



Public Consultation
on the EirGrid
Transmission Development Plan 2010

Submission from the
Western Development Commission
January 2011

Western Development Commission

Dillon House
Ballaghaderreen
Co. Roscommon

Phone: 094 986 1441

E mail: helenmchenry@wdc.ie

Web: www.wdc.ie

Introduction

The Western Development Commission (WDC) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the EirGrid Draft Transmission Development Plan 2010 (hereafter referred to as the Development Plan).

The WDC is a statutory body established by government to promote, foster and encourage economic and social development in the Western Region¹. One of the functions of the WDC is regional policy development. 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. The WDC works to highlight infrastructural development and regulatory issues as they affect 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. This submission on the Development Plan provides another opportunity to continue this work in relation to electricity transmission.

In this submission we make comments about the importance of electricity provision in regional development and then address issues in relation to the Transmission Development Plan 2010.

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 in the Region needs robust, reliable electricity supply, and infrastructure which is capable of meeting any increase in electricity demand. In addition, the Western Region needs to be able to attract new industries. With its significant renewable energy potential, the Western Region is in a position to attract industries with high electricity demand which are seeking clean 'green' power sources, if the quality transmission system is in place to allow this. Without good capacity and reliability such businesses are less likely to consider regional locations. Development of the transmission system in the Region can therefore make a significant contribution to the economic potential of the Region and bring substantial benefits beyond those directly related to the transmission system.

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

Additionally, it should be recognised that throughout 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, and that other users can be attracted to the region.

The requirement for electricity transmission investment is not, however, just to meet the actual and potential electricity demand. The Western Region has abundant ocean energy and high wind speeds, and is therefore at the forefront of renewable energy generation and supply. In addition to renewable generation opportunities there are opportunities for research and development in such renewable technologies (particularly in relation to ocean energy) and for training in, and manufacturing of, newer technologies, as well as for marketing the region as an ‘energy region’ which can provide clean renewable power to users with high demand. All of these rely on a quality transmission grid.

While the full exploitation of such opportunities is not within EirGrid’s remit, it is important to recognise that EirGrid’s investment in the transmission system is a very significant infrastructural investment in the Region which has the potential to bring many economic benefits. The WDC believes that a co-ordinated effort should be made to ensure that the full benefits of future investments are realised and that EirGrid should work with agencies involved in enterprise development, with local authorities, and with other interested groups to make this happen. The WDC is happy to work with EirGrid on this in the future and recognises that the investment in transmission infrastructure in our Region will bring economic benefits to the country as a whole.

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, and are pleased to have the opportunity to comment on the Plan. We do have, however, a number of general comments about the Development Plan.

Time period, context and other strategies

Once again, as stated in our submission on the previous Development Plans we note that the period covered by the Development Plan (to 2015) is relatively short. 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 welcome that a context chapter in the Development Plan outlines long term electrical provision issues and future energy needs, generation issues and potential patterns of consumption.

We also find it useful to have the chapter outlining other potential developments (Chapter 5) which are likely to be required in the future but which are not at a stage where they can be included in this draft Development Plan.

Grid 25, the grid development strategy, outlined the requirement for development to meet transmission needs in 2025, in particular in relation to the targeted increase in renewable generation. As the strategy acknowledged there is likely to be a substantial increase in renewable generation in the Western Region (from wind, ocean based technologies and biomass) as well as from more conventional forms of generation. The WDC welcomed the publication of the Grid25 strategy and although it understands that the projects in the Western Region envisaged under that strategy are not in the draft Development Plan under consultation, it welcomes the inclusion of the chapter on other potential investment. This chapter provides a link between the shorter term projects detailed in the Development Plan and the longer term transmission system needs.

The WDC would like to emphasise the importance of ensuring that EirGrid remains focused on the development of these potential transmission projects. We expect that the detail of these projects (outlined in Grid25) will be included in the next Development Plan. The potential for renewable energy in the region has been outlined earlier and it is important that the transmission infrastructure necessary for this potential to be realised is in place as soon as possible.

Practices in relation to future investments

The WDC recognises that there can be significant difficulties and delays in bringing transmission projects to completion. Delays can occur in the planning process and also post planning. The WDC understands that EirGrid is working on strategies to minimise such delays including ensuring that for future investment projects there is wider and earlier consultation on planned projects. It would be helpful if the Development Plan were to give more detail on the processes and practices that EirGrid will use in future to reduce delays and to help to make the timeline for the completion of investment projects more predictable.

All Island Planning

The WDC welcomes that move to more planning of the development of the transmission network for the whole island of Ireland taking account of the issues and needs of the transmission system on both sides of the border. We believe this allows for improved electricity infrastructure and capacity in border counties and also makes for more efficient and cost effective investment on both sides of the border.

Details in the Development Plan

The detail of the project in development tabled in Chapter 4 Planned Network Developments is a useful summary of progress on projects within the region. It would be helpful, however, if a more general location (e.g. county or region) were to be provided in the table to indicate the area where the developments are taking place.

It is otherwise quite time consuming for the user to find the location of the developments especially where the name of the stations are unfamiliar.

In addition it is noted that although the Development Plan was issued for consultation at the end of November 2010 a number of the projects listed have an ECD during 2010 and the status of these projects is not clear. It would be helpful if the table were updated to give a clearer indication of whether these projects are completed or whether some have been delayed.

Conclusion

The WDC welcomes the publication of the draft Transmission Development Plan 2010 and is 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, or discuss any of the issues raised should this be required.

Western Development Commission

January 2011

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

Dr Helen McHenry

Policy Analyst

Western Development Commission

Dillon House

Ballaghaderreen

Co. Roscommon

Phone: 094 986 1441

E mail: helenmchenry@wdc.ie