

Under embargo until 11.30am 15th September 2009

Planning Permission Granted for Ireland Wales Electricity Link

Decision takes Ireland “one step closer to energy independence” says Minister

Project construction will begin in 2010 bringing 100 jobs to Ireland during construction

15th September 2009: An Bord Pleanála today granted EirGrid permission to build the 500 MW electricity Interconnector between Ireland and Wales.

The decision is a key step in the development of this vital electricity link, which will enable two-way transmission of power from 2012, and which will enable Ireland to be an exporter of renewable power.

The East-West Interconnector, which will be approximately 260 km long, can carry 500 megawatts of electricity – the equivalent of supplying power to approximately 300,000 homes. This capacity approximates to 10 per cent of peak daily electricity demand in winter in Ireland.

An Bord Pleanála's Strategic Infrastructure Board has granted permission for the location and construction of a converter station in Woodland, Co. Meath and the installation of underground cables, mainly in public roads, to the coast at Rush, Co. Dublin approximately 45 km / 30 miles in length and in the seabed out to the foreshore limit.

Construction, which is being undertaken by Swedish engineering firm ABB, will take two years beginning in 2010 and will create 100 jobs.

Welcoming the news, **Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources Eamon Ryan** said that: “The East-West Interconnector is vital infrastructure for our country and will bring many benefits. “Connection to the UK will enhance the security of our energy supply. It will mean we can import electricity when required from the UK market. More importantly, it will mean we can export our electricity to the UK. When the wind is blowing in Ireland, we can sell this power to our neighbours”.

“Interconnection will also increase competition in the electricity sector, which will benefit consumers in the long-run, placing downward pressure on prices”.

“This project will allow us to accelerate our development of renewable energy. We are rich in renewable power; we need to develop this to secure our energy supplies. This project will also help the development of the green economy, bringing investment and jobs to Ireland in the growing renewable power industry. This investment from Europe is a significant boost to the Irish economy. It brings us one step closer to energy independence.”

EirGrid Chief Executive Dermot Byrne said that: “Today's announcement is a major milestone for the project. Extensive preparation has been underway over the past 2 years involving marine surveys, route selection, public engagement, route amendments and pre-application consultation and now we have the green light to proceed to deliver this vital infrastructure for Ireland, on track and on time”.

“As an island of 5 million people that is over 90% dependent on imported fossil fuels for our energy, we have an immediate and pressing need to improve our security of supply, and to enhance our capacity to generate renewable energy. The East West Interconnector will help us do both.”

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Editor’s note:

EirGrid plc is a leading Irish energy business, dedicated to the provision of transmission and market services for the benefit of electricity consumers. It is a state-owned commercial company. EirGrid holds licences as independent electricity Transmission System Operator (TSO) and Market Operator (MO) in the wholesale trading system in Ireland, and is the owner of the System Operator Northern Ireland (SONI Ltd), the licenced TSO and market operator in Northern Ireland. The Single Electricity Market Operator (SEMO) is part of the EirGrid Group.

The East West Interconnector will represent an investment of €600 million. ABB, the Swedish engineering firm was awarded the contract to design, manufacture and install the interconnector. It is expected that this project will result in approximately 100 jobs in Ireland during the construction phase. The project is due for completion in 2012.

In the National Development Plan 2007 – 2013, the Irish Government has identified the need for a strategic energy link, in the form of an electrical High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) interconnector, to be developed between Ireland and the UK. The interconnector is being developed by EirGrid, working closely with the Commission for Energy Regulation, and will be owned by EirGrid following its completion.

EirGrid submitted the planning application for the Interconnector to the Strategic Infrastructure Division of An Bord Pleanála on Tuesday 18th November 2008. For more information on the planning application please see www.eirgrideastwestinterconnector.ie