

Preservation and promotion of cultural and natural heritage through GreenWAYS



Regional Action Plan

December 2020 – November 2022



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Acronyms and Glossary of Terms

BMW – Border Midlands and Western Regional Operational Programme

DPER - Department of Public Expenditure and Reform

ERDF - European Regional Development Fund

EU – European Union

GP – Good Practice

LEO - Local Enterprise Office

NDP / NPF – National Development Plan / National Planning Framework

NWRA – Northern and Western Regional Assembly

RSES - Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy

PPSG – Programme Partnership Steering Group

R&I – Research & Innovation

RPO – Regional Policy Objective

ROP - Regional Operational Plan

SME – Small & Medium Enterprise

General information

PROJECT: OUR WAY

PARTNER ORGANISATION:	Northern and Western Regional Assembly
COUNTRY:	Ireland
NUTS2 REGION:	Northern and Western Region
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REGIONAL STAKEHOLDERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Authorities (City and County Councils) in the Region <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Cavan County Council ○ Donegal County Council ○ Leitrim County Council ○ Longford County Council ○ Mayo County Council ○ Monaghan County Council ○ Galway City Council ○ Galway County Council ○ Sligo County Council ○ Roscommon County Council • Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport • Department of Public Expenditure and Reform • Fáilte Ireland • Waterways Ireland • Sport Ireland

Policy context

The DEVISE project and this Action Plan aims to impact the following Policies:

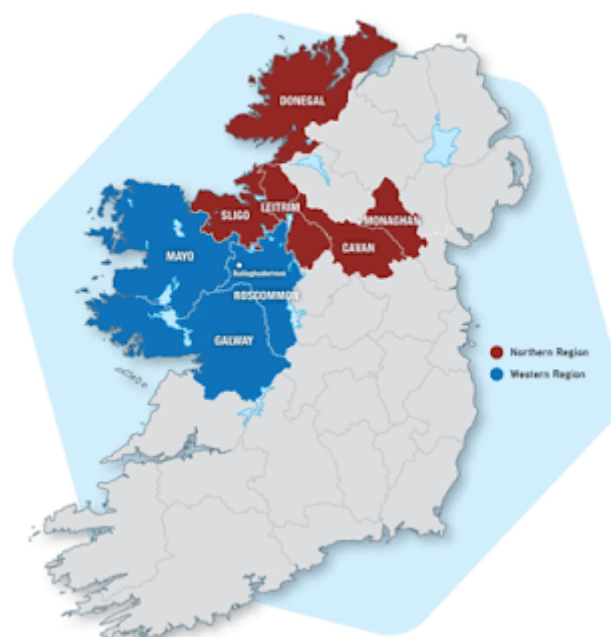
1. Regional Operational Programme (ROP) 2021-2027 for Ireland
2. Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Northern and Western Region (2020-2032)

Regional Operational Programme (ROP) for the Border, Midland and Western 2014-2020

The third Regional Operational Programme (ROP) for the Border, Midland and Western (BMW) Region is a funding package of €320 million from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Irish exchequer, invested in the region between 2014 and 2020. EU legislation sets out the objectives for the ERDF and identified 11 Thematic Objectives to facilitate Member States in adopting a common approach to the design of their Regional Operational Programmes. For the period, 2014 - 2020, the BMW Region is classified as a 'more developed' region with the BMW Regional Operational Programme focusing on a limited number of priorities including the NWRA target priority: Enhancing the competitiveness of SMEs, to which €58m was allocated. In the current ROP 2014-2020 there are no programmes to support the development of Greenway infrastructure or cultural and heritage assets along Greenways.

As the OUR WAY Action Plan is emerging at the end of the current Operational Programme, the Action Plan has carefully being prepared in the context of our region's changed status as a 'region in transition' and to seek to influence the next Operational Programme 2021- 2027.

