



FROM INSIGHT TO INFLUENCE

# SSEN Transmission Infrastructure Engagement 2023

## Final report

Prepared for SSEN Transmission

Prepared by Impact

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Project No. 1395



**Scottish & Southern**  
Electricity Networks

TRANSMISSION

All projects are carried out in compliance with the ISO 20252 international standard for market, opinion and social research and GDPR.

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## 1. Executive summary

Under RIIO-T2, Ofgem has set out a requirement for Transmission Operators to run an Infrastructure Stakeholder Engagement Survey (ISES), as a way to look for continuous improvement in their stakeholder engagement.

With this in mind, in early 2022, SSEN Transmission commissioned Impact to create and implement an independent ISES with the aim of understanding the experiences of stakeholders that could have been impacted by recent infrastructure projects. Due to the success of this project, Impact was commissioned to run a similar survey in 2023.

The objectives of the survey are to:

- Understand stakeholders' perceptions and attitudes towards particular infrastructure projects and any engagement / communications from SSEN Transmission regarding the project(s)
- Identify challenges faced by stakeholders with regards to infrastructure projects and engagement / communications from SSEN Transmission
- Understand improvements that could be made and identify future opportunities for stakeholders with regards to infrastructure projects and engagement / communications from SSEN Transmission

Impact adopted a two-stage approach to meet these objectives. Firstly, 50 semi-structured telephone interviews were completed with stakeholders of SSEN Transmission, followed by two 90-minute focus groups, with 12 of the stakeholders that took part in the initial interviews.

Overall knowledge of SSEN Transmission was high, and the majority of respondents had engaged with them over the last 12 months. Mostly this was engagement regarding a specific project, such as the Beaulieu to Peterhead line.

Satisfaction with SSEN Transmission was down in 2022, which was mainly attributed to the impact of ongoing, or upcoming, infrastructure projects, specifically the Beaulieu to Peterhead pylon line. In addition, stakeholders felt they were not getting enough, or adequate information about these projects, and were not being consulted in the decision-making process. Many stakeholders said that any engagement they did have with SSEN Transmission was not personal or local enough, with events happening in locations that were not nearby to the local communities affected. They also felt the quality of information shared could be improved, and some suggested leaflets should not be used, as these can look like junk mail.

Stakeholders, overall, felt that community support initiatives in the local area were important, and a third of those who participated in the interviews had been supported by at least one initiative.

Looking at particular infrastructure projects, most stakeholders had been impacted and, of these, over half felt the impact on them was negative. Around a third of these stakeholders felt engagement with SSEN Transmission had helped mitigate the impact.

The focus groups highlighted many examples of excellent engagement and communication, but also many anxieties about the impact of planned projects on rural communities. There is a need to demonstrate a better understanding of the impact on local areas and be honest and transparent about exactly what decisions stakeholders can (and can't) have a role in influencing.

## 2. Background & Objectives

Under RIIO-T1, which ran from April 2013 to March 2021, Ofgem measured the stakeholder engagement progress of Transmission and Distribution Operators under the Stakeholder Engagement Incentive, and there was a small financial reward based partly on performance in this area.

Under RIIO-T2, which runs from April 2021 to March 2026, the system has changed slightly and now there is an Infrastructure Stakeholder Engagement Survey (ISES) for Transmission Operators (TOs). Ofgem has set the requirement for TOs to continue to improve their stakeholder engagement, using a qualitative survey as a measurement on an annual basis.

Ofgem's intention for this survey is to encourage engagement with stakeholders that may have been impacted by recent infrastructure projects to understand their experience, and ultimately how this can be improved. This will ensure a transparent feedback loop exists between the TO and their stakeholders. There is no financial incentive for SSEN Transmission to carry out this survey.

With this in mind, in early 2022, SSEN Transmission commissioned Impact to create and implement an ISES with the aim of understanding the experiences of stakeholders that could have been impacted by recent infrastructure projects. Due to the success of this project, Impact was commissioned to run a similar survey in 2023.

As in 2022, the following project objectives were set:



## 3. Method

Impact conducted a two-stage approach to this research, laid out below, to meet the research objectives:



### Semi-structured interviews

- Telephone survey with 50 stakeholders of SSEN Transmission in December 2022 and January 2023
- All respondents were pre-screened to confirm they were happy to take part in the research



### Focus Groups

- 2 x 90- minute focus groups were conducted in February 2023
- Invitations were sent out to 31 of the 50 stakeholders who took part in the semi-structured interviews and who agreed to take part in further research
- In total 12 of the 31 stakeholders contacted attended across two focus groups

## Semi-structured interviews

The first stage of the project was semi-structured interviews conducted over the phone. The questionnaire lasted approximately 20 minutes and was completed by 50 stakeholders of SSEN Transmission from within their region. All stakeholders were pre-screened prior to taking part to establish the likelihood of having been impacted by recent infrastructure project(s) conducted by SSEN Transmission and willingness to participate in the research.

The interview length and content were carefully designed to keep respondents fully engaged throughout, to maximise response rate and ensure no stakeholders dropped out mid-interview. The survey contained a mixture of closed (including scale and yes/no type questions) and open questions, designed to elicit detailed feedback on the objectives. The questionnaire was similar to that asked in 2022, but updated to focus on upcoming priorities for SSEN Transmission. The interview covered the following topics:

- Awareness of SSEN Transmission
- Satisfaction with current levels of service
- Engagement with SSEN Transmission
- Impact by a recent infrastructure project
- Stakeholder Engagement Plan

A full copy of the interview guide is given in [Appendix 1](#).

## Focus Groups

At the end of the semi-structured interview, stakeholders were asked if they would be willing to take part in further research, in the form of a focus group, and 31 out of 50 indicated they would. Of these, 12 were able to attend the sessions conducted.

The two sessions each lasted 90 minutes, and the discussion guide was designed to explore the results from the semi-structured interviews in more detail, to understand how SSEN Transmission can improve the service they offer to their stakeholders. The discussion guide covered the following content:

- Satisfaction and engagement with SSEN Transmission
- Engagement aimed at mitigating the impact of any issues

A full copy of the discussion guide is given in [Appendix 2](#) and the stimulus material is shown in [Appendix 3](#).

