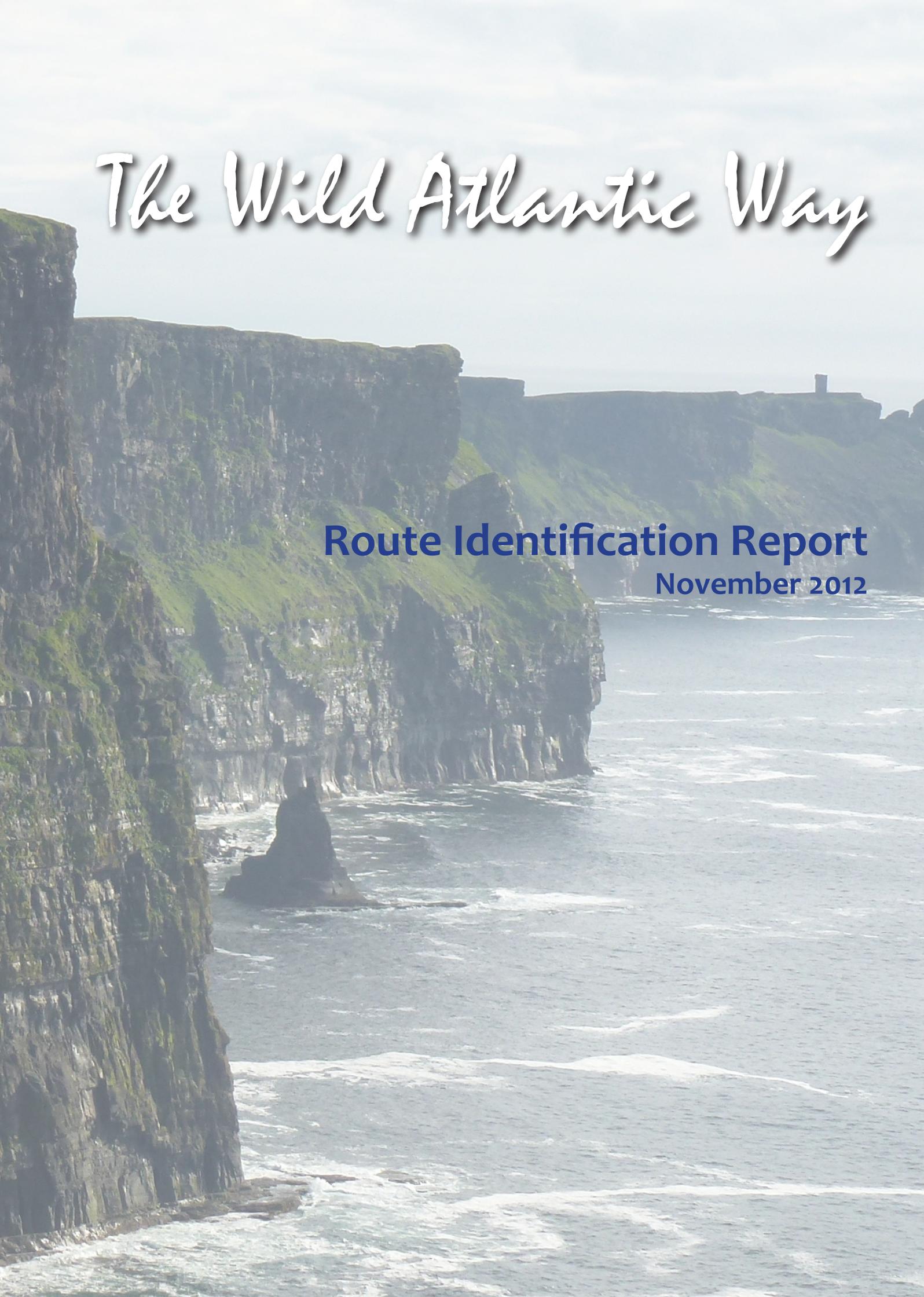


The Wild Atlantic Way



Route Identification Report
November 2012





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i THE WILD ATLANTIC WAY

The Wild Atlantic Way is an exciting new project which involves the development of a visitor journey along the Atlantic coast of Ireland from Donegal to West Cork. The central objective is to develop a coastal route of sufficient scale and singularity to achieve greater visibility for the west coast of Ireland in overseas markets. The ambition of the project is that it will be ranked alongside the great driving routes of the world, such as the Great Ocean Road in Australia and the Garden Route in South Africa, and become a 'must-do' experience in Europe. Its success will rely on the quality of the visitor experience, and the extent to which it can deliver on the brand promise of the Wild Atlantic Way.

In parallel with its work on the design of the route, Fáilte Ireland is also developing a clear proposition and brand identity for the Wild Atlantic Way. That work will result in a clear understanding of the market for this type of experience, what it needs to deliver for the visitor, together with a brand identity and logo. This work has helped us to identify the route for the Wild Atlantic Way, which is the focus of this report.

Initially, we are identifying the spine of the route – the single route that will lead the visitor along the Atlantic coast. Later in 2013, we will supplement this experience by identifying loops off the spine which will encourage visitors to circulate within the wider destinations along the west coast.

The Wild Atlantic Way will be a journey between County Cork and County Donegal. In the main, it will be purposeful, not deviating greatly from the general direction of the coast, nor looping or doubling back on itself, unless there is no alternative. The core proposition for the Wild Atlantic Way is Ireland's west coast. Where there are alternative routes, the coastal one should prevail over an inland route, even if the inland route is of exceptional quality. The route will allow travellers to see and be introduced to many outstanding aspects of the Atlantic coastline as an attraction in its own right, and as such its presentation must be of the highest standard.

