

Belfast City Council response to SONI Draft Transmission Development Plan (2020-29) - December 2020.

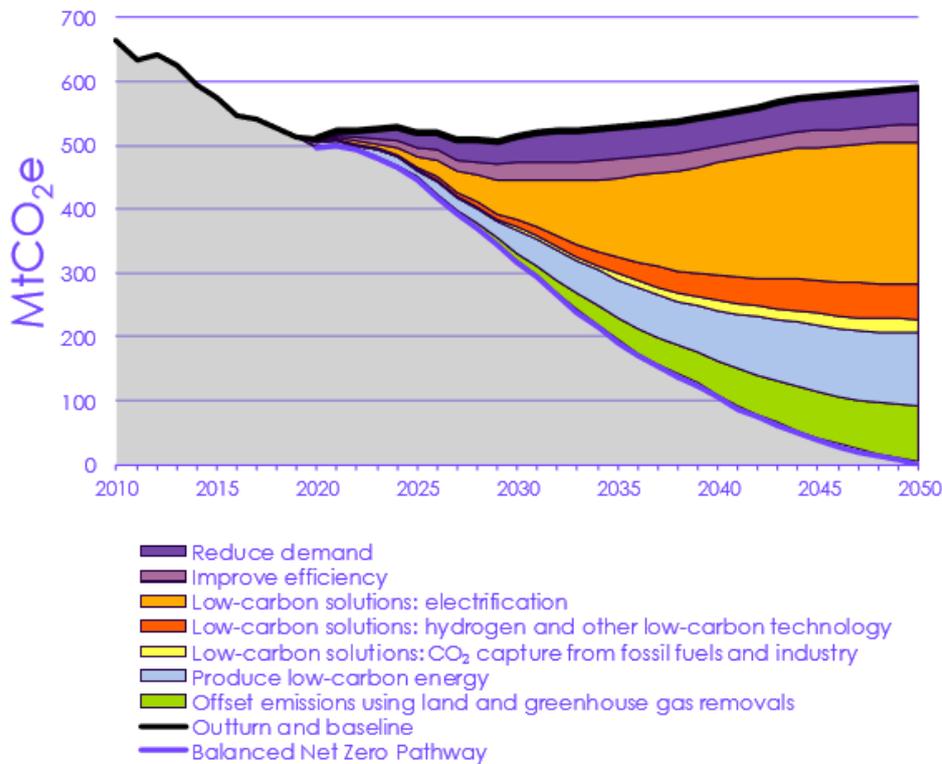
Belfast City Council welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Draft Transmission Plan from SONI. This Council welcomes SONI's positive and proactive approach in planning ahead to meet the electricity transmission needs in Belfast and the wider region during this decade and beyond given the critical climate change challenge ahead.

Investment in this important infrastructure is key to meeting the governments net zero carbon targets by 2050 and realising the stated ambition of the NI Economy Minister to have at least 70% electricity from renewable sources by 2030. It is also critical for the achievement of the priorities set out in Belfast Agenda, the city's Community Plan, for our wider economic ambitions in this decade, and our goal to transition to an inclusive, climate resilient, zero emissions economy in a generation.

The importance of a smart and efficient grid network is crucial in realising the UK Climate Change Committee pathway goals, as outlined in its 6th Carbon Budget Report. The report highlights the key role that electrification of heating and transport systems will play as key pillars of decarbonisation.

The diagram below from the UK Climate Change Committees 6th Carbon Budget report illustrates the dominant role that electrification will have in future.

Figure 2.6 Types of abatement in the Balanced Net Zero pathway



Source: BEIS (2020) *Provisional UK greenhouse gas emissions national statistics 2019*; CCC analysis.
 Notes: 'Other low-carbon technology' includes use of bioenergy and waste treatment measures. 'Producing low-carbon energy' requires the use of carbon capture and storage (CCS) in electricity generation.

This predictable increase in demand for electricity to power clean heating and transport systems from 2020 as illustrated in the graph above, will inevitably place pressure on the existing electricity grid. It is therefore imperative that we have modern, efficient grid which can meet this demand.

