

National Investment Framework for Transport in Ireland

Shannon Chamber would reiterate the points made the Atlantic Economic Corridor (AEC) in its submission response, particularly as below:

- The AEC Business Forum & Shannon Chamber have produced a number of reports and made various submissions which have relevance to the topic of transport. Key points are presented below.
- A recent submission to the national recovery and resilience plan. The key focus is on the development of a Low Carbon-High Value economy led from the AEC region and which can revolutionise the transport and mobility agenda in Ireland for the current and future generations to come.
- The Business Case for a Multi-Annual Funded Action Plan for Regional Air Access Recovery & Growth, March 2021. Prepared by Shannon Chamber and the Irish Hotels Federation with the support of Ennis, Galway and Limerick Chambers. While the focus is on Shannon, the arguments apply to airports across the AEC. The submission was followed by a presentation on 6 May 2021 to Minister of State Naughton on the details of a proposed Traffic Recovery Support Scheme. Again, Shannon was used to illustrate the case, but as stated to the Minister the intention is that the scheme should apply to air access across the regions.

Key points made by Shannon Chamber in Submissions to Government which included the below references to Transport:

National Transport Strategy (2019)

- **Requirement for a Rail Link to Shannon Airport**

Shannon Chamber recommended that consideration be given to creating a rail link between Limerick City and Shannon.

Our recommendation in this regard was that the reservation retained by Clare Co. Council for a **spur line** to link Galway – Athenry – Ennis – Limerick line into Shannon Airport be considered, given that it would avoid any planning obstacles in the future and would enhance the improvements already made to this route.

- **Bus Services**

Shannon Chamber called for the provision for upgraded and more frequent **Direct** bus connectivity from Shannon Airport to **Galway and Cork** should be provided for in this

Transport Strategy, as a greater level of connectivity is a critical component of the region's transport infrastructure.

Consideration should also be given to introducing a direct public transport service between **Shannon and Cork**.

Shannon Chamber would suggest that a better public transport service to/from Shannon Airport might help to reduce the inordinate level of private coach services currently travelling from the region to/from Dublin airport, which is contributing negatively to Ireland's carbon footprint. This level of motorway traffic is also counter-productive to the Ireland 2040's goal of delivering balanced regional development.

Given that Shannon's population is reducing in age, and that many residents and workers are car free and rely on public transport, a more frequent linkage between Shannon and Limerick with speedy onward connection to key locations such as the University of Limerick and Limerick Institute of Technology would reduce the stress of availing of third-level educational opportunities and introduce a more urban feel to the locality and region.

- **Multi-Modal Transport**

There is scope for the implementation of a number of coordinated actions relating to land use and provision of multi-modal transport/recreation services in the Shannon-Limerick area that could potentially reap rich dividends in future years. This could entail:

- Provision being made for land acquisition to enable the development of Walkways/Cycleways from Shannon to Bunratty and onwards to Limerick, Sixmilebridge and other locations, building on existing pathways and infrastructure and following on from the planned Estuary flood land bank works at Shannon.
- The long-term provision for rail connection to Shannon / Improved road networks linking Shannon – M18/N19, Shannon Town, Bunratty / Improved direct bus connections to Shannon
- Shannon Chamber recommends that this multi-modal transportation and land use approach be adopted

Limerick Shannon Metropolitan Area Network Strategy (LSMATS) - 2020

Summary of key points from Shannon Chamber

Walking (Section 6)

- Improve walkways in and around Shannon to allow for better accessibility between services in the town centre, the key employment hub of the Shannon Free Zone and Shannon Airport.
- The abundant green areas in Shannon, which include a long-established network of "black paths" developed as the town was built, offer real potential for attractive and green walkways and cycleways.

- Extend the walkway/cycle way from Limerick to Bunratty to Shannon using existing riverside infrastructure – using existing green and landscaped areas, not roads.
- Refocus walkways in Shannon on the existing black path network that already exists and is extensively linked to the town.
- Upgrade the existing Shannon walkways signage to include direction indicators – develop a wayfinding system for Shannon.
- An outcome from the LSMATS should include a recommendation that a walkable neighbourhood map be created for Shannon.
- Ensure that the pedestrian environment is significantly enhanced, more attractive and safer than at present, particularly around key visitor attractions such as King John’s Castle.
- Enhance wayfinding in both Shannon and Limerick City Centre with a focus, in Limerick particularly, on ensuring ease of access to key tourist sites.