Map of the Northern and Western Region



Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) 2020-2032

www.nwra.ie/rses

This RSES provides a high-level development framework for the Northern and Western Region that supports the implementation of the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the relevant economic policies and objectives of Government. It provides a 12-year strategy to deliver the

transformational change that is necessary to achieve the objectives and vision of the Regional Assembly.

The RSES Growth Framework provides a clear sustainable strategy for compact growth and delivering those key elements known to inform business location choices. It identifies a pathway through the inclusion of a Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (MASP) for Galway, tailored Regional Growth Centre Strategic Plans for Sligo, Athlone and Letterkenny (incorporating the strategic cross-border partnership with Derry-Strabane) and the identification of priority actions for Key Towns and places. This region is also defined by its strong connection to our rural areas and rural economies. The RSES provides for the careful management and encouragement of development within rural areas, to ensure that they remain and grow as vibrant communities.



**RSES – Growth Framework
(2020 -2032)**

Section 5.8 & Section of the RSES positions the NWRA as a key collaborator with other stakeholders, including Fáilte Ireland, Waterways Ireland, Dept. Transport Tourism & Sport, and Local Authorities in the region on the development of Greenways / Cycling Infrastructure. The overall aim of the RSES in this area is to harness the potential of new Greenway Routes which will transform Rural areas, and to simultaneously introduce Urban Cycling infrastructure which will grow urban sustainability, and contribute to modal shift away from the private car.

RPO (Regional Policy Objective) 5.18 sets out the clear ambition of the Regional Assembly to advance Key Regional (and National) Greenway Projects, which are high capacity, and which can be extended across County boundaries (or even across international boundaries, in the case of the Border Region (Donegal / Cavan / Monaghan / Leitrim). This objective also seeks to prioritise Greenways of scale, (20km and greater), where businesses can develop on the fringes of routes.

RPO 5.20 seeks to facilitate and support the continued development of Blueways along existing waterways (the Shannon Blueway being one such example), and through re-opening existing waterways, (e.g. the Ulster Canal).

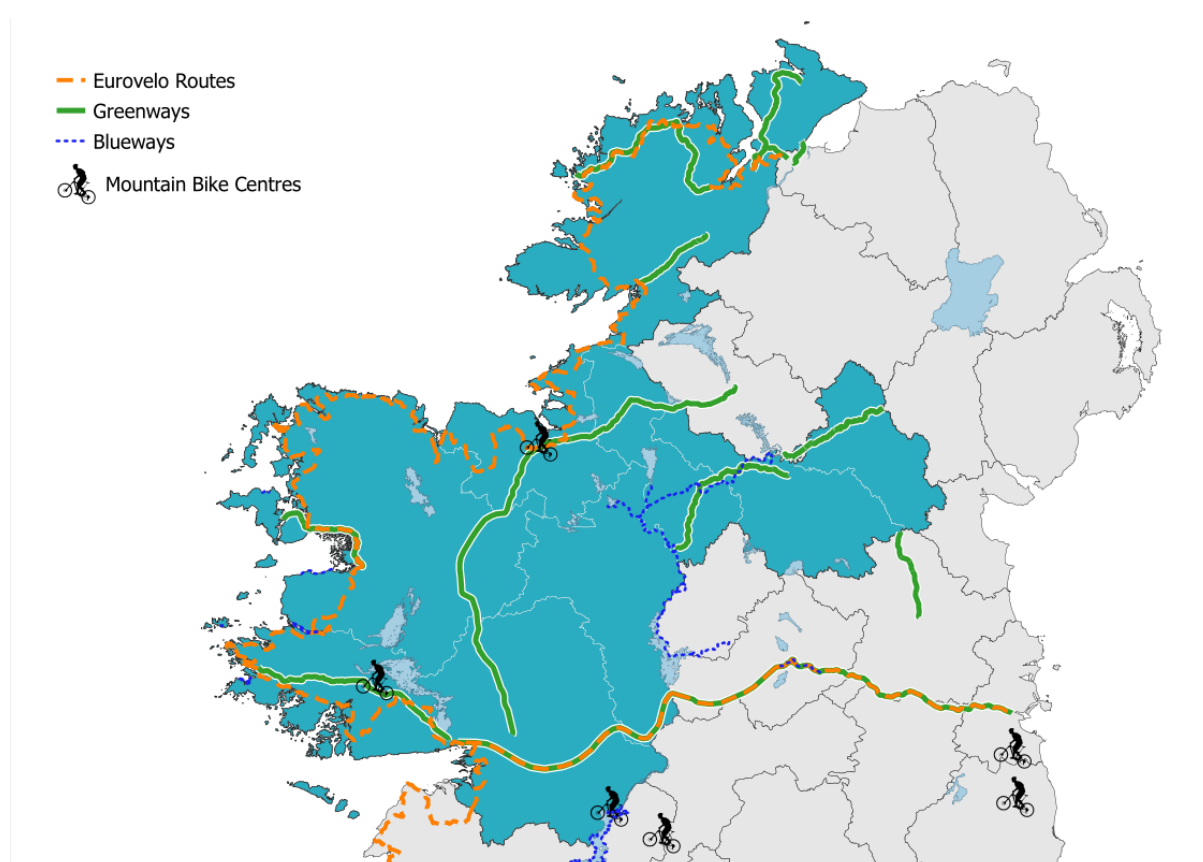
RPO 5.21 seeks to enable collaborative networks to realise the economic opportunities created by blueways,

