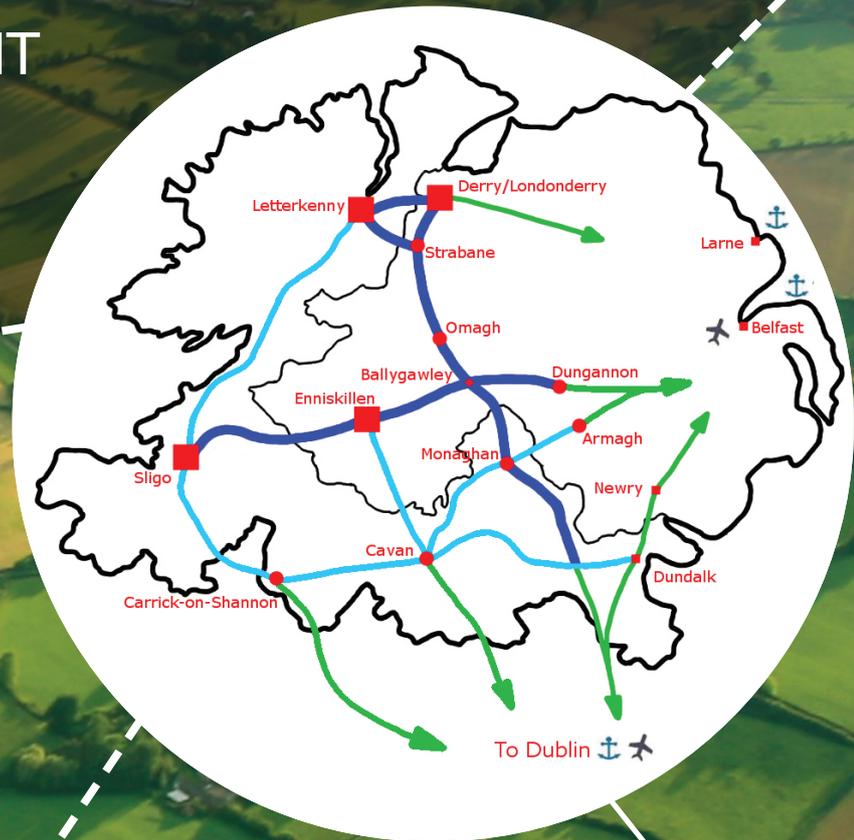


Irish Central Border Area Network (ICBAN)

North West Region Cross Border Group (NWRCBG)

# ADVOCACY DOCUMENT

October 2012



## Improvements to the N16/A4 Sligo to Ballygawley and N2/A5 Monaghan to Letterkenny Transport Corridors



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A Spatial Planning Initiative



# Foreword

by Councillor Robert Turner

Chair, Joint ICBAN / NWRCBG 'Roads to Opportunity' Working Group



As Chair of the joint Cross-Border Groups' "Roads to Opportunity Working Group, I commend to you this summary report advocating "Improvements to the N16/A4 Sligo to Ballygawley & N2/A5 Monaghan to Letterkenny Transport Corridors".

This report has been driven by ICBAN and undertaken as part of a wider Central Border Region Spatial Planning Initiative. This wider initiative aims to ensure regional commitment to joined-up planning practices amongst stakeholders and seeks to maximise future investment in and development of the Central Border Region. This work includes the development of a Vision Plan for the region, a Vision in which it is expected that improvements in roads infrastructure will be seen as key to the future functionality of the Central Border area.

This study provides an evidence-based analysis of the issues and develops arguments for support and funding for both the N16/A4 & N2/A5 Key Transport Corridors. It examines the current obstacles and specifically addresses the potential benefits which would accrue to the island economy as a whole, by opening up the North West of the island of Ireland in terms of greater roads access.

