

8. NATIONAL GRID PROPOSALS IN THE WOODHEAD TUNNEL A.862/RJB

Introduction

This report sets out a summary of the cabling works that National Grid (NG) is proposing for the Woodhead Tunnels. The report assesses the implications of this in terms of the need for planning permission and the Authority's planning and transport policies.

This consultation is based on Schedule 9 of the Electricity Act 1989 whereby National Grid are required to consult with Local Authorities and others on proposals which have a high impact on the environment.

The report outlines actions already taken by officers and makes recommendations for further action.

Existing situation with regard to the tunnels

NG owns the three disused railway tunnels, which are the north tunnel, south tunnel, and the newer 1953 tunnel. The south tunnel is in the worst condition, after suffering some collapses since it was built, and as such, is no longer suitable for cabling or transport use in its current condition. The north tunnel is where the electric cabling (400kV) has been since 1963 but, this tunnel is also degrading. The 1953 tunnel is the newest of the three, and in the best condition, and is currently not used for cabling. This tunnel has the highest potential for being used as a transport link in the future, as it is not as degraded as the other two tunnels. Furthermore, it has a diameter that is larger and thus suitable to transfer freight from road to rail where the old tunnels would only be suitable for passenger traffic.

This is a main electricity supply link to the greater Manchester area from Yorkshire (Thorpe Marsh to Stalybridge). NG are proposing to move the electric cabling from the north tunnel to the 1953 tunnel, as the existing cables come to the end of their asset life in 2009. NG state that the older tunnels are still degrading so are no longer suitable for cabling. Works are scheduled to take place between 2007 and 2009, with the new cables being laid in the 1953 tunnel in that period, and the existing cables still being used to carry the electricity. This will amount to 4.7 km of new cable in the 1953 tunnel. NG will then switch the electricity supply from the north tunnel to the 1953 tunnel, so that there is no in break in the electricity supply. After the supply has been switched to the 1953 tunnel, the south tunnel will be sealed up, in accordance with details to be agreed with the Authority.

NG also state that essential repairs will be made to the overhead towers between Woodhead and Stalybridge extending the life of the overhead line by 5 years. This will amount to less than 5% of the steelwork.

NG state that in the near future they will be consulting further on proposals to repair /replace substantial lengths of the overhead line within the park.

There are 3 main factors driving the need to resite the cable in the 1953 tunnel: (1) tunnel condition issues, (2) the customer need to retain the supply during replacement cable works. and the associated costs (possibly £34 million) of alternatives to the proposal, and (3) cable integrity issues particularly the need to replace the current oil cooled cable to reduce fire risk.

Implications for Authority policy

The works proposed by NG would have implications for the following Structure Plan and Local Plan policies.

- T6, Public Transport, *The route of the former railway between Hadfield and Dunford Bridge, especially the Woodhead tunnels, will be safeguarded for possible re-use as a railway.*

- LT3, Cross-Park Traffic road and rail,..... *Land required for the reinstatement of Woodhead railway including the tunnels will be safeguarded.*

These policies regarding reinstatement of the tunnels as a rail route would be affected by the proposed works, as installing the cables in the 1953 tunnel would mean it would not be possible to use this as a rail route. This is because NG would need access to the cables at all times, for both routine maintenance of the cables and for emergency works. Thus, it would not be possible to re-schedule trains every time NG needed to access the cables, as the services would be severely disrupted.

It has been suggested that if NG laid the cables underground, then the tunnel could still be used as a transport link at the same time, however, NG stated that they would still need access to the cables at any time – whether under ground, on the ground or on the side of the tunnel.

Related policies

The Yorkshire Regional Transport Strategy has a policy for Improvement to the trans Pennine rail links This includes improvement to freight capability in terms of capacity and loading gauge. Reference is made to the re-opening of the Woodhead trans-Pennine route to provide additional capacity and capability.

The Barnsley UDP supports the route for rail reinstatement and the line of the route within Barnsley has been bought by the Council with the express concern of safeguarding the route

The North West Regional Spatial Strategy refers to protection of disused rail routes and improving trans-Pennine rail links.

Greater Manchester have already made representations to protect land for a four track configuration at Gamely to protect the route for re-instatement

South Pennines Integrated Transport Study(SPITS) – has the following priorities;
Improved/reinstated rail routes and services across in or around the South Pennines area
Lobbying for the introduction of a mix of short-term deliverable and long-term aspirational measures to deliver improvements to the inter-regional rail network in the area. This will range from the reinstatement of the East Midlands to the North West via Hope Valley service, to improvements to trans-Pennine services, including the re-opening of the Woodhead route subject to suitable environmental safeguards.
This has the objective *“To encourage greater use of rail for appropriate cross-Park passenger and freight movements “*

East Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy policy 43 requires Local Authorities to have regard to implementing SPITS priorities.

Environmental Impact Assessment (E.I.A.)

The proposed works are permitted development as they are technically underground. However, it is still necessary to consider the need for an Environmental Impact Assessment. The initial view of the Authority is that this may not be required as this type of development is not listed under Schedule 2 of the E.I.A. Regulations 1999. However, in exceptional cases the Secretary of State for the Environment has general powers to direct that development is EIA development. Advice is being sought as to whether the Secretary of State would be prepared to direct submission of an E.I.A. and withdraw permitted development rights. This may be available at the time of the meeting.

The essential environmental impacts of the proposal are indirect but significant in terms of the loss of the potential to use the tunnel for rail traffic and reduce road traffic.

