



## Five Western Transmission Projects in New Fast-Tracking Pilot

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The federal government has selected five transmission projects under development in the Western Interconnection for a pilot program aimed at accelerating the permitting process and creating jobs.

Three Northwest projects were selected: Idaho Power's proposed 300-mile Boardman-to-Hemingway Project, Idaho Power and PacifiCorp's 1,150-mile Gateway West project, and PGE's 210-mile Cascade Crossing Line.

Also selected were the TransWest Express line, which would stretch 700 miles from Wyoming to Nevada, and the 500-KV SunZia Transmission project, which will connect New Mexico and Arizona.

The recently formed Rapid Response Team for Transmission is made up of nine federal agencies that will work to coordinate permitting at the federal level, while trying to increase cooperation among federal, state and tribal permitting agencies.

Part of the reason for creating the RRTT was the White House's acknowledgment that federal agencies don't have much experience permitting transmission projects. The last wave of transmission construction was in the 1970s, said John Sullivan, project director of the Cascade Crossing Project.

The 210-mile Cascade Crossing Project will need approval from six or seven federal agencies and at least 10 state agencies and one tribe, he said.

"We are hoping that this (pilot) will provide more certainty around our schedule," Sullivan told *Energy Prospects West*.

The project filed notices of intent in May 2010 with state, federal and tribal officials. PGE hopes to have a final order from the Oregon Energy Facility Siting Council in early 2014, with a final record of decision about the same time. Construction could then begin in the second quarter of 2014, wrapping up in late 2016 or early 2017.

Bringing transmission projects from the development stage to construction will also hasten the hiring of "thousands of construction and operations jobs" and help modernize the grid, according to a news release from the U.S. Department of Energy.

"To compete in the global economy, we need a modern electricity grid," Energy Secretary Steven Chu said in the release. "An upgraded electricity grid will give consumers choices while promoting energy savings, increasing energy efficiency, and fostering the growth of renewable energy resources."

Idaho Power, which is involved in the Boardman-to-Hemingway and Gateway West projects, is still waiting to see the details on how the fast-tracking program will work, spokeswoman Lynette Berriochoa told *Prospects*.

"Until we see more of the plan, we're just not sure how it will impact our projects," she said.

PacifiCorp, which is investing \$2 billion on transmission projects in 10 western states, is working with Idaho Power on the Gateway West project and has expressed interest in the Cascade Crossing line. In 2009, PacifiCorp signed an MOU with PGE to explore the prospects of jointly developing the \$825-million Cascade Crossing Project, which would run from Boardman to near Salem, Ore.

Jan Mitchell, spokeswoman for PacifiCorp, said the utility "applauds the federal attention to getting this critical infrastructure built.

"For our projects, we look forward to the anticipated benefits that will come for our customers from the much-needed and focused federal effort, and are very interested in how it can help with schedule certainty--a major step in getting these projects built to serve our customers," she said.

The other projects selected for the program are the 345-KV Hampton-Rochester-La Crosse Line to move power to Minnesota and Wisconsin, and the Susquehanna-to-Roseland Line, which would bring new transmission to Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

- **Steve Ernst**