A real challenge will undoubtedly be the cross-border dimension, and this initiative is a unique and ambitious approach to helping tackle challenges which traverse both the jurisdictions of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

This document will help re-promote and consolidate the case for prioritising the development of both these key routes. To enable this quadrant of the island to be sustainable, develop and indeed to attract much needed inward investment, it is vital that we have the infrastructure to do so. Modern, safe and quality road corridors are of paramount importance to our social fabric and are the lifeblood of this region's economy.

I hope that the issues clearly identified in this study can be addressed to give the region the opportunity to compete on an equal footing with other areas.

I would wish to record my gratitude to all those stakeholders who participated in the consultation events and those who assisted in the preparation of the report. We look forward to working with you all, collectively, in promoting and completing these ambitions.

Councillor Robert Turner

Chair

Joint ICBAN / NWRCBG 'Roads to Opportunity' Working Group

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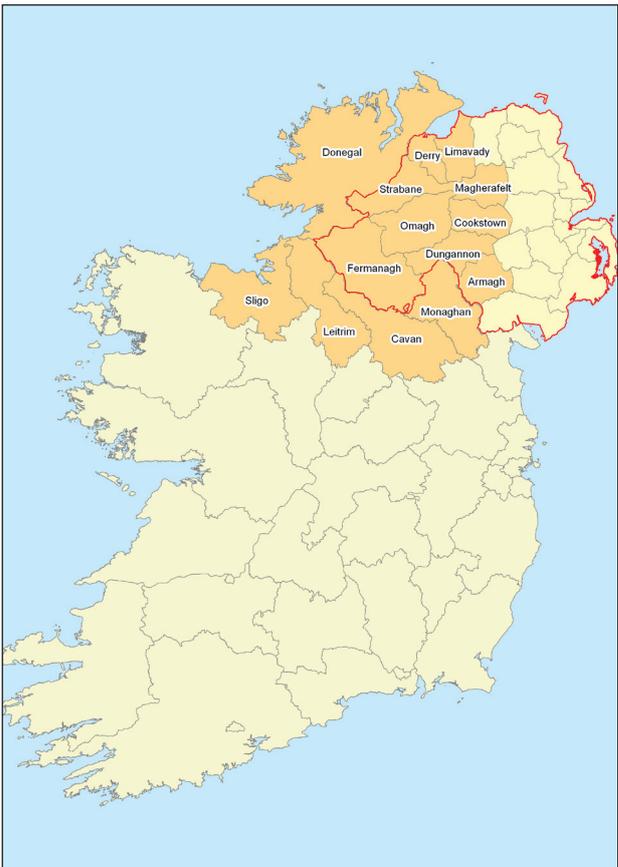
# Introduction

The Advocacy Document sets out a **compelling socio-economic case** for a step-change in the quality of transport infrastructure in the border areas of Northern Ireland (NI) and the Republic of Ireland (RoI). It draws on a detailed and robust report commissioned by the Irish Central Border Area Network (ICBAN) in conjunction with the North West Region Cross Border Group (NWRCBG) in 2011-12 which fully investigated the socio-economic issues affecting the area, and how these could be addressed through improvements in transport infrastructure.

Our area of reference is highlighted in the dark orange shade in the figure below. It became clear from both desk-based research and extensive consultation that the transport related problems and issues in the Border Area stem from inadequate roads infrastructure. Our initial prioritisation led to a focus on two key road corridors, namely those between:

- Derry / Londonderry - Aughnacloy – Dublin (A5/N2) including:
- Lifford and Letterkenny (N14); and
- Sligo and Ballygawley (N16/A4).

It is crucial to note that our case is built upon infrastructure improvements that would benefit **the entire Border Area**, rather than a small number of counties within it. While there is general support for transport improvements that could be of benefit to specific parts of the Border Area, the focus here was largely on schemes that were contained **within** the Area.



The key questions we sought to answer were:

- What are the **benefits to government** of investing in new transport infrastructure in the Border Area?
- What should the **investment priorities** be?

