

Victoria-NSW Interconnector West (NSW Section)

Interim Feedback Report – December 2024

Community Investment and Benefits



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1. Project Overview

The Victoria to NSW Interconnector West – known as VNI West – is a proposed new 500 kV double circuit transmission line connecting the high voltage electricity grids in New South Wales and Victoria.

VNI West is being jointly developed with Transmission Company Victoria (TCV) and will connect major projects EnergyConnect in NSW and Western Renewables Link in Victoria. The preferred option runs from Transgrid’s Dinawan substation north of Jerilderie in NSW to new substations proposed near Kerang and Bulgana in Victoria. Transgrid is responsible for the NSW section of the project which is 239km in length.

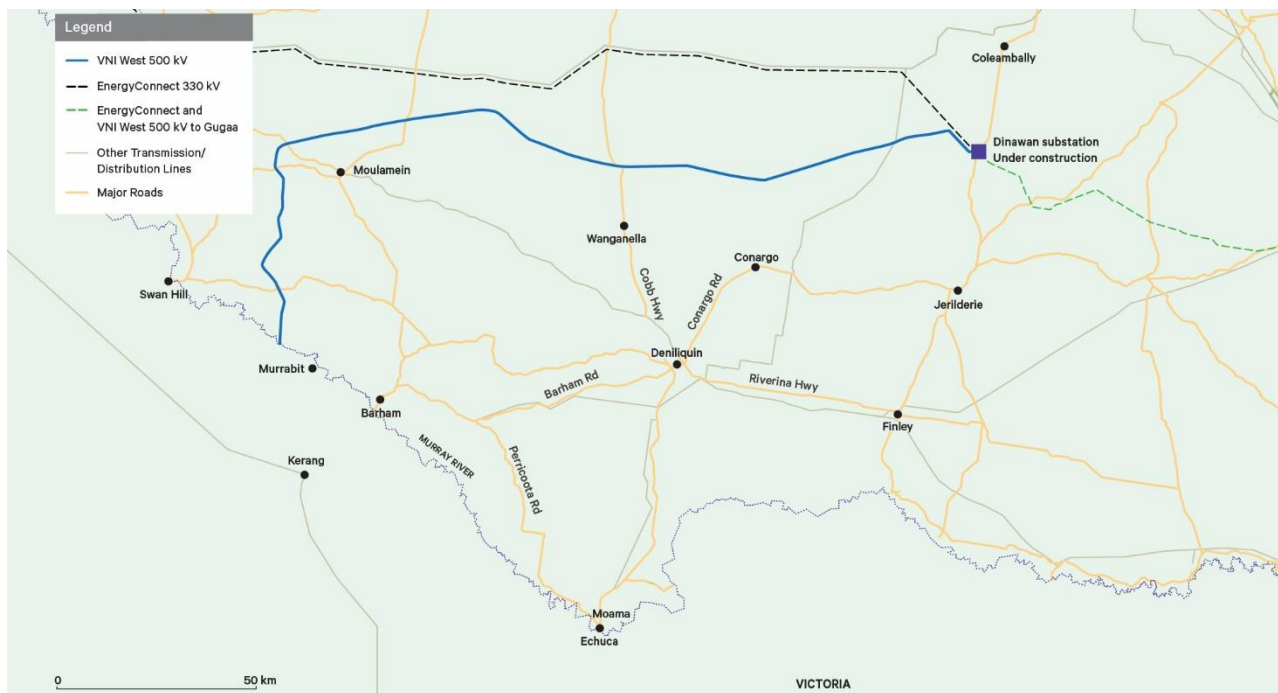


Figure 1 VNI West 200-metre-wide Transmission Line Corridor

2. Purpose

This report provides a summary of feedback received about potential opportunities for Community Investment and Benefits (CIB) for the VNI West footprint since community engagement commenced in July 2023. It specifically provides information gathered between Tuesday 6 August 2024 and Thursday 12 December 2024. This was gained through organised focus groups, stakeholder meetings, a targeted survey and consulting with community groups and individuals who are expected to be most impacted by the project.