RPO 6.27 Outlines the Assemblies support the collaborative preparation of LTPs (Local Transport Plans), led by Local Authorities, in conjunction with the NTA (National Transport Agency), which will enable sustainable Urban Transport to be developed with an increasing focus on cycleways / green networks. This RPO has identified an initial 12no. settlements, and others beyond which may be determined, they are as follows:

Athlone, Letterkenny, Sligo Town, Cavan Town, Monaghan Town, Castlebar, Roscommon Town, Donegal Town, Ballinasloe, Carrick on Shannon, Tuam, and Ballina.

Following from the above, **RPO 6.28** states that policies & objectives which emerge from the Local Transport Plans (LTPs) will be incorporated into Development Plans, Local Area Plans, Urban Area Plans etc.

RPO 6.29 & RPO 6.30 seek to promote Walking, Cycling and public transport within Towns, as well as prioritising permeability for walking and cycling in new development zones within Urban area's.

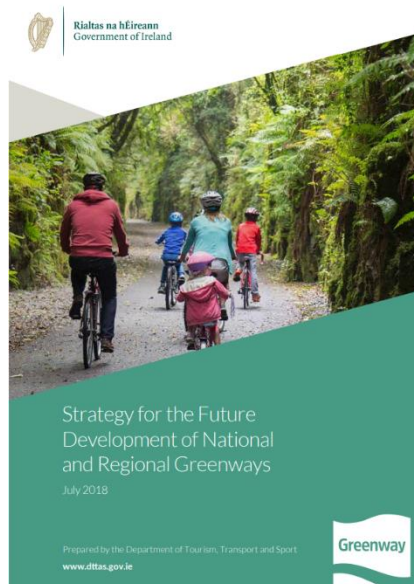


Network of Existing and planned Greenways in the Northern and Western Region of Ireland - <https://www.nwra.ie/rses/>

The Greenways Strategy (2018)

Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways

The objective of this Strategy is to assist in the strategic development of nationally and regionally significant Greenways in appropriate locations constructed to an appropriate standard in order to deliver a quality experience for all Greenways users. It also aims to increase the number and geographical spread of Greenways of scale and quality around the country over the next 10 years with a consequent significant increase in the number of people using Greenways as a visitor experience and as a recreational amenity. To achieve these objectives, the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport will ensure that project promoters will work with Local Communities, Local Landowners, Local Authorities and other relevant State Bodies and organisations.



The Greenway strategy states that:

Greenways are for everyone. While they might be designed specifically to meet the needs of cyclists in terms of gradient and surface, they are used by pedestrians, wheelchair users, children in buggies as well as people on all types of bicycles. Greenways funded under this Strategy should meet the requirements of all users.



