

North Connacht 110 kV Project Step 4 Consultation – Frequently Asked Questions

What is the North Connacht 110 kV project?

The North Connacht 110 kV project is a proposal to develop the transmission grid in the North Connacht region. The start point will be at Moy substation near Ballina, Co. Mayo. The end point will be at Tonroe substation near Ballaghaderreen, Co. Roscommon. The connection will be made using either a 110 kV overhead line or underground cable. Either technology option will also require upgrade works to the existing overhead 110 kV line from Tonroe to Flagford (Carrick-on-Shannon). The proposed upgrade works do not require additional overhead lines or structure, but a replacement of some of the existing infrastructure and cabling. Further details are available on the [EirGrid website](#).

Why is the project needed and what are the benefits?

The North Connacht 110 kV project will facilitate the transport of electricity across the region. It will also ensure security of supply for customers and provide the robust electricity infrastructure required by industry across North Connacht. This project supports plans to boost business and investment in the region.

In terms of addressing future needs, it is worth noting that as of 2020 just 40% of the electricity that we currently use in Ireland comes from renewable energy. The Government's Climate Action Plan, published in 2019, has set the target of achieving 70% of electricity consumption via renewable energy sources by 2030. At present a large amount of renewable electricity is generated by wind farms in the North Connacht region with more planned over the coming years. The level of renewable generation in the region is far greater than the capacity of the local electricity network. This means we must look at ways of improving the electricity infrastructure in Connacht. EirGrid is legally obliged under our TSO licence from the government to connect those who generate electricity, which means we must develop the grid in response to plans for new generation.

Is this proposal any different to the Grid West project?

The Grid West project was originally proposed in 2012. This was a large-scale development of 400 kV infrastructure to facilitate the level of renewable generation planned at that time. However, by June 2017 the amount of planned renewable generation capacity in the region had dropped by half and Grid West was no longer required. We anticipated then that the reduced amount of renewable energy could be met through a smaller scale of development. That remains the case and we are now progressing with the North Connacht 110 kV project.

What stage of the project are we at now?

EirGrid follows a six-step approach to developing the grid. The North Connacht 110 kV project is currently in the middle of Step 4. The first two steps identified the need for the project and the range of technologies available to meet that need. During Step 3, two technology options and a study area were identified which met the need of this project.

At the start of Step 4 the project team completed further analysis and identified seven specific corridors within the study area which may be feasible for developing the project. The options included four overhead line corridors and three underground cable corridors. (See our document [North Connacht Brochure – Summer 2020](#) for more details).

Between September and December 2020 EirGrid ran a wide-ranging public consultation on the North Connacht 110 kV project. As part of the consultation, we welcomed comments, queries and general feedback on each of the seven options proposed for the project. The results from this consultation, in addition to further technical, economic, environmental and socio-economic studies, will directly inform the final phase of Step 4 when EirGrid decides on the best performing option for the project.

What happens next on the project?

The project team has collated all stakeholder views into a Public Consultation report available on the [EirGrid website](#). This report, coupled with the results taken from the criteria previously outlined, will allow us to make a well-informed decision on the emerging best performing corridor and technology option for the project.

We will publish a report (Step 4B report) containing the details of our assessments and the emerging best performing option on the EirGrid website in March 2021. It will include a summary of all information received and how that feedback was considered. We are publishing this report to demonstrate transparency in our approach.

Once the emerging best performing option is identified (Step 4B report), we will conduct detailed analysis on that specific corridor in order to determine an exact route for the project. This route will be outlined in greater detail in a Step 4C report which will publish towards the middle of 2021. The Step 4C report will confirm a best performing option to be taken into Step 5 (planning process).

Have you already made your mind up? Was there any point to the consultation?

The technology and corridor options identified in previous studies are being assessed against five project development criteria: technical, economic, environmental, socio-economic and deliverability. However, no decision will be made on the best performing option for the project until feedback from the public and stakeholders has been fully considered. The Step 4 public consultation provided communities and stakeholders with an opportunity to have their say and to be part of the decision-making process.

Why did you hold a consultation during the COVID-19 pandemic?

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on our planned engagement and consultation process during 2020. It was our plan to consult on the project through March, April and May of 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic forced us to postpone all planned project consultation for the first half of the year. Nevertheless, cognisant of the project benefits, namely supporting plans for industry and investment in the region, and the government led ambitious 2030 renewable energy targets, we took the necessary decision to begin our project consultation on this vital project for the region.

The latest consultation gave us an opportunity to accelerate our innovation in the public engagement space. We trialled many digital solutions including webinars, digital workshops, virtual exhibitions and microsites in addition to maintaining as many traditional engagement methods as possible. This resulted in higher levels of engagement than we had previously seen on many projects, pre the pandemic. It is worth noting that many other public consultations continued across industry during the pandemic without interruption.

How did you publicise the consultation? Did you engage the local community?