This report intends to provide a high-level analysis of the most prominent themes, issues and feedback received to date. It will be further refined and form the basis for a final report that will be submitted to inform and support Transgrid’s VNI West Contingent Project Application Stage 2 (CPA2) which seeks the funding required to deliver the project from the Australian Energy Regulator. The CPA2 social licence cost elements will include potential investments in initiatives that would benefit the communities most impacted by the project.

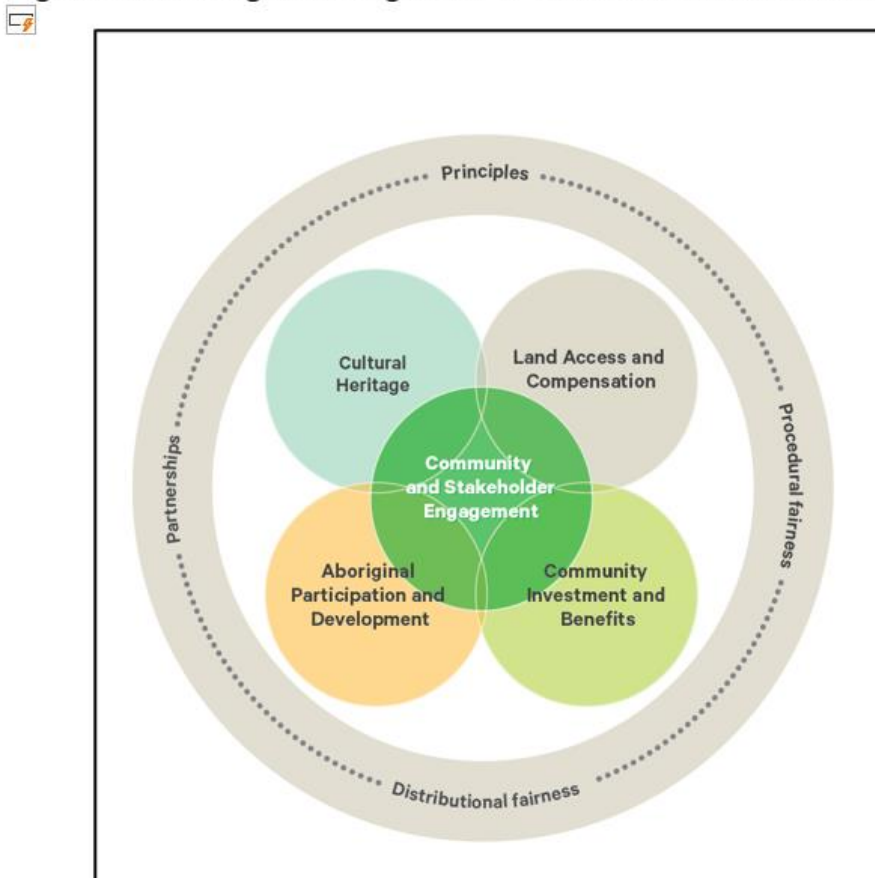
3. Transgrid Social Licence Framework and Community Investment & Benefits Strategy

Transgrid places the voice of the community at the centre of our decision making. We strive to build positive and lasting relationships with our local communities, and create tangible benefits for energy consumers, local communities, and the environment as part of our commitment to building a sustainable clean energy future.

Transgrid's Social Licence framework outlines:

- our approach to building and maintaining Social Licence across its projects and operations activities.
- the elements of expenditure that can be categorised as Social Licence investment;
- the project level delivery tools and plans contributing to achieving Social Licence;
- a decision-making process for the identification, evaluation, scoping, planning, cost/benefit appraisal (where possible) and delivery of prudent and efficient Social Licence investment opportunities; and
- the Social Licence investment governance, monitoring, and evaluation process.

Figure illustrating the integration of the Social Licence elements.




Community Investment and Benefits elements are illustrated in the below figure:





If multiple community investment opportunities are identified through the consultation process, within a limited approved budget, the matrix below is used to provide an assessment and to prioritise which community investment opportunity to pursue.


The four criteria below have equal weighting and can be interpreted as follows:

Potential opportunity	Community Needs	Initiative Delivery	Cost and Benefits	Sustainability	Total Scoring	Overall Ranking
Initiative A						
Initiative B						
Initiative C						

- Address a community need** 
 - Does the project adequately address the community's needs and aspirations?
 - Will the initiative increase the availability of needed resources to the community?
 - Will the initiative benefit a broad cross-section of the community?
 - Has the beneficiary received community development support from us in the past?

