North West Transmission Developments

Fact sheet | Social and economic

April 2025

This fact sheet provides information on the study undertaken to understand how the community and economy could be impacted by the construction and operation of the transmission lines, towers and associated substations, switching station and access tracks.

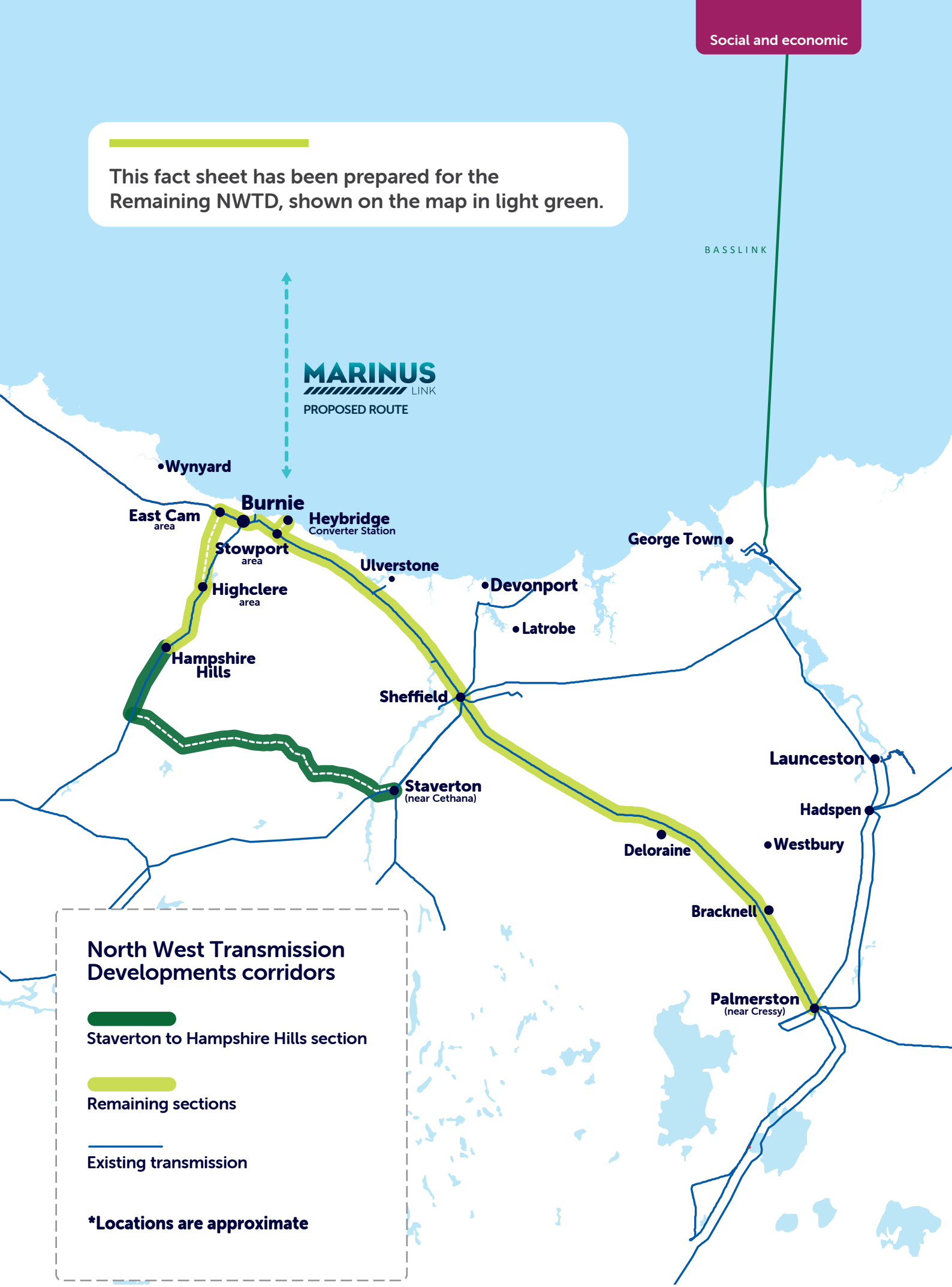
As Tasmania's energy demands increase, TasNetworks needs to strengthen the state's transmission network. The North West Transmission Developments (NWTD) will include new and upgraded overhead transmission lines (OHTLs), substations and switching stations.

