

The AESO will meet Central Alberta's escalating electricity demands

With a significant growth in electricity demand expected in Central Alberta over the next decade, the Alberta Electric System Operator (AESO) will be upgrading infrastructure, developing transmission potential and boosting generational capacity between now and 2020 to meet that demand.

The AESO, a not-for-profit organization, plans and manages the safe, reliable and economic operation of the Alberta Interconnected Electric System, and keeps a close watch on how well the provincial transmission system meets the needs of Albertans now and into the future.

The AESO expects electricity demand in Central Alberta, to climb from 1,505 megawatts (MW) in 2010 to 2,251 MW in 2020 — a jump of 49.5 per cent. Increased pipeline and industrial activity, as well as residential and commercial expansion in the Red Deer area, are the main factors for this growth.

With the release of its draft 2011 Long-term Transmission Plan (the Plan), the AESO is responding to this increasing need for electricity head-on.

“Alberta will be boosting its generation capacity in a significant way to meet the growing demand,” says AESO Vice-President of Transmission Shan Bhattacharya. “Central Alberta will be capable of generating between 2,130 MW and 2,630 MW by 2020, thanks to the addition of primarily gas-fired capacity and wind generation. In fact, we’ve had a number of wind projects in the Central region totaling over 1,000 MW, apply for connection.”

The AESO's draft 2011 Plan calls for substantial infrastructure improvements in the Hanna-Wainwright regions, transmission development in Red Deer and a substantial rebuild for aging infrastructure in the Central East area (east of Edmonton, between Cold Lake and Vermilion) as well as the Central West (stretching west from Wabamun Lake and Drayton Valley to Edson and Hinton).

In the Hanna and Wainwright areas, a number of new pipelines carrying bitumen and oil products, connecting northern Alberta oilsands projects to markets in the United States and elsewhere, will drive the demand for electricity. Meanwhile, transmission development is required in the Red Deer and Didsbury areas to mitigate existing constraints and accommodate population growth.

For more information about the AESO's 2011 Plan or the need for transmission upgrades in Alberta, visit www.poweringalberta.com