



Tionól Réigiúnach
an Deiscirt

Southern Regional
Assembly

Limerick - Shannon Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan

2027 - 2040

Issues Paper

March 2026



Introduction

This paper is one of a series of four issued to assist input from the public and other stakeholders to the pre-draft consultation process for the review of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Southern Region (RSES) which takes place from 26th March 2026 to 22nd May 2026. It introduces the context and considerations for the new Limerick-Shannon Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (LS-MASP), which will form part of the new RSES.

The other papers available at consult.southernassembly.ie are:

- The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Southern Region (RSES) 2027 – 2040 Issues Paper which provides an overview of the RSES review process and should be read in conjunction with this paper.
- Cork Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (C-MASP) Issues Paper.
- Waterford Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (W-MASP) Issues Paper.

The LS-MASP will guide the future strategic development of the Limerick-Shannon Metropolitan Area up to 2040, and includes areas administered by both Limerick City & County Council and Clare County Council. The MASP must align with national government policy as set out in the revised National Planning Framework (NPF), April 2025.

Responses to the challenges and questions set out in this Issues Paper will inform the draft of the new LS-MASP for 2027-2040 and are invited from anyone who wishes to contribute. The draft RSES and Limerick-Shannon MASP is scheduled for publication in Q4 2026, at which point there will be further opportunity to respond to the proposals within the draft.

Legislative Context

The preparation of the Limerick-Shannon MASP is required under Section 29(2) of the Planning & Development Act 2024 (as amended). The legislation indicates that the RSES will include an integrated land-use and transportation strategy for the metropolitan area, which should be consistent with the RSES. Section 29(5) of the Act states that the ‘metropolitan area’ of a city means the area consisting of the city and its surrounding area approximating to the extent of its commuter zone. Section 29(13) of the Act requires that the RSES and the MASP include measures to ensure effective implementation and monitoring, including:

- Priorities for infrastructure of scale relating to transportation (including public transportation), water services, waste

management, energy and communications networks and the provision of educational, healthcare, retail, cultural and recreational facilities. An order of priority is required for infrastructure provision, and potential sources of funding.

- Cross-sectoral investment and actions required to deliver planned growth and development.
- Coordination between constituent local authorities, and the cooperation of public bodies, and;
- The monitoring and reporting arrangements required to measure and evaluate progress in implementing the RSES and MASPs.

What is the MASP and Why is it Important?

The Limerick-Shannon MASP is an integrated land-use and transportation strategy that will guide the future development of the Limerick-Shannon Metropolitan Area, up to the year 2040 and beyond. It is a statutory planning document at the regional level that must align with national planning and other policies. In turn local-level planning documents, such as City and County Development Plans, must be consistent with the Limerick-Shannon MASP.

The aim of the MASP is to put in place the framework as to how Limerick will meet its ambitious growth targets set out in the NPF to grow by at least 50% over 2016 levels by 2040. The NPF targets Limerick City and Suburbs to increase its population by approximately 44,000 people (over Census 2022 levels) by the year 2040 and have an overall population of at least 150,000 people in total.

The Limerick-Shannon MASP will provide a strategy to help improve quality of life, choice in terms of housing, employment, and amenities, and address the impact of trends such as digitalisation, changing retail and working patterns.

The Story to Date - Limerick - Shannon MASP (2020)

The existing Limerick-Shannon MASP was adopted in 2020 and builds on previous strategies such as the Mid-West Area Strategic Plan. New structures such as the directly elected Mayor of Limerick (an ex-officio member of the Southern Regional Assembly) and the setting up of the Limerick Project Ireland 2040 Delivery Board and the Limerick Project Ireland 2040 Delivery Board Transport Sub-Group, support the coordination and implementation of the Limerick-Shannon MASP.

