

New ATC transmission line project surges ahead

JUDY NEWMAN | jdnewman@madison.com | 608-252-6156 | Posted: Thursday, June 2, 2011 5:00 am

About 40,000 homes and businesses from Middleton to north of La Crosse are getting letters this week from American Transmission Co. telling them a powerful electrical transmission line could be built within 3,000 feet — or about half a mile — and inviting them to public meetings later this month.



Plans for the so-called Badger Coulee line, introduced in 2010, are moving into phase 2. ATC has taken the broad swath from south-central to western Wisconsin and identified dozens of corridors to consider for the project, which will carry 345 kilovolts of electricity over 150 miles and will cost about \$425 million.

- In Dane County, the line could run north from the town of Middleton or it could skirt the west edge of Waunakee and go through DeForest's north side, then head up Highway 12, Interstate 39 or Highway 51.
- It could run along the edge of communities such as Prairie du Sac, Lodi, Poynette, Portage, West Baraboo, Elroy or Viroqua. It also could travel through Reedsburg, Wisconsin Dells or Mauston.
- Richland County will be spared.

The area being studied has been expanded north into Trempealeau and Jackson counties. That's because the Badger Coulee line might meet up with CapX2020, a 700-mile series of mostly 345-kilovolt lines stretching from the Dakotas. CapX2020 proposes to cross into Wisconsin at Alma, in Buffalo County.

"We could, conceivably, connect with their line. It doesn't have to be at their end point," said ATC local relations manager Sarah Justus.

Eleven utility companies have joined forces to build CapX2020, including WPPI Energy, of Sun Prairie, and Dairyland Power Cooperative and Xcel Energy, which cover parts of western Wisconsin. The state Public Service Commission is expected to decide within the next week if a revised proposal for the Alma crossing has enough information for a full-fledged review.

At the south end, the Badger Coulee line is expected to hook up to the 345-kilovolt transmission line across Dane County that will start construction later this year.

ATC says Badger Coulee is needed to bring less expensive power from states to the west into the Upper Midwest and to improve the reliability of Wisconsin's electric transmission grid over the long term. "We're looking out 10, 20, 30, 40 years," Justus said.

If the line is built, it would add about 75 cents a month to a \$100 utility bill, she said.

Charlie Higley, executive director of the Citizens' Utility Board, said he's waiting to take a stand on the proposed line until he sees ATC's justification for the project when it applies for approval from the PSC.

“We understand the need to increase transmission capabilities to the west. That’s been a long-standing issue for Wisconsin. But that said, the recession really changed the amount of electricity people use. That may have some impact on whether this line is needed,” Higley said.

A recent PSC report said peak power use is growing more slowly than before the recession but moving power to customers, via transmission lines, remains a challenge in Wisconsin.

Citizen groups have formed in western Wisconsin. Joan Kent, whose home is in one of the possible corridors, is on a committee formed by the town of Stark, near La Farge, to get information about the project. The committee doesn’t believe the line is needed, Kent said.

