

# **Briefing for the Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement Update on Shared Island Initiative**

**5 March 2024**

The Government is taking forward the Shared Island initiative to work with all communities for a shared future, underpinned by the Good Friday Agreement.

This involves:

- unprecedented all-island investment, through the €1billion Shared Island Fund;
- engaging with all communities on how practically we better share the island; and,
- providing a stronger evidence base and analysis of the whole island through research.

The initiative is taken forward on a whole-of-Government basis by Ministers and their Departments, coordinated through the Shared Island unit in the Department of the Taoiseach.

## **Shared Island Fund:**

The Government in the Programme for Government and revised National Development Plan (2021- 2030) set out a significantly-enhanced level of ambition for collaborative all-island investment. The goal is a more connected, sustainable and prosperous island for all communities.

This is backed by a total all-island investment commitment of more than €3.5billion out to 2030, through the Government's Shared Island Fund; Project Ireland 2040 funds; resourcing for North/South cooperation; and the PEACEPLUS programme, delivered with the European Union, UK Government and Northern Ireland Executive.

The Shared Island Fund - with a commitment of at least €1billion out to 2030 - is ringfenced funding to enable delivery of all-island investment commitments and objectives. Shared Island Fund projects are taken forward by Ministers and their Departments, working through all-island partnerships, including with counterparts in Northern Ireland and the UK Government and with local authorities, educational institutions and civil society.

## *Latest announcements:*

On 20 February, the Government confirmed a range of funding commitments of over €800 million for all-island projects representing the largest ever package of Government funding for cross-border investments.

The Government committed €600 million to the A5 North-West transport corridor and is also advancing work on linked road projects, including the N2 Clontibret to the border and Donegal TEN-T upgrades in 2024.

The Government also agreed allocations from the Shared Island Fund:

- To build the landmark Narrow Water Bridge connecting the Cooley Peninsula in Louth to the Mourne Mountains in Down, and to complete the Carlingford Greenway, boosting tourism and transport links in the east border region;
- €50 million to a redeveloped Casement Park in Belfast, creating a high-quality sports stadium which can also host matches as part of the EURO2028 tournament;
- €12.5 million to increase to hourly the frequency of the rail service between Belfast and Dublin;

- €10 million to renew the visitor experience at the Battle of the Boyne site to reflect its unique historic significance to communities North and South;
- To develop pilot cooperation schemes by enterprise agencies (up to €30 million) and on education (up to €24 million); and,
- To move ahead with work with the Astronomical Observatories of Ireland on how the heritage and tourism value of its three sites at Dunsink, Armagh, and Birr can be harnessed.

The Government had previously allocated almost €250m from the Shared Island Fund, including €44.5m for construction of a new teaching building at Ulster University in Derry and €47m to move forward with the Ulster Canal restoration.

The Government will work with the new Northern Ireland Executive and with the British Government to progress these Shared Island investment priorities over the coming years.

Further details of the 20 February funding commitments are at Annex I, and a full list of Shared Island Fund allocations made by Government to date is in Annex II.

All Departments continue to develop potential projects, in consultation with counterparts in Northern Ireland, the UK Government and a wide range of stakeholders, North and South.

### **Shared Island Research:**

The purpose of the Shared Island research programme is to provide high-quality evidence and analysis on the opportunities and the challenges around deepening cooperation and connections on the island.

The Shared Island unit in the Department of the Taoiseach is working with the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), Irish Research Council (IRC), National Economic and Social Council (NESC), Standing Conference on Teacher Education North and South (SCoTENS), and other partners.

The programme is providing a stronger evidence-base and rigorous analysis to inform inclusive civic and political discussion on a shared future on the island of Ireland.

More than 30 reports have been published so far, and are available at [gov.ie/sharedisland/research](https://gov.ie/sharedisland/research).

### **Dialogue and engagement:**

Inclusive dialogue with all communities and political traditions is central to the Government's Shared Island approach.

#### *Shared Island Forum:*

The Taoiseach set out the Government's priorities for the initiative in 2024, [in a keynote address](#) to the [3rd Shared Island Forum](#) on 8 February. Over 200 political, civic, community and economic stakeholders from across the island of Ireland attended. The Forum featured panel sessions on the Shared Island Youth Forum, on projects supported by the Government's Shared Island Fund, and on opportunities to cooperate on strategic challenges and opportunities for the island of Ireland in the years ahead.

Coinciding with the Forum, a report '[Shared Island Initiative 2023 - Action on a Shared Future](#)' was published by the Department of the Taoiseach setting out how the Government has taken forward its commitment to engage with all communities and traditions to build a shared future on the island, underpinned by the Good Friday Agreement.

