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EAC updated on multi-million dollar project

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ESCANABA - Escanaba is not alone in looking ahead to its customers' future electric needs. The American Transmission Co., which owns and operates most transmission lines in the region, is also planning ahead.

Brett French, senior regional manager for ATC, updated Escanaba's Electric Advisory Board (EAC) Monday on the status of an ongoing multi-million dollar project to upgrade transmission systems as well as a study of future electrical needs.

"The transmission business is a long-term thing," French said.

ATC is about three-quarters of the way done in a major investment consisting of nine improvement projects. The \$569 million Northern Umbrella Plan began in 2003 and is expected to be finished in 2010.

"ATC saw a limited ability to import energy into the U.P. from Wisconsin. A transmission infrastructure was needed to meet the growing demand and (address) the reliability issue," French said.

ATC is also moving forward with analyzing load and generation scenarios in five-, 10-, and 15-year time frames, French said. Company officials are talking with utilities, including Escanaba officials, to study future energy resources and needs.

The analysis will also explore alternative energy resources so ATC can determine what it needs to adjust based on development of future power sources, he said.

"It's challenging for us to make decisions on the fly ... in a relatively short time ... for the long-term," he said. The study will analyze areas in needs of new transmission lines, additional lines, new generation and distribution.

"This plan will be fairly comprehensive and cover all the counties in the Upper Peninsula," French said. The study began three months ago and is expected to be completed in about a year and a half.

"The situation we have here in the U.P. is that the system is balanced. Anytime you do anything with load distribution or transmission..., that changes that balance," said French. As the economy changes and power needs change, new transmission has to be constructed to support it, he said.

For example, challenges facing ATC include a new biofuel plant to be constructed in the eastern U.P. which will require an increased transmission load. A manufacturing plant in Calumet, which produces space shuttle parts, will increase demand for load need, he said.

French commented that between Escanaba's electric plant and the generators at NewPage, "the city does a pretty good job of meeting its load requirements..., but you couldn't remove a substantial amount of generation without making adjustments to the system."

ATC, formed in 2001, is the first multi-state transmission-only utility, French said. The company owns and operates about 9,100 miles of transmission lines and 480 substations, meeting the needs of about five million people in Michigan, Wisconsin and Illinois.

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