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## Feds designate energy corridor

WASHINGTON – Most of the state and the entire length of New York Regional Interconnect Inc.'s proposed power line now rests in one of the two "National Interest Electric Transmission Corridor" designations announced by the U.S. Department of Energy Tuesday.

The designations were guided by the 2005 Energy Policy Act and finalized without much change after draft versions were created in April.

The energy department created a "Southwest" and "Mid-Atlantic" corridor, both encompassing two of country's most populated and energy constrained areas, its report states.

Inside the corridors – which cover all or part of 10 states in total – the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) will have unprecedented authority to review power line projects that a state has either denied or failed to review within one year.

The "Mid-Atlantic" corridor stretches from northern Virginia to northern New York state, where it covers 47 of 62 counties. NYRI's project would run through eight of those 47 counties, including Chenango. While most of those counties are not constrained, they can aid in energy being brought to the places that are, the department says.

NYRI opponents fear the corridors unnecessarily undermine state authority and open a door for NYRI to slip through if it's denied.

"It undermines our state's existing, forward thinking energy philosophy by imposing the federal government's view of what should be done upon us," said Hubbardsville resident Chris Rossi, the co-chair of the citizens group Stop NYRI. "It's really frightening."

NYRI's project was deemed unnecessary in September by the state's electricity grid operator, which claimed in an annual report that there were more than enough solutions to meet New York's energy needs.

In all, the Mid-Atlantic corridor encompasses counties in Ohio, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, New York, Maryland, Virginia, and all of New Jersey, Delaware, and the District of Columbia. The Southwest corridor blankets parts of southern California and

Arizona.

Both corridors will encourage state's to take "prompt" measures to meet the nation's growing energy needs in the coming years, Secretary of Energy Samuel W. Bodman stated in a press release Tuesday.

"These National Corridors serve as an important indication by the federal government that significant transmission constraint or congestion problems exist," Bodman said. "The goal is simple – to keep reliable supplies of electric energy flowing to all Americans. By designating these National Corridors, we are encouraging stakeholders in these regions to identify solutions and take prompt action."

Assistant Energy Secretary Kevin Kovelar said the policy doesn't take away a state's rights, but rather gives the federal government a chance to step in if it fails to take prompt action.

"States will retain their primary responsibility" as siting authorities, Kovelar said.

If FERC does take over a power line review, Kovelar assured reporters that the utilities or companies proposing them would not be given a free pass.

"Filing with FERC does not equal an approval," Kovelar said. "Opponents of this (policy) have equated an application going to FERC with an approval; that is simply not accurate."

NYRI is proposing to build a \$1.6 billion line from Utica to Orange County that would split 44 miles of Chenango. Project officials say the line would relieve electricity constraints in the New York City area.

"The DOE's corridor designations that it announced today continue to encourage states like New York to identify solutions and take action against the pressing problem of transmission congestion," said NYRI spokesman David Kalson in an e-mail message to The Evening Sun. "Federal, state and private sector studies all show a congestion problem in New York State that causes serious economic impacts for millions of consumers. The DOE designations represent an important step in encouraging modernization of New York State's transmission infrastructure that will increase reliability and efficiency, and make possible greater use of clean, renewable energy sources."

NYRI has not filed a complete permit application with the state Public Service Commission – New York's power line authority – or begun its review process. If and when the review does begin, the PSC will have one year to approve or deny NYRI's project. Even if denied, NYRI's project could still get picked up by FERC.

Representatives of the PSC say the corridor designations are unnecessary.

“We will review the designation and respond accordingly,” said PSC spokeswoman Anne Dalton. “In comments we supplied the department in July, we stated that the article VII one-stop siting process has functioned well in the past and will continue to work well. There’s been no demonstrated need to designate any corridor within New York state.”

U.S. Congressman Michael Arcuri said he will continue to fight NYRI, and he admonished the DOE for making the corridor designations.

“This corridor is not only unsound energy policy and an economic disaster for Upstate New York, but it has been executed with an astounding disregard for local governments and residents,” he said in statement Tuesday. “This disingenuous process has consistently shown a total lack of respect for the people of Upstate New York. Everything about DOE’s designation procedure seems shockingly arbitrary, from where the corridor was located to who was involved in the process. I will not stand by as the DOE brings a process to allow utility companies to run roughshod over local communities and take private property from landowners. This is not the end of our fight, only the beginning.”

The corridor designations will last for 12 years, Kovelar said.

The department reportedly received 2,000 comments from stakeholders across the country in a 60-day comment period regarding the designations that ended in July.

The department claims the corridors will help the country keep pace with growing energy demand its expects to rise 40 percent by 2030.

“While it (energy infrastructure) served our last century well, it will not serve this century very well,” Kovelar said.

He also claims the corridors are not directed at any one project or solution.

“It’s not an endorsement of any single solution,” he said.