

GREAT RIVER ENERGY

MINNESOTA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

MPUC DOCKET NO. ET2/TL-24-132
OAH DOCKET NO. 21-2500-40445

DIRECT TESTIMONY OF MICHAEL SWENSON

April 22, 2025

I. INTRODUCTIONS AND QUALIFICATIONS

Q. Please state your name, employer, and business address.

A. My name is Michael Swenson. I am a Transmission Permitting Specialist with Great River Energy. My business address is 12300 Elm Creek Boulevard, Maple Grove, Minnesota 55369.

Q. Please briefly describe your educational and professional background and experience.

A. I have a bachelor's degree in biology from Luther College. I hold certificates in Construction Site Management and SWPPP Design from the University of Minnesota Erosion and Stormwater Management Certification Program, and a Minnesota Wetland Professional Certificate from the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources. I joined Great River Energy as a Transmission Permitting Specialist in 2023. In my role as a Transmission Permitting Specialist, I am responsible for managing and obtaining all environmental permits, including Minnesota Public Utilities Commission ("Commission") route permits for transmission projects. I also advise Great River Energy staff on environmental and permitting implications during the early project planning phases. I had 16 years of experience providing environmental regulatory guidance related to Project management, engineering, land rights, and construction prior to joining Great River Energy.

Q. What is your role with respect to the Laketown 115 kilovolt ("kV") transmission line project ("Project")?

A. My role is to assist in selecting the Project route; assist with stakeholder outreach and community relations for the Project; obtain all necessary permits, licenses, and approvals for the construction and operation of the Project; and ensure compliance with permit and license conditions through the construction and energization of the Project.

1 **Q. What is the purpose of your Direct Testimony?**

2 A. The purpose of my Direct Testimony is to: describe the Project; discuss the Project
3 schedule; describe the Applicants' coordination and consultation with the
4 Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office ("SHPO"); and discuss the
5 Applicants' review of the Environmental Assessment ("EA").
6

7 **Q. What Schedules are attached to your Direct Testimony?**

8 A. Attached to my Direct Testimony as **Schedule A** is a copy of the Project fact sheet
9 and open house map.
10

11 **Q. Are you also sponsoring the Application?**

12 A. Yes, I am sponsoring the entire Route Permit Application.¹
13

14 **II. PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

15

16 **Q. Please provide a summary of the Project.**

17 A. Great River Energy and Minnesota Valley Electric Cooperative ("MVEC")
18 (together, "Applicants") are proposing to build a new 4.3-mile 115-kV double-circuit
19 high voltage transmission line ("HVTL") in Laketown and Dahlgren Townships in
20 Carver County, Minnesota. The Project also includes construction of a new MVEC-
21 owned substation in Laketown Township (the "Laketown Substation"). The HVTL
22 will be constructed and owned by Great River Energy; the Laketown Substation
23 will be constructed and owned by MVEC. The Project will connect Great River
24 Energy's existing 115kV MV-VTT transmission line to the proposed Laketown
25 Substation.
26

27 **Q. Why are Applicants proposing the Project?**

28 A. The Project is needed to provide electric energy to the new Laketown Substation,
29 which will provide service to end users within MVEC's service territory. That

¹ Route Permit Application (Aug. 19, 2024) (eDocket No. [20248-209604-02](#)) ("Application").

1 service territory includes portions of Carver, Sibley, Scott, Rice, and LeSueur
2 counties. The Project is needed to provide reliable electric service to current and
3 future end-use customers in the rapidly growing area near the Project. The ability
4 to operate at the 115-kV voltage will ensure there is sufficient electrical capability
5 to serve increased electrical demand in the future. In his Direct Testimony, my
6 colleague Nicholas Goater will provide additional details regarding how the
7 Project's Proposed Route has been designed to reliably meet this need.

