

## Public Service Commission votes down Grain Belt project

By **JODIE JACKSON JR.**

Thursday, July 2, 2015 at 2:00 pm Comments (17)

Neither supporters nor opponents of the Grain Belt Express are declaring the project completely derailed, despite the Missouri Public Service Commission on Wednesday rejecting the transmission line that would carry wind energy from the plains across Missouri.

Commissioners voted 3-2 to deny an application to greenlight the proposed \$2 billion, 780-mile transmission line that would carry wind-generated electricity from Kansas through Missouri and Illinois to Indiana. Grain Belt officials said the line would provide power for up to 200,000 Missouri homes while creating hundreds of jobs — including additional work at Hubbell Power Systems in Centralia — and millions of dollars in property tax revenue.

Staff had suggested rejecting the application, filed by Clean Line Energy. The transmission line would bisect the southern part of Randolph County, where several landowners expressed strong opposition to the project.

The PSC order to deny parent company Clean Line's application for a certificate of convenience and public necessity said Clean Line did not present evidence to prove that the project would benefit the state. The order also noted the "substantial opposition to the project" expressed by business owners, landowners and farmers.

"The evidence shows that any actual benefits to the general public from the project are outweighed by the burdens on affected landowners," the order stated.

PSC staff recommended denial of the application and said Clean Line's claims about lowering electric prices and meeting renewable energy standards were "not sufficiently supported by the record."

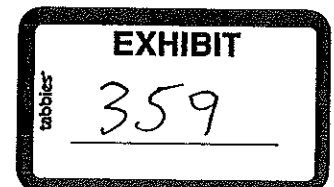
Mark Lawlor, director of development for the Grain Belt project, said Clean Line officials were reviewing the commission's order.

"It's too early to announce the next move, but we would definitely say that there will be a 'next move,'" Lawlor said Thursday morning. Clean Line "will find a way to move forward. It's simply too important to the state of Missouri not to."

He said there was confusion among commissioners about Clean Line's business model as a merchant transmission line, which puts the investment risk for the project on the company and shareholders and not on customers paying the electric rates.

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"We need to more clearly articulate the exact need that's out there and the precise benefits" to the state, he said. Lawlor wasn't sure whether Clean Line will ask for a rehearing or refile the case.

A certificate from the PSC is necessary for Clean Line to use eminent domain to obtain easements from landowners unwilling to voluntarily enter an agreement. The project would have required easements from about 500 landowners in Missouri. The Grain Belt project won approval from Kansas regulators in 2011 but still needs approval in Missouri and Illinois.

Jennifer Gatrel, who was part of the Block Grain Belt Express organization that opposed the application, said the PSC commissioners apparently believed the proposed line is not needed by the people of Missouri.

"Grain Belt does have additional options it might pursue," Gatrel said in an email. "We, however, are confident that we can succeed in preserving" the PSC's "decision."

PSC spokesman Kevin Kelly said Clean Line officials could file an application for a rehearing with the PSC within 10 days from the commission's order.

Cindy O'Laughlin, who owns Shelbina-based Leo O'Laughlin Inc., said she was "very disappointed" in the PSC's decision. She had hoped to bid for work on the project to benefit her 40 employees as well as the rural communities along the proposed Grain Belt Express transmission line route.

"We're largely rural, so how do we continue to provide necessary services and have good roads and schools?" she said. "Yet we run off an opportunity like this. It's a very poor decision."

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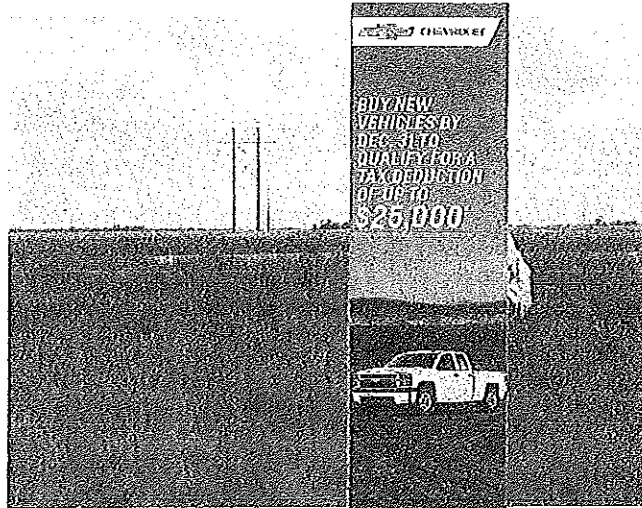
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# 3-2 vote denies certificate of convenience and necessity for Grain Belt Express

