



**Chambers
Ireland**
Advancing business together

**Chambers Ireland stakeholder
engagement report on EirGrid's public
consultation on 'Shaping our Electricity
Future'**

June 2021

Chambers Ireland perspective on Shaping our Electricity Future

Chambers Ireland is the State's largest business representative network. We are an all-island organisation with a unique geographical reach; our members are the chambers of commerce in the cities and towns throughout the country – active in every constituency. Each of our member chambers is central to their local business community and all seek to promote thriving local economies that can support sustainable cities and communities.

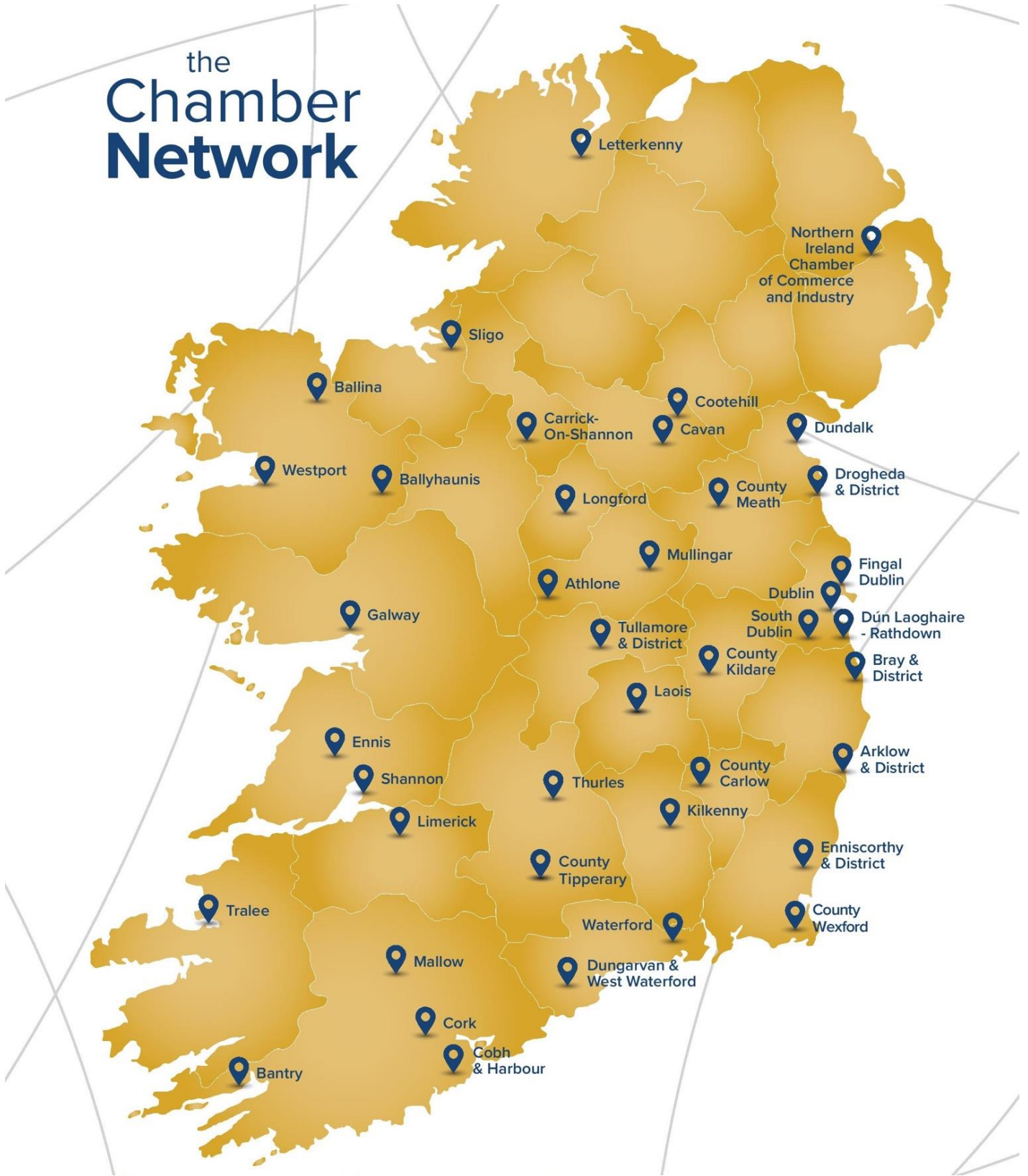
As the impact of climate change has become ever more obvious, Chambers Ireland has become more active in calling for action in this area. In doing so, both Chambers Ireland and our network of chambers use the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to prioritise our policy analysis and recommendations.¹ We are eager to see the acceleration of EirGrid's ambitions to meet and surpass the government's 70 per cent renewable electricity target by 2030 and enable our transition to net-Zero by 2050. Specifically, increased investment in the national grid infrastructure and a reform of the current regulatory regime must be ensured so that renewable technologies, such as offshore wind, can be delivered efficiently and successfully by 2030.

The absence of regulations to permit offshore renewable energy has delayed our development of an offshore energy industry which has damaged our country's capacity to meet our obligations under the Goals of Climate Action (Goal 13) and Affordable Clean Energy (Goal 7). Reforms which do not deliver the minimum target of 5GW by 2030, in combination with Microgeneration, the creation of a solar energy industry that produces up to 1.5GW of electricity, and the expansion of our onshore wind energy fleet by as much as 8GW, will meet neither our business nor our climate needs. It is also important that EirGrid's work facilitates reaching that target while using grid assets inefficiently will damage our economy's capacity to develop Sustainable Cities and Communities (Goal 11), Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure (Goal 9) and will ultimately undermine the challenge of creating Decent Work and Economic Growth (Goal 8). Therefore, the Chambers Ireland Network is profoundly interested and engaged with the development of renewably sourced electricity.

We are pleased to bring this report to EirGrid as part of its 'Shaping our Electricity Future' consultation to ensure both power generation and power demand are planned properly to enable the government's target of 70 per cent renewable electricity to be achieved by 2030.

¹ See Appendix I for more information on Chambers Ireland and the SDGs.

the Chamber Network



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Executive Summary

With a final tally of 240 representatives from over 172 businesses/employers across eight workshops throughout the country Chambers Ireland is grateful for the time and energy which EirGrid dedicated to informing our members about their proposed strategies to bring Ireland to our 2030 70% renewable energy target.

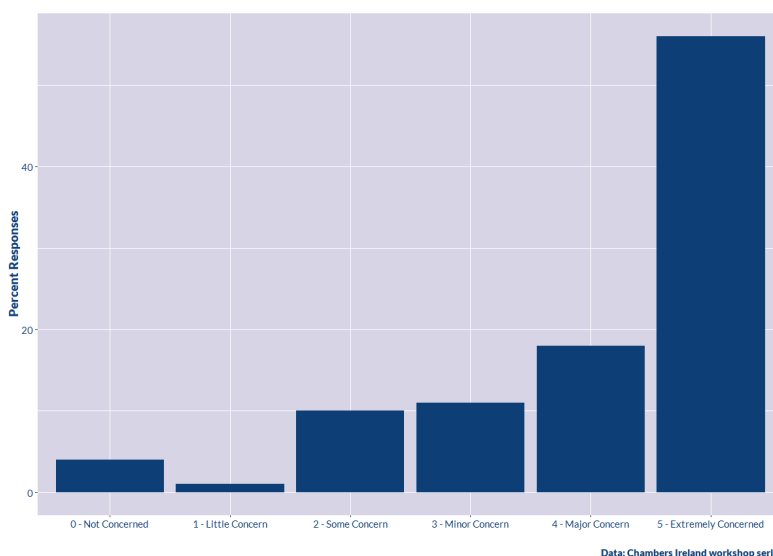
This process was a positive and rewarding experience for our member chambers, and also an informative one. It gave us an opportunity to take a reading of the business community's interest in our national transition to a decarbonised economy.

In addition to a qualitative assessment of participants questions and comments Chambers Ireland carried out a survey of those who attended the workshops.

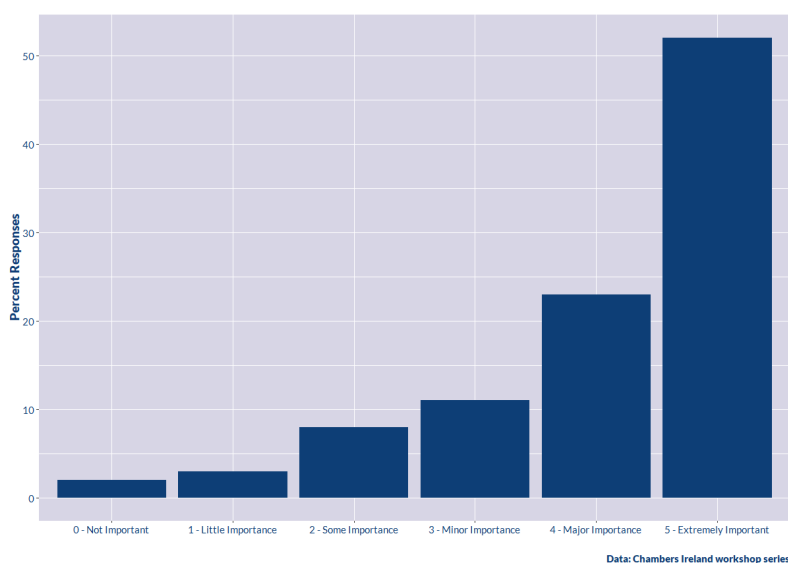
Participants were overwhelmingly, almost uniformly, concerned about climate change, and are eager to work towards the decarbonisation of our society and our economy.

Participants were also deeply interested in the role that EirGrid has to play in achieving decarbonisation.

How concerned are you about climate change?



How do you rate the national importance of EirGrid's upgrade programme?



There was considerable excitement about the opportunities that our switch to renewables offers the country and deep interest in the various technologies that will support that transition. Offshore wind was an element that featured in every discussion, along with microgeneration, the potential role for hydrogen in our power networks featured regularly, and so too did more speculative technologies like the SuperGrid and wave generation.

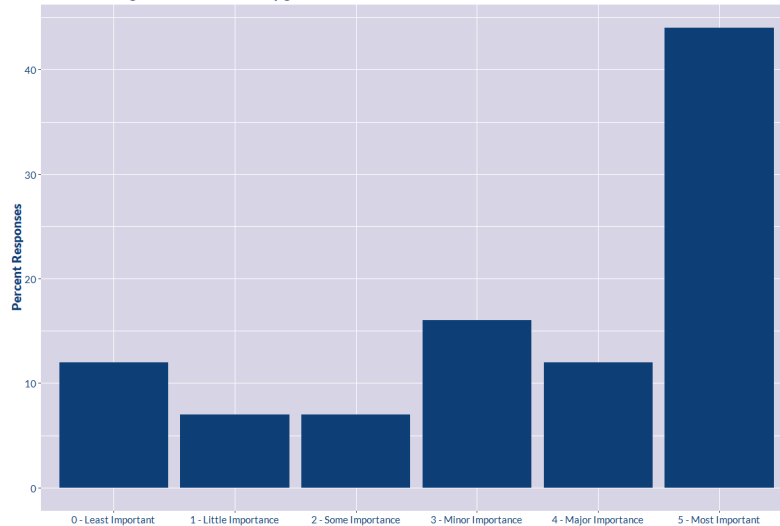
There was a huge degree of support for a campaign of action from EirGrid that would enable the maximum amount of renewably generated electricity to be integrated into the Irish grid.

Meeting our decarbonisation delivery milestones, in a timely fashion (to ensure that Ireland will be capable of meeting its national targets and its international commitments) also had a high prioritisation – one which complements the onboarding of renewables.

Helpfully, participants were, generally, eager to not only engage in this process, but also to advocate locally and publicly about the benefits of decarbonisation.

