



Have Your Say

How we develop the
electricity grid, and how you
can influence our plans.



The current. The future.

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We have been working with NALA, the National Adult Literacy Agency, to help us to present clearer information to you. This document uses NALA's plain English principles and guidelines to help us communicate as clearly and effectively as possible. We have also included a plain English glossary of specialist terms on page 19.

Who are EirGrid - and what do we do?

EirGrid is responsible for a safe, secure and reliable supply of electricity – now and in the future.

We develop, manage and operate the electricity transmission grid. This brings power from where it is generated to where it is needed – throughout Ireland. We use our grid to supply power to industry and businesses that use large amounts of electricity. Our grid also powers the distribution network. This supplies the electricity you use every day in your homes, businesses, schools, hospitals, and farms.

We develop new electricity infrastructure only when it is needed. EirGrid answers to Government and to regulators. We obey all laws, and meet all health and safety standards. We work for the benefit and safety of every person in Ireland.



A partnership for a better grid

When we work together, we can create a stronger and better electricity grid with the least possible impact on you and your community.

Following a review of our public consultation process, we promised to improve the way we consult with the public and other stakeholders.

This guide is a summary of our improved consultation process. It explains why we develop the electricity grid, and how we consult with the public and other stakeholders to get feedback on our plans. In short, this guide tells you what to expect from us, and what we would like from you.

There is one very important principle that is at the heart of our consultation process.

The earlier you get involved in our projects, the more influence you can have on them.

Even if you disagree with our plans, you have the opportunity to affect what we do when you talk to us. And the earlier you engage, the greater the potential for change.

What can you expect from EirGrid?

Our Values

We aim to provide a quality, efficient and independent electricity transmission system that benefits everyone. We have a set of values that we expect all employees to follow to support this aim.

Our new way of consulting on projects is based on these values:

- We innovate to provide better value for all our customers
- We behave in a socially responsible way
- We keep our promises
- We behave with integrity
- We never compromise safety
- We recognise that our people are our greatest asset

Our promises to you:

- We will communicate clearly with you. We will give you plain English summaries of our proposals and make them available online and on paper.
- We will allow enough time for you to consider the information we give you – and to give us your views.
- Anybody who wishes to respond to our plans will be able to do so.

- We will offer clear opportunities to engage with us. This guide will explain what these are.
- We will explain the decisions we need to make – and when. We will explain the factors that influence these decisions, and how you can contribute to the decision-making process.
- We will communicate with everyone who has taken the time to engage with us. We will explain how we considered their feedback and the outcome of our decisions.
- Our staff will treat everyone, on every project, with honesty and respect.

These promises show our commitment to the Aarhus Convention. This is an international agreement that grants three core rights to the public for projects that affect the environment.

1. Public access to information on the environment.
2. Public participation in environmental decision making.
3. Public access to justice, or the right to review procedures and challenge decisions.



Our new approach to consultation

Who do we talk to?

When we consider new work on the grid, we talk to individuals and organisations that may have an interest or involvement in the project. We call these people stakeholders. This section explains which stakeholders we may consult with on a new project.

The Public

When we talk about “the public” we mean:

- members of local communities,
- local authorities and elected representatives.

If you live near a project area, we’ll try our best to make sure you learn about our plans, and how they might affect you.

Other Organisations

We also talk to businesses or representative organisations. This helps us to get the opinions of those with a specific interest in our plans, or on a particular issue.

We engage with organisations from many sectors. We do this by talking to groups interested in issues like the environment, tourism and heritage. We also talk to relevant government departments when needed.

Landowners

When we consider new grid infrastructure, we consult with local landowners that may be affected. This can include:

- individual landowners, or
- companies that own the land.

Our consultation process

We start by asking ourselves the following questions:

- Who may our project affect? Who may have a particular interest in our project?
- What decisions do we need to make in this project? When and how could the people and representatives we talk to influence these decisions?
- What are the best ways to involve people who our project may affect, or groups with an interest in the project?

The answers to these questions inform the next steps.

