

DIRECT TESTIMONY

of

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Financial Analysis Division
Illinois Commerce Commission

North Shore Gas Company and
The Peoples Gas Light and Coke Company

Proposed general increase in rates for gas service

Docket Nos. 07-0241 and 07-0242
(Consolidated)

June 29, 2007

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WITNESS IDENTIFICATION

Q. Please state your name and business address.

A. My name is Janis Freetly. My business address is 527 East Capitol Avenue, Springfield, Illinois 62701.

Q. What is your current position with the Illinois Commerce Commission (“Commission”)?

A. I am currently employed as a Senior Financial Analyst in the Finance Department of the Financial Analysis Division.

Q. Please describe your qualifications and background.

A. In May of 1995, I earned a Bachelor of Business degree from Western Illinois University. I received a Master of Business Administration degree, with a concentration in Finance, from Western Illinois University in May of 1998. I have been employed by the Commission since September of 1998. I was promoted to Senior Financial Analyst on August 31, 2001.

Q. What is the purpose of your testimony in this proceeding?

A. The purpose of my testimony is to present the overall cost of capital and to recommend a fair rate of return on rate base for North Shore Gas Company (“North Shore”) and The Peoples Gas Light and Coke Company (“Peoples Gas”) (individually, the “Company” and collectively, the “Companies”). The overall cost of capital that I recommend for each Company incorporates the rate of return on

21 common equity recommended in the direct testimony of Staff witness Sheena
22 Kight-Garlich (ICC Staff Exhibit 6.0).

23 **Q. Please explain the P and N suffixes that appear in your schedule numbers.**

24 A. Schedules with the suffix "P" relate to Peoples Gas and schedules with the "N"
25 suffix relate to North Shore.

26 **COST OF CAPITAL**

27 **Q. Please summarize your findings.**

28 A. I recommend an overall cost of capital for North Shore of 7.68% and an overall
29 cost of capital for Peoples Gas of 7.47%. The overall costs of capital for the
30 Companies are shown on Schedule 5.1.

31 **Q. Why must one determine an overall cost of capital for a public utility?**

32 A. Under the traditional regulatory model, ratepayer and shareholder interests are
33 balanced when the Commission authorizes a rate of return on rate base equal to
34 the public utility's overall cost of capital, as long as that overall cost of capital is
35 not unnecessarily expensive. If the authorized rate of return exceeds the cost of
36 capital, then ratepayers bear the burden of excessive prices. Conversely, if the
37 authorized rate of return is lower than the overall cost of capital, the financial
38 strength of the utility could deteriorate, making it difficult for the utility to raise
39 capital at a reasonable cost. Ultimately, the utility's inability to raise sufficient
40 capital would impair service quality. Therefore, ratepayer interests are best

41 served when the authorized rate of return on rate base equals the utility's overall
42 cost of capital.

43 In authorizing a rate of return on rate base equal to the overall cost of capital, all
44 costs of service are assumed reasonable and accurately measured, including the
45 costs and balances of the components of the capital structure. If unreasonable
46 costs continue to be incurred, or if any reasonable cost of service component is
47 measured inaccurately, then the allowed rate of return on rate base will not
48 balance ratepayer and investor interests.

49 **Q. Please define the overall cost of capital for a public utility.**

50 A. The overall cost of capital for a public utility equals the sum of the costs of the
51 components of the capital structure (i.e., debt, preferred stock and common
52 equity) after weighting each by its proportion to total capital.

53 **Cost of Long-term Debt**

54 **Q. What is North Shore's embedded cost of long-term debt?**

55 A. As shown on Schedule 5.2N, North Shore's embedded cost of long-term debt for
56 September 30, 2006 equals 5.37%.

57 **Q. What is Peoples Gas' embedded cost of long-term debt?**

58 A. As shown on Schedule 5.2P, Peoples Gas' embedded cost of long-term debt for
59 September 30, 2006 equals 4.64%.

60 **Q. Do the embedded costs of long-term debt presented by North Shore and**
61 **Peoples Gas reflect the stand-alone financial strength of the utility**
62 **Companies?**

