

January 2, 2018

Daniel P. Wolf Executive Secretary Minnesota Public Utilities Commission 121 7<sup>th</sup> Place East, Suite 350 St. Paul, Minnesota 55101-2147

RE: Comments of the Minnesota Department of Commerce, Division of Energy Resources
Docket No. E999/M-17-377

Dear Mr. Wolf:

Attached are the comments of the Minnesota Department of Commerce, Division of Energy Resources (Department) in the following matter:

2016 Biennial Transmission Projects Report.

The petition was filed on November 1, 2017, by the Minnesota Transmission Owners (American Transmission Company, LLC; Dairyland Power Cooperative; East River Electric Power Cooperative; Great River Energy; Hutchinson Utilities Commission; ITC Midwest LLC; L&O Power Cooperative; Marshall Municipal Utilities; Minnesota Power; Minnkota Power Cooperative; Missouri River Energy Services; Northern States Power Company; Otter Tail Power Company; Rochester Public Utilities; Southern Minnesota Municipal Power Agency; and Willmar Municipal Utilities).

The Department recommends **approval with reporting requirements.** The Department is available to answer any questions the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission may have.

Sincerely,

/s/ MICHAEL N. ZAJICEK Rates Analyst

MNZ/ja Attachment



# **Before the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission**

# Comments of the Minnesota Department of Commerce Division of Energy Resources

Docket No. E999/M-17-377

#### I. INTRODUCTION

On November 1, 2017 the Minnesota Transmission Owners (MTO) submitted to the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (Commission) the MTO's 2017 Biennial Transmission Projects Report (Report). The MTO is a coalition of sixteen electric utilities that own or operate high voltage transmission facilities in Minnesota.<sup>1</sup> The Report provides a review of the MTO's transmission planning activities. Northwestern Wisconsin Electric Company (NWEC) did not file a biennial transmission report.<sup>2</sup>

The Report does not seek certification of any high voltage transmission line. Therefore, pursuant to Minnesota Rules 7848.1800, subpart 3 and the Commission's November 9, 2017 *Notice of Comment Periods and Deadlines,* comments on the Report's compliance with the filing requirements (Minnesota Rules 7848.1300) and procedural recommendations were due November 21, 2017 with initial comments on the merits of the report due January 15, 2018, with reply commends due March 1, 2018. The Minnesota Department of Commerce, Division of Energy Resources (Department) notes that petitions to intervene<sup>3</sup> and comments on the merits, including any procedural recommendation, are to be submitted by January 15, 2018.

On November 14, 2017, comments on compliance with the filing requirements were filed by the Department. The MTO filed supplemental data November 21, 2017 in response to the Department's comments.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The members of the MTO are: American Transmission Company, LLC; Dairyland Power Cooperative; East River Electric Power Cooperative; Great River Energy (GRE); Hutchinson Utilities Commission; ITC Midwest LLC; L&O Power Cooperative; Marshall Municipal Utilities; Minnesota Power; Minnkota Power Cooperative; Missouri River Energy Services; Northern States Power Company d/b/a Xcel Energy (Xcel); Otter Tail Power Company; Rochester Public Utilities; Southern Minnesota Municipal Power Agency; and Willmar Municipal Utilities.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> On October 22, 2009 Northwestern Wisconsin Electric Company (NWEC) filed NWEC's *Transmission Projects Biennial Report (TPBR)*. The TPBR states "NWEC owns approximately three miles of 69kV transmission line and a portion of a 230kV substation."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Minnesota Rules 7848.1900, subpart 4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Minnesota Rules 7848.1900, subpart 5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Minnesota Rules 7848.1900, subpart 6.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Minnesota Rules 7848.1800, subpart 5.

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Below are the comments of the Department on the merits of the Report.

#### II. ANALYSIS OF PLANNING ACTIVITIES

#### A. NWEC

NWEC did not submit a biennial transmission plan. Given the limited nature of NWEC's Minnesota transmission system as referenced in footnote 2, the Department has no comments regarding NWEC.

