

Staff Briefing Papers

Meeting Date: January 29, 2026

Agenda Item 2*

Company: Northern States Power Company d/b/a Xcel Energy

Docket: E-002/TL-22-132

In the Matter of the Applications of Xcel Energy for a Certificate of Need and Route Permit for the Minnesota Energy Connection Project in Sherburne, Stearns, Kandiyohi, Wright, Meeker, Chippewa, Yellow Medicine, Renville, Redwood, and Lyon counties in Minnesota.

- Issues:**
- Should the Commission amend the route permit as requested by the Permittee?
 - If the route permit amendment is authorized, what additional conditions, if any, should the Commission impose?

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✓ Relevant Documents	Date
Application to the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission for a Route Permit for the Minnesota Energy Connection Project (43 parts, one part is Trade Secret)	10/30/2023
Final Environmental Impact Statement (13 parts)	01/22/2025

The attached materials are work papers of the Commission Staff. They are intended for use by the Public Utilities Commission and are based upon information already in the record unless noted otherwise.

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✓ Relevant Documents	Date
Order Modifying and Adopting Administrative Law Judge Report, Granting Certificate of Need, and Issuing Route Permit for the Minnesota Energy Connection Project	06/11/2025
Route Permit Amendment Application	11/24/2025
Wyatt Johansen Comment Letter	12/03/2025
Minnesota Public Utilities Commission Energy Infrastructure Permitting (EIP) Staff comments and Recommendations	12/18/2025
Thomas Hook Comment Letter	12/22/2025
Xcel Energy Reply Comment Letter	12/23/2025

ISSUES

- Should the Commission amend the route permit as requested by the Permittee?
- If the route permit amendment is authorized, what additional conditions, if any, should the Commission impose?

PROJECT BACKGROUND

On June 11, 2025, the Commission issued an *Order Modifying and Adopting Administrative Law Judge Report, Granting Certificate Of Need, And Issuing Route Permit For The Minnesota Energy Connection Project* to Northern States Power Company, doing business as Xcel Energy (Xcel Energy) for the construction and operation of the Minnesota Energy Connection project (project).¹ On November 24, 2025, Xcel Energy filed a request to amend the route permit under Minn. Stat. § 216I.09.² Xcel Energy is requesting an amendment to shift a short segment of the approved transmission line route in Redwood County south to instead follow an approximately 2.5 mile portion along the north side of County Road 4. For this

¹ Minnesota Public Utilities Commission, *Order Modifying and Adopting Administrative Law Judge Report, Granting Certificate of Need, and Issuing Route Permit for the Minnesota Energy Connection Project*, June 11, 2025, eDockets No. [20256-219823-01](#)

² Xcel Energy, *Route Permit Amendment to the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission for the Minnesota Energy Connection Project*, November 24, 2025, eDockets No. [202511-225238-01](#)

amended segment, Xcel Energy is proposing a 200-foot route width and a 150-foot right-of-way. Xcel Energy indicated that the proposed permit amendment is the result of landowner coordination, and that the amendment would reduce tree clearing and would avoid drainage ditches associated with a landowner's planned erosion control berms. Xcel Energy noted that landowners whose property is crossed by the proposed amended route are agreeable to the amended route. Xcel Energy indicated that it does not oppose the proposed amended route because it is the same length as the permitted route and does not increase impacts or costs.

RULES AND STATUTES

Minn. Stat. § 216I.09 establishes the process for amending a Commission-issued site or route permit for a large energy infrastructure facility. The permittee must submit a written application describing the proposed amendment and explaining how the request qualifies under the statute, including identifying any changes to environmental impacts evaluated by the Commission as part of the original permit approval. If the proposal would cause significant changes in those impacts, additional environmental review is required.

The Commission must mail notice that the application was received and provide at least a 10-day public comment period, with up to seven days for the applicant to respond. Within 30 days after the permittee's response, the Commission must either authorize the amendment, bring the matter to the Commission for consideration, or determine that a different permitting decision is required under this chapter. The Commission may approve the amendment with reasonable conditions and must provide written notice to the permittee and to anyone who commented or requested notification.

SUMMARY OF COMMENTS

The Commission issued a Notice of Comment Period on the Route Permit Amendment Application on December 4, 2025.³ Initial written comments were accepted through December 18, 2025; reply comments through December 26, 2025; and supplemental comments through December 31, 2025. The Commission received comments from two landowners, Wyatt Johansen and Thomas Hook. Commission Energy Infrastructure Permitting (EIP) staff also provided comments. Xcel Energy provided reply comments. No comments were received during the supplemental comment period. The comment letters are summarized below.

