

Staff Briefing Papers

Meeting Date August 6, 2026

Agenda Item 3**

Company Northern States Power Company d/b/a Xcel Energy and Echo Zone, LLC

Docket No. E002/TL-26-135

In the Matter of the Application of Xcel Energy and Echo Zone LLC for a Route Permit for the North Rochester to Skyway High Voltage Transmission Line Project in Goodhue County, Minnesota.

- Issues**
- Should the Commission require an addendum to the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the project?
 - If an addendum is required, should the Commission authorize the Executive Secretary to approve the scope of an EA addendum?
 - If an addendum is required, should the Commission extend the six-month statutory deadline for the Commission to make a decision (not to exceed nine months)?
 - Should the Commission issue the draft route permit prepared by Energy Infrastructure Permitting Staff (PUC EIP staff), including the proposed special permit conditions?
 - Should the Commission request that an Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) from the Court of Administrative Hearings (CAH) conduct public hearings for the project and prepare a summary of public testimony as expeditiously as possible?

Staff	Saarah Maxon	Saarah.Maxon@state.mn.us	651-201-2200
	Sam Weaver	Sam.Weaver@state.mn.us	651-539-1531

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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.

✓ **Relevant Documents**

	Date
Xcel Energy and Echo Zone, LLC (Applicants) – Route Permit Application (four parts)	04/28/2026
Public Utilities Commission (PUC) – Application Completeness Determination	05/12/2026
Carol Overland – Considerations for Environmental and Substantive Review	06/02/2026
Applicants – Tribal Correspondence Compliance Filing	06/05/2026
Ben Dvorak – Goodhue County Soil and Water Conservation District – Public Comment	06/11/2026
Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) - Comments	06/25/2026
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) – DNR Comment Letter	06/26/2026
PUC – Oral Comments from Public Information and Scoping Meetings	06/29/2026
PUC – Written Public Comments Received	06/29/2026
Nicole Mills – Public Comments	07/08/2026
Janet Hanke - Public Comments	07/08/2026
Lora Walker - Public Comments	07/08/2026
Bonnie Flitsch - Public Comments	07/08/2026
Tosca Wohl - Public Comments	07/08/2026
Aubree Derksen – Public Comments (two parts)	07/08/2026
Kira Christine Dunkle Weyrauch Anderson - Public Comments	07/08/2026
Applicants – Response to Scoping Comments	07/14/2026
North Route Group and NO765MN - NRG & NO765MN Comment on Data Centers and Tranche 2.1 Transmission	07/15/2026

Attachments

Attachment A: Draft Route Permit

I. ISSUES

- Should the Commission require an addendum to the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the project?
- If an addendum is required, should the Commission authorize the Executive Secretary to approve the scope of an EA addendum?
- If an addendum is required, should the Commission extend the six-month statutory deadline for the Commission to make a decision (not to exceed nine months)?
- Should the Commission issue the draft route permit prepared by Energy Infrastructure Permitting Staff (PUC EIP staff), including the proposed special permit conditions?
- Should the Commission request that an Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) from the Court of Administrative Hearings (CAH) conduct public hearings for the project and prepare a summary of public testimony as expeditiously as possible?

II. PROJECT BACKGROUND

Northern States Power Company, doing business as Xcel Energy, and Echo Zone LLC, a subsidiary of Google LLC (Applicants) proposed to construct an approximately 1.2-mile double-circuit 345 kilovolt (kV) transmission line that would connect Xcel Energy's North Rochester Substation to four new substation facilities at the proposed Pine Island Industrial Planned Unit Development (Project Skyway) site. The Applicants also proposed to expand the existing North Rochester Substation, currently on a footprint of 10 acres, by approximately 11.3 acres. The transmission line and North Rochester Substation expansion (North Rochester to Skyway HVTL Project) will be owned and operated by Xcel Energy, and the four Project Skyway substations will be owned and operated by Echo Zone LLC.

The Applicants have requested a route width of 1,000 feet for the transmission line, 500 feet on either side of the centerline, with an expanded route width around the North Rochester Substation and Project Skyway substations. The Applicants stated that the required right-of way for the transmission line is 150 feet. Structures utilized for the project would be made of steel and range from 100 to 180 feet in height. Spans between structures would range from 150 to 975 feet.

In their application, the Applicants proposed to start construction in May 2027 with an estimated in-service date of December 2029 and provided an estimated total cost for the North Rochester to Skyway HVTL Project of between \$198,000,000 and \$248,000,000.

III. RULES AND STATUTES

a. Certificate of Need

Under Minn. Stat. § 216B.243 Subd. 2, no large energy facility shall be sited or constructed in Minnesota without the issuance of a certificate of need by the Commission.

Under Minn. Stat. § 216B.243 Subd. 8(a)(2), a high-voltage transmission line (HVTL) proposed primarily to distribute electricity to serve the demand of a single customer at a single location is exempt from a certificate of need. The proposed North Rochester to Skyway HVTL Project would be constructed to serve a single customer at a single location, and therefore is exempt from a certificate of need.

b. Route Permit

Under Minn. Stat. § 216I.05 Subd. 2, no person may construct a high-voltage transmission line without a route permit issued by the Commission. Additionally, a high-voltage transmission line may only be constructed along a route approved by the Commission. As defined by Minn. Stat. § 216I.02 Subd. 8, a high-voltage transmission line means a conductor of electric energy and associated facilities that is (1) designed for and capable of operation at a nominal voltage of 100 kilovolts or more, and (2) is greater than 1,500 feet in length. The proposed North Rochester to Skyway HVTL Project would involve construction of approximately 1.2-mile double-circuit 345 kV transmission line, and therefore meets the definition of a high-voltage transmission line.

Under Minn. Stat. § 216I.07 Subd 2(4), an applicant may follow standard review procedures for high-voltage transmission lines with a capacity in excess of 300 kilovolts and less than 30 miles in length in Minnesota. The proposed North Rochester to Skyway HVTL Project would involve construction of approximately 1.2-mile long double-circuit 345 kV transmission line, and therefore may follow the standard review procedure.

Under Minn. Stat. § 216I.07 Subd. 3, for projects following the standard review process, applicants must prepare and submit an EA with the application containing information on the proposed project's human and environmental impacts and mitigating measures. If after the public meeting, the Commission identifies other routes or potential impacts for review beyond what was included as part of the applicant-prepared EA, Commission staff must prepare an EA addendum.

IV. PROCEDURAL HISTORY

1) Application Completeness

On April 28, 2026, the Applicants filed a Route Permit Application (four parts).¹

On May 5, 2026, Public Utilities Commission (PUC or Commission) Energy Infrastructure

¹ Applicants – [Route Permit Application](#), 04/28/2026

Permitting (EIP) staff filed an application completeness determination letter.²

On June 2, 2026, Carol Overland filed comments on considerations for environmental and substantive review.³

Also on June 2, 2026, PUC EIP staff filed a notice of complete route permit application and public information meetings.⁴ Notice of the complete route permit application and public information meetings was issued on June 2, 2026, and in accordance with Minn. Stat. § 216I.05, notice was provided to the project contact list, landowners along the proposed route, local governments, state agency representatives, Tribal Historic Preservation Officers, Tribal Governments, and the Energy Infrastructure Permitting Act general service list. The notice was published in a local newspaper⁵ on June 10, 2026.

On June 5, 2026, the Applicants filed a Tribal correspondence compliance filing.⁶

On June 8, 2026, Ms. Overland filed a comment regarding the public meeting location.⁷

On June 11, 2026, a comment was received from Ben Dvorak on behalf of the Goodhue County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD).⁸ Also on June 11, 2026, a public comment was received from Janet Hanke.⁹

2) Public Meeting, Environmental Assessment Addendum, and Draft Permit

On June 15, 2026, PUC EIP staff held an in-person public information and scoping meeting in Zumbrota, Minnesota. Approximately 50 members of the public attended the in-person meeting.

On June 16, 2026, PUC EIP staff held a virtual public information and scoping meeting via Webex. Approximately 15 members of the public attended the virtual meeting. A corresponding written public comment period was open through June 26, 2026.

On June 25, 2026, the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) filed comments.¹⁰ Also on June 25, 2026, a public comment was received from Cory Mines.¹¹

On June 26, 2026, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) filed a comment

² PUC EIP staff – [Application Completeness Determination](#), 05/05/2026

³ Public Comment – Carol Overland – [Considerations for Environmental and Substantive Review](#), 06/02/2026

⁴ PUC EIP staff – [Notice of Complete Route Permit Application and Public Information Meetings](#), 06/02/2026

⁵ Applicants, [North Rochester to Skyway Public Information Meeting – Newspaper Affidavits](#), June 10, 2026

⁶ Applicants – [Tribal Correspondence Compliance Filing](#), 06/05/2026

⁷ Public Comment – [Carol Overland](#), 06/06/2026

⁸ Public Comment – [Ben Dvorak, Goodhue County Soil and Water Conservation District](#), 06/11/2026

⁹ Public Comment – [Janet Hanke](#), 06/11/2026

¹⁰ MnDOT – [Comments](#), 06/25/2026

¹¹ Public Comment – [Cory Mines](#), 06/25/2026

letter.¹² Also on June 26, 2026, a public comment was received from Trevor Scrabeck.¹³

On June 29, 2026, PUC EIP staff filed oral comments from the public information and scoping meetings¹⁴ and written public comments received to date.¹⁵

On July 2, 2026, PUC EIP staff filed a sample HVTL permit.¹⁶ A copy of the sample HVTL permit was also available at the in-person public information and scoping meeting as a handout.

