

Symbios Project.

Santiago De Compostela, May 2015

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Local Government Reform Act 2014

Vision of the Act is that –

“Local government will be the main vehicle of governance and public service at local level - leading economic, social and community development, delivering efficient and good value services, and representing citizens and local communities effectively and accountably”

Aim of the Act – Streamline local government; give local authorities more power; avoid duplication of services – which hopes to make the system more efficient which will save money and other resources

Responsibilities of local authorities (LA)

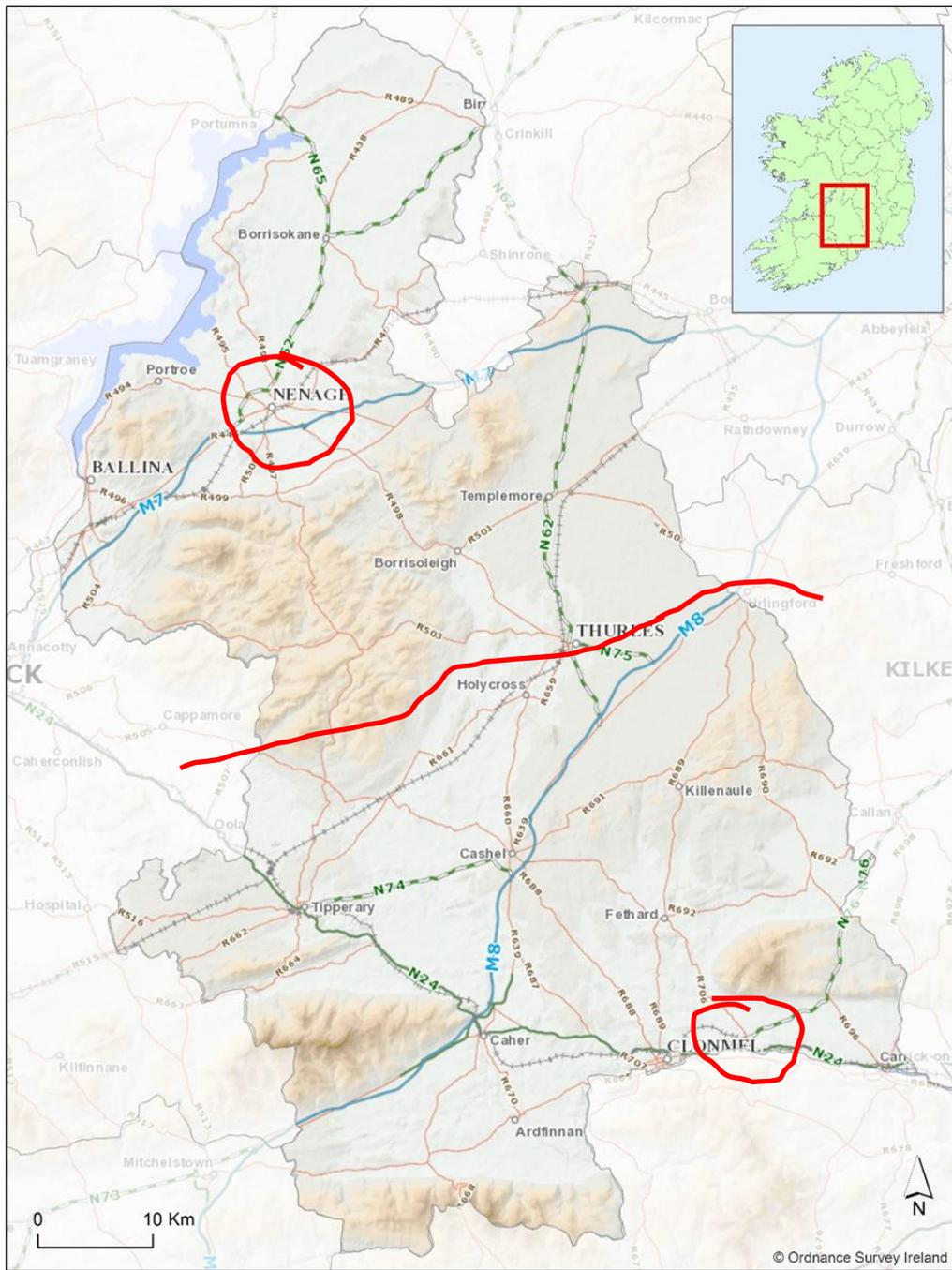
These are typically broken down into the following broad categories:

