

Natural gas delivery system pipeline modernization planned for Edwardsville region

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In 2027, Ameren Illinois will construct a new natural gas delivery system pipeline to service the greater Edwardsville region. Anticipated to stretch roughly five to seven miles, this modernization project is necessary to continue meeting the needs of both current and new customers as well as to strengthen the safety, integrity, and reliability of the region’s natural gas system.

The impacted geographical area is roughly bound by Fruit Road to the north, Interstate 55 on the east, south of Interstate 270 and Glen Crossing Drive, along Illinois Route 157 and through the SIUE campus on the west.

Earlier this year, Ameren Illinois began gathering public feedback on the project through a series of virtual and in-person public meetings while also hoping to increase awareness of the Edwardsville Reliability Enhancement Project undertaking.

Public input has an important impact on the project in a number of ways, including providing the Project team with information and insight regarding impacted properties, potential constraints, and opportunities.

The scope of this project is rather monumental, as Ameren Illinois officials pointed out at a recent March public meeting held at the N.O. Nelson Complex in Edwardsville. Ample lead time, therefore, is imperative. Input from the public and impacted stakeholders continues to be sought after.

This gathered public input will be combined with other important considerations to come up with the “most appropriate and responsible” pipeline route to propose to the Illinois Commerce Commission. Ameren Illinois is regulated by the ICC; its regulatory process includes public comments and participation. The utility will only be allowed to move forward with the project after the ICC approves it



Ameren Illinois officials, as subject matter specialists, gather around a table to review a map of possible new natural gas pipeline paths with a member of the community during a recent open house forum held at the N.O. Nelson Complex in Edwardsville in late March. (Melissa Crockett Meske/Illinois Business Journal)

and determines the final pipeline route.

“And naturally, the total cost of the project will depend on the final approved route,” noted Brad Kloepfel, senior director of Gas Operations for Ameren Illinois.

Included in the other important considerations is a substantial list of factors: Impacted and surrounding residences/homes, federal and state lands, schools, businesses, floodplains, existing structures, cemeteries, visibility of above-ground facilities, highways, threatened and endangered species, churches, historic and archaeological sites, wetlands and waterways, conservation areas, irrigation systems/center pivots, wooded areas, land suitability for construction, cost, new and platted developments, railroads, and existing/planned utilities.

If the ICC-approved path crosses a property, Ameren Illinois representatives will then meet with the owners to discuss the property overview and survey access, easement needs and damage compensation, the construction process and necessary access, as well as to negotiate easements and any land restorations on-site.

Easements will be sought, where needed, for construction, operation, and maintenance of the project. Landowners who enter into an easement agreement with Ameren Illinois will retain their property owner rights.

Ameren Illinois is also evaluating any opportunity to repurpose existing below-ground and above-ground facilities. For example, the utility may re-utilize and repurpose some existing infrastructure south of where Ameren Illinois pipeline crosses I-270 and ends at Franklin St. Station, located at the intersection of Franklin and Madison Avenues.

The company will also propose a route for a new gas transmission pipeline, followed by its design and construction once the route’s path is approved by the Illinois Commerce Commission.

The design and engineering phase and ICC approval, followed by land and easement acquisition, environmental surveying and permitting, are all anticipated to occur start-

ing in Fall 2024. Land clearing is expected to commence by Fall 2026, with construction beginning in Spring 2027. The entire upgraded natural gas delivery system pipeline is expected to be in service by Fall 2027.

This project is one of hundreds being undertaken by Ameren Illinois to replace older natural gas facilities and equipment throughout its 43,700 square-mile territory.

“There are 11 pipelines that criss-cross the state of Illinois,” Kloepfel explained further. “Our transmission system taps into them, then transmits out to our system throughout the Metro East.”

“This interconnection of pipeline is known as Transmission Route 9,” said Ameren Illinois’s Project Manager Yvonne Blount. “It encompasses work from 2020 in Glen Carbon, about six-and-a-half miles in Granite City, and this project. Its route will be just over 14 miles when done.”

“This upgrade will also help to reduce the pressure on the existing system, which dates back to the 1960s. But this is not just a project of choice,” Kloepfel added. “We are also coming into compliance with new guidelines issued in 2019.”

“Another benefit to come from a modernized pipeline system will be that the larger-diameter pipeline will facilitate in-line inspections. We can avoid the more costly direct inspection or assessment that involves digging up the line,” said Kloepfel. “We will be able to more effectively react to changes in load or weather impact while also maintaining reductions in ongoing costs for maintenance and repairs.”

For more information about the Edwardsville Reliability Enhancement Project, or to share comments, visit online at AmerenIllinois.com/EdwardsvilleGasProject or call (618) 221-0379. The public can access an interactive map of the project online as well. To reach out by email, send a message to edwardsvillegasproject@ameren.com.

Truckin’

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A second California-based law potentially making its way to Illinois is known as AB5. AB5 reclassifies independent contractors as employees. Schaefer explained to AgriNews that this legislation essentially eliminates the independent contractor and the owner/operator model from the trucking industry.

AB5, or Assembly Bill 5 as passed by the California State Legislature and signed into law there in the fall of 2019, was initially thought of as one way to bring employee benefits to the gig economy sector.

AB5 involves a three-point, or ABC test, where a worker is assumed to be an employee unless they meet all three of the test criteria: (A) They are free from the control and direction of the hiring entity when performing their work; (B) The work performed is outside the usual course of the hiring entity’s business; and (C) The worker is customarily engaged in an independently established trade, occupation or business.