As a long distance driving route, the Wild Atlantic Way will provide the introduction to some of Ireland's most incredible experiences, its coastline, seascapes, history, culture and people. The route will encourage, entice and inspire travellers to explore and engage with these areas, making them eager to journey further. Their spirit of adventure will drive them to seek new experiences as they travel.

While the cities and large towns along the route and close to it are very important service centres and accommodation hubs, they are not viewed as central to the core Wild Atlantic Way experience, which is all about experiencing the Wild Atlantic coast. However, these larger settlements play a very important supporting role, catering for the needs of visitors and offering a wide range of things for them to see and do. Some of these cities and larger towns have been identified as very important gateways to the Wild Atlantic Way. These settlements will also feature in all relevant marketing material for the Wild Atlantic Way.

The Wild Atlantic Way is a work in progress. It is at an early stage of development and there is still a lot to do before it is ready to be launched. At this stage, we are identifying the spine of the route and that is the focus of this report. In 2013 we will move to identify loops off the route.

ii FURTHER STAGES OF THE WILD ATLANTIC WAY PROJECT

The project is currently at Stage 2 which is the Route Identification stage. There are five stages to the project, as follows:

Stage 1: Market Research, Brand Proposition and Identity.

Stage 2: Identification of the spine of the route.

Stage 3: Way-finding strategy (including the preparation of a signage plan for the route).

Stage 4: Interpretation and Infrastructure Plans for sections of the route, including the design of Discovery Points. Identification of the loops off the main route for each destination.

Stage 5: Development and implementation of the Marketing and Communications Plan.

Stages 1 and 2 are due for completion by the end of 2012, while Stages 3, 4 and 5 will be completed by mid-2014. It is also hoped to have the directional signage in place by mid-2014. However, the infrastructural element of Stage 4, including the construction of Discovery Points, will take place over the next five to ten years, depending on the availability of funding.

