

MINNESOTA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

NOTICE OF PUBLIC INFORMATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT SCOPING MEETINGS

In the Matter of the Application for a Certificate of Need for the Big Stone South—Alexandria—Big Oaks Transmission Project and In the Matter of the Application for a Route Permit for the Alexandria to Big Oaks 345-kV Transmission Project in Central Minnesota.

PUC Docket Numbers: CN-22-538 (Certificate of Need) and TL-23-159 (Route Permit)

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (Commission) and Minnesota Department of Commerce will hold public information and environmental assessment scoping meetings on the applications of Xcel Energy, Great River Energy, Minnesota Power, Otter Tail Power Company, and Western Minnesota Municipal Power Agency (Applicants) for a certificate of need for the proposed Big Stone South—Alexandria—Big Oaks 345 kilovolt (kV) Transmission Project and a route permit for the Alexandria to Big Oaks 345 kV Transmission Project, the eastern segment of the Big Stone South—Alexandria—Big Oaks 345 kV Transmission Project.

The purpose of the meeting is to: (1) provide information to the public about the proposed project and the state's high-voltage transmission line certificate of need and route permitting processes; and (2) provide members of the public an opportunity to participate in developing the scope of the environmental assessment. This includes commenting on issues or concerns related to the proposed project and proposing alternatives for consideration.

IN-PERSON MEETINGS

Meeting Location	Date	Time
Broadway Ballroom 115 30th Avenue E Alexandria, MN 56308	December 12, 2023	10:00 a.m. (pre-meeting hour) 11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. (formal meeting)
Monticello Community Center Mississippi Room 505 Walnut Street Monticello, MN 55362	December 12, 2023	5:00 p.m. (pre-meeting hour) 6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m. (formal meeting)
Ortonville Community Center 200 Monroe Avenue Ortonville, MN 56278	December 13, 2023	10:00 a.m. (pre-meeting hour) 11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. (formal meeting)
Benson Northside Elementary 1800 Nevada Avenue Benson, MN 56215	December 13, 2023	5:00 p.m. (pre-meeting hour) 6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m. (formal meeting)
College of St. Benedict Gorecki Hall, Room 204 37 College Avenue S St. Joseph, MN 56374	December 14, 2023	10:00 a.m. (pre-meeting hour) 11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. (formal meeting)

To find out if a meeting is canceled due to bad weather or other call 1-855-731-6208 or 651-201-2213 or visit mn.gov/puc.

ONLINE (WEBEX) MEETING

Date: December 14, 2023

Time: 6:00 p.m.

Join by WebEx (Webinar) Link: <https://minnesota.webex.com/minnesota/j.php?MTID=m82fc9deae0b876f7e7641991e22f2e92>

Webinar Number: 2497 915 2538

Webinar Password: JkXxtU2a43 (55993882 from phones)

Join by Phone: 1-855-282-6330 Toll Free **Access Code:** 249 791 52538

If you are joining the meeting by WebEx and would like to ask a question or make a comment during the designated portion of the meeting, use the chat function or raised hand function to send a message to the meeting moderator. If you are joining the meeting by phone, press *3 on your phone. When it is your turn to speak, your line will be unmuted, and you will be able to ask questions and provide comments. Additional information and instructions are available at: <https://mn.gov/puc/activities/meetings/webex/>

MEETING INFORMATION

Doors will open one hour prior to each meeting. Attendees will have an opportunity to review maps and materials for the project and ask questions of the Applicants and state staff. During this time, comments made by attendees will become a part of the record for Commission consideration only if the attendee submits the comment in writing. Forms will be available for this purpose.

