

4.0 Public Participation

4.1 Requirements

The Public Utilities Commission has established certain procedures the utilities must follow to advise local governmental officials and the general public about planning activities and possible new high voltage transmission lines. These procedures involve the holding of a public meeting in each Transmission Planning Zone at least once per year. Minn. Rules part 7848.0900. The utilities must announce the public meetings by mailing notice to certain local and state and tribal officials and to certain individuals and by publishing notice in local and statewide newspapers. Minn. Rules part 7848.1000.

The rules require the utilities to prepare a summary of each planning meeting and mail or e-mail the summaries to all persons who have registered at any of the meetings and to liaisons with county government, tribal governments, and other state organizations and agencies. Minn. Rules part 7848.1100. The utilities have prepared a brief summary of each zonal meeting below, although attendance at the annual meetings was slight, and there is not much to summarize. The MTO utilities are suggesting that the PUC consider amending its rules to eliminate the annual zonal meetings.

4.2 2006 Public Meetings

The 2006 Transmission Planning Meetings were held around the state in October and November 2006. The utilities made a concerted effort to get notice out to the general public and to local governmental officials about the existence of transmission situations in their area and about the upcoming public meetings. The following discussion summarizes the notice that was provided.

- (1) **Generally.** The Notice not only gave information about the upcoming public meeting but also described the transmission planning process, identified certain areas in the zone where an inadequacy had been identified, attached a colored map showing all the inadequacies in the zone, identified discussion topics and invited public input, and provided the name of a contact person at one of the utilities who could provide additional information.
- (2) **Counties.** Every county in the state received Notice of the zone meeting in which the county is located. Each county also received a letter requesting that the county appoint a liaison to the utilities on transmission issues. The letter mentioned specifics about the zone in which the county is located and provided information on the other zone meetings. The utilities attempted to identify a specific person in the county government to mail the documents too, rather than just mail the Notice to a generic county board address.
- (3) **Cities.** There is no requirement in the PUC rules (7848.1000) to mail notice to cities, but a number of cities that were located close to any of the potential projects related to the inadequacies identified in the 2005 Biennial Report were

mailed Notice of the 2006 zone meeting and a letter explaining the purpose of the meetings.

- (4) **League of Minnesota Cities.** The League was mailed Notices for all six transmission planning zones and a letter requesting that the League appoint a liaison.
- (5) **Association of Minnesota Counties.** The Association was mailed Notices for all six transmission planning zones and a letter requesting that the Association appoint a liaison.
- (6) **Association of Townships.** There is no requirement in the PUC rules to notify the townships but the Notices and a letter were mailed to the Association of Townships.
- (7) **Governmental Agencies.** Those agencies specified in the PUC rule (7848.1000, item F) were mailed all six Notices and a letter providing more information and requesting that they appoint a liaison to the utilities. In addition, a number of other agencies were mailed the Notices without a letter requesting a liaison.
- (8) **Agency Personnel.** In addition to mailing Notice to certain agencies in general, a number of individual staff people were mailed Notices directly.
- (9) **Tribal Government.** Notice for the appropriate zone was mailed to twelve tribal governments around the state.
- (10) **State Legislators.** The appropriate Notice or Notices were mailed to every state legislator, depending on the area represented by the legislator, along with a letter explaining more about the process and providing notice of all six zonal meetings.
- (11) **Congressional Delegation.** All ten members of the Minnesota Congressional delegation received six Notices and a personal letter.
- (12) **Individuals.** Working from various lists maintained by the utilities and the PUC, a number of individuals were mailed either the Notice for the zone where the individual lived or all six Notices. Each person was advised of the specifics for all six meetings. Each person who was mailed a Notice also received a Dear Recipient letter explaining the transmission planning meetings and providing information about all six zonal meetings. Several hundred names were on these mailing lists.
- (13) **Newspaper Publication.** In addition to the Notices that were mailed out, Notice was published in several newspapers in each zone. Each of the utilities in charge of the public meeting in the zone determined what newspapers to publish the Notice in.

Each public meeting was conducted as an open house – a change in how the meetings were conducted in past years – to encourage attendees to ask questions and to make it easier for the public and local governmental officials to attend at a convenient time. Each utility with transmission facilities in the zone set up a separate display table with maps and brochures and other information about the utility’s transmission facilities in the zone and about the transmission inadequacies that have been identified in the zone. In addition, a separate display was available on the Phase I CapX 2020 projects. Attendees were able to walk from table to table and discuss particular issues one-on-one with a utility representative. Each meeting was open for a period of four hours, beginning in the afternoon and continuing into early evening.

