

# Meeting Snapshot

## New Transmission Connections Workshop | Part 1

Monday 11 November 2024

Participants	
Attendees	AusNet staff
Glenn Orgias, <i>Chair of Transmission Stakeholder Advisory Panel (TSAP)</i>	Liz Ryan, <i>EGM Transmission</i>
Alex Crosby, <i>TSAP Member</i>	Tom Hallam, <i>GM Strategy &amp; Regulation (Transmission)</i>
Bart Simes, <i>Virya Energy</i>	Aaron McArrich, <i>GM Project Delivery (Transmission)</i>
Bensil Paul, <i>BayWa r.e.</i>	Hitendra Joshi, <i>Head of Regulated Victorian Transmission Connections</i>
Craig Aumuller, <i>Trina Solar</i>	Jack San, <i>Senior Manager, Policy and Advocacy</i>
Daniel Mapleson, <i>Offshore Infrastructure Registrar</i>	Lucy Holder, <i>Customer Engagement Manager</i>
David Prins, <i>Consumer Challenge Panel</i>	Jason Jina, <i>Policy and Reform Manager</i>
David Shapero, <i>ReFuture</i>	Rebecca Love, <i>Senior Regulatory Economist</i>
Harshal Patel, <i>Beca, TSAP Member</i>	Charlie Qin, <i>Regulatory Economist</i>
Ian Christmas, <i>Edify Energy</i>	Emma Ferrie, <i>Engagement Specialist</i>
Jay Knight, <i>Wind Prospect</i>	Lia Mavrias, <i>Business Graduate</i>
Khalid Beg, <i>BayWa r.e.</i>	
Lai Nguyen, <i>AEMO</i>	
Laura Letteron, <i>Engie</i>	
Lockie Curran, <i>Flow Power</i>	
Lotte Scheel, <i>AER</i>	
Michael Jones, <i>WestWind Energy</i>	
Nicholas Hall, <i>OX2</i>	
Nimisha Upadhayay, <i>WestWind Energy</i>	
Peter Higgins, <i>ReFuture</i>	
Rebecca Xuereb, <i>TSAP Member</i>	
Richard Robson, <i>Powercor, TSAP Member</i>	
Rina Bessarion, <i>AEMO</i>	
Roy Unny, <i>TSAP Member</i>	
Steve Crowe, <i>Virya Energy</i>	
Theodora Karastergiou, <i>TSAP Member</i>	
Tim Sheridan, <i>DEECA</i>	

### Overview of the session:

On Monday 11 November 2024, AusNet hosted an in-depth workshop on the connections process into the Victorian Transmission Network. The purpose of this session was for AusNet to hear from developers and other stakeholders involved in connections to the current Victorian transmission network to enhance their current understanding of what good looks like, how their performance is meeting expectations, and identify opportunities to improve the connections process.

AusNet directly invited all parties involved in non-contestable connections projects in Victoria in the last 18 months, plus representatives from the Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO), the Victorian Department of Energy, Environment and

Climate Action (DEECA), the State Electricity Commission (SEC), the Australian Energy Regulator (AER), and VicGrid. Additionally, the session was promoted on LinkedIn and AusNet's Community Hub website, with an open invitation to all interested parties to register and attend.

Ahead of the meeting, AusNet distributed a slide pack to all participants as pre-reading material to provide context for the session and encourage active participation on the day.

Attendees were seated on tables roughly based on their background and involvement in the connection process. Organising "like" participants together generally allows for in-depth discussions relevant to their specific interests.

Feedback was collected through worksheets, where attendees were asked to provide their views and comments, and via group discussions at the end of each session. 6 topics were discussed:

- Capacity to connect into the Victorian transmission network
- Fair and transparent charging
- Timelines and visibility of the connections process
- Effective coordination behind the scenes
- Information and education
- Customer service and technical expertise

The worksheets included a range of prompts to extract feedback. Feedback was captured through the information on the worksheets, table group discussions and the whole-group discussion at the end of each segment. Feedback was largely consistent and dissenting views have been captured in this report.

These topics were chosen because they are known priorities for connecting parties, and topics raised with AusNet previously. Attendees were given an opportunity to suggest additional topics in the forum, but it was agreed all items attendees wanted to discuss could be captured under the headings above.