#### B. The MTO

## 1. Existing Transmission Issues

The first step in maintaining a reliable transmission system is to address areas where the current transmission system cannot provide reliable service. Department Information Request No. 1 requested the MTO to list the areas where historical demand had been greater than the supply capability after a single contingency occurs. In response, the MTO listed 10 areas as follows:

- 1. 2017-TC-N6 Plymouth-Area Power Upgrade
- 2. 2011-SE-N5 Arlington-Green Isle 69 kV
- 3. 2015-SE-N4 Line 0714 Rebuild
- 4. 2011-NE-N2 15 Line Upgrade
- 5. 2015-NE-N1 5 Line Upgrade
- 6. 2015-NE-N2 868 Line Upgrade
- 7. 2015-NE-N14 83 Line Upgrade
- 8. 2015-NE-N15 95 Line Upgrade
- 9. 2013-SW-N1 Heron Lake Capacitors
- 10. 2017-SE-N4 Walters 161/69 kV Substation Expansion

In the list above, the year indicates when the issue first arose in the biennial plan. Department Information Request No. 1 also requested the MTO to provide an estimated date by which reliability would be restored to each of the above areas. In response, the MTO indicated that reliability would be restored as follows:

- 2017: 1 issue completed (2015-NE-N15)
- 2018: 2 issues (2011-NE-N2 and 2017-SE-N4)
- 2019: 3 issues (2015-NE-N1, 2015-NE-N2, and 2015-SE-N4)
- 2020: 1 issue (2017-TC-N6)

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• 2023: 1 issue (2011-SE-N5)

After 2022: 1 issue (2013-SW-N1)

 1 issue is being monitored to determine if it is still necessary to resolve given other completed projects (2015-NE-N14).

As indicated in the Department's comments in prior transmission planning dockets, the Department expects that transmission deficiencies will exist for a variety of reasons that are beyond the MTO members' control. As reported by the MTO, six of the ten issues will be fixed within the next two years (by year-end 2019).

#### 2. Forecasted Transmission Issues

An early step in addressing forecasted inadequacies is to obtain the necessary permits. In order to monitor the MTO's progress in terms of obtaining necessary permits, Department Information Request No. 2 requested the MTO to provide a schedule with estimated dates for the submission of certificate of need (CN) applications for situations in which the MTO has a potential solution and that potential solution may require a CN. The MTO's response is summarized below in Table 1. Table 1 shows the schedule of estimated filing dates for CN applications for future projects. Some projects reported by the MTO are dependent upon CNs already under review or already approved by the Commission. These projects are not included in Table 1.

Table 1: Schedule of Certificates of Need

Tracking Number	r Project Estimated Filing		Responding Utility
2017-SE-N1	Huntley to Wilmarth 345 kV MEP Project	2018	Xcel and ITC Midwest
2007-NW-N3	Winger-Thief River Falls 230 kV	August 2019	OTP
2015-NW-N1	Clearbrook West 115 kV-Bagley West 230 kV	January 2022	ОТР

Several projects were reported as potentially requiring a CN but not yet having a filing date estimated. These projects are shown in Table 2 below.

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**Table 2: Potential Certificates of Need** 

Tracking Number	Project	Estimated Filing Date	Responding Utility
2003-WC-N7	Panther Area	2021 – Need based on area load growth	GRE
2007-NE-N1	Duluth Area 230 kV	Early 2020s depending on future studies	MP
2015-NE-N12	Iron Range-Arrowhead 245 kV Project	No current need to construct the project	MP

The Department briefly reviewed the MTO's discussion for the projects listed in Table 2. The table shows that there are relatively few projects planned at this time that potentially require CNs where the timeline is not yet known. The Department has no concerns with any of these projects or their estimated CN filing dates.

In response to an information request<sup>7</sup> by the Department, the MTO stated that two other projects may require a Certificate of Need in the future depending on load growth and storm damage. The MTO stated that they are currently evaluating these projects further. Table 3 below lists these projects:

**Table 3: Projects Under Evaluation for Certificates of Need** 

Tracking Number	Project	Responding Utility
2009-WC-N6	Elk River-Becker Area	GRE
2017-WC-N5	DS Line Rebuild Project	GRE

The Department has no concerns with these projects at this time.