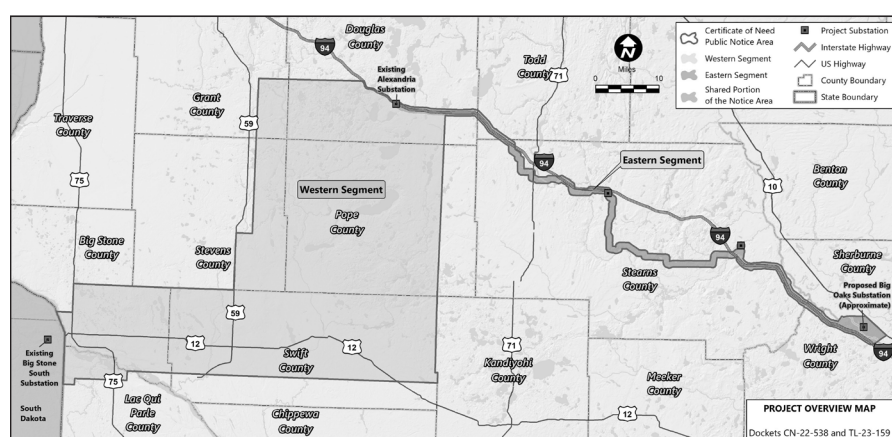
During the formal public meeting, state staff will make a presentation regarding the state's permitting process and environmental review and the Applicants will summarize the proposed project. After the presentations, attendees will have the opportunity to offer oral and written comments into the record. The meetings will end when all attendees have had the opportunity to comment and all other business has been concluded, or the scheduled end time of the meeting, whichever occurs first. The information presented will be the same at all meetings.

WRITTEN COMMENT PERIOD

Written comments will be accepted through **January 8, 2024, by 4:30 p.m.** Please include the docket number in all communications. Comments received after the close of the comment period may or may not be considered by the Commission.

Please focus your comments on information that will help answer the following questions:

- Are there other ways to meet the stated need for the project, for example, a different size project or a different type of facility?
- What potential human and environmental impacts of the proposed project should be considered in the environmental assessment?
- Are there any methods to minimize, mitigate, or avoid potential impacts of the proposed project that should be considered in the environmental assessment?
- Are there any alternative routes or route segments that should be considered to address or mitigate potential impacts associated with the proposed project?
- Are there any unique characteristics of the proposed route or the project that should be considered?



COMMENTS MAY BE SUBMITTED:

Online: <https://mn.gov/commerce/energyfacilities/#comment>

Email: jenna.ness@state.mn.us

U.S. Mail: Jenna Ness
Minnesota Department of Commerce
85 7th Place East, Suite 280
St. Paul, MN 55101

Important. Comments will be made available to the public via the Commission's website, except in limited circumstances consistent with the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act. The Commission and the Department of Commerce do not edit or delete personal identifying information from submissions.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Big Stone South—Alexandria—Big Oaks Transmission Project, the subject of the certificate of need application, is comprised of two segments; a western segment and an eastern segment:

- The western segment (Big Stone South to Alexandria 345 kV Transmission Project) of the 345 kV transmission line would connect the existing Big Stone South Substation near Big Stone City, South Dakota to the existing Alexandria Substation near the city of Alexandria and may cross Grant, Douglas, Stevens, Pope, Swift, Big Stone, and Lac Qui Parle counties, depending on the final route.¹
- The eastern segment (Alexandria to Big Oaks 345 kV Transmission Project) of the 345 kV transmission line is the subject of the current route permit application and would entail construction of an approximately 105- to 108-mile 345-kV transmission line from the existing Alexandria Substation to a new Big Oaks Substation in the city of Becker and would cross Douglas, Todd, Stearns, Sherburne, and Wright counties. As proposed, the transmission line would be collocated on the open position of the existing double-circuit-capable CapX2020 structures, within existing transmission line right-of-way, for more than 95 percent of its length.

On the eastern segment, the new transmission line would deviate from existing infrastructure at four locations: near the Alexandria Substation, the Riverview Substation, and the Quarry Substation; and when crossing the Mississippi River to the new Big Oaks Substation near the city of Becker. Two options for crossing the river are proposed: a direct-span western crossing approximately 0.7 miles long; and an eastern crossing approximately 3.4 miles long which includes two structures to be placed on an island in the river.

