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Allegheny Energy delays schedule for power lines

Completion date moved back a year, now set for 2014

by Christian Brown | Staff Writer

Allegheny Energy announced on April 15 that it will delay completion of a power transmission line extending from West Virginia to a substation in Kemptown by one year.

The Potomac-Appalachian Transmission Highline (PATH), a 280-mile long transmission line that will extend from near Charleston, W.Va. to Kemptown, Md., will not need to go online as soon as expected because of the recession.

According to Todd Meyers, a spokesman for the company, Allegheny still intends to file its plans with regulatory bodies in West Virginia, Virginia and Maryland by the second quarter of this year.

After these plans are filed, each state will hold a series of hearings on the transmission lines.

In Maryland, the Public Service Commission will hold public input hearings, formal hearings where members of the public will have their say on PATH, and evidentiary hearings, where experts will give testimony "similar to a court case," Meyers said.

After these hearings, each state's regulators will decide whether or not to approve PATH.

PATH is a joint venture of Allegheny Energy and Ohio-based American Electric Power.

PJM, a regional power grid operator that is directing the construction of PATH, initially projected the transmission line would be needed by 2012 to prevent grid failure, but has moved back the deadline date to 2014.

Ray Dotter, a spokesman for PJM, said that this deadline for the transmission lines was like the wear indicator on a tire.

If you change the tire before the wear indicator is visible, you aren't any less safe, he said.

Dotter said that PJM creates a forecast every year of electrical usage in the region, which covers Delaware, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia and the District of Columbia.

This forecast projects electrical usage for 15 years, and because of the recession, PJM does not expect the regional grid to be as taxed this summer. Until the economy picks up again, electrical demand will not be as high, although Dotter said PJM expects next year's demand to be higher.

However, Meyers said this "breathing room" did not afford the time to do nothing. He said when the economy picks up, electrical demand is expected to grow by 1.4 percent every year.

"We'd like to [have PATH] in place and ready to serve that need once it manifests itself," Meyers said.

Dotter echoed Meyers, saying that the extra time could be needed to file plans, conduct studies, hearings and build the power lines.

"Having a little more time for everything to happen is not a bad thing," he said.

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