NWTD will support new renewable energy developments and generate significant benefits and opportunities for Tasmanian communities and businesses. The project is proposed to be delivered across two stages. The first stage will link Cressy, Sheffield and Burnie, and the second stage will connect Staverton, Hampshire Hills and Burnie. Two spurs will be constructed between the Stowport area and Heybridge.

The Remaining NWTD includes constructing new double-circuit OHTLs, dismantling of the existing single circuit 220 kV OHTLs from Palmerston to Sheffield and Sheffield to Burnie, constructing a new switching station at Hampshire Hills, modifying the Palmerston, Sheffield and Burnie substations, modifying two short sections of the existing 110 kV Sheffield to Burnie OHTL, and modifying the 22 kV distribution network where the new OHTL crosses distribution lines.

A permit is required for the section of new OHTL between Staverton to Hampshire Hills, and a separate permit is required for the remaining sections of the project (Remaining NWTD).

This fact sheet has been prepared for the Remaining NWTD, shown on the map in light green.



Understanding social and economic impacts

Technical specialists have undertaken a socio-economic study to understand the impacts the new transmission lines and towers will have on local communities and the region. This included an Economic Impact Assessment and Social Impact Assessment.

The first phase of the study involved developing a social and economic profile of the project area, by:

- Reviewing demographic data and resources published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, federal, state, and local governments
- Interviewing stakeholders, businesses, and residents
- Reviewing economic modelling and published literature on the social and economic context of the local communities and region.

This socio-economic profile established an understanding of how people live, work and use services in the local and regional areas, and which of those things people value. It also provided an understanding of attitudes toward the project, its potential impacts, and any other areas of community concern.

The second phase of the study used the socio-economic profile developed in the first phase to assess the positive and negative impacts the construction and operation of the transmission lines may have on the local and regional communities and economy. The findings of the study help to identify measures to avoid and reduce the negative impacts of the transmission lines and maximise the benefits.

Study findings

The study found that there were a range of potential socio-economic impacts and opportunities from the construction and operation of the project. Potential impacts were assessed across four main areas:

- Community identity
- Economy and livelihoods
- Infrastructure and services
- People's productive capacity.

Community identity

The first area of assessment, community identity, considered the impact the project may have on the character, amenity, and sense of place of the project area. It also considered access to and use of natural and recreational areas.

Feedback received from the community highlighted they value the existing amenity, which underpins the lifestyle in the North West region. This was taken into consideration when assessing impacts. The assessment found that the construction of the project will result in temporary changes to the environment with the potential to affect the amenity and character of the project area including changes to visual amenity, air quality and noise and vibration (the noise environment).

The combined and individual changes to the noise environment, air quality and the landscape views will be noticeable to some residents, particularly those near Burnie, Stowport and Heybridge. These changes may be disruptive or annoying for some residents, temporarily affecting the enjoyment of their properties.

Once the transmission lines are operational, TasNetworks' staff and contractors will carry out inspections, operate the switching station and undertake planned and emergency maintenance. There may be some noise and vibration associated with these activities, however, they will be short-term, infrequent, and unlikely to impact the amenity or character of the area.

The changes in amenity during construction will result in some temporary impacts to users of natural and recreational areas. These include reduced use and access to private forestry land, regional reserves, and state forests such as the trail entrance to the Penguin Cradle Trail (from Penguin) and Mt Montgomery trail. Transmission towers will be visible to walkers on some trails within the Dial Ranges.

Economy and livelihoods

The second area assessed in the study was economy and livelihoods. This considers the potential for the project to affect employment, local businesses, workforce availability, housing affordability, and housing availability within the tourism, agricultural and forestry industries.

Employment, workforce, and procurement

The study found that during construction the project is expected to support approximately 1,223 full time equivalent (FTEs)[1] jobs, with 45% of these being local workers from North West Tasmania. Workers from other locations within Tasmania will make up approximately 10% of the workforce, with the remaining 45% anticipated to be drawn from interstate.

The study found that goods and services required for the project's construction will support local businesses across the supply chain, including those in the construction, manufacturing and short-term accommodation sectors. The project will benefit short-term accommodation providers through increased demand, resulting in increased occupancy rates and business revenue.

