

New Statement of Strategy 2026 - 2030 for the National Transport Authority

The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly welcomes the preparation of a new National Transport Authority (NTA) Statement of Strategy 2026 – 2030. The purpose of this public consultation is to outline the NTA’s Draft Mission, Goals and Strategic Objectives to inform the development of its Statement of Strategy for 2026–2030.

The submission set out hereunder contains recommendations on behalf of the Regional Assembly. This submission has been prepared by the executive and approved by the Cathaoirleach of the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly.

1.0 Overall Context

The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA) is part of the regional tier of governance in Ireland. It is primarily focused on driving regional development through the formulation, adoption and implementation of the Regional, Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES), oversight and coordination of City and County Development Plans and Local Economic and Community Plans, management of EU Operational Programmes, EU project participation, and the implementation of national economic policy. As a strategic policy body, EMRA also participates in the consultation processes of other relevant strategic plans and policies.

The scope of the RSES 2019-2031, was provided for in the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, which included support for and alignment with the economic policies and objectives of the Government. However, this legislation has been superseded by the Planning and Development Act 2024, which was signed into law on the 17th October 2024, and the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2025. The provisions of the Planning and Development Act 2024 relevant to the Regional Assembly commenced on 2nd October 2025 and various sections of the legislation will commence on a phased basis in the coming months.

It is noted that the Planning and Development Act 2024 expands the scope of the RSES and the functions of the Regional Assembly. This includes matters directly relevant to the NTA in defining its Strategy Mission, Goals and Strategic Objectives particularly in the areas of climate action, integrated land use and transport planning and transport infrastructure provision. These are explored in the submission below.

The Regional Assembly is further mindful of its obligations, as a relevant body, under the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015 (as amended) to perform its functions in a manner consistent with achieving Ireland’s national climate objective.

1.1 Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES)

The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midland Region was made by the Members of the Assembly in June 2019, and it is a strategic plan and investment framework to shape future growth throughout the Region. The overall vision of the Strategy is to create a sustainable and competitive Region that supports the health and wellbeing of people and places in the Region, from urban to rural, with access to quality housing, travel and employment opportunity for all.

The vision of the RSES is supported by sixteen Regional Strategic Outcomes (RSOs), that are aligned with National Strategic Outcomes of the National Planning Framework (NPF) and framed around the three key principles of Healthy Placemaking, Climate Action and Economic Opportunity. Of relevance to this NTA public consultation are the following RSOs which:

- RSO 1 – promote ‘Sustainable Settlement Patterns’, manage the sustainable and compact growth of Dublin, develop the regional growth centres and complementary settlements to drive regional growth
- RSO 2 – support ‘Compact Growth and Urban Regeneration’
- RSO 3 – support ‘Rural Communities’ and strengthening rural networks, economies and communities
- RSO 4 - support ‘Healthy Communities’ including active lifestyles and access to services
- RSO 6 - promote ‘Integrated Transport and Land Use’ including the best use of existing and planned transport infrastructure, sustainable and active travel modes
- RSO 8 - seek to ‘Build Climate Resilience’ particularly from flooding risk, extreme weather events, coastal erosion and protection of property and critical infrastructure
- RSO 9 - support the ‘Transition to Low Carbon and Clean Energy’
- RSO 10 - seek to protect and enhance ecosystem services through ‘Enhanced Green Infrastructure’
- RSO 11 - conserve and enhance ‘Biodiversity and Natural Heritage’ and protect the landscape
- RSO 12 - support a ‘Strong Economy Supported by Enterprise and Innovation’ for economic growth
- RSO 13 - ‘Improve Education Skills and Social Inclusion’ to attract employers and ensure opportunities for quality jobs including access to education/ jobs
- RSO 14 - promote the ‘Global City Region’ and enhance international connectivity at ports and airports
- RSO 15 - support ‘Enhanced Strategic Connectivity’ and regional accessibility for economic development/ resilience, strengthen rural communities, the blue-green economy and tourism

A primary statutory objective of the RSES is to support the implementation of the National Planning Framework (NPF), achieve alignment of investment priorities with those of the National Development Plan (NDP) and the National Marine Planning Framework (NMPF), and thus Project Ireland 2040, by coupling new development with the requisite investment in services and infrastructure. In doing so, the RSES supports the spatial, economic and climate policies of the Government by providing a long-term strategic planning and economic framework for the Eastern and Midland Region. The RSES also sets the context for local authorities within the Region to develop their City and County Development Plans (CDPs), and Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs) in a manner that will ensure alignment between national, regional and local plans.

The RSES presents a Spatial Strategy, devised and informed by a complementary Economic Strategy, which provides a framework for future growth, ensuring the delivery of effective regional development through the realisation of viable and vital places. This includes championing the capital city of Dublin as a smart, climate resilient and global city region; securing Athlone, Drogheda and Dundalk as Regional Growth Centres, acting as regional economic drivers and supports for their wider catchment areas; and promoting a network of large economically active Key Towns (which include Swords, Maynooth, Bray, Navan, Naas, Wicklow, Longford, Mullingar, Tullamore, Portlaoise and Graiguecullen-Carlow) that provide employment and services to their surrounding areas. All of this is supported by self-sustaining growth towns, self-sustaining towns and a network of multifaceted rural places.

2.0 Submission

The Assembly welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of a new NTA Statement of Strategy 2026-2030. EMRA supports the NTA's continued leadership in delivering sustainable, inclusive and integrated transport systems. The Assembly particularly acknowledges the Authority's progress in transitioning the national network towards low- and zero-emission transport modes, their role in strengthening land use–transport alignment, identification of and investment in sustainable transport infrastructure and enhancing the integration of transport services.

The Assembly recognises the NTA's key statutory role in regional transport planning and its central contribution to achieving the NPF 2025, NDP 2025, National Sustainable Mobility Policy 2022, Climate Action Plan (CAP) 2024/2025, and implementation of the RSES and the Dublin Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (MASP).

2.1 New RSES, Planning & Development Act 2024-2025 & NPF

The Assembly wishes to highlight its role as identified in new national planning legislation and updated national planning policy, for the consideration of the NTA in its preparation of a new Strategy and directly address the public consultation document which outlines the Draft NTA Mission, Goals and associated Strategic Objectives.