## AGENDA

Agenda item	Lead/s	Timings
Welcome & introduction	Glenn Orgias & Liz Ryan	2.00pm   10 mins
Overview of the current connections process	Tom Hallam	2.10pm   10 mins
Key connections process aspects	Tom Hallam	2.20pm   10mins
Afternoon tea		2.30pm   10mins
Workshopping the process aspects	Glenn Orgias	2.40pm   2hr15mins
Next steps and close	Liz Ryan	4.55pm   5mins
Close		5.00pm

## Key discussion points

Agenda item	Key discussion points
<b>Welcome</b>	AusNet's Liz Ryan welcomed participants and outlined the meeting purpose. Glenn Orgias, independent chair, then spoke through the agenda.
<b>1. Overview of the current connections process</b>	AusNet's Tom Hallam gave an overview of the current connections process into the transmission network, highlighting AusNet's role in the process and the priorities of involved stakeholders.

## 2. Capacity to connect

AusNet introduced and gave an overview of the capacity and constraints in the Victorian transmission network, and what is in and out of its control with respect to augmentation and growth.

Feedback received on capacity to connect included:

- **A need for communications to be streamlined and centralised:** Attendees suggested AusNet advocate for a central portal to support communications and technical design standards between connecting parties, AusNet and AEMO. This would help connecting parties receive up to date information and improve communication. Connecting parties expressed that they often feel caught in the middle of AusNet and AEMO and suggested a common portal centralising communications between organisations would benefit all.

*Opportunity: Creation of a joint portal between AusNet, AEMO and connecting parties to facilitate centralised communication, provide access to design standards, and outline timelines throughout the entire connections process.*

- **Connecting parties want more visibility of planned upgrades:** Connecting parties would like more visibility on planned upgrades to the transmission network early in the connections process. It was noted that these upgrades can impact and influence their decision making, and at times they don't find out until late into the connections process. Having access to a list of planned upgrades would be highly beneficial for connecting parties.

*Opportunity: Connecting parties to have access to a list of planned upgrades to the Victorian Transmission Network.*

- **Connecting parties want more visibility of grid capacity:** Connecting parties would like better visibility of available capacity before submitting applications. Connecting parties expressed that having guaranteed capacity and/or visibility of where their project sits in the queue would reduce their risk and may alter business cases.

Suggestions to increase visibility of grid capacity include:

- a heat map showcasing capacity across the transmission network
- a system or platform that allows connecting parties to view historic megawatts (MW) and megavolt-amperes reactive (MVAR) flows in the transmission network
- a system to guarantee space on the network for projects
- ability to track where a project is sitting in the connections queue, and how and why that queue is or might be changing.

*Opportunities: Creation and implementation of:*

- a heat map to allow connecting parties to view the overall capacity on the transmission network.
- a system or platform that allows connecting parties to view historic megawatts (MW) and megavolt-amperes reactive (MVAR) flows in the transmission network.
- a system that allows connecting parties to guarantee space for their projects on the transmission network
- a system that allows connecting parties to have better visibility of progress on their projects.

- **AusNet is seen to be missing opportunities for more proactive planning:** Some connecting parties feel there is not enough proactive network replacement, with AusNet instead waiting for issues to arise before they are fixed. They would like to see planning for and investment to address potential issues before they materialise. An example given was upgrading an asset before the end of its life, rather than waiting to replace it with an identical version, which might help make it easier for new projects to connect.

Connecting parties also raised a need for more proactive site planning, taking into consideration where it will be easier to connect to the network.

*Opportunity: More proactive network replacements, and strategic placement of terminal stations to help enhance capacity and streamline future connections.*

- **Land acquisition blocking connection infrastructure from being built:** Connecting parties raised that there is an issue with individuals buying up land around terminal stations and preventing or making it challenging for others to build and connect new renewables / storage developments.

*Opportunity: Implement strategies to help prevent land banking and support the construction of connection infrastructure.*

- **Connecting parties want AusNet to be more open to innovative and non-standard solutions:** Connecting parties shared that there are opportunities to explore innovative ideas for increasing capacity, including looking to and assessing technologies that TNSPs in other states are utilising. Connecting parties would appreciate the option to discuss and work with AusNet to explore how capacity on the network can be increased.