On July 8, 2026, eight public comments were received from members of the public.¹⁷

On July 14, 2026, the Applicants filed a response to scoping comments.¹⁸

On July 15, 2026, Ms. Overland filed a comment on behalf of the North Route Group (NRG) and NO765MN Group.¹⁹

V. COMMENTS RECEIVED

Approximately 65 members of the public attended the public meetings and several attendees spoke. Additionally, written comments were received from the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT), Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Goodhue Soil and Water Conservation District, and ten members of the public. Comments and questions covered a variety of topics including concern over the proposed data center, frustration over separate permitting and environmental review of infrastructure projects in the area, location of the public meeting and name of the project, and potential impacts of the North Rochester to Skyway HVTL Project. PUC EIP staff has summarized the comments that were received below.

General Comments

Numerous commenters generally referenced other infrastructure projects in the area such as the proposed Project Skyway Data Center, Gopher to Badger Transmission Project, and the PowerOn Midwest Transmission Project certificate of need. Commenters expressed frustration over the separate permitting and environmental review of infrastructure projects in the area and shared a desire to understand the “bigger picture” as to how the projects are connected or what might be proposed in the future.

Several members of the public commented specifically on the proposed Project Skyway Data Center that would be served by the North Rochester to Skyway HVTL Project. Commenters

¹² DNR – [Comments Letter](#), 06/26/2026

¹³ Public Comment – [Trevor Scrabeck](#), 06/26/2026

¹⁴ PUC EIP staff – [Oral Comments from Public Information and Scoping Meetings](#), 06/29/2026

¹⁵ PUC EIP staff – [Written Comments Received](#), 06/29/2026

¹⁶ PUC EIP staff – [Sample HVTL Permit](#), 07/02/2026

¹⁷ Comments were received from [Nicole Mills](#), [Janet Hanke](#), [Lora Walker](#), [Bonnie Flitsch](#), [Tosca Wohl](#), Aubree Derksen – ([comment 1](#), [comment 2](#)), and [Kira Christine Dunkle Weyrauch Anderson](#), 07/08/2026

¹⁸ Applicants – [Response to Scoping Comments](#), 07/14/2026

¹⁹ Public Comment – [NRG and No765MN](#), 07/15/2026

expressed concern over the proposed data center's impacts on rates, property values, and aesthetics, and a perceived lack of local benefits. Commenters also discussed confusion regarding the size and scope of the proposed Project Skyway Data Center. One public commenter, Ms. Carol Overland, stated that the Project Skyway Data Center, along with the Tranche 2.1 projects that would connect to the North Rochester Substation, should be considered connected and phased actions for the purposes of environmental review. Other commenters requested a stay on the permitting review process for the North Rochester to Skyway HVTL Project until court cases involving the proposed Project Skyway Data Center are resolved. One commenter discussed the need for more environmental review if the court cases lead to a change in the project design for the transmission project. Two commenters also argued that the North Rochester to Skyway HVTL Project should not be exempt from a certificate of need. Some commenters also expressed that the public information and scoping meetings should have been held in Pine Island and not Zumbrota, Minnesota.

North Rochester to Skyway HVTL Related Comments

Comments from members of the public related to the North Rochester to Skyway HVTL Project covered a variety of topics.

- Concern over environmental and human health impacts (e.g., electromagnetic fields, soil, water, noise, fire risk, aesthetics, property values)
- A request to fully evaluate agricultural, land, environmental, and cumulative impacts
- Concern over construction impacts and reassurances for revegetation and restoration efforts after construction of the transmission line
- Soil testing for heavy metals and other contaminants
- Conferring with other agencies and organizations beyond the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (e.g., Land Stewardship Project)
- A request for an environmental impact statement (EIS)
- Road impacts
- A request for analysis of reasonably foreseeable future transmission, substation expansion, and related load growth
- A request that the applicants not be exempt from a certificate of need

PUC EIP staff notes that many comments received regarding the project were intertwined with comments focused on other infrastructure projects in the area, including other transmission projects but primarily the proposed Project Skyway Data Center. While staff has summarized and highlighted comments discussing potential impacts from the proposed North Rochester to Skyway HVTL Project above, staff directs the Commission to the filings for the full context surrounding these comments.

MnDOT

In their June 25, 2026, comments, MnDOT stated that they had reviewed the North Rochester to Skyway HVTL Project application and that the proposal involves a perpendicular crossing of US 52. MnDOT discussed that there is a Monarch Candidate Conservation Adoption Area (CCAA) requiring native seeding along US 52 in the North Rochester to Skyway HVTL project area. Therefore, if any temporary or permanent work is planned within the trunk highway right-of-way, the Applicants may need to coordinate with the Roadside Vegetation Management Unit at MnDOT for more information. MnDOT also stated that the application of broadcast herbicides or chemicals within the highway right-of-way along U.S. 52 should not be permitted without evidence of consultation with the MnDOT Protected Species Program.

MnDOT indicated that they had informed the Applicants of upcoming construction on US 52 and that continued coordination with their staff is expected. MnDOT also attached additional comments from MnDOT resource groups.

DNR

In their June 26, 2026, comments, DNR stated that they had reviewed the North Rochester to Skyway HVTL Project application. DNR recommended permit conditions for lighting, avian flight diverters, the timing of vegetation clearing, wildlife friendly erosion control, and dust control. Additionally, the DNR discussed that a DNR Water Appropriation Permit is required for all users withdrawing more than 10,000 gallons of water per day or 1 million gallons per year.

Goodhue County SWCD

On June 11, 2026, Ben Dvorak, Natural Resource Specialist for the Goodhue County SWCD, provided a comment discussing the presence of a wetland within and to the east of the proposed North Rochester to Skyway HVTL Project. Mr. Dvorak discussed the need to comply with the Minnesota Wetland Conservation Act, including adherence to avoidance requirements in Minnesota WCA Rule 8420.0100 Subp. 1C. Additionally, Mr. Dvorak stated that delineation, avoidance/sequencing, and mitigation may be needed to comply with the Minnesota Wetland Conservation Act.

Applicants Responses to Comments

On July 14, 2026, the Applicants filed comments in response to comments that were filed prior to the close of the comment period on June 26, 2026. In their comments, the Applicants stated that their response does not include discussion of topics that will be addressed in other proceedings such as the Electric Service Agreement (ESA) and Interconnection Agreement currently under review by the Commission (Docket No. E002/M-26-170). However, the Applicants briefly discussed the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's (MPCA's) environmental review of the backup generators for the proposed Project Skyway Data Center and stated that the public will have an additional opportunity for comment through the MPCA permitting process.

1) DNR

In response to the DNR's comments and suggested permit conditions, the Applicants stated the following -

- Substation Lighting: The Applicants do not object to a special condition regarding substation lighting as long as there is no conflict with North American Electric Reliability Corporation, National Electric Safety Code, and other applicable safety and security requirements.
- Vegetation Clearing Timing: The Applicants do not object to a special permit condition regarding vegetation clearing timing restrictions so long as it includes the phrase "to the extent practicable" and stated that there may be limited circumstances when the Applicants must remove trees during the June 1 through August 15 timeframe.
- The Applicants do not object to permit conditions regarding Avian Flight Diverters, Wildlife-Friendly Erosion Control, and Dust Control, and noted that these conditions are already included as standard permit conditions in the sample route permit.

2) MnDOT

In response to MnDOT's comments, the Applicants stated that they will continue to coordinate with MnDOT and other federal and state agencies and will obtain all required permits and approvals necessary for construction and operation of the project.

3) Goodhue County SWCD

In response to Goodhue County SWCD's comments, the Applicants stated that they will comply with the Minnesota Wetland Conservation Act and that the sample route permit includes a permit condition to minimize potential impacts to wetlands and water resources.