The Planning and Development Act 2024 sets out specific requirements for the review of the RSES. Transportation (including public transportation) infrastructure and services, sustainable and active travel are key considerations in many of the strategy elements of the existing RSES and will continue to underpin the new RSES. Of relevance to the NTA are Sections 29 (1)(a), (i), (p), 29(2) and (13) which require the RSES to:

- Identify sustainable settlement patterns and transportation strategies in urban and rural areas
- Set out the provision of transportation (including public transportation).
- Provide a statement of the actions being taken (or proposed) for the purpose of ensuring the effective integration of transport and land-use planning, including how provisions for the NTA

Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) have been included and the NTA's observations in relation to this.

- Include an integrated land-use and transportation strategy for the metropolitan area of Dublin.
- Measures to secure the effective implementation and monitoring of the RSES and MASP including an indication of priorities for infrastructure of scale relating to transportation (including public transportation), an order of priority for infrastructure provision, potential sources of funding for infrastructure, cross-sectoral investment and actions required to deliver planned growth and development, coordination between constituent local authorities, the cooperation of public bodies, and reporting arrangements to measure and evaluate progress in implementing the RSES and MASP.

The RSES has a statutory role in supporting balanced regional development including sustainable population and settlement growth and integrated land use and transport planning. It is critical that there is close alignment between the NTA's strategic transport planning framework, the NPF and DHLGH housing/ population growth targets, other long-term forecasting analysis such as the Future Forty (Department of Finance); and the RSES.

By aligning with the RSES and adapting quickly to updated targets from the DHLGH, the NTA can ensure that public transport investment reflects actual settlement trends/ needs and supports regional development policy, thus strengthening regional connectivity, mitigating infrastructural bottlenecks and supporting balanced climate-resilient population growth consistent with long-term demographic forecasts.

It is recommended that the Statement of Strategy commits to supporting both inter-regional and intra-regional balance and providing equitable access to reliable public transport across the regions to ensure there is sufficient connectivity between existing and emerging residential and employment clusters. Forecasted increase in migration, for example, will affect public transport and mobility, affecting some areas more acutely if growth is uneven within or across the region.

2.2 Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) Regulations

TEN-T Regulations (EU) 2024/1679 published in 2024 require that urban nodes on the TEN-T network develop and implement a Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan (SUMP) by 31st December 2027. Dublin is one of the four urban nodes identified in Ireland, and forms part of the North Sea-Rhine-Mediterranean European Transport Corridor and the Atlantic Transport Corridor. Thus far the Metropolitan Area Transport Strategies (MATS) have been Ireland's equivalent to the SUMPs and the Transport Strategy for the GDA has already been developed on a legislative basis, meeting the requirements of the Regulations. The TEN-T Regulations will be an important guide to the NTA's Strategy development, and the Regional Assembly would welcome involvement in any future 'SUMP Network' to support implementation of the RSES, fostering peer learning and sharing good practice.

2.3 Draft Mission, Goals and Strategic Objectives

The Assembly supports the Draft Mission, which supports community vitality, environmental health, and economic strength, though the Assembly considers it could be strengthened by explicit references to climate resilience, decarbonisation, and regional equity to align with NPF 2025 objectives and to emphasise balanced, climate-resilient growth.

Comments from the Assembly are set out under the Draft Goals and associated Strategic Objectives, as follows:

1. Customer First
2. Climate Action
3. Transport Planning
4. Transport Infrastructure
5. Transport Services
6. Transport Safety & Regulation
7. Stakeholder Engagement
8. People & Organisation

2.3.1 Customer First

The Assembly welcomes this goal which is centred on delivering infrastructure and services that meet customer needs, are efficient, integrated, inclusive and accessible to all. Transport is one of several key policy areas through which social inclusion can be effectively supported and it is considered that the Draft Goal contributes to the promotion of ‘Healthy Placemaking,’ which is one of the three cross-cutting principles of the RSES. It also aligns with Regional Policy Objectives (RPOs) 9.10 to 9.13 of the RSES, which highlight the need for improvements to both physical and social infrastructure including public realm enhancements, sustainable travel, recreation, public space and the provision of community facilities and services to create sustainable inclusive communities. It is also noted that the NTA has introduced an Equality Impact Assessment process, and this could be a Strategic Objective under ‘Customer First’.

The Assembly supports the NTA in its aim to regularly evaluate customer needs, working towards seamless integration of the public transport journey experience and the removal of barriers to the use of public transport, and increased modal shift. This includes the delivery of Next Generation Ticketing as a major upgrade to Ireland’s public-transport ticketing/ payment infrastructure creating a more integrated, accessible, and user-friendly public transport network. Its rollout will encourage greater use of public transport services. The NTA’s investment in modernising fare collection, improving passenger experience, and supporting the transition to a low-carbon infrastructure is welcomed; and the singular Automatic Vehicle Location system showing real-time location of vehicles for all Public Service Obligation (PSO) bus services and its integration with Mobility as a Service (MaaS), will further increase the attractiveness of public transport in Ireland.

The RSES (Section 6.4) recognises the rapid evolution of emerging technologies and opportunities for further development in different sectors. In the context of future mobility technologies, the Statement of Strategy should acknowledge and emphasise the rapid pace of innovation in transport technology,

including, for example, developments in autonomous vehicles, connected transport systems, and new forms of light rail or guided mobility that utilise road-based markers rather than fixed tracks. Over the 2026–2030 period, the NTA should commit to assessing and, where appropriate, piloting infrastructure designs and standards that are compatible with these emerging technologies. This would future-proof investment decisions and ensure that Ireland’s transport network remains adaptable, efficient and globally competitive. While the adoption of AI within the NTA is welcome, its application should extend beyond internal operations to support planning, modelling and decision-making for future transport systems.

The Assembly supports the delivery of the pilot programmes such as ‘Mobility Hubs’ and the proposed Bus Stop Enhancement Programme. These measures align with Chapter 7 of the RSES which sets out the commitment to support the transition to a low carbon, circular and climate resilient region and supports healthy placemaking (Section 9.4).