*Opportunity: Implement innovative strategies and tools used by other TNSPs and integrate feedback and ideas from connecting parties to help increase capacity on the network.*

### 3. Fair & transparent charging

AusNet gave an overview of the technical and commercial factors that underpin its pricing strategy, and what it currently does to support fair and transparent charging.

Feedback received on fair & transparent charging included:

- **Connecting parties would like more transparency on costs and repricing:** Connecting parties would like to see more transparency and detail on AusNet's costs and repricing. This includes seeing a detailed scope of work and detailed breakdown of costs.

*Opportunity: Connecting parties to receive a more detailed breakdown of costs and scope from AusNet.*

- **Connecting parties would like more accurate and detailed upfront cost estimates:** Connecting parties would like more accuracy on AusNet's initial cost estimates, noting that a variation of +/- 40% is too large to be useful for them. Connecting parties raised that last minute changes in price often can't be absorbed by the project, and the price increasing can make a non-contestable project (<\$10 million) contestable (>\$10 million).

*Opportunity: Price estimate strategy from AusNet to be reviewed to investigate if a more detailed estimate can be provided to connecting parties earlier in the connections process, or if there is an option for a fixed price for connections.*

- **AusNet to share information when certainty can't be provided:** Connecting parties would like AusNet to share more information on what is driving the uncertainty, to help them complete their own more detailed risk and cost-benefit assessments.

*Opportunity: AusNet to provide connecting parties with information on what is driving uncertainty where applicable.*

- **Engagement on pricing to occur earlier:** Connecting parties want engagement on pricing to occur earlier in the process. Connecting parties shared that if the mandatory offer came earlier, it would allow for changes that are not possible with the current timing. This lag can lead to project delays or inappropriate solutions being put forward.

*Opportunity: Engagement on pricing to occur earlier in the connections process.*

- **Connecting parties want assurance AusNet's prices are fair and benchmarked across industry standards:** Some connecting parties think AusNet has no incentive to manage delivery partners' costs due to the direct cost pass-through arrangement with AusNet's delivery partners. Connecting parties would like AusNet's KPIs to help mitigate this from occurring. Additionally, connecting parties would like to see AusNet benchmark its costs against third parties and/or other TNSPs. This would help give connecting parties' confidence that charges from or passed on by AusNet are competitive and in line with industry standards.

*Opportunities:*

- Continuous efforts to optimise AusNet's KPIs to minimise the potential of high costs from AusNet's delivery partners being passed directly through to connecting parties.
- AusNet's prices to be benchmarked against third parties and TNSPs in other states.

## 4. Timelines and visibility

AusNet gave an overview of the current timeframes for stages in the connections process, and steps it has taken to reduce wait times.

Feedback received on timelines and visibility included:

- **Connecting parties would like AusNet involved earlier:** Connecting parties would find it beneficial to have AusNet involved earlier in the connections process to help streamline the process and ensure AusNet is across the details in the initial requests.

*Opportunity: AusNet to be involved earlier in the connections process to help streamline the connections process and be better across the details in connection parties' initial requests.*

- **Increased visibility of the connections process, including specific roles that need to be completed by AusNet, AEMO and connecting parties:** Connecting parties would like more visibility and transparency over the broader connections process, as well as the specific roles they need to complete and what roles AusNet and AEMO will complete. Key aspects within the process connecting parties would like visibility on include:
  - project and construction schedules
  - aspects of the contract that are up for negotiation
  - what is funded augmentation versus prescribed services.

*Opportunity: Increase and improve visibility and transparency of the connections process including:*

- the specific roles and responsibilities of AusNet, AEMO, and connecting parties in the connections process
- project and construction schedules
- aspects of the contract that are negotiable
- the difference between funded augmentation and prescribed services.

- **Connecting parties would like to receive accurate timelines:** Connecting parties find AusNet's prescribed timelines reasonable. AusNet's prescribed timelines are:
  - Application: Approx 12-14 weeks
  - Contract: Approx 2-6 months
  - Construction: Dependent on the scope of the project

However, connecting parties noted that in reality these timelines are often not met, and would like more certainty in the timelines AusNet prescribes.