4) Public Comments

The Applicants also responded to comments that were received during the scoping process, and in their response stated that many comments related to matters other than the need for an EA addendum. PUC EIP staff summarized the Applicants' discussion below:

- In response to Ms. Overland's comments regarding connections between the proposed North Rochester to Skyway HVTL Project and the 765 kV Midwest Independent System Operator (MISO) Tranche 2.1 projects, the Applicants stated that the need for the Tranche 2.1 projects was evaluated using demand forecasts that did not include the proposed Project Skyway Data Center. The Applicants also clarified that the North Rochester to Skyway HVTL Project would involve a double-circuit 345 kV transmission line or two 345 kV transmission lines located on a single structure and that this information is available in the application. The Applicants also addressed Ms. Overland's comments regarding MnDOT projects on US 52 and stated that road impacts were evaluated in the EA and they will continue to coordinate with MnDOT.
- In response to comments expressing concern for agricultural impacts, mitigation, and restoration, the Applicants briefly discussed that these topics were evaluated in the EA and that the sample route permit includes a number of permit conditions focused on agricultural lands. Similarly, in regards to concerns about construction impacts, the Applicants stated that construction impacts were studied in the EA and that the EA included a discussion of potential mitigation measures.
- In response to a comment regarding the size of the proposed Project Skyway Data Center, the Applicants clarified that the EA described the area of Project Skyway to be approximately 482 acres, located east of the North Rochester Substation and within the North Rochester to Skyway HVTL Project area. Additionally, the Applicants stated that Google has executed a lease for a single data center building but that they will provide updated information regarding the Project Skyway Data Center if additional details become available.

VI. PUC STAFF DISCUSSION

Should the Commission require an addendum to the EA for the project? If an addendum is required, should the Commission authorize the Executive Secretary to approve the scope of an EA addendum?

The Commission is charged with preparing an EA addendum if alternative routes or potential impacts that require study are identified during the public information and scoping process.²⁰

PUC EIP staff have reviewed all comments received; staff have focused their analysis on comments pertinent to the need for an EA addendum and the development of the draft route permit. No alternative routes were suggested by commenters. Staff finds that concerns

²⁰ [Minn. Stat. § 216I.07, Subd. 3\(b\)](#)

regarding the environmental impacts associated with the North Rochester to Skyway HVTL Project, primarily electromagnetic fields, wetland impacts, and impacts to farmland, are addressed sufficiently in the environmental assessment provided by the Applicants. Staff notes that the Applicant-prepared EA also addressed the cumulative potential effects of foreseeable projects in the project area.

One public commenter, Ms. Carol Overland, stated that the Project Skyway Data Center, along with the Tranche 2.1 projects that would connect to the North Rochester Substation, should be considered connected and phased actions for the purposes of environmental review.²¹ While this project and the data center may meet the definition of connected or phased actions under Chapter 4410,²² the requirements in Chapter 4410 regarding consideration of connected and phased actions in preparing environmental assessment worksheets and environmental impact statements do not apply to EAs for standard review projects under Minn. Stat. § 216I.²³ Therefore, this project does not require consideration of the environmental impacts of the data center or other transmission facilities.

One member of the public, Mr. Cory Mines,²⁴ submitted a written comment that requested an EIS be prepared for the project. Staff notes that it is unclear whether his request for an EIS was specific to the North Rochester to Skyway HVTL Project or to the proposed Project Skyway Data Center. With respect to the North Rochester to Skyway HVTL Project, an EA, including any EA addendum, is the only state environmental review document that must be prepared for the project.²⁵ Accordingly, an EIS is not allowable or required for the project.

With respect to the Project Skyway Data Center, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) is conducting environmental review of the data center. The type of environmental review document prepared by the MPCA is a decision to be made by the MPCA, not the Commission.

Based on EIP staff's review of the applicant-prepared EA and public comments received, EIP staff believes that an EA addendum is not required for the project.

If an addendum is required, should the Commission extend the six-month statutory deadline for the Commission to make a decision (not to exceed nine months)?

A final decision on a route permit application for standard review projects under Minn. Stat. § 216I.07 must be made within 6 months of the date the commission determines the application is complete, or within 9 months for just cause or upon agreement with the applicant.

If the Commission determines an EA addendum is necessary, the Commission may want to

²¹ Public Comment – Carol Overland – [Considerations for Environmental and Substantive Review](#), 06/02/2026

²² [Minn. Rules Chapter 4410](#)

²³ [Minn. Stat. § 216I.07, subd. 3\(a\)](#) (“The environmental assessment is the only state environmental review document that must be prepared for the proposed project.”)

²⁴ Public Comment – [Cory Mines](#), 06/25/2026

²⁵ [Minn. Stat. § 216I.07, Subd. 3\(b\)](#)

consider extending the six-month statutory deadline, by up to three months, to allow sufficient time for PUC EIP staff to develop an EA Addendum and for the Commission to make a final decision.

Should the Commission issue the draft route permit prepared by PUC EIP staff, including the proposed special permit conditions?

Upon close of the public comment period, the Commission must issue a draft route permit for the project.²⁶ The draft permit must identify the person or persons who are the permittee, describe the proposed project, and include proposed permit conditions.²⁷ PUC EIP staff recommends the approval of the attached draft route permit (**Attachment A**).

PUC EIP staff entered a sample permit into the docket on July 2, 2026.²⁸ The attached draft permit updates the sample permit with project-specific information in sections 1, 2, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 3, and 4. As a result of the comments received and based on PUC EIP staff's analysis of the record, staff also recommends four special permit conditions in the attached draft route permit:

- Section 6.1 would require the Applicants to not commence construction on the project until the associated Project Skyway Data Center receives all local, state, and federal approvals required for construction. This condition is responsive to multiple public comments.
- Section 6.2 would require the Applicants to avoid tree removal from June 1 through August 15 to minimize impacts to nesting bird species and bats, including the federally endangered northern long-eared bat. This condition is responsive to the DNR's scoping comment.²⁹
- Section 6.3 would prohibit the broadcast application of herbicides or other chemicals within DOT right-of-way along US 52 without evidence of additional MnDOT Protected Species Program consultation. This comment is responsive to MnDOT's scoping comment.³⁰
- Section 6.4 would require the Applicants to turn off non-essential lighting on substation buildings and associated structures from midnight until dawn March 15 to May 31 and August 15 to October 31 to minimize impacts to migratory birds and the Mayfly hatch, to the extent this lighting scheme is consistent with North American Electric Reliability

²⁶ [Minn. Stat. § 216I.05, Subd. 10](#)

²⁷ Id.

²⁸ PUC, [Sample HVTL Permit](#), July 2, 2026

²⁹ DNR – [Comments Letter](#), 06/26/2026

³⁰ MnDOT – [Comments](#), 06/25/2026

Corporation, National Electric Safety Code, and other applicable safety and security requirements. This comment is responsive to the DNR's scoping comment.³¹

Should the Commission request that an ALJ from the CAH conduct public hearings for the project and prepare a summary of public testimony as expeditiously as possible?

Upon issuance of a draft permit, the Commission must hold a public hearing for the project.³² The Commission may request that an ALJ from the CAH conduct the hearing and prepare a report.³³

Based on the record, EIP staff recommends that an ALJ from the CAH be requested to conduct the public hearings and that the ALJ prepare a summary of public testimony from the hearings.

Commission staff have observed high public engagement on the proposed North Rochester to Skyway HVTL Project through both comments in the record and participation at the public meetings. Many comments received do not make a clear distinction between the North Rochester to Skyway HVTL Project, the proposed Project Skyway Data Center, or other energy infrastructure projects in the area undergoing separate permitting review at the Commission. Additionally, members of the public have expressed strong opposition to the proposed Project Skyway Data Center which would be served by the North Rochester to Skyway HVTL Project. Staff notes that these factors add to the complexity of the proposed North Rochester to Skyway HVTL Project.

As CAH is an independent, neutral, fact-finding court, not associated with any of the parties involved in the proposed North Rochester to Skyway HVTL Project, staff believes that requesting an ALJ to preside over the public hearings and prepare a summary of public testimony would be in the public interest. A summary of public testimony would also help ensure the Commission has a robust record on which to base its decision.

³¹ DNR – [Comments Letter](#), 06/26/2026

³² [Minn. Stat. § 216I, Subd. 4.](#)

³³ *Id.*

DECISION OPTIONS

Environmental Review

1. Find that an addendum to the applicant-prepared EA is required for the North Rochester to Skyway HVTL Project to provide additional discussion of the following:
 - A. Environmental effects of the proposed Project Skyway Data Center.
 - B. Environmental effects of MISO Tranche 2.1 transmission projects proposed in Minnesota.
 - C. Environmental effects of the planned additions of 1,400 MW wind, 200 MW solar, and 300 MW iron air battery referenced in the ESA petition in Docket No. E002/M-26-170.

And

2. Authorize the Executive Secretary to approve the scope of an EA addendum.

Or

3. Find that an addendum to the applicant EA is not required for the North Rochester to Skyway HVTL Project. (staff)

Or

4. Require an EIS for the North Rochester to Skyway HVTL Project.

Schedule

5. Extend the six-month statutory deadline for the Commission to make a decision (not to exceed nine months) for just cause.

