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By the FRANCO BRITISH *Chamber*

ENERGY CRISIS, GREEN OPPORTUNITIES: UK & FRANCE FACING CLIMATE CHALLENGES

Lessons from The Cross-Channel Institute Economic Round Table



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On 1 October, the Franco-British Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Cross-Channel Institute brought together public authorities, energy specialists and business leaders at the British Embassy in Paris to examine how France and the United Kingdom can turn energy constraints into investment, competitiveness and closer cooperation.

The discussion reached a clear conclusion. Increasing low-carbon generation remains essential, but it is no longer sufficient. The next phase of the transition depends on networks, flexibility, storage, predictable regulation and the ability of businesses to connect and electrify at an economically viable cost.



A discussion grounded in policy and business experience

Olivier Campenon opened the first Cross-Channel Institute Economic Round Table. Alun Rees of ENGIE then set the strategic context before a France–UK comparison introduced the discussion.

The first session brought together Julien Danne of the British Embassy, Alun Rees of ENGIE and Oliver Sartor of Voltalis to consider policy, regulation, investment and demand-side flexibility. The second session moved to implementation, with Loïc Chavaroche of Groupe STERNE and David Bucher of Jaguar Land Rover examining the practical conditions for transport and fleet electrification.

Five priorities for delivery

1

PLAN NETWORKS AROUND FUTURE DEMAND

France and the UK should treat electricity networks as strategic economic infrastructure. Planning, permitting and investment must anticipate industrial projects, charging demand and new generation rather than respond only after constraints appear.

2

GIVE FLEXIBILITY A CLEAR ECONOMIC VALUE

Market rules should allow storage, demand-side response and smart charging to compete fairly with generation and network reinforcement. Customers must be able to understand and share in the value they provide.

3

IMPROVE VISIBILITY FOR BUSINESS INVESTMENT

Governments and regulators should provide clearer long-term signals on electricity prices, network charges, taxation, support mechanisms and connection timetables.

4

BUILD ELECTRIFICATION AROUND REAL USE CASES

Transport and industrial policies should address vehicles and equipment together with charging, connections, land, permits and operating constraints. Electrification programmes should be designed around how companies actually use energy.

5

TURN FRANCO BRITISH COOPERATION INTO PROJECTS

The two countries should use a regular business and government dialogue to identify regulatory barriers, strengthen strategic supply chains and advance specific projects in interconnection, grids, flexibility and industrial decarbonisation.

Different energy systems with common constraints

France and the United Kingdom approach the transition from different starting points. France benefits from a predominantly low-carbon electricity system built around nuclear power and renewable generation. Its central challenge is to use this advantage to replace fossil fuels in transport, buildings and industry.

The United Kingdom has become a leader in wind generation, but gas still plays a larger role in its electricity system and continues to expose consumers and businesses to international price volatility. The Clean Power 2030 plan seeks to bring clean sources to at least 95 per cent of Great Britain's electricity generation in a typical weather year.

Despite these differences, both countries face the same practical test: how to electrify more activity while maintaining security of supply, affordability and industrial competitiveness. The transition will succeed only if generation, networks and demand develop together.





Electricity networks are now economic infrastructure

Grid capacity emerged as one of the strongest themes of the round table. A renewable project creates little value if it cannot connect. An industrial site cannot electrify its processes, and a transport operator cannot convert its fleet, if the required connection arrives too late or at an uncertain cost.

The timing of the discussion was particularly relevant. Two days before the event, the UK Government announced Great British Grid, a publicly owned body within Great British Energy intended to accelerate investment in network infrastructure and connections. In France, the third Multiannual Energy Programme sets the energy-policy framework for 2026–2035, while RTE's approved investment programme for 2026 totals €4.24 billion, with increased expenditure on connections and network adaptation.

These initiatives recognise that networks cannot be treated as a passive consequence of energy policy. They must be planned as strategic infrastructure and, where possible, built ahead of demand. Delayed connections can postpone investment, restrict regional development and weaken the business case for electrification.



Flexibility must become part of the system design

More variable renewable generation will increase the value of storage, demand-side response and smart charging. The discussion of Voltalis's activities helped distinguish three related effects: reducing overall consumption, shifting consumption away from periods of system stress and making flexible capacity available to the electricity network.

This distinction matters. Flexibility is not simply an energy-saving measure. It can reduce peak demand, make better use of existing infrastructure and limit the need for some network reinforcement. Its development will depend on clear market rules, appropriate remuneration, suitable equipment and customer acceptance. The value created must also be shared transparently among customers, flexibility providers and the wider electricity system.



Businesses make decisions on the complete operating model

The perspectives from Groupe STERNE and Jaguar Land Rover brought the discussion back to the conditions companies face on the ground. The availability of an electric vehicle is only one part of a fleet-electrification decision. Companies also assess total cost, charging time, depot capacity, grid connections, land, permits, insurance and the effect on day-to-day operations.

Smart charging can improve the economics of electrification when several vehicles share a site, but only if the charging strategy reflects operational schedules and electricity-market conditions. For manufacturers and their customers, regulatory predictability, rules of origin and resilient supply chains also influence where vehicles and components are produced and where capital is invested.

The broader lesson is that businesses do not invest against policy targets alone. They invest when the complete proposition is workable: the infrastructure is available, the operating model is credible and future costs can be assessed with reasonable confidence.



Predictability is as important as support

Energy projects, industrial assets and vehicle fleets operate over long-time horizons. Companies can sometimes adapt to a high but predictable cost. They find it much harder to commit capital when energy prices, network charges, market arrangements or planning rules may change before an investment has paid back.

Public support can help emerging technologies and strategic projects, but repeated policy changes raise the cost of capital and encourage delay. Governments and regulators therefore need to provide a credible long-term relationship between electricity and fossil-fuel prices, together with stable rules for connections, flexibility and infrastructure investment.



A practical Franco-British energy partnership

France and the United Kingdom have complementary assets. France brings extensive nuclear generation and a highly decarbonised electricity mix. The UK brings substantial offshore-wind resources, experience in renewable deployment and a fast-developing flexibility market. Their interconnectors already improve security of supply and allow both systems to benefit from different generation and demand patterns.

The discussion identified several areas in which cooperation could produce practical results: stronger interconnection and grid coordination; shared work on flexibility, storage and smart charging; cooperation in nuclear power and offshore wind; targeted use of low-carbon hydrogen in sectors that are difficult to electrify; and closer alignment on carbon markets, border measures and clean-energy supply chains.

Cooperation will be most useful when it moves beyond general dialogue towards investable projects, compatible rules and specific obstacles that businesses and governments can remove together.



The next phase of the transition

France and the United Kingdom have set ambitious goals and have access to most of the technologies required to pursue them. Delivery now depends on coordination: between generation and networks, policy and investment, national strategy and business reality.

For companies, the objective is to turn energy from a source of uncertainty into a foundation for investment and competitiveness. For governments, it is to provide infrastructure and rules that enable private capital to move. For the Franco-British relationship, it is an opportunity to build a more connected, flexible and resilient energy system across the Channel.

The next stage will be measured less by the number of new targets announced than by the speed at which viable projects connect, businesses electrify, and cooperation produces concrete results.

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