



An
Bord
Pleanála

Inspector's Report ABP-314112-22

Development

400 kV underground cable between Dunstown 400 kV Station in Co. Kildare and Woodland 400 kV Station in Co. Meath known as the 'Kildare-Meath Grid Upgrade'.

Location

Between Dunstown 400 kV Station in the townland of Dunstown, Co. Kildare and Woodland 400 kV Station in the townland of Woodland, Co. Meath.

Planning Authorities

Kildare Co. Co. and Meath Co. Co.

Prospective Applicant

EirGrid Plc.

Type of Application

SID Pre-Application Consultation under S.182E

Date of Consultation Meeting

15/09/2022, 15/12/2022, 16/02/2023

Inspector

Conor McGrath

1.0 Introduction

The Board received a request on 19/07/2022 from EirGrid plc. to enter into a pre-application consultation under section 182E of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, in relation to a proposed development consisting of the development of a 400 kV underground cable between Dunstown 400 kV Station in Co. Kildare and Woodland 400 kV Station in Co. Meath known as the 'Kildare-Meath Grid Upgrade'. Three pre-application consultation meetings were held in respect of this case on 15/09/2022, 15/012/2022 and 16/02/2023.

This report provides an overview of the proposed development, relevant precedents and legislative provisions and recommends that the proposed development would constitute strategic infrastructure.

2.0 Proposed Development

The proposed development comprises a 400 kV electricity transmission connection between Dunstown 400 kV Station in Co. Kildare and Woodland 400 kV Station in Co. Meath. The scope of the proposed development was extended following the third pre-application consultation meeting to include additional works at Woodland substation, and as described as comprising:

- 1) An underground cable (UGC) over approx. 53km (45km on public road and 8km on private lands), connecting Dunstown 400 kV Station and Woodland 400kV Substation. The UGC will incorporate the following:
 - i. A trench of approx. 1.5m in width and approx. 1.3m in depth.
 - ii. joint bays, communication chambers and link boxes (approx. every 745m), and hardstanding areas approx. 3 m around off-road joint bays.
 - iii. Communication links and fibre optic cables in the trench with the cable.
 - iv. ten access tracks (approx.4m wide) over private lands to off-road joint bays, communication chambers and link boxes;

- v. Construction compounds (approx. 8.5ha), laydown areas and construction passing bays (33 no. each approximately 100m long and 5.5 m wide), construction access tracks (approx. 9.5km) and all water, rail, road and utility crossings using either trenchless drilling such as Horizontal Direction Drilling (HDD) or open cut techniques.
 - vi. All associated works.
- 2) Installation of additional electrical equipment and apparatus at the Woodland 400 kV Station, similar to the existing infrastructure, within a permitted / proposed substation compound extension (PA ref. 22/1550). This includes:
- i. A 400 kV cable bay and associated electrical shunt reactor.
 - ii. Insulators, instrumental transformers, current transformers, overhead conductors, disconnectors, circuit breakers, surge arrestors in order to connect the bay to the busbar.
 - iii. Ancillary site development works required to facilitate the development.
- 3) Installation of additional electrical equipment and apparatus at the existing Dunstown 400 kV Station, similar to the existing infrastructure. This includes:
- i. A 400 kV cable bay and associated electrical shunt reactor.
 - ii. An extension to the 400 kV busbar in order to connect the 400 kV cable feeder bay to the existing 400 kV busbar;
 - iii. Lightning masts (approximately 41 m high);
 - iv. Insulators, instrument transformers, current transformers overhead conductors, disconnectors, circuit breakers, surge arrestors.
 - v. Ancillary site development works required to facilitate the development.

The proposed route of the UGC is predominantly on-road. In some on-road sections, an off-road crossing of a watercourse will be required, where bridges cannot accommodate the cable. It is indicated that the project has been in development since 2017 when the need for the project was identified and confirmed. Alternative options were subject to public consultation and examination.

Four potential underground cable route options were examined and the emerging best performing option (EBPO) was identified. A route option report accompanies the request.

The prospective applicants describe the need for the proposed development as being driven by two key factors.