The Missouri Public Service Commission denied a crucial certificate for a multi-state wind-powered transmission line proposal that would pass through Ralls County if built.



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Clean One Energy President Michael Skelly stands in front of a power line tower near the converter station near the Grain Belt Express.

Eric Danton/Courier-Post

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The Missouri Public Service Commission denied a crucial certificate for a multi-state wind-powered transmission line proposal that would pass through Ralls County if built.

Commissioners voted 3-2 on Wednesday to deny a Certificate of Convenience and Necessity for

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the Clean Line Energy Partners Grain Belt Express Clean Line proposal, Missouri Public Service Commission spokesperson Kevin Kelly said. Supporters and opponents of the \$2 billion proposal prepared to pore through each paragraph of the commission's order to determine what the future might hold.

Commissioners assessed specific criteria for the decision to grant or deny the certificate: there must be a need for the proposed service and it must "promote the public interest"; the applicant must be qualified to provide the proposal and possess the financial ability to complete a proposal that is economically feasible.

The commission determined that Clean Line Energy Partners demonstrated its qualifications and financial ability related to the proposal, but the commissioners decided the proposal did not satisfy the remaining stipulations.

"In this case the evidence shows that any actual benefits to the general public from the Project are outweighed by the burdens on affected landowners. The Commission concludes that GBE has failed to meet its burden of proof to demonstrate that the Project as described in its application for a certificate of convenience and necessity promotes the public interest," according to a Missouri Public Service Commission written release.

Clean Line Energy Partners representatives told commissioners about the proposal's "enormous benefits" to Missouri, including potential jobs, annual tax revenue for counties in the proposed path and meeting future EPA clean energy requirements, Director of Development Mark Lawlor said.

"There appears to be some confusion by a majority of commissioners about the benefits of this project to Missouri," Lawlor said.

Clean Line Energy Partners would review the Public Service Commission order carefully to determine possible options for the future of the project.

"We feel like the project is too important to the state of Missouri to not pursue a way forward," Lawlor said.

Wind on the Wires — a St. Paul, Minn.-based nonprofit organization of groups related to the wind energy industry — saw considerable potential for the project as well.

"The PSC's decision today is a huge missed opportunity to provide low-cost clean energy to the Heartland and to create the jobs and economic development that comes along with wind development and transmission projects like the Grain Belt Express, Wind on the Wires Executive Director Beth Soholt," said.

But opposition groups were encouraged by the Wednesday decision, including Block Grain Belt Express — a group of Missouri farmers, landowners and residents who oppose the project.

"The commissioners apparently believed that the proposed line is not needed by the citizens of Missouri," Block Grain Belt Express Vice President Jennifer Gatrell said. "Grain Belt does have additional options it might pursue. We, however, are confident that we can succeed in preserving what appears to be today's decision at the Public Service Commission."

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BY DONALD BRADLEY  
[dbradley@kcstar.com](mailto:dbradley@kcstar.com)

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November 23, 2015

The Missouri Public Service Commission voted Wednesday to deny a Texas company's plan for a controversial \$2.2 billion, 780-mile transmission line to carry wind power from the Kansas high plains across Missouri to eastern power grids.

Backers, including environmentalists, had pushed the first-of-its kind project as a major step in the fight for renewable energy against coal-fired power plants. The "Grain Belt Express" was also touted as a way to create jobs and provide low-cost electricity to consumers, including 200,000 homes in Missouri.

But while U.S. energy policy calls for increased wind power, it doesn't include a federal right of way to get those power lines past Missouri farmers who didn't want it coming across their land.

