

Spittal – Loch Buidhe – Beauly 400kV Connection Consultation Summary Report July 2023



Scottish & Southern
Electricity Networks

TRANSMISSION

About us

We are SSEN Transmission, and we are part of the SSE plc Group. We are responsible for maintaining and investing in the high voltage 132kV, 275kV and 400kV electricity transmission network in the north of Scotland.

Our network consists of underground and subsea cables, overhead lines on wooden poles or steel towers, and electricity substations. It extends over a quarter of the UK's land mass, crossing some of its most challenging terrain.

Our priority is to provide a safe and reliable supply of electricity to our communities. We do this by taking the electricity from generators and transporting it at high voltages over long distances through our transmission network for onwards distribution to homes and businesses in villages, towns and cities.

Our operating area is home to vast renewable energy resources, and this is being harnessed by wind, hydro and marine generation. Working closely with National Grid Electricity System Operator (the 'ESO'), we enable electricity generators to connect to the transmission system, allowing the electricity generated by them to be transported to areas of demand across the country.

We are committed to inclusive stakeholder engagement, conducting regular external assurance audits on both our Stakeholder Engagement Strategy and delivery plans, and were recently awarded 'Advanced' status by AccountAbility, the international consulting and standards firm.

Find out more: www.ssen-transmission.co.uk



Why do we hold community consultation events?

As a stakeholder-led business, we aim to be as accessible as possible to all our stakeholders and keep them informed and consulted throughout a project's lifecycle. Most of the consultations we carry out are voluntary, as we recognise the clear benefits of engaging early with our stakeholders. This engagement allows us to collate relevant and insightful feedback, ensuring local communities and wider stakeholders have the opportunity to help inform the development and design of our project proposals.

We do this by listening closely to identify any areas of concern or issues arising, allowing us to then consider the next steps required prior to refining proposals. This may involve adapting our initial proposals, considering, or investigating alternative routes or sites or looking at adopting a different technology in some areas.

Over and above our extensive voluntary engagement, we are also required to hold mandated pre-application consultation events for many of our infrastructure projects. Statutory events are often very similar to our voluntary consultation, however, must meet the requirements set out by the relevant planning authorities. We will always inform stakeholders when community consultation events are carried out in line with pre-application planning requirements.

Background - The Pathway to 2030

The [Spittal – Loch Buidhe – Beaully 400kV Connection](#) project is part of a major upgrade of the electricity transmission network across Great Britain that has been independently assessed by the ESO as required to help meet UK and Scottish Government climate change and renewable energy targets. The project will also help secure the country’s future energy independence, delivering on the objectives set out in the UK Government’s [British Energy Security Strategy \(BESS\)](#).

Following extensive system studies, Spittal to Beaully has been identified as a critical corridor in establishing this required reinforcement, connecting into new substation sites at Spittal, Loch Buidhe and Beaully along the way.

The BESS set out the UK Government’s plans to secure the country’s future energy independence by reducing dependence on, and price exposure to, volatile global wholesale gas markets by accelerating the deployment of homegrown and affordable low carbon electricity generation, together with developing the electricity network infrastructure required to connect and transport this power. The BESS included an increased ambition for offshore wind of 50GW by 2030, up from the previous target of 40GW.



New SSEN Transmission projects under the Pathway to 2030

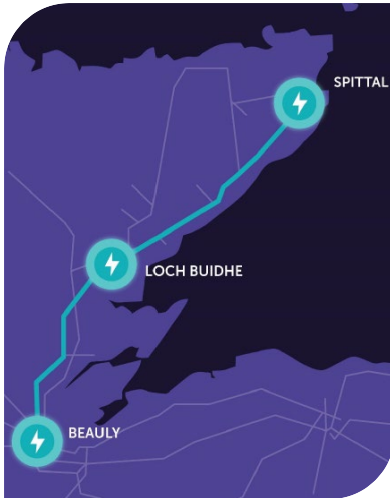
To enable connection of that 2030 target, the ESO, working in collaboration with the three GB Transmission Owners (of which SSEN Transmission is one), developed what is known as the '[Holistic Network Design](#)' (the HND). Published in July 2022, it sets out the onshore and offshore electricity transmission infrastructure required across GB to deliver this UK Government target with a “Required in Service Date” of 2030.

In December 2022, the energy regulator, Ofgem, approved the need for these projects as part of its [Accelerated Strategic Transmission Investment](#) (ASTI) framework decision.

Our 2030 reinforcements are also key to enable the connection of the first phase of the ScotWind leasing round, which will connect 11GW of ScotWind’s total ambition of 28GW. The requirement for an onshore connection from Spittal – Loch Buidhe – Beaully is confirmed within the Holistic Network Design and Ofgem’s ASTI framework.

