
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR DECISION

Title: Beauly – Denny 400kV Transmission Line
Newtonmore Local Session of the Public Local Inquiry
Undergrounding of Overhead Line – Route Options

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Purpose

1. The CNPA has already given evidence at the Strategic Session of the Public Local Inquiry in Perth from February – May 2007 in respect of its preferred position that the proposed overhead transmission line should not be routed through the Park.
2. This report is to appraise Members of potential alternative route options including undergrounding sections of the proposed 400kV overhead electricity transmission line within the Cairngorms National Park that have been the subject of discussion between officers of the CNPA, The Highland Council (THC), Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and Scottish Hydro Electric Transmission Ltd. (SHETL). They will form part of the consideration of the proposal at the CNP session of the Inquiry which will take place in Newtonmore from 28 August to 21 September.
3. This report seeks Members' agreement to the principle of these options as potential alternatives on the basis that any formal decision to pursue any of them would have to be subject to full environmental assessment and subsequent detailed consideration: all without prejudice to the preferred position that the transmission line should avoid the Park.

Recommendation

4. That the Planning Committee agree, without prejudice to its previously stated position, to support the principle of the potential route options, including selective undergrounding as shown in Maps A, B & C for consideration at the forthcoming Newtonmore Local Session of the Beauly – Denny PLI.

Background

5. The CNPA had resolved in March 2004 and August 2004, in response to earlier consultations, that its preference was for the line not to be routed through the Park, but if there was no alternative then the impact must be lessened by re-routing, undergrounding or other mitigation. An information paper in January 2005 on the emerging Glen Shirra option re-stated this position.
6. On 21 April 2006 Members resolved to object to the section of the proposed Beauly – Denny Overhead Transmission Line within the Cairngorms National Park, because *inter alia* the proposal conflicts with all four aims of the park and as such cannot contribute to their collective achievement. Members also resolved that the Scottish Executive should convene meetings with all parties to explore alternative overhead and/or underground routing.
7. The latter option was not taken up by the Scottish Executive and the Public Local Inquiry commenced in February 2007. Consideration of the principle of undergrounding as a technology and a possible alternative took place at the Strategic Session that finished in May and CNPA, THC and SNH had suggested that the stretch between Garva Bridge and Dalwhinnie should be considered as having potential for substantial undergrounding.
8. The Inverness Local Session took place during June and considered the stretch of line from Beauly to the Park boundary at the eastern end of the Corrieyairack Pass. It considered undergrounding issues in more detail in respect of the Beauly area and The Highland Council had indicated possible locations for undergrounding.
9. In the run up to the submission of documents and preparation of evidence for the Newtonmore Local Session the Reporters had asked for maps to be submitted showing possible alternative routes within the Park involving undergrounding to allow SHETL to carry out some evaluation prior to evidence being considered at the inquiry. CNPA officers have worked with THC and SNH to do this and meetings have taken place on site with SHETL. SNH has submitted maps as productions for the Newtonmore session and these are appended to this report. SHETL has produced a document for the Inquiry evaluating the use of underground cable based principally on one of these routes (**MAP B & MAP C**).
10. The beginning and end of any underground section require the construction of a Sealing End Compound (SEC) where the transition from overhead to underground takes place. These facilities can have a significant landscape/visual impact so careful siting is required. This has been a consideration in looking at possible alternative routes and the attached maps make reference to possible locations for SEC's.

11. **MAP A** is more or less the potential alternative that was tabled for the Strategic Session. This involves the overhead line entering the National Park from the Corrieyairack Pass to the west, construction of a SEC in the vicinity of Spey Dam and underground from thereon within a broad search corridor following the River Spey and A889 via Laggan, Catlodge and Cathar Mor to a SEC constructed south of Dalwhinnie and onwards by overhead line to Drumochter.
12. **MAP B** and **MAP C** show a more recent alternative. **MAP B** has the same starting point as **MAP A** but the undergrounding route then follows a search corridor southwards through Strath Mashie to a SEC constructed at Feagour. The line would then go overhead eastwards to a SEC to be constructed north of Meall Dubh Ruigh an Fhraoich west of the A889 at Cathar Mor. From there the line would go underground to a SEC to be constructed south of Dalwhinnie and thence overhead to Drumochter.
13. The use of any of these, or indeed any other, alternative would require a full environmental assessment as any development of this scale and nature would have environmental advantages and disadvantages. **MAP A** highlights a possible solution that could potentially have the greatest benefit from a landscape/visual point of view, but involves following the River Spey SAC for some distance. **MAP B** is a possible solution that still offers landscape/visual benefits, but has less of an impact on the River Spey SAC. The alternatives have been tabled at the request of the Reporters and principally because of the landscape and visual impact of the current proposed overhead transmission line. As has been stated, the CNPA has consistently made its position clear with a preference that the transmission line should avoid the National Park. This position has always included the proviso that undergrounding be considered if there is no alternative to the line going through the National Park.
14. Whilst full environmental assessment is required for any alternative it is the current view of CNPA officers in consultation with THC and SNH that the potential alternatives presently on the table demonstrate advantages in landscape and visual terms over the proposed overhead line.
15. Within this context, and in the knowledge that there will be further opportunities to formally consider any alternatives, Members are asked to support the recommendation at the front of this report.

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