

AT ISSUE: THE PROPOSED POWER LINE EXPANSION IN SUSSEX COUNTY

Power Points



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Ralph A. LaRossa, president, PSE&G.

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Scott Olson, Byram Township councilman

Upgraded line needed to ease energy traffic jam

RALPH LAROSSA

Sussex County residents who commute daily on Routes 15, 94 and 206 know all too well that our roads are becoming overcrowded. Highways built decades ago are no longer adequate to meet the demands of our growing population.

New Jersey's electrical grid is now facing similar bottlenecks. The existing line that stretches from the border of Pennsylvania into Roseland, New Jersey was built beginning in the late 1920s, and simply cannot handle the modern traffic in electricity.

If we don't upgrade that line, the region faces the real possibility of brownouts and blackouts as early as 2012. So it's time to get to work.

That is not a judgment call we made at PSE&G. It is the hard conclusion of experts at PJM, the organization charged by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission with maintaining the reliability of the grid in a 13-state region with 51 million people.

PJM has identified a need to build a new backbone for the regional grid by adding a 500,000-volt line from Pennsylvania to Roseland. The added capacity will strengthen the entire regional grid, and will be significant enough to ensure that we don't have to come back in a few years with another upgrade.

PSE&G is building the New Jersey portion of this line along a path that will cross parts of Warren, Sussex and Morris counties. We understand that some residents are worried about the impact of this project. But we'd like to put a few of those concerns to rest right now.

First, we are doing everything we can to keep our footprint on the region as light as possible. The reality is that this line must be built. But we are determined to listen, and to make reasonable adjustments to minimize the impact at every turn.

That started with our selection of the route for this line following an extensive study of three alternatives. In public hearings and workshops, we learned face-to-face about the concerns over building a new line through pristine parkland and other environmentally sensitive lands in northern Sussex County.

We listened. And that was a key reason we decided to propose building this line along an existing transmission right of way.

The selected route does not require the forced acquisition of additional prop-

erty. It crosses the least amount of wooded wetlands and forested lands and has the least potential to permanently alter these important habitats.

Yes, neighbors of this line may experience some inconvenience during the construction. And minimizing that is a house-by-house effort. That's why we've been meeting in public workshops and in one-on-one sessions with those property owners, and why we have taken measures like moving our towers and shifting access roads at their requests.

Some have criticized us for seeking approval for this line from the Board of Public Utilities. We made that decision when it became clear that the time needed to obtain town-by-town approvals would delay the project, leaving the region vulnerable to the brownouts and blackouts that PJM warned about. Maintaining reliability is our first concern and the sole reason PJM ordered this line to be built.

In addition, many of the concerns we heard in the towns were similar. The BPU can address them all, in an equitable fashion. And the BPU has experts on staff, while many towns would have to hire expensive consultants to help them weigh this project. In the end, we felt everyone would be better served at the BPU.

Contrary to some claims, that does not mean towns and local residents are shut out of this process. They will have the opportunity to participate in BPU public hearings. And we support the calls to hold those meetings in Morris and Sussex counties at night for the convenience of residents who wish to attend.

In this economic slowdown, New Jersey needs the jobs that will come from this \$750 million investment. Much of the work on the existing line was done during the Great Depression. It's fitting that the upgrade should provide needed stimulus today.

The energy challenges we face as a state and nation are enormous. We are all in this together and we pledge to continue to work with our neighbors as this critical reliability project moves forward.

Ralph A. LaRossa is president and chief operating officer of PSE&G. Power line project details are available at www.pseg.com at the Susquehanna-Roseland link.

Jersey needs relief, yes, but PSE&G needs to show options

SCOTT OLSON

The proposal by Public Service Electric & Gas to construct a major expansion along its Susquehanna-Roseland transmission line — more than tripling the line's current capacity and more than doubling the height of its towers — deserves serious scrutiny.

This massive project — “deconstructing” the existing 82-foot lattice towers and replacing them with new towers reaching 190-feet or higher and carrying a 500-kilovolt line in addition to the existing 230-kv line — is unprecedented in both size and scope. At a meeting in East Hanover, PSE&G's own representatives acknowledged that this 230-kv/500-kv configuration exists nowhere within their current system.

I cannot dispute that New Jersey's electricity corridors are congested and need relief to prevent potential price spikes and blackouts. Peak energy demand, however, only occurs for 50 hours out of the year, and should be addressed through other currently available alternatives.

