

PUBLIC OUTREACH ON THE 2009 UPDATE OF THE VELCO LONG-RANGE TRANSMISSION PLAN

Project Goal: To inform the public regarding the long-range transmission planning process, the release of the analysis of potential reliability deficiencies and proposed solutions, and the opportunity for public input on the analysis.

Background

Given electricity's vital role in our daily lives, utilities are responsible for building and maintaining highly reliable power systems. VELCO, the owner and operator of Vermont's transmission system, must publish a 20-year plan, updated every three years, that identifies where electricity load growth will require transmission upgrades, new generation or increased energy efficiency to maintain reliability.

VELCO will release its preliminary reliability analysis (INSERT TITLE) on April 3, 2009. This analysis will have already been reviewed by members of the Vermont System Planning Committee, which includes representatives from a broad cross section of interests including utilities, residential consumers, commercial and industrial consumers, and environmental protection organizations. VELCO is seeking to share its analysis of potential reliability deficiencies and solutions with a wider public before it is finalized and filed with state officials by July 1, 2009.

The analysis will be on-line and available on April 3, 2009. Public outreach related to the draft analysis will be conducted from April 27 through May 18, 2009, providing an opportunity for individuals and entities interested in the reliability of Vermont's electric system to understand and potentially influence the future of that system in their areas.

Public Forums

Purpose:

The purpose of the public forums is three-fold. First and foremost, it is to share a draft of the analysis and information regarding factors pertinent to the decision-making process, as well as the opportunities and latitude available to the public to influence decision-making.

The second purpose is to obtain input on the analysis from numerous demographically and geographically diverse stakeholders. A segment of each forum therefore will be designed to facilitate discussions with members of the public to identify questions and concerns related to the analysis, discuss potential solutions including non-transmission alternatives.

Third is to establish a strong foundation for future public input and engagement when the time comes to address individual reliability issues identified in the analysis.

Desired outcomes:

- Increase community understanding of the analysis, potential solutions and opportunities to influence selected solutions.
- Understand community questions and concerns related to deficiencies and potential solutions.
- Identify planning or activities in the region that may influence the electricity transmission, projected peak load and/or acceptable solutions?
- Identify individuals interested in participating in future community-specific discussions in areas to determine solutions to identified reliability deficiency.
- Foster trust and participation in the planning process.

Location: (Specific venues still to be determined) Sessions will be held in the following five regions: Hartford/WRJ, Burlington, St. Johnsbury/Newport, Brattleboro, and Montpelier.

Structure/Design:

The forums will be structured as a modified open-house/open-forum. The public will be invited to meet with VELCO staff and local utilities as appropriate in any or all of three ways:

1. General Presentation:
 - a. Initial welcome and outline of the session
 - b. Overview of electric transmission planning and the requirements under which VELCO is operating.
 - c. A clear articulation of the ways in which public input will be addressed in the finalizing the analysis and in subsequent decision-making.
 - d. Overview of analysis – planning overview, methodology, assumptions and findings (Note: See slides from GAR)
2. Participants will have access to a series of information kiosks to learn more about the long-range planning process and the contents of the analysis. Kiosks will display key aspects of the analysis, information about factors pertinent to decision-making, and initial screening of the viability of non-transmission alternatives. Members of the VELCO technical staff will be assigned to each kiosk to answer and record questions and concerns about the information presented. Possible topics include:
 - a. VT electric transmission basics
 - i. The components of the system and grid
 - ii. Visuals of what an upgrade looks like (lines, substations, etc.)
 - iii. statewide transmission and distribution map
 - b. Non-transmission alternatives – what they are; screening process to determine if NTA are viable
 - c. Forecasting and Methodology
 - d. 2009 Transmission Analysis Results (including local maps of deficiency and potential solutions)

- e. Issues commonly of concern in siting: aesthetic mitigation, environmental impacts, electric and magnetic fields
 - f. Reliability/Regulatory Planning Process
 - g. Energy Policy
 3. After reviewing the information in the kiosks, participants will be invited to join small roundtable discussions with trained facilitators who will use prepared questions to solicit feedback from public participants regarding questions and/or concerns about specific projects. All comments and questions will be recorded for inclusion in the documentation of the public input process and how public input was incorporated into the analysis. The discussion will focus on:
 - a. concerns and questions about the analysis
 - b. local plans and activities that may change the future electricity transmission needs
 - c. specific local reliability deficiencies – recommended solutions and alternatives + opportunities to influence the decisions
 - d. options for continuing contact/communication through the next steps of the planning process
 4. Closing
 - a. Reporting from small groups
 - b. Description of actions in moving forward
 5. Evaluation/Questionnaire -
 - a. understanding of information shared
 - b. remaining questions about the analysis
 - c. concerns about the proposed solutions
 - d. concerns about the public process
 - e. belief in VELCO's transparency
 6. Registration/Sign Up
 - a. attended this meeting
 - b. interest in further communications about the planning process
 - c. interest in being contacted regarding specific projects

Handouts:

- Agenda
- Chart of identified reliability deficiencies and potential solutions
- Evaluation/questionnaire

Lessons from Southern Loop

It would have been helpful to describe the regulatory rules under which the utilities operate and under which options would be scrutinized (e.g., the “Societal Test”) a little earlier in the process so that the group would have a better understanding of what CVPS and VELCO have to go through in solving these types of problems

People wanted to have more information on renewable energy sources; the explanation about Vermont’s “Societal Test” was not satisfactory to most who asked

Some were disappointed that the information presented – and the entire process – was not more focused on energy policy and planning

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