

5.0 Transmission Planning Zones

5.1 Introduction

Minnesota has been divided geographically into the following six Transmission Planning Zones:

- Northwest Zone
- Northeast Zone
- West Central Zone
- Twin Cities Zone
- Southwest Zone
- Southeast Zone

The map below shows the six Zones.



Chapter 5 of the 2009 Report describes each of the Transmission Planning Zones in the state. The counties in the zone and the major population centers are identified. The utilities that own high voltage transmission lines in the zone are listed. Much of the information included in this chapter is reprinted from the 2007 and 2005 Biennial Reports.

Chapter 6 describes the needs that have been identified for each zone. A table identifying these needs in each zone is provided at the start of the discussion, and then further detail is provided in narrative form. A map of each zone showing the existing transmission lines and the inadequacies that have been identified is also included. A separate table showing the projects that have been completed in the last two years is also included for each zone.

Transmission systems in one zone are highly interconnected with those in other zones and with regional transmission systems. A particular utility may own transmission facilities in a zone that is outside its exclusive service area, or where it has few or no retail customers. Different segments of the same transmission line may be owned and/or operated by different utilities. A transmission line may span more than one zone, and transmission projects may involve more than one zone.

5.2 Northwest Zone

The Northwest Planning Zone is located in northwestern Minnesota and is bounded by the North Dakota border to the west and the Canadian border to the north. The Northwest Planning Zone includes the counties of Becker, Beltrami, Clay, Clearwater, Kittson, Lake of the Woods, Mahnomon, Marshall, Norman, Otter Tail, Pennington, Polk, Red Lake, Roseau, and Wilkin.

Primary population centers within the Northwest Planning Zone (population greater than 10,000) include the cities of Bemidji, Fergus Falls, and Moorhead.

The following utilities own transmission facilities in the Northwest Zone:

- Great River Energy
- Minnkota Power Cooperative
- Missouri River Energy Services
- Otter Tail Power Company
- Xcel Energy

A major portion of the transmission system that serves northwestern Minnesota is located in eastern North Dakota. Two 230 kV lines and one 345 kV line reach from western North Dakota to substations in Fargo, North Dakota, and four 230 kV lines reach out to Audubon, Morris, and Winger, Minnesota, and Wahpeton, North Dakota. The 230 kV system supports an underlying 115 kV system. Much of the load in the zone is actually served by 69 kV and 41.6 kV subtransmission lines.

5.3 Northeast Zone

The Northeast Planning Zone covers the area north of the Twin Cities suburban area to the Canadian border and from Lake Superior west to the Walker and Verndale areas. The zone includes the counties of Aitkin, Carlton, Cass, Cook, Crow Wing, Hubbard, Isanti, Itasca, Kanabec, Koochiching, Lake, Mille Lacs, Morrison, Pine, St. Louis, Todd, and Wadena counties.

The primary population centers in the Northeast Planning Zone include the cities of Brainerd, Cambridge, Cloquet, Duluth, Ely, Grand Rapids, Hermantown, Hibbing, International Falls, Little Falls, Long Prairie, Milaca, Park Rapids, Pine City, Princeton, Verndale, Virginia, and Walker.

The following utilities own transmission facilities in the Northeast Zone:

- American Transmission Company, LLC
- Great River Energy
- Minnesota Power
- Xcel Energy

The transmission system in the Northeast Planning Zone consists mainly of 230 kV, 138 kV and 115 kV lines that serve lower voltage systems comprised of 69 kV, 46 kV, 34.5 kV, 23 kV and 14 kV. American Transmission Company's 345 kV line runs between Duluth, Minnesota, and Wausau, Wisconsin. The 345 kV and 230 kV system is used as an outlet for generation and to deliver power to the major load centers within the zone. From the regional load centers, 115 kV lines carry power to lower voltage substations where it is distributed to outlying areas. In a few instances, 230 kV lines serve this purpose.