- We find out your views, in ways that meet our values, commitments and principles.
- At each step in our project process (6 steps in all), we consider any feedback and make a decision.
- We publish the decision to make sure that everyone who took part is aware of our decision – and we explain how we responded to their views.
- At each major step in a project, we pause to reflect on the work carried out. We pay particular attention to areas where there is room for improvement. We learn from this to improve future steps.

Why we develop the transmission grid

We develop the transmission grid to ensure that it works well. When we talk about grid development, we mean any significant work on our electricity transmission infrastructure. This can be categorised into two kinds of project – maintaining or upgrading the grid.

Electricity infrastructure is long-term, large-scale investment in the future. Each piece of equipment can last for over 30 years. As the grid is a network, we have to think of the entire grid when making changes at local level.

We develop the grid to;

- replace or upgrade old infrastructure;
- respond to changes to the demand for electricity;
- connect with electricity grids in other countries;

- accommodate new ways to generate electricity; or
- deal with different locations where it can be generated.

EirGrid is legally obliged to connect those who generate electricity. This means we must develop the grid in response to plans for new electricity generation, such as wind farms.

When we develop the grid, we follow three main principles:

1. We ensure that consultation with local communities is central to our development plans;
2. We consider all practical technology options for developing the network;
3. We minimise the need for new infrastructure.

How scale and time frame affects our projects

It's important to understand how long our projects can take to complete. Major developments to the electricity grid can take years to design, develop and plan before they are ready to build. Smaller developments may take considerably less time.

Depending on the scale of development, each step will last a number of weeks or months. We will always publish timelines on our website.

The length and scale of this work means we use a six-step project development process (see page 5).

At each step in this process, we make decisions that narrow our focus for the choices required in the next step.

However, we also recognise that time can affect both these points, particularly on large-scale projects. That's why we carry out regular reviews of our long-term grid development strategy. If we see changes to the need, or opportunities offered by new technology, we will update our project plans.

Our planning obligations

We are subject to the same planning laws as any other developer of infrastructure. We have to seek permission for projects on a project-by-project basis. Depending on the scale of a project, we will either apply to An Bord Pleanála, or to a local planning authority. However, some of our projects may be exempted development, which means they don't need planning permission.

How to get involved

At every step of our projects, we will provide information on our plans, and the ways you can get involved. Our website shows all projects in an area. It will tell you about:

- local information offices you can visit to ask a question,
- a phone number you can call,
- an email address you can use, or
- community or agriculture liaison officers you can talk to. These officers work on the ground in local communities to provide information and respond to questions.

How we develop projects

Many people might not take an active interest in a project until we identify a precise route. However, it is important that we gather your views before this point.

We want you to know how and why we plan our projects, so you can give us your feedback as early as possible.

Designing an electricity transmission project can be a complex and lengthy process.

Because of this, we use a consistent project planning process to explore options and make decisions. This means we follow the same steps for every project.

The decision-making tools we use, and the amount of engagement we carry out at each step, depends on the scale and complexity of each project.

The next ten pages explain how we develop projects, and how you can tell us your point of view as part of this process.

Step 1

How do we identify the future needs of the electricity grid?

Step 2

What technologies can meet these needs?

Step 3

What's the best option and what area may be affected?

Step 4

Where exactly should we build?

Step 5

The planning process

Step 6

Construction, energisation and benefit sharing



Step 1

How do we identify the future needs of the electricity grid?

We start to identify the future needs of the electricity grid by considering potential changes in the demand for electricity. These changes are influenced by factors such as:

- how and where electricity is and will be generated,
- changes in electricity use due to new consumer technologies.

We consider these changes by developing a set of scenarios that explore the future of electricity. Considering these scenarios helps us to plan and identify grid improvements that may be necessary. This in turn helps us to identify projects to meet potential future needs.

The scenarios respond to many factors including:

- government policy,
- stakeholder feedback,
- current and projected state of the economy, and
- expected growth in electricity demand.

We periodically review the scenarios to consider new trends, changes in the industry, and other factors.

When we identify a potential need to reinforce the grid, our first step is to confirm our thinking. We may discuss the need with:

- companies that generate electricity,
- companies that use large amounts of electricity,
- representative organisations.

