



James Cartlidge MP
Member of Parliament for South Suffolk

Fintan Slye – CEO
National Energy System Operator
Faraday House, Warwick Technology Park
Gallows Hill
Warwick
CV34 6DA

18th October 2024

CC: The Rt Hon Ed Miliband

Dear Fintan,

RE: CENTRALISED STRATEGIC NETWORK PLAN

We are writing to you as MPs from across the UK regarding your Centralised Strategic Network Plan (CSNP). As predominantly rural MPs, we are all profoundly concerned about the potential impact of the ‘Pylon Presumption’ on our communities, but want to find constructive ways to deliver the transmission infrastructure that we require.

We were delighted when ESO undertook a review of electricity transmission in East Anglia in 2023/4, including the consideration of offshore and fully undergrounded routes, resulting in the East Anglia Network Study. We know that you went about this in an entirely objective fashion, without prejudice to any particular option – and that’s why we set all the more value on your evidence-based conclusions which found that underground HVDC (U-DC) alternative (Option 8) had a lower overall cost than pylons, assuming a 2034 baseline. We understand that the relative price competitiveness of the U-DC option arose from its lower ‘constraint payments’.

You will be aware that hitherto there has been a ‘presumption’ in favour of pylons, not least based on a presumption of lower cost. Thus, with the revelation of your findings in relation to the potential cost competitiveness of U-DC, the previous Government confirmed – at the final Adjournment debate before dissolution – that it would urgently review the ‘pylon presumption’. The then Minister for Energy Security & Net Zero Justin Tomlinson stated in the Adjournment debate *‘National Grid Proposals: North-East Lincolnshire’*, 23rd May: “The ESO’s own recent figures for the East Anglia study suggested that, when considering lifetime cost - not just the up-front cost but the potential for long-term lower constraint cost - and challenges around delivery speed, each variable raised important questions. We cannot answer with certainty whether those questions are valid, because the data simply does not exist.” “That brings me back to the core point: the review gives us an opportunity to obtain up-to-date facts, recognising modern technology and the lessons that can be learned from Germany, and recognising the lifetime costs so that we can be confident that we are doing our best to deliver lower consumer bills, which are crucial not just to helping with the cost of living but to ensuring that we carry the public with us in respect of net zero.”

Given the above and the subsequent change of Government, we would like to request that NESO - through your CSNP - includes in its forthcoming work over the next 12 months, a national strategic option for the onshore grid based as far as possible on U-DC. In other words, a nationwide version of your East Anglia Network Study but with HVDC underground cables as the default, with all the technological and cost considerations necessary to make this possible – a **‘U-DC presumption, rather than a pylon one’**. Naturally, we would be fully supportive of utilisation of offshore options as well, where justified, and entirely accept that you will be considering all the other options, and look forward to the evidence being set out in a comparable manner, as with the East Anglia study.

Thank you in advance for your consideration and we look forward to working together in the best interests of our constituents, so that we can find a sustainable way to both reinforce the grid at the scale we need, whilst protecting consumers and the countryside.

Yours sincerely,

James Cartlidge MP
South Suffolk

Telephone: 020 7219 4875

Email: james.cartlidge.mp@parliament.uk

Website: www.jamescartlidge.com



James Cartlidge MP
Member of Parliament for South Suffolk

Sir Bernard Jenkin MP
Harwich and North Essex

Dame Priti Patel MP
Witham

Alex Burghart MP
Brentwood and Ongar

Adrian Ramsay MP
Waveney Valley

Patrick Spencer MP
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The Rt Hon. Victoria Atkins MP
Louth and Horncastle

James Wild MP
North West Norfolk

The Rt Hon. Sir John Whittingdale MP
Maldon

Mark Garnier MP
Wyre Forest

Telephone: 020 7219 4875

Email: james.cartlidge.mp@parliament.uk

Website: www.jamescartlidge.com