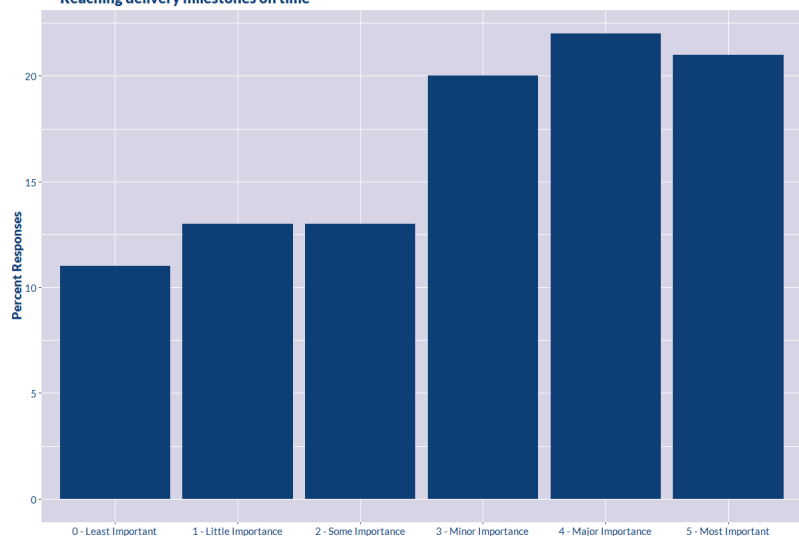
There was a very strong sense throughout these workshops that EirGrid is a key element of the national agenda of taking action on climate change.

In meeting government targets how should EirGrid prioritise the following:
Maximising renewable electricity generation



Data: Chambers Ireland workshop series

In meeting government targets how should EirGrid prioritise the following:
Reaching delivery milestones on time



Data: Chambers Ireland workshop series

While Chambers Ireland is aware of how important the broader climate action targets are to EirGrid’s strategy, the workshops demonstrated that the wider public is unaware of EirGrid’s goals in this regard.

This highlights one of our key concerns. Even the participants who were very engaged with the discussions were often unclear as to the extent of EirGrid’s role in the electricity networks, and its remit.

Very often their concerns with this consultation process arose from the misunderstanding that things which were not included in EirGrid’s documentation were things that EirGrid had left unconsidered (rather than EirGrid not including it because EirGrid knows it to be outside of EirGrid’s remit).

“The options are poorly thought out, and there is one missing - connecting micro renewable generators to the national grid”

A prime example of the disconnect between what EirGrid’s role is, and how the public view its remit, relates to microgeneration. While microgeneration is something that EirGrid supports and welcomes, it doesn’t feature in EirGrid’s “Shaping our Electricity Future” because it relates primarily to the distribution system. But, at every regional workshop, multiple individuals criticised EirGrid for not including microgeneration in our electrical future.

This highlights an opportunity for EirGrid to better tell its story about being the heart of a holistic, integrated and reinforcing electricity system.

The unique role that EirGrid has to play is also an element in some other concerns that emerged. A number of people who are members of coastal communities, particularly those that are reliant on tourism, are concerned that renewable energy generation will hurt their livelihoods. While EirGrid is not directly involved in those projects, EirGrid is vulnerable to strategic disinformation regarding its role. Even if on a project-by-project basis the concerns of these people are not relevant, at the higher level the viability of large-scale renewable energy production is contingent on EirGrid’s activities over the next decade being a success.



A considerable challenge for EirGrid in the coming years will be telling its story in such a way that it will undermine the logic of ‘stopping EirGrid to stop windfarms’ protests.

Fortunately, these workshops have revealed that there is a cohort amongst the business community that are willing to advocate for EirGrid as part of a wider discussion on the benefits of decarbonisation, even though their apparent understanding of the activities of EirGrid remains low. This suggests that there is an opportunity for EirGrid to activate an engaged audience through educating them about EirGrid’s role within the wider pathway to decarbonisation and so making these businesses advocates for the opportunities that the green transition presents.



Introduction

The electricity industry is experiencing significant transformation, driven by climate change and decarbonisation considerations set down in various European and national policies, directives, and legislation. In June 2019, the Irish Government launched a highly ambitious Climate Action Plan (CAP), which is currently under review with an aim towards greater ambition for our action on the threats to our climate. This plan puts the electricity system at the heart of our ambition to achieve major reductions in CO2 emissions. The CAP explicitly sets out the emission reductions targets Ireland needs to meet national and international commitments over the period 2021 to 2030. It places an explicit onus on EirGrid to both enable and deliver the greatest change on the power system since the rural electrification project. EirGrid's work to transform the electricity system is the foundation of the Government's CAP and will both lead and underpin Ireland's response to climate change.

At present, approximately 40 per cent of electricity used throughout the year comes from clean generation. The 70 per cent target for 2030 includes capacity to accommodate 95 per cent generation from renewable sources on the grid. To achieve this, the grid will need to be operated in a more dynamic and responsive way. This will require an end-to-end solution involving changes in user behaviour, improvements to infrastructure, operational practices, market design and operation of our Grid.

As part of EirGrid's 'Shaping our Electricity Future', Chambers Ireland collaborated with EirGrid and our network of Chambers to engage the business community throughout the country with a series of strategic webinars to discuss EirGrid's consultation paper and the overall future of Ireland's electricity system.

Eight roundtable engagements took place in partnership with Shannon Chamber, Athlone Chamber, Waterford Chamber, Sligo Chamber, Cork Chamber, Wexford Chamber, and the greater Dublin Chambers (Kildare, South Dublin, and Fingal), in addition to a national briefing for all Chamber Chief Executives, during which the perspectives and concerns of the business communities were heard.²

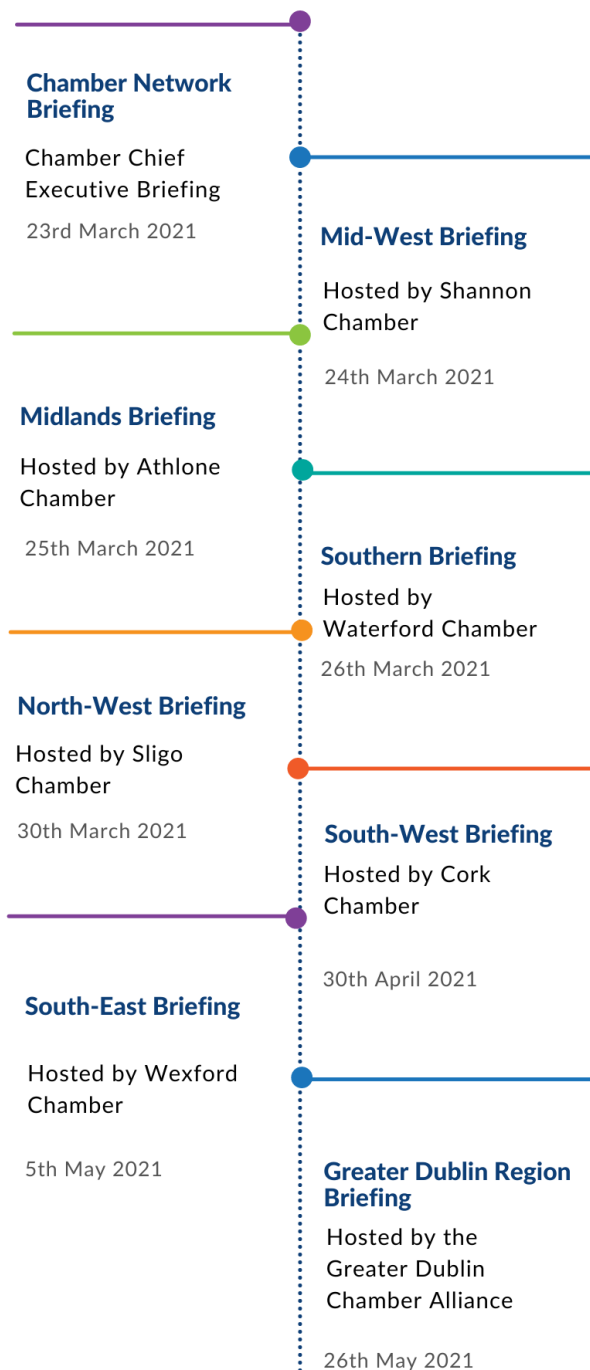
For Ireland, unlike many other countries, the transition away from fossil fuels creates an unprecedented opportunity. The most important task for the Irish State in the coming decade is ensuring that we maximise these benefits for our society. The next decade has the potential to be revolutionary for

² See Appendix II for more information.

Ireland's electricity system and our economy as it offers the potential for regional investment, attracting new green employment opportunities, community collaboration, and increased potential for Irish businesses. However, we must see a shift in Ireland's electricity planning where developers of energy assets and of large energy users will be directed to specific locations based on wider strategic energy planning.

The following section presents the 'Key Learnings' from the strategic webinar series, grouped across several themes which emerged organically over the eight stakeholder engagements. These can be broadly grouped under the themes of regional investment; balancing grid development with tourism and conservation; engaging with businesses as strategic partners; integrating complex forms of electricity generation in the grid development; and expanded ambitions. The themes explore a range of the main ideas raised in each workshop (as can be seen in the various tables throughout), the broad sentiment of the stakeholders in that region (also represented in the quote boxes throughout), and the link to each of the four draft approaches presented in the consultation document.

Timeline of Workshops



Findings

The overwhelming feedback from across the network is that EirGrid needs to have more ambition and needs to prioritise adding renewable supplies to their network. The existing issues around a lack of capacity within the transmission network leading to curtailment (and waste) of renewable energy should not be occurring, and will likely become significantly worse over the coming decade unless there is a step change in the capacity of our national transmission network.

Topic	N	Pct
Climate Change/Renewables	32	18%
Customer Price	5	3%
Energy Security	10	6%
Financing Projects	5	3%
Institutional Capacity	11	6%
Regionalisation	24	13%
Social Acceptance	21	12%
Technological Concerns	70	39%

There were two major threads to the concerns regarding ‘technology’. Firstly there was the conversation regarding the onboarding of renewable energy, and the widespread ambition for the country regarding the opportunities that this presents, not only from the development stages, and the exporting possibility, but also where the regional areas can become hubs for innovation and investment for technologies associated with the harnessing of renewable energies, and also the storage of them, through technologies that include batteries, hydrogen, green ammonia etc.

Participants everywhere, were extremely in favour of renewables being added to the electricity system – though both Sligo and Shannon stood out as champions here, which is unsurprising given the opportunities that renewables, and particularly offshore renewables have for the western region.

The second thread of conversation, which emerged even more frequently than the discussion on renewables, was the existing deficiencies in the transmission network, and queries as to whether any of the four proposed options would be capable of delivering what is needed to support our economy and prosperity on our pathway to decarbonisation.

Participants were often very critical of EirGrid’s ambition and capacity to deliver on infrastructure, citing that it took ‘too long to deliver projects’, ‘we’re behind before we even start’, ‘we need to just do it’.

This suggests that while many in the business community are supportive, and indeed often very supportive, of EirGrid's agenda, they are conflating failures in the planning system with failures on EirGrid's part. However, some participants were able to identify the institutional capacity of the planning system to grant permissions to projects as a key issue for all of the proposed options, and this was mirrored within the discussions that bordered on social acceptance. In those discussions, which contained all the objections that relate to scenic areas, and the aesthetic challenges of transmission equipment, the overwhelming majority of comments related to "NIMBYism" as a constraint upon EirGrid's plans; as something negative that needs to be overcome, and also how businesses can contribute to create pressures that support the activity of EirGrid.

As expected, the perceived conflict between the tourism sector and windfarms emerged most vocally in Waterford, but through the survey comments it was also perceptible in every region. There continues to be a strong association between EirGrid's work and the local presence of windfarms even when EirGrid is agnostic regarding the source of the renewable energy which is being supplied to the network.

The Greater Dublin Area workshop was concerned about security of supply. While participants in western regions were most likely to have experienced supply insecurity in recent years, the concern expressed by those on the East coast related to the potential for inward investment to be lost – if the transmission network is not robust enough to ensure security of supply.

The workshop in Shannon was also notable for the degree of concern which participants had for the risks associated with climate change. While this was a major concern everywhere, those participants in Shannon were most vocal about their concerns, and also the opportunity that harnessing renewable energy supplies has for the western seaboard.

EirGrids proposed strategies

There was a general sense that none of the projects were the ideal solution to the challenges that exist in the country and how we ought to develop out transmission network, however there was strong support in principle for the Regionalisation approach.

