

**BEFORE THE PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION
OF THE STATE OF MISSOURI**

In the Matter of the Application of Ameren)
Transmission Company of Illinois for a)
Certificate of Public Convenience and)
Necessity to Construct, Install, Own, Operate,)
Maintain, and Otherwise Control and Manage a)
138 kV Transmission Line and associated facilities in)
Perry and Cape Girardeau Counties, Missouri)

CASE NO. EA-2021-0087

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

COMES NOW, the Staff of the Missouri Public Service Commission, by and through the undersigned counsel, and for its *Staff Recommendation* states:

1. On September 25, 2020, Ameren Transmission Company of Illinois (“ATXI”) filed a *Notice of Intended Case Filing*, provided notice of its intentions to file an application for authority to construct, install, own, operate, maintain, and otherwise control and manage a new, approximately 12-19 mile 138 kV transmission line in Perry and Cape Girardeau Counties, Missouri and a 138 kV to 161 kV switching station.

2. On December 9, 2020, ATXI filed its *Motion for Waiver of In-Person Meeting Requirement Due to Covid-19 Concerns*. ATXI seeks a waiver of Commission Rule 20 CSR 4240-20.045(6)(K)(3), which requires an electric utility seeking a certificate of convenience and necessity to hold a public meeting, in a building accessible to the public and large enough to accommodate the number of people in the county entitled to receive notice of the application. ATXI states in its motion that both Perry and Cape Girardeau Counties each contain more than 25 people entitled to receive notice of the application.

3. On December 22, 2020, the Commission issued its *Order Directing Staff to File a Recommendation*, requesting a recommendation no later than 1 p.m. on December 29, 2020.

4. ATXI states its good cause for the waiver request is the ongoing public health crisis due to the Covid-19 pandemic. ATXI states to the Center for Disease Control guidance, and finds it should not hold in-person gatherings due to the risk of exposure. ATXI also states that relief requested:

is consistent with the Commission's current policy to remain closed to the public and to stream hearings online, along with federal, state and local social distancing guidelines and advice from public health officials, including the State of Missouri Public Health Warning directing all citizens to limit interactions to small groups of less than ten people. Perry and Cape Girardeau Counties are both currently classified as "Category 1: Extreme Risk" counties, where limiting in-person gatherings is especially critical.

ATXI also noted that Commission found it appropriate to hold virtual public hearings in the current Missouri American Water Company rate case.

5. In lieu of in person public hearings, ATXI outlines a robust suite of virtual options for the public. ATXI has already conducted interactive public webinars, Community Representative Forums, and four Virtual Public Meetings. These meetings allow individuals to participate by phone or online, with online participants having the options to pose questions and comments to ATXI for AXTI to answer. ATXI has plans to hold an additional Virtual Public Meeting and a Tele-Town Hall. The Tele-Town Hall will allow individuals without access to or a willingness to use the online tools to submit questions and comments. ATXI published notice of each Virtual Public Meeting in the local newspapers, as well as mailing notices to landowners potentially impacted the line's route. Notice was also published on ATXI's website, which also includes a frequently

asked questions section and Interactive Comment Map, and encourages individuals to reach out through the website, email, a dedicated hotline, traditional mail, or in person requests for information packages (which can also be mailed upon request.).

6. ATXI stated in its motion that participation in the Virtual Public Meetings is comparable to typical in person meetings. According to ATXI, approximately twenty-six (26) individuals attended the August 19, 2020 meetings, and sixty-eight (68) attended the October 28, 2020 meetings.

7. Staff recommends approval of ATXI's waiver request, as good cause has been shown as there are ongoing public health and safety concerns due to COVID-19. Although Staff notes there are public comments filed in EFIS regarding a lack of internet access or in-person meetings, ATXI's variety of virtual meeting options provide a venue for individuals, regardless of internet capabilities, to participate. The Tele-Town Hall is a phone based meeting option that will provide an opportunity for those without internet to have questions answered, as well as make comments directly to ATXI. If an individual is unable to attend the Tele-Town Hall, they can utilize the dedicated hotline, submit comments or questions by mail, or appear in person at the ATXI office to request more information and receive an informational packet. Individuals can also continue to submit public comments to EFIS for Commission consideration.

WHEREFORE, Staff prays the Commission accepts its *Staff Recommendation*, and approves the waiver request.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Nicole Mers

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CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that true and correct copies of the foregoing were served electronically to all counsel of record this 29th day of December, 2020.

/s/ Nicole Mers