

DOCKET NO. 98 - An application of the Connecticut Light and Power Company for a Certificate of Environmental Compatibility and Public Need for an underground electrical transmission line running from the Exeter Energy Project in Sterling, Connecticut, to an existing CL&P overhead transmission line in Plainfield, Connecticut. : Connecticut Siting Council : May 15, 1989

O P I N I O N

On June 30, 1988, the Connecticut Light and Power Company (CL&P) applied to the Connecticut Siting Council (Council) for a Certificate of Environmental Compatibility and Public Need (Certificate) for the construction of a 115-kV underground transmission line to connect the Exeter Energy facility in the Town of Sterling, Connecticut, to the existing CL&P overhead line in the Town of Plainfield.

The proposed line is needed to enable the Exeter Energy facility to transmit approximately 26.5 MW of electricity to the utility's transmission grid. The Exeter Energy facility is under construction and is expected to commence operation by 1991. Exeter Energy Limited Partnership (Exeter) would design and construct the line, and then transfer the title to CL&P. CL&P would then own the line, with maintenance and repairs conducted under contractual agreement with Exeter.

Under Section 16-50p of the General Statutes of Connecticut (CGS), the Council must balance the public need for the proposed underground transmission line with the nature of any probable environmental impacts created by the construction or operation of this line. The Council may not grant a Certificate unless it finds that conflicts with state environmental policies or adverse environmental effects are not sufficient to deny the application.

The connection of the Exeter Energy facility to CL&P's electric transmission system would contribute to the energy available in Connecticut, reducing the State's dependence on imported sources of energy, diversifying the State's energy supply mix, and enhancing supply system reliability.

The Council considered the adequacy and reliability of the proposed line, its effect on CL&P's electrical transmission service, and on the environment.

The dielectric line would be well suited for the purpose of interconnecting the proposed Exeter Energy facility. Any costs resulting from the construction, maintenance, cost overruns, or premature abandonment would be borne by the share holders of the Exeter Energy facility and not the rate payers of Connecticut. Because the line would be routed through the railroad bed and town roads, it would avoid disruption of natural areas. The abandoned railroad line would be kept intact for future recreational use.

Installation of the line through town roads would not significantly affect traffic in the area. Several alternatives to the proposed underground line were evaluated, such as using an existing overhead line, and constructing a new overhead line. These were found to have more substantial effects on the environment than the proposed underground line. The alternatives would involve greater visual impacts, substantial clearing of trees, crossing of wetlands, and additional right-of-way acquisitions. The proposed underground line, which would follow an abandoned railroad bed and existing local roadways, appears to be the most environmentally benign of the possible alternatives. Aside from some possible trimming of branches, the proposed line would not impact trees or vegetation along its route. No significant construction would take place in actual wetland habitat. In addition, the use of the solid dielectric line would eliminate the risk of an oil spill from oil-filled lines. The potential construction-related effects, such as noise, dust, erosion, and traffic disruption, would be both temporary and minimal. Other siting criteria, including historical, archaeological, architectural, and recreational effects have been sufficiently addressed.

The Council finds that the public need for this line outweighs any potential environmental effects and concludes that a Certificate of Environmental Compatibility and Public Need is warranted for the construction of this underground transmission line. The Council hereby directs that such Certificate be issued subject to the terms, limitations, and conditions of the Decision and Order which accompanies this Opinion.

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