

MT07-MT08

WEST-WIDE ENERGY CORRIDOR
PROGRAMMATIC ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

TRANSCRIPT OF THE PUBLIC HEARING
EVENING SESSION

Heard at the Holiday Inn
22 North Last chance Gulch
Helena, Montana

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1 to the western governors, who have committed ourselves,
2 time and again, recently, and we will continue to do so,
3 of putting together corridors that make sense, but taking
4 into consideration local communities.

5 So again, thank you for the opportunity of visiting
6 with you today, and I look forward to working with you in
7 the future. Thank you.

8 MR. POWERS: Thank you very much, Governor.

9 okay. Any questions about the process for tonight
10 before we call our -- I think only one person has signed
11 up to give a presentation.

MT08

12 (NO response.)

13 MR. POWERS: Thomas Schneider, a commissioner of
14 the Montana PSC.

15 COMMISSIONER SCHNEIDER: First of all, I guess
16 I'd like to thank the agencies for conducting a scoping
17 session in Montana, as you have been directed and are in
18 the other 10 or 11 states in the west. That's essential.
19 It's necessary, but it's not sufficient in economic terms.

20 You have received limited comment this afternoon from
21 a subset of interested people in Montana. But I'd like to
22 emphasize at the outset that the lack of participation by
23 environmental and public interest groups in this
24 high-level programmatic EIS does not reflect, in any way,
25 what you will face and what siting entities will face in

1 specific projects. The BLM surely ought to know that,
2 given their experiences in Montana. The people of Montana
3 take environmental impacts and socioeconomic impacts
4 extremely seriously when the rubber meets the road, and
5 that's at the time of a specific project proposal.

6 what scares me terribly in the whole concept of
7 programmatic EIS are actually reflected in some of the
8 opening remarks of Scott Powers, and that is that this
9 high-level programmatic EIS is going to streamline and
10 accommodate in one fell swoop -- ■ think those are a
11 couple of the phrases that were used -- acceleration of
12 projects within these designated corridors. ■ think that
13 is a very dangerous tone and a very dangerous perspective
14 to bring.

15 A programmatic EIS, by its nature, a west-wide
16 approach, is going to be at the 30,000 foot level. You
17 don't have the resources, and you don't have the specific
18 capabilities to look at impacts related to what ■ think
19 Ray Brush presented this morning, a number of different
20 potential corridors that they'd like to have -- apparently
21 like to have designated in advance as national corridors.
22 That really scares me.

23 The state of Montana has stepped up to the plate and
24 is a major exporter now, has shouldered that
25 responsibility for the Colstrip twin 500-kV lines going to

1 the west, as the Governor has indicated. within your
2 programmatic EIS, one of the options is upgrades and
3 efficiency utilization improvements. That can be done.
4 That is a positive, constructive, low-impact, economically
5 rational way to use that corridor, that existing corridor.
6 But you'd just as well -- From my standpoint, as an
7 individual commissioner that's been involved in these
8 issues since the '70s, you'd just as well erase those
9 lines that show east-west major additional transmission
10 corridors.

11 It was a bloody fight in the late '70s, and it will be
12 at least as bloody a fight going forward for export lines
13 going through the mountains of western Montana. The
14 corridors are limited, the terrain is tough. we've got
15 tribal lands, we've got endangered species, we've got a
16 very active public interest perspective on environmental
17 issues. It is a non-starter. That's my view, and it's an
18 informed view that I would urge you not deep-six. Again,
19 it fits with the idea that you're not hearing from
20 environmental groups or public interest groups at this
21 programmatic level. You will at the next level.

22 we really have been down this road before. we were
23 down this road in circa 1970 with the Northern Great
24 Plains coal project or multiple electricity transmission
25 corridors exporting coal from the Powder River Basin. It

1 didn't fly then, it won't fly now. It's got to be
2 selective, it's got to be economically rational, there has
3 to be a buyer and seller. It has to be a real project.
4 And some of those things can be done to integrate wind and
5 potentially some modest levels of coal. But you've got
6 California on the receiving end that's saying, we're not
7 going to export our environmental impacts and our global
8 warming impacts; we're going to demand that our
9 load-serving entities incorporate those serious
10 externalities.

11 So the risk is that you're going to develop momentum
12 and an expectation that there's going to be a fast track
13 for approval of multiple corridors. That expectation is
14 very dangerous, and I think it's unfounded. Good projects
15 can go forward; well-planned, integrated processes between
16 the developer, the transmission owners, and the customers
17 on the other end. And you have to recognize the Major
18 Facility Siting Act in Montana. There is a Western
19 Governors Siting protocol that makes a hell of a lot of
20 sense. There is a recognition that interstate projects
21 need coordinated activity.

22 But those state entities that have that responsibility
23 ought to be at the front table as co-leaders and not be
24 subjugated to a programmatic EIS that just contemplates an
25 EA after that. That is not sufficient. you're going to

1 designate these corridors and then you're going to fast
2 track with an EA, despite the level of analysis that's
3 done at the programmatic level? Baloney. That is not a
4 responsible way to approach your charge under the Act. ■
5 would urge that you not do that, that you not view this as
6 effectively carving in stone a fast-track corridor.

7 Those are my remarks as an individual commissioner.
8 They don't represent an official commission position at
9 this programmatic level. But ■ hope you take them
10 seriously. And we'll be watching. Thanks.

11 MR. POWERS: Thank you very much.

12 Is there anybody else that wishes to make a public
13 comment?

14 (No response.)

15 MR. POWERS: what we did this afternoon that
16 seemed pretty effective, and we had a good exchange of
17 information, was we turned off the recorder and we had a
18 question-and-answer session. So I'd suggest we go ahead
19 and do that at this time.

20 (A discussion was held off the record.)

21 (The proceedings concluded at 7:35 p.m.)

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