



ATCO Electric Ltd.

Brintnell Area Fibre Optic Project

November 24, 2023

Alberta Utilities Commission

Decision 28472-D01-2023

ATCO Electric Ltd.

Brintnell Area Fibre Optic Project

Proceeding 28472

Applications 28472-A003 and 28472-A004

November 24, 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 applications from ATCO Electric Ltd. to construct and operate a fibre optic telecommunications cable as the Brintnell Area Fibre Optic Project, designated as ELADFO019.

2 Applications

2. ATCO applied to construct and operate an approximately 13-kilometre overhead¹ fibre optic cable, designated as ELADFO019, between ATCO's existing Brintnell 876S Substation and Alberta PowerLine General Partner Ltd.'s existing Transmission Line 12L41, approximately 30 kilometres northeast of Wabasca-Desmarais. This creates an interconnection between two existing communication facilities to enhance the telecommunications network and augment ATCO's capacity to manage services during planned and unplanned outages, and emergencies.

3. This initiative is part of the SOC2 Strategic Fibre Project, which aims to extend the fibre network and establish a high-capacity communication backbone connecting the Fort McMurray region with ATCO system operations centres. The overall project increases communication capacity, introduces regional route diversity in the north-central portion of ATCO's communications network, and ultimately improves overall system resilience. ATCO provided the cost estimate for the SOC2 Strategic Fibre Project in Proceeding 27062: ATCO Electric Transmission 2023-2025 General Tariff Application, under consideration by the Commission.²

4. ATCO explained that the proposed route is the shortest route achievable, adhering to current transmission lines to decrease splice points and minimize the additional land needed for the project. The proposed route involves only one splice point, ensuring optimal communication reliability.

5. Construction of the Brintnell Area Fibre Optic Project is scheduled to commence in winter 2023 and the targeted in-service date is March 31, 2024.

3 Findings

6. For the reasons outlined below, 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 project, including its effect on the environment.

¹ A short segment of the fibre optic cable (approximately 30 metres) will be installed underground where the proposed route crosses an access road north of the Brintnell 876S Substation.

² Exhibit 27062-X0196, 2-1 to 2-22 - TCM Business Cases, Proceeding 27062, PDF page 723.

7. The Commission has determined that the information requirements specified in Rule 007: *Applications for Power Plants, Substations, Transmission Lines, Industrial System Designations, Hydro Developments and Gas Utility Pipelines* have been met.

8. The Commission finds that the participant involvement program for the proposed project meets the requirements of Rule 007. ATCO notified and consulted with landholders, agencies, industries, and other interested parties potentially directly affected and directly adjacent to the proposed route right-of-way. ATCO found that there was one trapline holder that is deceased and that the trapline had not been transferred to a new person in the publicly available Crown land database. ATCO stated that it will monitor the database until the start of construction and provide the project information to the new trapline holder if one is identified. ATCO did not receive any objection from any stakeholders.

9. Since new lands are required for the project located on Crown land, ATCO notified Bigstone Cree Nation and Metis Nation of Alberta – Region 5. Bigstone Cree Nation indicated no concerns and Metis Nation of Alberta – Region 5 did not respond. The Commission issued a notice of applications and notified the Indigenous groups, and did not receive any statements of intent to participate. The Commission finds that because the fibre optic cable will be located close to existing transmission lines and will be positioned within and adjacent to existing rights-of-way, there will be minimal impact on adjacent stakeholders.

10. ATCO retained Triton Environmental Consultants Ltd. to complete an environmental evaluation. ATCO explained that the project is located within the West Side Athabasca Caribou Range and that it is developing a caribou mitigation plan to provide field-level mitigation measures for use during construction. ATCO submitted that it will seek Alberta Environment and Protected Areas Fish & Wildlife's (AEPA F&W) acceptance of the mitigations prior to the start of construction. ATCO aims to start construction as soon as winter conditions allow and if more time is needed after Feb 15, 2024, it will seek permission from AEPA F&W.³

11. ATCO stated that the proposed route centreline will be positioned as close to existing transmission lines 12L41 and 9L10 as the vertical and horizontal clearances will permit. The proposed route will require limited and localized vegetation removal. ATCO affirmed that it will conduct a pre-construction survey of the wildlife in the area and will build and maintain the proposed infrastructure while complying with all relevant environmental rules and regulations, as well as the conditions specified in the right-of-way agreements and easements. Given that the proposed fibre optic cable route parallels existing developments for the full distance and given the mitigation measures proposed,⁴ the Commission accepts that the environmental effects of the proposed fibre optic cable can be minimized and that there should be no significant adverse environmental effects from the project.

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

³ Condition 1900 of master schedule of standards and conditions allows construction to continue into the restricted activity period if construction is at least 50 per cent completed.

⁴ Exhibit 28472-X0008, Atch07_BrintnellFibreOptic-FacilityApplication-EPP.

4 Decision

13. The Commission approves applications 28472-A003 and 28472-A004, under sections 14, 15 and 18 of the *Hydro and Electric Energy Act*, and grants ATCO Electric Ltd. the following approvals set out in appendices to this decision:

- a. Telecommunications Facilities Permit and Licence 28472-D02-2023, to construct and operate Fibre Optic Cable ELADFO019 (Appendix 1).
- b. Connection Order 28472-D03-2023, to connect Fibre Optic Cable ELADFO019 to Alberta PowerLine General Partner Ltd.'s Transmission Line 12L41 (Appendix 2).

14. The appendices will be distributed separately.

Dated on November 24, 2023.

Alberta Utilities Commission

(original signed by)

Doug Hawkins
Acting Commission Member