

IESO Regional Electricity Networks

Taking community engagement across Ontario

Summary of 2019/2020 IESO Regional Electricity Network Discussions

April 2020

Regional Electricity Networks are creating conversations

Engaging with communities is a high priority for the IESO.

By building and maintaining strong relationships with municipal leaders, residents and business owners and First Nation community members, the IESO is in a better position to share information with those who want to understand and influence local, regional and province-wide electricity planning. These connections also provide an important opportunity to build capacity for purposeful engagement, which should result in better, more informed decision-making for the benefit of all electricity consumers in Ontario.

To facilitate these conversations, the IESO launched a series of regional electricity networks at the end of 2019. These networks were an outcome of the feedback from stakeholders who said they wanted more ongoing engagement with the IESO.

2019/2020 forums to launch the networks

In late 2019 and early 2020, the IESO hosted meetings in each of the five network regions. In Thunder Bay (northwest), Sault Ste. Marie (northeast), Mississauga (central/GTA) participants could attend in person and by webinar. The Belleville (east) and Cambridge (southwest) meetings were only held by webinar to support the efforts of public health units to control the spread of COVID-19.

These forums brought together almost 1,000 people (network members as well as non-members) and this report is a summary of what we heard.

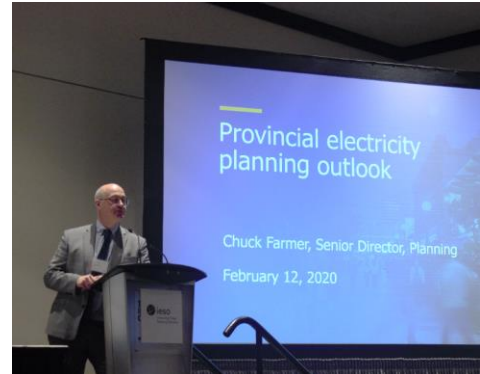
All presentations and recorded meetings are [online](#).



In addition to the meetings being well attended, participants were highly engaged, asking questions and sharing ideas. Many enquiries were about provincial electricity planning ([IESO Annual Planning Outlook](#) released in January), which reported that there is enough capacity to meet electricity needs for the next decade.

Most questions and comments concerned the following:

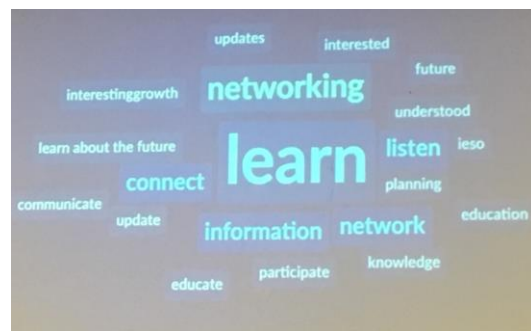
- The status of region-specific projects
- Electricity trade with Quebec, Michigan and Manitoba
- Factors that contribute to IESO electricity forecasts
- Microgrids, storage and other local energy resources
- Energy efficiency and opportunities to defer energy costs through distributed energy resources
- Local priorities around climate change and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and how this can impact electricity planning



For the in-person meetings, the conversations and questions continued at the break and the end of the meeting; attendees used every opportunity to engage with the IESO and each other.

And all those that attended received a survey to provide feedback on the meeting and how future meetings should look. Participants expressed appreciation for the opportunity to gather virtually or in person.

Overwhelmingly, people said that they came to events to learn and network. They told us that they wanted to become more engaged in the decision making process and provided feedback on ways to make engagement more effective and purposeful.



Participants were asked: "In one word, tell us why you are here today."

What we heard

In some cases, the issues and concerns of network members were similar across the network regions while in others they were unique.

In the **central/GTA** region, for example, forum attendees identified priorities that included: planning for continued population growth and urban development; the impact of GHG reduction measures such as heat pumps and the electrification of transportation on system capacity; and, the increasing prevalence of community-driven energy resources.



In the **southwest** region, there was discussion around the need to explore opportunities to increase electricity supply to accommodate new operations (particularly to meet the growing electricity needs for indoor agriculture). Those options included alternative energy sources like small-scale wind turbines, heat pumps and microgrids to meet growing needs and reduce GHG emissions.

In the **northwest** region, participants identified concerns around supply management and the opportunities and challenges associated with hydro-electric generation. There, participants also talked about engaging with Indigenous communities and municipalities in the regional electricity planning process to ensure economic development plans are considered.



In the **northeast**, the conversation was about how the IESO's planning outlook accounts for electric vehicles, decarbonization and climate change, and the interplay between natural gas and nuclear refurbishments. We also heard that attendees in this region want to know more about the evaluation of potential energy solutions as well as the cost/benefit evaluation of energy efficiency and how that factors into or compares with generation.

In the **east**, top-of-mind were climate change, importing/exporting electricity and GHG emission targets, the growing role and impact of heat pumps, as well as electrification of transportation.

What to expect

The IESO will use what we heard in these forums to help inform future discussions in each network region, and in line with their priorities.

The networks are all about connections and the IESO is actively creating more ways to enhance and improve on those connections. Communications will continue to inform and seek input on important initiatives within each network area.

Planning is also underway for the next round of network meetings and input continues to be a key factor in informing those meeting. Send agenda ideas to communityengagement@ieso.ca.

The IESO will share more details about these initiatives later this summer.

Conclusion

There is no question that the sector is evolving into a more distributed system with increasing opportunities for new participants. As the traditional stakeholder base in Ontario's electricity sector is changing, so too is the IESO in its approach to outreach in order to meet the needs of all affected stakeholders and communities.

To join the regional electricity network in your community, please visit www.ieso.ca/regional-networks.