*Shared Island Dialogue series:*

Over the last three years, the Shared Island dialogue series has brought together more than 3,500 citizens and civic representatives to discuss how cooperation and interaction can help address challenges and take up opportunities that concern and connect the whole island.

The dialogue series has sought to include as broad a range of experience and perspective as possible, including traditionally underrepresented voices in the Peace Process of women, young people and ethnic minority communities on the island.

Through the series, the Government is listening to people's views on a range of common concerns, on how we can work across communities and borders for a shared future, in practical, meaningful ways.

In 2023, Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Micheál Martin TD convened a dialogue on *Accommodating national identities* in October, co-hosted with the Abbey Theatre and attendance by over 300 civic representatives. A dialogue was held in June on *Education systems and connecting communities* co-hosted with the DCU Institute of Education and with participation by education stakeholders and political representatives from across the island, including the Chair of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement Fergus O'Dowd TD. A Dialogue was held in April on *Media representation of the island of Ireland* at the Convention Centre Dublin.

Reports and video summaries from the dialogue series are at [gov.ie/sharedisland/dialogues](https://gov.ie/sharedisland/dialogues).

*Shared Island Youth Forum:*

In September 2023, the [Shared Island Youth Forum](#) was launched, bringing together 80 young people aged 18 to 25 from across the island, reflecting gender, ethnic, community, faith and other identity diversities.

Taoiseach Leo Varadkar TD met with the Forum in Dublin on 7 December 2023 to discuss its work so far, and members' ambitions for the outcome statement to be published in 2024. Members of the Youth Forum also spoke at a panel discussion during the Third Shared Island Forum in Dublin Castle on 8 February 2024.

The Forum has met seven times to date, and is considering the themes of opportunity, sustainability, equality, wellbeing, and culture and identity. The Forum will produce an outcome statement on their vision and values for a shared future on the island of Ireland, underpinned by the Good Friday Agreement.

The Forum's statement will inform development of the Shared Island initiative and contribute to broader discussions on a shared future for all communities on the island of Ireland.

*Shared Island unit, Department of the Taoiseach, 5 March 2024*

## **Annex I:**

### **Information on Government Shared Island investment commitments announced on 20 February 2024**

#### **A5 North-West transport corridor and progressing the related N2 Clontibret and TEN-T upgrade in Donegal - €600m:**

- The Government has since the St. Andrew's Agreement in 2006 affirmed a funding commitment to the A5 North-West transport corridor, to provide a connection for and to the North-West of the island. The specified funding commitment has varied over subsequent years and the project remained at planning stage in Northern Ireland.
- The Department of Infrastructure in Northern Ireland has recently confirmed that the A5 scheme has received a final public inquiry report from the Planning Appeals Commission. Subject to the successful completion of the statutory processes and securing of funding, a decision to proceed could be taken for construction to commence before the end of 2024.
- Given the significance of the A5 scheme – and of the related Donegal TEN-T and N2 Clontibret upgrades – for the North-West region and for cross-border connectivity on the island; and the scope for the project to proceed in Northern Ireland, the Government has agreed a commitment to the A5 road upgrade project of up to €600m towards its costs along with progressing of planning and design work on the related N2 Clontibret and Donegal TEN-T schemes .
- Confirmation of the Government's funding commitment is intended to support the project in proceeding as soon as possible, alongside confirmation of funding from other sources by the NI Department of Infrastructure.

#### **Contribution to the construction of a redeveloped Casement Park in Belfast as part of the joint hosting by Ireland and the UK of the UEFA EURO2028 tournament - €50m:**

- The Government has committed €50m through the Shared Island Fund to contribute to construction of a redeveloped Casement Park in Belfast as a landmark sports infrastructure project and to host games as part of the EURO2028 tournament.
- Ireland will jointly host the UEFA EURO2028 Championship with the UK and this presents a wonderful opportunity to showcase the UK and Ireland and our world-class tourism and sports offering to Europe and the wider world. The inclusion of Casement Park as part of the joint Ireland-UK winning bid to host the UEFA EURO2028 championship has the support of the five football associations and all partners, including both Governments.
- The redevelopment project is owned and managed by the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) Ulster Council in cooperation with the Northern Ireland authorities, who are working to bring together an overall funding package to deliver the redeveloped stadium.
- The Government's funding contribution will be agreed by the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media with the GAA and progressed in cooperation with NI and UK counterparts.
- Consistent with the Government's policy on funding for large scale sports infrastructure, principles for funding of the project will be agreed such that it is accessible to and will benefit a range of sports, is operated to facilitate equality, diversity and inclusion in sport, including supporting cross-community relationships in Northern Ireland and across the island.

