

Midland Regional Transition Team and Just Transition Fund

Background & Information

Background:

The Midlands Regional Transition Team (MRTT) was established in response to the acceleration of Bord na Mona's decarbonisation programme and the closure of 21 active bogs and the two power stations in Offaly and Longford. The establishment of the MRTT was under the auspices of the Midland Regional Enterprise Plan and was established to fulfil two objectives:

1. Pursue funding opportunities to mitigate BNM job losses – impact on individuals and region
2. Position region to attract investment and secure alternative employment opportunities

Initial membership of the MRTT at this time comprised:

- Local Authority Senior Management Team Members from: Laois, Longford, Offaly, Westmeath, Roscommon & Kildare
- Local Dáil Deputies
- Bord na Móna, ESB, ICTU Representatives
- Office of Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan
- Regional and local representatives from IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, LEOs, Local Development Companies
- Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection
- Regional Skills Forum
- Athlone Institute of Technology
- Education and Training Boards
- Chambers of Commerce
- Eastern and Midlands Climate Action Regional Office (CARO)

Working under four distinct pillars the, the MRTT were successful in pursuing the following:

1. Securing special status

- Acceptance of Midlands Region into EU Coal Regions in Transition Platform & START programme.
- Budget 2020: Government Commitment for Just Transition Fund (6M and 5M pledged by ESB), Bog rehabilitation fund (5M), and Deep Retrofit Housing Programme (20M)
- Liaising with NESC on Transition Paper
- Presenting to Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Change, November 2019

2. Addressing the needs of employees

- DEASP, Intreo lead Clinics with Educational Training Boards (ETB) & Regional Skills Forum in communities to assist employees in December 2018- March 2019

- Skills, Education, Jobs Fair & Idea Generation Bootcamp held in Mount Lucas Training Centre, May 2019
- ETB and Regional Skills Forum collaboration leading to EXPLORE initiative for employees - upskilling programme, 2019
- Athlone Institute of Technology and Regional Skills Forum delivering springboard courses for employees under Voluntary Redundancy schemes 2019/2020 and 2020/2021
- Skills audits held in communities to assist employees in December 2019 and January 2020
- ETB Courses commenced - including Near Zero Energy Build (NZEB) training and bog rehabilitation Certificates.

3. Emerging opportunities from property portfolio

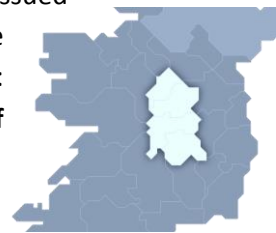
- Research and feasibility studies for new business undertaken by BnM including birchwater in Longford, herb and aquaculture trials in Offaly and for and Energy park in the region
- Feasibility for potential to develop Lough Boora Discovery Park into an Eco Tourism Destination

4. Marketing the Region

- National Conference on economic opportunities from Climate Change with Office of Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan, Offaly County Council and the Eastern and Midlands Climate Action Regional Office, October 2019
- Regional and principal town profiles developed for the Midlands

Just Transition Commissioner:

Mr. Kieran Mulvey was appointed as Just Transition Commissioner, with a full Terms of Reference, in November 2019 and published his first progress report in April 2020. The report outlined observations of the situation and work ongoing by the MRTT, issued recommendations and set out pathway for strategic implementation. The region impacted was clearly defined with the term 'wider Midlands' including: **Laois, Longford, Offaly, Westmeath with the impacted communities of Roscommon & Galway (East Galway), Kildare and Tipperary (Littleton).**



Key recommendation of the report called for restructuring of the MRTT, to reflect wider Midlands area and to establish working groups based on four key areas:

- Education & Training/Research
- Employment generation committee
- Employment Continuity Pathways
- Community Assistance Programme/ Social Enterprise Interventions

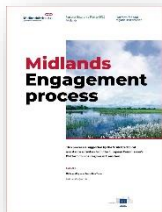
Implementation focuses attention on particular areas including:

- Budget 2020 Funds – Just Transition Fund, Retrofitting, NPWS Rehabilitation Programme
- Governments Detailed Implementation Plan – June 2020
- Carbon Tax Revenues, request of additional funds and Incentives to go green
- Infrastructure – broadband, EV charging

- Whole of Midlands Strategic Approach
- Strategic Partnerships of State Assets
- Climate Change Centre/ Eden Project

Scope for projects and Just Transition Fund:

Midland Engagement Process:



In May and June 2020, a Midlands Engagement process was facilitated by the MRTT with the assistance of the EU Coal Regions in Transition Platform & START programme. This was a scoping exercise to establish the nature and extent of private, public and community projects that may be feasible to assist with the just transition process. 154 projects registered with sectoral opportunities identified in areas such as

- Tourism / Culture and Heritage
 - Greenways, Blueways, enhancement of existing infrastructure
- Green and clean technologies
- Remote working / co-working / locationless jobs
- Agriculture
- Circular economy
- Training / Upskilling / Capacity Building

This process informed the criteria for the Just Transition Fund set by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment.

Just Transition Fund



The Just Transition Fund 2020 is a dedicated fund of €11m, financed by Government through an allocation of €6m from an increase in the carbon tax and an additional €5 million committed by ESB. The fund is administered directly by the newly titled Department of Environment, Climate and Communication. Applications that were previously registered to the Midlands Engagement process were invited under three priority areas:

- Priority 1: Employment and Enterprise Supports
- Priority 2: Training Supports
- Priority 3: Community Transitioning Supports

The closing date for receipt of applications was 17th July 2020

16 projects received a strand 1 Letter of Offer for less than €100,000 and evaluations remains ongoing for projects with a value of between €100k to €1M.

Of the 16 projects, the following 5 will have some relevance in Kildare:

Applicant	Project Title	Relevant Counties
Enterprise Ireland	Mide	Kildare, Laois, Offaly, Westmeath
Ballycommon Telework & Training Centre CLG	Training Workshop	Kildare, Laois, Offaly, Westmeath
Umeras Community Development	Umeras Peatlands Park: Design Study	Kildare, Laois, Offaly
Peatland Biodiversity Board Walk 4 th Final Phase	Lullymore	Kildare
RR Power Projects	Polysafe	Kildare, Laois, Longford, Offaly, Westmeath

MRTT new governance arrangements

Work is ongoing at present to fulfil the recommendations of the Just Transitioner on the reconfiguration of the MRTT. The revised structures provide for a high level MRTT Steering Group and four working groups:

- Education, training, research
- Employment generation
- Employment Continuity Pathways
- Community assistance / social enterprise interventions

The steering group and working groups are being convened currently (September and October 2020).

Establishment and Membership of the MRTT Steering group includes:

- 8 Chief Executives representing all counties identified in the region
- 8 Cathaoirleach representing all counties identified in the region
- Oireachtas members
- Just Transition Commissioner
- Bord na Mona
- ESB
- ICTU representatives
- 3 x Regional Assembly
