



AESO 2022 Telecommunication Long-term Plan

JANUARY 2022

Contents

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
2.0 BACKGROUND	2
2.1 Role of the AESO	2
2.2 Purpose of the utility telecommunication network	2
2.3 Key benefits of the utility telecommunication network	2
2.4 Private utility telecommunication network	3
3.0 TELECOMMUNICATION ENVIRONMENT UPDATE	4
3.1.1 Telecommunication equipment evolution	4
3.1.2 Dependence on telecommunication	4
3.1.3 Increased role of the distribution system	5
3.1.3.1 Distributed energy resources (DER)	5
3.1.3.2 Distribution capabilities	5
3.1.4 Market participant access	5
3.1.5 Wireless broadband	6
3.1.6 Low earth orbit (LEO) satellite internet	6
3.1.7 Microwave radio deployment	6
4.0 TELECOMMUNICATION PLAN DEVELOPMENT	7
4.1 Telecommunication planning process	7
4.2 Telecommunication planning guidelines	7
4.2.1 Secondary paths	7
4.2.2 Bandwidth capacity	7
4.2.3 Fibre deployment	8
4.2.4 Microwave radio deployment	8

5.0 TELECOMMUNICATION PLAN	9
5.1 Telecommunication reliability improvements	9
5.1.1 Northwest area	9
5.1.1.1 Fort McMurray West 500 kV OPGW (near-term)	9
5.1.1.2 Northwest fibre (near-term)	9
5.1.2 Central area	9
5.1.2.1 EATL fibre connection (near-term)	9
5.1.2.2 Central backbone interconnection (near-term)	10
5.1.2.3 PENV and 7L65 rebuild (near-term)	10
5.1.3 South area	10
5.1.3.1 South backbone interconnection (near-term)	10
5.2 AESO 2020 Long-term Transmission Plan	10
5.2.1 Northwest planning region	11
5.2.2 Central planning region	11
5.2.3 South planning region	11
5.3 List of other telecommunication initiatives	11
5.3.1 Utility network voice and data communications	11
5.3.2 Distributed energy resource communication	11
5.3.3 Mobile radio system upgrade	12
5.3.4 Emergency restoration planning	12
6.0 APPENDICES	13
6.1 Project development plan map	13
6.2 Fibre plan timeline map	14

1.0 Executive summary

The AESO 2022 Telecommunication Long-term Plan provides the background, environment update, plan development and high-level plan for the utility telecommunication network used for the operation of the Alberta Interconnected Electric System (AIES). The AESO 2022 Telecommunication Long-term Plan (Telecommunication LTP) is an update of the AESO's 2020 Telecommunication LTP and aligned with the AESO 2022 Transmission Long-term Plan (LTP).

The utility telecommunication network will play an increasing role in the safe, reliable and economic operation of the Alberta Interconnected Electrical System (AIES). More complex remedial action schemes (RAS) and non-wire transmission solutions dependent on telecommunication and increased distributed energy resources (DER) will likely be key drivers that will increase the role of the utility telecommunication network.

The 2022 Telecommunication LTP outlines possible projects that will improve and strengthen the reliability and availability of the utility telecommunication network, and therefore the transmission system. Particular focus was placed on opportunities to leverage existing or planned utility infrastructure to maximize the benefit and minimize the cost. In general, the telecommunication capital cost component represents one to five per cent of a transmission system upgrade or expansion. The possible projects described primarily focus on three areas of the province: the northwest, central, and south.

2.0 Background

2.1 ROLE OF THE AESO

The AESO is mandated through legislation¹ to operate the AIES in a safe, reliable and economic manner, and to plan a transmission system that meets electricity demand today and in the future. The utility telecommunication network represents a key component of the overall transmission system.

2.2 PURPOSE OF THE UTILITY TELECOMMUNICATION NETWORK

The utility telecommunication network carries critical telecommunication services that are used to protect, monitor and control the transmission system. It helps to quickly isolate faulted elements to maintain system stability and to protect equipment from unnecessary damage. It also allows transmission system operators to respond to changes in the system and take corrective action, as needed. System awareness and control is especially critical to respond during a major system or restoration event. Outages on the utility telecommunication network can require outages on the transmission system. These critical telecommunication services require the utility telecommunication network to be highly reliable and have appropriate capacity.

