctiveness. It also has excellent and committed third level educational institutions which are active in training and retaining and engaged with local industry. The Region has the potential to develop further its unique tourism offering of coastlines, lakes, inland waterways and hills, to the benefit of both residents and visitors.

The Central Border Region is a rural area, with a high quality landscape supporting natural agricultural and forestry products. These features make the area unique on the island of Ireland and create distinctive opportunities and challenges. In particular, it is essential that this Regional Strategic Framework (RSF) is sustainable in a rural area and also that the Strategic Framework sustains and supports the distinctive rural nature of the Region while providing it with guidance and direction on additional economic and social opportunities.

The Region also openly acknowledges its challenges. It has not escaped the current recession, resulting in job losses, emigration and a certain loss of confidence. With more public and private services being centralised in larger towns and cities, an increasingly urgent need for stakeholders to find new ways for the Region to sustain a range of local public and private services. There is a need to further improve connectivity infrastructure through investments, which will improve access to services and allow businesses to operate competitively on a local, national and international level. On a variety of economic and social indicators the Central Border Region is disadvantaged compared to other regions of Ireland and Northern Ireland and there is therefore a need to address this inequality of economic and social outcomes between the Central Border Region and other regions and also to address persistent inequalities within the Region.

The area has a rich potential and desire to become more competitive economically and socially, not just with other regions on the island, but also internationally. This is the first coherent Framework that has been developed for the Region and it is pioneering as the first such regional cross-border initiative of this type on the island of Ireland.

1.1 The Purpose of the Regional Strategic Framework (RSF)

This Regional Strategic Framework (RSF) is a Framework for the development of the Region, for the period up to 2027. The approach embraces the opportunities that regional thinking might create. It also sets out the challenges being faced and the actions required to tackle those.

The RSF is linked to a number of other key plans and strategies. As a regional strategy for development it fits within the context of the spatial development plans of the two governments on the island of Ireland; i.e., the National Spatial Strategy for Ireland and the Northern Ireland Regional Development Strategy. It offers a sub-regional context to the ‘Framework for Co-operation - Spatial Strategies of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland’ which has been agreed between the two governments. It also complies fully with the EU 2020 Strategy and offers a means of implementing EU 2020 policies at the regional cross-border level.
The diagram below illustrates how the RSF balances the influences of EU and national policies with the opportunities and challenges which are distinct to the region, as expressed both in the existing plans, strategies and priorities of the two Governments and in the stakeholder consultation processes which contributed to the development of the RSF.

This Regional Strategic Framework is an integrated approach to regional development within the Central Border Region. What sets this document apart from other approaches is:

• It is regional
• It is cross-border, and
• It is a co-operative approach.

This document has been driven by 10 local authorities from both sides of the Ireland/Northern Ireland border in the Central Border Region, working through their partnership organisation and Cross-Border Group, the Irish Central Border Area Network Ltd. (ICBAN).

The RSF represents an affirmation of the commonalities of local authorities in working together in an essentially rural cross-border region. An additional local authority – Magherafelt District Council – is seeking to join ICBAN with effect from autumn 2013. While the analysis in this Regional Strategic Framework is based on data and the views of the existing local authorities, Magherafelt District Council will be involved in the implementation of the Strategic Framework.

The two governments have together provided this opportunity to create a framework for development in this cross-border area. The RSF responds to this opportunity in developing a vision that will inform and affect policy change, and which will seek to replace the concept of a peripheral region with one of a region that can work together to realise opportunities for local authorities and other stakeholders to work together to realise opportunities and to respond to the challenges facing the area. The two governments, in agreement with other stakeholders, have identified a range of opportunities and challenges. The implementation of the Framework is, therefore, based around developing a common strategic vision and advocating the case for investment. As a result of obtaining the financial and other resources necessary to make this happen, the Central Border Region will be more prosperous and offer a better future to its citizens, as illustrated in the diagram right.

Framework for Strategic Planning and Development in Ireland

National Strategy

Regional Development Strategy

Local Government Plan

Framework for Cross Border Co-operation

II Regional Development Framework Local Government Strategic Plans

I National Development Framework National Strategy

II Regional Development Framework

Framework for Cross Border Co-operation Local Government Strategic Plans

I National Development Framework

1.2 The Key Ambitions and Aims

The key ambitions of the Regional Strategic Framework reflect the opportunities and priorities identified at local, regional, national, and international levels:

• To create a region of equal opportunities for Ireland and Northern Ireland on an inter-regional basis, for example in providing shared services, human resources and economic development.

• To influence the Governments of Ireland and Northern Ireland on current priorities for the Region, by providing an evidence base to justify investments.

• To address the inequalities in economic and social outcomes between the Central Border Region and other parts of Ireland and Northern Ireland and the inequalities which persist within the Region itself, by contributing to the balanced development of the area.

• To identify opportunities for local authorities and other stakeholders to work together to realise opportunities and to respond to the challenges facing the area. This is particularly important in a cross-border Region where development of the Border will make it more difficult to work together across different legal and organisational structures.

• To play a more involved role as an EU region, by not being peripheral in either a geographic or participatory sense. There is a desire to embrace the learning potential within the EU through networking and engaging, as well as securing investments for key initiatives and projects. This will help implement the aims of EU 2020 Strategy and in particular cross-border programmes such as INTERREG. This RSF can assist in supporting and identifying potential opportunities for further consideration and development by stakeholders.
As a result each of the themes is related to a particular type of asset found in the area, as shown in the diagram below.

A Smart and Internationally competitive region: Development of intellectual, education and innovation support and enterprise assets

A People centred and inclusive region: Development of people, skills and organisational assets

A sustainable region: Development and protection of natural assets, and

An accessible and connected region: Development of physical assets.

The Framework must not become a rigid straitjacket. It will need to be flexed and updated as new opportunities and challenges arise. In addition, the Framework is strategic in nature and does not set rigid targets; instead it provides a context or skeleton in which more detailed operational plans and project pipelines can be developed from time to time.

1.4 A Long-Term Framework

These changes will not be achieved overnight. There are three distinct time phases which overlap with the implementation phase, each with differing challenges.

The table summarises the different time periods in the Framework, their funding context and the implications for the types of activities which can be undertaken.

See Table below.

1.5 Structure of This Document

This document is structured as follows:

• Section 2 is concerned with the strategic context of the Framework;

• Section 3 provides a short profile of the Region, identifies its key characteristics and the actions required to further the development of the area;

• Sections 4, 5, 6 and 7 deal in turn with the four objectives of the RSF;

• Section 8 deals with the management, monitoring and evaluation of the Framework.

This document is complemented by a number of more detailed Supporting Documents and information resources which are available from www.icban.com.

These include DataCENTRAL, a substantial statistical analysis and profile of the Central Border Region and:

• A review of the main strategies and policies relevant to the Framework;

• A Survey of European Best Practice Case Studies relevant to the Framework;

• A detailed review of the infrastructure needs of the Central Border Region.

