

Exploring network visibility: costs, benefits and value discussion paper

In-person workshop – summary of feedback

Background

The Electricity Authority Te Mana Hiko (the Authority) hosted a workshop in Wellington on 18 September 2025 to capture feedback on its discussion paper *Exploring network visibility: costs, benefits and value*. Forty-one people attended the workshop, representing a variety of sectors including distributors, access seekers, flexibility services, non-profit organisations, and metering and data service providers

Attendees were assigned to one of eight tables with a moderator from the Authority at each to help ensure that a variety of perspectives were reflected in the discussions. Table discussions were framed around three main sessions:

1. Possible costs and benefits of the Australian Energy Regulator (AER) priority datasets for network visibility in New Zealand
2. Challenges and barriers to the development and use of disclosures relating to network capacity information
3. What could a roadmap for network visibility include?

At the beginning of each session, attendees heard from two speakers (one distributor and one access seeker or other interested party) who set the scene for the table discussions.

Summary of feedback

The following is a summary of the table discussions, as reported by the moderators. The discussion points listed below do not imply any level of agreement or otherwise with the point. Feedback has been grouped into themes for each of the three sessions.

Session 1: Possible costs and benefits of the Australian Energy Regulator's priority datasets

The Authority sought attendees' views of the priority datasets identified by the Australian Energy Regulator (AER) that could be required for network visibility.¹ We were particularly interested in whether these datasets might be suitable for adoption in New Zealand.

There wasn't an agreed view from attendees about the suitability of the AER priority datasets. However, the key themes include:

Standardisation of information

Most feedback strongly emphasised the importance of standardising data and information to improve accessibility. Many identified the value of standardisation for both access seekers – who would benefit from clearer, easier to understand information – and distributors, who currently receive network data in varying formats. While attendees recognised the value of standardisation, they also acknowledged the challenge of achieving consistency across all 29 distributors.

Capacity maps

Feedback from access seekers was that they would like to see distributors publishing network capacity or opportunity maps. This would provide access seekers with location-specific information

¹ See Appendix D of the [Exploring network visibility: costs benefits and value](#) discussion paper

about transformers, substations and feeder lines, which could assist with decision-making. There was also feedback that using clear, standardised labels for parts of the distribution networks would be useful as distributors currently use different naming conventions.

Identifying the needs of access seekers

A common theme was that different access seekers have different use cases for network visibility. Accordingly, some attendees said it is important that regulators and distributors don't make assumptions about what data and information access seekers need. This was reinforced in session 3 where some suggested distributors should work with access seekers to identify what their information needs are.

Session 2: Challenges and barriers

For this session, the Authority sought attendees' thoughts on the challenges and barriers to network visibility and the use of existing information disclosures.

Limitations of information disclosures

There was strong feedback from attendees that current information disclosures under Part 4 of the Commerce Act 1986 are not helpful for access seekers. This is in part due to the way information can be accessed. For example, some had difficulty identifying relevant information in asset management plans, and the use of PDFs, spreadsheets and small font size were mentioned as being unhelpful and not fit for purpose. Some attendees suggested using application programming interfaces (APIs) would improve access to information.

Some access seekers also said the frequency of information disclosures does not meet their needs. Information required under current information disclosures tends to be published annually in distributors' asset management plans. Access seekers said having access to dynamic network information rather than static information would be most helpful to them.

Relationship building

One of the speakers for this session highlighted that network visibility isn't just about data and information but should also be about the relationship between access seekers and distributors. This viewpoint also came through during the table discussions, for example, some noted:

- There is a need to build relationships between distributors and access seekers to enhance trust between both parties. This could address concerns expressed by some distributors about misuse of data and information.
- Some access seekers lack confidence in engaging with distributors as they don't have the technical knowledge and don't know what questions to ask.
- There may be a need for 'navigators' to connect access seekers and distributors and help translate data into information.

Cost for distribution businesses

One of the challenges identified by distributors is that to create network capacity insights they bear the costs of collecting, processing and enabling access to data and information. But some of the benefits of publishing this information accrue to the access seeker or consumer. Some attendees suggested that consideration could be given to a user-pays component for information over and above minimum data requirements.

Session 3: Roadmap for network visibility

For this session, the Authority invited attendees to provide feedback on a possible roadmap to improve network visibility. The themes reported back from the table discussions included:

Taking a staged approach

Several attendees said it is better to make some network information available now and fill in gaps later, rather than waiting for a full roadmap for network visibility. Most attendees thought the logical first stage would be distributors publishing information about high-voltage (HV) networks as they already hold good information about them. The next stage would be making information about medium-voltage (MV) networks and low-voltage (LV) networks would be the last stage. Several distributors did not support publishing LV network information, as the information is costly to produce and of little value to themselves or access seekers.

There were different perspectives regarding timeframes for progress. Some suggested it would be reasonable for HV network information to be made available within the next 6 to 12 months, while other tables suggested two years would be appropriate. There was general agreement that a five-year timeframe for making LV network information available would be suitable, and MV network information within the next three years.

Is there a need for regulation?

Feedback was mixed about whether regulation is needed to achieve network visibility. The main views were:

- A regulatory backstop may be needed to ensure uniform progress by all distributors and to achieve a minimum level of service.
- Common standards and requirements for providing access to network information could be specified in regulation.

Some suggested an alternative where the Authority and/or the Commerce Commission has a mediator role to help access seekers understand network data and information. Others suggested guidance would be helpful and could be developed by organisations like Electricity Networks Aotearoa or the Electrical Engineers' Association.

Opportunity for collaboration

Several groups noted that collaboration is needed to improve network visibility. Some suggested this could be an opportunity for distributors who are further along in their network visibility journey to share their experience with other distributors. This could be particularly helpful for smaller distributors who would benefit from extra support in developing their capability around network data.

Many said collaboration would help achieve standardisation across distributors, to avoid duplication of effort by working together on common tools. This was a theme throughout the workshop.