



Citizens Energy Task Force (www.cetf.us)

Paula Maccabee, Attorney (651-646-8890)

-BACKGROUND-

***PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION TO DECIDE NEED FOR MASSIVE POWER LINES
BACKGROUND FROM CITIZENS ENERGY TASK FORCE ON CAPX2020***

What's Imminent: Wednesday, April 15, PUC will hear oral argument and Thursday, April 16, PUC will decide whether to approve nearly \$2 billion and 600 miles of CapX2020 high voltage power lines. The project is in a certificate of need process which requires the PUC to find "need" based on accurate forecasts of demand and a lack of alternatives that would cause less harm. CETF has asked the PUC to reopen the record and hear new evidence that the power lines are not needed.

What is CapX2020? Three massive 345 kV high voltage power lines are being proposed by Xcel, Great River Energy and 9 other utilities. 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 energy, including coal and lignite coal from the Dakotas across Minnesota to Chicago and other points east.

What is the new evidence that the CapX2020 projects are not needed? The Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) Report recommending approval of the CapX2020 power lines assumed that regional peak demand for electricity would grow until 2020. *New evidence shows that Xcel Energy's peak demand declined nearly 12 percent from 2006 through 2008. 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 lowest threshold (24,701 MW) studied to justify the CapX2020 projects.*

Why does the lack of regional demand for the CapX2020 projects matter? Based on accurate forecasts of need:

- The La Crosse Project cannot be justified. Local energy needs in the Rochester and La Crosse areas will be met with local energy and shorter, lower voltage power lines. None of these lower voltage improvements require a new crossing of the Mississippi River within the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife Refuge.
- The Brookings Project would only be needed if conditions were imposed by the PUC requiring it be used for wind energy. It has no other justification.
- The Fargo Project would have to be reevaluated to determine if it is needed west of St. Cloud. Conservation and cheaper and smaller power lines could take care of community needs and C-BED projects could provide new renewable energy

What harms are caused by the CapX2020 power lines? High voltage power lines create powerful electric and electromagnetic fields (EMF) in addition to noise, aesthetic impacts and decline in property values. The ALJ 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 international studies. Communities along the Brookings Project proposed route have enacted resolutions opposing the power line and expressing concerns about its adverse impacts.

Environmental Impacts/National Wildlife Refuge Impact: The CapX2020 projects will create irreversible environmental harm. 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.

Coal Power/Fine Particle Pollution and Mercury: Burning coal in the Dakotas will affect air pollution and mercury in the fish in Minnesota, creating a risk of heart attack and death from fine particle pollution and a risk of brain damage to children and fetuses from the mercury. A recent MPCA report revealed a steep 15% increase of methyl mercury in fish from 1996 to 2006. Now is not the time to be burning more coal in the Upper Midwest region.

Exporting Power Long-Distance—Who Needs It?

CapX2020 and other projects like ITC's proposed 765 kV line would export power to areas that the US that may not actually need it. Chicago, for example, doesn't need North Dakota wind—they've already identified 9,000 megawatts of wind capacity closer to home. While lobbyists, ad agencies and PR firms hype the message that "clean" coal and the huge power lines that will carry "green" power are the answer to almost everything, ratepayers will pay the costs of huge infrastructure investments, whether or not they are needed and whether or not the huge interstate power lines transmit dirty coal.

WHAT IS THE ALTERNATIVE?

We are at a crossroads in the renewable energy debate. CETF supports conservation, efficiency and local, clean, renewable energy.

- 1) **Put conservation first** – efficiency is cheaper than new energy, creates local jobs and avoids environmental costs of power plants and power lines. It must become our first priority.
- 2) **Keep energy local** - put energy near where people use it. Develop jobs and build a local economy based on everything from small solar panels in homes and businesses to large community owned wind farms connected by an efficient power grid.
- 3) **Keep it renewable** - don't open up the grid to coal. Use the type of power line system designed for wind and make sure each state meets its renewable energy standards.
- 4) **Use "Smart Grid" technology** – smart grids will even out the peaks in demand so we don't overbuild power grids. It will integrate distributed generation so that homes and businesses using solar power or other renewable energy can add to the power grid as well as take away from it.
- 5) **Health issues:** New high voltage power lines create electromagnetic field (EMF) exposure, associated with increases in childhood leukemia. An energy approach based on conservation and small-scale facilities takes a precautionary approach to protect human health.
- 6) **Environmental concerns:** Massive 150-170 foot towers for huge power lines upset the ecosystem and harm the environment as well as hurt tourism and decrease home values. CETF proposes that we make energy choices that create the least harm to reliably meet demand.

Citizens Energy Task Force –*Citizens Energy Task Force is a grassroots group of more than 200 citizens—and growing—who support clean, renewable and sustainable energy.*

Media Contacts: **Robert Johnson**, CETF Vice Chair, 651-227-7333 **Jeremy Chipps**, CETF Member, 608-317-5700 **Paula Maccabee**, CETF Attorney: 651-646-8890 www.cetf.us additional info: www.ilsr.org, www.nawo.org