



The Centre for Cross Border Studies

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Submission to the Public Consultation on the Draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midland Region

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This response has been prepared by the Centre for Cross Border Studies as a contribution to the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly's public consultation on the Draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midland Region.¹

About The Centre for Cross Border Studies

The Centre for Cross Border Studies (CCBS), based in Armagh, has a strong reputation as an authoritative advocate for cross-border cooperation and as a valued source of research, information and support for collaboration across borders on the island of Ireland, Europe and beyond.

The Centre empowers citizens and builds capacity and capability for cooperation across sectors and jurisdictional boundaries on the island of Ireland and further afield. This mission is achieved through research, expertise, partnership and experience in a wide range of cross-border practices and concerns (for more details visit www.crossborder.ie).

The response that follows, therefore, is closely informed by the Centre's particular knowledge of and experience in cross-border socio-economic development involving a range of sectors from both Northern Ireland and Ireland, including public bodies, business and civil society. Given the Centre's remit, therefore, this response will focus primarily on the extent to which the Draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy includes any cross-border, North-South and all-island dimensions.

1. The Centre for Cross Border Studies (CCBS) welcomes the fact that the Draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) recognises how proper attainment of the core objective of creating a "sustainable and competitive region that supports the health and wellbeing of [its] people and places" will necessitate a cross-border and all-island outlook.²

¹ This response was authored by Dr Anthony Soares, Deputy Director of the Centre for Cross Border Studies.

² Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly, "Draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midland Region" (2018), p.4, <http://emra.ie/dubh/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/EMRA-DRAFT-RSES.pdf> [last accessed 18/01/2019].

2. It is positive to see how the region is recognised in the RSES as being connected to Northern Ireland and Great Britain, and it is essential, therefore, that continuing attention is paid to and dialogue is maintained with policy-makers and policy development at regional and local levels in both Northern Ireland and Great Britain in order to maximise any opportunities arising from beneficial synergies.

3. CCBS fully supports the strategy's underlying vision for promoting economic growth and improving regional connectivity through strengthening of the Dublin-Belfast corridor and by supporting cross-border networks as a means of deriving mutual benefit from the cross-border development and sharing of services and functions to communities. However, it is essential that whatever the outcome of the UK's ongoing negotiations over its withdrawal from the EU, the necessary mechanisms and funding are put in place to ensure the RSES's cross-border dimension is realised in practice.

4. In particular, CCBS welcomes the draft strategy's positioning of Drogheda within a cross-border network with significant potential for growth, and its recognition of the importance of promoting enhanced cross-border interactions in contributing to the future growth of Dundalk, but whilst also acknowledging the "need to ensure resilience to the potential implications of Brexit" (p.50). Given that it will be the border counties who will be most detrimentally affected by Brexit, it is essential that specific and sustained support is offered to population centres such as Dundalk and Drogheda, avoiding the further exacerbation of disparities between Dublin and other cities and settlements.

5. CCBS notes how "In preparing the draft Strategy, the Regional Assembly [...] engaged in collaboration with Local Authorities and Government agencies in Northern Ireland" (p.184), and encourages the Regional Assembly to maintain its determination to work together with its counterparts across the border whatever uncertainty may surround the UK's departure from the European Union. For its part, and in line with its core mission, CCBS will advocate for a reciprocal approach from relevant actors in Northern Ireland in the first instance, as well as UK Government representatives in light of the current lack of a functioning Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive.

6. In terms of point 5, above, CCBS will continue its engagement with policy-makers at UK Government level in relation to the proposed UK Shared Prosperity Fund in order to ensure it will offer adequate support to cross-border cooperation.³ CCBS will also continue to seek to participate in the development of the proposed PEACE PLUS programme, encouraging the widest possible support for North-South and cross-border initiatives.

7. CCBS notes that the Regional Assembly's "ambition is for the RSES to provide a platform for coordination and collaboration between Local Authorities, state and semi-state bodies to develop a shared responsibility and understanding about how we plan, to achieve a better future for all up to 2031 and beyond" (p.21). It is essential, however, that communities are continually regarded as active participants in the shaping of the places they inhabit, and therefore that participation should be assumed explicitly, and not taken as an implicit part of the collaborative process undertaken by

³ See, for example, Centre for Cross Border Studies, "Submission to the APPG on post-Brexit funding Inquiry" (28 August 2018), <http://crossborder.ie/site2015/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/CCBS-Response-to-APPG-on-Post-Brexit-Funding.pdf>.

local authorities, state and semi-state bodies. Moreover, such a process – where it relates to a cross-border dimension – should also integrate citizens’ participation on a cross-border basis. In this regard, proper examination of community development strategies developed at local authority level *on both sides of the border* should be undertaken in order to identify any potential opportunities for mutually beneficial cross-border cooperation. Given its knowledge of the relevant policy domains and its work with community groups in both jurisdictions in articulating their vision for cooperation within and between these islands,⁴ CCBS is ideally placed to assist regional and local authorities in making the appropriate cross-border and cross-sectoral linkages that will contribute to ensuring the achievement of a better future for all.

8. Indeed, the RSES not only identifies the necessity for collaboration at different governance levels within Ireland (as per point 7), but also the “need for collaboration and coordination, across boundaries, sectors and organisations”, and how “the draft RSES will enable cross boundary collaboration between local and regional bodies in relation to enterprise and employment, transport, education, retail and service delivery” (p.31). The RSES is entirely correct in acknowledging that delivery can only come about through collaboration and coordination that includes a cross-boundary – or cross-border – and cross-sectoral dimension, and involving a range of organisations. This should, naturally, include supporting and collaborating with the local authority-led cross-border networks (principally the East Border Region, but also where appropriate with the Irish Central Border Area Network), but also crucially with civic society organisations and local communities on a cross-border dimension, which is an area where the Centre for Cross Border Studies is ideally placed to assist.

9. CCBS agrees with the RSES’s assessment that the Dublin-Belfast Corridor “has the capacity to provide the only potential paired city European growth pole on the island of scale”, and that the “imperative to counteract Brexit with a proactive spatial economic policy adds to the international significance of the Corridor” (p.186). However, once again, this will entail the development of appropriate structures and funding programmes according to the nature of the UK’s and/or Northern Ireland’s future relations with the EU, which can support and encourage cross-border and North-South cooperation. The need for and development of appropriate structures and funding programmes to address and deliver in complex policy areas post-Brexit is a task the Centre for Cross Border Studies has been engaged in for a significant period of time, bringing its expertise and direct practical experience of cross-border cooperation to its assessment of what these structures and programmes might entail.⁵ The Centre is ready to assist the Regional Assembly in this area if it would find it beneficial.

⁴ See, for example, CCBS’s project “Towards a New Common Chapter”: <http://crossborder.ie/towards-a-new-common-chapter/>.

⁵ Some of the results of this work can be found at <http://crossborder.ie/category/research-and-policy/policy/briefings/> and <http://crossborder.ie/category/research-and-policy/policy/consultation-responses/>.