

STRONG REGIONAL INVESTMENT

More than 700 projects have been approved to date, under the Southern and Eastern Regional Programme, which is managed by the Southern Regional Assembly, through a combination of European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), National Exchequer and local authority funds, to deliver projects in the region over the 2014-2020 period.

The Southern Regional Assembly (SRA) is also a programme partner for the Ireland Wales Programme (2014-2020) and has an active role in a range of European Territorial Co-operation Programmes.

‘No man is an island’ rings true down the centuries and is a lyrical expression of the acknowledged interdependency of society. It reminds us of our human, geographic, and cultural connectedness.

It prefigures our want and desire to plan for our future. A future that strives for the betterment of the quality of life for all citizens. It is through this constant quest to improve and narrow disparities, that we as a region can realise our individual and collective potential.

The Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government is in the process of devising the National Planning Framework (NPF). This process brings into sharp focus the gravity of the choices we must now make. Choices that will impact on generations to come.

The NPF is an ambitious project, it needs to be, to keep pace with the accelerated rate of technological, social and economic change. The Assembly recognises there are significant challenges facing our country that require decisive leadership and a strong and effective set of national and regional strategies.

To secure a sustainable future it is imperative we avoid a piecemeal approach to strategy formulation. Critically, spatial planning must be informed by economic and social needs. The overarching principle of the protection of the environment combined with an impetus to improve social equality, will serve to copper-fasten and safeguard our future.

The changing world we live in brings with it challenges and opportunities. The Southern region, will experience population growth and a proportionately older population over the period of the plan.

HARNESSING ASSETS

While predominantly rural, the region includes three of the country's four regional cities and a strong settlement pattern of towns and villages. Rich agricultural land, freshwater rivers and



The Southern Regional Assembly has 33 members, 27 of whom are nominated from the constituent local authorities and six due to their membership of the Committee of the Regions (CoR). The councillors are supported by staff, mostly based at the Assembly HQ in Waterford City.

streams, a diverse coastline forms part of our natural resources.

We want to harness this wealth of assets, to rise to the challenges of tomorrow and to grow in a managed and sustainable manner. We will strive to do this by working with Government and its agencies to create sustainable development in the region, and by drawing together the components to inspire and attract people to live, work and participate in our vibrant region.

Irish people traditionally identify with parish and county. Various studies show that identity with place of living is still very strong in Ireland. It is enmeshed with a sense of belonging to the place where people grew up, the wider county and the nation.

Notwithstanding the changing face of Ireland, this consciousness and sense of belonging must inform and shape the NPF. Connectedness is immeasurably important to any community. It plays a part in safeguarding the health and well-being of citizens. Embeddedness is a difficult variable to quantify but one the Assembly contends is worthy of protection in plan making for the future.

SOUTHERN REGIONAL ASSEMBLY



Cllr Mattie Ryan, who was elected Cathaoirleach of the Southern Regional Assembly (SRA) in March 2017, pictured with SRA director Stephen Blair, and Cllr. Michael O'Shea.

It is worthwhile to pause and reflect what exactly place and belonging means in the Irish context. This needs to be done not in a bid to stall progress but to better understand the cultural sensitivities at play.

Place making or place-shaping is about improving the economic competitiveness, physical infrastructure and social fabric of a city, region or country, to increase its appeal as a place to live, work, study, invest in, trade with and visit.

FACTFILE: THE SOUTHERN REGION

- Three out of four Regional Cities.
- Population Growth of almost 3% over the last five years.
- Many Strong Rural Areas supported by a Network of Towns and Villages.
- Strong Job Growth with 62,600 new jobs created in the last five years.
- Two Universities and Five Institutes of Technology with a combined full-time student population of approximately 55,000 with an additional 12,000 part-time students.
- The only Two State Airports outside of Dublin as well as Two Regional Airports.
- All Tier 1 and Tier 2 Ports of National Significance outside of Dublin.
- Modern and Diverse Industrial Base with established cluster and specialisms in high value sectors such as pharmaceuticals, life sciences, aviation, precision engineering, information technology, food and beverages.
- Good quality farm land with High Agricultural Yields and strong food processing capabilities.
- Net exporter of Clean Renewable Energy with significant potential for further growth
- An extensive coastline with significant Marine Resource potential.

FUNCTIONS OF SOUTHERN REGIONAL ASSEMBLY

The Southern Regional Assembly, which meets on the second Friday of every month at its headquarters in Waterford, undertakes to:

- Manage and monitor EU programmes of Assistance.
- Co-ordinate, promote and support strategic planning and sustainable development of the region.
- Promote effective local government and public services in the region, in conjunction with the National Oversight and Audit Commission.
- Prepare and oversee the implementation of Regional Spatial & Economic Strategies.



REGIONAL VIBRANCY

No longer a homogenous society, isolated of the coast of continental Europe, we are globally connected, enriched with a diverse, young and educated population. We live in exciting and fast moving times. Our unique proposition as a nation, as a region, is firmly vested in our people and in our collective vision and values.

We are ready to play our part in contributing to the achievement of the greater national goals, among those being the transition to a low-carbon economy and the provision of high speed broadband for all unserved parts of the region.

Ubiquitous high-speed broadband is a pre-condition for regional competitiveness, key to securing a stronger economy, a socially enriched and environmentally protected region. Funding for initiatives in these key areas will be delivered under the Southern and Eastern Regional Programme.

Our role as European programme manager complements and uniquely positions us to guide and foster the potential of our region. Progress achieved to date by the urban centre development projects is proof of an integrated approach to planning.

The NPF is poised to benefit both the state and its regions. It doesn't need to threaten or undermine the aspirations of any part of the country, urban or rural.

Rather it can serve to unlock the latent potential of less-developed areas while increasing the competitiveness of the more developed areas. Quality of life for all and safeguarding for future generations is at the heart of its goal.