

Mid Antrim Upgrade

Part 2a Engagement Report

January 2023

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2 Introduction

2.1 Part 2a Engagement Summary Report

SONI, the electricity transmission system operator for Northern Ireland, is planning to bring forward the 'Mid Antrim Upgrade' project. This proposed project is a high-capacity transmission system upgrade between the Kells and Rasharkin Main substations in County Antrim.

The Mid Antrim Upgrade project will help to improve the efficiency of the electricity system in the local Antrim area, ensuring a more efficient and secure electricity supply on a more sustainable basis.

This report represents a concise, yet thorough assessment of the quality and extent of consultation activities that have taken place in relation to the proposed Mid Antrim Upgrade project during Part 2a of SONI's [three-part process](#) for developing the grid.

3 Background

3.1 SONI Background

SONI is the electricity transmission system operator (TSO) for Northern Ireland. It is responsible for the consistent and reliable transmission of electricity on the high-voltage grid, matching supply, and demand across Northern Ireland.

SONI also operates the all-island wholesale electricity market with EirGrid through the Single Electricity Market Operator (SEMO) which has been in operation since November 2007.

In April 2014 SONI was given the responsibility to plan and develop the transmission network. The transmission network is owned and maintained by the Northern Ireland Electricity Networks (NIEN), the transmission owner (TO).

3.2 Project Background

The Mid Antrim Upgrade is a proposed high-capacity transmission system upgrade between the Kells and Rasharkin Main substations in County Antrim.

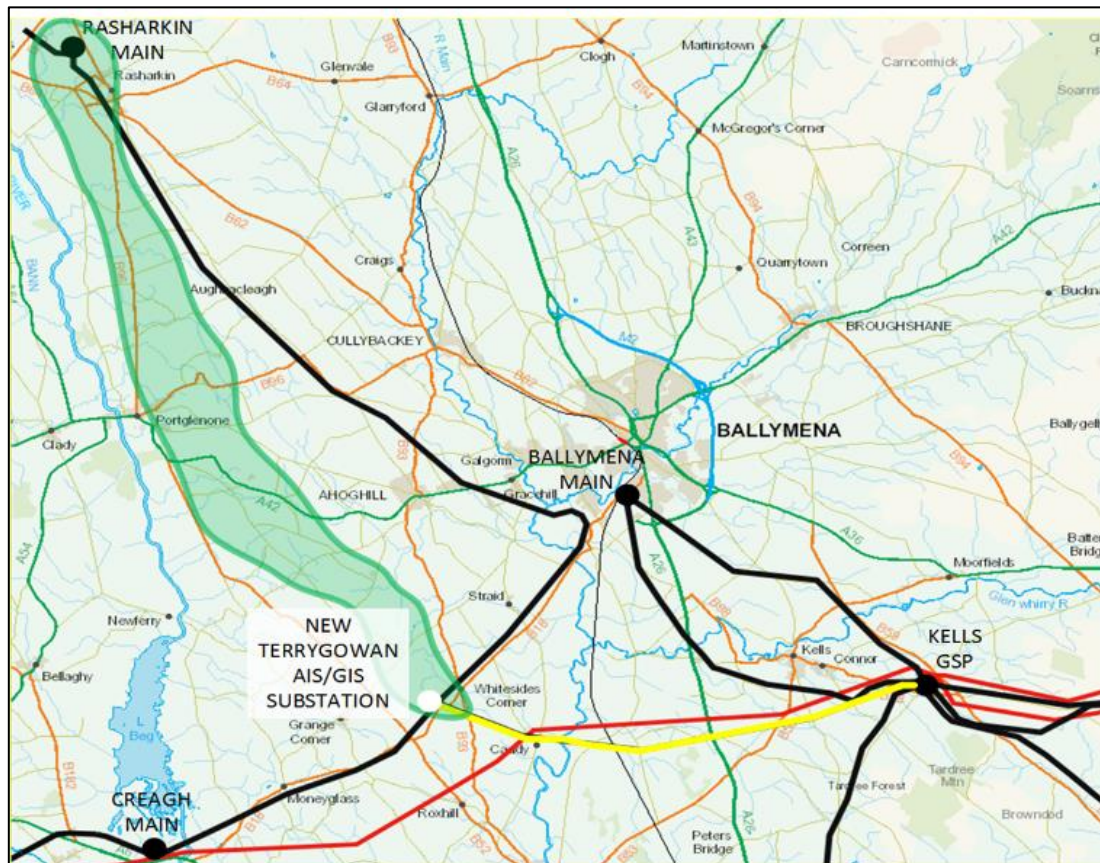
To accommodate the increase in renewable energy generation in the North and West and to get it to the East where it is needed, the grid in the Mid-Antrim area must be made stronger and more resilient. Renewable energy is central to delivering a clean, low carbon electricity system, which in turn, will support the delivery of Northern Ireland's climate targets.

Currently, there is a bottleneck on the grid in the Mid-Antrim area and there is an inability to transmit all the renewable energy generated in the North and West, to urban centres such as Ballymena, Antrim, and Greater Belfast. The Mid Antrim Upgrade is a proposed solution to this problem.

SONI carried out an examination of the study area which includes the existing grid between Ballymena, Creagh, Kells and Rasharkin substations. The examination looked at several different options for delivering the project in this area including environmental, technical, and economic factors.

In 2020, an Environmental Report was produced which appraised sample corridors where new grid infrastructure associated with each option could be located. SONI looked at existing grid infrastructure and how it could be utilised.

'Option 6' from the 'Option paper was selected, which includes a proposed new substation at Terrygowan, an uprate of the double circuit between Kells and Terrygowan (one side only) and a new overhead line between Terrygowan and Rasharkin.



Map of proposed Mid Antrim Upgrade

The proposed development falls within three council areas, Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council, Mid and East Antrim Borough Council and Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council. The proposal falls within the North Antrim and the South Antrim Assembly and Parliamentary constituencies.



Mid Antrim Upgrade Study Area and Council Boundaries

SONI’s proposed strategy is to submit three separate planning applications for the project to the relevant council planning authorities in Q2 2024.

3.3 Part 2a Engagement

SONI's [three part process](#) puts stakeholder and public consultation at the heart of how the transmission grid is developed.

Issues raised by those consulted and the public throughout the consultation process are set out in detail within the report. The feedback provided at this early stage will inform the final plans for the project, which will also be subject to a further consultation phase.

Any comments made to SONI are not representations to a Planning Authority and do not in any way affect the statutory right to make representations to a Planning Authority, about any application submitted to them.

This part 2a phase of the consultation was officially launched on 31st October 2022 and closed on 12th December 2022. The consultation period for this phase of the project, encompassed three separate open public information events, as well as several direct engagements with interest groups, council officials and elected representatives. SONI made significant efforts to share information with the public and obtain feedback on this project. The feedback received throughout the consultation period will help inform the further development of the project, including the route of the new overhead line between Terrygowan and Rasharkin.

SONI's Grid Development Process



4 Engagement Strategy

4.1 Purpose of Part 2a

SONI takes a structured and professional approach to public engagement which was guided by a detailed engagement and communications plan, drafted at the outset of the project, and updated throughout the consultation period.

In undertaking extensive consultation at this early stage, SONI's main aim was to ensure interested stakeholders had access to up-to-date and accurate information about the proposal and were provided with sufficient opportunity to provide feedback that could be considered as the plans are developed.

Part 2a engagement precedes any formal statutory consultation process associated with a planning application.

4.2 Stakeholder Mapping

Before any consultation began, SONI carried out a comprehensive stakeholder mapping exercise to identify relevant individuals and groups in relation to the proposal. Broadly, these included:

Governmental

- North Antrim MP / North Antrim MLAs
- South Antrim MP / South Antrim MLAs
- Councillors from Bannside DEA / Ballymoney DEA / Dunsilly DEA /
- Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council Officers (Chief Executive / Principal Planning Officer)
- Mid and East Antrim Borough Council Officers (Interim Chief Executive / Head of Planning)
- Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council Officers (Chief Executive / Director of Development)

Residents / Community

- Residents
- Community Groups / Associations
- Youth Clubs

Businesses/special interest groups

- Regional Lobby Groups
- Local Traders Groups/Business Improvement Districts (BIDs)
- Individual Businesses
- Faith groups

Stakeholders identified by SONI were reviewed and updated based on relevant feedback as the consultation period progressed.

4.3 Methods of Engagement

A key aspect of SONI's approach was giving careful consideration as to how they could reach those people most likely to be affected by the proposal and who may wish to be involved in the process. Identifying potential stakeholders subsequently informed SONI's methods of appropriate consultation, which are outlined within this report.

In keeping with best practice, SONI employed a variety of community consultation techniques to ensure they accessed all appropriate stakeholders.

As documented, SONI hosted three separate drop-in public consultation events and several individual engagements with other stakeholders.

In line with best practice, each consultation event hosted by SONI had an open invitation and was advertised through the local press. A campaign of social media activity on Twitter and LinkedIn also shared information on the project, directing people to SONI's Consultation Portal, where feedback could be submitted.

SONI established a dedicated webpage containing information about the project; distributed copies of advertisements containing details of each event in local centres; created a dedicated email address and relevant contact details were made publicly available.

A Community Forum and Citizen Sounding Board were established to enable as diverse a group as possible to learn more about the upgrade and route options and provide feedback that can be used when developing the preferred option for the upgrade.

By utilising several engagement methods, as set out above, SONI ensured that as many people as possible in the local area were aware of the consultation events, meaning stakeholders were informed of the proposal and how to provide feedback.

4.4 Drop in Consultation Events

SONI remained mindful of the fact that not everyone in the local community can be expected to have the same level of understanding of planning and energy issues, and therefore prioritised staffed exhibitions and drop-in sessions.

To ensure participation was genuine, respectful, and as inclusive as possible, SONI hosted three separate consultation events, in separate locations (Kells, Portglenone and Rasharkin). This was to ensure a geographical spread of locations throughout the proposed project area.

The chosen venues, Rosspark Hotel in Kells; The Bank Building, Portglenone; and Rasharkin Community Centre are accessible, catering for all audiences in the local area. The staffed exhibition, drop-in format of the events allowed for meaningful participation.

