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## CapX 2020 routing process: Brookings, SD–SE Twin Cities project

The routing process for high-voltage transmission lines considers information from landowners, local governments, state and federal agencies and other interested parties. Planning engineers first determine areas where a new line must connect into the existing electrical grid. The routing team – planners, engineers and environmental specialists – then determines a study corridor, which evaluates where the line could be built. Along with the rationale for their selection, these routes are submitted in a Route Permit application to the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (PUC), which determines the route and design of a transmission line.

This fact sheet is intended to provide information on how the process has progressed since the CapX 2020 utilities filed a Minnesota Certificate of Need application in August 2007, as




well as an overview of how it will proceed during the Route Permit application process.

Please note that the information in this fact sheet is a general overview and explains activities specific to the Brookings, SD–SE Twin Cities project. Other CapX 2020 transmission line projects may follow a different process or timeline.

**Route development process:** The chart below details the process the CapX 2020 Brookings, SD–SE Twin Cities project team followed to narrow initial notice corridors to the route options that will be proposed in its Minnesota Route Permit application.

**Gather land use information:** The project team conducted fieldwork throughout the entire notice corridor, identifying various types of land use. Geographic Information Systems (GIS) data

### MINNESOTA ROUTE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

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<b>Initial steps</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gather project area information</li> <li>• Open houses</li> <li>• Begin collecting public comments</li> <li>• Meet with local governments, state and federal agencies</li> <li>• Fall/Winter 2007-2008</li> </ul>		<b>Narrow corridor options</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hold routing work group meetings</li> <li>• Work with local government, state and federal agencies</li> <li>• Present corridor options at public open houses</li> <li>• Winter/Spring 2008</li> </ul>		<b>Develop route options</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop route options with public feedback</li> <li>• Hold routing work group meetings</li> <li>• Meet with local governments, state and federal agencies</li> <li>• Present refined route options at public open houses</li> <li>• Spring/Summer 2008</li> </ul>		<b>Develop route applications</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finalize Route Permit considering public input</li> <li>• Summer/Fall 2008</li> </ul>	<b>Submit Route Permit application to PUC</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fall/Winter 2008</li> </ul>

 Public comment opportunity

South Dakota process is a separate proceeding

was collected through publicly available data sources, agency personnel and the public.

**Meetings with local governments and state and federal agencies:** The project team met with local government officials as well as representatives from various state and federal agencies to discuss the project and identify current land uses as well as future land use plans.

**Open houses:** The information gathered at the CapX 2020 open houses and other public meetings was a crucial component to the route development process. These public sessions provided – and continue to provide – opportunities for the team to learn more about each local area and how those issues should be considered. The factors considered by the PUC – human settlements, public health and safety, land-based economies (such as farming or tourism), the natural environment and other criteria that may impact efficient operation and system reliability – are listed in Minnesota Rule 7849.5910.

**Routing work groups:** CapX 2020 routing work group meetings provided further opportunity for the public to review maps, provide information about potential route options, and identify and discuss the state’s criteria relating to transmission lines. People

who expressed an interest in the project, submitted comments to utilities, local government representatives, and others who signed up at public meetings or on the project Web site were invited to participate.

**Narrowing corridors:** After the project team evaluated all information collected from the data gathering process and public comments, it was used to narrow the initial notice corridor to potential route options.

### Route Permit Application

When utilities have determined what they feel is the most appropriate route for the proposed transmission line, they submit a Route Permit application to the PUC. The PUC, after a comprehensive public process, determines whether that Route Permit should be granted and, if so, what route the transmission line should take.

The Department of Commerce (DOC) is also significantly involved in the process, including developing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and conducting meetings regarding the EIS.

After the utilities file a Route Permit application, the process specified in the PUC regulations begins.

**Public meetings:** Upon receiving an application, the DOC will schedule public meetings to introduce the proposed project and the Route Permit process. Scoping for an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will begin at these meetings.

