

# A New Prairie Venture

BY WILLIAM B. MOORE

**PRESIDENT DWIGHT EISENHOWER** had a vision for a national, interstate highway and started it at the place he called home – Kansas. About five miles west of Topeka an obscure road sign indicates that the first eight miles of what we know today as the interstate highway system led from Valencia Road to Maple Hill. Back then, it would have been hard to imagine how we would ever need two lanes in both directions stretching as far as the eye could see. But Ike did not begin building it for his day. He built it for us.

There is another highway system that needs to be built – built by us, but not just for us. It is a super-high-capacity interstate electric transmission network.

Westar recently announced that it formed a joint venture called Prairie Wind Transmission with Electric Transmission America, a partnership owned equally by American Electric Power and MidAmerican Energy Holdings. Prairie Wind Transmission plans to construct an ultra-high-capacity electric transmission line in Kansas, the first such line west of the Mississippi River. If we succeed, our descendents many years from now will be able to say that we, too, thought ahead and provided well for their needs and not just our own. The project is about 230 miles of 765-kilovolt transmission facilities extending from the Wichita area west to the Dodge City area, with a spur south to the Kansas-Oklahoma border from near Medicine Lodge. This might sound like it's in the middle of nowhere to some people – like from Valencia Road to Maple Hill – but we believe it reflects the right starting point for sharing our vision.

The project is the first segment and a direct response to the visionary Southwest Power Pool Extra High Voltage Overlay Study issued this past March that recommended a 765-kilovolt transmission system for the region. It is expected to be in service by the end of 2013.

The SPP's plan calls for new ultra-high-capacity transmission lines serving the entire SPP footprint to enhance access to lower-cost electric power markets, improve efficiency and reliability of the electric grid, and enable extensive development of renewable wind energy.

As our nation looks to clean, renewable energy, the stiff Kansas breezes have become an asset to our state and even our nation. This line is the first step to making our high plains the renewable energy exporter to parts of our nation that don't have access to those resources.

Westar, AEP and MidAmerican were exploring opportunities to expand the nation's transmission infrastructure as part of their overall business strategies.

AEP has led the nation in the development of a national interstate transmission network of extra-high-voltage transmission. For all practical purposes, AEP invented 765-kilovolt transmission technology. Westar has led Kansas in the development of wind energy and new transmission projects, and has worked collaboratively with regulators and state officials to formulate sound energy policy for the state. MidAmerican is a leading energy supply and distribution company with extensive utility operations, including transmission, in the Midwest. AEP and MidAmerican had already jointly created a company called Electric Transmission America. It was a natural fit for us to work together.

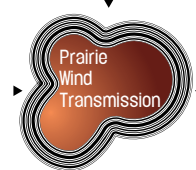
It's too early to estimate the project cost, although a project like this will likely require an ultimate investment of more than a half-billion dollars.

The SPP, as our region's transmission organization officially approved by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, oversees the tariff under which customers will obtain transmission service. Because the project will benefit a broad region, the costs for the lines should be recovered in the prices charged over that broad region, and not just from local Kansans.

Prairie Wind Transmission already has applied to the Kansas Corporation Commission to become a utility in Kansas. For a company to operate as utility in Kansas, it must receive certification as a utility from the KCC.

The higher voltage means reduced system line losses, which occur when electricity travels long distances, versus lower-voltage-class transmission lines. For instance, a 100-mile 765-kilovolt line carrying 1,000 megawatts will save 36 megawatts compared to a lower-voltage class of 345 kilovolts. A 36-megawatt savings is enough to power more than 25,000 homes in Kansas. And, these avoided line losses translate into reduced emissions and lessen the need for additional generation. In short, 765-kilovolt transmission is electrically powerful, economically beneficial and environmentally efficient.

*William B. Moore is president and chief executive officer of Westar Energy.*



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