Introduction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
<th>Funding Context</th>
<th>Appropriate Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Up to 2015</td>
<td>The short term which is principally about planning for the major activity and building the capacity of the Region.</td>
<td>Difficult - EU cross-border funding is largely committed. Local authority and national budgets under considerable fiscal pressure.</td>
<td>Preparatory actions, capacity building, building awareness of the needs of the Region. Project pipelines design.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015 - 2020</td>
<td>The medium term which is more strategic and ambitious is to pursue funding opportunities of national and EU funds for border region development including the INTERREG V and Horizon 2020 Programmes.</td>
<td>The next EU Framework will be 2014-2020; more strategic projects reflecting EU priorities and projects building new regional strengths for the future.</td>
<td>More strategic and more ambitious projects. Capital projects, projects reflecting EU priorities and new regional strengths for the future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020 - 2027</td>
<td>The longer term which is concerned with realising the benefits of the investments made in the earlier periods.</td>
<td>New EU Programmes may be available; perceived local budgets may ease further.</td>
<td>More aspirational projects, completing and building upon projects commenced in the previous periods.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This Section sets out the strategic context for the Central Border Region and how it is intended to work together to achieve these objectives.

- An understanding of the relationship between the RSF and key national, regional, and local plans and strategies.
- A review of the impending Government reform in both ROI and NI.
- An analysis of the needs of the region, based on an analysis of the Statistical Profile supporting document, as well as evidence on the response required.

2.1 The RSF and the Policies and Strategies of Ireland and Northern Ireland

The Regional Strategic Framework has been funded by the INTERREG IVB Programme, the Irish Government and the Northern Executive, as an important tool in the full implementation of the National Spatial Strategy for Ireland and the Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland and in making available an important early realisation of the Europe 2020 Strategy on the island of Ireland.

The National Spatial Strategy and the Regional Development Strategy are the key policy documents of the two Governments, which themselves are reflections of wider policies, such as the National Planning Framework for Ireland and the Programme for Government for Northern Ireland. The principles of these documents and the European Regional Development Strategy of 2020, together with the identified needs of the Central Border Region, have been among the principal building blocks of the Regional Strategic Framework. In addition the Border Regional Authority’s Regional Planning Guidelines and the existing plans, strategies and priorities of the local authorities in the area and the extensive stakeholder consultation processes, which contributed to the development of the RSF, have also been of critical importance.

As a result the RSF represents a balancing of key top-down policy considerations with an understanding of the distinctive opportunities and challenges within the Central Border Region.

The Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government in Ireland and the Department for Regional Development in Northern Ireland have agreed a ‘Framework for Co-operation - Spatial Strategies of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland’. The Framework for Co-operation outlines the key planning challenges faced in the two jurisdictions and identifies the potential for a non-statutory, collaborative, in spatial planning to mutual benefit. This RSF is an early example of the type of co-operation envisaged in the Framework for Co-operation at the level of a region.

The Framework for Co-operation described the form of working together as Lewes Co-operation where local authorities North and South are ‘responsible for achieving national and regional spatial planning objectives through the delivery of local plans, programmes and projects that are well-integrated in a cross-border context’.

It is not intended that the RSF will supersede any of these key plans and strategies. Instead, it proposes to act as a framework for regional cross-border cooperation, within the context of the NISG & RDS and the Europe 2020 strategy and the particular plans and strategies of the local authorities which make up the Central Border Region.

2.2 The RSF and the Europe 2020 Strategy

Europe 2020 is the European Union’s main strategy for putting Europe’s economy back on the path to growth and to make the EU a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy. These three mutually reinforcing priorities are intended to help the EU and the Member States to deliver high levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion.

There is a clear relationship between the objectives of the Regional Strategic Framework and the drivers of the Europe 2020 Strategy.

2.3 The RSF and Local Strategies

Local authorities in Northern Ireland and local authorities and a range of other bodies in the Republic of Ireland have been responsible for developing plans and strategies to develop their areas in appropriate ways. Those plans, strategies and priorities are an important input to the RSF, providing a bottom-up complement to the top-down perspectives which arise from EU and Governmental strategies and priorities.

A key factor influencing the Regional Strategic Framework is local Government reform, which is on the agenda in both of the jurisdictions which make up the Central Border Region. The development of County Action Plans is particularly timely as developments in the role of local authorities in both sides of the border are producing a convergence of functions and roles.

The Action Plan for Jobs, the development of County Action Plans, the Alignment Report and the new emphasis on local employment actions on local employment actions as set out in the ‘Putting People First Action Plan’, are all tending to give greater emphasis to the role of the frameworks in both jurisdictions and the need to strengthen and develop cross-border approaches and to share strategic perspectives.

In Northern Ireland the long awaited reform of local government under the Review of Public Administration (RPA) in Northern Ireland is now expected to be implemented in 2015. This will reduce the number of local authorities in Northern Ireland from 26 to 11 and extend Councils responsibility in relation to the responsibility for economic development and regeneration. At the same time, local authorities in Northern Ireland have been given a general power of competence to promote the well-being of their communities, and from 2015 will take on the role of community planning for the first time. Significant functions in relation to representation, local tourism and business support will be transferred to the Northern Ireland Councils.

The proposed new local government boundaries in Northern Ireland after 2015 are shown in the map below. Although the implementation of the new arrangements is more advanced in the Republic of Ireland than in Northern Ireland, during the period of this Framework Councils in the Central Border Region will have the opportunity to learn from each other’s approaches and to share strategic and operational perspectives around an enhanced range of issues and functions including the potential for joint initiatives around common needs and priorities in Emergency Services; Arts, Heritage and Tourism; Recreation services; Tourism; and Environmental and Technical services.

The RSF provides a framework for the development of such shared perspective and the development of joint strategies and initiatives. The review of the Economic impact of economic development will enable the Councils in the Region to deliver more effectively the priorities identified in the RSF. However, further more detailed work is required to identify the full potential of joint working by Councils to realise cross-border development opportunities and priorities.

In both jurisdictions the Regional Strategic Framework can, itself, be an important input to the development of community planning processes.
2.4 Outcomes from the Regional Strategic Framework

It is intended that the Regional Strategic Framework will provide a structure, skeleton or scaffolding on which more detailed plans will be developed from time to time over the period to 2027. In this sense the RSF should be seen as a living document and not as a prescriptive plan.

This has the advantage of maintaining relevance as circumstances change over time and new opportunities or new challenges emerge. This also means that it is not possible to predict in quantitative terms the impact which the RSF will have — this will depend on the priorities selected from time to time and the financial and other resources which will be allocated to them.

