

East Meath – North Dublin Grid Upgrade

Community Forum

7.30pm, 12th September 2023, via Zoom

Attending (members): Philip McCormack (Batterstown Village Enhancement Assoc.), Helena Merriman (St. Margaret’s Parish Hall Committee), Sheelagh Morris (St Margarets Action Committee), Liam O Gradaigh (St. Margaret’s GAA), Denis O’Leary (Kilbride Tidy Towns), Cllr. Damien O’Reilly (Meath County Council), Pearse Sutton (St. Margaret’s The Ward), Rob Webb (Tyrrelstown Residents Community Council)

Apologies: Walter Moran (Dunboyne AFC),
Eoghan O’Sullivan (Community Liaison Officer, EirGrid),

Attending (EirGrid): Grainne Duffy (Community Liaison Officer), Christie Elliott (Project Management Office), Ailbhe Farrell (Senior Engagement Specialist)

Facilitation: Harriet Emerson

Welcome & Agenda

Everyone was welcomed and Harriet apologised for the mix up over the meeting start time. She confirmed with everyone present that they were happy to proceed with the agenda as proposed.

Minutes of Meeting 19th April 2023 & Matters Arising

Those present approved the draft minutes of the last meeting (previously circulated) held on the 19th April 2023. It was agreed that all matters arising from these would be covered in the agenda.

EirGrid presentation on Best Performing Route Option

The EirGrid staff presented details of the Best Performing Route Option to be announced the following morning (13th September). The route is approximately 38km in length with an estimated 11km off-road, a small increase on the Emerging Best Performing Route Option previously announced. Changes involve resolution along three stretches where there were “bubbles” previously:

- The start of the route from the Woodland substation has been refined to an off-road section which will be shared with the Kildare-Meath upgrade route, with efficiencies in cables being laid together and reduced construction disruption.
- The bubble located at St. Margaret’s has been refined to an off-road section of about 0.5km to avoid the risk of disruption to airport lights.
- In response to public feedback and input from the County Council, the large bubble previously located on the route at Hollystown has now been refined to a 1.4km off-road section through agricultural land and will not come down to the village.

There are two bubbles where the definitive route remains to be finally determined. These are:

- Where the route crosses the M3, this section will all be off-road and the bubble has been reduced significant, but final agreement is still awaited before this section can be publicised.
- From the M1 to the Belcamp substation, the bubble has also been reduced although the specific route not finally confirmed yet. The crossing of the M1 is agreed and will involve horizontal directional drilling (HDD) so that there will be no disruption to traffic on the motorway. There is then approximately 3.5km of route passing through agricultural and industrial land. This is necessary to avoid other utilities already laid in the roadway and will also reduce the challenges of stop/go traffic systems for traffic during construction. Final refinement of this section of the route is still awaited.

There has also been a decision to reduce the final maximum width of the trench needed to 1.5m.

Technical studies are ongoing on roadways and private land, with additional environmental studies required under new legislation, and further engagement with landowners to complete the refinement of the route. It is hoped that these works will be completed by the end of November and that EirGrid can submit the planning application for this work in the first quarter of 2024. As a stakeholder, Community Forum members will be notified of the planning application before it is submitted.

As at previous stages, once the Best Performing Route Option is announced, communications and engagement with stakeholders gets underway. EirGrid will publicise the announcement via the local press, radio, targeted social and digital media and information webinars. Forum members are invited to disseminate this information as widely as possible.

The revised website will have an updated brochure (which can also be obtained in hard copy from EirGrid) and an interactive map of the Best Performing Route available, as well as the Engagement Summary Report and the Technical 4b Report which outlines how EirGrid refined the route from the Emerging Best Performing Option to the Best Performing Option. These will be available by 9am tomorrow morning (13th September) and details and links will be sent to Harriet then to be circulated immediately.

Stakeholder engagements involving the mobile information unit will take place at 3 locations, targeted at the bubble areas; Hollystown, St. Margarets, and Dunboyne, between 11am and 7pm, on

- Thursday 21st September – Hollystown Golf Club
- Thursday 28th September – St. Margarets GAA
- Thursday 5th October – Dunboyne Main st.