Each drop in event was held from 2pm-7pm to offer an opportunity for participants to attend at a time that suited them best. These steps were taken by SONI to encourage greater attendance by different groups of people.

Each of the events took the form of a staffed exhibition where the plans for the project were clearly displayed, with detailed maps available for more specific discussions with stakeholders as required.

Representatives from SONI, as well as environmental and stakeholder engagement consultants, were available to answer queries, provide clarification and facilitate feedback at each event.

For the events, SONI also:

- Produced a project-specific brochure.
- Developed a short video to explain the objectives and main features of the proposal, which was also published on SONI social media pages.
- Established a dedicated project section on the Consultation Portal, webpage, and email address.
- Provided contact information including a telephone number and dedicated project email address.
- Made questionnaires available for members of the public to provide feedback.
- Provided brochures about SONI and their commitment to public engagement.
- Endeavoured to record a summary of discussions held with members of the public at each consultation event.

As outlined above, SONI provided a broad range of information materials to enable local communities and stakeholders to understand and respond to the proposal. All information produced by SONI was written in clear, accessible, and non-technical language and was made available at each consultation event. SONI also provided access to information relating to the proposal online, via the SONI Consultation Portal and a dedicated project webpage on its website.

This enabled the local community to provide meaningful feedback to SONI before any line route or site location was chosen for the project, providing an opportunity for the public to input into the various elements of the project.

During the consultation events, SONI engineers explained the proposed start and end points of the new overhead line and explained how the route was yet to be determined, including the key considerations and constraints in the study area. They also highlighted the need for a new substation at Terrygowan and displayed the study area for this new infrastructure.

At each event, SONI representatives explained the purpose of the consultation phase it was undertaking.

More information on the feedback received from this phase of consultation is set out within this report.

5 Part 2a Engagement

5.1 Pre-Consultation Engagement

Ahead of the Part 2a consultation phase formally opening, SONI began to engage with key stakeholders in the areas affected by the project. This included engagement with elected representatives from all levels, as well as officers from Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough Council, Mid & East Antrim Borough Council and Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council.

Early engagement with elected representatives and Council officials meant they were made aware of the proposal and ensured they had access to up-to-date and accurate information, which was particularly important to SONI as it ensured local representatives were well equipped to respond to any constituent queries about the project. This early engagement also gave SONI the opportunity to collate valuable feedback from key stakeholders.

Elected Representative Engagement

Name	Date
Jim Allister MLA Cllr Timothy Gaston	12 th October 2022
Paul Frew MLA	13 th October 2022
John Blair MLA	14 th October 2022
Trevor Clarke MLA	2 nd November 2022
Ian Paisley MP	27 th January 2023

Council Engagement

Name	Date
Majella McAllister, Director of Economic Development & Planning; Michael McKenna, Head of Investment and Business Development; Sharon Mossman, Development Plan Manager, Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council	28 th July 2022
Shane Mathers, Planning and Development Manager, Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council	12 th August 2022
Valerie Watts, Chief Executive and Paul Duffy Head of Planning; Mid and East Antrim Borough Council	29 th September 2022

SONI continued to engage with elected representatives and Council officials throughout the engagement process, ensuring they were made aware in advance of all public events hosted by SONI.

5.2 Drop-in Consultation Events

SONI hosted three separate drop-in consultation events in November 2022. These included:

Venue	Date	Time
Rosspark Hotel, Kells	16 th November 2022	2pm – 7pm
The Bank Building, Portglenone	22 nd November 2022	2pm – 7pm
Rasharkin Community Centre	29 th November 2022	2pm – 7pm

Each of the events took the form of a staffed exhibition where the plans for the project were clearly displayed, with detailed maps available for more specific discussions with stakeholders as required.

To generate awareness of the events in the local area, adverts for the events were placed in the following local papers:

- Ballymoney and Coleraine Times
- Antrim Guardian
- Ballymena and Antrim Times

Adverts notifying all three events appeared in the papers in the three weeks in advance of the first public event:

- w/c 24/10/22
- w/c 31/10/22
- w/c 7/11/22

The advert outlined the objective of the project, broadly what is being proposed, and the details of the drop-in consultation events. The newspaper advert can be found at Appendix 2.

SONI also issued posters noting the public events to the following local centres:

- Kells & Connor Library
- Kells & Connor Medical Practice
- Rosspark Hotel
- Kells & Connor Primary School
- Kells & Connor Pharmacy
- Fullans Food Hall
- Portglenone Library
- The Bank, Portglenone
- St Mary's Primary School, Portglenone
- Portglenone Monastery
- Clear Pharmacy, Portglenone
- Portglenone Health Centre
- Eurospar, Rasharkin
- Rasharkin Health Centre
- Rasharkin Community Playgroup
- Rasharkin Primary School
- Rasharkin Community Centre

Invitations to the consultation events were also emailed directly to all elected representatives and council officers. North Antrim and South Antrim MPs / MLAs, Bannside DEA, Ballymoney DEA and Dunsilly DEA Councillors, Causeway Coast and Glens Council Officers, Mid and East Antrim Borough Council Officers and Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council Officers.

The consultation events provided attendees with the opportunity to view accurate information about the project and discuss the proposal with members of the project team.

Attendance at the events is outlined below:

- Wednesday 16th November 2022 – approximately 4 attendees
- Tuesday 22nd November 2022 – approximately 4 attendees
- Tuesday 29th November 2022 – approximately 7 attendees

A key aim of the consultation events was to gather feedback from members of the public which SONI could then take into consideration. Therefore, SONI staff completed a Record of Engagement form to provide a summary of the discussions that were held at each public event. Each attendee was also encouraged to complete a feedback form to detail their views on the proposals.

5.3 Feedback Received by SONI

A total of 13 feedback forms were completed and provided to SONI by attendees at the events, while a Record of Engagement form was completed for 14 participants. These provide a record of topics discussed with attendees at the events.

The feedback provided by attendees was recorded and analysed by SONI, so that it could feed into the project design process moving forward. This is documented below.

5.4 Information Received via Consultation Portal and Email

As well as providing feedback via consultation events it was also possible to submit feedback to the SONI Consultation Portal or via post or email. Most feedback received at the public events was uploaded to the Consultation Portal for the public to view.

5.5 Overview of Information Provided in Feedback Forms and Consultation Submissions

Included below is a summary of the feedback received by SONI via the Feedback Forms completed and returned by attendees at the events.

Overview of Feedback Forms

Based on the information in the 13 individual submissions provided:

10 respondents indicated they **live within the project study area**

3 indicated they **did not** live in the project study area

12 felt like they had been **provided with all relevant information** regarding the proposal

1 individual felt it was **early stages and hard to say** if they felt they had been provided with all relevant information regarding the proposal

13 respondents were **satisfied with the level of expertise** provided at the event

9 respondents **indicated support** for the proposals

4 indicated they are **undecided** if they are supportive of the proposal

People were made aware of the events through:

Poster

Online / Social Media

Maildrop

Worked in the Bank (venue of event)

Friend

SONI

The following comments were made in submissions:

Good to get an overview

I would make it very clear about the type of new transmission line you are contemplating i.e., not the metal pylons!

Wider circulate dates of consultation at next stage of process – letter, posters & online

It would be good to turn in both circuits from Kells into the new Terrygowan Substation

This information received at the events will feed into SONI’s approach to further consultation for the project. SONI will continue to review its own approach as to how people are made aware of the event, and to ensure relevant information is made publicly available. The information in the Record of Engagement forms, documented below, also played an important role in this.

5.6 Overview of SONI Record of Engagement Forms

Included below is an overview of the information provided in the SONI Record of Engagement forms completed during Part 2a of the consultation. These sheets were completed by SONI staff to reflect conversations with attendees at the consultation events.

The Record of Engagement forms provided SONI with the opportunity to identify specific issues which could then be considered by the project team going forward. Please note that the frequencies provided are approximate.

<u>Overview of SONI Record of Engagement Forms</u>	
Topics discussed (as highlighted by SONI representatives)	Frequency
Planning	9
Construction	6
Landscape & Visual	6
Undergrounding	6
Communication / Consultation	5
Renewables	3
Project Methodology	3
Ecology	1
Noise	1
Statutory Process	1
Material Assets	1
Alternatives	1

Environmental protection vs urgency of decarbonisation	1
State of play with Kells Battery Storage in terms of when it went fully operational	1
The route of the line	1
Pole & steel tower near property	1

The issues recorded in the SONI Record of Engagement forms provided an important insight into the main areas of interest for members of the public who discussed the proposal with members of the project team at the consultation events.

All feedback provided will be considered by SONI and considered ahead of the next phase of consultation on the project.

5.7 Summary of Feedback and Discussions Held During Part 2a.

Included below is a summary of the main issues and comments raised by stakeholders at the public drop in events during part 2a of SONI's Grid Development Process for the Mid Antrim Upgrade Project.

Theme	Summary of Feedback
New and Existing Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>What will the changes be to the existing poles/lines – will wooden or steel poles be used?</i> - <i>Concerns about the size and location of the proposed substation.</i> - <i>Discussion about the existing line and why this needs to be upgraded.</i> - <i>Constraints on existing infrastructure.</i> - <i>How many new lines are proposed?</i> - <i>Potential of connecting the new circuit to the existing Creagh – Rasharkin circuit.</i>
Route Selection and Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Suggestion to include smaller roads on maps included on project materials.</i> - <i>Concerns about the new line ruining the view.</i> - <i>Will the proposed new line follow the direction of the roads?</i> - <i>Will the new line go through the existing PV Farm, around it or underground?</i> - <i>Potential of connecting the new circuit to the existing Creagh – Rasharkin circuit.</i>
Undergrounding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Design of the line from Terrygowan to Rasharkin – undergrounding would be a good idea. around the village as much as possible.</i> - <i>Potential of undergrounding.</i> - <i>Possibility of providing an underground cable along the road to the substation.</i>
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>A main challenge will be getting people on board to make the grid better, you need to bring people along with you as the work needs to be done.</i> - <i>Traffic – local roads are already busy.</i> - <i>The area of bogland at the top of the map (Terrygowan) was highlighted as something that may be of note to the project team.</i> - <i>Challenge to get renewables built by 2030.</i>

Battery Storage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discussion around the battery storage at Kells substation. - Possible new battery site at the wind farm.
Environmental Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are the environmental considerations of this project and how will the project team deal with these.
Areas of Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is happening around Rasharkin and what impact will this project have on the area? - Concerns around how close new poles would come to properties. - Scale of the project.
Details of the Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are the timescales for this project? - Rationale for the project - The project is beneficial to everyone as this will help to reduce costs allow for the use of renewables as a way forward. - Renewable Generation and Security of Supply.
Windfarms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Concerns about the number of constrained wind turbines and the curtailment of windfarms.
Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discussion about constraints on local properties – have the project team engaged with any landowners at this stage? - General question on community Engagement and level of it going forward.
Kells Cluster	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Timescales for Kells Cluster to be approved. - Kells Cluster project will improve the geographical location South of Kells.

