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# Minnesota's Electric Transmission System

Annual Adequacy Report

01/15/2018

Minnesota Department of Commerce In Consultation With  
the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission

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## I. INTRODUCTION

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Minnesota Statute §216C.054, the Annual Transmission Adequacy Report to the Legislature,<sup>1</sup> requires the Commissioner of Commerce, in consultation with the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission, to prepare and submit this report annually to provide a nontechnical discussion of Minnesota’s current electric transmission system. This law also requires a report on transmission planning and other actions taken or in process to maintain electric service reliability as well as comply with the requirements of the state’s Renewable Energy Standard.

Because transmission issues tend to involve numerous considerations and entities, this report provides a general discussion of transmission as a reference guide, similar to the discussion from previous reports. This report also provides an update of current transmission projects as identified in the most recent biennial transmission report from Minnesota transmission owners. In addition, the report notes that a certificate of need process for one transmission line was started in Minnesota in 2017.

## II. WHY TRANSMISSION MATTERS: OVERVIEW

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Electricity is provided to consumers via three main steps: 1) electricity is generated at various power plants, 2) electricity is transmitted on an integrated system of large power lines and 3) electricity is delivered to consumers through a distribution system of smaller power lines. As the link between the production (generation) of electricity and delivery (distribution) to consumers, transmission plays a vital role in helping to ensure that consumers have low-cost, reliable energy.

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<sup>1</sup> The statute states:

The commissioner of commerce, in consultation with the Public Utilities Commission, shall annually by January 15 submit a written report to the chairs and the ranking minority members of the legislative committees with primary jurisdiction over energy policy that contains a narrative describing what electric transmission infrastructure is needed within the state over the next 15 years and what specific progress is being made to meet that need. To the extent possible, the report must contain a description of specific transmission needs and the current status of proposals to address that need. The report must identify any barriers to meeting transmission infrastructure needs and make recommendations, including any legislation, that are necessary to overcome those barriers. The report must be based on the best available information and must describe what assumptions are made as the basis for the report. If the commissioner determines that there are difficulties in accurately assessing future transmission infrastructure needs, the commissioner shall explain those difficulties as part of the report. The commissioner is not required to conduct original research to support the report. The commissioner may utilize information the commissioner, the commission, and the Office of Energy Security [now known as the Division of Energy Resources] possess and utilize in carrying out their existing statutory duties related to the state's transmission infrastructure. The report must be in easily understood, nontechnical terms.

Further, the transmission system can be impacted by changes in either supply or demand for power.

While it is a critical component in providing electric service, transmission accounts for a much smaller percent of utility costs than either generation or distribution facilities. For example, transmission may account for 10 percent of the costs of providing electric service while generation and distribution make up the other 90 percent.

At the time many of the original transmission facilities in Minnesota were built, prior to the series of electric power blackouts in the 1960s, they were designed primarily to interconnect a utility's generation and distribution facilities, and secondarily to interconnect neighboring utilities to each other to provide additional backup power. Over time, the focus on interconnecting utilities has grown to include interconnecting broader regions, even as the need to connect a utility's generation and distribution systems remains. This evolving design enables utilities to access other generation or transmission systems if something goes wrong on that utility's system. This interconnection with other electric systems provides a more reliable system overall than isolated systems and allows utilities to access lower cost power from other suppliers, or purchase power on a temporary basis rather than building a generation facility that may be used only occasionally. Transmission helps companies and states engage in a greater degree of specialization and thus allows the system of interconnected utilities to operate more efficiently and reliably than if each utility or state were operated on a stand-alone basis.

The interconnected transmission system is vast, covering the entire United States. Electrically, the nation's transmission grid is split into three sections: the Eastern Interconnection, the Western Interconnection, and the Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT). These areas are shown in the map in Appendix A.<sup>2</sup>

Electricity follows the laws of physics: it follows the path of least resistance. Electricity placed onto the interconnected transmission grid could be withdrawn at any other place within the interconnection as long as there is no congestion on the transmission system. Moreover, the electrical system must be balanced in real time, meaning that the amount of electricity being produced at any given time must essentially equal the amount of electricity being used by consumers. Because electricity cannot currently be stored in a cost-effective manner with current technology, the transmission system helps maintain this balance in a more cost-effective manner by allowing electricity to flow through the broader electrical system where possible.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix A, with source and electronic link: [NERC map](#)

<sup>3</sup> Development continues of technologies to store electricity for later use (including batteries, pumped hydro, compressed air, flywheels, etc.). However, few of these technologies are commercially viable or operational at a utility scale at this time. One exception is known as "Pumped Storage Hydro" which in effect stores the electricity in the potential energy of water, by using electricity at times when little power is being used for other purposes to pump

### **III. TRANSMISSION, RELIABILITY AND POWER COSTS**

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Adequate transmission is one essential component to ensure that Minnesotans have reliable electric service. When there are shortages in transmission capacity in certain areas, there are more frequent power outages and lower power quality (which can affect sensitive equipment such as computers). Since Minnesotans depend heavily on reliable power in their homes and businesses, it is critical to ensure that electric service is as reliable as reasonably possible to minimize the cost to Minnesota's economy in lost production time and disruption and potential harm to the myriad systems that depend on electricity. For example, electricity is needed to deliver natural gas and other fuels to consumers as these energy producers rely on electricity to produce and deliver their products.

Inadequate transmission capacity also increases the cost of power delivered on the system. The entire electric system starts by using the least-cost generators available and adds power from generators that are increasingly more expensive to operate. When there is not enough transmission capacity, certain paths on the system become congested, causing operators of the electric system to decrease the amount of electricity produced by the cheaper generators in congested areas and increase electricity produced by more expensive generators in areas free of congestion to make up for the generation that could not be delivered from the congested areas. As a result, when transmission congestion causes adjustments to the generation facilities used to produce power, the cost of power goes up as more expensive generation replaces less expensive generation.

Thus, inadequate transmission capacity can hurt Minnesota's economy. Lapses in power quality and reliability, along with higher costs, could potentially disrupt businesses, industries, hospitals, schools, public services and citizens who depend on computers and other electronics in their day-to-day lives and expect that power costs will be reasonable.

### **IV. ROLES OF ENTITIES INVOLVED IN TRANSMISSION**

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large amounts of water into a reservoir. Later, when electricity is needed, this reservoir water is allowed to flow through a hydro-power turbine, generating electricity. This technology's use is restricted due to the need for both a large amount of water to make it viable and large ponds to store the water and generate the hydro-power. Currently, the largest Pumped-storage Hydro facility in the eastern U.S. is located on the eastern shore of Lake Michigan. In addition, Northern States Power d/b/a Xcel Energy is testing use of a large battery facility to store power from energy for later use. Such batteries are still in the testing stage in the U.S., some with assistance from the Department of Energy's Office of Electricity Delivery and Energy Reliability. Storage is discussed below.

