

NAILSEA ACTION AGAINST PYLONS

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Independent report is good news for underground powerlines

OR

National Grid's costs for underground cables were out-of-date

Campaigners are welcoming the publication of the long-awaited report from the Institute of Engineering & Technology (IET) on the comparison of whole life costs of possible electricity transmission methods. Published on 31 January 2012, the report was commissioned by the government after public pressure from campaign groups and MPs in North Somerset and other counties where giant pylons some 50 metres high are planned.

"We have been waiting for over 2 years for independent and authoritative data to support our information that the costs of undergrounding were substantially lower than those quoted by National Grid", said Keith Edwards, chair of Nailsea Action Against Pylons.

"This report brings very good news. The report clearly shows that **National Grid's costs were out-of-date**", added Fiona Erleigh, spokesperson for Nailsea Action Against Pylons.

At the initial public consultations on the Hinkley C Connection in autumn 2009, National Grid quoted underground cables to be 12-17 times more expensive than overhead lines. In this report, the relative lifetime costs show undergrounding being only 4-6 times more expensive.

Fiona points out that "this is a significant drop from approximately 15 times to just 5 times, making underground cables much more affordable. It leads us to wonder how much further this ratio will drop as underground cables get ever cheaper with increased production, in the same way the cost of flat screen TVs have tumbled."

The IET report agrees "the conclusions are clearly given at this point in time, and **cannot reliably be projected far into the future** as technological developments could reduce some elements of the costs."

Encouragingly, some 55% of the 750km of planned high voltage powerlines in Europe will be laid underground. Denmark has gone further and said that 100% of new lines

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will go underground and National Grid will be undergrounding a new powerline in Lincolnshire in its entirety.

Campaigners calculate the cost implication to consumers of putting all of the Hinkley to Avonmouth route underground is no longer £1 per year, but now **only 30p annually per average household**. This is a trivial cost to preserve our landscape for future generations, to bury the blight of giant pylons and remove the fear of negative impacts on the health and homes of our communities in North Somerset.

Over the next few weeks, technical experts will be studying the report in detail to further advise the community. On initial readings, the report appears to have fairly comprehensive data on overhead lines, underground and subsea cabling, but has less data on alternative underground cabling such as Gas Insulated Lines (GIL).

The IET Report admits it did not study social, tourism and environmental costs and adds that “financial cost cannot be used as the only factor in the choice of one technology over another”.

In the light of the IET report and the much lower costs of 30p per household, campaigners are calling for National Grid to go back to the drawing board and reconsider undergrounding the entire 60km Hinkley to Avonmouth connection. Coupled with the environmental, social and visual impact of pylons it is irresponsible to continue using last century technology to meet the demands and expectations of the next century.

Link to IET report <http://www.theiet.org/policy/media/press-releases/20120131.cfm>