8
9 **Q. Please describe Great River Energy's routing process for the Project.**

10 A. Great River Energy's routing process is described in Section 4 of the Application.²
11 The first step in identifying route alternatives is to identify local, existing
12 transmission lines and then determine if the line can sufficiently support the needs
13 of the Project. That process identified five route options which were ultimately
14 rejected and not studied further because they either would not meet the long-term
15 reliability or transmission planning needs of the Project or would present threshold
16 routing difficulties that present constructability and logistical concerns. Then, as
17 described in Section 4.3 of the Application, Great River Energy considered two
18 route alternatives that would connect the Laketown Substation to Great River
19 Energy's existing MV-VTT line.³ These route alternatives were ultimately rejected
20 in favor of the Proposed Route because the Project's Proposed Route better
21 avoids and minimizes potential human and environmental impacts, consistent with
22 the Commission's routing criteria.

23
24 **Q. Did the Applicants' routing process include landowner outreach?**

25 A. Definitely, as we do with every project. More specifically, the Applicants held two
26 open house sessions at the Chaska Event Center in January 2024. Invitations to
27 the open house sessions, including a Project fact sheet with a map of the routes
28 being considered, were mailed to property owners of record for approximately 100

² Application at 4-1 to 4-11 (Aug. 19, 2024) (eDocket No. [20248-209604-02](#)).

³ Application at 4-3 (Aug. 19, 2024) (eDocket No. [20248-209604-02](#)).

1 parcels. The fact sheet and map is included as **Schedule A** to my testimony. Prior
2 to the open houses, Great River Energy was considering three potential routes for
3 the Transmission Line (Option 1 [or, the Proposed Route], Option 2 [or, the Xcel
4 Energy Powerline Alternative], or Option 3 [or, the CSAH 10 Alternative]).
5 Therefore, the Applicants included landowners within 500 feet of each of the three
6 route options considered in open house mailings to ensure that all interested
7 parties along the considered routes were aware of the meeting. The mailing was
8 also sent to representatives from regulatory agencies and local governments.
9 Advertisements promoting the open houses were placed in two regional
10 newspapers. Approximately 30 people attended the open house sessions. The
11 majority of the attendees were landowners associated with the three route options.
12 Project technical representatives provided information about the Project and
13 answered questions and/or responded to comments concerning:

- 14 • the reason for the Project;
- 15 • the process for permitting;
- 16 • easement requirements and acquisition;
- 17 • use of existing corridors for a nearby Xcel Energy 230-kV
18 transmission line (Option 2) or CSAH 10 (Option 3) to route the
19 Transmission Line;
- 20 • concerns with planned and future development along Option 2 or
21 Option 3
- 22 • questions regarding electric magnetic fields (EMF)
- 23 • Project timeline; and
- 24 • questions on the impact on members' electrical service.

25
26 **Q. Why did Great River Energy invite landowners along multiple route**
27 **alternatives to the open house?**

28 A. We wanted to make sure we got a full range of input from potentially impacted
29 landowners. At the time of the open houses, we had not reached a conclusion

1 regarding which route to propose in the Application, and the feedback we received
2 from landowners at the open houses was an important consideration in designating
3 a proposed route.
4

5 **Q. Did the Applicants' routing process include agency and local government**
6 **coordination?**

7 A. Yes. As with landowner outreach, this is both a standard and an important part of
8 our typical project development process. Agency and local government
9 representatives were invited to the open houses I described above. In addition,
10 after the open houses, the Applicants met twice with the Carver County Highway
11 Department, as well as the City of Victoria, Laketown Township, and Dahlgren
12 Township. Appendix E of the Application includes the pre-Application-filing Tribal,
13 agency, and local government coordination the Applicants conducted as part of
14 Project and route development. As reflected in Appendix E, the Applicants sought
15 input from the following stakeholders regarding the Project prior to filing the
16 Application: Tribes in Minnesota; U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; U.S. Fish and
17 Wildlife Service; Minnesota Department of Agriculture; Minnesota Department of
18 Health; Minnesota Department of Natural Resources; Minnesota Department of
19 Transportation; Minnesota Indian Affairs Council; Office of State Archaeologist;
20 Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources; Carver County; City of Victoria;
21 and Southwest Trails Association.
22

23 **Q. Does the Application describe the route options Great River Energy**
24 **considered but did not study further?**

25 A. Yes. Section 4.2 of the Application provides a detailed discussion of these options.
26 The first option considered and rejected in the Application is also nonetheless
27 being evaluated in the EA is Route Alternative B. The Applicants did not consider
28 Route Alternative B further because it would require multiple substations, including
29 the proposed new Laketown Substation, to be co-dependent on a single 115-kV

1 circuit.⁴ Mr. Goater describes Great River Energy's reasons for rejecting this option
2 in further detail.

