

DRAFT



A Summary and Guide

MID-WEST REGIONAL AUTHORITY
Údarás Réigiunach an Mheán Iarthair



Background

In the context of the National Spatial Strategy and the Planning and Development Act 2000, the Regional Authorities of the Republic of Ireland have been directed by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government to prepare Regional Economic Strategies and Regional Planning Guidelines for their areas. These documents will act as the basis for the future co-ordinated planning of the regions and may influence Governmental investment decisions. Local Authorities will be under an obligation to have regard to the Regional Planning Guidelines when acting in their roles as Local Planning Authorities and it is likely that other agencies will also be required to have regard to the Strategy and Guidelines. The intention is that the Economic Strategy and Planning Guidelines will enable the region to capitalise on its strengths and by facilitating co-ordinated actions and strategies will enable it to compete nationally and internationally for employment and investment, creating a sustainable, high quality future for all its citizens.

Refer to Section 1 for more details.

Key mechanisms

The following have been identified as the key mechanisms in responding to the demands of the NSS.

Vision: Developing a strong forward view, creating a longer-term perspective that guides current action, stimulating a strategic framework that generates an over-arching insight and bringing regional partners on board to support this vision;

Connectivity: The future growth of the region will be critically influenced by how easily the region can engage with those of national and international importance in the context of the region's goals and objectives, whether through e-trade, air transport, shipping or domestic surface transport;

World-Class Places and Products: Building on the critical ingredients that will shape the future of the region, particularly the drivers and influencers that will be especially relevant in the changing national and international economic and social environment;

Enterprise Enablers: Focusing on individual enterprises, and strengthening the regional support system in information, technology, research and innovation to build competitive enterprises;

Balance: Development of the region in a manner that incorporates a balanced approach, which allows the region to compete internationally while maintaining the economic and social fabric of all its areas;

Sustainability: Principles of sustainable development should inform all the region's policies, in particular securing a proper balance between social, economic, environmental and equity considerations.

Refer to Section 1 for more details.

Context

The Mid West Region is unique in several respects. The region features a strong central core, embracing Limerick City and the nearby centres of Shannon and Ennis. Together they create a metropolitan centre that is quite centrally located within the region and that has the potential to be accessed from all its parts. This area has also experienced considerable development and population growth during the past twenty years, with new facilities and services having been provided during this period. The presence of Shannon Airport and major educational institutions such as the University of Limerick and the Limerick Institute of Technology strengthen the Limerick/Ennis/Shannon area as a national focal point.

The area also forms the hub of a western/southern arc of development running from Galway to Cork. This arc is capable of being relatively easily integrated in access terms and will provide one of the principal locations for investment that will be capable of competing with Dublin on the international market.

The presence of good rail connections, and the Shannon/Foynes port facilities, are further key infrastructure within the region. In addition, the region has a number of significant electricity generating stations, while the gas network has now been extended to the Limerick/Shannon/Ennis area.

These facilities form the nucleus of a region with substantial capacity and potential for development, representing a considerable amount of public capital investment that needs to be used to the optimum.

Though the region has these strengths, however, it also has weaknesses. Some parts of the region are quite remote from its core in terms of distance and travel times. The population in many of these areas is small and

declining, with a weak urban structure. It is particularly noteworthy that outside of the core area there are only two towns with populations of more than 5,000, while 40 settlements lost population during the 1996-2002 period even though this population loss was often quite small. In addition, many of the towns that grew significantly are located within the core area's influence. Others are poorly connected to the core part of the region or to other regions.

Another interesting aspect of the region from an administrative point of view is the fact that each of the counties has a direct connection with the central core of Limerick/Ennis/Shannon. The region is a natural hinterland around an urban core. This calls for intensive collaboration between the administrative bodies concerned with the centre, as well as for actions to ensure that regional benefits flow to other areas from growth in the centre.