The potential of Greenways and cycle tourism to act as economic drivers in local areas was set out in detail in the public consultation document. This was informed by market research carried out on behalf of Fáilte Ireland which demonstrates that, along with the already existing growth in cycling and walking activities, there is great tourism potential for Greenways, particularly where the right type of infrastructure can be developed in the right places for the right people.

Furthermore, Greenways can assist in attracting visitors away from the busy traditional tourist centres and into rural communities. The associated job creation potential in local tourism and hospitality businesses is significant. To capitalise on this, the tourism potential of Greenways will be an important element in the Department's considerations around future Greenways development and the consequent funding decisions. Furthermore projects to be funded under the Greenways Strategy will need to provide an excellent experience for all visitors and in that regard will need to be of scale.

Learning Outcomes from OUR WAY project

Since June 2018, the Northern and Western Regional Assembly as a project partner in the OUR WAY project has been engaging with regional stakeholders to understand the current state of play in the development of Greenways and the valorisation of culture and heritage along greenways and Blueways.

In 2019, the NWRA with the support of stakeholders carried out a regional analysis and supply and demand analysis to get a better understanding of the needs and challenges facing SMEs and microenterprise with their digital transformation. The analysis and survey found that:

SWOT analysis carried out in 2019 for OUR WAY project:

<u>Strengths</u>	<u>Weaknesses</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>National Strategy for Greenways</i> • <i>Landscape & Scenery</i> • <i>Rich Culture & Heritage</i> • <i>Strong & Growing Tourism Industry</i> • <i>Existing Greenways & Blueways to learn from</i> • <i>Sustainable Travel/ Commuter Route</i> • <i>Greenways are located close to Airports & transport networks</i> • <i>Land assets such as Railway heritage and Boardwalks</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>No standard methodology to negotiate land access</i> • <i>No standard code of practice among all Greenways</i> • <i>Accommodation works can be expensive</i> • <i>Insurance Costs are significant</i> • <i>Cultural and heritage assets are not exploited to their full potential</i> • <i>Some Greenways are too short for long distance cyclists</i> • <i>Lack of funding for design and development of Greenways</i>

Working with stakeholders across the region, the NWRA has found that Greenways, walkways and Cycleways only serve as a greener form of transport, but can also bring significant economic opportunities to local towns and villages by attracting tourism to the area which support businesses such as accommodation providers, bicycle hire/repair shops and restaurants and coffee shops. Successful projects such as in the Great Western Greenway in Mayo and the Waterford Greenway have demonstrated how a greenway can create new jobs and opportunities for new and existing businesses. Furthermore, greenways and cycleways also have many health benefits for its users in terms of exercise and mental health. The WHO (World Health Organisation) Health Economic Assessment Tool (HEAT)* for cycling (and walking) enables policy makers at the local, regional and national levels to estimate the economic value of the health benefits of increased cycling (and/or walking). https://ec.europa.eu/transport/themes/urban/cycling/guidance-cycling-projects-eu/policy-development-and-evaluation-tools/heat_en

Action 1 - Development and Promotion of Greenways including Culture and Heritage Assets – Funded through Regional Operational Programme 2021 -2027.

