

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the new Approach to the design and routeing of new electricity transmission lines?

Over the next ten years, the UK will replace older power stations with new power sources, whether from nuclear, wind and other renewables, gas or clean coal. These new power sources will need to be connected to the high voltage electricity transmission network. The Approach sets out exactly how and when we will establish the need for new transmission infrastructure, appraise technologies and routes, and consult wherever we look to install new lines.

Why is this new Approach needed?

The nation's need for new, clean electricity generation means our energy infrastructure needs to be rebuilt. National Grid is investing significantly in the UK electricity transmission network in order to secure energy supply for the future and to help deliver the UK's climate change objectives. Not only will we be reinforcing existing transmission lines but we will also need to construct significant new transmission routes to connect new sources of low carbon generation, such as nuclear and wind.

It is important that all stakeholders in our projects understand how we work, when and how they will be consulted and what we take into account in forming our proposals.

Why has it expanded beyond an Approach to Undergrounding?

As we moved through the public consultation on our draft Approach to Undergrounding it became clear from feedback we received that we needed to set out

more broadly our approach to the routeing of all new high voltage electricity transmission lines whether underground, overhead or sub-sea.

What was the feedback from the public consultation on the draft Approach to Undergrounding?

We had a high response rate, particularly from statutory consultees, interest groups and members of the public living in areas where major infrastructure projects are coming forward.

The main messages we received during the consultation were:

- The Approach should not just focus on undergrounding but on developing and routeing electricity infrastructure as a whole
- Proposing overhead lines should not be seen as a default position as this is not acceptable to local communities
- Each project should be considered on a case by case basis
- Valued landscapes should be protected as far as possible, whether or not they have a specific designation
- There should not be too much emphasis on cost when considering routeing new electricity lines
- The Approach should identify how and when local communities should be consulted to ensure that communities feel their concerns are considered early enough to inform the decision-making process

A full copy of the Consultation Report can be found at www.nationalgrid.com/undergrounding.

How is the new Approach different from the way National Grid currently works to develop new electricity lines?

The new Approach summarises the processes that we have developed in response to the Planning Act 2008 and feedback that we have received over the last two years in the course of our projects.

At the same time as publishing this document, we are also giving a commitment to place greater emphasis on minimising the visual impact of new lines in our planning applications. In doing so, we recognise that we must balance this with the need to keep costs down for electricity bill-payers. This is consistent with Government policy, which has recently been set out in the National Policy Statements.

Does this mean National Grid will underground more new electricity lines?

We have no predetermined preference for overhead or underground solutions for any of our projects. Our approach is always to work with all our stakeholders and local communities to find the right balance between keeping costs down for consumers with the need to minimise the visual impact of these new lines. There are many ways of achieving this including sensitive line-routeing, screening, use of alternative pylon designs, dismantling existing infrastructure and undergrounding. This assessment will be done on a case by case basis to ensure that local considerations are fully understood and accounted for.

In what circumstances will National Grid now underground new electricity lines?

Each project will be considered on a case by case basis but examples of where undergrounding might be considered include:

- Locations with physical difficulties in constructing an overhead line, such as in urban areas
- Wide river or estuary crossings, or
- The presence of highly valued landscapes such as National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and other nationally important areas, and also particularly sensitive landscapes and iconic views or areas where potential impacts could only be mitigated by undergrounding

This is not an exhaustive list and all projects will be considered on a case by case basis following consultation with a wide range of stakeholders.

Why wouldn't National Grid now underground all new high voltage electricity lines?

We must stay mindful of the need to strike a balance between minimising visual impacts and seeking to reduce cost pressures on consumers.

We will use the process set out in our new Approach document to review all projects on a case by case basis to determine the most appropriate route and mix of technologies. We will look at all factors, including visual amenity, the environment, the effects on local people, technical issues and cost, when evaluating the possible routes and technologies to propose.

Is undergrounding more cost effective than the alternatives over the life of the line, as some people have suggested?

We examine both capital and lifetime costs in our options appraisal process. In our experience, however, consideration of lifetime costs generally makes little difference to the economics because of the very significant variation in capital costs between the technologies.

We very much welcome the fact that Parsons Brinckerhoff has been appointed to undertake an independent study into the comparative costs of new high voltage overhead and underground power circuits. We will continue to provide full cooperation to ensure this study is successful. Once complete, this report will provide an authoritative and independent point of reference to support the decision-making process for our projects.

How will the upcoming independent report on the costs of undergrounding be taken into account now that the new Approach has been published?

We would have liked to have had access to the final comparative costs analysis before we further developed our new Approach. However, having launched our undergrounding consultation last December, there was a need to provide clarity on our approach to the design and routeing of new electricity transmission lines to all involved in our major infrastructure projects. Once the comparative costs analysis is published, due by the end of this year, we will take into account the findings and review our proposals for major infrastructure projects accordingly.

How will this new Approach inform major infrastructure projects already underway?

Our new Approach document sets out the process that we will use to take these projects forward: the stages of consultation; the people and organisations that we will consult with, and; the way in which we will appraise and narrow down the options. As part of this process, we will work with stakeholders and communities on how best to mitigate visual impacts, including identifying any areas where undergrounding of each new route should take place.

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