However some of the potential impacts can be described qualitatively. In relation to the four objectives of a smart and internationally competitive region, a people centred and inclusive region, a sustainable region and an accessible and connected region, the potential impacts of the Regional Strategic Frameworks are given in the appropriate later Sections (see Sections 4.4, 5.4, 6.4 and 7.4).

There are also some cross-cutting impacts which do not fall easily under the four objectives, or are the cumulative effect of all of the actions taken under the Framework. These cross-cutting impacts include:

- The Central Border Region participates in a range of European networks covering smart, inclusive and sustainable growth, to learn from other regions and to share its experience with other rural cross-border areas;
- The Region has a much greater sense of its own identity and has shared pride in that identity with its citizens;
- Greater success as a Region in drawing down EU and national funds; and
- The local authorities of the Region, the Government Departments which engage with the Region, regional stakeholders and citizens of the area all see a more confident, outwardly focused, sustainable and coherent Region making a distinctive contribution to economic renewal and growth on the island of Ireland and offering the best possible quality of life to its residents.
A Profile of the Central Border Region

3.1 Key Demographic and Economic Data
The ten existing member Council areas of the Central Border Region, together with the exclusion of an additional local authority - Magherafelt District Council, which is seeking to join ICBAN, with effect from autumn 2013, had a population of approximately 700,000 in 2011 and that population had increased by 13% since the 1991 Census. County Down accounted for just under ¼ of the total regional population.

Population projections suggest that the Region’s total population will grow to 724,018 by 2016 and to 804,818 by 2022. This would represent a 12% rate of population change over the decade to 2022, which is a slightly lower rate of growth than was experienced in the decade to 2011. The rate of projected population growth would be well in excess of the projected Northern Ireland population growth over the period (8.9%) but below the projected Republic of Ireland average growth (17.2%).

The tables below show the key demographic statistics for the Central Border Region, taken from the 2011 Censuses.

<table>
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<th></th>
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<tr>
<td>County</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Down</td>
<td>328,168</td>
<td>340,401</td>
<td>351,270</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
<td>79.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyrone</td>
<td>186,177</td>
<td>197,236</td>
<td>208,710</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
<td>79.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Londonderry</td>
<td>50,161</td>
<td>53,906</td>
<td>57,348</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
<td>67.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fermanagh</td>
<td>42,517</td>
<td>47,260</td>
<td>52,087</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>88.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyrone</td>
<td>10,063</td>
<td>11,259</td>
<td>13,132</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
<td>41.8%</td>
<td>27.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newry</td>
<td>54,163</td>
<td>57,813</td>
<td>61,655</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
<td>77.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derry</td>
<td>13,705</td>
<td>15,980</td>
<td>18,818</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
<td>27.9%</td>
<td>76.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Border</td>
<td>9,860</td>
<td>10,926</td>
<td>13,269</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
<td>34.0%</td>
<td>48.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROI</td>
<td>3,292,719</td>
<td>3,517,256</td>
<td>3,956,293</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
<td>24.7%</td>
<td>97.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2 Employment and Business Data
There are 33,769 VAT or PAYE registered businesses in the Region, of which 29 have more than 50 employees, 41% of all businesses employ fewer than 10 persons.

3.3 Business Activity by Area

The Region is predominantly rural in nature, characterised by a dispersed population and distance from major urban centres. Approximately one third of the population live in settlements over 1,500 population, and two thirds in small settlements and open countryside. This makes the region quite “rural” with all the associated challenges for “critical mass” and the cost of services provision. There are in excess of 50 villages of over 1,000 population, with a greater number of small villages and hamlets of less than 1,000 population.

The Region’s economy is dominated by the public service sector, with an estimated 33,769 VAT or PAYE registered businesses in the Region, of which 29 have more than 50 employees and just 274 have more than 50 employees, 41% of all businesses employ fewer than 10 persons.

1 Source: 2011 Census (CSO and NISRA)
3 Area Population projections are dependent on the Statistical Analysis Supporting Document

The difficulties in using non-Census data are set out in detail in the Central Border Region Data Profile, but essentially they relate to the use of different statistical definitions and different time periods on each side of the Border. The challenge remains to continue to remove this constraint from sources other than the Censuses to improve cross-border data sets which this Regional Strategic Framework is also an output.

The analysis of the Region has had the advantage of being able to draw on the record results of the 2011 Censuses. (The Census is held every 10 years in Northern Ireland and every 5 years in the Republic of Ireland).

The Census information enables comparisons to be made with earlier periods on the recent results of the 2011 Census on the basis using data from sources other than the Censuses is quite low across the Region and well below the average population densities for both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

The ten existing member Council areas of the Central Border Region, together with the exclusion of an additional local authority - Magherafelt District Council, which is seeking to join ICBAN, with effect from autumn 2013, had a population of approximately 700,000 in 2011 and that population had increased by 13% since the 1991 Census. County Down accounted for just under ¼ of the total regional population.

With the exceptions of Armagh, Craigavon, Dungannon and Magherafelt, the population density continues to remove this constraint from sources other than the Censuses for both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

The ten existing member Council areas of the Central Border Region, together with the exclusion of an additional local authority - Magherafelt District Council, which is seeking to join ICBAN, with effect from autumn 2013, had a population of approximately 700,000 in 2011 and that population had increased by 13% since the 1991 Census. County Down accounted for just under ¼ of the total regional population.

With the exceptions of Armagh, Craigavon, Dungannon and Magherafelt, the population density con...
The table below shows the size distribution of VAT or PAYE Registered Businesses in the Central Border Region.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>0 - 9</th>
<th>10 - 99</th>
<th>100 - 499</th>
<th>500 - 999</th>
<th>1,000 - 4,999</th>
<th>5,000 - 9,999</th>
<th>10,000 - 24,999</th>
<th>25,000+</th>
<th>Total Firms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northern Ireland</td>
<td>1,932</td>
<td>2,484</td>
<td>2,793</td>
<td>2,572</td>
<td>1,241</td>
<td>1,035</td>
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<td>Northern Ireland</td>
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<td>4,190</td>
<td>3,325</td>
<td>2,270</td>
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<td>2,458</td>
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<td>Northern Ireland</td>
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<td>Total Firms</td>
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<td>24,535</td>
<td>23,714</td>
<td>20,300</td>
<td>21,223</td>
<td>20,739</td>
<td>21,522</td>
<td>21,670</td>
<td>162,933</td>
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</table>

In summary, just over 20,000 people are employed in agriculture in the Region. 17,024 people are employed in manufacturing, which accounts for a reduction of just over 3% on the previous 10 years. In Retail and Wholesale, there are 5,906 people employed, which is just under 1%. The largest employers are in retail with a number of 13,673 people employed, followed by manufacturing with 13,325 people employed.

In the Central Border Region there has been significant progress from secondary to tertiary since 2001. Between 2001 and 2011, employment in the tertiary sector grew from 23% to 43%. However, employment in the secondary sector in the Region remains above both the Ireland and Northern Ireland averages, while employment in the tertiary sector remains just below the respective regional and national averages.

