



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
PENNSYLVANIA PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION
400 NORTH STREET, HARRISBURG, PA 17120

IN REPLY PLEASE
REFER TO OUR FILE

December 28, 2023

Docket No. M-2009-2094773
Utility Code No. 111250

DANIEL A GARCIA
STATE REGULATORY ATTORNEY II
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**Re: Biennial Inspection, Maintenance, Repair and Replacement Plan (2025-2026)
of West Penn Power Company at Docket No. M-2009-2094773**

Dear Mr. Garcia:

On September 29, 2023, West Penn Power Company (“West Penn”) filed its Biennial Inspection, Maintenance, Repair and Replacement Plan (Plan), pursuant to 52 Pa. Code § 57.198(a), to be made effective on January 1, 2025. In its Plan, West Penn has proposed continuation of previous modifications to its original Plan, and the change to the distribution wood pole treatment program which will be discussed herein. The Commission’s Bureau of Technical Utility Services¹ (TUS Staff) in accordance with 52 Pa. Code § 57.198(h) & (j) delegated authority,² rejects West Penn’s Plan for the reasons expressed below. TUS Staff directs West Penn to file a revised Plan within 30 days of service of this letter that includes the Distribution Overhead Line Inspections Interval and Distribution Overhead Transformer Inspections Interval consistent with 52 Pa. Code § 57.198(n)(4) and (6). Further, TUS Staff directs West Penn to consider re-evaluating and reviewing the effectiveness of the Vegetation Management portion of its Plan and update its Plan accordingly to achieve an improvement in its performance.

On November 2, 2023, TUS Staff sent a data request to West Penn via a Secretarial Letter. TUS Staff’s Data Request sought additional information related to West Penn’s reliability metrics and performance and West Penn’s Vegetation Management Program. TUS Staff also asked West Penn to provide a detailed justification for the continuation of previously

¹ The Bureau of Conservation, Economics and Energy Planning was eliminated, and its functions and staff transferred to the Bureau of Technical Utility Services. *See Implementation of Act 129 of 2008; Organization of Bureaus and Offices*, Final Procedural Order, entered August 11, 2011, at Docket No. M-2008-2071852, at 4.

² 52 Pa. Code § 57.198(h) *Review procedures*. Within 90 days of receipt of the plan, the Commission or the Director of the Bureau of Conservation, Economics and Energy Planning (CEEP) will accept or reject the plan in writing. 52 Pa. Code § 57.198(j) *Plan deficiencies*. If the plan is rejected, in whole or in part, by the Commission or the Director of CEEP, the EDC will be notified of the plan’s deficiencies and directed to submit one of the following: (i) A revised plan, or pertinent parts of the plan, addressing the identified deficiencies.

granted deviations for the inspection intervals for the Plan's Distribution Overhead Line Inspections and Distribution Transformer Inspections. On November 17, 2023, West Penn filed its response.

The Commission's regulations require electric distribution companies (EDCs) to file, every two years by October 1, a plan for the periodic inspection, maintenance, repair, and replacement of facilities that is designed to meet reliability performance benchmarks and standards set forth in 52 Pa. Code § § 57.191-57.197. West Penn, as one of five EDCs in Compliance Group 1 must file their eighth biennial Plan by October 1, 2023. The Plan must cover the two calendar years beginning 15 months after filing and remain in effect for two calendar years thereafter (January 1, 2025, through December 31, 2026).

Plan Revisions

West Penn submitted its original Plan for the period January 1, 2023, through December 31, 2024, on October 1, 2021. The Commission concluded that West Penn's Plan generally complied with the requirements in 52 Pa. Code § 57.198 and therefore approved it on December 21, 2021. On April 28, 2023, pursuant to 52 Pa. Code § 57.198(l), West Penn submitted a revised Plan, proposing the addition of a distribution pole life extension process to be applied in certain cases, but otherwise consistent with its previously approved Plan with no substantive changes to its inspection cycles. The Commission concluded that West Penn's Plan, as revised, generally complied with the requirements in 52 Pa. Code § 57.198 and approved the revised Plan via a Secretarial Letter dated July 17, 2023.