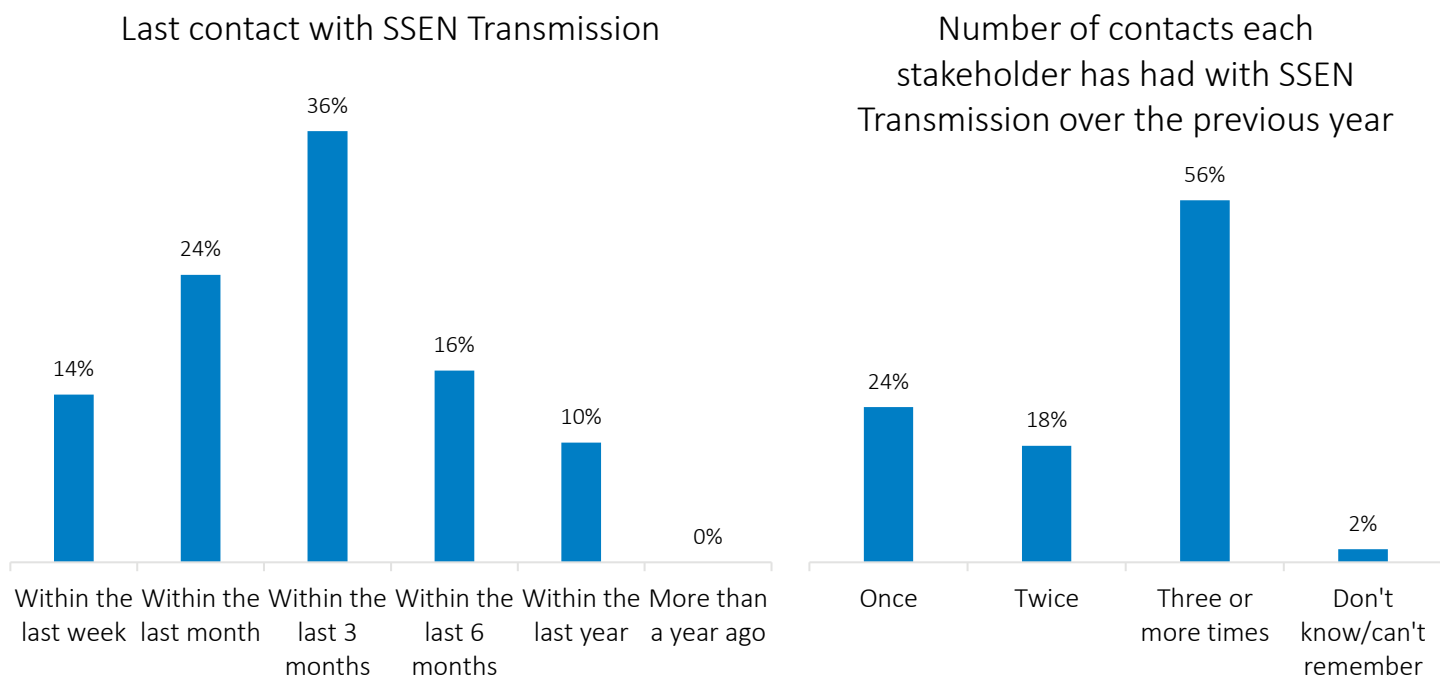


## 4. Results

### Awareness and contact with SSEN Transmission

During the semi-structured interviews, stakeholders were first asked if they had heard of SSEN Transmission, and the majority (74%) claimed they had at least some knowledge of them. This value is high, but as all respondents were pre-contacted and potentially impacted by an SSEN Transmission Infrastructure project, it is not surprising.

All stakeholders that participated in the interviews had engaged with SSEN Transmission within the last year, and 38% within the last month. Over half of stakeholders (56%) had been in contact with SSEN Transmission three or more times in the last 12 months.



There were a range of reasons why stakeholders had been in contact with SSEN Transmission, with the most commonly cited related to:

- New pylons being put up, specifically the Beauly to Peterhead transmission line, upgrading current infrastructure
- Worries about pylons ruining the natural landscape
- General information gathering on new projects such as a hydrogen production facility, wind farm, and substation, and how these will affect stakeholders and local residents

Stakeholders were also asked in the interviews what they thought SSEN Transmission could do to promote a better understanding of its role, with the most common answer related to a desire for SSEN Transmission to be more open and transparent with contracts, procedures, and policies (38%). Other suggestions included a need for SSEN Transmission to be more available for meetings, specifically one to ones (30%), and a desire for more communication/contact in general (30%). The full breakdown of suggestions is given below, along with responses to the survey from last year, highlighting how respondents had more suggestions overall this time around.

Just under a third of stakeholders (28%) were either unsure or did not think there was any more SSEN Transmission could do to promote a better understanding of its role.

Communication type	Percentage of respondents	Percentage of respondents 2021/2022
Be more open/transparent relating to contracts, procedures, and policy	38%	12%
Be available for meetings, more one to ones	30%	18%
More consultation/communication/contact/seminars/Trade fairs etc.	30%	22%
Be upfront/pro-active about informing stakeholders about connection delays and other project issues	24%	16%
Prioritise environmental impact	16%	12%
Social media	16%	10%
Print media	14%	10%
Be more sustainable	6%	2%
Provide list of future projects and dates	6%	4%
Stronger presence online	6%	8%
Television	4%	4%
Prioritise Health and Safety / safe working practise	0%	0%
Show more interest in non-SSEN companies	0%	0%
Speed up delivery of projects/access to the network	0%	4%
Don't Know/nothing	28%	34%

## Satisfaction and engagement

Satisfaction and dissatisfaction scores quoted below are NET scores based on combining the percentages for 8, 9, and 10 when regarding high-scores (T3B), and 1, 2, and 3 for low-scores (B3B) on a 10-point scale.

Stakeholder satisfaction with their overall relationship with SSEN Transmission varied. In this wave, 44% of those surveyed reported being satisfied, down from 66% in the previous wave. This corresponded with an increase in dissatisfaction with their overall relationship since the last wave (16% vs. 2%).

The full breakdown is given below.

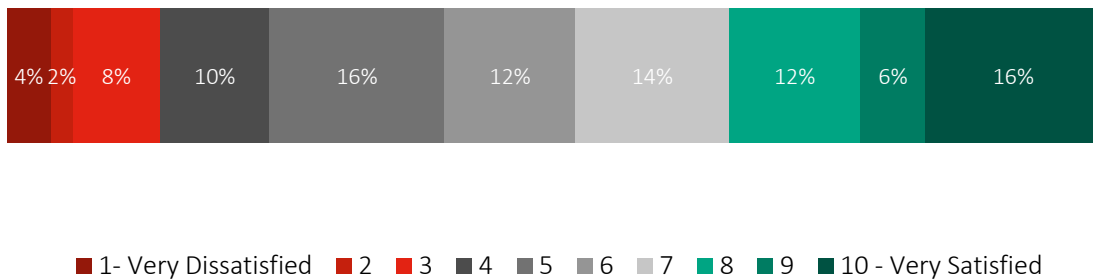
### Overall stakeholder satisfaction with their relationship with SSEN Transmission



■ 1- Very Dissatisfied ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5 ■ 6 ■ 7 ■ 8 ■ 9 ■ 10 - Very Satisfied ■ Don't Know

Overall satisfaction with the level of engagement received was 34%, compared with 70% during the previous wave, with 14% of stakeholders reporting being dissatisfied with the level of engagement they'd received from SSEN Transmission, compared with 4% during the previous wave.

## Stakeholder satisfaction with their level of engagement from SSEN Transmission



Stakeholders who did not give a score of 10 out of 10 for their level of engagement from SSEN Transmission were asked for suggestions on how SSEN Transmission could improve. The most popular responses were:

- Be more genuine and open about communication for proposed work
- Engage through face-to-face communication with the community rather than solely through social media
- Provide evidence that stakeholders' feedback is taken on board, as many feel that any communications channels with SSEN Transmission are merely a formality and none of their feedback is taken on board.
- Many feel let down regarding work relating to overhead cables as they felt that they were consulted too late and that their feedback was not taken seriously.
- Provide more information concerning planned power cuts
- Provide information to customers in layman's terms with no technical jargon

The focus group attendees were, overall, not particularly surprised that satisfaction scores had reduced, and mainly put this down to the ongoing, or upcoming projects. There were suggestions made that key information on the project had not been shared fast enough, if at all, with no clear explanation being given on the decision-making process behind key project decisions, such as the exact location of a power line. There were also comments from stakeholders that the engagement had occurred after these decisions had been made, so there was no opportunity for stakeholders to give feedback, that would have an impact on the outcome of the project.

"The decisions have all been taken and we're the mugs that are going, 'oh yes, we'll go to the meetings, we'll do this, we'll do that. Yes, that's great you're listening', but they're not really taking on board things." *Stakeholder, Group 1*

The key project that had affected the highest number of stakeholders present was the Beaulieu to Peterhead line, and feedback on that project echoed what had been said on an overall level. While some respondents had seen some leaflets being given out, they said they looked like junk mail and were not important enough, so felt many in the local community would not have paid attention to it.

"I feel that the meetings about the upcoming Beaulieu to Peterhead – we got something in the post but it just looked like junk mail, and I think a lot of my neighbours would've just ignored it, and had ignored it." *Stakeholder, Group 2*



There was some positive sentiment in the groups towards the SSEN Transmission employees involved in the engagement, and in particular, those in the Communities Team. Stakeholders did suggest, however, that often SSEN Transmission could not provide enough information, or were not aware of things they should have been, one example being given of an airfield near a line, which could be an air safety hazard.

