

## **Government-Owned Corporations and their Obligations to Citizens**

What is the obligation of government-owned corporations to listen to citizens' concerns and most importantly protect citizens from potential harms? What role does the voice of citizens play in determining the implementation of projects ultimately funded by constituents?

In May 2016, a proposed Hydro Quebec project to construct a 315kV transmission line in densely populated Dollard-Des-Ormeaux (DDO) between the Boul. Des Sources and Boul. St. Jean power substations entered the government-mandated public consultation phase. At these public hearings, before the Bureau d'audiences publiques sur l'environnement (BAPE), concerned residents presented their well-researched issues and arguments opposing the aerial installation of this high voltage transmission line. While recognizing Hydro Quebec's need for an upgraded power grid on Montreal's West Island, the citizens of DDO called for the line to be constructed underground. Their call has been fully supported by the DDO city officials, whose mayor and entire town council unanimously passed a resolution requesting an underground installation of this line. The list of concerns regarding this project includes:

**Lack of Public Consultation by Hydro Quebec:** From the outset of this proposed project, few residents were aware of the construction of this new transmission line, the timeline for the project, and its ramifications due to an ineffective and deficient consultative process on the part of Hydro Quebec. In fact, only recently through printed publications regarding this project did it become clear that Hydro Quebec has arbitrarily advanced the timeline for construction of the line by two years.

**Misrepresentation of the Scope of the Project:** The data provided by Hydro Quebec to the Regie de l'energie for the project approval underrepresented the power capacity of the line. As such, once the line is fully operational, the electromagnetic field (EMF) and noise emission levels presented publicly by Hydro Quebec will in fact be inaccurate and significantly understated. In a recent article in The Suburban (June 15, 2016), a Hydro Quebec employee finally quoted more realistic EMF values that are 10 times greater than those originally presented to the Regie de l'energie, the city officials of DDO and residents. Additionally, despite Hydro Quebec's repeated assurances that a westward expansion of this transmission line was not planned for at least 40 years, residents recently learned through official documents submitted to the BAPE, that the line to the Baie D'Urfe substation is actually in Hydro Quebec's existing 15-year plan. This westward expansion reinforces that the line will be used to transport more power than originally stated, further impacting DDO residents as well as those residing farther to the west of Boul. St. Jean.

**Possible Health Risks:** Decades of international empirical research has suggested that there are potential health risks correlated with the electromagnetic fields (EMFs) emitted by high-tension power lines. Possible health risks include childhood leukemia, breast cancer, and Alzheimer's disease.

**Precedent for the Underground Installation of High-Tension Hydro Lines:** The precedent to construct high-tension power lines underground has already been established in Quebec. In the city of Limoilou (a suburb of Quebec City very similar geographically to DDO), a 6Km 230kV line has been installed underground replacing two aerial lines. Additionally, there are approximately 131Kms of 315kV line running underground on the island of Montreal. In the case of the Poste Saint-Jean project, the 3Km distance between the two power substations is a negligible trajectory for undergrounding. Furthermore, this "precedent" should be the standard by which all new transmission lines are constructed in densely

populated areas such as DDO. In fact, during the Limoilou project, a Hydro Quebec representative was quoted as saying that in 99% of cases, underground lines are a preferred option in urban settings.

**Environmental Impact:** The proposed aerial installation calls for the construction of eleven 52-meter metal pylons running adjacent to existing 30-meter pylons. These enormous pylons and exposed wires will greatly detract from the urban landscape – a situation that is starkly contrary to current universal government trends that highlight the importance of the environment and the necessity for “green” solutions.

**Property Value Depreciation:** Proximity to high-tension power lines has a significant negative impact on property values and has been shown to result in depreciated market values for residential properties adjacent to pylons.

**Omission of Important Factual Evidence:** Representatives and documentation from Hydro Quebec omitted evidence from their own research studies pointing to potential health risks, depreciated property values, noise pollution and ecological concerns.

In the case of the Poste Saint-Jean project, the public tribunal has allowed for and encouraged public consultation. It remains vitally important that constituents have the opportunity to be heard regarding projects funded by the public purse. The concerned citizens of DDO are hopeful that their cogent, well-researched and formally documented arguments opposing the construction of this 315kV transmission line will be analyzed and seriously considered by the BAPE and the Quebec Ministers. Government projects cannot be implemented solely based on financial cost and ease of installation. The impact on citizens and their environment - a governmental mandate - must also be carefully evaluated.

Hydro Quebec is a corporation that professes to be an international leader in providing electrical power and industry-related research. They have vigorously embarked upon selling electrical power to neighboring provinces and U.S. states, many of the latter building their lines underground after the transmission lines reach their borders. Would our government allow a private contractor to disregard human and environmental concerns in the construction of such a high-tension transmission line? Does a provincially-owned corporation have an added responsibility to the citizens of this province? We urge Hydro Quebec to act responsibly by adhering to its mandate to ensure a safe and environmentally friendly distribution of power to its consumers.

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Build it Underground DDO/ Construisez-le sous terre DDO