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1. There has long been talk of a potential electricity grid under the sea. The company Airtricity proposed sub-sea connections linked to wind farms off north east Scotland, and developed the idea to a grid linking with mainland Europe. A European Super Grid was proposed (news^{263.9}) interconnecting Europe and regions around its borders with a high-voltage direct current (HVDC) power grid. There have also been proposals for Smart Grids (using digital technology to match demand with availability) and a Euro Super-Smart Grid (SSG). These ideas have been fairly speculative, at the “vision” stage. Various wikipedia pages describe these proposals.

2. Alongside the above wider grid ideas, motivated for security and efficiency, there is a long-standing EU policy on Trans-European Networks (TENs), motivated by market competition in a unified market place. This provides funds to support grid interconnection between countries and their electricity markets.
http://ec.europa.eu/energy/infrastructure/index_en.htm

3. One element in EU grid concepts is the HVDC North Seas Countries Offshore Grid Initiative, motivated also for offshore wind power. In December 2009 nine countries including the UK and Ireland signed a political declaration supporting this idea. It is still at the vision stage but strategic plans and a “blueprint” are expected in 2010, though it is recognized that costs are “enormous” and “barriers still exist”.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Sea_Offshore_Grid

4. It is in the above European context that ideas such as the sub-sea link from the Hebrides to the Mersey, promoted by then Energy Minister Brian Wilson and now by the joint industry-government Vision for 2020 (news²⁸³ and Chairman’s Report 2009); the UK Ring Main idea of Stour Valley Underground (news^{292.7}); and sub-sea transmission cables down both east and west coasts of Britain carrying wind power from northern Scotland, need to be seen.

5. CPRE made a good response to the DECC consultation on the draft National Policy Statements (NPS) on energy infrastructure. CPRE makes the point that the draft NPS accepts the government-industry strategic overview (Vision for 2020) without it having a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). Likewise the presumption against undergrounding is based on industry views without an SEA. The essence is also in a joint response to EN-5 made by CPRE together with the national bodies for National Parks and AONBs.
http://www.cpre.org.uk/filegrab/CR_EnergyNPSs_DB0210.pdf?ref=4154

6. The Infrastructure Planning Commission (IPC) is required to keep a record of advice it gives. The IPC web site seems transparent and easily accessible – well done! A log of advice given can be accessed under Advice and Guidance / Register of Advice / IPC Advice Log at <http://infrastructure.independent.gov.uk/>

7. IPC gave advice to National Grid, listed at 10/0034 in the log. The item starts: “Advised National Grid (NG) about the risks of identifying the initial choice of route options and then setting out the case against undergrounding or an undersea route, without explaining fully why (in NG’s view) they should not be taken forward. This approach could be seen by other parties as predetermining the choice of a route(s) and cloud the approach of all to any subsequent consultation.” Indeed! The IPC note goes on to offer to facilitate a meeting between NG and interested parties. Thanks to Bob Barfoot and the CPRE South West Energy Topic Group for raising these issues with IPC and for passing on this information.

8. Stour Valley Underground has today (28 Feb) distributed its formal response to NG’s consultation on its proposed Bramford-Twinstead 400kV line. The SVU response challenges both the consultation and the imposition of the industry’s strategy, citing the IPC advice as above. SVU call for connecting the new Sizewell nuclear reactors and off-shore wind by under-sea cables to London via the Thames estuary, integral with the mooted EU North Sea grid initiative, instead of an overhead line through the countryside. <http://www.stourvalleyunderground.org.uk/>