This project also requires a considerable amount of trade and community engagement to ensure its success. This work will begin in early 2013.

iii THE PURPOSE OF THE ROUTE SPINE

The overall project aim is to identify a spine which provides the richest wild Atlantic experience for the visitor. The route should:

- provide an unbroken link for motorists from County Cork to County Donegal;
- ensure that the overall brand proposition is not diluted by the incorporation of other national and regional assets which do not have resonance with the wild Atlantic;
- be navigable in its entirety by cars, motor homes, bicycles and motorbikes;
- be navigable in the main by buses and coaches;
- be easily accessible locally, regionally and nationally;
- be navigable from end-to-end, but equally enjoyed in sections;
- have a range of places to stop along it, from the globally recognised to the locally interesting, appropriately distributed to ensure that the route remains engaging over its length, no matter where someone joins or leaves it;
- provide an introduction to the area around it, encouraging people to spend time in and explore a specific area in more detail;
- provide opportunities for people to visit specific attractions, use the full spectrum of accommodation, eat, shop and enjoy cultural experiences.

iv THE OVERALL FRAMEWORK OF THE ROUTE

The following outlines the elements in the route framework which comprise this report:

1. Wild Atlantic Way Brand Proposition
2. International Arrival Points
3. Regional Gateways
4. Wild Atlantic Way Spine
5. Wild Atlantic Way Destinations
6. Wild Atlantic Way Discovery Points (on the Spine)

1. WILD ATLANTIC WAY BRAND PROPOSITION

The Proposition and Brand Identity are currently being developed for Fáilte Ireland by Colliers International. The purpose of this work is to develop a clear focus about what the Wild Atlantic Way is about, what market segments it is being aimed at, and what experiences it needs to deliver on.

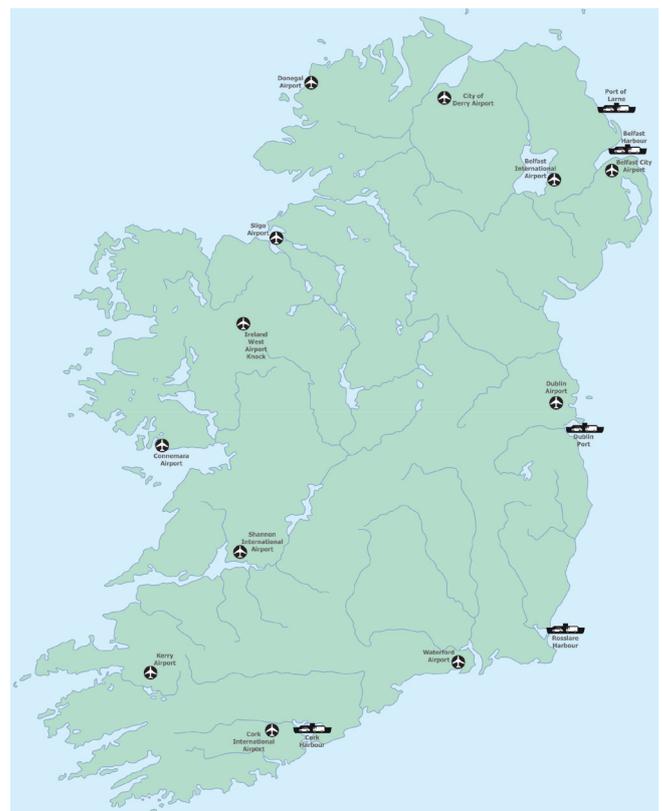
The strength of the Brand Proposition for the Wild Atlantic Way is that it is clear and specific, targeted and precise. It is not a brand for the entire west of Ireland, it is a brand only for the Wild Atlantic Way. It will, therefore, only cover and govern the offer and experience to be had on the Wild Atlantic Way.

The Draft Brand Proposition Report warns that “All too many place and destination branding strategies result in a plethora of logos and graphic designs – often referred to as “brand soup” – which creates confusion about the offer of the place. Far better to create an identity that reflects the simple and compelling idea at the heart of the Brand proposition and ask stakeholders to unite around it”. This report, which will identify a clear brand proposition and brand identity for the Wild Atlantic way, will be published in early 2013.