3
4 **Q. Did Great River Energy consider any route alternatives in further detail for**
5 **the Project?**

6 A. Yes. Great River Energy considered two route alternatives that originate at the MV-
7 VTT 115-kV transmission line along Victoria Drive/Guernsey Avenue and connect
8 to the Laketown Substation: the CSAH 10 Alternative and the Xcel Energy
9 Powerline Alternative.

10
11 The CSAH 10 Route Alternative (described in the EA as Route Alternative A) is
12 collocated in its entirety with CSAH 10 and was initially designed in this manner to
13 maximize collocation with an existing right-of-way. The Xcel Energy Powerline
14 Alternative (described in the EA as Route Alternative C) is collocated on the north
15 side of an existing Xcel 230-kV transmission line.

16
17 **Q. Why did Great River Energy reject the CSAH 10 and Xcel Energy Powerline**
18 **Alternatives?**

19 A. Great River Energy rejected the CSAH 10 and Xcel Energy Powerline Alternatives
20 due to human impact considerations. As discussed in Section 4.3.2 of the
21 Application, Great River Energy rejected the CSAH 10 Alternative due to long-
22 standing and detailed plans for the reconstruction/realignment and expansion of
23 CSAH 10, as detailed by Carver County, as well as the proximity of existing
24 residences along CSAH 10. Great River Energy rejected the Xcel Energy
25 Powerline Alternative due to the City of Victoria's concerns that the Project would
26 "severely prohibit development" of an area that has been "highly anticipated for the
27 last few decades to become the commercial hub for the city."⁵ Great River Energy's
28 analysis is discussed extensively in Section 4.3 of the Application.

⁴ Application at 4-1 (Aug. 19, 2024) (eDocket No. [20248-209604-02](#)).

⁵ Application at 4-9 (Aug. 19, 2024) (eDocket No. [20248-209604-02](#)).

1
2 **Q. Please discuss Great River Energy's coordination with Carver County**
3 **regarding the Project and potentially routing along CSAH 10.**

4 A. Working with road authorities is an important part of route development. Consistent
5 with the Commission's routing criteria, we initially evaluate potential routes along
6 roadways and other linear features, and early coordination with road authorities
7 provides important information regarding potential conflicts (and opportunities) for
8 routing along roads. Here, our early coordination with Carver County revealed that
9 the County does not support routing along CSAH 10 because of the County's
10 relatively near-term plans for the road. Specifically, Great River Energy met with
11 representatives from Carver County multiple times and exchanged detailed
12 information regarding the Project and the County's plans for CSAH 10 as part of
13 our route development. That correspondence is included in Appendix E to the
14 Application. Carver County stated that it did not recommend routing along CSAH
15 10 because it would interfere with the County's plans to realign and widen that
16 road in the next 5-10 years. Similarly, in a letter dated October 31, 2024, Carver
17 County Public Works expressed support for the Proposed Route and indicated that
18 it does not wish the Project to interfere with the County's right-of-way requirements
19 for its upcoming improvements to CSAH.

20
21 **Q. Please discuss Great River Energy's coordination with the City of Victoria**
22 **regarding the Project.**

23 A. Great River Energy coordinated with the City of Victoria as part of our
24 consideration of an alternative following the existing 230-kV Xcel Energy line
25 (which does not follow a road). The City of Victoria notified Great River Energy that
26 this Route Alternative is located within land that will eventually become part of the
27 City of Victoria through an annexation agreement with Laketown Township, and
28 that the City would like to develop this property for commercial and industrial use
29 in the near future. The City's position is that the presence of the transmission line
30 and right-of-way building restrictions would deter such development (see
31 correspondence in Appendix E). Great River Energy later met with the City of

1 Victoria on February 22, 2024, to discuss the Project, and the City of Victoria
2 submitted a letter to Great River Energy on February 27, 2024, restating the City's
3 concerns with a route following the existing 230-kV line. As I understand the City's
4 position, because the existing 230-kV line is cross-country (does not follow a road),
5 placing another right-of-way along that existing line would increase the magnitude
6 of potential impact.

