

RETA wants line re-studied

Michael Di Massa *April 6, 2010*
News Staff

Responsible Electricity Transmission for Albertans (RETA) has sent an open letter to the province asking that it re-examine if a 500 kV double-circuit power line from Wabamun to the Industrial Heartland is necessary.

The organization has been vocal in its pushing to get as much of the 500 kV power line underground as possible. Additionally, a recently released study by Alberta Electric System Operator (AESO) has shown that installing the line underground is feasible.

"An unnecessary Heartland power line, proposed to add about 50 per cent of Alberta's total existing transmission capacity, yet to be energized to only 15 per cent of the line's capacity until at least 2027, would burden Albertans with anywhere from \$413 million to \$787 million in infrastructure costs (based on data from the (AESO)," reads a part of the letter, signed by RETA president Bruce Johnson.

The letter has been sent to Premier Ed Stelmach and Energy Minister Ron Liepert, as well as a host of MLAs, including Dave Quest (Strathcona), Iris Evans (Sherwood Park), and municipal representatives who represent areas that contain part of the two proposed routes from Wabamun to the Heartland.

"Being competitive means not burdening Albertans and our fragile economy with a multi-million dollar line that may no longer be needed, at least on the grand scale as proposed in 2007-08. Indeed, if AltaLink and EPCOR were to actually overbuild the line to the extent currently proposed by the AESO, the costs would be particularly burdensome to Alberta industry, existing and potential, which in itself would reduce our overall competitiveness as a province."

The letter notes that many upgrader projects announced in 2007-2008 have been shelved — temporarily or permanently.

"Only two of the nine proposed upgraders may be built, and plans for additional upgraders have been overtaken by other decisions already made by the energy industry, including the processing of more of Alberta's bitumen in the United States," the

letter notes.

"The energy companies are retrofitting existing refineries in Michigan, Texas, and Illinois. They are building new pipelines and have recently obtained approval from the National Energy Board to build even more pipelines. These U.S. refineries will upgrade the bitumen that was to have been processed in the Industrial Heartland by the nine upgraders proposed in 2007-08."

The letter also notes future plans for facilities in the Industrial Heartland will begin relying on cluster development, which, among other things, will include sharing Heartland power generation between multiple sites.

As a result of what's happening now and future plans, RETA argues that, "A smaller-scale upgrade to the Industrial Heartland ... will mean that any needed upgrades to the Heartland electricity grid can be built at a much lower cost, and can be built more responsibly, including burying the Heartland line whenever it runs near homes, schools, day care centres, hospitals and environmentally sensitive areas."

According to RETA, 70 per cent of Albertans who were polled last year said they would want any high-voltage power line to be built underground. Albertans also said they'd be willing to pay more on their monthly

electric bill to have the power line installed underground, RETA noted.

Although the new line is expected to add as much as \$.34 to every power bill, the letter notes that, "This cost could be even lower because, based on information we have gathered from other sources, the AESO-commissioned costs for undergrounding are significantly higher than the actual costs would be."

Epcor and AltaLink are expected to submit an application to the Alberta Utilities Commission this spring to construct the 500 kV power line.

The preferred route would bring the line along the Anthony Henday Transportation Utility Corridor east of Edmonton and head north, just west of Sherwood Park.

A proposed alternative route would bring the line east of Spruce Grove and head east north of Morinville and Bon Accord.

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