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Power plan is good for taxpayers and good for the environment

By Gary A. Long / For the Monitor
March 5, 2011

The Northern Pass transmission project to bring hydroelectric power from Canada into New Hampshire offers a golden opportunity to add jobs and tax dollars to our state's economy while also securing a long-term source of reliable, competitively priced clean energy. However, no large-scale energy project comes completely free of tradeoffs or controversy.

Some people are understandably concerned about how a new transmission line would change their landscape. Others are concerned about the ability of their city or town to fund schools and vital services and welcome the boost that tax revenue from the Northern Pass would bring to their communities.

In my 35 years of working in New Hampshire's energy industry, I have seen more thorny problems than I can count. But what I have not yet experienced is a problem that has been impossible to work out. The lengthy federal and state review processes that will examine the Northern Pass are designed to encourage open dialogue and a free exchange of ideas.

On both sides of the Northern Pass issue are well-meaning, dedicated people who want what they believe is best for their communities - and their state. By working together we can find a resolution that will bring the many economic and clean-power benefits to the state while addressing our common concerns.

As a subsidiary of Northeast Utilities, the lead partner in the company proposing to import Hydro-Quebec power, PSNH has a vested interest in the Northern Pass project. But as New Hampshire's largest electric company, we are also responsible for providing reliable service to our 500,000 customers and ensuring that the state has the power supply diversity and price stability it needs to build a strong economy. We view the hydroelectric power that the Northern Pass project will import as absolutely essential to our ability to fulfill these responsibilities and to help the state meet its long-term clean energy goals.

Unique opportunity

Most renewable energy comes at a relatively small scale, at a premium price, and is heavily dependent on weather conditions. In New Hampshire, we are fortunate to live in close proximity to Canada's unparalleled hydroelectric resources. The Northern Pass

project offers us the rare opportunity to tap into a significant amount of reliable, competitively priced clean energy. PSNH is negotiating a power purchase agreement with Hydro-Quebec that would ensure PSNH and its customers receive additional value through the purchase of a portion of this power for the next 40 years at a price competitive with the current and future electricity prices in New England.

The Northern Pass project would also result in a significant infusion of jobs and tax revenue to New Hampshire communities. The economic benefits of the Northern Pass project to New Hampshire include:

- An average of 1,200 New Hampshire jobs per year during the estimated three-year construction phase;
- More than \$400 million in new local investments in Coos and Grafton counties;
- An estimated \$5.4 million annually in local tax payments to towns in Coos and Grafton counties;
- An estimated \$24.5 million per year in state, local and county tax payments throughout New Hampshire.

Get involved

Several steps must be taken before the Northern Pass project can move forward, including environmental studies, consultations with the public, a review by state and federal agencies and the issuance of permits.

As currently proposed, the Northern Pass calls for building 140 miles of direct current transmission line in New Hampshire from the Canadian border to a converter terminal in Franklin. There it would be converted to alternating current and sent to a substation in Deerfield, where it would connect to the New England power grid. Most of the line's route would utilize existing rights of way, but about 40 miles of new rights of way would be needed at the state's northernmost tip. This route was identified through a rigorous process that included discussions with state agencies and environmental groups, the evaluation of hundreds of potential route alternatives, and studies designed to minimize environmental and social impacts.

That said, the project's proposed route is not set in stone. The U.S. Department of Energy review is just starting, and the first public meetings will take place the week of March 14, in locations around the state. The DOE is also accepting written comments until April 12. We urge you to get involved and bring your ideas forward. Scheduling and location details are available on the Northern Pass project website: northernpass.us. In the meantime, we welcome the opportunity for dialogue. Please call us with questions or comments at 800-286-7305.

(Gary A. Long is president and chief operating officer of PSNH and a representative on the members committee of NU Transmission Ventures Inc., which owns 75 percent of Northern Pass Transmission LLC.)