EirGrid have engaged with the public on the North Connacht 110 kV project since September 2017. Ahead of the recent consultation, in 2019 and early 2020 (before COVID-19 restrictions came into effect), we held a number of meetings with local groups, walk in clinics at our office in Castlebar office, information stands at local marts across the study area, and held public open days with our mobile information unit in towns across the study area including Ballina, Swinford, Foxford, Charlestown, Tubbercurry and Ballaghaderreen.

In addition to liaising with the public at open days and events across the various project phases, Mayo, Sligo and Roscommon county councils and their respective municipal district councils received project briefings at each stage of the project.

During the recent Step 4 consultation we ran a Media campaign: “Upgrading Lines – Upgrading Lives” within the community, advertising on radio and in the regional press on 5 occasions. On 3 occasions during the 3-month consultation we delivered 41,000 leaflets via An Post to all registered addresses across the study area in addition to hosting 5 online webinars and encouraging the public to make use of a dedicated telephone line with the project team. We also engaged with Elected Representatives, Public Participation Networks and Chambers of Commerce.

Have you listened to concerns from those living and working locally? How have you taken the feedback on board?

Engagement and feedback from stakeholder through Step 3 of the project resulted in us bringing three underground cable options to the public for consultation in Step 4. We have never presented as many underground options for a similar scale project before and we hope that this will be viewed and welcomed as evidence of our changed approach. The project is needed for the reasons outlined above – and we are willing to look at all the options before establishing which is the best performing option to take forward.

During the consultation period that ended in mid-December, we held 5 webinars and received numerous calls and emails detailing the concerns of the public. We received 654 individual consultation responses (both online and in hard copy format), details of which have been captured in the Step 4 Public Consultation Report available on the [EirGrid website](#). The feedback received feeds into the overall multi-criteria analysis which is part of the decision-making process that allows EirGrid to identify the best performing option for the North Connacht project. This best performing option will be confirmed, following further studies and assessments by the project team, in the first half of 2021.

Now the consultation is over, will we be ignored?

No, we will continue to engage with impacted communities throughout the planning and construction phases of the project. Our liaison team are always available to take calls and meet with stakeholder's on-the-ground (when restrictions allow). EirGrid plans to establish a stakeholder reference group/community forum to ensure communities impacted by the project are represented and informed as the project progresses. We will always remain available to discuss the project with the public and stakeholders and will clearly outline the process that follows and how the public can feed into it.

What is the purpose of establishing a local advisory group?

The group is being considered to ensure that stakeholder and community views are understood and properly considered during project delivery. It would provide a forum for dialogue between the project team and stakeholders. Full membership and terms of reference would be agreed at a later stage of the project.

What is the community fund and what projects will it be used for?

We intend to deliver a community fund at the same time as the construction programme. Our policy is to focus on projects for community infrastructure, education and sustainability. We will consider other options put forward by the community, which is why we asked for suggestions as part of the Step 4 consultation process. EirGrid will work with a specialist grant making organisation to determine how the fund should be managed and spent. We believe this is the fairest possible approach and will ensure that EirGrid is a participant in the process rather than a decision-maker. It also allows us to work closely and collaboratively with communities while the fund is facilitated by an independent body.

What is the value of the community benefit fund? Who can apply and how do they go about it?

During the Step 4 consultation, we asked for feedback on how a community fund can be best applied by those impacted by the project. The aim of the Community Fund is to support local projects in the communities near new infrastructure. To ensure that this is done fairly, we work with independent organisations who assess the applicants and application. The technology type used and the length of the overall project, both of which have yet to be established, will determine the size of the community fund.

Why have other options been discounted at this stage?

Our process used to identify the study area and corridors presented in the recent Step 4 public consultation is outlined in detail in the Step 3 report available on the [EirGrid website](#).

What assessments have been carried out at Step 4?

Full details of the analysis and assessments that have been completed in Step 4 can be seen in the Step 4A report on the [EirGrid website](#). A Step 4B report containing further details on the work on the project will be published in March 2021.

When does the project go for planning?

The North Connacht 110 kV project is at Step 4 of EirGrid's six-step process. When this step has been completed the proposed location of a new line or cable will be determined. We hope to make a planning application in late 2021.

How long will construction take? Will there be disruption to the environment?

The construction timelines are dependent on the final option which is taken forward to the planning process at Step 5. Included in the planning application will be environmental reporting. The environmental reporting will set out the possible impact that a proposed development may have on an area. It firstly assesses the current situation in the area with regard to health, noise, ecology, visual amenity, air quality, flora and fauna. It then examines the possible impact a proposed development might have on each of these and proposes measures that can be taken to avoid or reduce these effects to acceptable levels.

EirGrid has a lot of local opposition in other regions. Why are all your projects so controversial?

We recognise that building any new infrastructure impacts people living and working in the area. However, we will work with communities to ensure any new development has the least possible impact. The transmission grid, which we plan, manage and operate, is intended to supply everyone. Without it, we don't have a safe, secure and reliable source of electricity. We understand that many landowners and stakeholders across the country

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would prefer if they were not impacted by electrical infrastructure. Unfortunately, that's not always possible. The same of course is true for other national infrastructure projects, from which we all benefit, like roads, telecommunications, gas pipelines and the distribution grid operated by the ESB. We accept that to develop the grid, to meet the increasing demands for electricity, also means disturbing people along the way. Reaching our climate change targets and having an electricity grid reliant on more renewables and less fossil fuels cannot be achieved without disruption.

