

PSE&G delays construction of controversial Susquehanna-Roseland power line

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Brian T. Murray/The Star-Ledger



Jerry McCrea/ The Star-

LedgerView of PSE&G's North Jersey Susquehanna-Roseland transmission line in Montville

Construction and completion of the controversial Susquehanna-Roseland power transmission line, which will cut across New Jersey's protected and water-rich Highlands, will be delayed by three years, utility officials said today.

Obtaining environmental approvals has taken longer than anticipated, PSE&G said just days after the state Department of Environmental Protection found the company's application to disturb wetlands incomplete. PSE&G now anticipates the \$750 million power project, initially scheduled for completion by 2012, will not be done until 2015.

"We are disappointed by the delay, but we are going to work with the regulators. ... We are still committed to constructing the line. It's just going to be delayed," said PSE&G spokeswoman Deann Muzikar, adding the line is needed to prevent interruptions in service in the region.

The New Jersey Highlands Coalition and the New Jersey chapter of the Sierra Club said the state should kill the project, which they claim will ruin pristine land and promote polluting, coal-burning generating plants in the west.

"The nation will be moving toward renewable energy sources in the next five years, making this already unnecessary power line obsolete," said Jeff Tittel of the Sierra Club.

Approved by the state Board of Public Utilities and the New Jersey Highlands Council, the project involves a 500,000-volt transmission line along a 146-mile route between Pennsylvania and northern New Jersey and erecting 500-kilovolt transmission towers along a path where smaller, 230-kilovolt towers already exist.

The main hurdle has been the National Park Service, which must approve the line crossing the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, Middle Delaware National Scenic and Recreational River and the Appalachian National Scenic Trail.

PSE&G split the project earlier this year, hoping to begin construction this summer on an eastern leg between Hopatcong in Sussex County and Roseland in Essex County. But that strategy caused trouble for its permit reviews by the DEP, which said this week the BPU reviewed the project in one piece, not in a bifurcated process, and the DEP needs to do the same.

The park service also is standing firm on refusing to take action before 2012, as it holds public hearings and considers alternative routes for the line.

"PSE&G has been playing a high-stakes game of chicken with the public and regulators, whom they are now blaming for their not getting their permits on a fast track," said Julia Somers of the Highlands Coalition. "This doesn't surprise us, considering the vast environmental and scenic damage that will be imposed on the Highlands for this risky, ill-conceived, and expensive project."