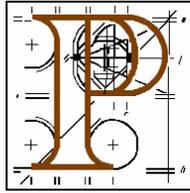


---

## An Bord Pleanála



**Ref:** **PL02.VS0002**

**Prospective Applicant:** Eirgrid Plc.

**Local Authorities:** Meath County Council  
Cavan County Council  
Monaghan County Council

**Nature of Application:** Written opinion on information to be contained in an EIS for a proposed 400kV North-South Electricity Interconnector.

**Location:** From an existing 400kV electricity substation at Woodlands, Co. Meath, to a planned substation at Turleenan, Co. Tyrone (NI). The route crosses the border with Northern Ireland in the townland of Lemgare, Co. Monaghan.

**Inspector:** **Conor McGrath**

**Site inspection:** **25/09/2013**

---

**Request for opinion on the information to be contained in the EIS for the proposed 400kV North-South Electricity Interconnector from the existing substation at Woodlands, Co. Meath to a planned substation at Turleenan, Co. Tyrone.**

**1.0 Introduction**

The proposal comprises the development of part of a planned 400kV overhead power line linking an existing 400kV electricity substation at Woodlands, near Batterstown in Co. Meath with a planned substation at Turleenan, Co. Tyrone (NI), to provide a high capacity electricity transmission line / interconnector between Ireland and Northern Ireland. The subject proposal relates to that section of the development within the Republic, passing through the counties of Meath, Cavan and Monaghan over a distance of approx. 105km. The route crosses the border with Northern Ireland at Lemgare, Co. Monaghan. That section of the overall project occurring within Northern Ireland is approx. 40km in length.

In accordance with the provisions of Part 1 of Schedule 5 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 - 2013, an EIS is required in respect of development involving the “construction of overhead electrical power lines with a voltage of 220 kilovolts or more and a length of more than 15 kilometers.”

A request for an opinion on the information to be contained in the EIS for the proposed development was lodged by the prospective applicants, Eirgrid Plc, on 20/08/2013. The scoping request was referred by the Board to the prescribed bodies identified below and responses were received from those bodies highlighted in bold. The responses have been incorporated into the written opinion set out below and it is recommended that copies of the responses received be provided to the prospective applicants for information purposes.

Bodies Consulted:

- **Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht**, Development Applications Unit
- Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources,
- **The Environmental Protection Agency**,
- **Meath County Council**,
- **Cavan County Council**
- **Monaghan County Councils**,
- **National Roads Authority**,
- An Chomhairle Ealaíon,

- 
- **Fáilte Ireland,**
  - **An Taisce - the National Trust for Ireland,**
  - Heritage Council,
  - Irish Aviation Authority,
  - Údarás na Gaeltachta,
  - **Health Service Executive / Environmental Health Service,**
  - Commission for Energy Regulation,
  - **Inland Fisheries Ireland ,**
  - Iarnrod Eireann,
  - Railway Safety Commission,
  - Border and Mid-East Regional Authorities.

Also:

- Birdwatch Ireland
- Irish Peatland Conservation Council

Having regard to the potential of the proposed development to give rise to tranboundary impacts, the comments of the **Department of the Environment, (Northern Ireland)**, were also requested. A response to this request was received on Monday 9<sup>th</sup> December.

## **2.0 WRITTEN OPINION**

I recommend that the following written opinion on the information to be contained in the EIS be forwarded to the prospective applicants:

### **2.1 Introduction**

The Environmental Impact Statement for the project must contain the information specified in Paragraph 1 of Schedule 6 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 – 2013, and the information specified in Paragraph 2 of Schedule 6 to the extent that this information is relevant to the nature of the development in question and to the environmental features likely to be affected. This shall include details of the environmental impacts during the construction and operational phases of the development and provide precise, clear and unambiguous mitigation measures where such are proposed, including an indication as to who has responsibility for the implementation of such measures, and for the monitoring of the impacts of the development.

The Environmental Impact Statement must contain a summary, in non-technical language of the information contained in the Environmental Impact Statement. The summary should contain an objective statement of the environmental effects of the development and all significant effects and

---

mitigation measures should be referred to therein. The description of the development to be contained in the non-technical summary should explain the proposals clearly and unambiguously in terms of their nature, scale and extent in order to allow the public to understand the EIA process and to make submissions in relation to the development.

