



**In the Matter of Minnesota Power's Application  
for a Certificate of Need for the proposed Great  
Northern Transmission Line Project.**

**ER SCOPING DECISION  
PUC Docket No. E0015/CN-12-1163**

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The above matter came before the Deputy Commissioner, Department of Commerce (Department) for a decision on the scope of the Environmental Report (ER) to be prepared for the Minnesota Power application for a Certificate of Need determination for the proposed MP Great Northern Transmission Line (GNL) project.

### **Project Description**

Minnesota Power, in partnership with Manitoba Hydro, proposes to construct a 500 kV transmission line from the International border that would terminate at the Blackberry Substation in Itasca County (spanning an estimated 235 to 270 miles).

At this time, Minnesota Power is considering three potential international border crossing areas: near US Highway 59 in Kittson County, County State Aid Highway 24 along the Kittson/Roseau County border, and Minnesota Trunk Highway 89 in Roseau County. The potential route(s) from those crossing areas to the Blackberry Substation in Itasca County will be developed through the HVTL routing proceedings and should reflect the consideration of a number of factors, including infrastructure sharing opportunities, large water bodies, Scientific and Natural Areas, State Parks, and large areas of open wooded wetland and cities.

### **Purpose and Need**

The Applicant has stated that the project would provide a critical new transmission resource for northern Minnesota and the region by providing an additional high voltage tie-line between Manitoba and the United States. The Applicant stated that an additional consideration is that the current transmission resources are unable to facilitate significant new energy exchanges and that the existing 500 kV tie-line between Manitoba and the United States represents the single largest potential system emergency in the region. As such, new transmission not only enables additional energy exchanges, but also strengthens the regional transmission grid.

The Applicant continues, adding that the project represents the Minnesota portion of major new transmission facilities necessary to deliver the power called for under the Commission-approved 250 MW Agreements (MPUC Docket No. E-015/RP-09-1088, Order Accepting Resource Plan and Requiring Compliance Filings, May 6, 2011).

### **Regulatory Background**

On October 21, 2013, Minnesota Power submitted an Application for a Certificate of Need to construct the Great Northern Transmission Line project to the Public Utilities Commission (Commission). This new large high voltage transmission line will extend from the Manitoba United States border to Minnesota Power's Blackberry Substation in Itasca County, Minnesota. The application was submitted pursuant to the Certificate of Need (CN) provisions found in Minnesota Rules 7849.

The Commission accepted the CN Application as complete on December 18, 2013.

Before any large energy facility, in this case HVTL, can be constructed in Minnesota, the Commission must determine that they are necessary and in the best interest of the state. The certificate of need process includes environmental review and public hearings, and typically takes 12 months. This process is the only proceeding in which a no-build alternative and the size, type, timing, system configuration and voltage of the proposed project will be considered.

If a certificate of need is required, it must be issued prior to the route permit for a project (Minnesota Statute 216B.243).

The Department Energy Environmental Review and Analysis (EERA) staff is responsible for administering the environmental review process. The Commission is responsible for determining if the transmission lines proposed are needed.

The environmental review process under the certificate of need procedures includes public information/scoping meetings and the preparation of an environmental review document, the Environmental Report (ER). The environmental report is a written document that describes the human and environmental impacts of the proposed project, alternatives to the project and methods to mitigate anticipated adverse impacts.

The ER must be prepared before the public hearing and before the Commission can make a decision on the certificate of need application.

### ***Scoping Process Summary***

On January 15, 2014, Commission staff sent notice of the places, dates and times of the Public Information and ER Scoping meetings to those persons on the General List maintained by the Department, the agency technical representatives list and the project contact list.

Commission staff and EERA staff jointly held six public information/scoping meetings. The purpose of the meetings was to provide information to the public about the proposed project, to answer questions, and to allow the public an opportunity to suggest CN alternatives and potential impacts that should be considered during preparation of the environmental review document. A variety of topics were discussed during the presentation. Topics included: the certificate of need process, schedule, statutes and rules; Minnesota power's description of the purpose and need, and project components; environmental review procedures; and, the scoping of alternatives and impacts.

Approximately 90 people attended the public information and scoping meetings; 20 individual took the opportunity to speak on the record. A court reporter was present to document oral statements. Written comments were due no later than Friday, March 14, 2014. Twenty-eight written comments were received.

