
DRAFT
ENVIRONMENTAL REPORT
SCOPING DOCUMENT

GREAT NORTHERN TRANSMISSION LINE PROJECT

CERTIFICATE OF NEED

PUC DOCKET No. E015/CN-12-1163

Prepared by the Staff of the



February 5, 2014

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This scoping document is intended to advise the public of the scoping process and the process for the preparation of the Environmental Review document (i.e., Environmental Report). The scoping decision will identify for the public the issues and alternatives that the Department of Commerce (Department) Energy Environmental Review and Analysis (EERA) unit has determined are appropriate for inclusion in the environmental review document.

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.

CERTIFICATE OF NEED

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).

A copy of the certificate of need application, along with other relevant documents, can be reviewed at the Energy Facility Permitting web page at:

<http://mn.gov/commerce/energyfacilities//resource.html?Id=33610>

The Department EERA staff is responsible for administering the environmental review process. The Commission is responsible for determining if the transmission lines proposed are needed.

Environmental Review

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 associated with the size, type, and timing of the project, system configurations, and voltage. The environmental report must also contain information on alternatives to the proposed project and shall address mitigating measures for 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.

A person desiring that a particular alternative to the proposed project or a possible adverse impact of the project be considered in the environmental report shall identify the alternative or impact to be included during the scoping process; the person shall provide an explanation of why the alternative or impact should be included in the environmental report, and submit all supporting information the person wants the Department to consider.

The Department shall provide the applicant with an opportunity to respond to each request that is filed.

The Department may exclude from analysis in the ER any alternative that does not meet the underlying need for or purpose of the project or that is not likely to have any significant environmental benefit compared to the project as proposed, or if another alternative that will be analyzed is likely to have similar environmental benefits with substantially less adverse economic, employment, or sociological impacts than the suggested alternative.

The Department shall include in the environmental report any alternative or impact identified by the Commission for inclusion in the ER document.

HVTL ROUTE PERMITTING

Minnesota Statutes Section 216E.03, subd. 2, provides that no person may construct a HVTL without a route permit from the Commission. An HVTL is defined as a transmission line of 100 kV or more and greater than 1,500 feet in length in Minnesota Statutes Section 216E.01, subd. 4. The proposed transmission lines are HVTLs and, therefore, a route permit will be required prior to construction.

Routing of the GNTL project and its potential impacts will be considered in both the Presidential Permit required for the GNTL project and in the Route Permit process, which will come before the Commission in a separate docket.

Applications for *HVTL Route Permits* are subject to environmental review, which is conducted by EERA staff under Minn. R. 7850. The EERA staff will provide notice and conduct public information and scoping meetings to solicit public comments on the scope of an environmental impact statement (EIS). An EIS is a written document that describes the human and environmental impacts of routing and constructing of a proposed HVTL project (and selected alternative routes) and methods to mitigate such impacts. The public will have an opportunity to comment on the scope of the EIS and the draft EIS through public comment periods and at EERA sponsored information meetings.

Applications for high voltage transmission line route permits, under the full permitting process, require a public contested-case hearing upon completion of the draft EIS pursuant to Minn. R. 7849.5330. A portion of the hearing will be held in the counties where the proposed project would be located.

The draft EIS will be completed and made available prior to the public hearing.

2.0 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. 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 strengthens the regional transmission grid as well.

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).

3.0 ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW DOCUMENT

The environmental review document under the certificate of need procedures (Minnesota Rules 7849.1500, subpart 1) must include the following:

- A. A general description of the proposed project and associated facilities;
- B. A general description of the alternatives to the proposed project; these shall include:
 - The no-build alternative;
 - Demand side management;
 - Purchased power;
 - Facilities of a different size;
 - Upgrading of existing facilities;
 - Generation rather than Transmission; and

- Use of renewable energy sources.
- C. An analysis of the human and environmental impacts of a project of the type proposed and of the alternatives identified;
- D. Analysis of the potential impacts that are project specific;
- E. An analysis of mitigative measures that could reasonably be implemented to eliminate or minimize any adverse impacts identified for the proposed project and each alternative;
- F. An analysis of the feasibility and availability of each alternative considered;
- G. A list of permits required for the project; and
- H. A discussion of other matters identified in the *Scoping Decision*.

4.0 EA SCOPING PROCESS

The purpose of the scoping process is to provide the public with an opportunity to participate in the development of the scope of the ER by holding a public meeting and soliciting public comment.

The public information/scoping meetings and the comment period listed below are your opportunity to participate in the determination of the content or “scope” of the ER.

COUNTY	CITY	MEETING LOCATION	DATE AND TIME
Roseau	Roseau	Roseau Civic Center 121 Center Street E	Tuesday, February 11, 2014 6:00 pm
Lake of the Woods	Baudette	Baudette Ambulance Garage 111 First Avenue SW	Wednesday, February 12, 2014 6:00 pm
Koochiching	International Falls	AmericInn 1500 Hwy 71	Thursday, February 13, 2014 6:00 pm
Pennington	Thief River Falls	Ralph Engelstad Arena, Imperial Room 525 Brooks Avenue N	Tuesday, February 18, 2014 6:00 pm
Beltrami	Bemidji	The Sanford Center 1111 Event Center Drive NE	Wednesday, February 19, 2014 6:00 pm
Itasca	Grand Rapids	Sawmill Inn 2301 S Highway 169	Thursday, February 20, 2014 6:00 pm

The meetings will inform the public about the project and the Certificate of Need regulatory proceedings; provide a forum to discuss the environmental, social and economic issues of importance in the areas potentially affected; and gather public input into the scope of the ER to be prepared for the project. The meetings provide the public an opportunity to ask questions about the project and suggest alternatives to the proposed project and specific impacts that should be addressed in the ER.

Representatives of the Department, the Commission and the Applicant will be at the meetings to describe the proposed project and answer questions.

Written public comments can be submitted to the Department EERA staff until **March 14, 2014**. Once the scope is determined, EERA staff will prepare the ER and introduce it into the record at a public hearing to be scheduled, noticed and held at a later date.

5.0 DRAFT SCOPE FOR COMPLETION OF ER

The environmental report will address/discuss 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
- 3.6 Facilities of a Different Size
- 3.7 New Generation

4.0 ENVIRONMENTAL AFFECTS

- 4.1 Air Quality
- 4.2 Biological Resources
- 4.3 Culture Resources
- 4.4 Geology and Soils
- 4.5 Health and Safety
- 4.6 Land Use
- 4.7 Noise
- 4.8 Socioeconomics
- 4.9 Transportation
- 4.10 Visual Impacts and Aesthetics
- 4.11 Water Resources (surface, groundwater, wetlands)
- 4.12 Waste Management and Disposal

6.0 SCHEDULE FOR COMPLETION OF ER

It is anticipated that the Environmental Report on the GNTL CN application will be completed by June 30, 2014.

Upon completion of the ER, the EERA will notify those persons who have asked to be notified of the completion. In addition, the EERA will publish notice of the availability of the ER in the EQB Monitor. The ER will be made available for review and will be posted on the Department's webpage and in edockets.

Following the release of the ER, a public hearing will be held in the vicinity of the project area to obtain public opinion on the necessity of granting a certificate of need.