Wisconsin-Illinois Reliability Project

Q. What is being proposed for this project?

American Transmission Co. has identified an electric reliability issue that puts southeast Wisconsin and northeast Illinois at risk for a cascading transmission system outage under certain operating conditions, including high power flows from Wisconsin to Illinois. ATC is proposing a cost-effective solution which provides an alternative power path for this increased power flow and during emergency conditions. Components of the project include:

- Constructing a double-circuit, 345-kilovolt transmission line that would electrically connect to an existing line near Pleasant Prairie, Wis.
- Connecting the proposed transmission line to the ComEd transmission system through a proposed new substation on the north side of Rosecrans Road (Hwy. 173) in the Village of Wadsworth, Ill.

Q. Why is this project needed?

The electricity moving between southeast Wisconsin and northeast Illinois has significantly increased in the last five years, creating a reliability issue in this region. In the coming years, the existing transmission infrastructure will be unable to support the increasing power flows under certain conditions and will become vulnerable to the risk of widespread cascading outages. When a transmission line becomes heavily loaded beyond its capacity, or is affected by an electrical disturbance (i.e. lightning) – a fault or trip may occur, forcing an outage on the line. The electricity will seek an alternative path, which may lead to overloads and outages on other lines. This is known as a cascading outage. The proposed transmission line and substation will strengthen the system by providing a much-needed alternative path to help ensure the reliability of the system.

Q. What are the roles of the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin and the Illinois Commerce Commission?

The PSCW is the regulatory agency that reviews and approves major utility projects in Wisconsin, while the ICC is the regulatory agency that reviews and approves major utility project in Illinois. ATC must submit an application to both commissions with two route options and all the documentation required for both agencies to review the project and render a decision, which can take up to a year. The PSCW and ICC will notify affected individuals when the review process has started and will schedule public hearings so that the public may offer formal comments on the project.

Q. What is this project going to cost and who's going to pay for it?

Depending on the route selected, the estimated cost of this proposed project ranges from $55 million to $66 million. Typically costs associated with electric utility projects are built into the rates paid by electricity users. The transmission costs associated with construction, operations and maintenance of all of ATC's transmission system facilities are shared by 5 million electric customers in our service area and typically make up approximately 7 to 10 percent of the monthly bill.

Q. What will the poles look like, and how do you build transmission poles and wires where infrastructure such as other lines, already exist?

In most areas, we plan to use steel poles approximately 110 to 160 feet tall, placed 700 to 1,000 feet apart. The poles will either have a weathering steel or galvanized steel finish. Depending on the route selected, some existing transmission poles may need to be moved or repositioned to co-locate with the new transmission line.

Q. How are transmission line routes identified and selected?

During the routing and siting process, we consider options that are appropriate for the location while minimizing the impacts to landowners and the environment. Transmission line routing involves trade-offs amoung a variety of factors. The route options that are most feasible balance community input with environmental impacts, constructability, current and future land use, project costs and specific electric system needs.

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Q. Can the transmission line be placed underground?

Particularly for higher voltages like the 345-kilovolt line being proposed, construction, environmental issues, operational challenges and costs generally rule out underground transmission lines for most projects. Regulatory approval for underground transmission lines is difficult unless there is a compelling, technical reason to place the transmission line underground.

Q. How much land is needed for an easement?

The amount of land needed for easements will depend on the route selected by both regulatory agencies. Depending on the location and whether there are existing transmission lines, the easement could range from 80-110 feet. For routes on private property that are not adjacent to a road, ATC generally requires a width of approximately 110 feet. Right-of-way width is determined by engineering requirements for safe clearances. We compensate landowners when an easement is needed on their property.

Q. Will you need to remove trees?

Incompatible vegetation within the easement is removed to allow construction crews to work safely and to allow the transmission line to operate reliably and safely once it's completed and placed in service. We will discuss any vegetation removal plans with landowners in advance.

Q. Will the project impact my property value?

Research suggests that transmission lines have little negative impact on residential property values, except where the transmission line is within 200 feet of a residence. In those circumstances, the studies find an average effect between 1 and 10 percent of the property value, depending on the specifics of the property. According to a 2014 SNL Financial article on transmission lines and property values, "studies also suggest the impact of transmission lines on the value of homes tends to dissipate over time with the use of landscaping or other shielding techniques." If your property is directly impacted by this project, an ATC real estate representative will contact you to discuss the purchase of an easement interest to build and operate the transmission line facilities on your land.

Q. A transmission line was recently built in this region. Why is another one needed?

ATC's Pleasant Prairie-Zion transmission line was proposed in 2011 and placed in service in 2013. The line allows lower-cost power to be moved from generation sources in Wisconsin into northeast Illinois. As a result, the line is carrying more power from north to south than originally anticipated by ATC's transmission planning models. The evolving energy market combined with the changing electric generation mix in the region has impacted the way in which the transmission system is needed to move power. The WI-IL Reliability Project is needed to respond to these changes.

Q. What are the next steps in the process?

ATC will finalize the two route alternatives that will be included in its applications to the PSCW and the ICC. ATC will file the regulatory applications with the ICC in summer 2016, and the PSCW in fall 2016. Following the application filings, the ICC and PSCW will conduct a public outreach process, review the applications, issue a decision on the project need and determine which of the route alternatives will be constructed.

Q. What is the schedule* for this proposed project?

Project introduced to the public	Early spring 2016
Finalize route alternatives	Spring 2016
Submit application to the ICC	Summer 2016
Submit application to the PSCW	Fall 2016
Anticipated decision from the ICC	Spring 2017
Anticipated decision from the PSCW	Fall 2018
Start construction	Spring 2020
In-service date	2020

Green Masters Program

ATC is a member of the Green Masters Program, a recognition and assessment program for Wisconsin businesses interested in improving and being recognized for their sustainability initiatives

Information current as of June 2017

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