

Powerful compromise: Northern Pass: Much to like

EDITORIAL

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We hesitate to call it a win-win-win just yet, but the new Northern Pass electricity proposal unveiled last week by Eversource New Hampshire chief Bill Quinlan is pretty darned close to that. Only its most hardened opponents will remain unsatisfied. But they would be so unless there were no project, ever.

More reasonable critics, those with legitimate concerns about the North Country (particularly its tourist-dependent economy and its scenic vistas), are likely to be relieved, if not elated, by the new plan. They and others also have reason to take satisfaction in knowing they were right to demand a specific New Hampshire share of the projected savings from the cheaper Hydro Quebec power that would flow into the New England grid.

Even with the dramatic reduction in its above-ground portions, Northern Pass will run through New Hampshire and only New Hampshire. Granted, that means the state gets the direct benefits of a \$1.4 billion project, which are not to be sneezed at. One would need to go back to the Seabrook Nuclear project for an effort of comparable economic impact.

But it was not unreasonable for the Granite State to expect some specific and longer-term tangible benefits. Eversource has now laid them out: a guaranteed amount of the hydro power being allocated to New Hampshire consumers, and a \$200 million economic fund to assist tourism, economic development, community investment and clean energy.

An added, though much smaller bonus, is that the new plan buries some of the power line along state roads, meaning the state will be reimbursed for use of that right-of-way.

The biggest plus from the standpoint of many critics, of course, is Eversource's decision to bury an additional 52 miles of the line, much of it through the White Mountain National Forest as well as Sugar Hill and Franconia to the north and Thornton, Campton, and Ashland to the south.

That is a huge step, made possible in part by stepping down the power the line will carry from 1,200 to 1,000 megawatts. The reduction means less power for the grid, which may mean a higher cost for the power. But it also means the project can use a high-tech cable capable of being buried.

It also means a reduction in the height of transmission towers where the line will remain above ground, which is in current powerline rights of way. No eminent domain land-taking is contemplated.

So what is the win-win-win here? Environmentalists who say they favor "green power" such as hydro should warm to a plan that eliminates above-ground lines in the national forest.

North Country residents and small businesses should embrace a plan with substantial immediate and long-term benefits.

Businesses large and small throughout New Hampshire are already hailing a plan that provides some relief from high electricity costs.

Northern Pass and Eversource have made the compromise they needed to make. It is time for on-the-fence politicians and understandably skeptical North Country partisans to do likewise.

Business steps up: Stressing the need for power

EDITORIAL

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The benefits of Northern Pass electricity for New Hampshire businesses and consumers should not be underestimated. Although the big news last week was the new plan itself (see above editorial), what businesses old and new had to say about the plan should not be overlooked. It is, after all, businesses that provide the jobs for Granite Staters.

So when the CEO and chairman of Dyn, Manchester's innovative and fast-growing tech support firm, and a spokesman for BAE Systems, one of the state's largest employers, both applaud the plan, it is worth noting.

Paul Markwardt of BAE said the Northern Pass plan provides "unmistakably clear benefits to New Hampshire by bringing low-cost electricity directly to the state's residents and businesses."

Jeremy Hitchcock of Dyn added, "This isn't just about the bottom line, it's about the future. If businesses like mine hope to grow and expand here, we need to see lower energy costs. It's that simple."

Don Welch, president of Globe Manufacturing in Pittsfield, which hosted the plan's unveiling last week, said balanced solutions are needed, "solutions that bring us the energy we need, diversify our sources of energy, deliver clean energy to replace older technologies."

It should be noted that all of these business leaders live and work in New Hampshire. These aren't the absentee timber barons of the 19th century or mill owners of the early 20th century who clear-cut our mountains and befouled our rivers. They are responsible leaders who see the need and have stepped out to support a solution. Good for them.