

The Washington Post

Companies pull high-voltage power line application in Va.

By Kafia A. Hosh
Washington Post Staff Writer
Wednesday, December 23, 2009; B08

The companies planning to build a high-voltage transmission line through Maryland, Virginia and West Virginia have asked to withdraw their application in Virginia in a move to coordinate the state procedural schedules.

The Potomac-Appalachian Transmission Highline, known as PATH, is a 765,000-volt line that would stretch for 275 miles from a substation near St. Albans, W.Va., to a proposed substation near Kemptown, Md. PATH is a joint venture of Pennsylvania-based Allegheny Energy and Ohio-based American Electric Power.

PATH officials had hoped state regulators would hold evidentiary hearings on the power line application about the same time in early 2010. But in September, Maryland rejected the application on a legal technicality, throwing off the coordinated timeline among the three states.

"That starts the clock all over again, so we won't get a decision for at least a year in Maryland," said Allegheny spokesman Douglas G. Colafella.

In light of the application's rejection in Maryland, PATH asked West Virginia to postpone its review schedule. The state agreed to delay evidentiary hearings until October.

PATH has filed a new application in Maryland, which could put its review schedule there in sync with the one in West Virginia.

But the Virginia State Corporation Commission denied PATH's request to suspend its procedural schedule. Instead, Hearing Examiner Alexander F. Skirpan Jr. agreed to hear oral arguments on PATH's motion to withdraw its application. The hearing is scheduled to take place Dec. 30 in Richmond.

If its motion to withdraw is approved, PATH plans to file a new application for the 31-mile segment in Virginia in early 2010. Doing so could put the procedural schedule there in line with schedules in Maryland

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and West Virginia. It "would enable regulators in all three states to consider the needs of the project based on the same facts," Colafella said.

If it's built, PATH would run parallel to two existing power lines, a 138,000-volt Allegheny line and a 500,000-volt Dominion Virginia Power line. Utility officials say the project is needed to relieve the strain on the two lines and meet the area's growing demand for electricity.

But the \$1.8 billion project has sparked coordinated opposition movements in Maryland, Virginia and West Virginia.

Residents in the Lovettesville area of Loudoun County, where the power line would run through a 10.5-mile stretch, have expressed concern that the line's steel towers would mar the rural landscape, drag down property values and hurt the environment.

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