

Second Public Inquiry period

The electricity interconnection with France across the Bay of Biscay starts the last phase of its administrative permitting process

The project includes suggestions received as a result of the comments and arguments that citizens and the public administrations had the opportunity to put forward during the first Public Inquiry period.

The new interconnection will double the exchange capacity between France and Spain, bolstering both electricity systems and helping to advance the integration of renewables in line with the energy transition objectives.

The interconnection is classified as a Project of Community Interest by the European Commission and is included in the Spanish Government's 2021-2026 Transmission Grid Planning.

Bilbao, 13 June 2022

Red Eléctrica, the Redeia company responsible for the transmission and operation of the national electricity system, has started the last phase of the administrative permitting process for the future electricity interconnection between Spain and France across the Bay of Biscay. With this step, the second Public Inquiry period regarding this project in Spain has begun. This second round contemplates the best technical, social and environmental solution that is a result of the agreement reached following the first Public Inquiry period that took place in 2021.

The project was conceived with a clear objective of listening to citizens and stakeholders in the territory. In fact, at the end of 2017, an initial phase of simultaneous public participation was opened in Spain and France, which served to draft the initial proposal, while always taking into consideration the reality of the territory. Since then, Red Eléctrica, in addition to the regulatory process of the environmental and administrative permitting process, has carried out numerous informative and transparent dissemination actions in order to explain the real scope of the project to the Basque society, its impact on and benefit for the electricity system, and the positive effect it will have on the area.

The new interconnection will be the first submarine interconnection between the two countries. Its commissioning will almost double the electricity exchange capacity with France from 2,800 MW to 5,000 MW with the aim of strengthening the quality and security of supply. Furthermore, it will contribute to advancing the green transition, thanks to greater integration of emission-free energy, and creating a more efficient system that will generate savings that will benefit consumers. It is a key infrastructure for making progress in consolidating a common European electricity system.

It will also be an economic driver for the region, with an estimated impact of more than 400 million euros on the region's GDP. One of the sectors that will benefit most will be the regional industry and the local suppliers, generating around 6,800 jobs, the sum of both direct and indirect employment. Redeia (Red Eléctrica's parent company) currently has 138 qualified suppliers in the Basque Country.

The Spain-France electricity interconnection across the Bay of Biscay is a priority project for Spain and for the European Commission, which is included in the four lists of Projects of Common Interest (PCIs) approved by the European Union, and which has the backing of the Spanish Government, the French Government and the European Commission itself. It is also included in the 2021-2026 Transmission Grid Planning approved by the Council of Ministers and that is binding for Red Eléctrica.

A project integrated into the territory

The project connects the Spanish and French electricity systems through two 400 kV links from the town of Gatika, in the province of Vizcaya, to the French town of Cubnezais, in the Bordeaux area. The interconnection route will run both underground and underwater and seeks at all times to minimise its impact on the environment.

Thus, the section of the Spanish part runs along a totally underground section of 13 km in direct current from the new converter station of Gatika, passing through the municipalities of Maruri-Jatabe and Lemoiz, until it reaches the sea. The route continues 300 km through an underwater link in direct current to the French coast, where, except for a short underground section in French territory to avoid the Capbreton canyon, it will finally run 80 km overland in France to the new Cubnezais converter station.

The route avoids urban centres and roads at all times, trying to take advantage of existing forest tracks and roads. In addition, both the crossing of roads and rivers and its landing point at the seafront will be carried out using horizontal directional drilling techniques, thus avoiding any impact on the environment and reducing potential impacts on the usual uses of these areas.

On the other hand, when choosing the location for the Gatika converter station, priority has been given to minimising the visual impact, ensuring it is located at the greatest distance possible from population centres and that it has the least possible impact on the vegetation and flora in the area.

The project includes the dismantling of two 10 km overhead lines (Gatika-Lemoiz), further reducing the visual impact of the infrastructure on the environment.

A participatory and consensual process

The choice of the route has been carried out through an open and participatory process, with the aim of finding the greatest social consensus that translates into the best solution for the territory. To this end, since 2015, the Company has been working together with the public administrations involved and the general public in the search for the best project based on technical, economic, social and environmental criteria, paying attention at all times to the protection of ecosystems, avoiding any impact on their biodiversity, as well as on the historical and cultural heritage of the areas through which the interconnection runs and advocating for the restoration of any spaces through which the link passes.