

VENTILUS TO PREPARE POWER GRID FOR MORE SUSTAINABLE ENERGY

- Ventilus is crucial for connecting additional onshore and offshore renewable power generation and exchanging international energy flows.
- The Flemish government has approved the launch notice for the construction of Ventilus.
- The Flemish government and Elia want to involve citizens, local residents and interest groups as much as possible in the project.

BRUSSELS – BRUGES | The Flemish government and the Belgian system operator have jointly proposed plans for ‘Ventilus’, a new high-voltage project in West Flanders. Flemish Environment Minister Koen Van den Heuvel and Governor of West Flanders Carl Decaluwé both attended a press conference on the subject in Bruges, which mainly emphasised the need for the project. In a few years’ time, Ventilus should connect additional offshore wind power generation, among other things. The project is also important for the further industrial development of West Flanders and the integration of other renewable energy sources. Ventilus’ route will be determined once the general public and interest groups have had their say.

By connecting additional renewable power generation to the grid through Ventilus, the Flemish government and Elia are taking a key step towards a more sustainable energy system. The Flemish government approved the launch notice on Friday. Ventilus will help Belgium to meet its climate targets, since the National Energy and Climate Plan states that 18.3% of our energy consumption must come from renewable sources by 2030.

“Now that we have approval, we are launching this ambitious project. Ventilus will help us to make the transition to sustainable energy. If we want to meet our targets, we must invest in renewable energy in the next few years. This goes hand in hand with shoring up and further developing our power grid. Only then can we achieve the energy transition and provide consumers with a reliable power supply. The Flemish government is making every effort to guarantee a robust and smooth land-use planning procedure so that the offshore wind turbines in the North Sea can be connected in good time.”

(Koen Van den Heuvel, Flemish Minister for the Environment, Nature and Agriculture)

More renewable energy

Wind energy is Belgium's biggest source of renewable generation (8% of the total energy mix) and there are specific plans to expand wind capacity with a second concession area for offshore wind in the Belgian part of the North Sea. Ventilus will ensure that this additional electricity is transmitted from the North Sea to consumers onshore. There will also be a link with the existing Stevin line, which became operational in 2017. Connecting the two projects with each other will make Belgium's power grid more robust and more reliable. In the long term, Ventilus will also make it possible to build a second subsea connection with the United Kingdom, alongside the existing Nemo Link project that became operational at the start of this year.

"It is vital that we meet the climate targets for energy supply while guaranteeing a strong, reliable power grid, but this poses challenges. Ventilus will give West Flanders a strong, cutting-edge power grid and will transmit renewable energy generated offshore and onshore to consumers, which is crucially important for the entire Belgian energy network."

(Ilse Tant, Chief Community Relations Officer, Elia)

Final route still to be determined

Ventilus will be a 380-kV high-voltage line with a capacity of 6 GW. The project consists of several parts. For example, a new overhead line is planned between the existing Stevin line and the high-voltage substation in Avelgem. The exact route has not yet been determined. The launch notice from the Flemish government gives an overview of possible options for this and other aspects of Ventilus.

Maximum involvement of citizens and stakeholders

To determine the route, the Flemish government and Elia have resolutely opted for a participatory approach. Accordingly, the launch notice was drawn up in close cooperation with various stakeholders. In May and June, residents of the 25 municipalities affected will be invited to information sessions that will be held in 10 locations across West Flanders. Environmental, agricultural and employers' organisations will also be involved, together with the local authorities.

Up until the end of June 2019, anyone can add their thoughts about the route via the website www.ventilus.be.

"With Ventilus, West Flanders will become a vital hub in the crucial transition to sustainable energy. This means that new infrastructure needs to be built, but it is essential that a participatory process take place so that all residents of West Flanders can add their input before final decisions are made."

(Carl Decaluwé, Governor of West Flanders)

The result of the consultation process will be thoroughly reviewed and taken into account in a so-called scoping notice, which is expected in autumn 2019. This notice will indicate which variants will be specifically studied in terms of the environment. Based on the subsequent Environmental Impact Study (EIS), the Flemish government will determine the final route in 2021 by means of the Regional Land-Use Plan (GRUP). The next step will be to apply for an environmental permit. Taking into account the duration of these meticulous procedures, work will begin no earlier than late 2022.

Ventilus supported by the Flemish government and Elia

Elia is Belgium's high-voltage transmission system operator (30 kV to 400 kV). It is responsible for transmitting electricity in Belgium and for building the infrastructure needed to meet Belgium's energy targets.

The Flemish Government is in charge of drawing up Regional Land-Use Plans, which are needed so that new infrastructure such as Ventilus can be built in Flanders. The first step, which has already been set in motion, is the approval of the launch notice and the organisation of a notification phase for all those affected in May and June. Specific information about this notification phase will follow later.

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