

Why BPA prefers Central Alternative using Option 1

November 2012

BPA identifies its preferred alternative

After three years of public outreach, environmental analysis and technical study, BPA has identified the Central Alternative using Option 1 as the preferred alternative for the I-5 Corridor Reinforcement Project. The I-5 Project would be BPA's first new north-south transmission line in the Vancouver-Portland metropolitan area in 40 years. The new line would be built from Castle Rock, Wash., to Troutdale, Ore. The Bonneville Power Administration is sharing its preferred alternative for where to site the 79-mile line and its two new substations as part of the release of the draft environmental impact statement for the project. The draft EIS identifies the preferred alternative and other alternatives considered.

After thoroughly analyzing many factors, the agency believes Central Alternative using Option 1 strikes the best balance to fulfill diverse project objectives. While it is neither the least expensive alternative nor the easiest to construct, the preferred alternative provides a way forward that would limit project impacts and disruptions across a broad array of communities and neighbors, manages costs to ratepayers, and achieves the goal of preserving transmission system reliability for everyone in the I-5 area in the future.

Why we identified the preferred alternative now

We believe the public, as well as the decision process, will benefit from our identification of a preferred alternative now. Doing so as soon as possible allows the public, private landowners, our cooperating agencies, tribes and other stakeholders to better evaluate information in the draft EIS and provide more specific comments to help us refine our study. BPA has reviewed public comments and listened carefully to public concerns expressed during more than 100 meetings. We acknowledge that building this project will affect neighboring communities, regardless of which route is ultimately chosen.

Why the I-5 Project is needed

Since BPA last built a north-south transmission line in the 1970s, the population of the area along I-5 in Washington and northern Oregon has more than doubled. Residents and businesses now use new energy resources and more air conditioning. The transmission system in the I-5 corridor is approaching capacity during key high-demand periods, such as summer heat waves. The Northwest was once a winter peaking region in terms of energy use. But the emergence of new homes, most of which have air conditioning, has increased demand for energy in the summer. A combination of growth and limited transmission capacity has raised the likelihood of serious transmission reliability problems by as early as 2016, including the possibility of blackouts, if additional transmission or other measures are not provided to support the area. The primary driver for building this line is the responsibility resting on BPA to provide reliable service. Additionally, BPA has received requests for commercial transmission service from utilities and power generators that could be served by this line.

What identifying a preferred alternative means

Identifying a preferred alternative does not represent a final decision concerning the route for the project, but it does show the direction BPA is leaning. It presents a strong indication based on three years of scoping and information gathering, followed by thorough analysis of the likely advantages and disadvantages, documented in the draft EIS, of the four action alternatives and the No Action Alternative. Though BPA has identified a preferred alternative at this time, all other alternatives in the draft EIS are still being considered.



What principles guided BPA's selection of a preferred route?

- System reliability — BPA must ensure the route we choose meets the electrical needs of the project.
- While all routes meet the electrical requirements and transmission planning standards we follow, the West and Crossover alternatives would site more of the new line adjacent to our existing transmission system, which inherently decreases reliability because it increases the likelihood of losing more than one line at a time.
- Low rates — We considered impacts to our transmission rates, as well as how each alternative would affect our capital budget and other critical BPA projects that use capital funds.
- Environmental stewardship — We considered the impacts to both the human and natural environment and what we could do to mitigate those impacts.
- Regional accountability — We engaged the public and stakeholders in our decision making. We listened to their concerns and took their values into account. We are also committed to meeting our statutory and contractual obligations.
- Since announcing the project in 2009, we have met and spoken with thousands of stakeholders at public meetings we hosted, as well as those hosted by others. Our extensive project mailing list is nearing 14,000. We reviewed more than 4,000 public comments.

What specific advantages does the preferred alternative provide?

- Many members of the public and elected officials strongly urged us to limit impacts to private property, nearby residences, schools and highly populated areas. The preferred route responds to these concerns and largely avoids these areas though some homes are still affected. For example, there are 327 homes within 500 feet of the Central Alternative, compared to 3,032 along the West Alternative.
- Many stakeholders have asked us to move the new line as far north and east as possible. The preferred alternative avoids many small, rural parcels of private land by crossing significant lengths of land held by Weyerhaeuser, PacifiCorp, Longview Timber and Washington Department of Natural Resources, while avoiding the most environmentally, mission-sensitive

and high impact lands these stakeholders manage on the East Alternative.

- The preferred alternative helps minimize impacts to wetlands and waterways, and we believe the Army Corps of Engineers will ultimately be able to issue the required permits to build this proposed route. The Army Corps of Engineers is responsible for protection of wetlands and water ways of the United States.
- The preferred alternative includes the Casey Road substation site. As compared to the Baxter Road substation site, the Casey Road substation site avoids significant steep, rocky terrain, as well as wetlands and streams. Although it adds about two miles of transmission line, it has fewer overall project impacts and reduces costs.
- The overall visual impacts of the preferred route were rated lower than other alternatives, but did have higher impacts in several areas and around the 327 residences along the proposed route.
- The cost of this alternative is estimated at \$459 million. While not the least-cost, nor the highest-cost alternative, it provides advantages that make it the preferred choice.

What's next?

BPA's draft EIS has been released for public comment and review through March 1, 2013. BPA then will prepare a final EIS that responds to all comments received and includes any necessary revisions of the EIS. BPA expects to complete and publish the final EIS in 2014. During the remainder of the EIS process we will work closely with property owners and others who could be affected by the preferred alternative to help us refine transmission tower and access road locations for this alternative.

Following the release of the final EIS, BPA will issue a record of decision (ROD). The ROD will announce and explain BPA's final decision on whether to build the project. If a decision is made to build, the ROD also will explain BPA's final decision concerning which alternative route it will build.

For more information

Online: www.bpa.gov/goto/i5

Call and leave a voice mail message: 800-230-6593

Mail to: I-5 Corridor Reinforcement Project
P.O. Box 9250
Portland, OR 97207

I-5 Corridor Reinforcement Project Preferred Alternative: Central Alternative using Option 1 November 2012