“We found that whilst everyone was very enthusiastic and helpful, they had actually no idea that the airfield even existed, which was a bit embarrassing because it’s a potential air safety hazard ... and I do think that the way they presented the choice of route was kind of as a done deal.” *Stakeholder, Group 2*

### Methods of communication/engagement

During the interviews, stakeholders were also asked if they had been engaged with a local project has been in construction or development, and 86% had been. Of those, the most common engagement was with via email (79%). A leaflet (53%), a letter (51%), consultations (51%), face-to-face visits (47%), and telephone calls (40%) were the next most common forms of engagement. There has been an overall increase in communication across all channels since the previous wave, specifically leaflets (10% during the previous wave), letters (24% during the previous wave), and face-to-face visits (22% during the previous wave). The full breakdown of communication methods used is given below:

Communication method	Percentage of respondents	Percentage of respondent’s 2021/2022
Email	79%	80%
Leaflet	53%	10%
Letter	51%	24%
Consultation	51%	10%
Face-to-face visit	47%	22%
Telephone calls	40%	37%
Local Press	23%	2%
Town Hall events	23%	7%
Community Liaison Groups	19%	0%
Website/Blogs	19%	2%
Conferences/Events	16%	5%
Social media messages	12%	0%
Webinars	9%	5%
Surveys	9%	0%
E-bulletin	5%	0%
Insight Reports	5%	0%
Workshops	2%	0%

The increase in face-to-face visits is a positive, given the key suggestion raised in focus groups regarding communication was to provide more face-to-face contact. These stakeholders acknowledged that it was useful for information to be displayed on the SSEN website, but felt that few in the local community would be proactive enough to look for this information themselves, assuming they had access to the internet in the first place.

Stakeholders would like to see more of the SSEN Transmission team on the ground conducting face-to-face meetings. Their experience of these sessions was that few people would attend and that often the choice of location was not accessible for everyone to attend. One particular stakeholder mentioned that local network events had been held too far away from their home to travel to without a car. In addition, they had been held over one afternoon in the middle of the week, making them inaccessible to many who

“There needs to be far more actual face-to-face seeing people. Because video conferences don’t work when you’re trying to consult with the community.” *Stakeholder, Group 2*

wished to attend due to other commitments, such as work. For an event to be beneficial, they need to be small, local and accessible for the local community, whilst being primarily focused on the local impact of projects, rather than an overview of the project on the whole.

Positive attitudes towards engagement are increased by feeling involved from day 1 but only if they also feel that their feedback/needs will be taken into account.

*“They did engage with us by phone to tell us about it, and the people that did that, particularly the initial liaison person, were very good and friendly. But you kind of just get the overall impression that they’re doing what they can, but their hands are tied behind their backs” Stakeholder, Group 1*

Meetings are often arranged later in the project planning process than stakeholders would like. Stakeholders also expect any information shown at meetings to be correct and to demonstrate an understanding of the local area. In one example, a stakeholder working in tourism was upset that popular footpaths weren’t on the map shown at a meeting, which made her worry that the impact on footpaths for walkers and long-distance hikers wasn’t being considered. A further example is the Deveron Valley, where stakeholders felt SSEN Transmission wasn’t taking into account the special protections of the site in relation to over-wintering geese and swans.

There were mixed experiences of engagement meetings. SSEN Transmission staff attending meetings always came across as engaged and helpful. However, some stakeholders complained that the knowledge of staff at the meetings wasn’t specific or technical enough to answer the questions that they wanted to answer. SSEN Transmission could improve by sending better-qualified people to meetings, and by being more proactive, following up on questions after meetings if they weren’t answered during the meeting.

A further challenge to helping communities to accept projects in their area is that some stakeholders always compare them to their experience of projects run by private developers provided frequent and high-quality stakeholder engagement, and Moray East was able to spend additional funds on undergrounding cables to protect the local environment.

*“They came to all of our Community Council meetings until they’d finished the project in our area, and that was super. And they did get a lot of tough questions, but they could answer it. They always brought along the expert for that particular topic because we always put on the agenda what we really wanted to speak about.” Stakeholder, Group 2*

Leaflet drops were also seen as useful, but stakeholders re-iterated that not all everyone in the local community would read them. They felt a letter in an envelope, rather than a letter would help in making it look more official. There were also comments suggesting that the information given in these leaflets was not always balanced, and was instead heavily weighted towards the positive news stories and the benefits of doing the project. Some stakeholders also mentioned the need for more accessible written communications. For instance, the size of the type on the leaflet drops is sometimes very small, especially for older stakeholders.

Feedback forms: Stakeholders were very cynical about these. They were happy to fill them in but they didn't know whether anyone read them or did anything with the information. Updating the website and Community Councils / local development groups on feedback actions would help to close this loop.

Some stakeholders felt that SSE did a better job of publicising meetings (via email and post) than SSEN Transmission and also gave the option to attend virtually.

Finally, there was some mention of using schools as a communication channel. This has the double benefit of engaging with residents while they are young (school children) and being able to send leaflets/information on projects home to parents via their children. No stakeholders in the focus groups were aware of education activities currently undertaken by SSEN Transmission.

In terms of timing, there is no such thing as engaging too early in a project for many stakeholders. The general consensus during focus groups was that most stakeholders would prefer to know that there was a possibility of having new infrastructure in their area early in the process, rather than waiting until more definite decisions had been made on the potential locations of pylons and substations, etc.

"I think most people would like to know that there's a possibility something is going to happen. It's definite that something is going to happen, so the possibility would be if you knew then you can take more interest. If you're not given even the possibility information, then you sit back maybe and think, 'it's alright. It's not coming near me'." *Stakeholder, Group 1*

### Perceptions of SSEN Transmission being "genuine and open"

When asked what SSEN Transmission can do to become more 'genuine and open', there was a feeling that more honesty was needed during the engagement process. Stakeholders would like to see more updates given on progress, and not only once a decision has been made, ideally so they could have their say during the process. This would help communities feel they can influence what's going on, and highlight that they are being listened to. Stakeholders also suggested they would like to know if there is a possibility something might happen, rather than only being told once it has been confirmed. They would rather have more information, that subsequently changes, than not being told anything at all.

"The statutory card gets played quite a lot, and that to me makes it feel like it's happening regardless and that we are not necessarily empowered to be a part of the process... We're more likely to be providing information if we feel like we're going to be listened to." *Stakeholder, Group 2*

Although it was raised in the telephone surveys, there didn't appear to be a problem with stakeholders in the focus groups thinking SSEN Transmission wasn't genuine or open. Instead, they wanted more honest conversation and transparency over what decisions had, and hadn't already been made.

## Demonstrating the results of engagement

Once engagement has happened, there were some suggestions given for how SSEN Transmission could better communicate the outcome of stakeholder engagement. The main theme was around ensuring a personal touch, such as addressing letters to residents personally, highlighting the outcome of the conversation they'd had. This would ensure stakeholders felt like their opinion mattered and that they'd had an impact on the outcome of the project, or how it affected the local community.

They also wanted to make sure any consultation has a proper response, which included the following:

- The issue raised
- The outcome of the issue
- Why the decision has been made
- Process they followed when making the decision

Again, highlighting these factors ensures a stakeholder knows their question, or concern, has been listened to, and while they may not be happy with the outcome, they can at least understand why a decision has been made.

Demonstrating the impact of community engagement might be more powerful at the start of engagement about a project. SSEN Transmission should very clearly state which decisions have, and have not already been made (e.g., pylon locations). They should also be honest about which decisions require community feedback before they are made, and which aspects will more realistically be decided by other factors (cost, engineering feasibility, etc).

