

Resident is fighting new power lines on two fronts

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By Cindy Forrest

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PHOTO COURTESY OF EILEEN ROLNICK

Eileen Rolnick with florescent bulbs, unplugged, that light up when she stands under a utility line.

Eileen Rolnick has gone viral with her fight against the giant utility company, Public Service Electric and Gas. The spunky Parsippany resident has put out [a five-minute YouTube video](#) outlining her concerns and fears about the approved Susquehanna-Roseland Power Line.

The highlight of the video shows Rolnick holding two florescent bulbs – attached to nothing yet still lit up – as she stands under the utility line that runs behind her home.

The proposed transmission project she is fighting spans a total of 146 miles from Pennsylvania across northwestern New Jersey along an existing right-of-way. The proposed line would carry coal power across 45 miles in New Jersey, along monopoles and lattice towers up to 200 feet high, double the height of the existing towers.

So far, every governmental agency petitioned, including the New Jersey Highlands Council, the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities and the Pennsylvania Public Utilities Commission, has given PJM Interconnect, the regional grid operator, the approvals that it has sought for the project.

That means nothing to Rolnick. Before she went out on the web she advocated against the lines at public hearings, printed flyers and walked door to door in her neighborhood and even stood outside the local grocery store to educate people about the project.

And while Rolnick continues to fight her David vs. Goliath battle, environmental groups are taking a more traditional path to stopping the project.

Earlier this month, clean-energy advocates asked the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities (BPU) to reconsider a decision it made approving construction of the high-voltage electrical transmission line that would run from Berwick, Pennsylvania to Roseland, New Jersey. The environmentalist base their legal action on the fact that the line was approved on the "faulty assumption" that it would be needed to keep New Jersey's lights on but, they say, recent developments show this to be incorrect.

"Energy efficiency and demand response programs are working, and that means we don't need to pay for big new transmission lines to ship coal-fired power to New Jersey," said Earthjustice attorney Hannah Chang.

In April 2010, the BPU approved the New Jersey portion of the line to prevent brownouts and blackouts that were projected to occur beginning in 2012. But since the Board's decision, completion of the line has been delayed from 2012 to 2015. Therefore PSE&G has been forced to admit that interim fixes can solve any anticipated reliability issues.

"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."

Further defying the extreme need cited by the utility during the hearing is that PJM, which originally determined the transmission line was needed, last month revised its load forecast down significantly.

"The bottom line is that we are seeing permanent reductions in electricity demand," said attorney Kevin Pflug of the Eastern Environmental Law Center.

However PSE&G spokeswoman Deanna Muzikar disagreed. "The need for this line was established three times by PJM," she said, "The short-term measures that need to be taken in this instance do not negate the need for this line.

The transmission system running along the right of way that PSE&G is proposing to update was constructed more than 80 years ago, in 1928.

The proposed Susquehanna-Roseland high-voltage transmission line is one of several planned lines that would bring power from coal plants in Pennsylvania and West Virginia to urban areas in the mid-Atlantic region.

Earthjustice is joining the Eastern Environmental Law Center to represent Environment New Jersey, **The New Jersey Highlands Coalition**, Sierra Club, Stop the Lines, and New Jersey Environmental Federation in seeking to reopen the Board's decision approving the Susquehanna-

Roseland line. These groups intervened in the original proceeding to challenge approval of the line and appealed after the Board approved it. The appeal is pending before the Appellate Division of the New Jersey Superior Court.

"New Jersey is in the process of adding thousands of megawatts of electricity from wind, solar, and natural gas; and in the meantime, conservation and efficiency measures are working. This power line expansion project is not needed and will hurt ratepayers and the environment," stated Jeff Tittel, director of the New Jersey Sierra Club. "The Board needs to reconsider the Susquehanna-Roseland line because it is too costly, unnecessary, and will bring in dirty coal power from Pennsylvania."

"Ratepayers should not be footing the bill to expand these coal-by-wire power lines. The Board has a responsibility to re-examine the need for this costly project, which will have serious environmental and public health impacts," said Christine Guhl, Sierra Club field organizer.

For Rolnick the money issue is secondary to the impact on health and safety. Cancer clusters along the existing corridor where 230 kilovolts run today would only be exacerbated by the additional 500 kilowatts being proposed, she said. The dangers associated with the power tower's proximity to gas lines are another huge issue for Rolnick, as she likens the situation in New Jersey to the catastrophe that took place in San Bruno, CA, last year.

"You can see how close these 40-year-old gas pipes are to the towers," she says in the video.

Initially there were three route options for the power line. PSE&G chose Plan B over Plans A and C. Plan B crosses the Delaware River and enters New Jersey through the southern end of the Delaware Water Gap national Recreation Area Park and travels through Warren, Sussex, Morris and Essex Counties. Locally the line would run through Township of Boonton, East Hanover, Jefferson, Kinnelon, Montville, Parsippany-Troy Hills, and Rockaway Township.

The National Park Service (NPS) is in the process of a two-year study that won't be completed until 2012, which is what has pushed the project completion date to 2015. If the BPU fails to rescind its approval of the project, then the NPS permit is the last requirement before the start of the project.

In determining whether to issue that permit, the NPS needs to complete an Environmental Impact Study (EIS), which assesses the effect of the proposed power transmission line that, as it stands now, would cut through the Delaware Water Gap Recreation Area and bisect the Appalachian Trail.

To view Rolnick's YouTube video go to: www.youtube.com/watch?v=K5o7ot1ovbA. There is a correction to the website address Rolnick gives as the source of her data. It can be found at www.powerlinefacts.com/EMF.htm

E-mail: forrestc@northjersey.com