Total	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3
Option 1	23	26	30
Option 2	10	-	-
Option 3	11	16	-
Option 4	42	44	56
Non-Transferrable	5	5	5

Overall, the Network is in favour of Option 4 (the so-called 'demand led' approach) which foresees demand from businesses be moved to areas of high supply (to reduce the need for transmission infrastructure to be built in the first place. However, as came up repeatedly, this would need to be tightly coupled to other investments which would support the other needs of those businesses, or they won't be prepared to come to Ireland – if the only options for investment in Ireland are in regional areas which have not had the infrastructural investments that are needed.

Option 4 was particularly strongly supported at the Sligo Workshop, and in the context of there already being a significant infrastructural deficit, of which EirGrid is part, which has curtailed inward investment and economic development in the region. There was a general sense in the North-West that a hybrid of Options 3 and Options 4 would be the bare minimum that would be necessary to restore competitiveness for the region.

Even in the Greater Dublin Area the opportunities for the regional growth were seen to be a boon for the entire country and would be welcomed. However, these regional areas will also need to have investment in broadband, there needs to be international connectivity through airports to other global hubs, there needs to be a highly trained skills base available, and to support the availability of such workers the accommodation and transport options must be improved; If all these needs are not satisfied then the Irish projects will not be attractive compared to the alternative investment locations.

Fears were expressed that, in relying on Option 4, then will likely lose significant inward investment should the only available areas for investment prove to be in regional areas.

Participants views on what EirGrid’s priorities ought to be:

As part of the associated survey, Chambers Ireland asked participants to rank a series of options regarding what they believe EirGrids priorities ought to be when it comes to facilitating the meeting of government Climate Action targets.

In meeting government targets how should EirGrid prioritise the following:

	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Round 4
Maximising renewable electricity generation	26	27	29	39
Efficient use of existing infrastructure	24	24	31	44
Reaching delivery milestones on time	21	22	27	-
Final cost for customers	14	16	-	-
Planning concerns	5	-	-	-
Non-Transferrable	1	2	4	8

Chambers Ireland’s interpretation of these responses is that there were two pools of respondents.

The minority pool was concerned with how these projects would impact on their costbase and so was concerned about the inefficient use of existing infrastructure, and how the development of new infrastructure would feed into the tariffs that they experience.

The second, larger, pool of respondents were very supportive of the onboarding of renewable electricity onto the network, were less price sensitive, but have a strong concern regarding the capacity of these plans to deliver upon the necessary inclusion of renewable energy sources, hence the prioritisation of delivery milestones

This was mirrored in the support for the efficient use of infrastructure, which was often paired with secondary support for maximising renewable energy generation.

Participants priorities as customers:

Similarly, we asked participants to identify and rank their concerns as customers and asked them to rank what their priorities are.

As a customer, how do you prioritise the following:

	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Round 4
Security of Supply	45	45	45	53
Climate risks	24	24	25	30
Final cost for customers	16	16	17	-
Visual Impact	3	4	-	-
Local construction disruption	2	-	-	-
Non-Transferrable	1	2	4	8

Chambers Ireland's interpretation of these responses is that there is a considerable overlap between those that are price sensitive (regarding those participants which believe that EirGrid ought to prioritise the final cost for customers, and those for whom the price they pay for electricity is of the highest concern).

There is a very strong association between those that are most concerned with maximising Renewable Electricity Generation, and those that are concerned about the direct impact of climate risks upon their business, but the overwhelming concern of the business community is about security of supply.

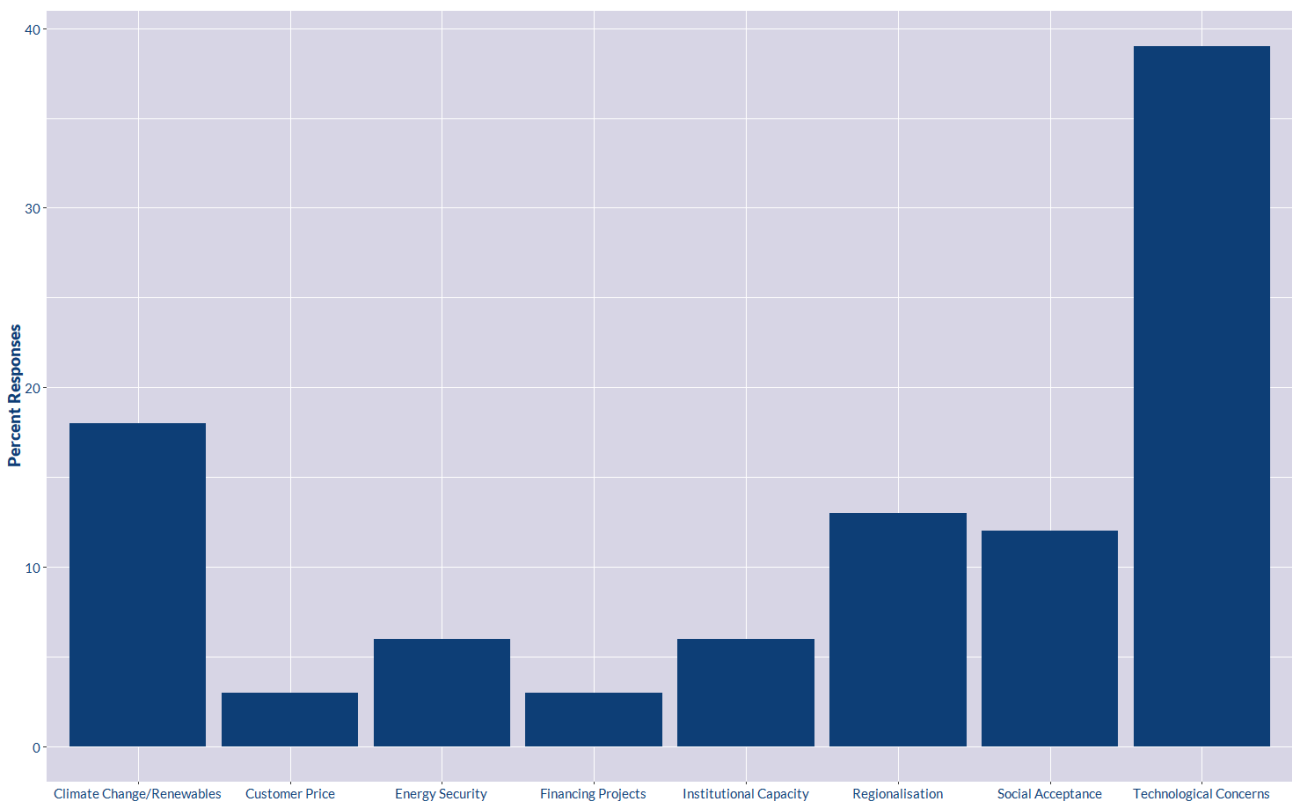
Themes:

The principal themes that emerged from the workshops included:

- Regional opportunities arising from the development of the grid
- Technological concerns
- Social acceptance
- Institutional capacity
- Customer price
- Financing projects

By their nature some of these themes cut across more than one of the themes so throughout this document we try to convey where these links emerged, and how they may relate to other themes and priorities over the course of this series of roundtables.

Topics that emerged organically over the workshops



Data: Chambers Ireland workshop series

High level observations emerging from these themes:

Although it is commendable that EirGrid's focus for the development of these four options has been on proven technologies, there are serious concerns that given the speed with which the renewables sector is innovating, the projects which these options comprise of will not be able to adapt in time to such innovation. This carries the risk that investment opportunities that would otherwise be viable will not be able to be integrated with the grid because transmission capacity is lacking. None of the four options considered seem to take account of the proposals to develop offshore wind along the south coast, at the scale that is currently being suggested in the programme for government, and the four options are not commensurate to the task of also managing the offshore grid.

“It is important to make sure that we work towards a future grid that is world-leading and future-proofed”

Alternative energy supplies was an issue that came up across the workshops, whether that be microgeneration, hydrogen, wave, biomass, battery storage, floating offshore turbines, etc. and the concerns that predominated were either EirGrid's lack of consideration for these technologies, and also the long run future proofing of the grid should the integration of such technologies not be considered at the earliest stages.

The proposals also make strong assumptions about what members of the public understand about the grid network, particularly concerning the relationship between the transmission network and the distribution network. By not using a holistic view of the grid most participants thought that the absence of references to microgeneration was a result of EirGrid not considering it, rather than something that is outside EirGrid's remit. Given that the public do not realise the scope of EirGrid's responsibilities there is work to do to communicate the extent of this remit to the public, and also to have answers for the public on issues like microgeneration, because ultimately the more microgeneration there is across the grid the less load will be placed on the transmission network, and the better it is for EirGrid.

This also reveals two other problems, one around a lack of trust among the public when it comes to their faith in EirGrid to assess all of the issues relating to Grid improvement, and secondly a gap between how EirGrid sees its remit, and what the expectations of the public are in relation to EirGrid.

This communications gap will inevitably cause problems for EirGrid over the coming decade. The response to this kind of challenge during the workshops has been to say, 'that's not our remit' in relation to offshore windfarm developments in sensitive tourist areas, or 'you need to talk to the ESB/SEAI about Microgeneration,'. These are probably not the most reassuring of responses, where parties have concerns (however unfounded these concerns might be).

If EirGrid is portraying its role as being the organisation that is "Shaping our Electricity Future", then it needs to consider the public's frame of reference, for them, their electricity future involves biogas, floating wind turbines, and hydrogen generation.



Regional opportunities arising from the development of the grid

Many of the attendees were interested in the development of the grid as a catalyst for renewed economic growth and regional development. Secondly, all participants were aware of the opportunity that is presented by making the most of our abundant renewable energy resources, and the key role that it has to play when it comes to decarbonisation of our electricity supply. There is a general understanding of the problem where our domestic demand for electricity is largely focused on the Greater Dublin Area, yet the vast majority of Ireland's renewable electricity potential will come from the more regional areas.

Even for the participants that were based in the Greater Dublin Region, the potential regional growth, and for EirGrid's infrastructure programme to act as a catalyst for that growth, was seen as positive opportunity for the country at large. The Greater Dublin Areas was also as positive about the regional growth potential of the Demand-Led approach, (Option 4 within the consultation), as the other parts of the country.

“ It would be great to see positive impacts from this in regional areas ”

There is widespread support for upgrading the transmission grid network as that will have the potential to unlock economic opportunities which will have multiple, reinforcing, and positive effects for all regions of the country. This was a theme that was strongly highlighted in each of the webinars. Local businesses and communities are keen to engage in the process.

“ The basic energy infrastructure needs to be updated as a priority and policies on microgrids are needed ”

There is widespread understanding, and support for the development of our renewable energy resources, this was particularly notable in the round tables that were conducted along the west coast. This is reasonable given the economic opportunities involved: Considering only offshore wind, the operations and maintenance servicing of offshore windfarms is both highly skilled and labour intensive³. With the June 2020 Programme for Government targeting a minimum of 5GW of

³ SSE's Beatrice field off Scotland is 588MW and will require 90 employees to maintain it through the 30 year+ lifespan of the windfarm [Beatrice Offshore Windfarm Limited project Socio-economic impact report, July 2017](#)

electricity generation offshore, ten of our coastal towns on the east and south of the country can expect to become the centres for jobs like these. Combining the high regional multiplier effect, and the wage levels associated with this highly skilled engineering work, offshore wind has the potential to breathe life (and hundreds of employment opportunities) into each of these small, regional, towns. When floating turbine technology matures, we can expect that the west coast will see ten times as many towns benefitting from the maintenance and servicing of windfarms. The risk that the transmission grid's capacity would not keep pace with the available energy, and so would prove to be a bottleneck for the activation of renewable energy sources a focal point of many of the workshop discussions.

Feedback from across the workshops emphasised the regional investment opportunities that could arise from the development of the grid in their localities.

The relocation of data centres away from where the greatest demand is in the Dublin region was repeatedly highlighted as a key opportunity for many towns and cities across the country to attract people, businesses, jobs and investment. Although EirGrid cannot mandate where data centres should be located, many in the south, mid-west and north-west are keen to support such projects to attract inward investment which will aid in the post-pandemic recovery and reinvigorating local economies and communities.



There was a strong feeling from others the north-west region that in the immediate to medium term, a blend of the technology-led approach combined with the demand-led approach would be best suited to redress the clear infrastructure deficit and the knock-on effects that underinvestment in grid in the west and north-west over the past two decades. It was repeatedly queried as to why this blended proposal of EirGrid Options 3 and 4 cannot be accelerated to boost investment in the region as soon as possible.

