

BEFORE THE POWER SITING BOARD OF THE STATE OF OHIO

**In the Matter of the Letter of Notification Application)
of AEP Ohio Transmission Company for a Certificate)
of Environmental Compatibility and Public Need for) Case No. 17-0807-EL-BLN
the Heppner-Rhodes 138 kV Transmission Line Project)**

Members of the Board:

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 Ohio Power Siting Board (Board) rules. The accelerated certificate application in this case is subject to an automatic approval process as required by Ohio Revised Code (R.C.) 4906.03 and Ohio Administrative Code (Ohio Adm.Code) 4906-6.

Staff recommends the application for automatic approval February 13, 2018, unless suspended by the Board, an administrative law judge, or the chairperson or executive director of the board for good cause shown. If suspended, the Board must render a decision on the application within 90 days from the date of suspension.

Please present any concerns you or your designee may have with this case to my office at least four business days prior to February 13, 2018, which is the recommended automatic approval date.

Sincerely,



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OPSB STAFF REPORT OF INVESTIGATION

Case Number: 17-0807-EL-BLN
Project Name: Heppner-Rhodes 138 kV Transmission Line Project
Project Location: Jackson County
Applicant: AEP Ohio Transmission Company
Application Filing Date: November 14, 2017
Filing Type: Letter of Notification
Inspection Date: January 19, 2018
Report Date: February 6, 2018
Recommended Automatic Approval Date: February 13, 2018
Applicant's Waiver Requests: none
Staff Assigned: J. Pawley, J. Cross, G. Zeto

Summary of Staff Recommendations (see discussion below):

Application: ☐ Approval ☐ Disapproval ☒ Approval with Conditions

Waiver: ☐ Approval ☐ Disapproval ☒ Not Applicable

Project Description

AEP Ohio Transmission Company, Inc. (AEP Ohio Transco or Applicant) proposes to rebuild a portion of the existing Heppner-Rhodes 69 kilovolt (kV) transmission line to a 138 kV single-circuit transmission line. The project would begin at the proposed Heppner Switch Station (see Case No. 17-0806-EL-BLN) along Prices Switch Road in Jackson County, and would terminate at the proposed Rhodes Substation (see Case No. 17-0805-EL-BLN) along Wellston Industrial Park Road in Jackson County. The length of the rebuild project is 4.6 miles.

The project is located in Coal and Lick townships, in Jackson County and would cross several roadways including state routes 93 and 788, and Martin Drive. Existing single circuit wood structures (predominately two pole H-frame structures) would be removed and replaced with single circuit two-pole (H-frame) and three-pole steel structures.

The Applicant originally requested expedited treatment for review of this project. However, on November 21, 2017, the Applicant withdrew expedited treatment of this application.

The Applicant anticipates that construction of this project would begin during the first quarter of 2018, and the facilities would be placed in service by December 2018. The estimated total cost of the project is \$7 million.

Basis of Need

AEP Ohio Transco states the existing line, which was constructed in 1926, is unable to accommodate increased capacity while maintaining reliability. The project is needed to increase reliability and add needed capacity to Ross and Jackson counties, and is part of a greater effort to bolster the 138 kV transmission network in southeast/southern Ohio. The proposed project would allow the transmission system to provide safe, reliable electric service, while meeting all the applicable planning criteria.

The Applicant plans to include the proposed project in the 2018 Long-Term Forecast Report filing to the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio. This project was submitted to PJM Interconnection, LLC (PJM) as a supplemental project. PJM assigned the project upgrade ID No. S1342. The construction status of transmission project can be tracked on PJM's website.¹

Nature of Impacts

Socioeconomic

The surrounding land use is a mix of pasture, cultivated crops, deciduous forest, and rural residential properties. The project is not located within any agricultural district lands. The Coalton Wildlife Area is located within one mile, but would not be impacted by the project. Because the project would predominately occur within a maintained easement, the proposed project would not incur any significant socioeconomic, ecological, or construction impacts. The Applicant proposes an alignment shift of approximately 1,650 feet in one section of the rebuild project, in order to provide adequate separation from the new transmission line and an existing encroaching structure. No structures would need to be removed to construct this project.