Find out more about our 2030 projects: www.ssen-transmission.co.uk/projects/2030-projects/

Consulting on the Spittal – Loch Buidhe – Beauly 400kV Connection



In February and March 2023, we launched our initial consultation on early proposals for the Spittal – Loch Buidhe – Beauly 400kV Connection project, during which we introduced the scheme and presented our approach to developing the following elements:

- Spittal – Loch Buidhe – Beauly 400kV Connection (New Overhead Line)
- New Spittal area 400kV substation and HVDC converter station
- New Loch Buidhe area 400kV substation
- New Beauly area 400kV substation and HVDC converter station

The aim of our consultation was to seek views regarding around 1km wide potential route options for the overhead line and potential substation and HVDC converter station site locations. The consultation included information regarding requirement, technology options, environmental considerations, and the site selection process. A series of in person events held across a two-week period provided an opportunity for local community members to meet the team and find out more.

Advertising process

The consultation events were advertised extensively using various platforms such as local newspapers (Press & Journal, Inverness Courier, Ross-Shire Journal, Northern Times, Caithness Courier), SSEN Transmission’s social media channels (LinkedIn and Twitter) and the dedicated project webpage.

In addition, a postcard was sent to **28,309 homes** and **1,133 businesses** within communities potentially impacted by our proposals. This postcard advertised the dates, times, and locations of the face to face and virtual consultation events. We know that sometimes a small number of households might not receive their flyer for a range of different external factors. That’s why we adopt a varied advertising campaign to try and reach as many interested people as possible.

Councillors and Community Councillors were emailed in advance of the consultations with information and a poster that they were encouraged to share within their local area and on social media.

As this was the first event for this project, we had a small email distribution list of those signed up for project updates. This distribution list is now extensive following consultation and will be utilised going forward to provide updates and inform of any upcoming events as the project is further developed.



Scottish & Southern Electricity Networks
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New Spittal – Loch Buidhe – Beauly 400kV Reinforcement
Public consultation events

We have developed proposals to reinforce the onshore transmission network between Spittal and Beauly, via Loch Buidhe. To enable this connection, new additional 400kV substations and associated infrastructure is also required near the three locations mentioned above.

We are inviting interested parties to attend our drop-in consultation events, where the project team will be in attendance to answer any questions and discuss the details of the following proposed projects:

We are seeking feedback regarding our preferred route for the new overhead line and our preferred locations for the new 400kV substations and converter stations listed above.

The consultation events will be taking place on:

20th February (2.30–7pm)	Halkirk – Ross Institute
21st February (2.30–7pm)	Helmsdale – Bunilidh Social Club
22nd February (2.30–7pm)	Dunbeath – Dunbeath Hall
23rd February (2.30–7pm)	Golspie – Fountain Road Hall
27th February (3.30–7pm)	Bonar Bridge – Community Hall
28th February (2.30–7pm)	Ardrross – Community Hall
1st March (2.30–7pm)	Dingwall – Legion Hall
2nd March (2.30–7pm)	Beauly – Kilmorack Hall
6th March (5–7pm)	Virtual event*

*Joining details available on website

If you have any questions, please contact the Community Liaison Manager:

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Find out more and register for project updates, visit the project website by scanning the QR code, or use the following URL:
ssen-transmission.co.uk/north-highlands

SSEN Community @SSETransmission

The project poster sent to over 28,000 properties

Stakeholder participation

Despite the rurality of some of the locations where consultation events were held, the events were well attended for an initial series of consultation events. Typically, it is as our proposals become more refined that we see an increase in attendance at consultation events.

Event attendance:

It is important to note that the numbers shown below are based solely on those who had registered attendance at these events. In most cases, actual turnout is thought to be considerably higher, especially in Dingwall and Beaully where we estimated the numbers to be **closer to 200 and 240** respectively.



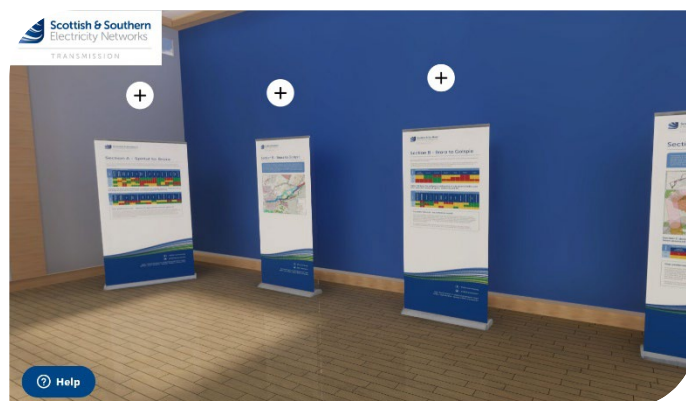
Date	Location	Number of Attendees Signed In
20 th Feb	Halkirk – Ross Institute	18
21 st Feb	Spittal (Coffee Morning) – Spittal Hall	9
21 st Feb	Helmsdale – Bunlidh Social Club	35
22 nd Feb	Dunbeath – Dunbeath Hall	36
23 rd Feb	Golspie – Fountain Road Hall	34
27 th Feb	Bonar Bridge – Community Hall	39
28 th Feb	Ardross – Community Hall	35
1 st March	Dingwall – Legion Hall	160
2 nd March	Beaully – Kilmorack Hall	214
6 th March	Virtual Event	23