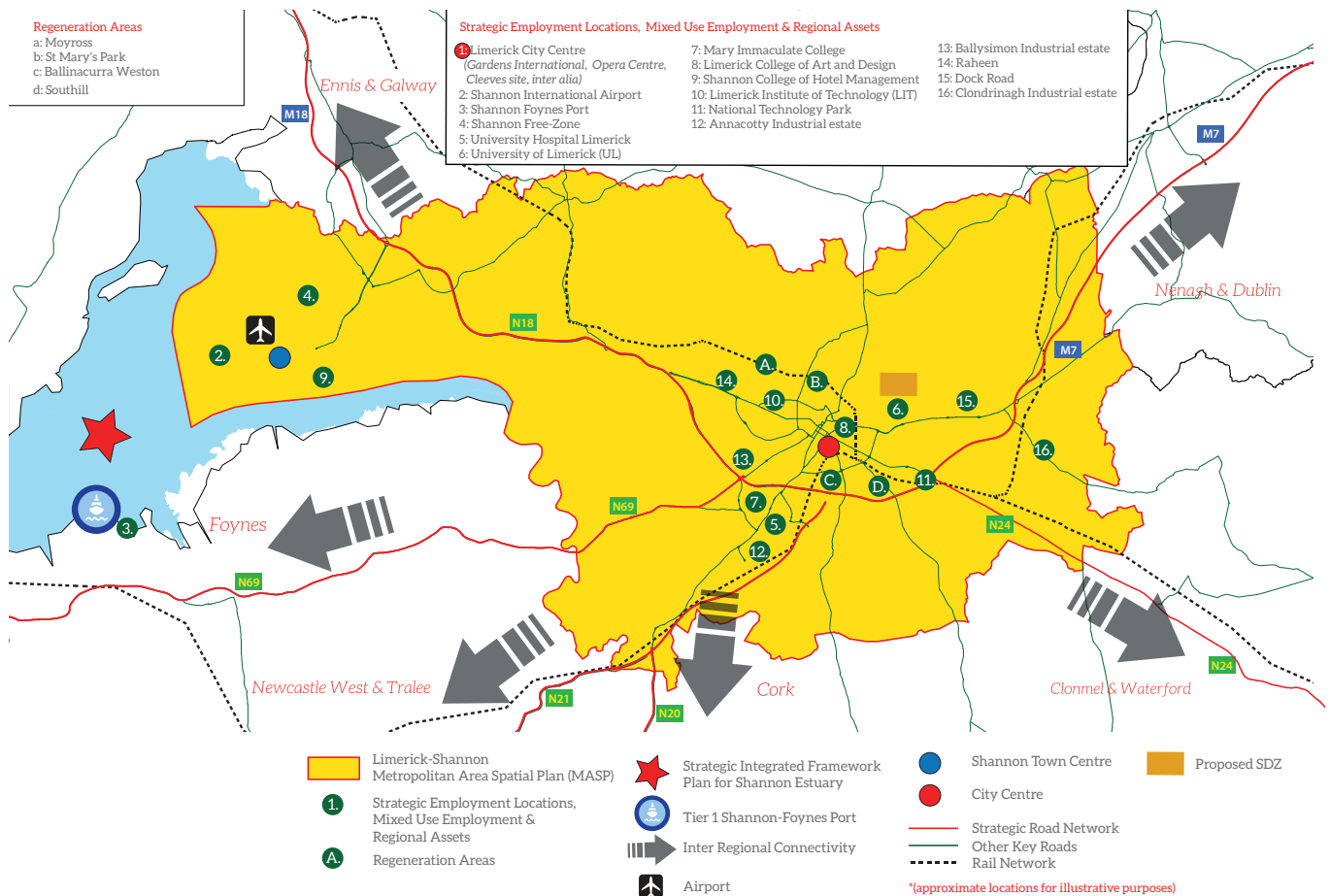


Figure 1: Limerick-Shannon Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan Map, Current RSES/MASP

Although in its initial stages of implementation, the current Limerick-Shannon MASP has assisted successes in key infrastructure planning and delivery, such as:

- Informing priorities for enhancing the role of Limerick as a regional city of influence, as outlined in the Limerick Development Plan (2022–2028) and the Limerick 2030 Economic & Spatial Plan for Limerick (updated 2022). The latter has seen €500 million of investment in infrastructure across Limerick, with a focus on redeveloping key strategic city-centre sites, promoting compact urban growth, and creating high-quality commercial and enterprise spaces to attract and support businesses.
- The production of the Limerick Shannon Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy (LSMATS), highlighting improvements to rail lines and key stations (e.g. Moyross, Ballysimon, Colbert), bus corridors, and active travel infrastructure.
- Advancing major redevelopment and connectivity initiatives by progressing plans and investments to strengthen links with key strategic locations, including the reinstated Limerick–Foynes rail line supporting Shannon Foynes Port, enhanced rail capacity and new stations improving connections toward Ennis and Galway, and long-term planning for improved access to Shannon Airport. This reflects a broader effort to integrate the city more strongly into regional economic and transport networks.
- Progress in housing development and service-infrastructure provision through the implementation of the Limerick Development Plan 2022–2028 and the Clare County Development Plan 2023–2029. This has increased dwelling pipeline and completions, monitored commercial floorspace delivery, and supported upgrades to urban infrastructure and new mixed-use development capacity.



