



News Release

Are the Lights Really Going to Go Out?

(Edmonton) January 20, 2011. Responsible Electricity Transmission for Albertans (RETA) is challenging the Alberta Government's, the Alberta Electric System Operator's (AESO) and transmission facility operators' contention that the 'lights are going to go out' if hundreds and hundreds of kilometres of additional mega-high voltage power lines are not built immediately in Alberta.

The 2009 AESO Long-Term Transmission System Plan planted the seeds for the 'lights are going to go out' mantra repeated during the past two years by the AESO, AltaLink, EPCOR, two Alberta Energy Ministers, and even Premier Stelmach.

RETA Vice President John Kristensen said, "This 'Fear of God' approach has been used intentionally by the Alberta Government in an attempt to rationalize development and adoption of a massive plan that would see 500 kilovolt monster power lines criss-cross Alberta. These scare tactics helped justify enactment of such legislation in 2009 as Bill 19, the *Land Assembly Project Area Act* and Bill 50, the *Electric Statutes Amendment Act*."

Bill 19 essentially gives the provincial government the authority to over-ride private landowner rights for utility purposes, while Bill 50 exempts transmission companies from having to prove to the public that new high voltage power lines are even needed.

Industry, which pays about 60% of the electricity transmission costs in Alberta, has not been fooled by the government's scare tactics. In an October 26, 2010 letter to members of the Alberta Progressive Conservative Caucus, Alberta Direct Connect and the Industrial Power Consumers Association of Alberta wrote that the AESO's and provincial government's electricity demand forecast is unrealistic. They wrote, 'It is difficult for us to understand how the AESO believes electricity consumption in the next 8 years will grow by 27,000 GWh when growth in the past decade has only been approximately 5,000 GWh. This forecast is missing common sense.'

"So," said Bryan Bradley, RETA Secretary, "we have industry saying we don't need significant increases in electricity generation and transmission. At the same time, we have the Premier telling the Sherwood Park Chamber of Commerce at a December 14 luncheon that we need more electricity infrastructure so we don't jeopardize industry with a power shortage. Who is telling the truth – the Premier or industry?"

Regarding the need for all of these new power lines that the government and the AESO have very cleverly but erroneously labeled 'Critical Transmission Infrastructure', Premier Stelmach told the Sherwood Park Chamber of Commerce last month that he didn't want to jeopardize Alberta residents and industry with possible blackouts, especially when it's minus 40°C in the middle of winter. He stated that it was not good enough that there was 99% or even 99.9% certainty with respect to our electricity transmission system; rather, he said we need 100% certainty all of the time.

At the same time the Premier is telling Albertans that the 'lights are going to go out' if we don't build more transmission lines over the next few years, TransAlta shut down its Sundance 1 and Sundance 2 coal-fired electricity generation units at Wabamun just west of Edmonton.

On January 4, 2011, TransAlta announced that it had shut down these two units due to 'boiler tube conditions above design limits' (<http://www.transalta.com/newsroom/news-releases/2011-01-04/transalta-reports-force-majeure-sundance-units-1-and-2>). These two units will be unavailable until mid-February 2011 while they are inspected to determine the scope of repairs that may be necessary. TransAlta has assured the public that this shut down will not have any effects on Albertans.

"This is unbelievable." said Bradley, "During the coldest period of the year, 560 megawatts of generation in Western Canada's largest coal-fired generating plant are shut down by TransAlta. The total Sundance power plant capacity of 2,126 megawatts is 18% of the total generation capacity in all of Alberta, and TransAlta has shut down over 26% of this capacity. How can we be just on the verge of the 'lights going out' if 26% of the Sundance capacity can so easily be shut down without having any effect on us during the coldest period of the year when electricity demand is at its highest? Who's telling the truth - the Premier or TransAlta?"

RETA is a not-for-profit society with over 8,000 registered members that encourages responsible electricity transmission in Alberta which includes: questioning the need for overhead high voltage towers and lines to criss-cross the province; if these lines are built, burying them whenever they run close to homes, schools, daycares, hospitals and environmentally sensitive areas; fairly compensating landowners if lines run near them and are not buried; and developing more efficient and environmentally-friendly ways of generating and transmitting electricity.

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