Online participation:

Not all participants in the consultation engaged via the in-person and virtual events, with many choosing to visit the project website to access information relating to the proposals prior to submitting feedback.

A [virtual exhibition](#) was made available throughout the consultation and was widely accessed by stakeholders.

Between 13th Feb (a week prior to the first event by which point the events were well within the public domain) and 14th April (the consultation close date):



An image taken from the virtual exhibition

- **3,140** individuals viewed the [Spittal – Loch Buidhe – Beaully 400kV Connection](#) project webpage
- **745** individuals viewed the [New Beaully Area 400kV Substation](#) project webpage
- **147** individuals viewed the [New Loch Buidhe Area 400kV Substation](#) project webpage
- **195** individuals viewed the [New Spittal Area 400kV Substation](#) project webpage

Community feedback

Throughout the consultation process, local attendees were encouraged to submit feedback forms or provide their comments directly to the Community Liaison Managers via email or letter. An online feedback form was also created and made available via the project webpage.

The consultation period was originally intended to run between 20th February – 31st March 2023. In response to calls for an extension to the consultation period, the consultation deadline was extended until Friday 14th April, running for over 7 weeks.

Volume:

We received a high volume of responses to the consultation from stakeholders interested in the project. The vast majority of this was submitted via the online feedback form or email.



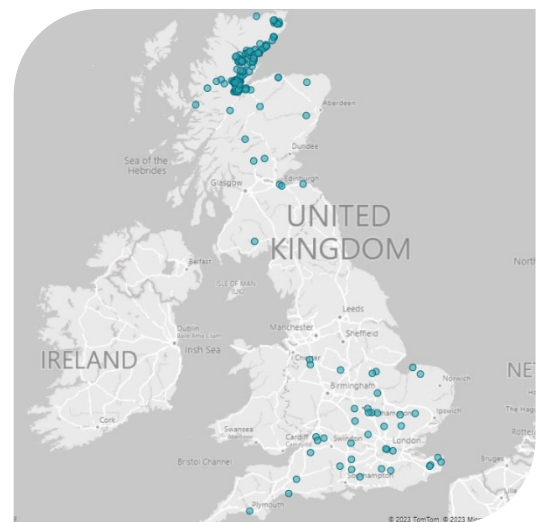
Location and consultation attendance:

In terms of location, the majority of those who submitted feedback were based in the north of Scotland, however, feedback was received from those residing in various parts of Scotland and across the south of England.

Of those who submitted feedback forms:

- **62%** stated that they had **either not attended** a consultation event or **had accessed the consultation materials online**
- **13%** attended the **Beauly** event, **12%** came to **Dingwall**
- **4%** met with the team at **Helmsdale**
- **3%** attended our **Ardross** event, and this figure was the same for both the **Bonar Bridge** and **Golspie** events
- **1%** stated they had attended the **Halkirk** event, and this figure was the same for **Dunbeath**

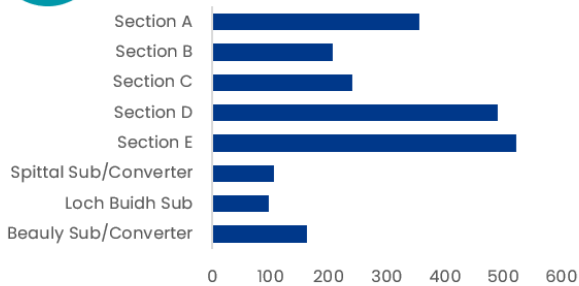
As the coffee morning in Spittal was an additional added engagement, this had not been captured in the already published feedback forms.



Stakeholder locations, based on information provided in feedback forms



Feedback by Section



Sections of interest:

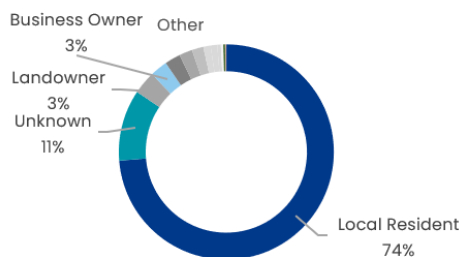
The feedback form asked that respondents select which section of the route or new substation they were most interested in. We also identified areas of interest based on analysis of email and letter responses. Many respondents selected all the available options, however **Sections A (Spittal - Brora), Section D (west of Dornoch) and Sections E (Dornoch to Dingwall)** were most cited as the areas of interest. Of the substations under consultation, **Beaulay Substation/ HVDC Converter station** was the most selected.

