

Pros and cons of power line weighed at open house

By [April Hudson](#), Spruce Grove Examiner/Stony Plain Reporter
Friday, February 27, 2015 7:29:11 MST PM

The last open house in the tri-area for a proposed transmission line took place at the Genesee Community Hall on Thursday, Feb. 12.

The Fort McMurray West 500-kV Transmission Project would be a 500-kilometre AC single-circuit power line that would run from the Sunnybrook Substation near Genesee to Fort McMurray.

On Dec. 18, 2014, the Alberta Electric System Operator (AESO) awarded the project's contract to Alberta PowerLine, an ATCO company who would be responsible for the line's design, construction and operation. Alberta PowerLine submitted a bid of \$1.4 billion.

The project is expected to be up and running by 2019.

Currently, Alberta PowerLine is deciding between an east and west route option, and held open houses between Feb. 3 and Feb. 19 to get public feedback on each option.

The west route would run past Keephills and Alberta Beach before branching off west and running north past Slave Lake before angling to connect with Fort McMurray.

The east route would hit Manly Corner just west of Stony Plain, run up past Onoway and branch east at Westlock. From there, it would connect with Fort McMurray.

During the Genesee open house, Alberta PowerLine representatives sat with residents, walked them through the project and answered their questions.

Most residents said they still had concerns about the project.

Elisabeth and Ulrich Drachenberg, who have lived in Parkland County for 10 years, said the Alberta PowerLine representatives presented the project in a reasonable way.

However, although Alberta PowerLine has said they do environmental assessments for their projects, the Drachenbergs were still worried about the effect the line could have on the environment.

"The problem is, we don't know how (widespread) the line's footprint will be. It could impact wildlife and even our horses," they said.

They also questioned whether such a long line was necessary, and suggested Alberta PowerLine look for ways to shorten it.

Parkland County residents Dan and Bernadette Vanderwell said they were not in favour of the eastern route due to its proximity to residential properties — theirs included.

"It runs quite close to our home; we would prefer it not to go through," Bernadette said.

Other residents expressed concerns about the necessity of the line and the billion-dollar price tag attached.

Paul Goguen, vice-president of competitive transmission for ATCO Electric, said Alberta PowerLine places great importance on informing residents about the process of the project.

“That’s important for me because there are opportunities to participate in the actual hearing process, not only initially with these open houses, but there will also be a public hearing and opportunities to express concerns once we file (our facilities application with the Alberta Utilities Commission),” he said.

That public hearing has no set date yet, but will likely be in 2016. Alberta PowerLine plans to file its application with the AUC by December 2015.

“The AESO has deemed this project necessary, essentially due to the growing requirements in the Fort McMurray area. They’re expecting loads there to double within the next 10 years,” Goguen said.

“But this project will also accommodate generation growth ... The line is meant to flow power up to that area as well as down to the other end of the province.”

Now that all open houses have ended, the next step for Alberta PowerLine is to assess and select their route options. They have noted that they will continue consulting with landowners and interested parties throughout the route selection process.

If the AUC grants approval at the end of 2015, construction will likely begin in mid-2017.