

What We Heard- A Report on the Public Consultation on Modernization Alternatives for the Pointe du Bois Generating Station

Meetings

Open house meetings were held on February 12 in Pointe du Bois, February 13 in Lac du Bonnet and February 15 in Winnipeg. Subsequent meetings were also held with the Sagkeeng First Nation and the Manitoba Metis Federation in response to their requests to meet to discuss Pointe du Bois modernization.

Your feedback

Manitoba Hydro would like to express appreciation to all those who participated in the meetings on modernization alternatives for Pointe du Bois and who shared with us their comments, interests and concerns.

The information we have received will help in our selection of the modernization alternative, the development of detailed project plans and our examination of environmental and socio-economic impacts and proposed mitigation for the selected alternative.

What we heard

- The need to modernize
 - There is a widely held recognition of the need to modernize Manitoba Hydro's facilities at Pointe du Bois. Indeed, many felt modernization was long overdue and concern was expressed that the modernization might not proceed.
 - Strong support was shown for continuing power production at this location, with the Rebuild alternative strongly favoured as the other alternatives were viewed as shorter-term and not as cost-effective.
 - The Rebuild alternative was also seen as offering the best potential to make the operation more efficient and safe.
 - The hydropower benefits of clean air and renewable power were noted, along with the importance to the Manitoba Hydro system of continuing power production in this southern location.

Water and water levels

- The impact of modernization on water levels was the most frequent question raised, with strong interest expressed in maintaining the present water regime, both upstream and downstream. .
 - Concern was expressed if there is the potential for impacts on downstream ice conditions, safety for winter ice crossings, and fluctuations in water levels in winter.
 - Concern was also expressed if there is the potential for erosion from fluctuating water levels and flow rates, and if these changes would impact water safety.
 - Public notification of possible water level changes was suggested.
 - Other water related interests raised included water quality, water currents and flow patterns, potential siltation during construction, and impacts on local water supply, both short and long-term.
- Fish and wildlife
 - Numerous comments were received about the variety and abundance of fish in the area.
 - As well, potential impacts on fish, fish habitat and spawning in both construction and operation were frequently mentioned, with concern expressed about the potential impact on aquatic species that may be rare or under threat.
 - Concern was also expressed for wildlife and wildlife habitat in the area.
- Construction
 - Impacts on the road into Pointe du Bois were mentioned frequently. Concerns included not only the physical deterioration of the road during construction and post-construction condition, but also traffic volumes, safety, noise, dust, potential use of a gravel surface, and who would bear the cost of road repairs. Continued access through the town site to cottages during construction was also mentioned.
 - Impact to the natural landscape during construction was a concern, with comments urging that priority be placed on ensuring a quality outdoor recreation environment upon project completion.

- Other concerns included potential for clearing of forest for construction, use of temporary dams during construction, timing of work (both throughout the day and seasonally), noise and light impacts, location of rock and gravel sources, transportation of construction materials to the work site in the river, and potential employment and business opportunities.
- Other questions and comments related to construction focused on the social impact of an influx of construction workers into a rural recreation area including crime and public safety, housing of construction workers, location of a construction camp, and adequacy of the town sewage treatment plant.
- Interest was expressed if the potential exists to shorten the construction schedule to reduce the number of years of disruption in the local area.
- Interest was expressed to improve existing boat launch facilities and develop new facilities for public use.
- There were questions about the relationship between provincial park regulations and Manitoba Hydro's modernization plans for the Pointe du Bois generating station.
- Economic Impacts
 - Comments also suggested a modernization project could have positive economic impacts for the region, including employment opportunities for local people.
 - Concern was also expressed that the reduction of Manitoba Hydro operating jobs following a modernization, particularly as it would reduce opportunities for young people in the region.
 - Concern was expressed that modernization may adversely impact the desirability of individual properties and property values.
- Future facilities
 - A number of questions concerned the specific location in the river of the modernized facilities (not yet determined).
 - Interest was expressed in whether the modernization would provide public access to the east side of the river, with some in favour and many opposed.
 - Concern was expressed that the snowmobile trail along the existing transmission line be considered during construction and development of any new transmission facilities that may be required.

- Town site
 - Comments included concern about the aesthetics of a nearly 100 year old plant and town site.
 - Many felt structures were in a state of disrepair and should be dismantled if no longer required.
 - Others expressed interest in purchasing houses no longer required by Manitoba Hydro.
 - Others questioned if there would be new cottage development.
 - The general aesthetics of the landscape, appearance of the town site, and local infrastructure facilities and services after the modernization project were of interest.

- Future of existing facilities
 - The future of facilities decommissioned through the modernization project was of interest, particularly if the Rebuild alternative is pursued.
 - The history of the Pointe du Bois facilities was noted. Suggestions included maintaining the existing generating station as a museum, salvaging key components as part of a historical display, and capturing the plant's heritage in the architectural design of the modernized plant.
 - Some suggested that if the Rebuild alternative is pursued, the existing plant be demolished as it would continue to deteriorate, pose safety and security risks, become an eyesore and a target for vandalism.
 - Increased availability of plant tours was also suggested.

- Continued information
 - Numerous comments expressed appreciation for the opportunity to learn about Manitoba Hydro's plans for the future of Pointe du Bois and the opportunity to comment and provide input before a project decision is made.
 - There was strong interest expressed in continuing to receive information and be 'kept in the loop' as the project proceeds, including suggestions that a local advisory committee be established to discuss any issues and to share information as construction progresses and that Manitoba Hydro attend meetings of certain local groups.

- Aboriginal interests and concerns
 - In addition to many of the interests and concerns presented above, specific concerns and interests raised in meetings with Aboriginal organizations included respect for Aboriginal and Treaty Rights, respect for the environment, impacts on water, fish and wildlife in traditional use lands, and access to revenues and other benefits from resources developed in their traditional areas.
 - Employment, training and contract opportunities during modernization and in Manitoba Hydro operations were also emphasized. Participation in the modernization was viewed as a means to build capacity in Aboriginal communities. However, loss of employment opportunities in Manitoba Hydro operations due to modernization was of concern.
 - Interest was expressed in opportunities to participate meaningfully in environmental impact assessment for the modernization, including the use of Traditional Knowledge. Interest was also expressed in working with Manitoba Hydro in programs to improve the environment.

Slave Falls Tramway

This potential project to convert the existing tramway to a private road is not part of the Pointe du Bois modernization. In an effort to inform stakeholders about other potential Manitoba Hydro projects in the area, the public open houses on Pointe du Bois modernization alternatives included brief information on the conversion of the tramway between Slave Falls Generating Station and the Pointe du Bois Generating Station to a private road. The purpose of this potential project would be to improve access to the Slave Falls Generating Station for emergency response, maintenance and operations.

- Numerous comments were received urging that use of the road be restricted to Manitoba Hydro and how access would be controlled.
- A high degree of concern was expressed that the road would become open to public use and lead to cottage development and other resource uses such as hunting and forestry in the area.
- Other comments suggested the improvement of reliable access to the Slave Falls Generating Station was overdue.
- Construction of an access road on an alternative route from the south via the Bannock Point road and existing transmission line right of way was suggested
- Concern about construction was expressed by property owners who have wells adjacent to the existing tramway.

These comments will be taken into account as planning for this proposed road project proceeds.