

PATH application filed in W. Va.; proposed route revealed

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By [Ed Waters Jr.](#)

The first official filing has been made for the 300-mile, \$1.8 billion PATH project.

Allegheny Power and American Electric Power filed an application Friday with the West Virginia Public Service Commission for the project.

The Potomac-Appalachian Transmission Highline will run from near Charleston, W.Va., to near Kemptown in southern Frederick County.

The proposed route for the project was also revealed Friday, showing a 20-mile stretch of the line in Frederick County.

Michael Gogol, consulting engineer for transmission siting, said the PATH line would follow existing corridors, where power lines are already in place, for 85 percent of the route in Maryland. The only deviation, he said, was near Urbana. A two-mile piece of the line will be located south of the existing lines to avoid Little Bennett Creek, Gogol said.

The filing is a step in a lengthy process, said Todd Meyers, manager for external communications for Allegheny Power. He said the West Virginia commission is expected to take about 400 days to approve the proposed route.

Allegheny Power will file with the Maryland and Virginia public service commissions by mid-next week, Meyers said. He expects those commissions to take about a year to review all relevant information and hear public input.

"In Maryland and Virginia, we sent a proposed route. They will approve or disapprove that. In West Virginia, we submitted proposed and alternative routes as in that state, they can choose an alternative route instead," Meyers said.

The possibility stands that West Virginia could choose a route that would be different from the preferred route, but Meyers said utility company executives hope all three states will work together for the best siting.

Michael Hosier, general manager for transmission projects, said PATH is needed "to keep the lights on." Studies have forecast problems regarding power needs by 2014. The line is needed to avoid blackouts and brownouts, Hosier said.

Once filed with the Maryland PSC, it will be up to that agency to schedule public hearings and oversight, Meyers said. Those meetings could come in late summer or early fall.

Since the project began, there have been 24 open houses that drew more than 2,500 interested residents to see proposed routes and talk with Allegheny Power representatives, Gogol said. "We learned a lot from the people."

Gogol said he has spent a year and a half researching the possible routes, using satellite maps and driving around the areas.

"We've worked with the Forestry Service, Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Maryland Historical Trust and local county planning departments."

By locating the end substation near Kemptown, Gogol said it would bring Allegheny Power, Baltimore Gas & Electric and Pepco lines into one place to serve the region's electricity needs.

Hosier said preliminary engineering and permitting processes have already been started in West Virginia and will be launched in Maryland and Virginia when the filing is in place. "We see construction beginning in late 2010, really picking up in 2012 and the project finished by 2014."

Meyers said it was imperative to start preliminary work early, so everything can come on line when

approved. The PATH project, even at five years, is aggressive, Meyers said. "A project like this could have taken a decade or longer."

Meyers said there were three alternatives to regional power needs: increasing transmission, building new generation plants and increased conservation of energy. He said Gov. Martin O'Malley has set a target of Maryland using 15 percent less energy by 2015.

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