



Tionól Reigiúnach Oirthir agus Lár-Tíre  
Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly

Mr. Jim Gavin

Chairperson

Dublin Citizens' Assembly

16 Parnell Square

Dublin 1

30th August 2022

Dear Mr. Gavin,

I welcome this opportunity to make a submission to the Dublin Citizens' Assembly, on foot of the invitation from your colleague Art O' Leary.

The invitation to make a submission to the Citizens' Assembly was discussed at the plenary meeting of the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly held on 8<sup>th</sup> July 2022. As part of this meeting, the elected members opted to not make a collective submission from the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly, but have asked that I respond to your request in my professional capacity as Director of the Eastern and Midland Region.

Accordingly, please find below a submission that I trust will facilitate the work of the Citizens' Assembly as they consider a Directly Elected Mayor for Dublin.

### 1.0 The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA)

Established in 2015, the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly is part of the existing regional tier of governance in Ireland. Created alongside the Southern Regional Assembly and Northern & Western Regional Assembly by the Local Government Reform Act 2014, EMRA operates independently to provide a range of functions for the Region which include policy making, monitoring and oversight and promoting enhanced co-ordination.

The Region covers nine counties containing twelve local authorities. These are the four Dublin local authorities of Dublin City, South Dublin, Fingal and Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown, along with Longford, Westmeath, Offaly, Laois, Louth, Meath, Kildare and Wicklow. The Region includes 3 subregions or Strategic Planning Areas (SPAs), namely the Dublin, Eastern and Midland SPAs.

The Assembly currently has forty-two elected members nominated from the twelve constituent local authorities, including regional members of the Irish delegation to the EU Committee of the Regions. A new Cathaoirleach (Chairperson) and Leas-Cathaoirleach (Deputy Chairperson) are elected by the members each year. The Regional Assembly has a five-year mandate and meets every month.



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*The Eastern and Midland Region and Strategic Planning Areas*

### 1.1 Role and Function of the Regional Assembly

The Regional Assembly plays a key role in the development of the Region for the benefit of its citizens. The Assembly's role is to promote better coordination and effectiveness between the different tiers of government. In its different capacities, EMRA promotes multi-level governance by acting as a bridge between the local, regional, national and European levels. This role revolves around three axes: strategic planning and sustainable development, European affairs and effectiveness in local government. These three areas constitute the core of EMRA's functions and the spheres in which the Regional Assembly focuses its strategic activities. This coordinating role enables a greater degree of coherence between the various initiatives and strategies developed at various levels, for the overall benefit of the Region.

The Assembly focuses on driving regional development through the formulation, adoption and implementation of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES), oversight and coordination of County Development Plans and Local Economic and Community Plans, management of EU Operational Programmes, EU project participation, implementation of national economic policy, and additional functions working with the National Oversight and Audit Commission.

Along with the three-fold ambition for the Region as stated in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) of healthy placemaking, economic opportunity and climate action, EMRA will also work towards the strategic goals in our Corporate Plan to grow the profile of the Region and to drive the regional agenda at home and abroad, working with our stakeholders to shape policymaking including the next round of EU 2021-2027 programmes and to enhance local, regional, national and EU coordination.

### 1.2 The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES)

In line with the provisions of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly made the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midland Region on the 28th of June 2019.

The overall vision of the Strategy is to create a sustainable and competitive Region that supports the health and wellbeing of our people and places, from urban to rural, with access to quality housing, travel and employment



opportunity for all. The primary statutory objective of the RSES (2019-2031) is to support implementation of Project Ireland 2040, which links planning and investment through the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the ten-year National Development Plan (NDP). The RSES is of critical importance for the delivery of Project Ireland 2040, given that it is the succeeding tier of policy delivery in Ireland. The RSES also supports the economic and climate policies of the Government by providing a long-term strategic planning and economic framework for the Region.