63 A. No, the costs of long-term debt presented by North Shore and Peoples Gas
64 reflect the current A- Standard & Poor's ("S&P") credit ratings for the Companies.
65 S&P downgraded the credit ratings of the Companies to A- from AA- on
66 September 26, 2002.¹ Staff witness Sheena Kight-Garlich testified that
67 affiliation with unregulated or non-utility companies adversely affected North
68 Shore's and Peoples Gas' credit ratings. (ICC Staff Exhibit 6.0, pp. 21-22) My
69 understanding is that, in determining a reasonable rate of return for establishing
70 rates, Section 9-230 of the Public Utilities Act prohibits the inclusion of any
71 incremental risk or increased cost of capital, which is the direct or indirect result
72 of the public utility's affiliation with unregulated or nonutility companies. Since
73 one of the outstanding debt series of North Shore and most of the outstanding
74 debt series of Peoples Gas were issued after this downgrade occurred and the
75 downgrade was due to the utility's affiliation with unregulated companies, the
76 costs associated with such issues need to be adjusted to eliminate the increased
77 cost associated with the lower rating.

¹ Standard & Poor's Ratings Direct - Research, North Shore Gas' Ratings Lowered; Outlook Stable, September 26, 2002; Peoples Gas Light & Coke's Ratings Cut; Outlook Stable, September 26, 2002.

78 **Q. What adjustments did you make to the embedded cost of long term debt**
79 **presented by North Shore in its Schedule D-3 to reflect the stronger level of**
80 **financial strength of the utility on a stand alone basis?**

81 A. North Shore issued the Series N-2 bonds on April 29, 2003, after the utility was
82 downgraded to A-. Therefore, I adjusted the interest rate to reflect the spread
83 between bonds rated Aa and A to represent the lower interest rate that would
84 have been obtained for the Series N-2 bonds had the downgrade not occurred.²
85 In April 2003, long-term utility bond yields averaged 6.47% for Aa rated bonds
86 and 6.64% for A rated bonds, resulting in a 0.17% spread.³ Since credit spread
87 is usually a direct function of term to maturity (i.e., as term to maturity increases,
88 credit spread tends to increase as well), I halved the 0.17% credit spread on
89 long-term bond yields to 0.085% to adjust the interest rate on the ten-year Series
90 N-2 bonds. As shown on Schedule 5.2N, this adjustment lowered the interest
91 rate on the Series N-2 bonds to 4.54% from 4.625%.⁴

92 **Q. What adjustments did you make to the embedded cost of long term debt**
93 **presented by Peoples Gas in its Schedule D-3 to reflect the stronger level**
94 **of financial strength of the utility on a stand alone basis?**

² Moody's Aa rating is equivalent to Standard & Poor's AA rating.

³ Mergent Bond Record, May 2003, Corporate Bond Yield Averages. This report provided the best available proxy for the adjustment.

⁴ Although the adjustment to the cost of the Series N-2 bonds is small, I understand that the Commission is obligated to remove the entire increase to a utility's cost of capital resulting from its affiliation with unregulated and non-utility companies, regardless of the magnitude of that increase.

95 A. Peoples Gas issued the Series MM-2 bonds on February 27, 2003 and the
96 Series NN-2 bonds on April 29, 2003. Since both of these bonds were issued
97 after the downgrade, the interest rates must be adjusted to reflect the lower risk
98 of the utilities on a stand-alone basis. Since the Series NN-2 was issued on the
99 same date as the Series N-2 of North Shore, I applied the same 0.085%
100 adjustment to the interest rate on the Series NN-2 bonds. As shown on
101 Schedule 5.2P, this adjustment lowered the interest rate on the Series NN-2
102 bonds to 4.54% from 4.625%.

103 For the Series MM-2 bonds, I used the long-term utility bond yield averages for
104 February 2003 when Aa rated utility bond yields were 6.66% and A rated utility
105 bond yields were 6.93%, resulting in a 0.27% spread.⁵ Since the utility bond
106 yields were for bonds with longer terms to maturity than the seven-year Series
107 MM-2 bonds and credit spreads tend to increase as term to maturity increases, I
108 subtracted half of the spread ($0.27\%/2 = 0.135\%$) to adjust the interest rate on
109 the Series N-2 bonds. As shown on Schedule 5.2P, this adjustment lowered the
110 interest rate on the Series MM-2 bonds to 3.87% from 4.00%.