**Scoping and routing additions:** An EIS will be prepared by the DOC. The first step of the Route Permit process is to establish the scope of the environmental analysis. Prior to preparation of an EIS, public comments are accepted on issues that should be examined in the EIS. Alternate routes to those proposed by the utility can also be proposed; however, the DOC has specific regulations that must be followed. Once the DOC scope of the EIS is published, no new routing options will be considered in the EIS.

**Citizens advisory task force:** The PUC may choose to establish an advisory committee (representatives of local governments and interest groups) to help determine the scope of the EIS and examine whether routing options should be added to those proposed by the utility.

**Draft EIS:** The DOC will prepare and publish a Draft EIS that examines the land use and environmental issues associated with the proposal and the alternatives that were identified in scoping.

**EIS comment period and public meetings:** Once the Draft EIS is published, the DOC will establish a period to receive comments on the document. The DOC also will hold public meetings to obtain comments on the document.

**Public hearings:** An Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) will conduct public hearings. Notice will be published in local newspapers prior to the hearings. The hearings are designed to receive comments, opinions and supporting evidence on where the proposed lines should be located and how potential impacts of the line should be addressed. The ALJ will prepare a report that summarizes the hearings and may make routing and mitigation recommendations to the PUC.

**Final EIS:** The DOC will take all comments on the Draft EIS, respond to them, revise the draft accordingly and then prepare a Final EIS.

**PUC Route Permit decision:** At the end of the process the PUC considers all material and conducts one or two public meetings. If two meetings are held, the first is used to receive oral comments and ask questions of the participants, and the second is to deliberate and make a decision. Sometimes the two steps are combined in one meeting. A Route Permit decision cannot be made until after a Certificate of Need is granted. If a Route Permit is granted, the PUC permit supersedes local jurisdictions as to the route itself; the utility may still be subject to other federal, state and local ordinances, such as a Department of Natural Resources license to cross public waters.

**Concurring permitting in other states:** Similar permitting processes are overseen by regulatory bodies in neighboring states.

South Dakota Public Utilities Commission:  
 • Facilities Permit

**Federal environmental review:** Before federal agencies grant loans or issue permits for transmission lines, the agencies must comply with requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act. Depending on the circumstances and the application of federal regulations, an Environmental Assessment or an Environmental Impact Statement may be prepared. Federal environmental review is usually done concurrently or jointly with state environmental review.

**For additional information about the state routing process, please contact the Public Utilities Commission or Department of Commerce at the numbers below.**

### State of Minnesota contact information

Minnesota Public Utilities Commission  
 Bret Eknes  
 651-201-2236  
 bret.eknes@state.mn.us

Minnesota Department of Commerce  
 Scott Ek  
 651-296-8813  
 scott.ek@state.mn.us

### State of South Dakota contact information

South Dakota Public Utilities Commission  
 605-773-3201  
 www.puc.sd.gov

## MINNESOTA ROUTE PERMIT PROCESS

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### Public Utilities Commission

<p><b>Submit Route Permit application to PUC</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fall/Winter 2008</li> </ul>	<p><b>Public hearings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PUC sponsored</li> <li>• Managed by Administrative Law Judge (ALJ)</li> <li>• Public can comment on any aspect of route process and application</li> <li>• All comments are part of the public record. The ALJ and PUC will evaluate public comments prior to making a decision on the Route Permit application</li> </ul>	<p><b>PUC makes decision on Route Permit application</b></p>
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### Department of Commerce

<p><b>Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) scoping meetings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Managed by Department of Commerce</li> <li>• EIS evaluates impact of utility-recommended routes</li> <li>• Public can suggest alternative routes at this stage</li> </ul>	<p><b>Draft EIS prepared and published</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public can comment on draft EIS and recommend additions and changes</li> </ul> <p><b>Comment Period</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Informational meetings held by Department of Commerce</li> </ul>	<p><b>Final EIS prepared and published</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Final EIS addresses public comments from draft phase</li> </ul>
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 Public comment opportunity

South Dakota process is a separate proceeding