Belfast Resilience Strategy

The opportunity to respond comes at an important time as Belfast City Council puts plans in place to address climate adaptation and mitigation issues in the city. In March 2019 Belfast declared a Climate emergency, and in December 2020, Belfast Council and partners in the Resilience and Sustainability Board launched its first City Resilience strategy. The strategy's central goal is to transition Belfast to an inclusive, climate resilient, zero emissions economy in a generation.

The Resilience Strategy examines shocks and stresses which weaken our economy in the long run. The threat from climate change is seen as the biggest single economic and environmental issue to affect the city for a generation. The City must plan a clear pathway for decarbonisation if it is to reduce this threat and benefit from the inevitable economic prosperity of a low carbon transition. Central to the city decarbonisation plan is the work of SONI in the decarbonisation of the grid in Belfast, by providing the capacity to absorb more renewables onto the grid and to manage the system efficiently to provide increase in electricity demand

through the rise in electric vehicle use, heat pumps etc. It is clear that strategic energy planning in cities will become an important economic factor in planning for sustainable city growth as well as a key enabler in reaching the UK Governments net zero carbon emissions target by 2050.

Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure

An efficient and modern grid is particularly important in a city which must provide the capacity to charge a new generation of electric vehicles, if we are to deliver a modal shift away from petrol and diesel vehicles in this decade. The capacity to charge EV's must be available both off- street for those in detached/semi-detached dwellings, and on -street for those living in terraced houses or apartments.

Belfast City Council is currently working with Virgin Media and Liberty Global on a £9.2m Innovate UK funded project, VPACH 2. This project will bring the first generation of commercial, smart, easily accessible EV charging to residential areas in seven UK cities. In the project Virgin Media's existing communications, internet and data management services will be repurposed for EV charging use .The success of the project will partially rely on the capacity of the grid in these areas to provide that electricity, especially during the night.

In this respect we particularly welcome the plan to modernise parts of the grid in the Belfast Metropolitan area, so there is adequate electricity supply. We also welcome the capacity to manage the supply of more renewable energy onto the grid in the city region which is necessary for the long-term sustainable economic growth in the city.

Belfast Mini – Stern Report

In parallel with Resilience Strategy, the Council in partnership with the PCAN (Place Based Climate Action Network) has produced a Mini – Stern report on the economics of decarbonisation in the city. This report, which examines the pathway to decarbonisation dovetails with the SONI objectives in its Corporate Plan and this Draft Transmission Development report. We would welcome further collaboration with SONI as we prepare for subsequent 'Readiness Assessments' on the preparedness of the city to move to cleaner transport technology and address the retrofit of homes to an advanced low carbon standard.

Planning Implications

The Local Development Plan (LDP) for Belfast is currently at the Draft Plan Strategy (dPS) stage and this Council welcomes that SONI broadly supports the LDP's policy approach with regard to essential electricity infrastructure that will support sustainable economic growth within the city. Similarly, from an LDP perspective it can be seen how the strategic objectives and the associated investment drivers set out in the draft TDP will help facilitate the delivery of the LDP's vision, aims and objectives whilst the policies set out in the dPS seek to support the development of sustainable electricity infrastructure and renewable energy development. The LDP team looks forward to building on the early, positive engagement with SONI as we progress towards the development of the Local Policies Plan. Generally, this necessary electricity transmission infrastructure is very much to be welcomed to support the ongoing growth of this region, but strong environmental safeguards, including Planning, do need to be in place and respected at all stages of the decision-making processes. We welcome the detail given in the report on adherence to relevant environmental regulations e.g SEA, Habitats directive etc.

The role of digital technology and data management

Although there is little reference to the role of data management and digital analytics within the report, we assume that these techniques are used extensively to predict electricity demand and supply. Given the role of 'big data' in determining accurate electricity demand and supply the BCC City Innovation team would be keen to share their experience of working with the Citizen Office of Data Analytics, a Belfast City Region Deal programme, which may offer opportunities for collaboration.

Furthermore, we would welcome the opportunity to further discuss our work to develop a Smart District, which aims to identify opportunities to innovate using a regulatory sandbox. It is our intention that this work will accelerate the city's transition to a zero emissions economy.

There are a range of opportunities for collaboration across both our organisations. I trust this response will lead to further discussions to find opportunity for partnership.