7
8 **Q. What is the schedule for the Project?**

9 A. The Applicants anticipate starting construction on the Laketown Substation in
10 spring 2027 and on the HVTL in fall 2027 and energizing the Project in the summer
11 of 2028.

12
13 **Q. Does the Application describe the proposed Laketown Substation?**

14 A. Yes. The proposed Laketown Substation is discussed in Section 3.2 of the
15 Application. The substation will be constructed, owned, and operated by MVEC
16 within property owned by MVEC.

17
18 **III. SHPO STATUS UPDATE**

19
20 **Q. The Commission authorized the Applicants to initiate consultation with**
21 **SHPO related to the Project and directed the Applicants to inform the**
22 **Commission of the status of that consultation with pre-filed testimony. Are**
23 **you aware of that authorization?**

24 A. Yes. In this section of my Direct Testimony, I will provide an update regarding our
25 coordination with SHPO regarding the Project. I will also describe our coordination
26 with Tribal Nations regarding the Project.

27
28 **Q. Please describe the cultural resources analysis the Applicants have**
29 **conducted for the Project.**

30 A. As discussed in Section 6.6 of the Application, a cultural resource literature review
31 was conducted for the Project and provided to SHPO in a letter dated March 13,

2024. SHPO responded on May 14, 2024. This correspondence is included in Appendix E of the Application. In its correspondence, SHPO recommended a Phase 1 archaeological survey for the Project due to the lack of prior survey in the area. Prior to construction, Great River Energy will complete the survey recommended by SHPO on the route selected by the Commission and the Laketown Substation location.

Q. Do you have updates regarding SHPO coordination since the Application was filed?

A. No, not at this time. As I noted, once the Commission selects a route for the Project, Great River Energy will conduct the field survey recommended by SHPO and submit the results of that survey for SHPO review and concurrence.

Q. Have the Applicants requested input from Tribal Nations regarding the Project?

A. Yes. Great River Energy requested feedback on the Project from the 11 federally recognized Tribes with geography within Minnesota and the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council in its Project notification letters sent in April 2024. As of the date of Application filing, two Tribes had responded. The Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community responded on April 19, 2024, stating that there are no concerns. On May 3, 2024, the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe responded that they do not have any recorded historic properties within this area but noted that this does not mean there are not any cultural resources present, at this time. To date, Applicants have not received additional input from any Tribal Nations.

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT & DRAFT ROUTE PERMIT

Q. Have you reviewed the EA and Draft Route Permit prepared by the Minnesota Department of Commerce Energy Environmental Review and Analysis (“DOC-EERA”) unit for the Project?

A. Yes, I have reviewed the documents.

1
2 **Q. DOC-EERA recommended including in the Draft Route Permit Special**
3 **Condition Section 6.1 (Phase 1 Archaeological Survey), which requires the**
4 **permittee to conduct a Phase 1 archeological survey of the permitted route;**
5 **share the results of the survey with the SHPO; implement any**
6 **recommendations received from SHPO resulting from the survey; keep**
7 **records of compliance with Draft Route Permit Special Condition Section 6.1;**
8 **and provide records of compliance to Commission staff upon request. What**
9 **is your response?**

10 A. The Applicants have no objection to this special condition. Great River Energy will
11 conduct a Phase I Archaeological Reconnaissance of the route selected by the
12 Commission and the Laketown Substation and adhere to the requirements of Draft
13 Route Permit Special Condition Section 6.1.
14

15 **Q. Will the Applicants have additional comments on the EA?**

16 A. Yes. We are continuing to review the EA, including its analysis of route
17 alternatives, and will provide additional analysis in forthcoming comments on the
18 EA.
19