2. INTERNATIONAL ARRIVAL POINTS

This report identifies the airports and seaports through which international visitors enter Ireland. One of the strategic objectives of the Wild Atlantic Way project is to encourage international visitors to travel directly to the west of Ireland and, therefore, into the airports in the west. While all of the western airports have a role to play in relation to this due to their links to the UK and the rest of Europe, of particular importance is Shannon due to its transatlantic links.

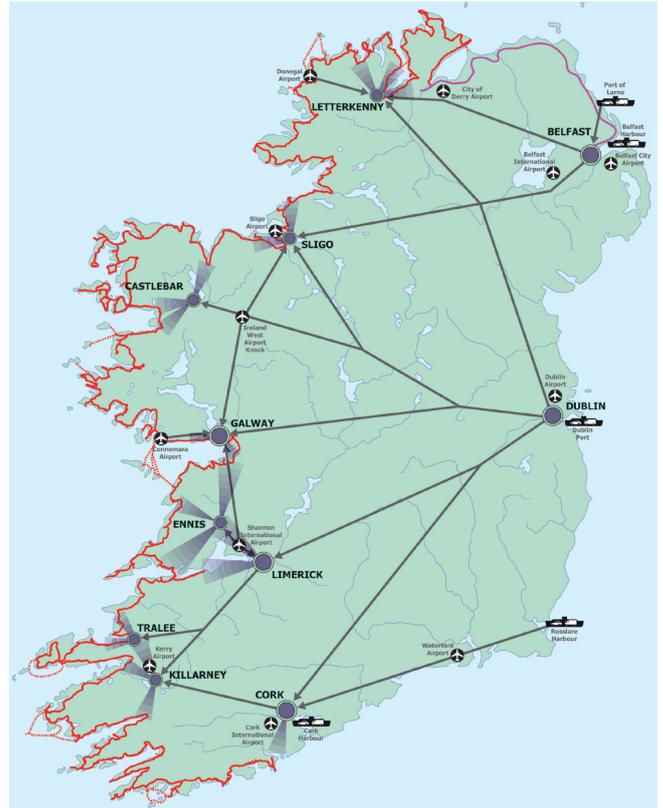
Given the fact that approximately two thirds of our international visitors currently enter Ireland through Dublin by air or sea, it is important that the Wild Atlantic Way also seeks to attract those visitors across to the west coast.



3. REGIONAL GATEWAYS

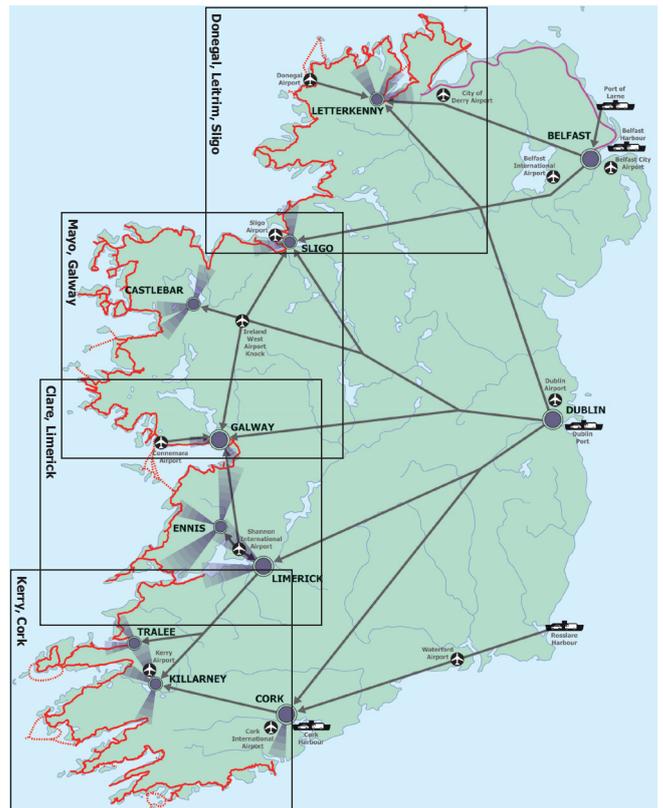
As the international or domestic visitor travels towards the Wild Atlantic Way, the cities and principal towns which are on, or in close proximity to, the main spine, will be identified as Regional Gateways. These gateways will play a key role as key access points to the Wild Atlantic Way and provide the visitor with information to help orientate them as they make their way to the main spine of the Wild Atlantic Way. In most cases, they are positioned at the end of the arterial road network emanating from Dublin, through which a significant portion of international visitors enter Ireland, thereby making these roads important access routes to the Wild Atlantic Way.

