

Transmission Line Routing Community Sounding Board

CSB Update Meeting Summary

January 11, 2021

Overview

Puget Sound Energy (PSE) hosted an online meeting for Community Sounding Board (CSB) members on January 11, 2021. The meeting's purpose was for PSE to follow-up on CSB feedback and suggested route segments shared at CSB Meeting 4 (held on October 12, 2020) and share information about the upcoming January 21, 2021 online community workshop.

The meeting was held online via Zoom. Attachment 1 contains the list of meeting participants.

Opening remarks

Kierra Phifer (PSE) welcomed the group, shared a safety moment, and provided a brief recap of past CSB meetings and information sessions. Susan Hayman (EnviroIssues) explained her role as the facilitator, explained how observers can offer public comments, and presented the meeting objectives and agenda.

Follow-up from CSB 4

PSE discussions with City of Bainbridge Island regarding Category II wetlands

Andy Swayne (PSE) provided an update that since the Oct. 12 meeting, PSE spoke with City of Bainbridge Island staff and received clarification that under the existing city code, new transmission and distribution line construction is prohibited in Category II wetlands. That presents an obstacle for Segments 6 and 17; however, PSE still wants to gather feedback from the public on those segments. It's possible the community will want PSE to try to make those segments work, and PSE is considering options to pursue a code amendment. The code interpretation could present additional obstacles for PSE, specifically regarding future improvements to the distribution system; therefore, PSE is considering a code amendment that would cover both distribution and transmission facilities on the Island.

In response to a question from a CSB member about which segments are affected, Andy noted that the mapping shows Category II wetlands on both sides of the road along Segments 6 and 17. For Segment 4, field review has shown that Category II wetlands do not extend west of that segment, so PSE is assuming that Segment 4 doesn't have the issue, leaving Segments 6 and 17 as the primary concern. Andy mentioned additional fieldwork will be necessary to confirm wetland locations and conditions once a route is selected.

One CSB member asked why aerial overhead lines structures which span wetlands would be prohibited; wouldn't the poles be the only impact? Andy said PSE would still need to manage the vegetation underneath the overhead line, which would be an impact to the wetlands, so it has the same limitation. Kirk Moughamer (HDR) confirmed that these areas are forested, though the vegetation is specifically alder trees, which sometimes can be considered shrubs; it depends on how tall they are as a factor of whether PSE will need to manage the trees. Kirk also noted that existing distribution lines are currently over both those wetlands.

Helipad considerations

Kirk provided an update on the helipad at Fire Station 21; PSE and HDR have reached out to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and communicated their interest in potentially building a transmission line near the helipad. They're going to talk with the FAA to understand if these segments adjacent to the helipad are viable.

One CSB member noted that perhaps PSE could run the line underground near the helipad and have it surface on the other side. Kirk noted coordination with FAA will be needed before doing any more detailed design. HDR and PSE would need to do some preliminary design and give the FAA proposed pole locations. Kirk also noted that there is existing distribution there but overbuilding with transmission would require increasing pole height. Andy noted that this is an option PSE is keeping on the table for now.

PSE response to CSB member-suggested route segments: Sakai Park, Westerly Lane, Winslow Tap re-route options

Sakai Park

Kirk noted that PSE is trying to keep potential route segments along existing public right-of-way (ROW), and the Sakai Park suggestion deviates from that goal. There are also Category II wetlands extending the length of Sakai Park. Although the code currently prohibits new transmission lines with Cat. II wetlands, PSE is not currently eliminating segments restricted by these features from consideration. Overall, a segment through Sakai Park doesn't appear to meet PSE's segment criteria.

One CSB member pointed out that siting a new transmission line through Sakai Park would be difficult even if the local code were amended to accommodate it. This is because the state grant programs that encumber this property prohibit building new power lines through it.

Another CSB member noted that crossing through Sakai might help avoid schools along Madison Ave N, and create an opportunity for a new trail underneath the transmission line to connect Highway 305 with Madison Ave N. This may also be preferable to bringing the line down the west side of Highway 305, as the Sound to Olympics Trail may continue along this part of Highway 305.