The utilities prepared a power point presentation about transmission planning and the needs that had been identified, which was presented formally or made available for review at each of the public meetings. The public had an opportunity to ask questions. A copy of the power point slides can be reviewed at www.minnelectrans.com. An e-mail link is provided on the webpage for any person who would like to send in electronically a comment or question.

The following is a brief summary of each zonal public meeting.

4.2.1 Summary of 2006 Southeast Zone Transmission Planning Meeting

Date: October 24, 2006

Location: International Event Center
7333 Airport View Drive S.W.
Rochester, Minnesota 55902

Time: 3:00 – 7:00 p.m.

Sponsors: Dairyland Power Cooperative
Great River Energy
Interstate Power and Light Company
Rochester Public Utilities
Southern Minnesota Municipal Power Agency
Xcel Energy

Attendees: 13

Summary of Public Input: Carol Overland discussed the LaCrosse 345 kV termination eventually connecting to Columbia and suggested that the line would serve Wisconsin rather than the Twin Cities Metro load.

4.2.2 Summary of 2006 Southwest Transmission Planning Meeting

Date: October 25, 2006

Location: Western Marshall Inn
1500 East College Drive
Marshall, Minnesota 56258

Time: 3:00 – 7:00 p.m.

Sponsors: East River Energy Power Coop
Great River Energy
Interstate Power and Light Company
L&O Power Cooperative
Marshall Municipal Utilities
Missouri River Energy Services
Otter Tail Power Company
Xcel Energy

Attendees: 12, including a state legislator and two city representatives

Summary of Public Input: Questions related to the CapX projects and to the PUC process.

4.2.3 Summary of 2006 West Central Transmission Planning Meeting

Date: October 26, 2006

Location: Kandi Entertainment Center
200 19th Ave. S.E.
Willmar, Minnesota 56201

Time: 3:00 – 7:00 p.m.

Sponsors: Great River Energy
Hutchinson Utilities Commission
Missouri River Energy Services
Otter Tail Power Company
Willmar Municipal Utilities
Xcel Energy

Attendees: 5

Summary of Public Input: One person asked about Appleton-Canby project and another asked about CBED development.

4.2.4 Summary of 2006 Twin Cities Transmission Planning Meeting

Date: November 1, 2006

Location: Radisson Inn
3131 Campus Drive
Plymouth, Minnesota 55441

Time: 3:00 – 7:00 p.m.

Sponsors: Great River Energy
Xcel Energy

Attendees: 13, including representatives from Dakota, Hennepin, and Scott counties

Summary of Public Input: Most of the discussion focused on the CapX projects. Some concerns were expressed about the notice that is provided regarding projects like the CapX projects, particularly to local governmental officials like townships.

4.2.5 Summary of 2006 Northeast Transmission Planning Meeting

Date: November 2, 2006

Location: Ramada Inn
2115 South 6th Street
Brainerd, Minnesota 56401

Time: 3:00 – 5:00 p.m. and 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.

Sponsors: Great River Energy
Minnesota Power
Xcel Energy
American Transmission Company

Attendees: 9

Summary of Public Input: Most attention was devoted to the Tower and Badoura projects because these projects are in the certification stage.

4.2.6 Summary of 2006 Northwest Transmission Planning Meeting

Date: November 14, 2006

Location: AmericInn
600 30th Avenue South
Moorhead, Minnesota

Time: 3:00 – 7:00 p.m.

Sponsors: Great River Energy
Minnkota Power Cooperative
Missouri River Energy Services
Otter Tail Power Company
Xcel Energy

Attendees: 25

Summary of Public Input: Most questions focused on the CapX line from Fargo to the Twin Cities.

4.3 2007 Public Meetings

The 2007 Transmission Planning Meetings were held around the state in September 2007. The utilities made the same concerted effort to get notice out to the general public and to governmental officials as was made in 2006, as described above in Section 4.2. The same kind of open house format was used in 2007 as was used in 2006.

In the notice that was provided for the 2007 meetings, the utilities made a separate reference to the four CapX 2020 projects and indicated that representatives would be available at the public meetings to discuss the CapX projects. Most people who showed up for the public meetings came to hear about the CapX projects and not about transmission planning generally. General information on the 230 kV CapX project (the Bemidji-Grand Rapids Line) was available in all zones and detailed information on this project was available in the Northeast and Northwest Zones where the project is located. The utilities did not attempt to maintain separate attendance sheets for those people who came to hear about the CapX 2020 Projects and those who were there to hear about transmission planning generally. It was readily apparent that most people came to hear about the CapX projects.

