

# Bury the Powerlines not the People

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**In September I travelled to Boyle, Roscommon, to visit a community group which is opposing a 35 mile, 220 kv, 110 feet, ESB pylon line, in favour of an alternative which would put the powerlines underground. Hence the campaign slogan ‘Bury the Powerlines not the People’.**



Early in June I had heard of what was going on there, due to reports in the Western papers about threatened high court injunctions. On the 21st of June the ESB arrived at the Roddy household.

*As Martina Roddy relates: “Well let’s see this was our fifth letter from the ESB, and three of them, including the one of the 14th of June, threatened us with the High Court if we didn’t grant access on the 21st of June, so basically through our solicitor we were informed that there was ESB personnel coming to our house to seek access. So the people of the group and friends and neighbours gathered at the house, and the ESB came to the door, asked for Michael, and were refused access. As I say we were threatened with a high court injunction on that day, and we refused them access and we will continue to refuse.”*

The group cites the work of Professor Henshaw of Bristol University, who has spoken of a link between childhood leukaemia, brain tumours, miscarriages and overhead power lines. They point out the intense difference between a heavily insulated underground powerline and the open nature of pylons. A number of local protests at the ESB were organised over the summer, in Carrick on Shannon and Sligo, these gained a lot of publicity and spurred on more people to get involved.

A national demonstration took place at the ESB HQ on July 25th , involving groups from around the country which have problems with ESB developments. The group in Boyle is well networked with other similar groups across the island, including ones in Cork, Dublin, Donegal and Galway.

The following article consists of two parts; an interview with Frank, community activist and organic farmer, and parts of a timeline presentation made by Martina Roddy for the [10th Grassroots Gathering](#).

## **Related Link:**

[Donegal Alternatives to Pylons](#)

### **So how did the campaign get started?**

The whole thing started about five years ago, the first we heard was when we saw a big ad in the back of the local paper, the Roscommon Herald, saying that the ESB intended to bring a powerline from Carrick-on-Shannon to a place down in Sligo called Shrananagh and the landowners that were directly affected were written to, but everybody else was ignored.

People that would be living in close proximity to the line were never notified of anything apart from this big ad in the paper.

Directly affected they call it if it is to go on your land, but to me everybody is directly affected. If you weren't to have a pylon on your land to the ESB you more or less didn't exist.

A group was set up, a committee was formed, you had several groups along the line, you see it's a 35 mile line, and therefore you wouldn't know people from one end of it, and so different groups formed along the line.

Myself and the Roddys and a few other neighbours formed a group here in the Boyle area.

All the groups then joined up together, and sent in objections, and looked for more information really, and this information was slow in coming. A lot of our questions were never answered.

### **How many objections were made in the Planning Process?**

I'd say on the whole line maybe 10 to 12,000. They were basically all ignored. We asked a serious amount of questions to the County Manager, to the ESB. We asked what were the alternative routes. Those letters, were, to this day, never answered.

### **What are your health concerns with this development?**

Most people are really worried about the health implications. More and more research has shown that living close to powerlines, or under them, or near them, is bad for your health to put it mildly.

Research has shown a link between, for example, childhood leukaemia and over head powerlines.

We are not trying to stop the line as such we are simply trying to get the ESB to put it in as an underground cable.

### **How big, how high and how wide are these pylons and this pylon line to be?**

The entire line will have about 200 pylons, they will range in height from 100 to 130 feet. They are fairly big structures. They are a new type of design called lattice towers. I believe they are the first of their type in the country.

### **How does that compare to other pylons?**

They will be one of the biggest groups of pylons in the country.

### **They call this a 'sterile corridor', what does that mean in practise?**

There is a strip of land, 30 metres each side of the line, which comes to about 200 feet in width in total, and that's the entire line. It is called a 'sterile corridor' as if you sign the 'deed of easement' you are actually signing away your rights to that property to the ESB, that strip of ground they will have control of, for ever.

And once they have the pylons up they can add whatever they like to the line, extra lines, phone masts, and so on.

**Adrian Leddy, the IFA (Irish Farmers Association) Regional Development Officer, commented on your campaign to the effect that "we don't live in the Dark Ages", the IFA also sent out letters claiming they had negotiated a "satisfactory outcome" to this dispute.**

From day one every time we had a meeting, the IFA would have one contradicting what we had said. The IFA claim to represent farmers well if they do why didn't they come to us on day one and say well what do you think of this.

We don't trust the IFA, the IFA as far as we are concerned are in bed with the ESB. There is nothing dark ages about an underground cable, that is real progress, there are underground cables in every town and village in the country.

This is the sort of stuff we have had to put up with for five years they have bullied and threatened people unbelievably.

A guy who is an engineer for the ESB, his name is Jarlath Doyle, he went to a neighbour of mine, a man who is not well at all, who is recovering from leukaemia, and Doyle said to him you still have your signs up and your gate locked, if you don't take down those signs and open those gates and let the ESB in, we'll take ya to the High Court and clean ya.

#### **TIMELINE:**

**Proposed Project:** 220kv ESB Power line going from Carrick on Shannon (Co Leitrim) to Sooeey in Co Sligo on 215 pylon towers with an average height of 110ft.

This project was started by ESB approx. 15 yrs ago when they made various attempts to go through other areas but much local opposition caused them to re-route the line in our direction in 1999-2000, where there is much afforestation and many elderly or single people living.