Many of the comments received, both oral and written, were more relevant to the routing process, meaning that they dealt with issues that are route specific. These comments will be reserved for the upcoming HVTL routing docket and evaluated during that docket's environmental review scoping process. Other comments have relevance to both the CN and the routing dockets, and will therefore be covered in the environmental review documents for both proceedings. The remaining relevant comments dealt with issues specific to the size, type, timing, system configuration and/or voltage of the proposal contained in MP's Certificate of Need application. These comments were: upgrading the existing transmission system; alternative voltages (230 kV, 345 kV),

direct current (DC) alternative; demand side management; line losses; and double circuiting along the Dorsey-Forbes 500 kV line.

Scoping comments, along with other relevant documents, can be reviewed at the Department's website: <http://mn.gov/commerce/energyfacilities//resource.html?Id=33610> and on eDockets: <http://www.edockets.state.mn.us/EFiling/search.jsp> (enter 12 for the year and 1163 for the number).

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**HAVING REVIEWED THE MATTER**, consulted with staff, and in accordance with Minnesota Rule 7849.1400, I hereby make the following Scoping Decision.

## **MATTERS TO BE ADDRESSED**

Selected alternatives and impacts, along with those required in rule (Minn. Rule 7849.1500, subpart 1 and subpart 3), are incorporated into the Environmental Report Scoping Decision.

The ER on the proposed Great Northern Transmission Line project will address and provide information on the following matters:

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Purpose and Need
- 1.2 Regulatory requirements

### 2.0 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

- 2.1 General
- 2.2 Design
- 2.3 Right-of-Way Requirements and Acquisition
- 2.4 Construction
- 2.5 Operation and Maintenance
- 2.6 Permits

### 3.0 ALTERNATIVES TO THE PROPOSED HVTL

- 3.1 No-build Alternative
- 3.2 Demand Side Management
- 3.3 Purchase Power
  - 3.3.1 Long term Purchase Power
  - 3.3.2 Short term Purchase Power
- 3.5 Up-grading Existing Facilities
  - 3.5.1 Double Circuit Existing Lines
- 3.6 Facilities of a Different Size
  - 3.6.1 Alternative Voltages
  - 3.6.2 DC Alternative
- 3.7 Generation Alternatives

### 4.0 ENVIRONMENTAL AFFECTS

- 4.1 Air Quality
- 4.2 Biological Resources
  - 4.2.1 Forest Fragmentation
  - 4.2.2 Avian
- 4.3 Culture Resources

- 4.4 Geology and Soils
- 4.5 Health and Safety
  - 4.5.1 EMF
  - 4.5.2 Stray Voltage
  - 4.5.3 Interference with Communications/GPS
- 4.6 Land Use
  - 4.6.1 Agricultural (livestock, crops, timber)
- 4.7 Noise
- 4.8 Socioeconomics
  - 4.8.1 Property Values
- 4.9 Transportation
- 4.10 Visual Impacts and Aesthetics
- 4.11 Water Resources (surface, groundwater, wetlands)
- 4.12 Waste Management and Disposal
- 5.0 REQUIRED PERMITS and APPROVALS

The ER will include a list of permits that will be required for the project.

The above outline is not intended to serve as a “Table of Contents” for the ER document, and as such, the organization (i.e., structure of the document) of the information and the data may not be similar to that appearing in the ER.

## ISSUES OUTSIDE THE SCOPE OF THE ER

The following issues will not be considered or evaluated in the ER:

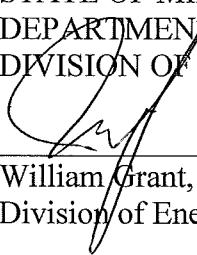
- Route alternatives.
- Any alternatives that do not meet the underlying need for or purpose of the project.
- The impacts and issues associated with components of the project which are within the Canadian jurisdiction.
- The manner in which land owners are paid for transmission rights-of-way easements.
- Contested issues or disputes of fact with respect to the representations made in the CN application.

## SCHEDULE

Following is the anticipated schedule: July 2014 – ER Available

Signed this 22<sup>nd</sup> day of April, 2014

STATE OF MINNESOTA  
DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
DIVISION OF ENERGY RESOURCES

  
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William Grant, Deputy Commissioner  
Division of Energy Resources