

Mr Michael Hewitt  
Projects Manager  
SONI

15 December 2020

**Re: Consultation from SONI on the Draft Transmission Development Plan 2020-2029**

Dear Mr Hewitt

Sustainable Northern Ireland welcomes the opportunity to engage with SONI on the current consultation of its Draft Transmission Development Plan 2020-2029.

We welcome the positive and proactive approach of SONI in planning ahead to meet the electricity transmission needs of Northern Ireland over the next decade and beyond. Such investment in this important infrastructure will undoubtedly support our development, prosperity and well-being, so it is particularly welcome, subject to the essential environmental safeguards that protect the area, our people and our climate.

Sustainable Northern Ireland's Vision is set out in our Strategic Plan – Time for Change, namely, to achieve:

*a world where prosperity is achieved in ways that are good for people and the planet.*

It is apparent that SONI is proposing to invest and develop the electricity network in the region over the next 10 years. This investment is in order to achieve 'security of supply' and to accommodate the very significant amount of 'Renewable Energy installations', especially wind turbines.

Generally, this necessary electricity transmission infrastructure is very much to be welcomed to support the sustainable growth of the Region, but strong environmental safeguards, including Planning, do need to be in place and respected at all stages of the decision-making processes.

In this respect, local authority Planning policy proposals and local energy strategy objectives should be taken into account. For the most part, these generally seek to have the infrastructure to facilitate growth of population, homes and jobs, as well as to protect any AONBs and other sensitive locations, with limited electricity undergrounding expected and for all renewables applications to be accompanied and assessed together through using the principles of sustainable development, with their required electricity network.

Sustainable Northern Ireland generally supports the long-term transition

towards a more decentralised and deregulated energy system, recognising the need in the short term to maintain security of supply through a robust grid network.

It is not immediately clear what the visual impact would be any new lines, poles or pylons and equipment. It is appreciated that this is a strategic document and is not intended to be a Planning submission. Ultimately, it is anticipated that most of these projects would be assessed as Planning applications, where applicable, by individual Councils or DfI.

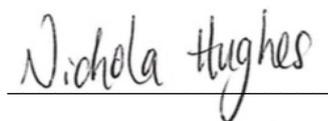
However, there will inevitably be Planning implications and concerns, especially visually, due to the impact of an increased number of electricity pylons/lines/equipment across the Region, which may present a disproportionate impact on rural communities. Any such Planning applications will require public consultation.

Therefore, in principle, Sustainable Northern Ireland would be supportive of the development and upgrading of the electricity infrastructure to meet the future economic and social needs of the Region. Additionally, we would be supportive of green energy, in support of Northern Ireland's declaration of a Climate Emergency, the new Energy Strategy, and proposed Climate Change Bill - all seeking energy self-sufficiency and long-term decarbonisation of the Region.

Subject to the Planning comments above, the draft Transmission Development Plan 2020-2029 is welcomed.

I trust that you find these comments useful. If you have any queries do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Nichola Hughes". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above a thin horizontal line.

**Nichola Hughes**

Executive Director