

PSE&G report promotes environmentally friendly alternatives to long-distance transmission lines

Friday, October 8, 2010

Aim Jefferson

Complicating the PSE&G controversy

Dear Editor,

Further complicating the controversy surrounding PSE&G's proposal to expand the Susquehanna-Roseland transmission line to import more coal-fired electricity to New Jersey and New York, PSE&G released a report, entitled "The Role of Transmission in the Clean Energy Economy," blasting the federal government's efforts to construct a "transmission superhighway" to bring renewable wind and solar power from the Mid-West to the population centers along the east and west coasts.

The report states that local renewable sources of power should be favored over new transmission projects. The report describes several noteworthy arguments why PSE&G opposes the federal transmission superhighway project, many of which are the same reasons environmental groups have long opposed the Susquehanna-Roseland expansion.

Specifically, the power company states that long-distance transmission increases our country's reliance on coal and impedes local, renewable energy infrastructure development. Moreover, the power company notes that it remains uncertain exactly how much of the costs of expanding transmission can be passed on to regional customers as surcharges to their monthly electric bills.

In the report, PSE&G states that it is a "fallacy" to believe that long-distance transmission lines are "green" but rather "expanded pathways for coal-generated electricity". The company explains that expanding long-distance transmission lines "will provide access not just to renewable resources, but to all power plants in the surrounding region where the lines are built...both coal and green energy will travel along these new lines to more easterly markets and replace eastern renewable and eastern power generated with cleaner, but more expensive, natural gas." In addition, the report suggests that west-to-east transmission lines undercut regional efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Environmentalists have long argued that the Susquehanna-Roseland line is a corridor for coal, and that its expansion is part of a coal industry plan to expand the market for their product.

"These same concerns apply with equal force to the proposed Susquehanna-Roseland project" said Julia Somers, Executive Director of the New Jersey Highlands Coalition. "New Jersey is a national leader in solar installations and has enacted aggressive commitments to off-shore wind energy, all of which will be compromised by PSE&G's plan to import coal-fired energy from across the Delaware River."

The power company also confirms in the report that local, renewable energy projects are suitable substitutes to long-distance power lines. With regard to the growing use of solar power in New Jersey, the report states that, "[d]eployment of this locally distributed renewable energy source would reduce the need for transmission lines from remote locations."

"PSE&G makes several good arguments in its report about why we should not be focused on building more transmission as a solution to future energy needs," said Dave Slaperud of Stop the Lines, a grassroots organization formed to oppose the project. "Hopefully PSE&G is realizing that expanding the Susquehanna-Roseland line has far too many negative impacts – we expect to see a withdrawal of the application soon."

"The easiest, most cost effective and environmentally-friendly solutions to this power line are really quite simple: Conservation; demand side management; energy efficiency; and local renewable generation," stated local activist Scott Olson. "Now PSE&G comes out and admits as much in their report. Does the right hand know what the left hand is doing within that corporation?"

"PSE&G has used its own words to underscore what environmentalists have been saying since the onset of this proposal. The company opposes massive transmission lines bringing renewable energy from west to east, but supports transmission of coal energy? PSE&G should advance local renewable generation and pull the transmission line expansion here and now," said Christine Guhl, Sierra Club Field Organizer.

Environmental opponents challenge the proposed project because it is unknown how much of the costs will be passed on to the power company's customers. Because the project may ultimately benefit electricity customers in New York City and Long Island, who are outside of PJM's "jurisdiction," such customers are possibly exempt from the costly rate hikes associated with the project. Yet in the report PSE&G was concerned that a similar situation would be created in the Mid-West. The report notes that in the Mid-West customers have "begun to push back on cost allocation methodologies that are not aligned with benefits...Few of them are buying the wind power being generated in their region, but they are paying for the transmission to have that power shipped to others."

In written comments submitted to the National Park Service earlier this month, environmentalists asked the National Park Service to study environmentally friendly and non-transmission alternatives to the proposed expansion of the Susquehanna-Roseland power lines.

"This power company report," said Kevin Pflug of the Eastern Environmental Law Center, "Confirms that the National Park Service should carefully examine non-transmission alternatives to expanding Susquehanna-Roseland."

Furthermore, Kate Millsaps of the New Jersey Highlands Coalition stated, "environmentalists are disillusioned by the power company's claims that local sources of renewable energy and increased efficiency measures are viable alternatives to some transmission projects, but are somehow inappropriate with regard to Susquehanna Roseland. This report entirely contradicts statements made to regulators that local renewable power should not be evaluated as possible alternatives to expanding Susquehanna-Roseland."

"The report shows how PSE&G is at best two faced; on one hand they see how long distance power lines undermine renewable energy and on the other hand they want to make money off of building a line to bring in dirty coal power," stated Jeff Tittel, Director of the New Jersey Chapter of the Sierra Club. "PSEG cares more about its bottom line and are using the power line to enrich its self at the expense of the consumers and the environment. Agree with your own report and kill this project."

The Role of Transmission in the Clean Energy Economy can be found online on the "thought leadership" page of the PSE&G corporate website at: http://www.pseg.com/info/media/thought_leader/grid.jsp.

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