



# Mississippi River Parkway Commission of Minnesota

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Members of the House: Sheldon Johnson (DFL – 67B) – Chair; Branden Petersen (R – 49B) Members of the Senate: David Senjem (R – 29), Sandra Pappas (DFL – 65) State Agency Appointees: Charlie Poster – Agriculture, Frank Pafko – Transportation, Adam Johnson – Explore Minnesota Tourism, Greg Murray – Natural Resources, Andrea Kajer – Historical Society Regional Appointees: Jack Frost – Lake Itasca to Grand Rapids, John Schaubach – Grand Rapids to Brainerd, Karl Samp – Brainerd to Elk River, Paul Labovitz – Elk River to Hastings, Sheronne Mulry – Hastings to Iowa Border  
Member at Large: Mark Anderson

April 29, 2011

Matthew Langan  
Office of Energy Security  
Minnesota Department of Commerce  
85 7<sup>th</sup> Place East, Suite 500  
St. Paul, MN 55101-2198

RE: CapX 2020 Hampton-Rochester-La Crosse DEIS, PUC Docket No. TL-09-1448

Dear Mr. Langan:

The Mississippi River Parkway Commission of Minnesota (MN-MRPC), byway organization for the Minnesota Great River Road National Scenic Byway, has reviewed the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Hampton-Rochester-La Crosse Transmission Line Project. The mission of the MN-MRPC is to promote, preserve and enhance the resources of the Mississippi River and to develop the highways and amenities of the Great River Road. Our input and concerns regarding the DEIS are listed below.

We oppose the alternate route that would parallel the Minnesota Great River Road (GRR) for approximately 1.3 miles. Paralleling the Great River Road would destroy the scenic value so unique and special to this area of the National Scenic Byway. As noted on page 37 of the DEIS, one of the options to reduce visual impact is to "avoid routing through areas with high-quality, distinctive view sheds, including scenic highways, river crossings, and similar areas where feasible." This area of the byway is clearly high-quality and distinctive and should not be diminished. There are also negative impacts associated with the alternate alignment on TH 42 including: potential perpendicular alignment on the GRR requiring substantial vegetation removal; TH 42 as it enters the Mississippi River Valley offers spectacular views as travelers approach the river and GRR; this segment of TH 42 includes highly erodible side slopes and bluffs that would be vulnerable due to the construction and long-term vegetation management practices; and the view from the river toward the west would reveal a new cut versus the current wooded bluff line.

Vegetation removal was not reflected in the Great River Road photo simulations provided. The MN-MRPC requests a video visual impact simulation including peripheral, front and rear views, in motion as travelers actually experience the byway, whether by car or bicycle. The simulations presented do not accurately or completely relate the cumulative experiential and resource impacts. Specifically they do not illustrate the vegetation removal, which is extensive in scope and severely impacts scenic, natural, recreational and historic intrinsic qualities of the byway. This is true if traveling directly under or near the proposed lines or if viewing them across the river, from the Wisconsin Great River Road perspective.

Section 7.3.5 regarding tree groves and windbreaks states a preference to remove trees in public road rights of way which include the Great River Road. The National Scenic Byway is not mentioned as requiring higher protection. Mitigation plans following construction were not specifically addressed, including steps to restore or enhance the experience of the byway traveler. Mitigation language for impacts to scenic byways in Section 7.11.1 focuses on safe operation and maintenance of roadways only.

The underground river crossing should not be ruled out as a possibility. This option would result in the most minimal visual impact near the Mississippi River and Great River Road. This could also provide an opportunity to partner with other efforts related to river crossings, such as installation of an invasive species barrier.

In addition, because this project impacts the Great River Road National Scenic Byway in two states, we ask that routing and river crossing decision making processes in Minnesota are aligned with processes in Wisconsin. The MN-MRPC opposes any routes that would parallel the Wisconsin Great River Road, both for the sake of scenic impact on our Minnesota Great River Road travelers, as well as the negative impacts to the Wisconsin Great River Road. Our partners, the Wisconsin MRPC, should be included in these conversations. After reviewing the DEIS, the WIMRPC has noted specific concerns related to impacts at Alma. Alma is one of the most popular destination points on the entire 250 mile Wisconsin Great River Road National Scenic Byway. The river town of Alma is quaint – its main street is located immediately adjacent to the Mississippi River and is listed on the National Historic Record; the Corp of Engineers Lock and Dam and its observation deck is adjacent to downtown. The Great River Road and the Mississippi River Trail pass thru downtown. Located on a bluff top above Alma is Buena Vista Park, a very popular tourist attraction providing a spectacular panoramic view extending across the majestic Mississippi River and its vast backwaters back dropped by the distant Minnesota bluffs. Alma was recently awarded a grant from the National Scenic Byway program to construct a high level wildlife and scenic viewing deck on an ascending bluff near the downtown area. "Viewing" (both scenic and wildlife) is a major attraction involving a wide range and preponderance of waterfowl. High tower transmission lines would have negative effects on the unique and treasured qualities of the area.

The Great River Road has achieved the esteemed designation of a National Scenic Byway because it possesses characteristics of regional and national significance. These characteristics are worthy of protection. We would welcome the opportunity for a meeting to discuss our concerns and options for resolution.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sheldon Johnson" followed by the initials "ICM".

Representative Sheldon Johnson, Chair

cc: Al Lorenz, WIMRPC