

The AESO will continue to satisfy Northwest Alberta's electricity appetite

Forestry and gas development in Peace Country and the Fort Nelson region of northeastern British Columbia is expected to spearhead the demand for electricity over the next decade in Northwest Alberta. With infrastructure upgrades, transmission reinforcement and additional resource generation, the Alberta Electric System Operator (AESO) says it will be able to meet that demand through the year 2020 and beyond.

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 the provincial transmission system's ability to meet the needs of Albertans.

"Northwest Alberta's electricity consumption is expected to jump 48 per cent between 2010 and 2020," says AESO Vice-President of Transmission Shan Bhattacharya. "We've taken into account the potential for oilsands development in the Peace River area as well as unconventional oil and gas resource development in the Drayton Valley and Hinton-Edson areas."

However, with the release of its draft 2011 Long-term Transmission Plan (the Plan), the AESO will ensure the region's increasing appetite for electricity is satisfied.

"Resources available for development include coal, gas, hydro, biomass and wind — and the potential also exists for further renewable generation in the Northwest region post-2020," adds Bhattacharya.

The demand in the Northwest region is expected to grow from 2010 actual figures of 1,039 megawatts (MW) to around 1,536 MW by 2020. Meanwhile, generation capacity in the region is expected to reach anywhere between 1,330 and 1,800 MW by 2020, with the addition of gas-fired capacity, the Dunvegan hydro project and the Swan Hills Synfuel underground coal gasification project.

The AESO's draft 2011 Plan in the Northwest region calls for line enhancements in the Grande Prairie area to alleviate potential overloading, decommissioning portions of aging, low-voltage circuits near Slave Lake, substation conversions, the construction of four new substations and significant transmission reinforcement.

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