A Profile of the Central Border Region

The increase in the ratios of unemployment is particularly notable in relation to the Census in the Republic of Ireland. The following charts show, respectively, the numbers in employment and unemployment in the Central Border Region for the period 2001 to 2011. Key sectors for employment in the Region include Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing, Mining &Quarrying, Manufacturing, Construction, Retail/Wholesale and Hotels & Restaurants. These are all traditional economic sectors and their status in this Region reflects the need to counter inroads to mainstream the employment structure of the area. Census data also shows that despite strong outputs in terms of educational attainment in local schools, this is not having the anticipated impact for university and later employment. Despite significant improvements compared to previous census results, the Region’s unemployment rate is high by a high proportion of persons with No Qualifications and their vocational low prerequisites of residents field degree level qualifications or above.

In the period between the 2001 and 2011 Censuses, the Central Border Region’s increased its size distribution of VAT or PAYE Registered Businesses in the Central Border Region. This apparently contradictory result arises from the Region’s increased population over the period and an increased level of labour market participation.

In the Central Border Region, this is a consequence of many young people needing to leave the area and return to areas of tertiary Qualifications. Although past trends have shown that people will come back if opportunities are presented. There are three general sectors of employment, the Primary Sector, which includes agriculture, forestry and fishing and the Secondary Sector which includes manufacturing and construction, and the Tertiary Sector which includes the service industry, which typifies modern and progressive economies.

Rates of Unemployed

In the Central Border Region there are over 40,000 people employed. This represents a 7% on the previous 10 years. In Retail and Wholesale, there are over 33,000 people employed in manufacturing, which accounts for a reduction of just over 3% on the previous 10 years. In Retail and Wholesale, there are 5,906 people employed, which is just under 1%. The largest employers are in retail with a number of 13,673 people employed, followed by manufacturing with 13,325 people employed.

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In summary, just over 20,000 people are employed in agriculture in the Region. 17,024 people are employed in manufacturing, which accounts for a reduction of just over 3% on the previous 10 years. In Retail and Wholesale, there are 5,906 people employed, which is just under 1%. The largest employers are in retail with a number of 13,673 people employed, followed by manufacturing with 13,325 people employed.
A Profile of the Central Border Region

2.6 Economic Activity

• The relative increase in unemployment indicates the need for sustained action to support living standards in order to prevent further disadvantage.
• There is a need for more effective interventions to reduce the growing problem of youth unemployment.
• The low rate of youth unemployment coupled with the high proportion of young people under 16 reflects the significant outward migration of younger people.

Employment and Industrial Base

• There is an opportunity to translate agricultural employment strengths into higher value-added opportunities e.g. in Agri-Food or Farm-based Businesses. This region has key resources to advance this and seek to increase cross-Council projects to this end.
• The area’s remunerating strengths range across the region but there is a clear potential for a Manufacturing Cluster, together with key skills needed to support it.
• The development of the Tertiary (Service) Sector has been built on, with significant direct and indirect employment provided to this, however, the potential for increased employment at a regional level.

5.5.3 The Characteristics of the Region

• There is a need to focus on Provision of Training for Green Energy, Creative Economy, Sectors and Visiter Education: Skills.
• There is a need to retain or attract back graduates through measures such as attract graduate and qualified workers who could relate to the need to generate new businesses.
• There is a need for a Regional skills audit to assess supply and demand of skills within regional labour force.
• There is an opportunity to promote a strong local Entrepreneurial culture throughout the Region at the level of secondary and tertiary education and to foster the promotion of linkages between local businesses and education/training providers.

Other

• Reduced household sizes and substantially increased numbers of households will require new and accessible services to maintain existing service level provision.
• The high proportion working from home across the region reflects the urgent need for FRP’s, Internet and mobile broadband access.
• There is a need for additional resources to address rural home service provision and to deal with isolation and lack of access to services.

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• The high proportion working from home across the region reflects the urgent need for FRP’s, Internet and mobile broadband access.
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Deprivation issues need to be acknowledged, appreciated and also addressed. All of the Counties within the Southern Central Border Region are deprived relative to the national average and the counties within the Border Region are deprived relative to the national average and the Republic of Ireland and:

• The Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure (2010) (NIMDM) is the official measure of spatial deprivation in Northern Ireland. On this measure none of the Districts in the northern part of the Central Border Region are highly deprived, although Fermanagh is the 4th most deprived District in Northern Ireland in terms of the extent of deprivation and the 9th most deprived District in terms of income, while Omagh is the 7th most deprived District in terms of deprivation.

3.4 Actions to Develop the Central Border Region

From the list of characteristics set out above and from other information provided it is possible to identify the actions required to further the development of the Region.

As Section 2 demonstrated, there is a strong alignment between the economic policy aims of the EU, the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive, as expressed in their policy documents and in their Spatial Planning policies. Combining those insights with the analysis of this Section suggests that the priorities for the Regional Strategic Framework are actions to:

• Build new economic strengths for the Region based on innovation, its tradition of entrepreneurship and its endowment of strong internationally competitive businesses;

• Ensure that the growth of the Region is inclusive in its character, offering a range of opportunities to everyone, addressing inequalities and recognising the unique challenges of a rural cross-border area;

• Build on environmental strengths by investing in and developing expertise in renewable energy, energy conservation and sustainable development; and

• Improving the ability of the Central Border Region to connect with other regions and its internal connections.

These can be summarised as actions to develop new sources of competitive advantage for the Central Border Region and as a result to make a major contribution to the realisation of EU, Irish Government and Northern Ireland Executive policies and priorities.
A Smart and Internationally Competitive Region

The first of the four objectives is that the region should become smart and internationally competitive. The Central Border Region has a relatively specialised economy, shown by the balance of employment. It is focused on manufacturing, wholesale distribution and tourism. Public service employment is also important to the area. By contrast the proportion of employment in knowledge-intensive sectors is lower.

There are many successful and internationally competitive businesses in the region, particularly in sectors such as engineering, food and food and light engineering, the chemical industry, renewable energy, wholesale distribution and tourism. Public service employment is also important to the area. By contrast the proportion of employment in knowledge-intensive sectors is lower.

A study by Professors Bradley and Bexton, undertaken for the Centre for Cross-Border Studies and funded by the INTERREG IV A Programme, concluded that some of the region’s existing productive base - ‘good, bad or indifferent in where you must start’. Fortunately the Central Border Region has a strong base of locally owned and externally owned companies serving local, national and international markets. These businesses are already smart and internationally competitive. The task is to upskill the region's competitiveness and make it more competitive and productive. This will require more concerted action by the region’s businesses and enterprise support organisations and by its third level educational institutions, which are already strongly engaged. Both in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland local authorities are gaining new powers to generate economic growth and employment in their areas and there is scope for them to work together to implement joint initiatives and to better address problems which are common on both sides of the border.