At this point, we aren't considering the detail of a solution, or where we may need to locate new infrastructure. We may consider the broad scale of a potential future project.

We may also raise the issue of future grid development in a forum such as the regional seminars we held in 2015. These were public meetings hosted independently by Irish Rural Link to discuss EirGrid's grid strategy.

As a potential need starts to become more certain, we will broaden our work. We may meet with elected representatives, or depending on the scale of the project, we may set up a Reference Group.

The purpose of a Reference Group is to gather together a cross-section of people who may be affected by a specific grid development project.

The size and membership of each group will vary considerably depending on the scale of the project. It may include community group leaders, elected officials, or representatives from special interest organisations.

When we have identified and confirmed a need, we start a formal process of project development.

At this point, the only decision that has been made is to confirm that there is a need for a grid development project.

Step 1 How do we identify the future needs of the electricity grid?

Step 2 What technologies can meet these needs?

Step 3 What's the best option and what area may be affected?

Step 4 Where exactly should we build?

Step 5 The planning process

Step 6 Construction, energisation and benefit sharing

Step 1 At a glance

What's happening?

We confirm the need for a project, and explain this need to representatives and interest groups.

How long will this take?

Up to 12 months.

What can you influence?

Grid development is heavily driven by government policy. You can talk to your elected representatives and share your thoughts on government policy. This may influence the development of policy that, in turn, drives grid development.

How can I get involved?

How we seek the views of the public will vary considerably during Step 1. Typically, we will talk to people like elected representatives or customers. If you want to get involved and provide your feedback, get in touch.

To find out more about how you can contribute to these discussions, visit www.eirgrid.com, or contact our Customer Relations Team on (01) 237 0472 or on info@eirgrid.com. They can advise on how best to contribute your views.

What have we decided at the end of this step?

The need for a project, and its scale.



Step 2

What technologies can meet these needs?

In Step 2 we look at the range of technical options that can meet the need or needs we confirmed in Step 1. As part of this process, we will seek feedback on the list of potential technical solutions. We want to understand which options you think are suitable, and which are not. We will study your feedback and produce a shortlist of options to consider in more detail.

In Step 2, we are only trying to find the best technology options. For a complex project we might look at many options. For example, these could include:

- Using new technology to enhance an existing line; or
- upgrading several substations on an existing connection to a generator.

There are many ways we could develop both of these - so this leads to a longer list of options based around the following questions:

- Which technologies are available for use?
- Which option would be preferable - overhead lines or underground cables?
- What related upgrades will the existing network need as a result of new infrastructure?
- Which substations may need an upgrade?
- What does this mean for the lines connecting these substations?

What we need from you

At this point, we will present the options we think should go forward, and the ones we have ruled out. We'll ask you for your views on these options, before considering these views and other factors. We will then make a decision on the most appropriate technical solutions to bring forward to the next step.

Our aim is to complete this step by publishing a shortlist of possible technical solutions. When compiling these, we will try to balance your preferences with technical, cost and environmental suitability.

This means we may include options that we believe are technically less suitable, if they have a strong public preference. We will consider the issue of overall suitability in more detail when we progress to Step 3.

Step 2 What technologies can meet these needs?

Step 3 What's the best option and what area may be affected?

Step 4 Where exactly should we build?

Step 5 The planning process

Step 6 Construction, energisation and benefit sharing

Step 2 At a glance

What's happening?

After considering a number of technical solutions, we narrow this down to a short-list of options – such as a new line, or upgrades to existing lines.

If a major new line is shortlisted, we will put an underground cable option on the table.

How long will this take?

Up to 6 months.

What can you influence?

You can influence the options we take forward to the next step.

We will publish all the latest updates on our website for your information.

How can I get involved?

Typically, we will talk to people like elected representatives, community leaders, or farming organisations.

At this step, we may also broaden the range of people and organisations we consult with to reflect the potential effects of our solutions. We will also publish a summary of our technical options. If you want to get involved and provide your feedback, get in touch.

If you want to find out more about how you can get involved at this step, contact our Customer Relations Team on (01) 237 0472, or on info@eirgrid.com. They can advise on how best to contribute your views.