Regard should be had to the guidance given for Type 20 projects outlined in the EPA document, *Advice Notes on Current Practice in the preparation of Environmental Impact Statements*. The Environmental Impact Statement in this case should, in particular, contain information on, and address the issues referred to below. Contributors to the EIS should be identified while any difficulties encountered in compiling the statement should be set out.

The Board note the previous application for a similar development under An Bord Pleanála ref. PL02 .VA0006, which was the subject of an EIS. The applicants may wish to have regard to submissions made in relation to that application in preparing the subject EIS, insofar as they are relevant to effects on the environment.

## **2.2 Description of Development**

- A full and detailed description of the nature, scale and extent of all aspects of the development, including development within Northern Ireland comprising part of this overall project.
- The description shall be provided in written form as well as by the provision of full and detailed scaled drawings, photographs and photomontages.
- The national / regional / local purpose or need for the proposed development should be identified, in conjunction with any relevant European, national, regional or local policies and/or objectives.
- The location of all proposed development between Woodlands, Co. Meath and Lemgare, Co. Monaghan should be clearly identified.
- The description of the construction phase should include a schedule of works, including timescales, and a construction methodology identifying any special work practices or application of specialised machinery / equipment. This should also address decommissioning works.

## **2.3 Alternatives:**

An outline of the alternatives considered prior to the selection of the preferred development option. This should extend to each aspect of development, ranging from alternatives considered at national and regional levels, to design details at a local level, and should include:

- Alternative interconnection / network reinforcement options.

- 
- Alternative technologies, including the use of underground cables or partial undergrounding of the route.
  - Alternative corridor options at national, regional and local level, including the most direct route option.
  - Alternatives in terms of the design and scale of development / structures.
  - The requirement for the inclusion of a substation(s) along the route.
  - Alternative construction methodologies.

The EIS should provide a justification for the preferred route corridor, taking into account the effects on the environment, including the criteria applied in assessing the various alternatives considered. In this context, the likely significant effects on the environment of the various alternative options shall be considered.

If reference is to be made to previous reports not forming part of the EIS, the findings should be summarised and these documents provided as an appendix to the statement.

## **2.4 Receiving Environment**

The receiving environment shall be defined to include all areas that would be impacted directly or indirectly by the proposed development. The information contained in the EIS should be based on comprehensive surveys of the area providing a thorough baseline assessment of the existing environment. The extent of baseline surveys undertaken should be identified, including the methodologies and practices applied.

## **2.5 Subject Areas**

The following is not intended to be an exhaustive schedule of the information required to be contained within the EIS in accordance with the requirements of the Act. It highlights a range of issues that are considered necessary to be addressed to allow for the comprehensive assessment of the proposed development. The EIS should, in particular, cover the matters raised below:

### **2.5.1 Humans:**

- The identification of potential impacts on settlement patterns along the route, including the identification of existing dwellings, community facilities or other public buildings such as schools, health care facilities etc., and any extant planning permissions for such development.

- 
- An assessment of the impact on residential amenities arising from the construction and siting of support structures and overhead lines.
  - The identification and assessment of likely operational impacts on residential amenity and human health, including impacts from noise and electromagnetic fields, based on recognised international standards. The assessment should have regard to the most recent epidemiological studies carried out internationally.
  - Assess and compare the effects of above and below ground development alternatives.
  - An assessment of the likely impacts on the linguistic or cultural heritage of the Gaeltacht area through which the route passes, or on the promotion of Irish as the community language.
  - Any implications for, or impacts on, the local, regional or national economy.