Or

6. Determine that an extension to the six-month statutory deadline is not necessary (staff).

Or

7. Stay the proceeding until litigation involving the proposed Skyway Data Center has been resolved. Authorize the Executive Secretary to set a schedule to resume proceedings after the litigation is resolved.

Draft Route Permit

8. Issue the Draft Route Permit prepared by PUC EIP staff, including the proposed special permit conditions (**Attachment A** to these briefing papers). (staff)

Or

9. Issue the Draft Route Permit prepared by PUC EIP staff, with modifications.

Public Hearings

10. Request that an Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) from the Court of Administrative Hearings (CAH) conduct public hearings for the project and prepare a summary of public testimony as expeditiously as possible. (staff)

Or

11. Delegate Authority to the Executive Secretary to designate a member of the Commission's senior staff to conduct public hearings for the project and prepare a summary of public testimony.

Staff Recommendations: 3, 6, 8, 10

STATE OF MINNESOTA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

**ROUTE PERMIT FOR
NORTH ROCHESTER TO SKYWAY HIGH VOLTAGE TRANSMISSION LINE PROJECT**

A HIGH-VOLTAGE TRANSMISSION LINE AND ASSOCIATED FACILITIES

**IN
GOODHUE COUNTY**

**ISSUED TO
NORTHERN STATES POWER COMPANY D/B/A XCEL ENERGY AND ECHO ZONE, LLC**

PUC DOCKET NO. E002/TL-26-135

In accordance with the requirements of Minnesota Statutes Chapter 216I, this route permit is hereby issued to:

NORTHERN STATES POWER COMPANY D/B/A XCEL ENERGY AND ECHO ZONE, LLC

Northern States Power Company d/b/a Xcel Energy and Echo Zone, LLC are authorized by this route permit to construct and operate the North Rochester to Skyway High Voltage Transmission Line Project (Project), an approximately 1.2-mile long double-circuit 345 kilovolt (kV) transmission line that would connect Xcel Energy's North Rochester Substation to four new substation facilities at the proposed Pine Island Industrial Planned Unit Development site, and to expand the existing North Rochester Substation by approximately 11.3 acres in Goodhue County, Minnesota.

The high-voltage transmission line shall be constructed within the route identified in this route permit and in compliance with the conditions specified in this route permit.

Approved and adopted this day of [Month, Year]

BY ORDER OF THE COMMISSION

Sasha Bergman, Executive Secretary

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DRAFT PERMIT

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – Complaint Handling Procedures for Permitted Energy Facilities

Attachment 2 – Compliance Filing Procedures for Permitted Energy Facilities

Attachment 3 – Route Permit Maps

1 ROUTE PERMIT

The Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (Commission) hereby issues this route permit to Northern States Power Company and Echo Zone, LLC (Permittees) pursuant to Minnesota Statutes Chapter 216I. This route permit authorizes the Permittees to construct and operate a an approximately 1.2-mile long double-circuit 345 kV transmission line that would connect Xcel Energy's North Rochester substation to four new substation facilities at the proposed Pine Island Industrial Planned Unit Development (Project Skyway) site, and to expand the existing North Rochester Substation by approximately 11.3 acres (North Rochester to Skyway High Voltage Transmission Line Project, henceforth known as Transmission Facility). The high-voltage transmission line shall be constructed within the route identified in this route permit and in compliance with the conditions specified in this route permit.

1.1 Pre-emption

Pursuant to Minn. Stat. § 216I.18, this route permit shall be the sole route approval required for construction of the Transmission Facility. This route permit shall supersede and preempt all zoning, building, or land use rules, regulations, or ordinances promulgated by regional, county, local and special purpose governments.

2 TRANSMISSION FACILITY DESCRIPTION

The Transmission Line and North Rochester substation facilities would be owned and operated by Xcel Energy, and the four Project Skyway substations would be owned and operated by Echo Zone, LLC.

The Transmission Facility is located in the following:

County	Township Name	Township	Range	Section
Goodhue	Pine Island	109N	015W	19, 29, 30

2.1 Structures

The structure types as described in the Permittees' route permit application are detailed in the table below.

Line Type	Structure		Foundation	Height	Span
	Type	Material			
Double-circuit, 345 kV	Double-circuit, double-pole terminal deadends	Steel	Reinforced concrete drilled piers, 8-10 foot diameter.	100-180 feet	150-975 feet
	Double-circuit, single-pole tangent				
	Single-circuit, single-pole terminal deadends.				
	Angle structures with V-string insulators				

2.2 Conductors

The double-circuit, 345 kV HVTL structures will have six single-conductor attachments, which will be 3-phase double-bundled twisted pair 636 kcmil 26/7 ACSR “Grosbeak”. There will be two shield wires per structure, which will be 0.555-inch diameter 48-fiber Optical Ground Wire (OPGW). The spans into the North Rochester Substation and Project Skyway Substations will both have two additional 3/8-inch EHS steel shield wires.

2.3 Substations and Associated Facilities

The substations and associated facilities authorized by this Route Permit include the expansion of the existing North Rochester Substation and the construction of the four Project Skyway Substations at the Project Skyway Data Center site.

Xcel Energy proposes to expand the North Rochester Substation’s footprint directly to the north by approximately 11.3 acres, increasing the total site area to approximately 22 acres. The expansion area will be graveled and fenced to accommodate additional 345 kV lines entering the site and will add 6 new breaker-and-a-half rows, providing capacity for 10 additional line terminations.

The Project Skyway Substations will range in size from approximately 230 to 250 feet wide and 175 to 285 feet in length. In total, the Project Skyway Substations will have a 5.8-acre footprint. The substations would consist of A-frame structures for 345 kV high voltage transmission and terminations, protection equipment, bus schemes, switches, breakers, controls, and transformers to output medium voltage to the industrial campus.

3 DESIGNATED ROUTE

The route designated by the Commission is depicted on the route maps attached to this route permit (Designated Route). The route width approved by this permit varies based on the proposed facilities. The minimum proposed route width is 1,000 feet for the transmission line portions of the project. An expanded route width is proposed around the North Rochester Substation expansion and the Project Skyway Substations.

The route begins at Xcel Energy's North Rochester Substation west of US Highway 52. The Proposed Alignment travels east for approximately 0.64-mile, crossing US Highway 52, then turns south for approximately 0.52-mile, where the route terminates at the southernmost of the four proposed Project Skyway Substations.

The Designed Route includes an anticipated alignment and a right-of-way. The right-of-way is the physical land needed for the safe operation of the transmission line. The Permittees shall locate the alignment and associated right-of-way within the Designated Route unless otherwise authorized by this route permit or the Commission. The Designated Route provides the Permittees with flexibility for minor adjustments of the alignment and right-of-way to accommodate landowner requests and unforeseen conditions.

Any modifications to the Designated Route or modifications that would result in right-of-way placement outside the Designated Route shall be specifically reviewed by the Commission in accordance with Minn. Stat. § 216I.09 and Section 10 of this route permit.

4 RIGHT-OF-WAY

This route permit authorizes the Permittees to obtain a new permanent right-of-way for the transmission line up to 150 feet in width. The permanent right-of-way is typically 75 feet on both sides of the transmission line measured from its centerline or alignment.

The anticipated alignment is intended to minimize potential impacts relative to the criteria identified in Minn. Stat. § 216I.05, subd. 11. The final alignment must generally conform to the anticipated alignment identified on the route maps unless changes are requested by individual landowners and agreed to by the Permittees or for unforeseen conditions that are encountered or as otherwise provided for by this route permit.

Any right-of-way or alignment modifications within the Designated Route shall be located so as to have comparable overall impacts relative to the factors in Minn. Stat. § 216I.05, subd. 11, as does the right-of-way and alignment identified in this route permit and shall be specifically identified and documented in and approved as part of the plan and profile submitted pursuant to Section 9.2 of this route permit.

Where the transmission line parallels existing highway and other road rights-of-way, the transmission line right-of-way shall occupy and utilize the existing right-of-way to the maximum

extent possible; consistent with the criteria in Minn. Stat. § 216I.05, subd. 11, and the other requirements of this route permit; and for highways under the jurisdiction of the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT), the procedures for accommodating utilities in trunk highway rights-of-way.

5 GENERAL CONDITIONS

The Permittees shall comply with the following conditions during construction and operation of the Transmission Facility over the life of this route permit.

5.1 Route Permit Distribution

Within 30 days of issuance of this route permit, the Permittees shall provide all affected landowners with a copy of this route permit and the complaint procedures. An affected landowner is any landowner or designee that is within or adjacent to the Designated Route. In no case shall a landowner receive this route permit and complaint procedures less than five days prior to the start of construction on their property. The Permittees shall also provide a copy of this route permit and the complaint procedures to the applicable regional development commissions, county environmental offices, and city and township clerks. The Permittees shall file with the Commission an affidavit of its route permit and complaint procedures distribution within 30 days of issuance of this route permit.

