

## Staff Briefing Papers

**Meeting Date** February 8, 2024

**Agenda Item \*1**

**Company** Northern States Power Company d/b/a Xcel Energy

**Docket No.** E002/RP-24-67

**In the Matter of Xcel Energy’s 2024-2040 Upper Midwest Integrated Resource Plan**

**Issues**

1. Should the Commission require Xcel Energy to include a bill insert and/or electronic notice to customers regarding public input in its IRP?
2. Should the Commission order one or more public meetings on this matter?
3. Should the Commission take any other actions related to soliciting public input?

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The attached materials are work papers of the Commission Staff. They are intended for use by the Public Utilities Commission and are based upon information already in the record unless noted otherwise.

## **BACKGROUND**

Xcel will file its 2024-2040 Upper Midwest Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) on February 1, 2024. The filing will contain Xcel's proposed resource decisions for the next 15 years. Unlike dockets such as rate cases or certificate of need proceedings, resource plans are generally not referred to the Office of Administrative Hearings for contested case proceedings; therefore, once an IRP is filed, rather than having a public meeting to be conducted by an Administrative Law Judge (ALJ), Staff normally issues a Notice of Comment Period to parties. Members of the public submit public comments through eDockets, via the PUC's Consumer Affairs Office (CAO), or mail, but do not receive individual notice from the Commission.

However, in Xcel Energy's 2019 IRP, the Commission referred the IRP to the Office of Administrative Hearings for the sole purpose of conducting one or more public meetings. The Commission also required Xcel to give written notice to its customers, in the form of a bill insert or electronic communication for customers with e-billing; develop an advertising plan; and work with Staff before publishing or serving the notices. The Decision Options below are nearly identical to the Commission's July 18, 2019 referral order in Xcel's 2019 IRP.

Additionally, Staff has reached out to the Company and stakeholders involved in the prior IRP to discuss how to engage the public through public meetings and other methods of communication. This has included preliminary discussions on the locations and format of the public meetings, open houses for the public to ask questions of Xcel and state agencies about the IRP process, and the collection of written comments from the public.

Of note, over the past two years, Xcel has held a number of workshops as directed by the Commission in its April 15, 2022 Order approving with modifications the Company's 2020-2034 IRP. This includes meetings on the following topics:

- IRP/IDP 101 Workshop September 26 and 27, 2022
- Policy, Technology and Planning Workshop November 15, 2022
- Forecasting Electrification and DER Workshop: Feb 13, 2023
- Envisioning the Grid of the Future Workshop: April 20, 2023
- Planning the Grid of the Future Workshop Part 1: May 24, 2023
- Planning the Grid of the Future Workshop Part 2: June 12, 2023
- 2024-2040 Integrated Resource Plan Modeling Workshop: August 8, 2023
- Request for Proposal 101 Workshop: October 12, 2023
- Equity Stakeholder Advisory Group: 14 meetings
- Allen S King Decommissioning Community Stakeholder Outreach: Quarterly meetings
- Sherburne County Decommissioning Community Stakeholder Outreach: Quarterly Meetings

Xcel has filed presentations from these workshops in the prior IRP record (Docket No. 19-368).

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Bill Insert and Electronic Notice to Customers**

One way for Xcel to inform its customers of the upcoming resource plan, as well as how to participate in the proceeding, would be for the Commission to direct Xcel to send a bill insert or electronic notice to each of its Minnesota ratepayers. The bill insert and electronic notice could include the following information:

1. A statement that the IRP has been filed;
2. A general description of the resource plan;
3. The Commission's role in resource planning;
4. Instructions on how to file public comments and attend any public meetings related to the resource plan; and
5. Any other topics that would assist ratepayers in understanding the IRP process.

If the Commission requires Xcel to send its customers an IRP-related bill insert or electronic notice, Staff recommends the content should first be approved by the Executive Secretary.

While the public may learn of the IRP through other means, Staff believes a bill insert and electronic notice has several advantages. First, it is a neutral, vetted, uniform communication that would be sent to all Xcel's Minnesota customers. Second, it would be the only communication where the Commission could ensure that members of the public were advised on how to provide input directly to the Commission.

Staff recommends that physical bill inserts are sent to customers who pay their bills by mail; for customers who have opted into electronic bills, Staff recommends that Xcel use an electronic form of notice, such as email.

### **Timing**

The IRP will be filed February 1, 2024, which is one week before the agenda meeting deciding on the bill insert and electronic notice. The Commission need not wait for more information on the IRP itself before deciding on the type of communication it wishes to distribute to the public. In all rate cases, the Commission requires that bill inserts be sent to customers regardless of the content of each particular rate case. In addition, directing a bill insert and electronic notice now will give Staff and Xcel sufficient time to draft the communication, distribute it, and make other related arrangements.

### **Public Meetings**

If the Commission wishes to once again refer IRP-related public hearings to the ALJ (as it did with the last IRP petition in 2019-2020<sup>1</sup>), it could also order that a limited number of public meetings take place without ordering a contested case. While the Commission's usual methods of gathering public comments may be sufficient for most customers, members of the public appreciated an in-person forum during the last IRP process where they could ask questions, provide input, and hear the thoughts of others. Based on that experience, Staff believes it would be valuable to hold public meetings for this new filing. The Commission could authorize

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<sup>1</sup> E002/RP-19-368, *In the Matter of Xcel Energy's 2020-2034 Upper Midwest Integrated Resource Plan*

the same process as Xcel's previous IRP filing, where an ALJ was assigned to conduct public meetings to allow for public input but not conduct a contested case; for Xcel's IRP, the ALJ would file a summary of the public meetings, rather than a report on the entire record.

### **Processes Outlined Are For Public Input Only**

It should be clarified that the processes outlined in these briefing papers are for the purpose of gathering public input. As Staff noted, Xcel has conducted meetings for stakeholders (that is, organizations that are likely to be parties to the IRP proceeding); Staff may also at times communicate with stakeholders on the Commission's IRP process generally. Gathering stakeholder (party) input is a separate issue that Staff has not addressed here in these briefing papers.

## **DECISION OPTIONS**

### **Bill Insert and Electronic Notice**

1. Require the Company to give the following notice of its resource plan:
  - a. Individual written notice to each customer in Minnesota, which may be in the form of a bill insert for customers with paper bills, or electronic communication for customers with e-billing.
  - b. Written notice to the governing bodies of all municipalities, counties, local governing bodies, and Minnesota Tribal Nations in the Company's Minnesota service area.
  - c. Advertisements in legal newspapers of affected counties and other newspapers of general circulation within the Company's Minnesota service area.
2. Require the Company to submit a draft of each notice required above for Commission approval prior to publication or service. The Company shall submit draft notices to Commission staff within 30 days of the date of the Order in this docket.
3. Delegate to the Executive Secretary the authority to approve customer notices, bill inserts, bill format, and any other communications for the duration of this proceeding.

### **Public Meetings**

4. Refer this case to the Office of Administrative Hearings for the sole purpose of conducting one or more public meetings.
  - a. The above-referenced customer notice shall include information about the public meetings, and notices shall be sent at least ten days before the first public hearing.
  - b. The Commission requests that the Office of Administrative Hearings provide a written summary of the public meetings within 60 days of the date of the last public hearing.