## What are the benefits to government of investing in new transport infrastructure in the Border Area?

Put simply, the Border Area is less well connected than other areas of Ireland and thus cannot currently contribute its full and significant economic potential to the island economy. There is strong evidence to support our view that a ‘three speed’ economy is emerging across the island, led by the city-regions of Belfast and Dublin, followed by the regions well connected to these city-regions by high quality motorways and dual carriageways and, lastly, the Border Area. Notably, the recent investment in motorways throughout Ireland has ignored the Border Area.



There are clear risks here for government – the continuation of unbalanced spatial development will jeopardise the long-term viability of the Border economy, potentially turning it into a ‘drag’ on economic growth rather than the highly positive contributor it has the potential to become. **Government must act now** – delay will only accentuate the problems, making them more difficult and costly to tackle in the future as the local economic situation deteriorates.

### ***What are the Problems?***

It is clear from our research that **poor connectivity** is a key inhibitor to the economic growth of the Border Area. Slow and often unreliable journey times have an impact on business competitiveness and make the Border Area a less attractive location for both indigenous firms to grow and other companies to invest in. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that the majority of Border Area firms are owned either by local people or those who have a historic connection to the area, further illustrating the lack of ‘inward’ investment.

In macroeconomic terms, the Border Area has been shown to perform poorly when compared with other areas of Ireland, and the data suggests that the situation is getting worse. Key headlines include:

- economic productivity lags behind the national average;
- there is a lower share of high value economic sectors, and a higher share of manufacturing and construction sector jobs, both of which are being badly hit by the current economic downturn;
- there is also a ‘brain drain’ of young and talented people from the Border Area; and
- the Border Area has a lower GVA per capita than other regions of the RoI.

Our socio-economic case sets out a wide variety of problems within the transport system of the Border Area which, when taken together, have a marked negative impact on overall connectivity to the rest of Ireland and beyond (including key export markets in the UK and Europe). These problems include:

- **slow travel speeds** and hence comparatively **poorer accessibility** to key economic centres;
  - the average speed from the Border Area towns to Dublin is **71kph**, compared to a typical **85kph** from other key towns in NI / RoI; and
  - the average speed from the Border Area towns to Belfast is also **71kph**, compared to a typical **76kph** from the other key towns NI / RoI;
- under-investment in transport infrastructure in the area – recent NRA spending per head on transport infrastructure in the Border area is around 45% of that of other RoI regions;
- some routes in the area, notably the N16, are not of the required standard for a designated National Primary Road ;
- issues with journey time reliability, particularly for traffic passing through the town of Enniskillen; and
- slow moving agricultural and goods vehicles causing queues and delaying faster cars and vans.





Taken together, these problems mean that the Border Area suffers from a **serious competitive disadvantage** when compared with other areas of Ireland. What is perhaps even more notable than the above is that residents of the Border Area have seen relative underinvestment in their area on a per capita basis. This is a **socially inequitable outcome** which it is in government's interest to address as a matter of urgency. As noted above, the longer the connectivity problem exists, the worse it will get and the more it will cost to rectify.

### ***What are the benefits of improved transport?***

It is necessary to consider how improvements to transport infrastructure would feed through to improved local and, ultimately, national economic performance. Transport in itself is not, of course, a panacea for all of the Border Area's economic difficulties. Any infrastructure improvements would need to be accompanied by investment in communications technology, industrial premises and skills development. However new infrastructure investment in itself can act as a catalyst for private sector investment and provide opportunities for new initiatives and development - indeed the long-term development of the area may be best supported by designating it as an 'Enterprise Area' - ie a Border Development Zone. The benefits of this are clear - they include:

- improved spatial balance in terms of economic performance;
- a Border Area contributing positively to the economic recovery and growth of the island of Ireland; and
- increased government revenue and a longer-term reduction in expenditure in the Border Area (for example, there is evidence to suggest that Border Area towns have a higher proportion of more costly local services, as poor connectivity limits the scope for centralising services).