West Penn's instant Plan (covering 2025 through 2026) includes a distribution wood pole treatment program that is otherwise consistent with its previously approved distribution wood pole treatment program in its approved revised Plan for the years 2023 and 2024.

Plan Consistency

52 Pa. Code § 57.198(b) Plan consistency. The plan must be consistent with the National Electrical Safety Code, Codes and Practices of the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission Regulations, and provisions of the American National Standards Institute, Inc.

TUS Staff finds that West Penn's Plan generally complies with 52 Pa. Code §57.198(b). However, the Plan's overall compliance and achievement of purpose will be discussed *infra*.

Time Frames

52. Pa. Code § 57.198(c) Time frames. The plan must comply with the inspection and maintenance standards in subsection (n). A justification for the inspection and maintenance time frames selected shall be provided, even if the time frame falls within the intervals prescribed in subsection (n). However, an EDC may propose a plan that, for a given standard, uses intervals outside the Commission standard, provided the deviation can be justified by the EDC's unique

circumstances or a cost/benefit analysis to support an alternative approach that will still support the level of reliability required by law.

West Penn has proposed continuation of current modifications discussed *infra*, for the following programs, or parts of programs:

- Pole inspections.
- Distribution overhead line inspection interval.
- Distribution overhead transformer inspection interval

Record Keeping

52 Pa. Code § 57.198(m) Recordkeeping. An EDC shall maintain records of its inspection and maintenance activities sufficient to demonstrate compliance with its distribution facilities inspection, maintenance, repair, and replacement programs as required by subsection (n). The records shall be made available to the Commission upon request within 30 days. Examples of sufficient records include:

- (1) Date-stamped records signed by EDC staff who performed the tasks related to inspection.*
- (2) Maintenance, repair, and replacement receipts from independent contractors showing when and what type of inspection, maintenance, repair or replacement work was done.*

West Penn's avers that it will maintain inspection and maintenance records either electronically or in hard copy as required by 52 Pa. Code § 57.198(m).

TUS Staff finds that West Penn's Plan generally complies with 52 Pa. Code § 57.198(m).

Vegetation Management

52 Pa. Code § 57.198(n)(1) Vegetation management. The Statewide minimum inspection and treatment cycle for vegetation management is between 4-8 years for distribution facilities. An EDC shall submit a condition-based plan for vegetation management for its distribution system facilities explaining its treatment cycle.

TUS Staff finds that West Penn's Plan generally complies with 52 Pa. Code § 57.198(n)(1). However, TUS Staff's evaluations of West Penn's performance for vegetation-related customer interruptions indicate a need for West Penn to re-evaluate and improve its vegetation management program and consider vegetation inspection patrols scheduled at a minimum of every four-years for all circuits. As detailed in West Penn's Revised Joint 2022 Annual Reliability Report, filed on October 6, 2023, and West Penn's Joint 3rd Quarter 2023 Reliability Report, filed on November 1, 2023,³ TUS Staff finds that West Penn's reliability performance does not comply with 52 Pa. Code § 57.194(e) (relating to an EDC achieving the reliability performance benchmarks and minimum performance standards established by the Commission).

³ See, Docket Nos. M-2016-2522508 and M-2023-3039027, respectively.

TUS Staff has performed an evaluation of West Penn's outage causes and notes that as reported in West Penn's Joint 4th Quarter 2004 Reliability Report, filed on February 1, 2005,^{4, 5} West Penn customers experienced 3,641 vegetation-caused customer outages. That number remained relatively the same for each rolling 12-month quarter thereafter up to the fourth quarter of 2015, with 2,954 vegetation-caused outages. The average annual number of vegetation-caused outages during the period of 2004 through 2015 was 3,457. TUS Staff found that during the rolling 12-month quarter ending March 31, 2016, there were 2,664 vegetation outages. That number began to rise each rolling 12-month quarter thereafter with the number of vegetation-caused outages reported for the rolling 12-month quarter ending December 31, 2022 at 6,153. The average annual number of vegetation-caused outages during the period of 2016 through 2022 was 4,020, which is a 16.3% increase above the annual average during the years 2004 through 2015.

