BPA eliminates four route segments on proposed I-5 corridor reinforcement

Local News

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Portland, Ore. - After several months of study, the Bonneville Power Administration has determined it will no longer consider four of the 52 potential route segments for its proposed I-5 Corridor Reinforcement Project between the Castle Rock, Wash., area and Troutdale, Ore. The segments no longer being considered stretch from northeast of Amboy, Wash., to northwest of Camas, Wash. The four segments are identified as segments 27, 31, 42 and 44 on the I-5 Corridor Reinforcement Project map.

“Though the four segments we were considering follow an existing transmission right-of-way, they just are not the right fit for a 500-kilovolt power line,” said Mark Korsness, BPA project manager. “Other segments currently under consideration either already have a BPA line on an existing right-of-way or allow for wider study corridors in less populated areas.”

For the past few months, BPA has been identifying and investigating the potential line routes it will consider in its environmental review consistent with requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act. BPA initially included the segments that are being eliminated from further consideration because they follow an existing vacant easement owned by PacifiCorp. The existing easement is only 100 feet wide. BPA would need to acquire 50 additional feet of right-of-way width to accommodate its proposed 500-kilovolt transmission line. On-the-ground review of the PacifiCorp right-of-way found this expansion is likely not feasible.

BPA is proposing the I-5 Corridor Reinforcement Project because congestion on its transmission system in southwest Washington and northwest Oregon has reached limits that now threaten reliability. BPA has not expanded its transmission system in the area for 40 years. The agency has used a combination of aggressive conservation measures and technical solutions to keep pace with the area’s energy needs.

“Energy demand in recent years has increased more than expected, particularly in the Longview-Vancouver-Portland area, including increasing demand for new renewable resources,” said Larry Bekkedahl, BPA vice president for Transmission Engineering and Technical Services. “Conservation and technical solutions can no longer keep pace with this growth, and now is the time to consider building this power line.”

Energy demand in the Portland/Vancouver area is generally forecast to grow at about 1 to 2 percent per year. However, in recent years, energy demand has exceeded that amount and in some cases has grown up to 5 percent per year.

Project officials will now concentrate on the remaining 48 segments under consideration. Those segments include several existing BPA rights-of-way that could accommodate a new line for the much needed reinforcement between Castle Rock and Troutdale, as well as numerous other segments without power lines.

More than 2,700 landowners and others attended six BPA public meetings in October and November to learn about the project. The agency received more than 3,000 written comments during an extended scoping comment period, which ended Monday, Dec. 14. Despite the official close of the scoping period, BPA will continue to accept comments.

“We thank everyone who has taken the time to participate in our open houses and provide

comments,” said Mark Korsness, BPA project manager. “We are committed to sharing information about the project with affected landowners and others as soon as it’s available.”

BPA continues to gather information along its remaining proposed segments for the I-5 Corridor Reinforcement Project. In late January, the agency will conclude its scoping efforts by issuing a “scoping summary.” In spring 2010, the agency intends to release a more detailed description of potential routing alternatives to be considered in its draft EIS. These alternatives will then be further evaluated and refined, and the draft EIS will include a thorough analysis of potentially viable alternatives. The draft EIS is slated for completion in early 2011. BPA will publicly circulate the draft EIS and take additional comments, after which it will prepare a final EIS. The agency expects to decide whether to build the line in 2012. At that time, if the decision is to build, a final route would be identified.

BPA is a not-for-profit federal electric utility that operates a high-voltage transmission grid comprising more than 15,000 miles of lines and associated substations in Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Montana. It also markets more than a third of the electricity consumed in the Pacific Northwest. The power is produced at 31 federal dams operated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Bureau of Reclamation and one nuclear plant in the Northwest and is sold to more than 140 Northwest utilities. BPA purchases power from seven wind projects and has more than 2,300 megawatts of wind interconnected to its transmission system.