The utility telecommunication network can also enable transmission facility owners (TFOs) to remotely monitor the condition of key equipment, remotely collect information for faster troubleshooting and more effectively manage utility assets. As more devices become capable of providing information, the telecommunication network will be leveraged further and provide even more value to the AIES.

2.3 KEY BENEFITS OF THE UTILITY TELECOMMUNICATION NETWORK

- Enables coordinated monitoring, control and operation of the transmission system
- Enables larger power flows on transmission lines by facilitating faster fault-clearing times and advanced protection schemes
- Enables the connection of additional and diverse generation on existing transmission lines
- Enables the connection of additional load on existing transmission lines
- Provides emergency voice and data telecommunication for effective power system restoration

¹ https://open.alberta.ca/publications/2007_086

2.4 PRIVATE UTILITY TELECOMMUNICATION NETWORK

The utility telecommunication network is a private telecommunication network owned and operated by the TFOs. Utility telecommunication requires low communication latency, needs to be highly reliable, and must be available and functional under all operating conditions, including during system emergencies. Maintaining telecommunications during a major system or restoration event is critical to the stabilization and recovery of the power system.

Some transmission and generation services can be provided by external telecommunication companies (telcos) based on the service requirements and criticality. Where high availability is essential, the use of both a telco network and the utility telecommunication network is being used for critical services. The restoration time, service availability in remote areas, and backup power system capacity can be challenging depending on telco networks for critical transmission services. Additional challenges include traffic prioritization, communication latency, information security and the designed equipment performance. In some cases, telcos can meet the highest requirements for critical transmission services but the cost can be expensive and this level of service is typically only available in dense urban areas.

3.0 Telecommunication environment update

3.1.1 Telecommunication equipment evolution

The standard telecommunication equipment and technology available to utilities has evolved. The equipment that controls the flow of traffic across the communication network (multiplexers or routers) is more commonly now packet-based.² This shift is due to the much larger equipment demand from telcos providing packet-based internet, data, and phone services. The legacy equipment and legacy technologies are becoming harder to procure and support. As a result, many utilities are transitioning to packet-based technologies. The benefits of packet-based telecommunication will continue to increase as more substation equipment evolves to packet communication. Packet-based networks are capable of enabling more flexible networks and more complex protection schemes. A challenge for utilities will be the increased impact and frequency of telecommunication planned outages associated with newer equipment, the impact of which will depend on a networks topology and designed secondary paths. Ultimately, the advantages to packet technology must be balanced with the risk of staying with a system and technology that is increasingly difficult to support and maintain.

3.1.2 Dependence on Telecommunication

The utility telecommunication network continues to see more dependence placed on it for the reliability and availability of the transmission system. In addition to the standard critical services needed for operation and protection of the transmission system, more complex RAS and non-wires transmission solutions involving telecommunication are being deployed more frequently. These alternative solutions are used for new connection projects, system driven projects, and operational challenges. The telecommunication network is being used to address system congestion, protection mis-coordination, provide risk mitigation and automatic system stabilization, and prevent islanding or other undesirable system conditions. The primary drivers for leveraging telecommunication in this way are reduced costs, higher utilization of existing transmission assets, fewer new transmission line builds, and denser connection of generation which may involve tapping into existing transmission lines.

The telecommunication network is also being leveraged to carry more accurate real-time information obtained by phasor measurement units (PMUs), and to provide more accurate generation forecast data for the growing variable generation sources such as solar and wind. Inverter-based generation sources, including batteries, solar and wind, which have little inertia but fast response may change how quickly the system needs to respond, increase the amount of situational awareness needed across the system, and/or expand the use of automated control dependent on telecommunication. As the existing transmission system carries more power and the telecommunication network is leveraged further, the impact of telecommunication outages on the transmission system and challenges in scheduling outages will continue to increase. Therefore, the importance of having a reliable utility telecommunication network and implementing prudent telecommunication secondary paths is expected to increase.

3.1.3 Increased role of the distribution system

The distribution system has been changing and evolving. Current trends suggest the distribution system will continue to increase its role in the stable and reliable operation of the AIES. Telecommunication will be required to manage and support this increased role. The flow of information is expected to shift such that more data from the distribution system is needed in real time by the transmission system. The following areas present the drivers for this increasing role of the distribution system.

² Packet-based equipment routes data packets, which are chunks of data/information, based on the address or label on the packet towards its final destination.

