

3.0 Public engagement process

3.1 Purpose, goals and objectives

The purpose of the Public Engagement Process (PEP) is to provide the public and stakeholders with meaningful opportunities to participate in the process, including receiving timely and pertinent information and methods to voice any concerns and share input into the route selection and environmental assessment processes. The goals and commitments made for the PEP to ensure participant involvement included the following:

- Sharing information;
- Gathering and understanding local interests;
- Integrating interests and concerns into the routing and environmental assessment process; and
- Discussing potential mitigation measures.

These goals were met by:

- Involving the public and stakeholders throughout route selection and environmental assessment stages;
- Providing clear, timely, and relevant information and responses; and
- Documenting and reporting on feedback received.

3.2 Process methods

3.2.1 Overview

The PEP used a variety of methods to involve and engage the public and stakeholders and create opportunities for participants to ask questions and provide feedback into the Project.

The various mechanisms to share information on the Project included the following:

- Identification of stakeholders;
- Development of Project newsletter;
- Notification through direct mail outs, emails and telephone calls;
- Establishment of a Project website;
- Development of a Project information line and email address;
- Landowner Information Centre; and
- Stakeholder meetings.

3.2.2 Stakeholder identification

An initial list of stakeholders was developed based on the Project location, with recognition that others may be added throughout the process. Of primary importance were the private landowners potentially affected by the route and once the preferred route and alternatives had been developed, a list of the 101 landowners within one mile of this was compiled. In addition, stakeholder groups were identified and included the Rural Municipality of Portage La Prairie and non-government organizations with interest or potential activities in the area, such as Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation, Nature Conservancy of Canada, Manitoba Aerial Applicators, and Keystone Agricultural Producers. The list also included provincial government representatives with interest, activities or management responsibilities in the area, such as Manitoba Infrastructure; Agriculture; Indigenous and Municipal Relations; Sports, Culture and Heritage; Rural Development/Mineral Resources; and representatives from Environmental Approvals, Fisheries, Forestry, Lands, Protected Areas Initiative, Wildlife. Indigenous organizations are discussed in Section 4.0.

3.2.3 Development of project newsletter

The Project newsletter provided information on the Project description and location (including a map of the preferred route and alternatives), a summary of the routing and regulatory approvals process, and contact information for any follow up or questions. The newsletter can be found in Appendix B.

3.2.4 Project notification

Direct mailings were sent to the 101 landowners that included a letter and a Project newsletter. The letter contained a Project description, location and times of the public events, and contact information.

Stakeholder groups were notified through telephone calls and emails encouraging them to contact Manitoba Hydro if they wished to discuss the project. The emails contained included a copy of the newsletter and a link to the Project website. In total, 25 stakeholder groups were identified and notified.

3.2.5 Project web page

A Project information web page was developed on the Manitoba Hydro website (www.hydro.mb.ca/poplarbluff). The Project site includes a Project description, anticipated schedule, the environmental assessment process, telephone and email contact information for questions and concerns and a Document Library where engagement materials are included.

3.2.6 Landowner Information Centre

A landowner information centre was organized in Portage La Prairie on April 5 and 6, 2017 from 1:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. The sessions followed a drop-in format and welcomed landowners located within one mile of the alternative route options to attend and ask questions and have feedback documented by a Manitoba Hydro representative. Manitoba Hydro representatives hosted the event to explain the Project, answer questions and gather feedback. Participants were requested to identify concerns regarding the Project, identify areas of concern or opportunity; share information on the local landscape, mark up maps to highlight different areas and provide recommendations on minimizing potential Project effects. A total of 20 participants attended over the two days.

3.2.7 Stakeholder meetings

A meeting with the Rural Municipality of Portage La Prairie occurred on February 14, 2017, to provide an overview of the Project and gather information regarding the area. A follow up meeting was deemed unnecessary by the municipality. Stakeholder groups had their feedback collected through email and phone and no other meetings were requested.