Numerous entities are involved in various aspects of the design and cost of the transmission system that serves Minnesota. For example, because transmission lines located outside of Minnesota serve Minnesota customers, the utilities that own those facilities and states that regulate those utilities affect the cost and design of the transmission grid that serves Minnesotans. While Minnesota’s electric utilities are certainly involved in these matters, so are other entities, including:

1. The **Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC)** regulates the wholesale rates that utilities charge for transmission service and the type of transmission services provided.
2. The **Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO)** and **Southwest Power Pool (SPP)** do not own transmission or generation facilities, but work with utilities that choose to be their members to operate the regional transmission system reliably and in the least-cost manner through energy markets.<sup>4</sup> MISO and SPP help their members develop long-term transmission plans for the region. MISO currently covers all or part of 15 states plus, for reliability purposes, a Canadian province, Manitoba.<sup>5</sup> MISO cannot require any of its members to build new resources and is not responsible for developing long-term generation plans. FERC regulates the rates and practices of MISO and SPP.
3. The **North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC)** develops and enforces certain electric reliability standards for what is known as the “Bulk Power System” or “the grid.” There are eight NERC Reliability Regions covering the United States and Canada, as shown in Appendix A to this report; Minnesota is in the “MRO” region. Because an outage in one part of the grid can affect other parts of the grid, NERC coordinates among these regions.
4. The **Midwest Reliability Organization (MRO)**, with members in eight states (Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Montana and Illinois) and two Canadian Provinces (Manitoba and Saskatchewan), develops and ensures compliance with regional and interregional electric standards for the transmission system and performs assessments of the grid’s ability to meet demands for electricity.
5. The **Organization of MISO States (OMS)** is a self-governing organization of representatives from each of the regulatory commissions in ten states with authority over utilities or other entities participating in MISO. The OMS analyzes and makes recommendations to MISO, FERC, and other relevant government agencies regarding matters that affect regional transmission issues. The Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (Commission) represents

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<sup>4</sup> MISO and SPP are called Regional Transmission Organizations, which are responsible for moving electricity over large interstate areas. Despite this geographical definition, electric utilities can choose which Regional Transmission Organization to join and, if they meet the terms of the agreements, could switch to another Regional Transmission Organization.

<sup>5</sup> As shown in Appendix B to this report, MISO covers some or all of the following states: Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Arkansas, Kentucky, Missouri, Mississippi, Texas, and Louisiana.

Minnesota in OMS. In addition, the Department represents Minnesota as an associate member in OMS and, along with other Public Consumer Advocates such as the Minnesota Office of Attorney General's Residential Utilities and Antitrust Division, participates in efforts by OMS and MISO.

6. The **Minnesota Public Utilities Commission** requires Minnesota utilities to develop sufficient transmission to serve load and regulates the rates that Minnesota's investor-owned utilities charge to their retail customers to recover transmission costs. In addition, while the Minnesota Commission does not regulate the wholesale rates that Minnesota's investor-owned utilities charge to wholesale customers, the Commission does ensure that these utilities allocate transmission costs and revenues appropriately at the retail level, considering facts pertaining to retail customers.
7. The **Division of Energy Resources of the Minnesota Department of Commerce (Commerce)** investigates matters pending before the Commission and makes recommendations to address proposals by utilities and others.

Because it is so involved in the operations of Minnesota's electrical system, MISO warrants further discussion. As noted above, MISO is a Regional Transmission Organization created and regulated by FERC. It is involved in numerous matters that are critical to the reliable and low-cost operation of the bulk transmission system, including planning for contingencies if large generation plants or transmission components retire or fail, conducting engineering analyses of the effects of changes in generation or transmission components on the system as a whole, planning for the transmission needs in the MISO region, coordinating with other areas of the Eastern Interconnection System, monitoring the day-to-day (and minute-to-minute) operations of the transmission system, telling utilities which generation facilities to operate (from lowest to highest cost), addressing the operational effects of congestion on the transmission system, analyzing where the greatest congestion exists and so forth. The Department and Commission Staff participate in various MISO and OMS committees.

As noted above, the geographical area of MISO's region spans 15 states and, for reliability purposes, a Canadian province. To focus its review of the reliability of the transmission system, MISO established resource "planning reserve zones." In its planning, MISO focuses on ensuring that there are adequate electric resources to meet the needs in each zone, and considers any limits on a region's ability to import or export power.

As shown in Appendix B to this report, most of Minnesota is part of MISO's Planning Reserve Zone 1, along with the western half of Wisconsin, the portions of North Dakota with utilities belonging to MISO, and portions of Montana, South Dakota, and Illinois. Utilities included in Zone 1 include Central Minnesota Municipal Power Agency, Dairyland Power Cooperative, Great River Energy, Heartland Consumers Power District, Minnesota Municipal Power Agency, Minnesota Power, Missouri River Energy Services, Montana-Dakota Utilities, Northern States Power (Xcel Energy),

Otter Tail Power, Rochester Public Utilities, the Southern Minnesota Municipal Power Agency, and Willmar Municipal Utilities.

## **V. HOW MUCH TRANSMISSION IS ENOUGH**

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### **A. MINNESOTA'S TRANSMISSION SYSTEM**

When the initial components of Minnesota's transmission system were designed and built, largely 50 to 70 years ago, items such as home computers, video games, cable TV, and cell phones were unheard of, few customers had air conditioners, and there were few plug-in appliances. Those transmission facilities were sized to meet the then-current electricity needs of the population and economy of the day plus some assumptions for growth based on what was known at that time.

While Minnesota's transmission system was previously built with more capacity than was immediately needed for immediate economic and reliability purposes, Minnesota has been outgrowing its system both in terms of the quantity of electricity customers demand and where the electricity is produced. In addition the system has been aging. In response to the changes in the amount and location of electricity supply and demand more transmission has been added recently and more may be needed in the future. Moreover, Minnesota residents and industry need not only electricity, but also acceptable power quality, meaning evenly delivered energy without power surges and other fluctuations that can impact computers and other sensitive electronic devices. Lack of sufficient space or capacity on the grid also means that there could be some locations in the state where power quality may become unacceptable. Further, in some Minnesota locations too much electricity is trying to flow on the lines causing "grid lock," and associated economic and reliability problems in making sure the power can be delivered where it is needed.

Determining the amount of transmission infrastructure needed to provide economic and reliable electric service in Minnesota requires balancing the risks of building too much transmission or too little. However, these risks are not symmetrical. If more transmission capacity is built than needed to provide delivery service for available generation resources, the system will be relatively free of transmission constraints, but will cost more than is necessary to provide adequate service. However, if too little capacity is built for delivery service from existing and new generation resources, the transmission cost component of providing electricity service may be lower, but the overall costs to Minnesota's economy of the less reliable power and use of higher cost generation resources that would result may be far greater than the cost of building transmission. As noted above, costs of a less reliable electric system may include lost productivity, damage to security systems, damage to computer systems, and increased cost of producing electricity.

While use of the transmission system varies with the overall demand for electricity and the location of the supply, transmission planning requires focus on the amount and timing of the highest needs to import electricity to a region and the highest needs to export electricity from a region. For

example, in some regions the clearest need is to be able to export power from the region. Sometimes, the greatest need to export power is when demand for electricity is low, and the supply of electricity exceeds demand in an area. This imbalance occurs during overnight hours of the spring and fall when demand for power is low and generation from “must run” resources such as wind is high.

When planning for the requirement to import electricity, the highest demand for electricity (peak demand) is reviewed. While peak electric use typically occurs in the summer, MISO must also plan for meeting high winter loads. For example, temperatures in January and February of 2014 were exceedingly cold during the two “polar vortexes.”

In fact, the historic winter peak electric demand on MISO’s system was set on January 6, 2014. At the same time, there were shortages of propane and natural gas, two primary fuels used to heat homes and water in Minnesota and surrounding areas. Because this event was significant, MISO issued a report on September 23, 2014, “MISO and Stakeholder Polar Vortex Experiences with Natural Gas Availability and Enhanced RTO/Pipeline Communication,” in which MISO stated that the January 6, 2014 historic winter peak demand of 109,307 MW was 9 percent higher than the prior winter peak demand. MISO summarized its report as follows:

“The January 2014 polar vortex brought extreme weather conditions to the MISO Region that introduced significant challenges to the reliable operation of the power grid. The [e]ffects were far-reaching, spanning from the Canadian province of Manitoba to the Gulf Coast. While the severity of the conditions was forecasted well in advance, this was nevertheless a rare weather event for which the full impact could not be precisely anticipated. Overall, however, MISO was able to effectively manage system assets to maintain the reliability of the Bulk Power System within its region, while also supporting and assisting neighboring entities in their efforts to do the same. MISO’s market functions performed as expected during the event.”