Fifty-three parcels were identified by the Applicant as needing additional defined easement or option in order to expand the existing right-of-way, which in most instances involves a blanket-type easement. The Applicant is in the process of obtaining all supplemental easements in order to define a 100-foot right-of-way for this transmission line. The Applicant has maintained an approximately 75-foot easement since the 1920s, for the existing 69 kV line, so some expansion/clearing would be necessary for a 100-foot right-of-way.

Cultural Resources

The Applicant's cultural resources consultant performed a literature review and Phase I cultural resource management investigation (archaeology and history/architecture) for the project in September 2017. The consultant determined that the project would not involve or impact any significant cultural resources or landmarks, and that no further cultural resource management work was considered to be necessary. The findings were submitted to the Ohio Historic Preservation Office (OHPO). The OHPO responded to the consultant in concurrence that this project would not affect historic properties on October 23, 2017 (letter forwarded to Staff).

Surface Waters

The survey corridor contains seven streams, including two perennial streams, four intermittent streams, and one ephemeral stream. No structures would be located in streams. No in-water work

1. PJM Interconnection, "Transmission Construction Status," accessed January 30, 2018, <http://pjm.com/planning/rtep-upgrades-status/construct-status.aspx>.

is planned, and no permanent impacts are anticipated. The project would not cross a 100-year floodplain.

The survey corridor contains 21 wetlands including ten category 1 wetlands, nine category 2 wetlands, and two category 3 wetlands. Total wetland fill would be approximately 0.47 acres, including potential fill within isolated wetlands, including 0.05 acres of fill within one category 3 wetland. The Applicant has been in contact with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency regarding wetland impact permitting and has stated that it will continue to coordinate with these agencies to obtain the appropriate permits. Specifics about how wetlands would be further protected from indirect construction stormwater impacts using erosion and sedimentation controls would be outlined in the Applicant's Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan.

Threatened and Endangered Species

The project area is within the range of state and federal endangered Indiana bat (*Myotis sodalis*) and the federal threatened northern long-eared bat (*Myotis septentrionalis*). The project would require that the right-of-way be widened from approximately 75 feet to 100 feet, which would involve some tree clearing. As tree roosting species in the summer months, the habitat of these species would be impacted by the project. In order to avoid impacts to the Indiana bat and northern long-eared bat, Staff recommends the Applicant adhere to seasonal tree cutting dates of October 1 through March 31 for all trees three inches or greater in diameter, unless coordination efforts with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) allows a different course of action.

The project would cross over an abandoned mine area. Abandoned mines may be used as hibernacula during the winter months. The USFWS stated that if any caves or abandoned mines may be disturbed, further coordination with their office is requested to determine if fall or spring portal surveys are warranted.

Due to no in-water work and a lack of suitable habitat, impacts to other state and federal listed species are not anticipated.

Conclusion

Staff's review of the application included consideration of the requirements listed in R.C. 4906.10. Based on Staff's review, the application meets the necessary criteria for granting a certificate. Staff recommends automatic approval of this case on February 13, 2018, provided that the following conditions are satisfied.

Conditions:

- (1) Prior to the commencement of construction activities in areas that require permits or authorizations by federal or state laws and regulations, the Applicant shall obtain and comply with such permits or authorizations. The Applicant shall provide copies of permits and authorizations, including all supporting documentation, to Staff within seven days of issuance or receipt by the Applicant.
- (2) The Applicant shall adhere to seasonal cutting dates of October 1 through March 31 for removal of any trees greater than three inches in diameter, unless coordination with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) allows a different course of action.

- (3) If any caves or abandoned mines may be disturbed the Applicant shall coordinate with the USFWS to determine if fall or spring portal surveys are warranted.

This foregoing document was electronically filed with the Public Utilities

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in

Case No(s). 17-0807-EL-BLN

Summary: Staff Report of Investigation electronically filed by Mr. Matt Butler on behalf of Staff of OPSB