

Those challenging the need for new high voltage transmission lines in Wisconsin say an application filed ---- with the Wisconsin Public Service Commission (PSC) could create the incorrect impression that additional high voltage lines are the only option to meet Wisconsin's energy needs.

"The energy direction determined on the Badger Coulee proposal by American Transmission Company and Xcel Energy will have profound consequences on Wisconsin's energy future," said Rob Danielson, secretary, Town of Stark Energy Planning and Information Committee.

"Expanding transmission and centralized power does not fit with the image most people have of the energy future," said Jane Powers, who operates a Mauston area dairy farm that has been in her family more than 100 years. "Building these lines across the state would be like us spending billions on expanding land line phone service as we move more and more toward cellular phones. We are at a fork in the road: We can either invest in cutting waste and developing local, self-sufficient solar power, or in promoting continued waste and increasing our dependency on power that sends our dollars out of state."

More than 90 municipalities across WI have filed resolutions and more than 2000 ratepayers signed petitions asking the PSC to do a cost/benefit comparison between the proposed lines and alternatives. They seek a study comparing benefits if the total amount ratepayers would pay for all the new high capacity lines was instead invested in accelerated energy efficiency, development of local power, and improvements made to low voltage lines needed for in-state reliability.

"I agree with the dozens of municipalities and county boards that passed resolutions calling for a wiser approach to our energy future," said Senator Dale Schultz (R-Richland Center). "Before we acquiesce to Wall Street investors on how and where billions of our utility rate dollars will go, we, the Wisconsin community, can look at alternatives to putting all our eggs in the grid build-out basket. We should have an inclusive discussion on questions like what benefits the alternative directions offer for local jobs, energy independence and sustainability."

Wisconsin Farmers Union President Darin Von Ruden called for scrutiny of all options. "When a new power line is built, it's not going through empty space -- it's cutting through farms, towns, and scenic natural areas that are important for recreation and tourism," he said. "Before we allow a power line to have that kind of permanent impact on peoples' communities and livelihoods, we should have all the alternatives on the table."

"The CapX2020 line was approved without verifying benefits to Wisconsin communities," said Debra Severson of Citizens Energy Task Force. "The utilities are seeking greater access to regional markets using bulk transfer of power through our state and asking us to fund their profit plans. This comes at a time when other states are questioning whether high-voltage transmission expansion is financially and environmentally sustainable. Keeping our energy dollars in state using local generation and reducing the energy wasted through energy efficiency makes better ratepayer sense even if at the expense of utility profits."

Kathy Byrne of Crawford Stewardship Project sees direct ties between new transmission lines and frac sand mining. "We've been informing ourselves about utility planning and are concerned about the increasing emphasis placed on regional transmission expansion and new, natural gas power plants. If we make fossil fuel energy such a high investment priority, the more our lands and communities will suffer the numerous, adverse impacts of industrial sand mining. The loss of good, productive agricultural lands, excessive water withdrawal along with ongoing pollution of our waters and air would be exacerbated even further. If we prioritize energy efficiency to slash our glaring, unnecessary waste, it removes pressure on our lands rather than adding to it."

“Every dollar we spend on efficiency goes three times as far toward eliminating carbon emissions compared to spending that dollar on renewable power,” says Jim Olson of E3, an energy consulting business in Viroqua. “Renewables are important, but efficiency saves everyone money and dramatically cuts emissions at the same time. Investing in centralized power results in a tiny fraction of the number of jobs compared to the local trade jobs created improving our homes, farms and businesses.”

“Part of the challenge is that the state could be more pro-active in informing ratepayers of our rights and energy solution options,” Danielson said. “We feel every household and business owner in Wisconsin should be invited to provide their own energy priorities. It’s our money. We will lose control of it if we do not come forward.”

“SOUL of Wisconsin is offering an energy priority form to all Wisconsin ratepayers and we hope the Commission will follow suit,” said Keith Ashley Wright, president. “We need to proactively assist Wisconsin ratepayers in these decisions, especially as our use of electricity flattens out and more solutions surface.”

When a transmission project was considered for the Milwaukee area, ratepayers did not understand how the review process works, said Barbara Agnew, Friends of the Monarch Trail. “As a result, the utilities never had to fully account for need or alternatives and we found out too late that load reduction through efficiency was never even considered. Ratepayers and landowners have to participate in the review and insist over and over on good information.”

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