

Jobs, Wind Projects Depend On Transmission Line Approval

REPORT ON SOUTHEAST ALBERTA 2010 – Celebrating Our Community ALEX MCCUAIG
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Hundreds of direct and indirect jobs, along with billions of dollars in wind power infrastructure, hang in the balance for southeastern Alberta.

It's all awaiting the hoped for eventual approval from the Alberta Utilities Commission (AUC) for AltaLink to proceed with its plans for the construction of transmission lines.

AltaLink Management Ltd. manages Alberta's largest electricity transmission system, serving 85 percent of the province population.

The East Palliser Transmission Line would, in part, consist of a new transmission line and substations between Brooks and Medicine Hat, aimed at supporting proposed wind power projects in the area.

In addition, a new transmission line and substation is proposed from Medicine Hat to Whittla. These, along with other area improvements are all part of what is called the Southern Alberta Transmission Reinforcement (SATR).

Approval of the transmission lines is expected to take a year or so.

The Economic Development Alliance (EDA) of Southeast Alberta estimates that prospective wind farm development in southeast Alberta could total close to \$4 billion and up to some 1,600 megawatts (MW) of wind power.

The capital spending required for the development and construction of the proposed wind farms is expected to support the direct local employment equivalent of 1,757 full-year jobs over the entire construction phase of the projects. The payroll for those workers is estimated to exceed \$123 million.

While the EDA admits that a sizable portion of those billions of dollars would go toward the purchase of wind turbine generators produced outside of Canada, it suggests that a significant portion of that spending could be expected to occur within southeast Alberta.

The range of industries expected to benefit from providing good and services to the wind farms would include construction, transportation, and accommodation, as well as companies offering legal, financial and professional advice.

The annual spending required to operate and maintain the various proposed wind farms is approximately \$100 million.

Pending AUC approval on the East Palliser Transmission Line, the first proposed wind farm development in the immediate Medicine Hat area would be the Wild Rose 1 and 2 wind power projects, located in Cypress County. The developer is NaturEner Energy Canada Inc.

Once constructed, they would comprise the largest wind farm development in Alberta at close to 400 megawatts (MW) and provide emissions-free power for an estimated 50,000 homes. It would also make the largest wind farm development in the country, according to the company's director of wind project development, Greg Copeland.

NaturEner and AltaLink are working together to obtain approval from the Alberta Utilities Commission (AUC) to construct and operate the East Palliser Transmission Line. AltaLink intends to submit a facility application for the project to the AUC for approval to operate the proposed transmission facilities in the winter of 2010. A green light could see both Wild Rose 1 and Wild Rose 2 completed by the fall of 2012/13.

Getting to the present stage has posed a number of challenges for the two wind power projects, which have been in the planning stages for the past six years. Everything from wildlife and birds, to agricultural impacts, to noise, sight lines and landowner approvals have had to be studied and negotiated.

In a recent interview with the News, Steve Hodgkinson, vice-president of corporate development and business partnerships with AltaLink, said Medicine Hat and area residents have been primarily positive regarding the proposed new transmission lines, following open housed and other information sessions.