



**Waterford
Chamber**
Advancing business together

SUBMISSION

National Development Plan 2026–2035 Review

JUNE 2025



INTRODUCTION

Waterford Chamber welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the National Development Plan (NDP) 2026–2035 consultation. Representing over 800 businesses in Ireland’s oldest city and the capital of the South East, we urge the Government to address decades of underinvestment and unlock the region’s economic, social, and environmental potential.

While Dublin and Cork have received the majority of infrastructure investment over the past decade, the South East remains well below its pro rata share of capital allocations. This disparity hampers national objectives in housing, regional development, and climate resilience. We advocate for targeted, transformational investment in Waterford and the broader region.



WATERFORD AIRPORT

Balanced regional development is a cornerstone of government policy. A well-serviced regional airport in Waterford offers a clear opportunity to alleviate congestion at Dublin Airport while catalysing economic growth in the South East. This investment supports regional equity and enhances national infrastructure.

From a value for money perspective, the development of Waterford Airport presents a strong return with minimal taxpayer exposure. Under the current proposal, a private consortium will fully fund the €30 million runway extension, infrastructure development, and all regulatory certifications before any public funding is activated.

Strategically, Waterford Airport will support offshore wind energy projects along the South East coast and bolster regional tourism, trade, and connectivity. Its development is not merely a regional priority, it is a national opportunity.



SOUTH EAST TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY (SETU)

Waterford Chamber strongly supports sustained and accelerated capital investment in South East Technological University (SETU), as outlined in the current NDP. SETU is the sole university in the region and is central to advancing national priorities in skills development, innovation, and regional competitiveness.

Key capital priorities include the One Health Building at the Glassworks site, the new Wexford campus, facilities for Veterinary and Pharmacy programmes, expanded apprenticeship infrastructure, and purpose-built student accommodation. These are not optional upgrades, they are essential national investments.

The South East continues to be underrepresented in higher education funding, despite rapid population growth. This has hindered talent retention and economic potential.

Expanding SETU's campuses will:

- » Broaden access to education in priority sectors such as health, life sciences, agriculture, and sustainability
- » Enhance regional innovation ecosystems
- » Attract and retain talent through quality infrastructure
- » Address national skills shortages in veterinary, pharmacy, and technical trades

These projects align with key NDP objectives, particularly NSO 3 (Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities) and NSO 5 (A Strong Economy, Supported by Enterprise, Innovation and Skills). Budget 2026 must prioritise approval and funding for SETU's capital business cases. Now is the time to deliver on commitments to balanced regional development.

NATIONAL ROAD NETWORK

Upgrading the N24 to motorway standard between Waterford and the M8 through Cahir, and on to Limerick, is vital. This project will complete the motorway network connecting Cork, Limerick, Waterford, and Galway, creating a viable counterbalance to growth in the Dublin region.

Currently, the N24 is among the poorest quality national roads, disconnecting the South East from key western and midwestern regions and limiting access to Rosslare Europort. Investment in this route will unlock economic connectivity and support national logistics.

Enhanced and cost-effective public transport within, and to and from, Waterford is equally essential for supporting sustainable population and employment growth.

ESTABLISH A SOUTH EAST DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

To coordinate investment and address delivery gaps, we propose the creation of a South East Development Agency, modelled on the Western Development Commission and Shannon Development. This agency would:

- » Build regional institutional capacity
- » Develop robust business cases
- » Facilitate strategic coordination of infrastructure and innovation projects

Despite strong assets, the South East continues to underperform due to fragmented governance. A dedicated development agency would provide the leadership and organisational framework needed to ensure the region plays a full role in Ireland's economic future.





OFFSHORE RENEWABLE ENERGY INFRASTRUCTURE

The South East is uniquely positioned to lead in offshore wind. The “Tonn Nua” project, located 12km off Waterford’s coast and expected to deliver 900MW of clean energy, exemplifies this potential. However, projected delays in its development signal a broader issue, planning and infrastructure bottlenecks are slowing progress on climate goals.

Offshore wind development offers:

- » High quality local employment,
- » Robust supply chain opportunities,
- » Carbon reduction and enhanced energy security,
- » Direct community benefits.
- » These benefits can only be realised with immediate action on enabling infrastructure.

Ports as a Critical Enabler

Port readiness is the single biggest obstacle to offshore wind deployment. We call for dedicated NDP funding for southern region port upgrades, particularly the Port of Waterford. Without investment, Ireland risks losing economic opportunities to better prepared overseas ports.

The Port of Waterford is well positioned to support both construction and ongoing operations for offshore wind farms. Government policy must align with these regional capabilities.

Grid and Planning Acceleration

Uncertainty around grid capacity and delivery timelines is eroding investor confidence. The Government must prioritise grid expansion in the South East and work with EirGrid to accelerate connection processes. A clear, plan led project pipeline and roadmap for future auctions will boost investor certainty and unlock sustained regional growth.