3.3 Public engagement feedback

3.3.1 Overview

Engagement feedback typically focused around one or more of the following topics:

- Agriculture, including cattle and crops;
- Routing;
- Compensation; and
- Vegetation and wildlife; and

In addition to these main topics, other topics included tower design and fencing requirements.

3.3.2 Agriculture

Most discussions with participants were focused on agriculture as this is the predominant land use in the area. In general, participants expressed a preference for the route to use pasture or wet areas and to follow mile/road alignments to minimize over-application, working around structures and potential interference with aerial application.

Participants who owned cattle wished to know whether the cattle would be safe under the transmission line (exposure to electric and magnetic fields) and whether each tower would require a fence to keep cattle away from the structure. It was noted that cattle could continue grazing within the ROW and no fencing would be required. One landowner indicated that he would need time to move cattle during construction. It was noted that Manitoba Hydro will notify landowners at key stages in the Project and if approved would work with the landowner prior to construction on their property.

3.3.3 Compensation

Participants wished to know how compensation would be paid if the Project were to be approved. As described in Section 2.4, the voluntary easement agreement being offered by Manitoba Hydro includes land compensation (one-time payment of 150% market value for granting an easement for the right-of-way on private lands), structure impact compensation (depending on factors such as field placement and structure footprint), ancillary damage compensation (where Manitoba Hydro's use of the ROW impacts property use outside of the ROW) and construction damage compensation. Landowners were interested in issues such as whether the payments were over time and whether they were taxable. It was outlined that it is a one-time payment and that they should discuss with an accountant regarding taxable income as this can vary with each individual situation.

3.3.4 Routing

Section 2.3.2 summarizes the inputs to the routing process. There was some good discussion about possible route modifications; some were discarded during the session, as landowners gained a better understanding of the routing process, but adjustments were made based on input.

A route modification was presented by a landowner to place the transmission line on the eastern edge of a parcel to minimize potential effects on agriculture. It was noted that the modification would be brought forward and would be considered as part of the routing process. This option moved the transmission line in closer proximity to a residence and would need to have the line placed in-field that would interfere with manoeuvring farm equipment around the structures. As this modification did not provide a net benefit to the landowners involved, the modification was not pursued and the original alignment will remain part of the preferred route.

In general, most participants indicated that the current options being presented (as per Map 2-1) were acceptable and did not raise many concerns. Following the existing rail bed, existing transmission lines and mile lines were viewed favorably. Avoidance of homes was also viewed positively and avoiding alternatives that "box" (transmission line located on two edges of a parcel) landowners in would be much preferred.

The preferred route location (Map 2-1) was preferred by most participants. In the northern section of the transmission line landowners had a stronger preference for the preferred route and not the alternative. In the central area of the proposed route concerns were raised on aerial application, future land potential and diagonal crossing of agricultural lands showed a preference to move away from residences and utilize the more low-lying wet areas on the alternative route.

3.3.5 Vegetation and wildlife

Based on several discussions, representatives from Manitoba Sustainable Development Wildlife Branch indicated that there were no major concerns regarding the proposed Project and route, but recommended that that Manitoba Hydro assesses the quality of any native grassland patches that may be impacted by the route, construction access trails, and other Project-related infrastructure. They noted that if it is determined that native grassland may be impacted; they would expect that adequate mitigation will be proposed (Brian Kiss Email Communication Mar 31 2017).

3.3.6 Other comments

Other topics that were of interest to participants included:

- Tower design;
- A new local distribution supply centre;
- Ownership of the abandoned rail line; and;
- Fencing and gate requirements.

A participant shared with Manitoba Hydro that their home was built over 100 years ago and they considered it a heritage home. The closest routing option at this time is more than a half mile from the site.

3.4 Ongoing engagement

Manitoba Hydro will continue to notify stakeholder groups, the municipality and landowners within the area. This includes notifying each affected landowner once the final preferred route is determined and providing them with contact information, an outline of the regulatory process and the upcoming timelines. The Project web page will continue to be updated as the Project progresses and the information line and email address will remain active.