1. Increased demand on the east coast due to natural growth and increasing demand from data centres.
2. The need to transport power generated by renewables in the south and southwest of the country, and by newer and more cost effective existing conventional generation units, to areas of higher demand on the east coast.

These factors give rise to cross country power flows from west to east on the existing transmission system. The network is reported to experience significant violations of Transmission System Security Planning Standards (TSSPS), related to the unplanned loss of any existing 400kV circuits between Moneypoint in the West, and Dunstown and Woodland 400 kV stations in the east.

The proposed 400kV underground cable between Woodland and Dunstown is identified as the best performing option to address the transfer of power west-east and within the transmission network as it reaches the east coast. This will mitigate capacity and voltage problems and strengthen the electricity network.

The proposed cable route does not traverse any European sites, however, there are sites downstream of the proposed route. In documentation submitted during the pre-application consultation process, the prospective applicants have indicated that any future application will be accompanied by a Natura Impact Statement.

Correspondence accompanying the consultation request indicates further that it is the view of the prospective applicants that the proposed development is not a type listed in Schedule 5 of the regulations, and that there will be no requirement for an EIAR. I note the provisions of Section 182A (2) of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 as amended, and the prescribed classes of development for the purposes of section 176 set out in Schedule 5 of the regulations in this regard.

3.0 Relevant Planning Cases

ABP-314111-22: It was determined that the proposed upgrading of the existing Woodland 400kV substation did not constitute Strategic Infrastructure Development. The proposed development included the installation of additional outdoor Air Insulated Switchgear (AIS) electrical apparatus, an extension to the existing substation compound, renewal, alteration and / or removal of associated 400 / 200kV apparatus and equipment and associated works.

Meath Co. Co. Planning ref. 22/1550: Application by Eirgrid PLC for upgrading works at Woodland Station, including

1. Installation of outdoor Air Insulated Switchgear (AIS) electrical apparatus, including an extension to the hardstand compound (c. 4 ha) and new and amended electrical apparatus, an extension to the existing control building.
2. New lightning masts and relocation of one existing mast.
3. Two bays to the newly extended 400 kV busbars at the southern end of the substation to incorporate equipment to connect the new 400 kV underground cable links from Dunstown and Belcamp substations respectively.
4. Renewal, alteration and/or removal of electrical apparatus and equipment.
5. All ancillary site development works including site preparation works.

In February, Meath Co. Co. sought further information from the applicants, noting that the development differed from that considered by ABP under ref. ABP-314111-22. A response to the request was received by the planning authority on 27/02/2023, which amended the proposed development to accord with the layout previously submitted to An Bord Pleanála under ref ABP-314111-22.

Other relevant Board Determinations:

VC08.305271: The Board determined that a proposed 5km 400kV AC (alternating current) underground cable between the existing Moneypoint 400 kV

GIS substation in County Clare and the existing Kilpaddoge 220kV substation in County Kerry with the provision of an AIS bay within an extended compound at the existing Kilpaddoge 220kV substation, fell within the scope of Section 182A of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended) and would constitute strategic infrastructure within the meaning of the Act.

4.0 The Nature of the Request

The prospective applicants have requested that the Board advise as to whether or not the proposed development constitutes Strategic Infrastructure Development in accordance with the provisions of section 182A of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended or whether an application for permission should be made to the local authorities for the respective areas in accordance with the provisions of s.34 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended.

5.0 Legislative Provisions

It is noted that the long title of the *Planning and Development (Strategic Infrastructure) Act 2006*, refers to applications for planning permission in respect of certain proposed developments of strategic importance to the state.

Section 2(1) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended defines 'strategic infrastructure' as including, inter alia: "(d) *any proposed development referred to in section 182A(1)*"

Section 182A(1) of the Act provides that, where a person (the 'undertaker') intends to carry out development comprising or for the purposes of electricity transmission, the undertaker shall prepare, or cause to be prepared, an application for approval of the development under section 182B and shall apply to the Board for such approval accordingly.

