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For further information contact:
Paul Arnold, Vice President
(503) 867-5720

ColumbiaGrid Corrals Projects to Build Master Plan

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PORTLAND—ColumbiaGrid has set the wheels in motion to identify high-priority transmission projects in the Northwest. With a call for plans from its members, an invitation for broad participation, and work sessions to hone a list of projects, ColumbiaGrid is on its way toward developing its first comprehensive 10-year transmission plan.

One of the principal tasks outlined in ColumbiaGrid's planning and expansion agreement is preparation of a plan that can be updated every two years. The job starts with collecting existing transmission expansion plans, with a focus on projects that will affect the bulk transmission system at 100 kV or higher and that could impact a neighboring facility, according to corporate vice president Paul Arnold.

A June 19 meeting drew about 40 participants for presentations on the plans that have been submitted. Another session is scheduled for July 11.

In addition to its members and planning partners, ColumbiaGrid invited the Northern Tier Transmission Group (NTTG), the Northwest Power Pool's transmission assessment committee (NTAC), Portland General Electric, and others to participate. We can't effectively develop our plan without knowing what others are doing, so we want them to join with us and discuss how to mutually coordinate efforts as we go forward, Arnold said.

"It's crucial that we get participation of entities outside of our own organization," Lloyd Meyers, chair of ColumbiaGrid's board of directors, stated. One of the big issues for us is to get all interested parties to discuss their plans and for all of us to identify where we are having problems with reliability and capacity, he said. ColumbiaGrid's mission is to provide a means for single-system planning, and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission has impressed on us the need to make this a broad regional process, Meyers explained.

ColumbiaGrid corrals projects (cont.)

The next step for ColumbiaGrid is to compile a complete list of proposed projects. From the list, which could end up with 100+ projects, ColumbiaGrid and the other participants will determine those that have regional significance, establish priorities, and set up study teams.

Two Bonneville Power Administration projects, considered essential for reliability and integrating new generation, including wind, have already been identified as fast track. They are West of McNary and an I-5 Corridor reinforcement.

Other large projects have also been percolating in the region for years, including a North cross-Cascades 500 kV line, California-Oregon Intertie Reinforcement, and Olympic Peninsula Reinforcement. In addition, new lines driven by renewables initiatives in Oregon and Washington, as well as those to support commercial ventures, are likely to be on the final list, Arnold said.

All of these projects are the raw material for ColumbiaGrid's first 10-year plan, which will be completed in the next two years. "It's a master puzzle," Arnold said of pulling all of the plans and projects together into a cohesive whole.

For now, ColumbiaGrid is trying to bring transmission planners into one room to coordinate efforts and come up with the best, most efficient solutions. "It's a challenge to get everyone to come to the party," Meyers said, but so far, the level of participation is encouraging.

The agenda for the next 10-year Planning Meeting is July 11. Work will continue on compiling the list of projects and identifying where coordination is needed. For further information and meeting materials, contact Paul Arnold at (503) 867-5720, arnold@columbiagrid.org, and/or visit us at www.columbiagrid.org.

ColumbiaGrid, a non-profit membership Washington corporation, was formed in 2006 to improve the operational efficiency, reliability, and planned expansion of the Northwest transmission grid. The current members of ColumbiaGrid are Avista Corp., Bonneville Power Administration, Chelan County PUD, Grant County PUD, Puget Sound Energy, Seattle City Light and Tacoma Power. Snohomish County PUD has signed ColumbiaGrid's functional agreements. All Northwest control area operators are welcome to join ColumbiaGrid or to sign and participate in the organization's functional agreements without becoming a member.