Many other aspects of development in the region are also cross-county in nature, demanding co-operative action if they are to be addressed, such as the Shannon Estuary, Lough Derg, retail provision and transport systems.

In summary the Mid West region has a number of unique attributes in terms of a strong core of Limerick/Ennis/Shannon, capable of acting as a national focal point and energising the entire region. Key weaknesses, however, lies in the relative remoteness of some rural areas with the need for stimulus and development, complementing growth in the centre.

Refer to Section 2 for more details.

Goals

The overall goals that have been proposed for the Region are as follows-

1. That Limerick/Shannon/Ennis would be developed in a co-ordinated way as a single integrated metropolitan zone that acts as the core driver of the region and a principal mechanism for attracting investment into the area. This will require that the public authorities in the area work through co-operative processes to achieve common agreed outcomes.
2. That this area would be linked through an integrated public transport system as well as a system of roads to accommodate the private car and that an integrated traffic management plan would be developed and put in place for this area.
3. The city core of this area would develop as a vibrant, multi-purpose zone with a population of a size capable of supporting a high level of social and commercial activity.
4. That the area immediately adjacent to Limerick/Ennis/Shannon would be provided with transport systems giving easy access to the core area and allowing its population to benefit from the facilities provided.
5. That, overall, the Mid West region would be linked and integrated with the Galway and Cork areas in particular, creating a critical mass to attract investment and activity on a competitive basis.
6. That each of the peripheral areas of the region would develop its own key service centre, encouraging enterprise development and providing a significant level of social, commercial and community services to the local hinterland, as well as acting as a base for high quality transport links to the core area of the region.
7. That transport systems would be developed that would link the peripheral areas of the region with the core area and that would facilitate an exchange of social and economic activity between those areas.
8. That the natural resources of the region would be managed and developed so that their economic and social potential would be realised while sustaining environmental quality.
9. That the new enterprise sectors would be developed, supported where necessary by Strategic Development Zones.
10. That the economic development of the region would be promoted through the development of the social, economic and physical infrastructure demanded by foreign and indigenous industry and that, in particular, the education and research resources of the region would be integrated with the needs of industry
11. That the needs of each of the region's sub-zones would be responded to.

Refer to Section 3 for more details

Basic Approaches

The following are the basic approaches proposed for the development of the region:

1. Division of the region into a number of **development zones** (See Map 1) and identification of the particular potentials and needs of each zone
2. Identification of the **enterprise sectors** in which the region has a particular advantage and the needs of those sectors
3. Identification of those **areas that cross county and regional boundaries** (See Map 2) and that require to be developed in a co-ordinated way
4. Identification of the infrastructural needs of the region's sectors, zones and special areas
5. Identification of the current situation with respect to the relevant infrastructure
6. Identification of the priority action needed to address the development zone, sectoral and area needs

For these purposes the region has been divided into nine zones as follows (See Map 1)

Zone 1	The Limerick/Shannon/Ennis Area. The population of this area in 2002 was 175,000
Zone 2	The Zone 1 Hinterland Area. The population of this area in 2002 was 40,000
Zone 3	The West Clare Area. The population of this area in 2002 was 13,500
Zone 4	The North Clare Area. The population of this area in 2002 was 13,200
Zone 5	The West Limerick Area. The population of this area in 2002 was 32,300
Zone 6	The East Tipperary Area based around Thurles. In 2002 the population of this area was 24,000
Zone 7	The North Tipperary area around Roscrea. The population of this area in 2002 was 18,500
Zone 8	The area of North East Clare around Scarrif. In 2002 its population was 5,300
Zone 9	The South Limerick Area. In 2002 it had a population of 16,300.

