

BEFORE THE POWER SITING BOARD OF THE STATE OF OHIO

**In the Matter of the Letter of Notification Application by)
American Electric Power Ohio Transmission Company)
for a Certificate of Environmental Compatibility and) Case Number
Public Need for the Hocking-West Lancaster 138 kV) 14-0144-EL-BLN
Transmission Line Rebuild Project in Fairfield and)
Hocking Counties, Ohio.)**

Members of the Board:

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| Chairman, Public Utilities Commission | Ohio House of Representatives |
| Director, Development Services Agency | Ohio Senate |
| Director, Department of Health | |
| Director, Department of Agriculture | |
| Director, Environmental Protection Agency | |
| Director, Department of Natural Resources | |
| Public Member | |

To the Honorable Power Siting Board:

Please review the attached Staff Report of Investigation, which has been filed in accordance with the Board's rules. The applicant's accelerated certificate application in this case is subject to an automatic approval process as required by Section 4906.03 of the Ohio Revised Code.

The application will be automatically approved on **June 19, 2014**, unless suspended by the Board's chairperson, the executive director, or an administrative law judge. If suspended, the Board must render a decision on the application within 90 days.

The Staff Report includes recommended conditions of the certificate. Prior to the automatic approval date, the applicant must file a supplement to its application that adopts these conditions. Absent such supplement, Staff will recommend that the case be suspended.

Any concerns you or your representative may have with this case must be presented to the Executive Director of the Power Siting Board at least four business days prior to **June 19, 2014**, which is the automatic approval date. To contact the Executive Director with concerns, you can reply to the email to which this document was attached, or use the ContactOPSB email address listed below.

Sincerely,



Patrick Donlon
Interim Executive Director
Ohio Power Siting Board
(614) 466-6692
ContactOPSB@puc.state.oh.us

OPSB STAFF REPORT OF INVESTIGATION

Case Number: 14-0144-EL-BLN
Project Name: Hocking-West Lancaster 138 kV Transmission Line Rebuild Project
Project Location: Fairfield and Hocking counties, Ohio
Applicant: American Electric Power Ohio Transmission Company
Application Filing Date: March 20, 2014
Filing Type: Letter of Notification
Inspection Dates: May 16 & May 29, 2014
Report Date: June 11, 2014
Automatic Approval Date: June 19, 2014
Applicant's Waiver Requests: None
Staff Assigned: J. Pawley, D. Rostofer, A. Holderbaum

Summary of Staff Recommendations (see discussion below):

Application: Approval Disapproval Approval with Conditions

Waiver: Approval Disapproval Not Applicable

Project Description

The purpose of this project is to rebuild an existing 138 kV (kilovolt) single-circuit transmission line in an existing 100-foot right-of-way corridor between the Hocking and West Lancaster substations, in Fairfield and Hocking counties. The total length of the rebuilt 138 kV circuit is approximately 19.3 miles. A total of 118 existing structures will be replaced with 115 new structures. The cost of the overall project is estimated at approximately \$13 million. Construction is expected to commence September 1, 2014, and be completed and placed in service by November 1, 2015.

The Applicant states that the purpose of the Hocking–West Lancaster 138 kV Transmission Line Rebuild Project is to improve the quality of electric service and reliability in the Central Ohio area, including AEP Ohio electric load areas. This rebuild project will address reliability concerns associated with the ageing line. Inspections by the Applicant have found that the structures, foundations, poles, cross-arms, braces, conductors, and associated components do not meet certain current AEP guidelines. These guidelines are built upon the National Electrical Safety Code, which specifies the necessary structural integrity and physical condition of a line to maintain a safe and reliable system. According to the Applicant, the transmission lines identified in this program (including Hocking-West Lancaster) contain structures that can no longer perform their designed function and must be replaced.

Nature of Impacts

Social

The Applicant has proposed to rebuild the entire line within existing right-of-way. Therefore, potential impacts are expected to be largely confined to access for structure replacement and line stringing and should be temporary in nature. The existing right-of-way traverses low-density residential areas, including a mobile home park and single-family residential areas. Since the initial construction of the facility, residences and outbuildings have been constructed near the existing 138 kV transmission circuit. Residential aesthetic impacts are expected to be similar as present conditions, given the presence of the existing right-of-way and line.

Wood H-frame structures will be replaced with either monopole, H-frame or three-pole steel structures. The Applicant has indicated that vegetation within the right-of-way, or trees that present a hazard to the line will need to be cleared and/or trimmed, effecting residential screening. Additionally, there is the possibility that non-inhabited structures may need to be moved/removed from the right-of-way. The Applicant will coordinate with residential property owners before removing fencing, sheds, trees, etc. from the existing right-of-way. Some landowner permissions and roadway permits will be needed for access to the existing structures in order to minimize impacts to drainage ways, wetlands, etc. Significant crossings include U.S. Routes 22 and 33 as well as the Hocking River. The Applicant has appropriate access and is currently working with landowners to finalize an access plan for the project to best minimize impacts to individual properties.

