



Public Consultation
on the EirGrid
Transmission Development Plan 2007-2011

Submission from the
Western Development Commission
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Western Development Commission

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Introduction

The Western Development Commission (WDC) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the EirGrid Transmission Development Plan 2007-2011 (hereafter referred to as the Development Plan). The WDC has been working in the last few years to highlight electricity infrastructural development and regulatory issues as they affect the Western Region. This submission on the Development Plan provides another opportunity to continue this work.

The WDC is a statutory body established by government to promote, foster and encourage economic and social development in the Western Region¹. Established in 1997, the Commission was put on a statutory basis in February 1999. One of the functions of the WDC is regional policy development. In doing this, the WDC seeks to ensure that government policy reflects the needs of the region across such areas as infrastructure, natural resources, industrial and rural development. It also tracks the implementation of policies and recommends adjustments as appropriate.

In monitoring government policy and associated regulation, and ensuring that these reflect the needs of the Western Region, the WDC regards the provision of a quality electricity network and supply as important elements of the infrastructure required to underpin the economic development of the region. Hence the WDC monitors and comments on developments and policies for the electricity sector.

In this submission we make comments about the importance of electricity provision in regional development and some general points on the Transmission Development Plan 2007-2011.

The importance of electricity for regional development

The WDC believes that an efficient, resilient energy infrastructure is crucial for regional development and welcomes the recognition given to this in the Development Plan. Given the importance of energy infrastructure in underpinning development we have been concerned that regions such as the west, with low population densities and spatially dispersed industrial development, are given due consideration in the development of electricity transmission infrastructure.

Existing industry needs robust, reliable electricity supply, and infrastructure which is capable of meeting any increase in their electricity need. To allow further development, the Western Region also needs to be able to attract new industries. The internationally traded services (ITS) sector is seen as a significant growth area for the future in the Western Region. This sector is also very power dependent, particularly in terms of reliability. In order for the Western Region to be in a position to compete with other parts of Ireland for investment and employment, there needs to be sufficient electricity supply capacity available in order to attract new industries and services to locate or to start up in the Region. Without good capacity and reliability such businesses are less likely to consider regional locations.

¹ Counties Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Roscommon, Mayo, Galway and Clare.

The WDC has previously raised concerns with both the Commission of Energy Regulation (CER) and ESB National Grid (ESBNG) in relation to infrastructure and supply, and has emphasised that appropriate investments must be made to allow the region to compete in attracting industry and employment.

In much of the region there is little choice of energy supply (e.g. natural gas) and hence the Western Region is particularly reliant on electricity. It is thus important that electricity users in the region can plan for future developments confident that supplies will improve and that their remoter locations will not militate against them in terms of electricity provision and cost.

General Comments on the Development Plan

The WDC welcomes the major investment which has taken place in the electricity transmission grid in recent years, and we recognise the benefits which it has brought to our Region. We also welcome the publication of this draft Development Plan which describes the process of planning and development of electricity transmission in Ireland for the next five years. We do have, however, a number of general comments about the Development Plan.

Once again, as stated in our submission on the previous Development Plan (2006-2010) we note that the period covered by the Development Plan (to 2011) is relatively short and that the Development Plan is based on short term projections of demand and future transmission needs. There are a number of studies due to be completed which will have significant implications for the planning of the transmission network and its future development. These include the Grid Development Strategy, the All Island Grid Study and the Gate 2 Integration Study. The findings of all of these studies will affect the planning of the transmission system in the future and so it is clear that there will be important developments in transmission planning in the coming year and that this Development Plan will be superseded by the changes envisaged in these studies.

The Grid Development Strategy, the All Island Grid Study and the Gate 2 integration Study are all of particular importance to the Western Region where there is already significant wind generation, and great potential for more wind generation and in the longer term for wave generation. The Development Plan (5-5) notes that the connection of Gate 2 wind farms will have significant impacts on the transmission system in the North West. The WDC awaits the outcome of these studies with interest, and expects that the developments which are planned on the basis of these studies will recognise the growing importance of generation in our Region.

The WDC particularly welcomes the decision of EirGrid to prepare a long term "Grid Development Strategy". Investment in electricity transmission infrastructure is, a long term investment with the assets having a useful life of about 40 years (and longer with refurbishment). It is therefore important that long term electrical provision issues and future energy needs, generation issues and potential patterns of consumption provide a context for the investments included in future Development Plans.

We recognise that it was not possible to capture the findings of these studies in this Development Plan. We would expect that their findings should be incorporated into transmission planning as soon as possible and be fully incorporated into the next Development Plan.

All Island Planning

We believe that planning the development of the transmission network should be done on an All-Island basis and that this would allow for improved electricity infrastructure and capacity in border counties.

The WDC believes that there is considerable potential to improve electricity transmission and supply in Donegal by increased use of the Strabane/Letterkenny interconnector, and also by planning electricity transmission on an All-Island basis. While the emphasis in the Development Plan is on the North South interconnector and the planned interconnector with Great Britain, we believe that there is potential for improvement to the network in the North West by increasing the potential and use of the smaller interconnectors. Coolkeeragh power plant is very close to Donegal and could be in a position to provide stability in the North West in the context of the growth of wind generation in Donegal and neighbouring counties.

We would welcome more recognition of the all island nature of the transmission system in future Development Plans.

Conclusion

The WDC welcomes the publication of the draft Development Plan and are pleased to have the opportunity of making a submission on it. We are happy to provide further information or examples in relation to this submission, should they be required.

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If there are any queries in relation to this submission, please contact

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