3.1.3.1 Distributed energy resources (DER)

Distributed energy resources are generation resources connected to the electric distribution system. As of December 2021, there was 914 MW of installed DER capacity³ connected in Alberta with approximately 21 per cent or 197 MW added since December 2020. The overall cost of DER, particularly wind or solar, is expected to continue dropping and deployment to increase based on both economic and social drivers. Individually, one small generator has little impact on the overall system but, as a group, they could become a significant percentage of overall generation in the province. This will have an impact on power flows, generation forecasting, system voltage, frequency balance, reliability, and system restoration. Telecommunication will likely be required to effectively monitor and control this growing generation source. Larger wind and solar sources are most often placed in remote rural areas where telecommunication can be a challenge.

There is increasing use of a fail-safe mechanism on the communications for protection applications of generators. Protection applications require high availability, and this enables the use of alternative communications with the fail-safe removing the DER or, in some cases, transmission connected generation from the system in the event of a communications failure. The amount of generation with fail-safe on the same telecommunication network will need to be monitored and may be restricted in the future to prevent a network failure from tripping an amount of generation that could impact general system operation.

3.3.1.2 Distribution capabilities

The distribution facility owners (DFOs) have an increasing demand for telecommunication as they deploy new applications and require more visibility and control of the distribution system. Many of these new applications increase DFOs' operational capabilities and present benefits to the overall electrical system. Applications such as distribution automation, demand response, and supervisory control and data acquisition (SCADA) make the distribution system more flexible and dynamic, resulting in improved system reliability. The transmission utility telecommunication network could be further leveraged to help support these new applications, in particular for rural areas where telecommunication access and reliability may be a challenge, and where the possible duplication of telecommunication infrastructure can be avoided. Leveraging the same highly reliable telecommunication network will also support the expected increased data flow between the distribution system and the transmission system control centres.

3.1.4 Market participant access

Most market participants, such as generators connecting to the transmission system or, in some cases, the distribution system, are required to establish communications with the AESO (SCADA, operational data, and operational voice⁴) and their interconnecting transmission facility owner (teleprotection, SCADA, operational voice). For market participants, the utility telecommunication network is an option to carry these services. The cost to connect into the utility telecommunication network is paid for by the market participant. The AESO supports the services being carried on the utility telecommunication network as a highly available network built, paid for, and maintained for the purposes of operating the AIES. Critical generation facilities are being required to leverage the utility telecommunication network to implement network redundancy for essential SCADA and voice communications.

³ <https://www.aeso.ca/assets/Uploads/grid/DER-Roadmap-Progress-Update-Q4-2021.pdf>

⁴ Section 502.8 – SCADA Technical and Operating Requirements, Section 502.9 – Synchrophasor Measurement Unit Technical Requirements, Section 502.4 Automated Dispatch and Messaging System and Voice Communication System Requirements.

3.1.5 Wireless broadband

The use of wireless broadband for connecting some transmission and generation facilities is becoming more common and possible as the technology continues to advance and be broadly deployed. Large investment in these networks by telcos continues to increase the capability and performance of the commercial broadband networks. An April 2021, Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) decision⁵ supports advanced electric utility access to commercial wireless networks, making possible mixed commercial and private networks that could support growing DER connection and other utility data and voice needs.

3.1.6 Low earth orbit (LEO) satellite internet

The deployment of satellite internet constellations with lower latency and higher capacity is a telecommunication technology that may be leveraged in the future. The commercial access for utilities and the overall reliability and performance characteristics of these new satellite internet services remains unproven but may continue to improve as more satellites are deployed. In the near term, these systems will likely be evaluated for backup data services at select facilities.

3.1.7 Edge radio solutions

For protection applications such as RAS, breaker failure, and transfer trip with less demanding latency requirements, the AESO encourages the deployment of last mile connections outside of the usual fibre and microwave radio. Examples include low-capacity radio setups which may be composed of a mix of licensed low capacity radios and unlicensed spread spectrum radios being applied in parallel to produce higher availability and performance.

⁵ <https://crtc.gc.ca/eng/archive/2021/2021-130.html>

4.0 Telecommunication plan development

4.1 TELECOMMUNICATION PLANNING PROCESS

The telecommunication network is planned in coordination between the AESO and TFOs. A telecommunication working group is in place with the large TFOs and DFOs in the province (AltaLink, ATCO, ENMAX, EPCOR and FortisAlberta). As the operators and primary planners of their utility telecommunication networks, the workgroup supports the AESO in creating the overall telecommunication long-term plan. The AESO's role in the telecommunication planning is to, at the provincial level, lead coordinated planning between the utilities, provide long-term direction, identify inter-organizational opportunities, and determine the need for key telecommunication projects.