5.8 Overview of Feedback Received During Engagement with Elected Representatives

The table below outlines a summary of the main issues and comments raised by elected representatives during part 2a of SONI's Grid Development Process.

Theme	Summary of Feedback
Kells Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Where is the solar farm connected? - Residents are concerned about the battery scheme and it going on fire. - Requests that a letter is sent regarding the state of play with Kells Battery Storage in terms of when it went fully operational. - Discussions around the location of Kells Substation. - The recent decision to approve planning for the Solar Farm could potentially cause issues. People are very concerned about renewables in their area.
Noise and Disruption at Kells Substation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Concerns about the noise issue at Kells, will more renewables at Kells mean more noise in the area and is there a focus on Kells for renewables? - People in Kells are very tolerant at the minute and there is now a complete disregard for the people of Kells. - Discussions about the noise and nuisance at Kells Substation. A nuisance order had been issued by Environmental Health in 2021. This noise was because of a variable flow of electricity from renewables. Why are all measures not being taken at Kells to abate the noise as this would be a key concern of people living in the Kells area.
Options, Route Selection & Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Why is option 6 the preferred option, is it the cheapest option? Where is the existing corridor? - What options will we have at the next set of consultations – discussed switching station options, compulsory wayleaves, and battery schemes. - Discussions around undergrounding and where undergrounding would take place. - Conversations regarding the section between Terrygowan and Rasharkin, whether new towers would be constructed. - Will the new line be run near or beside the existing transmission line between Rasharkin and Terrygowan (via Ballymena)? Wanted to ensure all options were explored. Would eddy currents have an impact on this? - The uprating of the current infrastructure between Kells and Creagh is good and sympathetic to constituents. - What part of the line would be restring? - Queries about where exactly the existing line from Kells to Creagh was, particularly in relation to Whiteside Road Cross Road

Planning Application	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discussions about the locations of the project and how this straddles three council areas.
Overall Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What does it mean to uprate one side of the line? - Support of the Kells Cluster project and of the Kells Solar Farm which recently received planning permission. - Have any objections been manifested to date? - Clarification on what side of the line is being restrung and what does it mean to uprate one side of the line. - It is going to be a difficult process to deal with three planning applications? The three councils in question are three different councils with three very different planning departments. - What will the new substation look like? - Ultimately there is a need for this project as the transmission system is operating at c.193% capacity. - The substation could be visually integrated. - Whilst it is important this project is delivered; it needs to impact the least amount of people as possible.
Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - When will landowners begin to be contacted on the project? - Are SONI planning to engage with environmental lobby groups on this? The Toome Tidal Group as a potential group to engage with. The part of the project in South Antrim is quite rural and sparsely populated. - It is vital to go out and speak to people on the project and the three venues identified for the consultation were strategically placed. - People may not complain about the pylons or infrastructure themselves, but the worry will be the upgrading of the grid will open the door for further renewable energy generation in their area. This could manifest itself into objections on the project. - When SONI negotiate with landowners to put down a pylon how does it work with a construction or maintenance swathe of land? Are landowner agreements in place before submitting a planning application?
Grid Connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How would Rathsherry windfarm be connected to the grid? - Discussions of a hypothetical example of a solar farm near Ahoghill and whether this project would allow the easier connection of renewables into the grid. - Will this project improve connections of renewables in the North Antrim? - What percentage of renewable energy generation will this help bring onto the grid?

5.9 Overview of Feedback Received During Engagement with Council Officials

The table below outlines a summary of the main issues and comments raised by Council officials during part 2a of SONI's Grid Development Process.

Theme	Summary of Feedback
Options, Route Selection & Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is there going to be any additional 'plant' as part of this planning application? - Seeking more clarity on the restringing of the line.
Overall Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discussions around the timeline for the PAD in Q3 – happy to take any informal queries. All applications being submitted at the same time should somewhat mitigate against potential issues arising. - It would be useful to understand what benefits the project would bring.
Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All political representatives at all levels should be briefed prior to the consultation events. - If there is to be three separate planning applications, council would be content to facilitate discussions across councils, particularly regarding statutory consultees. - It is positive to hear about all the proposed engagement with residents and key stakeholders.
Planning Application	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discussions around the category of the development and whether it would be dealt with by DfI. - 110kV double circuits fall under regionally significant applications and therefore the planning application would then be deemed as major and be dealt with by the council, with council officers formulating a recommendation for the planning committee to ultimately determine the planning application. - The fee for this application would be £813. An ES would cost additional c. £10,000.

<p>Planning Policy / Key Documents</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is there a potential of an EIA in relation to schedule 2 category 3 as this project exceeds 33kv. - Some planning policies to be aware of, such as SPPS paras 6.429 and 6.250 which is in relation to overhead lines and EMF. Para 6.250 outlines potential impact on AONB, amenity and the environment. - Discussions around the PSU8 'New Infrastructure' and the tests that need to be met as part of that policy such as need, alternative sites and environmental impact. It would be useful to demonstrate why this route was chosen. - PPS 2 'Natural Heritage' and PPS 3 'Built Heritage' Policies need to be considered. - Planning policy such as need; public health and visual amenity needs to be considered as part of any planning application. - With the three sperate planning applications it would be appropriate to have one EIA covering all three applications.
<p>Other Existing Infrastructure / Projects</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Several windfarm developments in council area which were seeking planning approval, are currently being built or are being powered up. - Discussions around the Eden to Carnmoney project – an update and could the presentation be shared with the council. - Consider the a previous connected planning application which was and be aware of all possible Judicial Review grounds that could be brought forward.

5.10 Community Forum and Citizen Sounding Board

During this phase of the Grid Development Process, SONI appointed a public participation charity 'Involve', to facilitate a two-part engagement process consisting of a Community Forum and a Citizen Sounding Board. This was to enable as diverse a group as possible to learn more about the upgrade and route options and provide feedback that can be used when developing the preferred option for the upgrade.

The Community Forum provided an opportunity for community representatives to come together to build their understanding of the proposed route options, reflect their views of their organisation or community, and provide information or insights that they feel may need to be taken into account during project delivery.

The Citizen Sounding Board brought together a randomly selected group of people who live within the proposed area of the new overhead line and broadly represent the entire community. People selected to attend the Citizen Sounding Board learned about issues, discussed these with one another and made recommendations about what should happen moving forward in this project.

5.11 Summary of Part 2a Consultation

The information provided throughout this chapter provides an overview of the feedback received by SONI during part 2a of SONI's Three Part Process for Grid Development for the Mid Antrim Upgrade project. It also outlines how SONI have responded to comments received and issues raised by members of the public and elected representatives at consultation events and through individual briefings.

Feedback was received via ongoing engagement with elected representatives and the public through individual meetings, three public events (Kells, Portglenone and Rasharkin) and a Community Forum and Citizen Sounding Board. Hosting these separate events on different dates provided as many people as possible from across the area of the project with the opportunity to access information on the proposals.

In summary, the information gathered from SONI's first round of community consultation shows the following key findings:

- 92% of those who completed feedback forms at the public events felt they had been provided with all relevant information regarding the proposal, 100% were satisfied with the level of expertise provided at the consultation event
- Kells infrastructure, undergrounding, route design and engagement were key themes that developed from discussions during the public events and through individual briefings with elected reps.
- From the records of engagement collected at each public event the key topics discussed were planning, construction, landscape & visual, undergrounding and communication / consultation.

The key themes emerging from part 2a engagement are summarised below to include key extracts from meetings with key stakeholders.

Key Theme 1: Kells Infrastructure

- “The recent decision to approve planning for the Solar Farm could potentially cause issues. Kells Vocal are very concerned about renewables in their area, and they have members of their group who are informed on technical matters.”

Key Theme 2: Undergrounding

- “It would be a good idea to underground around the Rasharkin village as much as possible”.
- “Where will undergrounding take place, will it all be in the Rasharkin area?”

Key Theme 3: Route Design

- “Will the new line be run near or beside the existing transmission line between Rasharkin and Terrygowan”
- “Will the new line go through the existing PV Farm, around it or underground?”
- “Would it be possible to connect the new circuit to the existing Creagh – Rasharkin circuit?”

Key Theme 4: Engagement

- “What will be the constraints on local properties – have the project team engaged with any landowners at this stage?”
- “Are SONI planning to engage with environmental lobby groups on this. The Toome Tidal Group as a potential group to engage with”.
- “It is vital to go out and speak to people on the project”.

6 Ongoing Engagement

6.1 Existing Liaison Arrangements

SONI has taken several steps to ensure lines of communication remain open with stakeholders regarding the project, as the project progresses through the three-part process for developing the grid.

The dedicated project webpage remained live throughout the engagement process that provided information on the proposals, details of the consultation events and details on how to provide feedback on the proposals. SONI's contact details have been included on all project materials which included the dedicated project email address and is monitored on a regular basis.

6.2 Future Engagement

As SONI move through the three-part process for developing the grid, SONI will continue to engage with local key stakeholders to get their feedback on the proposals. SONI's three-part process puts stakeholder and public consultation at the heart of developing the transmission grid. SONI will continue to provide opportunities for the local community to participate in the process before the finalisation of the project and submission of any future planning applications.

SONI will continue to work closely with relevant landowners to ensure accurate and up-to-date information is accessible as the project progresses and any concerns are acknowledged and addressed where appropriate or possible. All information materials and correspondence will include SONI contact details.

This engagement will likely take the form of providing stakeholders with written information materials as required, face-to-face meetings and engagement with relevant political representatives. The dedicated project webpage on SONI's website will also be updated as the project progresses and can therefore be viewed as an information source for stakeholders.