A +/- 250 kV DC line runs from North Dakota to Duluth and serves as a generator outlet for lignite-fired generation located in North Dakota. In May 2009 Minnesota Power petitioned the Public Utilities Commission for approval to purchase this line. PUC Docket No. E-015/PA-09-526. Minnesota Power plans to over time transmit wind power from the Dakotas over this line to its customers in Minnesota. In addition, a 500 kV line and a 230 kV line provide interconnections with Manitoba and a 115 kV line interconnects with Ontario at International Falls. The interconnections with Canada provide for generation resource sharing as well as seasonal and economic power interchanges between Minnesota and Canada.

5.4 West Central Zone

The West Central Transmission Planning Zone extends from Sherburne and Wright counties on the east, to Traverse and Big Stone counties on the west, bordered by Grant and Douglas counties on the north and Renville county to the south. The West Central Planning Zone includes the counties of Traverse, Big Stone, Lac qui Parle, Swift, Stevens, Grant, Douglas, Pope, Chippewa, Renville, Kandiyohi, Stearns, Meeker, McLeod, Wright, Sherburne, and Benton.

The primary population centers in the zone include the cities of Alexandria, Buffalo, Elk River, Glencoe, Hutchinson, Litchfield, Sartell, Sauk Rapids, St. Cloud, St. Michael, and Willmar.

The following utilities own transmission facilities in the West Central Zone:

- Great River Energy
- Hutchinson Utilities Commission
- Missouri River Energy Services
- Otter Tail Power Company
- Willmar Municipal Utilities
- Xcel Energy

This transmission system in the West Central Planning Zone is characterized by a 115 kV loop connecting Grant County – Alexandria – West St. Cloud – Paynesville – Willmar – Morris and back to Grant County. These 115 kV transmission lines provide a hub from which 69 kV subtransmission lines provide transmission to loads in the zone.

A 345 kV line from Sherburne County to St. Cloud and 115 kV and 230 kV lines from Monticello to St. Cloud provide the primary transmission supply to St. Cloud and much of the eastern half of this zone. Two 230 kV lines from Granite Falls – one to the Black Dog generating plant in the Twin Cities and one to Willmar – provide the main source in the southern part of the zone.

Demand in the St. Cloud area continues to grow and several individual projects are being considered to address the need for more power into this area. A new 345 kV line from Fargo to Monticello, which is part of the CapX 2020 group of projects, is a significant part of the solution to transformer overloads and low voltage contingencies that are anticipated in the St. Cloud area.

Some of the 69 kV “subtransmission” network is becoming inadequate for supporting the growing load in the area. Solutions to the 69 kV transmission inadequacies may involve construction of new 115 kV transmission lines. Therefore, any discussion about the inadequacy of the existing system must include an analysis of parts of the existing 69 kV subtransmission system.

5.5 Twin Cities Zone

The Twin Cities Planning Zone comprises the Twin Cities metropolitan area. It includes the counties of Anoka, Carver, Chisago, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott and Washington.

The following utilities own transmission facilities in the Twin Cities Zone:

- Great River Energy
- Xcel Energy

The transmission system in the Twin Cities Planning Zone is characterized by a 345 kV double circuit loop around the core Twin Cities and first tier suburbs. Inside the 345 kV loop, a network

of high capacity 115 kV lines serves the distribution substations. Outside the loop, a number of 115 kV lines extend outward from the Twin Cities with much of the local load serving accomplished via lower capacity, 69 kV transmission lines.

The GRE DC line and 345 kV circuits tie into the northwest side of the 345 kV loop and are dedicated to bringing generation to Twin Cities and Minnesota loads. Tie lines extend from the 345 kV loop to three 345 kV lines: one to eastern Wisconsin, one to southeast Iowa and one to southwest Iowa. The other tie is the Xcel Energy 500 kV line from Canada that is tied into the northeast side of the 345 kV loop.

Major generating plants are interconnected to the 345 kV transmission loop at the Sherburne County generating plant and the Monticello generating plant in the northwest, the Allen S. King plant in the northeast, and Prairie Island in the southeast. On the 115 kV transmission system in the Twin Cities Planning Zone there are three intermediate generating plants: Riverside (located in northeast Minneapolis), High Bridge (located in St. Paul), and Black Dog (located in north Burnsville). There are also two peaking generating plants – Blue Lake and Inver Hills – interconnected on the southeast and the southwest, respectively.