In developing the 2022 Telecommunication LTP, the AESO evaluated the current and future needs for the utility telecommunication network. The 2022 Telecommunication LTP is developed to align with the LTP, which is a major driver of new telecommunication development and opportunities.

The compiled list of telecommunication projects and needs have been reviewed by the AESO and stakeholders. A high-level evaluation of the cost versus benefit is considered for all the outlined telecommunication projects. As per the standard process, individual business cases and justification documents are still required to support the execution and determine the specific timing of the outlined telecommunication projects..

4.2.1 Secondary paths

Just as on the electric transmission system, the reliability and availability of critical telecommunication services is dramatically improved by having adequate secondary paths on the telecommunication network. Hardware redundancy is implemented as deemed necessary by the utilities, guarding against some single points of failure and reducing the impact of both planned and unplanned telecommunication outages on the transmission system. Secondary paths that form ring topologies are the ideal solution, eliminating most single points of failure.

Opportunities for establishing secondary paths and rings, which require small amounts of additional infrastructure, are focused upon in the telecommunication planning effort. The telecommunication long-term plan attempts to identify secondary paths possible in the near and longer-term, leveraging existing and planned telecommunication. Identifying these potential secondary paths will ensure that opportunities for these improvements, in particular those associated with transmission line builds, are not missed. Planning considerations for secondary paths include bandwidth capacity, path length (communication latency), and the number and criticality of services improved.

4.2.2 Bandwidth capacity

The bandwidth capacity needed for the utility telecommunication network is growing as more devices are contributing data. Technology evolution is contributing to higher minimum bandwidth levels in some scenarios while also making higher bandwidth equipment less expensive. It is recommended for secondary paths involving inter-utility exchange that, where prudent, the telecommunication links used have a minimum capacity of 150 megabits per second (Mbps), such that a minimum 50 Mbps can be exchanged. Adequate bandwidth capacity ensures appropriate communication latency and traffic prioritization, and that capacity bottlenecks do not restrict the functionality of the secondary paths. In terms of bandwidth capacity, fibre is still preferred, providing links of one gigabit per second (Gbps) and 10 Gbps capacity. Higher bandwidth capacity is possible using the same fibre with specialized optical equipment.

4.2.3 Fibre deployment

Deployment of optical ground wire (OPGW), which is optical fibre contained within the transmission line overhead ground wire, on all new and rebuilt 240 kV-and-higher voltage transmission lines continues to be a very cost-effective way of deploying utility telecommunication that meets the needs of today and the future. The addition of OPGW on a transmission line typically represents a less-than-two per cent increase to the project cost compared to a normal shield wire, and often is the most cost-effective telecommunication option. Fibre deployments, including OPGW, provide large bandwidth capacity that is immune to the atmospheric interference that impacts microwave radio. Leveraging multiple fibre pairs found in a typical fibre cable with redundant hardware, results in fewer single points of failure, increased reliability, and reduced impact of planned and unplanned telecommunication outages.

OPGW deployments can also provide relatively inexpensive telecommunication for new connections when the tapped line has OPGW. The tapping of existing transmission lines is becoming more common. In many cases, telecommunication is a requirement for permitting a tapped connection.

The continued deployment of OPGW is recommended on all new 240 kV and higher-voltage transmission lines, and deployment on new 138/144 kV lines will continue to be considered, especially in areas where taps are expected in the future.

4.2.4 Microwave radio deployment

Microwave radio continues to be extensively used by the regional TFOs. While fibre has advantages, microwave radio will continue to be relied upon and deployed on the network where it is both practical and economical. The telecommunication towers required by microwave radio represent the most significant cost in the deployment of additional microwave radio. Leveraging existing telecommunication towers or upgrading the bandwidth capacity of existing microwave radios is a cost-effective method of creating new secondary paths or enabling the effective exchange of secondary paths.

5.0 Telecommunication plan

5.1 TELECOMMUNICATION RELIABILITY IMPROVEMENTS

Projects in the 2022 Telecommunication LTP have been selected to significantly reduce both planned and unplanned outages on the telecommunication network and, therefore, improve the overall reliability and availability of the transmission system. Particular focus is placed on improvements to the 500 kV and 240 kV transmission systems. As per the standard process, individual business cases and justification documents are still required to support the execution and determine the required timing of the outlined telecommunication projects.