- Housing
- Planning
- Roads
- Water supply and sewerage
- Development incentives and controls
- Environmental protection including rivers, lakes, air and noise
 - Recreation facilities and amenities
- **Not responsible for Public Transport – Rail/National Bus Service**

In addition to the functions outlined above, a fundamental role of democratically elected local government is the representation of local communities, voicing local concerns and responding to local needs.

Outcome of the Reform Act -

- A reduction in the number of local authorities from 114 to 31, including the abolition of all town councils (a reduction of 83 councils).
- A reduction in the number of councillors from 1,627 to 949 (a reduction of 678 seats).
- All counties to be divided into municipal districts, with county councillors also being district councillors.
- Waterford City Council is merged with Waterford County Council
 - Limerick City Council is merged with Limerick County Council
- North Tipperary County Council is merged with South Tipperary County Council
- Local Community Development Committees to be established



Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs)

The aims of which are to :

- Develop community elements of a Local Economic and Community Plan,
- The management and **oversight** of local development (and Social Inclusion) programme delivery
- To Work closely with local development agencies to coordinate local and community development activity in their areas

LCDCs are also the Government's preferred choice to be the LAG (Local Action Group) to deliver the LEADER programme for each County.

European **LEADER** programme - (*Liaisons entre actions de developpement de l'économie rurale*)

LEADER is a **community-led approach** to the delivery of rural development interventions that is supported by a Local Development Strategy (LDS) and implemented at a local level by Local Action Groups (LAGs).

The **LEADER** element of the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 will provide €250 million in financial resources to address poverty reduction, social inclusion and economic development of rural areas over the life-span of the 2014-2020 programme.

The **LEADER** 2007 – 2013 Programme was worth €450 million to Ireland. **(The current round is worth €200 million less)**

South Tipperary received €12.5 in the last programme. This time the entire county (North and South) will receive €10 million. This huge reduction will lead to job losses in the Local Development Companies who administered the previous programme

As of end of May 2015, nobody has been appointed by the Government to administer the new **LEADER** programme.

LEADER & Rural Development

- LEADER 2007-2013 Budget for Ireland - €450 Million
- LEADER 2014-2020 Budget for Ireland - €250 Million
- LEADER 2007-2013 Tipperary received €24 Million
- LEADER 2014-2020 Tipperary will receive €10 million
- LEADER 2007-2013 Two Local Development Companies delivered the LEADER Programme
- LEADER 2014-2020 Government still undecided who will deliver the programme – but preferred choice is the LCDC to be Local Action Group (LAG) for the county. At a local level this, and the reduced budget, will mean job losses

Policy, Practice and the Political Disconnect.

THE POLICY - Ireland's Taoiseach (Prime Minister) launched a new tourism strategy in March 2015, in which it is stated that - "Tourism is one of Ireland's most important economic sectors and has significant potential to play a further role in Ireland's economic renewal...The tourism sector supports 140,000 jobs in the accommodation and food sector alone, and overall employment in tourism is estimated to be in the region of 200,000. However, tourism's contribution is not confined to directly generating employment, economic activity and exports. **It also contributes by encouraging social inclusion and access to the labour market** (my emphasis)...In terms of specific targets, by 2025 the Government's ambition is that overseas tourism revenue will reach €5 billion in real terms (i.e. in 2014 prices), and employment in the sector will reach 250,000. (Statement from Paschal Donohoe T.D. Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, and Michael Ring T.D. Minister of State for Tourism and Sport in PEOPLE, PLACE AND POLICY GROWING TOURISM TO 2025, Dept. of Transport, Tourism and Sport, March 2015 : 6)