They dug in their boots, planted signs, organized and packed hearings around the state.

The PSC voted 3-2 Wednesday to deny Houston-based Clean Line Energy's application, saying the project was not needed. The accompanying order noted farmers' concerns about crops, pastures and maneuvering large equipment around towers.

Evidence showed, the order said, that "actual benefits to the general public from the Project are outweighed by the burdens on affected landowners."

Clean Line Energy said Wednesday it's fight for the power route is not over.

A week before the vote, Loren Sprouse — along with two brothers, he farms land in Caldwell County that's been in the family since 1919 — said of Grain Belt: "This is a giant land grab by a huge company. They (Clean Line) are a private, for-profit company trying to masquerade as a public utility."

After Wednesday's vote, Sprouse said: "Now we can get back to the important business of feeding America."

The PSC vote clearly disappointed, and frustrated, Clean Line officials, who only last week announced a Kansas City company would build Grain Belt.

"The commissioners were confused about the benefits to the state of Missouri," Mark Lawlor, the project's development director, said after the vote.

Company officials had pushed the 1,300 construction jobs. They said Grain Belt would have brought low-cost renewable energy to the state and generated an additional \$6.4 million in property taxes for the eight Missouri counties it intended to cross. That would be

money for schools, roads, hospitals and emergency services.

The company still has options to save the project. It could go to court or even seek federal intervention with the U.S. Department of Energy.

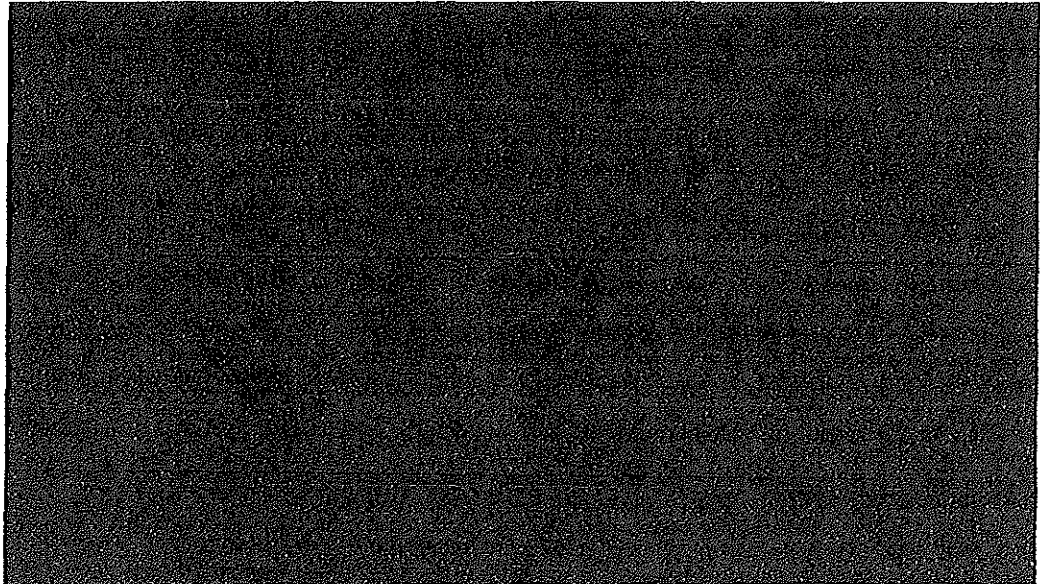
Lawlor said the company was not ready to walk away.

The Grain Belt fight had shaped up to be an urban-rural conflict. But it also pit the future against the past.

Clean Line uses the latest energy technology and was backed by chambers of commerce, labor unions and national environmental groups, such as the Sierra Club. They pushed the future of renewable energy, cleaner air, better health, jobs and tax dollars.

The farmers talked about what 150-foot towers strung with high-voltage cable on 200-foot easements would look like coming across their fields and pastures. Some said it would ruin the land for the next generation.

Also, the fact that the proposed route avoided cities and towns made farmers feel like they were viewed as easy pickings.