Should West Penn's reliability performance on vegetation-caused outages not improve in subsequent years, TUS Staff expects West Penn to re-evaluate and review the effectiveness of the Vegetation Management portion of its Plan and update its Plan accordingly to achieve an improvement in its performance.

Pole Inspections

52 Pa. Code § 57.198(n)(2) Pole inspections. Distribution poles shall be inspected at least as often as every 10-12 years except for the new southern yellow pine creosoted utility poles which shall be initially inspected within 25 years, then within 12 years annually after the initial inspection. Pole inspections must include:

- (i) Drill tests at and below ground level,*
- (ii) A shell tests.*
- (iii) Visual inspection for holes or evidence of insect infestation.*
- (iv) Visual inspection for evidence of unauthorized backfilling or excavation near the pole.*
- (v) Visual inspection for signs of lightning strikes.*
- (vi) A load calculation.*

The Plan states that West Penn will visually inspect distribution wood poles on a 12-year cycle. The preventative maintenance inspection for wood poles will include a visual inspection as well as hammer-sounding as needed. The inspection consists of the recording of abnormal conditions from the groundline to the top of the pole, including damage (broken or leaning), equipment (crossarms, insulators, conductors, oil leaking), and testing for decayed internal wood. poles showing incipient decay will be bored to further assess the condition of the pole.

⁴ See, Docket No. L-00030161. All quarterly and annual reliability reports for EDCs may be found at Docket Nos. L-00030161 (1994 through 2015), M-2016-2522508 (2016 through 2022), and M-2023-3039027 (2023 – current).

⁵ The reliability performance evaluation that follows in this document is based on the review of the reliability metrics as reported by West Penn to the Commission, and in West Penn's quarterly and annual reliability reports, at the dockets cited in Footnote 4.

West Penn avers that serviceable poles that pass the visual, sound, and bore testing may be treated for life extension. Reinforced poles may also be treated. Three different types of treatments may be used depending on the need determined during inspection. External treatments are applied as a preservative paste, after decay is scraped off. Internal preventative treatments are for protection against fungal decay and insects and to interrupt degradation. Internal void treatments are used where decay pockets exist. The selected treatment method will be based on the best available information at the time.

West Penn included a previously approved deviation from performing pole load calculations as part of pole inspections as required by 52 Pa. Code § 57.198(n)(2)(vi). TUS Staff finds that West Penn has justified the continuation of the previously approved deviation from performing load calculations as part of its pole inspection program in accordance with 52 Pa. Code § 57.198(c).

TUS Staff finds that West Penn's Plan generally complies with 52 Pa. Code § 57.198(n)(2).

Pole Inspection Failure

52 Pa. Code § 57.198(n)(3) Pole inspection failure. If a pole fails the groundline inspection and shows dangerous conditions that are an immediate risk to public or employee safety or conditions affecting the integrity of the circuit, the pole shall be replaced within 30 days of the date of inspection.

The Plan states that wood poles and supporting structures with recorded defects that West Penn could reasonably expect to endanger life or property will be repaired or replaced within 30 days. All remaining deficiencies will be evaluated and prioritized on a case-by-case basis.

TUS Staff finds that West Penn's Plan generally complies with 52 Pa. Code § 57.198(n)(3).

Distribution Overhead Line Inspections

52 Pa. Code § 57.198(n)(4) Distribution overhead line inspections. Distribution lines shall be inspected by ground patrol a minimum of once every 1-2 years. A visual inspection must include checking for:

- (i) Broken insulators.*
- (ii) Conditions that may adversely affect operation of the overhead transformer.*
- (iii) Other conditions that may adversely affect operation of the overhead distribution line.*

The Commission ensures that EDCs are providing reliable service by requiring EDCs to meet certain reliability performance measures. The benchmarks and standards established by the Commission are based on four reliability performance metrics adopted by the Institute of

Electrical and Electronic Engineers, Inc. (IEEE): SAIFI, CAIDI, SAIDI, and MAIFI.⁶ Our electric reliability regulations may be found at 52 Pa. Code § 57.191-198.

