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Utilities need time for power line plan

Applications to build high-voltage service won't be ready until fall

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The two companies proposing to build a high-voltage transmission line from Wabamun to Alberta's industrial heartland say they need more time to prepare their application to the Alberta Utilities Commission.

Epcor and AltaLink had planned this spring to submit the application for the 500-kV double-circuit transmission line, but Epcor spokesman Tim LeRiche said the application is now expected in the fall.

"This has been one of the largest public consultations in Alberta ever, so there is a lot of material for us to

go through," LeRiche said Monday. "We've done detailed field work, environmental studies, engineering work. Our application is going to be complex and we want to make sure we do it right."

Residents opposing the line said the postponement will allow them more time to raise funds for their legal fight. They hope the province will reflect on whether such a high-voltage line is still needed.

Bruce Johnson, president of an Edmonton-area group called Responsible Transmission for Alberta (RETA), said when the line was first proposed in 2007, it was slated to carry electricity to nine oil-sands upgraders, but today only two upgraders are being constructed.

RETA has appealed to Premier Ed Stelmach to review the need for the project, which his government has designated critical infrastructure, but the residents' group has not yet received a response, Johnson said.

He's urging the premier to take a second look at the plan in light of the changed economic circumstances just as Stelmach did with his changes to the oil and gas royalty regime.

"We're talking about building a 20-lane highway when maybe a two-lane will do — or if we're looking to the future, maybe we should build a four-lane," Johnson said. He said reduced demand makes a 240-kV line more practical and

the lower-voltage line would be cheaper to bury in areas where it passes homes, schools, day cares and hospitals.

But LeRiche said the Heartland Team building the line has no plans to deviate from the project that has been proposed.

"Nothing has changed in terms of the content of the plan," he said.

"This is transmission that is being planned for future use. This is prudent planning to do it now because we expect in the future there may be major industrial development in the Heartland area and it takes time to put these kinds of power lines in so you want to get going a few years ahead of time."

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