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September 20, 2021

In the Matter of Xcel Energy Electric's Petition for Approval of Electric Vehicle Programs as part of COVID-19 Pandemic Economic Recovery Investments

Docket No. E002/M-20-745

Reply Comments of Fresh Energy, Sierra Club, Union of Concerned Scientists, and Plug In America

Fresh Energy, Sierra Club, Union of Concerned Scientists, and Plug In America (the "Clean Energy Groups" or "CEGs") submit these Reply Comments in response to the Commission's <u>August 3</u>, 2021 Fourth Notice of Extended Comment Period.

The CEGs support approval of Xcel Energy's ("Xcel" or "the Company") electric vehicle rebate proposal as modified in our initial comments and further in these reply comments. We also support approval of Xcel's public fast charging proposal as modified in these reply comments, and support approval of Xcel's own fleet electrification. A discussion and response to Xcel and other stakeholders' initial comments is below.

1) Electric Vehicle Rebate Proposal

1.1 Department of Commerce

Light Duty Vehicle Rebates

The Department of Commerce ("Department") lays out a proposal in its initial comments similar to the one offered by the CEGs in ours, as Xcel notes in its reply.^{1,2} There is a minor difference in rebate amount proposed for new light-duty electric vehicles (LDEVs) between the Department

 $^{^1}$ Xcel, "Reply Comments Electric Vehicle Programs as Part of COVID-19 Relief & Recovery," posted September 9, 2021 in Docket E002/M-20-745, at 9. Hereby referred to as "Xcel Reply."

² Initial Comments of Department of Commerce, posted August 26, 2021 in Docket E002/M-20-745, at 9. Hereby referred to as "DOC Reply."

and CEGs, and to converge our recommendations and match the Colorado Program³ exactly the **CEGs also recommend that the per-vehicle light-duty rebate for new vehicles is set at \$5,500**, rather than \$5,000 as the CEGs originally proposed.

The Department also lays out examples of state assistance programs offered in Minnesota that could streamline eligibility for income-qualified residential customers seeking to use the LDEV rebate.⁴ These examples align with the spirit of the CEGs own recommendation to make sure program eligibility and participation made as simple as possible with ease and flexibility for the customer in mind⁵ and we thank and support the Department for including them.

1.2 Xcel Energy

The CEGs appreciate Xcel's openness to reducing the overall electric vehicle (EV) rebate program to match what the CEGs proposed, at least as a "Phase I" investment. We support including discussion and consideration of expanding the EV rebate program as part of the 2023 Transportation Electrification Plan process, per Xcel's suggestion. Additional responses to Xcel's reply follow.

Managed Charging for Light-Duty Vehicle Rebates

In its reply, Xcel cautions that *not* requiring managed charging when a customer is unable to participate in any existing or future managed charging program would both decrease the grid-related benefits of its LDEV rebate program by reducing the incentive for rebate recipients to charge off-peak and increase administrative costs related to verifying a rebate recipients' ability to participate in a managed charging program. Instead, the Company suggests keeping the managed charging requirement for most rebate recipients and instead "[explore] simple solutions that would exempt some income-qualified customers from the managed charging requirement if they do not have access to home charging, do not have an ability to charge their vehicle on their existing Xcel Energy account, and/or believe that charging off-peak would create a burden for them given household preferences or work schedule." While the CEGs did not originally the last point as a barrier to participating in a managed charging program, we appreciate Xcel bringing this up as another possible challenge for income-qualified customers.

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³ Colorado PUC, "In the matter of the Application of the Public Service Company of Colorado for Approval of its 2021-2023 Transportation Electrification Plan: Commission Decision Granting Application With Modification." (2021). Hereby referred to as "Colorado Program."

⁴ DOC Reply at 24-45.

⁵ Initial Comments of Clean Energy Groups, posted August 27, 2021 in Docket E002/M-20-745 at 12. Hereby "CEG Initial Comments"

⁶ Xcel Reply at 5

⁷ Xcel Reply at 11

⁸ Ibid.