20 **V. CONCLUSION**

21

22 **Q. Does this conclude your Direct Testimony?**

23 A. Yes.
24



Great River Energy
12300 Elm Creek Boulevard
Maple Grove, MN 55369
1-888-521-0130
greatriverenergy.com



Minnesota Valley Electric Cooperative
125 Minnesota Valley Electric Drive
Jordan, MN 55352-0125
952-492-2313
mvec.net

Laketown 115-kV transmission line project

Great River Energy, wholesale power provider to Minnesota Valley Electric Cooperative, proposes to build approximately 3 to 5 miles of 115-kilovolt (kV) electric transmission lines within Laketown and Dahlgren Townships in Carver County. A route permit must be issued by the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (PUC) before construction can begin.

Overview

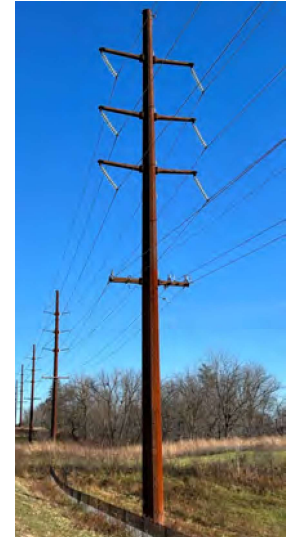
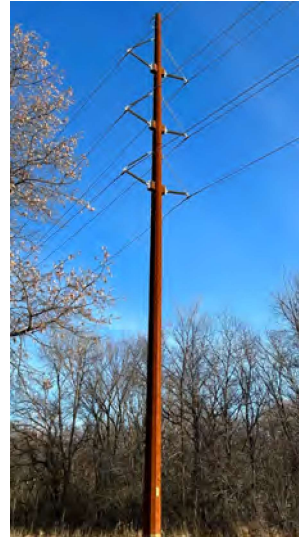
Great River Energy is planning to construct a new 115-kV double-circuit transmission line to power a new distribution substation being built by Minnesota Valley Electric Cooperative at the northwest corner of the intersection of Carver County Road 10 and Laketown Road (see map on back). Great River Energy is currently reviewing three potential routes for the new transmission line as depicted on the map.

Transmission line construction will generally use single direct-embedded steel poles 70 to 95 feet tall, placed 300 to 450 feet apart. Some specialty poles, including steel on foundation, may be required for larger angles. To provide a safe construction, operation and maintenance area, a 100-foot-wide right of way, 50 feet each side of the centerline, will need to be maintained to be clear of trees and vegetation.

Permitting and public involvement

Great River Energy will host a public open house in early 2024 to share additional project information with landowners, local government officials and other stakeholders to solicit input on the project.

Great River Energy will apply for a route permit from the PUC. During the route permitting process, all stakeholders will have opportunities to provide input on the project, including public meetings facilitated by the PUC and the Department of Commerce Energy Environmental Review and Analysis (DOC EERA). The DOC EERA will prepare an environmental assessment for the project.



Typical 115-kV structures

Great River Energy will work with county, state and federal agencies to secure any other required environmental or construction and road crossing permits.

Easements

Once the project has been approved by the PUC, landowners will be contacted to begin the easement acquisition process. Easements will be needed to provide adequate land rights for construction, operation and maintenance of the new line. Landowners will be presented with a copy of the route permit, easement and compensation settlement offer. Information will also be provided on the proposed design and pole locations, along with information on tree removal, construction access, settlement of damages and restoration of the right-of-way.