The Assembly recommends that the Statement of Strategy commits to measuring the ‘time cost’ of congestion to public transport users, including delays, interchange waiting times and reduced service reliability. Such delays undermine accessibility, user confidence and the economic efficiency of the wider transport network. A performance indicator framework could measure and support the reduction of average journey times and variability across modes. Prioritising journey time reliability through bus priority, signal optimisation and modal integration would contribute to the “Customer First” goal, enhancing the customer experience and support regional economic productivity.

2.3.2 Climate Action

Climate Action is one of the three key principles of the RSES and the RSES aims to ensure that it drives regional climate resilience and accelerates climate action through Regional Policy Objectives (RPOs) including a move to low carbon and clean energy (RSO 9). Climate focused RPOs are integrated throughout the RSES and include priorities related to the built environment, sustainable transport, energy and waste, flood resilience and water and ecosystem services (Section 7.9 of the RSES).

The Assembly supports the Draft Goal and Strategic Objectives, but notes the opportunity to explicitly address climate adaptation, mitigation and resilience, transport infrastructure resilience and resource efficiency, in line with the National Adaptation Framework-Planning for a Climate Resilient Ireland (2024¹), Public Sector Climate Action Mandate (2024²) and 2019 SUMP Guidelines.

Climate resilience should be a core consideration of investment appraisals and project prioritisation. New infrastructure must be designed for long-term stability (or existing infrastructure retrofitted) to account for extreme weather events (heat/ flooding/ wind, etc.) and measured against resilience

¹ <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/national-adaptation-framework-2024-0fa761a3-84e5-4bcf-ac40-0f91f6431ae8.pdf>

² <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/public-sector-climate-action-mandate-climate-action-plan-2024.pdf>

performance indicators. A National Transport Resilience Framework, coordinated across transport providers and local authorities could be developed to guide adaptation investments. The NTA are advised that the new RSES must make provision for the effects of sea level change on coastal zone management and associated strategic infrastructure along the coast.

The Assembly notes and supports the NTA's ambition to the transition of 75% of urban bus services to zero/low emission vehicles and energy management accreditation, which aligns with RSO 9 of the RSES. It is recommended that the NTA engages with the Climate Action Regional Offices (CAROs) and local authorities within the Region to 'future proof' services and to help to inform longer-term adaptation planning and investment priorities as it relates to critical infrastructure and the interdependencies between different types of sectoral infrastructure (RPO 7.43 of the RSES). Transport adaptation measures should align with the National Adaptation Framework 2024.

There is an opportunity to promote Circular Economy (CE) practices for emissions reduction and as an adaptation measure which would reduce resource vulnerability and enhance resilience to supply/service disruptions. CE principles should be embedded within project delivery mechanisms and include the use of low-carbon construction materials, asset reuse, sustainable procurement and a reduction in waste volumes. The RSES supports a move towards the achievement of a CE which is essential if the Region is to make better use of resources/ become more resource efficient.

The Assembly welcomes the NTA's goal to advance sustainable infrastructure by encouraging greater use of walking, cycling and public transport, alongside effective transport demand management measures for the GDA. The RSES recognises the importance of the built environment and compact settlements in supporting active lifestyles as reflected in its key principle of 'Healthy Placemaking'.

In the context of 'Integrating Demand Management and Behavioural Change', the Assembly welcomes the NTA's commitment to sustainable mobility and recommends that the forthcoming Strategy explicitly references the implementation of a National Transport Demand Management Strategy. A coordinated approach to the "Avoid-Shift-Improve" framework, combining policy, pricing, spatial and behavioural measures to reduce car dependence is supported. The Regional Assembly and local authorities should align their land use and transport plans with compact growth, make use of behavioural insights, support cross-sector coordination and ensure that demand management is embedded in local and regional strategies as a key enabler of decarbonisation.

The NTA's attention is further drawn to the [Smart and Sustainable Mobility Accelerator](#) (SSMA) which is a repository of knowledge, showcasing case studies, project outcomes, and ongoing advancements in active travel and sustainable mobility across all local authorities. This repository is a key output of the Pathfinder 27 Project under the National Sustainable Mobility Policy (SMP) Action Plan 2022-2025. The SSMA Programme is being delivered by the Assembly for the Eastern and Midland Region.

In addition, EMRA was a lead stakeholder on the [ESPON QGasSP Targeted Analysis Project](#) which focused on 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. As a result, the [Greenhouse Gas Impact Assessment Tool](#) was launched in 2023. The Assembly supports the development of a user-friendly tool for quantifying and forecasting the relative GHG impacts of alternative spatial planning policies in Ireland - as well as the development of a tool to collate and visualise emissions data from multiple sectors at a regional level based on international best practice - and would welcome support for the development of such user-friendly tools and resources in the Statement of Strategy.

It is recommended that the Strategy incorporates outcomes-based monitoring of progress made in climate adaptation, consistent with the National Adaptation Framework 2024. Resilience indicators must be tracked alongside decarbonisation and modal-shift targets. It is also recommended that the Regional Assembly is recognised as a statutory partner in implementing and monitoring adaptation measures within the transport sector, ensuring coherence between the NTA Strategy, RSES objectives and the National Adaptation Framework.

Additional Goal, Strategic Objectives – Nature Restoration & Biodiversity Enhancement

Ireland's climate, biodiversity, and water protection objectives are now embedded in both domestic and EU law, requiring full compliance in infrastructure planning and delivery. Infrastructure delivery must also comply with Ireland's obligations under the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Acts 2015-2021, the Water Framework Directive, the Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Directive, and the EU Nature Restoration Regulation.

It is recommended that 'Nature Restoration and Biodiversity Enhancement' are integrated into the NTA Statement of Strategy and linked to the delivery of Ireland's 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan (2023–2030) and the EU Nature Restoration Regulation, which establish binding national targets for restoring ecosystems - enhancing biodiversity across all sectors, including transport and spatial development.

The RSES for the Eastern and Midland Region already prioritises protection and enhancement of natural capital, green infrastructure, and ecosystem services as central to achieving a resilient, low-carbon region. By incorporating restoration principles into transport planning—such as pollinator-friendly design, habitat connectivity along transport corridors, and green-blue infrastructure integration—the NTA can support national restoration targets while delivering co-benefits for climate adaptation, flood management, and community wellbeing.

