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The door is opening a bit wider for wind power development in northeast South Dakota.

Transmission lines originally slated to carry coal-generated power from the scrapped Big Stone II plant could open up a new market for proposed eastern South Dakota wind farms.

Big Stone II's plans had called for new and upgraded high-voltage power lines in southern Minnesota to carry power to customers to the east from both the power plant near Milbank and nearby wind farms. When the Big Stone II project was scrapped, the Midwest ISO, a regional power-grid agency, immediately stepped in to salvage the transmission line portion of the project.

The Midwest Independent Transmission System Operator has identified about 1,900 megawatts, enough to power 500,000 homes, of potential wind projects that could jump on board an upgraded transmission system. One project already accepted into the Midwest ISO study is Dakota Wind Energy, a 300-megawatt wind farm planned for Marshall, Roberts, and Day counties.

Steve Wegman, executive director of the South Dakota Wind Energy Association, said transmission upgrades could inject new life into projects proposed along the Coteau Des Prairies ridge of northeastern South Dakota.

"Building wind farms without transmission lines is like building cars with no roads to drive on," said Wegman. "It gives our state an economic development tool to sell wind energy into the Minneapolis area."

Midwest ISO hopes to complete its study by August, establishing a transmission plan to connect those 1,900 megawatts to the grid. The next step would be to pinpoint what it's going to cost and how long it would take to build.

The Indiana-based company is hoping to keep the cost of transmission upgrades to be shared by the power providers to around \$200,000 a megawatt.

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The state ran ads last week detailing documents and procedures necessary to get a driver's license. Much more documentation is now needed in light of national security and identity theft concerns. Do you think that additional ID requirements to get a driver's license is a good thing?

yes