## Landowner Loren Sprouse opposes high-voltage Grain Belt Express power line

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"They (Clean Line) act like they can do whatever they want and that don't sit well with a lot of us up here," Logan Kelly, who with his brother recently bought a piece of the old family place near Braymer in Caldwell County, said a week ago.

"They tell us what a great deal we're getting," he said. "But you take a pencil to it, and there's nothing good about it."

The opponents were quick to say they have nothing against wind energy, but if folks back east want it they can make their own.

That's where the maps with the purple blotches came in.

Maps charting annual wind speed show it blows hardest and more often along a strip from the Dakotas south to Texas. A big purple blotch, noting high wind, covers southwestern Kansas, an area dubbed "the Saudi Arabia of wind."

So that's where companies like Clean Line have gone. Grain Belt is only one of the company's routes. If the country is to reach its goal of 20 percent wind power by 2030, Kansas wind must be exported, Lawlor argued.

For more than two years, Clean Line employees had driven blacktops and gravel roads trying to reach easement agreements with farmers. But of 500 or so tracts of land between Buchanan County on the west and Ralls County on the east, the company came to terms with fewer than 50 owners.

Lawlor had likened the conflict to the 1930s, when electric power came to rural America and many farmers didn't want the intrusion.

"We will always have opposition," Lawlor said before Wednesday's vote. "But people opposed to this now turned on their lights this morning and that power came across somebody's land."



The transmission line would have required an easement 150 to 200 feet wide. Clean Line offered to pay 100 percent market value per acre even though farmers could continue to use the land for crops and cattle.

Depending on what style of tower, the company offered annual payments of \$500 to \$1,500 or one-time payments of \$6,000 to \$18,000.

Opponents wanted no part of it. They argued that wind farms could be built off the Atlantic coast to serve the East, an idea deemed doable by experts, if not for the exorbitant cost. Opponents also thought the lines could be buried, though industry experts say that's not practical for such high voltage.

And some opponents simply distrusted big business. Clean Line is backed by National Grid, based in Great Britain and one of the largest international energy companies in the world.

Jennifer Gatrel, a leader of the grassroots opposition group Block Grain Belt Express Missouri, described the victory as democracy in action.

"You can stand up to corporate interests and protect your property rights," she said.

John Hickey, head of the Sierra Club in Missouri, said there are too many power lines in the state, but he was a big supporter of Grain Belt Express.

The country needs low-cost wind from Kansas, Hickey said, and projects like Grain Belt would eventually rid the country of dirty emissions from coal-fired electricity.

Of course transmission lines can be disruptive, he added.

"But you have to look at the impact on public health and air quality," Hickey said.

"Having electricity has its price."

*To reach Donald Bradley, call 816-234-4182 or send email to [dbradley@kcstar.com](mailto:dbradley@kcstar.com).*

## WHAT'S NEXT

Clean Line Energy said after Wednesday's decision that its efforts to build the transmission line were not over.

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**CLEAN LINE ENERGY STATEMENT ON GRAIN BELT EXPRESS CASE IN MISSOURI**

July 1, 2015 – The Grain Belt Express Clean Line will deliver enough low-cost clean energy to power 200,000 Missouri homes, yet there appears to be some confusion at the Missouri Public Service Commission about how the project will benefit Missourians. This project is needed to move Missouri and our nation to a cleaner, more modern energy mix. After we review the Commission's order, we look forward to further clarifying all of the benefits the project will bring to Missouri.

The Grain Belt Express Clean Line will create thousands of manufacturing and construction jobs, and generate millions of dollars in tax revenue to benefit schools and other community services. Missouri manufacturers and businesses are standing by to build the Grain Belt Express, a project that will boost Missouri's economy while delivering low-cost electricity to the state.

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**About Clean Line Energy Partners:** Clean Line's mission is to connect abundant, low-cost, renewable energy resources to areas that have a high demand for clean, reliable energy. Clean Line is developing a series of transmission projects to move renewable energy to market. For more information, please visit [www.CleanLineEnergy.com](http://www.CleanLineEnergy.com).