

LEADER-TELEGRAM

The Leader-Telegram is a division of the Eau Claire Press Co.

Don Huebscher Editor
Doug Mell Managing Editor
Gary Johnson Local News Editor

Board made right move on power line

The Marathon County Board should be commended for taking the first step in allowing the American Transmission Co. access to county land for a 345-kilovolt power line that is badly needed in Wisconsin.

The board did not grant an easement to ATC for the power line, which would stretch from the Superior area to near Weston. The line would cross parts of Chippewa and Clark counties.

The board did vote 22-9 to allow county staff to negotiate with ATC for an easement through a small part of the Nine Mile Recreation Area. The board would have to approve any easement terms developed in the negotiations.

"This is an encouraging step forward," said Mark Williamson, ATC vice president of major projects.

Editorial

This was a significant decision for the Marathon County Board and one that signaled a change of mind. In 1999, the board voted to oppose the \$420 million project. The board in May 2002 denied Wisconsin Public Service Corp., which started the power line project before ATC took over, access to county land to do surveys.

Then last month a county committee voted that the county take no action on the easement request.

The issue:
The Marathon County Board has decided to negotiate with American Transmission Co. for access to a county recreation area for a power line.

Our view:
The high-voltage power line is needed for the economic health of Wisconsin.

The board's action makes sense. Much of the line should go through publicly owned land rather than through private land.

ATC has the ability, through condemnation powers, to gain access to private land. But ATC can't have public land condemned for easements. It also makes economic sense, according to the Wausau Daily Herald. ATC would give the county a one-time payment of \$1.5 million, along with \$89,000 a year to use the land and \$60,000 for the easement.

The Arrowhead-Weston project has been reviewed and approved by the state Public Service Commission twice. Opponents organized into the Save Our Unique Lands organization have been throwing up every conceivable roadblock in front of the project, and their efforts will continue.

A power line of this magnitude *should* go through a rigorous review process. This line could, if not designed properly, cause major environmental problems in northern Wisconsin.

But the line also is needed. Wisconsin needs to import more power to ensure that its economy can grow. Right now there are not enough high-capacity power lines coming into Wisconsin, and the state can't generate enough power to meet its needs.

Pat Puyleart, president of the Wausau/Marathon County Chamber of Commerce, took the Marathon County Board to task recently over its lack of support for the power line.

In an opinion column in the Wausau Daily Herald, Puyleart said the amount of land the board is fighting over is slightly bigger than a football field.

"We need to get moving on the Arrowhead-Weston line," Puyleart said, adding that delays are threatening service disruptions and adding costs to the project.

In response to the Marathon County Board vote Tuesday, SOUL President Tom Kreager tried to downplay the significance of the action. He maintained that the power line "is on its last leg."

Kreager, who now is trying to get elected to the state Assembly, better be wrong. Wisconsin needs more power, and the Arrowhead-Weston line is a major way to get it.

— Doug Mell, managing editor