

# SONI's Draft Transmission Development Plan for Northern Ireland 2023- 2032.

Consultation Paper 02 July 2024



## About the Utility Regulator

The Utility Regulator is the independent non-ministerial government department responsible for regulating Northern Ireland's electricity, gas, water and sewerage industries, to promote the short and long-term interests of consumers.

We are not a policy-making department of government, but we make sure that the energy and water utility industries in Northern Ireland are regulated and developed within ministerial policy as set out in our statutory duties.

We are governed by a Board of Directors and are accountable to the Northern Ireland Assembly through financial and annual reporting obligations.

We are based at Queens House in the centre of Belfast. The Chief Executive leads a management team of directors representing each of the key functional areas in the organisation: Corporate Affairs, Markets and Networks. The staff team includes economists, engineers, accountants, utility specialists, legal advisors and administration professionals.



## Abstract

SONI, as Transmission System Operator (TSO), is responsible for ensuring continuity of electricity supply for homes and businesses across Northern Ireland. In order to do so, SONI must plan investment in the transmission network.

The Transmission Development Plan Northern Ireland (TDPNI) 2023-2032 is the proposal for the development of the NI transmission network and interconnection over the ten years from 2023. This plan presents projects that are expected to be needed for the operation of the transmission network in the short and medium-term.

## Audience

This document is likely to be of interest to regulated companies in the energy industry, government, industry groups, consumer bodies, environmental groups and those with an interest in the energy industry and network planning.

## Consumer impact

The TDPNI provides clarity to consumers on:

- 1) The drivers of electricity transmission investment;
- 2) The need for action;
- 3) The location and activity of network investment;
- 4) The estimated cost and timing of project completion and
- 5) Tomorrows Energy Scenarios NI
- 6) NI Projects in European Plans and Projects

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# Executive Summary

The Transmission Development Plan for Northern Ireland (**TDPNI**) 2023-2032 is the proposals for the development of the NI transmission network and interconnection over the ten years from 2023. This plan presents projects that are expected to be needed for the operation of the transmission network in the short and medium-term.

The TDPNI will help to achieve the strategic objectives as laid out by national and EU policies. The strategic objectives include:

- a) Ensuring the security of electricity supply;
- b) Ensuring the competitiveness of the national economy;
- c) Ensuring the long-term sustainability of electricity supply.

In accordance with its' licence (Condition 40), SONI must prepare a TDPNI every year. Under Article 22(4) of Directive [2009/72/EC](#), the Utility Regulator (**UR**<sup>1</sup>) must then consult on the draft TDPNI prepared by SONI, this was then superseded by Article 51 of the [Directive 2019/944](#).

The last TPDNI was published in 2021 and we published our [decision paper](#) and approval of SONI's Transmission Development Plan for Northern Ireland (TDPNI) 2021-2030.

SONI has now consulted upon the [Draft TDPNI 2023-2032](#) plan and has provided a response to representations received from their consultation, to the UR for consideration. The UR has prepared this consultation paper calling for further comment on the TDPNI.

UR welcomes comments on all aspects of SONI's draft TDPNI.

The UR will require SONI to fully consider all comments and suggestions submitted as part of the consultation, before submitting a final TDPNI for approval. The deadline for submitting responses to this consultation is 5pm on 2<sup>nd</sup> Aug 2024.

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<sup>1</sup> In this document we use the words "us" "our" "we" "Utility Regulator" and "Authority" in each case to refer to the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation: see Article 3 of the Energy (NI) Order 2003 (the Energy Order)

## 2. Introduction

### Background

- 2.1 SONI is the independent electricity Transmission System Operator (**TSO**) for Northern Ireland. As part of its function as TSO, SONI has a licence obligation under Condition 40 to produce a Transmission Development Plan for Northern Ireland (TDPNI).
- 2.2 SONI has consulted upon a draft TDPNI for 2021-30. Results have been considered and an updated plan has been submitted to the UR.
- 2.3 Under Article 22(4) of Directive [2009/72/EC](#), the UR must then consult on the draft TDPNI prepared by SONI, this was then superseded by Article 51 of the [Directive 2019/944](#). The UR has prepared this consultation paper calling for comment on the TDPNI 2023-32.

### Related Documents

- 2.4 We had previously published our decision paper and approval of SONI's Transmission Development Plan for Northern Ireland (TDPNI) 2021-2030.
- 2.5 UR is now seeking views on the SONI Draft TDPNI 2023-2032. This document should be read in conjunction with:
- a) SONI report - [TDPNI Consultation Responses](#);
  - b) Strategic Environmental Assessment (**SEA**) – [Environmental Report](#)<sup>2</sup>;
  - c) Habitats Regulation Assessment (**HRA**) – [Report](#).
- 2.6 UR welcomes comments / views on all aspects of SONI's draft 2023-2032 TDPNI.

