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Power line foes may appeal CAPX2020 ruling

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A group opposed to building a network of high voltage lines through southeast Minnesota said it might appeal a decision by state regulators in support of the project.

The Minnesota Public Utilities Commission acknowledged a need for energy companies to build a \$1.7 billion network of high-voltage lines through the Winona and La Crosse, Wis., areas and last week approved a certificate of need for CapX2020, a proposal by 11 energy companies to build three 345-kilovolt power lines across Minnesota. By this fall, the energy companies will identify their preferred route for the portion of the line from Hampton Corner, Minn., through Rochester, Minn., to La Crosse, Wis. CapX2020 officials already have identified three cities where that line might cross the Mississippi River: Winona, Alma, Wis., and La Crescent, Minn.

CapX2020 foes worry about the environmental and aesthetic impact of extending high-voltage lines on 15-story towers across the Mississippi, a flyway for migratory birds. Jeremy Chipps heads

the La Crescent-based Citizens Energy Task Force, which he said may appeal last week's decision by the Public Utilities Commission. Chipps says the task force hasn't picked a preferred river crossing site if the lines are built.

"They're all dreadful," Chipps said. "From the environmental, ecological standpoint, these are the most damaging things one could do."

Officials with the Upper Mississippi Wildlife Refuge and Sen. Sharon Erickson Ropes, DFL-Winona, also have questioned the need for the CapX2020 lines.

Energy companies say the lines are necessary to bolster power infrastructure in St. Cloud, the Twin Cities and Rochester, and to transmit new renewable energy from where it's generated in wind-rich western Minnesota and the Dakotas. Minnesota utility companies are scrambling to meet a requirement that 25 percent of energy generated in the state come from renewable sources by 2025, CapX2020 spokesman Tim Carlsgaard said.

"Every utility is out there trying to bring renewable energy onto their system," Carlsgaard said.

In addition to CapX2020, another energy consortium has proposed the "Green Power Express," a similar plan to run high-voltage lines from the Dakotas to Illinois via southern Minnesota. Initial sketches indicate that proposed line would go through Adams, Minn., in Mower County en route to Madison.

Chipp's says mega-power line proposals are poor alternatives to a decentralized approach that emphasizes smaller lines and uses existing lines to full capacity. CapX2020 opponents also question why Minnesota power consumers must pay for a line that would transmit power to population centers outside the state, such as Chicago and Milwaukee.

**On the Web:**

Citizens Energy Task Force at [www.cetf.us](http://www.cetf.us)

CapX2020 at [www.capx2020.com](http://www.capx2020.com)