



**PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION OF OREGON
STAFF REPORT
PUBLIC MEETING DATE: November 12, 2014**

REGULAR _____ CONSENT X EFFECTIVE DATE _____

DATE: October 23, 2014

TO: Public Utility Commission

FROM: Matt Muldoon 

THROUGH: Jason Eisdorfer and Marc Hellman  

SUBJECT: PORTLAND GENERAL ELECTRIC: (Docket No. UF 4291) Requests authority to issue up to \$400 million of first mortgage bonds and unsecured notes

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends the Commission approve Portland General Electric Company's (PGE or Company) application subject to nine conditions and reporting requirements.

DISCUSSION:

PGE filed an application October 16, 2014, pursuant to ORS Chapter 757 in general and more specifically ORS 757.405, ORS 757.410(1), ORS 757.415, and OARs 860-027-0025 and 860-027-0030 for authority to issue and sell or exchange up to an aggregate amount of \$400 million (M) in long-term First Mortgage Bonds (FMB) and Unsecured Notes having maturities of at least one year.¹ In the context herein, the term "Unsecured Notes" includes both unsecured bonds and unsecured notes, which may be either fixed or floating rate.

Staff supplemented the information provided by the Company in its application that largely provides information through June 30, 2014, with PGE's SEC filings such as its Form 8-K Current Report of October 15, 2014, updating the Company's 2014 bond issuances. Staff also evaluated information provided by PGE with Bloomberg analysis.

¹ Long-term debt as used in this Staff Report and the Company's application denotes debt having a maturity of over one year. Information regarding debt maturities over the 9 month or 270 day maximum maturity of Commercial Paper, but less than one year, is received by Staff for informational purposes only, consistent with ORS 757.415(3).

Staff concludes that, subject to the recommended conditions as provided herein, the proposed issuance satisfies the Commission's criteria and the statutory criteria and recommends that the Commission approve the application. With the exception of an authorized \$80M of 3.51 percent coupon rate bonds that PGE will issue on November 17, 2014, all remaining long-term debt issuance authority granted by prior Commission Orders will automatically terminate when a final order is entered in Docket No. UF 4291 granting PGE's application as modified herein.² Thereafter, except as noted above, FMB and Unsecured Notes may be issued in any proportion and in any combination of differently sized public offerings or private placements provided that the combined total of these offerings does not exceed \$400M, inclusive of any original issue discount (OID).

First Mortgage Bonds (FMB):

PGE represents in its application that it may issue fixed-rate, secured long-term debt in the form of FMB. FMBs have been the traditional debt financing vehicle utilized by utilities in the United States. The Company's FMB place a lien on Company property under its Mortgage and Deed of Trust as amended and supplemented by various supplemental indentures since inception. The lien acts as collateral for bondholders, which in current market conditions results in a higher credit rating than the Company's unsecured rating, and decrease of the coupon rate at issuance, as compared with otherwise similar unsecured debt.

Floating Rate Notes:

Interest rates for floating rate Notes may be periodically reset based on a fixed spread over 1-, 2-, 3-, or 6-month London Interbank Offering Rates (LIBOR) as reported on Bloomberg. In no case will the fixed spread over pertinent LIBOR exceed 1.5 percent. In the unlikely event that LIBOR is not reported or is unavailable, the parties may use a rate from another recognized source or a rate agreed to by the parties intended to approximate LIBOR.³

Credit Ratings:

PGE's FMB are currently rated as:

² The termination of prior authority to issue bonds or notes under prior orders is consistent with the Company's application, page 1, paragraph 1.

³ See the bottom of page 8 of the Company's application.

Moody's: A1

S&P: A-

PGE's Unsecured Long-Term Debt is currently rated as:

Moody's: A3

S&P: BBB

In general, the interest rate or coupon is higher for unsecured debt because the unsecured ratings are typically one or two notches less than secured ratings. Debt issued in the private placement market may be advantageous since it provides flexibility of timing and size, and lower issuance costs. Private placements generally do not require rating by rating agencies.⁴ But, they do have an implied rating based on the Company's current ratings.