5.2 Access to Property

The Permittees shall notify landowners prior to entering or conducting maintenance within their property, unless otherwise negotiated with the landowner. The Permittees shall keep records of compliance with this section and provide them upon the request of Commission staff.

5.3 Construction and Operation Practices

The Permittees shall comply with the construction practices, operation and maintenance practices, and material specifications described in the permitting record for this Transmission Facility unless this route permit establishes a different requirement in which case this route permit shall prevail.

5.3.1 Field Representative

The Permittees shall designate a field representative responsible for overseeing compliance with the conditions of this route permit during construction of the Transmission Facility. This person shall be accessible by telephone or other means during normal business hours throughout site preparation, construction, cleanup, and restoration.

The Permittees shall file with the Commission the name, address, email, phone number, and emergency phone number of the field representative at least 14 days prior to the pre-construction meeting. The Permittees shall provide the field representative's contact information to affected landowners, local government units and other interested persons at least 14 days prior to the pre-construction meeting. The Permittees may change the field representative at any time upon notice to the Commission, affected landowners, local government units and other interested persons. The Permittees shall file with the Commission an affidavit of distribution of its field representative's contact information at least 14 days prior to the pre-construction meeting and upon changes to the field representative.

5.3.2 Employee Training

The Permittees shall train all employees, contractors, and other persons involved in the Transmission Facility construction regarding the terms and conditions of this route permit. The Permittees shall keep records of compliance with this section and provide them upon the request of Commission staff.

5.3.3 Independent Third-Party Monitoring

Prior to any construction, the Permittees shall propose a scope of work and identify an independent third-party monitor to conduct Project construction monitoring on behalf of the Commission. The scope of work shall be developed in consultation with and approved by Commission staff. This third-party monitor will report directly to and will be under the control of the Commission with costs borne by the Permittees.

The Permittees shall file with the Commission the approved scope of work and the name, address, email, and telephone number of the third party-monitor at least 14 days prior to commencing any construction or right-of-way preparation and upon any change in contact information that may occur during Project construction and restoration of the right-of-way.

The Permittees shall keep records of compliance with this section and ensure that status reports detailing the construction monitoring are filed with the Commission in accordance with the approved scope of work.

5.3.4 Public Services, Public Utilities, and Existing Easements

During Transmission Facility construction, the Permittees shall minimize any disruption to public services or public utilities. To the extent disruptions to public services or public utilities occur these shall be temporary, and the Permittees shall restore service promptly. Where any impacts to utilities have the potential to occur the Permittees shall work with both landowners and local entities to determine the most appropriate mitigation measures if not already considered as part of this route permit.

The Permittees shall coordinate with county and city road authorities to develop appropriate signage and traffic management during construction. The Permittees shall keep records of compliance with this section and provide them upon the request of Commission staff.

5.3.5 Temporary Workspace

The Permittees shall limit temporary easements to special construction access needs and additional staging or lay-down areas required outside of the authorized right-of-way. Temporary space shall be selected to limit the removal and impacts to vegetation. The Permittees shall obtain temporary easements outside of the authorized transmission line right-of-way from affected landowners through rental or lease agreements. Temporary easements are not provided for in this route permit.

The Permittees may construct temporary driveways between roadways and transmission structures to minimize impacts by using the shortest route feasible. The Permittees shall use construction mats to minimize impacts on access paths and construction areas. The Permittees shall submit the location of temporary workspaces and driveways with the plan and profile pursuant to Section 9.2.

5.3.6 Noise

The Permittees shall comply with noise standards established under Minn. R. 7030.0010 to 7030.0080. The Permittees shall limit construction and maintenance activities to daytime working hours to the extent practicable.

5.3.7 Aesthetics

The Permittees shall consider input pertaining to visual impacts from landowners or land management agencies prior to final location of structures, rights-of-way, and other areas with the potential for visual disturbance. The Permittees shall use care to preserve the natural landscape, minimize tree removal and prevent any unnecessary destruction of the natural

surroundings in the vicinity of the Transmission Facility during construction and maintenance. The Permittees shall work with landowners to locate the high-voltage transmission line to minimize the loss of agricultural land, forest, and wetlands, and to avoid homes and farmsteads. The Permittees shall place structures at a distance, consistent with sound engineering principles and system reliability criteria, from intersecting roads, highways, or trail crossings.

5.3.8 Soil Erosion and Sediment Control

The Permittees shall implement those erosion prevention and sediment control practices recommended by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) Construction Stormwater Program. If construction of the Transmission Facility disturbs more than one acre of land or is sited in an area designated by the MPCA as having potential for impacts to water resources, the Permittees shall obtain a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System/State Disposal System Construction Stormwater Permit from the MPCA that provides for development of a Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan that describes methods to control erosion and runoff.

The Permittees shall implement reasonable measures to minimize erosion and sedimentation during construction and shall employ perimeter sediment controls, protect exposed soil by promptly planting, seeding, using erosion control blankets and turf reinforcement mats, stabilizing slopes, protecting storm drain inlets, protecting soil stockpiles, and controlling vehicle tracking. Contours shall be graded as required so that all surfaces provide for proper drainage, blend with the natural terrain, and are left in a condition that will facilitate re-vegetation and prevent erosion. All areas disturbed during construction of the Transmission Facility shall be returned to pre-construction conditions.

5.3.9 Wetlands and Water Resources

The Permittees shall develop wetland impact avoidance measures and implement them during construction of the Transmission Facility. Measures shall include spacing and placing transmission structures at variable distances to span and avoid wetlands, watercourses, and floodplains. Unavoidable wetland impacts as a result of the placement of structures shall be limited to the immediate area around the structures. To minimize impacts, the Permittees shall construct in wetland areas during frozen ground conditions where practicable and according to permit requirements by the applicable permitting authority. When construction during winter is not possible, the Permittees shall use wooden or composite mats to protect wetland vegetation.

The Permittees shall contain soil excavated from the wetlands and riparian areas and not place it back into the wetland or riparian area. The Permittees shall access wetlands and riparian areas using the shortest route possible in order to minimize travel through wetland areas and prevent

unnecessary impacts. The Permittees shall not place staging or stringing set up areas within or adjacent to wetlands or water resources, as practicable. The Permittees shall assemble structures on upland areas before they are brought to the site for installation.

The Permittees shall restore wetland and water resource areas disturbed by construction activities to pre-construction conditions in accordance with the requirements of applicable state and federal permits or laws and landowner agreements. The Permittees shall meet the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources, and local units of government wetland and water resource requirements.

5.3.10 Vegetation Management

The Permittees shall minimize the number of trees to be removed in selecting the right-of-way specifically preserving to the maximum extent practicable windbreaks, shelterbelts, living snow fences, and vegetation in areas such as trail and stream crossings where vegetative screening may minimize aesthetic impacts, to the extent that such actions do not violate sound engineering principles or system reliability criteria.

The Permittees shall remove tall growing species located within the transmission line right-of-way that endanger the safe and reliable operation of the transmission line. The Permittees shall leave undisturbed, to the extent possible, existing low growing species in the right-of-way or replant such species in the right-of-way to blend the difference between the right-of-way and adjacent areas, to the extent that the low growing vegetation will not pose a threat to the transmission line or impede construction.

The Permittees shall develop a vegetation management plan (VMP), in coordination with the Vegetation Management Plan Working Group (VMPWG), using best management practices established by the DNR and BWSR. The Permittees shall file the VMP and documentation of the coordination efforts between the Permittees and the DNR with the Commission as part of the plan and profile required in Section 9.2 of the Permit.

5.3.11 Application of Pesticides

The Permittees shall restrict pesticide use to those pesticides and methods of application approved by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA), DNR, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Selective foliage or basal application shall be used when practicable. All pesticides shall be applied in a safe and cautious manner so as not to damage adjacent properties including crops, orchards, tree farms, apiaries, or gardens. The Permittees shall contact the landowner at least 14 days prior to pesticide application on their

property. The Permittees may not apply any pesticide if the landowner requests that there be no application of pesticides within the landowner's property. The Permittees shall provide notice of pesticide application to landowners and beekeepers operating known apiaries within three miles of the pesticide application area at least 14 days prior to such application. The Permittees shall use the MDA's Apiary Registry (<https://mn.beecheck.org/map>) to identify known apiaries for purposes of compliance with this condition. The Permittees shall keep pesticide communication and application records and provide them upon the request of Commission staff.

5.3.12 Invasive Species

The Permittees shall employ best management practices to avoid the potential introduction and spread of invasive species on lands disturbed by Transmission Facility construction activities. The Permittees shall develop an Invasive Species Prevention Plan and file it with the Commission at least 14 days prior to the pre-construction meeting. The Permittees shall comply with the most recently filed Invasive Species Prevention Plan.

5.3.13 Noxious Weeds

The Permittees shall take all reasonable precautions against the spread of noxious weeds during all phases of construction. When utilizing seed to establish temporary and permanent vegetative cover on exposed soil the Permittees shall select site appropriate seed certified to be free of noxious weeds. To the extent possible, the Permittees shall use native seed mixes. The Permittees shall keep records of compliance with this section and provide them upon the request of Commission staff.