In addition, well-designed transmission systems help facilitate more efficient use of generation resources. A transmission system or “grid” that covers a broader region and multiple utilities, with access to a larger portfolio of generation resources, permits strategic use of the most efficient resources available on the grid at any given moment. As indicated above, in its role as a regional transmission organization, MISO helps coordinate both regional transmission planning and operations. These functions help to mitigate potential inefficiencies that can result from a balkanized utility grid that is based on individual utilities planning and operating their systems solely to meet the needs of their service territories. Being aware of the various costs of resources in its region, MISO can provide direction to its members on how to dispatch those resources more efficiently overall.

As a result, planning the transmission system means meeting not only the overall expected demand for power, typically in summer months, but also the demand for relatively high amounts of power during extreme weather and other circumstances. Moreover, when generation resources are higher than the demand for electricity in a region, the need to move electricity out of such a region increases.

This planning also needs to take into account expected changes in the economy. While excessive transmission facilities would result in costs and local environmental impacts being higher than necessary, too little transmission would also have a negative effect on the cost and reliability of electricity. Thus, the overall goal is to have a system that is sized just large enough to be ready to handle the demands to import and export power to allow for growth in the economy and expected changes in the generation fleet. For example, if the transmission system were planned assuming that the relatively low demand for power that occurs during a recessionary period would continue in the future, the transmission system would be unable to accommodate recovery and growth in the economy.<sup>6</sup> Or, if plans for transmission ignore potential growth in new technologies that rely on electricity, then the transmission system may not be adequate in the future.

The minimum time period that should be considered in planning for new facilities is the number of years that it takes to build new transmission lines (including assessing a need, conducting engineering analysis, working with local communities and landowners, obtaining needed permits and installing the lines). It can take a decade for a large transmission line to move from planning through permitting and construction to be placed in service. Thus, as the economy grows in the future it will be necessary to ensure that the transmission system is ready to meet the needs of the future.

Minnesota largely avoided serious problems with its transmission system due to having one of the strongest energy conservation programs in the country. Minnesota's Conservation Improvement Program has, since its inception, conserved enough energy to push back by many years the need for building multiple major electric generation plants by offering industry, business and residents various programs to save energy in their day-to-day operations. As a consequence, while power usage continued to increase the rate of growth has declined significantly.

In addition, strategically placed generation and storage facilities could also help ensure reliable electric service, particularly when such resources are relatively low cost and located in areas where such resources can address congestion on the transmission system. For example, new generation

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<sup>6</sup> The Commission recognized these concepts in its May 22, 2009 Order in the certificate of need proceeding for the transmission capacity expansion project for 2020, or CapX 2020. The Minnesota Court of Appeals affirmed the Commission's decision on June 8, 2010.

should be sited where sufficient transmission capacity already exists. Storage resources placed in strategic areas may delay or prevent the need to build new transmission.

However, these programs should not be expected to put off needed changes to transmission indefinitely. Further, conservation might actually increase the need for new transmission if it occurs in an area where there are limits to the amount of generation that can be exported. For example, as more renewable energy has been added in and near Minnesota, there often is a greater need to build more transmission to export the power during off-peak hours when demand is low.

**B. FEDERAL AND STATE ACTIONS RELATED TO MINNESOTA’S TRANSMISSION GRID IN 2017**

Additions to transmission are needed not only due to factors in Minnesota, but also due to federal and regional governmental actions directly impacting the use of Minnesota’s transmission grid (as well as other states’ grids). Issues that developed in 2017 with potential effects on Minnesota include:

***1. MISO South Integration Update***

As noted in prior reports, the Entergy Region [portions of Arkansas, Louisiana (including New Orleans), Mississippi, and Texas ] referred to as “MISO South” started their energy market with MISO on December 19, 2013. As a result of this integration of MISO South, MISO’s footprint added 16,000 miles of transmission lines (which is a 32 percent increase in transmission), 50,000 MW of generation (which is a 38 percent increase in generation), and 30,000 MW of load (which is a 31 percent increase in load). MISO South is expected to create benefits for existing MISO members by reducing MISO administrative fees since they will be shared across a larger footprint. FERC approved a five-year transition period for MISO transmission planning and MISO cost allocation for the MISO South Region; the end of this period is approaching (12/19/2018).

Due to its wide swath and differences in certain areas, MISO divided its system into three geographical regions and ten geographical sub-regions, to focus on reliability in those sub-regions:

MISO Central Region:

- Wisconsin and Upper Michigan sub-region
- Lower Michigan, Northern Indiana sub-region
- Central and Southern Indiana and Southern Ohio sub-region
- Missouri and Southern Illinois sub-region

MISO North Region:

- Dakotas sub-region
- Minnesota/Western Wisconsin sub-region
- Iowa sub-region
- Manitoba, Canada sub-region

MISO South Region:

- Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas sub-region

Minnesota is in the “MISO North” region of MISO.

## ***2. Constraints on Power Transfers within MISO***

The amount of electricity that MISO North can export to and import from MISO South has been limited since MISO integrated the Entergy region. 2014 Southwest Power Pool (SPP) filed a complaint with FERC, claiming that MISO should pay for certain transfers that exceed 1,000 MW. Under a settlement, MISO is currently paying SPP more to transfer power over 1,000 MW. The annual cost to maintain the settlement is estimated to be up to \$38 million and is dependent on the capacity factor usage of the interface.

Later in 2016 MISO began to study ways to address the 1,000 MW limit, called the Footprint Diversity Study. Of the 35 transmission projects that were studied to solve the congestion, none passed the benefit-to-cost ratio of 1.25 that is used within the Market Congestion Planning study process. While there are significant potential savings in settlement costs, the minimal amount of physical congestion on the interface between MISO North/Central and MISO South within MISO’s models did not provide enough economic benefit to justify a project candidate for board approval.

### ***3. MISO's Competitive Bid Process for Regional Transmission (Transmission Developer Qualification and Selection)***

FERC requires MISO to have a Transmission Developer Qualification and Selection System and to eliminate federal (but not state) rights of first refusal on cost shared transmission projects. One of FERC's stated goals is to promote competition for transmission projects; Minnesota and other states agree with this goal. In fact, Minnesota's existing certificate of need law requires the Commission to consider alternatives to proposed facilities. Minnesota statutes also require a Minnesota utility ("incumbent electric transmission owner") to give notice as to whether or not it intends to build a high-voltage transmission facility that has been selected in a MISO planning process (passing MISO's various standards and engineering effects on the electrical grid). If the utility does not intend to build the facility, the Commission "may determine whether the incumbent transmission owner or another entity will build the electric transmission line, taking into consideration issues such as cost, efficiency, reliability, and other factors identified in [Minnesota law]."

One such project near Mankato, referred to as "Huntley-Wilmarth", was approved by MISO in December 2016. The project would build a transmission line to interconnect substations owned by Xcel Energy and ITC Transmission. Pre-filing procedural steps in the statutory Minnesota certificate of need process were started in 2017 but the petition itself is not expected until some time in 2018.

