

EXCLUSIVE THE EIRGRID FILES

“We must get the North South Interconnector across the line”: Chief Technical Advisor

EirGrid correspondence with DCCAE

Michael Fisher

The following 25 emails obtained under a Freedom of Information request are mainly ones sent by an EirGrid executive (whose name we have redacted) and addressed to Kevin Brady and Enda Gallagher of the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment. Some messages are circulated to other important people in EirGrid, whose names are already in the public domain. There are also some responses from the Department. EirGrid say they report regularly to the Department on all aspects of the North South Interconnector project and that there is “nothing in any way unusual about such communications.”

December 6th 2016
Tweet by SONI Ltd on Twitter @Dept_CCAE Bob Hanna tells @polycyni “A simple message we must get the North South Interconnector across the line” (with link to picture). A reference to the meeting at the Stormont Hotel Belfast of the Policy Forum for Northern Ireland on the energy market, renewables and security of supply, which the Chief Technical Advisor of the DCCAE Bob Hanna addressed.

December 9th 2016
NI Timeline
Based on NI input this is apparently our best guess on NI planning timeframe
Task:
Timeline:
Submission of statement of case to PAC Today 9th December 2016
Submission of rebuttal statement to PAC Friday 13th January 2017
Commencement of Public Inquiry Wed 22nd February 2017
Expected decision & recommendation July 2017
Decision by DFI Minister August 2017

December 21st 2016
Minister says interconnector will benefit all people in Ireland but local groups have concerns/ Northern Sound
See for info: (link to Northern Sound: north south interconnector reported to have gotten the go ahead)

December 21st 2016
Taoiseach's comments
See comments from the Taoiseach which I just spotted on RTE website.
“Reacting to the decision, Taoiseach Enda Kenny said that An Bord Pleanála is independent in its views. He said: ‘It is a completely independent board. We have an all island energy market and these kinds of facilities are important for the economy north and south. But it’s not for me to adjudicate on the independence of An Bord Pleanála.’ Mr Kenny said he understands that it will go for a judicial review that he said, is also independent in its determination of its outcome.”

December 22nd 2016
Recording of Taoiseach's comments
See very bottom of this page the recording of Taoiseach's full comments re NSIC for info. (link to RTE News website).

January 6th 2017
IT today
See article in Times Business supplement today for info (link to Irish Times website) debate about second electricity interconnector needs to get real

January 19th 2017
DHPLG PQ
For info see PQ which Minister Coveney answered on Tuesday. You may be already be aware of. (Deputy Brendan Smith PQ)

January 25th 2017
Transcript of Sean O'Rourke Gents, this (transcript) was done up here.
Might be worth having in the back pocket.
Needless to say we were pleased with it. (Sean O'Rourke interview with Denis Naughten transcript re. NSI)

January 31st 2017
Local campaign group calls for politicians to push for undergrounding of interconnector – Northern Sound
Gents, for note – in particular: It comes as groups opposed to the project are to meet with Denis Naughten next month. (link to Northern Sound story)

February 1st 2017
Order of Business yesterday (Transcript of Dáil proceedings starting with Deputy Shane Cassells question. The Taoiseach: Certainly not. The Government always listens...and listens carefully).

February 1st 2017
NSIC – Seanad follow up
Hi See (heavily marked up – sorry) note for info with input from M Norton and Aidan Geog on this side. Can set up call if you want to discuss any of the points. Ireland Document: who not develop the project underground? Cost-technical considerations.

February 1st 2017
For info – press release re NSIC
“NEPPC welcomes strong support from Fianna Fáil front bench and urges local Ministers to stand up and be counted on the issue.

