



HB2321

Testimony of Bruce Akin, VP, Transmission and Distribution

For the House Committee on Energy, Utilities and Telecommunications

Neutral

February 18, 2021

Chairman Seiwert, Vice Chairman Schreiber, Ranking Minority Kuether and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 2321.

A few years ago, Evergy (then Westar Energy) began the process of rebuilding a 69kV transmission line in northeast Wichita near Wichita State University. This line was more than 50 years old and ready for replacement. It was part of enhancements to the electric grid in Wichita to improve reliability. We began contacting property owners and tenants in the area who would be directly impacted by construction. This included residents or tenants who would see a utility pole on their property or whose property existed on the path of the line. We also met with District 1 council members, District Advisory Board members, as well as homeowner/neighborhood associations.

As we began installing the larger, more modern structures for the rebuilt transmission line, we quickly learned there was community concern. And we began to address those concerns. During the last two years, we have held additional community meetings, facilitated conversations with community leaders and elected officials, and reviewed our own internal processes and procedures. Based on community input, we have changed some of the large, steel structures back to wooden poles, and have taken into account the concerns and feedback of the community as we improve our processes around transmission construction and project communication.

For example, Evergy's engineering team has looked at the next phase of the project and have made changes that will reduce the footprint and visual impact of the line. For the next phase, we will rebuild it using primarily wooden poles and consider public easements in addition to private easements. And we will hold community meetings so that residents have the opportunity for input. This will be in addition to the normal practice of meeting individually with the homeowners directly on the path of the line.

In 2019, HB2317 proposed to regulate the siting of transmission lines that are of voltages between 69kV and 230kV (the Kansas Corporation Commission currently regulates siting of transmission lines that are 230kV and above). At the time, we expressed our intent to work with proponents of the bill to explore solutions that would not negatively impact transmission construction in Kansas or increase the costs of doing so by drawing in virtually all transmission construction in Kansas. Among other things, timely construction of transmission is vital to the reliable delivery of electricity and our ability to deliver affordable renewable energy which helps reduce the amount customers pay for generation.

We are able to say today that after months of conversation and collaboration with the proponents of what is now HB2321, we have found common ground that we believe addresses consumer concerns while also ensuring that transmission construction in Kansas remains reliable and affordable. Attached to this testimony is a copy of a friendly amendment that Evergy would offer should the committee decide to proceed with HB2321. It adds some language agreed to by the opponents regarding the types of community meetings to be held for a transmission construction project.

We want to reiterate that Evergy is grateful for the patience and understanding of residents in the Wichita neighborhood where this transmission line is located. Their feedback has made a difference and has resulted in changes to how Evergy will approach communication in the future as we undertake the projects necessary to provide reliable electricity. As for residents of this northeast Wichita neighborhood, they can be assured we will continue working together, listening to their concerns and doing all we can to be good community partners for decades to come.

Thank you again, committee, for the opportunity to comment on HB2321.