

**STATE OF RHODE ISLAND
ENERGY FACILITY SITING BOARD**

THE NARRAGANSETT ELECTRIC COMPANY :
NOTICE OF INTENT APPLICATION : **DOCKET NO. SB-2024-04**
L14 M13 MAINLINE 115 kV REBUILD PROJECT :

DECISION AND ORDER

On August 26, 2024, The Narragansett Electric Company (Narragansett Electric or Company) filed a Notice of Intent Application with the Energy Facility Siting Board (EFSB or Board) pursuant to Rule 1.6(F) of the Board’s Rules of Practice and Procedure (Rules).¹ The application proposed to rebuild the existing L14 and M13 115 kilovolt (kV) Transmission Lines, (Mainlines) located within the Towns of Tiverton and Portsmouth and traveling a distance of approximately 7.9 miles (Project) which includes a 551-foot aerial span across the Sakonnet River.²

A copy of the Notice of Intent to Construct or Relocate Power Lines of More than 1,000 feet is required by 445-RICR-00-00-1.6(F) of the Rules to be filed with the Council of the municipality affected by the construction of said lines at least ninety days before construction is to commence. On August 26, 2024, Narragansett Electric filed the Notice of Intent with the Tiverton Town Clerk and Portsmouth Town Clerk for distribution to the Town Councilors. The Rule also allows the municipality, or any intervenor, up to thirty days after the filing to file an objection with the Board. No such objection was received by the Board.

¹ Rule 1.6(F) provides for an abbreviated review of an application for the construction of power lines of more than 1,000 feet, but less than 6,000 feet, or the modification or relocation of existing power lines. After the application is filed and a public hearing held in one or more of the cities or towns affected by the project, the Board must make a determination within sixty days of the filing as to whether the project “may result in a significant impact on the environment or the public health, safety and welfare.” If the Board finds no significant impact, the project does not constitute a major alteration, and the applicant may proceed without further review.

² The Notice of Intent and supporting documentation can be found at <https://ripuc.ri.gov/Docket-SB-2024-04>.

In its application, the Company explained that the Mainlines, which provide the only source of electricity to Aquidneck Island and Jamestown, were originally constructed in 1964 and suffer from a number of physical deficiencies that have resulted in temporary and sustained outages since 1998. The Mainlines have been designated as two of the worst performing on the Company's system. An aerial inspection revealed conductor deficiencies and broken stands, and a ground inspection of the 292 single-circuit structures and nine double-circuit structures that are mostly single wood pole davit arms structures, revealed signs of deterioration like discoloration, bowing, rotting, and woodpecker holes. The Company represented that unless upgraded and rebuilt the area is at risk of future reliability issues. The Project includes the following improvements:

1. Rebuilding the existing Mainlines between Canonicus Street in Tiverton to the Dexter Substation located off Freeborn Street in Portsmouth which includes rebuilding the existing Sakonnet River overhead crossing and replacing the 24 transmission structures crossing Montaup Country Club with 12 double-circuit steel pole structures;
2. Reconductoring the existing overhead conductor with 1113.0 kcmil aluminum conductor steel supported (ACSS) conductor;
3. Replacing the existing overhead shield wire with new overhead 48 count fiber Optical Ground Wire (OPGW); and
4. Restoring and stabilizing the affected areas within the Right-of-Way (ROW).

The Company described the existing ROW as approximately 100 feet wide and the height of the wood monopoles and steel H-frame structures to range between 46 and 103 feet, and the

steel lattice towers from 81 to 143 feet near the Sakonnet River crossing and the height of the steel lattice tower at the Canonicus Switching Station is 101 feet.

A number of construction maintenance practices will be implemented to avoid or minimize environmental impacts. Prior to construction commencing, vegetation mowing in the ROW will occur and certain trees will be trimmed or removed. An environmental monitor will be present to supervise throughout the project. Soil erosion and sediment controls will be installed to mitigate disruption to the environment and will be removed upon completion of the project. Narragansett Electric plans to improve existing access roads and to construct new ones. Where other access is not available, the Company will use construction mats to protect environmentally sensitive areas. As much as possible of the construction debris will be recycled, and what cannot be recycled will be properly disposed off-site. Once construction is complete, the ROW will be restored to pre-construction conditions to the extent possible.