Cycling (Section 7)

- Designate a coherent network of cycle routes and cycle hubs across Shannon which will provide access to Shannon Airport, Shannon Free Zone and Shannon Town.
- Expand the Bicycle Sharing Scheme to Shannon.
- Development of cycling and walkway from Shannon to Bunratty /Sixmilebridge and following the riverbank to Limerick
- Shannon offers significant potential for cycling and walking using the existing network of off-road and riverside pathways and rural roads.
- Consider pilot testing walk and cycle-to-school initiatives in Shannon using quiet ways based on existing pathways.
- Create long-stay parking and cycle parking hubs in Shannon, Shannon Free Zone and Shannon Airport.
- Introduce a dockless bike system for Shannon.
- Extend the cycle line in Shannon to take in the riverside in Shannon and on to the airport; achievable through piggybacking on the upcoming flood relief works.

BusConnects (Section 8)

- Implement more direct inter-regional bus services between Shannon Airport and the second- tier cities of Galway and Cork.
- Assess how private operators can be licenced to operate on routes noted in our commentary on P3/4 (Section 3... comments related to P19) of this submission.

- Connect with Shannon to Limerick City Centre and other key locations such as UL and LIT via a fast frequent and reliable bus service.
- Develop Park and Ride in both directions – Shannon to Limerick and vice versa and to facilitate access to e.g. inter-city buses also.

Rail (Section 9)

- Shannon Chamber would recommend that the concept of light rail linking Limerick, Shannon, Sixmilebridge and Galway warrants further examination as the trend for this type of connectivity could become more beneficial in the future... given the requirement to reduce our carbon footprint; light rail might be a faster and direct method of transport and a driver of rail spur development.
- As a short-term proposal, a shuttle bus linking e.g. Sixmilebridge to Shannon might warrant consideration given that circa 40% of this 'village's' population (6,000 – 7,000) commute to Shannon on a daily basis between schools and work.
- Review rail freight taking into account work on the Western Railway. The development of renewable energy (wind) along the Atlantic Economic Corridor will require interlinked and sustainable port and transport facilities.

Roads & Streets (Section 10)

- Upgrade the N19 approach road to Shannon Airport from the current single carriageway road layout.
- Address capacity constraints on the N19 at junctions connecting to the Business Park and Town.
- Develop a new signalised junction on the R471 at Smithstown and a new link road to connect the junction with the existing road at Smithstown.
- Upgrade the junction of L3126 and Low Road (and its approaches) at Bunratty.
- Review Shannon Town Centre parking including rationale for blocking a previous access point at the Lidl roundabout and its negative impact on traffic behaviour.
- Advance the M20 project linking Limerick and Cork and the Limerick Northern Distributor Road.
- Consideration should also be given to a future upgrade of the Limerick to Kerry route to facilitate easier access to Limerick, Shannon Airport, Galway, and the west of Ireland.

Traffic Management (Section 11)

- Develop an integrated coach management scheme to support traffic management measures at key locations.

Freight, Delivery and Servicing (Section 12)

- Rather than limiting the size of HGVs accessing Limerick city centre, to be replaced by smaller vans with a higher environmental impact, Shannon Chamber suggests assessing the feasibility of developing a consolidation centre outside the city as a means of reducing the number of HGVs entering the city.
- Consider impact online shopping and the associated doubling of van delivering in the last 6 months alone. This is increasing carbon footprint, particularly in rural areas where distances required for each delivery are higher than in urban locations.

Supporting Measures (Section 13)

- Support the development of the Connected Autonomous Vehicle (CAV)/Mobility as a Service (MaaS) sector in the Shannon area including Unmanned Ariel Vehicle (UAV) R&D.
- Consider the likelihood of future unexpected occurrences which could further alter the pattern of living and working.
- Consider the benefits of a 4th River Shannon crossing for long-term delivery. Potential to deliver a significant city of scale and enhance the served market for Shannon Airport. enhance Shannon Foynes Port, and create the potential for an orbital route around the airport and the greater Limerick Shannon Metropolitan Area.

Housing – Impact on Transport

- The regeneration of cities and town will see an increase in the number of families and individuals opting for city-centre living. Consider the impact remote working on city-centre office accommodation and the potential to regenerate such buildings to living spaces. Regeneration needs people and people needs better cycling, walking and a fast and easily accessible mode of transport.
- Rural areas will also benefit from remote and hub working but will also require access to urban areas such as Shannon and Limerick city. This trend needs to be factored into the delivery of an all-encompassing Transport Strategy.

General Commentary

Given the level of change necessitated by COVID-19 and the growth in remote working, which is reducing worker commuting to major employment centres, it would be beneficial to factor this and any future such potential impacts on transport patterns into the drafting of the LSMATS, as this might further impact the way we live our lives.

