



Citizens Energy Task Force (www.cetf.us)

Media Contact: Jeremy Chipps, 608-317-5700

April 13, 2009 - For Immediate Release

***MINN. PUBLIC UTILITIES COM'N TO DECIDE NEED FOR CAPX2020 POWER LINES
CITIZENS SEEK TO REOPEN RECORD -- NEW EVIDENCE OF DEMAND DECLINE***

St. Paul, MN— The Minnesota Public Utilities Commission will hear oral argument this Wednesday and will decide this Thursday whether the CapX2020 power lines are needed or whether to reopen the record in light of new evidence of falling electric demand. Local opposition to the high voltage power lines is increasing, and newly-discovered evidence presented by Citizens Energy Task Force (CETF) and other groups shows actual declines in energy demand, undermining the utilities' claims of need for the CapX2020 power lines.

The CapX2020 projects are three massive 345 kV high voltage power lines proposed by Xcel Energy and 10 other utilities, costing nearly \$2 billion. They would reach from the Twin Cities to La Crosse, Wisconsin (La Crosse Project), the Twin Cities to Fargo, North Dakota (Fargo Project) and the Twin Cities to Brookings, South Dakota (Brookings Project). These power lines are being built to export electricity, including coal power from the Dakotas, across Minnesota to Chicago and other points east as well as to serve Minnesota load.

The CapX utilities' claim that the projects are needed for regional energy growth is based on studies assuming continuous growth in demand and minimal conservation through 2020. New evidence from Xcel Energy's disclosures to the Securities and Exchange Commission shows that Xcel's peak demand sharply declined more than 11 percent in absolute numbers from 2006 through 2008. Using these actual numbers and reasonable predictions of future load growth puts regional electric demand far below the lowest threshold (24,701 MW) studied to justify the CapX2020 projects. Other utilities' customers have also needed less energy, and the economic recession continues. Any reasonable forecast of peak demand for the CapX2020 utilities through 2020 puts regional electric demand far below the level studied to justify the CapX2020 projects.

“Minnesota certificate of need law was written so that facts should matter. Based on actual energy use declines during the past two years, State regulators should reopen the record to ensure that ratepayers don't pay \$2 billion for huge power lines that are not needed,” explained Citizens Energy Task Force attorney Paula Maccabee. “Lower forecasts of regional demand mean that smaller power lines and local energy sources can keep the lights on with less environmental harm and fewer risks to human health than the CapX2020 projects.”

It is acknowledged that high voltage power lines create powerful electric and electromagnetic fields (EMF) in addition to noise, aesthetic impacts and decline in property values. The Administrative Law Judge's Report for CapX2020 found that the levels of EMF at the edge of the right-of-way were higher than those associated with a doubling of childhood leukemia in the medical literature.

Local communities along the proposed route for the Brookings Project and the La Crosse Project have enacted resolutions opposing the power line and expressing concerns about its adverse impacts.

The CapX2020 projects will create irreversible environmental harms, especially at river crossings. In particular, the La Crosse project will require a crossing of the Mississippi River within the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife Refuge, impairing endangered habitats, rare and endangered species and the Mississippi River Migratory Bird Flyway.

“The CapX2020 La Crosse power line will harm a federal wildlife refuge and scenic area – no matter what route is chosen,” said Jeremy Chipps, CETF member. “There are feasible alternatives to the massive CapX giants, including conservation as well as local renewable energy that can serve our local communities without doing this damage.”

If a certificate of need is granted, the only additional regulatory review will be the route for the high voltage power lines. Eminent domain laws will allow the utilities to condemn private property.

“This whole process is stacked against ordinary citizens,” explained Robert Johnson, a businessman serving as vice-chair of CETF. “The utilities have too much influence over the regulatory process, and then they are exempted from laws that give landowners some protection in condemnation. It’s time for State agencies to serve the public interest, not just the interests of Xcel Energy and other utilities.”

Oral arguments are scheduled before the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission on Wednesday, April 15, starting at 9:30 am. Members of the public who wish to speak need to request permission by contacting PUC staff member, Bret Eknes at bret.eknes@state.mn.us, phone 651.201.2236. Commission deliberations begin at 9:30 and on Thursday, April 16, with a likely decision that day.

Citizens Energy Task Force – is a grassroots group of more than 200 citizens—and growing fast—who support clean, renewable and sustainable energy. For more information: www.cetf.us,

Media Contacts: Jeremy Chipps, CETF Member, 608-317-5700; Paula Maccabee, Attorney for CETF, 651-646-8890; Robert Johnson, CETF Vice-Chair, 651-227-7333.

* * *