7 Conclusion

This report presents a concise, yet thorough assessment of the quality and extent of consultation activities that have taken place in relation to the proposed Mid Antrim Upgrade project during Part 2a of SONI's three-part process for developing the grid. A lengthy period of community consultation has taken place to gain feedback on the proposals from those who live in the local area.

The report outlines details on the Mid Antrim Upgrade project as well as providing details of the engagement strategy that was used for this stage of consultation. The report goes into detail on the feedback received from stakeholders during the consultation events and through individual briefings with elected reps.

SONI has made extensive efforts to inform members of the local community about the proposal, provided stakeholders with up-to-date and accurate information and enabled them to provide feedback to SONI on the proposals. SONI have endeavoured to ensure that all feedback made by stakeholders and the local community will be considered by the project team. The feedback received throughout this consultation period will help in shaping the final design of the proposals.

As referenced above, SONI will continue to engage directly with all stakeholders as the project processes and until all the necessary consents relating to SONI have been achieved.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: Examples of SONI Event Advertisements and Newspaper advertisements



We're strengthening the Mid Antrim electricity grid and want to hear what you think.

At SONI we operate the electricity grid and plan for the future, helping Northern Ireland move to more sustainable energy. We are now planning an upgrade to the Mid-Antrim grid between Kells and Rasharkin Main substations. This will make the grid more resilient and enable us to bring increasing amounts of renewable energy, generated in the North and West, to the East where demand is greater.

We've investigated a number of options in the Mid-Antrim area and based on environmental, technical and economic factors, we have identified the area between Ballymena, Creagh, Kells and Rasharkin as the most suitable location.

To find out more, join our project team at one of our Public Consultation Days:

November 16th Ross Park Hotel, 20 Doagh Road, Kells, Ballymena BT42 3LZ 2pm-7pm

November 22nd The Bank, Main St, Portglenone, Ballymena BT44 8HP 2pm-7pm

November 29th Rasharkin Community Centre, Duneany Rd, Rasharkin, Ballymena BT44 8RX 2pm-7pm



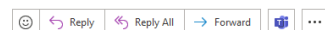
Delivering a cleaner energy future

You can also email us at midantrimupgrade@soni.ltd.uk, write to us at Mid Antrim Upgrade, SONI 12 Manse Road, Belfast, BT6 9RT or visit www.soni.ltd.uk/the-grid/projects/mid-antrim-upgrade/the-project/

Our consultation portal website at consult.soni.ltd.uk/ opens on October 31st and you can give us your feedback up until Monday, December 12th.

APPENDIX 2: Examples of Email correspondence to Elected Representatives and Council Officials

SONI - Mid and East Antrim - Request to Meet



Mon 04/07/2022 15:24

FAO: Mid and East Antrim Borough Council Interim Chief Executive & Head of Planning

Dear [redacted]

I am writing to you regarding 'The Mid Antrim Upgrade', a high capacity-transmission system upgrade that will run between the Kells and Rasharkin Main substations.

The project is being developed by SONI, the electricity transmission system operator for Northern Ireland and NIE Networks, with funding approved from the Utility Regulator. As it stands, part of the project will run through your borough and will require planning permission from the council.

This project is necessary because there is currently a bottleneck on the grid in this area and we are unable to transport all the renewable electricity generated in the North and West, to urban centres such as Ballymena, Antrim, and Greater Belfast, where there is most demand.

The Mid Antrim Upgrade is a solution to this issue and will be essential to support the delivery of Northern Ireland's future energy targets of 80% of renewable energy generation by 2030.

During Part 2 of our 3 Part Grid Development Process, we are undertaking an extensive range of consultation to inform and obtain feedback on the project. This will include a number of consultation events later in the year for members of the public and other stakeholders to attend to hear about the proposal and provide their feedback.

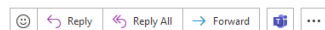
Prior to this, SONI would appreciate meeting with you, and any interested council officer colleagues, to inform you of the proposal and obtain any initial feedback you may have.

As such, I would appreciate if you could provide some dates and times in the coming weeks, that would suit you for a meeting.

In the meantime, should you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours Sincerely,

Proposed Mid Antrim Upgrade



Tue 06/09/2022 10:33

Dear Cllr [redacted]

I am emailing you in relation to the proposed 'Mid Antrim Upgrade', a high capacity-transmission system upgrade that will run between the Kells and Rasharkin Main substations.

The project is being developed by SONI, the electricity transmission system operator for Northern Ireland and NIE Networks, with funding approved from the Utility Regulator. As it stands, part of the project will run through your constituency.

This project is necessary because there is currently a bottleneck on the grid in this area and we are unable to transport all the renewable electricity generated in the North and West, to urban centres such as Ballymena, Antrim, and Greater Belfast, where there is most demand.

The Mid Antrim Upgrade is a solution to this issue and will be essential to support the delivery of Northern Ireland's future energy targets of 80% of renewable energy generation by 2030.

During Part 2 of our 3 Part Grid Development Process, SONI are undertaking an extensive range of consultation to inform and obtain feedback on the project. This will include a number of consultation events later in the year for members of the public and other stakeholders to attend to hear about the proposal and provide their feedback.

Prior to these consultation events, SONI would appreciate meeting with you, as a local elected representative, to inform you of the proposal and obtain any initial feedback you may have.

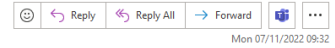
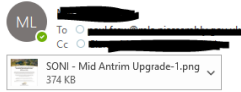
As such, I would appreciate if you could provide some dates and times in the coming weeks, that would suit you for a meeting.

Further information on the project can be found at <https://www.soni.ltd.uk/the-grid/projects/mid-antrim-upgrade/the-project/>

In the meantime, should you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind regards,

SONI - Mid Antrim Upgrade - Consultation Events



Mon 07/11/2022 09:32

Dear [REDACTED]

I hope you are well.

I am writing to you regarding the 'Mid Antrim Upgrade' project, which is a high-capacity transmission system upgrade between the Kells and Rasharkin Main substations in County Antrim.

The Mid Antrim Upgrade is being developed by SONI, the electricity transmission system operator for Northern Ireland and NIE Networks, with the NI UR having approved the necessary level of expenditure.

When completed the project will reduce congestion on the transmission grid and costly constraints, saving consumers an estimated £9.5million per year. It will also help to improve the efficiency of the electricity system, ensuring a more efficient and secure electricity supply on a sustainable basis.

Through future proofing the transmission system, the Mid Antrim Upgrade will accommodate the increasing renewable energy generated in the North and West and to get it to the East where it is needed.

During Part 2 of our three-part Grid Development Process ([three-part process](#)) we are undertaking an extensive range of consultation to inform and obtain feedback on the project, and we would be keen to hear views from the local community and other key stakeholders.

Should you wish to receive more information about the project, you can attend one of our drop-in consultation days, please see details below:

WEDNESDAY 16TH NOVEMBER 2022
(14:00 - 19:00)
Ross Park Hotel, 20 Doagh Road, Kells, BT42 3LZ

Or

TUESDAY 22ND NOVEMBER 2022
(14:00 - 19:00)
The Bank Building, 57-59 Main Street, Portglenone, BT44 8HP

Or

TUESDAY 29TH NOVEMBER 2022
(14:00 - 19:00)
Rasharkin Community Centre, 135 Duneaney Road, Rasharkin, BT44 8SR

We would also encourage you to share the above details on your social media pages to help inform the local community about the consultation events.

An example post for your social media could be the following:

SONI are currently consulting on the Mid Antrim Upgrade, an upgrade to the electricity transmission grid in County Antrim.

A number of drop in events are being held where you can find more information about the project:

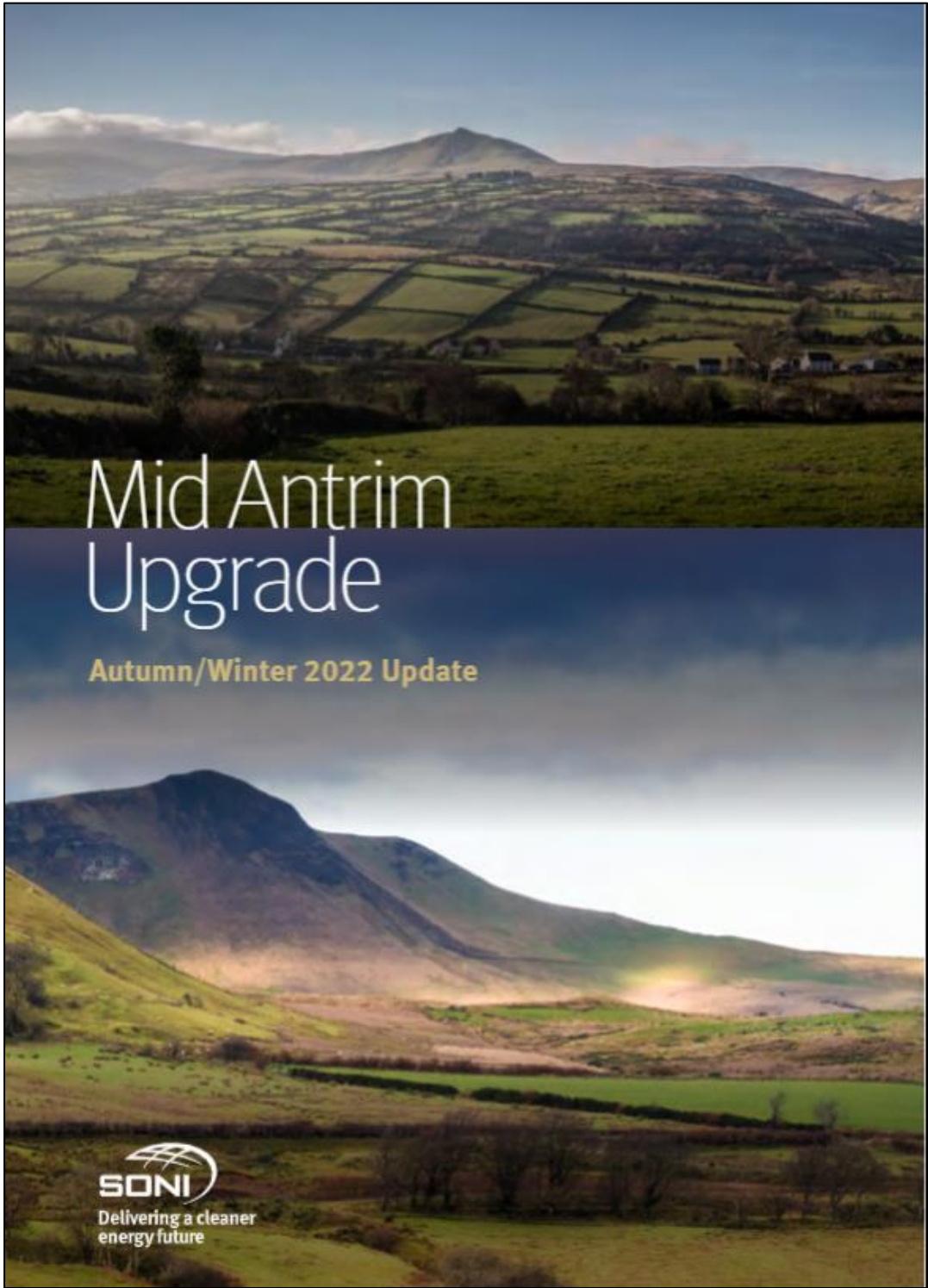
*WEDNESDAY 16TH NOVEMBER 2022
(2pm-7pm)
Ross Park Hotel
&
TUESDAY 22ND NOVEMBER 2022
(2pm-7pm)
The Bank Building, Portglenone,
&
TUESDAY 29TH NOVEMBER 2022
(2pm-7pm)
Rasharkin Community Centre*