EMRA's participation in the [Interreg Europe PROGRESS project](#) underscores the benefits of integrating ecosystem services and nature-based solutions into regional and transport planning. Through

PROGRESS, EMRA has developed policy tools and methodologies that quantify the value of nature in decision-making, promoting a “nature-positive” approach to spatial development. The NTA’s Strategy could draw on this learning by embedding natural capital and ecosystem service valuation into its appraisal processes—ensuring that future transport investments contribute to both connectivity and ecological health. This would strengthen the Authority’s alignment with EU and national policy and enhance the delivery of the RSES’s green infrastructure and climate resilience objectives.

Building on the insights of the QGasSP (Quantitative Greenhouse Gas Impact Assessment Method for Spatial Planning Policy), there is clear evidence that early integration of environmental data and spatial modelling can optimise climate and biodiversity outcomes in infrastructure planning. Its analytical tool can forecast greenhouse gas (GHG) impacts of spatial policy options, providing a valuable foundation for assessing the co-benefits of nature restoration measures—such as wetland rewetting or urban greening—within transport infrastructure projects.

There is an opportunity for EMRA and the NTA to adopt similar analytical frameworks in project appraisal and SEA, enabling transport and spatial planning decisions that deliver on carbon, resilience, and biodiversity objectives simultaneously. The NTA’s existing traffic and transport modelling capacity could form the basis for this analytical framework, particularly GHG and air pollution emissions.

2.3.3 Transport Planning

As set out in the NPF 2025 and the Planning and Development Act 2024, the Regional Assembly is tasked with a key role of aligning land use planning and transport planning by developing a MASP and a formal function in identifying priorities of infrastructure of scale relating to transportation including an order of priority for infrastructure provision. Given the MASP’s strategic alignment with transport-led spatial planning and its integral role in guiding investment and infrastructure priorities across the Metropolitan Area, it is recommended that the NTA make explicit reference to the MASPs in the final Statement of Strategy and the role of the Regional Assembly in delivering and implementing the MASPs. It is recommended that consideration is given to the future preparation of regional transport strategies to strengthen alignment with the RSES.

The Dublin MASP, prepared as part of RSES, provides a coordinated framework for the sustainable growth and development of the Metropolitan Area. It supports the phased delivery of strategic residential and economic development areas within the city centre and at key nodes along existing and planned high-quality public transport corridors. It also establishes an Implementation Group to facilitate collaboration between local authorities, infrastructure providers such as the NTA and TII, and enterprise agencies including IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland—to address infrastructure constraints and strengthen Dublin’s competitiveness as a key economic driver for both the Region and the State.

High quality access to international gateways, both within and outside the Region, is key for economic competitiveness. This includes investment in the TEN-T road, rail and port network and requires the protection of the strategic function of national transport corridors. The RSES seeks to protect and enhance land transport connections to the major ports and airports, including Dublin Airport, via delivery of Metrolink and to support the development of Dublin Port including proposals for a southern port access route, in line with priorities in National Aviation and National Ports policies.

Aligning with National Strategic Outcome (NSO) 2 of the NPF 2025, the interurban rail network plays a key role in offering sustainable travel alternatives to private car travel and broadens labour catchments, benefitting the international competitiveness of our major cities. As identified within the All-Island Strategic Rail Review, there is a need to enhance rail links between our major cities (including an intercity spine connecting Belfast, Dublin and Cork) with increased capacity, line speed and frequency of service. The Assembly recommends the strategic objective is updated with a commitment to implement the recommendations from the All-Island Strategic Rail Review in conjunction with other State Agencies to improve connectivity across the island of Ireland.

The RSES recognises the key role of the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor as the largest economic agglomeration and national entry point to the island of Ireland, connecting Drogheda, Dundalk and Newry, with major airports and ports in Dublin and Belfast. The RSES supports the improvement of Dublin – Belfast Road and rail links, including feasibility for high-speed rail between Dublin-Belfast and Dublin-Limerick Junction/Cork, along with improved connectivity to Rosslare Europort on the Eastern Corridor. Cross border co-ordination will play a critical role in ensuring effective and resilient cross border flows and addressing opportunities and challenges. The RSES also recognises the potential of rail freight to support increased exports and the efficient movement of goods across Ireland, along with the future role of regional ports as strategic marine related assets, supporting complimentary economic uses and facilitating offshore renewable energy.

The NPF 2025 supports measures to enable the efficient use of the national road network, for commercial traffic; and increase user safety and remove traffic congestion in urban and rural centres. The Assembly considers the strategic objectives should be strengthened by referencing the forthcoming [National Transport Demand Management Strategy](#) (NTDMS) (NSO 5). The purpose of the NTDMS is to manage and reduce traffic congestion, making the country's transport system more efficient for users and alleviate the impacts of car dependency on the economy, the environment and the health of Irish society. EMRA considers that it is essential that demand management policies, including measures to reduce car use, are implemented in parallel with significant improvements in access to sustainable transport options, particularly in rural and peripheral areas.

Again, it is considered that the Statement of Strategy should quantify and seek to reduce the economic costs of congestion, including productivity losses, increased operating costs, and journey delays

affecting both private and public transport users. Reducing congestion-related time costs is essential for regional competitiveness, labour-market accessibility, sustainable economic development and people's quality of life. EMRA recommends the inclusion of a dedicated Time and Productivity Performance Indicator to track progress on network efficiency and journey time reliability, complementing compact growth and sustainable mobility indicators.

Integrating land use and transport planning is key to ensuring that the built environment is designed in a way that reduces travel demand by private car and encourages use of active travel or public transport means. This means promoting compact settlements, discouraging urban sprawl and delivering appropriate land use zoning patterns which support this objective. The NTA seeks to increase the efficiency of existing sustainable transport systems; and support the coordination of land use and transport policy objectives to form complementary intervention measures.

The Assembly considers the NTA Strategy could better align with NSOs 1 and 4, 'Compact Growth' and 'Sustainable Mobility', of the NPF, by having a specific Strategic Objective to promote Transport-Oriented Development (TOD) and deepen reliance on TOD principles ensuring new housing and employment growth is concentrated around high-capacity public transport corridors. The delivery of TOD may require additional investment in public transport infrastructure and services and their inclusion in the Strategy may accelerate their delivery. EMRA's new RSES will reflect the emphasis on TOD which will filter into Development Plans.