Staff Recommendation Regarding Authorization of Longer than 30-Year Maturities:

The Company requests that authority be granted to allow FMB and Unsecured Notes to have a maturity of up to 45 years.⁵ Confidential benchmarking by Staff indicates that up to 45-year issuances at reasonable costs may be available to PGE. Such longer maturities may lock in historically low coupon rates while reducing pressure on the Company's debt maturity profile. Therefore, Staff's recommended Conditions are silent regarding maximum maturity, permitting longer than 30-year maturities when prudent and cost effective.

Broad Hedging Authority Requested and Conditionally Authorized:

PGE requests authority directly or constructively to engage in interest rate hedging arrangements with respect to bond issuances, including treasury interest rate locks, treasury interest rate caps, treasury interest rate collars, treasury options, forward starting interest rate swaps, and swap option combinations (swaptions). The Company does not claim, and Staff has seen no evidence, that any of the above options are necessary or cost effective in comparison to a delayed issuance in private placement at this time. However, the Company wishes to maintain flexibility for possible future hedging activity relating to FMB or Unsecured Notes.

Performing The Company's Own Hedging Analysis:

The Company recognizes that it should either conduct its own analysis of proposed hedging transactions, or use independent third party analysis, in addition to evaluating an investment bank's indicative analysis. PGE agrees with Staff as memorialized here that before entering into a hedging arrangement for the FMB or Unsecured Notes, it will

⁴ PGE indicates that debt in private placement may not be rated and registered on page 10 of its application.

⁵ See Application page 9.

perform “its own” in-depth analysis of incremental risks and costs represented by hedging, or rely on independent third party analysis.

Staff Recommendation Regarding Hedging: Proposed hedges should be benchmarked against alternatives inclusive of no hedge and delayed start in private placement, addressing outcomes under potential outlier events as well as most likely outcomes. Hedging analyses may be informed by, but should not solely rely on investment bank provided materials. The analyses should place minimal weight on unverified indicative data, and select range of years “snapshot” trend analysis. The hedging analyses should clearly identify material assumptions and answer the question: “Who wins and who loses, how much money, if assumptions and correlations do not hold true?” The analyses may rely on third party quantitative cost and risk analysis provided by a directly retained independent third party expert firm not associated with investment banks and not in the business of finding or acting as hedging counterparties.

The hedging analyses should capture contemporaneous cost quotes for hedging products, customized to allow the Company to avoid taking on incremental cost and risk in excess of the underlying volatility the Company strives to manage, inclusive of swaps with asymmetric distribution of outcome tails that trade some likelihood of surplus upside potential gain for elimination of downside risk should hedging assumptions and expected correlations not hold true. The analyses should also disaggregate any vanilla swaps and standardized hedging product from bond and debt securities issuances, and compare the cost of those products sourced via investment banks against the cost of exchange traded derivatives.

The Company asserts here that it will draw upon experience gained from previous hedging transactions to control the cost of like future hedging activity, in part to reduce the costs of customized hedging arrangements, including investment bank fees and legal costs of delayed starts in private placements.

PGE also represents that its hedging policy is a general outline and not an analytic evaluation tool that can be relied upon in lieu of the Company’s own case-by-case analysis of whether to enter into a hedge. In addition, the Company hedging policy allows for multiple accounting methods, and the Company represents that the hedging policy is not an after-the-fact evaluative tool that measures the cost vs. benefit of the hedge and determines the extent to which it managed underlying volatility. Thus the Company represents here that it will: 1) perform its own analysis prior to entering into any hedging; 2) monitor active hedges for unfavorable developments; and 3) carry out after-the-fact hedging evaluations from a rigorous and practical financial operations perspective, understanding that this perspective will not be the same as accounting tests of effectiveness. For all hedging activity, other than delayed start in private placement with de minimis incremental cost and risk, PGE will maintain its analysis in a MS Excel spreadsheet form that can be provided to Staff on request. PGE will maintain

this analysis at least through the conclusion of its next general rate case in Oregon after each financial hedge is completed or unwound.

