

Committee on Energy, Utilities, and Technology
Public Hearing January 11, 2024

Senator Lawrence, Representative Zeigler, Members of the Committee on Energy, Utilities, and Technology:

Good afternoon. My name is Eric Rolfson, and I live in Albion.

I support and use renewable energy; understand the critical need for expanding Maine's power grid; recognize the existential threat from climate change; and fully support the state's renewable energy goals. Yet, I am dismayed with the process by which the transmission portion of "the Program" was conceived and could potentially unfold.

Maine, unlike New Hampshire, lacks a Site Evaluation Committee (SEC) that includes Commissioners from the PUC, the Departments of Environmental Services, Business and Economic Affairs, Transportation, and Natural and Cultural Resources, among others. <https://www.nhsec.nh.gov>

As such, our state struggles to take a more holistic view of the challenges this energy transition will entail.

Have we Mainers learned nothing from the NECEC referendum -- or from the Northern Pass project in New Hampshire that failed due to fierce community opposition?

For a state that depends upon tourism for nearly 20 percent of its GDP, are there not better solutions than building numerous HVAC transmission towers; approving projects one at a time rather than having a long-term strategic growth plan; and needlessly destroying agricultural and forest land?

Fortunately, there are, such as running HVDC lines underground along existing highways and upgraded corridors. Note that our neighbors in New Hampshire and Vermont have insisted upon this to preserve the rural nature of their states, offer a greener solution to the recognized need,

and respect agriculture, silviculture, the environment, and landowner rights.
<https://www.twinstatescleanenergylink.com>

In a recent Facebook poll, we asked 1,000 individuals how they would prefer transmission lines to be constructed should they pass through their properties -- 98% of respondents chose underground vs. above ground.

The primary argument against this solution is that it is “too expensive,” but that is a short-term view and a faulty analysis, since the calculation for initial construction does not include the long-term “costs” inherent with a disruptive climate environment, negative health outcomes, documented real estate devaluations, tourism issues, and extensive delays due to social and economic strife.

Maine needs a comprehensive, coordinated, strategic plan -- not only for this project, but for all the future HV transmission projects. Such a plan can only be informed by an independent, in-depth feasibility study.

The argument that delaying this bill to complete a study will derail our timeline also is faulty because missteps are time consuming and expensive.

LD 1963, with appropriate amendments to address eminent domain, ensure greener outcomes, and address feasibility study recommendations, is our opportunity to do this right.

Respectfully submitted,

Eric Rolfson
301 Barnes Road
Albion, Maine 04910
207-877-1067
Eric.rolfson@icloud.com