

## **Advancing Southern Colorado's Energy Highways**

Since the days of the covered wagon, pioneers have looked at ways of transporting people and products to keep our economy moving.

Over the years, our infrastructure has evolved from dirt roads to highways and from railroad tracks to airways.

Infrastructure investments have played a crucial role in our economy, and in Southern Colorado, we must always encourage new investments to create new jobs and attract investment.

Southern Colorado's is an important part of the state's energy economy. The use of modern energy technologies in our region is creating jobs, whether it's wind farms in the southeastern corner of the state or the new Vestas wind tower manufacturing plant in Pueblo.

However, to take advantage of these opportunities, our electricity infrastructure must be updated and modernized. With robust energy "super highways," we can continue to grow our energy economy.

This energy "super highway" system I'm referring to is our electrical transmission network.

This is no different than the challenges facing our transportation experts when proposing the widening of a road or the construction of a new highway. The same can be said about our existing transmission infrastructure.

In many instances, we are relying on transmission built more than 50 years ago. More often than not, these lines have reached their limit, requiring investments to increase capacity to keep pace with growth in population and industry. This, in turn, has caused a major challenge in terms of electric system reliability. This new infrastructure also is needed to allow extra capacity for the development of Southern Colorado's rich renewable resources including wind and solar.

The good news is that our state's utilities are working together to ensure Southern Colorado's electricity infrastructure can meet the needs of our communities and support renewable energy.

Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association and Xcel Energy have proposed to build new transmission lines from the San Luis Valley to Walsenburg and Pueblo. Currently, the Valley is served by three lines to the north that "dead end." This new project would create a reliable "loop" for power coming in and out of the Valley and provide additional capacity needed for renewable energy development.

In simple terms, this new line will help keep the lights on while creating a new highway to support renewable energy development.

Just as there are challenges with building a new highway, the same can be encountered with siting a transmission line. Fortunately, utilities are demonstrating they have an open and responsive process to collect public input that will help protect the interests of landowners and our environment.

And just like a needed road, having reliable and flexible power not only helps our economy, it's critical for our way of life.

Action 22 recognizes the importance of a dependable and efficient transmission infrastructure to help facilitate the delivery of affordable and reliable power to Southern Colorado. We support this project, and will continue to support transmission across Southern Colorado that increases reliability, facilitate energy development and keeps electricity affordable.

Cathy Garcia  
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