5.6 Southwest Zone

The Southwest Transmission Planning Zone is located in southwestern Minnesota and is generally bounded by the Iowa border on the south, Mankato on the east, Granite Falls on the north and the South Dakota border on the west. It includes the counties of Brown, Cottonwood, Jackson, Lincoln, Lyon, Martin, Murray, Pipestone, Redwood, Rock, Watonwan, and Yellow Medicine.

The primary population centers in the Southwest Zone include the cities of Fairmont, Granite Falls, Jackson, Marshall, New Ulm, Pipestone, St. James, and Worthington.

The following utilities own transmission facilities in the Southwest Zone:

- ITC Midwest LLC
- East River Electric Power Cooperative
- Great River Energy
- L&O Power Cooperative
- Marshall Municipal Utilities
- Missouri River Energy Services
- Otter Tail Power Company
- Xcel Energy

Since the last Biennial Report was filed in November 2007, ITC Midwest LLC purchased the transmission assets of Interstate Power and Light Company. The Public Utilities Commission approved the sale of Interstate transmission assets to ITC Midwest in an Order dated February 7, 2008. PUC Docket No. E001/PA-07-540. ITC Midwest now has the obligation to participate in the preparation of this Biennial Report.

The transmission system in the Southwest Zone consists mainly of two 345 kV transmission lines, one beginning at Split Rock Substation near Sioux Falls and traveling to Lakefield Junction and the second traveling from Lakefield Junction to Mankato, which serves as a major hub with several 161 kV lines throughout the zone. A number of 115 kV lines provide transmission service to loads in the area, particularly the large municipal load at Marshall. Much of the load in the southwestern zone is served by 69 kV subtransmission lines which have sources from 115/69 kV or 161/69 kV substations.

The 115 kV lines also provide transmission service for the wind generation that is being developed along Buffalo Ridge. The transmission system in this zone has changed significantly in recent years with new transmission additions to enable additional generation delivery. Continuing these changes, the system will soon be enhanced by the addition of the Twin Cities – Brookings 345 kV transmission line to provide additional outlet for the wind generation in the Southwest Zone. In addition to enabling additional delivery of wind generation, these lines will provide opportunities for new transmission substations to improve the load serving capability of the underlying subtransmission system.

5.7 Southeast Zone

The Southeast Planning Zone includes Blue Earth, Dodge, Faribault, Fillmore, Freeborn, Goodhue, Houston, Le Sueur, Mower, Nicollet, Olmsted, Rice, Sibley, Steele, Wabasha, Waseca, and Winona Counties. The zone is bordered by the State of Iowa to the south, the Mississippi River to the east, the Twin Cities Planning Zone and West Central Planning Zone to the north, and the Southwest Planning Zone to the west.

The primary population centers in the zone include the cities of Albert Lea, Austin, Faribault, Mankato, North Mankato, Northfield, Owatonna, Red Wing, Rochester, and Winona.

The following utilities own transmission facilities in the Southeast Zone:

- Dairyland Power Cooperative
- Great River Energy
- ITC Midwest LLC
- Rochester Public Utilities
- Southern Minnesota Municipal Power Agency
- Xcel Energy

The transmission system in the Southeast Planning Zone consists of 345 kV, 161 kV, 115 kV and 69 kV lines that serve lower voltage distribution systems. The 345 kV system is used to import power to the Southeast Planning Zone for lower voltage load service from generation stations outside of the area. The 345 kV system also allows the seasonal and economic exchange of power from Minnesota to the east and south from large generation stations that are located within and outside of the zone. The 161 kV and 115 kV systems are used to carry power from the 345 kV system and from local generation sites to the major load centers within the zone. From the regional load centers and smaller local generation sites, 69 kV lines are used for load service to the outlying areas of the Southeast Planning Zone.