



Draft

Project of Common Interest

Cross-Border Electricity Transmission Scheme
The North-South 400kV Interconnection Development



A Trans-European Energy Infrastructure Project



iStock
by Getty Images



INTRODUCTION

EirGrid and System Operator Northern Ireland (SONI) are jointly planning a major cross-border electricity transmission scheme.

This scheme is a 400kV overhead line linking a substation in Woodland, County Meath with a new substation in Turleenan, County Tyrone and will provide a second high-capacity transmission line between Ireland and Northern Ireland.

EirGrid will apply for planning approval for that part of the scheme located in Ireland called the North-South 400kV Interconnection Development.

The scheme will more than double the power transfer capacity between North and South, improving the efficiency of the all-island electricity market.

It will enhance the security of the electricity supply throughout the island of Ireland which is essential for economic growth, the creation of jobs and improving the standard of living and quality of life for all.

It will also enable more renewable energy to be connected to the network, reducing our production of greenhouse gasses and our reliance on imported fossil fuels.



HISTORY OF THE PROJECT

The proposed development was first launched in Ireland in autumn 2007 and an application for planning approval was submitted to An Bord Pleanála in December 2009. That application was withdrawn in July 2010.

Following the withdrawal of the application, EirGrid undertook a comprehensive re-evaluation of the project. This involved a thorough re-examination of the previous application, including issues raised during the previous application process.

In May 2011, EirGrid published its interim findings in a Preliminary Re-evaluation Report, which was subject to consultation. The consultation requested feedback on the content and findings of the report and included engagement with the public and landowners on the indicative line route.

A separate review process was undertaken by the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, under which an International Expert Commission reported on the case for, and cost of, undergrounding the North-South 400kV Interconnection Development.

This report was published in January 2012 and recommended that the interconnector should not be put underground using Alternating Current cable. The report also stated that if undergrounding is to be used, the best technology option currently available is Direct Current.

The report estimated that using this technology would cost up to three times more than the standard overhead line solution.

Following a period of consultation, a Government Policy Statement on the Strategic Importance of Transmission and Other Energy Infrastructure was published in July 2012. This policy statement recognised the interconnector project as one of a group that are “vital developments for the regions and for the economy and society as a whole.”

In April 2013, EirGrid published a Final Re-evaluation Report, which provided a comprehensive review of the project and was the subject of a six-week period of public engagement.

This feedback was considered by the project team and formed part of a Preferred Project Solution Report published two months later. This report documented the line design process and provided detailed information on the line route and there was an eight-week period of public consultation.





In December 2013 EirGrid published its proposed final line route for the project, the alignment of which will form the basis of a planning application that will be submitted to An Bord Pleanála.

This route took account of requests from stakeholders - mostly landowners - for localised changes to the line design. These were evaluated in accordance with the criteria set out in the Preferred Project Solution Report and many were accommodated.

In January 2014 the Government appointed an Independent Expert Panel to review EirGrid's evaluation of underground routes for the Grid West and Grid Link projects. In addition, the panel was asked to provide an opinion on "the compatibility of the methodologies to be employed on the Grid Link and Grid West projects with what has already been done on the North South Transmission Line project."

In July 2014 the panel provided its opinion, that the work completed to date on the North-South 400kV Interconnection Development is in all material respects compatible with the methodologies now being employed on the Grid West and Grid Link projects.



EU REGULATION 347/2013

In October 2013, the European Commission designated the overall proposed cross-border interconnector as a Project of Common Interest (PCI).

This is a significant development and means the project is subject to a new EU regulation for trans-European energy infrastructure, EU 347/2013 which entered into force on 1 June 2013. This establishes guidelines for trans-European energy infrastructure and includes a more efficient permit granting process for energy infrastructure projects designated as PCIs.