February 1, 2017
Response of 3 Ministers to RTE ‘Prime Time’ poll exposed a clear lack of support for affected local communities
NEPPC welcomes the recent press release from Fianna Fáil, following a meeting with the North East community groups opposing the EirGrid plans to construct over 400 pylons across the North-East. Senior Fianna Fáil front bench TD’s were present including party leader Micheál Martin and spokesperson on Communications, Energy and Climate Action Timmy Dooley. Also in attendance were a large number of elected representatives and councillors from Meath, Cavan and Monaghan. NEPPC welcomes the commitment that “Fianna Fáil will continue to work in the Oireachtas to ensure this project is placed underground”
Fianna Fáil Spokesperson on Communications, Energy and Climate Action, Timmy Dooley stated that “Fianna Fáil has been consistent in its calls for the undergrounding of this project and the most recent evidence reveals that it actually strengthens the grid and improves reliability. The financial analysis of underground cost versus overground needs further investigation.”
In contrast to the strong support from Fianna Fáil NEPPC is very disappointed at the lack of support from 3 of the 4 Fine Gael Ministers in the North-East, namely Ministers Humphries, McEntee and English. When asked by RTE for a recent ‘Prime Time’ programme on the North South interconnector if they would support the undergrounding campaign they kicked for touch, stating that the planning process has yet to be completed in Northern Ireland. “The three Ministers were unable to attend a recent public meeting in Kells, where over 600 of their constituents voiced their opposition in no uncertain terms to the recent An Bord Pleanála decision. We were giving them the benefit of the doubt on their support for our campaign. But the RTE statement makes it very clear where these 3 politicians stand. They are planning to stay below the radar on this issue so that they can remain best pupils in the class for their party leader, rather than stand four-square behind their constituents who are on course to have their homes, farms and livelihoods destroyed. NEPPC is sending out a clear message to them in relation to this tactic – the affected communities will not be fooled by this pretence of support. It is time to stand up and genuinely seek to change Government policy on this issue or else be straight with the affected communities”, stated Pdraig O'Reilly.
NEPPC also wants to clarify the simple option available to Minister Naughten. The Minister of the day holds the majority shareholding in EirGrid. For this reason he has the authority to pick up the phone and direct EirGrid to underground the line. In fact, EirGrid has stated that if directed to do so it will implement the decision and place the line underground. Fianna Fáil, Sinn Féin and Independents have an important and influential role to play in encouraging the Minister to make the call. The unique opportunity of having 4 Ministers from the North-East in Government who can really make a difference on this issue is not lost on the people of the North-East. Neither will it be forgotten if 3 of these 4 Ministers refuse to do the right thing for their constituents.”

February 2nd 2017
Reference to single electricity market in UK White Paper
Hi
Flagging two relevant parts from the Brexit White Paper just released by UK Govt.
8.28 With respect to energy, EU legislation underpins the coordinated trading of gas and electricity through existing interconnectors with Member States, including Ireland, France, Belgium and the Netherlands. There are also plans for further electricity interconnections between the UK and EU Member States and EEA Members. These coordinated energy trading arrangements help to ensure lower prices and improved security of supply for both the UK and EU Member States by improving the efficiency and reliability of interconnector flows, reducing the need for domestic back-up power and helping balance power flows as we increase the level of intermittent renewable electricity generation. We are considering all options for the UK's future relationship with the EU on energy, in particular, to avoid disruption to the all-Ireland single electricity market operating across the island of Ireland, on which both Northern Ireland and Ireland rely for affordable, sustainable and secure electricity supplies.

B.13 The Single Electricity Market operating on the island of Ireland provides both Ireland and Northern Ireland with affordable, sustainable and secure access to electricity for both businesses and domestic customers. The former First and deputy First Ministers of Northern Ireland highlighted this as an important priority for Northern Ireland and this Government recognises the importance of ensuring that it is secured following our departure from the EU.

February 2nd 2017
IEC Report p.61; PB Power Update Report p.3 of supplementary

Enda See suggested response. EirGrid estimates that the cost of constructing the proposed North South Interconnector will be €286 million. It is further estimated that €180 million of this will be incurred in the state with the remaining €106 million being incurred in Northern Ireland. In addition to the costs that are expected to be incurred during construction phase, there is an estimated €10 million that will be paid in proximity payments and community funds to people affected (sic) along the route of the interconnector.

In terms of additional material, in addition to the ROI €180m construction cost, there is approximately €35m spent to date on the planning process. This is in line with the material sent in an FOI last Autumn and which received coverage in the Farmer's Journal. This is repeated in the Farmer's Journal this week aswell (link to article). On the various reports and differing costs that are swirling around, see below. Attached are the relevant pages from the reports mentioned:
The PB Power Report covers the overall project, north and south. The objective of the PB Power Report was to calculate the difference in cost between the overhead line and the underground cable options. Therefore items that are common to all options (such as the substation at Turleuan and payments to landowners) are specifically excluded as they have no impact on the cost differential. The PB Powers estimates are not therefore whole-of-project cost estimates. PB Power's estimate of €140m for the overhead line is comparable with the IEC estimate of €167m as they both cover the entire line from Woodland to Turleuan and they both exclude provision for the common items. They do not however comparable with the €180m estimate for construction in the Republic.
Cost estimation alternatives for Meath Tyrone
Parsons Brinckerhoff costing update July 2013
Conclusions (part of)
9. Regardless of which technology option is chosen, the deferral of the substation near Kingscourt will reduce the initial investment required to develop the N-S Link.
10. The most cost effective technology option, however, remains an overhead line, estimated to cost around €140M.