Conclusion and Call to Action

Waterford Chamber urges the Government to act decisively:

- » Invest in port infrastructure
- » Accelerate grid development
- » Streamline planning and permitting
- » Establish a credible offshore wind project pipeline



Q1. Why should these sectors be a national priority for additional investment?

The sectors referenced, regional airports, higher education, transport infrastructure, offshore renewable energy, and ports should be national priorities for additional investment because they are fundamental to balanced and sustainable national development.

Firstly, in higher education, capital investment in South East Technological University (SETU) ensures that talent is developed and retained within the region, contributing to national skills strategies and economic competitiveness. Regional infrastructure like Waterford Airport and the N24 enhances national connectivity, alleviates pressure on overburdened hubs, and supports climate targets by reducing travel inefficiencies.

Offshore renewable energy, particularly wind, is critical to achieving Ireland's climate goals. The South East's unique geographic positioning makes it ideal for leading this transition, but delays in enabling infrastructure such as port upgrades and grid capacity are stalling progress. Investment here accelerates decarbonisation, secures energy independence, and positions Ireland as a global renewable energy leader. Moreover, underinvestment in these sectors perpetuates regional inequality, limiting Ireland's capacity to grow inclusively. Empowering the South East contributes to national resilience, diversifies the economic base, and supports population growth outside of already congested urban centres.

These sectors are not isolated regional concerns, they are core enablers of national progress across housing, energy, skills, and economic development. Prioritising them will help Ireland meet its international commitments while ensuring all regions contribute to, and benefit from, shared prosperity.

Q2. In the context of the need to boost the delivery of infrastructure, what trade-offs and constraints should the government be aware of and how should these be managed as part of the Review of the National Development Plan?

To boost infrastructure delivery, the government must navigate key trade-offs between speed, cost, environmental impact, and regional equity. Accelerated project timelines often conflict with rigorous planning and consultation requirements, while inflationary pressures and labour shortages are inflating costs and constraining capacity. Strategic prioritisation is essential.

A critical constraint is the current planning and regulatory system, which is too slow and unpredictable for delivering large scale infrastructure at the pace required for climate action, housing delivery, and economic competitiveness. Reforming planning laws to allow for streamlined, plan led approvals, particularly for priority projects in renewable energy and transport, is vital.

Budgetary constraints are another reality. The government should adopt a more agile investment framework that facilitates co-funding with the private sector, particularly in areas like airport development, offshore wind, and higher education. This would stretch limited Exchequer resources and de-risk delivery.

Institutional capacity is also a limiting factor, especially in under resourced regions. Investing in regional development agencies, like a proposed South East Development Agency, can provide the coordination and project management needed to turn plans into action.

Finally, a balanced geographic approach must be maintained. Prioritising high growth regions like the South East ensures national resilience and prevents over concentration in already pressurised urban centres.

Managing these trade-offs requires bold decision making, a clear hierarchy of national priorities, and a reformed governance model that values delivery outcomes as much as ambition. The Review offers an opportunity to align policy, process, and funding for maximum national impact.

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Q3. Government has been communicating on National Development Plan delivery in several ways, including through the Project Ireland 2040 Interactive Map and Tracker, and the Project Ireland 2040 Annual and Regional Reports. How can government best communicate the National Development Plan?

To effectively communicate the National Development Plan (NDP), the government must prioritise clarity, transparency, and regional relevance. While tools like the Project Ireland 2040 Interactive Map and Tracker are helpful, their impact is limited if not actively promoted, frequently updated, and aligned with local priorities.

The government should adopt a multi-channel communication strategy that combines digital tools with targeted regional outreach. This includes interactive, user-friendly platforms that present real-time updates on project status, funding, and timelines, along with clear explanations of how projects align with national objectives. Maps and data must be accessible, mobile-optimised, and linked to local authority and regional websites.

Annual and regional reports should move beyond high-level summaries and include performance metrics, delivery timelines, and explanations for any delays or changes. Visual formats such as infographics, short videos, and case studies can make progress more tangible to the public.

Regional engagement is crucial. The government should hold regular public briefings, town hall-style meetings, and stakeholder forums in each region, where local communities can ask questions, provide feedback, and understand how the NDP affects their area.

Finally, stronger collaboration with local media, chambers of commerce, and educational institutions can amplify messaging and foster civic awareness. A more transparent and interactive communication approach will build public trust, support accountability, and ensure that the NDP is seen not just as a national strategy, but as a lived reality in every region.



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Submitted to: Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform

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Submitted by: Waterford Chamber, 2 George's Street, Waterford City

Contact: Gerald Hurley, gerald.hurley@waterfordchamber.ie

Waterford Chamber

2 George's Street

Waterford

tel: 051 872639

info@waterfordchamber.ie

www.waterfordchamber.ie