



Galway Chamber of Commerce  
Economic Development Group

Submission to

The Galway Local Government Committee to examine:

a) whether the boundary of Galway City should be altered and if so, recommendations with respect to the alteration of the boundary

or

b) whether Galway City Council and Galway County Council should be unified

The future development of Galway must support a sustainable economic growth that is in excess of the national average, so that the GVA (gross value-add) is at or above the national average. This requires a rebalancing and growth in the region's population.

Galway, at 75k population, is the largest urban centre in the region and like the other centres must accommodate a growth in population that exceeds the average for the region. This will occur in an international context that drives a regional shift in county/city balance from its current 43%/57% to something approaching 70%/30% within the next twenty to thirty years.

This economic shift towards 'city' development is an international trend and is the imperative for the Chambers of Commerce in the region to respond through the concept of the Atlantic Economic Corridor. This concept links the urban and inter-urban centres along a north-south axis thus creating a more significant population density and a more effective use of infrastructure and assets. The stated purpose is *'to realise the economic opportunity that is present, to bring jobs and investment, to the Atlantic Economic Corridor'*. The immediate challenge for Galway is to lead that economic development, as the largest of the urban centres.

This will require a renewal of the city as we know it today to transform the centre to a vibrant business centre focused on new enterprise, technology start ups and internationally focused services. It will be a centre that attracts a significant younger population, providing the infrastructure suitable for their social, transport and work needs. This will require a significant investment on the back of an ambitious plan.

It will also depend on the expansion of the city. There will be a natural expansion of the city to the East as industry and enterprise take advantage of the road and rail infrastructure. The expansion however must be planned and must not happen in an unplanned way that gives way to the inevitable urban crawl that has been seen elsewhere. The outer expansion must be in unison with the development of the inner city, ensuring that infrastructure specifically transport, housing and enterprise real estate is optimally developed to one single blueprint.

Protecting the city and outlying areas from unplanned sprawl is central to maintaining a high quality living environment which is the underlying attribute to attracting and retaining a new highly skilled workforce. The inclusion and development of outer towns like Oranmore, Clarinbridge, Claregalway, Atherny, Bearna, Headford and Moycullen must be planned as part of one city blue print. The protection and transformation of those towns, as well serviced high quality sub-urban locations, is critical to ensuring that the expanding city can attract young professionals seeking high value employment, together with a quality education, social and living experience.

The continued renewal and expansion of the city will be based on the collective ability to attract new industries and exploit new opportunities for existing industries and sectors. It will depend on the collective ability to sustainably exploit our natural resources including the Marine, Agriculture, Tourism, Forestry and Mining. Those resources are based throughout the region and within the county. This requires the new City and County to engage in an effective and meaningful way to realise benefit in the interest of both. In this context a singular authority that brings together the ambition of the City with that of the Rural hinterland and larger towns like Tuam, Gort, Ballinasloe, Loughrea and Oughterard, creates a much stronger consensus and leads to a bigger success in Galway and within the Region.

The future of the City cannot be constrained by the existing arbitrary boundary between City and County or any other boundaries that sub-optimize the future opportunity. The future must be based on an ambitious blue print for accelerated growth that mitigates and manages all the known pitfalls associated with accelerated growth. The blue print must consider the future international context and be as mindful of the needs of new “settlers” as the people that currently live in the city and county.

This requires a single local government administration for the city and county. It requires an administration that is equipped to plan and manage the future renewal and expansion of the city in a way that truly benefits the county and region. While the operational administration must organise in a way that best responds to the various parts of the city and county, the strategic management and executive authority must be singular. The development of the new city must be enterprise and technology led and its economy must positively affect the region. The vision and leadership demonstrated by the local authorities when acquiring the airport site exemplifies the economic planning and foresight necessary to support renewal and expansion of the city in a new regional context.

Amalgamation of the two local authorities represents an opportunity to revitalize and rejuvenate Galway. Jobs are at the heart of economic, social and community well-being. The focus of local and national government must be job creation, which in turn will lead to improved social and community well-being. The amalgamation offers an opportunity for the new local authority to re-profile its resource base to give real and meaningful momentum to its new and important role in leading economic development. It is an opportunity to acquire new experienced leadership within the executive team with a proven capacity to build a new city – a city that responds to its region and a city that will stand out internationally as a sustainable model of social economic balance.

This opportunity must be taken and must be used to reap real and lasting benefits for Galway. In order to achieve this ambition, a new local authority working with national government must recognize this unique opportunity and support economic growth seeking the introduction of tax incentives, similar to the incentives that regenerated the Dublin Docklands and the creation of

the IFSC. This form of incentive is necessary if we are to establish some of the key initiatives e.g. A Conference Centre, in our 5 year Economic Plan.

It is recommended therefore that the councils of the city and county are merged under one administration. It is also recommended that the leadership of this new administration includes the requisite executives and professional staff to support economic development. Specifically it must support the development of new enterprise, the investment associated with a rapid technology led growth, the sustainable development of natural resources, and the availability of the human resource required to support that. It is regarded as opportune that other functions engaged in the development of infrastructure and services can be optimised. This will facilitate a transformation in the profile of the council itself and allow for the forming of an imaginative and ambitious executive and professional team.

The Chamber recognizes the significant change that will result from a doubling in the size of the city. It believes that a strong local government executive must be supported by strong community and business leadership. This unprecedented opportunity to integrate that non-executive leadership of community and business, with the new executive would give rise to a unique and powerful engine of growth and prosperity for a new Galway. In this regard the Chamber also recommends that the new arrangement (post merger) includes an active, non-executive position of “first citizen” or Mayor of Galway, with responsibility of representing community, business, and industry. The Mayor should be elected by the people of greater Galway City area and be for a 5 year term, evolving as the city and region develop to become a broader ambassadorial role. Critically, the role will connect Galway’s pride in the achievement of the past, with the enthusiasm and courage of people to take on the opportunity of the future.

Importantly the new local government executive together with the office of the ‘first citizen’ and with the support of the business community, will be responsible for leading the people of Galway through significant change and growth to become a future regional city.