Economic and business growth must be supported by effective skills and employability programmes. There is therefore a need to create the right enabling environment. Long-term strategies need to address, line and resources to drive forward. The White Paper is critical to ensuring that the region's productive base does not suffer from a skills bottleneck.

Best Practice Case Studies for the Smart and Internationally Competitive Region Objective

It is useful to examine the experience of other regions which have had to confront some of the issues facing the region under the Smart and Internationally Competitive Regional Objective. A best practice Case Study Supporting Paper is available from www.cbsan.com. It sets out a series of initiatives which are all relatively straightforward but which have resulted in their best practice status. While there is no local authority that is exactly like the Central Border Region it does have a number of similarities and this approach might be used to good effect.

The Central Border Region, like all regions, operates in an increasingly globalised economy in which companies and consumers can choose from a wide range of suppliers across the world. The region’s competitiveness is in competition for investment with areas which have much lower labour and production costs, and which are locally owned and independent companies which previously served local areas can be exported to distant markets. The region has no natural advantages in terms of cost or proximity to the customer, are forward looking and competitive and will have to be more innovative, more flexible or better service than their competitors. In short, the region needs to find new competitive advantages to sustain and develop both externally owned and indigenous companies.

4.1 The Rationale for this Objective

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A Smart and Internationally Competitive Region

- Examining the potential for Economic Corridors in Advanced Engineering and Manufacturing, Agri-food development, Sustainable development, Creative Media Industries and Tradable services etc. These initiatives could be linked to the proposals for a Border Development Zone which are currently being developed by the Centre for Cross Border Studies, using financial support from the INTERREG II A Programme.

- Entrepreneurship projects focused on:
  - Exploiting opportunities for new smart businesses in the Region;
  - Helping young people to relate to business enterprise and to understand the entrepreneurial opportunities in the Central Border Region;
  - Bursaries for young people who wish to remain in the Region and start a business as an alternative to emigration and also targeted support to those who have gone abroad to return, to use their skills and experience to start a business;
  - Increased cross-Council collaboration on enterprise development and job creation initiatives, given enhanced roles in economic development.

- A Regional Economic Forum. Bringing together cluster sectors, third-level educational institutions, local authorities and other key business development stakeholders, to debate, promote and develop SMART and Internationally Competitive Regional Economy Agenda.

- Development of internal trade, business co-operation and business linkages across the Region. Much of the purchasing power of public and private buyers in the Region leaks away, as a very high percentage of all purchases of goods and services come from outside the area. An internal trade and linkages programme could encourage purchasers to consider purchasing from suppliers within the Region.

- Regional promotion of the area to take wider advantage of inward investment and public sector employment opportunities.

- Participation in EU Smart Growth networks. The Central Border Region can learn from other regions by participating in EU and wider networks concerned with Smart Growth, and which would be of value to local businesses and regional development.

4.4 Outcomes from the Smart and Internationally Competitive Region Objective

Among the outcomes or potential impacts of this Objective are the following;

- A substantial diversification of the Regional economy, building new economic strength and competitive advantage to the Region and reducing its vulnerability to economic change;

- A more integrated Regional economy, with a higher degree of internal purchasing and supply reducing the leakage of expenditure out of the area;

- Much closer alignment of the Region’s educational and innovation resources to key industry sectors, offering opportunities for growth and development;

- A reduction in the economic and social inequalities between the Central Border Region and other regions in Ireland and Northern Ireland;

- Existing jobs in the traditional employment sectors in the Region will be protected and safeguarded and additional jobs will be generated in the new priority sectors.
5.1 The Rationale for this Objective

Vibrant and successful communities
• Providing balanced educational, training and employment opportunities and a diverse range of public and private services.
• Promoting the use of employment and income in the region, such as the local and rural furniture manufacturer, have been tested as inclusive employers of the people in this region in sectors where they need to sustain growth in local, rural and international markets.
• There is the opportunity for the Central Border Region to demonstrate how education can drive economic development and to build a reputation as an area which demonstrates excellence in this regard. This also offers the opportunity to provide employment to those young people from the region who have emigrated to countries where they see greater opportunities for employment.

This objective, therefore, is concerned with:

- Providing balanced educational, training and employment opportunities across the Central Border Region to support the transition from traditional sources of employment and to promote integration in the labour market as a means of sustaining initiatives within the Region and;
- Providing sustainable access to public and private services in a 21st Century, rural cross-border region.

5.2 Relationship to Europe

Activities undertaken under this objective align with the Interreg IVA HATCH Programme.

- For those previously employed in the construction sector;
- For young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs); and
- For those with a physical or mental disability.

The Rationale for this Objective

Objectives for the People Centred and Inclusive Region

- Encouraging cross-border labour mobility, through initiatives such as Border People and for tackling anomalies between the two jurisdictions in relation to taxation and social benefits, and to lobbying Government Departments to act in a more cohesive manner.
- New approaches to integrated service delivery in smaller communities, perhaps by using a variety of community or social enterprises to deliver local services in a more sustainable manner, for example providing multiple services through local schools as an alternative to their closures.
- A Regional Skills Audit.
- Enhanced co-operation between the region’s third-level colleges to deliver skills and training initiatives focused on Advanced Engineering and Manufacturing, Agri-food development, Sustainable development, Creative Media Industries and Tourism services.

This co-operation could include work to improve mutual recognition of qualifications within the region and work towards a model of accreditation which is accredited by the Central Border Region can learn from other regions by participating in EU and wider networks on Inclusive Growth, and which would be of value to local businesses and regional development.

- Development of new approaches to the regeneration of towns and villages.
- Developing a Healthy Living Region, through the promotion of initiatives such as Active Aging etc.;
- Jointly with CAWT addressing the wider determinants of health and well-being, i.e., employment, education, social inclusion, rurality and access to services;
- Using technology and innovative connected health approaches to respond to health and care challenges for those who have difficulty in accessing the current service provision;
- Participating in EU networks. The Central Border Region can learn from other regions by participating in EU and wider networks on Inclusive Growth, and which would be of value to local businesses and regional development.

Working with Co-operation and Working Together (CAWT) on key initiatives to promote health as a driver of economic development in a rural cross-border region, those initiatives might include:

- Developing a Healthy Living Region, through the promotion of initiatives such as Active Aging etc.;
- Jointly with CAWT addressing the wider determinants of health and well-being, i.e., employment, education, social inclusion, rurality and access to services;
- Using technology and innovative connected health approaches to respond to health and care challenges for those who have difficulty in accessing the current service provision;
- Participating in EU networks. The Central Border Region can learn from other regions by participating in EU and wider networks on Inclusive Growth, and which would be of value to local businesses and regional development.