Staff Recommendation Regarding Spreads Over U.S. Treasuries' (UST) Yields:

PGE's requested "Maximum Spreads over Benchmark Treasury Yields" on page 8 of its Application are replaced by values shown in Attachment A to this memorandum. Staff's recommended values in Attachment A are based in part on Bloomberg data summarized by the graphs in Attachment C. Limits shown in Attachment A allow adequate headroom for the Company to issue FMB and debt securities under financial market conditions anticipated by the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System over the next several years.⁶

Further, Staff sees few if any recent U.S. utility bond issuances with 15-, 20-, or 25-year maturities. When those unutilized maturities are removed from Attachment C, Staff's recommended spread over UST provides adequate headroom for the Company's likely 10-year or less, and 30-year FMB or Unsecured Note issuances.

Underwriter and Agent Fees:

Appendix A also shows Staff's recommendation regarding the maximum range of allowed agent and underwriting commissions for issuances. Underwriters' commissions represent the maximum commission to be paid by the Company and vary depending on the maturity of the Debt Securities issued (e.g., 0.875 percent is estimated to be the fees for issuances with maturity dates of approximately 30 years). Shorter maturities typically require lower commissions than do longer maturities.

Staff's recommended limits on underwriting commissions are stated in basis points (bps) or percentages of aggregate issuance amounts. Under Staff's recommendations, underwriting commissions will not in any case exceed 0.875 percent of gross proceeds (approximately \$3.5M in aggregate across the requested authorization).⁷

Other Technical Expenses:

After netting-out issuance fees as illustrated in Attachment B,⁸ the Company expects to achieve approximately \$396M in aggregate net proceeds, not including any OID determined at the time of issuance.

⁶ Staff accessed the materials of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, minutes of the Open Market Committee released for the meeting of September 16-17, 2014, released October 8, 2014 at <http://www.federalreserve.gov/monetarypolicy/fomccalendars.htm>.

⁷ See page 11 of the Company's Application, part (j).

⁸ Attachment B sets out PGE's Estimated Representative Issuance Expenses for the FMB and Unsecured Notes issuances.

Representative aggregate fees and charges in Attachment B are higher than for recent benchmark issuances.⁹ The Company may issue multiple separate sets of FMB or Unsecured Notes spread out over time rather than a single set of coordinated issuances within the same quarter. However, PGE stands ready to show that issuance costs were consistent with component costs for like stand-alone issuances in future audits or general rate cases.

Hard Cap Alternative:

Should all-in spreads exceed the relevant maximum spread over UST set forth in Attachment A, the Company may still issue FMB or Unsecured Notes without further Commission approval if the all-in rate does not exceed a "hard cap" of 6.0 percent, subject to additional reporting requirements outlined in Condition 6.¹⁰ A 6.0 percent all-in rate "hard cap" allows adequate headroom to assure Company access to debt markets, while providing reasonable cost controls to protect ratepayers.¹¹

Additionally, the Company may incur a new prevailing fee(s), not to exceed an aggregate 10 basis points of affected principal. PGE's next reporting to the Commission should include materials to demonstrate that this cost was new and market-pervasive at time of issuance. This flexibility addresses the potential for an additional fee(s) or charge(s) by investment banks, agents, organizers, or other parties that is not part of itemized bond issuance costs routinely encountered in October 2014 bond markets.

Use of Proceeds:

The Company states that it may use proceeds for any or all of the following purposes:

1. Construction, facility improvement, and maintenance programs;
2. Retire or exchange outstanding stock, bond, note, or other debt issuances;
3. Reimburse Company treasury for funds previously expended; and
4. Other purposes, as may be permitted by law.

