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### Virginia approves withdrawal of PATH application

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By [Ed Waters Jr.](#)

An action Wednesday by the Virginia State Corporation Commission could affect plans for a 275-mile transmission line through Maryland.

The Virginia commission approved the withdrawal of the Potomac Appalachian Transmission Highline application in the state and terminated the review process that had been under way for the project.

The move could affect the decision before the Maryland Public Service Commission, which is considering a new filing for the project.

Allegheny Energy filed its application in Virginia in May of last year. The utility company sought in December to withdraw the application in Virginia and the refiling in Maryland, as well as a move to delay the process in West Virginia. The goal was to have all three states come to a conclusion on the project at about the same time.

The transmission line, also known as PATH, is a \$1.8 billion project jointly planned by Allegheny Energy and American Electric Power. The line would span three states, ending at a substation planned near Mount Airy.

In its decision Wednesday, the Virginia State Corporation Commission said any future applications in that state would have to include transmission expansion plans by PJM, the regional entity that oversees electric power needs; updated load flow analyses; an analysis of changes in generation, demand response and energy efficiency resources; and information on PATH's original routes, including those that don't affect Virginia, consistent with other proposed and alternative routes.

Doug Kaplan, president of Sugarloaf Conservancy, said he hoped the move in Virginia would lead to Maryland Public Service Commission members denying the application.

"With Virginia out, PATH has nowhere to go," Kaplan said.

An initial application for the project was turned down in Maryland over legal issues, but the utility company made a new application in December.

David O'Leary, Maryland conservation chairman for the Sierra Club, said the move by Virginia was appropriate, including the requirement to provide timely data, when available from PJM, on energy needs and efficiency.

"It is the same thing we are doing in Maryland," O'Leary said of seeking the latest data.

Todd Meyers, spokesman for Allegheny Energy, said the company is still committed to the project.

"PJM is in the process of preparing more comprehensive analyses for the 2010 Regional Transmission Expansion Plan, which should be delivered sometime mid-year," Meyers said. "Based on that time frame, a new application in Virginia is not expected before the third quarter of 2010."

The company believes PATH is needed to reliably deliver power in the future, "it's just a question of when," Meyers said.

Studies by PJM over three years have confirmed a need for PATH, citing reliability concerns in parts of the Mid-Atlantic region, he said.

Opposition to the project has included public concern over the aesthetic, environmental and safety factors of the 765-kilovolt line and the substation. Opposition groups have also questioned the timetable for the project, and whether alternative energy sources should be considered.

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