

January 9, 2019

Comments on Nextgrid Draft Final Report

Illinois PIRG Education Fund and GlidePath understand that the stability, security and sustainability of the electric grid has a direct impact on every household and business in the state of Illinois.

Illinois PIRG Education Fund is an independent, non-partisan group that works for consumers and the public interest. We have played a crucial role in advocating for electric consumers in legislative and regulatory matters in Illinois and have worked closely with the office of the Illinois Attorney General to enforce consumer protections. Illinois PIRG Education Fund applied to be part of the NextGrid process but was not given an opportunity to participate.

Glidepath creates energy solutions that improve the reliability and efficiency of the grid. We have developed 80 MW of battery storage across four sites in Northern Illinois, making GlidePath a national leader in the deployment of battery storage technology and one of the first in the nation to use energy storage to lower costs for frequency regulation and ancillary services.

Illinois PIRG Education Fund and Glidepath know the importance and complexity of creating a more modern electric grid and understand that the outcome of the NextGrid process will have a significant impact on electricity costs, policy and competition in Illinois. We therefore object to the secretive and exclusionary way that NextGrid was conducted by the Illinois Commerce Commission (ICC) and believe this draft report should not have been released.

The ICC is a public body, and as such it is required to comply with Illinois' Open Meetings Act. But much of the Nextgrid study was conducted behind closed doors and in violation of the Act. The ICC deliberately excluded consumer advocates and market participants from many Nextgrid meetings, denied the public and the press the opportunity to attend meetings, and excluded working group member input from meeting minutes.

Though Nextgrid was legally required to be a public process, its facilitators were contracted and paid by utility companies. The facilitators' contract grants the utility companies the right to review all Nextgrid reports before they are issued. In short, this report was drafted and edited behind closed doors in order to benefit powerful utility interests.

After the ICC ignored our requests to conduct the Nextgrid process in compliance with the Open Meetings Act, Illinois PIRG Education Fund and Glidepath filed a lawsuit to force a more open and transparent process. Within weeks of our lawsuit's filing, the ICC agreed in its pleadings that its prior meetings were not in compliance with the Open Meetings Act and agreed in a court order to open meetings going forward.

That lawsuit is still in process. By issuing a draft report before the court has made its decision, the ICC and Chairman Sheahan have demonstrated a complete disregard for Illinois law.

We agree with the report's authors that "the future grid is a matter of utmost importance." The Nextgrid study covers crucial topics and could have far-reaching impacts in Illinois energy policy and regulations. Unless it can be created through the open and transparent process required by state law, the report should not be issued.

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