

Planning Transmission Lines in the Exurbs

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INTRODUCTION

The location of new transmission lines is always a difficult task in residential areas and resistance generally comes from groups representing residential concentrations, such as ratepayer groups, neighborhood committees, etc. However, there is a residential group that is often overlooked in transmission line planning because they live a more solitary life in the exurbs. Even though these people may be more isolated, they strongly resist the change to their life styles that the imposition of a transmission line represents.

During the past several years, Ontario Hydro has encountered increased resistance from this emerging residential group when planning its new transmission lines. As a result, a study was initiated to examine in more depth the makeup of this group and why they resist the location of new transmission lines in their area.

This paper details the results of that study.

THE EXURBS OF METROPOLITAN TORONTO

The term "exurbs" comes from a book entitled *The Exurbanites* (Spectorsky, 1955), which examines the life styles and commuting habits of the people working in New York and living in the outlying counties of Connecticut and New York State.

Spectorsky refers to an area he calls an exurb or exurbia as "being further from the city than the suburbs but still within reasonable commuting distance," which he felt was about one-hour travel time.

This hour of commuting time translates into a distance of approximately 80 to 90 kilometers (50 to 55 miles) and applies to the Toronto situation. Interestingly enough, the north-western area of this radius was the same area where Ontario Hydro was receiving resistance from rural residents for a new transmission line project from the Bruce Generating Station on Lake Huron to the Essa Switching Station north of Toronto.

Subsequently, a study was initiated to examine the reasons for the resistance. As a first step in the study, a field trip was taken to these exurbs to determine the rural residential types common to the area. Four types were identified: farm-related residential, hobby-farm residential, seasonal residential and rural estate residential.

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Farm-Related Residential

This exurb usually consists of either old farm houses or modern, medium-sized residences (three to four bedrooms) in association with other buildings necessary for the operation of a farm. The inhabitants earn their livelihood from the operation of the farm.

Hobby-Farm Residential

The hobby farm is usually characterized by a small landholding (less than 10 hectares) and a large residence or renovated farm house. Generally, the inhabitants are retirees or commuters who make extra income from the land or pursue personal interests, such as raising horses.

Seasonal Residential

This exurb usually consists of a small landholding, in the form of a

cottage or chalet, located in proximity to areas of recreational or outdoor activities, like ski resorts and lakes. Most of the inhabitants are city dwellers who tend to commute on weekends or holidays.

Rural Estate Residential

The term "rural estate" has been adopted from the rural estate designation often used in official plans that most incorporated municipalities of Ontario have for future land use planning and development control. Usually this designation is applied to all residential development beyond the urban boundaries, but the dictionary defines the word "estate" as "landed property; individually owned piece of land containing a residence especially one that is large and maintained by great wealth" (Webster's 1980).

However, field observations contradicted some aspects of this definition. Rural estate properties are individually owned, with a residence, but not all are large and maintained by great wealth. Many of the properties designated as rural estate residential are located on a small landholding with a small residence in comparison to the great wealth. Subsequently, rural estate residential includes two types of residences:

- 1) The estate home, as defined, is characterized by a large landholding (greater than one acre), a large residence (greater than four bedrooms and 3000 square feet) and facilities (pools, horse sheds, tennis courts, etc.). A slight variation is the rural estate subdivision, which has similar building characteristics but is generally

located on a smaller building lot (one-half to one acre) that preserves the rural estate flavor but also helps to create a sense of community.

- 2) The smaller country home is characterized by a small rural lot (less than one-half an acre) and a medium-sized residence (three to four bedrooms, 1500 to 2500 square feet).

A common characteristic of all rural estate development is location to natural amenities such as stream valleys, woodlots, rolling topography, etc.

WHO ARE RURAL ESTATERS?

Part of Ontario Hydro's approval process for new transmission lines involves public participation in the

form of information centers where the public is invited to express its concerns. Although opposition came from many rural residents, it became increasingly evident that the rural estate group was quickly becoming the largest and most vocal in their opposition. The reason for this can be easily explained. For the past 15 years, Ontario Hydro has made an effort to reduce the impact of transmission lines on farm-related residential and farming operations. Changes to tower location, new tower design and generous land compensation policies have, to a large extent, satisfied the farming community. Few hobby-farm residences are found in the Toronto exurbs, and it is unlikely that a new transmission line will be a problem for these resi-

dences. The seasonal residences are generally associated with a significant recreational development that is usually designated as a high impact area and, therefore, avoided in the environmental assessment/route selection process.

