

# Armagh Reinforcement Project

## Summary of Part 1 Stakeholder Engagement

March 2024



## **Introduction**

SONI External Communications has carried out the required stakeholder engagement during Part 1 of the Grid Development Process for the Armagh Reinforcement project. This document is intended to provide a summary of the feedback received from key stakeholders in the study area.

The existing substation is within the Newry and Armagh Parliamentary / Assembly Constituency and the Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council. As such, for this engagement, meeting requests were issued to the MP and MLAs within the Newry and Armagh Parliamentary / Assembly constituency, and Senior Planners at Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council. It was noted during one of the meetings, that with constituency boundary changes, part of the project is likely to move to the Upper Bann Constituency. However, this will not happen until the next General Election.

Engagement was carried out with all of the political parties which represent Newry and Armagh either at Parliament or the Assembly.

This report outlines a summary of the meetings held to date and the feedback that was received. A proportional breakdown of this feedback and key themes is provided in Appendix 1. To support this engagement, a slide deck was shared during each meeting (Appendix 2).

**Meeting with Justin McNulty (Newry and Armagh SDLP MLA) and Thomas O’Hanlon (Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon SDLP Councillor)**

24<sup>th</sup> January 2024 via Microsoft Teams

**Summary of Feedback**

- Heather Henry-Wilson and Niall McClements presented on the Armagh Reinforcement project.
- Justin McNulty (JMcN) and Thomas O’Hanlon (TOH) made the following comments and raised the following queries:
- JMcN asked what level of public consultation had been undertaken on the project to date.
- JMcN acknowledged the need for grid infrastructure reinforcement in the Armagh area and that the project would improve security of supply for consumers. He added that the wooden monopole setup proposed for the Armagh Reinforcement project was preferable to pylons. This led to him asking if there was any relationship between this project and the North-South Interconnector (NSI) project.
- JMcN then asked if any engagement had taken place with landowners.
- JMcN followed up by asking if SONI had or intended to meet SEAT on this project (Safe Electricity Armagh & Tyrone). TOH also strongly advised that SONI sought to meet with SEAT in advance of going public with the project because of their influence with landowners in the area, and because some of their members are also influential in the business community in Armagh.
- TOH also advised that two families (the O’Hagan’s and the Gordon’s) live very close to Armagh Central Substation and would be specifically affected by any works to take place there. He added that the Palace Demesne and Primate’s Wall in Armagh City were close to the proposed underground cable route linking Armagh Central and Armagh North Main Substations.
- TOH then asked if people living in between Armagh and Tandragee would be able to connect to the reinforced system.

- TOH then advised that part of the Newry and Armagh constituency, which currently contains Tandragee Substation and part of the proposed OHL circuit leading toward Armagh, would be moved into the Upper Bann constituency from the next General Election.
- TOH asked if the Ulster Farmer' Union (UFU) had been consulted on this project yet.
- TOH suggested that SONI brief a Full Council meeting (ABC Council) at an appropriate stage. He advised that engagement with SEAT should take place prior to any such meeting.

**Meeting with Sinead McEvoy (Planning Manager at Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council) and Roisin Hamill (Local Planning Officer at Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council)**

1<sup>st</sup> February 2024 via Microsoft Teams

**Summary of Feedback**

- Heather Henry-Wilson and Niall McClements presented on the Armagh Reinforcement project.
- RH asked for clarity on whether a new substation, or the extension of the existing substation, would be required at Armagh Central.
- SMcE noted she was familiar with the Tandragee Substation and the existence of a Synchronous Condenser near the site.
- SMcE then asked where the various aspects of the project would sit within the Development Management (DM) Regulations for Northern Ireland, and whether it would be subject to a full Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).
- RH said that ABCBC's Planning Department now has a dedicated team for prioritising the processing of planning applications related to renewable energy and would endeavour to ensure that this project fell under its remit given its importance for security of supply, economic growth, and climate action targets.
- RH added that engagement with local elected representatives was also key.
- RH asked about timescales for delivering the project.
- SMcE finally asked if it would be possible to see the Part 1 Needs / Options Report.