Minnesota has commented in FERC proceedings that reaching the overall goal of using competition to build new transmission resources -- obtaining the best projects at lowest costs -- depends critically on holding bidders accountable to their bids. If bidders are allowed to increase costs above bids or fail to meet the specifications in their bids with little or no accountability, then the federal process cannot be expected to result in low-cost, reliable resources. Specifically, the Department and the Commission filed comments on August 27, 2015 raising concerns about a utility's proposal as to rates charged for transmission projects. FERC held a technical conference and took comments on how to hold bidders accountable for cost increases, but has not determined how or whether to do so as yet.

#### **4. MISO's Multi Value Transmission Project Portfolio**

In 2011, MISO approved a portfolio of 17 different transmission projects across the MISO North and MISO Central footprint. The projects, referred to as multi-value projects or “MVP” projects had a wide variety of goals across the entire MISO North and MISO Central footprint, including:

- Provide benefits in excess of costs under the scenarios studied. In this case the benefit to cost ratio for the MVP portfolio as a whole ranged from 1.8 to 3.0;
- Maintain system reliability by resolving various reliability violations defined by federal reliability standards. The MVPs addressed violations on approximately 650 transmission elements for more than 6,700 system conditions and mitigated 31 system instability conditions;
- Enable 41 million MWh of wind energy per year to meet renewable energy mandates and goals;
- Provide an average annual value of \$1,279 million over the first 40 years of service, at an average annual revenue requirement of \$624 million; and
- Support a variety of generation policies by using a set of energy zones that support wind, natural gas and other fuel sources.

Two of the 17 MVP projects are located in Minnesota. The most recent cost estimates for the 2 MVP projects -- the 345 kV line between Brookings, South Dakota to Southeast Twin Cities and the Lakefield Junction to Winnebago to Iowa line – in Minnesota are at or below the cost estimate used by MISO; however, some of the MVP projects experienced cost overruns as high as 45 percent. This significant cost overrun highlights the importance of starting with a reasonable cost estimate and building adequate cost control measures into the transmission project approval process. The Minnesota Commission and the Department are participating in proceedings with OMS<sup>7</sup> and MISO to understand and address these concerns. MISO recently incorporated in their reporting process to FERC a method for comparing the actual costs of transmission projects selected by MISO to estimated costs, escalated to current dollars as of the expected year in service, to provide more comparable information and to allow entities interested in holding transmission owners financially to monitor cost overruns.

In Minnesota, the Department and Minnesota Commission hold project owners accountable for the costs proposed in certificate of need proceedings by not only comparing actual costs (escalated to current dollars) to estimated costs, but also preventing rate-regulated transmission owners from charging cost overruns to ratepayers without a proper vetting process. Rate-regulated utilities may charge ratepayers for cost overruns only if: 1) there was no competitive process used to select the project, 2) utilities can justify why it is reasonable to charge such cost overruns to ratepayers, and

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<sup>7</sup> The Organization of MISO States is defined in Section IV above.

3) the utility files a general rate case (cost overruns are not charged to ratepayers through rider rates prior to the rate case).

### ***5. Complaint by Large Power Customers to FERC regarding MISO Transmission Owners' Return on Equity***

As discussed in prior reports, a group of industrial end-users filed a complaint at FERC in late 2013 seeking to reduce the allowed return on equity (ROE) of MISO Transmission Owners and limit capital structure ratios and incentive equity adders. At that time, MISO transmission owners had a base ROE of 12.38 percent, with transmission owners belonging to organizations such as MISO at 12.88 percent. The complaint sought to decrease the transmission owners' base ROE over 300 basis points below the then-current base ROE, to 9.15 percent.

In 2015, MISO's Public Consumer Group, of which the Department is a member, provided testimony identifying the basis for decreasing the ROE to a reasonable level. FERC's Trial Staff filed briefs that were supportive of consumer advocates' positions. Transmission customers and consumer advocates argued that FERC's high ROEs imposed undue costs on consumers and distorted decision-making by encouraging utilities to build transmission rather than generation or distribution resources. While transmission resources are needed, it would not be appropriate to build only transmission to meet the electric needs of society since there must be an appropriate balance of production and delivery of electricity.

Because the Minnesota Commission requires utilities under its ratemaking authority to offset high ROE costs with high ROE revenues, Minnesotans taking service from such utilities have been spared from paying high ROEs without the revenue offset. While these ratemaking decisions have reduced the harm of paying for high ROEs for such ratepayers in Minnesota, such benefits will be returned to Minnesota retail ratepayers only if utilities choose to provide a credit to Minnesota retail ratepayers for higher revenues or – as with utilities subject to the Minnesota Commission's ratemaking – are required to do so. Whether or not Minnesota retail ratepayers receive the benefit of revenue offsets to reduce the high rates they pay for electric service, the distortion of utility decision-making remained.

On December 22, 2015, Administrative Law Judge David H. Coffman issued his Initial Decision, determining that the allowed base ROE should be reduced by over 206 basis points (just over 2 percent), to 10.32 percent. On September 28, 2016 FERC approved Judge Coffman's Initial Decision, requiring MISO to refund the difference between the base ROEs of 12.38 percent and 10.32 percent.

On July, 2017, MISO filed its compliance filing showing that MISO provided sizable refunds to Minnesota utilities in February and June 2017.

Also related to this proceeding is another complaint filed on February 12, 2015 regarding further reason to reduce the returns on equity for transmission assets in MISO. The Initial Decision by Administrative Law Judge David H. Coffman determined that the allowed base ROE should be further reduced from 10.32 percent to 9.7 percent. A final FERC decision in this case is expected in 2018.

## **6. Clean Power Plan**

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued its final rule for regulation of carbon emissions from existing power plants, called the “Clean Power Plan” (CPP). On February 9, 2016, the U.S. Supreme Court stayed implementation of the Clean Power Plan pending judicial review. On May 16, 2016, the full D.C. Circuit ordered, on its own motion, to reschedule a hearing before a three-judge panel to be heard instead by the D.C. Court *en banc* on September 27, 2016. On August 8, 2017, the D.C. Circuit ordered litigation be held in abeyance for an additional 60 days. At the time of this writing the case is currently pending in the D.C. Circuit.

On March 28, 2017 President Donald Trump signed the Executive Order on Energy Independence (E.O. 13783), which calls for a review of the Clean Power Plan. On October 25, 2017 the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued a report on implementing the Executive Order. On October 10, 2017, EPA Administrator E. Scott Pruitt signed a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking proposing to repeal the CPP. The public comment period closed on December 15, 2017.

While these potential rule changes apply to power plants rather than transmission facilities, if implemented the changes could affect the configuration of the existing integrated electrical system. For this reason, MISO worked with its stakeholders to study expected effects of the Clean Power Plan on the transmission system under various assumptions as to how states within the MISO region may implement the Clean Power Plan or respond to broad market changes that may have similar effects. MISO’s analyses indicating that regional approaches to respond to such matters can reduce the overall costs compared to a state-by-state response if there are overall factors that affect the MISO footprint. That is, broadening the area from which to draw power reduces overall costs of electricity.

## **7. MISO Regional Transmission Study**

To assist in the continuing efforts to provide reliable service at reasonable costs, 2016 MISO began a multi-year process to position the transmission grid to support the changing mix of resources on the electric grid to which Minnesota is connected and on which Minnesota relies. The process, called the Regional Transmission Overlay Study, focused on developing long-term transmission roadmaps and regional solutions. MISO gathered information about different factors that could affect the size and configuration of the transmission system. In 2017 the overlay planning analysis was brought to an early conclusion with identification of indicative overlays to help guide future

transmission issues and potential solutions. However, no definitive projects were identified or proposed for approval.