PGE had \$1.795 billion of FMB and \$121.4M of Pollution Control Revenue Bonds outstanding as of June 30, 2014. By the end of November, the Company will have also

⁹ Staff captured 2014 debt issuance detail reported by the Wall Street Journal, Bloomberg and SNL Financial LC, for electric utilities that Value Line covers, including PGE.

¹⁰ See the definition for "All-in Cost" by browsing to the lower right corner of the Commission's home webpage at: <http://www.puc.state.or.us/Pages/index.aspx>. Then, click the Quick Link: "Standard Data Requests for Energy Rate Cases" and scroll to page 32, "Terms."

¹¹ See the bottom of page 7 of the Company's application.

issued another \$280M of long-term debt. Authorization as requested will allow PGE to repay or replace maturing debt shown on page 5 of its application.

There is no single specific large project planned, which this issuance authority would support. Rather the entire \$400M debt would support usual utility purposes as described above, consistent with statutory requirements.¹² In addition approval of the Company's application as modified herein allows PGE to make best fiscal use of its outstanding equity forward. In general, ratepayers benefit to the extent that the Company can optimize timing and cost of financing cash flows to meet utility needs described above.

Early Redemption Features Are Authorized:

PGE may utilize an early redemption feature to provide financial flexibility. In addition, the Company will stand ready to demonstrate how any early redemption executed was cost effective based on prevailing market conditions at the time of execution. Shorter maturity debt may be more cost effective in the near term until PGE financial metrics allow for the issuance of additional FMB.¹³

A make-whole redemption feature allows an issuer to call bonds at any time at a cost equal to the future debt service discounted back to the redemption date. Such provisions are usual and generally to ratepayers benefit. The discount rate for a make-whole provision within a call feature is likely be a rate based on the prevailing treasury yield to current maturity plus fewer than 50 basis points. This type of redemption does not typically require the issuer to pay a higher coupon or fee since the bond holder is effectively made whole.

The Company may also choose to implement other redemption features that would allow PGE an option to call FMB or Unsecured Notes in the future at a rate determined at the time of issue. The redemption rate can be set at par or at some premium and is dictated by market conditions at the time of sale. These types of call provisions usually require that the issuer pay a higher coupon or interest rate to compensate the bondholder for the risk that their bonds may be called prior to maturity. Such provisions may also require a breakage fee or indemnification for any loss or costs.

Capital Structure:

PGE roughly targets a long-term 50/50 Debt/Equity capital structure. The ability to issue both equity and debt should allow the Company to achieve this target over time.

¹² The Company's intended uses mirror those authorized in ORS 757.415(1).

¹³ Multiple 2013 forced outages temporarily impaired PGE's interest coverage in the first half of 2014. Granting PGE the ability to issue Unsecured Notes is supportive of recent upgrades to the Company's credit ratings.

An order authorizing the Company to issue FMB and Unsecured Debt in the form and quantity requested would refresh PGE's authorization to issue long-term debt consistent with the Company's current utility obligations. Such authorization also lets PGE control costs by drawing on the more cost effective of debt or equity over the next year.

Selection of Agents:

Selection of agents, underwriters, and external counsel may include entities associated with the Company's outstanding debt based in part on knowledge of the Company's business, and proven ability to place debt, and to provide cost effective services. The Company may select additional service providers for the issuance of the FMB and/or Unsecured Notes as it deems appropriate.