February 3rd 2017
EWIC costs of undergrounding
Hi
On this, see below some bullets that may be useful in drafting a response. EirGrid's East West Interconnector has a capacity of 500MW. The proposed North South Interconnector requires a capacity of 1,500MW, three times the capacity of the East West Interconnector.
The cost of the East West Interconnector is not therefore directly comparable with that of the proposed Interconnector.
It is assumed that the suggested figure of €2.2M per kilometre for the East West Interconnector was calculated by dividing an overall project cost of 256, based on the 256km length of cables connecting the two ends of the East West Interconnector.
This is not an appropriate way of calculating the cost per km of a HVDC UGC scheme as the converter stations at the ends of the cable are such a large component of the overall cost and their cost would be incurred equally whether the length of the connecting cables was 50km, 100km, 256km or 500km.
(a reply by the EurGrid executive to a note sent by Enda Gallagher on February 2nd saying: “That EWIC stat is surfacing again, we might chat at some stage tomorrow.....” (link to agriland article: underground NSI may be the cheapest option).

February 6th 2017
For info – press release re NSIC
Hi Enda See some draft text on the issue around reliability etc.
Give me a bell if you need anything else.
In the case of the North South Interconnector Project an underground cable would not provide the same level of reliability and security of supply as the proposed overhead line option. The overhead line is a relatively simple and easy to operate technology that merges naturally into the existing AC transmission system. The DC underground cable option on the other hand would introduce considerable risk to the transmission system due to the very complex nature of the technology. Greater complexity brings greater risk. So not only will the HVDC option cost considerably more it will also not do the job as well as the proposed AC overhead line...statistics suggest that the proposed overhead line can be expected to experience one fault every 20 years...on average the fault will be repaired and returned to service within two days...the international statistics suggest that if the North South Interconnector was to be implemented using underground cable then it can be expected to experience one fault per annum and the statistics further show that the average time to repair such a fault is 25 days.

(response to email from Enda Gallagher on February 3rd for info – press release re NSIC)
Quote from FF spokesperson Timmy Dooley stating that the financial analysis of underground versus overground needs further

investigation.
February 6th 2017
For info re legal challenge re interconnector (link to Irish Independent article legal challenge launched against north south electricity interconnector).

February 7th 2017
Courts List Entry
Hi attached is the listing from the Courts list showing that the application was listed for hearing on Monday. Link should also work here but may have times out.
February 9th 2017
Clarifications re north south Enda Gallagher message
Hi xx
As discussed here are some questions arising from the meeting with the Minister and interested parties. Would be grateful of assistance from EirGrid in preparation of answers. Clarifications Required Post North – South Meeting

February 9th 2017
Tweet by Páircé Gallagher on Twitter @paraicgallagher 09/02/2017 16:18
Another Thursday, another Government loss on a vote — 82-51 This one on @fiannafailparty pensions bill.

February 10th 2017
Clarifications re north south
Hi See below. Still a bit of work in progress. I have asked that final version be available on Monday AM. (copy of note on 10th February from Aidan Geoghegan to xx and copied to Fintan Slye, John Fitzgerald, Rosemary Steen, Mark Norton, David De Casseres.
Here is our response. Appendix A relates to the answer to Question No. 6. Some of the answers are not complete as the information is not readily available. We can finalise anything that is outstanding next week. Regards, Aidan.

From xx to Aidan Geoghegan and cc others, 9th February
Hi Aidan As discussed, could you have a look at these and see if we have material that we could provide to assist the Dept. I will need to get this back to Dept tomorrow as Minister will want to review over weekend. Thanks.

From Enda Gallagher to xx February 9th
Hi As discussed here are some questions arising from the meeting with the Minister and interested parties. Would be grateful of assistance from EirGrid in preparation of answers. All the best, Enda. Clarifications Required Post North-South Meeting (11).

February 17th 2017
Letter copied from Siemens
Hi Kevin, Enda
See for info letter which Siemens have copied in us on in relation to issues that arose relating to North South. Thanks. (Siemens [Ireland] letter from Chief Executive Gary O'Callaghan dated February 15th 2017 addressed to Pdraig O'Reilly NEPPC).

