

## Presentation to the Clean Environment Commission regarding Bipole III

Presenter: Bob Wiens

I appreciate the opportunity to make a presentation to this committee. I have many concerns about the Bipole III line being built on the proposed West Side Route. As a citizen and tax payer of this province I object to the enormous additional expense of the longer route, both in initial construction costs and ongoing maintenance costs caused by an unnecessarily long line which crosses many miles of prime agricultural land.

My other concern has to do with being a farmer who will be negatively impacted by the line crossing my land. I currently farm land that has a hydro line crossing the middle of the field and am well aware of the inconvenience, additional costs of cropping inputs, and extra time this incurs. The doubling up of fertilizer and chemical application and the potential environmental hazard this might cause should be reason enough for this Commission to recommend that the line be built on the much shorter East Side Route. I'm also aware how easy it is to damage equipment and hydro poles when trying to get close with a machine that is 50-100 feet wide.

On our farm, 943 acres - approximately 40% of our crop land will be affected. The line will cross one mile east to west through the middle of a section (one square mile) of land in which the fields are laid out in a north to south pattern. We have spent many years improving our field drainage. The longest and deepest drains run north to south. We can operate seeding and harvesting equipment along these drains but not across them. So it is not practical to change our field pattern to an east/west configuration. The location of existing municipal ditches also make it impractical to change our drainage patterns.

The average assessment of the affected land on our farm is \$1,346 per acre. Using the current market value ratio of 1.3 proposed by Manitoba Hydro results in a market value of \$1,750 per acre. This is well below current market value, so the ratio needs to be increased. Using Manitoba Hydro's formula of market value x 150% (easement compensation factor) x 26.24 acres per mile equals approximately \$69,000. This gives Manitoba Hydro total control of 26 acres of land cutting across the middle of much of our farm. This will affect us for the rest of our farming career and generations to come - our children and grandchildren. For \$69,000 I am not interested in granting an easement to Manitoba Hydro, essentially giving up control of a parcel of land in the middle of my farm.

In a normal cropping season we cross our fields 8 times. Twice for seeding, twice for chemical application, twice for harvest and twice for fall work. Our seeding and tillage equipment averages 50 feet in width. Harvesting equipment is 35 and 40 feet wide. Spraying and harrowing equipment is 100 feet wide. In a normal year on this one mile wide section of land we could expect to travel underneath this line over 700 times at speeds from 5 to 12 miles per hour. Is this a possible health concern? Might it be in 20 or 30 or 50 years? Manitoba Hydro is offering to buy out residences located within 75 metres of the transmission line. Obviously there must be negative effects from living or working that close to this line.

Manitoba Hydro is offering a onetime payment for structure impact compensation. The amount being offered per structure is more for row crop land than for cereal crop land. Cropping practises in our area have changed dramatically in the past five years. Corn and soybean acreage (row crop land) is increasing rapidly at the expense of cereal and canola crops (cereal crop land). There is no reason to suggest that this trend will change. Basing one time structure payments on past cropping practises when changes are very likely is not reasonable. All structure payments on crop land should be based on row crop rates. The cost of working around a structure increases as labour, fuel, fertilizer, chemical and

equipment costs increase. These structures will exist for many decades and basing compensation for the future on current rates is unreasonable. The compensation agreement must include an annual payment to the land owner for as long as the line exists. These payments should be subject to periodic review, reflecting changes to input costs, crop values and the value of the hydro that's being transmitted.

Basing compensation for the future on current costs would be like Manitoba Hydro setting hydro rates based on current costs and guaranteeing these rates for decades into the future. In the November, 2011 Bipole III Landowner Compensation Information Brochure the compensation offered per structure has been lowered by 8.6% for cereal crop land and by 9.2% for row crop land compared to the initial Brochure which we received. Why are we now being offered less per structure? Will this amount be even lower next year?

We produce pedigreed seed on our farm, so producing a clean crop is very important in order to meet crop inspection regulations. We currently hand spray 1 or 2 times per year around the hydro posts running across one of our fields. According to Manitoba Hydro the base of each structure is 26 feet x 26 feet (8 metres). Allowing 3 feet on each side for equipment clearance would leave several 32 foot x 32 foot areas in the middle of our seed production fields that cannot receive the same weed control as the rest of the field. In order to control the weeds it means going back with a backpack sprayer or a small utility vehicle and doing it manually. It's a very time consuming operation at a time of year when farmers are already very busy. It's also my experience that much heavier rates of chemical are being used when doing small areas manually compared to a large field sprayer crossing a field. When the line runs through the middle of a field that I own, I have access to all 4 sides of the tower with my equipment and can work within 3 or 4 feet of the tower if I turn the equipment around enough times. The line also crosses another section of land where we are farming the south half section and another farmer owns the north half section - the towers would be situated on the border between our 2 properties. In this case we each have access to only one side of the tower, so with each farming operation the equipment

has to start moving over well before it get to the tower and it takes just as long to get back on course after passing the tower. Large triangles must be left unseeded on either side of the tower - another area that will either produce an abundance of weeds or need to be sprayed manually. No one knows what chemicals might be needed, how much they will cost and the cost of labor 2 or 3 decades from now, but Manitoba Hydro expects to adequately compensate us with a onetime payment. Not a very realistic plan!

Another big concern is liability insurance. The risk of damaging farm equipment and the towers is high. Farmers will have to carry extra liability insurance to cover the added risk. Extra coverage equals higher premiums. If a tower is damaged and the insurance company has to pay, the farmer risks losing his coverage and at the very least will lose his claims free discount for 3-5 years. Losing a 15% discount on a \$10,000 premium adds up quickly. Manitoba Hydro will be placing these towers on my land against my will. I don't want them, but may be forced to accept them and the added risk. Manitoba Hydro, as the owner of these towers must be responsible for the liability insurance, and the contract with farmers must state that farmers and their employees will not be held liable for accidental damage to the towers.

For crossing one mile of my farm I could expect to receive approximately \$40,000 for 3 structures. If this money is to cover my ongoing costs for many years in the future the real value to me is the interest it can earn - currently about 2% or \$800 per year. \$800 a year does not cover the costs and risks of working around the structures, the time and expense of doing manual weed control inside and around the structures and the additional liability insurance.

I am aware that the much shorter and less expensive East Side Route would also cross farmland and would negatively impact farmers in a different area of the province. After looking at the map of the final preferred West Side Route issued by Manitoba Hydro it's obvious that much less farmland would be affected by an East Side Route. If it was only 25-30% of the farmland crossed by the West Side Route,

east side farmers could be paid 3 or 4 times as much compensation. This might make it more acceptable to them.

Our government is promoting the Bipole III line as a great economic benefit to the province. Agriculture is also a great economic benefit to our province, but the serious negative effects that this line will have on thousands of acres of prime crop production land would seem to be of no concern to those people making the final decision. While most Manitobans will be the beneficiaries of Bipole III and not be inconvenienced in any way by its construction or location, hundreds of farmers will be seriously affected while being offered inadequate one-time compensation. A better option - the East Side Route exists. If these hearings carry any importance, and I hope they do, and if you as its members are truly concerned about the environment, and I hope you are, you will advise the government to abandon the West Side Route. I urge you to do so.

Respectfully submitted,

Bob Wiens