

## Mountain States Transmission Intertie Project (MSTI)

### Frequently Asked Questions

The following questions have been compiled from meetings the US Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has held with various organizations, governmental entities, and members of the public.

Q: What is MSTI?

R: MSTI stands for the Mountain States Transmission Intertie. MSTI is a proposed 500kV AC transmission power line starting at the proposed Townsend Substation (located approximately 5 miles south of Townsend, Montana) and terminating at the existing Midpoint Substation (located approximately 12 miles northeast of Jerome, Idaho). Other facilities such as access, communications, construction or expansion of substations are also proposed.

Q: Who proposes to build MSTI?

R: MSTI is proposed by NorthWestern Energy (NWE, NorthWestern).

Q: Why is MSTI proposed?

R: NWE proposes to construct, operate and maintain the Mountain States Transmission Intertie, a 500 kilovolt (kV) 1,500 megawatt transmission line, delivering electricity from the state of Montana to customers in the Western United States. The intent of the MSTI project is to address the need for new electric transmission service from generating sources to loads and customers and to help bolster the western power grid.

Q: What is the Montana Major Facility Siting Act?

R: The Major Facility Siting Act (MSFA) is a Montana law that requires a Certificate of Compliance prior to the start of construction of certain large transmission lines. For additional information see [http://data.opi.mt.gov/bills/mca\\_toc/75\\_20.htm](http://data.opi.mt.gov/bills/mca_toc/75_20.htm).

Q: What are NEPA and MEPA?

R: The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is a federal law that requires federal agencies to consider the impacts of their actions in order to make informed decisions. Because NWE has applied to federal agencies for permits to construct MSTI, agencies must comply with the procedural provisions of NEPA. More information about NEPA can be found at <http://ceq.hss.doe.gov/>.

The Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) is Montana's version of NEPA; however MEPA has several unique provisions not included in NEPA. You can find more information on MEPA at <http://leg.mt.gov/css/Services%20Division/Lepo/mepa/mepaforpublic.asp>.

BLM was selected as the lead federal agency and is responsible for working with other federal agencies having jurisdiction by law to ensure the environmental impact statement (EIS) is prepared in accordance with NEPA and agency directives. Montana Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) is responsible for compliance with MEPA in Montana, and is a co-lead with BLM in the preparation of the EIS. A number of state and local governments are involved as Cooperating Agencies.

Q: Why is the project separated into zones and how many alternatives are there?

R: The agencies involved in the analysis have divided the analysis area into zones for ease of analysis and discussion. Zones 1, 2, and 3 cover the alternatives in Montana and Zones 4, 5, and 6 cover alternatives in Idaho. The number of alternatives varies by Zone as follows: 1 alternative each in Zones 4 and 6; 3 alternatives in Zone 3; 4 alternatives in Zone 1; and 5 alternatives each in Zones 2 and 5. A

number of routing options are also under consideration. In general, alternatives from each zone could be combined to form a route for the proposed transmission line. For more information on the zones, you can visit <http://deq.mt.gov/MFS/MSTI/mstiindex.mcp.x>.

Q: Is there an agency preferred alternative?

R: No decision has been made yet on whether an agency preferred alternative will be identified in the Draft EIS (it is not mandated under the NEPA or MEPA regulations) or whether the project will be approved. Agencies are continuing to analyze the project and alternatives. A preferred alternative must be identified in the Final EIS. The preferred alternative may turn out to be one of the routing alternatives or combination of various alternatives, may involve one of the routing alternatives with additional measures required by an agency to reduce impacts, or agencies may select the No Action Alternative.

Q: Who makes the decision on federal lands?

R: The federal agency responsible for the lands affected by the action is responsible. In the case of MSTI, there are a number of federal agencies who would make a decision depending on the alternative selected once the NEPA process is completed. Among these agencies are the BLM, Forest Service, Bureau of Reclamation, Agricultural Research Station, and the Department of Energy. It should be noted that all applicable authorizations are required.

Q: Who makes the decision on private lands?

R: In the State of Montana, the MDEQ is responsible for approving and siting major transmission lines like MSTI. In the State of Idaho, conditional use permits would be required from affected counties.

Q: Who makes the decision on state owned lands?

R: The Board of Land Commissioners and Montana Department of Natural Resource Conservation would issue easement/land use license. In Idaho, the Idaho Department of Lands would issue a right-of-way easement.

Q: Where is the source of the power that MSTI would move?

R: The MSTI transmission line would be regulated by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) because it could carry interstate commerce. The MSTI line would be subjected to NorthWestern's FERC regulated Open Access Transmission Tariff (OATT) that requires NWE to provide open access to all parties on a non-discriminatory basis. NorthWestern expects the primary source of power that would use MSTI to be new renewable generation sources in Montana.

Q: Will MSTI move Colstrip generated power?

R: The multiple parties that own the existing Colstrip transmission system and generation facility in southeastern Montana already have existing transmission rights to move their power outside Montana. NorthWestern's ownership share of Colstrip is used to serve its network customers in Montana. NorthWestern is required to allow open access to all parties on a non-discriminatory basis under its OATT. For example, PPL Montana also owns a substantial amount of Montana generation and currently serves customers both inside and outside of Montana by utilizing NorthWestern's OATT.

Q: What is the Colstrip or BPA line (Zone 1) and how does it compare to the MSTI line?

R: In the MSTI project area west of Townsend, the existing Colstrip or BPA line is a double-circuit 500-kV transmission line that crosses western Montana and exits the state near Taft. The steel lattice structures on this portion of the Colstrip line are approximately 175-180 feet in height. East of Townsend, the Colstrip line consists of 2 parallel single-circuit 500-kV transmission lines, with guyed-V structures approximately 125 feet in height. One of the alternatives for MSTI (the northern alternative) would parallel the Colstrip or BPA line from Townsend to the Deer Lodge Valley. Since MSTI is a proposed

single-circuit 500-kV line, structures on some portions of the line would be similar to one of the circuits east of Townsend.

Q: If wind energy is not developed, would MSTI be built?

R: FERC issued order EL09-30 in June 2009, which approved NorthWestern's proposed rate structure for the project as a cost of service transmission line. NorthWestern has consistently stated it will build MSTI only with sufficient long term contracts from credit worthy parties. These contracts could be from wind energy producers or from any other source of electrical power.

Q: Will NWE be required to pay fees or taxes?

R: NorthWestern will be required to pay all applicable fees for the use of public lands and pays taxes to the applicable taxing jurisdictions that MSTI will be located in.

Q: What is the 368 Corridor and how wide is it?

R: Designation of 368 Corridors was the result of the West Wide Energy Corridor programmatic analysis for potential routing options for energy infrastructure. Decisions amended a number of Forest Service and BLM land use plans in the western US to establish corridors to help facilitate permitting of major utility projects on public lands. The corridor width ranges in size depending upon the segment location. In some areas along the alternative routes it is 3500-feet wide and in others it is 1000-feet wide.

Q: Do the 368 Corridor designations affect private land?

R: Although the 368 Corridor applies only to federally managed lands, it can influence where major utilities, such as transmission lines, are sited on private land.

Q: Is MSTI located in the 368 Corridor?

R: Where the 368 Corridor is available and roughly parallel to a possible MSTI route, MSTI alternatives have generally been proposed to be located in the established 368 Corridors. In a few isolated instances where sensitive resources have been found since designation of the corridor or where use of the corridor resulted in greater impacts to adjacent private lands, routing alternatives have been developed that only partially use the 368 Corridor.