



ATCO Electric Ltd.

Sweeney Creek Telecommunications Tower Site Project

October 10, 2023

Alberta Utilities Commission

Decision 28360-D01-2023

ATCO Electric Ltd.

Sweeney Creek Telecommunications Tower Site Project

Proceeding 28360

Application 28360-A001

October 10, 2023

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The Commission may, no later than 60 days from the date of this decision and without notice, correct typographical, spelling and calculation errors and other similar types of errors and post the corrected decision on its website.

1 Decision summary

1. In this decision, the Alberta Utilities Commission approves the facility application from ATCO Electric Ltd. for the Sweeney Creek Telecommunications Tower Site Project.

2 Application

2. ATCO Electric applied to the Commission for approval to construct and operate a new telecommunications tower site, to be designated as Sweeney Creek 1090 Telecommunications Tower Site, located on Crown land, approximately 50 kilometres northwest of Worsley, Alberta. More specifically, the site is located in the northwest quarter of Section 5, Township 89, Range 12, west of the Sixth Meridian.

3. ATCO Electric stated that the proposed Sweeney Creek Telecommunications Tower Site is needed to improve the reliability and capacity of ATCO Electric's telecommunication network in the northwest area of the province. The site will complete a communication loop between ATCO Electric's existing Sock Lake and Clear Hills telecommunications tower sites.

4. The proposed telecommunications tower site will consist of a 110-metre tall self-supported steel lattice telecommunications tower and associated control buildings and electric and telecommunications equipment.

5. ATCO Electric stated that the project site is remotely located and will not be connected to the Alberta Interconnected Electric System. To provide power to the site, ATCO noted that it also intends to install a hybrid power system consisting of a solar array, a battery energy storage system, and a generator. The solar array will include 112 ground mounted photovoltaic panels with a power generation output of 61 kilowatts (kW). The battery storage system will include storage cells and a battery inverter with a storage capacity of 60-kilowatt-hour (kWh) and the option to expand to 100 kWh. The generator will be a propane 3.0 Litre PSA engine with a power generation output of 20 kW. The maximum overall capability of the hybrid power system will be 170 kW. ATCO Electric stated that, in accordance with Section 4.1 of AUC Rule 007: *Applications for Power Plants, Substations, Transmission Lines, Industrial System Designations, Hydro Developments and Gas Utility Pipelines*, it did not submit a power plant application for the hybrid power system given that the capability of the system is less than one megawatt, and it is intended for ATCO Electric's own use.

6. ATCO Electric stated that the proposed site is located on suitable ground, is adjacent to an established all-weather access road, has no existing infrastructure constraints present, avoids environmentally sensitive areas, and is at an elevation that will allow for optimal communication between telecommunication tower sites.

7. ATCO Electric explained that it has applied to Alberta Forestry and Parks for a Department Miscellaneous Lease (DML) disposition for the land on which the telecommunications tower site will be located. ATCO Electric confirmed that it is proposing to construct an 80-metre long access road for the project within the boundary of the DML. ATCO Electric stated that it will comply with the all conditions outlined in the disposition document once issued by Alberta Forestry and Parks.
8. ATCO Electric retained Jacobs to conduct an environmental evaluation. Jacobs concluded that the potential adverse effects of the project on the biophysical elements considered (e.g., soil, vegetation, wetlands, wildlife and wildlife habitat) would not be significant provided that ATCO Electric implements the mitigation in the project-specific environmental protection plan, additional site-specific mitigation is developed and implemented, as appropriate, and the applicable regulatory requirements are adhered to.
9. ATCO Electric received an initial *Historical Resources Act* approval from Alberta Culture and Status of Women on August 5, 2020. Subsequently, during consultation with Doig River First Nation in October 2022, concerns were expressed regarding possible important traditional use areas and a request was made for ATCO Electric to complete a historical resources impact assessment (HRIA). ATCO Electric conducted an HRIA and no historical resources were identified. ATCO Electric submitted a second *Historical Resources Act* application, which included the HRIA, and Alberta Culture issued *Historical Resources Act* approval on February 17, 2023. While ATCO Electric submitted the potential of encountering any sites with Historical Resource Value to be very low, it confirmed that if any historical resources are discovered during construction, activity will be suspended pending notification and direction from Alberta Culture.
10. The telecommunications tower site is expected to begin operating by December 30, 2024.
11. ATCO Electric stated that the total cost estimate for the proposed project is \$5.19 million. ATCO Electric noted that this project is part of its Telecom Capacity & Reliability Upgrade Projects business case outlined in its 2020-2022 and 2023-2025 general tariff applications.¹
12. The Commission issued a notice of application to local stakeholders and the following Indigenous groups: Doig River First Nation, Dene Tha' First Nation, Horse Lake First Nation, and Duncan's First Nation. The Commission did not receive any statements of intent to participate in the proceeding.

3 Findings

13. For the reasons that follow, the Commission finds that approval of the proposed project is in the public interest having regard to the social, economic, and other effects of the proposed project, including its effect on the environment.
14. The Commission has determined that the application satisfies the information requirements specified in Rule 007.

¹ See Exhibit 28360-X0001, ATCO_Atch01_SweeneyCreek_Application Text, paragraph 7.

15. ATCO Electric conducted a participant involvement program and notified landholders, agencies, and other potentially interested parties within 800 metres of the proposed site boundary and conducted individual consultation with stakeholders within 100 metres of the proposed site boundary. ATCO Electric stated that there were no objections to the project and it will continue to engage with stakeholders throughout the duration of the project. ATCO Electric also confirmed that it consulted with four Indigenous groups as directed by the Aboriginal Consultation Office. ATCO Electric stated it did not receive a response from Doig River First Nation after providing a copy of the Historical Resources Impact Assessment and that the other three Indigenous groups had no concerns with the project. The Commission finds that the participant involvement program for the proposed project meets the requirements of Rule 007 and is satisfied there are no outstanding concerns as no submissions were received in response to the AUC's notice.

16. The Commission accepts that the environmental impacts of the proposed development are expected to be minimal, since the project has a small footprint and ATCO Electric has committed to the mitigations outlined in the environmental evaluation and the environmental protection plan. The Commission notes ATCO Electric's commitment to conducting pre-construction nest sweeps, including revisiting an inactive raptor nest.²

17. The Commission accepts that an application is not required for the hybrid power system, as per Section 4.1 of Rule 007, given that the requirements of Section 13 of the *Hydro and Electric Energy Act* are met.

18. Based on the foregoing, the Commission considers the project to be in the public interest in accordance with Section 17 of the *Alberta Utilities Commission Act*.

4 Decision

19. The Commission approves Application 28360-A001, under sections 14 and 15 of the *Hydro and Electric Energy Act*, and grants ATCO Electric Ltd. the approval set out in Appendix 1 - Telecommunications Facilities Permit and Licence 28360-D02-2023, to construct and operate the Sweeney Creek 1090 Telecommunications Tower Site (Appendix 1 will be distributed separately).

Dated on October 10, 2023.

Alberta Utilities Commission

(original signed by)

Vera Slawinski
Commission Member

² Exhibit 28360-0010, ATCO_ATTCH07_SweeneyCreek_EnvironmentalProtectionPlan, PDF page 11.