

Proposed Header: A New Year is here – but UI’s commitment to customers is unwavering
By Jim Cole

As we usher in a new year, we embrace a pivotal phase of an important grid resiliency project that has been in various stages of development and construction for more than a decade.

Finishing what we started means reconstructing the Fairfield to Congress portion of our transmission grid, the last seven miles of a 25-mile rebuild that represents the fifth and final phase of a much larger, comprehensive program. Once completed, that program will allow Fairfield and Bridgeport residents, all UI customers, and millions of people served by ISO-New England to enjoy the benefits of a strengthened transmission network.

That is why we continue to engage the Fairfield and Bridgeport communities in our plans, which are currently being considered by the Connecticut Siting Council (CSC), just as we did with the communities along the corridor in the program’s previous phases.

All this has been a truly extensive process. In particular, the evidentiary hearing phase, which concluded late last year, was thorough and thoughtful, designed to consider all stakeholders fairly, provide information to the community, and evaluate all options for enhancing the reliability and resiliency of our transmission infrastructure. Six hearings, each several hours in length, with intricate project details, questions asked and answered with meticulous attention. The hearings followed numerous community discussions that started more than two years ago, in addition to a [website](#) created specifically for this project that includes numerous, factual informational resources such as pole heights, easement information, project mapping and more. The full CSC application, which details this and more, can be found [here](#).

CSC’s public comment period now comes to a close on January 11, when we will submit a brief that summarizes the need, benefits, and impacts of the project as presented during the CSC hearings.

There is much to consider in the weeks ahead, and UI looks forward to receiving a final determination in March from the CSC for the project’s Scope of Work (SOW) that is deemed the most equitable and prudent to *all* stakeholders. As the CSC reviews the project information and considers community feedback, we are confident facts will guide the important decisions that lie ahead. We recognize there are disagreements among the parties and intervenors, but as we strive to complete this project in good faith, it is important to recognize the points we do agree on:

Upgraded infrastructure is a priority. UI’s existing infrastructure has run atop the railroad catenaries in the corridor for more than 60 years – and in some cases more than 80 years – and is at the end of its useful service life. The current lines require modernization to continue delivering the safe, reliable power that UI prioritizes for its customers, now and well into the future, to allow for better management and monitoring and to decrease the risk of asset condition-related outages.

A strong electric grid is also a cornerstone to economic opportunity. Access to reliable power attracts business and industry, leads to investments, and creates jobs. Nanoramic Laboratories’ recent announcement of 200 high-tech jobs coming to Bridgeport, and others like it, are not possible without the energy capabilities UI is providing to the economic pipeline.

Upgraded infrastructure requires proactive planning. Meeting the long-term electricity needs of our customers requires forward-thinking to address evolving energy usage, community impact, and economic opportunities in UI municipalities and throughout the region. To power green energy into the future, this project must prepare for greater electrification demands, which ISO-New England projects will double over current peak levels by 2050.

Safeguarding the environment requires long-term strategic decisions – including a proposed project area that avoids existing wildlife and resources, such as wetlands and watercourses – to adhere to UI’s long-standing commitment to sustainability.

Upgraded infrastructure has a price tag. Upgraded infrastructure is paid for by customers. We must prove our proposed projects are prudent and presented at the most affordable cost, because that cost is shared: not just for our customers in Fairfield or Bridgeport, but well beyond UI’s territory, extending to all 14 million customers served by ISO-New England.

Upgraded infrastructure can be achieved with participation. Project mailers, public forums, bill inserts, municipal meetings, legal notices, and public signage represent some of the outreach efforts our team used to inform stakeholders about this project. We look forward to continued opportunities to speak directly with our customers on this important initiative, and we will work together with community partners on whichever design is selected.

With more than 10 years invested in this effort, in many ways our work at UI is only just beginning. As always, we are committed to providing reliable, resilient service to our customers, and we will remain responsive to community feedback while we work to prepare the electric grid for the energy Connecticut – and New England – will need in 2024 and in the years to come.

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