

# AusNet – their say



By Helen Tatchell

“No route has been decided, we’re right at the start of our investigation process,” an AusNet Services spokesperson has told the Moorabool News.

The statement comes after a public meeting at Myrmiong on Saturday 20 June, and articles published outlining community devastation that overhead high voltage powerline transmission towers would be erected through 70-kilometres of the Moorabool Shire, the gateway to the Central Highlands.

Helina Lilley said while they were happy to attend the meeting they respectfully agreed to the wishes of the organiser, “which were for us not to attend.”

“We did supply the organiser with project fact sheets ahead of the meeting to be distributed to the community and these fact sheets outlined the broad area of interest and how we will determine the project corridor,” Ms Lilley said.

The Moorabool News asked AusNet Services if the route is not known, why would they be awarded the contract on a fixed price tender of approximately \$370million?

Ms Lilley said following a regulatory investment test process, which is publicly available, AusNet Services was appointed by the Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO) “to plan, consult on, design, seek approvals for, construct, own, operate and maintain this new transmission line.”

Despite landowners in a direct line from Darley to Dean, receiving letters and having a Mondo consultant attend their properties, AusNet say they have distributed these letters in stages, which means more landowners across the broad mapped out area of interest will start to or may already have received letters.

“Our focus now is on talking to landholders and communities across the broad area of interest and on doing survey work to understand existing constraints and opportunities before a preferred transmission line corridor is identified.”

To date AusNet say they have met with approximately 150 landowners and “will continue to explore the broad mapped out area of interest to conduct surveys.”

And it is not just the overhead transmission towers that is of concern, AusNet have commenced investigating the location for the terminal station in the area of interest, and deny they have already purchased a property in the Blampied/ Mollinghip area, despite two people at the public meeting confirming the sale, and also neighbours of the said property.

“Within this area of interest for the terminal station, where we have access agreements, we have conducted surveys. Based on the survey results, where there are viable locations, we have started preliminary discussions with landowners to determine the possibility of acquiring land for a terminal station for the project,” Ms Lilley told the Moorabool News.

AusNet Services said they are committed to working with communities to deliver this state-significant energy project and community input will be critical to help them learn more about local areas and inform project decisions.

“We’re seeking local knowledge and insights across the broad mapped out area of interest. Local input, alongside early environmental and technical investigations, will help us identify a preferred corridor within the project area of interest.”

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## WHY NOT UNDERGROUND?

**AusNet** – “Overhead transmission lines are an industry standard for most high voltage transmission lines within Australia and around the world. A sensitively designed, located and constructed overhead transmission line can have less environmental impacts. Underground transmission cables require the digging of wide and deep trenches to lay the cables underground as well as additional above ground infrastructure which means significantly more land disturbance, resulting in a greater environmental impact, greater cultural heritage impact and greater impact to farming land.

## WHY THIS DIRECT LINE FROM DARLEY TO DEAN?

**AusNet** – “There is an existing HV electricity transmission line between Bulgana and Waubra Terminal station and it is likely the new line will follow this existing line as this minimises the impact to the environment and the community. After Waubra the area of interest becomes much broader and no decision has been made on which route will be taken within this area. This is what we are consulting with landholders and the community about at the moment. Since late April we have been progressively exploring the broader mapped out area of interest to determine areas with the least impact to locate the transmission lines.

We started in Bulgana and we’re making our way East across the mapped-out area of interest. To date we have met with approximately 150 landowners and will continue to explore the broad mapped out area of interest to conduct surveys. We carry out a range of investigations to determine constraints and opportunities.

## THE NEED FOR TRANSMISSION TOWERS?

**AusNet** – “This is a really important project for Victoria.

Western Victoria is emerging as an important renewable energy-generation region. The current transmission network needs upgrading to share this renewable energy with all Victorians. The Western Victoria Transmission Network Project will add a new link to the network, making this possible. This project will involve major economic investment in Western Victoria, creating new jobs during and after construction. In addition, a number of local goods and services are expected to be used throughout construction, including local accommodation providers, and local cafes and restaurants.”

## WHAT IS THE NEXT STEP?

**AusNet** – “Our focus now is on talking to landholders and communities across the broad area of interest and on doing survey work to understand existing constraints and opportunities before a preferred transmission line corridor is identified and, to work with landowners to agree the most convenient and sensitive way to carry out survey works.

Community input is fundamental to this process. We will continue to engage with all community members and their representatives as we work to deliver clean and affordable power to all Victorians.”

## THE COST – WHO PAYS?

**AusNet** – “The cost of funding this project will be recovered from all Victorian electricity consumers through ongoing use of system charges. Overhead transmission lines are a financially responsible option for a consumer funded project.”