The 2022 Telecommunication LTP highlights key projects in the northwest, central, and south areas of the telecommunication network for the near-term (under five-years) and longer-term (>5 years) time periods. When applicable, project alternatives are also outlined. The selected projects follow the outlined planning guidelines and, where possible, leverage existing telecommunication infrastructure.

5.1.1 Northwest area

5.1.1.1 Fort McMurray West 500 kV OPGW (near term)

The constructed Fort McMurray West 500 kV transmission line presents an opportunity to improve telecommunication for existing transmission facilities in the vicinity of the line using the available spare fibre contained within the OPGW. In addition to the three 500 kV line terminal substations, five 240 kV substations can be connected to the OPGW fibre. This fibre will provide a high-capacity secondary connection for the northwest interconnection between AltaLink and ATCO leading into the northeast, and provide secondary paths for more than 11 240 kV teleprotection services, thereby improving overall system reliability in these areas.

5.1.1.2 Northwest fibre (near term)

A fibre linking the Fox Creek area to the Wabamun and/or Edmonton areas, in conjunction with planned transmission development in the Fox Creek area, and fibre already procured from the Grande Prairie area to the Fox Creek area would tie the fibre across those areas to the backbone fibre network. The benefits of such a connection would be high bandwidth capacity from the northwest including the city of Grande Prairie, increased system reliability in the region, secondary paths with low communication latency for four additional 240 kV lines, and a northwest interconnection between the AltaLink and ATCO networks.

5.1.2 Central area

5.1.2.1 EATL fibre connection (near term)

The existing Eastern Alberta Transmission Line (EATL) fibre can be leveraged with a mid-point connection to ATCO's backbone microwave radio network to provide lower communication latency secondary paths for the teleprotection of three or four 240 kV transmission lines. A midpoint connection could provide EATL with a secondary fibre path that is independent of the four EATL optical repeater sites. Additionally, with the central backbone interconnection (see further details in section 5.1.2.2) it can provide a central fibre link between the AltaLink and ATCO fibre and microwave backbones.

5.1.2.2 Central backbone interconnection (near term)

A high-capacity interconnection between AltaLink and ATCO is recommended for the central area of the province. This interconnection would create several secondary paths with low latency and enable unconstrained exchange of services between AltaLink and ATCO by connecting their backbone networks.

Option 1: A fibre connection from the Red Deer area to the Battle River area would connect the EATL and Western Alberta Transmission Line (WATL) fibre at the midpoint in the province, completing a fibre ring up to Edmonton and facilitate a future ring to Calgary. Fibre is preferred based on its immunity to atmospheric interference, multiple links possible from a fibre bundle and higher bandwidth capacity. The planned Central East Transfer-out Transmission Development (CETO)⁶ system project will provide OPGW between the areas needed to support this option.

Option 2: A microwave radio connection between the AltaLink and ATCO backbone networks is possible by upgrading the bandwidth capacity of two radio links. While less expensive, this option doesn't provide the same capability and future potential as the fibre option possible given planned transmission development.

5.1.2.3 PENV and 7L65 rebuild (near-term)

A planned rebuild of 7L65 will add OPGW in coordination with the planned Provost to Edgerton and Nilrem to Vermilion (PENV)⁷ system project. This will provide fibre from the Vegreville area to the Lloydminster area and into the Wainwright area. Existing fibre from the Sheerness area and Hanna area will also be extended within the Provost area. A future project should be able to complete an eastern loop improving both AltaLink and ATCO services.

5.1.3 South area

5.1.3.1 South backbone interconnection (medium term)

A larger-capacity interconnection between AltaLink and ATCO is recommended for the south area of the province. This interconnection would create several secondary paths with low communication latency and enable unconstrained exchange of services between AltaLink and ATCO by connecting their backbone networks in the South.

Option 1: A microwave radio connection between the AltaLink and ATCO backbone networks is possible by upgrading the bandwidth capacity of one radio link. This less-expensive option will enable the needed functionality in the near-term, but doesn't have as much future potential as the fibre option.

Option 2: A leased 10 Gbps service on commercial fibre is proposed to close the south loop from the West Brooks area to the Calgary area. This solution provides bandwidth capacity in the near-term for all existing applications and establishes a south fibre connection between AltaLink and ATCO.

