

Draft Corridor for VNI West



Introduction

VNI West is a major project to build a 500 kV transmission line from Bulgana in Victoria to the Dinawan terminal station in New South Wales. It will harness clean, low-cost electricity from both states and help bridge the looming supply gap as coal fired generation rapidly retires.

VNI West is expected to harness 3.4 gigawatts of renewable energy generation in Victoria, enough to power approximately 2.3 million homes.

Transmission Company Victoria (TCV) is responsible for developing the Victorian section of VNI West, and since May has narrowed down the broad 5 km - 50 km wide area of interest to a draft corridor of about 2km.

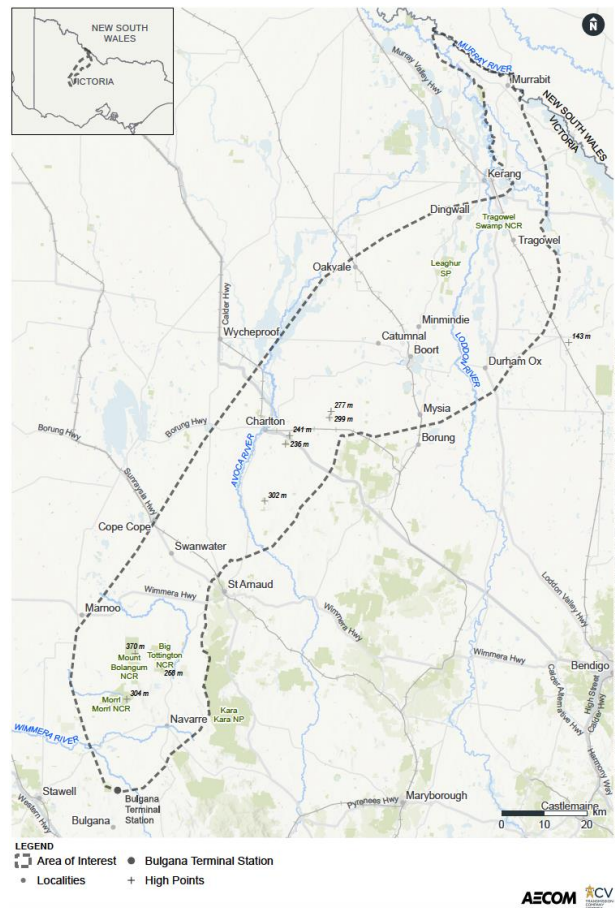
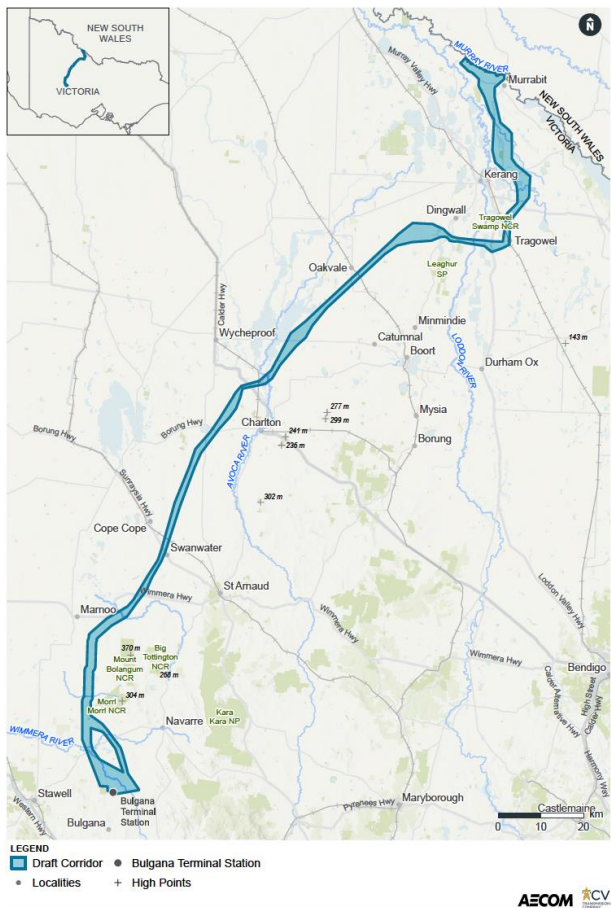
In this next phase of this project, TVC will work with landholders, communities and Traditional Owners to find the right location for the 70m – 120 m easement which has the least impact on lives and livelihoods.

To coincide with the release of the report on the draft corridor, we have launched a new interactive map which landholders can use to find out if they are currently in the draft corridor.

Communities across the draft corridor will have a chance to ask questions and learn more about the ongoing route refinement process at our next round of community meetings, which starts on Tuesday 10 October and runs until Thursday 19 October.

The TCV landholder liaisons will continue their discussions with landholders following the release of the draft corridor along with the ongoing work to reach the farmers and property owners we have not yet been in contact with.

If you are not sure whether your property is in the draft corridor you can check with our interactive map on the TCV website or contact us on 1800 824 221 or by sending an email to enquiries@transmissionvictoria.com.au.