### ***8. Price Cap on Offers of Energy in the Regional Wholesale Electric Market***

Because there were concerns about how MISO's energy market could affect costs ultimately charged to ratepayers, there has always been a cap on how high the charges for electric energy could rise. Since the beginning of the MISO wholesale energy market on April 1, 2005, MISO has had a cap of \$1,000 per MWh for energy bids (offers), plus a waiver to exceed this cap during the winter during emergency conditions ("soft cap").

However, balancing concerns about prices is the concern, at least in deregulate states, that there may not be sufficient resources to provide reliable service unless the prices were higher. Thus, in 2016, largely in response to higher energy prices in East Coast states where electric generation is deregulated, FERC held rulemaking to consider increasing those price caps. The concerns in Minnesota and other regulated states were: 1) ensuring that bids were reasonably based on costs that could be verified and 2) whether resources that would ordinarily serve Minnesota would seek to provide service in areas where prices were higher.

On November 17, 2016, FERC issued in its final rulemaking, which increased the soft cap for offers into the energy market at the higher of \$1,000/MWh or that resource's verified cost-based incremental energy offer and set a hard cap on the verified cost-based incremental energy offers used to calculate energy prices at \$2,000/MWh. FERC's Independent Market Monitor must verify all energy offers above \$1,000/MWh prior to any such offer being used to calculate energy prices, to ensure that a resource's cost-based incremental energy offer reasonably reflects that resource's actual or expected costs.

On November 9, 2017 FERC issued an order rejecting MISO's filing in Compliance with FERC's Order which required MISO to increase the energy offer cap from \$1,000 to \$2,000. MISO has a temporary waiver to deal with the issue; verified energy costs above \$1,000/MWh could be recovered. However, MISO will have to re-submit the compliance filing.

### ***9. Prorated Accumulated Deferred Income Taxes (ADIT)***

Utility rates spread (depreciate) the costs of structures such as a transmission line over the expected life of the facility, charging those who use the structure over its life a fair share of the costs. Since the 1970s, Congress, through the Internal Revenue Service, has allowed utilities to assume accelerated depreciation for income tax purposes, which results in lower income taxes in the early years of the facility's life and correspondingly higher taxes later in the life. Since ratemaking uses uniform rather than accelerated depreciation, utility rates overcharge for income taxes at the beginning of a facility's life and undercharge for income taxes later in the life of the

facility. To balance out the difference between uniform depreciation in utility rates and accelerated depreciation for income taxes, the utility maintains an accumulated deferred income tax (ADIT) account in its rate base, over the life of the facility. This account provides a credit for prepaid income taxes at the beginning of the facility's life, which reduces the utility's rates and offsets the overcharges for income taxes. Each year, this account is adjusted to maintain the difference in imputed and actual income taxes; by the end of the facility's life, the account should net out to zero.

In 2015, the Internal Revenue Service confirmed that, when utility rates are set based on a historical test year, this ratemaking should continue. However, the IRS determined that, when utility rates are set based on a forecasted test year, the credit to ADIT should be reduced, for the portion of the year that has not yet occurred. For example, if a utility's rates are forecasted and set for a calendar year, but the rates don't go into effect until September of the year, the IRS has determined that the full ADIT credit should be used (ratepayers should get the full credit) for the months of January through August, with the ADIT credit reduced (not fully given to ratepayers) for September through December.

FERC originally required Xcel to give the full credit to ADIT back in the following year, through a true-up. But Xcel filed a new request in late 2016, asking FERC to allow the Company never to provide a full ADIT credit to ratepayers, thus keeping for its shareholders the prepaid amount of income taxes in the ADIT credit, so that utility rates would in effect charge for non-existent income taxes.

The Department filed comments with Joint Consumer Advocates opposing Xcel's proposal to keep permanently for its shareholders some of the tax benefits of accelerated depreciation, as a result of not providing the full ADIT credit (by prorating) for the prepaid income taxes. However, in its December 30, 2016 Order in Docket ER17-306, FERC approved Xcel's request to keep tax benefits of accelerated depreciation.

In 2017, FERC denied a rehearing request that would have allowed Xcel to charge higher rates retroactively. However, Otter Tail Power and Minnesota Power followed Xcel's approach and now also charge higher rates for transmission and keep permanently for their shareholders the prepaid income taxes due to the tax benefits of accelerated depreciation.

## ***10. MISO and PJM Pseudo-Tie Requirements***

On May 8, 2017, the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission joined OMS in asking for a technical conference on how much a neighboring Regional Transmission Organization, PJM, should be allowed to rely on resources in MISO:

The OMS has recognized PJM's responsibility to ensure that energy associated with capacity committed to its footprint is available to meet its loads when needed. In order for PJM to meet this responsibility, the OMS has recognized that barriers to participation in a neighbor's capacity market may exist, but the paramount question is the appropriateness or reasonableness of those barriers. Additionally, the complaint addresses concerns with PJM's pseudo-tie requirements, which only requires a generator located in MISO to acquire firm long-term transmission anywhere within MISO to the PJM boarder to become pseudo-tied into PJM. There are current 12 pseudo-tied units from MISO to PJM representing about 2 GW.

Several parties also filed comments in this FERC docket, and the FERC Order is still pending.

### ***11. Department of Energy (DOE) Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NOPR) on Grid Resiliency***

On September 29, 2017, the DOE Requested FERC to issue a rule in 60 days to allow coal and nuclear plants (that maintain at least 90 days of fuel supply on site) to recover their full costs, even if those costs exceed prices in the energy market. This rule would require all independent system operators and Regional Transmission Organizations with day-ahead and real-time markets, such as MISO, to file a tariff. This NOPR appeared to address concerns with generation such as coal, nuclear, and pump storage facilities in deregulated states (where capacity costs are not paid for by state ratepayers) to be uplifted in the MISO Energy Market. Since Minnesota did not deregulate electric generation, all costs of such facilities (e.g. capital, property taxes, operation and maintenance) are included in utility rates.

On October 20, 2017, the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission and Minnesota Department of Commerce joined OMS in filing comments generally opposing this DOE/FERC NOPR, which would likely increase energy prices in Minnesota due to unfair socialization of capacity costs of facilities in deregulated states. The OMS comments concluded that the FERC should respect the jurisdictional role of state and local regulators in setting retail rates and exempt the MISO region from the provisions of the NOPR. Further, any implementation of the NOPR should hold harmless regions like MISO that have addressed reliability and resiliency of the electric system on an ongoing and non-discriminatory basis.

On January 8, 2018, FERC terminated this rulemaking, and instead required regional transmission organizations to provide information about reliability of electric service.

