



**Shannon
Chamber**
Advancing business together

Limerick-Shannon Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (LSMASP) and RSES Review

Shannon Chamber Submission
May 2026

Dear Southern Regional Assembly team,

On behalf of Shannon Chamber, I am pleased to submit our response to the consultation on the Limerick–Shannon Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (LSMASP) and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES).

This submission focuses primarily on the LSMASP as the key place-based framework for the region and is also intended to inform the wider RSES review.

Our submission reflects a consistent body of work developed over several years and sets out a strengthened strategic perspective on the role of the **Limerick–Shannon–Estuary area as a nationally significant economic system**.

In particular, we emphasise:

- The need to recognise the area as a **combined metropolitan, aviation and estuarine economic platform of national importance**
- The opportunity to **position Shannon Airport as the primary international gateway to the Wild Atlantic Way**, supporting increased regional economic value
- The **strategic importance of the Shannon Estuary, including all deep-water locations**, as a centre for energy, ports and industrial development
- The importance of moving beyond administrative boundaries to a **functional economic geography approach**, including the **evolution towards a Strategic Economic Zone-type model**
- The need to align infrastructure investment with economic opportunity, including **integrated transport networks and long-term connectivity planning**
- The critical requirement to move from strategy to **delivery, implementation and measurable outcomes**

We welcome the opportunity to contribute to this consultation process and would be pleased to engage further as the Strategy and RSES review progresses.

Yours sincerely,



Helen Downes, Chief Executive

Suite 14, Shannon Airport House, Shannon, Co. Clare. V14 E370

T: +353 61 475854 **M:** +353 86 8286711



Executive Summary

This submission focuses on the Limerick–Shannon Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (LSMASP) as the principal framework for shaping the future development of the region and is also intended to inform the review of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES).

The Limerick–Shannon Metropolitan Area represents one of Ireland’s most strategically important but underutilised economic systems. Its strength lies not in individual components, but in the **combination and interaction of complementary assets**, including:

- **Limerick City** – higher education, innovation, and urban scale
- **Shannon** – international connectivity, global enterprise base and living town
- **Shannon Estuary / Foynes** – energy, deep water port and industrial capacity

Together, these form a **combined metropolitan, aviation and estuarine economic system** with the potential to act as:

Ireland’s primary western gateway for enterprise, energy, and international access

To realise this potential, LSMASP and RSES must:

- Recognise Shannon as a **national economic and energy hub**
- Treat Limerick–Shannon as a **fully integrated metropolitan economy**
- Recognise the **combined estuary system (including all deep-water locations)** as a strategic economic zone
- Leverage **Shannon Airport as a gateway to the Wild Atlantic Way**
- Prioritise **connectivity and infrastructure as enablers of growth**
- Align infrastructure investment with **economic geography, not administrative boundaries**
- Address the persistent **gap between policy ambition and delivery capacity**
- Embed the metropolitan area within the **Atlantic Economic Corridor (AEC)**

A decisive shift is now required from planning to **implementation, delivery, and measurable outcomes**.

1. Strategic Context: Functional Economic Geography

A consistent theme of previous Shannon Chamber submissions across multiple policy cycles is the need to move beyond administrative boundaries toward **functional economic zones**.

The Limerick–Shannon–Ennis–Galway axis already operates as:

- A **connected economic system**
- A **linear city of scale within the Atlantic Economic Corridor (AEC)**

It is anchored by a range of complementary strengths:

Limerick

- University of Limerick (UL)
- Technological University of the Shannon (TUS)
- National Technology Park and innovation ecosystem
- Compact city with capacity for growth
- Potential for commuter and regional rail using existing infrastructure

Shannon

- Shannon Airport (international connectivity)
- Shannon Airport Business Park (FDI and enterprise cluster)
- Shannon College of Hotel Management (University of Galway)
- Established industrial, international services and logistics base
- A living town with a significant workforce and population

Shannon Estuary / Foynes

- Deep-water port infrastructure
- Existing energy and industrial assets
- Strategic position for offshore wind and energy transition

Key Insight

The combination of:

- **Airport (global connectivity)**
- **Estuary (energy and industry)**

creates a **dual-gateway economic platform unmatched elsewhere in Ireland** that is not yet reflected in spatial or investment policy and implementation.

2. Core Strategic Themes

2.1 Move from Metropolitan Area to Functional Economic Zone

Current planning frameworks are constrained by **administrative boundaries**.

In reality, the Limerick-Shannon economic system operates as:

- A **functional metropolitan region**
- Extending across **both sides of the Estuary**
- Including **Foynes as a critical economic node**

Key Priority: Progressively evolve towards recognition of this area as a:

Strategic Economic Zone (SEZ) type model based on real economic geography not administrative boundaries

2.2 Limerick–Shannon: A Complementary Economic System

The strength of the region lies in **complementarity, not competition**:

- Limerick: education, industry, innovation, urban living
- Shannon: global access, multi-sectoral enterprise and industry base, international services, logistics, compact and sustainable living, education, and working urban area
- Estuary: energy, industry, ports

Key Priority: Fully integrate:

- Land use planning
- Economic strategy
- Infrastructure investment
- Full mix of planned new housing needs

2.3 Shannon as a National Economic and Social Platform

Shannon generates economic output far beyond that of towns of comparable size and hosts the largest business park outside Dublin.

