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INITIAL COMMENTS OF WIRED WEST  
D.P.U. 25-10/D.T.C. 25-1

WiredWest, a municipal light plant cooperative formed under the provisions of G.L. c. 164, §§ 47C and 47E for telecommunications purposes, submits these comments in response to the Joint Order of Opening Inquiry issued by the Department of Public Utilities and Department of Telecommunications and Cable (collectively, the “Department”) on January 17, 2025, docketed as D.P.U. 25-10/D.T.C. 25-1, and the Hearing Officer Memorandum of the same date in that matter.

WiredWest was originally formed in 2011 to provide a regional network for high-speed Internet services to unserved and underserved Towns in Western Massachusetts. WiredWest’s current membership consists of the municipal light plants of the Towns of Becket, Heath, New Salem, Rowe, Washington and Windsor. Each of the member Towns has constructed its own network. WiredWest is run by a Board of Directors consisting of representatives from its member Towns. WiredWest is the vehicle by which its members, and any other non-member Towns who execute the appropriate agreements, can access the operational, financial and advisory services required for the provision of broadband service to customers. Currently, WiredWest has contracted with Whip City Fiber, owned by Westfield Gas & Electric Department, another municipal light department, to provide Internet and Internet-related services to the Towns’ customers.

The Towns’ fibers are attached to poles owned by Eversource, National Grid and/or jointly with Verizon (“IOUs”). There are approximately 9,777 poles in the Towns that could be impacted by the Department’s actions in this proceeding. Based on current rates paid by the Towns for moving fibers, WiredWest estimates that the Towns could face significant expenses in connection with IOUs having to upgrade poles to accommodate pole-mounted EVSE (*i.e.*, moving fiber). WiredWest submits that the Towns should not be burdened with such costs where they are incurred due to what is essentially an unfunded mandate. Where the Towns have paid for their own fiber networks, and the residents are already paying for the IOUs distribution plant through electric rates, this represents a double burden for all of the Towns’ customers.

Regardless of changes to 220 CMR 45.00 regarding pole and conduit access, all telecommunications providers seeking attachments should be treated equally among IOUs, including in the areas of pole owners’ rates, terms and conditions. Procedures and requirements should not create conflicts with the federal laws or the variety of applicable safety and clearance codes, create a disadvantage to small, municipal telecommunications providers trying to increase broadband access in unserved and underserved areas of Massachusetts or unduly burden those systems financially.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.