## **VI. MINNESOTA'S TRANSMISSION SYSTEM – PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE**

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### **A. BIENNIAL TRANSMISSION REPORT**

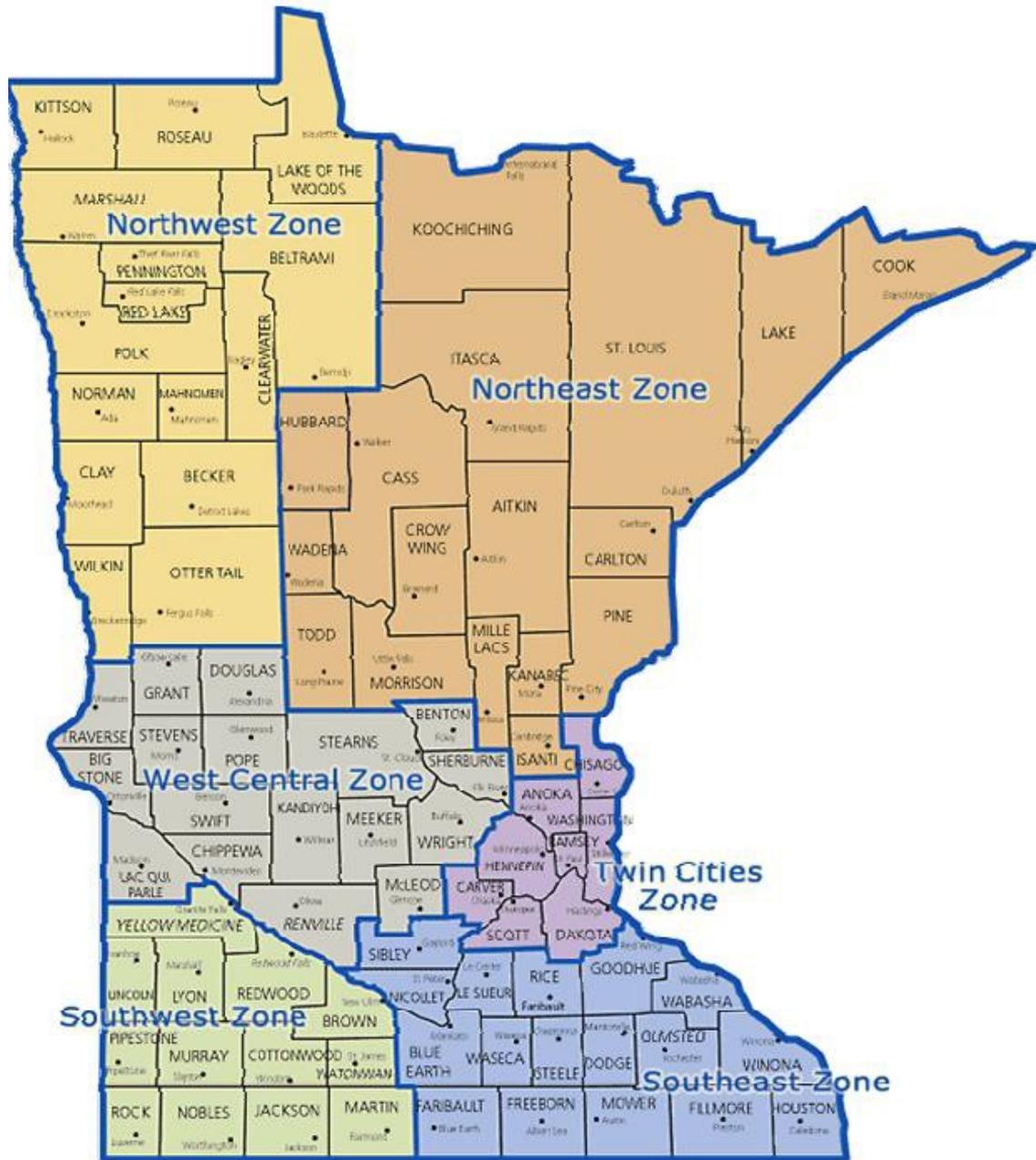
Minnesota Statute §216B.2425 requires utilities that own or operate electric transmission facilities in the state to report by November 1 of each odd-numbered year on the status of the transmission system, including present and foreseeable inadequacies and proposed solutions.

The last Biennial Transmission Report was filed on November 1, 2017 by the utilities listed below.

- American Transmission Company, LLC,
- Dairyland Power Cooperative,
- East River Electric Power Cooperative,
- Great River Energy,
- Hutchinson Utilities Commission,
- ITC Midwest LLC,
- L&O Power Cooperative,
- Marshall Municipal Utilities,
- Minnesota Power,
- Minnkota Power Cooperative,
- Missouri River Energy Services,
- Northern States Power Company d/b/a Xcel Energy,
- Otter Tail Power Company,
- Rochester Public Utilities,
- Southern Minnesota Municipal Power Agency, and
- Willmar Municipal Utilities.

These utilities also jointly maintain the following helpful website that provides information about transmission planning and projects: <http://www.minnelectrans.com>.

Detailed information (including maps) on all transmission actions is broken down into six geographic zones of the state: Northeast, Northwest, West Central, Twin Cities, Southwest and Southeast. The transmission-owning utilities operating in six geographical zones put that zone's report together. The six zones in the state are shown in the map below.



**Table 1: Transmission-owning utilities in each Minnesota region**

<p><b>Northwest Zone</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Great River Energy,</li> <li>• Minnkota Power Cooperative,</li> <li>• Missouri River Energy Services,</li> <li>• Otter Tail Power Company and</li> <li>• Xcel Energy</li> </ul>
<p><b>Northeast Zone</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• American Transmission Company, LLC,</li> <li>• Great River Energy,</li> <li>• Minnesota Power and</li> <li>• Xcel Energy</li> </ul>
<p><b>West Central Zone</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Great River Energy,</li> <li>• Hutchinson Utilities Commission,</li> <li>• Missouri River Energy Services,</li> <li>• Otter Tail Power Company,</li> <li>• Willmar Municipal Utilities and</li> <li>• Xcel Energy</li> </ul>
<p><b>Twin Cities Zone</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Great River Energy and</li> <li>• Xcel Energy</li> </ul>
<p><b>Southwest Zone</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ITC Midwest LLC,</li> <li>• East River Electric Power Cooperative,</li> <li>• Great River Energy,</li> <li>• L&amp;O Power Cooperative (headquartered in Iowa),</li> <li>• Marshall Municipal Utilities,</li> <li>• Missouri River Energy Services,</li> <li>• Otter Tail Power Company and</li> <li>• Xcel Energy</li> </ul>
<p><b>Southeast Zone</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dairyland Power Cooperative,</li> <li>• Great River Energy,</li> <li>• ITC Midwest LLC,</li> <li>• Rochester Public Utilities,</li> <li>• Southern Minnesota Municipal Power Agency and</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Xcel Energy</li> </ul>
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As shown in Table 2 below, the utilities’ most recent Biennial Transmission Report, filed in 2017, stated that over 90 transmission inadequacies, 50 of which had been newly identified in that report, needed to be addressed to improve the transmission system. The 2017 Report identified projects in the Northeast Zone for Minnesota Power and Great River Energy, in the Southeast for Xcel Energy and ITC Midwest, and in the Northwest for Otter Tail Power. These utilities have already filed or will file certificate of need applications for new transmission lines in the near future.

**Table 2: Expected Transmission Proposals**

Name and Description of Proposed Transmission Project	Name of Utility
<p>Great Northern Transmission Line 500 kV line between Winnipeg in Manitoba, Canada through numerous counties in Minnesota to the Blackberry Substation (225 to 300 miles), and a 345 kV double circuit line between Blackberry and the Arrowhead Substation near Hermantown in St. Louis County, Minnesota (approximately 50 to 70 miles).<sup>8</sup></p> <p>Impacted counties include Kittson, Roseau, Marshall, Pennington, Red Lake, Polk, Clearwater, Lake of the Woods, Beltrami, Koochiching, Itasca, and St. Louis. Commission granted a certificate of need in May, 2015 and approved a minor alteration in December, 2016. Minnesota Power began construction of the project in early 2017.</p>	Minnesota Power
<p>Palisade Pumping Station (X3A) - Construction of an approximately 13 mile 115 kV transmission line from Minnesota Power’s 115 kV Line to the Enbridge Palisade Pumping Station.</p> <p>Project applied for a Certificate of need in MPUC Docket No. ET2/TL-15-423. On August 11, 2016, the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission issued an ORDER DEFERRING ACTION until such time that a decision is made on the Enbridge Line 3 certificate of need and route permit docket.</p>	Great River Energy

<sup>8</sup> The Iron Range-Arrowhead 345 kV Project is not currently needed or economically justified at the current level of Manitoba Hydro export.