Shannon has a global and pioneering DNA

- Founded in 1960 to house people and families working in the Shannon Free Zone
- A multicultural and diverse community long before the term entered common usage

- An airport gateway for movement of people, goods and services between North America, the UK, and Europe
- Home to the Shannon Airport Business Park - the largest business park outside Dublin with a diverse industry base
- A centre of foreign and Irish-owned multinational innovation
- A story of constant reinvention

Yet Shannon has a Perception Challenge

- Despite economic success, Shannon's origins as a planned new town have shaped perceptions of place
- It provides abundant high value jobs, but is not currently seen by those from elsewhere as a desirable place to live
- This perception contrast – strong employment weaker residential appeal – defines the opportunity

Key Priority: Recognition of Shannon as a **national strategic growth centre**, with potential in a compact urban area to deliver real life examples of integrated economic and social investments that will **shift perceptions, build on its founding optimism** and **set a new trajectory** for Shannon.

2.4 Airport–Estuary Dual Gateway Model

The defining strength of the region is the combination of aviation and marine assets.

Key Priority: Adopt a **dual-gateway development model** integrating:

- Shannon Airport
- Shannon Estuary
- Enterprise, Education and Housing lands
- Transport and utilities infrastructure

2.5 Airport as a Gateway to the Wild Atlantic Way

Shannon Airport represents a **significantly underutilised national asset**.

Current aviation patterns:

- Are based on a Dublin-dominated hub and spoke model
- Lead to **day-trip tourism patterns** from the capital to the regions
- Limit **regional economic spend**

There is a continuing opportunity to unlock unrealised potential to:

- Position Shannon as the **primary international gateway to the Wild Atlantic Way**
- Support **direct access to western regions**
- Increase **overnight stays and regional spend**

Key Priority: Integrate aviation, tourism, and regional development policy to:

- Support **direct route development**
- Shift towards **regional entry models**

2.6 Shannon Estuary and Comparative Advantage

A core principle across previous submissions is that economic strategy should be based on **realising underused comparative advantage**.

The Shannon Estuary provides:

- Deep-water access
- Industrial infrastructure
- Proximity to offshore wind resources

It is ideally positioned to support:

- Offshore renewable energy
- Hydrogen production
- Energy-intensive industry

Key Priority: Designation of the Shannon Estuary as a **Renewable Energy Accelerator area**

2.7 Regional Linkage and Polycentric Development

A critical missing element in national policy has been **regional linkage**.

Growth must be:

- Connected
- Cooperative
- Mutually reinforcing

This avoids the over-concentration of development in Dublin and supports balanced growth.

Key Priority: Embed **regional linkage and inter-urban connectivity** as explicit policy objectives within LSMASP and RSES.

2.8 Connectivity and Infrastructure as Enablers

Connectivity is the single most important constraint on growth.

Priorities include:

- Integrated public transport systems
- Direct connectivity between Shannon and Limerick
- Development of a rail link to Shannon Airport
- Multi-modal infrastructure aligned with economic activity

Key Priority: Move from fragmented projects to **integrated transport systems aligned with economic geography**.

2.9 Infrastructure, Resilience and Risk

Recent analysis highlights the exposure of Shannon to **flood risk with significant national economic implications**

Key Priority:

- Accelerate delivery of flood defence infrastructure while enhancing the existing amenity value of the river embankments
- Integrate **climate resilience** into spatial planning
- Protect critical national assets (airport, industry, town)

2.10 From Strategy to Delivery

A consistent finding across all previous submissions is the **gap between ambition and delivery**.

Effective implementation requires:

- Clear action plans and funding
- Defined responsibilities
- Timelines and accountability

Key Priority: Adopt a **mission-led delivery approach**, including:

- Dedicated delivery structures
- Monitoring frameworks
- Cross-agency coordination

3. Strategic Shift Required

Across multiple policy cycles, the same conclusion emerges. A shift is required from:

- Administrative areas to functional economic zones
- Projects to integrated systems
- Regional thinking to national strategic positioning
- Untapped potential to realised comparative advantage
- Plans to delivery

4. What Success Looks Like

Success should be measured by:

- A fully integrated **Limerick–Shannon–Estuary economic system**
- Shannon Airport operating as a **gateway to the Wild Atlantic Way**
- Development of the Shannon Estuary as a **renewable energy hub of European scale**
- Delivery of **integrated transport and infrastructure systems** (road, rail, port, air, energy grid, communications, housing, ...)
- Realisation of the **Atlantic Economic Corridor as a connected “city of scale”**
- Demonstrable progress in **delivery, implementation, and outcomes**

5. Conclusion

The evidence from multiple Shannon Chamber submissions over a decade or more is clear:

- The opportunity is strong and well understood
- The assets are already in place
- The strategy has been articulated

The remaining challenge is **delivery**.