The EirGrid team will be piloting the use of a QR code to collect feedback on the route. More information can be found at <https://forms.office.com/e/m0rVFea3LB>

In addition, presentations and discussions will be held with the County Council executives, the Chambers of Commerce, the PPNs, elected representatives, and national schools along the route. There will also be door-to-door contact in these areas in advance of the dates above.

There followed questions and discussion on the presentation, which generated the following information.

Timeline for route finalisation, planning, commencement and completion

EirGrid hopes to have the finalised route by November, after which work will proceed on the Planning Application with the intention that this is put in during the first quarter of 2024. It is not possible to know whether there will be any delays while it is considered by An Bord Pleanála but the aspiration is for approval to be received so that construction can begin in 2026. There will be some ground investigation work next year that will be agreed with the County Councils and, while this is complex, the EirGrid team will try to send out information about the anticipated timelines for this so that people in communities are kept informed and aware of activities.

EirGrid is happy to share the updated, finalised map with the Community Forum once the route through the remaining bubbles is clarified so that it can preview this before the Planning Permission application is submitted.

Construction of the upgrade is expected to take 3 years (2026 – 2029). It is anticipated that multiple crews will be working on the route simultaneously, in different locations, with the intention of completing the work as quickly as possible and minimising disruption. Details of this will be set out in the Construction Management Plan that will be produced in due course.

Engagement with other stakeholders

EirGrid will continue to engage with all relevant stakeholders. This will include discussions with the Dublin Airport Authority as some of the road on the route is in their ownership and will focus particularly on the Construction Management Plan and emergency procedures. Regular meetings take place with the Local Authorities and elected Councillors, the Chambers of Commerce and others.

Participation of elected members in the Community Forum

The conscientious participation by Cllr Damien O'Reilly in the Community Forum was recognised and appreciated. The complete absence of attendance or communications by elected members from Fingal

County Council was considered highly regrettable; reducing the ability of such members to hear the concerns of community members, for example about road re-instatement, and to ensure that there is informed follow-through and a response by the County Council on these matters. It was agreed that Harriet will write to Corporate Affairs at Fingal County Council on behalf of the Community Forum about this matter and report back on the response received.

Community proposal

A proposal by Kilbride Tidy Town and Village to work with Meath County Council and the Ashbourne MD on the possibility of a footpath and cycle lane being installed along the route was raised. Up to this point, EirGrid has been focused on identifying the route. Now that this is largely done, they are in a position to meet and will have a conversation with the Tidy Town group about this.

Details of Community Benefit Fund

The Community Benefit Fund is provided in recognition of the disruption experienced by communities along the route in its construction and for the hosting of this infrastructure. It comprises 3% of the cost of the cable/km. If this cost is approximately €47,000.00/km, the likely value of the Community Benefit Fund for this project will be in excess of €1,750,000.00.

EirGrid has a Community Fund Policy (found [here](#)) that requires the money to be spread equally between projects focused on

- Sustainability
- Biodiversity
- Community

In addition to this, a strategy is developed for the allocation of each specific fund, and all applications will be assessed against this. This may include a guide on maximum size of grants considered, the division of monies between large and small applications, and so forth. The oversight of the Fund is the responsibility of an independent Fund Administrator (to be appointed). The Community Forum has a significant role in feeding into this strategy.

The Fund will be paid out in 3 tranches (rounds of applications); 40% when the project is commenced, 30% when it is underway, and a final 30% when it is energised or operational.

From 2024, there will be public information sessions to assist community groups to identify possible funding from SEAI, Leader and other sources, and ways in which joint funding applications may be considered.

Future of the Community Forum

Now that the route is clearly defined, continued involvement in the Community Forum is relevant primarily to those communities through which the route will run. It is important that all of these are represented and members were asked to help identify any areas where they see a gap in representation and if they can identify a suitable group which might be invited to join the Forum for that area.

Harriet will communicate with Forum members ahead of the next meeting to discuss their continued participation in the Forum, identify stretches of the route where communities may not be represented, and look at what groups might get involved to do that.

Any other business

No additional items of business were raised for discussion.

Next meeting

It was agreed that the Forum will meet again in person on the 22nd November, with the venue to be confirmed nearer to the time. This meeting will be an opportunity for EirGrid to thank members for their continued commitment and work on the Forum during 2023 and for the Forum to welcome any new members as it aims to ensure all the communities along the route are actively represented.

As there was no further business, everyone was thanked for their attendance and the meeting ended at 9.00pm.