It is recommended that the Strategy include Strategic Objectives regarding goods movement, logistics and freight in the GDA. Furthermore, the Assembly recommends that the NTA, Regional Assembly, local authorities and other transport agencies collaborate to prepare regional and city-level freight and logistics strategies, beyond the GDA, to ensure consistency with the National Logistics and Supply Chain Strategy. The Statement should also address congestion-related costs by incorporating a dedicated indicator for Journey Time Reliability and Economic Productivity. Such initiatives would improve freight and logistics efficiency. This could include the development of low-emission distribution systems and hubs for 'last-mile urban consolidation and distribution centres'. This approach would be consistent with compact settlement approach and support regional economic corridors within the Region. Last-mile hubs comprise small centres in urban areas where good are sorted and distributed from large to smaller vehicles, low-emission travel modes and onward to the customer. RPO 8.5 of the RSES also supports the preparation of a regional strategy for freight transport to align with the GDA Strategy.

Section 8.3 of the RSES contains 'Guiding Principles' for the 'Integration of Land Use and Transport' which requires settlement centres to prioritise urban space for sustainable modes of travel, including permeability "to create accessible, attractive, vibrant and safe places to work, live, shop and engage in community life". The Guiding Principles also refer to supporting the '10-minute' settlement concept

whereby a range of community facilities and services are accessible in short walking and cycling timeframes from homes or accessible by high quality public transport to these services in larger settlements. The NTA is referred to the [15-Minute City Pathway document](#) which identifies public policy support, ongoing actions, good practice examples, and funding opportunities to support '15-minute city' and '10 Minute Town' concepts.

Additionally, it is recommended that a Statement of Strategy - Strategic Objectives include a commitment to developing the following:

- New 'Urban mobility indicators' to be prepared by 2027 in accordance with TEN-T Regulations.
- New 'Compact (Development) and Accessibility Indicators' as performance measures which could be guided by the NTA's Public Transport Access Level (PTAL) connectivity analysis toolkit (e.g. proportion of new homes/ jobs within 800m of a high-frequency service)
- 'National Parking Data Inventory' as another measure to monitor and inform integrated land use and transport planning policy.

A parking inventory and the application of consistent parking policy/ guidance for space allocation and parking management across local authority areas would be valuable tools for demand management and active travel delivery and allow for more efficient use of urban spaces, promote sustainable travel, improve the public realm and support compact growth and climate objectives.

Finally, it is recommended that the Strategic Objectives include a commitment to carrying out Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Appropriate Assessment (AA) and SEA monitoring of the Statement of Strategy is carried out at regular intervals during the lifetime of the Strategy.

2.3.4 Transport Infrastructure

The Eastern and Midland Region requires better alignment between population and employment growth and the delivery of enabling transport and other infrastructure, to reduce the need for long distance car-based commuting and the promotion of the best use of transport networks, existing and planned.

The RSES Spatial Strategy seeks to ensure that investment is targeted in the right locations with a focus on compact growth within the existing built-up area of cities, towns and villages in line with the 'Town Centres First' policy. The RSES also recognises the role of transport in rural development and providing access to key services, while recognising that urban-generated development in rural areas needs to be managed in such a way to safeguard the integrity of rural areas.

The RSES (RPO 5.2) supports the delivery of key infrastructure projects such as Northern line to Drogheda and the Southeast line to Wicklow, the construction of DART+ West and DART+ SouthWest, the BusConnects programme including four no. bus corridors in Dublin, securing planning consent for

additional Luas lines and the Greater Dublin Metropolitan Cycle Network. It is noted that the DART+ Coastal North Railway Order has been approved, and while it is subject to Judicial Review, should be included in the Strategic Objectives, referenced in a similar manner to the MetroLink (at point no. 4).

The strategic projects listed in the Strategy align with RPO 5.2 of the RSES and will ensure that future development maximises the efficiency and protects the strategic capacity of the metropolitan area transport network. In addition, RPO 5.3 states that future development in the Dublin Metropolitan Area shall be planned and designed in a manner that facilitates sustainable travel patterns, with a particular focus on increasing the share of active modes (walking and cycling) and public transport use; and creating a safe and attractive street environment for pedestrians and cyclists. The continued implementation of 800km active travel projects around the country is supported, however smaller projects of importance (which should be included in the Strategic Objectives) are the provision of adequate bicycle parking at public transport stations and stops. All transport infrastructure projects must take advantage of opportunities to improve permeability for walking and cycling.

It is also acknowledged that to support RPO 5.3, parts of existing national road corridors in the Region will need to be upgraded to support a high-quality public transport service, improving reliability and frequency of national bus services.

The Strategic Objectives could place greater emphasis on infrastructure readiness for fleet electrification including the necessary supporting energy infrastructure which will need to be developed by the NTA in association with other transport orientated State Agencies, as follows:

- Electric Bus Infrastructure - It is recommended that investment is prioritised in electrical grid capacity and depot retrofitting to support large-scale deployment of battery-electric buses, with a strategic charging network plan developed in conjunction with ESB Networks and EirGrid, to include shared charging depots and smart grid integration. Regional charging hubs could serve multiple operators to maximise efficiency and interoperability.
- Rail Electrification and Network Readiness – It is recommended that the NTA and IÉ develop a programme of phased electrification of the railway network, starting with key commuter and inter-urban corridors and consider hybrid electrification solutions where overhead infrastructure is not yet feasible (subject to Railway Order conditions). Opportunities for renewable power integration at rail depots and stations (solar, on-site storage, green hydrogen) should be explored.

Chapter 7 of the RSES highlights the importance of the environment and climate, particularly climate resilience. Transport infrastructure is ‘critical infrastructure’ and will need to be resilient to future hazards and threats, both man-made and natural including the impacts of climate change. Energy use implications, and the associated impacts on the environment and climate, of constructing, delivering and operating infrastructure projects must be accounted for with an emphasis on use of most energy efficient methods. At design stage, flood resilience drainage design, and asset durability should be

considered and the NTA should prioritise retrofitting (of existing infrastructure) where possible within their maintenance and renewal programmes.

