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**Contact:**

**Randy Fordice**  
(763) 445-5713 (office)  
(612) 865-1366 (mobile)  
[rfordice@greenergy.com](mailto:rfordice@greenergy.com)

**Tim Carlsgaard**  
(612) 330-7697 (office)  
(612) 201-7538 (mobile)  
[timothy.s.carlsgaard@xcelenergy.com](mailto:timothy.s.carlsgaard@xcelenergy.com)

**Minnesota Public Utilities Commission approves Belle Plaine as aerial river crossing location of CapX2020 transmission line**

February 3, 2011—Minneapolis—The Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (MN PUC) today approved the Minnesota River crossing at Belle Plaine for the CapX2020 Brookings County-Hampton 345 kV transmission line. This approval finalizes the last segment of the project route between the Cedar Mountain substation (Renville County) and Helena substation (Scott County).

The decision comes after a rigorous public review that lasted more than two years and included nearly 30 public meetings and hearings where landowners, local governments and other interested stakeholders expressed comments and provided input about the project's route.

The MN PUC approved the majority of the route in July 2010, but sent the Minnesota River crossing back to Administrative Law Judge Richard Luis for review additional information regarding impacts to birds at the crossing.

"The CapX2020 utilities appreciate the work of the Commission, its staff, many other state employees and landowners throughout the area who were involved in this vital proceeding," said Dan Leshner, Great River Energy, project routing lead. "This important project can now move forward with the certainty of a final route."

"This transmission line will help to provide continued reliable service, support the regional transmission system, and allow access to new generation, including renewable wind generation in western Minnesota and South Dakota," said Will Kaul, vice president of transmission at Great River Energy and chairman of CapX2020. "The Commission's decision supports CapX2020's ability to continue to develop and construct needed transmission in the Upper Midwest."

The MN PUC-approved route follows the original preferred route from the Cedar Mountain substation and connects with the alternate route in Sibley County at what is known as the “Gibbon alternative,” an approximately five-mile route west of Gibbon. It then follows the alternate route to cross the Minnesota River near an existing 69 kV transmission line by Belle Plaine. After crossing the river, the route follows roads, fields and section lines to connect with the permitted Helena substation site near 270th Street and Aberdeen Avenue west of New Prague.

### **Route Permit proceeding**

The Route Permit application was filed with the Minnesota PUC by the CapX2020 utilities in December 2008 and identified a preferred and alternate route, as required by Minnesota Rule. Additional route segments were identified during the scoping process for the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in mid-2009. Public meetings and hearings in 2009 and 2010 provided information about the project and the EIS, and solicited public input regarding the route, the overall project, and routing and environmental considerations. Judge Luis presided over both the initial contested case hearing, as well as the remand hearings.

### **Construction schedule**

Field construction on the Brookings County-Hampton project is scheduled to begin in 2012 and be completed in 2015. Along with the approximately 250-mile transmission line, four new substations will be built, and four existing substations will be expanded.

The final route includes a combination of the original preferred route, alternate route and routes submitted during the EIS scoping process. Landowners will be contacted in 2011 to begin the easement negotiation and purchase process. The construction schedule is dependent upon the certainty of cost allocation by the Midwest Independent Transmission System Operator and completion of commercial arrangements by the CapX2020 utilities.

### **About CapX2020**

CapX2020 is a joint initiative of 11 investor-owned, cooperative and municipal utilities in Minnesota and the surrounding region to upgrade and expand the electric transmission grid to ensure continued reliable and affordable service. The CapX2020 Group 1 projects include three proposed 345 kV transmission lines and a proposed 230 kV line. It is the largest development of new transmission in the upper Midwest in 30 years. The projects are projected to cost nearly \$2 billion and cover a distance of more than 700 miles. The new infrastructure will provide a foundation for the region’s projected electricity growth as well as connect into renewable energy sources in southern and western Minnesota and the Dakotas. The CapX2020 utilities recently started construction on one of the projects, a 30-mile, 345 kV line segment between Monticello and St. Cloud, Minnesota.