Option 3: Any planned longer-term transmission projects that would provide OPGW between the Blackie or High River area to the Brooks area or the Lethbridge area to the Medicine Hat area can complete the southern end of fibre ring(s) and strengthen the overall network reliability. This option is dependent on planned transmission providing the opportunity. One of the three conceptual solutions for the Southeast identified in the LTP could provide this south backbone interconnection.

5.2 AESO 2020 LONG-TERM TRANSMISSION PLAN

The AESO 2022 LTP highlights planned transmission system development in the near-term time periods. Some of the planned transmission is mentioned above as it directly supports identified telecommunication reliability improvements. For the following near-term transmission development from the reference case, OPGW deployment will have significant benefit potential. In addition to providing necessary telecommunication for the planned transmission line, other benefits include secondary paths with low communication latency for 240 kV and higher-voltage transmission lines, overall improved telecommunication reliability, and increased bandwidth capacity.

⁶ <https://www.aeso.ca/grid/projects/central-east-transfer-out-transmission-development/>

⁷ <https://www.aeso.ca/grid/projects/penv/>

5.2.1 Northwest Planning Region

Development	Timing
Fox Creek 741S to Fox Creek 347S – 7L199	Near term
Fox Creek 347S to Benbow 397S – 720L	Near term
Clairmont Lake 811S to New 9L11 Substation	Near term

5.2.2 Central Planning Region

Development	Timing
Tinchebray 972S to Gaetz 87S	NID approved
Hansman Lake 650S to Edgerton 899S	NID approved
Nilrem 574S to New Drury 2007S	NID approved

5.2.3 South Planning Region

Development	Timing
Chapel Rock 491S to Pincher Creek Area	Near-term deferrable
Wintering Hills 804S to Coyote Lake 963S	Near-term deferrable
Whitla 251S to Milo 356S	Near-term
Bowron 674S to new sub 967L/968L	Near-term

Note: the above list focuses on the reference case, and on wider regional benefits which excludes the planned transmission lines within the City of Edmonton. Other planned transmission lines may also be deployed with OPGW depending on the cost and benefits upon further investigation. For full details on planned transmission, please refer to the complete 2022 LTP.

5.3 LIST OF OTHER TELECOMMUNICATION INITIATIVES

5.3.1 Utility network voice and data communications

A telecommunication system project is underway that leverages the utility telecommunication network to strengthen the voice and SCADA from all critical transmission and generation facilities. The private voice communication connection, called utility orderwire, ensures effective and unimpeded backup voice communications between critical facilities in the event of a major system event. Network redundancy for SCADA from critical facilities ensures a network outage doesn't severely impact the visibility and operational tools used by the AESO and transmission system operators to maintain system reliability in normal conditions and respond to system events.

5.3.2 Distributed energy resource communication

Both the AESO and the DFOs will likely require an increasing amount of information and control of DER in the future. The telecommunication requirements will likely vary depending on the size and type of DER. Depending on these still undefined telecommunication requirements for DER, a number of telecommunication options may be possible. The following are a few options with a brief description of the impact to the utility telecommunication network. Note: a combination of these options may be the optimal solution.

Option 1: The most economical solution for DER will likely continue to be provided by the telco providers over the internet and/or a leased virtual private network. This option could see large amounts of generation visibility and control operating over the telco network. The AESO would consider using a series of regional collection points and the utility telecommunication network to mitigate the risk of complete losing visibility and control.

Option 2: Require that DER deploy appropriate telecommunication to direct-connect with the utility telecommunication network. This may be cost prohibitive for smaller DER installations, and availability may depend on proximity to existing infrastructure. The AESO would consider the additional use of unlicensed spread-spectrum radios or other lower-cost radio solutions.

Option 3: Deploy a private field-area network, operated by the utilities, to provide blanket coverage of dense DER regions. A mix of commercial and private wireless broadband solutions could be a possible solution. This would require a significant investment but may be justified based on the future defined telecommunication requirements, and the density/number of DER installations. This option may provide high reliability while keeping the terminal equipment costs affordable for smaller DER installations. This option would require an analysis of the potential technologies, the forecasted DER demand, and the cost comparison with other options.