The Statement of Strategy emphasises the need for alignment between transport infrastructure and digital infrastructure/ connectivity. Sustainable mobility should be supported by real-time data systems, AI-supported traffic management, and open data platforms consistent with the EU Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS) Directive 2023/2661. Digital technologies continue to play a transformative role in the transport sector by empowering users with real-time information on travel options, service frequency and performance, and network efficiency. This is supported by RPOs in the RSES (e.g. RPO 10.19) that supports the roll-out of Smart Grids and Smart Cities Action Plan enabling new connections, grid balancing, energy management and micro grid development. The Assembly supports the NTA in advancing low carbon and digital transitions in the Region in line with national and regional policy.

The Assembly wishes to draw the NTA's attention to the [Regional Development Monitor](#) (RDM) which is a publicly accessible data website that provides a national mapping and visualisation tool with a range of analytics dashboards, designed to enhance key societal trends in Ireland. It is a collaborative project between the three Regional Assemblies, the All-Ireland Research Observatory, and Tailte Éireann (TÉ) (via the GeoHive platform). Relevant dashboards to the evaluation of the NTA Strategy are 'Our People and Places' and 'Our Green and Sustainable Future' which include indicators relevant to compact growth and urban regeneration (% housing completions within the built-up footprint); sustainable and planned urban and rural patterns (commuting patterns to work and education and related mode of travel); healthy people and places (health infrastructure); and low carbon future (data on electric vehicles and hybrid vehicles including location of charge points).

Reference to the RDM in the Statement of Strategy, as a data source for NTA monitoring and as a shared evidence base for evaluating sustainable mobility, accessibility, and wellbeing outcomes is supported. Where possible, the integration of these datasets into NTA transport modelling would support evidence-led policy and decision-making regarding land use and transport planning. The RDM and RSES framework can support consistent evaluation of sustainable transport indicators and provide evidence to guide investment prioritisation. Indeed, it may support the measurement of congestion and journey time costs across the Region, integrating data from the NTA's Automatic Vehicle Location (AVL) for public service buses and Mobility as a Service (MaaS) systems; providing an evidence base to further support policies to reduce congestion by improving public transport services and active travel infrastructure.

The Assembly seeks to optimise and lead investment in the Region and maximise the potential of national and European funding. This is facilitated through partnership with stakeholders and in collaboration with other agencies to drive regional development and continue building a sustainable,

healthy and resilient region. EMRA continually participates in externally funded learning platforms and projects which develop and share best practices from the Region with partners across Europe in the fields of the smart and sustainable mobility, spatial planning, the environment and digital economy.

EMRA manages the Irish Regions European Office (IREO) which represents the interests of Irish local and regional government in Brussels and supports the Irish delegation to the Committee of the Regions (CoR). In this regard EMRA acts as a bridge between local and European levels, ensuring the European dimension is incorporated into regional and local decisions. It provides advice and guidance to local authorities and other stakeholders in the Region, on EU funding, with the support and expertise of the IREO, and in this regard the Assembly is the Contact Point for EU programmes such as URBACT and the European Urban Initiative (EUI). The NTA are invited to engage with EMRA regarding European and cross-border funding opportunities to support innovation in sustainable mobility, demand management, and decarbonisation. Leveraging EU funding would enhance delivery capacity and align Ireland's transport strategy with the European Green Deal objectives.

2.3.5 Transport Services

The RSES recognises the need to overcome barriers to improve mobility, whether they are political, economic, or physical such as poverty, disability, affordability or gender. It also identifies that the provision of good public transport, greenways and cycleways can enhance areas, including people's health and wellbeing. Furthermore, the RSES notes that the success of transport planning in meeting society's needs requires close integration of transport investment and land use planning.

The Assembly supports the development of a PSO framework which will play a key role in maintaining essential bus and rail services that may not be commercially viable but are critical to supporting social inclusion, regional connectivity, and sustainable mobility. The PSO will help to promote balanced regional development, compact growth, and a transition toward a low-carbon, accessible transport system. It is recommended that the transport service objectives are strengthened to ensure equitable access across the regional and rural spectrum, and to align with the NPF's regional parity outcomes.

The Assembly will continue to support key programmes such as Connecting Ireland and the BusConnects programmes. Recognising the benefits of the NTA's Rural Mobility Plan, it is recommended that a Regional Mobility Strategy Framework is developed to support balanced and equitable service delivery across the region linking/ integrating PSO and Local Link operations with an integrated timetable for all public transport operators (including licensed commercial bus operators). The NTA is encouraged to expand the public transport system to settlements which meet a defined threshold (i.e. population, employment, visitor no.'s, etc.) and it is recommended that the local link network is expanded to include rural towns and villages so that they have access to reliable and frequent bus services.

RPO 8.9 of the RSES supports several bus projects (at Table 8.3) including the provision of bus services within the Region. While the proposal to implement ten new or expanded town bus services through the continued rollout of Connecting Ireland, represents welcome progress it lacks ambition for a five-year strategy. It is recommended that the NTA set a more aspirational target and outline a clear roadmap for expanding local and town-level bus networks across the Region.

Equity-focused measures are needed in parts of the Region where there is no realistic alternative to the private car. Demand management policies must be accompanied by improved access to sustainable transport in rural and peripheral areas, preventing social or geographic exclusion during the mobility transition. EMRA encourages the NTA to pilot further Rural Mobility Hubs that combine active travel infrastructure, electric vehicle (EV) charging, shared mobility services and local bus connectivity.

2.3.6 Transport Safety & Regulation

The Assembly supports the goal which seeks to strengthen transport safety, regulation, and resilience across the public transport network. The Assembly welcomes the NTA's commitment to developing a comprehensive framework for enhanced transport security, including the establishment of a Transport Security Force in line with the Programme for Government. The Assembly also recognises the importance of ongoing measures to improve passenger safety, service quality, and accessibility. Passenger safety design features should be explored (both digital and physical design measures) to enhance personal sense of security (e.g. safety of women) and remove barriers to public transport use. RPO 8.2 supports the management and enhancement of the capacity and safety of the region's transport infrastructure and Section 8.3 of the RSES supports 'access for all' through better design of the built environment to better support social inclusion across societal needs and abilities.