However, the study also found that some employment sectors, including mining, agriculture and manufacturing, may experience higher costs due to competition with the construction industry for available workers and increased business costs as competition for human resources drives up prices (including labour).

Engagement with industry stakeholders highlighted that planned infrastructure and renewable energy projects in the region could result in a shortage of skilled workers in the construction sector impacting major projects, residential construction and council works. TasNetworks has been actively working with stakeholders to consider programs that will help build a skilled workforce to maximise local jobs and reduce impacts on other industries and projects during construction.

The project is proposed to start operating in 2030 (pending approvals) and will operate for up to 60 years. Throughout the operational period, people will be employed to support the operations, management, and maintenance of the transmission lines. Operating and maintaining the transmission lines is expected to result in employment opportunities within the electricity, gas, water, vegetation management and waste services sectors. Ongoing purchases of goods and services may generate even wider opportunities in sectors such as construction services, transport, postal and warehousing, and rental, hiring and real estate sectors.

Availability and affordability of housing

A peak of 333 FTE roles is estimated during the construction phase, with local workers from North West Tasmania expected to make up approximately 45% of the construction force.

Interstate resources and workers coming from other locations within Tasmania will make up approximately 55% of the workforce and may seek short-term accommodation in major townships in North West Tasmania including Devonport, Ulverstone, Sheffield, Burnie and Waratah.

The project's non-residential workforce may contribute to demand for rental housing in the regional study area and exacerbate existing rental availability and affordability issues which is currently constrained. This may affect very low and low income households disproportionally. Stakeholders raised housing availability as a key concern and in response TasNetworks is preparing a Workforce Accommodation Strategy to minimise impacts on rental housing during construction.

Agriculture and forestry

Agriculture and plantation forestry (forestry) are significant industries within the local and regional study area, employing approximately 10% of the region's population. More than three quarters of the land that is directly affected by the project is used for grazing (44.2%), forestry (16.6%), irrigated lands (15.8%) and intensive agriculture (3.0%).

The study found the construction and operation of the transmission lines will impact agricultural and forestry industries. During construction, the proposed agricultural production losses across grazing, cropping and horticulture were found to be between 0.6% and 1.3% of the annual regional production (indicative value of $4.8 to $10 million/year). This reduces to 0.3% and 0.8% during operations (indicative value of $2.3 to $5.8 million/year). The study found the project impacts directly on 1,139 ha of agricultural land and 63 ha of forestry during construction.

Other impacts identified included:

- Disruption to agriculture activities including restricted access to infrastructure, reducing farm productivity and potentially requiring redesign of the farm layout
- Reduced economic and environmental viability of the agricultural and forestry enterprises from damage caused by construction activities to the natural assets, including soil, water, topography, and vegetation
- Risk to biosecurity of the agriculture and forestry enterprises through the introduction of weeds, pests, pathogens, diseases, or contaminants.

Tourism

Tourism in the study area is primarily based around the natural and agricultural character of the region. It was found that some construction activities may result in temporary and short-term changes to the amenity and character of areas used for tourism. This is related to increased noise and vibration, dust and visual changes. You can find out more about visual and noise and vibration impacts in the Noise and Vibration Study.

[1] A full-time equivalent job is equivalent to one person working full time for a period of one year.

Community infrastructure and services

The third area assessed in the study considered the potential for the construction and operation of the project to impact on community infrastructure and services, and the regional road network.

Potential, short-term negative impacts on community infrastructure and services during construction were identified, including increased demand on health and emergency services, including for GPs, ambulances and hospital services. This was due to an increase in population from workers who are not from the local area. In addition, some social impacts of the construction activities on road access and connectivity were identified. These included potential delays for existing road users and road safety concerns for vulnerable road users, including children and school buses.

People's productive capacity

The fourth area assessed in the study looked at potential impacts on the people's productive capacity to participate in society and its economy in the local and regional study area.

Stakeholders expressed concern regarding the project's potential impact on their property, health, safety and the environment during its planning, construction and operation and maintenance phases. During consultation activities, residents within the regional study area raised specific concerns about Electromagnetic Frequency (EMF), increased bushfire risks and biosecurity impacts from construction and operation of the transmission lines. These concerns are likely to result in continued frustration, stress, and anxiety for some residents. TasNetworks has developed a range of educational materials about EMF, bushfire risks and biosecurity to provide accurate information about these topics to address community concerns.

