

BEYOND PUBLIC OPPOSITION TO GRID EXPANSION

Achieving Public Acceptance: Transparency, Participation, Benefit Sharing

Introduction

The Renewables-Grid-Initiative (RGI) addresses some of the challenges faced by the power sector in a unique partnership between transmission system operators (TSOs) and environmental NGOs. The mission of RGI is to support grid expansion in order to enable integration of renewable electricity in the European grid.

This document presents the activities of the Renewables-Grid-Initiative and suggests practical areas of collaboration with the Commission on the issue of public acceptance.

Transformation of the power system

Global challenges and climate change have increased the level of complexity and urgency in the energy system. Governments around the world are confronted with the need to focus not only on energy security but also competitiveness, environmental protection and decarbonisation requirements. The need for political leadership is greater than ever. This is required for shaping the transition and bringing clarity, for channelling private investments and for delivering the required transformation. Once political leadership and clarity is in place, the success of the energy transition will largely depend on the ability of building large support across different sectors in society.

Grid expansion is crucial for any Roadmap 2050 introduction

The required transformation of the energy system changes the geographical and timely horizon for the planning and implementation of new infrastructure. To fully integrate renewable energy sources from centralised and decentralised generation, the grid architecture needs to be adapted and expanded to allow for transmission from generation to consumption and storage sites over long distances and across national borders. Expanding and upgrading the grid infrastructure is absolutely crucial to achieve the energy and climate targets of any of the recent Roadmaps 2050.

Public acceptance becomes key critical success factor

Thousands of kilometres of new lines need to be built today, even more in the coming decades. However, public opposition is growing steadily. Besides all financial and technical questions of future grid development, broad and lasting public acceptance for infrastructure projects becomes a key critical success factor. To secure public support, new alliances across society are needed.

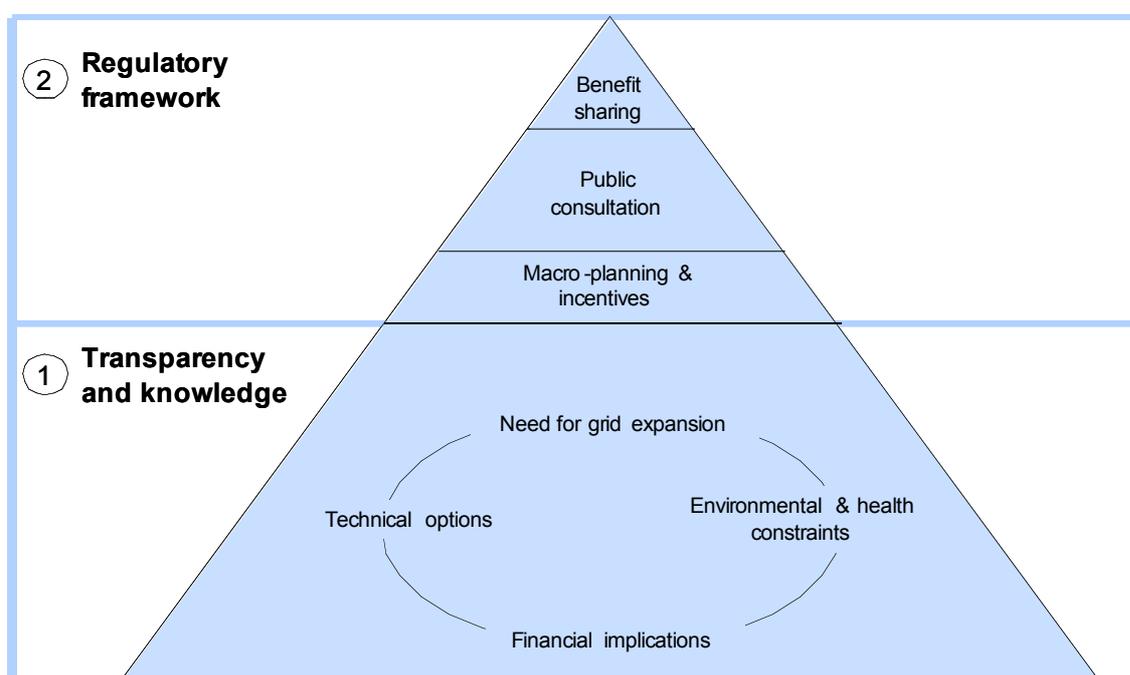
Towards 100% integration of renewable energies

The mission of the Renewables-Grid-Initiative is to promote effective and full integration of electricity produced from renewable energy sources. It advocates national and EU authorities to strive for an efficient, sustainable, clean and socially accepted development of the European network infrastructure for both decentralised and utility scale renewable energies.

To achieve its mission, RGI carries out activities with a twofold objective:

- Strengthen the common interest of all stakeholders in grid expansion by creating transparency and knowledge
- Support implementation of grid expansion by advocating an improved regulatory framework

The second objective is thereby directly based upon the first. Building on knowledge exchange and constructive dialogue between its stakeholders, RGI will advocate jointly supported suggestions for improvements.