2.3.7 Stakeholder Engagement

The Assembly supports the dedicated strategic goal to strengthen stakeholder engagement and communication to deliver sustainable transport solutions. The Assembly welcomes the NTA's ongoing commitment to open dialogue, collaboration with sector stakeholders, and transparent communication to build trust and understanding with the public. The Assembly commends the NTA's strong level of collaboration with the Regional Assembly and local authorities and considers that policy coherence can be maximised through closer cooperation. Furthermore, it is recommended that the finalised Statement of Strategy should recognise the role of the Regional Assembly as implementation partners particularly in monitoring regional progress toward compact growth, modal shift, and demand management outcomes.

The Assembly has developed a wide stakeholder network across the Region, nationally and at European level, and this has been further enhanced by the collaborative approach that was taken in the formulation of the RSES, the EU Just Transition Fund Programme and the RDM. EMRA will continue

to support the work of the NTA staff and the functions of the organisation and welcomes its input in the regional planning functions of the Assembly including the development and implementation of RSES, MASP, data sharing, indicator development, strategic regional and cross boundary issues, etc. Overall, it is considered that closer cooperation between the NTA and EMRA would ensure strategic consistency across RSES and NTA transport strategies; enable joint monitoring of compact growth and mobility outcomes; and align project prioritisation with regional investment sequencing under the NDP.

2.3.8 People & Organisation

These Strategic Objectives recognise the importance of the NTA's leadership, delivery, services and performance. EMRA welcomes the NTA's focus on digital transformation, AI adoption, and equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI). The NTA is encouraged to continue building staff capacity in areas such as climate adaptation, spatial analysis, and environmental economics, thus ensuring that the transport workforce remains future-ready and knowledge is shared among other transport agencies, the Regional Assembly and local authorities.

In addition, it is recommended that the NTA collaborates with the Regional Assembly and local government training partners to strengthen policymaker education in sustainable transport planning and delivery. Achieving low- and zero-carbon mobility requires decision-makers who understand statutory obligations, climate goals, and the social, spatial, and behavioural aspects of sustainable transport.

Joint initiatives could include shared learning modules, workshops, and knowledge exchange on integrated land use and transport planning, active travel, demand management, behavioural change and community engagement, adaptation capacity building and skills development and sustainable transport delivery, building on the work of the SSMA Programme. Such collaboration would support evidence-based and inclusive decision-making, enhance policy coherence, and strengthen local democratic legitimacy in shaping Ireland's transport future. Policymakers, planners, and local authority staff would be equipped with the practical skills needed to deliver regional and national mobility objectives effectively and climate-resilient infrastructure and services.

3.0 Recommendations

The NTA is requested to consider the followings key recommendations of the Regional Assembly before finalising its Statement of Strategy.

1. Role of the Regional Assembly

- (a) The Statement of Strategy should recognise the statutory role of the Regional Assembly in preparing a Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (MASP) for Dublin and its function in identifying

transportation including public transportation provisions, priorities of infrastructure of scale and order of priority, as set out in the Planning and Development Act 2024.

- (b) The Statement of Strategy should recognise the role of the Regional Assembly as an implementation partner, particularly in monitoring regional progress towards compact growth, modal shift, and demand management outcomes.
- (c) The NTA and the Regional Assembly can jointly support the sharing of best practices within the Region with partners across Europe in the context of smart and sustainable mobility, spatial planning, the environment and digital economy.

Reason: To reflect the enhanced role of the Regional Assembly under the Planning and Development Act 2024 and to align with the policies and objectives of the NPF 2025.

2. Strategy Mission

- (a) The Draft Mission should be enhanced, as follows: *“...contributing to vibrant, climate resilient communities, a healthy environment, balanced regional development and a strong decarbonised economy.”*

Reason: To fully align with the NPF 2025.

3. Goals & Strategic Objectives

3.1 Climate Action

- (a) The Statement of Strategy should address climate adaptation, transport infrastructure resilience and resource efficiency as per the National Adaptation Framework 2024 and Public Sector Climate Action Mandate 2024 and ensure that climate adaptation and resilience is integrated into all investment appraisals and project prioritisation. A National Transport Resilience Framework could be developed to guide adaptation investments.
- (b) In formulating the Statement of Strategy, the NTA should ensure engagement with the Climate Action Regional Offices, the Regional Assembly and local authorities with a view to identifying critical infrastructure within their functional areas, particularly the interdependencies between different types of sectoral infrastructure.

Reason: To ensure consistency with RPO 7.43 of the RSES and as a first step in ‘future proofing’ services and to help to inform longer-term adaptation planning and investment priorities; and to ensure consistency between the Statement of Strategy, the NPF 2025, the Planning and Development Act 2024, the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Acts 2015-2021 and the Climate Action Plan 2024/2025.

3.2 Transport Planning/ Monitoring

- (a) The Statement of Strategy should be informed by the TEN-T Regulation (EU) 2024/1679.
- (b) The Statement of Strategy should make direct reference to Transport Orientated Development (TOD), including it as a specific strategic objective; and where relevant identify associated

investment requirements. Consideration should be given to the development of TOD Implementation Frameworks which could inform the new RSES and lower-level plans.