Route is 35 miles long and will affect 15,000 acres of land in total. The ESB are attempting to gain access to lands using 1927 Electricity Act (amended in 1985) which gave ESB rights to enter any lands for the construction of any necessary structure. They have also enlisted the help of the Irish Farmers Association to negotiate with landowners and get them to agree to allow pylon bases to be constructed on their lands. The ESB need a landowner's signature of a 'Deed of Easement' to ensure a type of ownership of the land beneath the pylon bases and the overhead powerlines. They are also seeking to take over a 60 metre wide 'sterile corridor'.

#### **Timetable of events to date:**

**May 2000:** landowners first informed of proposal and given maps of route of lines. No consultation with landowners or locals before maps drawn up.

**Sept 2000:** meeting between ESB officials and our local group, our feelings about plan clearly spelt out.

**Oct 2001:** Planning permission granted by the 3 Co Cos Roscommon, Sligo and Leitrim.

We appealed to An Bord Plenala and requested/paid for Oral Hearing which was refused and money never refunded.

**Oct 2002:** An Bord Plenala upheld Co Councils permission and ignored advise of Mr. Wall their inspector who deemed the EIS to be 70% inaccurate and advised permission should be refused.

**June 2003:** Complaint and Petition sent to Europe based on inadequate Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and the ESBs failure to comply with many EU Directives like consultation with the locals involved. Nothing positive heard back, EU pointed out that EIS was done and the fact it was 70% inadequate appeared irrelevant. Matter still ongoing.

**Nov 2003:** first wayleaves issued to landowners who were notified of ESBs 'intention to start work immediately but no later than Jan 04'.

**March / April 2004:** work began in Coillte lands and on farmers lands where permission to enter lands was given. IFA and ESBs reps began visiting landowners to gain either verbal/written consent to access lands. Many older farmers/single people particularly in Sligo section were talked around and gave in. IFA worked out 'great deal' for all landowners €1,250 per pylon and €1.50 per metre of line crossing over lands.

**Oct 2004:** we first received notification of thir intention to enter our lands, workers never showed up on date named by ESB after our solicitor pointed out strongly our opposition to plan.

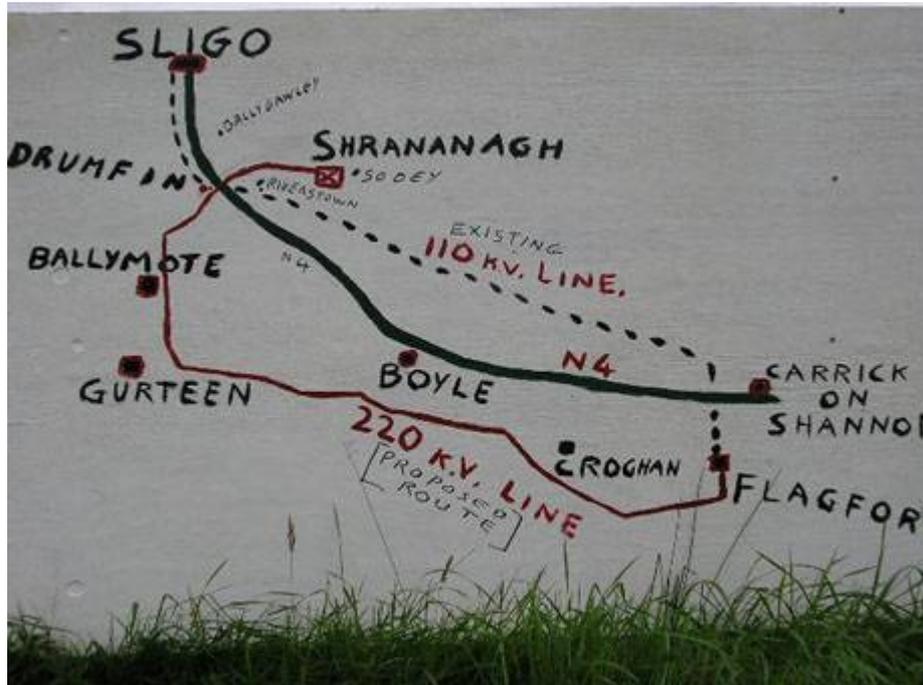
**Between Oct 2004 – June 2005** we received 5 letters from ESBs lawyer stating their intention to 'enter our lands as a matter of urgency' and 3 letters contained High Court Injunction threats which would take place 'without further notice' if we made any attempt to stop ESB personnel entering our private lands.

**2nd Feb/1st June and 21st June 2005:** We were visited by 2 ESB reps. On 21st June we refused access outright and a crowd of 50 –60 gathered outside our home to support our opposition to pylons. 2 ESB reps called to our door on June 21st, 2 ESB jeeps with approx. 8 workers parked about 70m down the rd and a digger was parked about a 1/2 mile away from house. 2 Gardai also waited outside our front gate at invitation of ESB.

**July 4th :** anti- pylon protest outside ESB premises in Sligo town about 50 attended. Much radio and newspaper coverage.

**July 25th 2005 :** National protest with approx. 150 people outside ESB HQ on Lower Fitzwilliam Street in Dublin. INN and Irish Times coverage as well as local stations and newspapers.

**August 22nd 2005:** Local protest outside ESB premises in Carrick on Shannon again much interest by local media.



Map on a protest sign showing the extent of the development



Micheal and Frank pointing to a proposed site for a pylon, note the adjoining house



Micheal Roddy chaining the gate to a field in which the ESB plan to build a pylon



Another Protest Sign

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