<p>Rationale</p>	<p>During Phase 1 of the OUR WAY project, the NWRA along with regional Stakeholders carried out a regional Analysis of the current funding programmes to support the development of Greenways as well as the utilisation and promotion of cultural and heritage sites along greenways and Blueways. In the current 2014-2020 Regional Operational programme, there are no measures to support the development of Greenways or Cultural and heritage sites on Greenways.</p> <p>The Greenway Strategy launched in 2018 was provided funding allocation for Local Authorities to develop Greenways. While a range of Greenways have been awarded funding since its launch, there is still a significant number of planned Greenway and Blueway projects which have not been able to commence development due to a lack of funding. Furthermore, there is no structured funding programme for Local Authorities and communities to develop and promote cultural and heritage assets along Greenways or to facilitate the development of SMEs on Greenways once infrastructure is put in place.</p>
<p>Action Description</p>	<p>The aim of this action is to influence the development of the Regional Operational programme 2021 -2027 by having specific allocation of funding from the ROP 2021-2027 allocated to the development of Greenways. In addition to this, a portion of the fund should be allocated the preservation and promotion of Cultural and heritage assets along Greenways and to facilitate the development of Start-up businesses along greenways.</p> <p>These proposals align to Policy Objective (PO) 2 and 3 of the draft Common Provision Regulations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ PO2: A greener, low-carbon Europe (including energy transition, the circular economy, climate adaptation and risk management) ➤ PO3: A more connected Europe (mobility and ICT connectivity) <p>The activities for this action will comprise of a series of consultations and submissions with The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform</p>

	<p>(DPER) who are responsible for preparing a Partnership Agreement outlining the strategic funding priorities for the period, and Operational Programmes detailing how they will implement the Funds. DPER along with the Department of Education and Skills and the three Regional Assemblies are responsible for drafting and detailing the Operational Programmes for ERDF and ESF+.</p>
<p>Learning from OUR WAY project</p>	<p><u>Taxation on Sensitive Natural Spaces</u> - Department de Herault, France</p> <p>https://www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning/good-practices/item/3744/taxation-on-sensitive-natural-spaces/</p> <p>GP Description:</p> <p><i>For the preservation of biodiversity, the tax makes it possible to finance studies, the acquisition of land, light development, the rehabilitation of natural spaces, subsidies to third parties to carry out this type of projects, expenses of communication and animation, the development and management of spaces, sites and itineraries (Greenways) related to outdoor sports, acquisition, management and maintenance of Natura 2000 sites. Beneficiaries of the practice are the Departmental Council, the municipalities and communities.</i></p> <p>During Phase 1 of the OUR WAY project, PP2 and regional stakeholders learnt how the Development Taxes in the Herault region of France are used in the planning and development of greenways and , management and maintenance of Natura 2000 sites While it is not part of the Regional Operational Programme, PP2 aims to learn from this model by having a similar funding mechanism included in the Regional Operational Programme 2021-2027 that would allow Local Authorities and Communities to apply for funding to develop and preserve Greenways and linked natural heritage sites. PP2 will seek guidance and advice from PP4 (Departmental Council of Herault) when implementing this action.</p>
<p>Players Involved</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Authorities (City and County Councils) in the Region <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ (Galway City, Galway County, Roscommon, Leitrim, Sligo, Donegal, Monaghan, Mayo and Cavan). • Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport • Department of Public Expenditure and Reform • Fáilte Ireland • Waterways Ireland • Sport Ireland

Timeline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submission to ESIF Consultation - <u>Complete</u> • Identify Funding needs with Stakeholders: <u>June 2020 – February 2021</u> • Consultation with Department of Transport and Department of Public Expenditure and Reform on ROP 2021-2027 - <u>December 2020 – April 2021</u>
Costs	NWRA and Stakeholder’s Staff time and travel expenses
Funding Sources	Funded by the NWRA and stakeholder’s existing annual budget
Implementation and Monitoring	<p>The progress of Action 1 of phase 2 of the OUR WAY project will be monitored through Quarterly Meetings with Regional Stakeholders sharing inputs and progress reviews. This will directly feed into the monitoring tool. Activities and targets will also be reviewed in light of opportunities that emerge, prevailing regional circumstances, proposed policy improvements, etc. Opportunities to further influence /improve policy from ROP perspective and at national, regional and local level will be discussed, and actions agreed as appropriate.</p> <p>The Northern and Western Regional Assembly will have overall responsibility for implementing this action but will be supported by the regional stakeholders including the Local Authorities, Department of Transport and Fáilte Ireland.</p>