As with the 2006 meetings, each meeting was conducted as an open house, with each utility maintaining a separate display table with information about specific transmission needs in the zone. The utility representatives also had available a power point presentation that was presented at a convenient time. The power point slides are available on the <http://www.minelectrans.com> webpage.

A representative of the Midwest Independent System Operator (MISO) attended the 2007 public meetings and was able to answer questions about the role and work of MISO. It was helpful to the public to have a MISO representative in attendance, and the utilities appreciate the willingness of MISO to send a person to the meetings.

The following is a brief summary of each zonal public meeting.

4.3.1 Summary of 2007 Southeast Zone Transmission Planning Meeting

Date: September 12, 2007

Location: International Event Center
7333 Airport View Drive S.W.
Rochester, Minnesota 55902

Time: 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 noon and 3:00 – 7:00 p.m.

Sponsors: Dairyland Power Cooperative
Great River Energy
Interstate Power and Light Company
Rochester Public Utilities
Southern Minnesota Municipal Power Agency
Xcel Energy

Attendees: About 100 in the morning and around 50 in the afternoon.

Summary of Public Input: Nearly everybody who attended the meeting came to hear about the CapX Projects, particularly the Twin Cities to LaCrosse 345 kV line. The following is a sample of the types of questions that were asked:

What is the typical right-of-way width?

What are the land use restrictions within the right-of-way?

How would this line affect a conservation easement?

How does the condemnation process work?

Due to the fact that ice storms and other storms are becoming more frequent and severe, what adjustments are the utilities making in the design of the transmission lines?

Has the route for the CapX line to LaCrosse already been selected?

After the presentation the audience had an opportunity to talk to the various utility representatives at the display tables. Most of the questions had to do with the CapX line from the Twin Cities to LaCrosse. The public asked about the routing process and focused specifically on where the line might be in relation to their property.

The afternoon session started at 3:00 p.m. Again, the concerns expressed related to the CapX line. One person was concerned about his airport runway along Interstate 90. Several others were concerned about the lines affecting their property. A contingent of landowners who live on

a Minnesota Land Trust conservation easement about a half section in size north of Rochester were concerned about the routing. One landowner had heard that the Minnesota Department of Transportation was not supportive of routing the line along Interstate 90, and he hoped the governmental agencies could work this out because he preferred the interstate right-of-way over a new right-of-way. A number of people asked about the Public Utility Commission's certificate of need and route permitting process, which was explained.

4.3.2 Summary of 2007 Southwest Zone Transmission Planning Meeting

Date: September 11, 2007

Location: Prairie Event Center
1507 East College Drive
Marshall, Minnesota 56258

Time: 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 noon and 3:00 – 7:00 p.m.

Sponsors: East River Electric Power Coop
Great River Energy
Interstate Power and Light Company
L&O Power Cooperative
Marshall Municipal Utilities
Missouri River Energy Services
Otter Tail Power Company
Xcel Energy

Attendees: 50-60 in the morning and about 50 in the afternoon.

Summary of Public Input: Nearly everybody came to hear about the Twin Cities to Brookings County CapX 2020 Project. One landowner inquired about pole placement along one of the BRIGO lines. Another asked about connecting wind generation to the grid. A representative from the Lower Sioux Agency asked whether the permitting process took into account concerns about native artifacts, burial grounds, and related issues. Questions were raised about maintenance practices and undergrounding transmission lines.

4.3.3 Summary of 2007 Northwest Zone Transmission Planning Meeting

Date: September 12, 2007

Location: Courtyard by Marriott
1080 28th Ave. S.
Moorhead, Minnesota 56560-4406

Time: 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 noon and 3:00 – 7:00 p.m.

Sponsors: Great River Energy
Minnkota Power Cooperative
Missouri River Energy Services
Otter Tail Power Company
Xcel Energy

Attendees: 60-70 total for both sessions

Summary of Public Input: All the interest from the public related to the Twin Cities – Fargo CapX 2020 Project. The questions had to do with routing and the PUC process.

