

STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE

Inter-Department Communication

DATE: January 28, 2019

AT (OFFICE): NHPUC

FROM: Kath Mullholand, Director, Regulatory Innovation and Strategy
Randy Knepper, Director, Safety Division
Kurt Demmer, Utilities Analyst, Electric Division

SUBJECT: IR 18-062 Investigation of Utility Poles and Attachments
Storm Damage and Response
Staff Report

TO: Commissioners
Debra A. Howland, Executive Director

CC: Thomas C. Frantz, Director, Electric Division
David K. Wiesner, Director, Legal Division
Paul Kasper, Assistant Director, Safety Division
Service List

I. Summary

After conducting an investigation that involved written discovery and technical sessions with pole owners, attachers, and first responders, Staff concludes that poles are adequately labelled, and there appears to be good working relationships between electric utilities and first responders. Staff recommends further evaluation of pole owners pole inspection and condemned pole process to address inconsistencies in assessment and resolution timeframes, which can be addressed in rulemaking. Staff recommends that the investigation be concluded and the docket closed.

II. Background

On April 10, 2018, Staff filed a recommendation that the Commission open an investigation regarding storm damage with the goal of reducing the duration of road closures and to assess the condition of pole assets. Staff wanted to determine whether a more efficient and effective identification procedure/process for various entities on a pole could improve notification and response, particularly on the part of communications attachers. Staff recommended that the Commission open a docket pursuant to RSA 365:5 (regarding independent inquiry by the Commission), 365:6 (authority to inspect plant), 365:7 (authority to inspect upon written authorization of the Commission), 365:19 (investigation and hearing requirements), 374:1 (duty of public utilities generally to provide safe and adequate service), 374:3 (general supervisory powers of the Commission), 374:4 (Commission duty to keep informed), 374:7 (general investigation

powers of the Commission), and 374:34-a (pole attachments), regarding matters related to the safety and general status of utility poles and wires in the state.

The Commission opened the above-named docket on April 13, 2018. The following utilities filed notices of appearance: Dixville Telephone Company, New Hampshire Telephone Association on behalf of Granite State Telephone and the TDS companies in New Hampshire, CTIA- The Wireless Association, CenturyLink, Comcast, Charter Communications, and Eversource Energy. Staff made eight discovery requests of all pole owners and attachers. In addition to the utilities listed above, Staff received responses from Liberty Utilities (Liberty), New Hampshire Electric Cooperative (NHEC), Unutil Energy Systems, Inc. (Unutil), Northern New England Telephone Operations LLC d/b/a Consolidated Communications – NNE (Consolidated), AT&T, Atlantic Broadband, FirstLight Fiber, and T-Mobile Northeast.

III. Staff's Investigation

On May 17, 2018, Staff held a technical session with pole owners and attachers to review discovery responses, address the concerns Staff raised in its recommendation, and explore potential options. The attendance list is attached as Attachment 1. In general, the pole owners and attachers were in agreement that first responders generally know how to reach the electric utilities and that there is a cooperative and effective working relationship between the electric utilities and first responders. Liberty noted that they meet frequently with first responders through mutual aid and emergency preparation exercises. In compliance with Commission rules, companies are holding annual meetings with municipalities. The electric utilities conduct eleven joint trainings annually around the state in cooperation with the New Hampshire Fire Marshal's office.

Pole owners stated that poles are sufficiently marked and that each major pole owner knows the joint owners' routes as well as their own. Consolidated indicated that when wires are down they dispatch personnel to look at the situation and that telecom personnel have no issue identifying the various telecommunications wires because they know what they are looking at. Consolidated pointed out that there are sleeves or a label on every attachment. Attachers noted that, whenever they perform maintenance, the labels are changed to reflect the current telecom line or cable owner. Older labels will continue to exist on attachments that have not required any maintenance. NHEC noted that the electric companies maintain databases of all attachments. The one issue a few attendees noted was that telephone numbers on the labels are useful, but are occasionally out-of-date.

