

# PUC hears arguments on 600 miles of high voltage power lines

by [Sea Stachura](#), Minnesota Public Radio

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**Opponents of the CapX2020 project produced evidence today they said proves the high voltage power lines are not needed. The project would upgrade and expand power lines along three routes across the Minnesota. The Minnesota Public Utilities Commission is expected to vote on whether the powerlines are needed this week. During today's, some of the project's opponents point to evidence that shows the state's energy demands are well below the minimum needs required for approval of the power lines.**

St. Paul, Minn. — The power line project is needed for three reasons that resemble a three-legged stool, according to CapX2020 legal counsel Mike Krikua.

"There are important and immediate needs in a number of communities in and around Minnesota, including Rochester, St. Cloud, La Crosse, Fargo, Alexandria, areas like that. That's leg number one," Krikua told Minnesota Public Utilities commissioners.

Regional reliability is leg number two, Krikua said. And increasing the voltage capacity on lines around the state is the third leg, he said.

Along the 600 miles of the proposed routes, Xcel Energy and the other utilities that make up CapX, would replace existing 230-kilovolt lines with 345-kilovolt lines. Those lines will make it possible for utilities to carry more renewable energy on the lines, like wind, Krikua said.



[Map: Potential power lines](#)

But opposition, in the form of the group, Citizens Energy Task Force, argued that the three-legged stool is missing a leg. The group's attorney Paula Maccabee told the PUC Xcel Energy's filings with the Securities and Exchange Commission from 2006 to 2008 show energy demands dropped below the minimum requirement for new lines.

"That's a number, 24,701 megawatts, that the administrative law judge specifically relied on in finding there was a regional need for the projects," Maccabee told the PUC.

Those demand numbers should require the commission re-open the record, she said. That would in effect, send the project back to the drawing board and force the utilities to resubmit their application for a fresh review.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service also weighed in on the project today. In something of an unusual move, Upper Mississippi Wildlife Refuge Manager Don Hultman submitted a letter to the Public Utilities Commission asking that commissioners delay their decision on CapX. Hultman cited a "tremendous amount of confusion and concern with the general public" regarding the project. One of the CapX lines would cross the wildlife refuge.

A state senator who represents one of the areas where the line would cross the Mississippi River asked the PUC to delay the project. Sen. Sharon Erickson Ropes, DFL-Winona, asked the PUC to get more evidence that the lines are necessary before making a ruling.

The commissioners are scheduled to make their decision tomorrow.