

AN APPLICATION SUBMITTED BY NORTHEAST UTILITIES SERVICE COMPANY, AS AGENT FOR THE CONNECTICUT LIGHT AND POWER COMPANY, FOR A CERTIFICATE OF ENVIRONMENTAL COMPATIBILITY AND PUBLIC NEED WITH RESPECT TO A NEW 115 KV TRANSMISSION LINE ALONG A ROUTE THROUGH THE TOWNS OF MANSFIELD, WILLINGTON AND STAFFORD, WITH AN ALTERNATE ROUTE THROUGH THE TOWNS OF VERNON, ELLINGTON, TOLLAND AND STAFFORD

POWER FACILITY
EVALUATION COUNCIL

November 18, 1975

OPINION

This application is for a certificate of environmental compatibility and public need for the construction of a double circuit 115 KV overhead electric transmission line between Applicant's existing Mansfield substation and a proposed new Blair substation to be constructed on Willington Avenue in Stafford Springs. The line will supply electricity to Ashford, Stafford, Union, Willington and portions of Ellington and Tolland.

Public hearings were held in the Willington town hall on May 6, 7, 8, 13 and June 12, 1975 resulting in a transcript of 885 pages. In addition to advertised notice, notice was mailed, in accordance with law, to the chief executive officers of the affected towns, Mansfield, Willington and Stafford and to the members of the Connecticut General Assembly representing each of the three towns.

The Applicant presented testimony and exhibits to support its claims that the transmission line is needed, that the construction of the line as proposed would not adversely affect the environment to a degree justifying the much higher cost of undergrounding, and that the proposed route of the line is environmentally preferable to the alternative routes considered.

The case in opposition to the application was presented principally by counsel for a group of residents in the St. Moritz area of Willington, who by cross-examination and direct evidence disputed the need for the line and supported the claim that alternatives to the proposed line would be preferable.

It is the opinion of the Power Facility Evaluation Council, based on its findings, that the application which is the subject of Docket No. 7 should be granted, subject to such terms, conditions and modifications as shall hereinafter be set forth in the Decision and Order.

The members of the Council conducted a field inspection of the proposed route and the alternatives and in reaching this decision have considered the information thus obtained as well as the oral and written testimony.

The question of need is always difficult because it involves projections into the future. It takes nearly a full year for the Council to hear and act upon an application for a certificate and this particular transmission line will take about one and one-half additional years to construct. To require the anticipated need to have completely materialized before the application is made would not only force the electric company to fail to meet the demands of customers, but could also cause so much overloading of existing circuits as to result in a major outage of service in the area. Thus we must do our best to evaluate projected electricity requirements for mid-1977 and beyond.

The Council has considered all of the evidence on the question of need, particularly historic data and future projections with respect to population, electric consumption and peak loads. In analyzing this evidence, the Council has been made acutely aware of the fact that current consumption and peak loads are depressed by the unusually warm weather of the past two winters, the effects of conservation measures, and the recent abnormally low industrial production; however, consideration must also be given to population projections by various public agencies; the fact that Willington again permits construction of apartments after having banned them in 1972; the fact that a substantial amount of land in the area is

zoned for industrial construction and use; the fact that the comments of the Commerce Commissioner favor the granting of the application and the realization that potential industry in this area will demand electricity, not the promise that it may be available in the future.

The Council is of the opinion that there is a public need for the proposed facility since the maximum reliable capacity of the present transmission system, 27 megavolt amperes (MVA), can reasonably be expected to be exceeded in 1977, 1978, or 1979 depending on winter weather and the pace of recovery from the economic recession. We note parenthetically that the adverse consequences of running out of electricity for residential, commercial and industrial customers far outweigh any possible harm from building the line a year or even two years before projected peak loads are reached.

The Council has considered the alternative routes suggested by the parties and discussed during the hearings. The alternate route to supply Blair Substation by construction of a double circuit 115 KV from Rockville Substation rather than Mansfield Substation would involve a slightly longer distance, a widening of the right-of-way which averages about 50 feet, and a greater visibility of the line. It would also cost an additional \$4,825,000. It has concluded that the alternate route north of Route I-86 along the Willimantic River would cause substantial environmental damage as detailed in the Findings; similarly, a relocation westerly of the Willimantic River would involve three to four miles of new right-of-way, two crossings of the Willimantic River, conflict with planned development in Tolland and additional costs of \$500,000 to \$600,000. Several minor relocations in Willington were considered and rejected; none were supported by a majority of the residents of the particular area. The one most discussed was the St. Moritz Circle area. Here we have found that relocation to the west of Schofield Road would require about 1.8 miles of new right-of-way, higher costs and affect more homes than those on St. Moritz Circle.