*Opportunity: Review of the accuracy of AusNet's prescribed timelines and factors that may be causing delays.*

- **Technical and contractual workstreams to run in parallel to reduce timelines:** Connecting parties would find it beneficial for technical and contractual workstreams to run in parallel to help reduce timelines and manage project uncertainties.

*Opportunity: Technical and contractual workstreams to run in parallel.*

- **Connecting parties would like more flexibility on terms and conditions:** Increased flexibility on the terms and conditions would help reduce challenges for connecting parties in the contractual stage. Currently connecting parties feel they have to push hard to 'unlock' areas of flexibility.

*Opportunity: Allow for greater flexibility in the terms and conditions, as well as increase visibility on what aspects currently have flexibility.*

## 5. Effective coordination behind the scenes

AusNet gave an overview of the key stakeholders and organisations that it coordinates with to enable connections into the transmission network.

Feedback received on effective coordination behind the scenes included:

- **Centralised communication between connecting parties, AusNet and AEMO:** A central portal accessible by AusNet and AEMO to track communications and timelines with connecting parties would be beneficial to help streamline communication.

*Opportunity: As mentioned under opportunities for 'Capacity to connect', creation of a joint portal between AusNet, AEMO and connecting parties to facilitate centralised communication, provide access to design standards, and outline timelines throughout the entire connections process.*

- **Understanding the role of VicGrid:** There is some confusion and uncertainty around the role VicGrid will play in the connections process into the transmission network. Connecting parties would like to be kept informed on any changes that may occur as this develops and progresses.
- *Opportunity: Connecting parties to be kept up to date with any changes VicGrid makes to the connections process.*

## 6. Information & education

AusNet provided an overview of the role connecting parties play in facilitating a smooth connections process, and the support AusNet provides.

Feedback received on information and education that connecting parties would find most useful include:

- **Connecting parties would like clear expectations and guidelines:** Connecting parties would like to have a clear understanding of what good looks like and what is expected from them.
- **More certainty and clarity on responsibilities:** Connecting parties would like more certainty on process management and ownership, making it clear who does what between AEMO and AusNet, and at what stage of the process. This could include providing a fact sheet on each stage of the process with a responsibility matrix.
- **Understanding what can be negotiated vs what is fixed in the connections process:** Connecting parties would like further clarity of which aspects of the process are flexible and can be negotiated versus what is fixed.
- **Access to AusNet's Technical information :** Connecting parties would find it helpful if AusNet's Station Design Manual (SDM) and other relevant technical resources were made accessible on its website.
- **More information on how connecting parties can establish early engagement:** Connecting parties would like more information on how to establish early engagement.

*Opportunities: Fact sheets to be shared either on AusNet's website or through a tech portal similar to Ausgrid's that outline:*

- the responsibilities and steps connecting parties need to take (highlighting what 'good looks like')
  - how connecting parties can establish early engagement
  - the roles of AusNet and AEMO at every stage in the connections process.
- **Connecting parties would like AusNet to conduct technical workshops on the connections process:** Connecting parties would find it useful if AusNet offered technical workshops on the connections process. It was noted that engineers could earn Continuing Professional Development (CPD) points by participating, and it would help increase knowledge around the processes and expectations in the connections process.

*Opportunity: AusNet to investigate how it might provide technical workshops to help educate and upskill connecting parties.*

## 7. Customer service & technical expertise

AusNet gave an overview of the current level of support and technical expertise that it provides developers throughout the connections process.

Connecting parties gave AusNet a wide range of feedback on the provided worksheets. Some attendees ranked AusNet's customer service and technical expertise favourably, while others ranked it poorly. However, there was consensus on the types of opportunities connecting parties would like implemented. The Feedback received on AusNet's customer service and technical expertise included:

- **Connecting parties would like AusNet's standards to be based on new technologies and modelling practices:** It was suggested that AusNet review its engineering and technical standards generally to ensure they adopt new technologies and modelling practices. No specific areas that are out of date were referenced. It was also suggested that AusNet could look to align its standards with other TNSPs' standards.

