Q. (Reference Application Schedule B, pages 57 and 58 of 98) It is stated that the Distribution Feeder Automation (pooled) project cannot be deferred. Why is NP continuing deployment of automated equipment rather than automating all distribution feeders immediately, or for that matter, why hasn't all automation already been completed given that it cannot be deferred?

A. Increasing the level of automation at the distribution feeder level increases the efficiency of operations under both normal and emergency conditions by enhancing the Company's response to outages. This in turn improves service to the Company's customers. Distribution feeder automation has become commonplace in modern utility operations. Utilities are employing automated equipment in their distribution systems with the most common being downline reclosers.[1]

The Company described its strategy for the installation of downline automated distribution equipment over a multi-year horizon in report *4.5 Distribution Feeder Automation* filed as part of the Company's *2020 Capital Budget Application*. The report detailed a plan to install an average of 15 downline automated reclosers per year on select feeders for the 2020-2024 period. The device locations and deployment configurations of the automated equipment to be installed as part of the plan are evaluated annually for inclusion in the Company's capital budget application.[2] The alternative of automating all distribution feeders immediately is not considered as part of the Company's plan.

The deployment of automated distribution equipment in this manner will provide the Company more flexibility in the operation of the distribution system. This includes: (i) reducing the overall number of customers who experience an outage; (ii) the more timely restoration of feeders following extended outages; and (iii) more efficient use of line crews and operation field staff in responding to customer outages.

[1] A recent Centre for Energy Advancement through Technological Innovation report titled *Grid Modernization: A Snapshot*, identified that 18 of 21 utilities surveyed have employed automated downline reclosers in their distribution systems.

[2] The selection of device locations and configurations will be dependent upon various feeder characteristics such as the number of customers, feeder load and geographic area.