

Two leaders, one vision

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New Brunswick and Maine have long been considered the eastern hinterlands of their respective nations. This week, Premier Shawn Graham and Governor John Baldacci took a big step toward turning that stereotype on its head.

At a time when most U.S. states and Canadian provinces are fretting about energy security, New Brunswick and Maine have struck an historic agreement to do something about it. The two leaders have announced their intention to work toward a northeast energy corridor linking New Brunswick's energy hub with the New England energy market. It will generate thousands of jobs and draw billions of dollars in investment to the region.

The first phase would consist of a transmission line capable of carrying 1,200 to 1,500 megawatts of electricity. The anchor development for this line would be a dual-purpose generating station, which Irving Oil is considering building in Saint John. This power plant would combine a high-tech wind farm with turbines fired by natural gas. The plant would have the capacity to generate power even when its windmills are idle. This strategy would overcome one of the chief objections to the development of renewable power by guaranteeing customers a reliable supply of energy.

The transmission line also will be able to carry energy from other generators, opening the door to wind and tidal power development and providing a market route for a second nuclear reactor. And that's just the beginning.

Premier Graham and Gov. Baldacci believe the transmission line could provide the foundation for a new transportation network - an international corridor for electricity, LNG and petroleum products. If a right-of-way is secured through New Brunswick and Maine, businesses will be able to deliver energy to the entire eastern seaboard.

A century and a half ago, New Brunswickers and Mainers played key roles in global trade. Today, we have the opportunity to lead again, by working together to establish new domestic energy industries.

It is remarkable that two small governments have committed to this complex vision. It is more remarkable that they have done so in the midst of a recession, when politicians are under tremendous pressure to maintain the status quo.

That speaks to two characteristic Mainers and New Brunswickers share in common: an unshakeable belief in the power of trade to drive growth in the economy, and a willingness to take on big challenges to bring prosperity home.