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<sup>2</sup> The SEA has a five year lifespan and was carried out in 2023, related documents associated with the development plan can be found at <http://www.soni.ltd.uk/the-grid/projects/tdpni/related-documents/>

## 3. Overview

### 2021 - 2030 – Decision Paper

3.1 In 2021 we published our [decision paper](#) on the 2021-2030 TDPNI, on approval we drew a number of conclusions. These included the following:

- 1) Increasing renewables on the system along with the importance of grid development projects and the North / South remain key to delivering on net zero targets and Northern Ireland's 80% RES targets
- 2) We must evolve to accommodate new technologies to lower min gen levels and reduce Northern Ireland's reliance on thermal generation
- 3) There are important action plans and legislation reforms that are to be delivered and implemented in our journey toward 2030
- 4) We encourage SONI and NIE Networks to continually place community engagement at the forefront of Northern Ireland's network infrastructure development
- 5) SONI and NIE Networks must engage and work collaboratively under the framework of the Transmission Interface Arrangement to carry out and deliver the required network investment and related TO asset replacement requirements

### 2023 - 2032 Draft TDPNI

3.2 SONI's draft TDPNI 2023-32 is the third such plan that they have had to complete. This ten year plan undertakes a variety of functions including:

- a) Outlines the drivers for network development;
- b) Details the network investment needs;
- c) Lists the projects and activity required to address these needs;
- d) Describes the TSO's planning process;
- e) Details project information i.e. category, planning area, location, activity, estimated cost and completion date.
- f) Incorporates Tomorrow's Energy Scenarios NI

3.3 The draft TDPNI describes 77 different projects under this plan. Of this, 41 are NIE Networks asset replacement projects, and 36 are network development projects.

- 3.4 On a region and project category basis, the 36 development projects are captured as follows:

<b>Projects by Planning Area and Category</b>				
<b>Project Category</b>	<b>North-West</b>	<b>South-East</b>	<b>Both Areas</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
<b>New Build</b>	9	6	0	<b>13</b>
<b>Uprate / Modify</b>	9	7	4	<b>21</b>
<b>Refurbish / Replace</b>	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
<b>Combination/ Other</b>	0	2	0	<b>2</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>36</b>

2023-2032 Network Development Projects

- 3.5 In comparison with last year, six projects have been cancelled and five new projects have been included, three projects have been renamed, had a change in scope, or been incorporated into other project scopes and two projects have been completed.
- 3.6 For the current projects, 36% are New Builds, 58% are Uprate/Modify, and 6% are a Combination or Other.
- 3.7 SONI expenditure on transmission development projects is estimated at £61.4m for the ten-year period, of which £13.7 million has been spent already. This figure is the amount SONI state is required to bring projects to the point of handover to NIE Networks. Estimated TO costs associated with these projects are £571.2 million, as stated within SONI's Draft 2023-2032 TDPNI.
- 3.8 Total estimated asset replacement costs over the ten years covered by this plan are approximately £177.5 million, as stated within SONI's Draft 2023-2032 TDPNI.
- 3.9 The total estimated cost of all projects described in the TDPNI 2023-2032 is £810.1 million, as stated within SONI's Draft 2023-2032 TDPNI.
- 3.10 To allow for comparison of network development projects on a year-on-year basis, data is represented at a fixed point in time - the data freeze date. The data freeze date of TDPNI 2023 is 1 May 2023.
- 3.11 SONI has indicated that there has been a number of changes in regard to a project's status or scope since the data freeze. These are detailed within section 1.8 of SONI's draft 2023-2032 TDPNI.
- 3.12 In regard to the SEA, it was first published in 2018 and it should be noted these have a five-year lifespan therefore SONI has carried out a new SEA



which was published on 28 September 2023.

- 3.13 The HRA report had also expired so SONI has published a new HRA on 28 September 2023 and is available on SONI's Website<sup>3</sup>. The main findings of these assessments have influenced and are incorporated into the current Plan.
- 3.14 SONI has also produced a report summarising the feedback received from its own consultation. It further details the TSO responses to issues raised and subsequent changes made from the previous version of the TDPNI to the updated plan published alongside this document<sup>4</sup>.
- 3.15 Following consultation, UR intends to consider responses and share findings with SONI. This will help inform submission of a final TDPNI for approval.
- 3.16 As well as progressing this TDPNI approval, we are currently considering proposed Licence Modifications to Condition 40 in regard to requirements within Directive 2009/72, Article 22 and with Directive 2019/944, Article 51 in relation to obligation and requirement to consult, within certain time periods and we will be finalising that in the near future.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.soni.ltd.uk/the-grid/projects/tdpni/related-documents/>

<sup>4</sup> [Report-on-Draft-TDPNI-2023-2032-SONI-Consultation.pdf](#)

## 4. Next Steps

### Consultation Responses

- 4.1 The deadline for responses to this consultation is 5pm on 2<sup>nd</sup> Aug 2024. Responses should be sent to:

Jody O'Boyle
Utility Regulator
Queens House
14 Queen Street
Belfast
BT1 6ED
<a href="mailto:Jody.OBoyle@uregni.gov.uk">Jody.OBoyle@uregni.gov.uk</a>
<a href="mailto:SONIUREGNI@uregni.gov.uk">SONIUREGNI@uregni.gov.uk</a>

- 4.2 The Utility Regulator's preference would be for responses to be submitted by e-mail to the above email addresses. We welcome feedback on any aspect of the TDPNI.
- 4.3 Your response may be made public by the Utility Regulator. If you do not want all or part of your response or name made public, please state this clearly in the response by marking your response as 'CONFIDENTIAL'.
- 4.4 If you want other information that you provide to be treated as confidential, please be aware that, under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, there is a statutory Code of Practice with which public authorities must comply and which deals, amongst other things, with obligations of confidence. In view of this, it would be helpful if you could explain to us why you regard the information you have provided as confidential.
- 4.5 Information provided in response to this consultation, including personal information, may be subject to publication or disclosure in accordance with the access to information regimes (these are primarily the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Data Protection Act 2018
- 4.6 As stated in the GDPR Privacy Statement for consumers and stakeholders, any personal data contained within your response will be deleted once the matter being consulted on has been concluded though the substance of the response may be retained.

- 4.7 This paper is available in alternative formats such as audio, Braille etc. If an alternative format is required, please contact us and we will be happy to assist.