THE PRACTICE - The Minister for Tourism, Transport and Sport, Paschal Donohoe TD, together with Minister of State, Michael Ring TD, officially launched Ireland's Ancient East, Fáilte Ireland's latest tourism initiative which will build on the wealth of historical and cultural assets in the east and south of Ireland. (April 14th, 2015)

Fáilte Ireland (National Tourism Authority) will be working with businesses and communities in the region to bring the proposition to life - including a series of experience development workshops to assist them in **animating the stories of their locality** (My emphasis). <http://www.failteireland.ie/Footer/Media-Centre/Ministers-Donohoe-Ring-launch-%E2%80%98Ireland%E2%80%99s-Ancient-E.aspx#sthash.rVMjMmyD>.

THE POLITICAL DISCONNECT – As Minister Kelly announced the 'new' LEADER Programme he stated that, "LEADER is a vital lifeline for many rural communities. These substantial financial resources allocated to each county for the delivery of LEADER will support the continued sustainable development of rural communities all over Ireland in the coming years. Minister Phelan and I are determined to address issues of rural decline and I am confident that the 2014-2020 programme will be just as successful as the 2007-2013..." <http://www.environ.ie/en/Community/RuralDevelopment/News/MainBody.40741.en.htm> [even though it's €200 million less than the previous programme]. "LEADER has supported so many successful businesses that are at the forefront of rural innovation. However in the past, **too much of this funding was used for local historical books or to develop rural tourism brochures.** This time it has to be spent on projects that will sustain employment in a community." <http://www.alankelly.ie/press/national/14271114208154466.html>

The Disconnect continues – **Public Transport in Ireland**

- Everyone aged 66 and over living permanently in the State is entitled to the Free Travel Scheme on Public Transport.- bus / rail / ferry
- Anyone in receipt of a disability allowance is also entitled to free Travel
- People who are entitled to Free Travel can also apply to have a companion travel with them for free.
- Students can get a small discount when they use Public Transport
- **It's important to have a source of public transport**

Live in a rural area? You could be getting nicer bus shelters soon



CYCLE PATHS AND bus shelters are due an upgrade with €7 million worth of funding from the Department of Transport.

It is part of a €200 million stimulus package previously announced by government, which Public Transport Minister Alan Kelly said will both improve the public transport system and provide employment.

At least 40 new bus shelters are to be created in rural areas with this new round of funding.

“The winter storms recently demonstrated the shortage of bus shelters in many rural areas,” Kelly said. The government has set its sights the public taking five million more

journeys using public transport this year. Other measures, some of which Kelly conceded are “quite small” but will result in an improved service, include:

- Additional hand-straps for the DART,
- Improvement works at Busáras station,
- The purchasing of ticketing equipment to speed-up roll out of the Leap Card to cities outside Dublin,
 - Walking/cycling improvements across Dublin and other cities.

May 20th 2014 <http://www.thejournal.ie/public-transport-funding-1474814-May2014>

Is your bus route going to be cut? Almost 100 services are being ended and Bus Éireann is also reviewing some of its Expressway services. (Feb 23rd 2015)



THE PROPOSALS TO cut almost 100 Bus Éireann services have been met with widespread criticism from opposition parties and trade unions. The company has decided to cut some services between Dublin and the south and southeast and it's also reviewing some of its Expressway services. **The plans have has been described as 'an alarming step backwards for rural Ireland'.**

Fianna Fail's Transport Spokesperson Timmy Dooley said the loss of vital transport links to Dublin will leave many rural communities even more isolated.

"Any attempt to leave communities without any public transport links to the capital must be resisted."

He added that Bus Éireann plays an important role by providing rural communities with regular access to our towns and cities. This has to be about more than just budgets. Bus Éireann is funded by the taxpayer and it has a public responsibility to serve all communities across the country. While Sinn Féin Councillor Kathleen Funchion said, "These cuts by Bus Éireann are a direct result of years of underfunding of public transport services.

The three routes which service 15 towns and villages, that will now no longer have a service, are important links for the public for commuting as well as for leisure. "Bus Éireann is an essential part of our public transport network and provide good quality service to a huge number of towns and villages that would otherwise be isolated and only reached with private cars."