However, the rural estaters group is too large to avoid and their numbers are steadily increasing as high property prices and the disamenities of the city force more and more city dwellers to the exurbs.

In his New York City case study, Spector sky states that most people living in the exurbs commute to the city and live within one hour or fifty rail miles of their work. Typically, the New York exurbanites were either employed in the communications

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industry, free-lancers or unemployed (between jobs in the communications industry), but always well-heeled. Many were daily commuters but did not have typical nine-to-five jobs and their working hours varied considerably (p.51). The idea of varied working hours was confirmed in a more recent article by E. Graber (1974), who claims that a large number of people commuting to Denver from nearby rural areas are involved in occupations with large blocks of time off (e.g., airline pilots, firemen, etc.),

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resulting in less overall commuting time. Graber further states that the commuters are generally young (30's to 40's), educated, wealthy and very sophisticated about the quality of life they desire.

These theories were then applied to the rural estaters living in the exurbs of Toronto through field study and personal interviews. It was found that most rural estaters live within one hour or 60 miles of the urban area. Of course, there are exceptions as some people are willing to commute beyond this limit if they can gain the rural amenities they desire. Typically, most rural estaters do not have normal nine-to-five working hours. Instead, they have varied working hours and large blocks of time off, which reduces the overall commuting time and allows them more time to enjoy their rural life styles.

The rural estaters come from various walks of life; they are professionals, independent businessmen, retirees, airline pilots, white-collar workers, etc. However, no matter what their occupation, a combined income of at least \$75,000 per year was perceived by those interviewed as being the minimum financial requirement for rural living. The financial commitment required for rural living includes the operation of at least two automobiles, high commuting costs, high maintenance costs for residences and high initial construction costs.

WHY ARE THEY RURAL ESTATERS?

Having established who are the rural estaters, the question is: why have they chosen this life style? Again, Spectorsky claims that by moving to the exurbs, people are taking "a major step in the realization of their ambition on the right path to achieving their unlimited dream." He further states that by moving to the exurbs they get away from the clatter, rumble and crowd of the city. This desire to get away from the city and

all the negative aspects of it has also been put forward by others:

- 1) I. Robinson (1981) wrote in an article on Canadian growth trends that the benefits of living in a metropolis are being outweighed by the so-called diseconomies or disamenities of these areas such as crime, pollution, congestion and noise.
- 2) G. Eckbo (1969) claims in his book *The Landscape We See* that the landscape which surrounds city dwellers is seldom pretty and almost never beautiful. It is dull, disorderly, squalid, sterile, drab, dirty, noisy, frustrating etc. Rarely is it inspiring, cheerful, restful, relaxing or uplifting.

Despite the claims of the attractiveness of rural living and the unattractiveness of city living, rural estaters still desire the best of both worlds. Many want the proximity to metropolitan areas for their work and the closeness of certain urban amenities. They also like the size of the metro areas but wish to retain the amenities of rural living, which allows them to "have their cake and eat it too" (Robinson, 1981).

The people interviewed generally agreed that rural estaters seek escape from the city and all of its negative aspects. But escape from the city is not the only reason cited for country living. Other views included:

- 1) Privacy and seclusion from other people
- 2) A simple change to a slower life style
- 3) A return to their roots, i.e., born and raised in the country, tried city life, did not like it so they returned to the country
- 4) Love of nature and a desire to spend spare time outdoors close to nature
- 5) Involvement with rural society (i.e., people are friendlier)
- 6) High cost of living in the city

Most rural estaters want to be able to borrow the size of the urban area. Although many do not particularly exercise this option on a regular basis, it is still comforting to them that such amenities are close at hand. The desire to be within a reasonable commuting distance is clearly demonstrated by observing the fewer number of rural estates outside the exurb area of Toronto.

THE IMPACT OF TRANSMISSION LINES

It is clear that rural estaters have chosen their life styles to take advantage of the quality of life and amenities that rural living offers. Any change to this life style will not be readily accepted because change, according G. Eckbo in *The Landscape We See*, "represents chaos, disorder, ugliness, destruction and especially the fear of the unknown." Sectorsky claims that people in the exurbs see "change as an unmitigated nuisance, they urge change to go away, not bother to come again another day."