Action 2 - Establish a Regional Forum to Develop Greenways

<p>Rationale</p>	<p>During Phase 1 of the project, the Northern and Western Regional Assembly has been hosting stakeholder meetings with Local Authorities and other stakeholders working on Greenways including Fáilte Ireland, Waterways Ireland and the Department of Transport and Tourism. The feedback from the stakeholders attending the meetings has been positive as it has given them the opportunities to share challenges and solutions when planning and developing meetings.</p> <p>While this action does not directly create a policy change, establishing this Forum will a critical tool to implementing Action 1 and 2. In order to develop ‘long distance Greenways of Scale’ as mentioned in the RSES and Greenway strategy, it necessary for Local Authorities and communities from different municipalities to work together to create joint planning and funding applications for Greenways. Establishing a Regional Forum will be essential to facilitating this collaboration.</p> <p>While the stakeholders are not part of a formal network or forum, it was agreed by all partners that establishing a regional forum that would meet at least once a quarter to discuss challenges, Best Practice and plan greenways which cross county boundaries. The importance and need to develop Greenways in the region has been included in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy and includes an objective to establish a regional forum with the aim of developing Greenways of scale. https://www.nwra.ie/rses/</p>
<p>Action Description</p>	<p>The aim of this action is to establish a regional Forum that would support the development of Greenways through increased collaboration and knowledge sharing between key regional stakeholder. Although this Action does not change Policy directly, it is a vehicle which facilitates the necessary collaboration between key regional stakeholders to achieve the Policy changes outlined in Action 1 and 3.</p> <p>During Phase 1 of the project, stakeholder meetings have already served as a. The Regional Greenway Forum would serve as a platform</p>

	<p>for key stakeholders including Local Authorities Fáilte Ireland, Waterways Ireland and the Department of Transport of Tourism to develop plans for larger greenways that extend beyond County boundaries. The Forum would also allow local authorities to share and discuss common challenges and potential solutions and identify opportunities for funding.</p> <p>The Regional Forum will also serve as a platform for regional stakeholders to make a joint submission to any upcoming consultations on Regional, National or European Commission Policies which will have an impact on Greenway development in this region.</p>
<p>Learning from OUR WAY project</p>	<p>This action incorporates learning outcomes from good practices identified during the OUR WAY project including the Greenways Management Model Consortium (Región de Murcia, Spain (España)). https://www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning/good-practices/item/2987/greenways-management-model-consortium/</p> <p>GP Description:</p> <p><i>The Consortium of the Greenways of the Region of Murcia was created in 2003, of an administrative nature and with full legal personality,</i></p> <p><i>The main task of the Entity will be that the old disused railway lines come to life, not only as generators of environmental, natural, cultural, tourist or religious activities, but also as an engine and regional socioeconomic revulsive. In this sense, both initiatives for the preservation and enhancement of the Greenways are undertaken, as well as actions that allow enhancing its aspect of territorial dynamism and cohesion. This association between conservation and socioeconomic dynamization allows the creation of new work and business opportunities.</i></p> <p>PP2 aims to learn from this model by establishing a similar Forum in Ireland which facilitates the collaboration of Local Authorities and communities in different counties (municipalities). PP2 will work with PP2 and The Consortium of the Greenways of the Region of Murcia to establish the key challenges and benefits of establishing a consortium of this nature. During Phase 2 of the</p>