5.3.14 Roads

The Permittees shall advise the appropriate governing bodies having jurisdiction over all state, county, city, or township roads that will be used during the construction phase of the Transmission Facility. Where practical, existing roadways shall be used for all activities associated with construction of the Transmission Facility. Oversize or overweight loads associated with the Transmission Facility shall not be hauled across public roads without required permits and approvals.

The Permittees shall construct the fewest number of site access roads required. Access roads shall not be constructed across streams and drainage ways without the required permits and approvals. Access roads shall be constructed in accordance with all necessary township, county or state road requirements and permits.

The Permittees shall promptly repair private roads or lanes damaged when moving equipment or when accessing construction workspace, unless otherwise negotiated with the affected landowner.

5.3.15 Archaeological and Historic Resources

The Permittees shall make every effort to avoid impacts to archaeological and historic resources when constructing the Transmission Facility. In the event that a resource is encountered, the Permittees shall consult with the State Historic Preservation Office and the State Archaeologist. Where feasible, avoidance of the resource is required. Where not feasible, mitigation must include an effort to minimize Transmission Facility impacts on the resource consistent with State Historic Preservation Office and State Archaeologist requirements.

The Permittees shall develop an Unanticipated Discoveries Plan (UDP) to identify guidelines to be used in the event previously unrecorded archeological or historic properties, or human remains, are encountered during construction, or if unanticipated effects to previously identified archaeological or historic properties occur during construction. The UDP is in addition to and not in lieu of any other obligations that may exist under law or regulation relating to these matters. The Permittees shall file the UDP with the Commission at least 14 days prior to the preconstruction meeting.

The Permittees shall train workers about the need to avoid cultural properties, how to identify cultural properties, and procedures to follow if undocumented cultural properties, including gravesites, are found during construction. If human remains are encountered during construction, the Permittees shall, in accordance with Minn. Stat. Ch. 307 (Private Cemeteries Act), immediately halt construction and promptly notify local law enforcement and the State Archaeologist. The Permittees shall not resume construction at such location until authorized by local law enforcement or the State Archaeologist. The Permittees shall keep records of compliance with this section and provide them upon the request of Commission staff.

5.3.16 Avian Protection

The Permittees in cooperation with the DNR shall identify areas of the transmission line where bird flight diverters will be incorporated into the transmission line design to prevent large avian collisions attributed to visibility issues. Standard transmission design shall incorporate adequate spacing of conductors and grounding devices in accordance with Avian Power Line Interaction Committee standards to eliminate the risk of electrocution to raptors with larger wingspans that may simultaneously come in contact with a conductor and grounding devices. The Permittees shall submit documentation of its avian protection coordination with the plan and profile pursuant to Section 9.2.

5.3.17 Drainage Tiles

The Permittees shall avoid, promptly repair, or replace all drainage tiles broken or damaged during all phases of the Transmission Facility's life. The Permittees shall keep records of compliance with this section and provide them upon the request of Commission staff.

5.3.18 Restoration

The Permittees shall restore the right-of-way, temporary workspaces, access roads, abandoned right-of-way, and other public or private lands affected by construction of the Transmission Facility. Restoration within the right-of-way must be compatible with the safe operation, maintenance, and inspection of the transmission line. Within 60 days after completion of all restoration activities, the Permittees shall file with the Commission a Notice of Restoration Completion.

5.3.19 Cleanup

The Permittees shall remove and properly dispose of all construction waste and scrap from the right-of-way and all premises on which construction activities were conducted upon completion of each task. The Permittees shall remove and properly dispose of all personal litter, including bottles, cans, and paper from construction activities daily.

5.3.20 Pollution and Hazardous Wastes

The Permittees shall take all appropriate precautions to protect against pollution of the environment. The Permittees shall be responsible for compliance with all laws applicable to the generation, storage, transportation, clean up and disposal of all waste generated during construction and restoration of the Transmission Facility.

5.3.21 Damages

The Permittees shall fairly restore or compensate landowners for damage to crops, fences, private roads and lanes, landscaping, drain tile, or other damages sustained during construction. The Permittees shall keep records of compliance with this section and provide them upon the request of Commission staff.

5.3.22 Facility Lighting

The Permittees shall use shielded and downward facing lighting and LED lighting that minimizes blue hue.

5.3.23 Dust Control

The Permittees shall utilize non-chloride products for onsite dust control during construction.

5.3.24 Wildlife Friendly Erosion Control

The Permittees shall use only “bio-netting” or “natural netting” types of erosion control materials and mulch products without synthetic (plastic) fiber additives or malachite green dye.

5.4 Electrical Performance Standards

5.4.1 Grounding

The Permittees shall design, construct, and operate the transmission line in a manner so that the maximum induced steady-state short-circuit current shall be limited to five milliamperes root mean square (rms) alternating current between the ground and any non-stationary object within the right-of-way, including but not limited to large motor vehicles and agricultural equipment. All fixed metallic objects on or off the right-of-way, except electric fences that parallel or cross the right-of-way, shall be grounded to the extent necessary to limit the induced short-circuit current between ground and the object so as not to exceed one milliamperes rms under steady state conditions of the transmission line and to comply with the ground fault conditions specified in the National Electric Safety Code. The Permittees shall address and rectify any induced current problems that arise during transmission line operation.

5.4.2 Electric Field

The Permittees shall design, construct, and operate the transmission line in such a manner that the electric field measured one meter above ground level immediately below the transmission line shall not exceed 8.0 kV/m rms.

5.4.3 Interference with Communication Devices

If interference with radio or television, satellite, wireless internet, GPS-based agriculture navigation systems or other communication devices is caused by the presence or operation of the Transmission Facility, the Permittees shall take whatever action is necessary to restore or

provide reception equivalent to reception levels in the immediate area just prior to the construction of the Transmission Facility. The Permittees shall keep records of compliance with this section and provide them upon the request of Commission staff.

5.5 Other Requirements

5.5.1 Safety Codes and Design Requirements

The Permittees shall design the transmission line and associated facilities to meet or exceed all relevant local and state codes, the National Electric Safety Code, and North American Electric Reliability Corporation requirements. This includes standards relating to clearances to ground, clearance to crossing utilities, clearance to buildings, strength of materials, clearances over roadways, right-of-way widths, and permit requirements.

5.5.2 Other Permits and Regulations

The Permittees shall comply with all applicable state statutes and rules. The Permittees shall obtain all required permits for the Transmission Facility and comply with the conditions of those permits unless those permits conflict with or are preempted by federal or state permits and regulations.

At least 14 days prior to the pre-construction meeting, the Permittees shall file with the Commission an Other Permits and Regulations Submittal that contains a detailed status of all permits, authorizations, and approvals that have been applied for specific to the Transmission Facility. The Other Permits and Regulations Submittal shall also include the permitting agency name; the name of the permit, authorization, or approval being sought; contact person and contact information for the permitting agency or authority; brief description of why the permit, authorization, or approval is needed; application submittal date; and the date the permit, authorization, or approval was issued or is anticipated to be issued.

The Permittees shall demonstrate that it has obtained all necessary permits, authorizations, and approvals by filing an affidavit stating as such and an updated Other Permits and Regulations Submittal prior to commencing construction. The Permittees shall provide a copy of any such permits, authorizations, and approvals at the request of Commission staff.

6 SPECIAL CONDITIONS

The special conditions shall take precedence over other conditions of this permit should there be a conflict.

6.1 Data Center Approvals

The Permittees may not begin construction of the Transmission Facility until all required local, state, and federal approvals necessary to build the Project Skyway Data Center have been obtained. The Permittees must file documentation of these approvals 14 days prior to the pre-construction meeting for the Transmission Facility.

6.2 Tree Clearing Restrictions

The Permittees shall avoid tree removal from June 1 through August 15 to minimize impacts to nesting bird species and bats, including the federally endangered northern long-eared bat.

6.3 Application of Herbicides in Highway Right-of-way

The Permittees shall not apply broadcast herbicides or chemicals within the highway right-of-way along U.S. 52 without evidence of consultation with the MnDOT Protected Species Program.

6.4 Substation Lighting

The Permittees shall turn off non-essential lighting on substation buildings and associated structures from midnight until dawn during the periods of March 15 to May 31 and August 15 to October 31 to minimize impacts to migratory birds and the Mayfly hatch, to the extent such a lighting scheme does not conflict with Section 5.5.1 of this permit or other applicable safety and security requirements.

7 DELAY IN CONSTRUCTION

If the Permittees have not commenced construction or improvement of the Transmission Facility within four years after the date of issuance of this route permit the Permittees shall file a Failure to Construct Report and the Commission shall consider suspension of this route permit in accordance with Minn. Stat. § 216I.24.

