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### Va. staff again recommends denial of PATH project

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A project to put a high-voltage transmission line across three states is facing another obstacle in its path.

On Wednesday, the Virginia State Corporation Commission's staff again recommended the denial of the proposed PATH system in the Old Dominion.

After reviewing testimony on the issue, the SCC staff is advising the commission, which oversees utilities in the state, to turn down the proposal from Allegheny Energy.

The Potomac Appalachian Transmission Highline is a nearly 300-mile, \$1.8 billion project beginning in West Virginia, crossing Virginia and ending in southern Frederick County at a proposed new substation. It is a joint project of Allegheny Energy and American Electric Power.

In November, the Virginia commission's senior hearing examiner denied a similar motion by the staff members. Alexander F. Skirpan said continuing the project in Virginia gave the commission jurisdiction over the project.

The SCC staff has argued that without approval in Maryland of PATH, and a move by West Virginia authorities to postpone a decision on the project until 2011, the transmission line is going nowhere. Allegheny Energy said it will file a new application for PATH in Maryland within the next few weeks. The application in Maryland was initially turned down on legal issues.

"We only just received the Virginia commission staff's testimony and will closely review the testimony over coming days. PATH Allegheny Virginia Transmission Corporation will respond to staff testimony with rebuttal testimony sometime near the end of December," said Todd Meyers, manager of external communications for Allegheny Energy, on Thursday.

"The public regulatory review process in Virginia is extremely thorough and has a long way to go. The PATH evidentiary hearings before the Virginia State Corporation Commission are scheduled to begin in Richmond, Va., on Jan. 19, 2010, and are expected to last about two weeks," Meyers said.

Doug Kaplan, president of the Sugarloaf Conservancy, said Thursday that while he commended the Virginia staff, "the battle is far from over." Kaplan's group represents many residents who live in or near the route of PATH and have voiced environmental, visual and safety concerns about the project. The group has disagreed with electric power needs in the near future as stated by Allegheny Power.

John P. Flannery, counsel for River's Edge, a community in Lovettsville, Va., has been an outspoken opponent of PATH. Flannery criticized Skirpan for not initially denying the project in November and again called for the rejection of the project in Virginia. Flannery was among speakers when Skirpan was at hearing in Lovettsville that drew about 250 opponents to the project in the audience.

Kaplan said the utility companies should look beyond the potential revenue generated by PATH and withdraw the applications in both Virginia and West Virginia. "We do not believe it is in the best interest of their customers who will continue to pay for the cost of continuing these cases," Kaplan said.

Another Frederick County-based group, Citizens Against the Kempton Electric Substation, have been active in fighting the proposed substation to be located near Mount Airy. The proposed substation would be the largest ever built in the U.S. and one of the largest in the world.

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