

Setting the Record Straight –
Manitoba Transmission Corridors / Road System for East Side
November 2007

1. Ownership

MISINFORMATION: First Nation communities can share ownership of transmission infrastructure.

THE REAL STORY: Manitoba Hydro promotes a First Nations equity partnership model for *generation* facilities. Legal issues and obligations to other utilities in Canada and the US that collectively maintain the grid prevent Manitoba Hydro from pursuing shared ownership for *transmission* lines. Manitoba Hydro says that the line “must be managed and operated in conjunction with the rest of the system”. The company has publicly indicated that shared ownership of transmission infrastructure is NOT under consideration¹. Statements have been made to the media and in legislative committee that joint ownership of transmission systems will not be pursued.

2. Economic Benefits

MISINFORMATION: First Nations communities will have long-term economic benefits from transmission corridors and infrastructure, including Bipole III

THE REAL STORY: Most potential benefits for First Nations communities associated with transmission line development are from construction activity – corridor clearing, construction contracts, etc. – and are short-term. There are some potential benefits in the operational stage from maintenance of the corridor right-of-way. These opportunities do not result in numerous jobs or full-time employment².

On the other hand, Manitoba Hydro has indicated that development funds are one way of providing enduring benefits to communities whose traditional lands are crossed by transmission line corridors³. More recently, Manitoba Hydro indicated it is considering a policy of providing payments for easement rights for Hydro transmission line corridors through First Nations’ traditional territories⁴, just as easement payments are provided when transmission line corridors go through farmers’ fields. It is not clear whether such payments would go to the First Nation or to the trapline holders. Existing Manitoba Hydro programs for payment for environmental impacts to lands and waters are a patchwork, with many outstanding claims in northern Manitoba. First Nations whose territory includes the oldest dams in the province have seen no payments of this kind to date.

¹ December 2002 Manitoba Hydro document, *Future Transmission Line Development on the East Side: Summary of Key Perspectives from Introductory Meetings with Leadership of East Side Communities* (page 10) <http://manitobawildlands.org/pdfs/MBHydroESideFutureDec2002.pdf>

² Ibid (page 4)

³ Ibid (page 4)

⁴ *Winnipeg Free Press*, November 2, 2007 “Plebiscites should guide where power line is built” <http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/subscriber/westview/story/4069828p-4671400c.html>

3. Routing

MISINFORMATION: Routing a transmission line down the west side of Manitoba will cause just as much ecological disturbance as a route down the east side of Lake Winnipeg.

THE REAL STORY: All hydro transmission corridors result in ecological impacts. Longer and wider hydro corridors (such as those needed for a Bipole) disturb more of the landscape, and result in more fragmented habitat for species that may already be under pressure from loss of habitat.

There is no way to know the precise details about environmental impacts unless Manitoba Hydro provides public information about its options for routes, including its own studies regarding impacts. The utility rarely makes such reports available – and did not do so during the 2004 Wuskwatim hearings.

4. Access to Power

MISINFORMATION: First Nation communities will be able to access power from a new Bipole.

THE REAL STORY: A Bipole transmission line is a direct current (DC) line, which carries electricity from northern sources to southern Manitoba or export users. It does NOT provide additional power to communities along the way⁵. To do so would require construction of infrastructure that converts DC power to AC (alternating current) power – which is the form in which electricity is delivered to homes.

5. Ecological Impacts

MISINFORMATION: It is possible to mitigate (i.e. address impacts or reduce them significantly) the ecological impacts of hydro transmission corridors.

THE REAL STORY: These corridors are maintained so the corridor right-of-way does not regenerate naturally – they permanently alter the landscape. Fragmentation of habitat is therefore unavoidable, which means that certain species are affected. The relationships between predators and prey can also change; some predators use the corridors as a ‘short cut’ to hunt more efficiently (these predators include human hunters). For more information see Manitoba Wildlands’ boreal forest page

<http://manitobawildlands.org/forests.htm>

6. Cost

MISINFORMATION: It will cost more to build a transmission line down the west side as compared to costs for routing down Manitoba’s east side.

THE REAL STORY: Cost is important but a thorough analysis must examine both costs and benefits. It is essential to consider financial costs and benefits, *and* also the ecological and social costs and benefits. Hydro corridors reduce ecological services from the ecosystem. These services can now be priced and reported as a loss. To view a project

⁵ December 2002 Manitoba Hydro document, *Future Transmission Line Development on the East Side: Summary of Key Perspectives from Introductory Meetings with Leadership of East Side Communities* (page 4) <http://manitobawildlands.org/pdfs/MBHydroESideFutureDec2002.pdf>

only in terms of monetary costs and benefits is no longer an adequate approach. Independent analysis of these costs and benefits has been absent in decision making in Manitoba. A review of Manitoba Hydro's conclusions is needed.

Manitoba Hydro has indicated it will cost significantly more per km to build the transmission corridor on the east side of the province. Public information as to the cost per kilometer for east and west corridors has not been provided. The east side has hundreds of lakes along the way of any corridor.

7. One Transmission Corridor or Many?

MISINFORMATION: Bipole III is the only new transmission corridor needed on the east side.

THE REAL STORY: Each new generation station built in Manitoba will require transmission lines. Manitoba Hydro has indicated that sharing transmission corridors is no longer their policy, based on security and weather concerns. This means that other transmission corridors are planned for the east side and elsewhere in Manitoba. No clear public information regarding where the east west grid would travel, or how energy from new dams at the top of the east side would travel to Ontario exists. Manitoba needs an energy plan – and the utility needs to provide information about the various potential transmission lines for both sides of the province.

8. Transmission Corridor = All-Weather Road?

MISINFORMATION: Constructing a transmission corridor would hasten plans for an all-weather road system on the east side, as a permanent all-weather road system for Manitoba's east side would follow the route of a transmission line corridor. The two projects could even be built in the same corridor.

THE REAL STORY: Manitoba Hydro says it doesn't need a road to build a transmission line. It can build and maintain a transmission line without road access and road access is not desirable in some ways, as public access means increased safety risks and more opportunities to disturb wildlife. Hydro also says that the best route for a road is not necessarily the best route for a transmission line – roads have different terrain requirements from transmission lines⁶.

9. Barriers to an East Side All-Weather Road System

MISINFORMATION: Work to construct an all-weather road system on Manitoba's east side could begin immediately.

THE REAL STORY: A permanent all-weather road system for Manitoba's east side is years away – no federal funds have been allocated for this project and the Government of Manitoba can not pay for the road system on its own. The \$15 million identified in Manitoba's 2006 budget will not pay for the outstanding work on the Rice River Road. The environmental and social studies required for the environmental review and assessment process for an all-weather road have not yet begun. Costs may be as high as one million dollars per kilometer.

⁶ Ibid. (page 9)