The route width being requested generally ranges from 150 feet to 1,000 feet with the exception of the Mississippi River crossing which may range from 0.75 to 1.0 mile. The final right-of-way for the transmission line would be 150 feet wide.

REVIEW PROCESS

The Commission must approve a certificate of need and a route permit before the project can be constructed. The certificate of need and route permit applications are being processed jointly and will be reviewed using the informal review process (Minn. R. 7829.1200) and the alternative review process (Minn. R. 7850.2800 to 7850.3900), respectively. This meeting satisfies the public meeting requirement for both the certificate of need application (Minn. R. 7849.1400) and route permit application (Minn. R. 7850.3500). Relevant Minnesota statute (chapters 216B and 216E) and rules (chapters 7849 and 7850) may be viewed at: <https://www.revisor.mn.gov>.

Environmental Review. The Minnesota Department of Commerce is tasked with preparing an environmental report (ER) for the Commission for the certificate of need application and an environmental assessment (EA) for the route permit application filed under the alternative permitting process. In this case, environmental review has been combined and an EA will be prepared instead of an ER. The EA will evaluate the human and environmental impacts of the proposed project, identify measures that could reasonably be implemented to avoid or minimize impacts identified, evaluate alternative routes identified, and will include the analysis of alternatives required under the certificate of need application review process.

Public Hearing. When the EA is complete, public hearings will be held near the project area. The hearings will be presided over by an administrative law judge from the Office of Administrative Hearings. At the hearings, members of the public will have an opportunity to make an oral presentation, present evidence, and ask questions of the Applicants and staff. The administrative law judge will prepare findings of fact, conclusions, and recommendations for the Commission to consider.

Upon completion of the public hearing process, the Commission will make a final decision on whether to issue a certificate of need and a route permit. If issued a certificate of need and a route permit by the Commission, the Applicants may exercise the power of eminent domain to acquire land for this project pursuant to Minn. Stat. § 216E.12.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Filing Requirements. Utilities, telecommunications carriers, official parties, and state agencies are required to file documents using the Commission's electronic filing system (eFiling). All parties, participants, and interested persons are encouraged to use eFiling: mn.gov/puc/edockets, select Go to eDockets and follow the prompts.

Full Case Record. See all documents filed in this matter via the Commission's website at mn.gov/puc/edockets, select Go to eDockets, enter the year and the docket number (22-538 for the certificate of need or 23-159 for the eastern segment route permit), and select Search.

Subscribe to the Docket. To receive email notification when new documents are filed in this matter visit: <https://www.edockets.state.mn.us/EFiling>, select Subscribe to Dockets and follow the prompts.

Project Mailing List. Sign up to receive notices about project milestones and opportunities to participate or change your mailing preference. Email admin@state.mn.us or call 651-201-2246 with the docket number (22-538 or 23-159), your name, mailing address, and email address.

Department of Commerce Website:

<https://apps.commerce.state.mn.us/eera/web/project/15111>

CONTACTS

Public Utilities Commission

Scott Ek, Energy Facilities Planner, scott.ek@state.mn.us or 651-539-1070

Department of Commerce

Jenna Ness, Environmental Review Manager, jenna.ness@state.mn.us or 651-539-1693

Xcel Energy

Matt Langan, Principal Agent, matthew.a.langan@xcelenergy.com, or 1-888-231-7068

If any reasonable accommodation is needed to enable you to fully participate in these meetings, please contact the Commission at 651-296-0406 or 1-800-657-3782 at least one week in advance of the meeting. To request this document in another format such as large print or audio, call 651-296-0406 (voice). Persons with a hearing or speech impairment may call using their preferred Telecommunications Relay Service or email consumer.puc@state.mn.us for assistance.

¹At this time, Otter Tail Power Company and Missouri River Energy Services, on behalf of Western Minnesota Municipal Power Agency, anticipate filing a route permit application for the western segment (Big Stone South to Alexandria 345kV Transmission Line Project) of the Big Stone South—Alexandria—Big Oaks Transmission Project in the fourth quarter of 2024. See Docket E-017, ET-10/TL-23-160.