

## **Submission to EirGRID**

**November 2013**

**Under-grounding makes sense – blotting the landscape does not**

***An alternative and sensible solution to transmitting electricity***

***Sinn Féin***



## Introduction

Sinn Féin has no objection in principle to the new Grid Link Project for the Southeast and East and the necessary enhancement of supply and expansion of the electricity grid in the regions. However the project will involve identifying a number of 1km wide route corridor options for a new 400kV overhead power line linking Leinster and Munster.

In its Stage One report EirGRID states that the project will

- Help secure a future electricity supply for homes, businesses, farms, factories and communities in Leinster and Munster.
- Provide a platform for economic growth and job creation in the south and east of Ireland.
- Help Ireland to meet its 40% renewable electricity target.

These objectives are laudable. However, Sinn Féin cannot support EirGrid's determination to use overground pylons and wires for the entire length of these routes and to rule out the underground option. The party intends in the coming weeks to launch a discussion document outlining our concerns in more

detail, offering alternatives to overhead powerlines and supporting an all-Ireland energy policy. The party will also seek meetings with EirGrid representatives, including its chief executive, and discuss with them our concerns in some considerable detail.

Sinn Féin welcomes the establishment of community-based groups that have been set up to help inform communities of the project and to voice the many genuine and serious concerns communities have about the project.

We intend to complement in every way possible the community-led campaign of opposition that has manifested itself across the entire length of these proposed new power lines.

Sinn Féin are at one with campaigning communities across all affected counties and will continue to use our influence to enhance this community-led effort to secure a rethink of the approach to these planned power lines by Eirgrid.

It would appear that despite the clearly expressed opposition of thousands of families living close to the proposed routes of these power lines and their support pylons, EirGrid remains fixed on its overhead approach to these projects.

Communities the length of the proposed power lines are vehemently opposed to the installation of unsightly pylons and fear for the health of all exposed to high voltage power conduits.

They are fearful for themselves, their families and for the children of these communities. We must stand together in supporting a

sensible solution for transmitting electricity and oppose attempts to blot our landscape.

### **Flawed Planning Process**

It is essential we recognise the reality of the outworking of the Planning and Development (Strategic Infrastructure) Act 2006 which Minister for Communications Pat Rabbitte abstained on and Sinn Féin opposed and voted against. This legislation facilitates the forcing through of such projects, regardless of the expressed wishes of communities.

Real fear and absolute opposition to the over-ground approach has been voiced along the entire route through counties Waterford, Cork, Carlow, Kilkenny, Kildare, Laois, Wicklow, Wexford and Tipperary. Very large public meetings have been held in several centres. The concern knows no political boundaries and people of all opinions are coming together as concerned communities endeavouring to ensure that EirGrid take a different approach.

EirGrid needs to respond to the concerns of communities, families and citizens directly affected by the proposal. We need to restore access to the proper planning process.

Sinn Féin recommends a revisiting of the Planning and Development (Strategic Infrastructure) Act by the Minister and his Fine Gael colleagues in Government to ensure delivery in this regard.

We need to ensure there is compliance by all wishing to see major projects undertaken and to ensure that communities and citizens have the right to engage as objectors in the normal course.

***In reality, the Planning and Development (Strategic Infrastructure) Act should be repealed.***

While this is not the responsibility of EirGRID it is important nonetheless to bring to its attention the obvious flaws in the planning process involved.

### **Core concerns for objecting to the Grid Link Project:**

- Devaluation of residential property
- Devaluation of farmland
- Impact on future agricultural development
- Impact on our landscape
- Impact on architectural and built heritage
- Visual impact of pylon towers
- Impact on lakes, water courses and their environs
- Impact on areas of primary and secondary heritage
- Impact on bio-diversity
- Impact on trees and hedgerows
- Impact on archaeology
- Impact on wildlife and habitat
- Impact on rural and agricultural economy
- Potential Health Impact on humans and animals



## **Health must come first**

A number of studies have shown that serious medical problems can potentially be caused by high voltage power lines of the type used by the ESB and EirGRID.