#### C. TRANSMISSION FOR RENEWABLES

The Report also contains a section regarding Minnesota's Renewable Energy Standard (RES Report) in compliance with Minnesota Statutes §216B.2425, subd. 7. The RES Report is a joint effort separate from that of the MTO but containing many of the same utilities. Minnesota Statutes §216B.2425, subd. 7 governing the RES Report states:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> See Department Attachment 1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> The utilities sponsoring the RES Report are: Minnesota Power, Northern States Power Company, Otter Tail Power Company, Dairyland Power Cooperative, Basin Electric Power Cooperative, East River Electric Power Cooperative, Great River Energy, L&O Power Cooperative, Minnkota Power Cooperative, Central Minnesota Municipal Power Agency, Minnesota Municipal Power Agency, Southern Minnesota Municipal Power Agency, Western Minnesota

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Each entity subject to this section shall determine necessary transmission upgrades to support development of renewable energy resources required to meet objectives under section 216B.1691 and shall include those upgrades in its report under subdivision 2.

In compliance with this statute, the RES Report starts with a gap analysis which provides "an estimate of how many more megawatts of renewable generating capacity a utility expects to need beyond what is presently available to obtain the required amount of renewable energy." The RES Report shows that utilities subject to the Minnesota RES have sufficient capacity acquired to meet the Minnesota RES needs through 2025. According to the chart on page 147 of the Report, the Minnesota RES utilities also have enough capacity to meet the RES needs of other jurisdictions as well as Minnesota's RES needs through 2025. Thus it appears that significant additional transmission investment for the purposes of the RES is not required in the near future.

The RES Utilities note that, in its May 18, 2012 Order, the Commission directed the MTO to provide an update on the Corridor Upgrade Project. The Corridor Upgrade Project is an upgrade of the 230-kV line between the Hazel Creek Substation near Granite Falls, Minnesota, and the Blue Lake Substation in Shakopee, Minnesota to a double circuit 345-kV system. The Corridor Upgrade Project would provide significant new transmission capacity from the Dakotas, southwestern Minnesota and western Minnesota to the Twin Cities, at a cost estimated in 2009 to be approximately \$350 million. As a result of the May 12, 2014 Order approving the 2013 Biennial Transmission Report, the Commission recognized that the schedule for the Corridor Upgrade Project has likely moved out beyond 2018 and did not require the utilities to report on the status of the project in the 2015 Report. The Commission similarly did not require the MTO to report on the status of the Corridor Upgrade Project in its 2017 Report in its May 27, 2016 Order approving the 2015 Biennial Transmission Report.

The Department requests that the MTO provide in reply comments a discussion on the current status of the Corridor Upgrade Project, its schedule, and whether further discussion of the project would be useful in the next 2019 Biennial Transmission Report.

#### D. SOLAR ENERGY STANDARD

In 2013, the Minnesota Legislature established a solar energy standard (SES) for public utilities, effective by the end of 2020. Minn. Laws 2013, Ch. 85, § 3, codified at Minnesota Statutes § 216B.1691, subd. 2f (Solar energy standard), establish a solar energy standard at 1.5 percent of a utility's retail sales by the end of 2020.

Municipal Power Agency/Missouri River Energy Services, and Heartland Consumers Power District (jointly, the RES Utilities).

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That statute requires public utilities subject to the SES to report to the Commission on July 1, 2014, and each July thereafter, on progress in achieving the standard. The first reports were filed with the Commission in May and June of 2014, and accepted in an Order dated October 23, 2014. The second set of reports were filed in the summer of 2015 and were approved by the Commission in an October 28, 2015 Order. The third set of reports were filed in the summer of 2016 and were approved by the Commission in its November 28, 2016 Order. The fourth set of reports were filed in the summer of 2017 and were approved by the Commission in its October 20, 2017 Order. More information is provided on the utilities' progress toward meeting the upcoming SES in those dockets. The MTO briefly discussed the SES in the Report and presented data that indicates that the MTO utilities subject to the SES are on pace to meet the 2020 and 2025 SES requirements.

