

Clarification of Route Development Process

16th June, 2009

Introduction

As recorded in the minutes of the pre-application consultation meeting between the Applicant and An Bord Pleanála dated 21st January, 2009, in respect of the pending application for the proposed Corrib Onshore Pipeline, the Board's advice to the Applicant included the following:

- Robust route selection criteria should be detailed including considerations of a technical or commercial nature.
- Any negative outcomes of a chosen route should be measured and compared with the original route.

The route selection process, including the various route selection criteria employed in selecting the proposed onshore pipeline route is detailed in Chapter 3, Volume 1 of the Corrib Onshore Pipeline EIS. This note provides additional detail regarding the route development process for the Corrib Onshore Pipeline. As such it should be read in conjunction with Chapter 3 of the EIS.

The selection criteria used in the route development process derived from the public consultation process undertaken by RPS in the period February to June, 2007 as well as from input from the technical, environmental and other experts of the project team.

Corridor Evaluation and Short-listing Process (September, 2007)

Input from all specialists for each corridor was recorded on a matrix (see Sheet 1 attached) where the identified selection criteria were listed against identified corridor options and the previously approved route.

Each specialist provided input into the matrix, in his/her area of expertise and based on the extent of knowledge that had been obtained for each corridor by this time. In this way no criterion was deemed to be of any greater or lesser importance than another. The criteria were broken down into sub-criteria to allow for additional detail in the evaluation process.

At this stage, such information was generally of a high level, primarily based upon desk-top and vantage point / visual surveys. However, an additional detailed matrix on environmental factors was compiled (see Sheet 2 attached), deriving from the more extensive environmental studies that had been carried out in the area over the preceding years. This environmental information is summarised on the main evaluation matrix.

Following input of all specialist information, the characteristics of each corridor in respect of the agreed route selection criteria were evaluated qualitatively by the various members of the multi-disciplinary project team in a series of workshops.

A colour coding system was used in the evaluation process to assist in the determination of preferred corridors as follows:

- Green – indicates that the criterion is 'preferred';
- Amber – indicates that the criterion represents a 'potential constraint'; and
- No colour – indicates that one corridor cannot be distinguished from another in respect of a particular criterion i.e. it is not preferred or does not have potential constraints.

The matrix allowed a comparative evaluation of identified corridors and the previously approved route, in terms of community, environmental and technical route selection criteria. Resulting from this comparative evaluation, all route corridors emerged as having criteria that constituted both potential preferences and constraints (envisaged positive and negative outcomes).

The result of the evaluation process was that Corridors A, B and C emerged as being preferred / having least constraint. The primary reasons for short-listing these corridors is detailed in Chapter 3 of the EIS. It is clear from the evaluation matrix (Sheet 1) that the preferred corridors were least constrained. The iterative qualitative evaluation process meant that the other identified corridors were not eliminated from further consideration should this have been required i.e. should new information cause the short-listed corridors to be eliminated.

Detailed Corridor / Route Evaluation (November, 2007 - February, 2008)

Further assessment of the short-listed corridors, and ongoing public and stakeholder consultation, revealed potential significant constraints with corridors A and C; this resulted in the identification of variations to these corridors as explained in Chapter 3 of the EIS.

The same multi-disciplinary qualitative process was used to evaluate the short-listed corridors and their variations against the agreed selection criteria, and with the input of new information which had been obtained in the interim period (see Sheet 3 attached). The evaluation continued to include the previously approved route. This ensured that in overall terms, the evaluation of alternative corridors / routes was consistent and robust.

Subsequently, criteria which had a neutral evaluation for all identified short-listed corridors were removed from the matrix (see Sheet 4 attached). This was because it was considered that these criteria no longer assisted in identifying a preferred corridor / route. However, this was no reflection on the importance or otherwise of these criteria. This allowed for a greater focus on the criteria which were considered to be more preferred / constrained for each route.

Having, done this, a further evaluation sought to remove criteria which were no longer considered to be of critical relevance to the selection process or which were effectively covered by other criteria. This iterative evaluation also allowed for input of new information as before.

The result of this process was a Reduced Route Evaluation Matrix (see Sheet 5 attached). This was further refined (with the elimination of 1 other criterion) in the Final Route Evaluation Matrix (see Sheet 6 attached), dated February, 2008.

The Final Route Evaluation Matrix identified Route C1 as having the least number of potential constraints when evaluated against the other identified potential routes and the previously approved route.

Conclusion

It is considered that the iterative qualitative route selection process carried out over the period September, 2007 to February, 2008 is very robust. It allowed for the inclusion of all route selection criteria that emerged during the public consultation process; it allowed for the evaluation of new information as more focussed environmental and technical studies were undertaken; it allowed for an evaluation of the previously approved route against this agreed set of route selection criteria; and finally it did not rely on a weighting of criteria. This process therefore allowed a clear understanding and evaluation of the balance of community, technical and environmental criteria for each identified route option.