What have we decided at the end of this step?

The shortlist of technical solutions we bring forward to Step 3.



Step 3

What's the best option and what area may be affected?

During this step, we study the potential benefits and impacts of the different options we could build, and where we could build them. For our largest projects, we are likely to spend over a year at this step.

When we're considering where we may build a project, we start by looking at what we call a study area. This is a broad area within a region, rather than a specific, detailed route. Typically, we use this step to identify potential issues that could restrict our options within the study area.

What we need from you

During Step 3, we will ask for your views on a specific technology option, and on the study area where we want to locate the project. This consultation will help us to understand what is important to you, and to learn more about the local area.

We may consider more than one technical option, such as developing a new or upgraded line, or upgrading or extending a substation. Where there are choices like this, we will consult with the public. We will do this to understand any issues of public concern that could affect which option we choose. These issues could include environmental concerns, questions about land use, or other topics that could affect the technology options.

As part of this process, we will:

- tell you about all the technologies and areas that we considered,
- give our opinion on their suitability,
- identify the most suitable option, and
- explain why others are not suitable.

At the end of Step 3, we will decide on a preferred technology for the project, and on the study area where this option could be placed.

We will base our decision on a detailed analysis of your feedback, and on a number of factors:

- economic,
- technical,
- social, and
- environmental.

Step 3 What's the best option and what area may be affected?

Step 4 Where exactly should we build?

Step 5 The planning process

Step 6 Construction, energisation and benefit sharing

Step 3 At a glance

What's happening?

We consider technology options in more detail. We also look at the broad study areas we may use for possible routes or site locations. We will also provide information to stakeholders on the methods we're using to analyse the technology options and study areas. We then narrow our analysis to a preferred option and its study area.

How long will this take?

Up to a year.

What can you influence?

You will be able to influence our choice of technology, and where we build the project.

How can I get involved?

In Step 3, we will broaden the range of people and organisations we consult with.

We may now speak to environment and planning agencies, and to specialist representative groups. We may also engage at local level with members of the public, landowners, and local representatives from the potential project areas. We'll do this in a number of different ways. This could include local and national advertising, regular updates on our website and workshops.

If you want to find out more about how you can get involved at this step, contact our Customer Relations Team on (01) 237 0472, or on info@eirgrid.com. They can advise on how best to contribute your views.

What have we decided at the end of this step?

If a new line is needed, we will ask for and consider your views on an overhead line option and an underground cable option.



Step 4 Where exactly should we build?

Following consultation and engagement in steps 1, 2, and 3, we have made some key decisions. We know which technology we will use on the project, and roughly where the project will be built.

As mentioned in step 3, we will continue to examine and consider both an overhead line option and an underground cable option if a new line is needed.

In Step 4, we will assess exactly where is the most appropriate place to build the project. This could be either a route or a site, or both.

What we need from you

At this step, you can significantly influence exactly where we build the project. This is because, during this step, we work closely with local people – especially landowners who will be directly affected by our project.

We want to understand how our project could affect you, and how we can design the project to minimise this.

We will engage with landowners and the wider community to understand which locations for new infrastructure are preferred by local people.

We also use this process to learn more about local factors that could affect how and where we build. At this stage, our aim is to collaborate on an agreed route or site, once it is possible and practical.

We will consider all the information gathered in this step, including local knowledge. We will then decide on a preferred route or site to include in our planning application.

By getting involved, you can give us your views on these proposals. This will influence the detail of where we build the agreed solution.

Step 4 Where exactly should we build?

Step 5 The planning process

Step 6 Construction, energisation and benefit sharing

Step 4 At a glance

What's happening?

We develop a detailed route or site. This will specify the exact position of any new equipment or infrastructure.

How long will this take?

Up to 12 months.

What can you influence?

You can influence where exactly the project will be built.

How can I get involved?

We will look at the best ways to seek your views during this step. Depending on the size of the project, this could take many forms, such as public meetings or web pages with response forms.

We will promote any consultation that is planned or underway. This information will appear on our website, and in local or national media.