5.3 Opportunities for the People Centred and Inclusive Region

Activities undertaken under this objective include:

- Supporting representatives to safeguard rural service provision, highlighting the need for rural economic policy addresses issues of isolation and the lack of appropriate services in rural areas.
- Measures to tackle unemployment, economic inactivity and alienation across a range of personal circumstances as a means of tackling inequalities within the Region, i.e.;
- For those previously employed in the construction sector;
- For young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs); and
- For those with a physical or mental disability.

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5.4 Outcomes from the People Centred and Inclusive Region Objective

Among the outcomes or potential impacts of the People Centred and Inclusive Region Objective are the following:

- A reduced number of vulnerable people and economically inactive
- A healthier society where everyone has the opportunity to take advantage of the quality of the environment to support vulnerable people
- Implementation of a regional strategic approach to retaining and developing human resources with knowledge and skills
- A more equal distribution of social and economic opportunities and outcomes
- Reduction of public and private services in smaller towns
- Regional development of the area of rural people experiencing inequality and increasing participation of those affected by inequality

Best Practice Case Studies for the People Centred and Inclusive Region Objective

The examples of best practice in the Best Practice Case Studies Supporting Paper which are relevant to this objective are:

- **SUCCES Project**, which is a collaboration between Kent and Norfolk in England, Nord-Pas de Calais in France and Flanders in Belgium, has developed a cross-border programme of employment support. The project is focused on 10,000 people which have experience economic decline. It has assisted 34,000 people in total, and published the 'Ten Steps to Work' guide. The project is particularly successful in sharing innovative and creative ideas between the 3 jurisdictions, in part through staff exchanges. SUCCES focuses initially on soft skills development, to build self-esteem confidence, motivation to work and basic employment skills. Participants can then progress to a wider range of sector skills training. The project focuses on persons with poor health, who are homeless, in debt or in broken relationships. Emphasis is placed on linking participants with community activities and tailored training is provided for groups or individuals, if necessary in their own homes. A 3 year programme of the SUCCES project was funded by the INTERREG IV A Programme at a cost of €2.7 million, of which 50% was ERDF funding.

- **The STRIDES Alliance** tackles deprivation in the Neath Port Talbot area of Wales, which suffers from low employment, low incomes and poor health. The STRIDES Alliance focuses on engaging and progressing disadvantaged persons to employment using simulated working environments covering work opportunities. Through these they offer training on personal and sectoral skills, literacy, numeracy and financial management. The STRIDES Alliance has engaged with 1025 unemployed people and 800 economically inactive people. Over 1200 persons have found a job, entered into further learning or gained a qualification. The STRIDES Alliance was funded by ERDF and INTERREG IV B Programme over the period 2010-2012 at a total cost of €3.2 million, of which 1.8 million was ESF funding.

- **Sønderborg in Southern Denmark / Northern Germany is a region of small towns challenged by urbanization and where people leave rural areas and move to large cities.** The region has developed a concerted campaign to remarket itself, that life doesn’t have to be dull to live outside the big cities. Under the ideal of a “Countryside Metropolitan” theme, promoting the slogan “Provincial is cool” Sønderborg promotes that rural areas have a lot of attractive qualities that are right once they are developed and rendered visible. Here, life is at a healthier pace, nature is right outside the door, and there are many strong communities. Linked into a campaign for European Capital of Culture, the region has set culture and creativity at the heart of this drive also. This is a starting point for creating a melting pot where cultural diversity is seen as strength in a region not dissimilar to the Irish Central Border area, where conflict was a recurring feature and where today younger generations are being attracted not towards larger cities.

- **The University of the Highlands and Islands** in Western Scotland is an example of a regional initiative to encourage people leaving rural areas to stay. Larger universities got together to create the critical mass to offer full degree courses in the remote west of Scotland, through a network of 50 learning centres.
The Central Border Region is characterized by the diversity and quality of its landscapes, its network of vibrant cities and towns, its strong tradition of enterprises with many internationally competitive local businesses and the quality of life which it offers to residents and to visitors.

6.1 Rationale for this Objective
Together with the skills, resources and enterprises of its people, a key asset of the Central Border Region is its high quality environment. Making good use of these natural environmental assets by means of a renewed emphasis on sustainability (in terms of both the environmental and economic sense of the term) can assist the Region to prepare for climate change and foster a scale and type of economic development which is appropriate for a rural area. These natural environmental assets can also be used to develop a new competitive advantage for local businesses which supply sustainable products and services to local, national and international markets.

6.2 Relationship to Europe 2020 Strategy
Action undertaken under this objective align with the Sustainable Development Goal 17 (SDG 17) of Europe 2020 Strategy under which EU Programmes can support actions such as shifting to a low carbon economy, promoting climate change adaptation, protecting the environment, regenerating brownfield sites and development of the Region’s cultural heritage.

6.3 Opportunities for Sustainable Region Objective
The RIF provides a framework within which opportunities to take forward the four objectives can be identified, funded, implemented and evaluated over the period to 2027. It is not appropriate to identify specific projects to be carried out over this time period. Instead ICABAN will bring together the local authorities of the Region and other stakeholders to identify projects which can be implemented to achieve the four objectives over the timeframe to 2027.

The opportunities which could be pursued under this Objective include:
- A sustainable energy and technology development network in the Central Border Region, to assist in the dissemination of existing knowledge to a wider SME and micro-enterprise network. That wider network could, in turn, develop the capacity of the area as an Eco-Region, and to prepare for and adapt to climate-change, enhance the survival and the competitiveness of existing businesses and improve the likelihood of new businesses, based on knowledge of renewable energy and sustainable technologies, emerging.
- Best Practice Case Studies for the Sustainable Region Objective
  The Best Practice Case Studies Supporting Paper provides the following examples relevant to the sustainable region objective:
  - Development of shared service collaborations between local authorities and other public bodies in the Central Border Region. Potential areas for collaboration include economic development, emergency services, the arts, transport and education.
  - Developing the SME project in the region of Southern Austria to create 5,000 new jobs by helping small business establish the market, ensure energy efficiency improvements in residential and office buildings. Green Business Growth was launched in July 2010 and is targeted at small businesses and in particular the green craftsmen, who are being retrained in the techniques of energy-saving renovation. SMEs showing an interest in the project are offered a business plan designed to provide them with the skills and information needed to improve energy rennovation and the marketing of their services. The project has targeted the creation of 300 new green jobs over the period to 2015.
  - Austria’s GreenTech Valley, Austria. The aim of the project was to establish a platform to engage environmental companies that date back to 1990. On the one hand, the local business support agency established a computerized web platform to promote green technology companies. By 2004, the Cluster network had evolved into a well-founded association of companies and research centres are already working in the sector on the environmental engineering solutions of the future. Within the framework of the cluster development project during the period 2007-2010, the project can learn from other regions, can develop common aims for the Region, including the rich natural environment and the cultural and heritage endowment. A Regional Tourism Strategy can contribute:
  - Regional Tourism branding / identity.
  - Identification of flagship regional tourism assets and development of plans to maximize the tourism impact in the Region.
  - A destination region for leisure / adventure / activity tourism; a metropolis for rural living.
  - Regional Carbon Reduction programme.
  - Dealing with energy conservation and efficiency in SMEs and the public sector, as well as in domestic dwellings.
  - Development of Centres for Excellence in Sustainable Development.
  - Creation of clustered econo-
to and eco-styles.
  - Environmental protection and remediation. The quality of its natural and built environment is a major asset of the Central Border Region which needs to be protected and, where appropriate, repaired. Action is needed to protect both rural and urban environments, to protect bio-diversity and where previous industrial development has left scars on the landscape, to restore the quality of the environment.
  - In agriculture, action is required to reduce the adverse impacts of wastes and, where feasible and economic, to make those wastes into economic assets.
  - Participating in EU networks. The Central Border Region can learn from other regions by participating in EU and wider networks on Sustainability Growth, and which would be of value to local businesses.

