

Assessment of the Aberbaldie-Niangala travelling stock reserve route

New England Renewable Energy Zone (REZ)

August 2024

Frequently asked questions

Q. How has the study corridor been developed for the REZ network infrastructure project?

Since 2022, EnergyCo has been following a comprehensive process to develop a study corridor for the New England REZ project guided by EnergyCo's planning pillars and principles, and informed by ongoing environmental and technical assessments. In June 2023 we released a preliminary study corridor and began consultation with landowners, stakeholders and the community.

Since June 2023, we have met with more than 400 affected landowners to better understand property owner concerns and opportunities as well as carrying out field studies across sections of the corridor. All of this information was used to develop the revised study corridor announced in March 2024. The changes resulted in 80 fewer landholders in the study corridor, a total reduction in transmission easements of around 39 kilometres and a 6 kilometre increase in the use of public land.

The revised study corridor included changes in the Dungowan region including some outgoing landowners and some new landowners in the study area. On balance, there was an overall reduction of 28 landowners from the study area in this region.

For more information about the route selection process, you can view our fact sheet online at energyco.nsw.gov.au/ne.

Q. Why was an alternative route proposed?

In March 2024 some landholders and stakeholders around Dungowan, Woolomin, Duncans Creek and surrounds raised concerns about the proposed location of the study corridor due to potential environmental, economic and social impacts through this area.

Based on these concerns, community members and a local community group known as Valley Alliance provided feedback to EnergyCo suggesting an amended alignment be considered which used the Aberbaldie-Niangala Travelling Stock Reserves (TSRs) to the east of EnergyCo's preferred study corridor (referred to as the TSR route).

Further details about the alternate route proposal is included in section 1.2 of the TSR assessment report on EnergyCo's website.

Q. How did EnergyCo assess the alternate route?

We carried out a detailed assessment of the TSR route against EnergyCo's key planning pillars and principles which have formed the basis of our route selection process to date. These included:

- **People and communities:** how close the route would be to towns, how many landholders (both private and public) would be impacted, and the number of dwellings in proximity to the route
- **Environment and land use:** impacts to biodiversity value areas, impacts to high value agricultural land, Aboriginal cultural heritage, bushfire resilience as well as the use of suitable public land
- **Efficiency and deliverability:** the length of the transmission line needed, the ability to co-locate with existing infrastructure, and how challenging construction would be including cost and time.

Q. What were the findings of the assessment?

The assessment found that the alternate options provided a better outcome on some criteria, including lower average slopes, access to existing roads for construction, increased use of public land and bushfire resilience in the travelling stock route section.

However, the assessment showed the preferred study corridor provided a better outcome on impacts to private landholdings, proximity to dwellings, interactions with land with high environmental and biophysical strategic agricultural land values, and construction time and costs.

On balance, the assessment found the preferred study corridor provides better outcomes than the TSR route against multiple criteria, most notably impacts to private landowners. The TSR route will therefore not be progressed further.

We have released the TSR assessment report to provide transparency on the work undertaken that led to this the conclusion.

The detailed findings of the assessment are outlined in the TSR assessment report which is available to view on our website at energyco.nsw.gov.au/ne.

Q. Has community feedback informed the assessment?

Yes, the alternate route option was assessed in response to feedback from local community members in Dungowan, Woolomin, Duncans Creek and surrounding areas. Throughout the review we have carried out ongoing engagement with Valley Alliance to discuss route options and compare findings and data.

We have continued to hold regular pop-up stalls throughout the region to receive feedback and answer questions.

Q. How can the community find out more about the assessment?

The TSR assessment report is available to view on our website at energyco.nsw.gov.au/ne.

In addition, we are holding a series of engagement activities in the coming month to update the community on the REZ network infrastructure project. This includes community information sessions in late August and early September including in Woolomin, Uralla and Armidale, and a number of pop-up stalls throughout the region. These events are an opportunity for the community to speak to our team and ask questions about the project and the TSR assessment.

You can find all the details about our upcoming engagement events at energyco.nsw.gov.au/ne/working-community.

