

Tuesday, Nov. 10, 2009

Potomac Edison set to refile power line plans

Company still trying to have electricity running through new PATH line by 2014

by Christian Brown | Staff Writer

Potomac Edison plans to restart its proposal to build the last leg of a multi-state power line in Frederick County.

Joseph Curran III, an attorney representing Potomac Edison, sent a letter on Monday to the Maryland Public Service Commission saying the company will file a new application to build the Potomac-Appalachian Transmission Highline, or PATH, by the end of the year.

The 275-mile power line would begin at a substation in southern West Virginia and end at a proposed 50-acre substation near Mount Airy, called the Kemptown Substation.

PATH will serve PJM Interconnection, a regional organization that coordinates power transmission in 13 states, including those through which it passes, and Washington, D.C.

Allegheny Energy, of which Potomac Edison is a subsidiary, and American Electric Power have partnered to build PATH, with Allegheny having sole responsibility for the portion to be constructed in Maryland.

Both companies argue that without the new power lines, the region's power grid will not be able to reliably meet electrical demands. The companies say PATH must be constructed by 2014 to keep up with projected demand.

Opponents, such as George Loehr, the former executive director of the Northeast Power Coordinating Council who testified against PATH on the behalf of the Sierra Club, said the long power line would actually make the grid less reliable.

He said pinning the electrical needs of major East Coast cities like Baltimore and Philadelphia on PATH would leave them vulnerable to interruptions in the line. "It's like running an extension cord down the block to plug your toaster into a neighbor's outlet rather than plugging it into an outlet in your own kitchen," Loehr said.

On Sept. 9, the Maryland Public Service Commission rejected Potomac Edison's application for PATH because it would not be built by an electric company operating within Maryland, as state law requires. The commission did not comment on the need for the upgrade.

Virginia's State Corporation Commission and West Virginia's Public Service Commission are also considering denial of the project.

In response to these states, company officials have requested an extension of the procedure, which would allow them to submit new evidence on the need for PATH to both states by June 29, 2010. It would also postpone the decision in both states until 2011.

Todd Meyers, a spokesman for Allegheny, wrote in an e-mail to The Gazette that this would still allow the companies to build the power line by their deadline.

"In a nutshell, the proposed extension of the procedural schedule allows the project to attain decisions in all three states in a similar timeframe and still meet [the] in-service deadline of 2014," Meyers wrote.

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