6.4 Outcomes for the Sustainable Region Objective
Among the outcomes or potential impacts of the Sustainable Region Objective are the following:
- A Region which respects and protects its environmental assets both for their own value and as a source of regional competitiveness.
- Development of a stronger regional tourism, although the implementation of the cross-border regional tourism strategy.
- Green technologies in energy and other fields become a key sector and a source of competitive advantage for the Region.
- The Central Border Region becomes known for its carbon reduction work, which underpins business competitiveness and reduces fuel poverty and social exclusion.
- Central Border Region develops a reputation across Europe for sustainable development of rural cross-border regions.
An Accessible and Connected Region

Both the National Spatial Strategy for Ireland and the Northern Ireland Regional Development Strategy recognizes the importance of infrastructure to balanced and effective regional development. This Section provides an overview of the infrastructure needs of the Central Border Region. A more detailed review will be presented in the Infrastructure Supporting Paper which will be published shortly.

As the Regional Development Strategy notes, good linkages between towns and rural areas for access to services and business opportunities are vital. Improved connectivity will support the network of towns and their associated business opportunities and helps to remain competitive in the global market. The aim is to continue to promote transport which balances the needs of our environment, society and economy. The National Spatial Strategy, overall, aims to achieve a better balance of social, economic and physical development across Ireland, supported by more effective and integrated planning.

The Central Border Region needs to improve its roads infrastructure to enhance the competitiveness of its businesses. It has become a prominent tourist to visit the Region and to improve access to key services. There is also the need to significantly improve the telecommunications infrastructure, especially broadband speeds and mobile communications, across the entire Region.

This would enable industry, including micro SMEs, the creative industries and farm-based businesses to operate efficiently and competitively. People in general and for smaller businesses in particular, to key arterial routes such as motorways, telecommunications, in terms of mobile and Wi-Fi access, is poor outside of the main towns. The area is also relatively distant from major airports, and nearer access to the island of Ireland, particularly from Dublin and Belfast.

As has been noted in relation to each of the other themes, this paper provides a framework within which opportunities can be identified, funded and implemented in a comprehensive manner.

7.1 Rationale for this Objective

The Central Border Region has limited connectivity to major roads and, in particular, key arterial routes such as motorways. Transport connectivity and telecommunications, in terms of mobile and Wi-Fi access, is poorer outside of the main towns. The area is also relatively distant from major airports, and nearer access to the island of Ireland, particularly from Dublin and Belfast.

Development of public transport in the Region is, through the improved transport network and the provision of quality public transport, aimed at the sustainable and environmentally friendly provision of services. In terms of the sustainable mobility strategy, to enhance mobility and the formation of public transport networks.

In addition, the provision of a reliable and secure energy supply, both electricity and gas, that also addresses renewable energy connectivity, and achieves sustainable energy supply, is critical to the region's economy.

These projects dealing with Roads and Telecommunications have been shown by ICBAN to be strategic for the development of the Central Border Region. The impressive outcomes of this project include: fibre access for 100% of the region's population; the emergence and growth of low carbon technologies; the expansion of businesses in the area, allowing them to grow and remain in the area; private partners invested almost all (99%) of the funds required; as a result of the lead by the municipalities in stimulating demand, with the financial benefits of accelerating public transport, especially in the planning process; and the farming community has become a prominent user group, with the need to access and upload information on livestock etc.

Best Practice Example for the Accessible and Connected Region Objective

Midhosenyland is a small farming region in southern Denmark. In 2002 the region authority identified that the area was very deficient in broadband infrastructure and services. The area suffered from typical rural socio-economic problems, including high rates of unemployment, low wages, and a lack of a higher education institution. The development of a suitable ICT and broadband infrastructure was seen as a key component in a strategy to reverse the region's problems.

A group of four municipalities came together and built a network themselves, supplying fibre connections between the municipalities, with an initial public investment of €1.4m.

The impressive outcomes of this project include: fibre access for 100% of the region's population; the emergence and growth of low carbon technology companies; involving a local University with significant technical benefits and synergies; has stimulated other businesses in the area, allowing them to grow and remain in the area; private partners invested almost all (99%) of the funds required; as a result of the lead by the municipalities in stimulating demand, in demonstrating the economic benefits, by offering public transport, especially in the planning process; and the farming community has become a prominent user group, with the need to access and upload information on livestock etc.

Innovacom Consulting, August 2012

• ‘A Strategic Way Forward for Infrastructure in the Central Border Region’, Innovacom Consulting, August 2012.

7.2 Relationship to Europe

Strategic Framework supports the development of region-wide and cross-border initiatives and projects. Projects including the A4 Sligo to Ballygawley & N2/A5 Monaghan to Letterkenny.

As has been noted in relation to each of the other themes, this paper provides a framework within which opportunities can be identified, funded and implemented in a comprehensive manner.
Priorities for this theme are:

- **Roads**
  ICBAN and other interest groups have pressed the case for delivery of the A5/N2 and A16/N16 projects as set out in the MVA Report. These are ICBAN established strategic priorities for the Region. However, other important regional roads projects such as the A29 and N3 networks merit consideration for improvements.

- **Telecommunications**
  ICBAN has already argued for major investment in the telecommunications infrastructure of the Region through the Innovacom Report. This will help realise the Vision for Telecommunications:

  “The ICBAN region will have an advanced broadband infrastructure capable of delivering download speeds of at least 100Mbps to 50% of premises, and deliveringdownload speeds of at least 15Mbps to the remaining 50% of premises by 2017.”

  The ICBAN Telecommunications study makes recommendations based on five pillars: Planning, Public Assets, Investment, Local Activism and Demand Stimulation.

- **Advocating the case for sustainable public transport provision in the Region, particularly local and community transport, in order to improve quality of life for residents, by improving access to services and to employment and to facilitate tourist mobility.

