

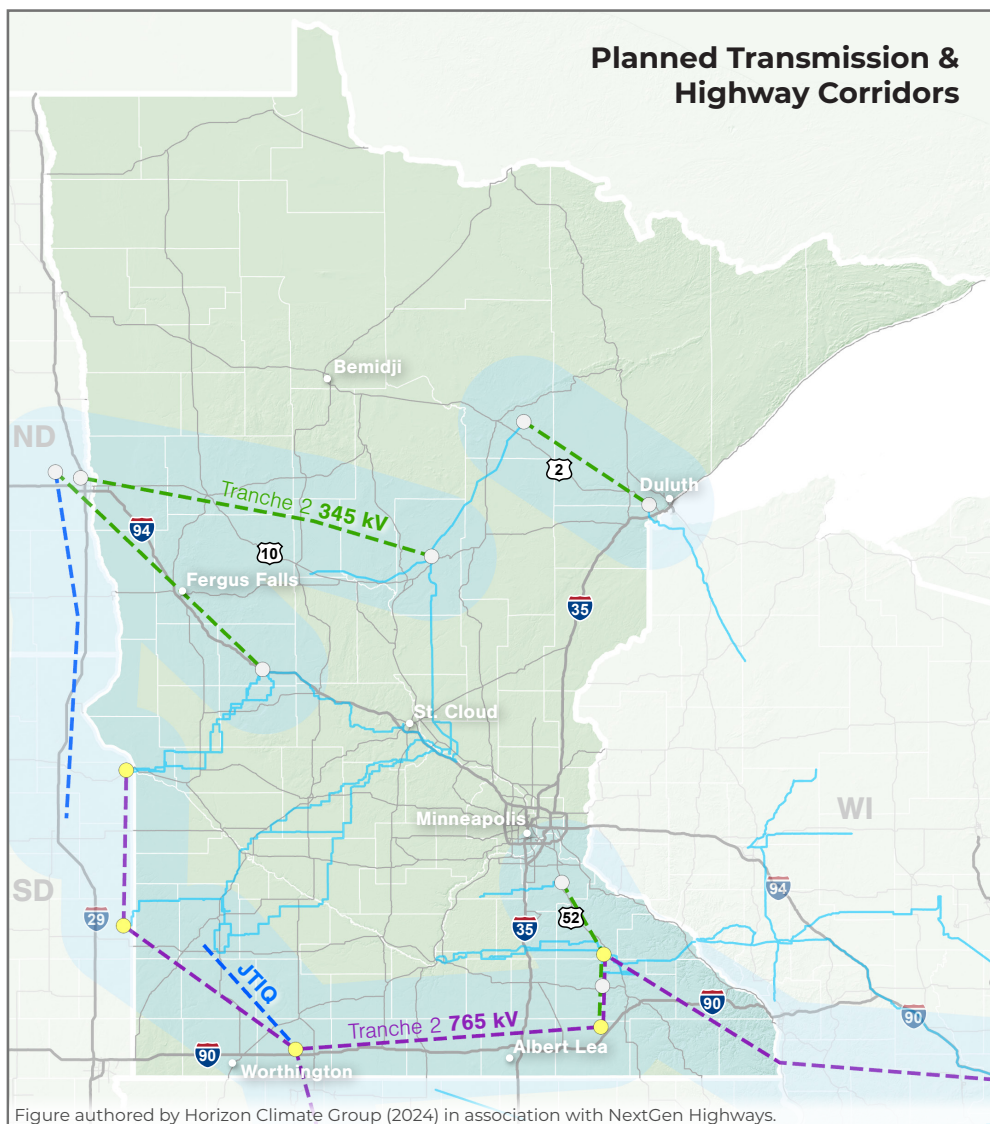
Reimagining Highways as Infrastructure Corridors to Meet Society's Needs

Transmission providers are planning several projects across the State of Minnesota to maintain a reliable electric grid and meet the State's clean electricity and decarbonization mandates. To accelerate progress and minimize the need for development on undisturbed land, state agencies and policy makers took steps in 2024 to allow transmission siting in highway rights-of-way and other existing corridors.

Progress to Date

New Changes to State Law to Streamline Transmission Deployment

In 2024, Governor Tim Walz signed legislation into law that requires the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) to allow co-location of overhead high-voltage transmission lines to be built within all highway rights-of-way across the state. This policy also requires the use of a constructability report by the DOT and utilities to evaluate the suitability of DOT rights-of-way for co-location and that MnDOT coordinate with the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission when permitting new transmission lines.



MISO, the region's grid operator, is planning several transmission projects in Minnesota, called Tranche 2 and JTIQ. Routes are preliminary and expected to be sited in 2025. If allowed, portions of projects could be sited in interstate rights-of-way.

Federal & state highways

- Interstate
- Other highway
- NextGen Highways corridor study region

MISO Tranche 2 planned transmission

Tranche 2 lines

- 345 kV
- 765 kV

Tranche 2 substations

- Existing substation (additional work)
- Existing substation (new voltage)
- New substation

Other planned transmission

- JTIQ lines
- Other planned lines ≥ 230 kV

MnDOT Policy Revision

MnDOT is in the process of updating its Utility Accommodation Policy (UAP) to comply with the law. While MnDOT, utilities, and transmission developers coordinate on highway crossings and nearby alignments, the changes to be implemented to the UAP should clarify the process by which the parties can work together to utilize highway rights-of-way for transmission co-location.

Specifically, MnDOT's updates to its rules and procedures are expected to:



Promote smooth coordination amongst MnDOT, transmission developers, and the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission



Ensure highway rights-of-way are viable options for transmission siting



Lessen development pressure on land owners, wildlife, and the natural environment

Additional Policy Opportunities

The policy changes to open all highway rights-of-way for transmission co-location are an important step in furthering the deployment of needed transmission infrastructure to meet Minnesota's clean energy and decarbonization targets.

However, more can be done to ensure that transmission builders and state agencies give due consideration to the use of highway corridors. The NextGen Highways Minnesota Coalition suggests policy changes to prioritize the use of existing linear corridors like transmission lines, highways, and rail lines, for siting new high-voltage transmission lines in Minnesota.

Transmission siting priorities policy will help bring all parties to the table for holistic, collaborative transmission siting, resulting in an efficient and effective process for deploying new transmission lines.

Our Work

NextGen Highways Minnesota is a diverse coalition of organizations representing economic, environmental, labor, and wildlife interests with a common interest in utilizing existing infrastructure corridors for transmission siting.

NextGen Highways Minnesota coalition members include:

- Audubon Upper Mississippi River
- Center for Rural Affairs
- Citizens' Climate Lobby Minnesota
- Clean Energy Economy Minnesota
- Fresh Energy
- LIUNA Minnesota & North Dakota
- Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy
- Minnesota Conservative Energy Forum
- Minnesota Mechanical Contractors Association