Further information can also be found on the webpage: <https://www.soni.ltd.uk/the-grid/projects/mid-antrim-upgrade/the-project/>

In the meantime, should you have any queries, please contact Claran McCartan, SONI's Senior Communications and Engagement Specialist.

Yours sincerely,

APPENDIX 3: Copy of SONI's Mid Antrim Upgrade Project Brochure



Mid Antrim Upgrade

Autumn/Winter 2022 Update





Who are SONI – and what do we do?

SONI is the electricity transmission system operator for Northern Ireland. This means we plan for the future of the electricity grid and operate it every minute of every day. This includes interconnecting to neighbouring grids and running the wholesale electricity market. We make sure that everyone has power when they need it, at the most economic price possible. The grid safely brings power from generators and sends it to NIE Networks. They then supply electricity to every home, farm, community and business in Northern Ireland via their distribution network.

As Northern Ireland continues its move towards cleaner energy, the electricity system must also evolve. Investing in and improving the grid is essential to make your supply of electricity more reliable and cost effective. It also supports economic growth, enables competition, and helps to deliver a clean energy future.

What is the ‘Mid Antrim Upgrade’ project?

We need to build new physical infrastructure in the Mid Antrim Area in order to make it easier for renewable energy to move from where it is created in the North and West, to the bigger towns and cities in the east such as Ballymena, Antrim and Belfast, where most electricity is used. This new infrastructure is called the Mid Antrim Upgrade.

Why are we doing this?

To reduce the overload on the electricity system

Right now, there's a bottleneck on the Kells to Rasharkin line which means we can't move that renewable energy around very quickly. This project will not only reduce congestion on the line and pave the way for more renewable energy to be generated, it will also save NI consumers an estimated £9.5m a year by 2030.

To increase the amount of clean energy transported into urban areas

Renewable energy is central to delivering a clean, low carbon electricity system, which will support Northern Ireland's clean electricity target of at least 80% renewable energy generation by 2030. We need to double the amount of renewable generation connected to the grid today by 2030, to meet the Northern Ireland Executive's Energy Strategy.

To strengthen the network

This project will help to improve the efficiency of the whole electricity system, making sure we have a more efficient, secure and sustainable electricity supply.

What's the study area?

The map below represents the 'study area' for this project and includes the existing grid between Ballymena, Creagh, Kells and Rasharkin substations.



Our three-part process

We're committed to gaining your input on any decisions we make on our investment projects. Our three-part process puts stakeholder and public consultation at the heart of how we develop the transmission grid. By working together, we can create a stronger electricity system for Northern Ireland – with the least possible inconvenience to you.

SONI's Grid Development Process



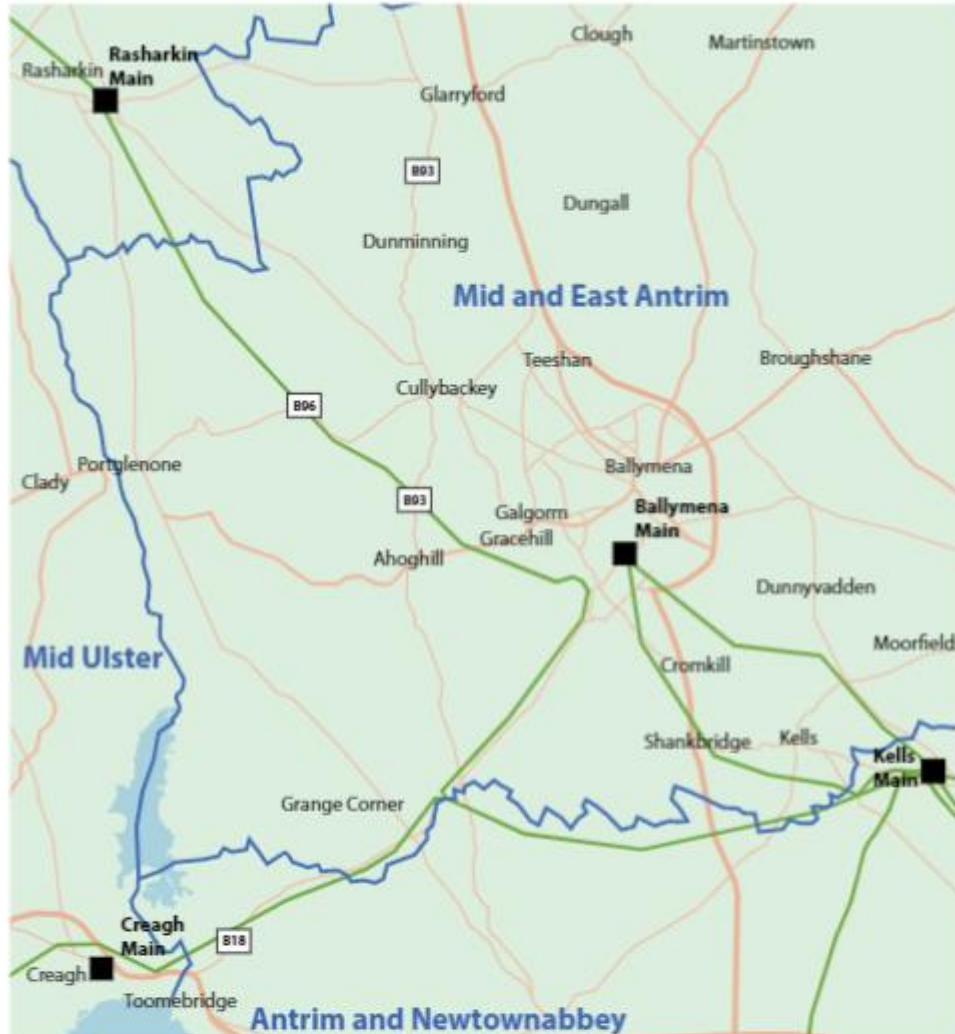
Part 1: Identifying the optimum solution and what area may be affected. When we have thoroughly researched the potential solutions, we'll have what we call **'a best performing technology solution'**. At this point we provide opportunities for you to have your say, before we finalise the solution and the location for the project.

Part 2: Identifying where the project will be built. Once we've examined all locations within the general area for the project, we narrow our choice to what we call **'a best performing location'**. Again, we provide opportunities for you to participate in the process and tell us what you think, before we finalise the location.

Part 3: Planning application to project handover to NIE Networks. Should we receive a favourable decision from the planning authority, we'll hand the project over for NIE Networks to construct and energise. We'll continue to engage with local communities and landowners in the vicinity of the project, and make sure everyone's kept informed.

The Mid Antrim Upgrade project is now within Part 2 of SONI's Grid Development Process.

What happened in part 1?



During part 1 of the project, we looked in detail at the area between Ballymena, Creagh, Kells and Rasharkin, and identified the best area for this new infrastructure to go, considering environmental, technical and economic factors.

Following engagement with local stakeholders and with NIE Networks, we've identified the best performing option as a new substation at Terrygowan, an uprate of the Existing Double Circuit between Kells and Terrygowan (one side only) and a new overhead line between Terrygowan and Rasharkin.

What's happening next?

Part 2 of our 3-part process of Developing the Grid in Mid Antrim is to identify where the project will be built. We will identify:

- the location of the proposed new substation at Terrygowan
- the exact route of the new overhead line circuit, which is to be approximately 22km in length from the proposed substation in Terrygowan to Rasharkin. We're proposing to construct the new overhead line on mainly wooden poles with steel towers at challenging angles
- the exact route of the proposed undergrounding of cabling for entry into Rasharkin substation and undergrounding of cabling into the proposed station at Terrygowan substation, subject to the design and location of the substation

During this process, we'll be engaging with local stakeholders to gain feedback on the proposals from those who live in the area. We encourage you to engage with us and have your say during the consultation period.

At the end of the process, we'll publish a consultation report.

How can I provide feedback to SONI?

There are many ways to get involved and provide feedback. These include:

- Visiting the SONI Consultation Portal: <https://consult.soni.ltd.uk/>
- Attending one of our consultation days, where members of the project team will be able to discuss the maintenance and construction aspects of the project with you:
 - **2pm-7pm, Wednesday 16 November 2022 at the Ross Park Hotel, Ballymena, BT42 3LZ**
 - **2pm-7pm, Tuesday 22 November 2022 at The Bank, Portglenone, Portglenone, BT44 8HP**
 - **2pm-7pm, Tuesday 29 November 2022 at Rasharkin Community Centre, Ballymena, BT44 8RX**
- Email your submission to us at midantrimupgrade@soni.ltd.uk
- Write your own submission and freepost it back to us at 'Mid Antrim Upgrade Project, SONI, Castlereagh House, 12 Manse Road, Belfast, BT6 9RT'
- You can follow us on LinkedIn – SONI Ltd or Twitter – @Soni_Ltd, or visit our project webpage at <https://www.soni.ltd.uk/the-grid/projects/mid-antrim-upgrade/the-project/>

We welcome your feedback up until 12th of December 2022.

