



The microtunnel between the Albert Canal and the Meuse: a vital link for the ALEGrO interconnector project

In January 2018, work began on the ALEGrO project, the first electricity interconnector between Belgium and Germany. One of the three pieces of infrastructure making up this huge project is a microtunnel that will enable the connection to pass underneath the River Meuse and the Albert Canal. As the tunnel boring machine has arrived at the pit in Herstal, Elia is taking the opportunity to explain this technical feat in detail.

Elia is currently implementing a major project to build an interconnector between Belgium and Germany called ALEGrO. Work officially started in January 2018 with three separate but simultaneous projects: the underground connection between Lixhe (Visé) and the border point at Eynatten (Raeren), the converter station at Lixhe, and the microtunnel between Liège and Herstal. The 90-km direct-current connection will have a capacity of 1,000 MW and will link Elia's high-voltage power grid in Belgium with that of Amprion in Germany.

To mark the beginning of the microtunnel drilling stage and the tunnel boring machine's arrival at the pit in Herstal, Elia invited representatives of the municipalities directly affected – Herstal, Liège, Oupeye and Visé – to visit the site, where they learned about the tools and techniques used to excavate the two access pits, and the drilling of the tunnel.

A 670-M TUNNEL UNDER THE MEUSE AND THE ALBERT CANAL

At the Cheratte viaduct, the route of the ALEGrO high-voltage connection crosses the Albert Canal and the Meuse. To ensure that mobility on the viaduct would not be affected, Elia decided to build a microtunnel to enable the two high-voltage cables to pass underneath the canal and the river.

The microtunnel is being dug to a depth of 30 m and will be 670 m long when it is finished, with a diameter of 2 m. At the start of April, a new stage in the project was reached: the horizontal drilling of the tunnel. The pits at both the Liège and Herstal ends of the tunnel have already been dug and concreted. Excavation of the tunnel has now begun thanks to the use of a tunnel boring machine, which will arrive at its destination in the next few days.

Els Celens, Project Manager

"We had to opt for a microtunnel to prevent major mobility problems on the Cheratte viaduct. As the road is one of the region's main thoroughfares, it was essential for Elia to find an optimal solution that would limit disruption."





ABOUT ELIA:

Elia is Belgium's high-voltage transmission system operator (30 kV to 380 kV), employing 1,350 professionals and currently in charge of more than 8,495 km of underground cables and overhead lines. Its grid is considered one of the most reliable in Europe and plays a key role in the community since large industrial customers are connected to it and it transmits electricity from generators to distribution networks (DSOs).

In addition to the information available on Elia's website (www.elia.be/alegro), a freephone number (0800 18 002) and an e-mail address (alegro@elia.be) have been made available to local residents so they can ask any questions they might have about the project. The progress of the project can also be monitored daily on the interactive map available on the site's project page.

For more information, please contact:

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