#### E. MITIGATION COSTS

As utilities have been building more infrastructure and more significantly sized infrastructure, it has become increasingly necessary to ensure that utilities use cost discipline as they construct new resources. To encourage cost discipline and prevent ratepayers from paying more than is reasonable for new utility infrastructure, the Department and Commission have been holding utilities accountable by comparing the utilities' estimated costs of a project as proposed in a CN proceeding to the actual cost of the project requested in a rate recovery proceeding. Utilities are not allowed to recover any cost overruns through riders and at a minimum, must justify in a general rate case any cost recovery above the amount the utility originally indicated that the project would cost. This requirement is an important tool to ensure that cost discipline is maintained throughout the regulatory process. The presence of cost discipline is important to ensure the accuracy of cost estimates used in planning proceedings such as resource plans and the biennial transmission plan. Such cost estimates are used to make significant decisions so it is important to minimize errors in estimation to avoid poor decisions and higher system costs.

Due to significant additions in infrastructure expected now and in the future, the Department concludes that additional measures are necessary to help ensure that costs charged to ratepayers for upgrades to the electric system are reasonable. Further, it is important to ensure that decisions made by a utility in response to local governments reasonably consider cost implications, and that costs of upgrades are allocated appropriately to ratepayers, based on ratemaking principles such as cost-causation, cost minimization and administrative feasibility. When utilities install infrastructure in an area, there are always mitigation measures involved. So long as the costs of such measures are reasonable, prudent and relatively small in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Docket No. E999/M-14-321

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Docket No. E999/M-15-462

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Docket No. E999-M-16-342

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Docket No. E999-M-17-283

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size, it is generally reasonable to allow the costs to be borne by all ratepayers. <sup>13</sup> However, when a mitigation measure is not needed for electrical purposes and is significant in size, it is important to consider whether the costs should be allocated to the entire rate base or to a smaller group of customers, based on the entity requesting such enhancement or optional mitigation. An example of such a mitigation measure is undergrounding transmission facilities for aesthetic reasons. Because such options increase costs not only of installation but also ongoing maintenance of the facilities, and because the beneficiaries of such designs can be limited to local ratepayers, careful consideration should be given to proposals to charge the incremental costs of optional undergrounding to all ratepayers. Application of cost-causation principles are important because, if such optional mitigation costs are consistently allocated to the entire rate base, the incentive to prudently control costs throughout the permitting processes is reduced.

As in previous comments on biennial transmission reports, the Department continues to recommend that the Commission require the rate-regulated electric utilities – Otter Tail Power Company, Minnesota Power, and Xcel – to provide the following information in future rate requests to recover the costs of new energy facilities:

- a summary of all mitigation measures that have been added at any step in the permitting process,
- the general reason for the mitigation measure, including whether the measure was requested or required,
- the entity requesting or requiring the mitigation, and
- the cost of the mitigation measure.

This list should include data regarding mitigation measures that the utilities undertook voluntarily. Such data will enable cost allocations to be considered in ratemaking as appropriate and in a more accurate and consistent manner. The Department also notes that these recommended reporting requirements do not in any way limit the Commission's decision-making authority but instead would better inform the Commission's decision-making process.

#### III. DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION

The Department recommends that the Commission accept the Report.

Additionally the Department requests that the MTO's provide in reply comments a discussion on the current status of the Corridor Upgrade Project, its schedule, and whether further discussion of the project would be useful in the next 2019 Biennial Transmission Report.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> It would not be administratively feasible or desirable to tailor rates in each area of Minnesota to reflect incremental costs of all optional mitigation measures in the area.

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Finally, the Department recommends that the Commission require Otter Tail Power Company, Minnesota Power, and Xcel to provide the following information in future rate requests to recover the costs of new energy facilities:

- a summary of all mitigation measures that have been added at any step in the permitting process,
- the general reason for the mitigation measure, including whether the measure was requested or required,
- the entity requesting or requiring the mitigation, and
- the cost of the mitigation measure.

