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Utilities seek approval of three major transmission lines to ensure future reliability, increase access to renewables

ST. PAUL, Minn. – A group of regional utilities today asked Minnesota regulators to approve construction of three major transmission lines to ensure customers continue to enjoy reliable access to low-cost electricity and to increase access to renewable energy sources.

“The 345-kilovolt lines proposed by the CapX 2020 utilities will help ensure continued reliable electricity service in Minnesota and the surrounding region by upgrading and expanding the high voltage transmission network that is the backbone of the region’s electricity system,” said Terry Grove of Great River Energy, a co-leader of the CapX 2020 effort. “Additionally, the lines will strengthen the network so that more wind energy resources can be developed in southern and western Minnesota and eastern North Dakota and South Dakota.”

The CapX 2020 utilities – an alliance of 11 electric cooperatives, municipals and investor-owned utilities – asked the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission to determine the new high-voltage lines and associated projects are needed. CapX 2020 is short for Capacity Expansion needed by 2020.

The proposed lines would span more than 600 miles and represent one of the largest single transmission initiatives in the region in decades. The approximate lengths and general locations of the proposed lines are as follows:

- A 200-mile, 345-kilovolt line between Brookings, S.D., and the southeast Twin Cities, plus a related 345-kilovolt line between Marshall, Minn., and Granite Falls, Minn.;
- A 250-mile, 345-kilovolt line between Fargo, N.D., and Alexandria, St. Cloud and Monticello, Minn.;
- A 150-mile, 345-kilovolt line between the southeast Twin Cities, Rochester, Minn., and La Crosse, Wis.

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Following a rigorous public process, the commission is expected to decide whether the lines are needed by early 2009. If the commission decides the projects are needed, it will determine routes for the new lines in separate proceedings. Portions of the lines also will require approvals by federal officials and by regulators in North Dakota, South Dakota and Wisconsin.

As soon as regulatory need and routing decisions are complete in 2009 or 2010, construction will get under way, and the lines are expected to be completed three or four years later.

“In July we mailed information about the lines to nearly 500 local government officials and approximately 73,000 landowners in three proposed study corridors,” said Laura McCarten of Xcel Energy, a CapX 2020 co-leader. “We will work closely with all stakeholders to determine the best routes for the lines if the commission determines they are needed.”

“Public meetings will be held in the potentially affected communities to describe the projects and answer questions. We will post information about the projects and updates on the CapX 2020 Web site at www.capx2020.com, and we will begin building mailing lists to keep people informed as the long regulatory process unfolds.”

“We look forward to working with everyone involved to determine whether the lines are needed and, if so, their routes,” Grove added. “We encourage everyone to participate by attending open houses and public meetings and providing information to the commission and the CapX 2020 utilities.”

While Great River Energy and Xcel Energy are taking the lead on the three 345-kilovolt lines, other utilities also will be involved in permitting, building and financing them. A fourth line – a 230-kilovolt, 70-mile line between Bemidji and Grand Rapids in north central Minnesota – also is among the CapX 2020 Group 1 projects. The utilities plan to ask the Minnesota commission to approve the fourth line in a separate filing later this year.

The first four projects represent a combined investment of approximately \$1.4 billion to \$1.7 billion.

Along with Great River Energy, Elk River, Minn., and Xcel Energy, Minneapolis, utilities or groups that expect to participate in one or more of the CapX 2020 projects are: Central Minnesota Municipal Power Agency, Blue Earth, Minn.; Dairyland Power Cooperative, La Crosse, Wis.; Minnesota Power, Duluth, Minn.; Minnkota Power Cooperative, Grand Forks, N.D.; Missouri River Energy Services, Sioux Falls, S.D.; Otter Tail Power Company, Fergus Falls, Minn.; Rochester Public Utilities, Rochester, Minn.; Southern Minnesota Municipal Power Agency, Rochester, Minn., and Wisconsin Public Power Inc., Sun Prairie, Wis.

Today’s filing will be posted on the CapX 2020 Web site at www.capx2020.com.