Feb 23rd 2015 <http://www.thejournal.ie/bus-eireann-route-cut-1955580-Feb2015/>



Bus route to Cork / Kilkenny
and on to Dublin

**Vital link for –
Elderly
Students
Tourists**

“Another nail in the coffin of rural Ireland”

Irish Rural Link spokesman, James Claffey, said: “It is another nail in the coffin in that it is another service under threat.”... “We are good at closing down services in this country but not good at coming up with alternatives,” he said, adding that cutbacks on routes would add to rural isolation following the closure of many country post offices and Garda stations. People using these services are the most marginalised and the most in need of it,” he said.

<http://www.irishtimes.com/ireland/bus-cuts-nail-in-coffin-for-rural-areas-317868.html>

“Rural Ireland feeling isolated by cuts to bus routes”

News of the elimination of the Number 7 Dublin-Cork route which currently goes through parts of Kilkenny and south Tipperary; and the scaling-back of the Number 5 route between Dublin and Waterford which serves part of north Wexford, has been greeted by consternation.

A village like Ballyporeen on the Tipperary side of the county’s border with Cork, was largely ignored by the Celtic Tiger and has long forgotten the days of President Ronald Reagan’s visit over three decades ago, and will now be left without its bus link to Cork and Dublin.

It’s in a similar position to nearby Clogheen, hardly the transport hub of Munster, along with places like Ardfinnan...

<http://www.irishtimes.com/business/transport-and-tourism/rural-ireland-feeling-isolated-by-cuts-to-bus-routes-1.212051>

“Cuts to bus routes just the latest in a long line of struggles for rural Ireland...”

Rural Ireland took a real bashing during the recession. The closure of Garda stations, post offices and banks, coupled with massive job losses outside big urban areas and mass emigration, left many country communities reeling. There is still a real sense of desolation, deflation and isolation. But, despite the supposed turnaround in our fortunes, rural Ireland is still being attacked. News that Bus Eireann is cutting transport routes between Dublin and the South and South East really is a huge blow to a section of our population already hurting.

<http://www.irishmirror.ie/news/news-opinion/marie-kierans-wrong-route-rural-5250646>

It keeps on going -----

Post Office Network in Rural Ireland

It is where –

- Most State/Government social welfare payments are collected (old-age pension; children's allowance; job-seekers benefit/allowance)
 - Bills can be paid.
- Savings can be deposited and withdrawn at short notice
- It has become one of the few socialising spaces remaining where local information can be exchanged

Realising how important the Post Office Network is -

The Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, Alex White T.D., today [21st December 2014] announced Bobby Kerr is to be the independent Chair of the Post Office Network Business Development Group to examine the potential and opportunities for new Government and commercial business that could be transacted through the post office network.

