

## CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

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**Title: PROPOSED BEAULY - DENNY 440KV  
TRANSMISSION LINE : UPDATE AND REVISION TO  
(SSE) PREFERRED ROUTE.**

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### **Purpose:**

The aim of this report is to update the Board on the current position regarding the proposed 440kv transmission line from Beauly - Denny, which passes through the SW section of the Park. We have also just received a revision to the proposed route, on which SSE have requested our comment.

Following this we will be consulted on the Section 37 (Electricity Act) Application, sometime before summer 2005.

### **Recommendations:**

The Board agree this response to the SSE.

### **Executive Summary:**

While our preferred option from a CNPA perspective continues to be that the Transmission Line does not cross through the CNP, we appreciate that the proposed route amendments could possibly lessen the impacts on communities, the environment and the landscape. Without more detailed supporting information, however, we feel we cannot comment further.

While the Laggan and Dalwhinnie communities have already been consulted on the general proposals, any-one who will be affected by the new routing should also be fully consulted. Any changes to the route will also require full environmental and cultural investigation, as well as careful design and placement of pylons to lessen the impacts on the landscape.

When we receive the Section 37 Application consultation, we would expect it to recognise the importance of the Cairngorms National Park, which is not merely another layer of designation, but the recognition of a nationally important asset. Every effort must be made to mitigate against any impacts on the landscape, the environment and the people who live in *and* visit the Park.

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Figure 1: Map showing original route options, with link to new route shown dashed-red; from there the new dark blue route takes the line further north from Dalwhinnie, joining onto the green line which then follows the eastern side of the A9 south. (Park boundary shown pale-yellow).





Figure 2 : Amendment to the proposed route shown solid red (cutting down from Garvabeg through Glen Shirra to NE of Kinloch Laggan, crossing Inverpattack and re-joining the previous preferred route 2km south of Strathmashie House), previous 'SSE preferred' route shown dashed red, alternative routes via Drumgask/Catlodge shown dotted-red.

## **The Previous SSE Consultations:**

1. Our response to the initial consultations, at Committee on 12th March and 13th August 2004, were that we would prefer the line not to pass through the CNP at all. This position remains unchanged, and was reached from the perspective of our remit as the CNPA. We recognise and accept, however, that other respondees charged with taking a wider national perspective came to a different view on the initial consultation, primarily because of concern over potential impact on wild land areas outside the CNP that were not material considerations in our assessment (as they were outside our remit). There is no inherent contradiction between their initial conclusion and ours, because we were each making the assessment from the perspective of organisations with differing remits.
2. The last consultation asked us to comment on a range of five possible routings between Laggan and Dalwhinnie, but we felt we could not comment without detailed information on route visualisation, and potential impacts on communities, environment and landscape. These routes are shown in Figure 1 above, to which I have added an alteration to the blue route, and a connection to the amended route via Glen Shirra. The alteration to the blue route, shown darker blue, takes the point at which the transmission line crosses Glen Truim north of Dalwhinnie by approximately 1km, then follows the 'green' route south on the eastern side of the A9. This should alleviate many of the concerns of the Dalwhinnie community.
3. Relative to the area shown on Figure 1, two principal concerns still remain: the impact on the landscape when crossing the open moorland of Glen Truim; and the impact on the Drumochter SPA and cSAC(SCI). Issue one could possibly be addressed by undergrounding (see section 13) and the designated sites should be fully addressed by the Environmental Statement.
4. SSE (Scottish and Southern Energy plc) are currently finalising the proposed route from Beaully to Denny, as the CNP section is not the only one which has still been changing/considering alternatives. The proposed route should be finalised by the end of February 2005, following which the implications for the 'route corridor' and construction issues can be fully assessed, prior to their application to the Scottish Executive under the Section 37 (Electricity Act 1989) regulations. The Scottish Executive will then send a consultation on this to the CNPA, for our views on the proposal and its supporting Environmental Statement.