	project, PP2 aims to visit the Region of Murcia to assess the implementation of this action
Players Involved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Authorities (City and County Councils) in the Region <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ (Galway City, Galway County, Roscommon, Leitrim, Sligo, Donegal, Monaghan, Mayo and Cavan). • Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport • Department of Public Expenditure and Reform • Fáilte Ireland • Waterways Ireland • Sport Ireland
Timeline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submission to ESIF Consultation - <u>Complete</u> • Identify Funding needs with Stakeholders: <u>June 2020 – February 2021</u> • Consultation with Department of Transport and Department of Public Expenditure and Reform on ROP 2021-2027 - <u>December 2020 – April 2021</u>
Costs	<p>NWRA and Stakeholder's Staff time and travel expenses</p> <p>Meeting Room hire for hosting Regional Forum meetings and site visits.</p>
Funding Sources	Funded by the NWRA and stakeholder's existing annual budget. Meeting room hire costs funded by Local Authorities (City and County Councils)
Implementation and Monitoring	The progress of Action 1 of phase 2 of the OUR WAY project will be monitored through Quarterly Meetings with Regional Stakeholders sharing inputs and progress reviews. This will directly feed into the monitoring tool. Activities and targets will also be reviewed in light of opportunities that emerge, prevailing regional circumstances, proposed policy improvements, etc. Opportunities to further influence /improve policy from ROP perspective and at national, regional and local level will be discussed, and actions agreed as appropriate.

Action 3 - Have plans for Greenways included in County Development Plans

<p>Rationale</p>	<p>From 2018 – 2020 the Northern and Western Regional Assembly has been developing the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the region. This strategy aims to provide regional level strategic planning and economic policy in support of the implementation of the National Planning Framework and provide a greater level of focus around the National Policy Objectives and National Strategic Outcomes of the NPF. Included in the Strategy is a section on the value and strategy to develop significant greenways of scale across the region. The adoption and publication of the Regional Strategy means that each Local Authority (County Council) will now review and update each County & City Development Plan.</p> <p>This action aims to encourage and promote the development of greenways by making a recommendation to Local Authorities to include a plan or strategy for developing and funding Greenways in the new County Development Plans.</p>
<p>Action Description</p>	<p>The action will involve a series of meetings and presentations by staff at the Northern and Western Regional assembly with planners, engineers, and Directors in each of the Local Authorities working on the new County Development Plan.</p> <p>While many Local Authorities will already have references or plans for Greenways in previous County Development plans, by aligning the strategy to development of Greenways within the RSES will ensure a consistent approach across National, Regional and Local Policy.</p>
<p>Learning from OUR WAY project</p>	<p>Cooperation of The Eastern Poland Regions With The Promotion Of The Eastern Cycling Trail Green Velo. https://www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning/good-practices/item/2649/cooperation-of-the-eastern-poland-regions-with-the-promotion-of-the-eastern-cycling-trail-green-velo/</p> <p>The partnership cooperation of 5 regions of Eastern Poland (EP) is to serve the development of a tourist product which is the Eastern Bicycle Trail-Green Velo-the first Polish tourist product on such a large scale (over 2000 km route). Maintaining uniform standards for this network product requires cooperation and integration of</p>

	activities between many stakeholders. Cooperation takes place on many levels, including on the interregional level.
Players Involved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NWRA – Regional Planners • Cavan County Council • Donegal County Council • Leitrim County Council • Mayo County Council • Monaghan County Council • Galway City Council • Galway County Council • Sligo County Council • Roscommon County Council
Timeline	January 2021 – December 2021 Meeting with each Local Authority to review County Development plan
Costs	NWRA and Stakeholder’s Staff time and travel expenses
Funding Sources	Funded by the NWRA and stakeholder’s existing annual budget. Meeting room hire costs funded by Local Authorities (City and County Councils)
Implementation and Monitoring	Staff at the NWRA will monitor the progress and updates of the County Development Plans through quarterly meetings. Regional Planners and planners within each Local Authority will monitor the implementation of this Action.

The Northern and Western Regional Assembly is the Managing Authority for the Regional Operational Programme in the Border, Midland and Western Region of Ireland.

On behalf of the Northern and Western Regional Assembly, I would like to confirm our support for the three actions indicated in this Action Plan, developed through the OUR WAY project.

We agree, where appropriate, to promote and give assistance to the delivery and implementation of the projects and other activities as detailed in the OUR WAY Action Plan.

I confirm that I have the required authorisation of to do so and that the required authorisation process of has been duly carried out.

On behalf of:

Signed: _____

Name: _____

Position in Organisation: _____

Date: _____