Stakeholders from the mid-west, north-west and midlands workshops focused a lot of their attention on EirGrid Option 4 facilitating the regional growth through the incentivisation of investment in these regional areas. There was much support for clustering, where new investment, particularly those that have high energy demands were co-located with energy, and in particular renewable energy, generation which would obviate the need to rely on the national transmission network. There was a strong belief that this would support business competitiveness and growth through the creation of energy parks and so act as a driver for regional investment. Nonetheless, there were differing views on the most suitable approach to best serve these interests. Some in the mid-west and north-west regions are of the view that a blend of the developer-led approach and the demand-led approach would be best served to achieve this. Also, most businesses were aware of the existing infrastructural limitations that exist in their areas (other than transmission grid infrastructure).

Broadband capacity, skills availability, international connectivity are all problems which regional areas have to contend with and reliance on a model of transmission grid investment which does not involve co-ordinated investment programmes to address these other needs is likely to undermine the success of EirGrid Option 4. This Demand-Led approach depends upon interconnected government investment programmes and initiations that boost the availability of broadband and adequate housing etc.

Technological Concerns

The range of observations that were made relating to the upgrading of the transmission network were broad, but could largely fall into the following groups:

Underambition in EirGrid's proposed strategies

Alternative Energy Supplies

Underambition in EirGrid's proposed strategies

Most of our workshops saw attendees calling for more ambition in the final EirGrid strategy post-consultation. There was a general sense that these options were developed in the period that preceded the Programme for Government which foresees considerable investment in generation over the next ten years. As is, the State's ambition is that a minimum of 5GW of offshore wind will be landed by 2030. This is in addition to up to 8GW of new onshore wind generation, up to another 1.5GW of solar, and an additional 500MW of microgeneration.

There was a generalised concern regarding how these options would be able to facilitate the long-term aim of net neutrality, and the complete decarbonisation of electricity supply on the island. Given that the four options that are part of this consultation do not seem to be able to accept the quantity of generative capacity which the government is aiming to see developed over the coming ten years, there are concerns that if there is further accelerated ambition, either in the 2030 targets, or (as is likely) in the 2050 targets, then the national transmission network will not be in a position to support these aims.

**“
We need
to get on
with it
”**

There is an enormous opportunity for the country, and for EirGrid, to reinforce its position as a world leader in renewable electricity generation, particularly as Ireland is likely to become net energy exporters over the coming decades.

The fear that became apparent within the business community over the course of these workshops is that EirGrid could become a bottleneck for the decarbonisation of our electricity supply. The worry is that as a result of the conservative approach that EirGrid is taking to this cycle of development we may not be able to make the investments we need if we are to reach an ambitious timeline to net-neutrality.



Alternative Energy Supplies

The workshop participants were enthusiastic about the application of new technologies, particularly around the generation of renewable electricity.

While the overall list of considerations which has emerged from these workshops is certainly not exhaustive, it might be useful for EirGrid to have prepared responses/contingencies for how advances or setbacks in such technologies will impact the strategies that EirGrid is proposing when it comes to the upgrading the national transmission network, not least because it will demonstrate that EirGrid has fully considered fullest extent of the dynamic set of potential technologies which are going to be included in our energy mix over the coming years.

In terms of frequency, the following is the range of technologies that have been queried by participants in the series of workshops:

- Microgeneration
- Hydrogen
- Floating offshore wind/wave
- Battery storage
- Solar
- Biomass
- International connectivity

Microgeneration

Most prominent, in terms of interest from the business community, was microgeneration. There was considerable interest in every workshop regarding the possibility of integrating Microgeneration into businesses or using it as a potential revenue stream which would enhance the sustainability of their businesses.

While we have already addressed the fact that Microgeneration is outside of the direct remit of EirGrid, it should also be considered as a measure of the willingness of businesses to engage in a sustainable energy network. This is an opportunity for EirGrid to engage positively with the business community, and so EirGrid's publications which support the "Shaping Ireland's Future" programme should deal with it directly, while using it to explain more about our High Voltage Transmission and Low Voltage Distribution Networks.

Hydrogen

Hydrogen was another issue that came up frequently. Again, there should be some discussion within the "Shaping Ireland's Future" documentation regarding the various roles that hydrogen may play in the future of the Irish grid in order to demonstrate how hydrogen has factored into EirGrid's decision making processes. For example, it could be used in combination with offshore wind to ensure that excess offshore wind derived electricity needs never touch the transmission grid, as it would be possible to electrolyse water at coastal locations which could then be exported, converted back into electricity via fuel cells, substitute for methane in thermal plants, be introduced to the domestic gas supply, run Hydrogen vehicles, or included in industrial processes where high-quality heat is necessary but not attainable through electrical heating.

Floating offshore wind/wave

The long run economic gains from renewable energy will arise from the exploitation of our vast Atlantic wind/wave opportunities. Vast quantities of electricity, likely more than we will have capacity to use (regardless of our eventual mix of fuels we use for transport/heating/electricity), will become available if we are to make the most of our offshore renewable energy resources. It would be useful if EirGrid could demonstrate what it would do if we reach the outside edge of that energy production envelope, and how our energy grid infrastructure could be configured to accept such a quantity of electricity, and what the local, coastal, energy storage options would have to be developed should the capacity to transmit such electricity around the country fall short of our production potential.

Battery Storage

A more niche concern than earlier ones, but again it would be useful if EirGrid demonstrated how battery storage, whether that be in domestic settings, small-scale industrial, or large-scale commercial settings plays a role in the strategies that support this consultation. As the aim of this consultation process is 'shaping our electricity future' it would be beneficial to take a wider view of what that means, as the public is likely to take such a wide view, and as stated earlier assumes that what isn't mentioned hasn't been considered.

Solar

Solar also featured amongst the concerns that individuals raised about financing. There seems to be great uncertainty about the viability of solar at the present price points. While solar is included and is likely to become increasingly commercially viable over the coming decade, there seems to be an underweighting of the risks associated with it, particularly around the planning system. While large scale solar generation projects have not been objected to, they have yet to be delivered, so plans which rely on a certain minimum of solar derived electricity being available may not be as robust as we need, if we are going to achieve our national ambitions.

Biomass

Biomass again features through taking a holistic view of our electricity system. Furthermore, if we are to make a success of our energy transition it will be because it is a just transition, as some of our participants noted farmers will need to rent, sell, or invest in their land if we are to meet our solar electricity ambitions. There will be trade-offs between different technologies, so solar will be competing with biofuels which will be generated for domestic heating, thermal plants, road vehicles etc.

International connectivity

International connections repeatedly emerged as part of the conversations around energy generation and distribution, both in relation to existing export of energy (particularly when renewables are available) and the importation of energy (particularly electricity derived from nuclear energy), along the existing East-West Interconnector, the Celtic Interconnector which is under construction, the proposed the North-South Interconnector that will help unite the single energy market on the island, in addition to other commercial projects which have been proposed and more ambitious suggestions like the European SuperGrid.



Social Acceptance

Social acceptance of renewable energy projects, and the grid reinforcement that is necessary to support them, were key topics of discussion in a number of workshops. Broadly the participants in the workshops were enthusiastic about the programme, and the general view was that they want to see even more investment and activity being carried out to enable the decarbonisation of our electricity supply.

“
**EirGrid need to
get the public
onside**
”

Participants expressed a lot of concern about NIMBYism, and individual projects that had been blocked or stalled as a result of planning objections. Participants expressed a strong desire for communities to be considered as prosumers under EirGrid’s plans, highlighting a perceived absence of the community links needed to facilitate this. Those participants also focused on the opportunities for other agencies to partner with EirGrid on future renewable technologies, indicating a preference for a blend of the developer-led approach and the technology-led approach.

The primary response to this over the course of the webinars is that businesspeople should ‘engage’ with the material and participate in the consultation. It may be possible to use these businesses, through the creation of tool kits for those that will respond to a call to action on this and help them become local advocates for the decarbonisation process.

It is revealing that the business community is not only open to the projects that EirGrid is proposing, but are also willing to actively support them, but they do not seem to know how to do this.

EirGrid’s programme to achieve the target of 70% of our electricity coming from renewable sources will require a level of work that hasn’t been attempted since the roll-out of rural electrification.

To achieve this, EirGrid will need to work in partnership with all stakeholders, and also identify new partners. Local communities can play a vital role in the journey towards our low carbon future. and can now participate in community-led renewable electricity projects supported by Irish policy initiatives,

including the government's Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS). Empowering communities and businesses in this journey and in proactively providing information, such as advice and guidance in relation to connecting community-led renewable energy projects to the electricity distribution network, will be central to the success of any proposed project. Businesses are eager to be involved as key partners as EirGrid explores the impact and capabilities of new low-carbon and support technologies and where to locate them. The webinar series demonstrated this very clearly.

The Tourism Challenge

The shift towards renewable energies and technologies is positioning our country to become a net energy producer. This will likely have an enlivening effect on our regional areas which have to date been so dependent on the inherently volatile tourist trade. However, this creates one of the risks for this project - many local economies and communities currently rely on natural tourist attractions for their survival. This pits the fears of those within the tourist trade against the wider economic interests of the locality.

For example, a focal point in the south-east stakeholder webinar, hosted by Waterford Chamber, was how future grid developments might hinder the views of Dungarvan and Tramore bays. These communities have the reasonable fear that renewables could have a negative impact on their local economies.

While the concern was most prominent in the Waterford workshop with specific concerns arising about the Copper Coast's Geopark designation and special conservation status of Dungarvan and Helvick areas, this is likely to be a type of concern that emerges on the ground for EirGrid as it reaches deeper into communities that are reliant on tourism around the country.

Again, the response from EirGrid was that this was outside its remit. A concern that could be raised is that:

- There exists a segment of the community that has genuine concerns about the impact technologies such as offshore wind will have upon their livelihoods
- They fear that they will lose out so that people in the big cities will get to go green, and
- That it will be necessary for EirGrid's programme of work to be completed for these projects to become viable.

Therefore, even if they are not concerned about the individual projects that EirGrid is rolling out, they will advocate against EirGrids projects in order to prevent the manifestation of their real fears. EirGrid risks becoming the lightning rod for these other concerns simply because it is a large, and vulnerable target for local activism and the story that 'Stopping EirGrid will stop the turbines' is an easy sell.

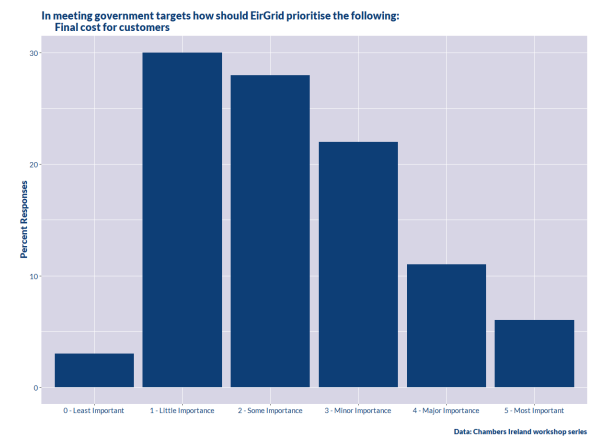
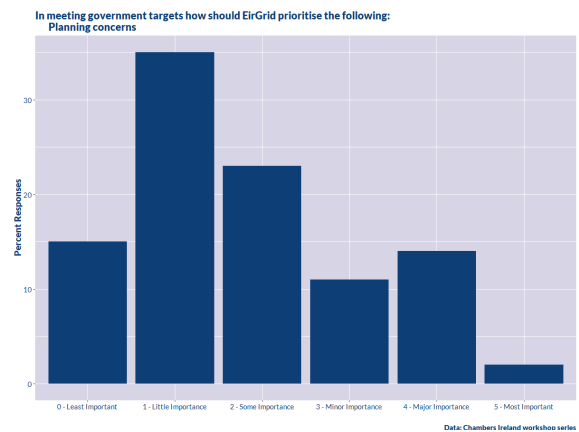
Institutional Capacity/Price for Customers/Financial Risks

The capacity of the administrative system to deal with the planning permission element, combined with EirGrid's institutional capacity to fight a limited number of planning battles was frequently a concern of the participants. This was often set against the gap between the revised targets in the updated Climate Action Plan and the potential capacity of the various EirGrid options.