111 **Q. Did you adjust any other bonds for Peoples Gas to reflect the lower risk of**
112 **the utility on a stand alone basis?**

113 A. Yes. The Series KK, LL, OO, PP, QQ and RR bonds of Peoples Gas were
114 issued as insured tax-exempt bonds to the Illinois Development Finance
115 Authority ("IDFA"). The repayment of the principal and interest on the bonds

116 issued to the IDFA is secured by an insurance policy, purchased by Peoples
117 Gas. As a consequence of that insurance, the IDFA bonds are rated AAA. All
118 six bond series were issued after the rating downgrade and therefore reflect the
119 increased risk of the unregulated affiliates. Had Peoples Gas' credit ratings not
120 been downgraded, the insurance premium would have been lower since Peoples
121 Gas would have posed less credit risk to the insurers of the bonds. Therefore, I
122 reduced the recoverable insurance fees for each of the issues and the
123 associated annual amortization of those fees to reflect the lower credit risk had
124 Peoples Gas' rating remained AA-.

125 **Q. Please explain how you reflected your proposal to reduce the recoverable**
126 **portion of the insurance fees in the costs of the Series KK, LL, OO, PP, QQ**
127 **and RR bonds of Peoples Gas.**

128 A. I began with the total amount of the insurance fee paid by Peoples Gas on each
129 tax-exempt series and subtracted amortization through September 30, 2006.⁶ I
130 then reduced the September 30, 2006 unamortized debt expense balance by
131 half,⁷ which thereby reduced the amortization of debt expense by the amount

⁵ Mergent Bond Record, May 2003, Corporate Bond Yield Averages. This report provided the best available proxy for the adjustment.

⁶ Reports filed pursuant to 83 Ill. Adm. Code 240, Docket No. 03-0066, Final Report for Series LL, November 30, 2005; Docket No. 01-0655, Twenty-Second Report for Series KK, May 29, 2007; Docket No. 03-0548, Final Report for Series OO, PP and QQ, November 30, 2005; Docket No. 04-0711, Final Report for Series RR, May 30, 2006.

⁷ Reducing the insurance fee by half approximates the insurance premiums that would have been paid had Peoples Gas' rating at the time of issuance been AA- instead of A-. This adjustment reflects my judgment, since I can not be certain of the amount of the insurance premium had the downgrade not occurred. In rebuttal testimony, the Companies may be able to provide better estimates of what the insurance premium would have been had the downgrade not occurred.

132 attributed to that portion of the insurance fee. This adjustment reduced the
133 embedded cost of debt for Peoples Gas as demonstrated on Schedule 5.2P.

134 **Q. What other changes did you make to the embedded cost of long term debt**
135 **presented by Peoples Gas in its Schedule D-3?**

136 A. The interest rates on the Series OO and PP bonds are adjustable based on an
137 auction rate. The interest rates presented on Schedule D-3 by Peoples Gas for
138 the Series OO and PP are based on the auction rate in effect at September 30,
139 2006. I updated those interest rates to reflect the auction rate that would have
140 been in effect on the stock price measurement date (April 25, 2007) used by Staff
141 witness Sheena Kight-Garlich in her cost of equity analysis. For the Series OO
142 bonds, I used the 3.70% auction rate that was set at the April 25, 2007 auction.⁸
143 For the Series PP bonds, I used the 3.66% auction rate that was set at the March
144 28, 2007 auction.⁹

145 CAPITAL STRUCTURE

146 **Q. What capital structure did the Companies propose for setting rates?**

147 A. North Shore and Peoples Gas each propose imputed capital structures
148 comprised of 44% long-term debt and 56% common equity.¹⁰ On September 30,
149 2006, the actual capital structure of North Shore was comprised of 40% long-

⁸ Peoples Gas Response to Staff Data Request JF-5.01.

⁹ Peoples Gas Response to Staff Data Request JF-5.01.

¹⁰ North Shore Schedule D-1; Peoples Gas Schedule D-1.

