



Tue 05/05/2020 14:05

Gosling, Paul

SONI consultation

To UREGNI SONI

Cc McLaughlin, Sinead

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to respond to your consultation regarding the investment plans of SONI.

Electricity infrastructure is extremely important for the economic development of Northern Ireland, including in spreading economic development across the whole of Northern Ireland, an SDLP political priority. We are very mindful of past inequality of infrastructure provision, which has had a negative impact on economic and social opportunities for parts of Northern Ireland. We are therefore determined that future infrastructure investment, including in the electricity grid, considers these issues and to the greatest practical extent redresses past imbalances.

In light of this, we make these specific comments:

1. We are concerned that some businesses have advised us that they have been unable to invest in the north west because of grid capacity restrictions. We therefore believe it is essential to strengthen electricity grid capacity in the north west.
2. We are conscious that the Covid-19 emergency has led to a greater reliance on home broadband, downloads and datacentres, all of which can be expected to significantly increase demand on electricity networks and place new pressure on the resilience of the electricity grid across Northern Ireland.
3. We have been advised that the grid needs to be strengthened to support a greater input from renewable generation, including from micro generation of electricity (eg surplus from homes with solar panels).
4. We support the early construction of the North-South Interconnector. We are aware that the absence of this is causing electricity prices in Northern Ireland to be too high, with the particular negative impact of damaging the competitiveness of manufacturers in Northern Ireland.
5. We support a much larger proportion of generation of electricity from renewable sources. The grid needs to facilitate this.

Regards,

Sinead McLaughlin MLA

SDLP spokesperson on the economy

(Sent from her office and on her behalf by Paul Gosling)