

## The New Jersey Herald

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# Power line foes to state: Rethink approval

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**NEWARK** -- A coalition of environmental groups petitioned the state Board of Public Utilities Thursday asking the commissioners to reconsider its decision nearly a year ago that approved building a 45-mile section of a 500-kilovolt transmission line across southern Sussex County.

The groups claim a lot has changed since the April 21 decision, and even the company that wants to build the line, Public Service Electric & Gas, has admitted the line won't be built quickly enough to address some of the problems and those concerns are being addressed by other actions.

Also cited are recent studies that show the state's demand for electricity, while growing, is growing at a much reduced level, and starting from a lower level, than what was presented to the BPU during hearings last year.

**"The New Jersey Board of Public Utilities approved this \$750 million project because they were told the lights could go out without it. Now we know that's not true," said Julia Somers, executive director of the New Jersey Highlands Coalition. "It's time to take a fresh look at better and cheaper ways to meet our energy needs."**

The proposal, known as the Susquehanna-Roseland Transmission Line, would begin in Pennsylvania, picking up electricity from coal-fired plants. Following a 100-mile route through that state, the line would cross the Delaware River through the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area and enter New Jersey in the Warren County town of Knowlton.

The line would then cross the Sussex County towns of Stillwater, Fredon, Newton, Andover, Byram and Sparta before entering Morris County and ending in Roseland, Essex County.

Much of the route chosen by PSE&G and its project partner, PPL, follows an existing right-of-way for a 230-kilovolt line. The current towers, which average about 85 feet tall, would be replaced by structures nearly 200 feet tall, which would carry the new lines as well as the existing 230-kilovolt lines. The existing lines would be upgraded and could carry 500 kilovolts in the future.

Karen Johnson, spokesperson for PSE&G, said the company received a copy of the motion Thursday afternoon and is reviewing it.

"We continue to believe, however, that the record is well documented in this case and the intervenors have not set forth sufficient grounds to reopen it," she said, adding the project is still needed "to maintain reliability of our regional electric grid."

When the line was first proposed nearly two years ago, the utilities said they needed it built and in operation by 2012 to head off possible power outages and other problems forecast by PJM Interconnection, the regional electric grid operator.

However, the National Park Service is required to do a full environmental impact statement on the request

to cross park land, and that assessment, and the park service's decision on whether the line can be built, isn't expected until late summer or early fall of 2012.

And the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection has said it won't issue any of the permits necessary for construction of the lines in designated wetlands and other environmentally sensitive areas until after it sees what the federal decision is.

The park service could refuse permission, which would then require the utilities to follow a route that skirts the park or not build the line at all.

The Eastern Environmental Law Center had been representing the various groups in this case, and a parallel case in state Appellate Court that challenges BPU's decision, but has been joined by Earthjustice, a New York City-based firm that represents environmental groups and individuals.

The hold on construction because of the park service study prompted PSE&G to say the line wouldn't be in service until at least 2015, and the filing notes that is three years after the outages would have otherwise occurred.

PSE&G said actions it has taken to reduce the summer peak loads, which prompted PJM's concerns, will solve the reliability issues.

And, in a recent load forecast report, PJM admitted those actions have reduced the number of projected reliability violations.

In a recent auction, which meets projected needs for the year beginning June 1, 2013, PJM sold nearly a third more demand response units of power than it did in the 2009 auction. Demand response is a way of big power users reducing their energy requirements during times of peak demand, such as summer heat waves.

Most transmission systems are built to handle those the reliability issues created by those peaks, which may occur for just a couple of hours on a couple of days a year.

In addition to the reliability issue, the groups also challenged the BPU decision because of New Jersey's efforts to increase renewable energy sources such as solar and wind. The success of those efforts could eliminate the need for the upgraded transmission lines, a question the groups said the board should look at.

There is precedent and the state law that created the BPU allows for the board to revisit past decisions as situations change.

"The failure to revisit the need for this project could saddle ratepayers with significant costs that are unwarranted," the groups said in their filing.

Whether or not the issue even gets before the full board was unclear Thursday.

The board's public relations director Greg Reinert raised the possibility that since the board's order was before the Appellate Division, jurisdiction may be in the court's hands and not the board's.

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