150 term debt and 60% common equity and the actual capital structure of Peoples
151 Gas was comprised of 43% long-term debt and 57% common equity.¹¹

152 **Q. How does capital structure affect the overall cost of capital?**

153 A. Capital structure affects the value of a firm and, therefore, its cost of capital, to
154 the extent it affects the expected level of cash flows that accrue to parties other
155 than debt and stock holders. Employing debt as a source of capital reduces a
156 company's income taxes,¹² thereby reducing the cost of capital; however, as
157 reliance on debt as a source of capital increases, so does the probability of
158 default. As the probability of default rises, expected payments to attorneys,
159 trustees, and other outside parties increase. Further, the expected cash flows
160 decline as the company foregoes investment that would have been available to it
161 had its financial condition been stronger, including the expected value of the
162 income tax shield from debt financing. Beyond a certain point, a growing
163 dependence on debt as a source of funds increases the overall cost of capital.
164 Therefore, the Commission should not determine the overall rate of return from a
165 utility's actual capital structure if the Commission concludes that capital structure
166 adversely affects the overall cost of capital.

¹¹ Direct Testimony of Bradley A. Johnson, Peoples Gas Ex. BAJ-1.1 and North Shore Ex. BAJ-1.1.

¹² The tax advantage debt has over equity at the corporate level is partially offset at the individual investor level. Debt investors receive returns largely in the form of current income (i.e., interest). In contrast, equity investors receive returns in the form of both current income (i.e., dividends) and capital appreciation (i.e., capital gains). Taxes on common dividends and capital gains are lower than taxes on interest income because common dividends and capital gains tax rates are lower, and taxes on capital gains are deferred until realized.

167 An optimal capital structure would minimize the cost of capital and maintain a
168 utility's financial integrity. Unfortunately, determining whether a capital structure
169 is optimal remains problematic because (1) the cost of capital is a continuous
170 function of the capital structure, rendering its precise measurement along each
171 segment of the range of possible capital structures problematic; (2) the optimal
172 capital structure is a function of operating risk, which is dynamic; and (3) the
173 relative costs of the different types of capital vary with dynamic market
174 conditions. Consequently, one should determine whether the capital structure is
175 consistent with the financial strength necessary to access the capital markets
176 under most economic conditions, and if so, whether the cost of that financial
177 strength is reasonable.

178 **Q. How did you evaluate the Companies' capital structures?**

179 A. I compared the debt ratio from the proposed capital structure for the Companies
180 to Standard & Poor's benchmark total debt to total capital ratio, which is
181 published by business profile score and credit rating. S&P currently assigns
182 North Shore and Peoples Gas issuer credit ratings of A- and business profile
183 scores of 3. According to S&P, the benchmark range for the total debt to total
184 capital ratio for utilities with a business profile score of 3 is 50% to 55% for A-
185 rated utilities and 42% to 50% for AA-rated utilities.¹³ The 44% total debt to total
186 capital ratio proposed by both North Shore and Peoples Gas lies within the range

¹³ Standard & Poor's Ratings Direct, "New Business Profile Scores Assigned for U.S. Utility and Power Companies; Financial Guidelines Revised," June 2, 2004.

187 for AA-rated utilities. According to S&P, an obligor rated AA has a very strong
188 capacity to meets its financial commitments.

189 Further, I considered Ms. Kight-Garlich's analysis of the effect of Staff's
190 proposed revenue requirement on the other two S&P benchmark ratios, funds
191 from operations interest coverage and funds from operations as a percentage of
192 average debt. Ms. Kight-Garlich concludes that under Staff's proposed revenue
193 requirement, the financial strength is commensurate with an AA rating for North
194 Shore and an AA- rating for Peoples Gas. The above suggests that the
195 Companies capital structures are commensurate with a strong degree of financial
196 strength.

197 **Q. Does a 56% common equity ratio result in an excessively expensive overall**
198 **cost of capital?**

199 A. As I stated previously, determining the optimal capital structure is problematic.
200 Therefore, an unequivocal statement of the reasonableness of a capital structure
201 is not always possible. Nevertheless, the Commission must decide whether a
202 capital structure is reasonable for setting utility rates. The Companies' ultimate
203 parent company, Integrys Energy Group, Inc. ("Integrys"), has a target common
204 equity ratio of 50-55% despite having greater operating risk than the
205 Companies.¹⁴ This suggests that a capital structure comprising 56% common
206 equity may be unnecessarily expensive for the Companies. Nevertheless, I am
207 recommending the Commission accept the Companies' proposed capital