Subsection 182A(9) states that “...‘*transmission*’, *in relation to electricity, shall be construed in accordance with section 2(1) of the Electricity Regulation Act 1999 but, for the purposes of this section, the foregoing expression, in relation to electricity, shall also be construed as meaning the transport of electricity by means of—*

- (a) a high voltage line where the voltage would be 110 kilovolts or more, or*
- (b) an interconnector, whether ownership of the interconnector will be vested in the undertaker or not.”*

Section 182E(1) provides that a prospective applicant who proposes to apply for approval under section 182B or 182D shall, before making the application, enter into consultations with the Board in relation to the proposed development.

Section 2(1) of the Electricity Regulation Act 1999, as amended sets out the following definitions:

Transmission: “...the transport of electricity by means of a transmission system, that is to say a system which consists, wholly or mainly, of high voltage lines and electric plant and which is used for conveying electricity from a generating station to a substation, from one generating station to another, from one substation to another or to or from any interconnector or to final customers but shall not include any such lines which the Board may, from time to time, with the approval of the Commission, specify as being part of the distribution system but shall include any interconnector owned by the Board.”

‘Electric plant’: “.....any plant, apparatus or appliance used for, or for the purposes connected with, the generation, transmission, distribution or supply of electricity other than –

- (a) An electric line*
- (b) a meter used for ascertaining the quantity of electricity supplied to any premises, or*
- (c) an electrical appliance under the control of a consumer.”*

6.0 Relevant Policy Context

6.1 National Planning Framework

Shared Goals – Our National Strategic Outcome

Transition to a Low Carbon and Climate Resilient Society - The National Climate Policy Position establishes the national objective of achieving transition to a competitive, low carbon, climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by 2050. New energy systems and transmission grids will be necessary for a more distributed, renewables-focused energy generation system, and connecting the richest sources of that energy to the major sources of demand.

National Policy Objective 42: To support, within the context of the Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan (OREDPA) and its successors, the progressive development of Ireland’s offshore renewable energy potential, including domestic and international grid connectivity enhancements.

6.2 Climate Action Plan 2023

12.1.3 The Scale of the Challenge: Transformational policies, measures and actions, and societal change are now required to meet the electricity sector’s carbon budget programme and sectoral emissions ceilings.

12.3.1 Accelerate Renewable Electricity Generation

Grid Scale Renewables: Measures to support Ireland’s renewables acceleration programme include:

- Strengthening the electricity system by upgrading the network and building supporting infrastructure at key strategic locations.
- Enable the use of the public road and potentially the rail networks for routing of new public and private electricity circuits.

6.3 Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midland Region 2019 - 2031.

Section 10.3 Energy, notes that a secure and resilient supply of energy is critical to a well-functioning region. Having regard to projected population growth and economic growth in the Region it is important that the existing electricity and gas networks can be upgraded to provide appropriate capacity to facilitate development of the Region.

The development of renewable energy is dependent on the development of enabling infrastructure including grid facilities to bring the energy ashore and connect to major sources of energy demand.

The Dublin and Eastern Region is the major load centre on the Irish electricity transmission system, and residential, commercial and industrial demand is expected to grow up to 2025 and beyond. Developing the grid in the Region will enable the transmission system to safely accommodate more diverse power flows from renewable generation and also to facilitate future growth in electricity demand. These developments will strengthen the grid for all electricity users, and in doing so will improve the security and quality of supply.

7.0 Applicant's Case.

The Prospective Applicant makes the following points in their submissions:

- Given the nature, scale and function of the proposed development on the transmission network, it may be considered Strategic Infrastructure Development (SID), having regard to Section 182A.
- The development is for the purposes of electricity transmission as defined in Section 182A(9) of the Act, and will ultimately form part of the 400kV transmission network.

- The development may contribute substantially to the fulfilment of objectives in the National Planning Framework and in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy.
- The project will ensure a safe, secure and reliable supply of electricity in the region. More generally the project may be of strategic economic or social importance to the State when considering targets and objectives set out in the Government of Ireland's Climate Action Plan.
- The development may also have a significant effect on the area of more than one planning authority, namely Kildare and Meath County Councils.
- The Board have previously determined that such cable projects fall within the scope of section 182A, including the Cross Shannon 400 kV Cable Project (VC08.305271).