Transport improvements are a central enabler of any such economic stimulus package in that they can assist in:

- improving business confidence in the future of the Border Area;
- encouraging the skilled pool of workers currently resident to remain;
- facilitating and supporting the regeneration of the local and national economy, helping it recover from the current downturn and creating a more balanced economy in terms of the sectoral mix;
- assisting in the development of indigenous industries;
- creating a better environment for business investment, lessening the dependence on the shrinking public sector;
- assisting in maintaining the social and economic fabric of the Border Area; and
- reducing the perception of peripherality, particularly amongst tourists and businesses.

In short, improved transport is a **critical enabler** if the Border Area is to achieve its full **economic and social potential** and contribute towards the **wider economic success of the island of Ireland**.



# What should the investment priorities be?

## **An Objective-led Process**

Objectively defining, appraising and prioritising investment in transport infrastructure is a complex process, and this can be subjected to local pressures. Investment prioritisation must be supported by a robust evidence base that gives decision makers and other stakeholders confidence in the outcomes of the process. Our socio-economic case therefore adopted a proven and **objective-led** appraisal process. This ensured that all suggested projects were appraised against a set of objectives developed through consultation with stakeholders.

In addressing the transport problems in the Border Area, a series of 'Transport Planning Objectives' (TPO) were set to complement established government policy. These objectives, if realised, will support the long-term sustainable economic development of the Border Area and contribute towards the overall economic success of the island. The Transport Planning Objectives are focused on improving the connectivity of the Border Area and tackling the actual and perceived peripherality of the area. The objectives are:

- **TPO1a:** Work towards equalisation of average road travel speeds from the Border Area **to Belfast** with other comparable regions of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland;
- **TPO1b:** Work towards equalisation of average road travel speeds from the Border Area **to Dublin** with other comparable regions of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland;
- **TPO2:** Ensure average inter-urban travel speeds of no less than 80kph between designated key towns **within the region**;
- **TPO3:** Provide a modern, safe and well maintained road network targeted at supporting indigenous firms and attracting inward investment; and
- **TPO4:** Ensure a best value solution for delivering improved transport connectivity within and to / from the Border Area.

It became evident very early in the process that stakeholders see the development of two transport corridors within the Border Area as their priority areas for investment:

- **A5 / N2 between Derry / Londonderry, Aughnacloy and onwards to Dublin.** Included within this overall corridor plan were suggested improvements to links with Letterkenny along the N14 corridor; and
- **A4 / N16 between Sligo and Ballygawley.**

The research undertaken clearly identified the importance of **both corridors in supporting the future economic prosperity of the Border Area, ensuring that it contributes positively to the long-term success of the island of Ireland.** We therefore considered the merits of each corridor separately. This should not be seen as A5 / N2 versus A4 / N16 as the reality is that both corridors **must** be improved if the Border Area is to realise its goal of sustainable and balanced economic development. All stakeholders are committed to **working together** to realise improvements on both the east-west and north-south axes.

We would envisage that the prioritisation set out below relates only to the phasing of improvements and that **all of the options will be delivered within a defined timescale to complete each of the two routes.**



### ***A5 / N2 Corridor Prioritisation***

By testing options identified for the A5 / N2 corridor against the Transport Planning Objectives and government criteria, we have identified the following set of priorities:

- **Priority 1:** Dualling of the A5 between Derry / Londonderry and Ballygawley, followed by Ballygawley to Aughnacloy, including the A5 link between the N14 / N15 at Strabane;
- **Priority 2:** Improvement of the N14 between Lifford and Letterkenny, linking into the new A5 at Strabane;
- **Priority 3:** Improvements to the N2 between the Border and Castleblayney; and
- **Priority 4:** Dualling of the N2 between Ardee and Ashbourne, including the Slane Bypass. An alternative to this scheme, from a Border Area perspective, would be to upgrade the N33 between Ardee and Charleville, providing a direct link to the M1.

