

UTILITIES

New group wants more power lines built

By Len Lazarick
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The head of a new group advocating the building of more power transmission lines to avoid electricity brownouts or blackouts in a few years said he was "appalled" by the Public Service Commission's lack of political backbone on new power lines.

In a 2007 report to the legislature, the commission said transmission was the most economically attractive option.

"We need to move forward," said Russell Frisby, a former chairman of the PSC who is starting Marylanders for Reliable Power. "But the commission was uncertain it could move forward because of political opposition.

"We shouldn't be talking about this type of opposition when we face this type of crisis," Frisby said at an Annapolis news conference.

The purpose of Frisby's group is to raise public and political awareness of the potential for real electrici-

ty shortages in 2012 if nothing is done — a point Gov. Martin O'Malley has frequently raised in supporting conservation measures and production of more renewable resources.

The fledgling groups includes utility companies and cooperatives, labor unions and business groups, among them the **Greater Baltimore Committee** and the Maryland Chamber of Commerce.

"Maryland is now paying among the highest prices in the nation" because transmission lines are "overburdened and congested," Frisby said.

"Maryland has not done a good job building new power plants," said Todd Newkirk, a representative of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, a member of Reliable Power.

PSC consultants estimated that in 2006, Marylanders paid about \$500 million in net congestion charges, one of the components of electric rates.

Other than raising awareness of the issue among the public, the group has no specific goals. "It's been known, but it's been ignored,"

Frisby said.

The most important transmission line for the near term is TRAIL, the Trans-Allegheny Interstate Line being built by Allegheny Energy (part of the coalition). This will link Western Maryland to Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia sources of power, and other less expensive

sources of power generation to the west, including renewable energy.

None of TRAIL goes through Maryland, but a second line, the Potomac-Appalachian Transmission Highline from West Virginia, does go through Washington County to south of Frederick.

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