4.3.4 Summary of 2007 Northeast Zone Transmission Planning Meeting

Date: September 19, 2007

Location: Ramada Inn
2115 South 6th Street
Brainerd, Minnesota 56401

Time: 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 noon

Sponsors: Great River Energy
Minnesota Power
Xcel Energy
American Transmission Company

Attendees: Less than 25

Summary of Public Input: Two members of the public asked about the Excelsior Energy project.

4.3.5 Summary of 2007 West Central Zone Transmission Planning Meeting

Date: September 13, 2007

Location: Max's Grill
2425 West Lincoln Avenue
Olivia, Minnesota 56277

Time: 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 noon and 3:00 – 7:00 p.m.

Sponsors: Great River Energy
Hutchinson Utilities Commission
Missouri River Energy Services
Otter Tail Power Company
Willmar Municipal Utilities
Xcel Energy

Attendees: Less than 25

Summary of Public Input: Most people were interested in the Twin Cities to Brookings County CapX 2020 project, although most attended the general presentation.

4.3.6 Summary of 2007 Twin Cities Zone Transmission Planning Meeting

Date: September 17, 2007

Location: Canterbury Inn
Crown Ballroom
1244 Canterbury Road
Shakopee, Minnesota 55379

Time: 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 noon and 3:00 – 7:00 p.m.

Sponsors: Great River Energy
Xcel Energy

Attendees: Four people in the morning and about ten in the afternoon. A couple of local officials attended.

Summary of Public Input: No particular questions were raised.

4.4 Suggestions for Change

In the 2005 Biennial Report, the utilities raised the issue of whether the annual zonal meetings were worthwhile. The utilities suggested that the Public Utilities Commission consider ways to improve the public participation provisions of the biennial transmission planning process.

When it approved the 2005 Report on May 31, 2006, the Commission in its Order Accepting the Report invited interested stakeholders to participate in a staff-organized discussion of potential changes in the process. The PUC staff conducted a meeting with interested individuals on August 15, 2006, and about thirty people attended. However, no consensus was reached on any changes to make or on any further steps to take to examine this issue further. As a result the utilities simply proceeded in accordance with the existing rules and held public meetings in each zone in 2006 and 2007.

These two additional rounds of annual zonal meetings have confirmed what is already widely recognized – that the public does not show up for these annual zonal meetings to hear about local load serving issues and more esoteric transmission planning issues. Even with all the notice that was provided in 2006 and 2007, with separate letters being sent to local government and state and federal agencies and to individuals, and with requests that governmental bodies appoint liaisons to work with the utilities, the results have been disappointing. The public and local officials are not showing up to hear about transmission planning and transmission inadequacies.

While attendance at the 2007 meetings was higher than at the 2006 meetings, most people came to hear about the CapX 2020 Projects and wanted to know about specific routing issues. The people who attended were landowners who owned land near a possible route for one of the CapX lines, not members of the general public interested in transmission inadequacies. Also, when the utilities inquired about how the people who did attend the meeting learned of the meeting, the answer was usually through a letter mailed directly to the landowner located near a possible route for one of the CapX Projects, and not through a general notice or a newspaper ad.

The public wants to hear about specific proposals and possible routes. These are the kind of meetings that are held when certificates of need and route permits are applied for. The utilities hold numerous meetings in the local area when a project has developed to the point that specific transmission lines and potential routes can be identified.

What the MTO requests is that the Public Utilities Commission initiate a rulemaking proceeding to amend chapter 7848, the rules relating to the Biennial Report. Minnesota Rules chapter 7848 was adopted in April 2003. It will be coming up to five years since the rules went into effect. There is no reason to continue a requirement to hold annual zoning meetings when nobody is showing up at the meetings.

The rules could be amended sometime in 2007 to eliminate the zonal meeting requirement before another round is required. The Commission could publish notice of intent to amend its rules and solicit public comments on all provisions in the rules to solicit ideas for other provisions that could be improved through amendment.

In the meantime, the utilities are exploring other methods for advising the public and local officials of transmission issues and potential transmission projects. Contact is often made with local officials to alert them to pending issues and to invite them to meet with utility representatives to discuss local interests and concerns. An effort has been made to meet with the Association of Minnesota Counties and other similar organizations to advise these bodies of ongoing planning activities and areas of concern. Of course, once a certificate of need and a route permit for a specific project are applied for, ample notice and public proceedings are required, and the MTO utilities are not suggesting that these public meetings be reduced or eliminated.

The MTO looks forward to the Commission's serious deliberation of this matter and request that the Commission proceed with a rulemaking proceeding to amend its chapter 7848 rules as appropriate.