**Meeting with Mickey Brady (Sinn Féin MP for Newry and Armagh) and Cathal Boylan (Sinn Féin MLA for Newry and Armagh)**

7<sup>th</sup> February 2024 via Microsoft Teams

**Summary of Feedback**

- Heather Henry-Wilson and Niall McClements presented on the Armagh Reinforcement project.
- MB asked what the projected asset life cycle was for Option 3 (the Preliminary Preferred Option). NMcC responded that it is projected to be circa 40 years. MB noted it was sensible to spend more on the initial project to obtain a longer life cycle.
- MB asked what the level of the public consultation would be.
- CB noted the proposed infrastructure upgrades at both Tandragee and Armagh Central and questioned where the need for capacity was in the Armagh area.
- CB reiterated the importance of engaging with the public and the general public as early as possible, and noted he did not foresee any major planning issues regarding the Tandragee substation element.
- CB asked about the recent outages in the Armagh area.
- MB asked about the potential disruption regarding the installation of an underground cable between Armagh Central Substation and Armagh North Substation.
- CB added that he foresaw this as a circa 10-year project and will help power homes and businesses in Armagh. CB was happy to assist with any engagement required including with the Utility Regulator if required.
- MB concluded that this project was to be seen as progress particularly considering new housing developments in the area and electricity being a key requirement.
- CB referred to the emerging ABC Area Plan, and it was important to take cognisance of that in terms of future planning for the area.

**Meeting with William Irwin (DUP MLA for Newry and Armagh) and Garreth Wilson (Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon DUP Councillor)**

1<sup>st</sup> March 2024 via Microsoft Teams

**Summary of Feedback**

- Heather Henry-Wilson and Niall McClements presented on the Armagh Reinforcement project.
- WI asked about planning requirements and timelines.
- WI asked how long the OHL circuits proposed would be, and how far apart from each other.
- WI advised that landowners are the stakeholder demographic in the project area likely to cause the most objection, if any occurred.
- WI concluded by saying that ongoing engagement is crucial and that he would look forward to engaging with the project team as things progress over the coming months and years.

**Summary of Key Feedback**

Feedback collated from the stakeholder engagement meetings was analysed and key themes have emerged. These themes, including extracts from the meetings with the stakeholders, are outlined below.

### **Key Theme 1: Project Need and Benefits**

- *There is a need for grid infrastructure reinforcement in the Armagh area and this project will bolster security of supply for consumers.*
- *This project is important for security of supply, economic growth, and meeting climate action targets.*
- *This project will ensure security of supply for the increasing number of new housing developments that are in planning or development in the project area.*
- *This project will help power homes and businesses in Armagh.*

### **Key Theme 2: Public Consultation and Stakeholder Engagement**

- *What level of public consultation has been undertaken on the project to date?*
- *Two families live very close to Armagh Central Substation and would be specifically affected by any works to take place there.*
- *Part of the Newry and Armagh Assembly / Parliamentary constituency, which currently contains Tandragee Substation and part of the proposed OHL circuit leading toward Armagh, will be moved into the Upper Bann constituency from the next General Election.*
- *SONI should brief a Full Council meeting (ABC Council) at an appropriate stage, after engaging with SEAT.*
- *Engagement with local elected representatives is key.*
- *I [an elected representative] am happy to assist with any engagement required, including with the Utility Regulator.*

- *Ongoing engagement with key stakeholders is crucial.*

### **Key Theme 3: Landowner Engagement**

- *Has any engagement taken place with landowners?*
- *Landowners are the stakeholder demographic in the project area likely to cause the most objection, if any occurred.*
- *Has the Ulster Farmer' Union (UFU) been consulted on this project yet?*
- *Does SONI intend to meet SEAT (Safe Electricity Armagh & Tyrone) regarding this project?*

### **Key Theme 4: Planning**

- *Will a new substation, or an extension of the existing substation, be required at Armagh Central Substation?*
- *I am familiar with the Tandragee Substation and the existence of a Synchronous Condenser near the site.*
- *Where do the various aspects of the project sit within the Development Management (DM) Regulations for Northern Ireland, and would it be subject to a full Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).*
- *ABCBC's Planning Department now has a dedicated team for prioritising the processing of planning applications related to renewable energy and will endeavour to ensure that this project fell under its remit given its importance for security of supply, economic growth, and climate action targets.*
- *The emerging ABC Area Plan is important to consider, in terms of future planning for the area.*

### **Key Theme 5: Construction & Project Infrastructure**

- *The Palace Demesne and Primate's Wall in Armagh City are close to the proposed underground cable route linking Armagh Central and Armagh North Main Substations.*

- *Will there be any disruption around the installation of an underground cable between Armagh Central Substation and Armagh North Substation?*
- *What is the projected asset life cycle for Option 3 (the Preliminary Preferred Option)?*
- *How long are the OHL circuits proposed, and how far apart from each other will they be?*

#### **Key Theme 6: Visual Impact**

- *The wooden monopole setup proposed for the Armagh Reinforcement project is preferable to pylons.*
- *It's good to see that pylons are not proposed as part of this project.*

#### **Key Theme 7: Project Timescales**

- *What are the timescales for delivering this project?*
- *I envisage this as being a ten-year project.*
- *What about planning requirements and timelines?*

