

Rineer, Ken - PSC

From: Al Lorenz <alanlorenz@centurytel.net>
Sent: Tuesday, May 18, 2010 6:40 AM
To: Rineer, Ken - PSC; Fasick, Robert - DOT; Thiel, Jim - DOT; Vieth, David - DOT; Kinar, John - DOT
Cc: Beekman, Marlin - DOT
Subject: Fw: CAPX 2020 Transmission Line
Attachments: This memo relates to the Macro Study (July20).doc; When asked.pdf; May 17 OES Letter.doc

Public Service Commission of Wisconsin
RECEIVED: 05/25/11, 2:12:15 PM

Attached for your information is a copy of the letter that I sent today to the MN Department of Commerce, Office of Energy Security expressing concerns about their Environmental Impact Statement "Scoping Process" which is only evaluating CAPX2020 345 kV transmission line impacts on the MN side of the Mississippi River. The concern is that MN will issue a Permit for the crossing at Alma before the WI EIS and Route Permit process is completed.

Al

May 17, 2010

Mr. Matthew Langan
State Permit Manager
Minnesota Office of Energy Security
85 7th Place East, Suite 500
St. Paul, MN 55101-2198

RE: Hampton-Rochester-La Crosse 345 kV Transmission Line Project
EIS Scoping Meetings and Process
PUC Docket Number E002/TL-09-1448

Dear Mr. Langan:

I am writing to you on behalf of the Wisconsin Mississippi River Parkway Commission (WIMRPC) to express our deep concerns about the EIS Scoping Process for the 345 kV transmission line currently being conducted by your office.

OUR WIMRPC is the designated agency for the 250 mile Wisconsin Great River Road National Scenic Byway (GRRNSB) that extends along the Mississippi River from Prescott, WI south to Dubuque, IA. The Wisconsin GRRNSB is part of the National GRRNSB which extends through 10 States. Our GRR has been a part of the prestigious National Scenic Byway System since 2000

Our primary concerns are that your EIS Scoping Process appears to end at the Minnesota (MN) – Wisconsin (WI) State Line and does not include scoping meetings and subsequent environmental impact analysis for the 345kV transmission line as it enters WI at the City of Alma and extends on several proposed alternative routes south 60 some miles to La Crosse.

One of alternate routes being proposed in WI closely parallels the GRRNSB between Alma and Fountain City and then again in the Centerville-Trempealeau-Holmen area with significant aesthetic, scenic and environmental impacts.

Your April 19, 2010 Notice of Public Information and EIS Scoping Meetings indicated that the Wisconsin portion of the transmission line route will be reviewed by the Public Service Commission of WI(PSCW) when Xcel Energy submits a Permit Application to the PSCW in late summer of 2010.

It is our understanding that the MN Route Permit Process will take a maximum of 15 months and the WI Route Permit Process will take a maximum of 12 months to reach a decision for granting their respective Route Permits .

With this differential in the respective State schedules---- a Route Permit decision in the Spring of 2011 in MN and in the Fall of 2011 in WI, we seriously question how a Permit can be issued in MN 4-6 months prior to WI's Permit decision. How can a Route Permit be granted in MN without evaluating the full environmental impacts of the 345kV transmission line just across the State line in WI.

It is our understanding that based upon State Environmental Law, a State Transportation Agency could not legally reach a decision to construct a highway bridge across the State line between MN and WI without the detailed environmental analysis being completed in both States. How is a major transportation facility like a 345 kV transmission line considered differently than a major Bridge Crossing?

Also, how will the Federal EIS presently being completed by the Rural Utility Service for both States be incorporated into your MN EIS Scoping Process?

Will your Office of Energy Security consider the impacts of the transmission line in WI as a part of their EIS Scoping Process and before a Route Permit decision is made in MN and if not, why not?

Alan Lorenz
WIMRPC Chair

Enclosures: "The Significance of NSB Designation" and "July 24, 2009 WIMRPC Letter to RUS"

Cc: MNPUC
PSCW
Xcel Energy
Federal and State Legislators
WIDOT
WIDNR
MNMRPC
National MRPC

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
W 4927 Hoeth Street
La Crosse, WI 54601

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

When asked “what is the significance of designation as a National Scenic Byway?

or

The Great River Road was designated a National Scenic Byway – So What?

The abstract from the 1999 National Scenic Byway application for designation states the following:

“Wisconsin’s Great River road flanks the majestic and magnificent Mississippi River as it leisurely winds its way along 250 miles of Wisconsin’s western border. Along its way it is nestled at times between the river on one side and towering bluffs on the other becoming one of the most scenic drives in mid America. When the road meanders away from the river a bit it treats its guests to vista of rolling farm land and the beauty and splendor of forested valleys and coulees.

The 33 quaint River Towns proudly reveal their culture and heritage by their festivals and by the 19th and 20th century architecture of homes, business blocks, storefronts, mansions and more. The corridor is rich in history and the Great River Road traveler can learn of the early Indian occupants, the French fur traders and explorers, the lead mining boom, the steamboat era, the lumber barons by stopping at the 30 or more State Historical Markers and Archaeological sites and at the many local museums.

Recreational opportunities await the visitor around each bend of the Great River Road at over 50 local parks, beaches, in addition to 12 state and 3 national recreational resources. Observation decks at four Lock and Dams provide the opportunity to leisurely watch barges and riverboats move through. A lucky visitor may occasionally see steamboats like the Delta Queen pass by.

Travel the Wisconsin Great River Road. It’s and area to be enjoyed by all ages leisurely; a marvelous mix of natural beauty and history. In the new-green brilliance of spring; the white of winter; in summer sunlight or the amber hues of autumn - Wisconsin’s Great River Road is a delight in any season!”

The prestigious national designation bestowed on this unique road in reality encompasses the majestic Mississippi River valley corridor. The following is a listing of Great River Road virtues that precipitate from the designation

- The distinction of being among only 150 byways in America to have received the prestigious NSB designation by Federal Highway Administration thru the National Scenic Byway program and thus benefitting national publicity and receiving to-date \$5.4 million in grants to implement over 20 projects that enhance the travelers experience
- Erupting a consciousness that designation as a National Scenic Byway (NSB) implies a National resource – thus requiring special care
- Show casing its uniqueness of possessing all six NSB intrinsic qualities i.e. scenic, historical, natural, archeological, recreational and cultural and fulfilling NSB program definition i.e. show casing “the heart and soul of America”.
- Being recognized as a “special place in mid-America” by “forefathers” from the ten Mississippi River States who were motivated to initiate legislation that established the GRR in 1938. Subsequently Wisconsin Statute 14.85 established the Wisconsin Mississippi River Parkway Commission (WIMRPC) which legislation in part says the commission will “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”. The WIMRPC is the designated Byway Agency for the WIGRRNSB.
- Spurring a consciousness that culminated in a “major” policy decision by the State of Wisconsin to purchase (in 1950s) scenic easements along the route to preserve the scenic and other attributes of this valuable resource for future generations.
- The majestic Mississippi River valley corridor continues to motivate major publication such as National Geographic, Nature Conservancy, Midwest Living, etc to produce feature articles
- Being promoted by domestic and foreign Tour Groups as a travel destination and being recognized by foreign visitors as a priority place to visit in America
- Being part of (250 miles) of a 10 state (2200 mile) GRRNSB traversing the Mississippi River corridor from its source in Minnesota to the Gulf of Mexico and representatives from the other states expressing that the WIGRRNSB is the “best” of them all
- Being contiguous, in part, to the national Upper Mississippi River Wildlife and Fish Refuge and the Trempealeau Wildlife Refuge and accommodating one of America’s major migration flyways