This list should include data regarding mitigation measures that the utilities undertook voluntarily.

/ja

Docket No. E999/M-17-377 DOC Attachment 1

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☐ Not Public Document – Not For Public Disclosure

☐ Public Document – Not Public (Or Privileged) Data Has Been Excised

**☒** Public Document

Minnesota Transmission Owners

Docket No.: E999/M-17-377

Response To: Department of Commerce Information Request No. 3

Requestor: Michael Zajicek

Date Received: November 22, 2017

## Question:

The 2017 Biennial Transmission Projects report identifies several transmission projects that either construct new 115 kV line or upgrade existing lower voltage lines to 115 kV.

For the following list of transmission projects please:

- A. Provide the length of the line to be constructed or upgrade.
- B. If the length of the line to be constructed or upgraded is over 10 miles please explain why the proposed transmission project does not require a Certificate of Need.

# **Projects:**

- 1. 2007-NE-N6 Onigum 115 kV Conversion
- 2. 2015-NE-N5 16 Line Relocation
- 3. 2017-NE-N18 Tioga 115/23 kV Substation
- 4. 2009-WC-N6 Elk River-Becker Area
- 5. 2017-WC-N5 DS Line Rebuild Project

# Response:

- 1. 2007-NE-N6 Onigum 115 kV Conversion (Great River Energy)
  - a. The total length of the 115 kV line will be approximately 9 miles.
  - b. N/A line length is less than 10 miles
- 2. 2015-NE-N5 16 Line Relocation (Minnesota Power)
  - a. The total length of the 16 Line Relocation is approximately 3 miles. The MPUC granted a Route Permit for the 16 Line Reroute HVTL Project in January 2016 (MPUC Docket No. E015/TL-14-977).
  - b. N/A line length is less than 10 miles
- 3. 2017-NE-N18 Tioga 115/23 kV Substation (Minnesota Power)

- a. The Tioga Substation will be located adjacent to an existing 115 kV tap line. The length of the extension of the existing 115 kV line to the new substation is expected to be around 1,000 feet or less.
- b. N/A line length is less than 10 miles
- 4. 2009-WC-N6 Elk River-Becker Area (Great River Energy)
  - a. The total line mileage could be as much as 36.4 miles, and is being built in segments.
  - b. Construction of new 115 kV single circuit structures and rebuild with 115/69 kV double circuit structures will be phased in based on loading of the different line segments. If a large load appears on the system, a Certificate of Need may be needed.

The line segments are as follows:

Orrock - RDF Tap	8.4
RDF Tap - Daytonport	4.1
Daytonport - Energy Park	4.2
Energy Park - Enterprise Park	1.5
Orrock - Big Lake	4.8
Big Lake - Remmele	2.4
Remmele - Thompson Lake	6.5
Thompson Lake - Liberty	4.5

- 5. 2017-WC-N5 DS Line Rebuild Project (Great River Energy)
  - a. The line mileage could be as much as 24.7 miles.
  - b. Replacement of existing structures to 115 kV will likely will be based on storm damage and actual mileage impacted. GRE is currently seeking advice from the PUC on how to best proceed.

Date: December 4, 2017

Preparer: Great River Energy-Wayne Roelofs
Title: Transmission System Planning Analyst

Department: Transmission Planning

Telephone: 763-445-5952

Preparer: Minnesota Power-Christian Winter

Title: Transmission System Planning Engineer

Department: System Performance & Transmission Planning

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## CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I, Sharon Ferguson, hereby certify that I have this day, served copies of the following document on the attached list of persons by electronic filing, certified mail, e-mail, or by depositing a true and correct copy thereof properly enveloped with postage paid in the United States Mail at St. Paul, Minnesota.

Minnesota Department of Commerce Comments

Docket No. E999/M-17-377

Dated this 2<sup>nd</sup> day of January 2018

/s/Sharon Ferguson

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