Community Forum and Citizen Sounding Board

We've appointed the public participation charity Involve to facilitate a two-part engagement process consisting of a Community Forum and a Citizen Sounding Board, to enable as diverse a group as possible to learn more about the upgrade and route options, and provide feedback that we can use when developing the preferred option for the upgrade.

The Community Forum is an opportunity for community representations to come together to build their understanding of the proposed route options, reflect the views of their organisation or community, and provide information or insights that may need to be taken into account during project delivery. If you're a member of a local community organisation, we'd like to invite you to express an interest in joining this group.

The Citizen Sounding Board will bring together a randomly selected group of people who live within the proposed area of the new overhead line and broadly represent the entire community. The people who attend learn about issues, discuss them with one another, and then make recommendations about what should happen and how things should change.

Find out more at www.sortitionfoundation.org/midantrim





12 Manse Road, Belfast, Co Antrim BT6 9RT . Telephone: +44 (0)28 90794336 . www.soni.ltd.uk



APPENDIX 4: Mid Antrim Upgrade Press Release

SONI launch Mid-Antrim Upgrade Project to strengthen the electricity grid

31 October 2022

SONI, the electricity transmission system operator for Northern Ireland, have announced plans to upgrade the transmission grid between the Kells and Rasharkin Main Substations in County Antrim.

The proposed upgrade will strengthen the grid in the Mid Antrim area, making it more resilient, as well as supporting Northern Ireland's renewable ambitions. The project, if delivered, is estimated to save Northern Ireland consumers £9.5m per year by 2030.

As part of SONI's commitment to meaningful community engagement, the organisation is partnering with Involve NI who have expertise in helping to ensure effective local consultation.

The need for the additional grid capacity has been recognised by the Utility Regulator which has approved the necessary level of expenditure. Welcoming the project, SONI's Managing Director Alan Campbell said:

"The Mid Antrim Upgrade project is essential in allowing more renewable energy sources to be connected to the electricity grid and ensure a clean and secure electricity supply for everyone across Northern Ireland. Importantly it will also remove costly bottlenecks on the grid and will strengthen the grid locally, making it more resilient.

"We are currently in the early stages of planning for the project and are committed to early and meaningful engagement with local communities and stakeholders. As we develop our plans and proposed routes, an extensive public consultation process will be undertaken prior to the submission of a planning application."

"SONI are committed to achieving the best possible outcome so that we can continue to deliver effectively and efficiently for the Northern Ireland consumer. The project will also support our response to the climate emergency by transforming the power system for future generations."

Rebekah McCabe, Engagement Lead, Involve NI stated "We are delighted to support a robust community engagement process on this important project. Delivering renewable energy is vital if we are to tackle the climate crisis. But too often, decisions are made about how to do it without including local communities' voices. We are proud to support SONI to lead the way in changing that and placing the public at the heart of energy decisions that affect them and their communities."

The Mid Antrim Upgrade project was identified in The Shaping Our Electricity Future Roadmap as an upgrade to the transmission grid to help deliver Northern Ireland's 2030 clean energy ambition – an important step on the journey to net zero carbon emissions.

SONI have a central role to play in Northern Ireland's transition to cleaner electricity, as we strive to deliver our climate ambition of at least 80% of our electricity coming from renewable sources by 2030. To prepare for this, the way the electricity grid is developed needs fundamentally changed.

This significant Mid Antrim Upgrade investment will enable renewable energy produced in the north and west, to move to the urban centres in the east, where it will be used. Renewable energy is central to delivering a clean, low carbon electricity system, which will support Northern Ireland's clean electricity target of at least 80% renewable energy generation by 2030. We need to double the amount of renewable generation connected to the grid today by 2030, to meet the Northern Ireland Executive's Energy Strategy. This project will help to improve the efficiency of the whole electricity system, making sure we have a more efficient, secure and sustainable electricity supply.

Notes to Editors

1. The System Operator for Northern Ireland (SONI) is responsible for the safe, secure, efficient and reliable operation of the high-voltage electricity system in Northern Ireland (NI). Part of the EirGrid Group since 2009, SONI is the licensed independent electricity Transmission System Operator (TSO) and licensed Market Operator (MO) of the Single Electricity Market (SEM) wholesale trading system. SONI is responsible for planning the transmission network across NI. It manages all types of generation connected to or seeking to connect to the transmission system.

2. People can make submissions via the SONI Consultation Portal: <https://consult.soni.ltd.uk/>

There are consultation days, where members of the project team will be able to discuss the maintenance and construction aspects of the project with you:

2pm-7pm, Wednesday 16 November 2022 at the Ross Park Hotel, Ballymena, BT42 3LZ

2pm-7pm, Tuesday 22 November 2022 at The Bank Portglenone, Portglenone, BT44 8HP

2pm-7pm, Tuesday 29 November 2022 at Rasharkin Community, Ballymena, BT44 8RX

Submissions can be emailed to SONI at midantrimproject@soni.ltd.uk

Written submissions can be sent by freepost to 'Mid Antrim Upgrade Project, SONI, Castlereagh House, 12 Manse Road, Belfast, BT6 9RT'

The public can follow SONI on LinkedIn – SONI Ltd or Twitter – @Soni_ltd, or visit our project webpage at <https://www.soni.ltd.uk/the-grid/projects/mid-antrim-upgrade/the-project/>

SONI welcomes feedback up until 12 December 2022.

3. SONI has appointed the public participation charity Involve to facilitate a two-part engagement process consisting of a Community Forum and a Citizen Sounding Board, to enable as diverse a group as possible to learn more about the upgrade and route options, and provide feedback that SONI can use when developing the preferred option for the upgrade.

The Community Forum is an opportunity for community representations to come together to build their understanding of the proposed route options, reflect the views of their organisation or community, and provide information or insights that may need to be taken into account during project delivery. SONI would like members of local community organisations to express an interest in joining this group. The Citizen Sounding Board is a group of residents in the area who will be selected at random by posing invitations to households in the area, inviting them to take part.

For more information about the independent community engagement being organised by Involve, go to:

<https://involve.org.uk/our-work/our-projects/pioneering-innovation-practice/how-can-local-communities-help-choose-best>.

To express interest in joining the Community Forum, go to

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSesZoCBFhaqMTn7bCNARpde7JEnP6h2_5YON7QMHloKe49J_A/viewform

Inquiries about either the Community Forum or the Citizens' Sounding Board can go to MidAntrimUpgrade@involve.org.uk

4. This £4.4m investment being delivered through SONI, is the first part of this project. It is currently envisaged that the full project will provide an additional £22.5m, after planning approvals have been secured.

5. SONI is the electricity transmission system operator for Northern Ireland. SONI plans the future of the electricity grid and operates it every minute of every day. This includes interconnecting to neighbouring grids and running the wholesale electricity market. SONI makes sure that everyone has power when they need it, at the most economic price possible. The transmission grid brings power safely from generators and sends it to the NIE Networks distribution network, which supplies electricity to every home, farm, community and business in Northern Ireland.

APPENDIX 5: Mid Antrim Upgrade Blog

Mid Antrim Upgrade Project Blog: Alicia Trainor

9 November 2022

Alicia Trainor, Project Manager, SONI writes:

Our goal at SONI, is to invest in and upgrade the transmission grid so that the electricity supply is more reliable, efficient, and cost effective in order to deliver a clean energy future.

The proposed Mid Antrim Upgrade project is a key component of this goal, and it will see the upgrade of the electricity grid infrastructure between the Kells and Rasharkin Main Substations in County Antrim. The upgrade will ensure a more efficient and secure electricity supply, on a more sustainable basis, to achieve our climate ambition of 80% renewable electricity generation by 2030, as committed to in the Climate Change Act.

In addition, the project will facilitate the delivery of renewable energy to areas in demand, whilst ensuring the grid has the capacity and flexibility to handle greater levels of renewable energy in the future. This will in turn reduce bottlenecks in the area and result in predicted consumer savings of £9.5 million annually by 2030.



As part of SONI's commitment to undertaking meaningful and ongoing engagement with stakeholders, we will be hosting a number of in-person consultation events throughout November. Our consultation process will enable us to gather as much information as possible from those who live and work in the local area.

You can have your say by visiting The SONI Consultation portal: <https://consult.soni.ltd.uk/consultation/mid-antrim-upgrade>, or by attending one of our consultation days:

2pm-7pm, 16th November 2022 at Ross Park Hotel, Kells

2pm-7pm, 22nd November 2022 at The Bank, Portglenone

2pm-7pm, 29th November 2022 at Rasharkin Community Centre

The SONI consultation portal will remain open for 6 weeks until 12 December 2022.

We have also set up the Mid Antrim Upgrade Community Forum as an opportunity for the community to offer advice on key project developments such as how we communicate and engage with the public, what we need to consider in developing the project and how we can deliver meaningful community benefit to the area where our infrastructure is hosted.

We will use your feedback and collaboration to help inform us during the next stage of our grid development process.

As the project develops, further consultation with the public will then take place in 2023.

APPENDIX 6: Photographs from Public Consultation Events















APPENDIX 7: Feedback Forms/ Record of Engagement Forms

APPENDIX 8: Examples of SONI Social Media Activity



SONI Ltd  @soni_ltd · Oct 31, 2022 ...


We are pleased to launch the Mid Antrim Upgrade project - a high-capacity transmission system upgrade that will help to ensure a more efficient and secure electricity supply in the Mid Antrim area.

For more details, please see our press release here:
soni.ltd.uk/newsroom/press...



SONI Ltd

3,302 followers

2mo • 



Read our latest blog from Alicia Trainor, SONI Project Manager, who outlines the Mid Antrim Upgrade project and the benefits of the project in future proofing the transmission system in the Mid Antrim area. ...see more

Mid Antrim Upgrade

“

The upgrade will ensure a more efficient and secure electricity supply, on a more sustainable basis, to achieve our climate ambition of 80% renewable electricity generation by 2030, as committed to in the Climate Change Act.