With the trucking industry, the concern comes with “B.” If an independent contractor or owner/operator is “in the business,” then the work they would be performing is not outside their usual course of business. And, if a trucking company is contracting with them to move a load, then the trucking company is also not performing work outside of its usual course of business. Therein lies the problem.

If AB5 became law in Illinois as it is in California and elsewhere, thousands of truckers currently operating as independent contractors or as owner/operators could have to be reclassified as employees or the way business is conducted between the two parties would fundamentally need to be changed. Companies could also bear an additional burden, and cost, of providing standard employee benefits to this new class of employees now coming on their payroll.

Truckers are legally obligated to comply with ‘Hours of Service’ Regulations from the Federal Motor Carrier Safety

Administration. These regulations limit the amount of time that drivers can be behind the wheel, with mandatory rest breaks in place to ensure they’re sufficiently rested when they begin a new shift. While the essence of this seems sensible and protective of the driver, a new concern lies ahead that is, in part, an outcome of these regulations.

Truckers have found themselves being challenged repeatedly when it comes to parking their semis when the time comes for them to gear down and stop during a haul. Most evenings, the truck stops along the interstates fill up fast. The rest areas quickly follow suit. Truckers struggle to find places to park and comply as well with the federal law that prohibits them from moving on.

An American Transportation Research Institute (ATR) survey conducted back in 2016 had indicated that a driver spent nearly an hour a day on average looking for a place to park their rig. That number has likely increased in the last seven years. Now, with a push toward EV trucks being put on the road becoming more of the industry’s reality, this parking issue looks even more concerning.

“There’s already a huge problem in the US with the truck parking shortage. It is perennially identified by drivers as a top concern... Finding a truck parking space with a charger is going to be an entirely different ballgame,” said Jeff Short, vice president of ATRI in an interview with Overdrive Radio.

“When you find yourself behind the wheel of an electric truck, you realize it’s now essential to find a truck parking space that has access to charging. There’s no longer the option of parking on an off-ramp or an unauthorized location if a truck parking location is at capacity,” Short added.

In reference to the previously noted report, Short also pointed out issues at rural-located truck parking spots. He referred to a rural truck stop included in the study that had roughly 67 spaces for trucks, split on each side of the interstate in his example.

Short noted, “Truck charging at those locations necessitate new production of electricity, and the electricity will have to move across power lines, transmission lines, distribution lines, to places where large quantities of electricity have never gone before... That location would need more than the electricity equivalent of more than 5,000 US households each day just to power what we found to be 126 each day. That’s a lot of power.”

U.S. Rep. Mike Bost (R-Ill.), fueled in part by his personal history, has reintroduced legislation to provide the U.S. Department of Transportation funding on a competitive basis for the construction of new parking spaces for large commercial trucks. Bost was joined by U.S. Rep. Angie Craig (D-Minn.) and U.S. Senators Mark Kelly (D-Ariz.) and Cynthia Lummis (R-Wyo.) in this introduction of the Truck Parking Safety Improvement Action.

The Truck Parking Safety Improvement Act is written to allocate funds to create thousands of safe parking spots for trucks and make necessary improvements to existing truck parking areas.

In a recent statement released by Bost’s office, Chris Spear, president of American Trucking Associations, also noted: “The lack of safe and accessible truck parking places an enormous and costly burden on our nation’s truck drivers as they work to deliver for the American people. Given the chronic nature of this issue and its national scope, it is imperative Congress takes action to provide dedicated funding to expand commercial truck parking capacity.”

“Most folks probably don’t realize that 70% of American freight is transported by truck, yet incredibly there is only 1 parking spot for every 11 trucks on the road,” added Todd Spencer, president of the Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association (OOIDA). “When truck drivers don’t have a designated place to park, they end up parking on the side of the road, near exit ramps, or elsewhere. This isn’t safe for the driver

and it’s not safe for others on the road.”

“As an organization committed to promoting truck safety, we support the Truck Parking Safety Improvement Act,” said Harry Adler, Principal of the Institute for Safer Trucking. “If we are going to improve safety throughout the trucking industry, it is essential to prioritize the safety and well-being of commercial truck drivers. By providing safe and accessible truck parking facilities, we can help ensure that drivers are well rested.”

According to a study commissioned by the Federal Highway Administration, 98% of truck drivers say they regularly have trouble finding safe parking, and are forced to park on an exit ramp, on the side of an interstate, or other unsafe areas.

Spencer has also noted, however, that most plans to build new truck stops end up running into local opposition. Nearby residents to the proposed developments often put up resistance to welcoming a brightly lit, noisy, all-night business like a truck stop that also has a bit of notoriety for the types of illicit activities that are often associated with it.

Proposed truck stop developments do not incentivize local officials with the tax revenues they might bring either, as most drivers are out-of-state residents instead of locals who might patronize a tax-paying business in town.

“So truck parking is competing with bridge projects,” noted George O’Connor, a Washington spokesperson for OOIDA, during an NPR interview. “...if you are an elected official, are you going to go cut a ribbon in front of a bridge? [Or] are you going to cut a ribbon in front of a truck stop?”

Trucker Mike Nichols wrapped up his conversation with NPR by noting that the daily troll for parking spots as the limit on driving time approaches the clock will just continue. “Depending on where you’re at, it feels like being homeless,” Nichols added. “Because you don’t know where you’re going to sleep.”