### **2.5.2 Flora and Fauna:**

- Baseline data should include an ecological survey of all works sites at an appropriate time of the year. Where ex-situ impacts are possible survey work may be required outside of the development sites.
- Assess the impacts on flora, fauna and habitats with particular regard to:
  - Natura 2000 sites and other (proposed) designated sites
  - Habitats and species listed on Annexes I, II and IV of the Habitats Directive;
  - Birds listed on Annex I of the Birds Directive and important habitats for birds including nesting, feeding / wintering areas and flight corridors.
  - Habitats that can be considered to be corridors or stepping stones for the purpose of article 10 of the Habitats Directive;
  - Other species protected under the Wildlife Acts, Red Data Book species; and biodiversity in general.
  - The assessment should include the indirect effects of construction activity, including construction access, as well as long-term impacts in terms of fragmentation and severance.
- An assessment of potential impacts on the aquatic environment during construction and operation, including impacts on water table levels or groundwater flow which may impact on wetland sites some distance away.
- Any proposed mitigation measures should be identified in a construction management plan which must be included as part of the EIS / NIS.
- The EIS should address the issue of invasive alien plant and animal species, and methods to ensure they are not introduced or spread.
- An assessment of the extent and cumulative impact of hedgerow removal or linear woodland loss along the route. Mitigation should

---

include suitable planting of native species and timing of works outside the nesting season.

- Identify any requirement for licenses or derogations arising.

### **2.5.3 Soil:**

- An assessment of potential soil erosion, particularly where it affects priority habitats, designated conservation areas, and in the vicinity of surface waterbodies.
- Submission of a construction method statement, identifying areas of particular sensitivity which require specific construction mitigation measures, including areas of peat.
- Identification and assessment of potential impacts on sites of geological heritage interest, including Altmush Stream and Galtrim Moraine.

### **2.5.4 Water**

- Identification and assessment of the potential water quality impacts of excavation and construction activities proximate to or across watercourses along the route corridor, inclusive of the effects of nutrient release from site clearance or vegetation decomposition.
- An assessment of the potential hydrogeological impacts, including potential impacts on wetlands and drinking water sources.
- Submission of a construction method statement and management plan addressing potential impacts on water quality, including measures to protect water quality when diverting field drains or pumping groundwater which may impact on watercourses some distance away.

### **2.5.5 Air and Climate:**

- Air and Climate: Minor issues not requiring significant studies.
- Noise: Description and assessment of the noise environment at construction and operational phases, clearly measurable against the existing ambient noise environment

### **2.5.6 Landscape:**

- An overview of defined landscape character areas affected, having regard to the landscape character assessments which inform the development plans for each county through which the route passes.
- Identify the area of visual influence of the development.
- Assess impacts on landscape character and visual amenities, having particular regard to designated landscapes and views of amenity value

---

including protected views / scenic routes and on the setting of the main tourism assets.

- Regard should be had to the impacts of the development on the character and setting of sites of cultural and historic interest and on historic landscapes, including for example Bective Abbey, Donaghpatrick, Teltown.
- Identify historic demesne landscapes along the route and assess potential impacts thereon.
- The visual impacts of the development should be demonstrated by the submission of a series of scaled and accurate photomontages of all elements of the proposal, to include impacts on protected views / scenic routes.
- The potential for alternative routing or partial undergrounding in sensitive landscape areas should be addressed.
- Where separation between towers is reduced below average with resulting visual impacts, the rationale for the route / design approach adopted should be identified.
- Regard should be had to the cumulative visual and landscape impacts of the development with the existing and proposed 110kV and 220kV network in the area and other existing and permitted developments as appropriate.

#### **2.5.7 Material Assets:**

- Identify the enhancements to existing electricity network infrastructure.
- Identify and assess public road crossings, including the construction methodology. Particular regard should be had to the relationship with the national primary and secondary road network and with the proposed Leinster Orbital Route, to include issues of clearance and separation.
- Information on the likely effects on public utilities and services along the route corridor, and in particular any proposed re-routing of overhead electricity lines.
- A construction traffic management plan will be required, which should address stringing operations, road closures / detours and impacts on railway infrastructure.
- Identify the means of access for construction and on-going maintenance and the treatment of new or widened construction entrances.
- Assess the likely land use impacts, including restrictions on existing uses such as agriculture or commercial forestry.
- An assessment of the likely effects on the amenity / tourism value of the area, including designated tourist routes (e.g. the Monaghan Way) and possible impacts on fishing and fisheries tourism.
- Address impacts on the potential future use of disused railways.

- 
- Assessment of potential impacts on aviation transport, including impacts on Trim airfield.