Concerning West Penn's CAIDI,⁷ TUS Staff notes that from 1994 through 2016, West Penn's calendar-year CAIDI metric averaged 186 minutes. West Penn's calendar-year CAIDI metric for the years 2004 through 2016 averaged 181 minutes. West Penn's calendar-year CAIDI from 2017 through 2022 has averaged 198 minutes. We note that West Penn's rolling 12-month standard for CAIDI established by the Commission is 204 minutes.

Concerning West Penn's SAIFI, TUS Staff notes that from 1994 through 2016, West Penn's calendar-year SAIFI metric averaged 0.97. West Penn's calendar-year SAIFI metric for the years 2004 through 2016 averaged 1.12 occurrences. West Penn's calendar-year SAIFI from 2017 through 2022 averaged 1.23 occurrences. The 1.23 average annual SAIFI is 0.03 below West Penn's rolling 12-month standard of 1.26 established by the Commission.

Concerning West Penn's SAIDI, TUS Staff notes that from 1994 through 2016, West Penn's calendar-year SAIDI metric averaged 186.03 minutes. West Penn's calendar-year SAIDI metric from 2004 through 2016 averaged 204.23 minutes. West Penn's calendar-year SAIDI from 2017 through 2022 averaged 244.51 minutes. The average annual SAIDI of 244.51 minutes is 12.49 minutes below West Penn's rolling 12-month standard of 257 minutes established by the Commission.

TUS Staff notes that while West Penn's average annual CAIDI, SAIFI and SAIDI from 2017 through 2022 met its established performance standards, all three average annual metrics significantly increased (*i.e.*, worsened) from the period of 2004 through 2016. As noted in the Vegetation Management section above, West Penn's reliability performance in calendar year 2022 and in the rolling 12 months ending September 30, 2023, did not comply with 52 Pa. Code § 57.194(e) (relating to an EDC achieving the reliability performance benchmarks and minimum performance standards established by the Commission).

TUS Staff also notes the continual increases in the following interruption metrics submitted by West Penn from 2015 through 2022. The number of customers experiencing a sustained customer interruption⁸ each calendar year has increased from 827,613 in 2015 to 957,562 in 2022. This represents an increase of 15.70%. Also, the length of time for sustained customer interruptions, customer-minutes-interrupted (CMI), has increased from a CMI of 127,282,345 in 2015 to a CMI of 264,310,751 in 2022. This is an increase of 107.66%. The number of sustained customer interruption events has increased from 11,268 cases in 2015 to 16,538 cases in 2022, representing an increase of 46.77%. To summarize, a customer residing within West Penn's service territory during the last 8 years can expect to be interrupted 15.70% more often and remain interrupted 107.66% longer than in prior years.

⁶ SAIFI is the system average interruption frequency index, or frequency of outages; CAIDI is the customer average interruption duration index, or duration of outages; SAIDI is the system average interruption duration index, or average number of minutes the average customer experiences an interruption in the measurement period; and MAIFI is the momentary average interruption frequency index, or occurrences of momentary customer interruptions. There is no benchmark measure for MAIFI.

⁷ See, Footnote 5, above.

⁸ See, 52 Pa. Code § 57.192, Definitions.

Based on the above reported reliability performance measures, TUS Staff finds that West Penn's reliability performance does not comply with 52 Pa. Code § 57.194(e) (relating to an EDC achieving the reliability performance benchmarks and minimum performance standards established by the Commission).

In its response to the TUS Staff's data request, question 2 (asking West Penn for detailed justification for the continued distribution overhead line inspection cycle deviation), West Penn states that it has assessed the current overhead inspection program in the past and has determined that inspections are proactively identifying system issues that need remediation. West Penn asserts that visual inspections are completed from ground level and focus on identifying visible signs of issues, damage, or degradation, but they will not reveal internal problems/equipment damage. West Penn goes on to assert that increasing the periodicity of inspections would not enable West Penn to identify internal problems/equipment damage. West Penn acknowledges that its current overall SAIFI trend has been trending upward, however the trends relating to equipment and line failures have been trending downward. West Penn states that its line/equipment failure overall SAIFI has improved 27% and has seen a 12% improvement for blue-sky distribution line/equipment SAIFI when comparing year to date October 2023 to the same time period in 2018. West Penn states that it continues to address system degradation due to aging infrastructure through its Long-Term Infrastructure Improvement Plan (LTIIP) strategy.