The CEGs agree with Xcel that managed charging is key to supporting the societal and ratepayer benefits of the LDEV rebate program.⁹ However, the LDEV rebate program stands slightly apart from other EV proposals in that it has a stated goal of aiding economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Given that Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) and underresourced households¹⁰ were and still are impacted most severely by COVID-19, in terms of both economics and health, additional effort to ensure a LDEV program is accessible to and benefits under-resourced and BIPOC residential customers is warranted.¹¹ The need to ensure access and benefits to those customers is made even more acute when considering that these customers are also disproportionately impacted by air pollution as Figure 1 below shows.

Figure 1: Disproportionate Exposure to Air Pollution Risk in Minnesota¹²

Statewide average House Value > \$250K (cars and trucks) White Off-road vehicles and equipment (construction equipment, etc.) Asian Neighborhood sources Hispanic (dry cleaners, home heating, backyard fires, etc.) American Indian Industrial facilities (factories, power plants, etc.) Black Rent < \$700 2.5 Relative risk level

Air pollution risks are unequal

All types of air pollution are likely higher near your community if you are a person of color, American Indian, or have lower rent.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ "Under-resourced" is a preferred term of several Fresh Energy partners and is used in place "low-income" where possible.

¹¹ See <u>letter submitted August 31, 2020</u> to the Commission on behalf of multiple organizations calling for 40 percent of benefits from COVID-19 Recovery proposals to accrue to BIPOC communities. In the letter, the organizations state the various ways in which BIPOC communities have been most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

¹² Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, "Disproportionate Impacts in Minnesota." Webpage accessed 9/20/21.

Designing the program with higher amounts of per-vehicle rebates and focusing on incomequalified customers is one step to promote the equitable distribution of program benefits. Easing programmatic barriers, like the requirement to be on a managed charging program without consideration of whether such a program is even available to a prospective rebate recipient, is another.

Our particular concern is that income-qualified customers are more likely to be renters and/or reside multifamily housing, two customer classes that still lack the same access to home charging as single-family homeowners do. Xcel Energy recognized this when it designed and launched its Multi-Dwelling Unit EV Charging Pilot, which is a good step towards narrowing the EV charging access gap but isn't enough by itself to ensure that income-qualified residential customers can get on a managed charging program in order to qualify for an LDEV rebate under the original proposal. Additionally, renters of single-family homes still face barriers to participating in Xcel's EV residential charging programs due to the need to have property owner approval or involvement and possible investment.

The importance of removing such a barrier becomes more pronounced when understanding the percentage of BIPOC and under-resourced customers living in rental units. Figure 2 below shows the breakdown of demographics of renters in the Twin Cities region, which Xcel Energy serves. The data in Figure 2 shows that a high proportion of renters are BIPOC, with Black households, in particular, disproportionately renting vs. owning their homes. Additionally, among renters, the percentage of "cost-burdened" households is significant. Ensuring that these households can reduce their transportation costs and have access to clean vehicles with lower lifetime costs could have economic benefits beyond greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction or grid optimization.

¹³ "Cost burdened" refers to households spending more than 30% of their gross monthly income on housing costs. <u>Link</u>. ¹⁴ CEGs Initial Comments at 3.

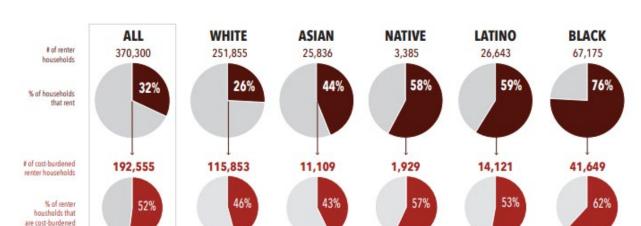


Figure 2: Demographic breakdown of Twin Cities households (2018)¹⁵

Finally, Xcel mentions that determining each prospective rebate recipients' ability to participate in a manage charging program would add administrative costs. Per the CEG's original recommendation, creating a "concierge" advisory service for prospective rebate recipients to walk through the process would be a natural fit for determining each customer's ability to get on a managed charging program. What's more, asking these questions for income-qualified customers would provide useful and actionable data on other barriers to EV access and charging that Xcel's current and proposed EV charging programs may not produce. As mentioned in our initial comments, the Colorado Public Utilities Commission recognized the importance of considering the distinct needs of income-qualified consumers. ¹⁶ Thus, the administrative costs would be worth the value of the data collected, and indeed may already be included in the \$0.5 - \$1 million Xcel requested in its reply comments to create a robust community outreach and marketing effort to support the LDEV program. ¹⁷