In relation to skill development and training, the civil construction industry in Tasmania is characterised as predominantly male (92%), ageing, and experiencing challenges recruiting employees with sufficient industry experience. Women and young people will continue to experience high levels of unemployment in the region without affirmative action. TasNetworks is working with education and training providers to identify strategies to target women, young people and socially vulnerable groups and create pathways into meaningful work created by the project and other developments in the region.

Managing impacts

A range of measures have been identified to avoid, reduce and manage the potential socio-economic impacts of the project and unlock the benefits for the community.

Social impacts that relate to other environmental issues, such as ecology, air quality, noise and vibration, landscape and visual assessment, and traffic will be managed in accordance with the measures outlined in their respective assessments.

Managing potential impacts and maximising opportunities will be achieved with a focus on the areas of health and emergency response; stakeholder and community engagement; landholder engagement, landholder compensation where required and access management; complaints management; and employment, local procurement, and workforce development. In addition, specific measures will be implemented to reduce and manage potential impacts to road access and connectivity, amenity, character, land, and landscape.

Some measures used across these focus areas will include:

- Developing an emergency response plan including joint emergency response protocols in consultation with local emergency response providers
- Developing a community health, safety and security management plan that details the strategies, procedures and education that will be implemented to protect public health, safety and security during construction
- Developing a land access management plan to notify landholders of works and access
- Implementing a Grievance Mechanism Procedure
- Developing and implementing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander procurement strategy and pro-actively seek opportunities to procure from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses
- Developing a gender equity and social inclusion plan to identify employment pathways for women, young people and vulnerable groups
- Developing and implementing an economic development action plan to enhance the range of opportunities for the region
- Implementing a project-specific community and stakeholder engagement plan that will inform, make aware and notify communities, landholders, residents, tourism operators and road users of the project and in advance of construction and operation activities, focusing on areas of community interest and concern
- Negotiating property management plans with individual landholders. The property management plan is part of the project's Construction Access Licence and Option Agreement that is sought to be entered into with landholders to manage and compensate for disturbance and impact on property values and production
- Implementing a workforce accommodation strategy to minimise potential impacts on the rental housing market in the region
- Implementing a noise management plan, rehabilitation plan, dust management plan, and weed and pathogen management plan.

Cumulative impacts, those that occur because of concurrent projects, will be mitigated and managed through the individual project measures as well as collaboration between industry, state and local government and other stakeholders in the planning, design and delivery of projects.

Community feedback

TasNetworks has been undertaking community engagement activities with stakeholders, community members and landholders since 2019. This has included one-on-one interviews with stakeholders and landholders.

Feedback received so far about social and economic impacts has related to:

- Residents highly valuing the lifestyle and amenity of North West Tasmania
- Investing in skills and training to upskill the community to maximise local job opportunities
- Concerns that existing workforce shortages in the region could be exacerbated by the project, impacting the construction industry
- Reducing impacts on the landscape, amenity, and environment
- Concerns about the potential impact on housing availability and affordability, particularly rental housing
- Concerns related to wellbeing including health impacts of electric magnetic fields (EMF), bushfire risks and impacts to the natural environment.

Next steps

The Remaining NWTD permit application will be submitted to the Tasmanian Planning Commission (TPC) for review and consideration. The TPC will place the application on public exhibition, including the full versions of all technical reports.

All members of the community will then be provided with the opportunity to make a written submission on the application when it is placed on public exhibition. We anticipate this to occur during May 2025.

The TPC will consider all submissions received and then hold hearings to provide community members with an additional opportunity to have a say. It is possible that the TPC could require additional information to address any matters raised in submissions or hearings. The TPC will then determine if the project will be approved or not approved. If the project is approved the permit would be subject to a number of conditions.

In addition, the project will need to be approved by the Commonwealth Government to satisfy the requirements of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (Cwth)* before works can commence.

We encourage you to sign up to receive the NWTD newsletter for regular updates on the project at www.tasnetworks.com.au/nwtd

Get in touch

To learn more about the North West Transmission Developments:

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