208 structures for the following reasons. First, the September 30, 2006 measurement
209 date for the Companies' capital structures precedes the completion of the merger
210 with WPS Resources and the creation of Integrys. Consequently, the
211 Companies' actual capital structures could not reflect Integrys' consolidated
212 target common equity ratio. Second, capital structures cannot be restructured
213 overnight. Therefore, I regard the Companies' voluntary decision to propose
214 capital structures containing lower proportions of common equity than their actual
215 capital structures as a positive first step by the Companies' new management
216 and consider it fair to give the Companies time to make their capital structures
217 consistent with Integrys' target consolidated capital structure. Third, Staff is
218 recommending adjustments to the costs of debt and common equity to reflect the
219 lower risk implied by the AA rating. Should the Commission decide to impute a
220 capital structure with a lower percentage of common equity than I am
221 recommending for this proceeding, those adjustments to the costs of common
222 equity and debt Ms. Kight-Garlsich and I recommend would need to be revised to
223 incorporate the financial strength inherent in that capital structure. Under no
224 circumstances should the Commission accept the Companies' proposed capital
225 structures without also accepting Staff's proposed adjustments to the
226 Companies' costs of common equity and debt. A reasonable balance of financial
227 strength and cost can only be achieved when the capital structure and the costs
228 of the components of the capital structure reflect the same degree of risk. Given

¹⁴ Integrys' S&P business profile is 5.

229 that the Companies' capital structure is consistent with the risk of an AA rating,
230 the component costs of capital must reflect the risk of an AA rating.

231 Although I am recommending that the Commission accept the Companies'
232 proposed capital structures, in future rate cases, should the Companies' capital
233 structures not be consistent with that of Integrys as a whole, taking differences in
234 operating risk into account, then Staff might recommend those capital structures
235 be rejected.

236 **RATE OF RETURN ON RATE BASE**

237 **Q. What is your recommended rate of return on rate base for North Shore?**

238 A. I recommend a 7.68% rate of return on North Shore's rate base. This rate of
239 return incorporates the 9.50% rate of return Staff witness Sheena Kight-Garlich
240 recommends for North Shore's common equity. The rate of return I recommend
241 on North Shore's rate base is shown on Schedule 5.1.

242 **Q. What is your recommended rate of return on rate base for Peoples Gas?**

243 A. I recommend a 7.47% rate of return on Peoples Gas' rate base. This rate of
244 return incorporates the 9.70% rate of return Staff witness Sheena Kight-Garlich
245 recommends for Peoples Gas' common equity. The rate of return I recommend
246 on Peoples Gas' rate base is shown on Schedule 5.1.

247 **Q. Does this conclude your direct testimony?**

248 A. Yes, it does.

Weighted Average Cost of Capital

North Shore Gas Company

	<u>Percent of Total Capital</u>	<u>Cost</u>	<u>Weighted Cost</u>
Long-term Debt	44.00%	5.37%	2.36%
Common Equity	<u>56.00%</u>	9.50%	<u>5.32%</u>
Total Capital	100.00%		
Weighted Average Cost of Capital			7.68%

The Peoples Gas Light and Coke Company

	<u>Percent of Total Capital</u>	<u>Cost</u>	<u>Weighted Cost</u>
Long-term Debt	44.00%	4.64%	2.04%
Common Equity	<u>56.00%</u>	9.70%	<u>5.43%</u>
Total Capital	100.00%		
Weighted Average Cost of Capital			7.47%