The fear underlying these concerns is that we will not meet our 2030 targets because the planning system will seize under the volume of activity that will be demanded of it. As mentioned earlier this fear seems to be the primary motivating factor for EirGrid's lack of ambition; because, *ceteris paribus*, EirGrid there is a potential for up to 50 projects to be delivered over the coming decade the four options that EirGrid describes are all that are possible – even if they may not help us reach our targets or our long-term potential.

Sensitivity around planning concerns was relatively low for the participants of the workshops. Which is not to say that they were entirely unconcerned about planning issues, for a minority this is their highest concern, and probably feeds into the earlier discussion on the potential impact of EirGrid's work on the tourism sector.

Where the impact on the price of power which customers were likely to experience over the coming years was raised, this was with a great degree of uncertainty about the direction of travel. Participants seemed to be unsure of whether the proposed infrastructural transformation of electricity generation and transmission systems would have any effect on the price they were paying.



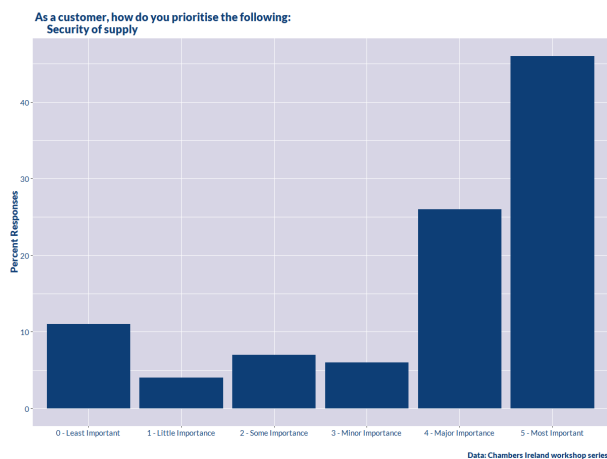
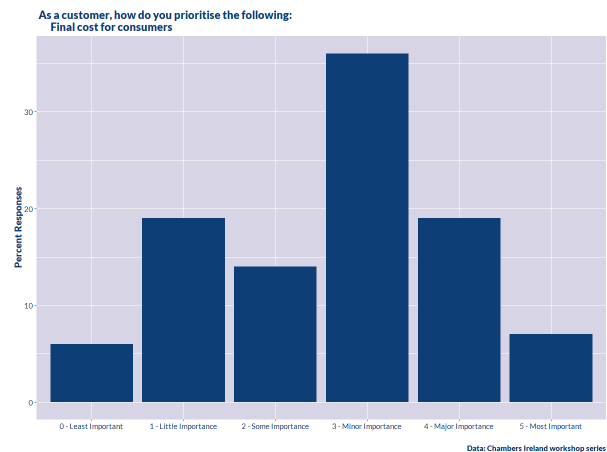
“ Over-emphasis on the cost of the four scenarios, given that the investment in grid will also help with 2050 zero carbon ambitions. ”

When cost was considered relative to another set of concerns (which included security of supply, climate risks, local disruption during the construction phase and the visual impact of projects) they were relatively insensitive to price increases, with security of supply and climate risks being the highest concerns, and the long run visual impact of projects followed by the temporary disruption during the construction period following far behind that

As noted earlier, the primary concern for participants is meeting the climate action targets and doing this in a timely fashion.

This is not to say that that they are insensitive to other concerns. There is strong support for EirGrid using its existing infrastructural resources efficiently. However, that that was not a primary concern of those that participated in the workshops – there seems to be an understanding that the climate crisis is something which we have to accept if we are to effect action. There is clearly a strong desire on the part of the

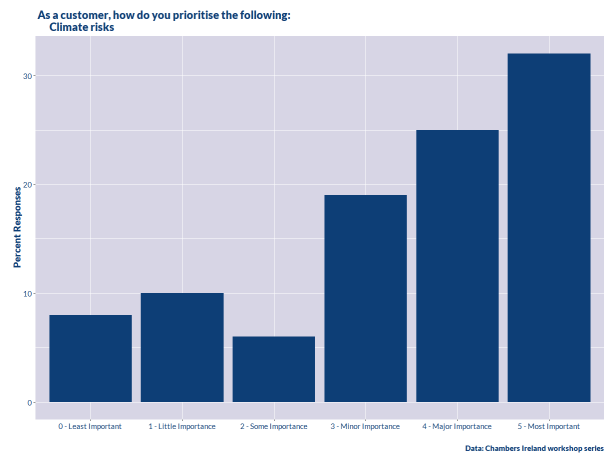
This attitude was supported in the accompanying survey where participants ranked final cost for customers below all the other concerns.



“ Security of supply - many modern processes cannot entertain interruptions ”

participants that EirGrid deliver value for money, but that is in service of these other goals; of climate action, increased renewables, and security of supply.

Where, discussions around the financing of projects emerged, there was concern that the lack of capacity on the grid at the moment is leading to curtailment for energy producers. This is leading to lower revenues for existing Renewable Energy Projects, which can only have a detrimental effect on the viability of proposed energy projects.



Concerns about the current viability of solar energy in the Irish environment, which is interesting when set against the price per watt trajectory of solar at the moment, some estimates suggest that large scale commercial solar will achieve a breakeven point for Irish developers only towards the end of this decade.

The benefits of solar to EirGrid are apparent, given our geography it's far less location- sensitive than wind, but it is as yet untested in the planning system which means that while Solar will not encounter the problems we know wind and transmission system infrastructure experience, it will it is likely encounter a number of novel problems which will need testing in the courts and so will carry additional risk which will need to be priced into the projects, and so will require additional ROI. Together, it raises the question as to whether EirGrid is underweighting the unknown risks associated with novel projects, relative to the known risks that are associated with projects that have been carried out in the past, or failed to secure sufficient social acceptability to become realised.

Appendices

Appendix I – Chambers Ireland and the Sustainable Development Goals

In September 2019, on the fourth anniversary of the SDGs, all affiliated Chambers across Ireland pledged their commitment to the SDGs.⁴ This involved all of our Chambers, including Chambers Ireland, committing to upholding, promoting and implementing the SDGs throughout the work that they are engaged in. Since then, Chambers are continuing to integrate the framework of the SDGs into their daily operations, advocating for the goals locally and creating or supporting policies that reflect the SDGs. Our network values the necessity of sustainable development and believes in the need to improve the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of the communities around them.

We have chosen to focus initially on five of the seventeen goals and we commit to championing these in the broad range of work that we carry out:

Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

Goal 13: Climate Action

Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities

Goal 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure

Goal 5: Gender Equality



The engagement of the business community will be vital to the success of the goals of sustainable development, as the private sector will be required to foster sustainable development and growth across a broad range of areas - from project finance and encouraging regional investment to supporting innovation and technological advancements.

If the SDGs are to be successfully implemented, business and government will have to work together to integrate the sustainable development agenda into the broader economy. This will include public-private partnerships at national and regional level and enhanced opportunities for engagement to better leverage business expertise and experience.

⁴ [Chambers to lead the way on SDGs](#)

Appendix II – Stakeholder Engagement

Chambers Ireland & EirGrid’s Strategic Webinar Series

Over the course of nine weeks, Chambers Ireland and EirGrid partnered together to provide a series of seven strategic workshops for the Chamber Network and their members. Beginning with a national briefing for the Chief Executives of our Network of Chambers, EirGrid representatives presented the background to the ‘Shaping our Future Electricity’ consultation, covering each of the four draft approaches, followed by a moderated discussion. The subsequent seven webinars with Shannon Chamber, Athlone Chamber, Waterford Chamber, Sligo Chamber, Cork Chamber, Wexford Chamber and the greater Dublin Chambers (Kildare, South Dublin, and Fingal) followed a similar format with a wide range of attendees from the local business community actively engaged (a list of which can be found below).

An important consideration when developing this strategic webinar series was that we wanted to use the opportunity for EirGrid to not only inform stakeholders but to also actively engage with them and create a dialogue. We structured the series so that each session was as interactive and engaging for our attendees as possible, with opportunities to participate in Q&A sessions with speakers and panellists, comment and share feedback.

Workshop Attendees

Chamber Network Chief Executive Briefing 23rd March 2021

Attendees:

Arklow Chamber
Ballina Chamber
Ballyhaunis Chamber
Bantry Chamber
Cavan Chamber
Chambers Ireland
Cork Chamber
County Carlow Chamber
County Kildare Chamber
County Meath Chamber
County Tipperary Chamber
County Wexford Chamber
Dublin Chamber
Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown Chamber
Dungarvan & West Waterford Chamber
Galway Chamber
Kilkenny Chamber
Laois Chamber
Letterkenny Chamber
Limerick Chamber
Mullingar Chamber
Shannon & District Chamber
Sligo Chamber
South Dublin Chamber
Westport Chamber

Mid-West Briefing Hosted by Shannon Chamber 24th March 2021

Attendees:

AiP Thermoform Packaging
Analog Devices
Beckman Coulter
Bernal Institute
Calqrisk
Chemifloc
Clarecare
Ei Electronics
Enicity
Exida
Fine Grain Property
Future Mobility Campus Ireland
IDA Ireland
Lufthansa Technik Shaannon
Mid-West Regional Enterprise
Mincon Group
PBCBiomed
PSE Power
PTG Tools
REGN
Sellors LLP
Shannon Foynes Port
Smithstown Light Engineering
Tekelek Europe Ltd
Thompstone Group
Western Development Commission
Zimmer Biomet

Chambers:

Chambers Ireland
Cork Chamber
County Tipperary Chamber
Shannon Chamber

Midlands Briefing Hosted by Athlone Chamber 25th March 2021

Attendees:

Athlone Tidy Towns
Civil Engineer
Decoy Country Cottages
G & T Autos
Galetech Group
IDA Ireland
MMKDA Consulting Engineers
Rowan Engineering Consultants
Shanowen Plant Hire Limited
Sidero Ltd
Teagasc
The Handmade Soap Company
Westmeath Co Co

Chambers:

Athlone Chamber
Chambers Ireland
County Meath Chamber
Mullingar Chamber

Southern Briefing Hosted by Waterford Chamber 26th March 2021

Attendees:

Adelphi Financial Brokers
Ahaon Engineering
Bausch
Bowe O'Brien Solicitors
Cantec Group
Dawn Meats
Europarks
GSK
Helloworld.ie
Jitter Beans
Meditate Smart Ply
movies-at
Natural Health Store
Oireachtas member
Reid Associates
Sanodi
Sedicii
Traverse Ltd.
UCD
WLRFM
Yoga Alliance

Chambers:

Chambers Ireland
Kilkenny Chamber
Waterford Chamber

North-West Briefing Hosted by Sligo Chamber 30th March 2021

Attendees:

Abbie
An Caora Dubh
Bold Craft Marketing
Constant Energy
Eamonn McGauran & Son
EBS
Ervia
ESB
IDA
Ireland West Airport
Irish Rail
IT Sligo
Jennings O'Donovan
Leitrim Co Co
Mayo Co Co
McCanny & Co Solicitors
Nolato
Plan Energy
Rockygrange
Ronan Group Renewables
Sligo Co Co
Sligo ETB
Surety Bonds
Vincent Hannon Architects
WDC

Chambers:

Ballina Chamber
Chambers Ireland
Sligo Chamber
Westport Chamber

South-West Briefing Hosted by Cork Chamber 30th April 2021

Attendees:

AB Sales
ABB
Arup
Brookfield Renewable
Bus Eireann
Coakley O'Neill Town Planning Ltd
Cork BIC
Cronin's Coaches Ltd
Doyle Shipping Group
DP Energy
Energy Cork
Energy Services LTD.
Gas Networks Ireland
GREEN REBEL MARINE LTD
Hitachi ABB Power Grids
Indaver
Indaver Ireland
Irish Exporters Association
John Cleary Developments
Munster Technological University
PM Group
Simply Blue Energy (Kinsale) Ltd.
The Mardyke Entertainment Complex
University College Cork

Chambers:

Chambers Ireland
Cork Chamber
Limerick Chamber

South-East Briefing Hosted by Wexford Chamber 5th May 2021

Attendees:

Dillon Dental
Dulann
Gas Networks Ireland
Integer
Irish Rail
Keating And Associates
Mccqs
Menapia Properties
Regional Skills
Wexford Bus
Xellz

Chambers:

Chambers Ireland
Wexford Chamber

Greater Dublin Region Briefing Hosted by the GDA Chamber Alliance 26th May 2021

Attendees:

4TC
AIB
Airfield
Ashbourne Autoclinic
BER Certs
City West
DLR Co Co
Dublin Gazette
Green Tiger Biofuels
IFA
Jigsaw Better Business
Lloyds
Microsoft
OGX
Osbourne
Pure Haven
RWE
South Dublin Co Co
TAM Services
TU Dublin

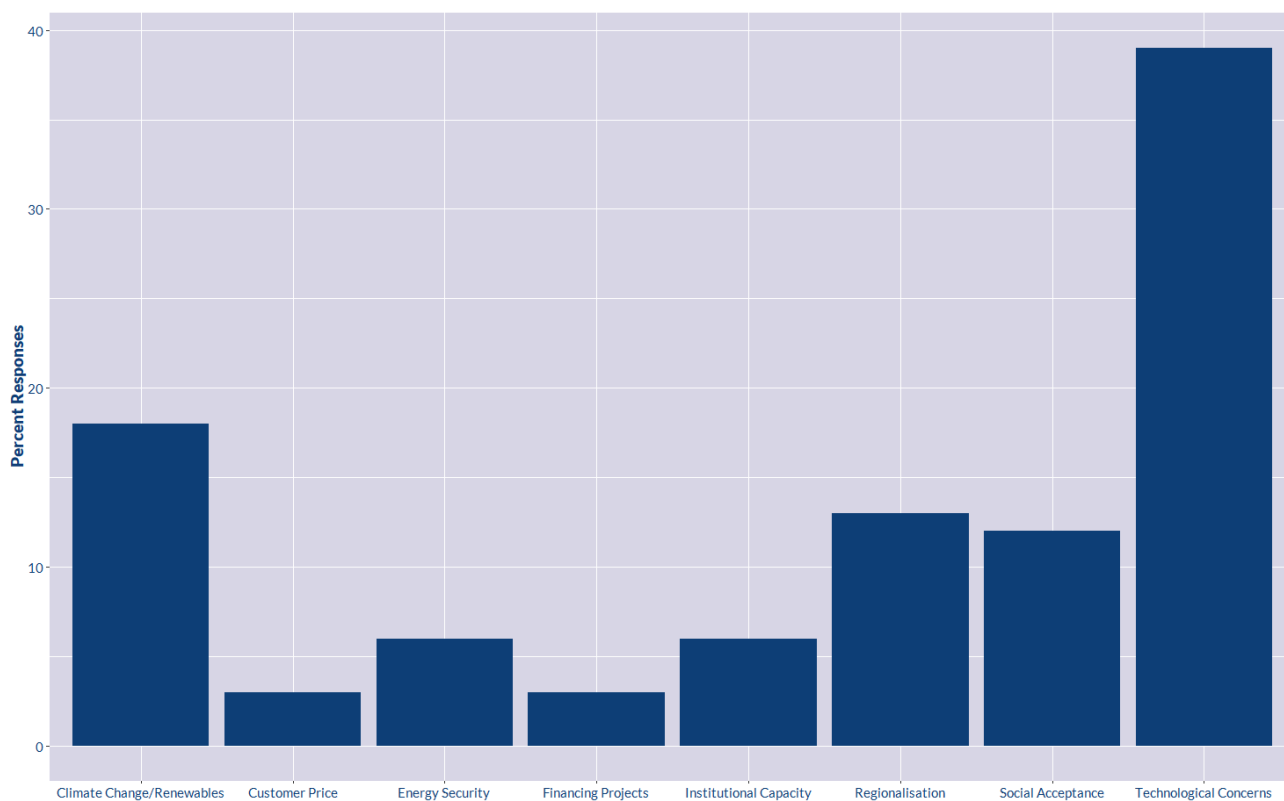
Chambers:

Chambers Ireland
County Meath Chamber
Dun Laoghaire Rathdown Chamber
Fingal Chamber
South Dublin Chamber

Workshop Topics of Discussion:

Workshop Location	Regionalisation	Tech	Price	Public Acceptance	Administrative Capacity	Finance	Climate Change Urgency/ Renewables	Energy Security
Athlone Chief Executives	2	5	1	3	0	0	3	0
Cork	1	7	0	2	0	0	2	0
Greater Dublin Area	2	9	2	1	2	0	2	6
National	0	7	0	1	2	0	2	1
Shannon	4	13	1	1	1	2	10	1
Sligo	12	14	0	0	4	1	5	0
Waterford	1	8	0	6	0	0	1	0
Wexford	0	4	0	2	1	0	0	0

Topics that emerged organically over the workshops

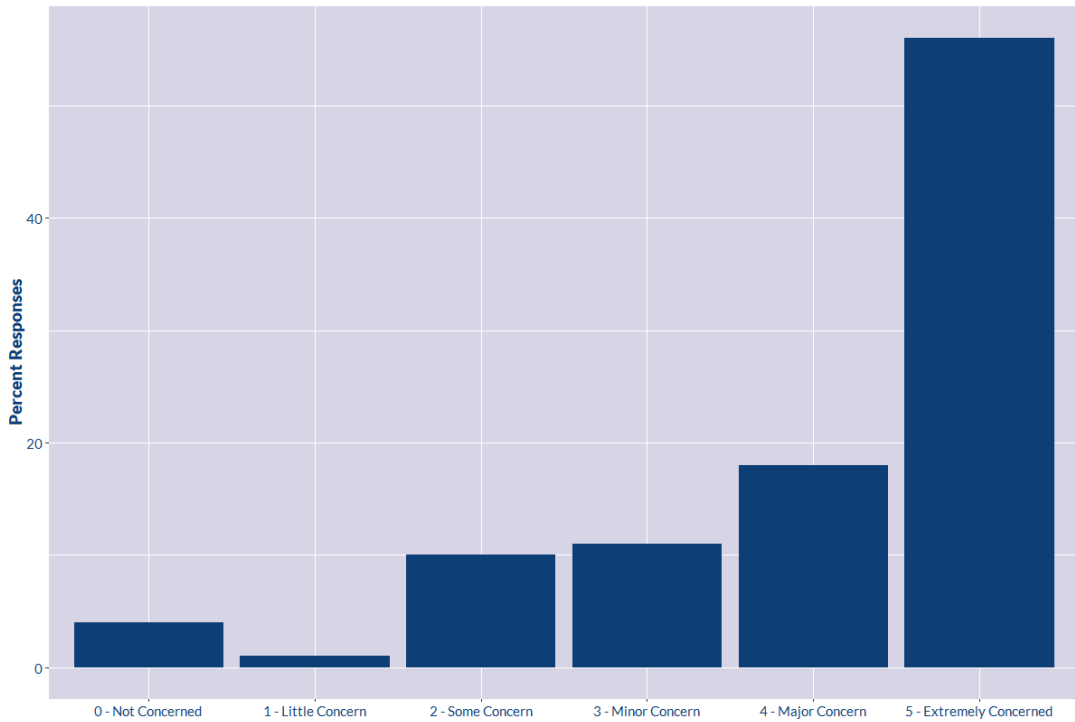


Data: Chambers Ireland workshop series

Appendix III – Analysis of Stakeholder Survey

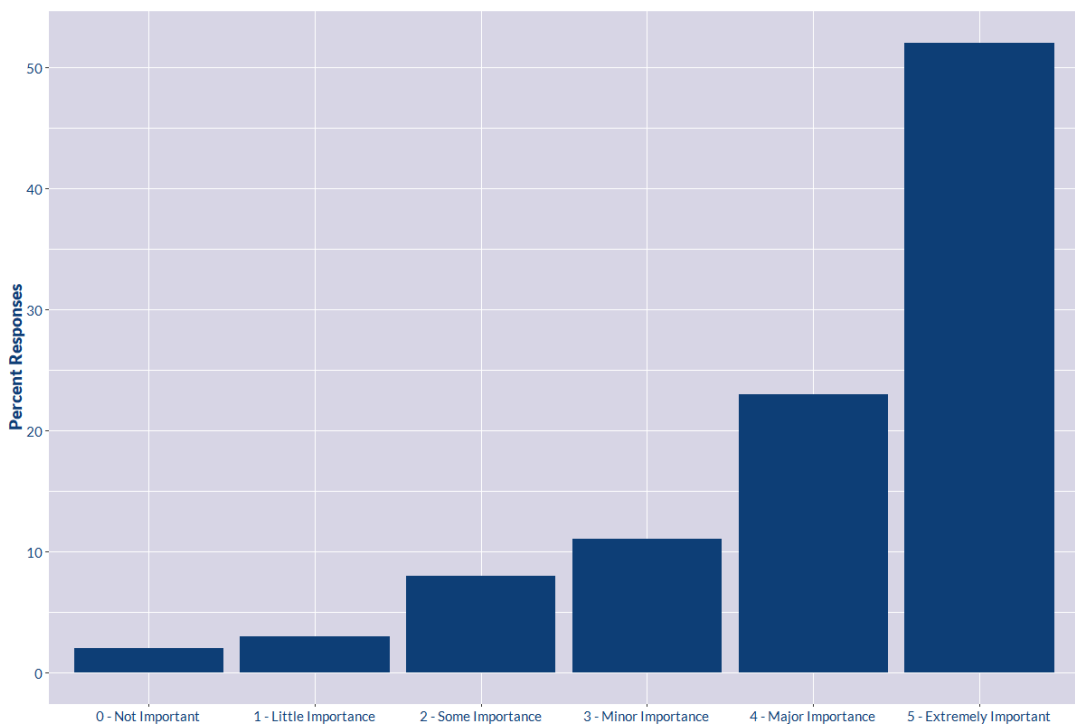
Key findings from Stakeholder Surveys

How concerned are you about climate change?



Data: Chambers Ireland workshop series

How do you rate the national importance of EirGrid's upgrade programme?