### 1.3 Dublin Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (MASP)

As part of the RSES, a Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (MASP) was prepared to set out a 12 to 20-year strategic planning and investment framework for the Dublin Metropolitan Area (DMA) which covers Dublin City, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown and South Dublin, and parts of Fingal, Meath, Kildare and Wicklow. The MASP is the first statutory plan for the metropolitan area of Dublin and was prepared in collaboration with the transport agencies, infrastructure providers and the local authorities in the counties of Dublin, Kildare, Meath and Wicklow. The MASP sets out a strategic planning and investment framework to support job creation and accelerated housing supply in the Dublin metropolitan area, to accommodate an additional 250,000 people by 2031.



*Dublin Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (Dublin MASP)*



The MASP contains an integrated land use and transportation strategy that promotes compact urban development in the city and suburbs and at other sustainable locations near high quality public transport corridors, both existing and planned. The strategy also identifies infrastructure investment priorities to co-ordinate the phased delivery of strategic development sites in tandem with key public transport projects including Metrolink, DART and LUAS expansion, Bus Connects and walking and cycling networks.

EMRA develops indicators and monitors progress on the ground to make sure the Assembly's strategic vision is delivered and has concrete impacts in the Region, including the Dublin Metropolitan Region. Through monitoring and reporting, the impact of our policies, programmes and projects can be measured. In doing so, EMRA measures how we are achieving our organisational goals and strategic outcomes in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy, which seek to improve people's quality of life in our Region.

#### 1.4 Supporting Governance Structures within the Regional Assembly

The overall Assembly is supported by an established governance structure, centred on Strategic Planning Areas and the Dublin Metropolitan Area, that allows for the elected members of the Assembly to perform their function through Strategic Planning Area Committees and a Dublin MASP Committee. The Strategic Planning Area Committees for the Midlands, Eastern and Dublin regions were reconstituted as part of the new Assembly in 2019 following on from the Local and European elections of May 2019. These Committees and the MASP Committee, adopt standing orders and nominate chairpersons. They provide a forum for elected members to advance priorities and policies specific to each strategic planning area and the Dublin Metropolitan Area. The MASP Committee comprises elected members from the Regional Assembly representing the seven local authorities included in the MASP area. It is independent of the Dublin SPA and the Eastern SPA.

With the objective of overseeing and driving delivery of the objectives of the MASP, the governance structure for the Dublin MASP also comprises an Implementation Group. The MASP Implementation Group oversees the implementation of the MASP and is tasked with driving delivery of strategic housing, employment and regeneration opportunities in tandem with the delivery of key public transport, enabling infrastructure and metropolitan scale amenities, in order to achieve targeted population and employment growth as set out in the RSES 2019-2031 and Project Ireland 2040 – National Planning Framework (NPF). It includes key stakeholders from the infrastructure and enterprise agencies, local authorities and Department of Housing Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH).

#### 1.5 Regional Government Delivering

Since the inception of the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly, the Regional Assembly has delivered on many fronts, providing a coordination role for Regional Development without disruption to, and facilitating, the Local Authorities' role of working closer to citizens in their respective areas.

In practical terms, a highlight of some of the items delivered includes;

- **The first Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Region, which includes a Dublin Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (MASP)**, which was approved by forty-two elected members from twelve different local authorities. EMRA were declared winners in the Plan Making Category at the Irish Planning Awards, in recognition of their Regional and Spatial Economic Strategy (RSES).
- **The establishment of governance structures to ensure and deliver coordinated regional development.** This includes Strategic Planning Area Committees and a MASP Implementation Group (see Section 1.4 above)
- **Ensuring Coordinated Regional Planning and Consistency with the RSES.** The Regional Assembly has a





statutory function under Section 27 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) with regard to the preparation of a draft development plan, the making of a draft development plan and the variation of a development plan. The Assembly has exercised its function in relation to section 27 in all cases, including the four Dublin Local Authorities and the remaining Local Authorities within the MASP. In formulating these submissions, the Assembly has worked with the local authorities in the preparation of City and County Development Plans both formally through the requirements of Section 27 by way of observations on Development Plans and variations of Development Plans, and informally through the executive in preparation of the core strategy of Development Plans.