*Opportunity: Updating AusNet's engineering and technical standards with new technologies and modelling practices, to generally align with other TNSPs' standards.*

- **AusNet managing staff turnover and consistency through the duration of projects:** Connecting parties noted that while AusNet has strong technical expertise, continuity of knowledge for specific projects is very important. Staff turnover is high across the sector, with turnover in AusNet's team having potential to cause a significant impact on the continuity of their connections projects and lead to confusion on who to go to and who the decision-makers are. Connecting parties would like to have an overview of who the decision-maker is for each step of the connections process so there is less confusion if an AusNet staff member leaves during a project.

*Opportunities:*

- *Connecting parties to be provided with a clear overview of who the decision maker is for each step in the connections process to help reduce uncertainty if an AusNet employee leaves the project mid-way.*
- *AusNet to review its internal handover procedures to ensure that customers are well informed and to maintain seamless knowledge transfer when staff changes occur on projects.*

- **Connecting parties need clear, timely and consistent updates:** Connecting parties need clear, timely and consistent updates on changes that impact their project's connections process.

*Opportunity: Connecting parties to receive clear, timely and consistent updates, particularly on changes that impact their project's connections process.*

## 8. Close, actions and next steps

AusNet's Liz Ryan concluded the session, thanking attendees for their time and feedback. Liz informed the group that AusNet will invite them to Part 2 of the New Connections Deep Dive in 2025, which will cover how AusNet is implementing this feedback to make improvements and reduce pain points for customers and stakeholders involved in the connections process.

## AusNet's response to opportunities

Below are AusNet's responses to the opportunities for the connections process raised and identified during the deep dive workshop:

Theme	Opportunity suggested at Forum #1	AusNet response for further discussion in Forum #2
1 <b>Capacity to connect</b>	Creation of a joint portal between AusNet, AEMO and connecting parties to facilitate centralised communication, provide access to design standards, and outline timelines throughout the entire connections process.	<b>VicGrid process reviews in place. The deep dive has influenced AusNet advocacy on possible improvements.</b>  VicGrid is taking over responsibility for several Victorian connections processes on 1 July 2025. We will talk to current/future reviews relevant to this.

Theme	Opportunity suggested at Forum #1	AusNet response for further discussion in Forum #2
<b>2 Capacity to connect</b>	Connecting parties to have access to a list of planned upgrades to the Victorian Transmission Network.	<b>Yes, AusNet will action, will present options</b>  This will be based on public planning documentation produced by AEMO, VicGrid, AusNet and distributors.
<b>3 Capacity to connect</b>	Implementation and creation of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a heat map to allow connecting parties to view the overall capacity on the transmission network.</li> <li>a system or platform that allows connecting parties to view historic megawatts (MW) and megavolt-amperes reactive (MVAR) flows in the transmission network.</li> <li>a system that allows connecting parties to guarantee space for their projects on the transmission network</li> <li>a system that allows connecting parties to have better visibility of progress on their projects.</li> </ul>	<b>Under consideration, will present options</b>  AusNet are open to further input/feedback to identify opportunities to provide helpful resources (that don't face major challenges).  Guarantees of space or access are the responsibility of AEMO or VicGrid from 1 July 2025.
<b>4 Capacity to connect</b>	More proactive network replacements, and strategic placement of terminal stations to help enhance capacity and streamline future connections	<b>Yes, AusNet will present on historic, current and forecast work.</b>  Stakeholders are invited to present ideas at the feedback session.
<b>5 Capacity to connect</b>	Implement strategies to help prevent land banking and support the construction of connection infrastructure.	<b>Responsibility sits with planners and Government who have processes in place. No further action here.</b>  There are a number of ongoing reviews/processes that present more suitable forums to address policy issues such as land banking.
<b>6 Capacity to connect</b>	Implement innovative strategies and tools used by other TNSPs and integrate feedback and ideas from connecting parties to help increase capacity on the network.	<b>Yes, AusNet will action.</b> We'll share our approach for feedback in the forum. We're very keen for your specific ideas here, if you have them.
<b>7 Fair and transparent charging</b>	Connecting parties to receive a more detailed breakdown of costs and scope from AusNet.	<b>Yes, AusNet will action.</b> We'll share our approach for feedback in the forum.
<b>8 Fair and transparent charging</b>	Price estimate strategy from AusNet to be reviewed to investigate if a more detailed estimate can be provided to connecting parties earlier in the connections process, or if there is an option for a fixed price for connections.	<b>Yes, AusNet will action.</b> We'll share our approach for feedback in the forum.
<b>9 Fair and transparent charging</b>	AusNet to provide connecting parties with information on what is driving uncertainty where applicable.	<b>Yes, AusNet will action.</b> We'll share our approach for feedback in the forum.
<b>10 Fair and transparent charging</b>	Engagement on pricing to occur earlier in the connections process.	<b>Yes, AusNet will action.</b> We'll share our approach for feedback in the forum.