A report compiled by a research team in Bristol University in England, found that the electrical charge created by overhead power lines results in ill-health for people living or working close-by.

According to the findings, they are exposed to three times the average daily dose of damaging chemicals from car and industrial emissions into their lungs. The research showed that the chemicals are charged by leaking electricity, making them more likely to stick to the lungs when breathed in, increasing the amount and impact of the pollution.

A significant body of research by Professor Draper of Oxford University in 2005 in Britain found that living within 200 metres of high voltage power lines increases a child chance of getting cancer by 69% and within 600 metres it was increased by an average of 20%.

Previous studies have found cancer clusters associated with high-voltage power-lines. Those living in the vicinity have been found to have a higher chance of suffering from lung cancer and leukaemia. The latest research has also found that the older the power lines, the more leakage occurs and therefore the greater the health hazard.

We should note that the Petitions Committee of the Scottish Parliament has unanimously recommended that the Scottish Parliament adopt a precautionary approach to any and every overhead power line proposal that presents because of its concerns at the health effects associated with living in close

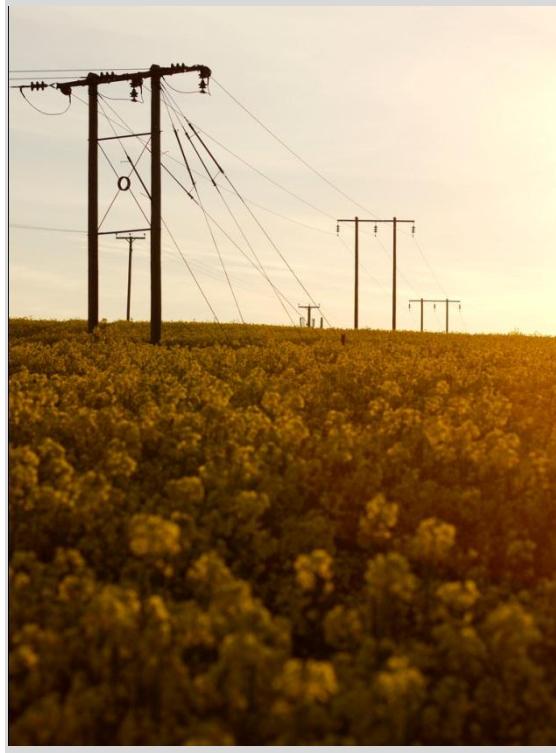
proximity to high-voltage overhead transmission lines.

While Sinn Féin accepts that even though the majority of scientific and medical research has been inconclusive, it is not acceptable that there should be any possible threat to public health when there is a viable solution available.

Insulated cables laid underground solve the problem of electricity leakage - which is the primary cause of the health risks associated with overhead power lines.

There can be no question that there is significant information on record. Eminent professionals and well-researched opinion stating there is every reason for genuine health concerns is indisputable.

***EirGrid must acknowledge that there is a potential problem and halt plans to erect new overhead power lines through Munster, Leinster and elsewhere.***



## Protecting our landscape and Tourism

Communities are quite rightly concerned about the visual impact on their environment of the proposed unsightly string of pylon structures stretching across beautiful and scenic areas in Leinster and the South East.

These regions are areas steeped in heritage with scenic landscapes, mountains, rivers and various heritage sites.

For example, the Comeragh Mountains in Waterford are a remarkable and varied range, stretching from the coast near Dungarvan inland as far as Clonmel. This includes prehistoric sites, standing stones, fulachta and cairns at Kilbrien, Móthel Abbey and the beautiful Mahon Falls.

The Comeragh landscape and other scenic areas such as Rosmore and Killeskin in Laois would be severely affected by the presence of overground pylon-supported power line infrastructure along the route under consideration.

Their presence would be no more acceptable across the rolling farmlands and scenic river valleys of the proposed new power lines across all counties in the East and South East.

These regions are famous for their natural scenic landscapes and unspoilt environment. Tourism is seen as a key economic driver for the South East and East.

Future generations will not forgive us easily if we are to allow our unique landscape to be eroded and blighted by the erection of unsightly high voltage power lines of up to 45 metres high.