- **Ensuring policy consistency across a wide range of sectors at different scales to safeguard delivery and implementation regional development through the RSES.** Accordingly, the Assembly has made numerous submissions in order to influence and shape European, national and regional policy. Examples of this include submissions made to the European Union Guidelines for the development of the trans-European transport network, to the DHLGH on the Review of Planning Provisions regarding SHDs, Ireland's Long-term Strategy on Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction, Ireland's Strategy Winning: Foreign Direct Investment 2020- 2024, DTTAS Sustainable Mobility Policy, the National Marine Planning Framework, Significant Water Management Issues in Ireland consultation, Rail Freight 2040 Strategy, the National Economic Recovery Plan, the Department of Transport Statement of Strategy, the Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment Statement of Strategy, Review to Renew- National Development Plan Review, the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, Housing for All, National Investment Framework for Transport in Ireland, DART + South West, The Transport Strategy for the GDA 2022-42, and Eirgrid's Shaping Our Electricity Future.
- **Providing a coordinated forum and enabling stakeholder cooperation.** The co-production element and existing statutory functions of the Assembly require that delivery of regional and coordinated development, through implementation of the RSES and other mechanisms, is performed by a wide range of stakeholders in the public sector. In this regard ongoing engagement, promotion and integration of the RSES in other forums on a bilateral and multilateral basis with key implementation stakeholders is critical. To this end, the Assembly works with numerous forums, committees and groups to advance this including the NTA, numerous Government Departments, Regional Enterprise Plans Committees, Climate Action Regional Offices Steering Groups, and the Office of the Planning Regulator to name a few.
- **Policy Development and Research.** This includes for instance timely economic research such as COVID-19 Regional Economic Analysis and Regional Co-Working Analysis, that enables policy makers to respond to topical and ongoing issues in a coordinated way. The Assembly is also a key partner in numerous European Projects to advance coordinated regional development through knowledge building, research and learning with partner European regions. Sample projects include PROGRESS<sup>1</sup>, Next2Met<sup>2</sup> and QGasSP<sup>3</sup>.
- **The development of a 'Regional Development Monitor' (RDM).** The RDM is fundamentally a data hub and it will be the biggest open-source data hub in the state once it is launched in early Q4 this year. Designed to allow regional assemblies monitor the performance of their respective RSESs, the RDM

<sup>1</sup> PROGRESS is an Interreg Europe funded project with the objective of promoting improved governance for regional ecosystem services through policy learning and capacity building activities.

<sup>2</sup> Next2Met is an Interreg Europe funded project that aims to increase the attractiveness of the Midland Region as a place to live, work and visit. The project focuses on attracting and retaining qualified people and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the Midlands by identifying and supporting soft digitalisation measures.

<sup>3</sup> This is a 12-month ESPON Targeted Analysis Project, EMRA are the lead stakeholder. The aim of this research project is the development and delivery of a robust, simple and proportionate method for quantifying and forecasting the relative GHG impacts of alternative spatial planning policies, with pan-European applicability.



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provides a series of live mapping and visualisation tools that will also assist government departments, local authorities, planners, policy makers, researchers and members of the public in gaining a greater insight into social, economic and environmental trends, in order to inform decision making and policy formation.