Consistent with UE 283 Stipulations:

PGE may lock in current attractive rates in 2014 for issuance and sale of securities in 2015, through the use of a delayed start in the private placement market, but does not plan to issue and fund additional long-term debt in 2014. Due to revision in working capital, other forecasted cash flows and timing of capital expense spending, PGE now asks for greater authority going into 2015 than the \$125M projected earlier in the UE 283 general rate case. However, tenure of the Company's planned issuances for 2015 is entirely 10-year or greater. PGE also has flexibility regarding timing of draw down on its equity forward. Staff's perspective is that PGE's requested authority, as modified and conditioned herein, is not inconsistent with stipulation provisions in Docket No. UE 283 titled S-0, Capital Structure and Cost of Debt.¹⁴

No Harm:

Staff review of this application indicates that the FMB issuance requested will do no harm and can be expected to benefit ratepayers. The Company wants the flexibility to engage in other activities that may not be demonstrated to be necessary or cost effective at this time, but that may be cost effective some years into the future. PGE agrees that the Company will perform its own case-by-case in-house analysis or retain its own independent third-party experts to ensure that ratepayers bear no unnecessary incremental cost or risk from activities beyond vanilla FMB or Unsecured Note issuance with delayed start in private placement. Based on that representation, not on Company hedging or accounting policies, Staff recommends approval of PGE's application as modified by this report.

¹⁴ PGE provided a teleconference update of its planned long-term debt issuances to Staff on the morning of Thursday, October 23, 2014.

The Company has reviewed and agrees with this memo including the Staff proposed conditions and reporting requirements.

PROPOSED COMMISSION MOTION:

The Company's application for authority to issue up to \$400M of First Mortgage Bonds and Unsecured Notes be approved with the conditions and reporting requirements 1-9 listed below:

1. Authorization Limit

Total aggregate bonds and notes issued, sold, or exchanged under this authority shall not exceed \$400M.

Note: If the bonds and notes are issued at an OID not to exceed one percent, such greater amount shall result in an aggregate offering price of not more than \$400M.

2. Withdrawal of Prior Authorization

All prior Commission's FMB and debt securities issuance authorizations will automatically terminate upon the issuance of a Commission's Order in UF 4291 approving PGE's Application to issue FMB and Unsecured Notes up to the limits shown in Condition 1 with the single exception of \$80M of 3.51 percent coupon rate bonds due in 2024 to be issued approximately November 17, 2014.

3. Cost Requirements

Subsequent to an authorizing Commission order pursuant to this application, the Company may issue FMB and Unsecured Notes without further Commission approval provided that proceeds are used for lawful utility purposes, and provided either:

- A. All-in rate spread(s) over yield(s) on like maturity UST do not exceed limits set forth in Attachment A. Interest rates on the Unsecured Notes may be periodically reset based on a fixed spread over 1-, 2-, 3-, or 6-month London Interbank Offering Rates (LIBOR) as reported on Bloomberg, Reuters, or other customary LIBOR sources. In no case for Unsecured Notes will the fixed spread over pertinent LIBOR exceed 1.5 percent. In the unlikely event that LIBOR is not reported or is unavailable, the parties may use a rate from another recognized source or a rate agreed to by the parties intended to approximate LIBOR; or
- B. The all-in rate does not exceed a 6.0 percent "hard cap." However, the agreements related to FMBs and Unsecured Notes may contain customary or market terms and conditions required by lenders or holders, including without

limitation, yield protection, capital adequacy requirements and tax indemnification, that will not be included in the hard cap.

Both "A" and "B" above incorporate the restriction that all costs of any hedging associated with any issuance under the authority requested must be accomplished within the all-in spreads or rate specified above.

The Company may also incur a new prevailing fee(s) (Unanticipated Fee Allowance), not to exceed an aggregate 10 basis points of affected principal. Such Unanticipated Fee Allowance is in addition to the hard caps described above. The Company should include materials in its next reporting to the Commission demonstrating that this cost was new and market pervasive at issuance.

4. Hedging Limitations

Authorization to enter into Interest Rate Hedging Arrangements as requested is predicated upon the Company's completion of the Company's own affirmative comprehensive analysis or use of independent third-party analysis. Regardless of any prevailing hedging and accounting policies, and regardless of the presence of associated materials generated by investment banks or hedge counterparties, prior to executing any hedging or financial derivative agreement, other than a delayed issuance arrangement of up to one year under a private placement at de minimis incremental cost and at no incremental risk, the Company will perform its own comprehensive analysis¹⁵ regarding hedging costs, benefits and risks, or will obtain expert advice from an entity not associated with investment banks and not offering hedging contracts. The Company will stand ready to present its hedging analysis to the Commission upon request and will maintain its analysis as described in the body of this report.