5.3.3 Mobile radio system upgrade

The mobile radio system is a critical system for the safe day-to-day operation of the transmission and distribution system in remote areas of the province. A mobile radio system is necessary for coordination of field resources in the event of a significant blackout or disaster event in which the telco system may go down. During the 2013 floods, telco communications were knocked out for the Canmore region and the mobile radio system was critical to restoration efforts and coordination between distribution, transmission, and generation for the region. During a significant blackout, voice communication enables the effective and fast restoration of the electrical system. Several Alberta electric utilities are looking to refresh their current legacy systems, which face obsolescence and the potential of increased failure rates. Those electric utilities are evaluating mobile radio system technologies, network topologies, and interoperability.

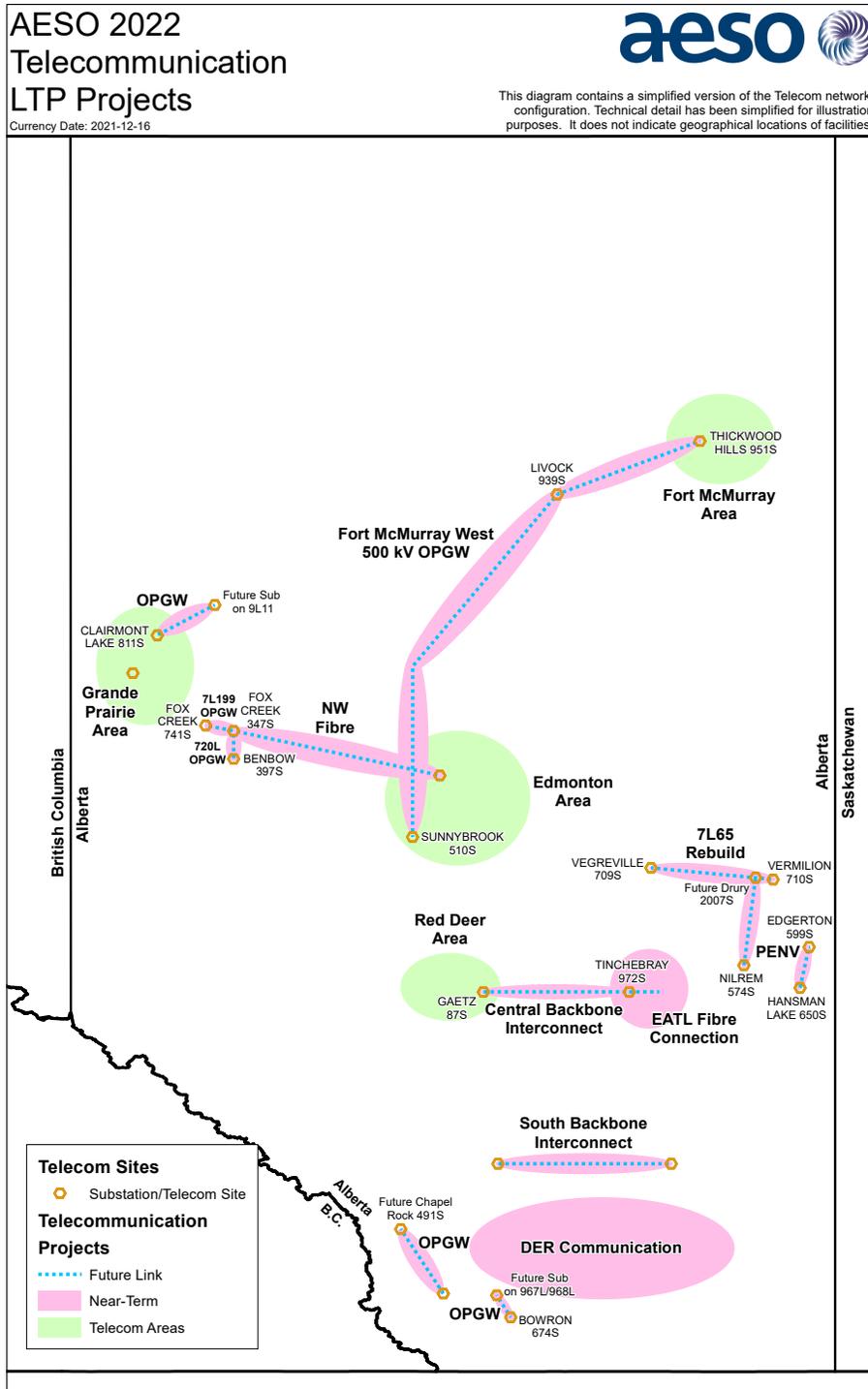
One possibility that continues to be explored is use of the Alberta First Responders Radio Communications System (AFRRCS), built by the Government of Alberta using the public safety frequency band. AFRRCS has the potential to meet the needs of the electric utilities but has challenges regarding access and licensing for utilities in the public safety frequency band.

