

The Environmental Assessment

An Environmental Assessment (EA) is a decision-making process used to promote good environmental planning by assessing the potential effects of certain activities on the environment. In Ontario, this process is defined in the *Environmental Assessment Act* (the Act) and its regulations. The Act ensures environmental issues are considered, and their effects planned for, before development or building takes place. Under the Act, the definition of “environment” is not limited to the natural environment but includes social, cultural, and economic considerations.

Electricity Projects and the Environmental Assessment Act

Electricity projects in Ontario are subject to Ontario Regulation 116/01 under the *Environmental Assessment Act*. This regulation states that a transmission line that will transmit 115-kilovolt (kV) or more of electricity, and is greater than 2 km long is subject to the requirements of the Act. The East-West Tie Transmission Project (the Project) proposes construction of an approximately 447 km, 230-kV, double-circuit line and is therefore subject to an Individual Environmental Assessment (EA).

Individual EA Process

An Individual EA requires that the proponent develop an EA Terms of Reference (ToR) and submit it to the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MOECC) for approval. Once the ToR is approved, the second phase of the EA process, the EA Study, can begin. Once submitted, the third phase, the EA Review, commences. The final phase is the Minister's Decision.

According to the Ontario Environmental Assessment Act, "environment" means:

- Air, land or water;
- Plant and animal life, including human life;
- The social, economic and cultural conditions that influence the life of humans or a community;
- Any building, structure, machine or other device or thing made by humans;
- Any solid, liquid, gas, odour, heat, sound, vibration or radiation resulting directly or indirectly from human activities; or,
- Any part or combination of the foregoing and the interrelationships between any two or more of them in or of Ontario.

Step 1 - Terms of Reference

A ToR establishes the framework for the preparation and review of the EA. The EA Act and associated regulations and guidelines specify the contents of the ToR and EA.

The first step in the EA process is the preparation of a ToR. It outlines how the study will be conducted and helps ensure that the public, First Nations and Métis communities, property owners, stakeholders, and government agencies know what will be considered in the EA. To support the development of the ToR, environmental studies, engagement, and consultation activities assisted in identification of potential issues and solutions early in the planning process. Collection of information from the studies and feedback from interested stakeholders and other parties will continue to be gathered throughout the life of the Project, and will help ensure pertinent information is considered in preparing the applications.

NextBridge submitted a ToR in February 2014 and amended it in May 2014. The ToR focused on the Reference Route (a proposed route which generally parallels the existing East-West Tie Line) and identified alternatives. The Minister of Environment and Climate Change approved the ToR for the project on August 2014. The approved ToR provides the framework for the second step in the process, the preparation of the EA document. The Ministry's Notice of Approval has been posted on the Ministry's website and can also be viewed at www.nextbridge.ca

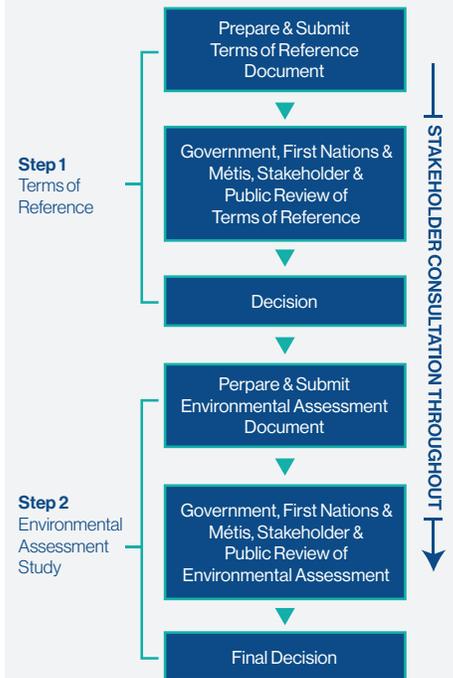
Step 2 - Environmental Assessment Study

The EA process for the Project has commenced and focuses on identifying potential effects, potential net effects, and potential mitigation measures along the route, including, but not limited to; line span length, tower height, diversion around sensitive features, alignment of access roads (temporary and permanent), timing of construction, and final route configuration.

During the EA, NextBridge will conduct environmental studies, and meet with agencies, community representatives, First Nations and Métis communities, property owners and members of the public to determine the potential impacts of the Project on the people, places, businesses, economy and natural environment in the study area. Local community members, the public, stakeholder groups, government agencies, property owners and other interested persons are encouraged to participate in the planning process.

Upon completion of the EA Study, NexBridge will issue a Notice of EA Submission and submit the document to the MOECC. The Environmental Approvals Branch then coordinates a review of the EA document and solicits comments from potentially affected stakeholders over a seven-week comment period. The MOECC reviews the EA and identifies any shortcomings, whether the EA fulfills the requirements of the Act and whether it was conducted in accordance with the approved ToR. The public, property owners, other stakeholders and First Nations and Métis communities may again comment on the proposed undertaking, the EA, and MOECC's review of the EA.

Overview of Environmental Assessment Process



Final Decision

- Refer all or part of the matter to the Environmental Review Tribunal for a hearing, or to another tribunal for a decision;
- Refer the EA or a particular issue to mediation;
- Approve the proposed undertaking with appropriate conditions; or,
- Refuse to grant approval to proceed with the proposed undertaking.