- Sustainability** 
 - Can the community keep the initiative running by itself once the assistance has gone?
 - Is the initiative sustainability or exit strategy practical?

- Initiative Delivery** 
 - Does the initiative require specialised technical expertise to both start and maintain?
 - Was a competent, experienced third party identified to implement?

- Cost and benefit** 
 - Is the cost of the initiative commensurate with the anticipated benefit from the project?
 - Will the community/beneficiary be able and willing to contribute to the project (normally through an in-kind contribution)?

4. Community engagement overview

Landowner and community consultation is vital to the success of the project. Landowners and community members hold important information that is often not publicly available, and their feedback helps us improve our design, and minimise impacts to local communities and the environment. It also allows us to get an insight into the challenges experienced in the region and some ideas/initiatives that could help to address them.

A program of engagement specific to finding out more about concerns, issues and priorities for community investment has been carried out for VNI West. The table below summarises engagement methods and activities.

Table 1 How we have engaged with the community

Engagement method	Description
Toll free number and email address	Direct phone calls and emails received by the Transgrid Community Engagement Team.
Website	Information provided on the dedicated Transgrid VNI West Project page.
Newspaper & social media	Adverts in newspapers and other publications like the 'Wongi' newsletter (Moulamein); Posts shared on social media pages (e.g. Council).
Email updates	Email updates sent directly to landowners and subscribers to project information, links to surveys and other relevant information.
Community Consultative Group (CCG)	<p>The purpose of the VNI West Community Consultative Group (CCG) is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> provide a forum for community members, stakeholders and local councils to seek information from Transgrid and provide feedback to inform route refinement and selection and the subsequent Environmental Assessment process provide a forum for open and constructive discussions about the VNI West project help Transgrid better understand community perspectives and issues related to the project work with Transgrid to develop ideas for community benefits and project legacy. <p>The CCG membership includes representation from landowners, community and industry groups, and local government - Murray River, Edward River and Murrumbidgee councils.</p> <p>Meetings are generally held quarterly and at the time of this report there has been six meetings between November 2023 and August 2024.</p>

Engagement method	Description
CIB Focus group sessions	Sessions focussed on getting feedback from community members in areas most impacted by the project route: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6th August 24 – Wanganella (morning); Jerilderie (evening). 7th August 24 – Moulamein (evening). 8th August 24 – Mallan (morning); Conargo (evening). 20th August 24 – Online session 1 (evening). 21st August 24 – Online session 2 (midday).
Interviews and meetings with community groups and individuals.	The Transgrid engagement team have met with numerous individuals and community groups either in person, by phone or via videoconference over the last 14 months.
Landowner discussions	Transgrid Place Managers and Land Access Officers have been speaking with landowners directly about the project since July 2023. The main focus of this engagement has been determining a route which minimises impacts, but community challenges and opportunities have also been discussed and documented.
Community Survey	A community survey was available to complete online Tuesday 24 September to Thursday 12 December 2024. Printed copies of the survey with reply-paid envelopes were also made available in local communities at meeting points (e.g. local shops). <i>*Community members also completed paper-based surveys during community information sessions (focussed on EIS development) held between 26th to 29th November 2024.</i>

5. Who we've spoken to

A key objective of the initial engagement program has been to speak with landowners, communities, First Nations groups and other stakeholders who are reasonably expected to be affected by the transmission project (directly and indirectly).

