

Whilst I have serious concerns about the impact of the whole project, I also have deep personal concerns about the effects in my own local community.

National Impact

At the end of the day, while all of New Zealand accepts that the energy requirements of the Auckland region must be maintained the question is how to do it. Transpower is paid to transport power and every decision made by that organisation is a self-serving one, i.e. how can the organisation make more profit from the Auckland power situation, when the rest of the populace should be concerned as to what is the most economical and environmentally friendly way to service this need.

Having attended many public meetings I can only conclude that, despite the requirements for public consultation Transpower representatives seemed to have a deliberate plan to shield the public from the full truth of their intentions.

I judge this by the many and varied answers that came up to ticklish questions. In one instance two years ago, to a question as to whether the giant pylons proposed had been tested as to whether they would not fall over, the speaker responded in the affirmative when I knew for a fact that they had not yet been fully designed at Beca engineering.

We pride ourselves on our clean green image, without nuclear energy (and I am in favour of the status quo on that one) but we must also be fully aware of the visual pollution of these monstrosities going the length of the country. There was an interesting newspaper article last year on the Scottish film industry and a controversy as to why they planned to shoot a major Scottish historical film in New Zealand. The answer was that the countryside in Scotland was so polluted with power pylons that it was more realistic to use the verdant New Zealand scenery. This proved a major coup for our blossoming film industry, something that could be jeopardised if the backward thinking plan of erecting similar pylons visibly pollutes our countryside.

The power shortages a few months ago due to a fault in the Otahuhu substation showed the folly of having all Auckland's power needs coming from one direction, yet this is exactly what Transpower proposes as they would not make the same commercial advantage if mooted wind farms or coal generators in the northern region were put in place to cover power shortfalls.

One proposal was to underground the line, as is being done in parts of Auckland but Transpower rejects this due to the expense, it being eight times the cost. I will refer to this further down when discussing local impact.

Their other argument against going underground was a technological one and herein lies one of their greatest weaknesses. Suffice to say that the best analogy would be to the transatlantic cable that came into existence in the 19th century. Western Union, the Transpower, of the time rejected the idea of the visionary Cyrus Field and his undersea cable for their own version of an overland line to London via Russia and Continental Europe.

Despite the much slower technological progress of the 19th century the undersea cable of Field was in commission before the Western Union overland route was halfway across Russia. Imagine the difficulties Roosevelt and Churchill would have had in communications during World War II if they had to rely on an overland phone going through countries controlled by Stalin and Hitler!

Technology today is travelling at such a rate, the fax machine and video recorder are both almost obsolete, and nanotechnology is progressing with an alarming velocity, that it is clear to all except Transpower that these giant pylons will be out of date before the line is even finished. Future generations will wonder at the lack of foresight of our generation just as the youth of today fail to understand the intransigence of our earlier sporting contacts with the apartheid regime in South Africa.

Now that the Huntly Power Station has installed e3p, the natural gas-fired turbine, coupled with a heat recovery boiler and steam turbine, that generates 385 mega watts (enough electricity for approximately 400,000 households) there is even less need for the pylon project. This one turbine can cover all the shortfalls in the Auckland region thus delaying even further the requirement for upgrading the Transpower line.

If one looks at the sensible and environmentally friendly option of wind farms in the Auckland region then obviously the shortfall, already covered by the increase in the capacity from Huntly, will virtually cease to exist and there is no logical reason to upgrade the existing line except to increase the profits of one company at the expense of the rest of the country.

If sanity does not prevail, and the government sacking of an electricity commissioner who had common sense shows that political will has overtaken democratic freedoms, then there are some serious local concerns that affect my community. (As an aside, what a great opportunity has now been handed to this heavy-handed government to try and arrest its almost fatal slide in the polls!)

Local Concerns

I live in Kuranui Road in Morrinsville, which is in the Matamata-Piako District. (Reference number RMR200621).

I have several concerns about what is happening in this district. Morrinsville is a rural heartland town that epitomises the New Zealand dairy industry. The greatest concentration of pastoral dairy cattle in the world is in the Morrinsville district. Part of the argument for supplying power to Auckland is that that city drives the New Zealand economy. I would suggest that Morrinsville and towns like it are far more important to our economy because, without their production, the country would not have an economy to speak of. This is why it is so galling that Transpower is so ready to ride roughshod over the concerns of the local community purely for their own commercial benefit.

This commercial gain also is the crux of the whole matter. If the cost of the transmission of electricity were spread evenly across the country then the populace would have little problem with it. However the fact that individual farms are targeted, in particular lifestyle blocks where people have invested their life savings only to have land values crash around their ears means that they alone are bearing the cost for Transpower's gain and the rest of the country does not complain because they are unaffected financially. This I find morally wrong and repugnant in a modern society.

If one accepts that the line will go through, despite legitimate concerns like those voiced above, then surely it is not unreasonable for the section close to Morrinsville to be put underground from skyline to skyline. Morrinsville is the only rural town in the Waikato which is close to the line. The town is in the heartland of the country's dairy industry and in recent years the local business community has spent several million dollars in upgrading the town and its image.

The logical growth area for a town such as Morrinsville is towards the major boroughs in the area, Hamilton and Cambridge. It is this area that the transmission line goes right through. In addition, Kuranui Road, the bypass of Morrinsville to the Matamata and Tauranga regions is becoming a major route for tourist buses. The major battle for our dairy industry in overseas markets is to project our clean green image. This proposed visual pollution in the heart of our pastoral farming community gives ammunition to our trading competitors in what is the country's largest export business.

Transpower resist putting the line underground because of cost to their own operation, unfairly putting their profits ahead of the finances of ordinary New Zealanders. Yet they are prepared to underground the line in areas close to Auckland.

I feel that, because of the impact on the local community, the line should be put underground in the Morrinsville region. One argument is that the cost of doing it for a length of only 2-3 kilometres, the distance from skyline to skyline, is much the same as doing it for 20 kilometres, as the major component of the cost of undergrounding the line is the initial going underground and then coming back up to an overhead line. My reply to that is fine; place the line underground for 20 kilometres, or even longer if possible. The needs of the local community must come before those of a profit-making organisation.

The line, according to Transpower, does not supposedly affect my own property. I live on a 22-hectare block alongside a farm that carries the line thus I am not liable to any compensation. However I have an application before Council to subdivide my uneconomic property into lifestyle blocks, something that is supported wholeheartedly by all my neighbours except Transpower who claim that my subdivision, half a kilometre and more from the line itself does not fit their plans and will be affected by the line.

Two questions arise from this. The first question is on a personal level and being that, if the line has such an effect on my property, should I not be entitled to compensation? Secondly, and more importantly for the community at large, if the line has such an effect on houses nearly a kilometre away, then surely it is too dangerous to go through countryside with dwellings much closer than that. Transpower have consistently spoken of a 50 metre corridor for safety. Have they been misleading the country on this issue?

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