The CEGs reiterate that the LDEV rebate program should require managed charging where available for its rebate recipients and should exempt income-qualified rebate applicants from the managed requirement where those customers do not have access to such a program. It is true that planning for grid optimization now by incentivizing off-peak EV charging is important. However, it is also true that Minnesota is very early in its adoption curve and cannot afford to miss opportunities to deploy EVs, especially in a more equitable manner, at this stage. Xcel can and should continue to design and implement EV charging programs, including managed charging programs, that are accessible to more renters and multifamily

 $^{^{15}}$ Minnesota Housing Partnership, "<u>Market Watch: Twin Cities</u>." (Nov 2018) at 3.

¹⁶ Id. at 14

¹⁷ Xcel Reply at 10.

housing residents. LDEV rebate recipients who do not have access to a managed charging program can be phased into future programs when programs are available to them. Furthermore, a customer is not prohibited from practicing managed charging if that customer is not enrolled in a program that provides benefits to do so. Xcel should provide information about charging at grid-beneficial times to as part of the rebate award process.

Residential Charger Rebates

In our initial proposal, the CEGs requested that Xcel include an additional \$1.67 million to support residential charging, either by offering to cover all installation-related costs up to \$1,000 per LDEV rebate or to provide a "charge card" for rebate recipients without an option to install home charging. Xcel appreciated the intent but declined to include this additional program element as part of its LDEV rebate program, stating additional discussion was warranted and that some aspects of our proposal were surfaced in the 2021 Transportation Electrification Plan filing Xcel made earlier this summer.¹⁸

The CEGs reiterate our preference for a complementary charger rebate as part of the income-qualified LDEV rebate program in order to maximize income-qualified customer participation, per best practices referenced in our initial comments. However, should the Public Utilities Commission ("Commission") choose not to approve such an income-qualified residential charger rebate program as part of Xcel's overall LDEV rebate program approval, we request that Commission direct Xcel to propose a residential charger program designed to support income-qualified residential customers who receive LDEV rebates within a year of the Commission's order on this docket.

Other LDEV Rebate Considerations

The CEGs appreciate Xcel's support to build a robust community outreach and incomeverification program and acknowledge that going above-and-beyond Xcel's current outreach model will require additional investment.²⁰ To better understand the scope of what Xcel is considering as part of this effort, we ask that Xcel provide a cost-breakdown of its estimated outreach and income verification budget, including amount expect to perform incomeverification, by October 1, 2021.

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¹⁸ Xcel Reply at 11

¹⁹ CEGs Initial Comments at 14

²⁰ Xcel Reply at 10

Additionally, we support Xcel's suggestion to include discussion of additional rebates (i.e. "Phase II" rebates) as part of its 2023 Transportation Electrification Plan process. ²¹ We also note that should the Commission decide to *include* non-income qualified residential customers as part of Xcel's "Phase I" rebate program, the per-vehicle rebate amounts should match Xcel's original proposal, i.e. \$2,500 for new LDEVs and \$1,250 for used LDEVs, with the minor modification of keeping per-vehicle rebates level (i.e. the same, without ratcheting down) during the initial three-year pilot operation.

Finally, on the issue of cost recovery, we ask Xcel to provide its cost assumptions used to calculate the Net Present Values depicted in Table 2²² (e.g. short-term debt cost).