CSB members discussed that building transmission lines over existing trails may be considered detrimental, while developing a new trail in association with a new transmission line may be considered an asset. Additionally, there are plans to route the Sound to Olympics trail through the park at that location. This could take years but with Bainbridge Island's sustainable transportation initiative, it may become a higher priority.

Other CSB members observed that constructing a transmission line across Sakai Park would be difficult for some community members to support due to discussions underway to build low-income housing and developing the park at that area.

Westerly Lane

Kirk provided a brief description of Westerly Lane, noting that it's a private road maintained by adjacent property owners with a dense tree canopy overhead. It dead ends before reaching Fletcher Bay Rd. The main challenge is that it's not a public ROW and would require a cross-country route segment. PSE is trying to utilize existing public ROW to the extent possible and doesn't feel this ideal for that reason.

One CSB member noted that PSE has existing facilities that connect Fletcher Bay Rd to Westerly Ln; the property at the far end receives power from the line along Fletcher Bay Road, and PSE just installed a

new transformer. The member noted there is some interest from residents of that lane to have fiber optics installed and suggested there may be an opportunity to do both.

Andy referenced PSE's system map and confirmed that there is an underground, single-phase distribution line that runs from Fletcher Bay Rd towards the property at the very end of Westerly Ln and added that any existing conduit would not be appropriate for an 115kv cable. Generally, the rest of the customers along that road receive power from High School Rd. To serve properties like this, PSE must obtain operating rights from each property owner. When it's the property owner requesting service, they grant those rights quite freely; if they want service but PSE must go through a neighbor's property to do so, it's the property owner's responsibility to work out that easement with their neighbors. PSE very likely has underground rights for limited service to these properties. If PSE were to suggest putting a transmission line along this route, each property owner would need to provide PSE with operating rights for the transmission line. They might agree and they might not; PSE generally tries to avoid condemnation and instead work with property owners. That's another factor with a segment like this; there would be challenges to overcome.

One CSB member commented on the challenges of trying to put this line on a private road, comparing it to the challenges of building a cross-country route. It would require more tree clearing, and the road is sometimes a little rough. There could be advantages to having a transmission line in this area, due to the potential for a significant shortcut between Fletcher Bay Rd and High School Rd. The city is planning non-motorized routes south of this location; establishment of a non-motorized route along Westerly Ln could be an added benefit.

Another member questioned whether it would be easier to convince homeowners along Westerly Lane that there could be a mutual benefit by siting the transmission line there or seek City Council approval to amend the code regarding Category II wetlands (which PSE may have to do anyway to maintain enough aerial clearance around existing infrastructure). Andy noted that PSE makes those kind of tradeoff decisions for many projects. However, PSE sees enough challenges with the Westerly Ln segment that the likelihood for success is low. For the time being, PSE will vet other segments on the table and get the community's feedback on those before exploring a potential alternative with less likelihood of success at this time.

Winslow Tap re-route

Andy shared that when this idea was first suggested by the CSB, there were several people on the PSE project team who thought this might be interesting to pursue. This was suggested by the CSB because, as PSE understands city code and restrictions in the Eagle Harbor area, PSE doesn't see any way to get a second transmission line through that corridor (Segment 44 – Eagle Harbor Drive NE), specifically right along the water. It was suggested that PSE explore rerouting the Winslow Tap transmission line so that the Eagle Harbor corridor could be available for the new "missing link" transmission line. PSE also knows that the city has a project planned to widen and improve the road there, which adds additional uncertainty.

PSE has taken a hard look at this with the idea of bringing back some of the gray-dashed segments in downtown Winslow for consideration if they can route through Eagle Harbor. After mapping potential re-configurations, PSE staff noted that they would still run into the same issues with re-routing Winslow Tap as they have with routing the new transmission line loop. PSE isn't sure how this contributes to the goal of the project. It brings some segments back onto the table that were previously ruled out, but it doesn't meet project objectives. However, PSE doesn't want to preclude the public from giving feedback on this option; it's possible community members will ask PSE to explore this option further. PSE isn't taking this option off the table indefinitely, but right now doesn't see the value of moving it forward.