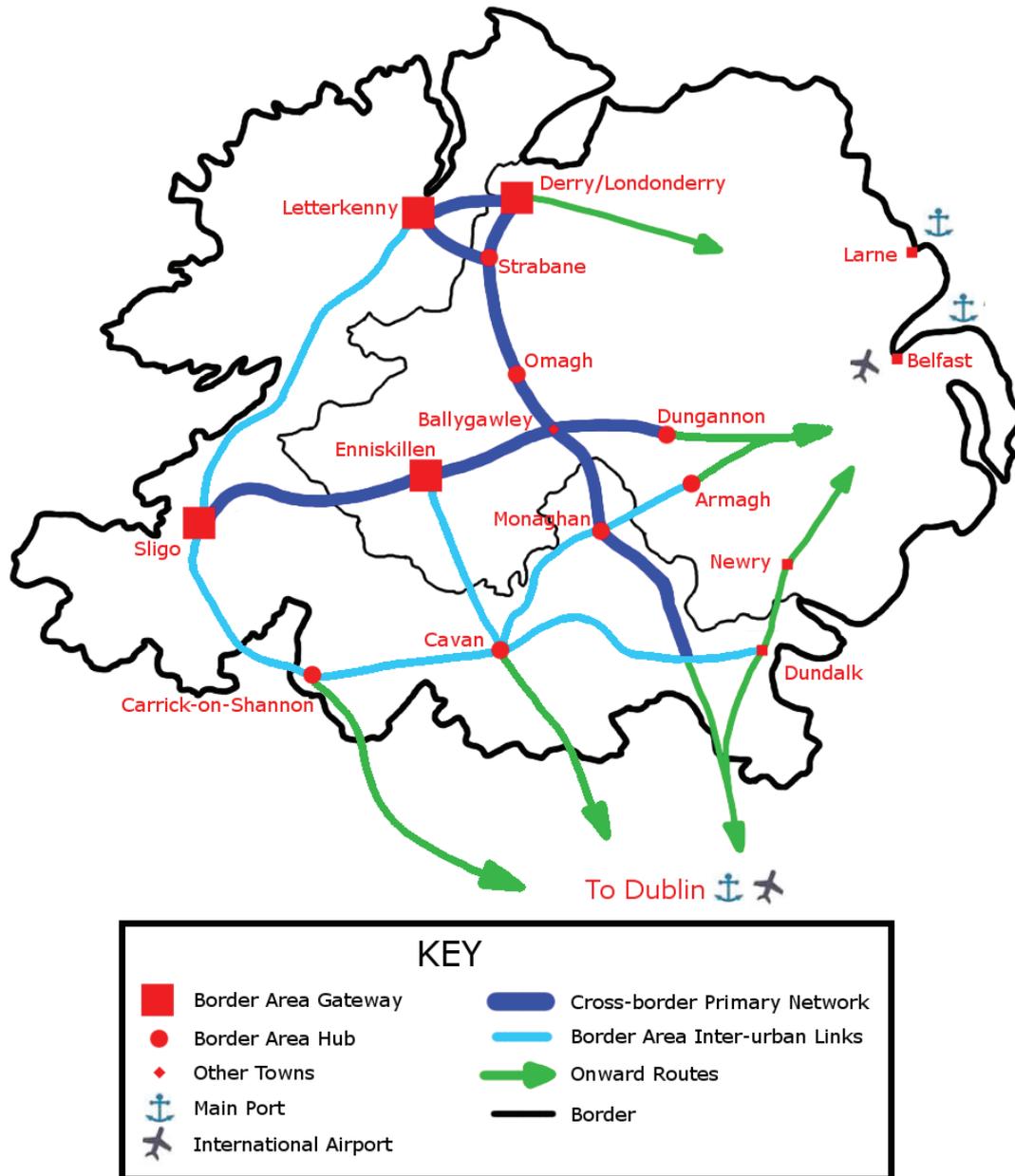
### ***A4 / N16 Corridor Prioritisation***

As with A5 / N2 corridor, we identified the following as the key priorities for the A4 / N16 corridor:

- **Priority 1:** Provision of a bypass of Enniskillen;
- **Priority 2:** Progressive upgrades to the N16, beginning with the section between Glencar and Glenfarne (including the Manorhamilton Bypass), followed by the Sligo to Glencar section and finally the Glenfarne to Blacklion section; and.
- **Priority 3:** Provision of a bypass of Fivemiletown.



