

# Pepco proposes Choptank River route for power line project

Courtesy of The Star Democrat

By DUSTIN HOLT Staff Writer | [0 comments](#)

CAMBRIDGE Wednesday's announcement by Pepco Holdings Inc. that it proposes to use the Choptank River Route for the Mid-Atlantic Power Pathway project has received mixed reviews from those opposed to the original route.

MAPP is a proposed high-voltage transmission line intended to help bring reliable and affordable power to the Delmarva Peninsula. The line will run from northern Virginia, across southern Maryland, under the Chesapeake Bay, through Dorchester and Wicomico counties, and end near Millsboro, Del. Pepco Holdings (PHI), which is the parent company of Delmarva Power, decided to bypass the original route through southern Dorchester County, which included portions of Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge, in favor of a mixed underwater, underground and aboveground route through the county.

Under the new proposal, the Dorchester route will follow the Choptank River underwater and make landfall east of Cambridge. The line will run underground for about a mile until reaching a point southeast of state Route 16.

It then will transition to above ground northeast of U.S. Route 50 before crossing over the Nanticoke River near Vienna. For the land portion of the route through Dorchester County, PHI has been successful in acquiring the majority of the necessary rights-of-way to construct the line.

MAPP Community Advisory Council Chairman Allen Nelson said the Choptank Route is the best option. "This company has sincerely tried to come up with some options that address many of our concerns," Nelson said in a written statement.

However, Eastern Shore Land Conservancy Deputy Director and CAC member Amy Owsley said she was disappointed by Wednesday's announcement.

She said the CAC formally approved a motion earlier this year not to endorse any route through Dorchester County until the necessary environmental impact studies were completed and the state released its findings on the need for the transmission line.

"We are disappointed in the announcement because the state has not approved the project and we feel proposing a route is premature since the project has not been approved," she said. "Also, there are studies being done now that could determine the project is not necessary because the future calls for less energy use."

She added that the ESLC is also disappointed because PHI has spent millions of dollars from customers to pay the people doing preliminary work on the project prior to state approval. "We feel they have put the cart before the horse," she said.

Sen. Richard Colburn, R-37-Mid-Shore, said he is not happy about the new proposal; however, it is better than the original proposal.

"I'm happy county residents and visitors to the county won't have to see the terrible eyesore of the power lines through Blackwater and the future Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Historical Park," he said. "In my opinion, I want to see the proposed above ground lines put underground. Pepco indicated to me this is their final proposal so we'll see if they do make any additional adjustments."

Dorchester County Commissioner Ricky Travers said he would only give 100 percent support to the project if the entire path through county was underwater and underground.

Del. Addie Eckardt, R-37B-Dorchester, said she is happy Pepco decided to use the Choptank route; however, she wants to know exactly where the line will run above ground and whether more changes are needed.

PHI originally proposed to bring the transmission line ashore at Taylors Island, and have 150-foot towers run above ground for 27 miles to Vienna. The transmission line would consume 650 acres of county agriculture, forest and rural lands, including portions of Blackwater, according to the ESLC.

Many local residents spoke against the original route through Blackwater at public hearings, and the Dorchester County Council, Cambridge City Council and town councils of East New Market and Vienna were opposed to the MAPP route through Blackwater.

In a written statement MAPP Project Manager Bob Jubic said the Choptank route completely avoids the environmentally sensitive areas of Blackwater and the culturally and historically significant areas of the proposed Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Historical Park.

According to the Delmarva Power press release, PHI has worked with local watermen to map, survey and select an underwater route that avoids a majority of the oyster beds in the area. PHI must mitigate for any oyster beds that are disturbed. The company expects to continue working with local watermen on that phase of the project.

"This project could be a real boost to the oyster population in the Choptank River and the Bay and we're encouraged that it may mean some of our local watermen will find work in the process," said Dorchester Seafood Harvesters Association President Ben Parks.

Another difference in the new proposal is PHI has reduced the length of the overhead portion of the line by nearly two-thirds, and for the majority of the route, shortened the poles from an average height of 125 feet to about 100 feet, according to Jubic.

The MAPP line will fill a significant void in the region's high-voltage transmission system, according to PHI.

"Currently, on the Delmarva Peninsula, no such high-voltage transmission lines exist," Jubic said. "The transmission system on the Peninsula requires an upgrade. MAPP will help meet the region's need for reliable and affordable energy."

Federal and state agencies, including the Maryland Public Service Commission, will need to approve the project as well as the proposed route. PHI will begin construction when all of the required permits and authorizations are granted.

Maps of the Choptank route and other route information will be on display to the public at the Holiday Inn Express in Cambridge from 4 to 8 p.m. May 12.

Residents can also visit the MAPP office at 828 Airpax Road, Suite B700, in Cambridge. The MAPP office is open Mondays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Wednesdays from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m.; and Fridays from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.