Community groups and other stakeholders we have spoken to include:

Aerial Application Association of Australia	Coleambally Irrigation Cooperative	Community Foundations Australia
Conargo Hall & Recreation Ground Committee	Cummeragunja Local Aboriginal Land Council	Department of Regional NSW (NSW Premiers Department)
Deniliquin Local Aboriginal Land Council	Edward River Council	EnergyCo (NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water)
Foundation for Rural & Regional & Renewal (FRRR)	Jerilderie Football & Netball Club	Mallan Hall & Recreation Reserve Committee
Moama Local Aboriginal Land Council	Moulamein Community Development Inc.	Moulamein Primary School P&C
Moulamein Youth Group	Murray Irrigation	Murray River Council
Murrumbidgee Council	NSW Farmers Association	NSW Local Land Services (Murray)
NSW Parks & Wildlife	Origin Energy	Riverina Murray Regional Assembly
Rural Financial Counselling Service NSW	Rural Fire Service (Argoona Brigade)	Rural Fire Service (Moulamein Brigade)
Rural Fire Service NSW	Regional Development Australia (Murray & Riverina)	Ricegrowers Association of Australia (Wakool Branch)
Spark Renewables	SunRice Ricegrowers Limited	Telstra
Wakool Indigenous Corporation	Wanganella District Social Club	Wamba Wamba Local Aboriginal Land Council
Wanganella Hall Committee	Yanco Creek & Tributaries Advisory Council (YACTAC)	Yarkuwa Indigenous Knowledge Centre

6. What we have heard so far

Engaging with community groups and individuals in the locations closest to the proposed project route has been very beneficial and has provided a range of insightful data and local knowledge that would not have otherwise been available. Several key themes have developed through the various engagement methods identified earlier in this document. These include broader issues and initiatives that span the project region, and those identified which are specific to locations or communities.



Below is a summary of the main themes/challenges/initiatives highlighted to date by community/locality:

Dinawan Area (30 km south of Coleambally)

- Connectivity – improving mobile phone service coverage.
- Support for the Rural Fire Service.
- Improving road infrastructure in the area that will be utilised by a number of infrastructure projects located in the South West Renewable Energy Zone.

Jerilderie

- Improving telecommunications.
- Local infrastructure upgrades (e.g. Recreation Ground, Schools, Housing, Drop-in Centre).
- Better roads.
- Bushfire management and training/resourcing local RFS brigades.
- Services and accessibility, particularly for health and aged care services.

- Local employment and procurement.
- Reducing cost of living pressures including cheaper or subsidised electricity (e.g. Community-owned renewable energy projects).

Conargo

- Re-developing the Community Hall and Recreation Ground precinct to increase tourism and attract people to the town.
- Re-opening the Conargo Store and Fuel Station as a community-owned and run social enterprise.
- Improved mobile phone service coverage in the region.
- Establishing a community trust or foundation model.

Wanganella

- Improving road infrastructure, including bridges over creeks and installing a stock bridge near the Cobb Highway crossing point of the Billabong Creek (safety concerns).
- Improving infrastructure and facilities in the village including a new water filtration system to improve drinking water, installation of curb & guttering and better drainage systems. Access to 3-phase power.
- Education & training scholarships and pathways to employment and career development.
- Better access to services and supports including health, aged care, community transport and childcare.
- Environment – feral animal & weed control, water management & monitoring.
- Fire-fighting education and resourcing.

Moulamein

- Connectivity – improving mobile phone service coverage
 - Education and employment pathway scholarships and programs.
 - Health & aged care services.
 - Improving and enhancing community infrastructure (e.g. Moulamein Wharf, Heritage Village, Youth Space, Town Hall).
 - Enhancing and promoting tourism in the area.
- Reducing cost of living pressures including cheaper or subsidised electricity (e.g. Community-owned renewable energy projects).
- Providing community housing as a legacy from required workforce accommodation.
 - Increased local business and employment opportunities.
 - Attracting and retaining new residents and workers to the township.
 - Increasing social participation and supporting volunteers.
 - Establishing a community trust or foundation model.

Mallan / Cunninyeuk / Cobramunga

Note: At the time of engaging with community members in this region about community investment and benefits, the community indicated that the route was perhaps less defined than in other areas and they were not ready to discuss community investment and benefits yet. While the meeting at Mallan Hall focused more on route selection, some broad initiatives were recorded.

- Supporting local community groups financially.
- Improving local infrastructure such as the Mallan Hall and Gonn-Mellool Rural Fire Service Shed.
- Providing opportunities for local procurement and employment.

