

February 25, 2026

**VIA E-FILING**

Ms. Sasha Bergman  
Executive Secretary  
Minnesota Public Utilities Commission  
121 7<sup>th</sup> Place East, Suite 350  
Saint Paul, MN 55101-2147



**Re: Comment on Application Completeness**  
*In the Matter of the Application for a Certificate of Need for the Gopher to Badger Link 765 kV High Voltage Transmission Line Project*  
**PUC Docket No. CN-25-121**

Dear Executive Secretary Bergman:

The Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy, the Citizens Utility Board of Minnesota, Sierra Club, Clean Grid Alliance, and Fresh Energy (“Joint Commenters”) respectfully submit these comments in response to the February 11, 2026 Notice of Comment Period on Application Completeness issued by the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission in the above-referenced docket.

As ratepayer and clean energy advocates, we recognize the importance of transmission developments for advancing clean, reliable, and affordable energy across the state. New transmission buildouts will open the state to more renewable energy generation resources and assist Minnesota’s utilities in complying with the state’s 100 percent carbon-free energy standards. New transmission is also needed to contribute to greater reliability and system resilience, as well as mitigate exposure to fuel cost volatility.

The Gopher to Badger Link project was developed as part of the Midcontinent Independent System Operator’s (“MISO”) Long-Range Transmission Planning (“LRTP”) process and represents the Minnesota portion of LRTP project 26. MISO develops LRTP portfolios through a 7-step planning process that involves evaluating scenario-based futures that consider load forecasts, generation forecasts, and siting. Solutions are identified, rigorously modeled, and vetted by stakeholders. The LRTP process culminates with MISO board approval consistent with MISO Transmission Expansion Plan (“MTEP”) procedures.<sup>1</sup> MISO’s LRTP Tranche 2.1 was approved by the Board

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<sup>1</sup> See MISO, *Long Range Transmission Planning (LRTP) Tranche 2 – FAQs*, <https://cdn.misoenergy.org/MISO%20Long-Range%20Transmission%20Planning%20LRTP%20Tranche%202%20FAQs631005.pdf> (accessed Feb. 23, 2026).

of Directors in December 2024. As Multi-Value Projects (MVPs) under MISO's tariff, LRTP projects must support one or more of the following objectives:

- Reliably and economically enable regional public policy needs;
- Provide multiple types of regional economic value; or
- Provide a combination of regional reliability and economic value.<sup>2</sup>

Both the need for and the benefit of the Gopher to Badger Link project have been well-documented during the LRTP Tranche 2.1 development process. We appreciate the efforts undertaken by the applicants to build on this analysis and bring forward a comprehensive project proposal that advances the interests of Minnesotans for clean, affordable, and reliable energy. We remain interested in ensuring the project is developed in a cost-effective manner and that the review process is reasonable and timely.

The scope and scale of the Gopher to Badger Link transmission development is significant, with construction estimated to cost between \$979 million and \$1.27 billion.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, MISO LRTP projects 22 through 26 are expected to provide between \$7.7 and \$25.3 billion in economic benefits during the first 20 years of operation.<sup>4</sup> Despite the magnitude of these investments, we believe the Certificate of Need Application can be appropriately reviewed and analyzed within the context of the Commission's informal docket procedures. Such review would not prevent referral to the Court of Administrative Hearings on siting and routing issues once a preferred route has been identified by the Applicants. Nor would it limit the ability of the Applicants, agencies, organizations, or the general public to build a robust record that enables the Commission to make an informed decision about project need. On the contrary, we have already seen numerous public comments filed in the instant docket raising questions and seeking answers related to both the certificate of need and the potential project route.

At this point, the Joint Commenters have not identified any materially contested issues that would necessitate referral to the Court of Administrative Hearings for contested case proceedings. Many of the questions raised by the public thus far are either addressed throughout the Certificate of Need Application, can be answered by the Applicants throughout the informal procedural process, or can be addressed once a route has been identified and a permit application submitted.

Given the amount of public engagement already generated by the proposed project, we believe utilizing the informal process is appropriate, as it would allow the Joint Commenters and the public to more fully and effectively participate in Commission proceedings. In the alternative, and if the Commission sees a need, it could appoint a hearing examiner for the purpose of developing a comprehensive record without requiring full contested case proceedings. In the Commission's

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<sup>2</sup> MISO, *Multi-Value Projects*, <https://www.misoenergy.org/planning/multi-value-projects-mvps/#t=10&p=0&s=Updated&sd=desc> (accessed Feb. 23, 2026).

<sup>3</sup> *In the Matter of the Application for a Certificate of Need for the Gopher to Badger Link 765 kV High Voltage Transmission Line Project*, Docket No. ET3, E002/CN-25-121, Joint Application for a Certificate of Need, Executive Summary at 1 (Feb. 6, 2026).

<sup>4</sup> *Id.* at 12.

decision on application completeness related to the Big Stone South – Alexandria – Big Oaks Transmission Project, it requested the Office of Administrative Hearings (1) assign an administrative law judge as a hearing examiner for public hearings, consistent with Minn. R. 7850.3800; and (2) develop a full report based on the evidence developed through the informal and alternative review processes.<sup>5</sup> While Minn. R. 7850.3800 has since been repealed, we are not aware of any prohibitions against employing a similar process in this proceeding. A primary goal of regulatory review is to ensure the public has an opportunity to express their opinions “on the necessity of granting a certificate of need.”<sup>6</sup> Pairing public hearings with informal review—either with or without an administrative law judge overseeing the process—would facilitate public engagement and ensure a robust record is developed from which the Commission can make an informed decision.

For these reasons, we recommend that the Commission utilize its informal process to develop the record for this matter.

Sincerely,

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*S/ Patrick Woolsey*

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*S/ Will Mulhern*

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<sup>5</sup> *In the Matter of the Application for a Certificate of Need for the Big Stone South – Alexandria – Big Oaks Transmission Project*, Docket No. E002, E017, ET2, E017, ET10/CN-22-538 at 5 (Dec. 5, 2023).

<sup>6</sup> Minn. Stat. § 216B.243, Subd. 4.