While these cities and towns are not seen as central to the core Wild Atlantic Way experience, they will, however, be included in marketing material, including maps and literature and have a very important role to play as key access points, accommodation hubs and centres for things to see and do. Key events taking place in these cities and towns will also be featured through the Wild Atlantic Way marketing material. For example, Limerick as European City of Culture in 2014 is the type of major event that would be featured.



4. WILD ATLANTIC WAY SPINE

Four Regional Steering Groups, comprising nine counties along the west of Ireland (illustrated right) were set up to help shape the route of the Wild Atlantic Way. In each case, the Regional Steering Group comprised representatives of Fáilte Ireland, the Local Authorities, the Leader Companies, Údaras na Gaeltachta and the Western Development Commission. Following a series of consultation workshops with these regional steering groups, the following route selection criteria emerged. These criteria, in addition to a comprehensive process of site analysis across the entire route, formed the basis for developing the spine of the Wild Atlantic Way.



4.1 WILD ATLANTIC WAY ROUTE SELECTION CRITERIA

4.1.1 OVERARCHING CONCEPT

“Where Land Meets Sea - Shaped by the wild Atlantic”

4.1.2 OVERARCHING PRINCIPLES

1. Focus on the wild Atlantic;
2. Hug the coast wherever possible;
3. Only include landscapes and attractions of immediate thematic relevance ;
4. Highlight settlements with a cluster of experiences eg beach, harbour, seafood, sealife watching;
5. Not dilute the product by straying inland or including non-Atlantic themed attractions.

4.1.3 ROUTE SELECTION CRITERIA

1. **Accessibility and Capacity of the Route**

- 1.1 Continuity / directness of route
- 1.2 Capacity of road (for all vehicles)
- 1.3 Accessibility from motorways and arterial road network
- 1.4 Road safety record

2. **Scenic Quality of the Route**

- 2.1 Proximity of road to the coast
- 2.2 Road with coastal views
- 2.3 Frequency of coastal views
- 2.4 Nationally significant landscapes
- 2.5 Protected coastal views
- 2.6 Quality of existing driving routes
- 2.7 Exceptional view points

3. **Points of Interest along the Route**

3.1 *Sea and Landscape*

- a) Atlantic islands
- b) Mountain ranges (that touch the Atlantic)
- c) Beaches
- d) Inlets
- e) Cliffs
- f) Headlands
- g) Caves
- h) Atlantic wildlife (salmon, cetaceans, seals, seabird colonies)
- i) Maritime ecology (machair, dunes, Atlantic peat bog, salt marshes)

3.2 Human Influence

- a) Lighthouses
- b) Castles and forts (defences from sea attack)
- c) Gardens - specialists in Atlantic semi-tropical plants
- d) Country houses - where the sea was an important factor in the location
- e) Religion heritage - with strong maritime association and accessible
- f) Historic harbours
- g) Seaside resorts
- h) Marine access opportunities
- i) Coastguard stations

3.3 Culture

- a) Maritime inspirations (for film-makers, writers, musicians etc)
- b) Edge influences (emigration 'next parish America' and innovation eg Atlantic cable)
- c) Maritime traditions and way of life (fishing, kelp industry, boatbuilding, carrageen)
- d) Maritime festivals (maritime influence eg sailing, seafood)
- e) Cultural icons (Galway hookers, curraghs, Aran jerseys)
- f) Gaeltacht - focus on seafaring traditions, language of the sea etc
- g) Food, e.g. seafood, seaweed bread
- h) Music and dance - again focussing on seafaring traditions
- i) Mythology and romance - pirates, sea monsters etc

