Overview

This conference was a one day supply chain seminar to get Wind Energy Original Equipment Manufacturers (GE, Vesta, Siemens, etc) together with supply companies to see if there was an opportunity to partner with the OEM’s to become first and second tier suppliers of not only wind tower components, but all parts and supplies that go into the production and placement of the wind towers.

For WisDOT it gave us the opportunity to see what is coming within the changing economic landscape and economic recovery efforts tied in part to this industry. The Governor spoke and asked participants from other states, as well as existing companies, to locate in Wisconsin or convert and expand to this industry and become suppliers and or research and development providers.

For WisDOT

Wisconsin is surrounded by states in the Midwest who have already embraced the wind industry. Thus Wisconsin may end up being a crossroads state for some of the parts and supplies that go into the various components of the Wind Industry even before pre assembly and project site delivery. There is a desire to build smaller farms within the state however the larger operations are targeted in the middle of the country starting from North Dakota and Minnesota across the middle states to Texas. This means deliveries for now (at least 50 percent of overall production) could continue to come in the ports and be transported across Wisconsin destine for Iowa and Minnesota. However some OEMS are looking to locate within these respective states as they try and close the gap between prefabricated assembly and final site delivery. At the same time demand for large transmission lines to get the generated energy to major markets (Minneapolis, Milwaukee, and Chicago) will begin to rapidly emerge.

The Governor’s Energy initiative calls for 25 percent of Wisconsin’s Energy Consumption to come from clean and renewable resources. To meet this goal wind energy would be a major part of it. This means an exponential increase in small wind farms in the state. There is also some desire to look at the feasibility along or out in Lake Superior and Lake Michigan.

WisDOT permits were blamed as a key reason Wisconsin was left out as a state for major production and assembly. Vestas (a major manufacture of Nacelles) reportedly became so frustrated they gave up. At the same time they recognize the brain trust in Wisconsin and are open to research and development here.

Some ideas for Freight Operations are as follows:

Continue with our efforts to streamline approvals and minimize on system delays.

Work with OEM’s before products are produced to ensure we can move them on our road or railways. Note: Transportation costs and access was mentioned as a key bottleneck for this industry.

Consider having signs posts and other fixed objects in the right of way removable for loads. Vesta’s VP Gene Cuenot stated that Europe uses “pull pins” for their signs and paved infields for their roundabouts. LTS&E study should do a lit search on this concept.