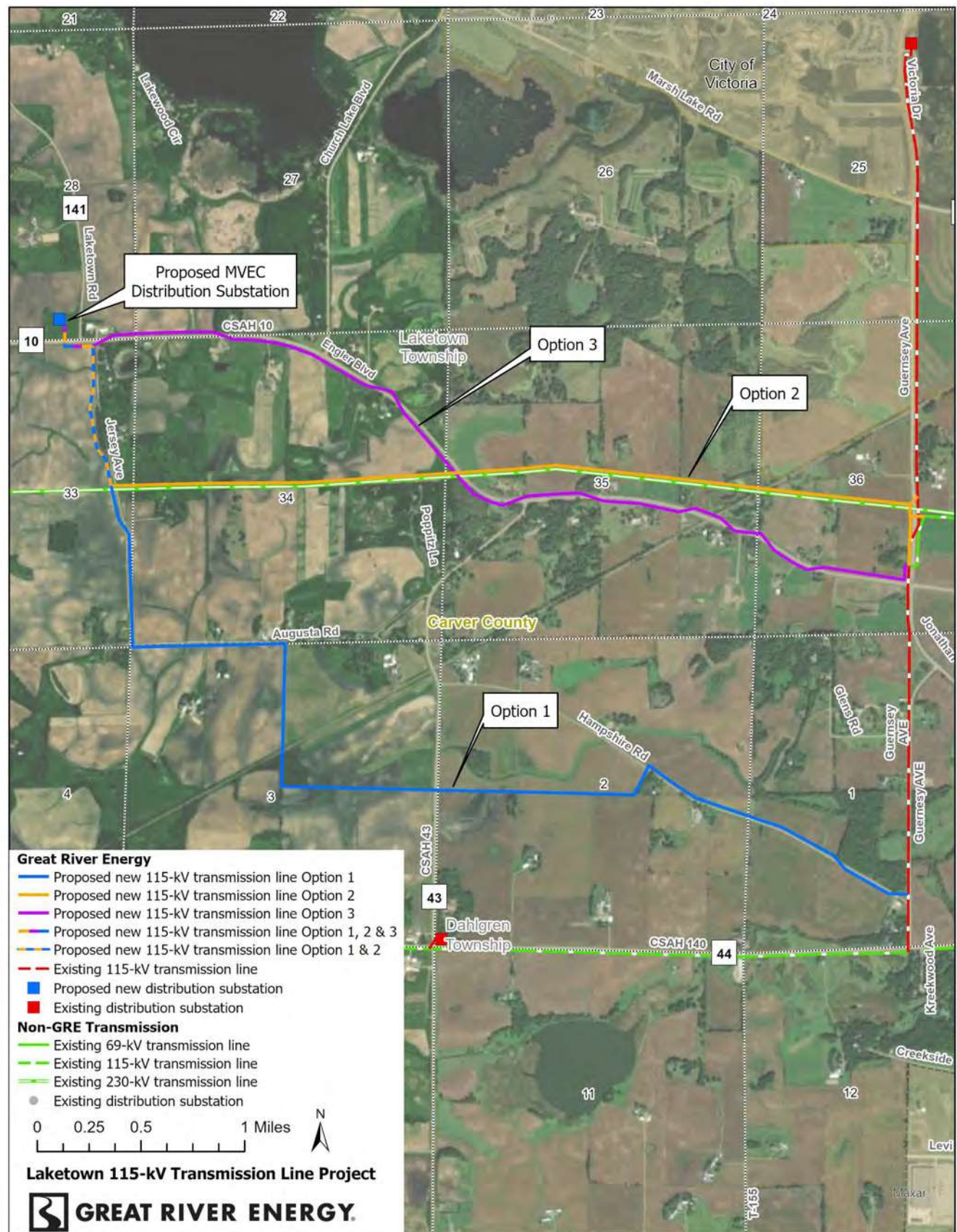
Schedule

State permitting	Summer 2024 – Spring 2026
Survey/design	Spring 2026
Easements/ Environmental permits	Summer 2026 – Fall 2027
Transmission line construction	Fall 2027 – Summer 2028
Energization	Summer 2028

Quick facts

Length	– 3 to 5 miles
Voltage	– 115-kV
Structures	– 70 to 95 feet tall
Spans	– 300 to 450 feet apart
Right of way	– Up to 100-foot-wide right of way, 50 feet on each side on the center line
Permits	– MN Public Utilities Commission route permit

Proposed project



1/02/2024

Great River Energy representatives

For project updates and information, visit www.greatriverenergy.com/laketown or contact any of the following

Michelle Lommel
Sr. Field Representative, Land Rights
763-445-5977 | mlommel@greenergy.com

Michael Swenson
Transmission Permitting Specialist
763-445-5979 | 952-807-4537 | mswenson@greenergy.com