There is work to do on demonstrating to stakeholders that their feedback is needed and the decisions haven't already been made.

Stakeholders that participated in the interviews were asked if they had taken part in consultations run by SSEN Transmission run alongside their transmission projects, and 80% said they had. Of those that had not, most stated that they had not been made aware of any consultations, with others stating that they often did not have the time to attend or were otherwise unavailable.

Over three-quarters of these stakeholders (72%) felt the information available on SSEN Transmission's projects is accessible, easy to find and understandable. This is a slight decrease when compared to the previous wave (78%).

Stakeholders would like to see the following topics included within the engagement plan next year:

- Communication, both in terms of a level of trust and openness with the sharing of information, as well as interaction with local communities
- Pylon removal and a focus on underground energy cables
- The effect of projects on local environments

"Maybe they could have individual letters addressed to the resident or whatever, by name hopefully, and make it look like it's directed at a particular person, that it is something important, rather than just a coloured card that looks like a flyer that you might glance at and then put in the recycling."

*Stakeholder, Group 2*

"I feel, they know fine where the corridors are and where the proposed sites are for the new substation here, but they've kept us dangling for months." *Stakeholder, Group 1*

## Sustainability strategy

During the interviews, stakeholders were introduced to a number of local community support initiatives that have been introduced by SSEN Transmission, these included:

- Increased funding for local projects
- Local reuse hubs
- Support for vulnerable customers
- Local fuel poverty
- Supporting domestic energy transition
- Increased community engagement/Communities of Practice
- Local Skills & Education Support
- Nature-based solutions
- Land use & Utility
- Culture & Heritage

80% of stakeholders believed that SSEN Transmission community support initiatives such as these were important, with just under a third of stakeholders (30%) stating that they or their community have been supported by at least one of the initiatives. Other initiatives stakeholders spontaneously stated they would be interested in include:

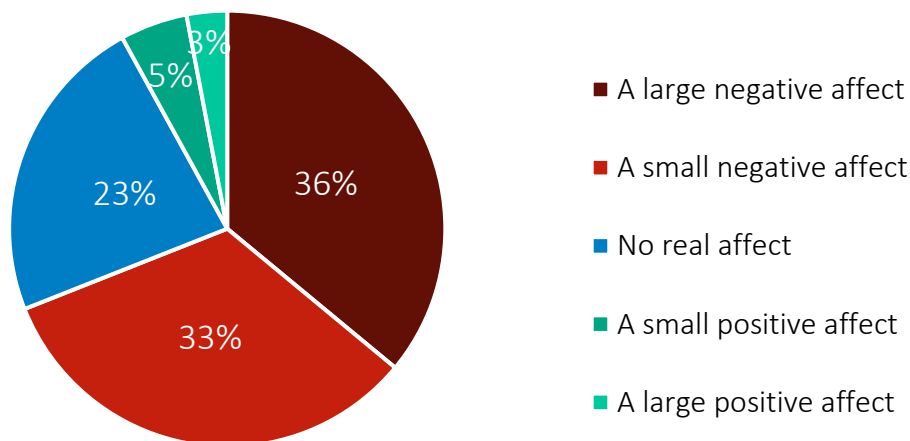
- Emergency plans/equipment supplied to communities
- Funding local schools and education programs
- Further support for the local environment

When asked about their knowledge of SSEN Transmission's Net Zero plans, only 20% of stakeholders reported being 'very knowledgeable', with 14% claiming to be 'not at all knowledgeable' of it.

The most challenging of SSEN Transmission targets were believed to be affordability (36%), followed by decarbonization (28%).

## Impact of recent projects

Stakeholders in the interviews were also asked questions about particular infrastructure projects that have affected them. Out of the 78% of stakeholders that said that they had been impacted, 50% had been directly impacted, while 28% had been indirectly impacted. The majority (69%) said they had been impacted negatively. The full breakdown of responses is given below.



The most common reason given for citing a negative impact was due to the destruction of the natural landscape of the area, specifically in relation to pylons being close to stakeholders' houses, the loss of the value of the land, or loss of common walking routes. Others were concerned about road closures or additional traffic in the area.

There were three respondents that reported a positive impact from the project, with one stating that the reason for this was that upgrading the infrastructure will help prepare for the future.

Just over a third (36%) of those impacted by an infrastructure project thought that engagement from SSEN Transmission throughout the project had reduced the negative impact, and the reasons for this included:

- General questions concerning the project were answered
- Concerns were addressed
- Some of the local road issues had been alleviated

Stakeholders were asked about the location of the projects being completed, in relation to where they lived. Most lived within three miles (62% of stakeholders lived less than a mile away and a further 23% lived within three miles). Additionally, 82% knew who the key contacts were for the project.

After a quiet few years, the increased number of projects going ahead or being planned now is genuinely impacting stakeholder communities. One community had been through a line upgrade and were now being consulted about a new line in the same area. Many didn't attend the new line consultation event as they assumed it was about the old project. Communication wasn't clear enough.

For some communities, the sheer number of projects going ahead in their area can feel overwhelming. As well as SSEN Transmission projects, many communities are impacted by other projects including new windfarms, forestry felling, and hydro-electric power infrastructure. Even when engagement is high quality, the number of meetings and leaflets are hard to keep track of for some residents. SSEN Transmission could help stakeholders navigate this by keeping on top of other projects affecting communities and either sending combined communications or even simply acknowledging the amount of stress put on stakeholders by multiple projects happening at the same time.

"It's not that it feels like you're being picked on, but you become very much a hot area of activity. And I think people just become completely fatigued with it and they don't know necessarily which project it is that's being talked about, and as I say, from my experience of it, there doesn't seem that there's much joined up thinking between the projects." *Stakeholder, Group 2*

Stakeholders agree with the need to replace and upgrade existing equipment. They are less accepting of having to live through disruption for the sake of transporting more electricity to England. They see these major projects as having a long-term, irreversible impact on their local environment. Many feel that their opinions aren't taken into account when planning large projects such as the new Beaulieu to Peterhead line. They have chosen to make their lives in areas of natural beauty and many feel this is being threatened and they are powerless to do anything about it.

In terms of current projects, it's important to tailor engagement to the specific interests of individual stakeholders. Some would prefer to get a maildrop telling them about a meeting and that's it. Others want to be able to read detailed planning documents. Ideally, all levels of information would be regularly updated on the website. Stakeholders felt that some residents were never going to fully engage even if they would be impacted by a project,



so SSEN Transmission should focus on those residents and Community Liaison Groups that do show an interest and want to engage.

“You’ve got to work on the people who are interested and engaged, and expect that they will communicate with others. If you do that successfully, you’ll go a lot further than multiple newspaper articles which people may not want to read, may not have time to read, and may not be interested in.” *Stakeholder, Group 2*

For those living in the area of current projects, it is important to update the website frequently (even if there isn’t much to update). Once updates / new documents have been added to the website, the most invested stakeholders would like an email to tell them there has been a new update. Stakeholders that were likely to be directly affected by a pylon or substation very near their house/land wanted more personalised communication. They appreciated the engagement meetings but also wanted SSEN Transmission to proactively sit down with them and discuss the specifics of their individual location and impact.

“You just kind of thought, can you get half-an-hour with somebody like that face-to-face and say, ‘this is what you’re going to be faced with. Is there anything you can do to stop that or change it in a way?’” *Stakeholder, Group 1.*

Some people aren’t receiving leaflets about engagement events. Especially in scattered, rural communities.

“All the glossy magazines and brochures that they produce all slanted to what a wonderful job they’re doing and we should be very lucky here to have everything that they’re doing for us. It’s all very, very, very positive, about benefits to the community, and I think it’s not balanced.” *Stakeholder, Group 1*

Some comms aren’t balanced and are felt to be too “glossy”. Communities that are directly impacted want more honest communications and less “marketing”. This is a challenge for SSEN transmission. Whilst it is important to communicate the benefits of projects (and engagement), this shouldn’t come at the expense of honest and open presentation of the facts.