**Introduction of an hourly-frequency rail service between Belfast and Dublin - €12.5m:**

- Introduction of an hourly-frequency rail service on the Dublin-Belfast line is an agreed priority for both Administrations. An hourly service will double current frequency and significantly enhance sustainable transport connectivity between the two largest cities on the island, and be a catalyst for economic and social connections throughout the Dublin Belfast economic corridor region and across the island.
- €12.5m is being allocated from the Shared Island Fund, with match funding from the Department of Transport, to meet the total cost of introducing of an hourly-frequency rail service between Belfast and Dublin over an initial three-year period.
- The additional resourcing will allow for increased capacity for Iarnród Éireann and Translink NI with their respective fleet networks. The increased service will be introduced progressively with an hourly-frequency service expected to be fully in place by Q1 2025.
- The increased service frequency is aligned with the objective under the revised National Development Plan, with the provision under the PEACEPLUS programme for investment in new sustainable rolling stock on the Dublin-Belfast line, and with recommendations of the draft All-Island Strategic Rail Review.

**Construction of the Narrow Water Bridge:**

- The Narrow Water Bridge will link the Mourne Mountains and Cooley peninsula, providing huge tourism and connectivity boosts in the east border region, and acting as an enabler for improved cross-border active travel and recreation activities including the development of greenways, walking trails and park amenities. The bridge is a longstanding commitment of the Government reflected in the Programme for Government and the 2020 *New Decade New Approach* Agreement.
- Planning permission is in place for a distinctive 280m cable-stayed bridge, anchored by two towers at either end, with segregated car, cycle and pedestrian lanes. The bridge will connect the A2 Newry to Warrenpoint dual carriageway with the R173 Omeath and open to allow for passage of boats through and on to the Newry Canal.
- A tender process for the main construction works contract for the project was conducted by Louth County Council in 2023, in accordance with the Public Spending Code, overseen by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage in consultation with the Department for Infrastructure in Northern Ireland.  
Louth County Council will proceed with the final steps in the procurement process and expect to award the contract to the successful bidder in H1 2024. Delivery of the project will be overseen by a Project Board, chaired by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

**Major investment in a renewed visitor experience of the Battle of the Boyne site - €10m:**

- The Government has confirmed a major investment in the development a renewed visitor experience for the Battle of the Boyne site as a priority to raise the heritage and tourism profile of the site which has unique historic and community significance on the island. A commitment of €10m from the Shared Island Fund has been made as part of the overall funding package for the project, once finalised. This work will be taken forward by the Office of Public Works (OPW) based on a Conservation Management Plan for the site and in consultation with communities North and South.
- Oldbridge Estate was purchased by the State in 2000, due to its national significance as the site of the historic Battle of the Boyne. Following extensive renovation and development, the Battle of the Boyne Visitor Centre, located in Oldbridge House, opened to the public in summer 2008.

- In 2022, an updated Conservation Management Plan was commissioned by OPW, and is now completed. This plan aims to present and sensitively interpret the Battle of the Boyne site. The future development of the site will be guided by the Plan, including:
  - o Ensuring overall conservation and protection of the site;
  - o consideration of potential for deepening North-South community interaction and advancing reconciliation.
  - o Contributing to the tourism and economic agenda for Meath and south Louth.
- In 2022, the Estate welcomed close to 500,000 visitors, and the Visitor Centre in the house welcomed some 40,000 visitors to the exhibition. The OPW will lead work to expand the offering for visitors to the Estate even further in the coming years.

#### **Shared Island enterprise scheme - up to €30m:**

- InterTradeIreland, Enterprise Ireland and Invest Northern Ireland, in consultation with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and the Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland, will develop a scheme for cooperation by the agencies on a collaborative cross-border basis and consistent with each agency's remit.
- The Government has made an allocation in principle of up to €30m for development of a scheme to focus on promoting female entrepreneurship; cross-border networks and clusters; and sustainability and innovation investment.
- The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment in consultation with the Department for the Economy (NI) will oversee the further development of the scheme, and subject to Ministerial agreement in both Administrations, will commence in late 2024.