We suggest that transport can be broken down into 5 main categories:

- Daily Commuter
- Delivery network
- Family shopping and discretionary journeys
- International travel/tourism
- Entertainment/Cultural/Sport events

For the commuter and most of the categories above, public transport is currently a poor substitute for the private vehicle when considering cost, convenience, efficient use of time especially in the morning, personal safety and availability to and from the outgoing final destination. People, particularly in non-urban centres, do not generally use public transport (unless they are travelling free) if they have any other alternative.

Unless there is a change in policy and practice, people will not transfer to public transport; interventions to change habits will take time but will be considered if the benefits are obvious and widely promoted. Could lessons be learnt from countries such as the Netherlands, where public transport is expensive yet a high percentage of the population already use it?

The view of Shannon Chamber and its membership is that, for public transport to work in Ireland, with a population so spread out, it has to operate like the courier, 'Hub and Spoke' model, with intercity high-speed transit time journeys connecting the cities, supported by local and frequent transport connections within each city and the surrounding areas, including park and ride locations on the periphery, as mentioned during our Teams meetings.

For this to be successful, the local transport network would need to be frequent, smaller, and environmentally friendly. The ideal solution for this type of local network could rest in some type of electrified autonomous trams or buses. The Netherlands, for example, utilises electrified buses powered by overhead power cables. In Antwerp, Belgium, the tram network is at surface level with as many stops as required where the only infrastructural requirement for a stop is a platform, with the last kilometre of the journey going underground at the city centre.

While not addressed in this LSMATS, we would question, is the current location of Limerick train station the most ideal location to sustain meaningful growth?

Our final suggestion is that the LSMATS should also consider the challenges facing Shannon Airport and position it to be best placed for potential future growth.

Review of NDP Submission (2021)

- **Requirement for Capital investment in multi-modal transport hubs and networks**

Move away from functional approach to transport investment to ensure that there are multiple options for connecting to global markets and supply chains.

Focus on connections that support and enable economic activity in regional growth centres connected and bringing benefits to surrounding areas.

- **Limerick Shannon Metropolitan Area benefit is as yet unclear**

A lot of effort was required to ensure that Shannon was integrated into the original draft LSMAP where Shannon came across as an add-on rather than strategic component of a key economic zone.

Similar effort was required with the LSMATS (transport strategy).

Follow through on urban rail services will be just one example of indicators of real commitment to the vision of an integrated metro area.

Connected and Autonomous Mobility (CAM) in Road Transport (2021)

- CAM, when deployed, will transform Ireland's transport network. Like all new technological developments, speed is of the essence. Given the progress being made at Future Mobility Campus Ireland and the opportunities the development of this sector presents, not just for the Mid-West but for the entire sectoral eco system in Ireland, and the potential it offers to attract multi-tier investment to Ireland, Shannon Chamber would hope that no time is lost in moving to the next step in planning for the introduction of this revolutionary mode of transport in Ireland.
- Shannon Chamber acknowledges that many complex challenges need to be overcome prior to progressing to full deployment, not least public acceptance, societal impacts, the nuances and complexity of communications technologies, ethical issues, standards and policy, software challenges such as system security and integrity, the challenge of streamlining and regulating many diverse vehicles with different operating constraints, and drivers understanding vehicles' capability and operating them safely. The positive societal impact such as a safer transport system, a lower cost of transport and the opportunities it presents to those currently unable to drive due to disability or otherwise, is what renders the development and deployment of CAM in road transport a very promising undertaking, ensuring that Ireland is a leader in the rollout of CAM nationally.
- Lack of adequate support for the development of the sector could result in Ireland losing market positioning, hence the need for adequate and proactive support by Government to the development and adoption of these new technologies.
- **Legislation:** There is an urgent need for legislation to be put in place to allow the testing of autonomous/automated vehicles on public roads. Without this CAM cannot realistically progress as an industry in Ireland.

- **Dedicated funding sources:** A dedicated fund focused towards CAM, future mobility and transportation is required to have a more holistic approach on how we develop CAM and its deployment into the future.
- The Department of Transport and other relevant bodies need to be adequately resourced to support the development and deployment of this revolutionary mode of transport in Ireland.
- Connectivity is a major component of CAM with everything viewed as connectable and the data that each device on the network generates viewed as open and shareable (subject to and following GDPR guidelines and adequate security provisions). An open data network infrastructure will allow the physical road network of Ireland to be “software defined” i.e. new features and business models can be created into the future on pre-existing infrastructure.
- Road infrastructure will need to be upgraded to become ‘smart roads’.