March 8th 2017
Minister Naughten ‘failing to recognise reality’ on North South interconnector – Agriland
Hi For info, see article that has been flagged to me. Thanks, xx (link to agriland article)

March 9th 2017
From Enda Gallagher
Re. Up this morning
Yes, solid

March 9th 2017
To Enda Gallagher
Up this morning
North South Interconnector Deputy Niamh Smyth PQ re implementation of FF motion Response by Minister Denis Naughten TD

“I would like to reemphasise the Government's continued strong support for this project.”
The party's Energy, Environment and Climate Change spokesperson, Cathal Boylan MLA published its document on ‘Powering Ireland 2030’, which called for action to tackle climate change to move Ireland to a zero carbon society.
Speaking after a consultation meeting with stakeholders on the document, the Newry/Armagh M.A. said: “Climate Change is a real threat to the island of Ireland, already three extreme weather events have hit Ireland this year. These had the potential to cause serious harm or death. ‘Powering Ireland 2030’ outlines Sinn Féin's vision of how Ireland can transition from being fossil fuel dependant to relying on renewable energy.”
“The Paris Agreement along with European Union targets on energy generation from renewable sources are helping shape policy with the environment at its heart. Sinn Féin's priority is to ensure that Ireland's energy and secure and energy in Ireland is affordable for all. No one in our society should be struggling to heat their homes.”
“Our vision for Ireland can be achieved by redirecting public, semi-state and private investment into developing and deploying a

“It is in this context that we report to the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment on all aspects of the North South Interconnector project. These regular updates cover ongoing developments, as well as wider activities relating to the project.”

Michael Fisher

EirGrid is planning to complete the North South electricity interconnector within the next five years. A document published earlier this month entitled “Tomorrow's Energy Scenarios 2017 Locations: Planning our Energy Future” contains two references to the interconnector.

7.2. Interconnection
“Ireland is currently interconnected with Great Britain through the East West Interconnector and to Northern Ireland via a 275 kV double circuit line. There are also two 110 kV tie lines between Northern Ireland and Ireland. However, these tie lines are not interconnectors as they do not, on their own, have sufficient power carrying capacity to securely hold the two transmission systems together.
The East West Interconnector uses HVDC technology and connects Deeside in Wales to the Woodland substation in Meath. The maximum transfer capacity of this interconnector is 500 MW. (My bold script) Further interconnection with Northern Ireland is planned with the high voltage alternating current North South Interconnector planned to be completed in 2023. This project will increase the total transfer capacity between Ireland and Northern Ireland to 1,200 MW. This transfer capacity is lower than the combined design capacities of both interconnectors.

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Completion of interconnector in 2023

This is because power flows on these interconnectors must be limited so that the transmission systems, both sides of the border, remain stable if one of the interconnectors were to go down unexpectedly.”
Also: Executive Summary p.4
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EARLIER VERSION
In an earlier version of the same document published in April intended as a “consultation” exercise, the company stated that the project was planned to be completed in 2020:
5.2 Interconnection
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The East West Interconnector

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NEPPC RESPONSE

The North East Pylon Pressure Campaign continues to examine the significant quantity of documentation (obtained by the Northern Standard under a Freedom of Information request) that specifies underground cable systems suitable for the NSI have a very high reliability and availability rate.
The EirGrid briefing to the DCCAE contradicts its own submission to the An Bord Pleanála Oral Hearing in 2010, where the same EirGrid project manager stated that there was no difference between overhead and underground in terms of reliability.
The Independent Expert Commission report in 2012, actually commissioned by the Department, does not consider reliability to be an issue for either the underground cables or associated converter stations.
The EirGrid briefing document makes great play on very long repair times to fix an underground cable fault compared to an overhead line

fault. But it fails to mention the critical point: most underground systems are now double circuits and a second backup cable is installed in parallel, so that if a fault occurs on the first one there is an instant switchover to the second one, meaning that repair time is irrelevant.
The EirGrid briefing refers to ‘international statistics’, but fails to reference a single source for the so-called statistics. There is no follow-up request from the DCCAE for any clarity on statistics or indeed any challenging of the sweeping statements made by EirGrid. This is lazy unprofessionalism from a Department whose only objective is to get the project ‘over the line’ (as in the first record described in this week’s list). It is also lazy expressed concern that Northern Ireland could become reliant on the Republic for electricity, amid growing scrutiny of the all-island energy market. Jim Shannon, who represents Strangford, is a member of a Westminster committee investigating the security of Northern Ireland’s electricity supply. He said that although he did not oppose co-operation with the Republic, the moves to further integrate the Northern Ireland electricity market with the Republic “always worried me.”
There has been a single electricity market for the island of Ireland since 2007 and a new and more integrated all-island market is to be launched on October 1st. As part of that process Kilroot power station, one of Northern Ireland’s main generating units, lost out, prompting its owner to announce it would be closed.
“Since 2009 the company which operates the electricity grid in Northern Ireland, the System Operator for Northern Ireland (SONI), has been owned by the Irish government.

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