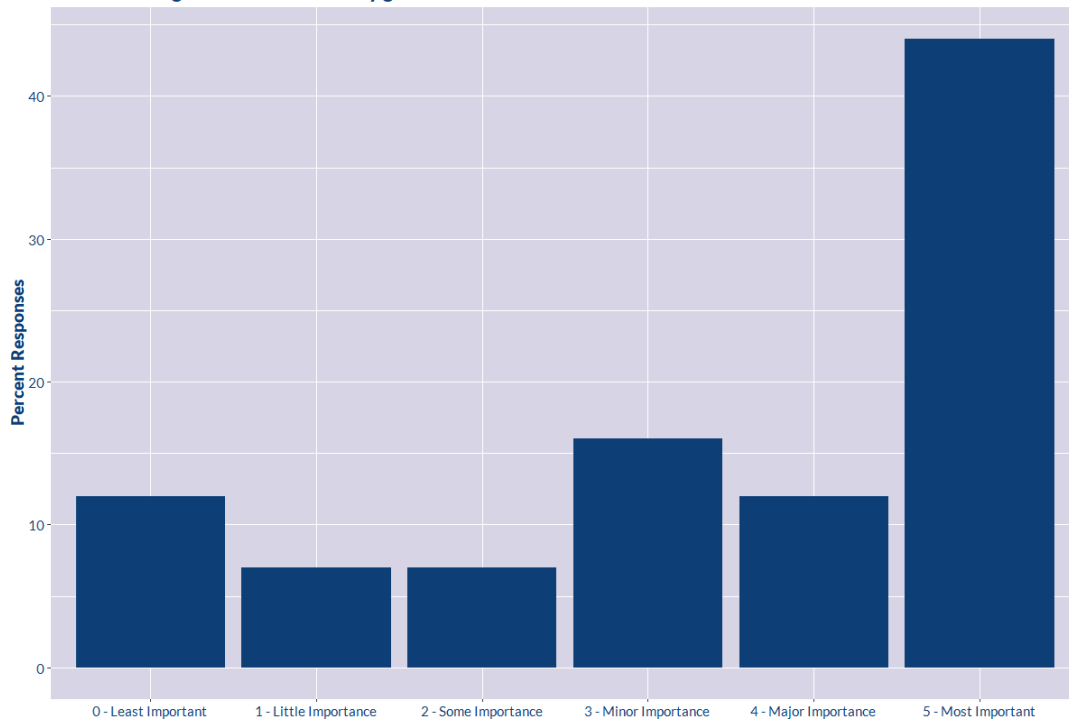


Data: Chambers Ireland workshop series

Respondents' beliefs about EirGrid's priorities

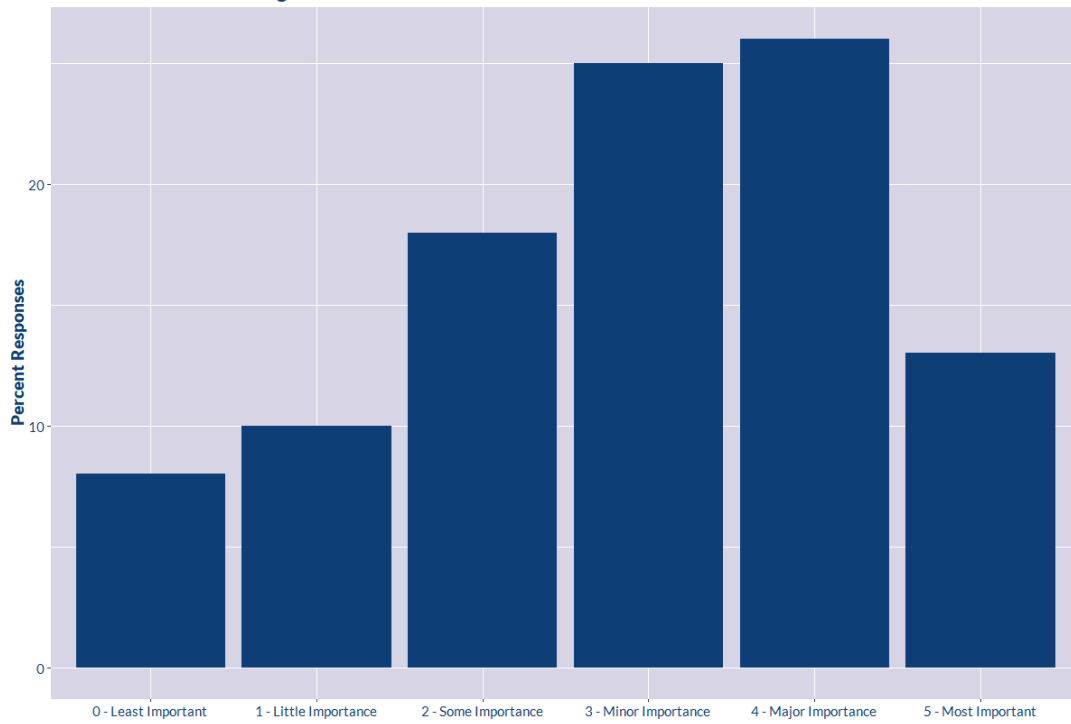
	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Round 4
Maximising renewable electricity generation	26	27	29	39
Efficient use of existing infrastructure	24	24	31	44
Reaching delivery milestones on time	21	22	27	-
Final cost for customers	14	16	-	-
Planning concerns	5	-	-	-
Non-Transferrable	1	2	4	8

In meeting government targets how should EirGrid prioritise the following:
Maximising renewable electricity generation



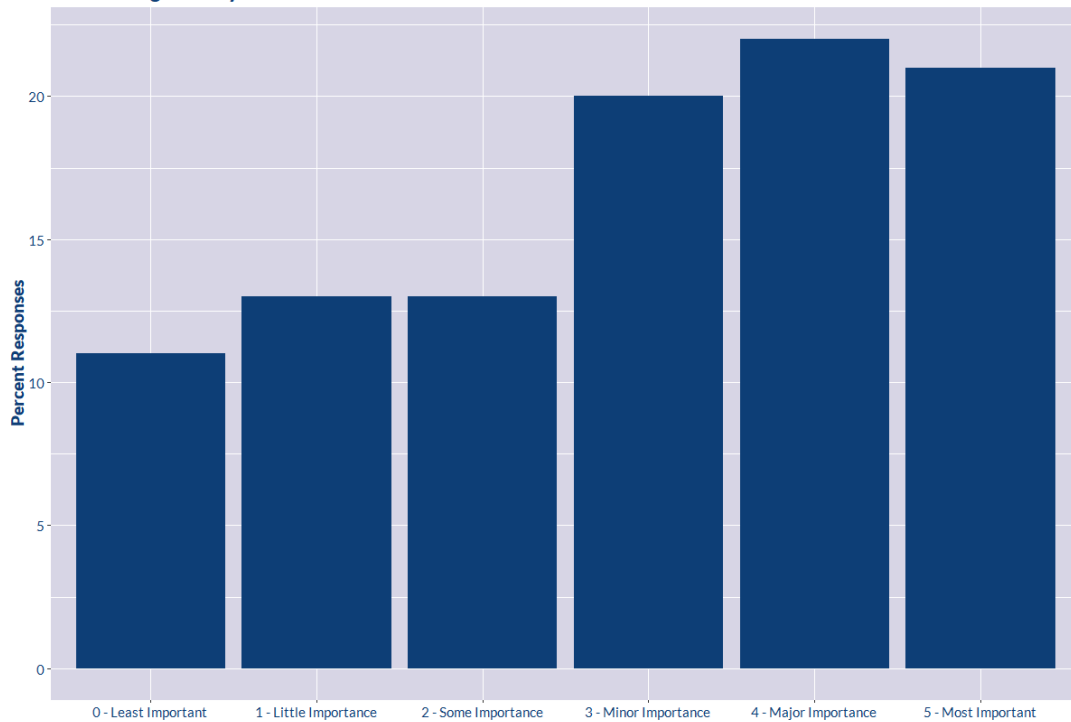
Data: Chambers Ireland workshop series

**In meeting government targets how should EirGrid prioritise the following:
Efficient use of existing infrastructure**



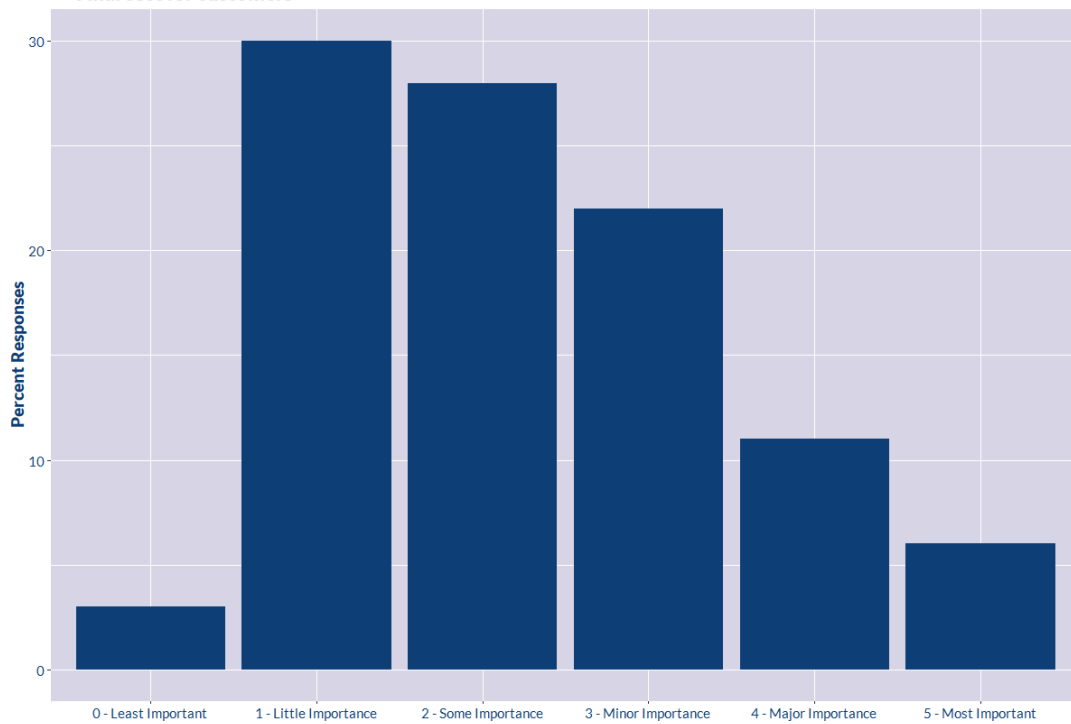
Data: Chambers Ireland workshop series

**In meeting government targets how should EirGrid prioritise the following:
Reaching delivery milestones on time**



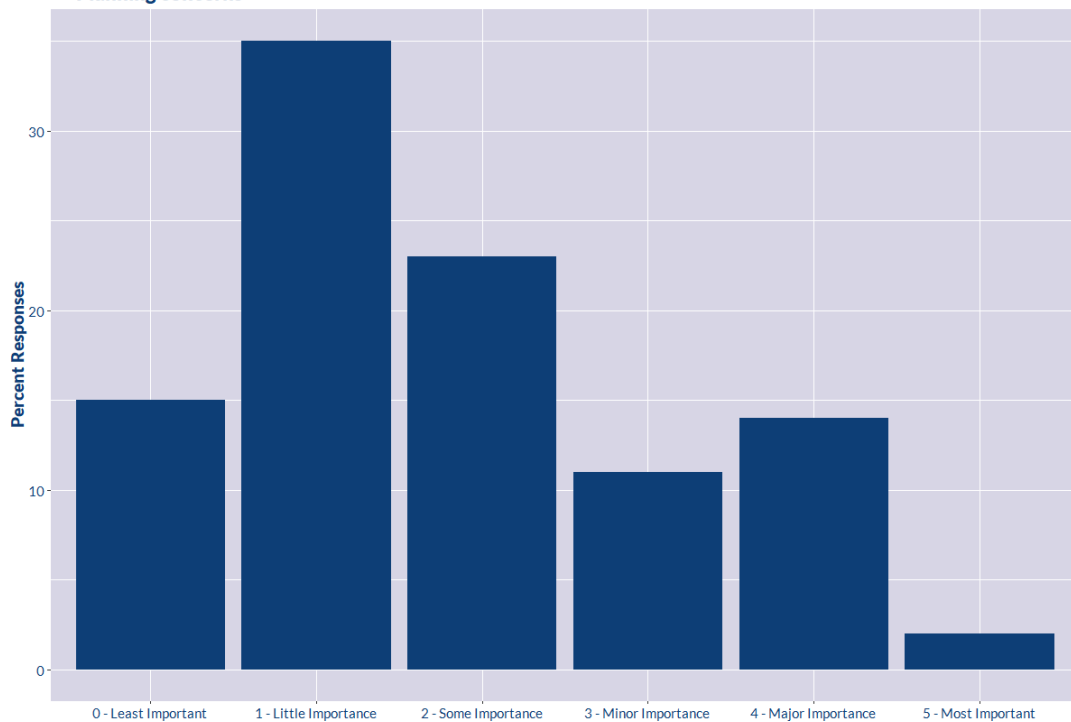
Data: Chambers Ireland workshop series

**In meeting government targets how should EirGrid prioritise the following:
Final cost for customers**



Data: Chambers Ireland workshop series

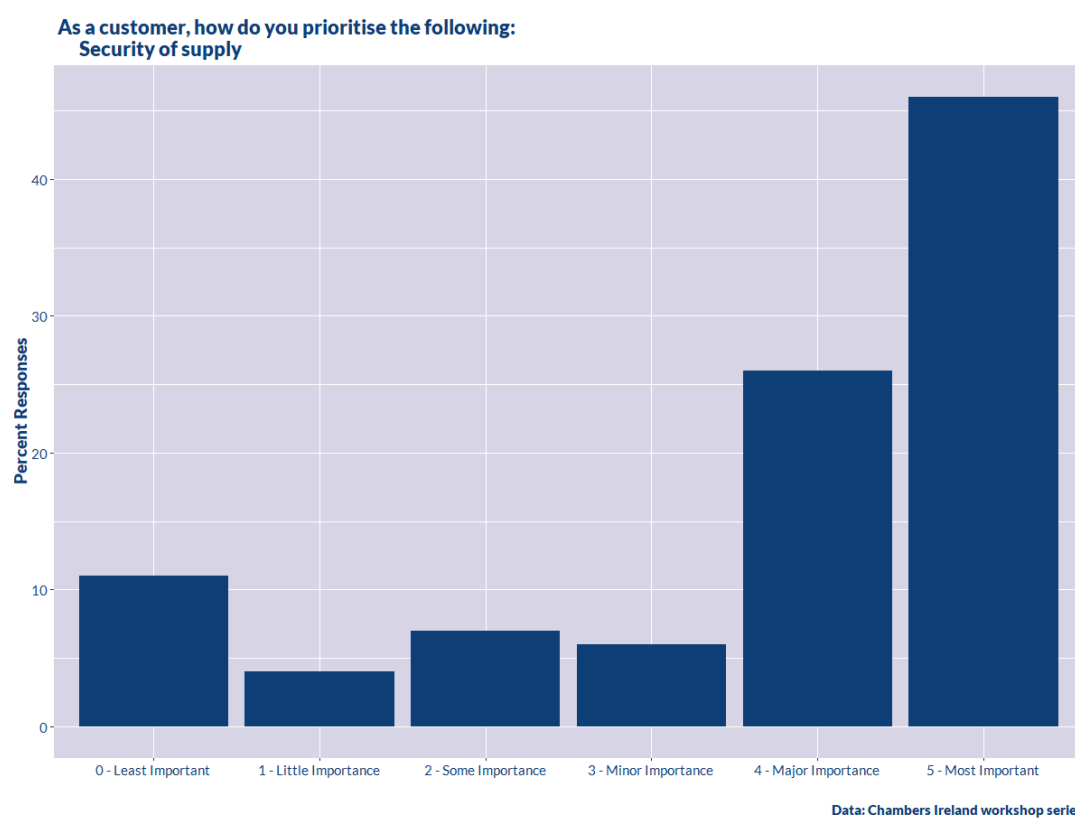
**In meeting government targets how should EirGrid prioritise the following:
Planning concerns**