The Company provided that intermittent and temporary additional traffic may occur during the construction period. It will work with the Rhode Island Department of Transportation (RIDOT) to develop a traffic management plan for work within the state highways and with the two Towns for work on local streets and roads. Construction is scheduled to occur between 7:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m. Monday through Friday, and when necessary, between 7:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. on weekends but may be required outside of those timeframes to complete certain activities. Narragansett Electric has committed to notifying landowners, abutters, municipal officials, Town Public Works staff, and Town Police and Fire Chiefs of all planned construction.

The Company has planned and begun its community outreach efforts to inform and educate residents, businesses, and municipal officials about the project. Outreach includes meetings with municipalities and relevant governmental organizations, community open house events, a door-to-

door campaign and canvassing, a user-friendly website, a project hotline, fact sheets, door hangers, FAQs, timelines, and advertising. The Company has met with state and local officials in the Town to provide details about the project. Narragansett Electric anticipates the project to cost approximately \$53 million. Planning and Engineering began in Q4 2022; construction is expected to begin in Q4 2024 and be completed in Q2 2026. Facilities are expected to be in service by Q2 2026, and the area fully restored by Q3 2027.

Four alternatives were considered by the Company: 1) no action, 2) line remediation 3) a new underground route; and 4) the parallel circuit transmission line rebuild (the preferred alternative). The no action alternative was rejected because the Company concluded that it would not meet existing codes and would not resolve the condition and reliability issues. The Company maintained that failure to address the condition of the Mainlines will result in a severe risk to public safety and impact customer interruptions. The line remediation alternative or waiting until an asset reached its expected life was rejected because it would result in higher costs, additional environmental impacts by having to access areas more than once, and operational disadvantages. The new underground route alternative would require the excavation of two trenches within the ROW and obtaining rights from each property owner located along the ROW. Additionally, the impacts to the natural and social environment would be significantly more than the preferred alternative. The Company also considered a second underground alternative along state local roads which would involve detailed surveys to locate existing underground utilities to determine whether there exists space to install two ductbanks. The underground alternatives were rejected for the above identified reasons, as well as the cost, which is approximately ten times more than the preferred alternative. Thus, the chosen

alternative was found to be superior because it would resolve the condition and reliability issues with the existing lines.

A public hearing was held on October 23, 2024 in the Town of Portsmouth. At the public hearing, the Company presented the following witnesses:

1) Thomas Arias, the Project Manager with Narragansett Electric and 2) Jamie Durand, a senior environmental project manager with POWER Engineers to support the details in the application and the Environmental Report and to respond to inquiries.

Mr. Arias reiterated the details set forth in the Notice of Intent, noting that the Company will replace approximately 193 existing structures with steel monopoles and replacing conductors and shield wiring. He explained why the project was needed because since constructed in the 1960, the lines and supporting structures have been deteriorating. He specified that the conductor was losing its mechanical strength. He stated that alternatives were considered and that the chosen alternative was preferable. He described the construction sequence and noted that engineering and planning were complete. He stated that construction was expected to start in 2024 and continue through Q2 2026 with lines capable of being loaded by 2026. Mr. Arias explained why the restoration portion of the project would take a long period in that CRMC required salt marsh mitigation. He also described the community outreach the Company engaged and would continue to engage in. Lastly, he testified that the project would be completed in phases.³

Mr. Durand described the environmental impacts to the 7.9 mile long project span. He noted that one or two spans of the project will be in Fall River, Massachusetts and that the Company has gotten approval from the City of Fall River to do its proposed work in that city. Mr. Durand testified that the ROW is approximately 100 feet wide. In evaluating the area, he mapped

³ Hr'g Tr. at 9-12 (Oct. 23, 2024).