The recommended improvements to both the A5 / N2 and A4 / N16 corridors are shown in the figure below. The dark blue lines represent the principal recommended improvements identified in this document. In addition the roads linking the principal Border Area towns should be reviewed and improved in order that the target average inter-urban speed of 80 kph is achievable.



**Figure 1 Recommended Network Improvements**

**Additional Recommendations**

Other improvements have been identified which will contribute to raising the standard throughout the length of the corridors:

- a long-term commitment to dual the N13 between Letterkenny and Derry/Londonderry, assisting the development of these ‘linked gateways’; and
- improvements to the A4 between Enniskillen and Belcoo.



In addition to the corridor specific options, there should be a general commitment to ensure that National Primary / Key Transport Corridor roads are of the required **minimum standard**<sup>1</sup> for that designation of road. This is a particularly pertinent point for the N16, which falls well below the required standard, as well as the A4 between Enniskillen and Belcoo.

There should also be an **immediate commitment** to making relatively low cost improvements in travel information and safety, including:

- more frequent signage, particularly route confirmatory signs showing distances to major destination towns and tourist information signs; and
- improved lining, signing and lighting.

While no specific public transport options were advanced by stakeholders, there is a very clear **opportunity for public transport improvements to complement any improvements to the road network**. This could include express bus services between key towns operated jointly by Translink (Ulsterbus) and Bus Eireann (particularly between Derry / Londonderry and Letterkenny).

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<sup>1</sup> In ROI the minimum standard for a National Primary Road is A Standard Single Carriageway cross-section of total width 18.3m. In NI no such formal minimum standard exists although the Regional Transportation Strategy 2002 – 2012 identifies the Key Transport Corridors (which include the A5 and A4 routes) as the most important in NI and the focus for performance monitoring and improvements.



## Key Recommendations

***The Northern Ireland Assembly and the Government of the Republic of Ireland should make an immediate, unequivocal and time specific commitment to upgrade both the A5 / N2 and A4 / N16 corridors in their entirety, following the prioritisation framework set out in this Advocacy Document.***

***There is a compelling socio-economic case for such investment – at present, the Border Area economy significantly lags the average economic performance of both Northern Ireland and the RoI. There are clear signs of the emergence of a ‘three-speed economy’, where the economic performance of the Border Area trails the city-regions of Belfast and Dublin and the other well-connected regions of the island of Ireland. This situation will only get worse if it is not rectified and the costs of addressing the problems will also grow over time.***

***There are therefore clear benefits to government of investing in the identified Border Area transport improvements, namely:***

- ***The Border Area realises its full economic potential, delivering the objectives set out in the Northern Ireland Regional Development Strategy 2035; the Irish National Spatial Strategy 2002-2020; and the Border Regional Planning Guidelines 2010-22.***
- ***The Border Area contributes positively towards the economic development of both Northern Ireland and the RoI.***
- ***Equity and social inclusion – the equalisation of investment in the Border Area with other areas in the island of Ireland will ensure that it is an attractive place to live, work, invest and do business in.***

***Decision-makers must also consider the consequences of not channelling an appropriate level of investment into the Border Area. The long-term financial costs of this failure to invest would be significant, as it will become more costly to address the economic challenges of the area as the local economy underperforms relative to the rest of the island. In addition, government must also consider the island-wide opportunity cost – the Border Area will become a resource intensive drag on economic growth rather than fulfilling its positive economic potential, as identified in the planning documentation for the area.***

***In conclusion, there is a coherent and undeniable socio-economic case for the Governments of Northern Ireland and the RoI to invest in improved transport infrastructure in the Border Area – there are clear benefits of making such an investment and high costs of not taking action.***





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