

Wisconsin regulators question CapX2020 power-line proposal

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By Mary Juhl | Winona Daily News | Posted: Thursday, November 17, 2011 12:00 am | [Loading...](#)

WINONA, Minn. - The Wisconsin Public Service Commission isn't convinced the La Crosse-area population will increase enough to justify a proposed \$450 million, 345-kilovolt transmission line.

The proposed CapX2020 line would extend about 150 miles from Hampton, Minn., to the La Crosse area, crossing the Mississippi River at Alma and ending at a new substation near Holmen. Construction would begin in 2013, with the line in service by 2015.

The Public Service Commission, a state regulatory agency, released a preliminary review of the project this week that questioned some CapX2020 projections.

"The applicants state that the growing demand for electricity in the La Crosse/Winona area would exceed the capabilities of the existing electrical system to deliver power reliably under contingency conditions," the agency stated in its report. "At this time, that conclusion is still being questioned."

CapX2020 officials have projected the demand for electricity in the Winona and La Crosse area to increase significantly over the next 20 years, by 1.7 percent annually. Referencing its own data, the Public Service Commission says that estimate is high because projected population growth has slowed.

Matt Pagel, an agency spokesman, said the commission is still gathering information about demand for the line's increased capacity.

"Our job is nothing more than information collection and organization," he said. "The commissioners will evaluate what is correct and what is not."

CapX2020 is a consortium of Xcel Energy, La Crosse-based Dairyland Power Cooperative and nine other utilities in Minnesota, the Dakotas, Iowa and Wisconsin. Spokesman Tim Carlsgaard said the organization has gathered data that show an increased demand for electricity that wasn't included in the review. He said peak energy demand is a concern, and that when Xcel Energy examined electricity data in September, Wisconsin had one of the highest increases in power use this summer.

"We think that CapX2020 is the best solution when you look at the most cost-effective way to do this with the least impact," Carlsgaard said.

Both CapX2020 officials and the commission outlined alternatives to the project, such as wind or solar power, but Carlsgaard said the current project remains the most promising.

"When we look at the big picture, what's the best way to spend our rate-payers money?" Carlsgaard said. "It's a long-term solution that allows us to build a line that's going to last for decades."

Continued

Project timeline

Minnesota

Summer 2011: The Minnesota Public Utilities Commission drafts an environmental impact statement.

August 2011: The commission releases final EIS.

November 2011: A ruling from an administrative law judge on whether or not to send the EIS to the commission for a vote is expected by the end of the month.

January or February 2012: CapX2020 officials expect commissioners to make a final recommendation on a power line route.

Wisconsin

Fall 2011: The Public Service Commission of Wisconsin drafts an environmental impact statement.

January or February 2012: Commission expected to release final EIS.

March 2012: Public hearings are expected to be held to gather input.

June 2012: Commission expected to determine a final route.