Achieving public acceptance: transparency, participation, and benefit sharing

The key for strengthening the common interest of stakeholders is to create transparency and share knowledge. Acceptance of grid expansion will require the public to understand why more grids are needed in a power system with a large share of renewable energy. Implementation of grid expansion requires a constructive dialogue of TSOs and civil society on issues such as environmental and health aspects, as well as technical and financial implications and options of grid expansion will support the alignment of common interest. RGI is in a unique position to bring these stakeholders together and develop common perspectives. This will form the base for a common narrative and a communication strategy to reach interested stakeholders and the general public.

To support implementation of grid expansion, the regulatory framework needs to be enhanced to overcome barriers to grid expansion. Based on the common perspectives developed in stakeholder discussions, RGI will advocate regulatory improvements. RGI's activities in this field will focus on public consultations in the planning and permitting process and options of benefit sharing, and will also include aspects of macro planning and grid expansion incentivisation.

Creating transparency is a fundamental pre-condition

Without transparency all other measures will sooner or later become hollow and ineffective. Transparency is a pre-condition for trust and trust is a pre-condition for any sustainable agreement between different interest groups. In the past, trust was mainly created by the status of respected authorities. In times when authorities increasingly lack credibility, transparency and real time availability of relevant information becomes crucial and a pre-condition to any successful multi-stakeholder consensus building process. Due to its unique partner setup RGI has the potential to be more credible than any individual TSO. To create a solid ground for mutual understanding, RGI partners are currently discussing about making more data available (e.g. load data) as well as explaining and clarifying revenue streams related to grid activities and grid expansion. Similarly, RGI partners support complete and easy access to documents related to European grid projects.

Enabling participation of concerned citizens

Concerns about the impacts of grid expansion need to be fully understood and addressed. To win public support it is not enough to dismiss certain claims, rather each legitimate concern should find an exhaustive answer.

The first step is to develop a culture of participation and consultation within the TSOs; to engage the NGOs in developing sound arguments in favour of necessary grid expansion while safeguarding the environment, the citizens' life quality and the future of planet earth. Therefore RGI aims at involving concerned parties in a multi-stakeholder consensus building process.

In a second step affected and interested stakeholders need to be included in the consultation process to jointly look at challenges and define solutions and, when necessary, benefit sharing and compensation mechanisms. During the decision making phase, a mediation process can be envisaged wherever appropriate to follow the educational consultation exercise. A neutral and respected third party can help to facilitate the consensus building process. Together with Smart Energy for Europe Platform (SEFEP) RGI intends to set up a Communication Training Centre to teach grid experts additional communicational skills and to train professional moderators on grid related issues.

Ensuring benefit sharing and sustainable compensation

At the top of our pyramid we have positioned benefit sharing, recognising that local communities directly affected by grid expansion shall either share more directly the benefits or, if this is not possible, receive some compensation. RGI is interested in developing, together with stakeholders, cost neutral solutions for benefit sharing and compensation. For example, affected communities could be turned into "Smart Villages" by providing smart grid components to the local infrastructure, installing communal electric car sharing and generation of public owned decentralised renewable power on public soil or roofs. Grid expansion could provide an incentive to accelerate the transformation of a village into a low carbon future, thus creating highly visible benefits and possibly some attractive local jobs.

Proposal of the Renewables-Grid-Initiative for collaborating with the European Commission

RGI proposes the following practical steps and a close collaboration with the European Commission to accomplish them:

1. Establish a taskforce to
 - a. develop regulatory frameworks and consultation guidelines to support public acceptance, and
 - b. to establish a toolbox ready to be adapted, implemented and duplicated.
2. Identify a number of European pilot projects to test, verify and improve existing tools and new instruments developed by the taskforce.
3. Support the rollout of the Communication Training Centre and additional educational facilities across Europe if the pilot phase starting this summer proves successful.
4. Work out a European incentive scheme for regions that ensure quick and efficient permitting procedures (less than 5 years), backed by an efficient dialogue and acceptance process for projects of European interest.

Facts about the Renewables-Grid-Initiative

TSO members: 50Hertz (Germany), Elia (Belgium, 50Hertz in Germany), National Grid (UK), RTE (France), Swissgrid (Switzerland), TenneT (Netherlands, transpower in Germany)

NGO members: Germanwatch, WWF, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), Natuur & Milieu

Supporters/ Partners: Smart Energy for Europe Platform (SEFEP), European Climate Foundation (ECF), University Magdeburg, BTU Cottbus

Next Activities:

- Grid Dinner Debate (Brussels, 13 April 2011)
- Members Assembly (Brussels, 14 April 2011)
- Workshop on Environmental Issues (Scotland, 16 June, 2011)
- Simulation Trainer "GridLab": Understanding the Grid (Cottbus, 15 July, 2011)
- Workshop on Health Issues (Paris, autumn 2011)
- Stakeholder Conference (Brussels, Oct/Nov 2011)

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