Railbelt Electrical Grid

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The term “Railbelt” refers to either the broad geographical area serviced by the Alaska Railroad, or the electrical grid that covers that area. The Railbelt extends from Fairbanks through the Kenai Peninsula. It encompasses the most populous areas of Alaska, including Anchorage and the Matanuska-Susitna Valley. The Railbelt is home to around 70% of Alaska’s population and consumes (http://alaskarenewableenergy.org/why-renewable-energy-is-important/) 80% of its electricity.

The Railbelt is serviced by 6 different utilities: Golden Valley Electric Association (GVEA), Matanuska Electric Association (MEA), Chugach Electric Association (CEA), Homer Electric Association (HEA), Anchorage Municipal Light & Power (ML&P), and the City of Seward Electric System (SES). These utilities are all relatively small firms. They lack the economies of scale enjoyed by large power-generating corporations, which contributes to the high cost of Railbelt electricity.

In 2007 the state legislature commissioned an $800,000 study into the feasibility of creating a single-utility. This study (http://www.akenergyauthority.org/REGAFiles/9-12-08_AlaskaRailbeltREGAStudy_MasterFinalReport.pdf)(4.5 MB), called the Alaska Railbelt Electrical Grid Authority (REGA) Study, looked at a number of possibilities for condensing these utilities. They also examined a variety of alterative power generation mixes for the next 50 years.

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