A rigorous and consultative regulatory process to assess the potential environmental, cultural and social impacts of VNI West will take place over the next 12-18 months, with initial environmental field studies commencing soon.

Community consultation is an essential part of this process, and there will be opportunities for stakeholders and community members to make submissions and provide feedback.

A Community Reference Group has been established and the local members from across the region will meet regularly to address issues and questions raised by the community.

We will continue to engage with local stakeholders such as Councils and communicate regularly through the TCV website, our project updates and social media.

More information for landholders

TCV has been reaching out to all landholders connected with around 500 properties in the draft corridor. Not all these properties will be in the final route. However, TCV would like to speak with all landholders to better understand your land and how you use it, so we can design a final route that minimises impacts to farms and farming.

How do I know if I am in the draft corridor? An online interactive map shows where the draft corridor sits within the broader area of interest. You can input your address details and see where your property is, in relation to the draft corridor. Go to the Project Map section of the TCV website.

Who do I call to find out more? Each landholder has a dedicated Landholder Liaison who is your primary contact point for all questions and information about the project. If you have received a letter from TCV advising you that your property is in the draft corridor, a name and number will be included, and we encourage you to call your Liaison. If you have not heard from us yet, we would really like to hear from you – please call TCV on 1800 824 221 or email enquiries@transmissionvictoria.com.au.

What happens if you want to access my land? In coming months, TCV will be seeking access to a small number of properties to conduct environmental field surveys as the first phase of environmental studies. Our land team will negotiate access agreements, including biosecurity requirements, before any field surveys commence. Further information can be found in the Landholder Guide on our website.

Will I get compensated for providing access? Landholders will receive \$10,000 for entering into a land access agreement, paid at \$5,000 per annum over a 2 year term. It is worth noting that signing a land access agreement does not mean that a landholder agrees to have transmission infrastructure on their property. The access agreements are for field studies only.

If a property is eventually confirmed as the location for the transmission easement, a separate process of negotiation will be undertaken with the landholder for a “Option for Easement” agreement, which will include the amount of compensation and the terms for land access for VNI West construction and ongoing operations.

Will you cover my legal costs for entering a land access agreement? You can seek independent legal advice regarding an access agreement and TCV will reimburse reasonable costs up to \$1,000 (excluding GST).

What about costs for an independent valuer? If down the track TCV approaches you to discuss obtaining an easement over your land, TCV will reimburse the reasonable costs of professional advice such as legal or valuation fees.

Developing the draft corridor

The TCV draft corridor is approximately 2 kilometres wide along most of the route with wider areas in several locations where flexibility is needed, for example, to provide options for crossing the Murray River and connecting with the New South Wales component of the project. Important sensitivities such as residential areas and intensely irrigated agricultural land are largely avoided, and major townships including St Arnaud, Charlton and Boort are not directly impacted. The number of private properties in the draft corridor is about 500, compared to more than 5000 properties across the previous area of interest.

TCV has made a commitment to minimise impacts on people, businesses and the environment wherever possible. The overall approach adopted to refine the broad area of interest down to a narrower draft corridor was based on the principle of ‘avoidance’ of sensitive environmental, social and cultural values wherever possible.

The process to refine the route has included seeking input from landholders, Traditional Owners, community members, government agencies and other stakeholders, as well as the analysis of data from ongoing technical, engineering and environmental studies.

Identifying location constraints

Environmental and technical constraints across the area of interest were identified based on detailed desktop analysis and expert workshops, along with information gathered through community and stakeholder engagement. An [Environmental Constraints Summary Report](#) summarising these findings was released in July 2023.

Areas identified as those to be avoided include aerodromes, significant heritage sites, RAMSAR wetlands, conservation parks and recreation reserves and areas of high ecological value.

Desktop assessments investigated environmental and technical constraints and cultural values including:

- Places of Aboriginal cultural heritage significance
- Biodiversity and threatened species
- Existing and future land use including agriculture and infrastructure
- Proximity to dwellings schools and hospitals
- Land uses such as transport networks and airports
- Geography and topography such as water bodies
- Overall length required and number of landowners impacted
- Reducing the number of transmission line angle deviations where possible
- Accessibility for renewable development

In places where the draft corridor does intersect with constraints, there is flexibility within the approximately 2km-wide corridor to design and locate the easement and infrastructure, such as towers, to minimise impacts.

Feedback from the community

Community members, Traditional Owner groups, landholders and stakeholders provided numerous valuable insights including environmental, social and economic factors for consideration.

TCV has undertaken a regional communications and engagement program to learn more about the communities and land in the area of interest. The TCV project team attended community sessions throughout the region, talking with farmers, other landholders and community members to seek input into the corridor refinement process. Members of the community shared vital details about their farms and farming, about fragile ecosystems, endangered animals, special places and unique landmarks. People were encouraged to add constraints and opportunities to an online social pinpoint map, adding comments at specific geographic locations. TCV's interactive map was visited more than 4,000 times and received more than 2,300 comments.