- (c) The Statement of Strategy should reference the forthcoming National Demand Management Strategy (NDMS) to manage and reduce traffic congestion, making the country's transport system more efficient for users and alleviate the impacts of car dependency on the economy, the environment and the health of Irish society.
- (d) Demand management policies, including measures to reduce car use, should be implemented in parallel with significant improvements in access to sustainable transport options, particularly in rural and peripheral areas.
- (e) The Statement of Strategy should seek to quantify and address the time cost of congestion to public transport users and the broader economic cost of congestion (i.e. productivity impact), incorporating performance indicators for journey time reliability and network efficiency. These metrics should inform investment prioritisation and monitoring under the National Transport Demand Management Strategy with the aim of reducing congestion related impacts.
- (f) The NTA should collaborate with the Regional Assembly and other Transport Agencies to prepare Regional and City-level Freight and Logistics Strategies, beyond the GDA, to ensure consistency with the National Logistics and Supply Chain Strategy improving efficiency and identifying suitable hubs for 'last mile consolidation and distribution centres', facilitating a re-distribution of goods from large vehicles to smaller low-emission travel modes and final delivery.
- (g) To strengthen stakeholder engagement, the NTA should establish a Spatial Planning–Transport Coordination Forum with the Regional Assembly to support continued collaborative governance.
- (h) The Statement of Strategy should incorporate outcomes-based monitoring to determine the progress in achieving climate adaptation, consistent with the National Adaptation Framework 2024 and ensuring that resilience indicators are tracked alongside decarbonisation and modal-shift targets. The Regional Assembly should be recognised as a statutory partner in implementing and monitoring adaptation measures within the transport sector, ensuring coherence between the NTA Strategy, RSES objectives and the National Adaptation Framework.
- (i) The Statement of Strategy should include a commitment to developing 'Compact (Development) Accessibility Indicators', 'Urban Mobility Indicators', a 'National Parking Data Inventory' and policy guidance for local authorities regarding demand and parking management.

Reason: To ensure consistency between the Statement of Strategy, the NPF 2025, NDP 2025 and their objectives including compact development, sustainable mobility and economic competitiveness, the National Adaptation Framework 2024, and the Planning and Development Act 2024, and support effective implementation of the RSESs.

3.3 Transport Infrastructure

- (a) The Statement of Strategy should seek to implement recommendations of the All-Island Strategic Rail Review in conjunction with other transport agencies to deliver sustainable rail transport on the island of Ireland.
- (b) The Statement of Strategy should include a commitment to develop a strategic plan for bus depot charging, rail electrification, and coordinate with ESB Networks/ EirGrid regarding grid capacity and strengthening.
- (c) The Statement of Strategy should reference Circular Economy principles which should guide low-carbon, resource-efficient project delivery including use of low-carbon construction materials, asset reuse, and sustainable procurement.
- (d) The Statement of Strategy should state that as part of project development, flood resilience drainage design, and asset durability as well as retrofitting existing infrastructure should be considered.
- (e) The Statement of Strategy should continue to align digital infrastructure/ connectivity with transport infrastructure and Mobility as a Service (MaaS).
- (f) DART+ Coastal North Railway Order should be included in the strategic objectives, referenced in a similar manner to the MetroLink (at point no. 4).
- (g) The delivery of smaller projects/practical measures which remove 'barriers' to sustainable travel, should be referenced within the strategic objectives; and all transport infrastructure projects to include access and permeability improvements (for walking and cycling).

Reason: To ensure consistency between the Statement of Strategy, the NPF 2025, the All-Island Strategic Rail Review, Climate Action Plan 2024/2025, National Development Plan 2025, Circular Economy Strategy 2022 and RPO 10.19 of the RSES.

3.4 Transport Services/ Customer First

- (a) The Statement of Strategy should support the development of a Regional Mobility Strategy Framework to support equity to transport services throughout the Region, and Rural Mobility Hubs that combine active travel infrastructure, electric vehicle (EV) charging, shared mobility services and local bus connectivity.
- (b) Greater ambition and a more aspirational target are needed for the expansion of local and town-level bus networks across the Region, supported by a clear roadmap for delivery.
- (c) The Equality Impact Assessment process should be included in the strategic objectives.
- (d) Transport Service objectives should be strengthened to ensure equitable access across the regional and rural spectrum, and to align with the NPF's regional parity outcomes.
- (e) The Statement of Strategy should recognise the rapid pace of innovation in the transport sector and transport technology, ensuring it is able to adapt quickly, by using AI to support planning, modelling and decision-making for future transport systems. The NTA should commit to piloting and assessing nascent infrastructure designs and standards to future-proof

investment decisions and ensure Ireland’s transport network remains adaptable, efficient and globally competitive.

Reason: To ensure consistency between the Statement of Strategy, the NPF 2025 and the RSES.

3.5 Nature Restoration and Biodiversity Enhancement

- (a) The Statement of Strategy should include a new goal and strategic objectives incorporating ‘Nature Restoration’ and ‘Biodiversity Enhancement’ to meet binding national targets for restoring ecosystems and enhancing biodiversity across the transport sector.
- (b) The Statement of Strategy should include a commitment that the NTA should collaborate with the Regional Assembly to consider adopting similar analytical frameworks in project appraisal and SEA processes, enabling transport and spatial planning decisions that deliver on carbon, resilience, and biodiversity objectives.
- (c) The Statement of Strategy should commit to carrying out SEA (including monitoring) and AA of all NTA plans and programmes.

Reason: To align with Ireland’s 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan (2023–2030), the EU Nature Restoration Regulation and to implement the SEA Directive.

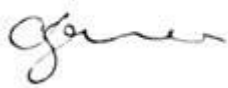
4.0 Observations

1. The Assembly wishes to refer the NTA to the [15-Minute City Implementation Pathway report](#) published by the Regional Assembly, which identifies public policy support, ongoing actions, good practice examples and funding opportunities for ‘15-Minute City’ and ‘10 Minute Town’ concepts.
Reason: In the interest of best practice.
2. Regarding monitoring, the Assembly wishes to draw attention to the [Regional Development Monitor](#) (RDM) which provides a series of mapping and visualisation tools which are intended to be of assistance to policy and decision makers in gaining a greater insight into social, economic and environmental trends to aid better monitoring.
Reason: In the interest of best practice.
3. The Assembly wishes to refer the NTA to the [Smart and Sustainable Mobility Accelerator](#) (SSMA) which is a repository of knowledge, showcasing case studies, project outcomes, and ongoing advancements across all local authorities in active travel and sustainable mobility. It presents an opportunity to support the stakeholder engagement objective of the NTA’s Statement of Strategy.
Reason: In the interest of best practice.
4. The NTA should collaborate with the Regional Assembly and local government training partners to strengthen policymaker education in sustainable transport planning and delivery.
Reason: In the interest of information sharing and best practice.

5.0 Conclusion

The Regional Assembly welcomes the opportunity to engage in the process of preparing the new Statement of Strategy 2026 – 2030 and looks forward to continuing engagement with the National Transport Authority (NTA).

Regards,



Clare Bannon,
A/Director
Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly
13th November 2025