

19/09/2026

Phillip Brett,

Chairman, Committee for the Economy,

Room 349, Parliament Buildings,

Stormont,

Belfast BT4 3XX

Dear Chairman,

Thank you for inviting responses to the proposed Regional Balance Private Members Bill.

There is a clear pattern in the investing of resources in Northern Ireland with an acceleration of Public investment in the Greater Belfast area over the past 15-20 years. While it is accepted economic practice to concentrate resources in areas of expertise, the Higher Civil Service has continued to ignore rural Northern Ireland in Investment decisions. If one takes the town of Enniskillen and County of Fermanagh this can be seen in on the one hand a loss of public service jobs and infrastructure and a corresponding Investment in the Greater Belfast Area. The net effect has been a steady flow of students and young people to leave the rural areas to pursue studies and employment opportunities. This can be seen in the following categories:

1 Infrastructure_

RAIL

In common with the rest of N Ireland and Ireland, County Fermanagh was left a rich Railway legacy by the Victorians and Enniskillen was the fulcrum of an extensive railway system which linked, Sligo, Derry, Belfast and Dublin. This was all closed down in 1957. The Shared Island Fund now seeks to redevelop parts of the old network except that County Fermanagh is entirely excluded. This has been endorsed by John O'Dowd, the Sinn Féin Economy Minister who travelled specially to Enniskillen to tell the locals that he had decided to exclude County Fermanagh in a remarkable piece of political punditry. It makes no sense and Fermanagh should be included with all the other Counties if and when the expansion comes to pass.

ROAD

The County network does not contain one stretch of Dual Carriageway never mind Motorway. The stretch from Ballygawley to Enniskillen is as twisty and turny as ever with a high rate of accidents and increased costs to all the citizens in travelling for work, education, Medical appointments, Business, sport and leisure. It is high time the Ballygawley – Enniskillen road was brought up to Dual-Carriageway standard.

AIR

No use is made of St Angelo Airport which is a small ready to use Airport. In ROI the Government provides Regional subventions to enable small airports to provide services from Regions to the large centres of population.

2. EDUCATION

South West College has a state-of art building but limited educational opportunities. Clearly more could be done to deliver some Higher Education locally. An example would be a link with the SWAH hospital and the training of Nurses and ancillary services. The Training of Post Grad Doctors at Magee could help to address perceived shortages of Staff at SWAH. These Doctors who have just qualified need to be directed where they are most use.

3.MEDICINE

The tenure of the Western Trust has been a disaster for Fermanagh and West Tyrone. There is no natural constituency with Altnagelvin. The Patients are put through an unnessessary and stressful procedure when all they want is to receive timely care at their local hospital for a large number of ailments which are non-acute. It should be possible to get treated for a hernia, appendicitis or receive a stent in your local hospital and not subjected to endless travelling ,worry and frustration. There must be a better and cheaper way of doing things and the local population are entitled to equity of treatment. Belfast has three acute hospitals within a few miles. No one there would be asked to travel 70 miles for treatment.

4.EMPLOYMENT

In the mid-1970's Enniskillen had three or four thriving factories employing in excess of 2000 people .This brought jobs and prosperity to the region. One by one they all closed .A BT call centre had supported over 300 well-paying jobs up until recently. It appears that the Department of Commerce had provided grant aid to BT to develop its headquarters in Belfast at the expense of Enniskillen. Another closure was the local tax office which for years supported over 100 well-paid jobs. Nothing has replaced these jobs and Invest NI has entirely failed to deliver any employment or growth for the region.

5 LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Local Government is not working for the area. If it is to employ the current workforce, it needs more to do. It could easily take over roles from DFI and EA. The senior staff are paid six figure sums to do very little. Anything the Council takes on it makes worse. It has taken over tourism for the district but has achieved little or nothing.

Despite not getting a fair amount of public expenditure the Fermanagh region is resilient and has a number of enterprising people and businesses. They are all entitled to equal treatment and not be punished for where they choose to live. Things can be done differently without spending a lot more money but it needs a change in mindset in Government and higher Civil Service.

Yours faithfully