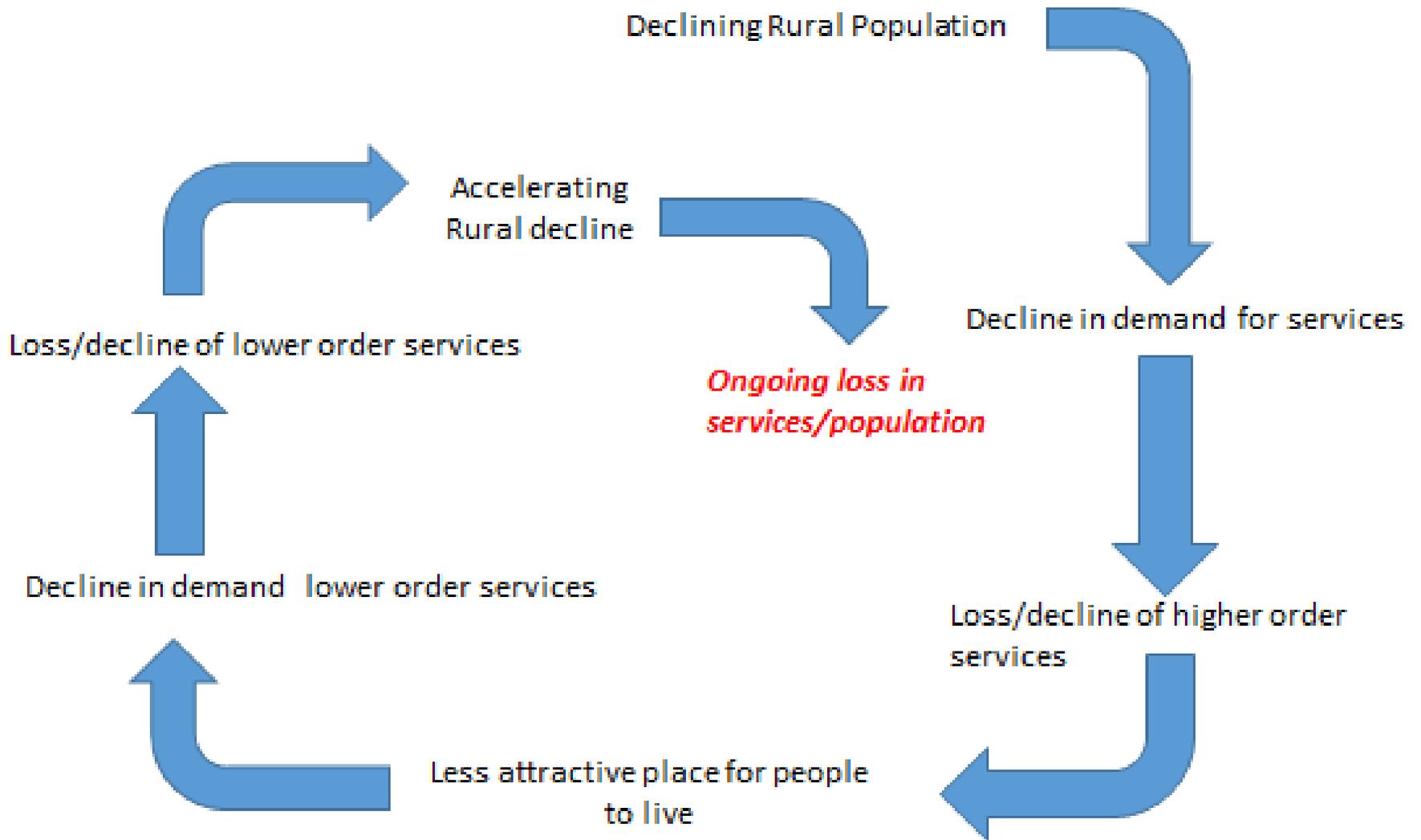
Minister for Rural Economic Development, Ann Phelan T.D., said “Post offices are often the hub of local communities across rural Ireland, and I look forward to working with Bobby Kerr and the Business Development Group in the New Year to find new ways of bringing business into the hearts of our communities.”

<http://www.dcenr.gov.ie/Press+Releases/2014/Minister+White+announces+Bobby+Kerr+as+Chair+of+Post+Office+Netw>

(35% of PO business is from paying out Social Welfare Payments and if these payments are to be transferred to customers using electronic transfers – what happen ?)

The Policy – “The move to digital transactions is in line with wider Government policies and objectives on better public services and more effective electronic payments as set out in the public service reform plan and the eGovernment strategy 2012-2015...These initiatives have made the case quite strongly for a move to electronic payments which will contribute to improved national competitiveness.”

Minister for Social Protection - <http://www.thomaspringle.ie/question-on-continuance-of-social-welfare-payments-through-an-post/>



One Additional Comment -

“The small financial savings that may have been secured by this local government reform is more than offset by the social losses that have resulted. Small communities are less well represented and local democracy is weakened rather than strengthened by the change ... Ireland is already a highly centralised state, and the further elimination of local representation reinforces that position... now some within the coalition [notably the Minister of Public Expenditure and Reform] recognise that [aspects of this reform] was a mistake.”

Irish Times Editorial Tuesday March 3rd 2015

<http://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/editorial/a-welcome-rethink-on-town-councils-1.2123277>