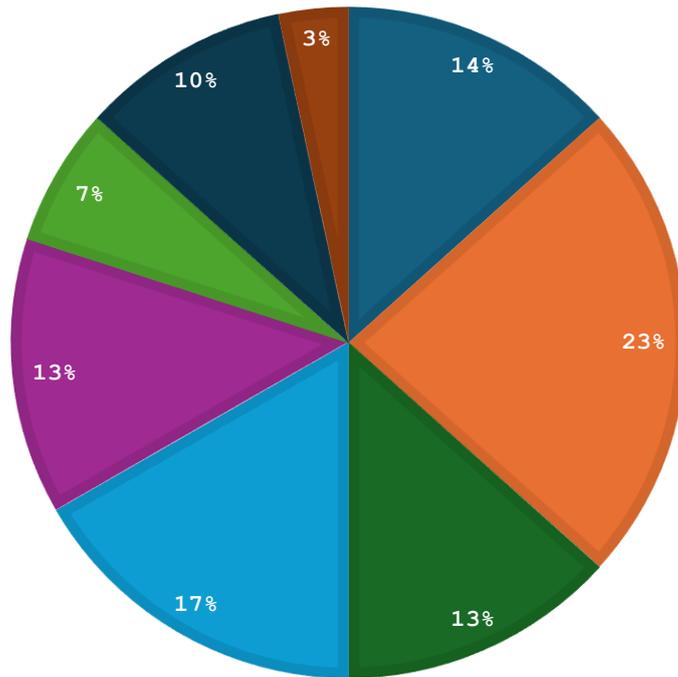
#### **Key Theme 8: Network Connections**

- *Will people living in between Armagh and Tandragee would be able to connect to the reinforced system?*

#### **Appendix 1**

### **Frequency of Feedback following Part 1 Engagement**

- Project Need and Benefits
- Public Consultation and Stakeholder Engagement
- Landowner Engagement
- Planning
- Construction & Project Infrastructure
- Visual Impact
- Project Timescales
- Network Connections



## Appendix 2

### Slide Deck Shared During Stakeholder Meetings



## Our Mission

- Responsible for operating and planning the transmission system in Northern Ireland

### We ensure that:

- There is the right amount of power at any given time
- Energy is being moved safely and securely
- Power is provided at the most economic price





### Armagh Project Need

- There is a need to protect security of supply and prepare for future increases in electricity demand in the Armagh area.
- Transformers at the existing Drumnakelly substation are at full capacity
- Increase in demand in relation to the Electric Vehicles and heat pumps has been factored in and highlights that reinforcement is needed.

**SONI**

## Benefits of the project

- Improve grid strength, capacity and resilience in Armagh;
- Allow new connections to the grid stimulating economic development;
- Help meet increasing domestic and industry demand in the Mid Armagh area



## Explored and Preferred Options for the Project



## Armagh Upgrade

### Outline of Shortlisted Options

#### Option 1

- Establish a second 110/33 kV substation at Drumnakelly
- Reinforcement of the distribution network with **four** new 33 kV circuits (creating a ring network between Drumnakelly and Tullygoonigan);

#### Option 2

- Establish a second 110/33 kV substation at Drumnakelly
- Reinforcement of the distribution network with **three** new 33 kV circuits (reinforcing the 33 kV network between Drumnakelly and Armagh North);

#### Option 3

- Establish a new 110/33 kV substation at Armagh Central, supplied by **two** new 110 kV circuits from Tandragee Main
- New 33 kV cable circuit between Armagh Central and Armagh North
- Strengthening and reconfiguration of the distribution network around Armagh.



## Part 1 Preliminary Preferred Option

#### Option 3

- Building of a new 110/33 kV substation within the existing Armagh Central (33/11 kV) substation site.
- This new proposed substation will be supplied by two new overhead line circuits from Tandragee (requiring a substation extension)
- A new 33 kV underground cable is required through Armagh City Centre to Armagh North substation (to reinforce the existing cable).
- A monopole design is proposed for the overhead line construction between Armagh and Tandragee, to minimise the visual impact of the proposed development.
- It is the optimum solution when considering the security of supply of the Armagh Network and additional demand growth resulting from the decarbonisation of heat and transport.
- It is the best performing option across multiple criteria.
- The estimated capital cost of Option 3 is £25.7m. Least cost life cycle option



Part 1 Study area.



Example of a Monopole overhead line.





## Next Steps

- Publish latest reports on SONI website, including:
  - Needs Case Report
  - Options Report
- Project approval submission to the Utility Regulator
- Progress to Part 2 of the Grid Development Process

Public consultation process planned as the project progresses

SONI

Thank you  
Any questions?

