

www.baltimoresun.com/business/bs-bz-path-transmission-project-20100928,0,2605521.story

baltimoresun.com

Proposed power line from W.Va. to Md. drawing opposition

Potomac-Appalachian Transmission Highline moving ahead slowly

By Hanah Cho, The Baltimore Sun

September 28, 2010

For years, Marylanders have been warned about the risk of blackouts as the region's growing energy needs overload the electricity grid.

One solution to ease such threats has been to build several high-voltage transmission lines to ship electricity to the region, including a contentious proposal to build a line connecting West Virginia to Maryland.

Called the Potomac-Appalachian Transmission Highline, that project is slowly moving forward amid regulatory hurdles and opposition from residents and environmentalists. This week, the PATH line faces scrutiny from Frederick County officials and a preliminary hearing before a Maryland Public Service Commission hearing examiner.

The multistate power line would stretch 275 miles from a substation in Putnam County, W.Va., through parts of Virginia to a proposed Kempton substation to be built near Mount Airy in Frederick County. Pennsylvania-based Allegheny Energy Inc., which serves Western Maryland, and American Electric Power, an Ohio utility, are heading the project, which was proposed in 2007.

Some opponents are now questioning whether the \$2.1 billion transmission line is even needed given lower electricity demand amid the recession and a growing energy conservation movement. But backers say its still needed. An ever-changing forecast of when the PATH line should be online to ensure lights stay on in the Mid-Atlantic has been push back to 2015.

"It's never been a matter of 'if' the project was needed, but how quickly it would be needed to resolve projected line overloads and voltage problems," Allegheny spokesman Todd Meyers said.

The PATH line is one of several transmission projects recommended by regional grid operator PJM Interconnection to ease congestion on the area's taxed power grid. The transmission needs to win regulatory approval from West Virginia, Virginia and Maryland.

Construction is under way for a power line extending from southwestern Pennsylvania to West Virginia to northern Virginia, which is expected to be completed by June 2011. Another proposal that would connect southern Maryland through cables under the Chesapeake Bay to the Delmarva Peninsula is expected to resume its regulatory review before Maryland energy regulators this fall.

Frederick County residents have been gearing up for a fight against the PATH line, particularly the Kempton substation that would be built on about 42 acres of a 173-acre site in Frederick County owned by Allegheny. Nearby residents worry that the substation would lower property values and are concerned about public safety, fearing fires and other accidents.

advertisement

**Successfully sell your
home with our no risk
Save and Sell Program!**

 **SYMPHONY VILLAGE**
AT CENTREVILLE

888.868.4790

138 Symphony Way | Centreville, MD 21617



Opponents are expected at today's hearing before the PSC's hearing examiner, who will consider a schedule for the regulatory process and other matters in the case.

In a separate process, the Frederick County Board of Zoning Appeals is scheduled Wednesday to consider a special exception zoning request to build the proposed substation in agricultural land. Meanwhile, the Frederick County Planning Commission earlier this month determined the proposed substation was not consistent with the county's land-use plan.

"They're trying to put the equivalent of a steel mill in the middle of all these homes," said Dick Ishler, president of the Citizens Against the Kempton Electric Substation. "Our opposition is not against the electricity. Our opposition is against the placement of that in the middle of a residential area."

Allegheny has been working to address some of the concerns and plans to spend almost \$1 million to obscure the fenced substation with trees and other type of landscaping.

The Maryland Office of the People's Counsel, which represents consumers on utility matters, does not have a position the PATH project yet because it's still too early in the regulatory process. Paula Carmody said her office would examine whether the project is needed to ensure system reliability, and whether alternatives might be cheaper.

All customers in the PJM region, which includes Maryland and 12 other states as well as the District of Columbia, are expected to share the \$1.2 billion cost for the PATH line. The cost-sharing would begin once the project is completed.

Allegheny's Maryland residential customers would see a 85-cent increase on average a month. Linda Foy, a spokeswoman at Baltimore Gas & Electric Co., said the utility does not have enough information to determine the cost share for its customers.

When the PATH line was proposed in 2007, the outlook for the region's grid was dire. The initial forecast determined that line was needed by 2012 to prevent isolated blackouts.

Paul McGlynn, a general manager of system planning at PJM, said the yearly analysis of transmission needs account for many "moving parts" that include anticipated electricity demand, new power generation and demand response programs, which compensates customers who cut back power usage during peak times.

Although the timing for the proposed line has changed, PJM's analysis has never called into question the need for the project, McGlynn said.

Still, critics like Doug Kaplan, president of the Sugarloaf Conservancy, are not convinced. Kaplan said he doesn't expect electricity usage to recover significantly as the economy recovers.

"It became apparent to us that there was not a need for the project," he said. "Initially, we accepted Allegheny's position that the lights will go out without the line."

hanah.cho@baltsun.com

<http://twitter.com/hanahcho>

-  [Text BUSINESS to 70701 to get Baltimore Sun Business text alerts](#)

Copyright © 2010, [The Baltimore Sun](#)