The majority of land use/land cover for the project is forested or wooded areas (with right-of-way cleared/maintained for the existing line circuit), and agricultural use. The project crosses four agricultural district parcels in Hocking County (roughly 2,200 linear feet of right-of-way) and none in Fairfield County. The Applicant has stated that the structure replacement is like-for-like (no additional structures are being added), and when completed, the project would not require any changes from current agricultural practices.

The Applicant performed a literature review and a Phase I archaeological survey for the route. The literature review identified 14 archaeological sites and 2 historic inventory forms for buildings/structures that are within or immediately adjacent to the project corridor. A National Register of Historic Places site is located within 300 feet of the project corridor. Based on this information, the Applicant had a Phase I Cultural Resources Management Investigation performed and will submit the final report to Staff for review and approval.

Surface Waters

The existing right-of-way crosses the Hocking River, Tarhe Run, Rush Creek, Helber Run, Harper Run, and thirty-six primary headwater stream segments. Twenty-one structures are located within the 100-year flood zones of the Hocking River, Rush Creek, and Helber Run. The right-of-way also crosses fifteen wetlands. All wetlands would be clearly staked prior to the commencement of any clearing in order to minimize incidental vehicle impacts. Stream impacts would be avoided by accessing pole locations from either side of the streams, where practicable. Timber matting will be utilized to temporarily cross some streams and wetlands for access to pole locations and to reduce and/or eliminate permanent impacts to these water resources. Three

ponds are located within the project right-of-way and the project does not traverse through any conservation areas, scenic rivers, or recreation lands.

The Applicant has provided a construction access plan, which has been incorporated into a final Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP), to Staff for review. Staff has reviewed this plan and determined that the Applicant has considered location of streams, wetlands, wooded areas, and sensitive plant species, as identified by the ODNR, and has illustrated appropriately how impacts to all sensitive resources would be avoided or minimized during construction.

The Applicant will utilize best management practices (BMPs), as outlined in the SWPPP, to minimize impacts to surface waters. The Applicant has received coverage under the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) General Permit OHC000004 for Storm Water Discharge Associated with Construction Activities. Coverage under the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Nationwide Permit program is not required.

Threatened and Endangered Species

Preferred habitat for the federal and state endangered Indiana bat (*Myotis sodalis*) and the state threatened great rhododendron (*Rhododendron maximum*) is located in the project area. In order to reduce or avoid impacts to the Indiana bat, the Applicant has committed to adherence to seasonal tree cutting dates of October 1 to March 31 for the clearing of trees that exhibit suitable Indiana bat summer habitat. In order to avoid impacts to great rhododendron populations, the Applicant will mark populations before construction commences. Additionally, this project is located within 1,300 feet of an active bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) nest. To reduce the incidence of bird interactions as well as prevent a bald eagle take, the Applicant will implement an Avian Protection Plan.

Conclusion

The Applicant's utilization of existing right-of-way and temporary access for the length of the project significantly minimizes potential adverse impacts. With the following conditions, the construction of this project should pose only minimal negative social and ecological impacts. Staff recommends automatic approval of this case on June 19, 2014.

Staff Recommended Conditions:

1. The Applicant shall obtain and comply with all applicable permits and authorizations as required by federal and state laws and regulations for any activities where such permit or authorization is required.
2. The Applicant shall conduct a preconstruction conference(s) prior to the start of any project work, which the Staff shall attend, to discuss how environmental concerns will be satisfactorily addressed. The Applicant may conduct separate preconstruction meetings for each stage of construction.

3. The Applicant shall utilize BMPs when working in the vicinity of environmentally sensitive areas. This includes, but is not limited to, the installation of silt fencing (or similarly effective tool) prior to initiating construction near streams and wetlands. The installation shall be done in accordance with generally accepted construction methods and shall be inspected regularly.
4. At least 30 days before the pre-construction conference, the Applicant shall submit to the Staff, for review and confirmation that it complies with this condition, a final project construction access plan. This plan shall include all laydown areas, residential and environmentally sensitive area access points (walk in locations only).
5. The Applicant shall institute a public information program that informs affected property owners of the nature of the project, specific contact information for Applicant personnel who are familiar with the project, the proposed timeframe for project construction, and a schedule for restoration activities. Notification to property owners shall be given at least 30 days prior to work on the affected property.
6. That the Applicant shall avoid, where possible, any damage to field drainage systems resulting from construction of the facility in agricultural areas. Damaged systems shall be repaired to at least original conditions at Applicant's expense. Severely compacted soils shall be plowed, if necessary, to restore them to original condition.
7. The Applicant shall remove all temporary gravel and other construction staging areas and access materials after completion of construction activities as weather permits, unless otherwise directed by the landowner. Impacted areas shall be restored to preconstruction conditions in compliance with the NPDES permit(s) obtained for the project and the approved SWPPP created for this project.

This foregoing document was electronically filed with the Public Utilities

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Case No(s). 14-0144-EL-BLN

Summary: Staff Report of Investigation electronically filed by Mr. Steve Irwin on behalf of Staff of OPSB