

Elson Advocacy

January 19, 2024

BY RESS AND EMAIL

Nancy Marconi

Registrar

Ontario Energy Board

2300 Yonge Street, Suite 2700, P.O. Box 2319

Toronto, Ontario M4P 1E4

Dear Ms. Walli:

**Re: EB-2019-0207 - Distributed Energy Resources Connections Review Initiative
Proposed Amendments to the Distribution System Code to Facilitate
Connection of Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure**

I am writing on behalf of Environmental Defence to provide comments on the proposed amendments to the distribution system code (“DSC”) to facilitate connection of electric vehicle charging infrastructure. Environmental Defence strongly supports these amendments. We also recommend changes to the distributed energy resources connections review process to streamline and strengthen progress on important issues going forward.

DSC Amendments

Environmental Defence strongly supports the proposed amendments to the DSC and, more generally, the OEB’s work to facilitate electric vehicle charging infrastructure connections. Although the *Electric Vehicle Charging Connection Procedures* (EVCCP) is a small step forward, it is an important step forward as it will help charging providers navigate Ontario’s fragmented electricity distribution sector.

We have heard certain distributor representatives oppose the EVCCP, or portions thereof, by arguing that all load connections should be treated exactly the same. This was raised repeatedly in meetings and was used as justification to remove various positive items from the draft EVCCP. This concern should not be used to pare down the EVCCP any further. There are strong reasons for different processes for electric vehicle charging connections, including the following:

- Facilitating electric vehicle charging connections is a government policy priority.
- Ontario is a laggard when it comes to these connections, in part due the fragmentation of our distribution system. Ontario is losing out on investments as some charging providers are leaving Ontario or devoting comparatively fewer resources to Ontario in favour of other jurisdictions with simpler and less expensive connection processes.

- Electric vehicle charging providers are more vulnerable to high connection costs because a greater proportion of their up-front costs are electricity connection costs.
- Electric vehicle charging providers have different and unique needs.
- Decarbonization of Ontario's transportation system requires a faster rollout of electric vehicle charging.

These factors warrant different treatment for electric vehicle charging connections. Indeed, they warrant differences above and beyond what is contained in the EVCCP, which largely reflects existing DSC rules.

Strengthen and Streamline Policy Development

The OEB staff responsible for the DER connections review have been doing extremely good work to move these issues forward. It is obvious from the amount of email traffic and materials that they have been working extremely hard. This hard work could be achieving even greater results if the policy development process was streamlined and strengthened.

In particular, we recommend that the OEB shift this process to the next phase in order to tackle some of the bigger issues that have been tabled in consultations thus far. To address these bigger issues, we recommend that OEB adopt a more traditional policy making process involving a third-party expert on DER connections and a third-party expert on electric vehicle charging connections. Each expert would be tasked with developing a full suite of recommendations to cost-effectively facilitate each of those connection types. This would involve: (a) an initial stakeholder meeting to gather initial input, (b) a draft report with draft recommendations, (c) written comments on the draft recommendations, (d) a final report, (e) written comments to the OEB on the final report, and (f) a final OEB decision. Throughout the process, the third-party consultants would work closely with Board Staff.

This process would have a number of benefits:

- **Expert advice:** The current process relies too heavily on LDCs to provide expert advice. This is a problem when LDCs are short on resources or the issue is one where the best solution is not aligned with LDC interests. Independent expert advice could help to empower the OEB to tackle some of the more difficult issues.
- **Finite time:** The current process has involved repeatedly discussing the same issues and factors. A new process with fixed steps would ensure that issues are dealt with and resolved, ending repeated discussions of the same issues.
- **Adjudication:** The current process has had difficulty in developing policy in areas where there are strong differences of opinion among participants. This has led to a bias in favour of the status quo. The proposed process would overcome this by having an explicit end-point involving an OEB decision.

- **Avoiding lowest-common-denominator:** The current process involves many LDCs. If even a small number of LDCs opposes a change, it becomes very difficult to implement. This can result in lowest-common-denominator outcomes.

We note that there are third-parties that are very well-suited to do this work. For DER connections, that consultant could be the Interstate Renewable Energy Council (IREC), whose work is focused almost entirely on this issue. IREC has worked with utilities across North America to improve their DER connections processes. They would be extremely well-placed to develop a strong set of recommendations. With respect to electric vehicle charging connections, there are consultants available that work with Ontario utilities and with charging providers who would be able to provide a strong set of recommendations, including the consultants responsible for the EVCCP.

The current approach has made important strides forward. However, we are running out of low hanging fruit that can be picked using a process centred on working group discussions and consensus. A move toward the approach we have outlined above would help us take the process to the next level and tackle some of the larger and more difficult issues.

Yours truly,



Kent Elson