Electric Bus Rebates

The CEGs recommended in our initial comments that \$20 million be allocated for Metro Transit to purchase electric buses, with an additional \$5 million for other transit agencies and \$5 million for school districts or school bus operators. We appreciate Xcel's openness to this pared down proposal.²³ However, we disagree with Xcel's suggestion that electric bus funds should not be earmarked for different recipient types.²⁴ Instead, earmarks for different recipients should remain, to avoid a better resourced entity like Metro Transit from claiming the entire rebate pool before other, less-resourced entities like school bus operators or smaller transit agencies have the opportunity to do so.

Additionally, keeping electric bus rebates as proposed will allow the rate of rebate claims to be tracked by recipient type, and to identify potential barriers to rebate use by non-Metro Transit agencies or school bus operators that would prove useful in a Phase II of the electric bus rebate program. For these reasons the CEGs recommend maintaining the allocations as originally proposed, with \$20 million to Metro Transit, \$5 million to other transit agencies, and \$5 million for school bus operators or districts.

2) Public Fast Charging Stations Proposal

The Clean Energy Groups support Xcel's proposal to build public fast charging stations in areas of its service territory currently underserved by private market participants. We also support the use of a time-varying rate to incentivize off-peak charging.

²¹ Xcel Reply at 5

²² Xcel Reply at 9

²³ Xcel Reply at 4

²⁴ Xcel Reply at 10

We do note, as we have in another docket, that charging customers "market-rate" retail rates is not necessarily supported or necessary when considering that these fast chargers are being placed in an area *not* currently served by market-rate charging stations. In other words, there is less of a need to ensure "market-competitive" rates at Xcel-owned fast charging stations when the primary motivation to build and own such charging stations is to fill a market gap, not to compete with existing or potential private market participants. Indeed, having lower-than-market retail rates could support market development in underserved areas. As in Minnesota Power's EV Charging Infrastructure Investment, we recommend that Xcel reconsider the energy charge to customers and adapt them to reflect the underlying energy costs more closely and be cost-competitive with equivalent gasoline prices. Specifically, the CEGs recommend that the Commission require Xcel Energy to file an updated EV retail tariff within 90 days of the Commission's Order to lower the energy charge to EV drivers that better reflects the actual cost of energy and provides the potential for fuel costs savings over gasoline at all company-owned DC fast charging stations.

We also agree with Xcel and disagree with ChargePoint, Inc on the issue of site hosts setting their own pricing.²⁶ Given Xcel is owning and operating these charging stations, the Company should be in charge of setting retail rates, not the site hosts.

3) Xcel's Own Fleet Electrification

The Clean Energy Groups support Xcel's plan to accelerate its own fleet electrification. Doing so can provide a helpful example to other organizations seeking to electrify their vehicle fleets, and support Xcel in meeting its stated goal of electrifying 20% of light-duty vehicles by 2030 across all its service territories.²⁷

4) Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, we reiterate our recommendations in our initial comments, with the following modifications:

1) Increase the per-vehicle rebate amount for new light-duty electric vehicle to **\$5,500** for income-qualified residential customers;

²⁵ Hanna Terwilliger, "<u>Staff Briefing Papers: In the Matter Minnesota Power's Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Investment</u>," (Sept 2021). Terwilliger summarizes the CEGs position on Minnesota Power's "market rate" energy charges at 10-11.

²⁶ Xcel Reply at 14

²⁷ Xcel Reply at 5

- 2) Approve Xcel's proposed public fast charging proposal with the modification that the Commission require Xcel Energy to file an updated EV retail tariff within 90 days of the Commission's Order to lower the energy charge to EV drivers so that it better reflects the actual cost of energy and provides the potential for fuel costs savings over gasoline at all company-owned DC fast charging stations;
- 3) Approve Xcel's accelerated fleet electrification.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

/s/ Anjali Bains

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I, Anjali Bains, hereby certify that I have this day, served a copy of the following document to the attached lists of persons by electronic filing and electronic mail.

Reply Comments of Fresh Energy, Union of Concerned Scientists, Sierra Club, and Plug In America

Docket No. E002/M-20-745

Dated this 20th day of September 2021

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