In most instances, the electric utility is called first even when electric plant is not involved. The electric utilities want their personnel to respond to every downed wire. Eversource monitors emergency response pagers and in some cases are the first on the scene. Electric utility personnel will try to move communications wires that are impeding the flow of traffic out of the roadway, but do not otherwise do anything to change communications cable conditions. Most electric utilities will not stay at the site if there is no electrical hazard, although NHEC noted that their personnel may state on-site

if they have sufficient personnel available. Consolidated and Comcast indicated that, if they are dispatched and their own cables are down, they will restore their communications cables and others if they have a relationship with the owners of those other cables. FirstLight indicated that it will not restore other companies' cables unless its contracted personnel are shared with the other affected company.

Occasionally, during major events, the wrong electric utility will be notified. This does not happen often, but when it does, it is typically in towns where electric service is shared by multiple electric utilities. There are rarely any false alarms. All pole owners and attachers agreed they would rather dispatch in error than not be called.

Unitil and Liberty use a cell phone application called "iRestore" that first responders use at no cost to report downed wires. The application registers the GPS location and allows photographs to be uploaded. Unitil has been using the iRestore application the longest in New Hampshire and began in earnest in 2017. First responders only use the application to report issues, and Unitil then follows-up with a phone call.

On November 2, 2018, Staff convened a technical session limited to attendance by first responders. The attendance list is attached as Attachment 2. First responders generally supported what the utilities had said about the cooperative relationship between electric utilities and themselves. Unitil was given high marks, and Eversource is considered responsive although less centralized. First responders noted that the communications companies, compared to electric companies, seem to be slower to determine or project what the customer impact will be if a cable is cut. First responders believed that the utilities may have more information available to them, but are guarded about sharing it, although electric utilities tend to share more information than the communications utilities.

The first responders drew a distinction between individual event reports and major events, pointing out that the latter requires prioritization. That prioritization generally is three-phase before single-phase, and Interstate highways first, with major state and U.S. highways next, and then local critical roads. In single events, the departments will assess the situation remotely before dispatching, and when wires are down, they will call all the utilities. Electric lines need to be cleared first, and then, once the site is safe, the decision is made to move or cut the downed communications lines. While the first responders would prefer there be a single interface across all agencies and utilities, the individual town representatives were generally satisfied with the efforts of the electric utilities to make information available, provide contact information, and respond promptly to issues as they arise. The electric company personnel generally know the communications services that are on the poles, and while communications cable attachers may be slower to show up, there is less of a safety issue with downed communications lines.

The Safety Division explained it has been developing maps of licensed crossings and also making an effort to identify the owners of wires crossing state and federal highways. Safety found that electric companies were readily identifiable, including circuit identification, but telecommunication providers and associated facilities were more

difficult to identify. The Safety Division prepared maps that show the interstates, New Hampshire Turnpikes, and state Route 101 have approximately 200 locations where wires cross above ground. These locations may be only electric or telecommunications or both. The Safety Division estimates that if all state roads were mapped then in excess of 2,000 locations would be involved. The first responders were very interested in those maps, and Safety plans to make the maps available to first responders upon request.

With respect to pole asset condition, Staff reviewed and evaluated discovery responses provided by pole owners, and determined that each pole owner establishes different criteria for assessing condition, establishing priorities, and determining replacement time frames. These varying criteria, which are based on technical references and risk assessment, make it difficult for Staff to determine whether issues exist regarding the timeliness of identification and remediation of deficient pole asset structural conditions.

Pole inspections, with the exception of the New Hampshire Electric Cooperative, are performed by the custodial pole owner for the municipality or territory. The dissemination of condemned pole information is not formalized in the pole owners' IOPs (Intercompany Operating Procedures). These varying standards lead to a lack of transparency between joint owners regarding plant conditions for poles outside of the owner's respective pole set area. Finally, the timeframe for condemned pole replacement for each pole owner is varied and in some cases lacks specific defined timeframes for condemned pole replacement.

Staff recommends further evaluation of pole owners' pole inspection and condemned pole identification and replacement processes to address the apparent inconsistencies and to increase pole owner, attacher, and Commission visibility. Staff believes that evaluation and resulting process improvements can be addressed through future rulemaking.

