



Puget Sound Energy's Energize Eastside project will replace two-pole towers with taller, single poles and four-pole towers with two poles. Photos courtesy of Puget Sound Energy

Final EIS published for Bellevue-based Puget Sound Energy's Energize Eastside project

The 4,800 page document will be used in the upcoming permitting process.

By Raechel Dawson

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The final Environmental Impact Statement for Puget Sound Energy's Energize Eastside project is complete after three years of work.

Energize Eastside is a proposed 230,000-volt transmission line that would run along 9 miles on the Eastside. The \$300 million project is scheduled for construction in summer 2018 after Bellevue-based Puget Sound Energy is able to complete permitting to build in Bellevue, Newcastle, Renton and, later, Redmond.

Led by the city of Bellevue, the 4,800 page final EIS concludes the project may be safely built and operated, according to Diann Strom, a spokeswoman for Energize Eastside.

City officials will use the document as they look over Puget Sound Energy's permit applications.

"They use this document to help inform their permitting process and permitting requirements," Strom said, adding that the utility company sees the finalization of the EIS as "another step forward" in launching Energize Eastside.

But community group CENSE (Coalition of Eastside Neighborhoods for Sensible Energy), which has been opposed to the project for environmental reasons, views the permitting process as another opportunity to change its course.

Don Marsh, president of CENSE, said the permit hearings will be heard by each city's hearing examiner and if the final decision is appealed, the decision will fall upon each city's council to determine the project's future.

This would then allow CENSE to make their case.

"... PSE's proposal ignores Washington State's environmental policy goals," Marsh said in a news release. "Advanced technology can improve electrical reliability, reduce carbon emissions and save money for customers. CENSE is ready to work with PSE and our elected officials to create an energy grid that benefits people and the environment."

CENSE said they retained energy experts to testify at public permit hearings in the coming months. One such expert is Robert McCullough, a Portland-based energy economist whose investigative work led to the criminal convictions of Enron after the California energy crisis in 2001, CENSE officials state.

"PSE still relies on 20th-century technology, instead of 21st century options like battery storage and smart technology," McCullough is quoted in the news release. "PSE should stop using outdated technology to serve one of the world's most vital technological centers."

Additionally, Marsh points out batteries were not included as a proposed alternative in the EIS.

Strom said the previous phases of the EIS, in phase I and II, looked at an array of proposed alternatives but all were found to be nonviable.

“Phase I looked at integrative resource alternatives that combined batteries with conservation and other things, when they analyzed these, they were considered but weren’t carried forward because they weren’t considered feasible,” she said.

In a [previous report](#), Andy Wappler, Puget Sound Energy’s vice president of customer operations and communications, said they determined the existing power line doesn’t have the ability to charge batteries to meet the community’s needs, which he estimated would be energy from more than 300 shipping-container sized batteries.

Marsh refuted with his belief that demand for electricity is not rising at the rate initially expected and, even if it is, PSE could slowly add batteries and recharge them at night and during the day when use is lower.

“You can start out with a very small battery in year 1,” he said. “If demand goes up, put in another battery and you add to the capacity of batteries you can store year after year if demand keeps going up. It would take a long time to get to the point of the number of batteries PSE says it needs.”

Bellevue has grown seven times since the existing power line was built about 55 years ago, Puget Sound Energy asserts, and, in the last four years, about 10,000 new residents have come to Bellevue. Puget Sound Regional Council projections show the Eastside population will likely grow by another third and employment will grow by more than three-quarters over the next 25 years.

And even though it’s a new project using “old technology,” Energize Eastside will give back what it takes. Strom said once the project is complete, there will be more trees.

The project also switches the two-pole system to a one-pole transmission line and will include the construction of the Richard's Creek station on Richards Road in Bellevue.

For more information on the final EIS, visit www.energizeeastsideEIS.org.



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