Figure 2: Gardens International (Source: Limerick Twenty Thirty)

The NPF identifies the following growth enablers for the area:

- Implementation of the updated Limerick 2030 Economic Strategy and enhancing opportunities for people living and working in, as well as visiting the city, particularly promoting vibrancy of the city centre.
 - Limerick Directly Elected Mayor to deliver the functions prescribed under the Local Government (Mayor of Limerick) Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2024.
 - Progressing the sustainable development of brownfield and greenfield areas for housing and supporting the delivery of public transport and other infrastructure.
 - The regeneration of Colbert Station as a sustainable mixed-use city quarter with an enhanced transport interchange.
 - A Metropolitan public transport network, in line with the Limerick Shannon Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy (LSMATS), with enhanced accessibility connecting Colbert Station, UL, Shannon Town Centre and other metropolitan centres.
- The continued expansion of the City's third-level institutions and integration with the wider City and region.
 - Improving bus, cycling, and sustainable transport services throughout the Limerick City region, delivering BusConnects Limerick and building on the existing Limerick Metropolitan Cycle Network Study.
 - Improving sustainability in terms of energy, waste management and resource efficiency and water, to include district heating, water conservation, water re-use and SuDS and the circular economy.
 - Improving sustainability in terms of energy, waste management and resource efficiency and water.
 - Enhanced rail and road connectivity and reduced journey times to Cork, Waterford, Galway and Shannon-Foynes port.
 - Ensuring that water supply and wastewater needs are met by new strategic projects to enhance Limerick's water supply and increase wastewater treatment capacity.

Key Focus Areas

Creating Sustainable Communities

The population of the Limerick-Shannon Metropolitan Area grew by 10,880 (8.2%) to a total of 143,300 in the intercensal period (2016 to 2022), which is in line with the national average growth, but only 60% of its projected growth in the RSES.

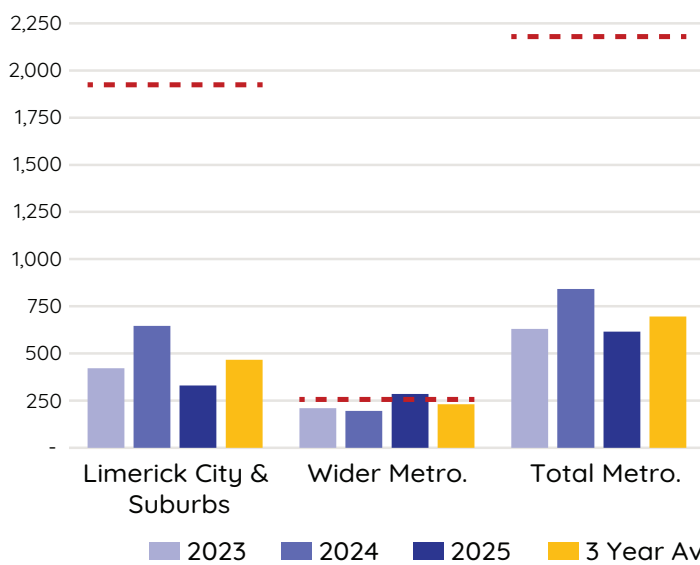
The urban core of Limerick City showed strong growth, however historically, population growth in Limerick has been focused outside of the urban area. Recent measures to deliver compact growth and address residential vacancy within the city boundaries have shown some success in reversing this trend.

Development of brownfield land within the built up footprint of the city and other settlements, identifying opportunities for transport oriented development and well-located urban expansion areas, offers the potential to build on this success in encouraging compact and sustainable growth.

Housing delivery within the Limerick-Shannon Metropolitan Area has been below development plan housing targets over the past 3 years. Between 2023 to 2025, housing completions only reached on average 32% of annual targets across the entire Metropolitan Area, and only 24% for Limerick City and Suburbs. A particular concern is that the increase in housing commencements witnessed nationally has not happened to the same extent in Limerick City and County, with commencements only achieving 41% of Development Plan targets. This compares to 72% for the Region as a whole and 85% nationally.

