

**FrederickNewsPost.com****Groups question PJM evaluation of PATH, call for alternatives**

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Eight consumer counsels, including one from Maryland, have sent a formal letter to PJM Interconnection asking the utility overseer to re-evaluate electric transmission projects under its jurisdiction.

PJM, based in Pennsylvania, determines the electric power needs for 13 states and the District of Columbia.

Besides the Maryland Office of People's Counsel, other signers of the letter to PJM's chairman include consumer counsels from Ohio, Virginia, Delaware, Illinois, West Virginia, New Jersey and the District of Columbia.

In a letter sent to PJM Chairman Howard Schneider, signatories question PJM's support of the 275-mile, \$2.1 billion Potomac-Appalachian Transmission Highline.

PATH as planned will cross three states, ending in Frederick County at a substation on Bartholows Road.

PJM needs to consider whether alternatives to the line could be cheaper.

"PATH is based upon 2007 costs that we understand have been revised by PATH three times and not independently evaluated," the letter states.

A better alternative to PATH, the letter writers argue, is the Mount Storm-Doubs project, a line set to run from West Virginia to the Doubs substation in Frederick County. That project would provide for the region's energy needs, rendering PATH unnecessary.

The line is scheduled to be complete in 2015, the target date set by PJM for meeting future energy needs in the region.

Virginia-based Dominion utility company is building the Mount Storm-Doubs system to replace antiquated transmission lines and upgrade facilities.

Doug Kaplan, president of Sugarloaf Conservancy, said the letter substantiates what his group has been saying on the PATH project.

Initially, the grassroots organization didn't oppose PATH, but asked the utility companies involved to consider underground placement of the lines or upgrading existing lines.

Over time, however, Kaplan and his group began to question the need for PATH.

"This addresses the issue of alternatives, alternatives that could save ratepayers money," Kaplan said.

Kaplan said adding "more equipment" to the Mount Storm-Doubs line would take care of the region's forecasted electric needs for 2015.

Kaplan said PJM is supposed to be independent when it oversees power projects, but is not behaving so.

"They (PJM) are not looking at the cost of \$400 million for the Virginia plan, versus \$2.1 billion for PATH."

Kaplan said foregoing PATH for the lesser-cost alternative would also open the door for wind power.

"A few years ago I would not have even thought about wind power," Kaplan said. "One day such systems could provide as much as two-thirds of our energy needs in Maryland. And that's considering today's technology, not what could happen with tomorrow's technology."

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