An EDC's Plan is to be designed to meet the Commission established reliability benchmarks and standards. 52 Pa. Code § 57.198(a). With consideration of West Penn's reliability performance as discussed above, West Penn's Plan, which includes a previously approved deviation for a five (5) year distribution overhead line inspection cycle, rather than the one to two (1-2) year inspection cycle as established in 52 Pa. Code § 57.198(n)(4), does not appear to be designed to meet West Penn's reliability benchmarks and standards. As noted above, West Penn admits that visual inspections are proactively identifying system issues that need remediation. TUS Staff finds that by increasing the inspection cycle to once every one to two years as set forth in 52 Pa. Code § 57.198(n)(4), West Penn should identify system issues and allow for remediation in a more timely manner that should improve CAIDI, SAIFI & SAIDI. As to West Penn's contention that increasing the periodicity of inspections would not enable West Penn to identify internal problems/equipment damage, TUS Staff notes that West Penn avers that its visual inspections, as performed in the past and currently, do not reveal internal problems/equipment damage. Therefore, West Penn's concern on this point is irrelevant as identification of internal problems/equipment damage are not part of West Penn's overhead line inspection process.

TUS Staff notes that as of the end of 2022, vegetation issues are the number one cause of sustained customer interruptions and CMI for West Penn. TUS Staff finds that in addition to proactive identification of issues with overhead circuit equipment, the shorter inspection cycle should allow West Penn to identify vegetation issues, consistent with 52 Pa. Code § 57.198(n)(4)(iii) (relating to identification of conditions that may adversely affect operation of the overhead distribution line) and address them in a timelier manner.

Therefore, TUS staff finds that West Penn has failed to justify the continuation of the current five-year inspection cycle for distribution overhead line inspections previously permitted by TUS Staff in accordance with 52 Pa. Code § 57.198(c). Accordingly, with respect to overhead lines and equipment to be inspected during patrols, TUS Staff finds that West Penn's Plan does not comply with 52 Pa. Code § 57.198(n)(4). West Penn is directed to file a revised Plan that includes the one to two (1-2) year inspection cycle for distribution overhead lines and equipment, as specified by 52 Pa. Code § 57.198(n)(4).

Inspection Failure

52 Pa. Code § 57.198(n)(5) Inspection failure. If critical maintenance problems are found that affect the integrity of the circuits, they shall be repaired or replaced no later than 30 days from discovery.

The Plan states that supporting structures with recorded defects that West Penn could reasonably expect to affect the integrity of the circuit shall be repaired or replaced within 30 days. All remaining deficiencies will be evaluated and prioritized on a case-by-case basis.

TUS Staff finds that West Penn's Plan generally complies with 52 Pa. Code § 57.198(n)(5).

Distribution Transformer Inspections

52 Pa. Code § 57.198(n)(6) Distribution transformer inspection. Overhead distribution transformers shall be visually inspected as part of the distribution line inspection every 1-2 years. Above-ground pad-mounted transformers shall be inspected at least as often as every 5 years and below-ground transformers shall be inspected at least as often as every 8 years. An inspection must include checking for:

- (i) Rust, dents, or other evidence of contact.*
- (ii) Leaking oil.*
- (iii) Installation of fences or shrubbery that could adversely affect access to and operation of the transformer.*
- (iv) Unauthorized excavation or changes in grade near the transformer.*

West Penn's Plan includes a previously approved deviation for a five (5) year inspection cycle for overhead transformers, consistent with their previous overhead line inspection cycle, instead of the required one to two (1-2) year cycle established in 52 Pa. Code § 57.198(n)(6). West Penn states that it will inspect above-ground pad-mounted transformers on a five (5) year cycle and below-ground transformers on an eight (8) year cycle, consistent with 52 Pa. Code § 57.198(n)(6).

