

Grain Belt Express hits a rough spot

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The problem for promoters of a high-voltage power line across Missouri is many people have trouble seeing the benefit for the state.

Some 530 property owners — out of 6 million state residents — would be directly impacted, and at this point they are split on whether the project would be good or bad for them.

Clean Line Energy Partners of Houston pledges it will pay fairly for right of way and use of land for towers. On the other side are landowners who either want higher compensation or think no amount of money can make up for encroachments on their property.

Residents of eight counties — out of 114 counties in the state — could expect to reap the benefit of increased property tax revenues. The counter argument is the taxes, while potentially substantial, are not justification for accepting a power line that provides no other local benefit.

Clean Line officials speak of the value of construction spending and construction jobs. Detractors note the predicted upsurge in employment would be temporary.

The staff of the Missouri Public Service Commission has joined with the opposition, leveling its assessment the power line would not be in the public interest for Missourians. The staff says promoters have not demonstrated this is something the state needs and, under some scenarios, the power line could end up adding to the cost of electricity in the state.

This power line, dubbed the Grain Belt Express, would carry power generated by wind turbines in Kansas to eastern markets, passing through Missouri and Illinois. Notably, the line is not being requested by Kansas City Power & Light or Ameren Missouri, our two largest electric utilities.

Clean Line will have its say, but strictly based on benefits that would accrue to Missouri, it has a ways to go to convince regulators of the wisdom of this project.