3.4 Sports and Activities

- a) Links golf courses
- b) Shore and sea angling
- c) Yachting, kayaking, sand yachting
- d) Surfing
- e) Diving
- f) Walking (coastal routes)

4. Visitor Facilities along the Route

- 4.1 Atlantic visitor attraction
- 4.2 Cluster/hotspots of Atlantic tourism businesses
- 4.3 Accessibility to general facilities e.g. toilets, food stores
- 4.4 Accommodation or proximity to accommodation hubs

The spine will comprise a continuous route which will not double back on itself unless there is no alternative. In places where an exceptional viewpoint has been identified, and where the road network does not easily allow for the incorporation of the site on the spine in a contiguous manner, the spine will be brought to the site and will double back on itself to join the main spine again.

Route for Coaches

Not all of the proposed Wild Atlantic Way spine can be accessed by coaches. However, it was decided not to exclude these roads for car traffic, due to the high quality of the viewing experiences. In these cases, an alternative route has been identified which is navigable by coaches.

5. WILD ATLANTIC WAY DESTINATIONS

One of the key objectives of the Wild Atlantic Way is to link key destinations along the west coast of Ireland. In addition to having the spine of the route pass through each of these destinations, it is also intended that each destination will be populated with a number of loops off the main spine, which will be designed to encourage visitors to circulate and dwell longer within each destination. It is expected that these loops will be identified during 2013 and 2014 and will be presented as options to visitors who wish to explore the destination further. Itineraries will be developed for each loop and will be included on the website and in related publications.

6. WILD ATLANTIC WAY DISCOVERY POINTS

As well as identifying the precise route of the Wild Atlantic Way, key locations that provide an exceptional Wild Atlantic experience and view have also been identified. In keeping with the overarching principles of the route selection criteria, these Wild Atlantic 'Discovery Points' must relate directly to the coast where possible and possess an immediate thematic relevance to the overall brand and essence of the project.

In the main, Discovery Points are sites which will provide exceptional views and at which there is an opportunity to provide some interpretation for the visitor. During 2013 and at Stage 4 of the project, Interpretation and Infrastructure Plans will be prepared for the route which will involve the design of viewing infrastructure for these Discovery Points to ensure a high quality experience for the visitor. Some of these proposed sites are very well known as existing viewing points, and some are already well developed, while others are lesser known but offer significant potential.

In addition, sections of the route of the Wild Atlantic Way which are considered to offer a high quality Wild Atlantic driving experience, due to their high scenic quality, have also been recorded.

7. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

The identification of the Wild Atlantic Way aims to provide tourists and visitors with a more coherent enjoyment and understanding of the scenery and heritage of the Atlantic Coast of Ireland. This project provides a conceptual link between existing and potential attractions based on existing roadways. While this report identifies a preferred route for the Wild Atlantic Way it does not provide a framework for development management or land-use planning.¹

¹ Ultimately, it may be deemed appropriate to incorporate the concept of the Wild Atlantic Way into a statutory plan or document – such as a County Development Plan, however any such decision will be subject to the requirements for Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment. Similarly any development works along the Wild Atlantic Way - whether relating to the promotion or enhancement of the Way, or being completely unrelated, will be subject to the normal consent and assessment procedures – including the requirement for planning permission, Environmental Impact Assessment, Strategic Environmental Assessment and / or Appropriate Assessment.

8. ROUTE IDENTIFICATION MAPS

Supplementary to this route identification report, plans for each of the four regions have been prepared to illustrate the emerging route of the Wild Atlantic Way along the west coast of Ireland. The preferred route has been developed following consultation workshops with the four regional steering groups (identified in section 4), an analysis mapping exercise studying the concentration of existing tourism services and a comprehensive process of on-site analysis.



Fáilte Ireland
National Tourism Development Authority

the **paulhogarth** company