³Minnesota Public Utilities Commission, *Notice of Comment Period on Route Permit Amendment Application*, December 4, 2025, eDockets No. [202512-225525-01](https://www.puc.state.mn.us/eDockets/202512-225525-01)

A. Wyatt Johansen

On December 3, 2025, Mr. Wyatt Johansen submitted a public comment in opposition to Xcel Energy's permit amendment request.⁴ Mr. Johansen's comments outlined the implications of the proposed amended route as increasing human settlement impacts, with specific concerns relating to residential proximity and driveway crossings. The proposed amended route would move the transmission line adjacent to the end of Mr. Johansen's driveway where his children wait for the bus. Mr. Johansen argued that Xcel Energy's proposed amended route fails to maintain comparable overall impacts and increases impacts to children, families, and multiple residences along County Road 4. Mr. Johansen requested that the Commission deny Xcel Energy's proposed route permit amendment.

B. Thomas Hook

On December 22, 2025, Mr. Thomas Hook submitted a public comment in opposition to Xcel Energy's permit amendment request.⁵ Mr. Hook's comments outlined the implications of the proposed amended route as increasing aesthetic and residential impacts, with specific concerns relating to residential proximity, electric and magnetic field (EMF) exposure, and the County Road 4 viewshed. Mr. Hook argued that the proposed amended route is a personal "want" that values tile and trees over the "need" to protect families, neighbors and human safety. Mr. Hook requested the Commission deny Xcel Energy's proposed route permit amendment.

C. EIP Staff

On December 18, 2025, EIP staff provided comments on Xcel Energy's proposed permit amendment.⁶ Staff noted that the text of Minn. Stat. § 216I.09 does not provide guidance as to when a permit amendment should be authorized by the Commission. Staff suggested that appropriate guidance could be found in the Commission's permit for the project – namely, that an amendment is appropriate if the amendment has comparable overall impacts relative to the routing factors of Minnesota Rule 7850.4100.

Analysis by EIP staff indicated that the proposed route permit amendment would increase impacts to human settlements, particularly aesthetic and property value impacts. Staff noted that the amendment would decrease impacts to tree clearing. Finally, staff noted that avoiding drainage ditches and erosion control berms could likely be accomplished by prudent structure placement along the permitted route.

⁴Wyatt Johansen, *Public Comment*, December 3, 2025, eDockets No. [202511-225306-01](#)

⁵Thomas Hook, *Public Comment*, December 22, 2025, eDockets No. [202512-226081-01](#)

⁶Minnesota Public Utilities Commission – Energy Infrastructure Permitting, *Comments and Recommendations on Route Permit Amendment*, December 18, 2025, eDockets No. [202512-226010-01](#)

D. Xcel Energy

On December 23, 2025, Xcel Energy submitted reply comments addressing comments made by Mr. Johansen, Mr. Hook, and EIP staff. Xcel Energy reiterated that the proposed amended route is, “a result of ongoing landowner coordination and . . . would reduce tree clearing and avoid a series of drainage ditches to accommodate the landowner’s plans to construct agricultural erosion control berms.” Xcel Energy also maintained that the landowners crossed by the proposed amended route are agreeable to the amended route.

Xcel Energy addressed Mr. Johansen’s comments regarding child safety by noting that the findings of fact developed for the project determined that “[n]o impacts to human health due to EMF are anticipated as a result of the project.”⁷ Further, Xcel Energy addressed Mr. Johansen’s concerns with Xcel Energy’s lack of communication with families living near the proposed amended alignment—who do not own the affected parcels—by stating that the landowners crossed by the route support the adoption of the proposed amended route because it reduces environmental impacts and facilitates efficient construction.

With respect to EIP staff’s comments, Xcel Energy acknowledged that the proposed amended route would place the transmission line closer to three residences, but did not agree that this proximity would lead to aesthetic and property value impacts. Xcel Energy asserted that there is no difference in potential impacts due to EMF between the proposed amended route and the permitted route. Xcel Energy agreed with EIP staff that the proposed amended route would reduce tree clearing impacts. However, Xcel Energy indicated that potential impacts to drainage ditches and erosion control berms could not be addressed by structure placement along the permitted route due to required span lengths between structures. Finally, Xcel Energy affirmed that it submitted the proposed amended route as a result of coordination with affected landowners.

In regard to Mr. Hook’s comments, Xcel Energy indicated that the concerns raised in his comments were largely the same as those presented in the comments of Mr. Johansen and EIP staff. Xcel Energy further noted that the Commission has historically encouraged permittees to work with affected landowners to address potential impacts even after a route permit is issued.

⁷ Office of Administrative Hearings, *Findings of Fact, Conclusions of Law, and Recommendation*, February 5, 2025, eDockets No. [20252-214994-01](#)

STAFF DISCUSSION

Reviewing the comments received on the proposed permit amendment, staff believes it's clear that although Xcel Energy indicated that all landowners whose property is crossed by the proposed amended route are agreeable to the amended route, not all landowners who are affected by the proposed amended route are in agreement. Staff continues to believe that the proposed amended route will increase aesthetic and property value impacts for certain landowners and will decrease tree clearing impacts.

