

In the Matter of the PowerForward)
Collaborative.) Case No. 18-1595-EL-GRD

COMMENTS ON GRID ARCHITECTURE BY THE ENVIRONMENTAL LAW & POLICY CENTER, ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENSE FUND, NATURAL RESOURCES DEFENSE COUNCIL, AND OHIO ENVIRONMENTAL COUNCIL

Interested parties the Environmental Law & Policy Center, Environmental Defense Fund, Natural Resources Defense Council, and Ohio Environmental Council (collectively, “Environmental Commenters”) hereby file these comments in response to the November 14, 2018 Entry in this case soliciting comments on “the proposed grid architecture status report discussing where each EDU stands in regards to the deployment of grid architecture, and the proposed filing date of April 1, 2019.” Entry at 3. The Environmental Commenters look forward to proceeding with the discussion regarding important grid modernization topics launched by the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (“Commission” or “PUCO”) in its August 29, 2018 report *PowerForward: A Roadmap to Ohio’s Electricity Future* (“Roadmap”). However, we provide the below comments in order to ensure that going forward, the Commission provides a process for considering and undertaking grid architecture investments that is fully consistent with the vision described in the Roadmap.

The Roadmap sets forth a detailed process for the Commission to facilitate a transition of Ohio’s distribution grid to a “platform that creates the opportunity for entities to provide innovative products and services to customers,” with the “grid as a network that supports the platform concept.” Roadmap at 14. Sensibly, one of the initial steps the Commission identified

in realizing this vision was for all of the Ohio utilities to file a report on their current status with respect to deployment of the core grid architecture components for the “platform” function.

Roadmap at 16-17.

The Environmental Commenters support this approach, and urge the Commission to fully utilize this status report process in conjunction with the task of analyzing forthcoming EDU grid modernization applications, reserving any major grid investment decisions until after the filing of the EDU grid architecture status reports. The generic term of “grid modernization” can encompass a range of distribution investments – often costly ones – and the Roadmap clearly identifies the importance of investing in grid architecture to support the platform model without giving utilities a “blank check.” *Id.* at 27. The EDUs’ reports on current grid architecture represent an important first step in identifying existing gaps, establishing areas for potential cross-utility sharing of “the investments of the cyber-physical platform,” and focusing utility investments to achieve the Commission’s objectives and maximize benefits to all customers. Roadmap at 15. Without a comprehensive picture of the EDUs’ current status and what needs to be done next, there is a real danger that grid modernization filings may turn into random acts of modernization rather than a coherent set of investments to move forward along the path laid out in the Roadmap.

The current process at play before the Commission does not appear to be consistent with this Roadmap plan to achieve a “holistic policy on grid modernization.” *Id.* FirstEnergy’s grid modernization proposal is already pending in Case Nos. 16-481-EL-UNC *et al.*, and Dayton Power & Light is due to file its plan by December 28, 2018. To avoid putting the cart before the horse, the Commission should wait to proceed with consideration of these proposals and any others until all four EDUs have provided the information contemplated in the Roadmap.

This consistent statewide process is particularly important with respect to providing an EDU platform that is not only accessible to the utilities and their customers, but also third parties such as distributed energy resource (“DER”) providers that can provide innovative energy services. The variety of DERs today is such that many services – for example, home energy management bundled with home security systems, or battery storage for mitigating demand-related charges – have a compelling value proposition to consumers that do not involve the utility, or even necessarily a traditional retail electric supplier. Utilities do not and should not have a monopoly on the best ways to manage energy costs for consumers. Given that the private sector has provided dozens of innovative services in recent years from smartphone apps to commercial and industrial energy management systems that utilities would not or could not provide themselves, it is the duty of public utility commissions to ensure that captive ratepayers get the maximum value from grid investments, including from private enterprise. A coherent statewide process going forward is the best way to avoid grid architecture investments, especially in information technology, that vary utility by utility in ways that increase costs to customers while undermining the goal of providing simple, interoperable pathways for third party providers to serve customers effectively.

To be truly customer-centered and open to market innovations, customers need the ability to seamlessly use DERs, meaning that consumers should have the ability to direct the utility to interoperate with the DER provider (and exchange information) on terms with the utility that are fair and non-discriminatory, removing artificial barriers to DER adoption. Because DERs are sold across utility boundaries and some, like EVs, even move across territories over time, for Ohio to successfully join the national market for DERs the state must undertake grid modernization consistent with national standards for data-sharing and interoperability. It may be

that the greatest efficiencies for data access by all service providers can be achieved through a single, state-wide data-sharing platform, similar to Smart Meter Texas. The Roadmap also recognizes the potential value of such an effort, and explicitly states: "Further, utilities should explore whether they can share among themselves some of the investments of the cyber-physical platform, as doing so will promote certain PowerForward principles and objectives." Roadmap at 15.

The Environmental Commenters support the Roadmap's goal of "[e]nsur[ing] that [grid modernization] investments and the environment fostered create societal benefit and allow for an enhanced customer electricity experience accessible to all customers." Roadmap at 8. That objective is best served by following the process laid out in the Roadmap, as informed by these comments.

December 4, 2018

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Madeline Fleisher
Madeline Fleisher
Environmental Law & Policy Center
21 West Broad St., 8th Floor
Columbus, OH 43215
(614) 569-3827
mfleisher@elpc.org

*Counsel for the Environmental Law &
Policy Center*

/s/Robert Dove
Robert Dove (0092019)
Kegler Brown Hill + Ritter Co., L.P.A.
65 E State St., Ste. 1800
Columbus, OH 43215-4295
Office: (614) 462-5443
Fax: (614) 464-2634
rdove@keglerbrown.com

*Attorney for the Natural Resources Defense
Council*

/s/ Miranda Leppla
Miranda Leppla
Ohio Environmental Council
1145 Chesapeake Avenue, Suite I
Columbus, Ohio 43212-3449
(614) 487-7506 - Telephone
(614) 487-7510 - Fax
mleppla@theOEC.org

*Counsel for the Ohio Environmental
Council and Environmental Defense Fund*

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that a true copy of the foregoing Comments submitted on behalf of the Environmental Law & Policy Center, Environmental Defense Fund, Natural Resources Defense Council, and Ohio Environmental Council was served by electronic mail, upon all Parties of Record on December 4, 2018.

/s Madeline Fleisher
Madeline Fleisher

This foregoing document was electronically filed with the Public Utilities

Commission of Ohio Docketing Information System on

12/4/2018 4:43:15 PM

in

Case No(s). 18-1595-EL-GRD

Summary: Comments Comments on Grid Architecture Status Reports by the Environmental Law & Policy Center, Environmental Defense Fund, Natural Resources Defense Council, and Ohio Environmental Council electronically filed by Madeline Fleisher on behalf of Environmental Law & Policy Center and Natural Resources Defense Council and Ohio Environmental Council and Environmental Defense Fund