

Coalition pushes for more power

■ Chambers, labor, energy firms seek investments in infrastructure, conservation

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A coalition of businesses, chambers of commerce, labor organizations and energy companies, warning of power blackouts and urging upgrades to Maryland's electricity infrastructure and more intensive energy-conservation efforts, has more than doubled its membership in the past two months.

Businesses such as grocer Graul's Market have joined groups including the Maryland Chamber of Commerce, Baltimore-Washington Corridor Chamber of Commerce and Greater Baltimore Committee in the coalition, called Marylanders for Reliable Power. Utility Allegheny Energy of Greensburg, Pa., which provides electricity in Western Maryland and parts of Montgomery, Howard and Carroll counties, and the Southern Maryland Electric Cooperative of Hughesville are involved.

The business benefits of investing in energy infrastructure include helping to retain and attract businesses by ensuring an adequate electricity supply and lowering the risk of economically crippling power outages, coalition leaders say.

"By 2012, we may be looking at blackouts and brownouts in Maryland," said H. Russell Frisby Jr., former chairman of the Maryland Public Service Commission and founding chairman of the Baltimore City Chamber of Commerce. The spokesman for the relatively new coalition, formed in March, met last week with Gazette editors and executives.

The coalition supports building a high-voltage power line called the Potomac-Appalachian

Transmission Highline, or PATH, planned by Allegheny — which is one of the group's key funders — and Ohio utility American Electric Power. The line would run from West Virginia to Kemptown in Frederick County near the Montgomery, Howard and Carroll borders.

Last year, regional grid operator PJM Interconnection approved the construction of the line, which Allegheny estimates will cost \$1.8 billion and be completed by 2012 if approval from the Maryland PSC and others is obtained. Officials with the U.S. Department of Energy and PJM have called the new transmission lines essential to prevent power outages, according to a report by the utilities.

"If something is not done to relieve stress on the transmission grid in the next few years, there could be adverse effects to our region, including blackouts," the report says.

The issue in Maryland is compounded by the thousands of people expected to move into Maryland due to the Pentagon's base realignment and closure program in the near future, Frisby said.

"While this is good for the state's economy, it will lead to a spike in the demand for electricity at a time when we face a capacity shortage," he said.

Providing more generation is another part of the solution, Frisby said.

Constellation Energy Group of Baltimore wants to build a third reactor at its Calvert Cliffs Nuclear Power Plant in Southern Maryland. The project, which has been opposed by groups such as the Maryland Public Interest Research Group, will cost billions of dollars and wouldn't be completed until at least 2015 if

approvals are granted.

The Maryland chamber supports upgrades to electricity infrastructure but hasn't taken a position on the Allegheny PATH power line, said Kathleen Snyder, chamber president and CEO. The group does support Constellation's proposed nuclear power plant, she said.

Competitive Power Ventures of Silver Spring has also filed with the state to build a \$400 million natural gas-fired generating plant in Waldorf as early as 2011.

Pursuing renewable energy is another recommendation of the coalition, Frisby said. Among its members is Synergics Wind Energy of Annapolis, which seeks to construct two wind farms on private land in Garrett County in Western Maryland.

Bluewater Wind LLC of Hoboken, N.J., also wants to build a wind farm near Ocean City. The Delaware Public Service Commission has approved an offshore wind farm to be built by Bluewater in that state, not far from the Maryland border.

The coalition is also urging more conservation efforts, such as businesses conducting energy audits to learn where they can curb use. "Some utilities are offering to do free audits," Frisby said.

Others involved in the coalition include the Utility Workers Union of America, Western Maryland Health System, the Maryland Coal Association, Mel's Business Systems and Kenny Construction Co.

In a speech last month, Gov. Martin O'Malley (D) said that energy deregulation had failed in Maryland and called for local governments to develop smaller-scale "peaking plants" that could feed into the grid when the demand for electricity spikes.

He also pledged to propose new legislation next session to quicken the construction of new plants through the bonding authority of the Maryland Environmental Services Agency. The state will also purchase electricity from renewable energy sources to help speed the development of wind farms or an Eastern Shore power plant powered by poultry litter, O'Malley said.