#### **2.5.8 Cultural Heritage:**

- Identification and assessment of potential impacts on archaeological heritage, including an appraisal of all recorded monuments potentially impacted on during construction activities and an assessment of the visual impact on listed sites. This should include impacts on the character and setting of features of interest as well as the relationship between sites.
- Particular areas of social, cultural and historic interest to be considered include Bective Abbey, Donaghpatrick, Teltown Zone of Archaeological Amenity, Muff Crossroads.
- Identify any pre-application archaeological excavations or site investigations undertaken. Describe the rationale for the approach adopted with regard to such pre-application investigations, particularly for areas of known archaeological potential.
- Identification and assessment of the effects on architectural heritage in the vicinity of the route corridor, including potential impacts on historic buildings or structures and their setting, and demesne landscapes. This should include Brittas House, where the line crosses the driveway, and views to and from Whitewood House.
- The indirect effects of construction activity, including construction access / routes, on structures and building should be considered.
- The impact on longer views from sites of national importance and significance should be considered and assessed.

#### **2.5.9 Transboundary effects:**

This written opinion refers to the scoping request submitted to the Board on 20/08/2013 in relation to that part of the overall project occurring within the Republic of Ireland.

The nature of the project, however, gives rise to a requirement to consider the issue of potential transboundary impacts. Regard should therefore be had to the provisions of the European Commission document, "*Guidance on the Application of the Environmental Impact Assessment Procedure for Large-scale Transboundary Projects*" (2013). In particular the prospective applicants are advised that while they are required to comply with national EIA requirements for each jurisdiction, they should also prepare a joint environmental report that covers the whole project and assesses its overall effects, in particular cumulative and significant adverse transboundary effects. This joint report should ensure the implementation of a common

---

approach and methodology for the identification and assessment of impacts arising across the overall project.

Many of the comments contained in this written opinion are relevant to the assessment of the impacts of those sections of the project proposed within the jurisdiction of Northern Ireland. The prospective applicants are, however, advised to consult with the relevant authorities in Northern Ireland with regard to the information to be contained in the EIS. The EIS should identify and assess any relevant projects occurring in Northern Ireland which could give rise to likely cumulative impacts, including that section of the proposed 400kV interconnector which occurs within Northern Ireland.

Notwithstanding the above, the prospective applicants are referred to the attached correspondence from the Department of the Environment (Northern Ireland), with respect to the information to be contained in the Environmental Impact Statement. This includes, in particular,

- The requirement for a comprehensive assessment of potential impacts on the historic environment of Northern Ireland, including impacts on known and previously unrecorded archaeology, and recommendations for mitigation measures.
- The methodology to be employed in the assessment of landscape and visual impacts of the proposed development.

## **2.6 Conclusion:**

In the event of significant effects on the environment being identified, particularly in relation to the topics referred to above, the EIS should contain a clear description of the measures envisaged in order to avoid, reduce and, if possible, remedy any significant adverse effects identified. Baseline surveys should be undertaken over appropriate periods to provide sufficient information on potential impacts arising from the proposed development.

A summary of all proposed mitigation measures should be prepared, as an appendix to the EIS, which should identify the party responsible for the implementation of each measure. In the event of monitoring being proposed as mitigation, the EIS should identify relevant trigger levels and associated actions to be taken when those levels are exceeded.

The Board notes that, as the Pre-Application Consultations have not concluded to date, other issues may arise at future meetings which may require consideration and which thereby may potentially affect the completeness of the Board's written opinion on the information to be contained in the Environmental Impact Statement, as set out above.

### **Note:**

---

I recommend that copies of all of the submissions received from the parties from which observations were requested, identified below, should be circulated to the prospective applicants.

- Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Development Applications Unit
- The Environmental Protection Agency,
- Meath County Council,
- Cavan County Council
- Monaghan County Councils,
- National Roads Authority,
- Fáilte Ireland,
- An Taisce - the National Trust for Ireland,
- Health Service Executive / Environmental Health Service,
- Inland Fisheries Ireland.
- Department of the Environment (Northern Ireland).

**Conor McGrath**  
**Inspectorate**