The background to this regulation is the strategy of the European Union to modernise and expand Europe's energy infrastructure and to connect networks across borders to meet its energy policy objectives of competitiveness, sustainability and security of supply. Relevant European Union energy policy objectives include completing the internal market in energy, guaranteeing security of supply, in particular for gas and oil, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, increasing the share of renewable energy in final energy consumption to 20% and achieving a 20% increase in energy efficiency by 2020 whereby energy efficiency gains may contribute to reducing the need for construction of new infrastructures.

Reliable, integrated energy networks are considered crucial for the European Union's economic strategy.

Tackling the challenges of low-carbon electricity generation while maintaining high standards of security of supply is far cheaper if done at a trans-European level through integrated markets, for which adequate infrastructures are essential, compared to the overall cost of fragmented national policies.

The European Union estimates that up to 2020 about €200bn of investment is needed to upgrade and expand European energy networks

The regulation identifies 12 strategic trans-European priority corridors and areas covering electricity and gas networks, as well as oil and carbon dioxide transport infrastructure, for which European Union action is needed for the achievement of its energy and climate policy objectives.

The regulation provides for the designation of PCIs for these corridors and areas which are proposed by twelve regional groups. Project promoters can apply to the regional groups for their projects to be included. They may also have access to financial support from the Connecting Europe Facility, under which a €5.85 billion budget has been allocated to trans-European energy infrastructure for the period 2014-20. The European Commission ultimately adopts the European Union list of PCIs.

The first set of PCIs is an important step towards the improved integration of member states' networks and making sure no country remains isolated. The list of PCIs will be updated every two years with the aim to integrate newly needed projects and remove obsolete ones.





The regulation seeks to streamline and accelerate the permit granting processes for PCIs, as well as providing for closer cooperation and enhanced public participation. The regulation establishes that PCIs are necessary to take forward European Union energy networks policy and should be allocated the status of the highest national significance possible and be treated as such in permit granting processes. As authorisation for a project may require several consents or permits, the regulation requires each member state to designate a competent authority to integrate or coordinate the permit granting processes. Ireland designated An Bord Pleanála as the competent authority under Regulation 347/2013.

The regulation further provides that all parties involved in the permit granting process are required to follow its principles for public participation.

Status as a PCI

The North-South 400kV Interconnection Development was one of 248 projects identified by the European Commission on the 14th October 2013, in the first list of PCIs. The majority of the PCIs are in the field of electricity, mainly transmission lines, and there are 14 storage projects and two smart grid projects. For a project to be awarded PCI status, it has to have significant benefits for at least two member states; contribute to market integration and further competition; enhance security of supply, and reduce CO2 emissions. The North-South 400kV Interconnection Development meets these criteria.

The designation of the North-South 400kV Interconnection Development establishes the necessity of the project from an energy policy perspective, without prejudice to the exact location, routing or technology of the project. EirGrid and all authorities concerned are required to ensure that the most rapid treatment legally possible is given to the project. As a PCI it is allocated the status of the highest national significance possible and should be treated as such in permit granting processes.

Also for the purposes of the Habitats and Water Framework Directives, the project is considered as being of public interest from an energy policy perspective, and may be considered as being of overriding public interest, provided that all the conditions set out in the directives are fulfilled.

As a PCI, the North-South 400kV Interconnection Development will be subject to the rules and requirements for the permit granting process set out in the regulation. An Bord Pleanála as competent authority has also published a Manual of Permit Granting Process Procedure as required by the regulation.

Benefits and Obligations from its Status as a PCI

The timely implementation of the PCIs is a priority for the EU and there are strict requirements on the permit granting process.

These include binding time limits for the entire permit process (a maximum of three and a half years); the establishment of a national 'one-stop-shop' for permit granting; early and effective public consultations; and a requirement for the member states to streamline environmental assessment procedures.

These requirements are aimed at accelerating the permitting process, whilst respecting the standards of European Union environmental law.

