

# TP&L to distribute wind turbine components from Great Plains

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Northern Plains Rail Services of Fordville, North Dakota, loads new ties to distribute along the rails in Great Plains Industrial Park. The work is part of the \$1.64 million in rail improvements being done inside Great Plains to pave the way for new industry to locate here, like Transportation Partners & Logistics, owner and operator of the largest wind component distribution center in North America. The company has chosen Great Plains in Parsons as its newest distribution location. TP&L will begin receiving rail shipments in Great Plains the first week of February.

Colleen Williamson/Sun photo

A small group of people with a vision for economic development in Labette County are finding success stories one step at a time.

Great Plains Industrial Park was developed in the aftermath of the former Kansas Army Ammunition Plant closing in 2005. The vision has been to add industry and jobs in the park acreage east of Parsons. Park officials hope a new transloading business will spark park interest.

On Thursday, a Great Plains Industrial Park official announced that the park will be home to Transportation Partners & Logistics' newest location.

TP&L owns and operates the largest wind component distribution center in North America in Garden City. The center, which began on 10 acres in December 2011, has grown to occupy more than 600 acres and employs around 85 people. It serves customers within a 500-mile radius.

Jim Orr, TP&L president, said, “With the driver shortage, our customers are trying to narrow that radius for ... trucking. There are a lot of projects within a 250 mile radius of this area. We are just trying to get more strategically located on the east side of Kansas, because it was important for us to hit those projects. It just kind of made sense from a strategic standpoint to narrow down that last haul for our customers.”

Orr said Great Plains has been “excellent” to deal with, and it provides wholly for the company’s needs with not only track to receive components, but indoor warehousing to store products.

“What we do is primarily in the wind industry, so wind tower components, towers, blades, nacelles and the hubs. There are 10 components per tower that will be laid down,” Orr said.

Basically, TP&L will provide rail transport of the components from the manufacturers to a point of storage for the wind energy companies building wind power installations within a few hundred miles.

“Once it is here we will offload it with cranes. We will store it as long as they want to store it. Sometimes it is in just in time, it will come in and we will take it off the train and put it on the truck. Sometimes it is here for 30 days and sometimes, depending what the needs are of the customer, it will sit here for years. We will do maintenance while it is in storage to keep the warranties up to date. Every quarter, maintenance has to be done. ... Once projects are ready we will load it up on trucks. Sometimes it is our trucks. We do own our own trucking company as well. And, sometimes the customer dictates the truck,” Orr said.

With quick access to U.S. 400, and its connections to U.S. 59, U.S. 169, U.S. 160 and Interstate 44, trucks can depart Great Plains and be on their way to their final destination in short order.

The \$1.64 million grant from the Kansas Department of Transportation, approved two weeks ago for the rehabilitation and replacement of rails within Great Plains, made leasing acreage and storage facilities to TP&L possible. Having integrated rail that could hold heavy capacity cars from a Class 1 railroad was needed.

“I think KDOT understands that sometimes a boost is needed, but they want to make sure the money they are spending is going to good use,” Orr said. “TP&L has a good track record with the state of Kansas. They know who we are and they know the volume we bring to southwest Kansas so when we had that conversation with them, it had merit. And I think Great Plains, Gary (Beachner) and his group did a good job.”

“By collaborating with Great Plains Industrial Park, the city of Parsons and TP&L, we are able to bring new wind energy jobs and new rail opportunities to the whole community. As a leader in wind energy, this is a strategic investment for the state,” KDOT Secretary Julie Lorenz said.

Employees of Northern Plains Rail Services of Fordville, North Dakota, are already at work on the rehabilitation and rebuilding of the rail in Great Plains. Koppers Railroad Structures of Madison, Wisconsin, will begin in January. Work on the rail line will be complete by Jan. 31, just in time for trains to begin deliveries to TP&L inside Great Plains. The first train delivering components will show up the first week of February.

TP&L has eight locations now, and each was selected based in part on the ability for the company to expand as it needs more space.

“Again we started out in Garden City on 10 acres and now we’re on 600. Our hopes are that is here as well,” Orr said. “We have multiple OEMs (original equipment manufacturers) that we service, that know about this facility coming open here in February, and so our hopes are the same thing. In Garden City, I have all three major OEM’s equipment in our yard. Enid, Oklahoma, we have two of the three major OEMs in our yard there, and up in our yard in O’Neill, Nebraska, we have two of three major OEMs up there as well. So, sometimes it is really project based. ... As busy as the wind industry is getting, there are typically multiple OEMs within a 200 mile radius of the facility.”

To begin, Orr said the Great Plains location will probably employ 12 to 15 people.

“We will try to bring in local help. We’ve already reached out to some of the staffing services. We will also bring experienced people in from Garden City or our Enid location for training purposes,” Orr said. “Once we start loading out trucks, we will probably be to 20 to 22 employee range. If we start doing long term maintenance, like we do in Garden City, we will add maintenance crews as well. ... Companywide, we employee about 250.”

About the second week of January, the company will start mobilizing, bringing in cranes and crews.

Orr said the company has contracted for 285 turbines in Great Plains in the year 2020.

“That’s about 2,800 truck loads. That will probably increase as we continue through the year. Again, the other OEMs that have projects in the area, we’ve reached out to them and they definitely have interest. My guess is they will come here as well,” Orr said. “So it will be busy.”

The economic benefit to Parsons and Labette County is significant, extending beyond the industrial park.

“You have 2,800 trucks that are going to leave here and every one of those trucks has two pilot cars. They are going to be staying in the hotels here. They are going to be eating in your restaurants. It’s a really quick influx to economic benefit for Parsons and the surrounding areas,” Orr said. “Then, we buy our fuel local. Everything we do, we try to do as much local as we can — buy vehicles locally, buy equipment locally, it’s just who we are. We try supporting the local economy.”

Once other industry hears TP&L is located in Parsons, the company could begin serving other transportation and logistics needs, such as for oil and gas companies.

“We’ve loaded liquid lysine in at Garden City. We’ve loaded scrap out there. Anything that’s industrial, we’re not opposed to,” Orr said, but added, “we don’t do anything that is hazmat. That is just not who we are. Transportation and logistics. It’s in our name and what we do, and we have a really good customer base, so expect this will grow pretty fast.”

“This is what we set out to do is attract companies that see the assets we have as beneficial, whether it be warehousing or plots of land up to 2,000 acres, those are the things we have to sell,” Great Plains Director Brad Reams said. “When you combine those with access to rail, there’s a certain group of companies that are looking for exactly that. Those are the ones we are welcome to be a home to.”

Reams said TP&L has a track record of benefiting communities far beyond where they start.

“By having this here, this will drive additional businesses as well. And, they are right, once the rail gets built up to standards, I think this is an amazing area for the amount of space they have here and the amount of track they have here,” Orr said. “This park can house many tenants. You’ve just kind of have to get that first boost and we’re happy to be that first boost. Our hopes are by us coming here, and KDOT’s influx of grant money they have provided, that will help spur the area.”

“I think you will see a lot of business to follow with them,” Reams said.