

# AltaLink proposes new route for \$500-million Castle Rock Ridge to Chapel Rock transmission project

By [John Stoesser](#), QMI Agency Pincher Creek Echo Friday, January 30, 2015

A map of proposed power line routes through Pincher Creek is starting to look pretty crowded. An additional route will be on display during the second round of AltaLink's upcoming information sessions in February for the wire company's proposed Castle Rock Ridge to Chapel Rock project.

In January, AltaLink released a map displaying the new route option added to the \$500 million proposal - which resulted from resident input during the first round of consultations held last October.

"We did get enough feedback from people attending the two information sessions (last October) that it made sense for us to look at this potential route," said Peter Brodsky, the AltaLink's external communications manager.

A 240-kilovolt line would head west from Pincher Creek just south of Township Road 70, paralleling the smaller, existing power line. At Highway 507 the line would veer north, terminate at a substation somewhere near Lee Lake and a 500-kilovolt line would continue north either skirting around Bellevue or up the North Burmis Road.

According to Brodsky, if the new route is approved, "We would need additional right of way, it wouldn't be going onto the existing right of way."

The line appears to run along the centre of land parcels in many places, but passing Lee Lake and Bellevue means the new line could affect more residents than other options.

"One of the impacts of looking at this route is it includes an additional 1000 residents or people in the area to add to the consultation now," Brodsky, who is anticipating more interest in the upcoming information sessions, said. "So before when we were consulting with about 400 residents, now we're consulting with about 1,400 residents."

Because the substation and line locations are not finalized Brodsky says changes to the project cost are hard to pin down.

Bill Trafford, the vice president of the Livingstone Landowners Group, has looked at the route and maps and says, "They're pretty vague at this point, frankly. It's hard to look at those maps and understand the implications, so there's not a lot of detail to the implications of those alternate routes."

A common criticism voiced by the LLG is that the proposal maps only show the line routes, but not the footprint of the access roads and set up areas needed to construct them.

Trafford is also critical of the cost and does not think that the province's current economic situation justifies a transmission project of this scope.

"It just doesn't make sense in current circumstances," he said.

"I think the premiere stated quite vocally that all infrastructure projects are under review and I think that these guys are kind of flying under the radar."

Transmission lines in Alberta are financed and owned by the companies that build them and are eventually paid for through the customer's electricity bills rather than taxes. According to records published by the

Alberta Electric Systems Operator - the province's nonprofit industry facilitator that created the needs documents for the CRRCR project and overarching Southern Alberta Transmission Reinforcement umbrella plan - residential users pay for about 18 per cent of transmission development.

"It's the same as a tax, I don't know anybody who doesn't need electricity," said Trafford, who thinks the CRRCR project is "alarming" and should be included on the list of infrastructure development for review.

Trafford also questioned if it was "very odd" that the change of ownership of AltaLink to Berkshire Hathaway would allow the company to do, "quite well out of this project yet the citizens of Alberta are kind of suffering under pretty severe circumstances right now."

"Berkshire Hathaway will get their guaranteed rate of return out of this," he said.

But beyond the cost the LLG also opposes the validity of the actual need for the new high-voltage line. The group has written a letter to the premier and wants the Alberta Utilities Commission to review the necessity of the project.

"What's really disturbing for us is things have changed quite substantially since 2004," said Trafford, noting there was more interest in wind generation in the Pincher Creek area at that time. "But they want to plow ahead with this investment without relooking at the need and without regard to what it means to the tax payers of Alberta."

According to the AESO's project list from December 2014, there are 15 wind connection projects in the province - many in the southern Alberta - that will generate a total of around 2,300-megawatts and have planned in service dates ranging from early December 2015 to late December 2018.

"Our position was that it's really about staying in existing corridors and so we're pleased to see that they've adopted their routes to stay in some areas in existing corridors," said Trafford. While the new line route proposal does parallel existing transmission infrastructure MD councillor Terry Yagos is quick to note that does not make the area an official utility corridor.

"We don't have any utility corridors in the MD," Yagos said.

The only land purchased by the province specifically for transportation and utility corridors loop around Calgary and Edmonton.

However, Yagos says the new line, that also goes near his place at Lee Lake, passes through another type of corridor, a wildlife migration path.

"It's a very critical wildlife corridor. It's really the last main migration path we have in the MD," Yagos said, also noting there may be environmental easements in the area.

Residents will get a chance to bring up questions of easements and wildlife at the upcoming information sessions says Brodsky.

"Personally I'm unaware of whether there are environmental easements in that area but again that would come up with the consultation process which we've just begun with these new residents that are impacted by this," he said. "So those kind of details will come out in the discussion before we finalize any routes."

Yagos cautioned being overly critical of the routing process until options are narrowed down and solidified but he did say that AltaLink's notification of the new line to affected residents may be lacking.

"We haven't had anything in the mail... I haven't got anything on paper and I know some of the people to the west of me haven't got anything either, just rumours," he said on January 20th.

Brodsky said all the notices had been sent out and that all the information is available online.

“We’d want to know if anybody who’s been identified for consultation along the route if they haven’t received their package,” he said. “We certainly welcome anybody who feels they need the information to contact us and request it.”

The AUC recommends that companies provide, “Public notification to all occupants, residents and landowners within 800 metres measured from the edge of the proposed right-of-way for the transmission line and/or the edge of the proposed substation site boundary.”

Other AUC rulings advise companies to identify affected wildlife areas through studies and surveys.

Both Yagos and Trafford were adamant that it’s up to AltaLink, not land owners, to pick the best route for the power line. If the power line proposal is approved the approximately 33-kilometres to 53-kilometres of additional wires would add an economic benefit to the MD’s already significant taxable revenue. According to the MD’s finance director, Mat Bonertz, the municipality brought in 46 per cent of its tax revenue on transmission lines, telephone lines, television cables and electrical generation in 2014.

The second round of community information sessions on AltaLink’s CRRRCR project will take place on February 10 in the Cowley Hall and February 11 in the Lundbreck Hall from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. each night.