5. Cost Competitive

Agent and underwriting commissions for the issuance of FMB will not exceed the fees as shown in Attachment A, and will not in any case exceed 0.875 percent of gross proceeds. The Company shall demonstrate for all debt issuances and associated activities that the Company achieved all-in rates that contemporaneously were both competitive and cost effective.

6. Timely Reporting

A. The Company will promptly provide a written summary notice through the PUC filing center and through email directly to PUC Staff named on the service list for this docket of any issuance or execution of a bond purchase and sale agreement with a delayed issuance feature occurring under an Order pursuant

¹⁵ See "Performing The Company's Own Hedging Analysis" on page 3 of this report.

to this application. A summary notice need only show series name, maturity, coupon rate, principal, and agreement date.

- B. The Company will also provide the Commission with the customary Report of Securities Issued and Disposition of Net Proceeds statements (Reports) no later than 30 calendar days after any transaction has been closed and funded. Reporting denominated in U.S. dollars will include, but not be limited to: total value of the issuance; total and per unit fees and expenses (including external legal costs); interest costs; credit ratings; and an explanation of the Company's choice and cost of placement. To the extent that fees, expenses, and invoices are not available within the 30-day period, they will be provided to the Commission in final Reports within 120 days after the transaction has been closed and funded.
- C. For each securities issuance under condition 3-B, the Company shall report to the Commission within 30 calendar days after any transaction is closed and funded regarding the prevailing market conditions and if applicable, the causes for all-in spreads exceeding the relevant spreads specified in Attachment A over the UST benchmark yields.

7. Termination of Authority

The Company's authorization to issue FMB and Unsecured Notes granted by an Order issued pursuant to this application is terminated if either S&P's or Moody's credit rating for PGE secured debt falls below Investment Grade.¹⁶

8. Authorization End Date(s)

Provided all conditions and reporting requirements are fulfilled, authorization under an Order issued pursuant to this application will remain in effect until superseded or exhausted. Hedging authority ends when securities issuance authority ends.

9. Reservation of Judgment Regarding Reasonableness

The Commission will reserve judgment on the reasonableness for ratemaking purposes of the Company's capital costs, capital structure, and the commissions and expenses incurred for security issuance and related activities.

¹⁶ Investment grade long-term debt is rated BBB- or better by S&P, or Baa3 or better by Moody's. Staff does not foresee a loss of ratepayer perceived protection or value absent ratings by Fitch.

Attachment A

Maximum Allowable Agent and Underwriter Commissions & All-in Spread over UST Yields for FMB and Unsecured Notes in Normal Market Conditions

Maturity		Maximum Underwriters Commission	Long-Term Debt Annual Spread	
At Least	But Less Than		FMB	Unsecured Notes
Years		Basis Points (bps)		
1	1.5	12.5	100	140
1.5	2	15		
2	3	25		
3	4	35		
4	5	45		
5	6	50		
6	7	55	110	150
7	10	60		
10	15	62.5		
15	20	67.5	170	210
20	30	75		
30	46	87.5		

Note: Comparing Bloomberg data¹⁷ for like rated utility bonds, Staff finds that the above limitations provide access to capital with reasonable headroom for likely combinations of issuances in public, and private placement with delayed start at no or minimal incremental cost that could be beneficial to ratepayers, over at least the next two years.

¹⁷ Staff referenced Bloomberg FMB and Unsecured USD indexed data on April 9, 2014.