- **Supporting the case for strengthening electricity transmission infrastructure to ensure security of supply, and especially where weaknesses pose a potential barrier to the development of renewable energy sources.

- **Promoting the extension of the natural gas distribution network as soon as is practicable, where technically possible and economically feasible, to enhance diversity of fuel supply and customer choice, and bring about reductions in CO2 emissions.

- **Champion enhancement of the key Waterways and Canals of the Region.

- **Investment in ports of promoting the refurbishment, upgrade and diversification of key ports in the Region.

- **Monitor and promote development of Regional airports within and adjacent to the Region.

- **Consideration of the case for extension of railway networks into and within the Region.

7.4 Outcomes of the Accessible and Connected Region Objective

Among the primary and potential impacts of the Accessible and Connected Region Objective are the following:

- **Investments reduce the perceived peripherality of the Region, opening new opportunities for tourism and leisure, and for increased residential and employment opportunities.

- **All parts of the Region have high quality fixed and mobile broadband services.

- **The energy infrastructure of the Region is reinforced by increased electricity interconnection and an expanded natural gas distribution network.**

An Accessible and Connected Region
Managing and Delivering the Regional Strategic Framework

The completion of this Regional Strategic Framework is an important step towards transforming the Central Border Region. The Framework has identified opportunities for future development and sets out a plan for realising them.

The next stage, implementation, will necessitate stakeholders sitting down and working together to prioritise the key ambitions and opportunities. This should be done in the form of a Regional Action Plan, which will set out the detailed targets and resources required.

The delivery of the Framework must be managed effectively if it is to make a difference to the development of the Central Border Region and the balanced sub-regional development of the island of Ireland. To date ICBAN has carried forward oversight of the wider Spatial Planning Initiative by means of an overall Steering Committee and a range of special interest groups. A new vision must be supported by new means of implementation.

It would therefore be appropriate to review the most appropriate structures for implementation of the Framework. This should also take into account the new functions and roles of local authorities in both jurisdictions and the opportunities for them to work together strategically by providing shared services to their citizens.

8.1 Moving Towards Implementation

During the development of this Framework, representatives of Local Government, Government Departments, Public Bodies, the Private Sector, Community and Voluntary Sector have all been actively involved in engagement to identify the needs of the Region and how they might be addressed.

The implementation stage will see a range of multi-sectoral partnership approaches, drawing on a range of expertise, experience and capacity. Those involved are to work to the common purpose and have a sense of real involvement and ownership of the project.

Their full buy-in and contribution is critical to success. The principle that partnership working, embracing change and adopting creative approaches to addressing these challenges will be the cornerstone of the approach.

8.2 Structure Considerations

The structure might consist of the following:

1. A Strategic Oversight Group which will oversee the strategic implementation of the Framework and agree on any reviews, updates or re-focusing of the Framework which are required. Membership of the Group would include senior representatives of Central Government, member Councils of the Region and other key stakeholders.

2. Priority Oversight Groups overseeing delivery of the four objectives.

3. A Policy Reference Group which would provide the interface between the Regional Strategic Framework and the Departments and Agencies of the two Governments, as well as the EU.

These structures would require to be professionally resourced to sustain their work and, in addition, an important consideration is that the Strategic Oversight Group might have an independent chairperson or joint chairperson from the two Governments. Such appointments need to ensure that the key role of CEOs within the Region, including Council CEOs and County Managers, is formalised in terms of involvement and governance.

ICBAN will work with the two Governments to identify options for the implementation structures and for ensuring those structures at a professional level. The structures identified through the Group and priority, generate a detailed, targeted and costed Regional Action Plan. This will consider in detail issues such as delivery responsibilities and sources of financing for the prioritised projects, as well as the arrangements for the monitoring and evaluation of the Framework and communication of its impacts more widely.

While the arrangements outlined in this Section may provide the blueprint for the management and delivery of the Regional Strategic Framework, the flesh can only be put on the structure by practical action. Consequently, therefore, remains a range of issues which will need to be explored not least in the course of implementation.

8.3 Responsibilities

The RIS is a Framework for the Region. It is a Framework for delivery. For ICBAN or by its member local authorities exclusively. Instead the principle should be that delivery of initiatives under the Regional Strategic Framework should be for the organisation or organisations best placed to deliver them.

This means that delivery of the Regional Strategic Framework will require a ‘whole economy’ approach where some initiatives are best led by local authorities, others might be delivered by, for example, Invest NI and Enterprise Ireland working together to deliver an initiative identified as important to the Region; and others by the third level educational institutions, private development organisations, the community and voluntary sectors and yet others by the private sector working on contract.

A strong bottom-up approach within the Region has developed this blueprint. To enable successful implementation the commitment and support of both Central governments, working together with other key decision-makers, will be important, given the decentralising authorities and possession of key development resources.

8.4 Key Principles Underpinning Implementation

1. The Regional Strategic Framework is to be effective and to make a difference it must:

- Be driven by key stakeholders who champion the aims of the Framework, and who are committed to the success of all initiatives;
- enable the implementation of the Framework;
- enable the delivery of the Regional Strategic Framework into an evidence-based, participative process which would be based on rigorous and timely monitoring, evaluation and learning of the outcomes of the Framework; and
- be able to make more effective public and private investment across the Region.

2. The Regional Strategic Framework is to be effective and to make a difference it must:

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- be able to make more effective public and private investment across the Region.

8.5 Engagement with other Regions

Over the period of the Framework, the Central Border Region will need to engage more strategically with other EU regions. Each of its key partner regions has shown how the Central Border Region can learn from other EU regions and, progressively, contribute its own experience to the development of those regions.

There may be a need for a central resource for this work to take place and to co-ordinate inputs and relationships between the Central Border Region and other EU regions. In carrying forward this work the Central Border Region will have the opportunity to work in co-operation with the other key regions across the island of Ireland, such as East Border Region and the development agencies to share resources and opportunities and to develop concepts such as a border development zone.

Over the period of the Regional Strategic Framework, it is likely that the emphasis on linkages with other EU regions will remain an important part of the internationalisation of the Central Border Region, so that many of the Region’s businesses will have international business relations and its Councils and the Department of the Environment.

In particular the Central Border Region is well-placed geographically and organisationally to promote sharing of experience between the EU and other regions in North America and to be able to reflect on the lessons learned in cross-border development process which will be new to other rural cross-border regions, including those in Africa, the Middle East, Brazil, Russia, India, and China.

Local, National & International Region
RSF
Regional Strategic Framework for the Central Border Region 2013-2027

'A sustainable region that delivers the best quality of life for its people and makes a distinctive contribution to economic and social renewal and growth on the island.'

A smart and internationally competitive region
A people centred and inclusive region
A sustainable region
An accessible and connected region
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