Andy also noted the existing Winslow Tap alignment needs improved access and vegetation management; the current plan is to rebuild Winslow Tap and have it in-service by 2023. There may be prudence issues with the Washington Utility and Transportation Commission (WUTC), and the community, if PSE subsequently wasn't able to utilize this segment of the Winslow Tap line due to rerouting the system. Given that construction timeframes often flex, there's a small possibility PSE's thinking on this might change. For now, it's not on the table unless PSE hears real enthusiasm for it from the community.

One CSB member noted their perceived benefits to re-routing Winslow Tap. One is that it makes the Eagle Harbor corridor part of a redundant loop; if the city does roadway work that requires a power outage, this part of the line could be de-energized, and no one would lose power. It also helps prevent one large tree from taking down the system. Westerly Lane could be a solution if PSE comes to an impasse with the city regarding Category II wetlands. From this member's perspective, the investments into the Winslow Tap rebuild are "sunk operating costs;" any money spent should have been spent years ago.

Another CSB member noted that if Eagle Harbor were a viable segment, it opens all the grey segments in downtown Winslow; it could even go over to Madison Ave N or down Highway 305; they all become viable options. Andy responded that the gray-dashed segments will be on the publicly accessible Segment Explorer and the community can share feedback on them.

One CSB member noted that they would prefer that Westerly Lane and Sakai Park be included in the Segment Explorer, because no one will comment on them if they're not lines on the map. Kirk reminded the group that segments originated through available public ROWs; Westerly Lane and Sakai Park didn't meet that criterion, and PSE would need compelling statements for why those should be added.

Public comment

One member of the public joined the meeting and provided public comment:

- *My name is David Johnson and I live on New Brooklyn Road, one of the segments under consideration. I've been involved in two prior attempts by PSE to route a line down New Brooklyn Road. Each time PSE decided not to pursue this option, so I am surprised it is back. Since my time is short, I'll note that I have several questions emailed to the project team – I have not received acknowledgement of receipt or response. I have other questions I will ask. I look forward to participating in the community workshop.*

Andy and Barry noted that PSE received David's emailed questions and PSE is working on responses.

Next steps

- Virtual community workshop: January 21, 2021
- Route segment feedback period: Jan. 22 – Feb. 12, 2021
- CSB Meeting 5: spring 2021

Closing remarks

Susan and Kierra thanked CSB members for participating. The meeting concluded at 2 p.m.

Attachment 1: Meeting Participants

Community Sounding Board

Individual Interests

Carl Siegrist
Elizabeth Doll
Erik Fong

Keith Bass
Ted Jones
Winifred Perkins

Organizational Interests

Glen Tyrrell, Bainbridge Island School District
Maradel Gale, Sustainable Bainbridge
Maria Metzler, Helpline House
Mark Epstein, City of Bainbridge Island
Stephen Hellriegel, Net253 LLC
Tom Curley, Suquamish Tribe

PSE Staff

Andy Swayne, PSE Municipal Liaison Manager and CSB Technical Liaison
Barry Lombard, PSE Project Manager
Brandon Capps, PSE Local Government Affairs and Community Outreach
Gretchen Aliabadi, PSE Communications
Kerry Kriner, PSE Land Planner
Kierra Phifer, PSE Local Government Affairs and Community Outreach
Shelby Naten, PSE Communications

HDR Staff

Bridget Brown, HDR
Kirk Moughamer, HDR
Vanessa Bauman, HDR

EnviroIssues Staff

Darcy Edmunds, EnviroIssues, Notetaker
Faiza Hassan, EnviroIssues, Zoom host and technical support
Nyles Green, EnviroIssues, Technical support
Susan Hayman, EnviroIssues, Facilitator

Observers

David Johnson