

FrederickNewsPost.com**Song captures people's wrath over PATH**

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URBANA — A group of activists opposed to a power line running through southern Frederick County rented a bus earlier this month to take them to a Public Service Commission hearing.

It was a long ride to Baltimore, and the activists, following the example of elementary school groups everywhere, started to sing.

"They want to cut right through an electric avenue, with towers that are higher," they sang. "They want to block our view, electric avenue, with towers spitting fire."

The 39 bus riders sang to the tune of Eddy Grant's "Electric Avenue," using computer printouts to follow along with the lyrics.

Peggy Kaplan, the secretary of the Sugarloaf Conservancy, one of the groups opposed to the Potomac Appalachian Transmission Highline, said it helped energize members before the hearing.

"It really put people in a good mood," she said.

There was even a YouTube video produced with the song, showing power lines and boxes of commentary on the PATH project.

But the group has started backing away from it now -- members are worried about copyright infringement, even though the lyrics of the song were completely changed.

"We love the song and we love the video, but we don't want anything that's going to take our time and energy from PATH," Kaplan said.

The high-voltage transmission line has been in the works for several years, and has drawn ire from property owners in West Virginia, Virginia and Maryland, where the line is to run.

As a result, it's been a war of words between power companies and activists, with state regulators serving as referees.

While opponents have been singing about their wrath against PATH, Allegheny Energy, the utility responsible for the Maryland section, has been running its own television ads.

"As the utility we have to operate based on clear facts and take a very conservative approach as to how we communicate about the project," said Doug Colafella, an Allegheny spokesman.

The latest ad shows an animation of electricity running along the grid to houses, hospitals and schools.

"From West Virginia and Maryland, it's one path, but it leads everywhere," the ad states. "Bringing safe, reliable energy to our communities. Making sure industry has a dependable source of energy to count on, and giving our local schools, hospitals and offices the energy it takes to stay up and running."

That's a far cry from the activists' song, a quirky, attention-grabbing stunt likely to draw attention on the Internet and other nontraditional mediums.

The PATH-specific lyrics were written by West Virginia resident Clissy Funkhouser, an accountant who is fighting the PATH project there.

She writes songs every year for an annual live radio show in Shepherdstown, called the "Rumsey Radio Hour."

This year, she decided to focus on PATH, and wrote the "Electric Avenue" parody.

She'll be performing at the show in a light-up costume that makes her look like Judy Jetson.

But though she's willing to have fun, she believes there is a serious lesson to be learned from the tune.

She's just as likely to be e-mailing a Wall Street Journal story about decreasing power consumption as she is to be taking on a reggae accent.

She's thrilled that the song has crossed state lines, hoping people who hear it will listen to the message that the power line will cause environmental devastation and property devaluation.

"It really condenses and makes a very difficult issue a little bit easier to understand," Funkhouser said.

It remains to be seen if public opposition will sway utility regulators in the three states.

Allegheny is hoping it can present the case that the energy grid needs to be strengthened by new transmission lines.

"We're confident that the project will be reviewed based on the facts," Colafella said. "It can't be evaluated based on emotions."

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