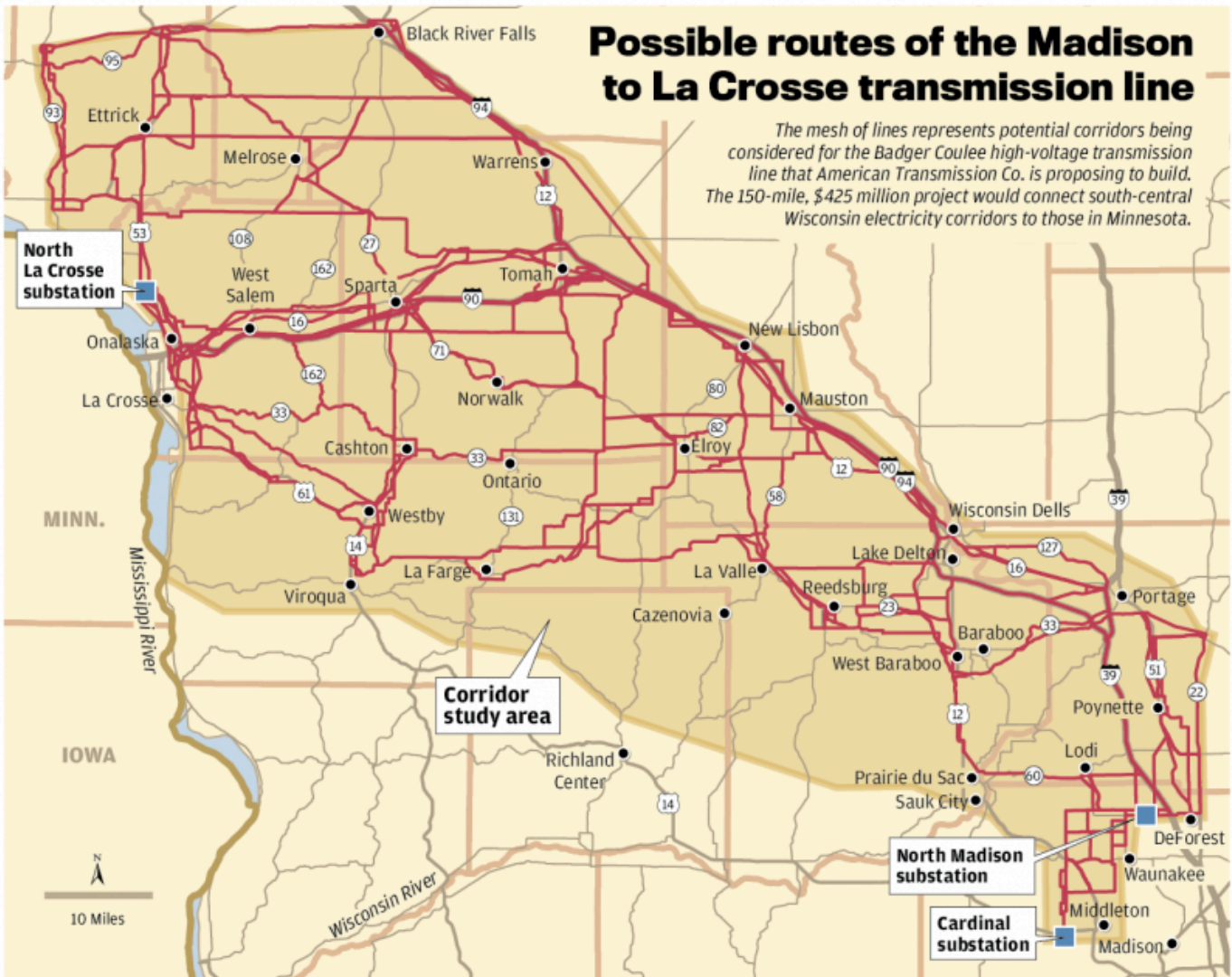
She also is concerned about Badger Coulee’s impact on the Kickapoo Valley’s scenic beauty. “It’s going to be such an eyesore that it will hurt tourism significantly,” Kent said.

Recreational trails in the Sparta and Tomah areas could also be on the transmission line’s path, and the line will have to cross the Wisconsin River at some point. “No route is without challenges and (will be) universally accepted and loved,” Justus said.

ATC will hold eight public meetings later this month, including one in Waunakee, to discuss the alternatives, answer questions and take public comments. It expects to narrow the list of routes to two alternatives in fall 2012 and submit an application to the PSC in 2013. If approved, the line could be in operation in 2018.

Possible routes of the Madison to La Crosse transmission line

The mesh of lines represents potential corridors being considered for the Badger Coulee high-voltage transmission line that American Transmission Co. is proposing to build. The 150-mile, \$425 million project would connect south-central Wisconsin electricity corridors to those in Minnesota.



SOURCE: American Transmission Co.

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