As a PCI, the project will benefit from a number of advantages. These include

- Accelerated planning and permit granting procedures
- A single national competent authority will act as a one-stop-shop for permit granting procedures. As noted in Ireland, An Bord Pleanála fulfils this role
- Less administrative costs for the project promoters and authorities due to a more streamlined environmental assessment procedure, whilst respecting the requirements of European Union law
- Increased transparency and improved public participation
- Increased visibility and attractiveness for investors thanks to an enhanced regulatory framework where costs are allocated to the countries that benefit most from a completed project
- Possibility to receive financial support under the Connecting Europe Facility which will play a key role in leveraging the necessary private and public funding

The regulation imposes obligations on An Bord Pleanála as the competent authority and also on other permitting authorities. As promoter of the North-South 400kV Interconnection Development, EirGrid is subject to a number of obligations and requirements under the PCI process. EirGrid must

- Draw up an implementation plan for the project
- Provide a reasonably detailed outline of the project when the PCI process is being initiated
- Have regard to the principles underlying public participation in the process
- Draw up and submit a Concept for Public Participation to An Bord Pleanála
- Ensure the completeness and adequate quality of the application file
- Ensure that all required information is made available promptly to the relevant authorities to ensure that the time limits set can be met

- Establish, maintain and update a project website
- Co-operate fully with An Bord Pleanála to meet deadlines and comply with the detailed schedule for the permit granting process
- Submit an annual report for the project to An Bord Pleanála

The European Commission will also monitor closely the implementation of the permit granting measures and, subject to planning consent, the construction of the project.

The Manual of Permit Granting Process Procedures states that it will establish a PCI Unit to administer the PCI process separate from its Strategic Infrastructure or Planning Appeals Units. It further states that this PCI Unit will be responsible for the co-ordination of the various consents and collaboration with the consent-giving bodies, and other competent authorities.

Consent is required for the North-South 400kv Interconnector Project as a Strategic Infrastructure Project and such an application will be lodged with the Strategic Infrastructure Unit of An Bord Pleanála.

A separate parallel consenting process is currently being undertaken in Northern Ireland in respect of that portion of the overall project within that jurisdiction. This is being administered through the Department of the Environment in Northern Ireland. The transitional provisions in Article 19 of Regulation (EU) No. 347/2013 apply to that part of the interconnector within Northern Ireland which means that permit granting procedures under the regulation do not apply to the portion of the project there.



For the purposes of the regulation, the permit granting process is divided into two stages. The pre-application procedure covers the period between the start of the permit granting process and the acceptance of the submitted application file by An Bord Pleanála (this period is to take place within an indicative period of two years. The statutory permit granting procedure covers the period from the date of acceptance of the submitted application file until the comprehensive decision is taken (the period for which shall not exceed one year and six months).

Therefore, prior to lodging the strategic infrastructure application with An Bord Pleanála, EirGrid is required to fulfil certain pre-application procedure obligations under Regulation 347/2013.

In fulfilment of this, EirGrid notified An Bord Pleanála on the 3rd June 2014 and provided a reasonably detailed outline of the project. This was acknowledged by An Bord Pleanála on the 2nd July 2014 which established the start of the permit granting for the purposes of the regulation.

EirGrid submitted a Concept for Public Participation to An Bord Pleanála on the 31st July 2014. This report, amongst other things, referred to the past consultations which have been carried. On the 10th September 2014, An Bord Pleanála decided to modify the concept, which included a requirement to publish this information leaflet.

An Bord Pleanála considers that all submissions received as part of the public consultation process should be published on the project website unless the submitter provides reasonable reasons for not doing so. In accordance with the same, EirGrid will publish submissions on the project website. All submissions will be published in compliance with the Data Protection Acts 1998 and 2003.

All relevant documentation relating to the PCI process and the North-South 400kV Interconnection Development will be posted to the EirGrid website.

Future Project Roadmap [TO BE INSERTED]





The Oval,
160 Shelbourne Road,
Ballsbridge,
Dublin 4.

Tel + 353 (0)1 **677 1700**
Fax + 353 (0)1 **661 5375**
info@eirgrid.com

An Oval,
160 Bóthar Shíol Bhroin,
Droichead na Dothra,
Baile Átha Cliath 4.