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Green Line Project Promises Tax Boon

Story date: 12/13/2006

By Greg Foster

As much as a 20 percent recovery of tax base lost from Maine Yankee is a prospect for Wiscasset, with plans announced Tuesday for a high voltage underwater transmission project requiring a multi-million dollar converter station.

“The converter station is not an inexpensive piece of property,” said Stephen Conant of Anbaric, LLC, project developers. “It will help build the tax base in a substantial way. It’s not going to go away and provides long term stability.”

The company’s aptly named Green Line Project consists of a 660-megawatt high voltage underwater transmission line from Wiscasset to Boston Harbor providing electric power to southern New England. It is similar to the one the Neptune Project developers presented several years ago.

“Our business is transmission and transmission only,” said Atty. James Broder of Curtis Thaxter, spokesman for the New England Independent Transmission Co., LLC.

Involving the same people as Neptune, the project poses both a boon to the financial picture of Wiscasset and to the state for hookups with green electric generators like wind energy with operation by 2013, according to Broder.

The current grid has a maximum load and does not allow for such addition but the Green Project will, he said.

Company officials came short of quoting any figures for the real estate proposition for a converter station near Maine Yankee on 15-20 acres that will convert AC electric power from the Maritimes into DC current to be transmitted over a line buried on the ocean floor from Birch Point to South Boston.

From there the line will serve electric power to downtown Boston, which is predicted to be short of 1000 megawatts by 2013, the year developers hope to have the project up and running.

Currently the company awaits FERC approval, expected to take 3-5 months before it can apply. A project proposal was filed Dec. 5 to ISO-New England, Inc. for a reliability transmission upgrade (RTU) that addresses the reliability needs outlined in ISO-NE’s 2006 regional system plan, Broder said.

The need to wean Maine from its dependency on natural gas for electric power by opening the door for increases fuel diversity is a motivating factor, according to Conant.

Conant said current electric power lines are congested from northern New England to southern New England where there is the most significant need for power, and described the transmission line as a bypass to that congestion.

The U.S. Dept. of Energy identified the congestion problem in its National Electric Transmission Study, which listed the Maine – Southern New England as one of just four “congestion areas of concern” in the country, according to the transmission company.

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"We're looking at the Pine Tree Development Zone in Wiscasset for location for the converter station," Conant said. "This is the first public presentation we have made."

Not only will the project promote development of more renewable resources in Maine, the plan cites minimal environmental impact as opposed to disrupting a vast swath of land including homes as the only other alternative.

So far there are two sites under consideration for the multi-million dollar converter station. One is in the Point East technology park and the other is at the former Maine Yankee plant site.

Asked what happened to the Neptune Project that was supposed to have a converter station in Wiscasset, Broder explained that it had several phases to it and has been done in part in the southern end in New York. However, the bidding started on Sept. 10, 2001.

"You all remember what happened the next day," he said. "The whole world changed."

Broder said that the bid for project to connect to Manhattan was approved three weeks ago.

As for any questions concerning deregulation, Broder emphasized that the company is strictly a transmission company and cannot be in the business of generating any power. He said the company is in need of the support of Gov. John Baldacci and the state Public Utilities Commission.

New England ITC will be the first independent transmission company and will be a "pure", stand-alone transmission entity without distribution or generation interests, the project plan states. It will be in the control area administered by ISO-New England (ISO-NE).

Furthermore, according to Town Manager Andrew Gilmore, whose last board meeting was Tuesday, the state Public Utilities Commission would not approve any operation unless it is going to benefit the ratepayers.

Currently the company is seeking a declaratory order from the FERC (Federal Energy Resource Commission) for the project.

In its regional system plan for 2006, the ISO-NE stated, "Transmission upgrades are required throughout New England to maintain system reliability, simplify system operations, increase system transfer capability, serve major load pockets, and reduce locational dependence on generating units."

The company considers the project as an answer to the upgrade need with its 140-mile long cable to be buried in ocean bottom that is largely sand and mud although there are areas with rocky or hard bottom conditions along the potential route.

Developers argue that the line along the ocean floor has short term construction impacts but no long term adverse environmental effects. Converter stations at each end of the line are the most visible elements of the systems which can be designed to blend aesthetically with the surroundings.

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