Attachment B

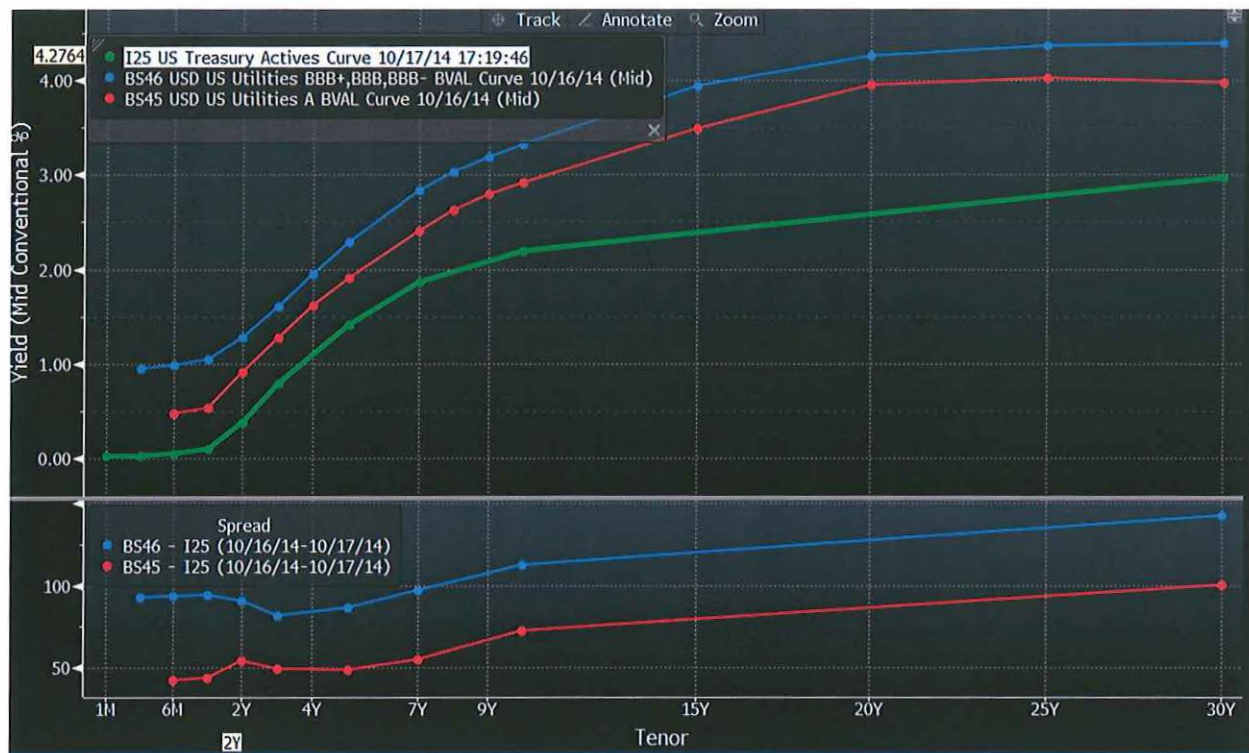
PGE Estimated Representative Issuance Expenses

Item	Debt Securities	
	\$	Per \$100
Principal Amount (Face Value)	\$400,000,000	\$100
Plus Premium or Less Discount	(Not Applicable)	
Gross Proceeds	\$400,000,000	\$100
Underwriter Spread & Commissions	3,500,000	\$ 0.875
SEC Registration	15,000	
Printing & Engraving	30,000	
Trustee Charges	25,000	
(Independent Public) Accounting	40,000	
Rating Agency	100,000	
Legal	150,000	
Total Deductions	3,860,000	\$ 0.965
Estimated Realized Net Amount	\$396,140,000	\$ 99.035

Attachment C

Bloomberg Current Utility Values and Spreads

Accessed by Staff on October 17, 2014



Referent Points of Interest:

10 Year Maturity Range from **A rated 73 bps** to B rated 112 bps
30 Year Maturity Range from **A rated 101 bps** to B rated 142 bps