



TOP STORY

THROWING THE SWITCH

Lorenz, Toland hope railroad work, TP&L to spark Great Plains

By Colleen Williamson cwilliamson@parsonssun.com
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Wind turbine blades are stacked at TP&L lay down yard at Great Plains Industrial Park east of Parsons.

Colleen Williamson/Sun photo

State officials were on hand Thursday in Parsons to help celebrate the opening of Great Plains Industrial Park's railroad to the first loaded rail car in 50 years.

Transportation Partners & Logistics (TP&L) President Jim Orr, Kansas Secretary of Transportation Julie Lorenz, Great Plains Development Authority Vice Chairman Gary Beachner and Kansas Secretary of Commerce David Toland threw the ceremonial rail switch Thursday inside a tent on TP&L's leased site.

TP&L provides transportation and logistics services to companies. The company has 11 locations and owns and operates the largest wind component distribution center in North America in Garden City. In late December, the company announced it would be creating a new site within the Great Plains Industrial Park, thanks to a \$1.64 million grant from the Kansas Department of Transportation for the rehabilitation and replacement of rails within Great Plains. Integrated rails that could hold heavy capacity cars from a Class 1 railroad were needed.

Primarily, TP&L works with the wind industry, moving and storing wind tower components, towers, blades, nacelles and hubs. There are 10 components per tower. Parts are transported by rail from manufacturers to a point of storage for the wind energy companies building wind power installations within a few hundred miles. TP&L maintains the components until the projects are ready. They are then loaded onto trucks and transported to the sites for assembly.

Locating within Great Plains allows the company quick access to U.S. 400 and its connections to U.S. 59, U.S. 169, U.S. 160 and Interstate 44.

TP&L President Jim Orr spoke to those present Thursday about Garden City starting on 10 acres, just like Great Plains. Now the company's site in Garden City is over 600 acres. They employ around 85 people, have anywhere from 7,000 to 8,000 components on the ground all the time and are loading an average of 100 trucks in and out a day.

Orr said it takes the support of a community to get a business going.

"You never know where it's going to take us," Orr said. "What we've found impressive is working in the state of Kansas. There is no state like Kansas for support. We are super excited to be here. Everywhere we go, we try to spend our dollars locally. ... We will be good stewards of the community."

It is hoped TP&L establishing a presence at Great Plains is the start to further economic development in the park for the benefit of Parsons, Labette County, Southeast Kansas and the state as was the Kansas State Army Ammunition Plant long ago.

Toland noted he worked for Mayor Anthony Williams in Washington, D.C., when Walter Reed Army Medical Center was on the same BRAC closure list as the KAAP. Toland assisted with helping get the transfer of Walter Reed from the military back to district government. It was during that time he met people from Parsons working to do the same with the KAAP for their community.

As Secretary of Commerce, Toland visited Great Plains in August, viewing the progress made in clean up and improvements and learning how he could assist in helping Great Plains achieve success in its mission of economic development. Thursday, Toland saw how success was realized through support and assistance from the Department of Commerce and Department of Transportation.

"This is a big day for Parsons, Labette County and all of Southeast Kansas, because it represents major progress in the redevelopment here at Great Plains Industrial Park," Toland said. "This provides potential as a major economic driver in Southeast Kansas. There is so much opportunity at this park because of its location, because of the infrastructure that's here, the number of parcels that are available for development. So we see just a variety of different businesses locating here at the Great Plains Industrial Park. ... I think the return on this investment is going to be huge when you look at all the capital improvements that were made. But that is going to turn over multiple times, not just with this business, but other businesses down the road. They are going to be attracted to the opportunities that are here."

Toland said Gov. Laura Kelly is committed to making sure that Kansas has prosperity in its rural regions and said it is a privilege for him to carry that agenda and to make sure rural areas are having these successes.

"When you look at the opportunities that exist here, when you look at our geographic positioning in the center of the country, when you look at the successes the state has had in clean energy, the fact that we are No. 1 in the nation for wind energy production, when you've got this great combination of infrastructure and committed local leadership and visionary people at all levels who are trying to grow Kansas, the sky is the limit. I am so excited and I congratulate everyone involved for making today possible."

Kansas Secretary of Transportation Julie Lorenz was introduced as someone interested in moving Kansas forward through strategic infrastructure improvements, such as those at Great Plains, helping the industrial park serve as an economic development engine for Southeast Kansas.

"Transportation drives the Kansas economy and at KDOT we recognize the importance of partnerships, working with everyone in this tent, and we'd like to see tents like these all across the state to make sure quality investments are made to support a strong transportation network," Lorenz said. "Where we are ... in the center of the country we need to play to our natural strengths, our natural advantages. We are within two days' drive (to) 85% of the American population. We need to take full advantage of that."

"I'm thrilled to be here today to celebrate an economic development win for Kansas and also celebrate the strong power of partnership. It was through our economic development program we were able to award the Great Plains Industrial Park a \$1.64 million grant, and we did it moving

at the speed of business. For those of you who heard me talk about the cost share program, we stood it up in 92 days. I'm glad to say I can now talk about this program and what we accomplished. So I'm pretty sure it was Gary (Beachner) who called, and within 14 days after he called we had a signed award letter. Within 53 days the first train arrived. ... Within 67 working days the deal came together and was executed. I thank my team and this entire tent. That's enormous progress. We are going to move at the speed of business."

Lorenz paraphrased a quote attributed to Amelia Earhart, "Some of us already have our runways built for us, and if you have one, go ahead. Take off. But if you don't have a runway, realize it is your responsibility to pick up a shovel and build one for yourself and for those who come after you."

"I couldn't be happier I stood with Gov. Kelly last week and we started talking about Forward, the new transportation program that will provide shovels to so many communities to help us rebuild Kansas. Kansas is ready for a better transportation system for themselves and for future generations and we need it now. ... It is our hope, and yours, that the redevelopment of this industrial park will lead to new ventures and new opportunities supporting the need for adaptation.

"Kansans have given us their time and their tax dollars and their trust to improve their transportation system," Lorenz said. "We owe it to them and to all those Amelias and future generations to deliver that new system. We're excited to be here to assist in throwing the ceremonial switch on this railroad, because it's time to move Kansas forward."