Theme	Opportunity suggested at Forum #1	AusNet response for further discussion in Forum #2
11 Fair and transparent charging	<p>Continuous efforts to optimise AusNet's KPIs to minimise the potential of high costs from AusNet's delivery partners being passed directly through to connecting parties.</p> <p>AusNet's prices to be benchmarked against third parties and TNSPs in other states.</p>	<b>Yes, AusNet will action.</b> We'll share our approach for feedback in the forum.
12 Timelines and visibility	AusNet to be involved earlier in the connections process to help streamline the connections process and be better across the details in connection parties' initial requests.	<b>Yes, AusNet will action.</b> We'll share our approach for feedback in the forum.
13 Timelines and visibility	<p>Increase and improve visibility and transparency of the connections process including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the specific roles and responsibilities of AusNet, AEMO, and connecting parties in the connections process</li> <li>project and construction schedules</li> <li>aspects of the contract that are negotiable the difference between funded augmentation and prescribed services.</li> </ul>	<b>Yes, AusNet will action.</b> We'll share our approach for feedback in the forum.
14 Timelines and visibility	Review of the accuracy of AusNet's prescribed timelines and factors that may be causing delays.	<b>Yes, AusNet will action.</b> We'll share our approach for feedback in the forum.
15 Timelines and visibility	Technical and contractual workstreams to run in parallel.	<b>Yes, AusNet will action.</b> We'll share our approach for feedback in the forum.
16 Timelines and visibility	Allow for greater flexibility in the terms and conditions, as well as increase visibility on what aspects currently have flexibility.	<b>Yes, AusNet will action.</b> We'll share our approach for feedback in the forum.
17 Effective coordination behind the scenes	As mentioned under opportunities for 'Capacity to connect', creation of a joint portal between AusNet, AEMO and connecting parties to facilitate centralised communication, provide access to design standards, and outline timelines throughout the entire connections process.	<b>Yes, AusNet will action.</b> We'll share our approach for feedback in the forum.
18 Effective coordination behind the scenes	Connecting parties to be kept up to date with any changes VicGrid makes to the connections process.	<b>Yes, AusNet will action.</b> We'll share our approach for feedback in the forum.
19 Information and education	<p>Fact sheets to be shared either on AusNet's website or through a tech portal similar to Ausgrid's that outline:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the responsibilities and steps connecting parties need to take (highlighting what 'good looks like')</li> <li>how connecting parties can establish early engagement</li> </ul>	<b>Yes, AusNet will action.</b> We'll share our approach for feedback in the forum. We're very keen for your specific ideas here, if you have them.

Theme	Opportunity suggested at Forum #1	AusNet response for further discussion in Forum #2
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the roles of AusNet and AEMO at every stage in the connections process.</li> </ul>	
20 Information and education	AusNet to investigate how it might provide technical workshops to help educate and upskill connecting parties.	<b>Yes, AusNet will action.</b> We'll share our approach for feedback in the forum. We're very keen for your specific ideas here, if you have them.
21 Information and education	<p>Connecting parties to be provided with a clear overview of who the decision maker is for each step in the connections process to help reduce uncertainty if an AusNet employee leaves the project mid-way.</p> <p>AusNet to review its internal handover procedures to ensure that customers are well informed and to maintain seamless knowledge transfer when staff changes occur on projects.</p>	<b>Yes, AusNet will action.</b> We'll share our approach for feedback in the forum.
22 Information and education	Connecting parties to receive clear, timely and consistent updates, particularly on changes that impact their project's connections process.	<b>Yes, AusNet will action.</b> We'll share our approach for feedback in the forum.

## Action items

Action	Assigned to	Status	Due date
AusNet to hold a follow-up session on improving outcomes for connecting parties via a New Connections Workshop Part 2.	AusNet	Open	Early-mid 2025