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RANDOLPH COUNTY

Grain Belt touts local benefits before public hearings

ALEX LINDLEY
MI Managing Editor

If Clean Line Energy Partners is granted the ability to construct and maintain the Grain Belt Express, a wind energy power line through northern Missouri, the Houston-Texas-based company is saying it will pay Randolph County landowners around \$3.4 million.

That's in addition to the \$720,000 in taxes the company estimates it will pay to Randolph

County schools, fire protection districts and other taxing entities in the first year of the Clean Line's operation.

"Working with the Missouri Tax Commission, we estimate the schools will receive the majority of the tax dollars, which would be about \$570,000 in Randolph County in the first year of the project's

operation alone," said Mark Lawlor, director of development for the Grain Belt Express, in a statement. "The Grain Belt Express' tax payments will make a

lasting impact on Randolph County schools and public services for decades to come."

In total, Clean Line is estimating that year one of the proposed line would funnel \$39 million into north Missouri.

Grain Belt Express announced those figures ahead of a series of Missouri Public Service Commission hearings scheduled to begin next week. One of those hearings will be Dec. 8 at the Moberly Municipal Auditorium at 6 p.m.

Despite Clean Line Energy

Partners' position that the line would provide considerable economic benefits to Randolph and other counties it would traverse, locals have voiced fierce opposition over the years the Grain Belt Express has been on the table, citing infringed-upon property rights.

Phil Brown, a Moberly attorney and member of an opposition group called Block Grain Belt Express, said in an emailed state-

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ment that Clean Line's promises are not guarantees.

"Grain Belt has not permanently waived the right to protest its property assessments and taxes or to seek abatement of its Missouri property taxes," he wrote. "Grain Belt obtained abatement of property taxes on its transmission line in Kansas."

The issue of eminent domain being granted to Clean Line has sparked opposition from Missouri landowners, who say granting the company public utility status would trample on their bargaining rights.

Brown said that, in addition to the reduced usable farm land during construction and ongoing maintenance of the proposed line, "Homeowners and landowners within view of the Grain Belt line, but whose land is not crossed by Grain Belt's line with towers 110 feet to 150 feet tall and in some places 200 feet tall, will receive no compensation for the decline in the values of their homes and land. The Grain Belt line and towers will be above the tree line and in view of homes within one or more miles from the line."

Although Block Grain Belt Express has rallied many area landowners to express their opposition, not all are in agreement.

In a letter sent to the Monitor-Index, Chariton County landowner Dennis Neidholdt said he was initially concerned about the line but has since changed his views after meeting with Clean Line and doing his own research.

"The compensation Grain Belt is offering, in my view, is very fair," he wrote. "They are not trying to take my land, just pay a fair price for the use of a very small portion of it. Since the beginning of our great state, private pipeline companies and energy companies have needed to use private property to build the infrastructure we need."

"... The municipal utilities estimate this wind energy will save their customers more than \$10 million on their electricity bills. That seems like a pretty big benefit to me."

Randolph County is not among the eight Missouri counties that have formally withdrawn support of the line, although newly elected Randolph County Western District Commissioner John Hobbs has expressed opposition, and commissioner Jerry Crutchfield previously said the commission has no official position on the matter.

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