(For more details on these zones see Pages 47 - 49)

The principal economic sectors that have been identified as those in which the region might have a particular advantage are as follows –

- Bio-technology
- Software development
- Digital content
- E-learning
- Aerospace
- Tourism/leisure
- Agriculture and related enterprise
- Distribution of goods, information and people

(For more details see Pages 39 - 41)

The following are the areas that were identified as requiring co-ordinated development:

- Zone 1
- Shannon Estuary
- Lough Derg

- Burren
- Atlantic Coast
- Galtees and
- Ballyhoura
- Slieve Aughty
- Slieve Felim

(For more details see Page 57 - 58)

Economic and Social Development

Based on this analysis, the potential and development needs of each zone, *(See Page 50 and following)* enterprise sectors *(See Page 58 and following)* and special areas *(See Page 57 - 58)* were identified.

In addition, the particular needs of Foreign Direct Investment companies and indigenous enterprises were identified. *(See Pages 61 - 63)*

The following is a summary of those needs, which informed the Regional Planning Guidelines.

- The development of the economic potential of each zone
- The establishment of a key service centre in each zone
- A clear regional population distribution policy
- A high-quality transport infrastructure and transport system in all its modes
- The integration of the region with other regions
- The protection, enhancement and exploitation of the key access infrastructure that serves foreign markets
- High quality, competitively priced broadband communication facilities
- Special support for economic activity in the more peripheral areas
- Integrated management of key areas and resources
- The availability of appropriate amounts of serviced residential, industrial, distribution and commercial land throughout the region
- The protection of the region's environment

Planning Guidelines

Some of the key factors that informed the development of these guidelines have been outlined above. Another factor that has influenced the planning guidelines is the advice of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government that the region should develop its strategy and guidelines in the context of a regional population increase of approximately 60,000 during the period of the strategy though it is noted that other strategy documents propose different population figures.

The planning guidelines address the following issues –

Population distribution

Under this heading it is proposed that in the context of the economic and social development of each zone and the need of the region to have a distribution of population that will address the concept of the NSS, that population targets be set for each zone and for the development zone service centres outside Zones 1 and 2. The targets contained in the guidelines would give rise to only modest changes in the current distribution of population throughout the region's various zones. Some important implications for development plans are as follows –

- Development plans should incorporate policies that would seek to facilitate the population targets set in the strategy and that population change in the region would be monitored and targets amended if actual population growth varied significantly from the targets proposed.

- Development plans should seek to accommodate the greater part of housing development on zoned and serviced land within Zones 1 and 2 and seek to promote higher densities near the rail corridors where appropriate
- Development plans should seek to reverse the population decline of smaller towns and villages
- Development plans should seek to create a key service centre in each Zone
- All of the above would require some restrictions on the provision of housing in other areas

(See Pages 65 - 72)

Economic and Employment Trends and the Location of Industrial and Commercial Development

Under this heading it is proposed that local authorities would seek to respond in their policies and strategies to the development needs of the various Zones as outlined in the earlier chapters of the document.

The following are the development plan implications –

- Development plan policies should seek to provide for the development needs of different types of zones as identified in the overall document
- If a Strategic Development Zone is identified as being necessary it should be located within close proximity of the Gateway/Hub
- The needs of rural enterprise and on-farm enterprise should get particular consideration. These would include afforestation, renewable energy and the processing of local materials
- The needs of Foreign Direct Investment and indigenous industry should be specifically provided for

(See Pages 73 - 74)

Transport

This part of the document addresses issues regarding roads, rail, bus transport, taxis, pedestrians and cyclists. It identifies the principle routes for improvement and upgrading and the provision of facilities for a variety of public and private transport needs.

The principal development plan implications area as follows –

- That development plans make provision for the improvement of the identified routes
- That the safety and capacity of the more important parts of the regional road network be protected
- That provision be made in the vicinity of public transport nodes for parking and other associated facilities
- That transport nodes be developed in the proposed service centres
- That development plans make provision for bus routes, bus facilities and pedestrian and cyclist facilities in new road and other developments

(See Map 3 and Pages 74 – 79)

Water supply and waste water-facilities

This part of the document addresses the issue of the co-ordinated provision of water and waste-water facilities in the region's settlements. It identifies some areas where inter-county co-ordination may be required and also identifies that the provision of these facilities are crucial to the future development of the region.