”

*Alicia Trainor
Project Manager, SONI*



2 reposts



SONI Ltd  @soni_ltd · Nov 14, 2022 ...

Join us on Wednesday 16th November at the Ross Park Hotel from 2pm-7pm at our in-person consultation event for the Mid Antrim Upgrade Project. Members of the project team will be available to answer any questions.

More details can be found here: consult.soni.ltd.uk/consultation/m...





SONI Ltd

3,302 followers

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Thank you to all those who attended our three consultation events on the Mid Antrim Upgrade Project. All events were well attended, and all attendees had the opportunity to ask questions and leave valuable feedback.

If you didn't get a chance to attend our events information can be found here:
https://lnkd.in/eD4_8QDH



👍 20



SONI Ltd  @soni_ltd · Dec 5, 2022 ...

1 week to go to have your say on the Mid Antrim Upgrade Project, our plan for improving the electricity transmission grid to plan for our green energy future and ensure security of supply in the Mid Antrim area.

Visit our consultation portal to respond:
consult.soni.ltd.uk/consultation/m...





SONI Ltd  @soni_ltd · Dec 9, 2022



Our consultation period for the Mid Antrim Upgrade Project closes on Monday 12th December, our plan for improving the electricity transmission grid to ensure security of supply in the Mid Antrim area.

Visit our consultation portal to respond:
consult.soni.ltd.uk/consultation/m...





SONI Ltd  @soni_ltd · Dec 12, 2022



Our consultation on the Mid Antrim Upgrade Project – our plan to improve the efficiency of the electricity system in Mid Antrim - is now closed.

Thank you to everyone who responded, a further opportunity will be provided through a Utility Regulator Consultation later this year.



APPENDIX 9: Mid Antrim Upgrade Project Webpage

[\(https://www.soni.ltd.uk/the-grid/projects/mid-antrim-upgrade/the-project/\)](https://www.soni.ltd.uk/the-grid/projects/mid-antrim-upgrade/the-project/)

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Mid Antrim Upgrade

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[THE PROJECT](#)[WHAT'S HAPPENING NOW?](#)[RELATED DOCUMENTS](#)[CONTACT](#)

SONI is the electricity transmission system operator for Northern Ireland. This means we plan for the future of the electricity grid and operate it every minute of every day. We ensure that everyone has power when they need it at the most economic price possible.

To prepare for a clean energy future, the UK government is aiming for Net Zero carbon emissions by 2050. Meanwhile, the Department for the Economy's Energy Strategy consultation puts forward an option for to achieve a 70% renewables target for Northern Ireland by 2030; with scope to increase to 80% should it prove feasible. To prepare for this significant increase in clean energy, SONI must make the electricity grid stronger and more flexible. The grid will need to carry more power, and most of this power will come from renewable generation that varies depending on the weather.

What will the project involve?

The Mid Antrim Upgrade is a high-capacity transmission system upgrade between the Kells and Rasharkin Main substations in County Antrim.

Renewable energy is central to delivering a clean, low carbon electricity system, which in turn, will support the delivery of Stormont's future energy targets.

To accommodate the increasing renewable energy generated in the North and West and to get it to the East where it is needed, we must make the grid in the Mid-Antrim area stronger and more resilient.

At the moment there is a bottleneck on the grid in that area and we are unable to transport all of the renewable energy generated in the North and West, to urban centres such as Ballymena, Antrim and Greater Belfast.

The Mid Antrim Upgrade is a solution to these problems.

What are the benefits of this project?

The project will:

- *Increase the amount of clean energy we can transport from the North and West into urban centres in the East*

To date approximately 1600 MW of renewable generation in Northern Ireland (including small scale generation) has been connected. Most of this is in the form of wind generation located in the North and West, while most demand for electricity is in the East.

- *Reduce congestion on the transmission grid and costly constraints*

Mid Antrim Upgrade will reduce bottlenecks on the grid, expected to save consumers an estimated £9 million per year by 2030. The system between Kells and Rasharkin has become a point of congestion due to the level of generation in the North that passes towards the East. This means we cannot readily transfer all the clean energy that is available leading to cost implications for consumers.

- *Strengthen the network and ensure consistent security of supply*

The Mid Antrim Upgrade will help to improve the efficiency of the electricity system, ensuring a more efficient and secure electricity supply on a sustainable basis.

- *Support NI future renewable energy targets & decarbonise the power system for future generations*

We project that Northern Ireland will need at least another 1,300 Megawatts of electricity from clean sources – if not more, in order to meet Stormont's renewable energy ambitions for 2030. This power will have to be generated, connected to the grid and delivered throughout Northern Ireland.

October 2022

Identifying the preferred option

The project is now in part 2 of our 3 Part Process for Developing the Grid and engaging with stakeholders. Following the completion of Part 1, we are proposing to proceed with the preliminary preferred option, a new substation at Terrygowan, an uprate of the double circuit between Kells and Terrygowan (one side only) and a new overhead line between Terrygowan and Rasharkin to be the preferred option for the Mid Antrim Upgrade.

The new substation will be located close to where the existing tower line section terminates into wood pole circuits, however the exact location for this will not be identified until the completion of part 2 of the 3 Part Process for Developing the Grid. From this substation a new 110kV overhead line circuit, approximately 22km in length would be constructed. Additionally, approximately 0.5km of underground cable is proposed for entry into Rasharkin substation.

The uprating of part of the existing tower line between Kells and Terrygowan will increase capacity of the line. This preliminary preferred option is both economically and environmentally the best performing option with a capital cost of £22.5 million. During this part of the process, we will identify an exact location where the new substation will be built and will engage with stakeholders, by using a range of consultation techniques, to enable them to have their say on the project.

We always consider how new projects may impact individuals and communities and we work hard to minimise this, where possible. As we continue to progress the plans for this project, we aim to carry out an extensive and best practice public consultation on the proposals in 2022/2023.

Public Consultation Events

As part of ongoing public engagement, we will hold consultation events to discuss the Mid Antrim Upgrade and the preliminary preferred option.

The Public Consultation Events will take place on:

- 16th November 2022 – Rosspark Hotel, Kells
- 22nd November 2022 – Portglenone Community Centre
- 29th November 2022 – Rasharkin Community Centre

The team will be available from 2pm to 7pm each day to answer any of your questions and to receive feedback about the best preliminary preferred option.

Talk to us

You can contact our Community Liaison Team to talk about this project or request that project information is sent to you by post or email.

Email the team

midantrimproject@soni.ltd.uk

Write to the team

Castlereagh House, 12 Manse Road, Belfast, BT6 9RT

Next Steps

Following the determination of the planning process we will then hand the project over to NIE Networks for them to begin construction.

The target for submission of planning application is 2024.

Our current estimated completion and energisation date is 2028.

August 2021

This project is currently within Part 1 of our [3 Part Process for Developing the Grid](#). This is where we consider all potential technology solutions and identify a preliminary preferred option and affected area. During this phase we look at the problem, the area, consider what technology could be used, how practical it is to deliver and how much it costs. We also engage with a number of key stakeholder groups, like the local council and elected representatives so that we can better understand what matters to communities, landowners and businesses in the proposed area.

We will soon be making a submission to the Utility Regulator to secure funding for the project and to allow us to proceed into the next stages of our 3 Part Process for Developing the Grid. This is a critical stage, because ultimately the costs for the project will be paid for through consumers' electricity bills.

We are currently at the early stages of project development and we aim to engage with the public on our plans in 2022. Your opinions and feedback are important to us. We always consider how new projects may impact individuals and communities, and we work hard to minimise this, where possible.

Following the determination of the planning process we will then hand the project over to NIE Networks for them to begin construction. Our current estimated completion and energisation date is 2028.

THE PROJECT

WHAT'S HAPPENING NOW?

RELATED DOCUMENTS

CONTACT

[Mid Antrim Upgrade – Needs report](#)

[Mid Antrim Upgrade – Preliminary Preferred Options report](#)

[Mid Antrim Upgrade – Environmental report](#)

THE PROJECT

WHAT'S HAPPENING NOW?

RELATED DOCUMENTS

CONTACT

You can contact us via email at info@soni.ltd.uk or in writing to 'Castlereagh House, 12 Manse Road, Belfast BT6 9RT'.

APPENDIX 10: Mid Antrim Upgrade Consultation Portal

Mid-Antrim Upgrade

CLOSED 📅 31 Oct, 2022, 12:00pm - 12 Dec, 2022, 11:55pm

[VIEW](#)

[DASHBOARD](#)

[SUBMISSIONS](#)



Share



Submissions

14 submissions have raised observations relating to this consultation.

Themes

General Comment

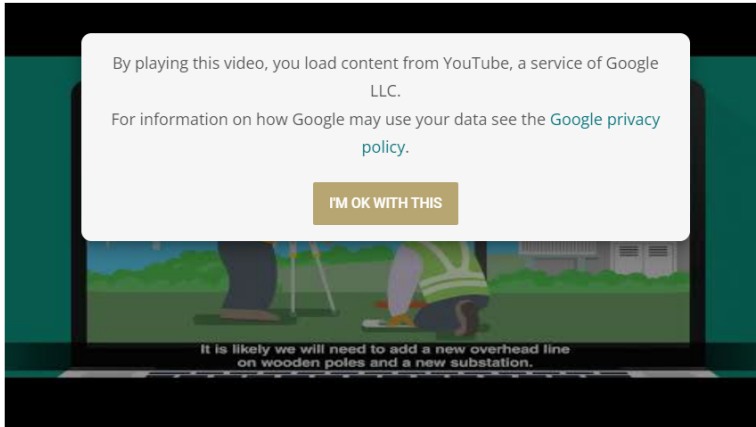
Materials



SONI Mid Antrim Brochure.pdf
517.46 KB


What is the 'Mid Antrim Upgrade' project?

The proposed Mid Antrim Upgrade will involve the strengthening of the transmission grid in the Mid Antrim area, making it more resilient, which will save consumers money, as well as supporting Northern Ireland's renewable ambition. The delivery will be essential in allowing more renewable energy sources to be connected to the grid and ensure a clean supply of secure electricity supply for everyone across Northern Ireland. The project will also ensure that clean energy generated the North and West of Northern Ireland can be securely transported to the East where this is most demand.



