

## **Consultation – SONI's Draft 2021-2030 Transmission Development Plan**

### **NIE Networks' Comments on response from Mr D Hutchinson**

**17 August 2022**

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NIE Networks and the System Operator for Northern Ireland (SONI) are separate companies, with different responsibilities, who work in partnership.

NIE Networks develops, constructs, maintains and owns the electricity transmission and distribution network. SONI is responsible for the daily operation of the transmission network and also for assessing the future capacity and capability requirements of the transmission network.

As outlined by Mr Hutchinson, the overhead line between Castlereagh and Rosebank has been de-energised since 1989. NIE Networks and our colleagues at SONI discussed the future of this part of the transmission network and it was decided that SONI would carry out a technical review of the future requirements for this line. There are a number of issues involved that SONI may be able to elaborate on in its own response.

#### **General**

This overhead line has been inspected in line with our policy for transmission overhead lines. The patrollers carrying out the inspections are trained to identify any potential safety issues and would not typically be aware of the ownership or legalities at each location. The sites indicated by Mr Hutchinson (towers 42 and 43) were identified as being enclosed and operationally safe. It was noted that Mr Hutchinson was accessing the site from his property and had vegetables planted below tower 43. This did not present any operational concerns for NIE Networks.

Insulators were replaced on this line in 2010/11 and further work including painting of the towers and conductor replacement was planned during NIE Networks' current price control period.

In general, we would not notify residents in advance of maintenance where we own the site and have no requirement to contact third party landowners.

#### **Planned Works**

Our responsibility is to maintain the electricity network to ensure that it poses no risk to the public and remains suitable for use. This includes assets that are both energised and de-energised. NIE Networks has a number of strategic assets that are retained for potential future requirements. This overhead line was included in our RP6 asset replacement works due to the age and condition of the equipment and to maintain the integrity of this asset which continues to support operational telecoms requirements for the network. The earth/fibre cable on this line remains operational as a fibre optic communication link between the two substations and forms part of our core communication network.

As SONI is still considering the future requirements of this line, NIE Networks has ceased any planned refurbishment works at this stage and will await further information from SONI. However, from NIE Networks' perspective, as the communication link is still being utilised, we would not currently consider this line to be redundant.

## Questions

**QUESTION 1** – *WHY HAVE THESE TOWERS AND LINES BETWEEN CR AND RB NOT BEEN REMOVED - 33 years standing unused? Does the underground cable installed a few years ago from CR at Manse Rd to RB at Ballygowan Rd not do away with the need for the overhead lines – OR has there been a design flaw or miscalculation in the capacity of the cable - with the lines been seen as a reserve measure?*

### **NIE Networks' Response**

The cable that was installed met the network requirements in 1989. There is no indication from SONI that this has changed. As the communication link is still in use and there has been no previous indication from SONI that it considers the overhead line may not be required in the future, it has not been removed. We continue with our regular inspection and maintenance programmes in line with ENA best practice.

**Question 2** – *What towers and lines has NIEN IN FACT REMOVED in its history; what exactly is its stated policy and who makes the decision? In the Draft on Page 34 there are MERELY 4 Removal projects mentioned – NONE INCLUDE TOWERS AND OVERHEAD LINES.*

### **NIE Networks' Response**

As outlined above, NIE Networks has its own policy on redundant assets which covers both the transmission and distribution networks. Transmission assets are considered on a case-by-case basis in partnership with SONI who determines the future need. It has not been NIE Networks' practice to remove lines of cable from the network historically and the transmission network in Northern Ireland has remained largely unchanged since it was constructed.

**Question 3** – *Is NIEN hindered/obliged in some way by SONI to keep such aging and deteriorating infrastructure in place because of its indecision and clarity as to what is requires in the short(?), medium(?) or long (?) term.*

### **NIE Networks' Response**

NIE Networks is the owner of the transmission system, and the owner and operator of the distribution system in Northern Ireland. We have a significant interest in SONI's future plans for the transmission network and the potential impact on our own activities. NIE Networks and SONI have a duty to co-ordinate their activities and work in partnership as detailed in the Transmission Interface Arrangements (TIA). We continue to work in partnership to develop SONI's Transmission Investment Plan (TIP) and Transmission Development Plan for Northern Ireland (TDPNI) each year. In addition, we are bound to ensure the provision of a safe, secure and reliable network and any decision on the future of installed assets will be taken with this as a central consideration.