Tourism will be greatly curtailed if the landscape is blighted with these pylons.

Householders and landowners could see the value of their property drop significantly. Local authorities across the regions have identified Tourism as a key economic driver.

These local authorities have invested in promoting the regions as first class tourist destinations. Any proposal which threatens such plans should be opposed and resisted.

***EirGRID needs to listen to the many thousands of voices of concern at the EirGrid power line proposal. This is not an argument against development. It is an argument for a better way and EirGRID should take that better way'***

## Impact on Agriculture

Agriculture is a key sector in the region which offers huge potential with the abolition of the milk quotas in 2015. The South East in particular is aiming to become a world leader in food production and processing. Any development which may potentially damage the reputation of the region needs to be resisted.

It is feared that the proposed route options are unsatisfactory with potential intrusions to within, in some cases, 50 metres or less of private dwellings and livestock holding areas. There is no doubt that 43 metre high voltage power lines are a significant source of intrusion and invasion onto farmers' lands.

The presence of such pylons will make it more difficult to work in some farmlands as farmers will have to work around poles and pylons. These challenges cannot be easily dismissed.

Householders and landowners could see the value of their property drop significantly. Planning restrictions will result from the

sterilisation of land over a radius out from these pylons.

These are all farming counties highly populated with livestock and wildlife habitats.

***The proposed pylons would represent a blot on the landscape and present serious challenges to many farmers and as such plans to proceed with such pylons should be scrapped.***

#### **Under-grounding is a sensible and sustainable solution**

Underground cables have lower transmission losses than overhead lines because, due to thermal reasons, underground cables have a larger conductor and therefore significantly smaller losses.

Studies on several 400 kV transmission grids show that the characteristics of underground cables can in many cases be beneficial to the overall performance of the network.

Disturbance of underground cables occurs less frequently than for overhead lines. Overhead cables are affected by severe weather. Only outside influences can disturb and damage underground cables. It is argued that underground cables are low-maintenance compared to overhead lines.

EirGrid states that underground cables — at installation — cost more than overhead lines. However, the fact that they are low-maintenance, have lower transmission losses, have a longer lifespan and no environmental impact, including visual intrusion, leads us to conclude that the initial additional outlay will be offset over time.

Undergrounding has many advantages, not least of which must be the peace of mind of

our fellow citizens whose understandable and justifiable concerns will have been met.

***Sinn Féin appeals to EirGRID to listen to the views of communities across the South East and Leinster.***

***We further appeal to EirGRID not to allow a situation where crass euros and cents would be the sole determinant factor in regard to what means will be employed by EirGrid.***

There are many issues that must be taken into account. We should be looking at the whole life cost over the projected life expectancy of these new interconnectors or power lines. Sinn Féin contends that the cost over the life expectancy, be it 40 years or whatever the case, by comparison between overhead and underground will show, at the very least, a balancing of the books and for the peace of mind, something one cannot translate on to a balance sheet.

***It is incumbent on the Government to commission a fully Independent Cost Benefit Analysis of both over-ground and under-ground options over a 40-50 year lifespan.***

#### **Sinn Féin's priorities**

- Promoting a sensible solution for transmitting electricity through the use of underground power lines and opposing unsightly and hazardous overhead high voltage power lines
- Encouraging EirGrid to follow the lead of other states, such as Denmark, who have determined that all future high-voltage power lines be undergrounded.
- Protecting our heritage, our environment and landscape, tourism and farming communities.

If we were among those families to be affected we would be as vociferous and as determined as they have shown themselves to be.

***Sinn Féin appeals to EirGRID to act responsibly and to respond to the all-elected view, and the opinion of the people of the affected areas, the affected counties and constituencies and to proceed by underground cabling.***

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Submission on behalf of:

Senator David Cullinane  
Sandra McLellan TD  
Brian Stanley TD

Michael Colreavy TD – Sinn Féin spokesperson on energy and natural resources  
Martin Ferris TD – Sinn Féin spokesperson on rural affairs  
Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh – Deputy Spokesperson on Rural Affairs