



## Proposed legislation could give control of transmission lines back to AUC

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The Alberta government introduced legislation that will return control of approving transmission-line projects to the Alberta Utilities Commission (AUC), Oct. 23.

If approved, Bill 8, the Electric Utilities Amendment Act, 2012, will reverse Bill 50, which gave the government the right to approve “critical” transmission projects without a public assessment process.

“We’ve listened to Albertans and we have responded,” said Alberta Minister of Energy Ken Hughes, who introduced the bill. “This amendment ensures that Albertans have an opportunity to share their perspectives on the need for transmission infrastructure and that decisions about the construction of future transmission lines will be made by an independent agency.”

According to an Alberta government press release, the bill was introduced in response to a key recommendation in a report, which was released by the Critical Transmission Review Committee in February, after a public input session last January

In that report, the government-appointed committee reiterated the need for three large transmission projects, but recommended the Province return to the decades-old AUC assessment process. That approval process was used until 2009 when the government approved Bill 50, the Electric Statutes Amendment Act, which allowed Cabinet to approve projects if it deemed them critical.

Under Bill 50, the government, led by then-premier Ed Stelmach, approved several massive power projects, including the controversial \$1.1-billion, 220-kilometre Western Alberta Transmission Line (WATL), which is slated to run from west of Edmonton to east Rocky View, passing through agricultural lands north of Crossfield.

Airdrie MLA Rob Anderson said debate of the bill is now underway.

“Sure we are happy that they are taking away the power of cabinet to unilaterally decide we need billions of dollars worth of more transmission,” said Anderson.

“The problem is we are still going ahead with the power lines. There is a step missing here and the step is that they skipped the independent needs assessment process.”

Anderson said it has become unclear whether the three transmission lines are necessary at all.

“We don’t know what we need,” he said. “We are in a situation that we might have \$16-billion of power lines with no power running through them. That is going to cause our powerbills to skyrocket even more.”

Land rights advocate Keith Wilson said the introduction of the bill makes it a “good day for Albertans.”

“I think the government has come to a realization, albeit reluctantly, that having politicians decide need behind the closed door of the Cabinet room, as opposed to experts in a public hearing process, wasn’t a good idea,” he said. “The major problem is that (the bill only) applies going forward.”

Over the past two years, Wilson has presented arguments against Bill 50 and the three massive power-line projects slated to be built in the province, which some estimate will cost at least \$16 billion. Wilson has spoken to more than 15,000 people at 64 meetings across Alberta.

He said the Province’s recent decision validates the concerns of Albertans, a large number of whom spoke out about Bill 50 and the power projects.

“The good sense of Albertans has prevailed and I am happy about that,” he said.

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