

July 23, 2009

To: Stephanie Strength, Environmental Protection Specialist
United States Department of Agriculture, Rural Utilities Service
Engineering and Environmental Staff
1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Stop 1571
Washington, D.C. 20250-1571

From: Wisconsin Mississippi River Parkway Commission

Subject: Macro-Corridor Study (May 2009)
CapX2020 Hampton – Rochester – La Crosse 345 kV Transmission System Improvement Project

This letter relates to the subject Macro-Corridor Study – specifically regarding the alternate transmission line corridor routings under study in Wisconsin between Alma and La Crosse. This memo is authored by the Wisconsin Mississippi River Parkway Commission (WIMRPC) to elaborate the concerns of the Wisconsin Great River Road National Scenic Byway (WIGRRNSB) that traverses the scenic Mississippi Valley between the aforementioned cities. Specifically the concerns are the perceived negative impacts of locating a high tower 345 kV transmission line within its view shed and /or encroaching on the various intrinsic Byway features along the route.

The following background and definitions should be helpful towards understanding and appreciating the WIGRRNSB concerns:

- Broad interest in the concept of a scenic parkway called the Great River Road (GRR) following the Mississippi River corridor from its source at Lake Itasca in Minnesota to the Gulf of Mexico resulted in all ten Mississippi River States establishing the Mississippi River Parkway Planning Commission in 1938. Congress began authorizing funding for advancing the parkway concept in the 1940 and 1950s. In Wisconsin STH 35 was the location of the GRR for most of its 250 mile length. The year 2008 marked the 70th anniversary of the GRR.
- Scenic Easements along the WIGRR were purchased by the State of Wisconsin in the 1950's to assist in preserving for present and future generations the unique natural scenic beauty created by the towering bluffs on one side of the route and the majestic Mississippi River on the other. It is this very unique beauty that moves many travelers of the ten state GRR route to rate the Wisconsin GRR as their Number 1 choice.
- The Wisconsin Mississippi River Parkway Commission was legislatively established in 1961 – with the following stated purpose(s) as expressed (in part) in the current WI Statute 14.85: *“assist in coordinating the development and preservation of the great river road in Wisconsin and its embellishments, such as scenic easements, roadside parks and scenic overlooks...”* *“assist in promoting as an attractive travel designation the great river road in Wisconsin and its unique historical, cultural, aesthetic and recreational features along the route...”* The WIMRPC continues to fulfill their statutory responsibility to the best of their ability.
- WIGRR received the prestigious designation of National Scenic Byway in the year 2000 upon the request of the State of Wisconsin and following its designation as a State Scenic Byway. This designation came after careful review and concurrence by a Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) National Review Committee. The intrinsic qualities of a NSB include: scenic, historical, recreational, natural, archeological and cultural. The WIMRPC is the designated “byway organization” e.g. to serve as the front line contact and overall coordinator of various activities involved in the promotion, preservation and development of the Byway.
- The Partnership Statement co-signed in June 2009 by the WIMRPC and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (Winona) states in part the following: *“WHEREAS the view shed of the WIGRRNSB corridor includes the Mississippi River and backwaters (e.g. the Upper Mississippi River Wildlife and Fish Refuge) on one side and the towering bluffs on the other” ... and “WHEREAS the U.S. Fish & Wildlife brochure entitled Byways to America’s Wildest Places states in part ... National wildlife refuges contribute to the intrinsic qualities that qualify a road as one of America’s Byways ...*

local residents and visitors benefit from national wildlife refuges being included in Byway corridor management plans and projects...”

The long standing existence of the Wisconsin Great River Road and its subsequent prestigious designation as a National Scenic Byway identifies the WIGRRNSB as a “national resource”. A national resource brings with it a special responsibility to all involved to advance the WIGRRNSB vision carefully and to preserve its unique intrinsic qualities for future generations.

The WIGRRNSB pleads that the CapX 2020 initiative will embrace this responsibility including fulfilling the RUS NEPA requirements to “consider a broad range of environmental issues as well as potential impacts ...” (pg 1-3 Of the Macro Corridor Study Report) relative to the afore-listed intrinsic qualities of the WIGRRNSB.

Sincerely,

Alan Lorenz, Chair
Wisconsin Mississippi River Parkway Commission
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cc: U.S. Senators Kohl, Feingold
U.S. Representative Kind
Governor Doyle
State Legislators
F&WL
COE
WIDOT
WIDNR
County Board Chairs of Buffalo/Trempealeau/La Crosse
Local Elected Officials