

The Honorable Sen. Nick Frentz
95 University Avenue W.
Minnesota Senate Bldg., Room 3109
St. Paul, MN 55155

March 4, 2024

Chair Frentz and members of the Energy, Utilities, Environment and Climate Committee,

Experts and stakeholders across the energy, environmental, and public sectors have clearly identified that expanding our electric transmission infrastructure is one of, if not the most important actions we need to take to achieve renewable energy generation growth and power grid reliability enhancements to successfully transition to a clean and prosperous carbon-neutral economy.

The NextGen Highways Coalition is a national movement, now with its first state-level coalition represented by the signers of this letter. Formed by diverse interests committed to knocking down barriers and opening up pathways to accelerate the critical transmission infrastructure sought by so many parties, the breadth of our coalition demonstrates the consensus that addressing the issues that make transmission development so difficult must be a top priority of our public officials.

Minnesota has a tremendous foundation for leading the country in this area, and this committee can set the tone by endorsing the legislation before it today. SF 3949 is supported by environmental groups, utilities, renewable energy developers, and labor who view it as a simple and common-sense first step to address a central cause slowing down transmission development in Minnesota – deciding where to put the infrastructure and securing the land rights and permits to put it there.

Many proposed transmission projects take years of time and financial investment to first plan a route that meets engineering standards and then negotiate with hundreds of individual landowners and community stakeholders for the rights to utilize that route. This comes at the expense of a speedy project timeline and often runs up against social resistance around impacts to other important land uses or simply folks who don't want a 150-ft. transmission tower dropped into their once unimpeded vista.

SF 3949 provides an option preferred by the vast majority of Minnesotans to solve these issues: ensuring all public rights-of-way (ROW) along interstates and highways are open to co-location of high-voltage transmission infrastructure. The state regulations currently prohibiting this option in interstate ROWs are based on both old federal guidance (since rescinded) and state statutes that have nothing to do with the technical, economic, or social feasibility of constructing high-voltage transmission lines in interstate ROWs. Recent public opinion research showed nearly 80% of Minnesotans would prefer the co-location of transmission lines and public ROWs to other alternatives.

The urgency is real. Minnesota committed to 100% carbon-free electricity by 2040 – 16 years from now. In the world of transmission planning which happens in 10-year cycles, that’s barely a blink of an eye. The calculus is simple:

- The state requires a dramatic expansion of renewable energy development to meet its clean power goals.
- Rapidly expanding transmission infrastructure is essential to achieving that development.
- This bill is a simple, effective, and highly popular solution for creating more options to build transmission faster.

Thank you for your consideration of this important legislation for Minnesota’s energy, economic and environmental future.

Sincerely,

Randy Satterfield
Executive Director
NextGen Highways Coalition

Co-signers



Fresh Energy

Rachel Wiedewitsch
Senior Policy Associate, Clean Electricity



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