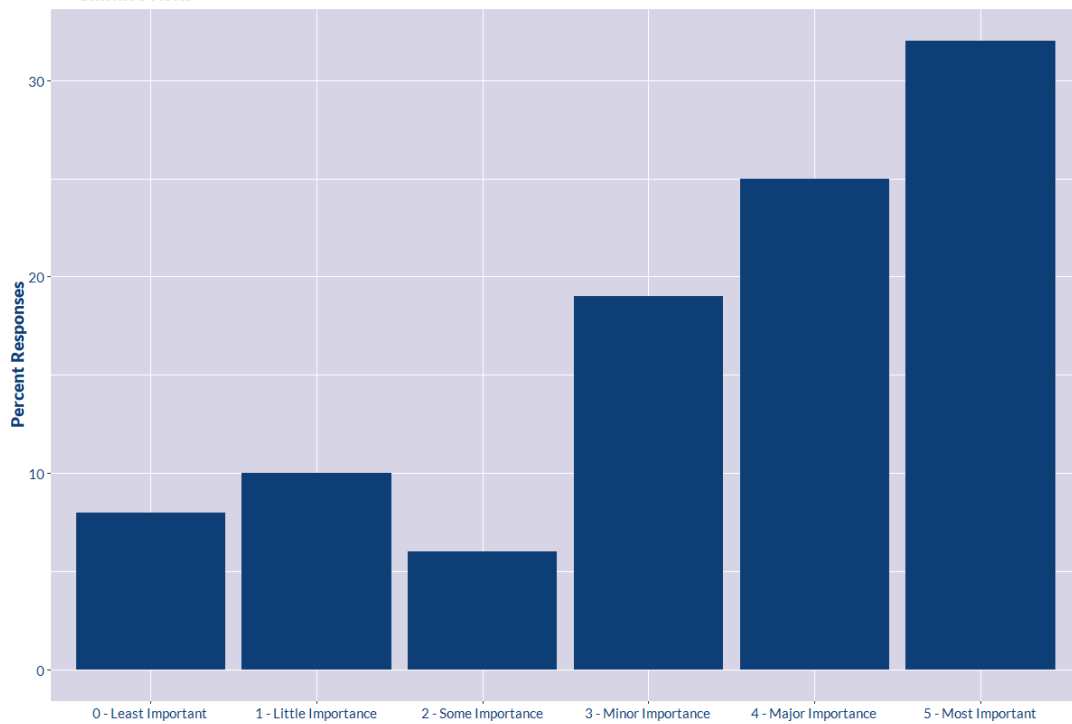
Data: Chambers Ireland workshop series

Respondents' beliefs about EirGrid's prioritisation

	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Round 4
Security of Supply	45	45	45	53
Climate risks	24	24	25	30
Final cost for customers	16	16	17	-
Visual Impact	3	4	-	-
Local construction disruption	2	-	-	-
Non-Transferrable	1	2	4	8

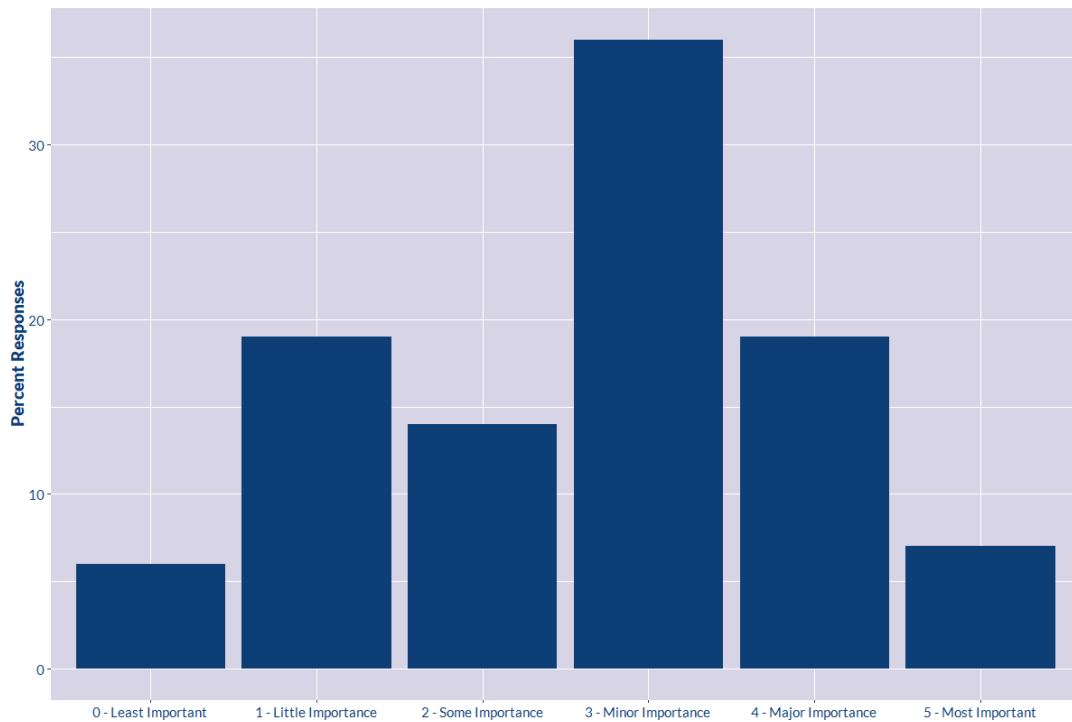


**As a customer, how do you prioritise the following:
Climate risks**



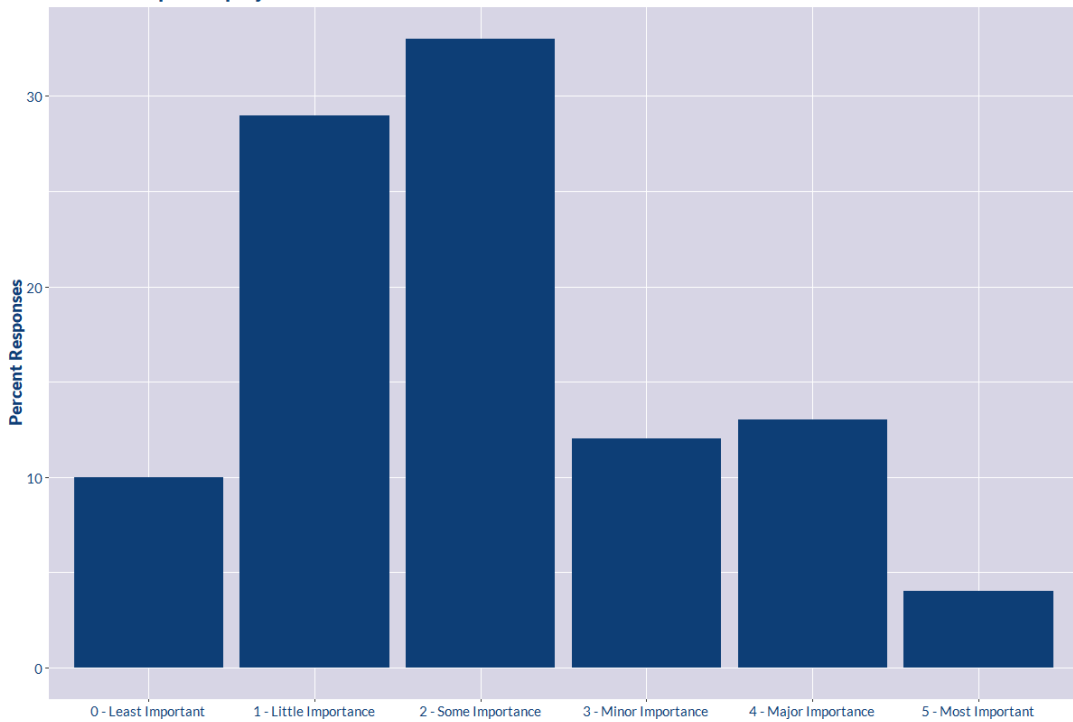
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**As a customer, how do you prioritise the following:
Final cost for consumers**



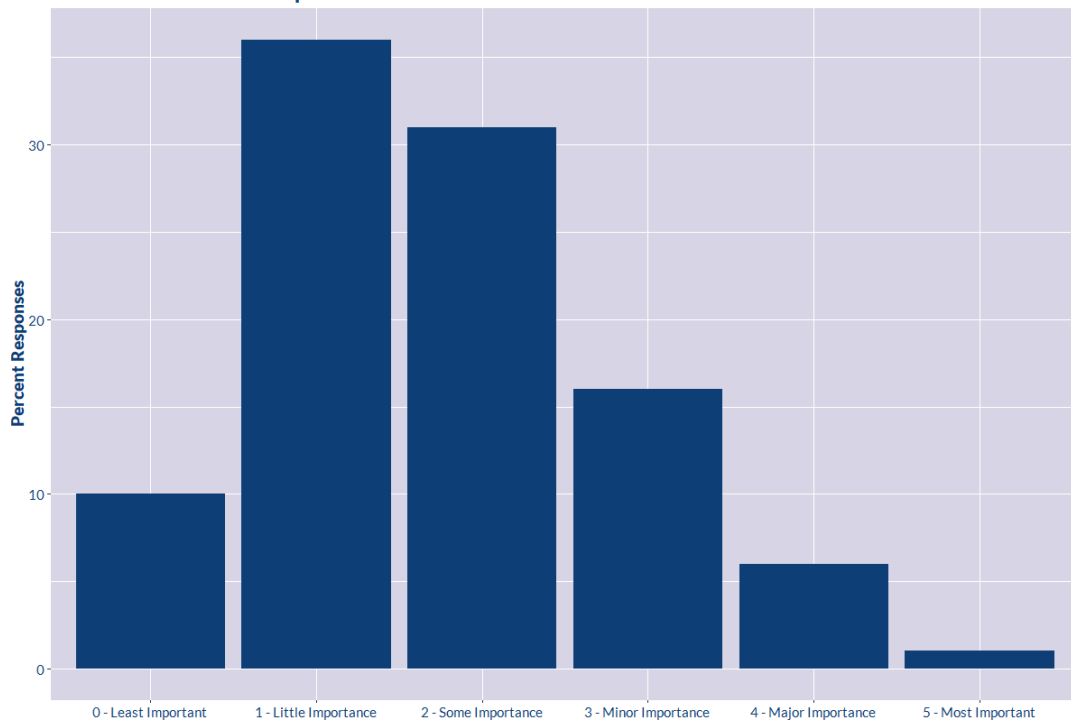
Data: Chambers Ireland workshop series

**As a customer, how do you prioritise the following:
Visual Impact of projects**



Data: Chambers Ireland workshop series

**As a customer, how do you prioritise the following:
Local construction disruption**



Data: Chambers Ireland workshop series