A more integrated, place-based, and implementation-focused approach - grounded in the strategic role of Limerick-Shannon and the Shannon Estuary - will be essential to achieving alignment and delivery at scale.

Appendix A:

Illustrative Priority Projects to Support Delivery of Strategic Themes

While this submission focuses on strategic principles appropriate to the current issues paper stage of consultation, Shannon Chamber recognises the importance of translating these into action.

Table A provides an illustrative set of priority projects aligned with the strategic themes outlined above. This is not intended to be exhaustive, but rather to demonstrate how the transition from strategy to delivery can be advanced.

Priority Definitions

- **High Priority / Short Term (0–5 years):** Essential enabling projects required now to unlock growth
- **Medium Priority / Medium Term (5–10 years):** Important system-building investments
- **Long-Term Strategic (10+ years):** Structural, transformational infrastructure requiring early planning

Table A: Illustrative Priority Projects to Support Delivery of Strategic Themes

Strategic Theme	Project / Initiative	Description / Rationale	Action Required	Priority	Timeframe
Integrated Metropolitan System	Limerick Northern Distributor Road (LNDR)	Strategic link connecting UL, TUS, National Technology Park and improving cross-regional access; should be seen as integration infrastructure	Confirm route, funding and delivery	High	Short–Medium
	Metropolitan coordination / governance mechanism	Align planning and delivery across Limerick–Clare–Estuary system	Policy and institutional framework	High	Short
Utilities	Water, wastewater and grid	Key enablers for housing, enterprise, offshore wind, electrification of industry etc,	Investment to remove enabling infrastructure constraints	High	Short
Transport & Connectivity	N19 Upgrade / Extension to Shannon Airport	Critical access route to airport, business park and enterprise base	Complete planning and construction	High	Short
	Shannon Airport Rail Link	Game-changing strategic link to national rail network	Feasibility, NDP inclusion	High	Medium
	Integrated public transport system (Shannon–Limerick)	Frequent, reliable services linking employment, education and residential centres	Align BusConnects / Connecting Ireland	High	Short
	Commuter rail (existing lines)	Underutilised rail infrastructure for metropolitan commuting	Feasibility, pilot, phased development	Medium	Medium
	Fifth Shannon River Crossing	Enables estuary integration, Foynes access, outer orbital system	Corridor protection, long-term planning	Long-Term Strategic	Long
Airport & International Connectivity	Shannon Airport route development support	Strengthen direct international connectivity.	Aviation policy and funding support	High	Short
	Continued investment in	Safety, security, and sustainability infrastructure to support growth	Adequate funding of Regional Airports Programme (RAP)	High	Short

	airport infrastructure				
	Integrated aviation / tourism strategy	Align tourism, transport and economic development to increase regional spend	Cross-department coordination	High	Short
Shannon Estuary & Energy Hub	Estuary (incl. all deep-water locations) Strategic Zone designation	Recognise estuary as national hub for energy, ports and industry - to deliver on Ireland's climate change targets	National policy designation as Industry Accelerator Area	High	Short
	Port and grid infrastructure upgrades	Enable offshore wind deployment, energy export and industrial growth	Capital investment aligned to energy policy	High	Medium
	Offshore wind enabling infrastructure	Ports, supply chain and marine planning to support west coast opportunity	Accelerate DMAPs and infrastructure	High	Short
Enterprise & Innovation	Shannon Airport Business Park Regeneration / Development	Strengthen cluster and attract next-generation industry	Continued capital investment and site readiness	High	Short–Medium
	National Technology Park expansion (Limerick)	Build innovation ecosystem linked to UL and industry	Land use and infrastructure support	Medium	Medium
	CAV (Connected & Autonomous Vehicles) testbed	Position region as leader in emerging transport and mobility technology	Public–private partnership, funding	Medium	Medium
Housing & Place Development	Serviced land and housing delivery	Align housing supply with employment growth	Infrastructure-first approach	High	Short
	Shannon Town Centre One Shannon Hub investment	Strengthen residential offer and place attractiveness	Funding (URDF-type) and delivery	High	Short–Medium
Climate Resilience	Shannon Flood Relief Scheme	Protect nationally critical infrastructure and economic activity	Accelerate delivery timeline and funding	High	Short–Medium

Atlantic Economic Corridor (AEC)	AEC Infrastructure Investment Programme	Integrated transport, energy and digital investment to unlock corridor potential	Cross-regional plan and funding	Medium	Medium-Long
Delivery & Implementation	Dedicated delivery mechanism / coordinating body	Address fragmentation and ensure implementation across sectors	Establish delivery structure with KPIs	High	Short

Submitted by:
Shannon Chamber
Suite 14, Shannon Airport House
Shannon
Co Clare
V14 E370
www.shannonchamber.ie
Tel: 061 475854
[email: hdownes@shannonchamber.ie](mailto:hdownes@shannonchamber.ie)