

WEST VIRGINIANS FOR RELIABLE POWER



Charleston Daily Mail

June 9, 2009

Editorial Page

On The Web at: <http://www.dailymail.com/Opinion/Commentary/200906080541>

**Bill Raney: The PATH power line is badly needed
W.Va., the region and the nation need reliability**

The construction of new high-voltage power lines is critical to meeting future demand for energy in our region and the nation.

New electric infrastructure will help make our country more secure, energy-independent and can help boost our economy here in the state.

Unbeknownst to many, the transmission of electricity is not just a local or state issue. It is a regional concern.

Like a series of dominoes falling, electrical outages - in the case of a main transmission line failure - can impact everyone on the grid. If something is not done to relieve stress on the electric grid, there could be adverse affects to our region.

The Potomac-Appalachian Transmission Highline - the PATH project - is a joint venture between Allegheny Energy and American Electric Power. It is proposed to stretch some 200 miles from the John Amos Power station in Putnam County diagonally across West Virginia and into Virginia and Maryland.

This 765-kilovolt line will help shore up our region's aging electric infrastructure and carry power to eastern markets.

Why is this line needed? Because regional and national experts, such as our grid operator, PJM Interconnection, and the North American Electric Reliability Council, have called for new transmission infrastructure to be built in our region within the next few years to prevent looming reliability concerns.

Our current infrastructure is aging and demand for electricity is only increasing.

President Obama understands the need for an improved electric grid, and in his Feb. 24, 2009 speech before a joint session of Congress, stated: "We will soon lay down thousands of miles of power lines that can carry new energy to cities and towns across this country."

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The federal stimulus package contains billions of dollars for grid-related projects.

According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, electricity demand is projected to grow by 26 percent from 2007 to 2030.

This is easy to understand when you consider the number of electronic devices in your house.

Computers and electronics in the home increased 188 percent between 1997-2004.

Additionally, the size of the average American home grew 21.9 percent between 1987-2004, creating more space to heat and cool.

As an energy state, West Virginia has much to gain from constructing these types of projects.

Obviously, as president of the West Virginia Coal Association, I believe an improved transmission system can lead to an increase in the amount of generation dispatched into the regional grid.

This helps preserve the future of existing power plants already on line, justifies additional investment in these plants, and increases the likelihood that new, clean-coal electric fired generation will be constructed in the state.

Activation of this new line could also lead to an increase in West Virginia coal production and security and stability for thousands of professional West Virginia coal miners.

Additionally, such projects will also open up the potential to connect other West Virginia energy resources, such as wind power and natural gas, to the grid.

Beyond the fact that we need to update the grid for reliability and demand concerns, energy infrastructure projects like PATH offer the potential for jobs, taxes and new markets for West Virginia energy.

This is particularly important in this time of rising unemployment and economic distress.

Raney is president of the West Virginia Coal Association.