8.0 Consultation Meetings

Three pre-application consultation meetings were held in respect of this request, on 15/09/2022, 15/12/2022 and 16/02/2023 and the associated meeting records are attached to this file. At each meeting a presentation was made to the Board's representatives, which are also attached to the file.

The principal matters discussed at the first pre-application consultation meeting related to the need for the proposal, alternatives considered and the issues pertaining to the environmental impacts of the proposed works, including loss of hedgerow, crossing of watercourses and road and traffic impacts. The likely timelines for lodgement of any subsequent application were also discussed.

Discussions at the second pre-application consultation meeting related primarily to proposed revisions / refinement of the cable route, the extent of works in public roads and including traffic management and environmental impacts, timeframe for works, and the project relationship with other electricity infrastructure projects at Woodland.

The final pre-application consultation meeting included discussion on the relationship with concurrent planning application with Meath Co. Co. (22/1550), updates on route selection, construction impacts and procedural issues.

9.0 Assessment

9.1 Strategic Infrastructure

The proposed development comprises a new 400kV underground cable connection between the existing 400kV Stations at Dunstown Co. Kildare and Woodland Co. Meath, and works at these substation sites to facilitate the connection of this new cable as described in the document and drawings submitted to the Board on 03/3/2023.

The definition of 'strategic infrastructure' includes development comprising or for the purposes of electricity transmission, with 'transmission' defined as either:

- The transport of electricity by means of a high voltage line of 110 kV or more, or an interconnector.
- The transport of electricity by means of a transmission system (a system of high voltage lines and electric plant used for conveying electricity from a generating station to a substation, from one generating station to another, from one substation to another or to or from any interconnector or to final customers, including interconnectors but excluding distribution system lines).

Based on this statutory definition and the information contained in the prospective applicant's request, I am satisfied that the existing 400kV stations at Dunstown and Woodland form part of the electricity transmission system for the purposes of the 2000 Act.

I am further satisfied that the proposed new 400kV underground cable connection between Dunstown and Woodland stations, and works at these substation sites to facilitate the connection of this new 400kV cable, would meet the definition set out in Section 182A(1).

I conclude therefore that the proposed development would fall within the scope of section 182A of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, requiring that any application for approval be submitted directly to the Board.

9.2 Prescribed Bodies

In view of the nature, scale and location of the proposed development, as set out in the prospective applicants' submissions and in this report, it is recommended that the prospective applicant consult with the prescribed bodies listed in Appendix 1, in respect of any future application for approval.

10.0 Conclusion

I conclude that the proposed development as described in the submitted documentation constitutes strategic infrastructure within the scope of section 182A of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, necessitating an application directly to the Board.

11.0 Recommendation

Having regard to the foregoing, I recommend that the prospective applicant, EirGrid plc., be informed that the proposed development, consisting of the development of a 400 kV underground cable between Dunstown 400kV Station in Co. Kildare and Woodland 400 kV Station in Co. Meath, and installation of additional electrical equipment and apparatus at Dunstown and Woodland 400kv Stations, known as the 'Kildare-Meath Grid Upgrade', as set out in the plans and particulars received by An Bord Pleanála, falls within the scope of section 182A of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended. Accordingly, the proposed development would constitute strategic infrastructure within the

meaning of the Act and any application for approval must therefore be made directly to the Board

Conor McGrath
Senior Planning Inspector

Appendix 1 - Prescribed Bodies

- Meath County Council
- Kildare County Council
- Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage
- Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications
- Commission for the Regulation of Utilities (CRU)
- An Taisce
- Heritage Council
- Comhairle Ealaíon
- Fáilte Ireland
- Córas Iompair Éireann
- Irish Rail
- Commission for Railway Regulation
- TII
- Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport
- Irish Water
- Waterways Ireland
- Inland Fisheries Ireland
- Office of Public Works