5.3.4 Emergency restoration planning

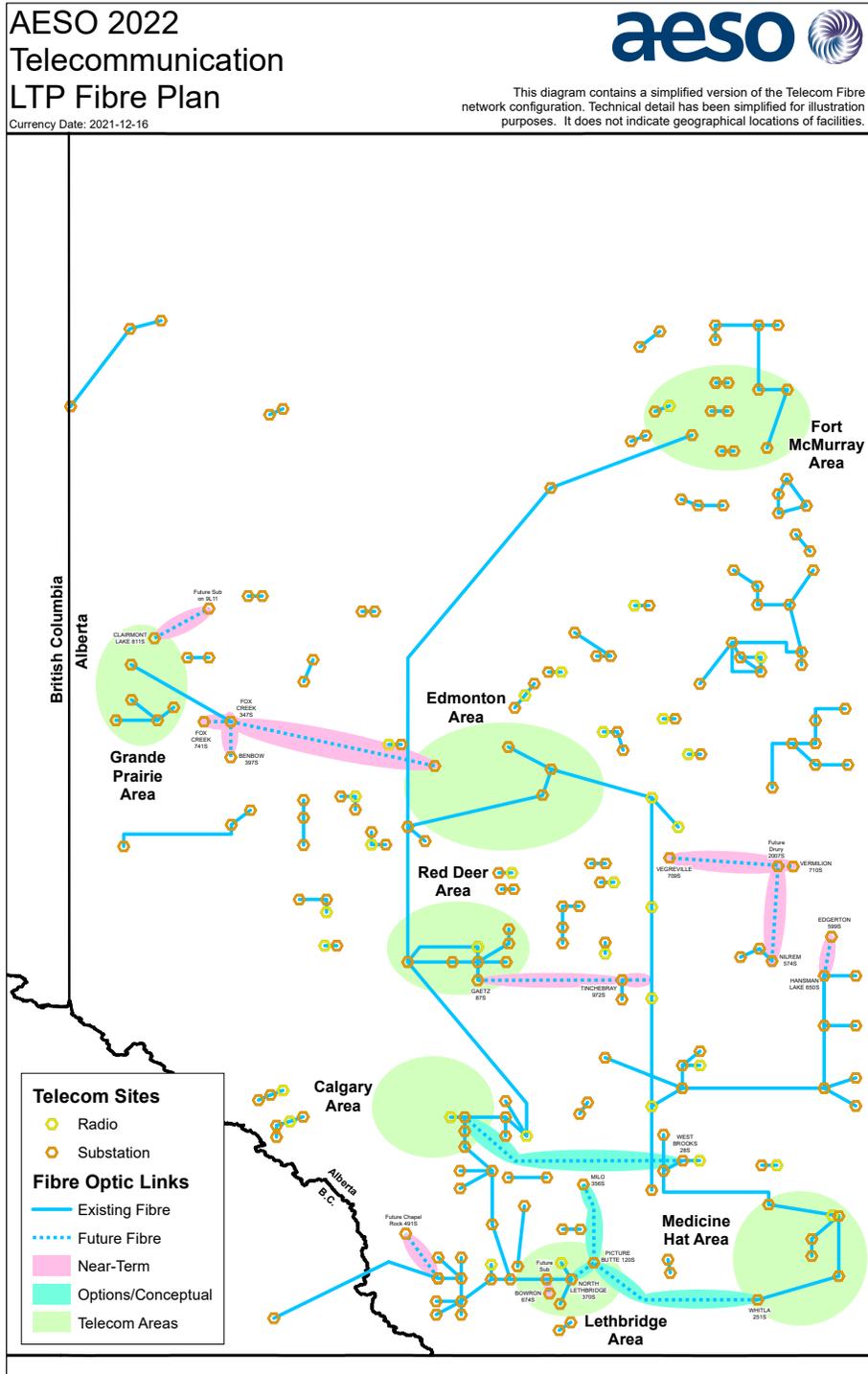
The AESO and the Telecommunication Work Group are working to ensure emergency restoration plans have adequate telecommunication information. In the event of a large-scale outage, telecommunication is essential to the effective restoration of power.

6.0 Appendices

6.1 PROJECT DEVELOPMENT PLAN MAP



6.2 FIBRE PLAN TIMELINE MAP



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