Stakeholder identification:

Most of those who submitted feedback were identified as local residents, however, feedback was also submitted from business owners, landowners, community groups, community councils and other bodies.



Stakeholder Groups



Other includes Community Groups, Community Council, Other Bodies etc



Feedback Themes

- Issues with the preferred technology
- Visual impact/Need for project
- Approach to the consultation
- Environmental Impacts
- Community Impacts

Themes of Feedback

As part of the feedback analysis, common topics raised within the content of the responses (forms, letters and emails) were categorised into key themes to allow for the top interests to be easily identified.

- Many respondents raised questions around the **preferred technology and identified routes** and this included suggesting that alternatives such as underground or subsea technology or the existing line/corridor is used. Concerns regarding the size of the overhead line towers and a lack of information on route option preferences was also cited.
- A lot of feedback commented on **the need for the project and/or the visual impact** that the proposals could have on the local area.
- Respondents shared their views about the **approach to consultation**. This included concerns around the weighting that community issues would have on decision making, with some respondents feeling there was either not enough information available at events or describing information as being difficult to understand. Concerns were also raised regarding an already identified preferred route being presented.

- There were also a high volume of references to **environmental issues** such as particular sites of interest, damage to land and noise impacts.
- Many respondents commented on **community and the economy** in the local area, and this included references to potential impact on businesses, tourism, and quality of life.



The project team were able to recognise the themes identified within the feedback as consistent with the themes that arose through discussion during the in-person events.

Understanding the issues local stakeholders feel most strongly about helps us to improve our consultation going forward by making changes to the process during early development (such as ensuring information is more accessible) and ensuring ongoing development takes close consideration of community asks (such as minimising and mitigating the visual impact as far as possible).

→ Next steps

The feedback received has been subject to extensive review and has helped inform a series of internal workshops on each overhead line section and substation area throughout May/June 2023 to begin to determine the next steps for development.

Alternative options assessment:

These next steps include the active consideration of alternative options and mitigations put to us during the feedback process. We are in the process of considering alternative sites and route options proposed via the consultation exercise and our teams are currently assessing these against key environmental and people, technical and economic factors.



Engaging with stakeholders:

Following the initial consultation, targeted meetings with communities who wished to discuss the rationale behind the identified routes and potential alternatives in more detail ahead of further refinement have been undertaken. We will continue to engage closely with local communities throughout the coming months.

Survey work:

To help inform this ongoing development work, key environmental and engineering surveys will continue to take place this Summer and beyond, including aerial surveys on potential overhead line routes, engineering walkover surveys and bird surveys, to help inform the ongoing development of the project. Ground investigation works will also take place as part of our ongoing substation site selection process.

Whilst initial surveys will prioritise routes and substation locations which scored best based on our initial assessment of the environmental and people, technical, and economic factors, additional routes or substation sites may also be investigated as we continue to consider feedback received through our consultation and ongoing community engagement.

If we establish that an alternative route or substation location is a viable alternative that warrants more detailed investigations, it will also be surveyed accordingly.

Publication of additional information and future engagement plans:

Within the feedback received, a volume of questions about the project were raised. In response to this, a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document is currently being finalised to further address the feedback received.

A detailed Report on Consultation will also be published later in the year to explain how feedback has been considered to inform the ongoing project development. Further communication and engagement will take place as part of the Report on Consultation, particularly with affected communities and statutory stakeholders.

A decision on which routes and substation locations we intend to take forward is expected towards the end of 2023 which will inform the development of more detailed route alignments. The identified alignment options will then be presented to stakeholders for further consultation which is expected towards the end of the year.

Further consultation will then take place next year in advance of submitting planning applications to the relevant planning authority. For substations, this will be the Highland Council and for the overhead line, the Scottish Government's Energy Consents Unit. Planning applications are currently expected to be submitted by the end of 2024.



Learn more

Further resources relevant to the project are available via the links below:

- [Consultation Response – May 2023](#)
- [Our Initial Response to Consultation](#)
- [SSEN Transmission's £10bn networks investment to support over 20,000 jobs throughout UK](#)
- [Digital Story Map including Interactive Map](#)
- [Route Consultation Booklet](#)
- [Route Maps](#)



How to get in touch

If you have any questions regarding this report, please contact the project Community Liaison Managers:

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