As noted in the Distribution Overhead Line Inspections section above, and in consideration of West Penn's reliability performance as discussed above, TUS Staff finds that West Penn's Plan, which includes a previously approved deviation for a five (5) year inspection cycle for overhead distribution transformers, does not appear to be designed to meet West Penn's reliability benchmarks and standards. As noted above, TUS Staff finds that by increasing the

inspection cycle to once every one to two years as set forth in 52 Pa. Code § 57.198(n)(4), West Penn will be able to identify system issues and allow for remediation in a more timely manner that should improve CAIDI, SAIFI & SAIDI.

Therefore, TUS Staff finds that West Penn has failed to justify the continuation of the current five-year visual inspection cycle for overhead distribution transformer inspections previously permitted by TUS Staff in accordance with 52 Pa. Code § 57.198(c). Accordingly, with respect to overhead distribution transformers and equipment to be visually inspected, TUS Staff finds that West Penn's Plan does not comply with 52 Pa. Code § 57.198(n)(6). West Penn is directed to file a revised Plan that includes the one to two (1-2) year visual inspection cycle for distribution transformers and equipment, as specified by 52 Pa. Code § 57.198(n)(6).

Recloser Inspections

52 Pa. Code § 57.198(n)(7) Recloser inspections. Three-phase reclosers shall be inspected on a cycle of 8 years or less. Single-phase reclosers shall be inspected as part of the EDC's individual distribution line inspection plan.

The Plan states that West Penn visually inspects distribution line reclosers annually and this practice is the same for all FirstEnergy companies.

TUS Staff finds that West Penn's Plan generally complies with 52 Pa. Code § 57.198(n)(7).

Substation Inspections

52 Pa. Code § 57.198(n)(8) Substation inspections. Substation equipment, structures and hardware shall be inspected on a cycle of 5 weeks or less.

West Penn's Plan includes inspections on monthly, quarterly, and biannual intervals. Safety and security inspections are conducted monthly; readings of currents, etc. are performed quarterly; and a more comprehensive inspection of substation equipment is performed biannually. This Plan is consistent with all FirstEnergy companies.

TUS Staff finds that West Penn's Plan generally complies with 52 Pa. Code § 57.198(n)(8).

Conclusion

Upon review of West Penn's Plan filed on September 29, 2023, TUS Staff finds that implementation of the submitted Plan would not lead to improved reliability and that West Penn's Plan is not designed to meet West Penn's reliability benchmarks and standards. As noted above, an EDC's Plan is to be designed to meet its reliability benchmarks and standards. 52 Pa. Code § 57.198(a). Specifically, TUS Staff finds that West Penn has failed to justify the continuation of the current five (5) year inspection interval for overhead distribution line

inspections, rather than the required one to two (1-2) year inspection cycle.⁹ Furthermore, TUS Staff finds that West Penn has failed to justify the continuation of the current five (5) year inspection cycle for overhead distribution transformers, rather than the required one to two (1-2) year cycle.¹⁰ Accordingly, TUS Staff rejects West Penn's Plan.

Pursuant to 52 Pa. Code § 57.198(j)(i), TUS Staff directs West Penn to file a revised Plan within 30 days of the date of this letter that includes the Distribution Overhead Line Inspections Interval and Distribution Overhead Transformer Inspections Interval consistent with 52 Pa. Code § 57.198(n)(4) and (6). Further, as noted in the Vegetation Management section above, West Penn should consider re-evaluating and reviewing the effectiveness of the Vegetation Management portion of its Plan and update its Plan accordingly to achieve an improvement in its performance.

If you are dissatisfied with the resolution of this matter, you may, as set forth in 52 Pa. Code §§ 5.44 and 57.198(k), file an appeal of this staff action with the Commission within twenty (20) days after receiving service of this letter. Please direct any questions regarding this filing to Harry R. Bidelspach, Sr., Electrical Reliability Engineer, TUS, at (717) 425-7401, or hbidelspac@pa.gov.

Sincerely,



Rosemary Chiavetta
Secretary

cc: Kriss Brown, LAW
John Van Zant, TUS
Dan Searfoorce, TUS
Harry Bidelspach, TUS
Brent Killian, BIE
Scott R. Wyman, FirstEnergy, wymans@firstenergycorp.com

⁹ See, 52 Pa. Code § 57.198(n)(4).

¹⁰ See, 52 Pa. Code § 57.198(n)(6).