Development plan implications are as follows –

- The co-ordination of service provision as identified and the making of arrangements for this should be addressed as part of the integrated management of these areas
- The putting in place of protocols for the private provision of services in smaller settlements should be addressed
- The integrated management of waste water disposal within the water body Special Areas should be addressed

(See Map 3 and Page 79)

Waste Management

The importance of waste management to the development of the region is recognised in this part of the document.

The implications for development plans are that policies should make provision for compliance with the relevant Regional Waste Management Strategies.

(See Page 80)

Energy and communications networks

This part of the guidelines addresses issues such as the provision of electricity, communication and other similar structures. It is proposed that a common approach be adopted by each local authority.

The principal development plan implications are as follows –

- Development plans would be required to include policies that recognise the importance of these facilities and that would generally allow them to be developed, whether serving their own or adjoining areas. The policies would also require those proposing such facilities to subject to demonstrate that the facilities are needed, that the approach proposed is the most appropriate and that negative impacts are being mitigated.
- It is also proposed that areas suitable for wind energy developments are identified by each local authority in accordance with a common set of criteria.

(See Pages 80 – 82)

The provision of educational, health care, retail and other community facilities

This part of the document addresses health, education, retail, recreational and amenity developments.

The principal development plan implications are as follows –

- Provision should be made for health reception centres in the main Service Centres
- The development of county and regional facilities should be catered for
- The continued development of third-level educational and research facilities should be catered for
- The Regional Retail Strategy should be adopted into the development plans
- Provision should be made for a range of regional scale recreational facilities
- Intra-regional walking routes should be protected

(See Pages 82 – 84)

The preservation and protection of the environment and its amenities, including the archaeological, architectural and natural heritage

The region has few resources of this nature that are cross county or cross-regional in nature. However a small number of items of architectural significance have been identified. It is also proposed that a common approach be taken to landscape evaluation and management.

The principal development plan implications are as follows –

- The identified items should be included as protected structures
- Development plans should use the commonly developed approach to evaluate and develop policies for the management and protection of the landscape

(See pages 84 – 85)

Protection of water bodies

It is proposed that development plans have regard to the Water Framework Directive that is in the process of being implemented and that particular attention is paid to issues of water quality in those areas of water bodies that require an integrated approach.

The principal development plan implications are as follows –

- Development Plans should include policies that will assist in the achievement of the objectives of the Water Framework Directive

- Development plans should include common protocols for the management of flood plains and areas vulnerable to flooding now and in the future and include them in the development plans

(See Pages 85 – 86)

Mineral Extraction

This part of the guidelines addresses the issue of the management of the use of the mineral assets of the region.

The principal development plan implications are as follows:

- Development plans should include policies and strategies that reflect the common approaches developed between the local authorities.

(See page 87)

Co-ordinated development of geographical areas

This part of the guidelines references the Special Areas identified in Section 3.

The principal development plan implications are as follows –

- Development plans should include policies, strategies and actions that reflect the integrated approaches developed through the mechanisms for managing the Special Areas referred to.

(See page 87)

Impact Assessment

An outline assessment of the Strategic Environmental and Social Impacts is included in this Section. It suggests that the impacts are, in general, neutral or positive.

(See pages 88 - 98)

