

FrederickNewsPost.com**PATH findings**

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Two years ago, Delegate Rick Weldon had some ominous words about the proposed 275-mile transmission line, the Potomac-Appalachian Transmission Highline, and the substation planned for Frederick County. "This is NOTHING like the transmission line we fought in Urbana ... this is a major (764kv) transmission line ... think big gantry towers, humming power lines, etc."

"This is huge," Weldon concluded, "so we can't afford to be asleep at the wheel."

Just how huge is hard to imagine. While Allegheny Power isn't giving out exact specifications, the land purchase and the balloon tests the company recently conducted lead to a few solid conclusions: at least 150-foot-high towers and a 50-acre substation site.

According to the Citizens Against Kempton Electric Substation, that's 32 football fields long. CAKES' research indicates that the planned substation between Mount Airy and Monrovia would be one of the largest in the world. The only other one that comes close is in Korea.

CAKES organizers haven't been asleep at the wheel, and members are quickly waking up their neighbors and the rest of the county to what's in the works. They've got reason, research and common sense on their side. And no, this isn't an isolated case of NIMBYism or of "tree huggers" protecting their viewshed, and here's why: Electric bills will go up, Marylanders won't be the beneficiaries, and despite what the heavily financed PR gurus at the power companies are spinning, the lights will stay on without this gargantuan and potentially dangerous target in our midst.

That's right. While Allegheny and American Electric Power Co. want you to believe that blackouts are inevitable without the "stability" of 200-plus miles of transmission lines, remember that the Urbana line that got slapped down was also supposed to prevent forecasted blackouts beginning in July 2006 — blackouts that never happened.

Now consumption is at historic lows. The Department of Energy reports that U.S. electricity consumption was down 2.8 percent in 2008. The Wall Street Journal's Aug. 12 front-page story "Electricity Prices Plummet" says 2009 will see "the sharpest falloff in more than a half a century." Combined with the 2008 decline, this year could easily mark the "first period of consecutive annual declines since at least 1950."

Whether the drop-offs are an anomaly or have some staying power remains to be seen, but John Shelk, president of the Electric Power Supply Association of Washington, D.C., which represents power generators, told the Journal that "it doesn't make sense to build anything" given that "there's more supply than demand and prices are really low."

Demand-reduction programs are helping, and that's not likely to change.

Patience Wait, the former City Hall reporter, has become fired up over the issue, taking the lead in researching and educating her neighbors in West Virginia and Maryland. Her state is slated as the genesis of the lines at the John E. Amos coal-fired plant. Amos recently made the EPA's list of high-hazard coal sites, a rating that applies to dams that have the most potential for killing people if they fail.

The PATH plan doesn't reflect this administration's policies and philosophies on alternative fuels and green technology and is hopelessly out of date, Wait said. In the end, it's about a 14 percent profit margin for electric companies.

"You've got a 19th-century technology and a 20th-century business model being applied to the 21st century," she said. "This is more about greed than need."

For more, check out nokemptonsubstation.org. And tell your neighbors.

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