Most of the negativity and cynicism around stakeholder engagement relates to the engagement that happens before a project starts. This is when emotions are running highest – communities are worried about whether a project will have a serious impact on them / their environment, and may feel

powerless to do anything about it. This is when the need for open and honest communication is most important. SSEN Transmission needs to be clear about what decisions the community can have an impact on, and listen to all concerns.

When stakeholders can’t visualise the impact of a project, they will themselves visualise the worst possible scenario. Any gaps in knowledge that aren’t filled in by SSEN Transmission (about the possible impact and mitigation etc) will naturally be filled in by hearsay and anecdotes from other projects. For example, one stakeholder was very concerned about potential noise from a new substation because she’d heard of another project that had suffered from lasting noise impact. She didn’t know any details of the other project, mitigation measures, or whether it would be similar to the potential project near her, but she was still using this as an example to heighten her (and her community’s) anxieties about the planned project.

“I can’t begin to imagine six years of construction traffic in this area here. The roads, the Lovat Bridge, I don’t think would even take heavy construction traffic. Even if the Kessock Bridge is closed, we have a flow of traffic that can hold up traffic along the road going over the Lovat Bridge for hours. I can’t even begin to imagine what the visual impact would be like in an area of such beauty here.” *Stakeholder, Group 1*

Once projects are underway, stakeholders are generally more positive about engagement. This is because engagement at this stage is less emotional, and more about practical problem-solving. SSEN Transmission and contractors generally do an excellent job of responding to community and individual problems with construction work. This is much easier to demonstrate success, and stakeholders are grateful for any mitigation actions or compensation payments that are arranged. In one example a contractor ran over a resident's dog. Even after such a traumatic event the stakeholder came away with a positive view of SSEN Transmission as the project manager was so helpful and took time to build a personal relationship, inviting them to the site to see how it was progressing. Another stakeholder was impressed with the speed with which mitigation measures were put into place to manage construction traffic outside his house.

. "I was having large pantechnicons turning into my driveway with some very ancient stone pillars on a very narrow single-track driveway, trying to deliver all sorts of things. So, I immediately contacted my contact and within two hours I had signage outside, we had signage along all the private driveways." *Stakeholder, Group 2*

## 5. Conclusions and recommendations

Stakeholders had good knowledge of SSEN Transmission and all had engaged with them in the last year, with over half having been in contact three or more times. The majority had engaged with SSEN Transmission regarding a specific project, most commonly the Beauly to Peterhead transmission line.

Satisfaction with SSEN Transmission among stakeholders was down on 2022, as was satisfaction with the level of engagement stakeholders had received. The key reasons for this related to the specific projects underway at the time of the research, and the perceived lack of information that had been shared regarding these key projects. Stakeholders also felt they had not been engaged with during the decision-making process on key projects; only later, once these decisions had been made.

In addition, stakeholders felt engagement was not local and personal enough, with events often happening in locations that are not accessible for local communities. Stakeholders would like to see clearer evidence of the outcomes of their engagement, suggesting that more of a personal touch was needed when ‘closing the loop’, highlighting what had been done as a result of their enquiry, and why particular decisions have been made. Stakeholders also felt that leaflets were not always the most effective way to engage with the local community, as they can often be seen as junk mail.

Our recommendations for future engagement, therefore, are as follows:

- Increased engagement on a local level at all stages of the project, including evidence of the effect of these engagements on a project
- Communication through letters over leaflets, or a redesign of leaflets simplifying the information, increasing font size, and clearly signposting to the project websites
- A focus on early research on the impact of projects on local areas including community amenities and footpaths
- More transparency about which decisions stakeholders can have a genuine impact on (and when), and which ones are driven mainly by other considerations

Stakeholders believed that local community support initiatives were important, with around a third reporting that they, or their community, had been supported by at least one initiative. Only one in five stakeholders felt knowledgeable about SSEN Transmission’s Net Zero plans but felt affordability and decarbonisation would be the most challenging areas for SSEN Transmission to deliver against.

Over three-quarters of stakeholders from the interviews had been affected by a local infrastructure project, with 62% of these stakeholders living less than a mile away from where work was being completed. Over two-thirds of the stakeholders interviewed (69%) felt this impact was negative, with just over a third of these stakeholders feeling that engagement had helped mitigate the negative impact.

Overall, stakeholders were pleased with the contact they had with SSEN Transmission, and there were plenty of examples of staff going above and beyond to help mitigate the impact, especially in the construction phase. That said, these projects do have a long-lasting and emotional impact on communities, and there is a desire for SSEN Transmission to be more a part of the community and increase the transparency of engagement.

## 6. Appendix

### Appendix 1: Semi-structured interview guide

#### INTRO AND GDPR

Good morning/afternoon/evening. My name is ..... and I am calling from Impact Research, an independent market research company.

We are conducting research on behalf of SSEN Transmission. They are responsible for maintaining and investing in high-voltage electricity transmission networks in the north of Scotland. SSEN Transmission's network comprises over 4,800km of high voltage overhead lines and underground cables. They serve around 70% of the landmass of Scotland, transporting high voltage electricity from where it's generated to areas of demand. SSEN Transmission is part of the SSE Group which includes their other Networks Business, SSEN Distribution who maintain the lower voltage network that supplies electricity directly to homes and businesses in the North of Scotland. You may have spoken to them if you have experienced a power outage or damage to the network during a storm. This survey will focus on your experience of engaging with SSEN Transmission only.

In a rapidly changing industry, one challenge they face is meeting the industry's future needs and energy consumers. Effective decision making relies on people's input from outside their business to make sure they are meeting expectations.

This research is about your experience of how SSEN Transmission have engaged with you when they have been developing, or constructing Infrastructure Projects that affect (you, your community, or your organisation.)

We know your time is valuable, and the survey should take no more than **20-25** minutes. SSEN is a stakeholder-led business, and we are always striving to maintain high quality standards in our stakeholder engagement processes across the Transmission business. By completing this short anonymous survey, you will be helping SSEN continuously improve and offer the highest quality of service to our customers, communities, and wider society.

This is a genuine market research study, and no sales call will result from our contact with you. The interview will be carried out in strict accordance with the Market Research Society's Code of Conduct and GDPR.

If you require any further information about how we store and use the data you provide, please see our privacy policy on our website: <https://www.impactmr.com/privacy-statement-research>

Would you like to write down our telephone number should you have any queries?

You can contact us on 01932 963618 and ask for a member of the Utilities team. PROVIDE OFFICE ADDRESS/EMAIL ADDRESS IF REQUESTED.

Are you happy to proceed with the survey?

Yes -> **CONTINUE**

No -> **THANK AND CLOSE – “We’re sorry you aren’t able to complete the survey. Thanks again for your time and if there is anything further the team at SSEN can help with please don’t hesitate to contact them. Have a nice day.**

#### INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS

##### **S ASK ALL**

**Q1 As a reminder, this survey is anonymous. However, we would like to ask for your postcode or region so we can attach or associate your feedback with the project that directly affects you.**

Some of the region names might not be easy to understand so might be useful to ask for spelling.