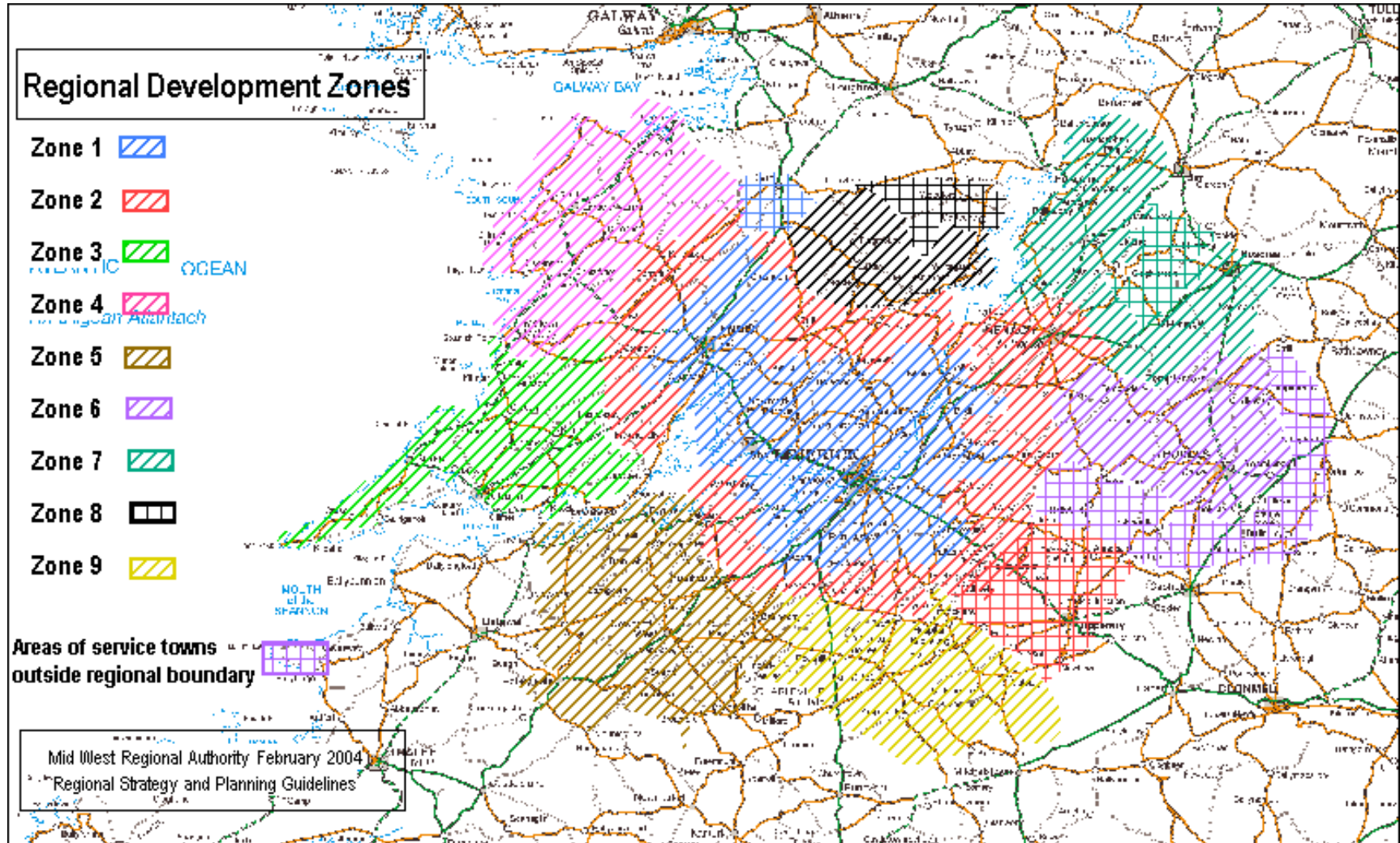
Implementation, Monitoring and Review

This Section addresses the mechanisms required for the implementation of the Economic Strategy and Regional Planning Guidelines. It emphasises that mechanisms that facilitate co-operative action must be put in place and that the Regional Authority should be the body responsible for the convening of groups, the recording of their outcomes and the monitoring and review of the implementation of the Strategy and Guidelines.