Representations

The Authority is itself a consultee in this process but it has engaged with interested parties and the following is a summary of their responses :

Friends of the Peak District-

- no consultation with residents or locals interest groups and NG have not met consultation requirements under Schedule 9 of the Electricity Act 1989 and section 62 of the Environment Act 1995
- The opportunity should be taken to carry out linked undergrounding works with the cable replacement (e.g. at the tunnel ends particularly Dunford Bridge) down the disused railway track to replace overhead pylons
- Aware there may be monies(e.g. Ofgem Innovation Fund) to carry out some undergrounding
- PDNPA should use an Article 4 Direction under the terms of the Town and Country Planning General Development Order to remove permitted development rights requiring submission of a planning application

Place(a local pressure group campaigning for undergrounding of electricity lines in the interests of preserving visual amenity)

- Raise all the points referred to by FPD
- Argue for a reconsideration of the scope to introduce undergrounding immediately beyond the tunnel ends. Question the economic and technical basis of NG's case for not undergrounding
- Make particular case for undergrounding at Dunford Bridge- saves cable length, land take is substantially less than 17-25 metres as quoted by NG, cost of undergrounding can be 6-10 times more expensive than overhead rather than the 10 times as NG state
- OFGEM Innovation Fund needs to be explored for potential funding

Translink UK Ltd (A company which has submitted a proposal to DfT and Network rail to reopen the Woodhead Line as a "rolling highway" where trains would transport lorries/freight and relieve pressure on the A 628)

- Concern that this proposal would negate their proposal
- Consider it would be possible to install electricity cables between the railway tracks

Peak Park Transport Forum

- In accordance with the South Pennines Integrated Transport Strategy (SPITS) improved trans-Pennine rail links should be lobbied for. Any practical measures should be taken to protect the route and at least it should be established how, and at what cost, any modifications to the power line would be carried out to facilitate the re-opening of the line.
- That a full study of what represents the public interest for use of the facility should be undertaken
- Any extra undergrounding beyond the tunnel should not prejudice nor further encroach on the line of route
- Alternatives to the proposed scheme that do not conflict with National Park purposes and offer potential environmental benefits from rail re-instatement are considered.

National Grid's Response essentially relates to the suggestions to extend this project to take the opportunity to provide undergrounding of existing overhead lines just beyond either end of the tunnel. The following is a summary of the NG response;

- This is not a new route and therefore Schedule 9 Commitments to protect areas such as national parks do not strictly apply
- The line is a main supply from Yorkshire to Manchester

- Dispute the PLACE land –take figures for surface undergrounding/troughing beyond the tunnel ends on technical grounds and quote a figure of 12-14 metres with a significantly wider “construction swathe”
- A cost multiplier of 10 is more realistic for the extra cost of undergrounding . This cost is not budgeted for
- The electricity line is not a new line and has a valid consent
- Undergrounding in remote locations, particularly in surface troughs as suggested has security risks
- Railway track bed would be sterilised for other uses; there is a requirement for access for maintenance
- Undergrounding has a longer timescale and could generate objections from third parties.

Yorkshire & Humberside Regional Transport Board (responsible fro delivering the transport element of the Regional Spatial Strategy)

- One of the priorities for the RSS is to improve rail connections between Sheffield and Manchester
- This could prohibit forever the use of this link for rail transport. Need full consideration of the alternatives

Comments

This consultation has been made on the basis of agreed consultation commitments under schedule 9 of the Electricity Act 1989 whereby NG will consult with interested parties on proposals with a potentially high environmental impact. It is, however, important to recognise this is not a new route to which these commitments normally apply.

There is a need to seek a direction from the Secretary of State with respect to the need for a formal Environmental Impact Assessment and consequently planning permission. Advice is awaited on this matter. This would have the same effect as service of an Article 4 Direction requiring submission of a planning application as referred to above and avoid the Authority in significant compensation issues in the event the application is refused.

However in view of the timescales for implementation of this project there is a need to make further representations to the Government Office for East Midlands in terms of the regional issues this raises and the conflicts with the agreed South Pennine Integrated Transport Strategy and adopted Development Plans.

It is clear that the proposal will seriously prejudice the future use of the tunnel as a rail route and is therefore contrary to the Authority’s policies and Regional Spatial Strategies relating to transport and wider environmental issues. The re-opening of the tunnel and line as a rail link would fulfil a range of national park polices to promote sustainable development and achieve national park purposes.

This issue needs to be considered at regional level due its strategic importance for transport and environmental policies in general. If it is determined that planning permission is required it is necessary that the government considers” calling in” the proposal. There are a number of bodies connected with any such decision including 3 government departments, CLG, Dept. of Transport and Department of Trade and Industry, 3 Regional Assemblies, Network Rail and Offgem. It is considered necessary that the government office takes a lead in resolving these complex regional issues.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Government Office for the East Midlands, or other appropriate body the Authority may be referred to, be informed it needs to take a strategic lead in resolving the complex transport and environmental issues presented by this proposal. Furthermore, it be informed that the Authority considers the proposal is contrary to its Structure and Local Plan policies together with SPITS priorities to retain the Woodhead line as a potential rail link in the interests of achieving national park purposes.

Human Rights

There are no Human Rights issues associated with this issue.

Background papers

Letters from National Grid outlining the proposal. Representations from F.P.D.,Place,Yorkshire, and Humberside Regional Assembly and Translink, Report from Peak Park Transport Forum.

Financial

Service of an Article 4 Direction could require the Authority to pay compensation in the event an application is refused and the applicant can claim abortive or extra expenditure incurred as a result of not being able to exercise permitted development rights.