Staff notes that Xcel Energy has indicated that impacts to drainage ditches and erosion control berms could not be addressed by structure placement along the permitted route due to required span lengths between structures. EIP staff acknowledges that there are likely optimal span lengths for the transmission line, but would need further clarification on how specific span lengths are determined and what is required, particularly in instances where pole placement would mitigate potential environmental impacts.

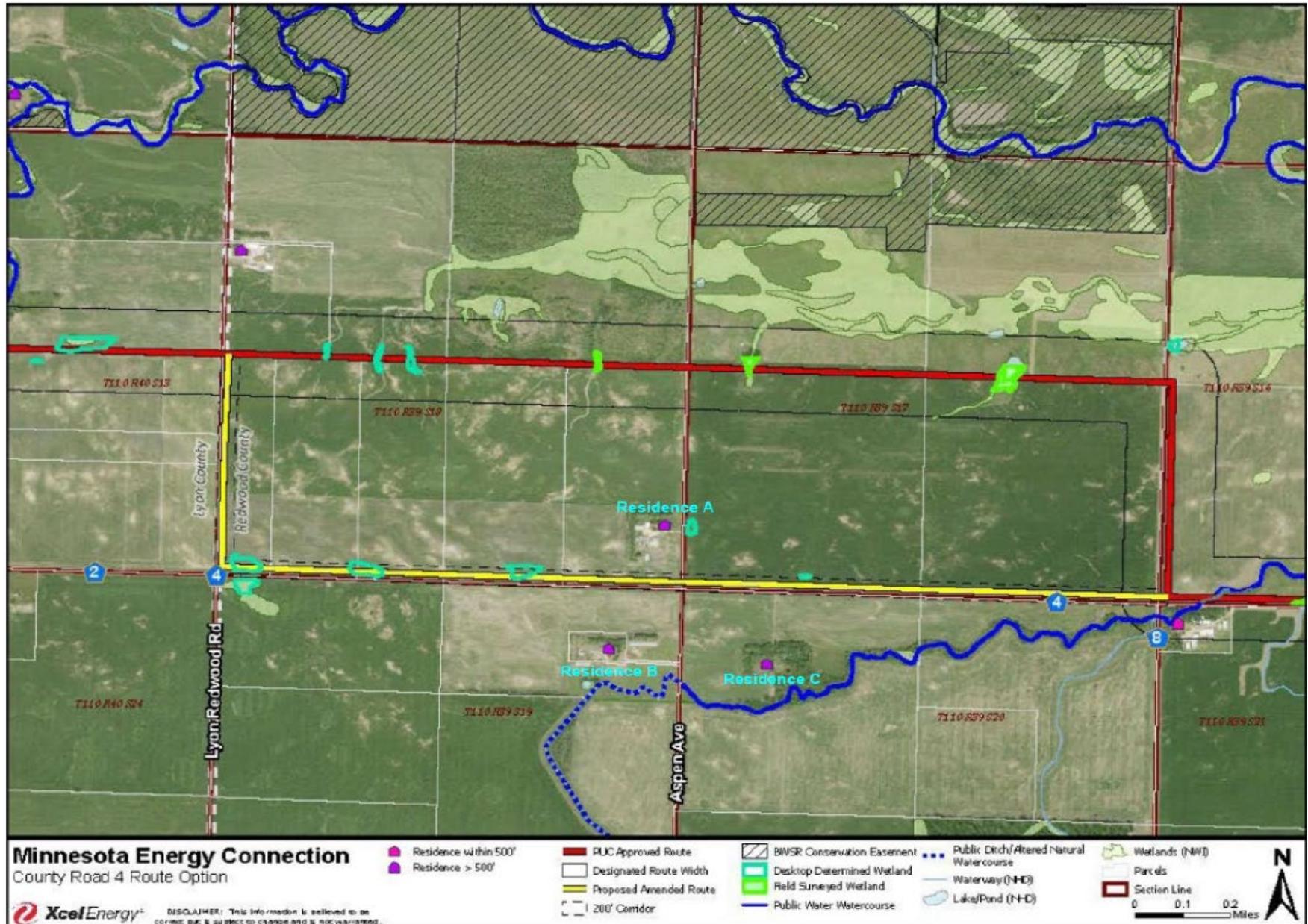
Staff recommends that if the Commission determines that the proposed amended route has comparable overall impacts relative to the factors in Minn. R. 7850.4100, then the Commission should authorize the permit amendment. If the Commission determines that the impacts are not comparable, the Commission should deny the permit amendment.

COMMISSION DECISION OPTIONS

Permit Amendment

1. Grant the route permit amendment requested by the permittee.
2. Grant the route permit amendment requested by the permittee with modifications or conditions.
3. Deny the route permit amendment requested by the permittee.

Figure 1 – Map of Proposed Amendment Area⁸



⁸ Adapted from Xcel's Route Permit Application Request, Map 1 Proposed Amended Route, but modified to designate Residences A, B, and C