a 5,000-foot study corridor around the ROW and identified watersheds, aquifers, wetlands, rare species, herbaceous vegetation, land use, and cultural resources. He noted that the project will not cross any drinking water supply or surface water supplies. He provided that the project will cross 18 freshwater and 4 coastal wetlands and that the Company has mitigation plans to protect these areas. He also provided that any wildlife displaced by construction will likely return as the disruption of habitat will only be temporary. He discussed the various mitigation measures the Company would engage in during construction. He indicated that Narragansett Electric will minimize construction impacts like noise, dust, and traffic which will all be temporary and short-term. He noted that the Company conducted an above ground and below ground archeological assessment. He reiterated as provided for in the Project Siting Report that the Company has submitted traffic management plans with the state and municipalities and has developed a Soil Erosion and Sedimentation Control Plan that was submitted to DEM. Lastly he testified that in his opinion, the project will not have a significant long-term impact to the social or natural environment.⁴

Following the Company's presentation at the August 21, 2024 hearing, the Chairman solicited public comment. David Gleason, an abutter to the Lines provided public comment. He stated that he was happy that the Lines were being replaced with 115 kV lines and not a higher voltage. Mr. Gleason asked if the replacement structures could have flat tops for wildlife to perch on top as they do with the wooden poles. He noted that his biggest concern was the metal structures over the Sakonnet River and wondered why the wooden poles would be replaced with galvanized metal structures expressing that he was not sure whether height requirements were required by law.⁵ Mr. Gleason also referred to a comment that he heard at a council meeting that suggested the

⁴ *Id.* at 13-33.

⁵ *Id.* at 32-36.

costs of the project would not be passed along to customers and questioned how that could be true.⁶ As a courtesy to Mr. Gleason's inquiry regarding who pays for the upgrade, the Chairman explained to Mr. Gleason that typically transmission costs flow through regional transmission rates. In such case, the costs of an individual project are spread over a large number of customers, including customers in other states outside of Rhode Island.⁷ Thus, with a project of this type, it is likely that there would not be a discernable impact on a Rhode Island customer's bill when isolating the impact of the costs of this project by itself.⁸

On November 21, 2024, the Board conducted an Open Meeting which was properly noticed. For the reasons described below, the Board found that the project does not constitute an alteration of a major energy facility.

The Company's Notice of Intent application filed pursuant to Rule 1.6(F) seeks a finding from the Board that the modification of an existing power line and replacement of existing structures do not constitute an alteration requiring further review by the Board. The Board finds the proposed improvements to the existing transmission assets to be necessary due to the age of the assets. This is a positive and necessary step in ensuring reliability for the area and in bringing the electric transmission system up to current standards.

Based on the evidence provided, the Board finds the project will not have a significant impact on the environment or public health, safety, and welfare. The social and environmental impacts resulting from the construction will be temporary and minimal. Moreover, the Board was assured and is confident that the Company will engage in appropriate mitigation measures to minimize any disturbances to vegetation and soil and to the social environment. Accordingly, the

⁶ *Id.* at 34.

⁷ *Id.* at 35-36.

⁸ *See id.* at 36.

Board unanimously finds that the project will not cause a significant impact on the environment, public health, safety, or welfare and, thus, is not an alteration of a major energy facility. Narragansett Electric may proceed without further review.

Accordingly, it is hereby

(170) ORDERED:

The Energy Facility Siting Board finds that the project does not constitute an alteration of a major energy facility as defined by R.I. Gen. Laws § 42-98-4(b) in that it will not result in a significant impact on the environment or public health, safety, and welfare and that The Narragansett Electric Company may proceed without further review.

DATED AND EFFECTIVE AT PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND ON NOVEMBER 21, 2024, PURSUANT TO AN OPEN MEETING DECISION. WRITTEN ORDER ISSUED MARCH 5, 2024.

ENERGY FACILITY SITING BOARD



Ronald T. Gerwatowski, Chairman

Meredith E. Brady, Member

Terrence Gray, Member