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AUC Launches Enhanced Participation Opportunities for Heartland Transmission Project

Edmonton, Alberta... Alberta's independent utilities regulator has launched enhanced procedural steps and opportunities for participation by affected parties in anticipation of an expected Heartland Transmission Project application to the Alberta Utilities Commission in spring 2010.

The Commission has determined that in order to provide opportunities for meaningful public participation through a fair, open and transparent process, necessary to reach a sound decision for the Heartland application, the AUC will adapt to the nature and scope of the anticipated Heartland proceeding and add some additional flexibility to its process.

First, the AUC is streamlining standing procedures for individuals and groups residing on or owning property within 800 metres of the edge of the proposed right-of-way who may be directly and adversely affected by the Commission's decision. Under the enhanced process, standing will be finalized once the application is submitted.

Second, effective today (outlined in Bulletin 2010-04), the AUC is allowing all interested parties to pre-register in the AUC's proceeding - giving greater time for participants to begin consulting with expert witnesses and legal counsel, should they wish to do so.

Third, the AUC will provide further flexibility by allowing participants to choose the extent to which they become involved in the quasi-judicial AUC proceeding. Participants may choose to provide a written statement of concerns and position without further commitment or involvement to the process. Participants may choose to provide a submission and make an oral statement for the AUC's public record. Participants may also choose to fully engage in the proceeding and public oral hearing through preparation of evidence, appearance as a witness for cross examination and cross examination of other witnesses.

Fourth, the AUC will hold general information sessions, and meetings with groups, prior to the submission of the application. This is to clarify the regulatory approval process, provide additional opportunities for people to pre-register, and explain the Commission's local intervener funding process.

These four steps establish a process that allows intervener participation even before a formal application is filed. It also allows the Commission to make and communicate decisions on scheduling, process, standing and local intervener costs as early as possible.

The Alberta Utilities Commission is an independent, quasi-judicial agency of the province of Alberta. As part of its mandate the Commission has jurisdiction over the siting of facilities deemed to be critical transmission facilities as well as other transmission facilities, electric power plants and natural gas transmission pipelines.

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Background

The *Electric Utilities Act* (amended with the passing of Bill 50 on November 26, 2009) gives authority to the provincial cabinet of the Government of Alberta to approve the need for critical transmission infrastructure. The *Electric Utilities Act* designates the Heartland Transmission Project as one of four critical infrastructure projects. The need for the Heartland project has been determined and does not require AUC approval; consequently, the determination of the need for the project will not be within the scope of the Heartland proceeding.

As part of its mandate, the AUC has jurisdiction over the siting of facilities including electric transmission facilities. When assessing a facilities application, the AUC has the option to accept the application, deny the application, or accept the application while requiring conditions.

The Heartland Transmission Project application, expected to be submitted to the AUC in spring 2010, will mark the first application for a project identified under the *Electric Utilities Act* as critical transmission infrastructure and where need has been determined by the government. In order to maximize the opportunity for involvement of potentially-affected persons and in anticipation of the project's scope, the AUC believes an enhanced proceeding process will assist those with concerns or objections to better develop their submissions. It will also clarify who will be granted standing - and thus be eligible to apply for intervener funding.

Recognizing the time and effort required to obtain adequate legal counsel and/or expert witnesses, the intent of this enhanced process is to assist and support those who may be directly and adversely affected by the Commission's decision on the proposed transmission development to have more time to meet regulatory timeframes. The AUC believes this streamlined standing process will assist in relieving some of the pressures and uncertainty.

The AUC will be scheduling a series of general information sessions and group meetings in the Edmonton area to provide details on the four specific enhancements announced today, how to become involved in the overall AUC review process, and eligibility for intervener funding.

Information about public involvement opportunities, pre-registration in this upcoming proceeding, the process to obtain intervener funding and a schedule of upcoming AUC information sessions can be found on the AUC website at www.auc.ab.ca.

Backgrounder

Once a completed Heartland application is received by the AUC, the Commission will also issue extensive public notice and schedule a process meeting within 30 days of receiving an application. This will provide further details regarding the format of the meeting, scheduling, and issues to be addressed during the full public hearing.

The AUC strongly encourages involvement by interested persons in the ongoing public consultations by the projects proponents, EPCOR Utilities Inc. and AltaLink L.P. in the Edmonton area as they solicit public input to assist them in finalizing their application to the AUC. Maps of the recently announced preferred routing option (the east Edmonton Transportation/Utility Corridor) and the alternate route, located west and north of Edmonton, can be found at on the proponents' website at www.heartlandtransmission.ca.