#### **Pilot cooperation on educational attainment - up to €24m:**

- As part of existing cooperation, the Department of Education and Department of Education in Northern Ireland will work to develop and introduce a pilot cooperation programme on educational underachievement.
- The Government has made an allocation in principle of up to €24m for a pilot cooperation programme in 2024 and 2025 to comprise elements on teachers' research exchange, creativity in schools, and supports to address educational underachievement.
- The cooperation programme will be further developed by the Departments of Education in Ireland and Northern Ireland and commence, subject to Ministerial agreement in both Administrations. If agreed, the programme will be continued in 2026 and 2027 with additional resourcing through the Shared Island Fund.

#### **Completion of the cross-border Carlingford Greenway - €1.5m:**

- The Shared Island Fund will provide a €1.5m contribution to enable the completion of an outstanding element of the cross-border Carlingford Greenway, a 1.6km boardwalk structure outside Newry. Funding is also being provided by the Department for Infrastructure in Northern Ireland and other sections of the Greenway are supported under the INTERREG VA programme.
- The project is overseen by the Department of Transport, working with Louth County Council and Newry, Mourne and Down District Council in consultation with the Department for Infrastructure in Northern Ireland.
- This project aligns with the objective under the National Development Plan to create an island-wide border region greenway network from the Atlantic coast to the Eastern seaboard, and the Department of Transport are actively exploring potential approaches to link existing border-region greenway routes to develop a transformational green infrastructure asset for residents and to grow sustainable tourism.

**UNESCO World Heritage status for transboundary sites:**

- The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (National Monuments Service) is working with the Astronomical Observatories of Ireland (AOI) - a partnership of Dunsink Observatory, the Armagh Observatory and Planetarium, and Birr Scientific and Heritage Foundation - to support a UNESCO World Heritage status bid as a transboundary property and feasibility work on how to harness the unique, connected scientific and built heritage value of the three sites in the years ahead.
- The National Monuments Service is also continuing to support the trans-boundary World Heritage Property bid of The Royal Sites of Ireland (including Eamhain Macha/Navan Fort in Armagh) which was included on Ireland's World Heritage Tentative List in 2021.

## Annex II: Shared Island Fund allocations as of March 2024

Shared Island Civic Society Fund contribution - €2m (total €3m fund including D/FA contribution). <i>Taken forward by the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs</i>
Development of two new all-island bioeconomy demonstrator facilities - €7m <i>Taken forward by the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine</i>
Two-year pilot programme to deepen cooperation on educational underachievement - €24m <i>Taken forward by the Minister for Education</i>
Shared Island Enterprise scheme - €30m <i>Taken forward by the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment</i>
Shared Island dimension to Community Climate Action Programme - €3m <i>Taken forward by the Minister for Environment, Climate and Communications</i>
North South Research Programme contribution (funding rounds 1 and 2, 2022-2027) - €50m <i>Taken forward by the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science</i>
Ulster University - new teaching and student services building in Derry - €44.5m <i>Taken forward by the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research Innovation and Science</i>
All-Island Co-Centres for Research and Innovation contribution - €20m <i>Taken forward by the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science</i>
Construction of respite and therapeutic centre for children diagnosed with cancer from across the island - €2.5m <i>Taken forward by the Minister for Health</i>
Tender and construction of the Narrow Water Bridge <i>Taken forward by the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage</i>
Phases 2 and 3 of the Ulster Canal restoration contribution - €47m <i>Taken forward by the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage</i>
Cross-border innovation hub - €12m <i>Taken forward by the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage</i>
All-island biodiversity actions on peatlands restoration and biosecurity - €11m <i>Taken forward by the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage</i>
Shared Island Local Authority development funding scheme - €5m <i>Taken forward by the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage</i>
Renewed visitor experience at the Battle of the Boyne site - €10m <i>Taken forward by the Minister of State with responsibility for the Office of Public Works</i>
Redevelopment of Casement Park - €50m <i>Taken forward by the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media</i>



<p>Shared Island dimension to Creative Ireland and cultural heritage projects - €8m</p> <p><i>Taken forward by the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media</i></p>
<p>Cross-border tourism brand collaboration and marketing initiative - €7.6m</p> <p><i>Taken forward by the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media</i></p>
<p>All-Island arts capital investment projects - €7.4m</p> <p><i>Taken forward by the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media</i></p>
<p>Electric Vehicle charging point scheme for Sports Clubs across the island - €15m</p> <p><i>Taken forward by the Minister for Transport</i></p>
<p>Introduction of an hourly rail service between Dublin and Belfast - €12.5m</p> <p><i>Taken forward by the Minister for Transport</i></p>
<p>Completion of the cross-border Carlingford Lough Greenway - €1.5m</p> <p><i>Taken forward by the Minister for Transport</i></p>