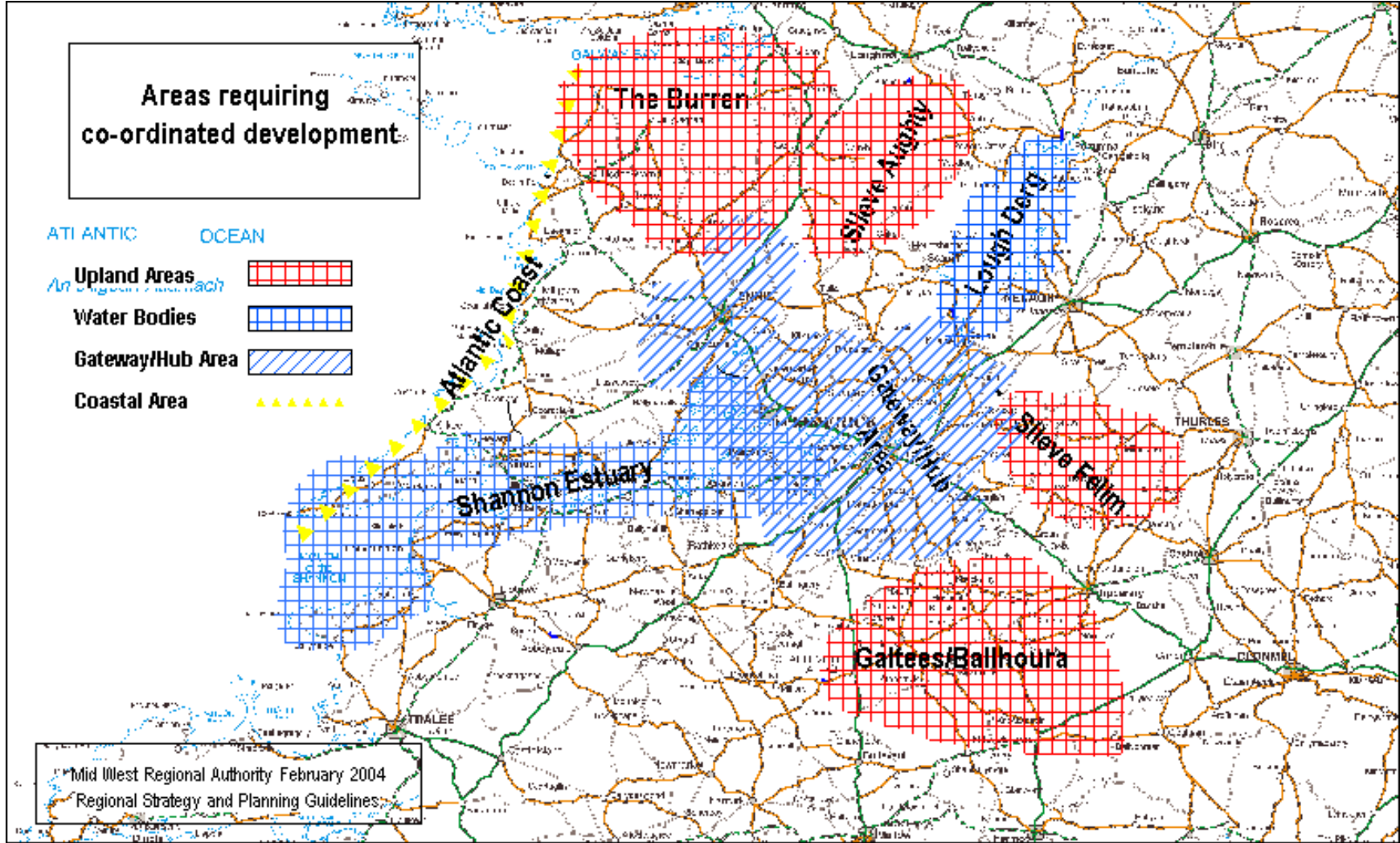
The implementation chapter also includes details on investment priorities, which identify the crucial investments that the region needs if the strategy's objectives are to be achieved.