If you want to find out more about how you can get involved at this step, contact our Customer Relations Team on (01) 237 0472, or on info@eirgrid.com. They can advise on how best to contribute your views.

What have we decided at the end of this step?

The precise route or site on which the project will be built.



Step 5 The planning process

Where a project requires planning permission, we will submit our planning application to the planning authority – either An Bord Pleanála or the local planning body.

We will publish a notice in the newspapers when we lodge this application. We will also continue to provide regular project updates.

The planning authority will seek views on our application. They will ask anybody with an interest in the project to send in a written submission of their views.

Once we make our application, An Bord Pleanála may hold an oral hearing. This will give those who submitted a written opinion a chance to share their views about the project.

Where possible, we will respond to submissions from those who are directly affected by our plans.

In this step, we cannot make fundamental changes to our planning application. But we can consider small adjustments if they ease your concerns.

When the planning process ends, the planning authority will do one of the following:

- Grant permission,
- Grant permission on the basis that EirGrid makes some changes to its application,
- Refuse permission.

Step 5 The planning process

Step 6 Construction, energisation and benefit sharing

Step 5 At a glance

What's happening?

The relevant planning authority will make a legally binding decision on the project. They may grant full planning permission, grant permission on the basis that we make changes, or refuse planning permission.

How long will this take?

Up to 18 months.

What can you influence?

You can ask the planning authority to make changes, or to refuse the project planning permission.

How can I get involved?

At this point, the decision maker is the planning authority, not EirGrid. The planning authority will ask for opinions on the project, and use the submissions they receive to inform their final decision.

When a project reaches Step 5, EirGrid is legally obliged to publish details of its proposed plan in the national newspapers. These notices will give details on how you can make a submission to the relevant planning authority. We will also publish and update this information on our website at www.eirgrid.com

What have we decided at the end of this step?

The planning authority will decide if the project has legal permission to proceed, to proceed with changes, or not to proceed.



Step 6

Construction, energisation and benefit sharing

We engage with you throughout the construction phase.

EirGrid plans the future of the electricity grid, but it is ESB Networks that builds new grid infrastructure. EirGrid and ESB Networks will work together to minimise any impact from construction.

Our goal is that those who live or work near our projects experience as little inconvenience as possible.

We will engage with you on details like road access, or planning the schedule of works so that it has the least impact possible. For example, we could adjust when we close roads to recognise established practices for moving livestock.

We will also inform the wider community of the progress of the project, up to the final process of testing and completion.

To do this, we will create a plan that gives landowners and communities details of the construction phase. This would include issues such as traffic management and access requirements.

Each time we build new transmission infrastructure in an area, we set up a Community Fund and Proximity Payments for the project.

We make Proximity Payments when new transmission infrastructure is built within 200m of homes in a rural location. This is to recognise any sense of visual intrusion for the homeowners.

The Community Fund awards grants and supports to local organisations and other good causes in a project area. For more information on Community Funds, visit our website at www.eirgrid.com

Our Community and Agricultural Liaison Officers are on hand throughout this step to answer any questions you may have.

Step 6 Construction, energisation and benefit sharing

Step 6 At a glance

What's happening?

The project is built and 'goes live' after a period of testing.

How long will this take?

From 6 to 36 months.

What can you influence?

At this stage in the project, you can work with EirGrid and ESB Networks to minimise any disruption and inconvenience.

How can I get involved?

At this stage we no longer seek the views of the public on the project itself.

However, we will keep you informed of construction work through updates on our website. If you are directly affected you can contact our Community and Agricultural Liaison Officer. They are on hand to help, and to answer any questions you may have.

What happens at this stage?

Construction of the project has been completed.



How do we assess our engagement?

When we're developing a new project, our goal is to have good working relationships with the people who may be affected by our work. We want to include you in this process and to build honest and strong relationships from the start. On large infrastructure projects like ours, there are always different and strongly held views on what the right outcome should be. Even if you disagree with our final decision, we hope you will agree that we made that decision in a fair and open way.

At the end of the project, we will assess the consultation process to see if our engagement activities have been effective.

We may ask you for your thoughts on:

- how we explained the overall project;
- how we explained the ways you could influence the project;
- how we took account of your comments; and
- what feedback we provided.

