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Rotary hears PATH debate

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By [Ed Waters Jr.](#)

Speakers for and against a multimillion-dollar power transmission line sparred Wednesday before the Frederick Rotary Club.

H. Russell Frisby Jr., of the PATH Education and Awareness Team, and Doug Kaplan, president of Sugarloaf Conservancy, presented the pros and cons of the Potomac-Appalachian Transmission Highline to Rotary members and guests.

Frisby said the \$1.8 billion, 275-mile transmission line from West Virginia to Maryland is needed to ensure reliable power for the region in the future. It is a joint venture of Allegheny Energy and American Electric Power Co.

"This is not just for New Jersey," Frisby told the audience, noting statements to that effect had been made by others. "We need power in right here in Maryland, as well as the region."

Frisby said the project would benefit the state economically by providing power to support jobs and expected growth at Maryland military sites. It would give Maryland a competitive balance in the international economy.

A former chairman of the Maryland Public Service Commission, Frisby said the need for PATH is well-documented. Electricity use is up 16 percent in the region from last summer. Putting the lines underground, if feasible, would double or triple the cost of the project, and eminent domain -- the taking of private property for the project -- would be a last resort.

Kaplan said the project has been delayed three times in West Virginia and withdrawn in Virginia. The project remains under review in Maryland by the PSC.

"Sugarloaf initially did not oppose the planned substation (near Mount Airy, but known as the Kemptown Substation), but it would be disastrous," Kaplan said.

The substation would be in the neighborhood of 1,300 homes.

"There is danger from fire, tornadoes, terrorists at the substation," Kaplan said, showing a PowerPoint image of directions to firefighters to not attempt to put out electric fires, but let them burn.

Kaplan said the driving force of the PATH project is a 14 percent return on investment for Allegheny Energy. "And only 12 percent of the power will stay in Maryland.

"No one wants the lights to go out," Kaplan said. "But with the economy slowing, there is no immediate need for this."

Kaplan, using PowerPoint maps, showed where wind power equipment could be located off the Atlantic Coast.

"And how do you get that wind power to where it needs to go? Transmission lines," Frisby countered.

Wayne Six, a Rotary Club member, questioned why the utility company would pay \$6 million for a farm, where the substation will be located, valued at only \$1.5 million. Six also asked about compensation for homeowners who must live in the vicinity of the substation.

Frisby said berms and trees would be used to alleviate the visual impact of the substation. He said if homeowners felt they should be compensated, they could take legal action.



Photo by Ed Waters, Jr.

Speakers for and against the PATH electric transmission line were at the Frederick Rotary Club on Wednesday. From left are Andy Carpel, club president; H. Russell Frisby, PATH Education and Awareness Team, and Doug Kaplan, president, Sugarloaf Conservancy.

For information, the speakers advised going to pathawareness.com and sugarloafconservancy.org.

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