These local issues and constraints were added to the information found in publicly available databases and other sources. Some examples of community inputs include:

- avoidance of industries that are vital to local economies, for example, key tourism hot spots such as parks and reserves, the olive industry near Boort and the large feedlot near Charlton;
- concerns around the visual impact of the project on the landscape;
- features including local vantage points, lookouts, hiking trails and recreational areas; and
- habitat and sightings for numerous endangered species.

Traditional Owner input

Discussions including some On Country Days were held to seek the initial views of Traditional Owners within the area of interest and further our understanding and appreciation of cultural heritage sensitivity, particularly regarding the intangible aspects of cultural heritage. Sites of cultural and historic significance within the area include culturally modified trees, oven mounds, burial sites, and sites of local heritage importance. Traditional Owners have emphasised the importance of intangible cultural values such as spiritual connection with the land, waterways and vegetation, in addition to sites containing artefacts.

Minimising impacts to sensitive areas

Reflecting feedback received from the community as well as from ongoing technical, environmental, and engineering studies, the draft corridor was designed to avoid sensitive areas wherever possible. This included consideration of populated areas, farming operations and farmhouses, steep or hilly topography, scenic high points, sensitive wetlands, areas prone to flooding and a range of other factors as outlined in the Report. Existing and planned infrastructure and bushfire risk were also factored in.

Example of how sensitivities were reflected in the draft corridor design include the following:

- Residential areas: The draft corridor is more than 6km away from any major towns, including Charlton, Boort and Kerang.
- Intensive agriculture: the course of the draft corridor to the west of the area of interest largely avoids intensive agriculture, running through dryland cropping and grazing farms.
- Floodplains: The proposed crossing point of the Loddon River limits the amount of floodplain the transmission line crosses. Where the line cannot avoid flood prone areas, more complex engineering solutions will be explored.
- Tourism and visual impacts: the draft corridor seeks to avoid areas where tourism or views could be compromised by the visual impact of the lines, such as the hilly areas south of Charlton.
- Cultural heritage: The draft corridor runs to the west of Boort, avoiding numerous areas of known Aboriginal cultural heritage, including scar trees and areas where artefacts have been found.
- Biodiversity: Avoiding National Parks including Big Tottington NCR, Kara Kara National Park, Morri Morri NCR and Mount Bolangum NCR.

Analysis of key constraints and local considerations identified that the areas further west and north within the area of interest displayed the least environmental constraints relative to other possible areas in the central and eastern areas.

Report on the Draft Corridor

While developing the draft corridor TCV sought to avoid areas of sensitivity and constraints to the maximum extent possible, while delivering the highest net benefits to the electricity consumer and maintaining technical design feasibility. The Report on the Draft Corridor for VNI West provides detail on how analysis of land use (agricultural, environmental, and cultural) influenced the route refinement process.

Project next steps

Working with communities: In the next stage of the project, TCV will continue to engage with landholders and communities in the draft corridor to provide information and seek input into important considerations such as opportunities for community benefits and ongoing route refinement.

The corridor will be narrowed considerably over the next two years, from 2km average width to an eventual easement of 70-120m. Not all the properties that are currently in the draft corridor will be in the final route for the transmission lines - many properties that currently fall within the draft corridor will not be directly impacted by the final transmission alignment.

Through direct engagement with all those within the draft corridor, TCV will build its understanding of how the land is used today to verify location constraints, and discuss how to minimise land-use, cultural and environmental impacts through planning and design.

Working with landholders: TCV will work directly with landholders to find the best practicable location for the transmission alignment to minimise impacts to farming operations and agriculture. TCV is currently talking with farmers and other property owners within the draft corridor to build our understanding of the land and land use.

Every landholder in the draft corridor has a dedicated landholder liaison, a key contact to help answer questions on important issues, including farming with transmission lines, biosecurity arrangements, access agreements, compensation for an easement and other payments.

Working with Traditional Owners: With a draft corridor identified, consultation with Traditional Owner groups is now essential to improve TCV's understanding of the cultural significance of the Country within the area of interest and identify specific areas of cultural significance where impacts should be avoided or mitigated. The engagement will also consider how VNI West may be able to provide positive outcomes and opportunities for Traditional Owner groups.

Environmental and technical studies: A comprehensive environmental assessment is required under Government regulation. In coming weeks TCV will refer the refined draft corridor to the Victorian Minister for Planning to consider whether an Environment Effects Statement (EES) will be required for the project. The EES is a rigorous and consultative regulatory process to comprehensively assess the potential environmental, cultural and social impacts of the project.

TCV is planning to commence environmental field studies this year and will be seeking access to some properties within the corridor to carry out some basic, non-invasive field testing.

The full "Report on the Draft Corridor for VNI West" is available on the TCV website at:

www.transmissionvictoria.com.au

For a copy of the Landholder Guide please visit the TCV website or contact us:

Phone: 1800 824 221

Email: enquiries@transmissionvictoria.com.au