Q. Will EnergyCo assess other alternate routes?

We understand communities and landowners would like certainty on the transmission corridor. From our detailed assessments to date including the alternate TSR route assessment, we have found that, on balance, the existing preferred study corridor is the best option when considered against our planning pillars.

Our next step is to continue investigating within the 1km-wide preferred study corridor to identify suitable locations for the final transmission easements. Our priority is to continue working with individual landowners to determine the most suitable route within the preferred study corridor. This is important for us to understand individual land use and to help us design the project in a way that avoids, mitigates and manages potential impacts to property wherever possible.

Q. Has the transmission route been finalised?

The transmission route has not yet been determined and we are still working within a broad study area to identify potential locations for transmission lines, energy hubs and related infrastructure.

We are directly engaging with landowners in the study corridor to understand individual land use, such as farming and business operations and the locations of existing dwellings and sheds, as the project is designed. Input from landowners is critical to help us achieve better outcomes for the community and the environment when planning the transmission route.

EnergyCo expects to lodge an environmental impact statement (EIS) for assessment and public exhibition in late 2025. The EIS will include a refined transmission corridor of about 250 metres wide. Until this time, changes and refinements will continue to occur in response to ongoing consultation and assessment.

Q. What are the next steps for the project?

In July 2024 EnergyCo lodged a scoping report for the REZ network infrastructure project with the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (DPHI). This marked the first major step in the planning process for the project.

We are now continuing to carry out field investigations and detailed environmental assessments to inform the environmental impact statement (EIS) for the project which is expected to be lodged for public exhibition in late 2025. During the public exhibition of the EIS interested stakeholders and community members will have the opportunity to consider the project on its merits and make a submission to DPHI.

Q. Will EnergyCo continue to engage with landowners and the community to develop the project?

Yes, EnergyCo will continue to work closely with individual landowners to inform the development of the transmission study corridor. Later this year we will carry out targeted consultation with communities and stakeholder groups to inform the social impact assessment and Aboriginal cultural heritage assessment for the project's EIS.

We are also establishing a community reference group for the project which will provide an open forum for engagement between EnergyCo, community representatives and key stakeholder groups. You can find out more about the community reference group and register your interest to be involved on our website at energyco.nsw.gov.au/ne.

Q. What support is available for landowners?

We are committed to carrying out meaningful and respectful engagement with affected landowners as we develop the project. We have provided each landowner with a Place Manager and Property Manager who are dedicated points of contact to provide support and answer any questions about individual property matters and the project.

We understand that potential impacts from the REZ network infrastructure project can be emotionally challenging and stressful. The NSW Government has independent support available for landowners and communities directly affected by property acquisition which you can find more information about at energyco.nsw.gov.au/community/support-landowners.

Q. When will the REZ network infrastructure project be operational?

Pending indicative planning approval in 2026, the REZ network infrastructure project is expected to begin construction in 2027. The first two stages of the project are scheduled for completion by 2033 to ensure energy security across NSW as our coal-fired power stations retire.

Q. How can the community find out more about the project?

We have a range of resources to help the community understand more about the New England REZ and network infrastructure project. This includes:

- **Engagement activities:** Our team hold regular pop-up events in the region to speak to the community and answer any questions about the project. Visit our website at energyco.nsw.gov.au/ne for all the details about our upcoming engagement activities.
- **Fact sheets:** We have published a range of resources about the New England REZ and network infrastructure project including fact sheets on key topics such as bush fire management, living and working around transmission lines and delivering benefits to communities. You can view our fact sheets at energyco.nsw.gov.au/ne/project-documents.
- **Interactive map:** Our interactive map shows key features of the New England REZ including the transmission study corridor, proposed energy hub locations, existing high voltage network and land boundaries. The map is available to view online at caportal.com.au/energyco/rez.
- **Newsletter:** We distribute regular newsletters with the latest updates about the New England REZ. You can sign up to our newsletter on our website or by contacting our community engagement team via the details below.
- **Contact us:** We welcome community feedback and questions on an ongoing basis as we develop the REZ and network infrastructure project. Please contact our community engagement team by emailing nerez@energyco.nsw.gov.au or by calling 1800 061 114 (Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm) if you have questions at any time.