## **The New Routings: Main Issues.**

5. SSE have decided that the 'blue & green' route, with the alteration noted above, are likely to be their preferred option. This new consultation, however, introduces an alternative to the original routing from Spey Dam via Strath Mashie, which crossed in front of Dun da Lamh Fort. This route was raising particular concerns from Historic Scotland regarding the impact on the setting of the fort, and from the residents of Strath Mashie. The Strath itself is fairly wide and open, and the crossing of the transmission line would have made a considerable visual impact.

6. The new alternative which has been proposed, see Figure 2, is to take the line down Glen Shirra to a point approximately 0.5km east of Kinloch Laggan, crossing the A86 south of Inverpattack Lodge, and then re-joining the old preferred route some 2km south of Strathmashie House. This new route takes the line away from the Fort, Strath Mashie and the general Laggan community area. Where the new route would cross the A86, views are much more restrictive than in Strath Mashie, due to the winding road, topography and tree cover. Visualisation of the line, from the western A86 approach along Loch Laggan, may however be an issue.
7. From visiting the various sites and viewpoints, it would initially appear that this alternative route will be less intrusive on the landscape than the previous one, and certainly less visible from the A86; the approach from the west will most likely view the pylons against a hillside backdrop. The new routing also takes away the impact on cultural heritage at Dun da Lamh Fort, which is one of the prime historic sites within the Park. There are also less houses along/in sight of this route, thus reducing the impact on local communities. Visualisation, through photo-montages, will show whether the line is visible from the tourist/community areas at the eastern end of Loch Laggan.
8. General Points; the following general points are also applicable:
9. Visualisation: It is extremely difficult to assess a development of this magnitude, and its impact on the landscape, environment and communities, from maps and plans. Photo-montages are required so that the impact of these massive pylons can be fully assessed. Ideally, a computer-generated 'walk-through' of the routes would be produced to further explain and demonstrate how the development will be viewed and perceived within the landscape.
10. Design issues: it is also difficult to assess the routes when we don't know the actual detail design, on issues such as: pylon design, pylon positions, the extent of possible under-grounding, landscaping measures and screening options. Issues such as where and how pylons cross the skyline will also be of prime importance (or another instance where under-grounding/tunnelling should be considered. Ancillary development, such as access roads, sub-stations or buildings will also need to be considered.
11. Environmental Impacts: as with the rest of the routing, it is essential that the new alteration be thoroughly investigated and assessed for the Environmental Statement. This should cover (as a minimum): visual impact, ecology and nature conservation, archaeology & cultural heritage, landscape, agriculture & forestry, recreation & tourism, planning & development, infrastructure, and physical effects. These should be cross-referenced/assessed against :population, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets and landscape.
12. Mitigating measures: both for impacts on local communities and on the environment/landscape, should be built into the scheme from the start, not merely added-on at the end.

13. Under-grounding: The CNPA, in partnership with the Highland Council and SNH, have commissioned an independent study to look at the options for the transmission line to be under-grounded; a report is due within the next two weeks. This report will look at the various technical options which are available as alternatives to overhead lines, as well as indicating the economic implications. The question then arises; what value do you put on a National Park?
14. Community Consultation: As the Laggan and Dalwhinnie communities were consulted at public meetings with regard to the previous route options, so the community at Kinloch Laggan and Inver Pattack should be fully consulted on the potential impacts of this proposed alteration to the route.
15. This whole proposal should also be thoroughly assessed by a sustainability appraisal, which could prove that the considerable impacts on landscape, environment and communities are fully outweighed by the benefits which the proposal will bring to the nation.

### **Conclusions to the SSE Consultation:**

16. While our preferred option would continue to be that the Transmission Line does not cross through the CNP, we appreciate that consideration of alternative routes within the wider context has shown the existing 'pylon-corridor' to be generally regarded as the least worst option, particularly in relation to developing 'wild land'.
17. On paper, the revised route via Glen Shirra would appear to avoid the specific cultural and landscape problems which were caused by the previous route around Dun da Lamh Fort and Strath Mashie, but we cannot fully comment without much more detailed information on route-visualisation and assessment of the impacts on the environment, landscape and local communities. The issue of the line passing through a National Park is one which is of significance to the whole nation and decisions cannot be taken lightly; equally, mitigation measures should be the highest priority to alleviate the impacts on communities, the environment and the landscape.

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