**S ASK ALL**

**Q2 From the list below, which of the following best describes the type of Stakeholder you are?**

1. Academia/Innovation
2. Community Member
3. NGO's (non-government organisation)
4. Statutory Consultee
5. Consumer Groups/Trade Bodies
6. Developers
7. Environment
8. Local Authorities
9. Government
10. Industry
11. Land
12. Supply Chain
13. Transmission Operator
14. Other (please specify)

**S ASK ALL**

**Q3 Before today, had you previously heard of SSEN Transmission and the strategic role they play in maintaining and operating the high voltage electricity network in the North of Scotland, and supporting the delivery of the UK and Scotland's Net Zero Targets??**

1. Yes – and have good knowledge about them
2. Yes – and have some knowledge about them
3. Yes – but have little knowledge about them
4. No – never heard of them/don't know anything about them **CLOSE**

**M ASK ALL**

**Q4 From your perspective, what do you think SSEN Transmission could do to promote a better understanding of its role?**

**INTERVIEWER: DO NOT READ OUT THE BELOW, ASK AS AN OPEN-ENDED QUESTION AND CODE RESPONSES GIVEN**

1. Be available for meetings, more one to ones
2. Be more open/transparent relating to contracts, procedures, and policy
3. Be more sustainable
4. Be upfront/pro-active about informing stakeholders about connection delays and other project issues
5. More consultation/communication/contact/seminars/Trade fairs etc.
6. Prioritise environmental Impact
7. Prioritise Health and Safety / safe working practise
8. Provide list of future projects and dates
9. Show more interest in non SSEN companies
10. Speed up delivery of projects/access to the network
11. Stronger presence online
12. Social media
13. Print media
14. Television
15. Don't know/nothing
16. Other (please specify)

**S ASK ALL**

**Q5 When did you last have contact with SSEN Transmission? – READ OUT**

1. Within the last week
2. Within the last month
3. Within the last 3 months
4. Within the last 6 months
5. Within the last year
6. More than a year ago
7. Don't know

**S ASK IF Q5=1-5**

**Q6 In the last 12 months how many times have you had contact with SSEN Transmission? – READ OUT**

1. Once
2. Twice
3. Three or more times
4. Don't know / can't remember

**O ASK IF Q6=1-3**

**Q7a What was the reason for your contact?**

**O ASK IF Q6=1-3**

**Q7b What was the outcome of the contact?**

**S ASK ALL**

**Q8 As a stakeholder of SSEN Transmission, how satisfied are you with the overall relationship that you have with them on a scale of 1-10, where 1 is very dissatisfied and 10 is very satisfied?**

Very Dissatisfied										Very Satisfied	Don't know
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	98	

**STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT PLAN**

**O ASK ALL**

**N1 What are your/ your organisation's strategic priorities for the coming year? Please give a brief summary of the areas you are focusing on/**

**INTERVIEWER: ALLOW N/A IF THEY DO NOT HAVE ANY, OR IF THEY ARE NOT AN ORGANISATION (E.G., IF A LAND OWNER)**

**O ASK IF RESPONSE GIVEN TO N1**

**N2 What, if anything, can SSEN Transmission do to support you to deliver these priorities?**

**S ASK ALL**

**N3 Please rate your knowledge of SSEN Transmission's plans to deliver the Transmission Network Infrastructure required to put us on a pathway to Net Zero, including meeting 2030 targets, a scale of 1-10, where 1 is not at all knowledgeable and 10 is very knowledgeable?**



Not at all knowledgeable									Very knowledgeable
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

**S ASK ALL**

**N4 Which of the following factors do you think will be most challenging for SSEN Transmission in the delivery of 2030 targets?**

1. Decarbonisation
2. Security of supply
3. Affordability
4. Other (please specify, and explain)

**O ASK ALL**

**N5 As SSEN Transmission pull together their engagement plans for the year ahead, they want to make sure they meet your expectations for engagement, what topics would you like to see included within the plan for next year?**

**SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY**

**“SSEN have a introduced a number of initiatives, aimed to support the local community. These include:**

**Increased funding for local projects**

Funding to support communities to identify, establish and deliver community led sustainability projects for community utility and gain.

**Local reuse hubs**

Setting up local reuse hubs for excess material from our projects, such as timber, aggregates etc. This would support the reuse of materials for community led initiatives and projects.

**Support for vulnerable customers**

Guidance, information and signposting to communities enable the identification, address and take proactive actions to support vulnerable individuals or groups in the community.

**Local fuel poverty**

Guidance, support and signposting for local communities to find options to reduce fuel poverty

**Supporting domestic energy transition**

Provision of resources to aid communities to move away from fossil fuel based heating systems toward renewable forms of home heating.

**Increased community engagement/Communities of Practice**

Supporting and building the capacity of local groups or social enterprises to engage with SSEN Transmission to understand needs and co-create solutions.

**Local Skills & Education Support**

Engaging more with schools, colleges and skills development programs to provide local individuals and community groups with the opportunity to learn and develop skills. This could include opportunities for younger community members through apprenticeship and intern programs.

**Nature based solutions**

Working with communities or community groups to prioritise the improve the environment in the local area. Providing information about and access to examples of ongoing projects which aim to develop biodiversity, environmental resilience and natural capital.

**Land use & utility**

Maintaining community stewardship of the local environment – retaining and enabling utility of land for recreation, public and private use, retaining a sense of place, improving and upgrading shared spaces.

**Culture & Heritage**

Community led initiatives to support, maintain or improve local culture and heritage. This could be related to language, creative arts and spaces or places or items of historic significance.”

**S ASK ALL**

**N6 How important is it to you that we provide community support through initiatives such as those given above. Please rate their importance on a scale of 1-10, where 1 is not at all important and 10 is very important?**

Not at all important									Very important	Don't know
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	98

**S ASK ALL**

**N7 Have you or your community been supported by SSEN Transmission through any of the above?**

- 1. Yes
- 2. No
- 3. Unsure

**O ASK ALL**

**N8 Are there any other ways you would like the local community, community groups, schools etc. to be supported by SSEN Transmission? Please explain what these are.**

**O ASK ALL**

**N9 Is there anything else you would like us to consider with regards to sustainability and supporting communities? Please explain, if so.**

## INFRASTRUCTURE QUESTIONS – OVERALL

“An important part of SSEN’s relationship with stakeholders is how it engages with them. In practice, engaging with stakeholders includes; phone calls, emails, community consultation events, newsletters, website updates, social media and face to face visits.”

### **S** ASK ALL

**Q9** Has SSEN Transmission engaged with you while a local project has been in construction or development?

1. Yes
2. No

### **M** ASK IF Q9=1

**Q10** How do they typically engage with you? – READ OUT

1. Letter
2. Leaflet
3. Email
4. E-bulletin (e.g., electronic newsletter)
5. Telephone call
6. Face to face visit
7. Social media message
8. Webinars
9. Insight Reports
10. Local Press
11. Consultations
12. Town Hall events
13. Workshops
14. Community Liaison Groups
15. Surveys
16. Conferences/Events
17. Website/Blogs
18. Other (please specify)

### **S** ASK ALL

**Q11** SSEN Transmission often carry out consultation at different stages of their projects. Have you taken part in any of the consultation events, either in person or virtually?

1. Yes
2. No

### **O** ASK IF Q11=2

**Q12** If not, is there a reason why?

### **S** ASK ALL

**Q13** Do you think the information available on SSEN Transmission’s projects is accessible, easy to find and understand?

1. Yes

2. No

**O ASK IF Q13=2**

**Q14 What could they do to improve this?**

**S ASK ALL**

**Q15 What is your preferred method for them to engage with you? – READ OUT**

1. Letter
2. Leaflet
3. Email
4. E-bulletin (e.g., electronic newsletter)
5. Telephone call
6. Face to face visit
7. Text message
8. Social media message
9. Other (please specify)

**S ASK ALL**

**Q16 Thinking overall, as a stakeholder of SSEN Transmission, how satisfied are you with their engagement?**

Very Dissatisfied									Very Satisfied	Don't know
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	98

**O ASK IF Q16=1-9**

**Q17 How could this be improved?**

**IF Q16=1-6, READ OUT:**

**“That’s a shame to hear you’ve scored low. You can contact SSEN to update your contact preferences and how they engage with you.”**

**IF Q16=7-10, READ OUT:**

**“That’s great to hear. Don’t forget, if you want to change the way you engage with SSEN you can contact them and update your preferences any time.”**

**Offer contact details.**

**O ASK ALL**

**Q18 Thinking ahead, is there anything, not covered in the earlier questions that you would like to see SSEN Transmission do differently in the future.**

## **INFRASTRUCTURE QUESTIONS – PROJECT SPECIFIC**

SSEN Transmission's work can be very complex and affect communities in a variety of ways depending on many contributing factors. This can lead to stakeholders and communities being impacted both positively and negatively throughout the lifetime of a project. It is important for us to understand both the positive and negative impacts of our infrastructure work upon our stakeholders and communities.

