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### PATH request for delay in hearings denied in Va.

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A request by utilities behind the multimillion-dollar PATH project to delay the review process in Virginia has been denied.

Alexander F. Skirpan Jr., senior hearing examiner for the Virginia State Corporation Commission, ruled Monday that the request be denied and that review proceedings continue on a schedule set in October.

Allegheny Energy and American Electric Power, which are jointly planning the Potomac-Appalachian Transmission Highline, had asked Virginia officials to delay the beginning of the review until November. The utility companies said additional information would by then be available on energy demands and related factors for the 275-mile, \$2.1 billion project. PATH is planned to cross three states, ending at a proposed substation near Mount Airy.

"The denial means that the proceeding will adhere to the schedule set forth by the Virginia commission in its October order, culminating in an evidentiary hearing on April 25," said Todd Meyers, a spokesman for Allegheny Energy. "We'll be reviewing the hearing examiner's ruling and will discuss the effects of the order further with the Virginia hearing examiner at a pre-conference hearing scheduled for Jan. 18."

Meyers said Allegheny and AEP remain committed the PATH project.

"The fundamental long-term need for the project has essentially remained unchanged, even as the in-service date has been pushed back several times in recent years," he said. "The regulatory process for large transmission line projects like PATH is a long road with plenty of twists and turns. It's all part of a dynamic, thorough review process."

Doug Kaplan, president of the Sugarloaf Conservancy, said he looks for PATH to withdraw its application in Virginia and refile it, as it did last year. Sugarloaf Conservancy is one of several groups, including Citizens Against the Kempton Electric Substation and the Sierra Club, that have opposed PATH.

Kaplan said the utility companies should see this as a signal to pull the plug on PATH. PJM Interconnection, the organization that initially approved PATH and a 14 percent return on investment for the utility companies involved, should recommend an end to the project, Kaplan said.

"There is no need for PATH," Kaplan said, referring to energy demand forecasts.

The project has had opposition as well from individuals and groups that say the utility companies fail to consider alternatives to PATH. Other projects in the area, such as West Virginia's Mount Storm to Doubs system could be upgraded to provide additional power instead of the complex PATH plan.

Jon Flannery, a lawyer and Lovettsville, Va., resident who has spoken out frequently against PATH, called Monday's decision, "a Mexican standoff." Rather than delay the hearing process, Flannery recommends the Virginia commission deny the PATH application.

"PATH has distinguished itself as an applicant worthy of outright denial, and the commission is plainly on notice of that fact," Flannery said. "And instead of this sophistic ballet, PATH should have been shut down now."

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