IV. Summary and Recommendation

Based on the stakeholder meetings and extensive discovery responses, Staff believes there is no compelling evidence to indicate the existence of widespread problems. Staff encouraged and provided opportunities for first responders to identify relevant issues and concerns, and there were no significant complaints. Staff notes that the New Hampshire Department of Transportation has an alternative method available for resolving any issues it identifies as impeding its design and maintenance operations. This can be readily accomplished through revisions to its Utility Accommodations Manual in a less formal process than the Commission can achieve through rules revisions.

Based on the foregoing, Staff recommends that the investigation be concluded and the docket closed.

Attachment 1
Attendance List

May 17, 2018 Technical Session with Pole Owners and Attachers

Staff

Kurt Demmer, Analyst, Electric Division
Paul Kasper, Assistant Director, Safety Division
Randy Knepper, Director, Safety Division
Kath Mullholand, Director, Regulatory Innovation and Strategy Division
David Wiesner, Staff Attorney

Attending by phone

Jim Huttenhower, AT&T
Steve Woodcock, AT&T
Carolyn Ridley, CenturyLink
David Duplonski, Charter Communications
Mark Anders, Dunbarton Telephone Company
Stephen Nelson, Dunbarton Telephone Company
Peter Seehusen, FirstLight Fiber

Pole Owners and Attachers

Lee Lajoie, Eversource
Matthew Fossum, Eversource
Michael Sheehan, Liberty Utilities
Robert Johnson, Liberty Utilities
Heather Tebbetts, Liberty Utilities
Mark Dean, NHEC
Dean Benton, NHEC
Gary Epler, Unitil
Chuck Lloyd, Unitil
Ray Letourneau, Jr., Unitil

Owen Smith, AT&T
Edward Merrill, Atlantic Broadband
Pamela Hollick, CenturyLink
David Bogan, representing Charter Communications
Susan Gieger, representing Comcast
Terry O'Brien, Comcast
Bob Meehan, Consolidated Communications
Mike Reed, Consolidated Communications
Mike Shultz, Consolidated Communications
Tom Gardiner, Consolidated Communications
Roberto Diaz, Consolidated Communications
Lawrence Lackey, FirstLight Fiber
Chris Rand, Granite State Telephone
Paul Phillips, representing New Hampshire Telephone Association

Attachment 2

Attendance List

November 2, 2018 Technical Session with First Responders

Staff

Kurt Demmer, Analyst, Electric Division

Paul Kasper, Assistant Director, Safety Division

Randy Knepper, Director, Safety Division

Jason List, Analyst, Safety Division

Kath Mullholand, Director, Regulatory Innovation and Strategy Division

David Wiesner, Director, Legal Division

First Responders and Safety Officials

Daniel Andrus, Fire Chief, Concord Fire and EMS

Steve Colburn, Assistant Chief, Hooksett Fire and Rescue

David Chamberlain, Chief, Jaffrey Fire Department

Michael Currick, Fire Chief, Merrimack Fire and Rescue

George Walker, Assistant Chief, Nashua Fire and Rescue

Charles Blackman, NHDOT Transportation Systems & Management Operations

Dana Lacasse, NHDOT - Bureau of Turnpikes

Tom Riley, District Chief, NH State Fire Marshal Office

Mark Doyle, Director, NH Department of Safety, DESC 911 and Emergency Services

Perry Plummer, Director, NH Department of Safety, NH-HSEM

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Pursuant to N.H. Admin Rule Puc 203.11 (a) (1): Serve an electronic copy on each person identified on the service list.

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Docket #: 18-062-1 Printed: January 28, 2019

FILING INSTRUCTIONS:

a) Pursuant to N.H. Admin Rule Puc 203.02 (a), with the exception of Discovery, file 7 copies, as well as an electronic copy, of all documents including cover letter with:

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b) Serve an electronic copy with each person identified on the Commission's service list and with the Office of Consumer Advocate.

c) Serve a written copy on each person on the service list not able to receive electronic mail.

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