A key focus of the Limerick Shannon MASP in terms of future housing delivery will be the NPF requirement that at least half of the growth planned for Limerick City up to 2040 should occur within its the existing built-up footprint. Furthermore, the Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlements Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DHLGH,

Housing Completions (City and Metropolitan Area)



Housing Commencements (Local Authorities)

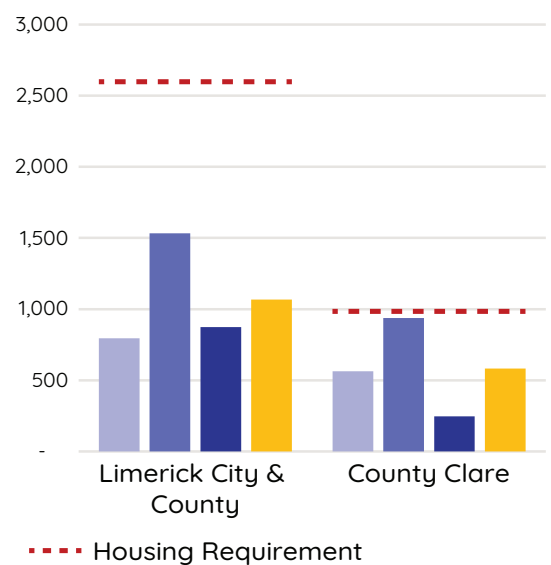


Figure 3: Housing Delivery in the Limerick-Shannon Metropolitan Area 2023 to 2025 (Source: NPF Implementation Housing Growth Requirements, CSO Housing Statistics)

2024), sets out ambitious policy and guidance for compact growth, renewing existing settlements rather than continued sprawl, the need for well-designed and mixed-use neighbourhoods as well as a focus on Transport Orientated Development (TOD).



Figure 4: Planned New Housing Delivery at Gasworks Site, Limerick (Source: LDA)

Creating Sustainable Communities Questions

- What are the key factors to consider in making the Limerick–Shannon Metropolitan Area a great place to live, with housing that meets a wide variety of needs?
- What infrastructural improvements are required over the next 10–20 years to deliver on ambitious growth targets and enable sustainable, public-transport led development?
- How can planned growth across the Limerick-Shannon Metropolitan Area (including Limerick City and Suburbs, Mungret and Annacotty, Shannon Town and smaller metropolitan settlements such as Castleconnell, Patrickswell and Sixmilebridge) be managed in a sustainable, compact way?
- How can the MASP best support brownfield and infill development, reuse of existing buildings, sustainable urban expansion, and Transport Orientated Development within the Metropolitan Area while catering for inclusive travel needs?

Transportation

Compared to the Cork and Waterford Metropolitan Areas, the Limerick-Shannon Metropolitan Area has a higher share of active travel (walking and cycling) at 31% compared to 19% in the other two cities. However, there is a major contrast between the levels of active travel for those living within the urban core compared to those living in the wider Metropolitan Area.

Considerable progress has been made in implementing active travel measures such as enhancement for walking and cycling routes in recent years. It is expected that BusConnects Limerick will play a key role in driving modal shift to public transport and active travel in the Metropolitan Area.

Within the wider City and Metropolitan Area, the proposed commuter rail network outlined in the Limerick-Shannon Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy (LSMATS), and reinforced within the All-Island Strategic Rail Review, would result in much improved connectivity,

including to Shannon. The proposed commuter rail service and new stations would also provide an opportunity for Transport Orientated Development which would have direct access to the City Centre.

Transportation Questions

- How can land use and transportation be better aligned to deliver an efficient and high-quality public transport service for the Metropolitan Area?
- What key transport infrastructure do you consider necessary in the next 10 to 20 years to enable the Metropolitan Area to grow as planned, focusing on sustainable modes of transport?
- How can we cater for the travel needs of all members of the community in an inclusive way?



Figure 5: TFI Bikes

Economy and Employment

The Limerick-Shannon Metropolitan Area is a key driver for economic development across the Mid-West, benefitting from a well-educated, multi-cultural workforce, a thriving domestic start-up culture, large Foreign Direct Investment, and strong academic-industry collaboration through third-level institutions such as the University of Limerick (UL) and Technical University of the Shannon (TUS). Shannon Airport plays a vital role as an international connectivity hub, alongside Shannon-Foynes Port, a tier 1 port targeted for major investment to support coordination and offshore renewable energy (ORE),

Key industry sectors in the Limerick-Shannon Metropolitan area include:

- Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering
- Aviation and Logistics
- Maritime, Freight and Port Services
- ICT, Digital and Knowledge Economy
- Renewable Energy and Green Economy
- Education & Research
- Life Sciences, Biopharma & MedTech
- Construction & Built Environment

The Limerick-Shannon Metropolitan Area experienced an increase of 20% in employment between 2016 and 2022. While employment in Limerick City and Suburbs increased 12%, the Shannon area increased 83% (+8,185 jobs) in this period, showing the key role it plays in the wider Metropolitan Area. It is worth noting however this increase is partly due to the revised boundary for the Shannon Built Up Area (BUA) under Census 2022, making direct comparison difficult.

