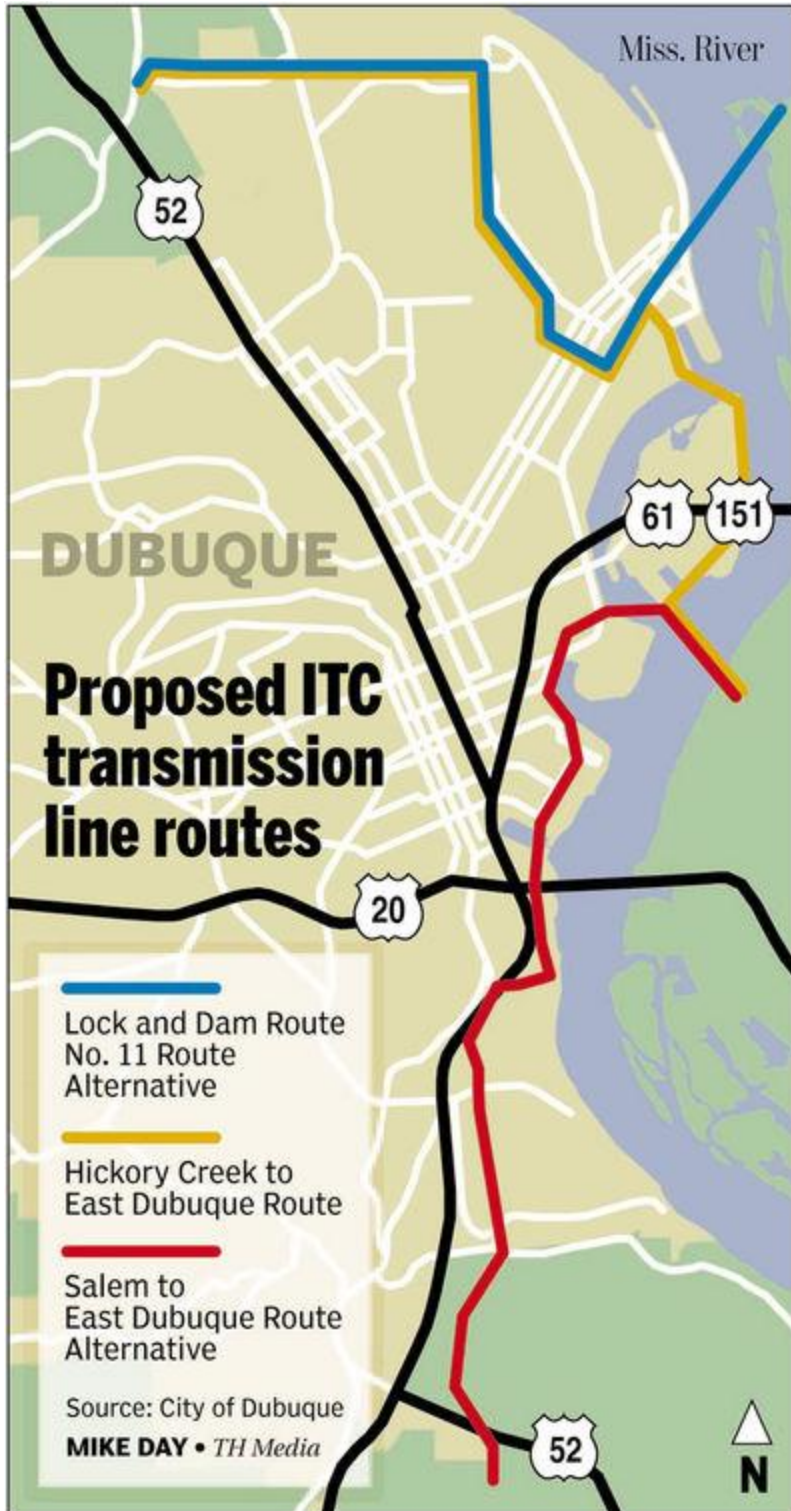


Dubuque: No to power line

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Proposed ITC transmission line routes through Dubuque.

Plans for a new high-voltage transmission line to pass through Dubuque face opposition from city staff, who say it would negatively affect residents and violate city code.

On Monday, City Council members will be asked to support efforts to keep the proposal from becoming a reality.

City Manager Mike Van Milligen recommends that council members adopt a resolution that, in effect, tells ITC Midwest that pursuing a line through Dubuque "would not be in the public interest."

"City staff has identified potential impacts for each route alternative proposed by ITC," Van Milligen wrote in a memo to council members. "Areas of the community affected by each route alternative include residential and commercial properties, parks, attractions, open space, other utilities, wetlands and waterways."

