

NEWS

\$6 billion power line from Canada to NYC flowing below capacity, experts say



Courtesy of Gov. Hochul's office

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13 comments

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New York City's \$6 billion power line from Canada was supposed to bring enough energy to power one million homes. Instead, it's been operating at a trickle since coming on line in June.

The Champlain Hudson Power Express, a 339-mile subterranean transmission line that links the Big Apple to hydropower plants in Quebec, has been touted as a lifeline for New York. Gov. Kathy Hochul called it a "game changer" and said it could meet 20% of New York City's energy needs while helping to cut carbon emissions.

But that assumes energy is flowing continuously, at full blast. In August, the transmission line was operating far below full capacity, according to the state grid operator's records and energy analysts.

Robert McCullough, an energy expert who analyzed the deliveries, found that in August the transmission line was operating, on average, at 24% capacity.

"It's time for a thorough review of this contract and the expectations over the next six months, because not only does it look like New Yorkers are not getting what they were promised, but they're likely to get considerably less," said McCullough, principal at McCullough Research.

The state's contract with Hydro-Québec, the Canadian company supplying the power along CHPE, doesn't specify how much energy will be delivered and when.

"There is no requirement in the contract for Hydro-Québec to provide continuous power on a daily basis," said Deanne Cohen, a spokesperson for the state.

Hydro-Québec told Gothamist that it concentrates its deliveries to New York City during periods of higher demand, such as heat waves.

“Rather than maximizing flows during lower-value periods, such as overnight hours when demand is typically lower, we are prioritizing deliveries during periods when the environmental and economic benefits to New York are greatest,” said Lynn St-Laurent, a spokesperson for the company.

But an analysis by Ken Girardin, a fellow at the Manhattan Institute, a conservative public policy think tank, found that power flow didn’t always line up with peak demand.

Girardin noted instances when CHPE’s energy was flowing during lower times of electricity demand, but not during some hotter periods of the day.

“No idea what cutoff they're using, but 1 p.m. on a humid August afternoon seems like a weird time to turn off CHPE,” Girardin said.



His conclusion was that CHPE is not operating like a dependable energy source.

“When you come back to the question of how this was sold to the public and what the supposed environmental benefits were going to be, there's a big gap between how CHPE is performing and how it was sold,” Girardin said. “The state has not been clear about why or when CHPE is being used to deliver power into the city.”

During its first month of full operation in July, power stopped flowing for most of the month because of two outages. The first was the result of an unspecified technical issue on the Canadian side that stopped flow on July 1. About two days later, power went down again because of a damaged section of underground cable on the New York side that took about 10 days to troubleshoot.