(See Pages 99 – 105 and Figure 1)

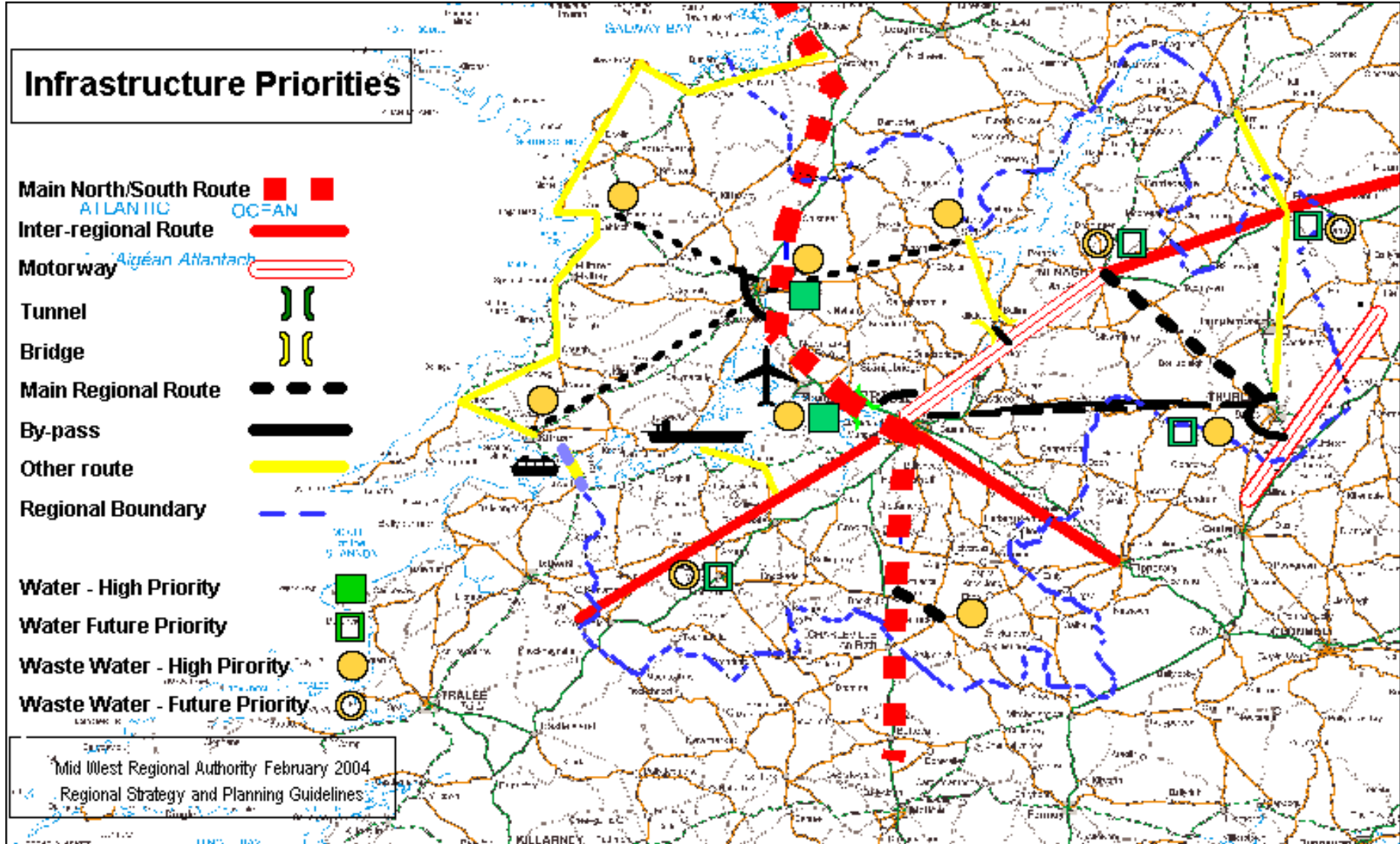
Map 1



Map 2



Map 3



Proposed Implementation Structures