Dashboard

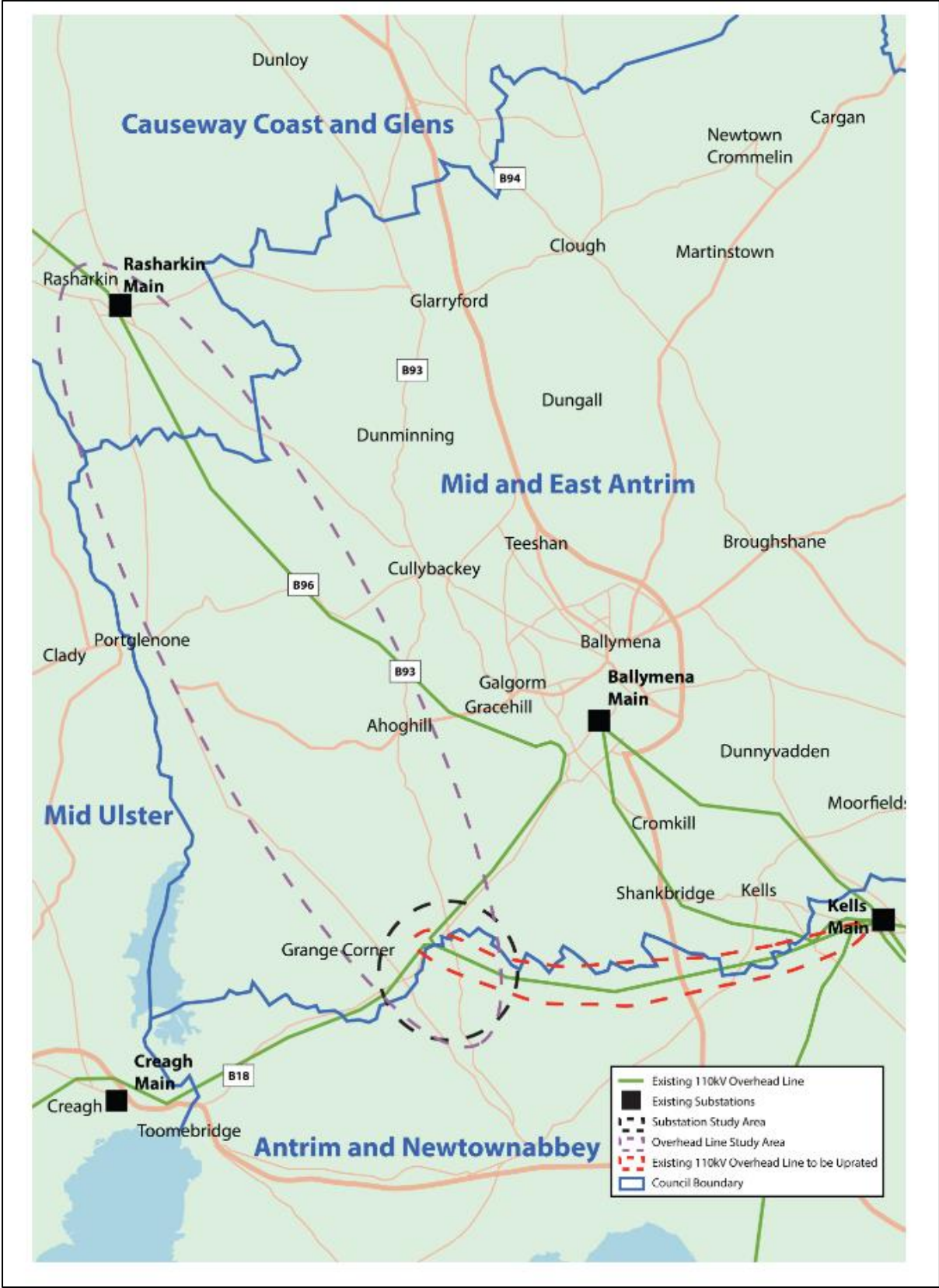
[View graphs and filter submission data for this consultation](#)

 **Subscribe**

What is the study area?

The map below represents the 'study area' for this project which includes the existing grid between Ballymena, Creagh, Kells and Rasharkin substations.

Following engagement with local stakeholders and with NIE Networks, we've identified the best performing option as a new substation at Terrygowan, an uprate of the Existing Double Circuit between Kells and Terrygowan (one side only) and a new overhead line between Terrygowan and Rasharkin.



Who are SONI – and what do we do?

SONI is the electricity transmission system operator for Northern Ireland. This means we plan for the future of the electricity grid and operate it every minute of every day. This includes interconnecting to neighbouring grids and running the wholesale electricity market. We make sure that everyone has power when they need it, at the most economic price possible. The grid safely brings power from generators and sends it to NIE Networks. They then supply electricity to every home, farm, community and business in Northern Ireland via their distribution network.

As Northern Ireland continues its move towards cleaner energy, the electricity system must also evolve. Investing in and improving the transmission grid is essential to make your supply of electricity more reliable and cost effective. It also supports economic growth, enables competition, and helps to deliver a cleaner energy future.

Why are we doing this?

To reduce congestion on the electricity grid and save consumers money

Right now, there's a bottleneck on the Kells to Rasharkin line which means we can't move that renewable energy around very quickly. This project will not only reduce congestion on the line, it will also save NI consumers an estimated £9.5m a year by 2030.

To increase the amount of clean energy transported into urban areas

Renewable energy is central to delivering a clean, low carbon electricity system, which will support Northern Ireland's clean electricity target of at least 80% renewable energy generation by 2030. We need to double the amount of renewable generation connected to the grid today by 2030, to meet the Northern Ireland Executive's Energy Strategy.

To strengthen the network

This project will help to improve the efficiency of the whole electricity system, making sure we have a more efficient, secure and sustainable electricity supply.

Our three-part process

We're committed to gaining your input on any decisions we make on our investment projects. Our three-part process puts stakeholder and public consultation at the heart of how we develop the transmission grid. By working together, we can create a stronger electricity system for Northern Ireland – with the least possible inconvenience to you. The Mid Antrim Upgrade project is now within Part 2 of SONI's Grid Development Process.

SONI's Grid Development Process



Part 1: Identifying the optimum solution and what area may be affected. When we have thoroughly researched the potential solutions, we'll have what we call '**a best performing technology solution**'. At this point we provide opportunities for you to have your say, before we finalise the solution and the location for the project.

Part 2: Identifying where the project will be built. Once we've examined all locations within the general area for the project, we narrow our choice to what we call '**a best performing location**'. Again, we provide opportunities for you to participate in the process and tell us what you think, before we finalise the location.

Part 3: Planning application to project handover to NIE Networks. Should we receive a favourable decision from the planning authority, we'll hand the project over for NIE Networks to construct and energise. We'll continue to engage with local communities and landowners in the vicinity of the project, and make sure everyone's kept informed.

What happened in part 1?

During part 1 of the project, we looked in detail at the area between Ballymena, Creagh, Kells and Rasharkin, and identified the best area for this new infrastructure to go, considering environmental, technical and economic factors.

What's happening next?

During Part 2 of our 3-part process of Developing the Grid in Mid Antrim, we will identify:

- the location of the proposed new substation at Terrygowan
- the exact route of the new overhead line circuit, which is to be approximately 22km in length from the proposed substation in Terrygowan to Rasharkin. We're proposing to construct the new overhead line on mainly wooden poles with steel towers at challenging angles
- the exact route of the proposed undergrounding of cabling for entry into Rasharkin substation and undergrounding of cabling into the proposed station at Terrygowan substation, subject to the design and location of the substation

During this process we'll be engaging with local stakeholders to gain feedback on the proposals from those who live in the area. We encourage you to engage with us and have your say during the consultation period.

At the end of this part of the consultation process, we will publish a report outlining all the feedback received from local stakeholders.

How can I provide feedback to SONI?

There are many ways to get involved and provide feedback. These include:



Making an online submission

Provide written feedback by registering for a free account on this platform and **make a submission** using the link opposite.

All submissions will be published for sharing ideas and information on this consultation.

How can I provide feedback to SONI?

There are many ways to get involved and provide feedback. These include:



Making an online submission

Provide written feedback by registering for a free account on this platform and **make a submission** using the link opposite. All submissions will be published for sharing ideas and information on this consultation.



Attending one of our consultation days, where members of the project team will be able to discuss the maintenance and construction aspects of the project with you:

2pm-7pm, **Wednesday 16 Nov 2022** at the Ross Park Hotel, Ballymena, BT42 3LZ
2pm-7pm, **Tuesday 22 Nov 2022** at The Bank Portglenone, Portglenone, BT44 8HP
2pm-7pm, **Tuesday 29 Nov 2022** at Rasharkin Community, Ballymena, BT44 8RX



By Email Email your submission to us at midantrimupgrade@soni.ltd.uk



By Post

Write your own submission and freepost it back to us at 'Mid Antrim Upgrade Project, SONI, Castlereagh House, 12 Manse Road, Belfast, BT6 9RT'

You can follow us on **LinkedIn - SONI Ltd** or **Twitter - @Soni_ltd** or visit our project webpage at <https://www.soni.ltd.uk/the-grid/projects/mid-antrim-upgrade/the-project/>

We welcome your feedback up until 12th of December 2022.

The Community Forum and Citizen Sounding Board

We've appointed the public participation charity Involve to facilitate a two-part engagement process consisting of a Community Forum and a Citizen Sounding Board, to enable as diverse a group as possible to learn more about the upgrade and route options, and provide feedback that we can use when developing the preferred option for the upgrade.

The Community Forum is an opportunity for community representations to come together to build their understanding of the proposed route options, reflect the views of their organisation or community, and provide information or insights that may need to be taken into account during project delivery. If you're a member of a local community organisation, we'd like to invite you to express an interest in joining this group.

The Citizen Sounding Board will bring together a randomly selected group of people who live within the proposed area of the new overhead line and broadly represent the entire community. The people who attend learn about issues, discuss them with one another, and then make recommendations about what should happen and how things should change.

Find out more at www.sortitionfoundation.org/midantrim

