

Yes, let's talk.

NorthWestern Energy wrote in the April 14, 2010 *Whitehall Ledger* that it is difficult to separate fact from fiction about the proposed Mountain States Transmission Intertie (MSTI). It shouldn't be. Members of **Save Scenic Jefferson Valley Coalition** concur that debate about MSTI should be open, honest, straightforward, and factual. Accordingly, in response to NorthWestern's invitation, we've sent these questions to Mr. Dan Rapkoch:

How many towers would be built in greater Whitehall?

Our concern: For NorthWestern's "preferred route," we calculate roughly 150 towers, each 145 feet tall (or 15 stories) between Big Mountain in Boulder Valley and Pipestone – a staggering impact on our landscape. If the state and federal agencies approve the project (not to be assumed) and further require that NorthWestern use Option 2C, which follows Jefferson Valley farther south, this would add some 100 additional towers to Silver Star, for a total of 250 towers in the greater Whitehall area. This does not include NWE's proposed Montana Renewable Collector System line through Jefferson Valley.

What is NorthWestern's estimate of the cost MSTI's towers and lines would impose on the general public?

Our concern: MSTI would cost greater Whitehall residents in terms of tourism development, human and animal health, attractiveness to potential new residents, and quality of life. When NorthWestern speaks of unnamed "others" paying for MSTI, NorthWestern is apparently not accounting for these costs of local environmental degradation to the general public. How does NorthWestern calculate that loss? How will the general public of greater Whitehall be compensated for that loss?

If MSTI would be a terrorist target, why not put it on public land and away from communities?

Our concern: NorthWestern has said a key reason it wants to build MSTI through greater Whitehall, instead of parallel to the BPA 500 kV transmission line within the existing federal energy corridor, is the threat of a terrorist strike on the lines. But why create a terrorism target through our community and along major roadways? Shouldn't this risk be shared on public lands? Who will pay for continuous security as well as for first response should a terrorist strike occur?

Who will own MSTI?

Our concern: NorthWestern has said it would not own MSTI but has not disclosed who *would* own MSTI. Greater Whitehall residents have a right to know more about an entity that proposes to build a gigantic facility that would condemn mile upon mile of land in our community, degrade our scenic and open landscape permanently, require perpetual maintenance, and entail significant security risks.

How will MSTI affect ratepayers?

Our concern: At the April 16, 2008 Public Service Commission meeting, while discussing whether building MSTI would be a mistake from the point of view of Montana consumers, a NorthWestern executive agreed, "It very well could be." Montana ratepayers should receive explicit protection before allowing MSTI to mainline Montana's energy resources to some of the most expensive energy markets in the country.

Would NorthWestern commit in writing that MSTI carry a minimum of 50% clean energy each year?

Our concern: Because NorthWestern is promoting MSTI as a public-benefit, green, wind-energy export project, the public should be guaranteed that MSTI will not be used to any significant extent to continue outdated, unclean energy practices. In addition, we have significant concerns regarding the environmental and economic soundness of the wind projects currently proposed. The bulk of U.S. tax subsidy for wind energy equipment now appears to be going overseas. The vast land resources required for wind farms and long distance transmission make wind energy much less "green" than advertised.

Might NorthWestern's MSTI "partners" include ourselves, the taxpayers?

Our concern: There is discussion that our own tax dollars (e.g., "stimulus money" or other taxes) may be used to help construct MSTI and/or its collector system. Greater Whitehall residents do not want our own tax money used to degrade our own community and scenic landscape. Can NorthWestern guarantee this will not happen?

Do electromagnetic fields from 500 kV lines increase the risk of childhood leukemia?

Our concern: Our review of the studies reveals that proof of an association between EMF's and childhood leukemia is now undeniable even by transmission industry interests. How is this risk to our children justified when there are alternative ways to provide clean energy to big, far-away markets?

Would MSTI qualify for the property tax abatements on transmission lines used for wind power?

Our concern: New tax abatements drastically reduce the property taxes corporations will pay on facilities (including transmission lines) built for wind energy. Will these apply to MSTI and/or its collector system? Why or why not? Wouldn't MSTI cause certain tax revenues to go down due to declining property values, reduced tourism, and reduced new migration to our community? The public needs harder data on tax impacts of MSTI.

Why do we have *separate* environmental processes for MSTI and its collector system?

Our concern: NorthWestern's proposed Montana Renewable Collector System (including an additional line traversing Jefferson Valley) is integral to the feasibility of MSTI. The Montana Energy Policy Act (MEPA) and National Energy Policy Act (NEPA) do not allow project review to occur in isolated segments. Having knowledge of the proposed collector system that MSTI requires, state and federal agencies should not piecemeal the environmental impact analysis of the proposed system.

Why is NorthWestern asking *again* for an energy corridor that has already been denied by BLM?

Our concern: NorthWestern adamantly promotes "preferred" MSTI routes, such as through the Boulder Valley and greater Whitehall, that the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has previously rejected as energy corridors for sound and well-documented reasons.

Given community concerns along all proposed MSTI routes, why aren't options to 500 kV towers considered?

Our concern: Why is NorthWestern not discussing creative alternatives which may be more acceptable to affected communities, such as burial of transmission lines or use of smaller DC (direct current) lines? With wind generation so degrading to Montana's landscape, why aren't distributed generation and conservation a bigger part of California's energy solution? It is too soon for citizens to assume that MSTI is justified - economically, environmentally, legally, or morally. We are very concerned that Montana's approval and siting process for 500 kV export lines is flawed, and that the process thus far has failed to provide due process for our community.

NorthWestern Energy, these are a few of our questions and concerns. **Save Scenic Jefferson Valley Coalition** has striven to be open, honest, straightforward, and factual – just as your corporation asked us to be and committed itself to be in its April 14, 2010 *Whitehall Ledger* advertisement. We look forward to receiving answers to these questions.

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