The rural estater wishes to avoid change. His reaction to change can take many different forms. Sectorsky states that people living in the exurbs are continually attempting to protect their seclusion and privacy and this means keeping others out. He refers to the fact that constant rezoning takes place in order to increase residential lot size beyond the affordability of all except the wealthy. He does not restrict this attitude to change only to prevent a population increase. He suggests that people living in the exurbs are dead set against new industry coming into the countryside. This industrial reference is supported by G. Eckbo who claims that "industrialization has released forces which will destroy the landscape unless consciously controlled." Rural estaters do not want to control new industry on their landscape. Quite simply, they do not want it or any other associated type of development, such as transmission lines, that represents change.

Responses from the rural estaters interviewed clearly illustrate their resistance. They cited problems of noise, traffic, congestion and invasion of privacy as being a direct result of development. The location of transmission lines in proximity to their rural homes represents change to their life styles. This change will be rejected because transmission lines are associated with the disamenities that rural estaters are seeking refuge from. To many rural estaters, transmission lines also represent a visual intrusion to their life styles.

As G. Robinette states in the book *Energy and the Environment*, "the ungainliness of the structures required to hold the lines have caused a visual blight in human perception of the natural landscape features." The idea of visual blight was substantiated by several rural estaters who

perceive transmission lines as an eyesore and an unattractive component to their landscape. It is their perception that the imposition of a transmission line will destroy the scenery.

However, there is an exception to rural estaters' usual negative attitude toward transmission lines. Established transmission lines are much more readily accepted as a neutral component of the landscape and people contemplating a move to the exurbs will not hesitate to locate near one. Field observations confirmed this as numerous examples were found of rural residences being located in proximity to an established transmission line. This could be interpreted to mean that it is the change, not the transmission line, they usually resent.

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CONCLUSIONS

There is no doubt that planning transmission lines in the exurbs is going to be more difficult in the future as the exodus of people moving to the country increases. Since their numbers increase, it is only natural that they will be more vocal about any change to their chosen life styles. Further, there is no doubt that a new transmission line represents change. In the future, transmission line planners will need to put greater emphasis on this emerging group and give them equal consideration with other groups, such as farmers and urban residents.

Heavy concentrations of rural estates in the exurb areas should be identified, mapped and avoided if possible when locating new lines. When this is not possible, consideration should be given for new ways

to meet the rural estates' needs and wants. For example, those in close proximity to the transmission line should be compensated for loss of life style. Towers could be camouflaged in order to ease the impact. When this is not possible, funding should be allocated for vegetative screening and associated landscaping.

SUGGESTIONS ON FUTURE STUDY

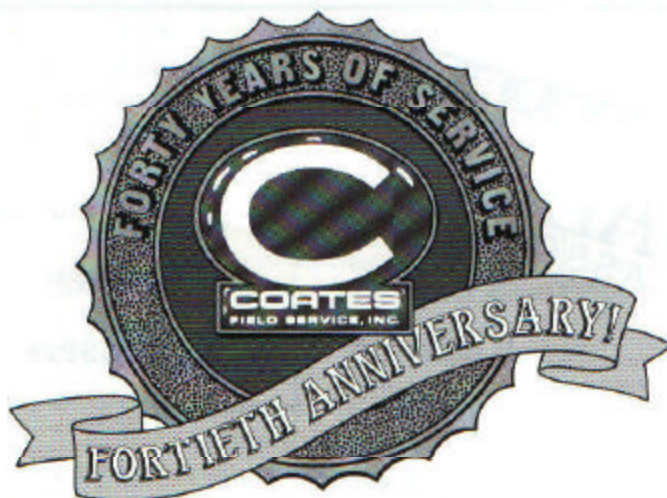
Planning transmission lines in the exurbs is certainly going to be a challenge in the future. This discussion described preliminary thoughts on the subject and certainly the techniques and results were not very refined or scientific. The following are some suggestions on possible future study:

- 1) More in depth study on the concepts such as the rural residential types.

- 2) A larger sample of interviewees for the different rural residential types, their feelings about change and how they perceive transmission lines.
- 3) Is monetary compensation for loss of life style feasible or realistic? For example, Ontario Hydro has offered buy out options for land-owners not directly affected by the transmission line but within 75 meters (250 feet) of the edge of the right of way. Of course, this poses the question: why 75 meters?
- 4) Are property values really affected by the location of a transmission line?
- 5) Why do people build a residence and, in some cases, a large and expensive one, right next to an established transmission line?
- 6) Are Spector's 1955 observations still valid? For example, is the commuter distance of one hour still feasible after 35 years given the better transportation modes of today? **IRWA**

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