The Peoples Gas Light and Coke Company

Embedded Cost of Long-Term Debt
September 30, 2006

Line No.	Debt Issue Type, Coupon Rate	Date Issued	Maturity Date	Date Reacquired	Principal Amount	Face Amount Outstanding	Unamortized Discount or (Premium)	Unamortized Debt Expense (Gain)	Carrying Value	Annual Coupon Interest	Annualized Amort. Of Discount or (Premium)	Annualized Amort. Of Debt Expense	Annualized Interest Expense
	[A]	[B]	[C]	[D]	[E]	[F]	[G]	[H]	[I]=[F-G-H]	[J]=[A*F]	[K]	[L]	[M]=[J+K+L]
1	First and Refunding Mortgage Bonds:												
2	Series HH 4.75% (1)	03/01/00	03/01/30	-	\$ 50,000,000	\$ 50,000,000	\$ -	\$ 1,676,000	\$ 48,324,000	\$ 2,375,000	\$ -	\$ 72,000	\$ 2,447,000
3	Series KK 5.00% (1)	02/06/03	02/01/33	-	50,000,000	50,000,000	605,000	1,152,000	48,243,000	2,500,000	23,000	\$ 44,000	2,567,000
4	Series LL 3.05% (1)	02/20/03	02/01/33	-	50,000,000	50,000,000	-	634,000	49,366,000	1,525,000	-	\$ 24,000	1,549,000
5	Series MM-2 3.87%	02/27/03	03/01/10	-	50,000,000	50,000,000	167,000	291,000	49,542,000	1,932,500	49,000	\$ 85,000	2,066,500
6	Series NN-2 4.54%	04/29/03	05/01/13	-	75,000,000	75,000,000	40,000	997,000	73,963,000	3,405,000	6,000	\$ 151,000	3,562,000
7	Series OO 3.70% (1) (2)	10/09/03	10/01/37	-	51,000,000	51,000,000	-	710,000	50,290,000	1,887,000	-	\$ 23,000	1,910,000
8	Series PP 3.66% (1) (2)	10/09/03	10/01/37	-	51,000,000	51,000,000	-	695,000	50,305,000	1,867,000	-	\$ 22,000	1,889,000
9	Series QQ 4.88% (1)	11/25/03	11/01/38	-	75,000,000	75,000,000	-	1,279,000	73,721,000	3,656,000	-	\$ 40,000	3,696,000
10	Series RR 4.30% (1)	06/01/05	06/01/35	-	50,000,000	50,000,000	-	819,000	49,181,000	2,150,000	-	\$ 29,000	2,179,000
11	Sub-Total				\$ 502,000,000	\$ 502,000,000	\$ 812,000	\$ 8,253,000	\$ 492,935,000	\$ 21,297,500	\$ 78,000	\$ 490,000	\$ 21,865,500
12	Loss on Reacquired Debt												
13	Series X 6.88% (1)	03/01/85	02/01/33	03/14/03	-	-	-	1,527,000	(1,527,000)	-	-	58,000	58,000
14	Series Y 7.50% (1)	03/01/85	02/01/33	04/03/00	-	-	-	692,000	(692,000)	-	-	26,000	26,000
15	Series Z 7.50% (1)	03/01/85	03/01/15	04/03/00	-	-	-	554,000	(554,000)	-	-	66,000	66,000
16	Series AA 10.25% (1)	03/01/85	06/01/35	08/01/95	-	-	-	1,481,000	(1,481,000)	-	-	52,000	52,000
17	Series BB 8.10% (1)	05/01/90	10/01/37	05/01/00	-	-	-	706,000	(706,000)	-	-	23,000	23,000
18	Series DD 5.75% (1)	12/01/93	11/01/38	12/01/03	-	-	-	2,239,000	(2,239,000)	-	-	70,000	70,000
19	Series EE Variable Rate (1)	12/01/93	10/01/37	10/14/03	-	-	-	232,000	(232,000)	-	-	7,000	7,000
20	Series FF 6.10% (1)	06/01/95	06/01/35	06/02/05	-	-	-	1,426,000	(1,426,000)	-	-	50,000	50,000
21	Series GG Variable Rate (1)	03/01/00	02/01/33	03/27/03	-	-	-	1,305,000	(1,305,000)	-	-	50,000	50,000
22	Series II Variable Rate (1)	03/01/00	10/01/37	11/12/03	-	-	-	797,000	(797,000)	-	-	26,000	26,000
23	Series JJ Variable Rate (1)	03/01/00	10/01/37	10/14/03	-	-	-	797,000	(797,000)	-	-	26,000	26,000
24	Sub-Total				\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 11,756,000	\$ (11,756,000)	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 454,000	\$ 454,000
25	Total				\$ 502,000,000	\$ 502,000,000	\$ 812,000	\$ 20,009,000	\$ 481,179,000	\$ 21,297,500	\$ 78,000	\$ 944,000	\$ 22,319,500
26	Embedded Cost of Long-Term Debt (M / I)												4.64%

Notes: (1) Tax-exempt bonds.
(2) Based on auction rate in effect at April 25, 2007.