Region-wide initiatives and priorities

- Strategic Investment in economic development projects, including upskilling for existing and emerging business owners that will create sustainable jobs and income streams after the VNI West project is completed.
- Consideration of the accumulative effects of several large-scale infrastructure projects being rolled out in the area in the coming years i.e. the South West Renewable Energy Zone (REZ).
- Collaboration required between all levels of government, Transgrid, and EnergyCo (including all successful proponents for the South West REZ) when engaging communities on investment and benefits.
- Improving telecommunications blackspots and overall connectivity in the region.
- Increasing affordable housing availability.
- Upgrading and maintaining road infrastructure in the most impacted areas.
- Workforce development and job readiness for young people to provide greater opportunities that help retain them in rural areas.
- Improving access to services (e.g. health specialists) via new or improved technology or systems.
- Recognising and celebrating First Nations culture and connection to country.
- Access to cheaper electricity for communities that are hosting new transmission lines and renewable energy projects.

7. Next steps

Feedback from community members and stakeholders will continue to be gathered over the coming months and added to the information we have already received. Our engagement team will be out in the community again in early 2025 to:

- provide project updates and feedback we have received to date;
- provide further opportunities for input on social impact and community benefits; and
- to answer any questions about the next steps.
- During 2025, we will work to identify specific project / initiative proposals for inclusion in CPA2. These initiatives will be analysed, costed, assessed and prioritised and relevant stakeholder partners will be part of the initiative development and refinement process. The indicative timeline is below.



Need more information or would like to connect with the Engagement Team?

Ph: 1800 955 588

Email: vniw@transgrid.com.au

Website: www.transgrid.com.au/vniw

Appendix A – Snapshot of Consultation on Community Investment so far

Victoria to New South Wales Interconnector
Have Your Say on Community Investment & Benefits



VNI West is a proposed new 500kV double circuit transmission line connecting the high voltage electricity grids in NSW and Victoria.

We would like to hear from local communities on how we can provide benefits to the area as part of the project.

Join us for a series of engaging discussions where you can share ideas for potential benefits and ways to invest in your community.

We'll be hosting the following in person sessions:

Tuesday 6 August 8am to Midday Wanganella Hall Lang Street Wanganella	Tuesday 6 August 4pm to 7pm Monash Tea Rooms Jerilderie Football and Netball Club Jerilderie	Wednesday 7 August 4pm to 7pm The Moulamein Gallery 33 Morago Street Moulamein	Thursday 8 August 8am to Midday Mallan Hall and Recreation Reserve Cunninyeuk Road Mallan
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Please scan the QR code to register your interest

For more information on VNI West, please contact the project team via:

Website: www.transgrid.com.au/vni-west Phone: 1800 955 588 Email: vnw@transgrid.com.au

VNI West Community Survey
Social Impacts & Community Benefits



September 2024

You are invited to participate in a survey to help Transgrid better understand the potential social impacts of VNI West on landowners and the community, both positive and negative, during construction and operation of the project.

As a follow up from our community investment and benefits workshops held in August, we're also seeking broader feedback on themes and topics which will help our assessment for community investment and benefit initiatives are also covered in this survey. We would like to receive your response by **12 December 2024**.

Your participation in this survey is voluntary and confidential. All information collected will be managed in accordance with Transgrid's privacy policy (<https://www.transgrid.com.au/media/1101/vnr/privacy-policy.pdf>)

Please provide your contact details

Name _____

Location (nearest town & postcode) _____

Email address _____


Would you like to register for project updates via email? (Please tick)

Yes No

Do you identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander?

Yes No Prefer not to say

To complete this survey online please scan the QR Code:



Focus Groups: In-person sessions

46 people attended in-person Focus Group sessions held in Wanganella, Jerilderie, Moulamein & Mallan.

Most participants were affected landowners and neighbours to the project footprint. An additional session was held at Conargo on Thursday 8 August which was initiated by the community – 17 participants were present.

Focus Groups: Online sessions

Sessions held on 20th August (evening) & 21st August (midday) - 9 participants.

Community Survey

26 respondents completed the survey either online or via paper form (Sept to Dec 2024)

Other engagement activities

We have also gathered relevant information and feedback provided throughout our engagement since July 2023 (see *Appendix B*).

Appendix B - Consultation Activities Overview: June 2023 – December 2024