Prudent investment toward our energy future should not continue to promote dirty coal plants, upwind of us in Ohio and Pennsylvania, when energy conservation and efficiency, and homegrown renewables can provide a healthier solution.

In October, Governor Corzine released a fifteen year Energy Master Plan (EMP) that proposes to increase our renewable energy standard to 30 percent by 2020. Utilities will be required to meet an increasing portion of our energy needs with renewables from solar, wind and other clean sources. These renewable energy goals — in conjunction with the Plan's efficiency objectives — can readily satisfy the State's energy needs without requiring New Jersey ratepayers to fund major transmission line expansions.

PSE&G's projection that demand will continue to rise by nearly 1.5 percent or more annually is at odds with the EMP's proposal to hold electricity demand nearly flat, reigning in conspicuous energy consumption by spending just under one billion dollars towards energy efficiency in the next four years to meet this objective. This investment can and should be targeted at the areas most in need of improved power reliability, including the area the Susquehanna-Roseland line serves.

This proposal by PSE&G to increase transmission capacity by several hundred percent along this line to meet their inflated demand projections is

excessive and profit motivated.

To enhance reliability, the \$750 million it will cost ratepayers to build the New Jersey portion of this \$1.3 billion line would be better spent on region-wide energy efficiency and renewable energy programs. California now holds energy efficiency as the highest priority resource in meeting its energy needs — there is no reason why New Jersey cannot ask PSE&G to do the same.

Yet on their Susquehanna-Roseland Reliability Project web page, PSE&G includes a link to a video that resembles a mini-infomercial for increased energy consumption — a lost opportunity to point out that we all need to be more conscientious about our electric usage.

The video begins with visuals of over-loaded wall sockets and extension cords, and enthusiastically embraces an increased demand for energy, at no time even mentioning energy conservation. Not difficult to understand when you consider that increased energy use means increased profits for PSE&G, especially when ratepayers will be bearing the financial burden for constructing these “reliability” projects.

In addition to these energy-planning issues, this enormous project also raises health, economic and environmental concerns.

PSE&G emphatically states that studies on electro-magnetic fields (EMFs) are “inconclusive” and that there is no causal relationship between EMFs and cancer. In the 1960s, cigarette companies said it was inconclusive that smoking causes cancer, but we know better now. Both the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) and World Health Organization (WHO) classify EMFs as a possible human carcinogen. Recent studies indicate some relationship between living near transmission lines and health problems, especially cancer.

Why subject the lives of families along this 45-mile project to a greater unknown risk?

Economics are an important concern as well.

The increased line voltage, visual impact of more than doubled tower heights, and additional vegetative clearing will decrease property values of homes adjoining the lines. The increased tower height also brings the lines and towers into plain view above the mature forest canopy in many res-

idential areas, potentially decreasing the value of homes currently not impacted by these lines. For every 100 homes with a decreased assessment of just \$10,000, municipalities will see a loss of one million dollars in ratables, a tough pill to swallow in these difficult fiscal times.

This project will also have an enormous impact on the environment, especially in New Jersey's Highlands Region. PSE&G has requested an exemption for this project from the Highlands Act, despite undisputed facts that the construction process will cause considerable environmental degradation, including damage to forests and wildlife habitat and loss of public parkland and other lands preserved with taxpayer dollars. The 190-foot high towers rising from the forest and running along ridgelines will industrialize the region's landscape.

Given the State's commitment to renewable energy, the only things I want to see towering that high into the air from the hills and forests of my community are wind-turbines generating clean, renewable power.

Faced with growing opposition and an unreasonably mandated timetable, PSE&G has chosen to bypass local approvals and intends to file an application with the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities (BPU) later this month, seeking direct State approval for the project. By doing so, PSE&G will no longer need approvals from local authorities, robbing municipalities and their residents of full participation in the decision making process.

PSE&G has not yet shown a proven need for this expansion, or that all other options have been exhausted and this is the only viable alternative. They have not yet proven that potential negative health effects could be lessened; nor have they shown how the environmental and economic impacts to our municipalities and residents would be addressed.

BPU should reject PSE&G's request for this project, and instead require that PSE&G develop an alternative proposal that employs other more appropriate and environmentally beneficial alternatives — small-scale distributed renewable energy installations, efficiency and conservation measures — to meet our future regional electricity needs.

Scott Olson is a Byram Township councilman, and maintains a web page with links and information on PSE&G's Susquehanna-Roseland Project at www.northbyram.org/routeb/.

WEEKEND GALLERY