<p>Huntley to Wilmarth 345 kV Project – Construct new 345 kV circuit from the Wilmarth Substation to the Huntley Substation. Certificate of Need process begun with application planned for early 2018.</p>	<p>Xcel Energy and ITC Midwest</p>
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Name and Description of Proposed Transmission Project	Name of Utility
<p>Winger-Thief River Falls 230 kV Project – Substation expansions for both Winger and Thief River Falls substations, construction of a new 47 mile 230 kV transmission line between Winger and Thief River Falls, and a new 230/115 kV transformer at Thief River Falls.</p> <p>Expected to file for a Certificate of Need in early 2018.</p>	<p>Minnkota Power Cooperative and Otter Tail Power Company</p>

**B. RENEWABLE ENERGY STANDARD TRANSMISSION STUDY**

In addition to reporting on transmission in general, utilities are required to determine any transmission upgrades needed to meet an upcoming milestone of the Minnesota Renewable Energy Standard (RES). Ongoing progress by utilities toward the RES is monitored in several venues, including separate biennial reports to the Legislature on this issue. The latest biennial report to the Legislature was filed on January 17, 2017. As indicated in that report, utilities are in compliance with present RES standards through 2015 and expect to have enough renewable generation and transmission to meet increased future RES milestones into the 2020’s. In the past year several utilities added wind resources beyond the RES levels, based on the currently lower costs of such resources.

**VII. CHALLENGES TO TRANSMISSION PLANNING – POTENTIAL IMPACTS TO MINNESOTA**

**A. NEW TRANSMISSION PROJECTS RAISE CONCERNS ABOUT LAND USE AND LAND RIGHTS**

In recent years, a number of energy entities, including natural gas pipelines, electric utilities, and crude oil pipelines, have sought approval to construct new energy projects in Minnesota. Since the siting process in Minnesota mandates a number of public meetings and hearings and other outreach efforts to potentially impacted residents and landowners, the laws and issues regarding land rights and land use are also receiving close scrutiny. In addition to wanting to know what benefit their area of the State would derive from the project, landowners and other impacted citizens naturally want to know what their rights are regarding such projects impacting their land so they may be assured that their rights are not infringed upon during the process.

To date, answers to impacted citizens and landowners have been identified during the regulatory processes. The answer to “what benefit does this project have for my area or my State” is a key

question that is addressed in the State’s Certificate of Need process (Minn. Stat. §216B.243) and land rights questions are addressed in various parts of Minnesota’s statutes.

To help stakeholders understand facility permitting proceedings before the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission that affect them and to help them have more productive input into those proceedings, the Commission created the specially designated position of Public Advisor. This position is responsible for designing and implementing a program to better inform stakeholders and to advise them on how to have a meaningful voice in the permitting process.

## **B. COST RESPONSIBILITY FOR MITIGATIONS**

As utilities build more energy infrastructure, state regulators ensure that utilities use cost discipline as they construct new resources. To encourage cost discipline and prevent ratepayers from paying more than is reasonable for new utility infrastructure, at a minimum, a utility must justify any cost recovery above the amount the utility originally indicated that the project would cost. This focus is important since decisions to approve or deny a project are based in part on cost effectiveness of the proposed facility. Consequently, it is important to minimize errors in estimation to avoid ill-informed decisions from being made that would result in higher system costs than necessary. Minnesota has built such discipline into its transmission approval process.

When utilities install infrastructure in an area, there are always mitigation measures employed to address local concerns. Thus, it is important to ensure that decisions made by a utility on behalf of local governments reasonably consider the cost implications noted above. Further, it is important that costs of any significant upgrades are equitably allocated to ratepayers, based on ratemaking principles such as cost-causation, cost minimization and administrative feasibility. Discussions about such issues have occurred and are likely to continue in the future.

## **C. FEDERAL VS. STATE JURISDICTION OVER SITING AND CONSTRUCTION**

The federal government “opened up” the interstate electric transmission grid in the 1990s. Certain eastern States challenged the federal government’s jurisdiction over interstate electric transmission lines.<sup>9</sup> The challenge went to the U.S. Supreme Court which upheld that FERC has legal and regulatory jurisdiction over electric lines used for interstate commerce (States retain jurisdiction over small power lines that distribute power directly to retail electric customers.) After the Supreme Court reached its decision, FERC issued a policy statement saying that it would not “preempt” state regulation of transmission lines as long as transmission service is not detrimentally

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<sup>9</sup> See *New York, et al. v. FERC, et al. and Enron Power Marketing, Inc. v. FERC* for further details.

impacted by state actions. When the federal approach of one-size-fits-all has not worked for Minnesota, the Department and Commission advocate for the interests of Minnesota.

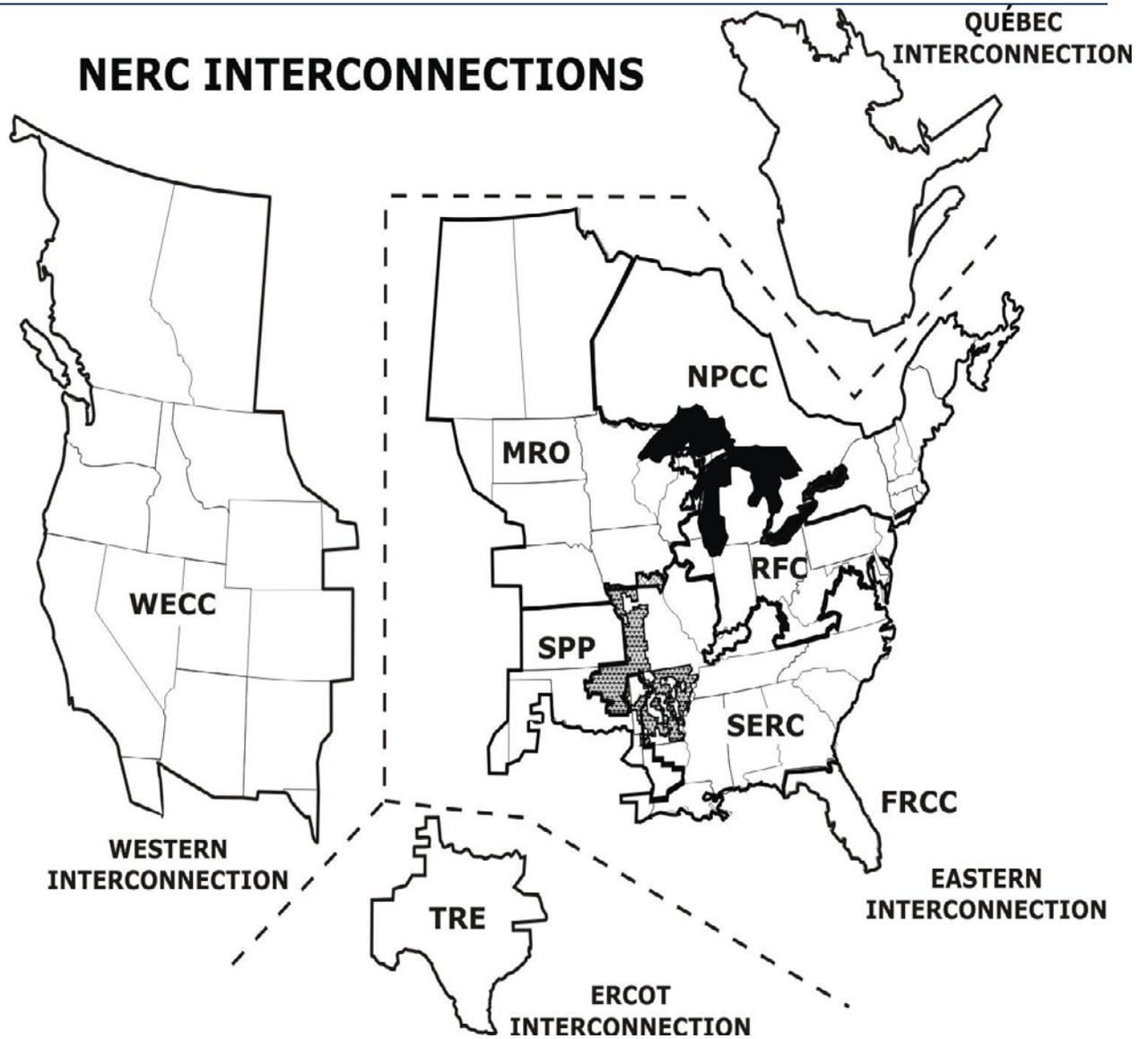
## **VIII. SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS**