- **Designated Managing Authority for the management of the €168 million European Just Transition Fund in Ireland.** The Draft Programme and associated Just Transition Territorial Plan has been approved by Government and is currently under consideration by the European Commission. The Just Transition Fund (JTF) is the first pillar of the Just Transition Mechanism and will provide support to impacted Member States in Europe. Established within the framework of cohesion policy, the JTF will be a key tool to support the territories most affected by social and economic impacts of the transition towards climate neutrality.
- In cooperation with the Southern Regional Assembly, EMRA have designed and will implement the **European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) programme covering the Eastern & Midland and Southern regions for the 2021- 2027 EU programming period.** The Programme has been approved by Government and should be approved by the European Commission before the end of 2022
- **Members of the Assembly and of the executive team sit on the Programme Monitoring Committees (PMC) of several EU funding programmes,** notably programmes co-funded by the European Regional Development Funds (ERDF). For the 2014-2020 programming period, EMRA was on the PMCs of the two ERDF Regional Operational Programmes (ROP), the Southern and Eastern ROP and the Border, Midlands and Western ROP. EMRA also engages in the following INTERREG programmes PMC: Ireland-Wales, Peace, North West-Europe, Atlantic Area and Urbact. In all instances, EMRA ensures that the programmes are delivering and supporting projects of regional interest.
- **Designated lead agency for the delivery of key actions associated with the Climate Action Plan 2021** including expediting the delivery of the Government's Sustainable Mobility Policy and the Renewable Electricity Spatial Policy Framework (RESPF).

### 2.0 Relevance to the Deliberations of the Dublin Citizens' Assembly

As an existing local government organisation with statutory functions in relation to regional spatial and economic planning and co-ordination, the Regional Assembly is well placed to contribute to the deliberations of the Dublin Citizens' Assembly. Furthermore, as an Assembly of elected members supported by a dedicated executive, our work is citizen focused. It is designed to be sensitive to and capable of adapting to new opportunities and changes to our operating environment.

The Assembly welcomes the deliberations of the Citizens' Assembly for Dublin and has identified a number of points of further consideration;

- The range of functions being considered for a directly elected Mayor and how these will complement the work of the four Dublin local authorities. These functions and their extensive nature were presented by the 4 Dublin Chief Executive and discussed by the members of the Citizens' Assembly. As outlined earlier in this submission, the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly has clear statutory functions in relation to Spatial Planning, Economic Development and regional co-ordination. Over the 7 years since their establishment, the Assemblies have grown their role in areas such as Climate Action and Circular Economy and are a resource to many organisations in developing approaches to delivering upon their remit. Other examples are in relation to Regional Enterprise Plans, Climate Action Plans and Sustainable Mobility Plans. While the focus is on the delivery of core Local Authority functions, the experience and



expertise of Regional Assemblies can clearly assist in considering the broader policy objectives of a City Region.

- How the Mayoral functions might sit alongside existing local and regional structures. The Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan and the Functional City Region approaches employed by the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly may be of interest to the Citizens' Assembly in its deliberations. Discussions pertaining to the governance and delivery process could benefit from the experiences of EMRA.
- Funding associated with the Mayoral function and its budgetary sources will clearly influence the deliberations of the Citizens' Assembly. Autonomous funding streams and revenue raising powers will be at the core of ensuring an effective and impactful Mayor. Careful consideration of the most appropriate approaches in the wider context of central, local and regional funding sources as well as those currently at the disposal of the other actors delivering on Metropolitan functions will be required.
- Governance arrangements and how these will work alongside statutory regional assembly and local government structures will again require careful consideration. The key nature of the democratic remit of the elected member and that role in the governance of the city region will be fundamental to a cohesive approach to governing a successful city region.
- The regional assemblies, in the course of their European work, have witnessed the substantial impact and influence of directly elected Mayors on regional spatial planning in an EU context. It would be important for the Dublin Citizens' Assembly to consider the experience of other European cities in this regard. Equally, a city region approach can maximise the potential impact of Dublin in its European context and the work of EMRA with the Dublin local authorities has increased this focus, particularly over recent years. The benefits of EU engagement should be carefully considered in the deliberations of the Citizens' Assembly.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the Regional Assembly welcomes the opportunity to engage in this process and is available for continued engagement with the Dublin Citizens' Assembly. I look forward to the proposals of the Citizens' Assembly as you consider, amongst other things, the potential benefits, risks, challenges and opportunities associated with a directly elected Mayor for Dublin and what functions could be delivered at a regional and local government level in Dublin, and how this should be structured and funded.

Yours sincerely,

Jim Conway

Director

Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly

30th August 2022