8 COMPLAINT PROCEDURES

At least 14 days prior to the pre-construction meeting, the Permittees shall file with the Commission the complaint procedures that will be used to receive and respond to complaints. The complaint procedures shall be in accordance with the requirements of Minn. R. 7829.1500 or Minn. R. 7829.1700, and as set forth in the complaint procedures attached to this route permit.

Upon request, the Permittees shall assist Commission staff with the disposition of unresolved or longstanding complaints. This assistance shall include, but is not limited to, the submittal of complaint correspondence and complaint resolution efforts.

9 COMPLIANCE REQUIREMENTS

Failure to timely and properly make compliance filings required by this route permit is a failure to comply with the conditions of this route permit. Compliance filings must be electronically filed with the Commission.

9.1 Pre-Construction Meeting

Prior to the start of construction, the Permittees shall participate in a pre-construction meeting with Commission staff to review pre-construction filing requirements, scheduling, and to coordinate monitoring of construction and site restoration activities. Within 14 days following the pre-construction meeting, the Permittees shall file with the Commission a summary of the topics reviewed and discussed and a list of attendees. The Permittees shall indicate in the filing the anticipated construction start date.

9.2 Plan and Profile

At least 14 days prior to the pre-construction meeting, the Permittees shall file with the Commission, and provide the counties where the Transmission Facility, or portion of the Transmission Facility, will be constructed with a plan and profile of the right-of-way and the specifications and drawings for right-of-way preparation, construction, structure specifications and locations, cleanup, and restoration for the Transmission Facility. The documentation shall include maps depicting the plan and profile including the right-of-way, alignment, and structures in relation to the route and alignment approved by this route permit.

The Permittees may not commence construction until the earlier of (i) 30 days after the pre-construction meeting or (ii) until the Commission staff has notified the Permittees in writing that it has completed its review of the documents and determined that the planned construction is consistent with this route permit.

If the Commission notifies the Permittees in writing within 30 days after the pre-construction meeting that it has completed its review of the documents and planned construction, and finds that the planned construction is not consistent with this route permit, the Permittees may submit additional and/or revised documentation and may not commence construction until the Commission has notified the Permittees in writing that it has determined that the planned construction is consistent with this route permit.

If the Permittees intends to make any significant changes in its plan and profile or the specifications and drawings after submission to the Commission, the Permittees shall notify the Commission and county staff at least five days before implementing the changes. No changes shall be made that would be in violation of any of the terms of this route permit.

9.3 Status Reports

The Permittees shall file with the Commission monthly Construction Status Reports beginning with the pre-construction meeting and until completion of restoration. Construction Status Reports shall describe construction activities and progress, activities undertaken in compliance with this route permit, and shall include text and photographs.

If the Permittees does not commence construction of the Transmission Facility within six months of this route permit issuance, the Permittees shall file with the Commission Pre-Construction Status Reports on the anticipated timing of construction every six months beginning with the issuance of this route permit until the pre-construction meeting. The Status Reports shall include information on the Project's Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO) interconnection process, if applicable.

9.4 Labor Statistic Reporting

The Permittees shall file quarterly Labor Statistic Reports with the Commission within 45 days of the end of the quarter regarding construction workers that participated in the construction of the Project. The Labor Statistic Reports shall:

- A. detail the Permittees' efforts and the site contractor's efforts to hire Minnesota workers; and
- B. provide an account of:
 - 1) the gross number of hours worked by or full-time equivalent workers who are Minnesota residents, as defined in Minn. Stat. § 290.01, subd. 7;
 - 2) the gross number of hours worked by or full-time equivalent workers who are residents of other states, but maintain a permanent residence within 150 miles of the Project; and
 - 3) the total gross hours worked or total full-time equivalent workers.

The Permittees shall work with its contractor to determine the suitable reporting metric. The report may not include personally identifiable data.

9.5 Prevailing Wage

The Permittees, its contractors, and subcontractors shall (1) pay no less than the prevailing wage rate as defined in Minn. Stat. § 177.42; and (2) shall be subject to the requirements and enforcement provisions under Minn. Stat. §§ 177.27, 177.30, 177.32, 177.41 to 177.435, and 177.45. The Permittees shall keep records of contractor and subcontractor pay and provide them at the request of Commission staff.

9.6 In-Service Date

At least three days before the Transmission Facility is to be placed into service, the Permittees shall notify the Commission of the date on which the Transmission Facility will be placed into service and the date on which construction was completed.

9.7 As-Built

Within 90 days after completion of construction, the Permittees shall submit to the Commission copies of all final as-built plans and specifications developed during the Transmission Facility construction.

9.8 GPS Data

Within 90 days after completion of construction, the Permittees shall submit to the Commission, in the format requested by the Commission, geo-spatial information (*e.g.*, ArcGIS compatible map files, GPS coordinates, associated database of characteristics) for all structures associated with the Transmission Facility and each substation connected.

9.9 Right of Entry

The Permittees shall allow Commission designated representatives to perform the following, upon reasonable notice, upon presentation of credentials and at all times in compliance with the Permittees' site safety standards:

- A. To enter upon the facilities easement of the property for the purpose of obtaining information, examining records, and conducting surveys or investigations.
- B. To bring such equipment upon the facilities easement of the property as is necessary to conduct such surveys and investigations.
- C. To sample and monitor upon the facilities easement of the property.
- D. To examine and copy any documents pertaining to compliance with the conditions of this route permit.

10 ROUTE PERMIT AMENDMENT

The Commission has the authority to modify this route permit at any time. The Permittees may request an amendment of the conditions of this route permit by submitting a request to the Commission in writing describing the amendment sought and the reasons for the amendment. The Commission may amend the conditions after affording the Permittees and interested persons such process as is required under Minn. Stat. § 216I.09.

11 TRANSFER OF ROUTE PERMIT

The Permittees may request at any time that the Commission transfer this route permit to another person or entity (transferee). In its request, the Permittees must provide the Commission with:

- A. the name and description of the transferee;
- B. the reasons for the transfer;

- C. a description of the facilities affected; and
- D. the proposed effective date of the transfer.

The transferee must provide the Commission with a certification that it has read, understands and is able to comply with the plans and procedures filed for the Transmission Facility and all conditions of this route permit. The Commission may authorize transfer of the route permit after affording the Permittees, the transferee, and interested persons such process as is required under Minn. Stat. § 216I.13.

12 REVOCATION OR SUSPENSION OF ROUTE PERMIT

The Commission may initiate action to revoke or suspend this route permit at any time. The Commission shall act in accordance with the requirements of Minn. Stat. § 216I.24, to revoke or suspend this route permit.

ATTACHMENT 1

Complaint Handling Procedures for Permitted Energy Facilities

DRAFT PERMIT

**MINNESOTA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION
COMPLAINT HANDLING PROCEDURES FOR
PERMITTED ENERGY FACILITIES**

A. Purpose

To establish a uniform and timely method of reporting and resolving complaints received by the permittee concerning permit conditions for site or route preparation, construction, cleanup, restoration, operation, and maintenance.

B. Scope

This document describes complaint reporting procedures and frequency.

C. Applicability

The procedures shall be used for all complaints received by the permittee and all complaints received by the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (Commission) under Minn. R. 7829.1500 or Minn. R. 7829.1700 relevant to this permit.

D. Definitions

Complaint: A verbal or written statement presented to the permittee by a person expressing dissatisfaction or concern regarding site or route preparation, cleanup or restoration, or other permit conditions. Complaints do not include requests, inquiries, questions or general comments.

Substantial Complaint: A written complaint alleging a violation of a specific permit condition that, if substantiated, could result in permit modification or suspension pursuant to the applicable regulations.

Unresolved Complaint: A complaint which, despite the good faith efforts of the permittee and a person, remains unresolved or unsatisfactorily resolved to one or both of the parties.

Person: An individual, partnership, joint venture, private or public corporation, association, firm, public service company, cooperative, political subdivision, municipal corporation, government agency, public utility district, or any other entity, public or private; however organized.

E. Complaint Documentation and Processing

1. The permittee shall designate a representative responsible for filing complaints to the Commission's eDocket system. This person's name, phone number and email address shall accompany all complaint submittals. The name and contact information for the representative shall be kept current in eDockets.
2. A person presenting the complaint should, to the extent possible, include the following information in their communications:
 - a. name, address, phone number, and email address;
 - b. initial date of the complaint;
 - c. tract, parcel number, or address of the complaint;
 - d. a summary of the complaint; and
 - e. whether the complaint relates to a permit violation, a construction practice issue, or other type of complaint.
3. The permittee shall document all complaints by maintaining a record of all applicable information concerning the complaint, including the following:
 - a. docket number and project name;
 - b. name of complainant, address, phone number and email address;
 - c. precise description of property or parcel number;
 - d. name of permittee representative receiving complaint and date of receipt;
 - e. nature of complaint and the applicable permit condition(s);
 - f. summary of activities undertaken to resolve the complaint; and
 - g. a statement on the final disposition of the complaint.