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In conclusion:

- Electricity continues to be an essential component in providing needed energy to Minnesota's homes and businesses.
- Minnesotans and the economy depend on reliable power every day.
- A Regional Transmission Organization (e.g., MISO) works with electric utilities to operate the electric transmission system in Minnesota and surrounding states to achieve regional coordination and efficiency.
- Even though we are using the transmission system in a highly efficient manner, our increased use of electricity and participation in the broader regional energy markets has strained the transmission grid, which was not designed for the purposes for which it is currently being used and expected to be used in the future.
- In some areas, we may have outgrown our aging transmission system and there have been and will continue to be significant changes in aging generation resources. Minnesota needs highly dependable electricity for computers and other sensitive equipment in our homes and businesses, so it is necessary to continue to upgrade and enhance our transmission infrastructure as needed to match expected use of the system and provide room for expansion in the future.
- The way that we build transmission is affected by state and federal policies, rules and laws facilitating the construction of certain types of generation and transmission and restricting other types of electricity and transmission in the state, region and across the United States.
- Minnesota has been and will continue to be involved in numerous regional and national efforts to ensure that electric transmission lines are planned and constructed in a reliable, cost-effective and environmentally responsible manner for the State's economic future and the needs of its businesses and citizens.
- Add a system status summary: total transmission lines/miles, integration etc.

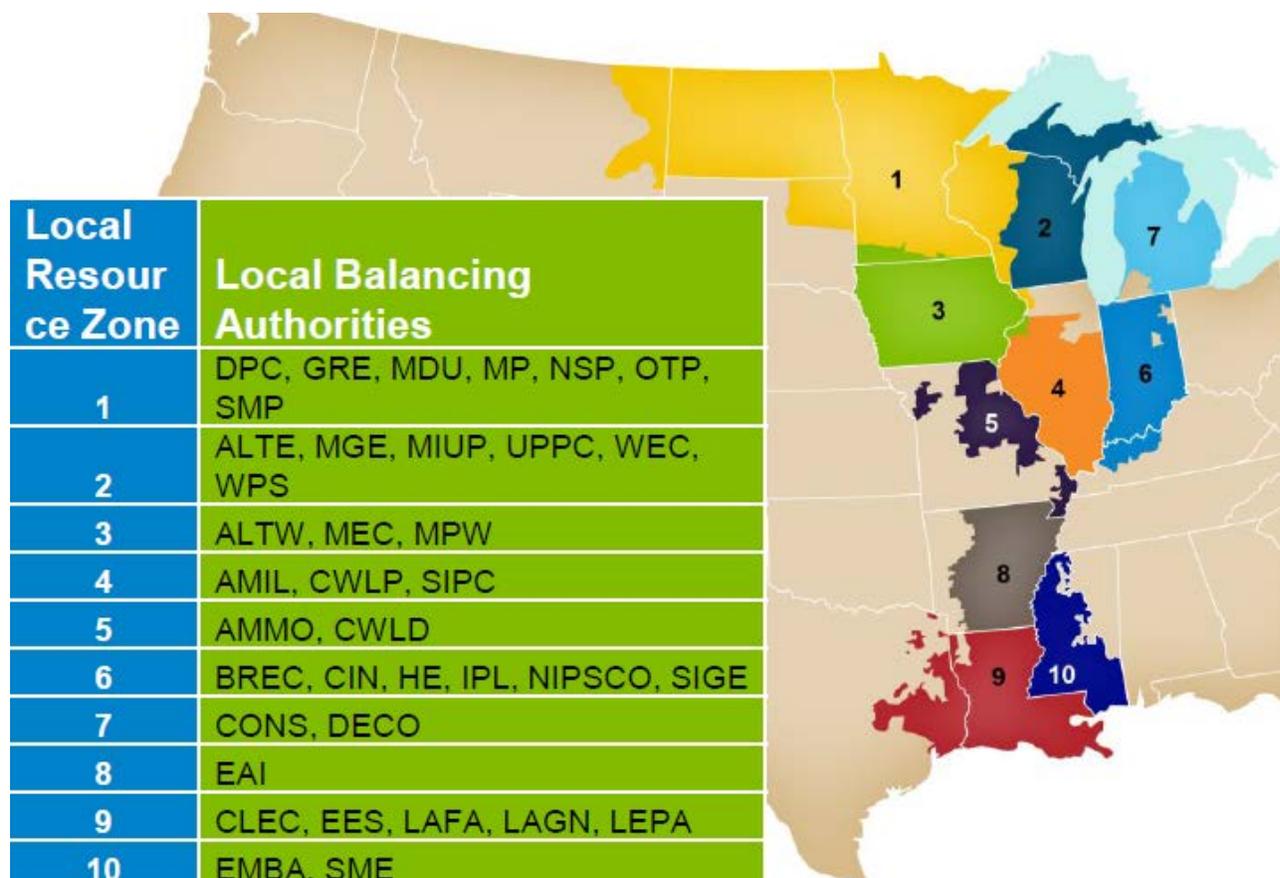
# Appendix A. MAP OF REGIONAL RELIABILITY AREAS



**Source:** North American Electric Reliability Corporation

## Appendix B. MISO’S RESOURCE PLANNING ZONES

The geographical area of MISO’s region spans numerous states. MISO has “planning reserve zones” to focus each region on the need to ensure that there are adequate electric resources to meet the needs in each zone. Minnesota is part of Planning Reserve Zone 1, along with the western half of Wisconsin, all of North Dakota, and portions of Montana, South Dakota, and Illinois. Utilities included in Zone 1 are Dairyland Power Cooperative, Great River Energy, Montana-Dakota Utilities, Minnesota Power, Northern States Power, Otter Tail Power and the Southern Minnesota Municipal Power Agency. The utility that serves Minnesota in Zone 3, in the southernmost part of Minnesota, is Interstate Power and Light, which sold its transmission resources to ITC Midwest, a transmission-only utility. Interstate also sold its distribution system to the Southern Minnesota Electric Cooperative.



**Source:** The Midcontinent Independent System Operator