**S** **ASK ALL**

**Q19** **Have you been impacted by an infrastructure project?**

**Note: impacted could theoretically be positive or negative, not just negative**

1. Yes, directly affected - *Someone directly impacted might be a community member, a landowner or a local business affected by our infrastructure works due to road closures, proximity to a substation or towers for overhead lines, access to private land, environmental concerns, noise etc.*
2. Yes, indirectly affected - *The stakeholder might not be directly impacted but will likely be indirectly impacted in some way, even if this is a very low impact. Stakeholders that are indirectly impacted but could be an elected member who has seen an influx of constituent complaints being emailed, a land agent acting on behalf of an owner, a supplier, or a local business somewhere on the supply chain. These might also be secondary impacts from stakeholder who are directly impacted such as the supply chain, local charities and third sector organisations.*
3. No

**QUOTA: MAX 20 – MONITOR AS PROJECT IS ONGOING**

**S** **ASK IF Q19=1 OR 2**

**Q20** **How close do you live to the project? – READ OUT**

1. Less than 1 mile
2. 1-3 miles
3. 3 – 5 miles
4. 5 miles +
5. 10 miles +
6. 20 miles +

**S** **ASK IF Q19=1 OR 2**

**Q21** **How much of an affect does the project typically have on you or your organisation/the customers that you represent?**

1. A large negative affect
2. A small negative affect
3. No real affect
4. A small positive affect
5. A large positive affect

**O** **ASK IF Q19=1 OR 2**

**Q22** **Please describe how you have been impacted? Please encourage feedback both positive and negative.**

**O** **ASK IF Q19=1 OR 2**

**Q23** **Please describe, in your own words the interaction you have with the project team at SSEN Transmission since the project started.**

**S** **ASK IF Q19=1 OR 2**

**Q24** Has the engagement with the SSEN Transmission Project Team reduced the negative impact or increased the positive impact the project as had on you/your community?

Please consider the following:

- How the project would have impacted you if there was no engagement.
- Additional support that was provided i.e., info on the project sent out, phone calls, questions answered, Community Liaison staff being easy to contact, ongoing support to handle issues when projects are in construction etc.
- Even if the outcome of a project route or location wasn't the outcome you wanted, did the engagement from SSEN staff (either in development or construction) provide the context and understanding or support to reduce the direct impact to them/their community.

1. Yes
2. No

**O** **ASK IF Q24=1**

**Q25** Please describe how.

**S** **ASK IF Q19=1 OR 2**

**Q26** How much do you know about the project? The needs for it, the duration, the route etc.

1. I have good knowledge about it
2. I have some knowledge about it
3. I have little knowledge about it
4. I have no knowledge other than it exists.

**O** **ASK IF Q19=1 OR 2**

**Q27** Do you know who the key contacts are for the project?

1. Yes
2. No

**O** **ASK ALL**

**Q28** Is there anything, not covered during today's interview, that you would have liked to have seen SSEN Transmission do differently while the project is ongoing? Please, in your own words, describe what this is.

**S** **ASK ALL**

**Q29** Impact Market Research and SSEN Transmission would like to invite stakeholders that have completed the survey to take part in a facilitated focus group session with other stakeholders in a virtual setting to draw from people's experiences and identify key improvements to our stakeholder engagement.

A focus group will bring together 6-8 stakeholders who have had similar experiences engaging with SSEN, allowing for more detailed feedback and discussion around key findings from the telephone surveys. These sessions will be conducted online, during January 2022 and will last up to 90 minutes.

**Would you like be interested in participating in these groups?**

1. Yes (if yes, mark this up on the contact list)
2. No



## WRAP-UP QUESTIONS

The purpose of this section is in line with best practice to refine the survey tool.

**INFO** We are very interested in hearing your views on our survey design.

### **G** ASK ALL

**D1** Using the rating please let us know how you would rate each of the following:

	<b>1</b> <b>Very Bad</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b> <b>Very Good</b>
Length of survey					
Ease of completion					
Ability to express my true opinion					
Overall experience					

If you have any additional feedback, please enter your comments here:

### **S** ASK ALL

**D2** Have you experienced any technical difficulties while taking the survey?

1. No
2. Yes (Please specify)

### **INFO**

**Thank you so much for taking part in our survey. We really appreciate your honest feedback and I'll be sure to send this over to SSEN who will review the finding and continue to make improvements. The results of this survey will be published and a copy of the report will be circulated to those who took part in the survey,**

## Appendix 2: Focus group discussion guide

### FOCUS GROUP STRUCTURE (90 MINUTES):

AREA OF DISCUSSION	TIME ALLOCATION
1. Moderator introduction	5 minutes
2. Warm up	5 minutes
3. Satisfaction and engagement	25 minutes
4. Impacted by recent projects	25 minutes

#### Moderator Introduction (5 minutes):

- Introduce yourself
- Explain that the research is being conducted on behalf of SSEN Transmission
- Explain purpose of discussion (*This research is about your experience of how SSEN Transmission have engaged with you when they have been developing, or constructing Infrastructure Projects that affect (you, your community, or your organisation).*)
- The aim of today is to develop tangible actions for SSEN Transmission to improve and enhance their engagement practices on infrastructure projects.

#### Moderator show Showcard A

- Confidentiality is guaranteed, no right/wrong answers, interested in everybody's opinions, in as much detail as possible. **All suggestions are welcome.**
- Explain audio and video recording, and members of the Impact and SSEN team observing.
- Any questions?
- A reminder that SSEN Transmission is part of the SSE Group which includes their other Networks Business, SSEN Distribution who maintain the lower voltage network that supplies electricity directly to homes and businesses in the North of Scotland. You may have spoken to them if you have experienced a power outage or damage to the network during a storm. This interview will focus on your experience of engaging with SSEN Transmission only.

#### Moderator show Showcard B

### Warm-up (5 minutes):

Please each introduce yourself:

- Name
- What type of stakeholder are you?
  - PROMPT if don't know: Academia/Innovation / Community Member NGO's (non-government organisation) / Statutory Consultee / Consumer Groups/Trade Bodies / Developers / Environment / Local Authorities / Government / Industry / Land / Supply Chain / Transmission Operator / Other (specify)

### Satisfaction and engagement (25 minutes)

The overall level of satisfaction was down on last years' figure, 36% from 66%, as was satisfaction with level of engagement, 34% down from 70%.

- Does these figures surprise you?
  - Why?
  - What would you expect them to be?
- Would you expect satisfaction with engagement be higher or lower than with the overall relationship?
  - Why is that?

### Moderator read out:

Communication was raised a key theme throughout the interviews, relating to various aspects of engagement. Typically, SSEN Transmission will communicate with their customers using the following methods, and engage with the following audiences.

### Show showcard C

- What are your thoughts on these methods?
- Have you been engaged with in these ways before?
  - Were you happy with it, at the time? Why?
- Do you think SSEN Transmission need to engage with any other audiences?
  - Who?

- Should they be tailoring their engagement methods to particular audiences?
  - How would methods differ across different audiences?

Looking specifically at events that SSEN Transmission run.