F. Reporting Requirements

The permittee shall commence complaint reporting at the beginning of project construction and continue through the term of the permit, unless otherwise required below. The permittee shall report all complaints to the Commission according to the following schedule:

Immediate Reports: All substantial complaints shall be reported to the Commission the same day received, or on the following working day for complaints received after working hours. Such reports are to be directed to the Commission's Consumer Affairs Office at 1-800-657-3782 (voice messages are acceptable) or consumer.puc@state.mn.us. For e-mail reporting, the email

subject line should read “PUC EIP Complaint” and include the appropriate project docket number.

Monthly Reports: During project construction, restoration, and operation, a summary of all complaints, including substantial complaints received or resolved during the preceding month, shall be filed by the 15th of each month to the eDockets system. The eDockets system is located at: <https://efiling.web.commerce.state.mn.us/>. If no complaints were received during the preceding month, the permittee shall file a summary indicating that no complaints were received.

If a project has submitted twelve consecutive months of complaint reports with no complaints, monthly reports can terminate by a letter to eDockets notifying the Commission of such action. If a substantial complaint is received (by the company or the Commission) following termination of the monthly complaint report, as noted above, the monthly reporting should commence for a period of six months following the most recent complaint or upon resolution of all pending complaints.

If a permittee is found to be in violation of this section, the Commission may reinstate monthly complaint reporting for the remaining permit term or enact some other commensurate requirement via notification by the Executive Secretary or some other action as decided by the Commission.

G. Complaints Received by the Commission

Complaints received directly by the Commission from aggrieved persons regarding the permit or issues related to site or route preparation, construction, cleanup, restoration, or operation and maintenance will be promptly sent to the permittee.

The permittee shall notify the Commission when the issue has been resolved. The permittee will add the complaint to the monthly reports of all complaints. If the permittee is unable to find resolution, the Commission will use the process outlined in the Unresolved Complaints Section to process the issue.

H. Commission Process for Unresolved Complaints

Complaints raising substantial and unresolved permit issues will be investigated by the Commission. Staff will notify the permittee and appropriate people if it determines that the complaint is a substantial complaint. With respect to such complaints, the permittee and

complainant shall be required to submit a written summary of the complaint and its current position on the issues to the Commission. Staff will set a deadline for comments. As necessary, the complaint will be presented to the Commission for consideration.

I. Permittee Contacts for Complaints and Complaint Reporting

Complaints may be filed by mail or email to the permittee's designated complaint representative, or to the Commission's Consumer Affairs Office at 1-800-657-3782 or consumer.puc@state.mn.us. The name and contact information for the permittee's designated complaint representative shall be kept current in the Commission's eDocket system.

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ATTACHMENT 2

Compliance Filing Procedures for Permitted Energy Facilities

**MINNESOTA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION
COMPLIANCE FILING PROCEDURE FOR
PERMITTED ENERGY FACILITIES**

A. Purpose

To establish a uniform and timely method of submitting information required by Commission energy facility permits.

B. Scope and Applicability

This procedure encompasses all known compliance filings required by the permit.

C. Definitions

Compliance Filing: A filing of information to the Commission, where the information is required by a Commission site or route permit.

D. Responsibilities

1. The permittee shall file all compliance filings through the eDockets system. The eDockets system is located at: <https://efiling.web.commerce.state.mn.us/>

General instructions are provided on the eDockets website. Permittees must register on the website to file documents.

2. All filings must have a cover sheet that includes:
 - a. Date
 - b. Name of submitter/permittee
 - c. Type of permit (site or route)
 - d. Project location
 - e. Project docket number
 - f. Permit section under which the filing is made
 - g. Short description of the filing

3. The Commission may request a paper copy or USB drive of filings that are graphic intensive (*e.g.*, maps and engineered drawings), in addition to being electronically filed. If requested, send a paper copy or USB drive to: Executive Secretary, Minnesota Public Utilities Commission, 121 7th Place East, Suite 350, St. Paul, MN 55101-2147.

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PERMIT COMPLIANCE FILINGS¹

PERMITTEE:

PERMIT TYPE:

PROJECT LOCATION:

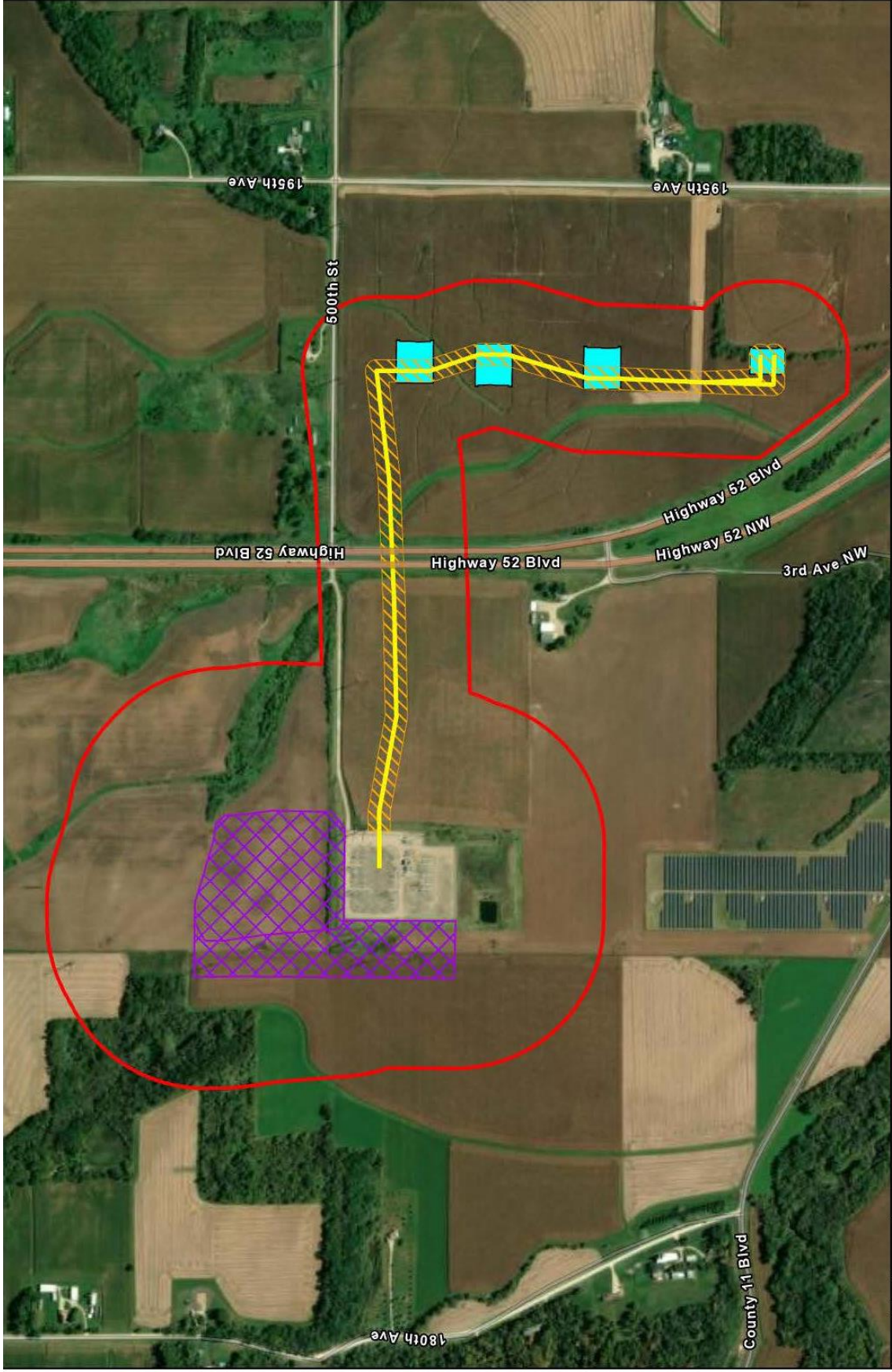
PUC DOCKET NUMBER:

Filing Number	Permit Section	Description of Compliance Filing	Due Date

¹ This compilation of permit compliance filings is provided for the convenience of the permittee and the Commission. It is not a substitute for the permit; the language of the permit controls.

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ATTACHMENT 3
Route Permit Map



- Route Width
- Proposed Alignment
- Proposed HVTL Right-of-way
- North Rochester Substation Expansion Area
- Proposed Project Skyway Substations

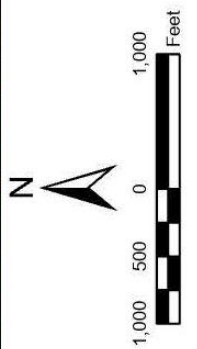


Figure 1: Route Overview
North Rochester to Skyway
HVTL Project
Goodhue County, Minnesota