Limerick City and Suburbs' unemployment rate fell from 10.9% to 5.2% between the 2016 and

2022 Censuses, although it remains comparably higher than unemployment rates in both Cork (8%) and Dublin (8.3%), indicating that it would benefit from continued investment in employment.

There is a need to refocus growth and activity in Limerick City Centre including reestablishing its role at the top of the retail hierarchy especially for higher-order comparison shopping, for leisure activity and as the main destination for shoppers and visitors in the Mid-West. Promoting the Night-Time Economy and the City Centre as a great place to live could also add to its vibrancy and attractiveness.

Economy and Employment Questions

- How can the MASP stimulate further investment in the domestic and multi-national employment base, and enhance industrial resilience to economic shocks?
- What strengths and challenges does the Limerick-Shannon Metropolitan Area face in terms of economic delivery and employment, including areas of high unemployment?
- How can the Limerick-Shannon Metropolitan Area adapt to and take advantage of emerging opportunities, such as the green economy, and advanced technologies and services?
- How could the location and provision of retail, leisure and tourism assets be improved, to enhance quality of life for residents, as well as visitor experience?
- How can areas such as the Limerick City Centre and Shannon Town Centre be enhanced? Is there a need to look at the visitor experience, provision for leisure facilities, food and beverage, arts and culture and the Night-time Economy?

Environment

The development and enhancement of green and blue amenity spaces, while protecting the natural environment and biodiversity is crucial in ensuring a high quality of life for people who live in, work in, and visit the Metropolitan Area.

To support long-term development, it will also be important that strategic projects meet water supply and wastewater needs, to enhance Limerick's water supply and wastewater treatment capacity, and avoid unintended environmental consequences of under-provision.

The Limerick-Shannon MASP will aim to integrate these principles into its strategy through:

- Enhancing access to parks, rivers, greenways, and waterfront areas.
- Integrating blue-green infrastructure into new development.
- Creating high-quality public realm and open spaces.

- Strengthening links between urban areas and natural assets.
- Improving water and wastewater treatment facilities to accommodate urban growth.

Environmental Questions

- How can we plan for the active and passive recreational needs of residents and visitors in terms of green and blue spaces i.e. parks, playing pitches, playgrounds and ensure they are accessible and close to home?
- What areas need to be protected or enhanced in terms of their status for biodiversity and the natural environment and other areas of local interest that may need to be enhanced or protected?
- How can we link or provide for a network of green and blue spaces (green and blueways for walking and cycling etc.)?



Figure 6: Shannon Town Park

Social and Cultural Infrastructure

With ambitious population and employment growth targets for the Metropolitan Area, alongside significant infrastructural change, it is essential that the Limerick-Shannon MASP provides a strategic approach to the provision of education, health, and community facilities. It will therefore support ongoing collaboration with regional stakeholders to ensure that social infrastructure needs are met and that opportunities for both social and physical regeneration are fully realised.

The following initiatives have been supported:

- Develop Limerick as a Learning City and seek investment in initiatives that support the Limerick Learning City Initiative.
- Support the role of Limerick as a WHO Healthy City.

- Seek investment in health infrastructure to meet its current and future population needs including proposals for an expansion of or new UHL hospital facility.
- Investments in smart technologies.
- Seek continued investment in initiatives that achieve physical, economic, social, and environmental regeneration of disadvantaged areas including regeneration areas.

Social & Cultural Questions

- What social and community (including health) infrastructure is needed to cater for the needs of the future population of the Metropolitan Area as well as larger facilities that may be needed to serve the wider Mid-West?
- How can we ensure that the social and community needs of all members of the community are catered for and that people do not feel excluded?



Figure 7: Sixmilebridge

Making a Submission

The Southern Regional Assembly is keen to receive views on any strategic planning issue facing the city and its wider metropolitan area to inform the new Limerick-Shannon MASP. We would also welcome your views on the wider RSES review itself.

We welcome your views on any or all the questions that we have set out in this Issues Paper, as well as general comments, ideas, or suggestions about matters that you feel have not been fully addressed in this paper.

This consultation will open on Thursday 26th March 2026 and conclude at 5pm on Friday 22nd May 2026.

Submissions can be made through the Southern Regional Assemblies dedicated online consultation portal available at: consult.southernassembly.ie, by email to rses@southernassembly.ie, or by post to RSES Submissions, Regional Planning Unit, Southern Regional Assembly, Assembly House, O'Connell Street, Waterford X91 F8PC.



Figure 8: Shannon Airport

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