

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
the Heppner Switch-Lick 138 kV Transmission Line
Project**

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Case No. 17-0808-EL-BLN

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 August 23, 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 August 23, 2018, which is the recommended automatic approval date.

Sincerely,



Raymond W. Strom
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OPSB STAFF REPORT OF INVESTIGATION

Case Number: 17-0808-EL-BLN
Project Name: Heppner Switch-Lick 138 kV Transmission Line Project
Project Location: Jackson County
Applicant: AEP Ohio Transmission Company
Application Filing Date: May 24, 2018
Filing Type: Letter of Notification
Inspection Date: July 17, 2018
Report Date: August 16, 2018
Recommended Automatic Approval Date: August 23, 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 Berlin-Ross and Coalton-Lick 69 kilovolt (kV) transmission lines to 138 kV standards with a new 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 existing Lick Substation adjacent to U.S. Route 35, also located in Jackson County. The length of the rebuild project is 4.9 miles.

The project is located in Coal and Lick townships, and the City of Jackson, in Jackson County and would cross several roadways including U.S. Route 35 (twice), and state routes 93 and 32/124. Existing single circuit wood structures (predominately monopole structures) would be removed and replaced with single circuit monopole and two-pole (H-frame) steel structures.

The Applicant anticipates that construction of this project would begin during the fourth quarter of 2018, and the facilities would be placed in service by December 2019. The estimated total cost of the project is \$10 million.

Basis of Need

The Applicant states the project is intended to address the request of a specific customer, the City of Jackson, for an additional delivery point that could serve their entire load. The existing line, which was constructed in 1926, is unable to accommodate the City of Jackson's increased capacity while maintaining reliability. The existing line has been responsible for 478,000 customer-minutes

of interruption between the years 2012 and 2017. The project is needed to increase reliability and add needed capacity to the City of Jackson. The proposed project would allow the transmission system to provide safe, reliable electric service, while meeting applicable planning criteria.

This project was included in the Applicant's most recent Long-Term Forecast Report filing, Case No. 18-1501-EL-FOR, and was submitted to PJM as a supplemental project. PJM assigned the project upgrade ID No. s1342. The construction status of the transmission project can be tracked on PJM's website.^{1, 2}

Nature of Impacts

Socioeconomic

The surrounding land use is a mix of urban residential, commercial and industrial properties within the City of Jackson, and wooded/forested areas, and rural residential properties in the township portions of the project. Multiple roadways and highways are also present. The project is not located within any agricultural district lands.

The project predominately would be installed within an existing maintained easement, thus minimizing additional socioeconomic impacts. The Applicant proposes some alignment shifts in order to provide adequate separation from the new transmission line and existing structures. No structures would need to be removed to construct this project, as no structures are located within 50 feet of the proposed rebuild centerline.

The Applicant has maintained a smaller easement since the 1920s, for the existing 69 kV line, so some expansion/clearing would be necessary for a new 100-foot right-of-way. Fifty-three parcels were identified by the Applicant as needing additional defined easement in order to expand the existing right-of-way. The Applicant is in the process of obtaining all supplemental easements in order to define a 100-foot right-of-way for this proposed transmission line.

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 August 2017, and supplemented its investigation in the spring of 2018. 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.

Surface Waters

The proposed right-of-way contains 18 streams including nine perennial, six intermittent, and three ephemeral streams. No poles would be located in streams. No in-water work is planned, and no permanent impacts are anticipated. The project would cross a 100-year floodplain, with a portion of the project located in a Federal Emergency Management Agency Regulatory Floodway. The

1. AEP Ohio Transmission Company, "Long-Term Forecast Report to the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio," Public Utilities Commission of Ohio Case No. 18-1501-EL-FOR, May 31, 2018.

2. PJM Interconnection, "Transmission Construction Status," accessed July 18, 2018, <http://pjm.com/planning/rtep-upgrades-status/construct-status.aspx>.

Applicant would submit a floodplain permit application to the Jackson County Planning Commission prior to construction.

The proposed right-of-way would cross eight wetlands totaling 4.2 acres. All wetlands are Category 1 and Category 2 wetlands. Three poles would be located within wetlands. Total wetland fill would be approximately 0.02 acre. These impacts would be covered under the Army Corps of Engineers 404 Nationwide 12 Permit. 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 to be submitted as part of the required National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Permit.

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*). Widening the right-of-way from approximately 50 feet to 100 feet would involve some tree clearing. As tree roosting species in the summer months, the habitat of these species could be impacted by the project. In order to avoid potential 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 several abandoned mine areas. 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. Because of the existence of abandoned mine areas in the vicinity of the project, Staff recommends that the Applicant undertake this coordination.

The project is within the range of the running buffalo clover (*Trifolium stoloniferum*). The Applicant completed a presence/absence and found that this species was not present within the project area. The USFWS has concurred with the results of this survey.

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 August 23, 2018, provided that the following conditions are satisfied.

Conditions:

- (1) Prior to construction in areas that require permits, the Applicant shall obtain and comply with all applicable permits and authorizations as required by federal and state entities. Copies of such permits and authorizations, including all supporting documentation, shall be provided to Staff to ensure compliance with this condition.
- (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 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) allows a different course of action.

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

This foregoing document was electronically filed with the Public Utilities

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in

Case No(s). 17-0808-EL-BLN

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