- Has anyone been to an engagement event conducted by SSEN Transmission? Please describe how it went
  - Was it relating to a specific project?
  - Were you satisfied with the information supplied?
  - How did you find out about the event?
- Speaking generally, what are your thoughts on how these events are promoted?
- How could this be improved?
  - What channels could be used?
  - How far in advance should they be promoted?
- Do you think the terminology for promoting these events is engaging?
- Are the materials used easy to understand?
- How could you improve these materials?

Moderator read out:

Moving on from events, there were mentions in the interviews about SSEN Transmission needing to ensure they are 'Genuine and open' when engaging with their stakeholders.

- What does this mean to you?
- How could SSEN Transmission be more genuine and open with you as a stakeholder?
- Have you got any examples of when SSEN Transmission have been genuine and open?
- Could you please describe a process of engagement that would demonstrate SSEN Transmission engaging with you in a genuine and open way?

Moderator read out:

Now we are moving on to talk about stakeholders inputting into project decisions.

## Show showcard D: Stakeholder input

### Moderator read out:

Stakeholder input is valuable to SSEN Transmission on all infrastructure projects and is imperative to shape proposals and identify concerns and opportunities.

### Our engagement aims to:

- **engage holistically with impacted stakeholders.**
- **inform stakeholders and communities of project need**
- **gather critical feedback on proposals**
- **acquire essential local knowledge**
- **use feedback to further develop proposals**

All engagement is documented and supplied to consenting bodies to evidence how public engagement has shaped the proposals. These are all publicly accessible.

- What are your thoughts on this?
- Do you think these are the right aims for SSEN Transmission to focus their engagement around?
  - Why is this?
- Do you think their engagement delivers against these aims?
  - Why?
- Have you ever seen any of these 'in action'?
- What can SSEN Transmission do to better communicate that stakeholders do have an impact in project decisions?
  - What channels should they use?
- Is there work to be done on how we communicate the overall process for project development?
  - How would this be improved?

## Engagement aimed at mitigating impact (25 minutes)

Moderator read out:

We would now like to cover how SSEN Transmission could better engage with their stakeholder to help mitigate the impact of infrastructure projects on their stakeholders.

- Has anyone engagement with SSEN Transmission either before, or during an infrastructure project, that has mitigated the impact, overall?
  - Please explain the process of how it happened, and how the impact was mitigated.

Show showcard E: Mitigating impact

Moderator read out:

During the development and construction of an infrastructure project, SSEN Transmission will engage with and support communities to mitigate any potential impact such as:

- Construction traffic
  - Road closures
  - Transportation of equipment
  - Noise
  - Visual impact
  - Economic impact
- Does anyone have any experience of being engaged with by SSEN Transmission in these ways?
    - Did their engagement help mitigate the impact of the ongoing project?

Show showcard F: Case Study 1

- Was this local to anyone in the group?
  - If so, did you noticed this engagement happening?
  - How did it affect the impact of the project on you personally?



- How do you think it would have helped mitigate the impact?
  - Do you think this is enough? Why?
- What else could have been done?

#### Show showcard G: Case Study 2

- Was this local to anyone in the group?
    - If so, did you noticed this engagement happening?
    - How did it affect the impact of the project on you personally?
  - How do you think it would have helped mitigate the impact?
    - Do you think this is enough? Why?
  - What else could have been done?
- 
- Thinking specially to you, and projects that have been completed that have impacted you, how could engagement have reduced the impact?
  - Aside from not doing the project, what else could SSEN Transmission done to help mitigate the impact?
  - How do SSEN Transmission 'tell the story' of this engagement better? i.e., explain to people what was done and how it helped people?

#### Further discussion on points raised (20 minutes):

Time at the end for anything that has come up during the session that is worth spending some dedicated time on.

SSEN Transmission to note any comments that came up during the session that they would like to probe on in more detail, and feed them to Impact team member, for discussion.

### Final thoughts (10 minutes):

- Thank you for your time today
- Anything else to help us ensure the experience our stakeholders get whilst an infrastructure project is ongoing is better?
  - What one thing would you change about your relationship with SSEN?

Show showcard H: Thank you

Invite SSEN to re-join the group and thank participants for their time

## Appendix 3: Focus group stimulus material

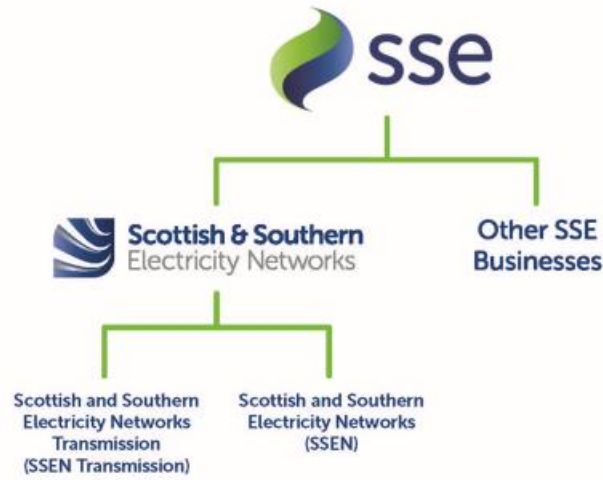


Showcard A

### AIM OF THE SESSION

Develop tangible actions for SSEN  
Transmission to improve and enhance their  
engagement practices on infrastructure  
projects.

## WHO ARE SSEN TRANSMISSION?



SSEN Transmission are responsible for the electricity transmission network in the north of Scotland, maintaining and investing in the high voltage 132kV, 220kV, 275kV and 400kV electricity transmission network.

## COMMUNICATION

### Methods

- Postcard maildrop
- Email mailing list
- Social media
- New SSEN Transmission Website
- Feedback forms
- Newspaper adverts
- Press releases
- Local networks

### Audience

- Elected members
- Local Authorities
- Community members
- Statutory Consultees

## STAKEHOLDER INPUT

Stakeholder input is valuable to SSEN Transmission on all infrastructure projects and is imperative to shape proposals and identify concerns and opportunities.

Our engagement aims to:

- engage holistically with impacted stakeholders.
- inform stakeholders and communities of project need
- gather critical feedback on proposals
- acquire essential local knowledge
- use feedback to further develop proposals

All engagement is documented and supplied to consenting bodies to evidence how public engagement has shaped the proposals. These are all publicly accessible.

## MITIGATING IMPACT

During the development and construction of an infrastructure project, SSEN Transmission will engage with and support communities to mitigate any potential impact such as:

- Construction traffic
- Road closures
- Transportation of equipment
- Noise
- Visual impact
- Economic impact

## MITIGATING IMPACT

### Case study 1

In 2019 we had planned road closures in Nethy Bridge for installing cable ducts for the project in the area, following engagement with the local Community Council we worked with the Principle Contractor and instead of open cutting the road they used Horizontal Directional Drilling techniques which meant that no road closures were required and the ducts still were installed keeping the project on programme.

Through pro-active engagement, we were able to reduce the impact on the local highland games and the local community during the busy tourist period and affect.

## MITIGATING IMPACT

### Case study 2

The CPNI (Centre of Protection of National Infrastructure) fencing project involves upgrading the security fencing at Beaulay substation to meet with CPNI guidelines. This includes the upgrading of the perimeter fence, CCTV and perimeter detection.

The Beaulay Community Liaison Group were very concerned about the visual impact of the galvanised steel fence both for the local community and the many road users on the A831 and they requested that the fence was powder-coated in an olive-green colour.

SSEN Transmission's technical team investigated the properties of powder-coated security fencing (as the fence is required to be earthed) to ascertain the possibilities of a coloured security fence which would also incur a large additional expense.

The CLG and Community were delighted to find that Transmission were able to and agree to install the earthed fence of their preferred colour, mitigating the visual impact of the fence to the public.