What if we don't meet your expectations?

We know that not everyone will agree with the decisions we make about new infrastructure. But we want everyone to have an equal chance to influence our projects, and to understand why we make our decisions.

If you feel that we haven't met this goal, we want to know. If you believe that we haven't met our consultation commitments, then please get in touch. If you just want to ask a question, call us.

Customer Relations Team:

(01) 237 0472

For other contact details, including information on how to make a complaint, please visit:

www.eirgrid.com/contact

We'll listen to your concerns and respond. We will give you a response and tell you about any changes we have made as a result of your query.

Some specialist terms we use

Capacity

The amount of electricity that can be safely transferred on the system or a circuit.

CER ('the regulator')

The Commission for Energy Regulation. The CER is Ireland's independent energy regulator with a range of economic, customer and safety functions.

Circuit

The overhead line or underground cable linking two substations. For example, the Moneypoint – Dunstown 400 kV circuit.

Corridor

The planned area along which an electricity line or cable will be located. This is a broad region that we then use to select a specific route.

Demand

The amount of electrical power that is drawn from the network by consumers. This may be talked about in terms of 'peak demand', which is the maximum amount of power drawn throughout a given period.

Demand forecasts

The amount of electricity that is predicted to be drawn from the network by energy users. The forecast is updated every year.

Distribution Network

This is the lower voltage network, owned and operated in Ireland by the ESB. It delivers power from the transmission network to households and businesses.

Energisation

The point in time when a new line or cable is complete and fully tested, and so goes live to become a fully operational part of the grid.

Generator

A facility that produces electricity. Generators use a variety of sources to generate power. This can include coal-fired power plants, gas fired power plants and wind farms.

Grid

See Transmission Network.

Grid infrastructure

The physical structures which make up the transmission grid. These include the cables and lines used to transmit electricity, the pylons that hold the lines, and the substations used to convert the electrical current and raise or lower the voltage of that current.

Infrastructure

This refers to the structures and facilities of a region or country, such as buildings, roads, bridges and the electrical grid. (Please see also Grid infrastructure.)

Interconnector

A high voltage transmission line connecting the national electricity networks of two countries.

Kilovolt (kV)

Operating voltage of electricity transmission equipment. One kilovolt is equal to one thousand volts. The highest voltage on the Irish transmission system is 400 kV.

Megawatt (MW)

A megawatt is 1,000,000 watts. A watt is the standard unit of power. (See below for a definition of Watt.)

Reference group

A cross-section of people who may be affected by a specific grid development project. Depending on the project, it could include community group leaders, elected officials, or representatives from special interest organisations.

Some specialist terms we use

Route

The path that a line or cable takes as it moves across the landscape from its start to its end point.

Reinforcement

Increasing capability on the existing electricity grid by building new infrastructure or upgrading existing equipment.

Stakeholder

A person, interest group or organisation that has an interest or concern in something.

Substation

A set of electrical equipment used to interlink circuits and change the voltage being sent down a line or cable.

Transmission line

A high-voltage power line running at 400 kV, 220 kV or 110 kV on the Irish transmission system. The high-voltage allows delivery of bulk power over long distances with minimal power loss.

Transmission Network or Grid

This is the network of around 6,800 km of high-voltage power lines, cables and substations across Ireland. It links generators of electricity to the distribution network and supplies large demand customers. It is operated by EirGrid and owned by the ESB.

Wind power

Energy harnessed from the wind at wind farms and converted to power.

Voltage


Voltage is a measure of the potential strength of the flow of electricity – similar to ‘pressure’ in a water system. Voltage is the measure of electrical charge or potential between two points (in an electrical field) such as between the positive and negative ends of a battery. The greater the voltage, the greater the potential flow of electrical current.

Watt

A watt is the standard unit of power in the International System of Units (SI). A watt measures the rate at which energy is produced or consumed. For example, a high-watt electrical appliance will consume more energy than a low-watt appliance.



The Oval, 160 Shelbourne Road, Ballsbridge, Dublin D04 FW28 • Telephone: 01 677 1700 • www.eirgrid.com

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