



Preparing a Northern Pass Visual Impact Analysis for the NH Site Evaluation Committee

Background: Visual impacts are part of the current SEC criteria in determining whether the State of NH will issue a certificate – specifically the SEC must make a finding that the proposed facility will not have an unreasonable adverse effect on ‘aesthetics’¹, which includes visual impacts. To be effective citizens presenting Northern Pass visual impacts before the SEC should use a structured and consistent format. Citizens presenting lots of different low to high cumulative visual impact examples in an accepted and consistent format could be a useful tool in making the case before the SEC that a cumulative undue adverse effect on ‘aesthetics’ exists.

Visual Impact analysis protocol: Some argue that visual impact analysis is totally subjective, but that is a red herring argument. There are established and accepted protocol for assessing visual impacts, which are used and recommended by the US Forest Service, US Bureau of Land Management, the National Academy of Science, etc. Visual impacts may be assessed from a single view to cumulatively.

Cumulative scenic visual impacts (effects) generally means the potential adverse effect on the scenic character and existing uses resulting from the incremental impact of a proposed project within a viewshed. Incremental impacts are based on the *combined, successive* and/or *sequential* observation of a proposed development within a viewshed. In the Northern Pass scenario ‘*combined*’ means a view from a viewpoint of more than one tower within the single field of a viewer; ‘*successive*’ means seeing multiple towers from a single viewpoint as viewer turns his/her head; and *sequential* means a view of more than one group of towers located within a viewshed as the viewer travels along a route located in a viewshed. Unlikely is that a single viewpoint of the Northern Pass project, even if from a viewpoint of national significance, may sway the SEC that an undue adverse impact on aesthetics exists, more likely would be the case for a “death of a thousand cuts” or cumulative impacts. Northern Pass may try to limit the review to a select, small set of recognized state or nationally significant viewpoints, e.g. the Appalachian National Scenic Trail and argue that the impact is not “undue”.

The opportunity exists for citizens to provide -- using standard terminology and reporting -- multiple, site-specific evidence in the SEC hearing that a cumulative visual impact on the landscape from viewpoints of other than just of recognized state or national significance.

Useful tools: The AMC visual flyover for the full route provides proposed tower locations and heights (at <http://www.outdoors.org/conservation/wherewework/wmnf/northern-pass-video-project.cfm>)

At Northern Pass’s ‘My Town’ web site <http://www.northernpass.us/towns.htm> click on your affected area town(s) and download the individual aerial photo segments for proposed tower location maps.

Additional visual impact protocol information is at AMC’s 2012 visual report at Section III - “Framework”. <http://www.outdoors.org/pdf/upload/NorthernPassVisualImpactAssessmentFinalReport.pdf>

¹ Chapter 162-H:16, Findings and Certificate Issuance. Section IV. C.

Cumulative Northern Pass Visual Impact Analysis

A. Name and address of the person reporting:

B. Describe location of single viewpoint and/or multiple viewpoints along a travel route (road, hike or other):

C. Attach map of viewpoint(s):

D. Picture(s) attached: yes ___ no ___

E. The expected visual impact is of a (i) single tower _____ ; (ii) combined (likely multiple towers in a viewpoint, # or range) _____ ; (iii) successive (multiple towers as viewer moves his/her head at a viewpoint, # or range) _____ ; (iv) sequential (see more than one group of tower(s) while traveling along a route, #), describe:

F. Approximate distance(s) from the viewpoint(s) to the proposed Northern Pass Towers

G. Would this view(s) of Northern Pass tower(s) be a prominent and inharmonious feature of the landscape as viewed from a sensitive viewpoint(s), if so how?

H. Would this view(s) of Northern Pass tower(s) offend the sensibilities of a reasonable person; if so how?

I. Would this view(s) of Northern Pass tower(s) impact the existing character of the area of potential effect in the host community and communities abutting or in the vicinity of the proposed facility; if so how?

J. What is the significance of the affected viewpoints?

K. What would be the expected extent, nature, and/or duration of public uses of the affected viewpoint(s)?

L. What would be the expected number (rate) of impacted public members at this viewpoint(s) [e.g. # of daily residents/day; # of tourist impacted per year, etc.]

M. What would be the expected scope and scale of the change in the landscape visible from the affected viewpoint(s)?

N. Other

Note: Word choice should be concise, clear, and convincing; not 'snarky'.