Following a review of our public consultation process several years ago, we promised to improve the way we consult with the public and other stakeholders. Our aim is to involve the public early to maximise the opportunity for them to be involved before decisions which may affect their communities are made. Unfortunately, early engagement also means that when we seek views, opinions and questions, we may not necessarily have all the answers.

On the North Connacht 110 kV project we are at Step 4 of that process and will continue to engage closely with all local stakeholders throughout this and other stages of the project.

Will the project provide employment opportunities for the local community?

It is expected that there will be several employment opportunities available within the community during the project construction phase through local contractors working on the project and indirectly in the local economy. One of the longer-term benefits of the project is a stronger power supply in the region. A stronger regional power supply attracts inward investment resulting in the growth of regional industry. This has been demonstrated throughout other parts of the country that have a strong, reliable, reinforced grid network.

Does the proposed development pose any risk to people's health?

EirGrid has the function to operate and ensure the maintenance of and, if necessary, to develop a safe, secure, reliable, economical and efficient electricity transmission system with due regard for the environment in Ireland.

The World Health Organisation and ICNIRP (the International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection) continually monitor the results of scientific studies into EMF, and all other EMF related studies. From the totality of these studies [ICNIRP](#) developed its 'Guidelines for limiting exposure to time-varying electric, magnetic and electromagnetic fields (up to 300GHz)'. Both the World Health Organisation and the European Commission have endorsed these guidelines. They form the basis of EU Council Recommendation 1999/519/EC which set out the relevant European Union Guidelines. EirGrid designs and operate the Irish transmission network in accordance with these EU Guidelines.

In addition, EirGrid is a member of CIGRE, the International Council on Large Electric Systems, and ENTSO-E, the European Network of Transmission System Operators, which thereby ensures that EirGrid has regard to, and follows, current international best practice in the planning and development of the Irish electricity transmission system. EirGrid is satisfied from the totality of studies, the views of international authoritative agencies and international experience of best practice in transmission system development that the

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balance of evidence is that the overhead transmission lines proposed for use do not have any adverse effect on human health or animal health.

Are Electro Magnetic Fields harmful? Is EMF emitted from power lines?

The electromagnetic fields emitted by transmission infrastructure are at an extremely low frequency and are at the non-ionising end of the electromagnetic spectrum. EirGrid operates the transmission grid in accordance with stringent safety recommendations which are made by national and international agencies. Further information on electro-magnetic fields and the guidelines which EirGrid adhere to are contained in our brochure “The Electricity Grid and Your Health” which can be found on the [EirGrid website](#).

Does the project impact local biodiversity?

The development of a strategic piece of infrastructure such as the North Connacht 110 kV project will always incur some impact. However, EirGrid will, as required by law, mitigate impacts to acceptable levels, through careful site and route selection and design and by working closely and iteratively with the local community and stakeholders, to achieve the correct balance between societal benefits and environmental impacts.

As part of our consultation process, we have examined the constraints associated with each of the different corridor and technology options, informed by bespoke field surveys ongoing since 2019. The environmental constraints are set out on in the Step 4A Report and we invite feedback on those assessments as part of the consultation process.

Why have you not carried out a full environmental assessment for each of the potential routes?

Extensive field and desktop surveys, and consultation with statutory and non-statutory bodies have been ongoing since 2019 to document sensitive environmental receptors within the study area. The best performing option which is taken forward to the statutory planning process will be the subject of rigorous assessment of potential environmental impacts, for which mitigation (and if appropriate enhancement) will be implemented.

Will you be talking directly to landowners impacted by the project? Will you pay compensation?

When the emerging best performing option is identified, we will engage directly with the landowners within the corridor of the proposed route. Compensation will be paid to all the affected landowners that host the infrastructure on their land. Payment rate and package will be determined when a technology option is confirmed for the project.

How close to properties will the new infrastructure be?

One of the main constraints in route selection of electricity lines and cables is avoiding existing residential developments such as houses, schools and hospitals. EirGrid always aims to plan infrastructure at a minimum distance of 50 metres from existing dwellings to the centre of the line. In most cases a much greater distance is achieved.

How can I stay in touch/find out more about the project?

If you would like to know more about the project or sign up for regular updates, please contact our Community Liaison Officer Eoghan O' Sullivan on 087 247 7732 or Agricultural Liaison Officer Aidan Naughton on 086 172 0156. Alternatively you can email the project team via northconnachtproject@eirgrid.com.

If you would like to be included on our mailing list for North Connacht 110 kV Project updates – send an email request to northconnachtproject@eirgrid.com stating “Subscribe me to updates”. By subscribing, you are giving us permission to store your name and email address for the purposes of issuing updates to you. You can unsubscribe from receiving updates at any time by emailing us regarding same.