The relocation of the proposed route to the rear 150 feet of the St. Moritz Circle lots could reduce, somewhat, the visual impact of the line for the majority of these residents but would require additional structures and costs (\$80,000). The St. Moritz area property owners, who were represented by Counsel, did not express an opinion with respect to this particular relocation.

The Council has concluded, based on its consideration of the entire record, including its field inspection, that the best route for this transmission line is the proposed route, with the line westerly of St. Moritz Circle constructed 40 feet from the westerly edge of the right-of-way.

The Council recognizes and the record reflects that certain adverse effects on the environment may occur as the result of the granting of a certificate in this matter. The nature of this probable environmental impact is detailed more particularly in the Findings which accompany this Opinion and will not be reiterated herein.

The Council is aware of no identifiable historic values which would be affected by the proposed facility and the record does not suggest that there would be any significant adverse effect on, or conflicts with, the policy of the State concerning ecological balance, scenic and recreational values, air and water purity, forests and parks, or fish and wildlife. It would appear that proper right-of-way maintenance should benefit wildlife in the area. Constructing the proposed facility in accordance with the applicable requirements of the Connecticut Public Utilities Commission and the National Electrical Safety Code should adequately safeguard public health and safety.

The Council is of the opinion that the possible adverse effects or conflicts with the policies of the State referred to above do not constitute sufficient reason to deny the application. In arriving at this conclusion the Council has carefully reviewed the

evidence and recommendations presented to it and finds that there is a demonstrable need for the proposed transmission facilities, in order to insure adequate and reliable electric power supply in the area to be served, and that many of the potential adverse environmental effects of the proposed facility are of minimal significance, as detailed in the findings, or will be considerably ameliorated by the conditions and modifications contained in the Decision and Order.

In analyzing the nature of the probable environmental impact of the proposed facility the Council has recognized that until such time as a certificate of environmental compatibility and public need has been issued to the Applicant, a detailed right-of-way development and management plan cannot be prepared. Thus, the precise route of the proposed facility and much of the detail necessary to evaluate more particularly and limit the extent of its adverse environmental impact is presently unavailable. It is for this reason that the Council feels it has a responsibility to require the Applicant to coordinate its specifications for construction of the facility, its detailed environmental inventory, and its right-of-way maintenance and use plan with the Department of Environmental Protection prior to the initiation of construction activities. Such a plan and the Department's recommendations would aid this Council in determining the most appropriate method of constructing and maintaining the proposed facility so that the least possible adverse effect on the environment will occur.

The Council is of the opinion that the entire length of the proposed facility should be located overhead. As the findings indicate, undergrounding of the proposed line could not be accomplished without unreasonable costs to consumers.

The Applicant and other electric systems in New England have established a grid of 345 KV transmission lines to transport large blocks of electric power from major generating stations to major

load areas for transformation to 115 KV and further transmission to local substations. The proposed 115 KV line is a part of the proposed expansion of this system.

The plan of the Applicant is to continue to support research and development of underground transmission materials and techniques which will make it economically justifiable to underground at least 115 KV lines and to continue to propose overhead transmission lines, except in congested urban areas, until the cost of underground transmission more nearly approaches that of overhead transmission.

The Council is satisfied that the proposed facility conforms to a long range plan for expansion of the electric power grid of the electric systems serving the state and interconnected utility systems, that will serve the interests of electric system economy and reliability and will be consistent with the purposes of Chapter 277a of the General Statutes.

The Council is satisfied that the proposed facility conforms to a long range plan to provide for the elimination of all overhead electric transmission lines, in accordance with the need for adequate and reliable electric service at reasonable costs.

The overhead portions of the facility conform to the Federal Power Commission "Guidelines for the Protection of Natural Historic, Scenic and Recreational Values in the Design and Location of Rights-of Way and Transmission Facilities", especially where relocations from the existing right-of-way are concerned.

The record, as expressed in the Council's findings indicates that the location of the proposed transmission line will not pose an undue hazard to persons or property along the area traversed by the line.