TRANSMISSION LINE PLANS

ITC Midwest has proposed building a 125-mile transmission line from the Madison, Wis.-area to Dubuque County. The Cardinal-Hickory Creek Project would connect American Transmission Company's Cardinal Substation in Middleton (Wis.) Township to ITC Midwest's Hickory Creek Substation, east of New Vienna in Dubuque County.

The proposal calls for construction to start in 2019, with the project in service in 2020. A press release put out by the companies last year touted the benefits of such a line, saying it would "provide economic savings, support renewable energy policy and improve electrical system reliability."

While specific routes have not been established, Van Milligen wrote that ITC has proposed three alternatives for the 345-kilovolt overhead line through the city.

ITC spokesman Tom Petersen confirmed the route alternatives but noted that the company is early in the process of exploring options for crossing the Mississippi River.

ROUTE IMPACTS

City of Dubuque staff said ITC's preferred route through the city is dubbed the Hickory Creek-East Dubuque Route Alternative. It would cross the river from East Dubuque, Ill., to Dubuque between Julien Dubuque Bridge and the Dubuque-Wisconsin bridge. It would connect at Chaplain Schmitt Island and the jog north before eventually running along Roosevelt Street to the northern part of the city before heading west, according to a map included in the council packet.

A second route would cross the Mississippi north of the Dubuque-Wisconsin bridge and follow much of the same route.

A third alternative would cross the river at the same point as the first route, but it would then head south.

A city staff memo breaks down the impacts of each route, noting which alternatives affect the most residential and commercial properties, wetland acres and woodland acres. It also notes proximity to planned water towers, a city pool and other Dubuque parks and attractions.

CITY CODE

The city code for licensing electric transmission line companies requires that a company files a petition with the City Council and that council members hold a public hearing when considering a petition. The city code requires a transmission line to be at least 250 feet from any dwelling or other building, except by agreement or when the line crosses or passes along a public highway or is located along a railroad right-of-way.

Van Milligen concurs with a recommendation by Planning Services Manager Laura Carstens and City Engineer Gus Psihoyos that council members adopt a resolution stating that the filing of a petition by ITC and a formal hearing process would not be in the public interest.

"I think the memo is pretty straightforward," Psihoyos said. "We have issues that we saw on all three routes, and a transmission line can't be within 250 feet of a residence."

Van Milligen further recommends that the minimum 250-foot distance from transmission lines not be waived if a petition is considered.

Petersen said ITC officials have discussed the project with city leaders.

"We've talked with the city, laid out what the need for the project is, the nature of the line and the potential routes," Petersen said. "There are a lot of moving parts and a lot of discussions going on."

He added that the company is working with "a number of agencies to explore options" for crossing the river.

"We're early in the stages of this," Petersen said. "Our task is to find the most viable route that balances the needs of multiple agencies and communities to build the needed infrastructure. We've been talking to communities, counties, cities and the (Upper Mississippi River) wildlife refuge as part of the exploration of our options."

PUBLIC INPUT IN WISCONSIN

Company officials already have held public discussion sessions in Wisconsin.

In October, southwest Wisconsin residents got their first look at the proposal. Information meetings were held in Lancaster, Belmont, Dodgeville and Middleton. A substation is proposed in the Montfort area.

But it's been months since Ron Brisbois, executive director of Grant County Economic Development Corp., has heard about and discussed the project with ITC officials.

"I remember during the open house in Lancaster, they talked about it could potentially go through Dubuque, did reference it, but it didn't seem it could go up the (U.S.) 151 corridor and have the space you need," he said. "To me, based on the conversations at that time, they were leaning toward bringing it across north of Dubuque along the same transmission line as Cassville and then on to Montfort.

GROUP WANTS TO PROTECT 'SENSITIVE ECOLOGY'

Staff at the Center for Rural Affairs also is following the project. Dyersville, Iowa, was chosen for its new office, the only one in Iowa, because of its proximity to Dubuque and the high-voltage transmission line.

The route option that the Center for Rural Affairs and Iowa Environmental Council currently supports is an existing right-of-way near Cassville, said Johnathan Hladik, Center for Rural Affairs senior policy advocate for energy and climate.

"The line there now seems like it could be upgraded fairly easily, and the area also does not appear to be sensitive from an environmental standpoint, at least relative to some of the other options," he said. "Our primary objective is to ensure ITC chooses a route that avoids harm to the sensitive ecology of the area."

Hladik added that the Center for Rural Affairs is working closely with area environmental and conservation groups to learn as much as it can.

"There are a lot of parties interested in the outcome, and many are willing to play an active role in the routing and approval process if necessary," he said. "To this point, ITC has been good about answering questions and helping us understand the option. We hope that this relationship continues."

Both Hladik and Petersen note that when ITC has gathered the necessary information to identify a couple of preferred options, the company then will hold public meetings to seek stakeholder input on the line.