

Dominion pre-files to begin pipeline review process

- Rachael Smith
- Nov 5, 2014



Source: Dominion Power
JOHN G. OWEN/TIMES-DISPATCH

A look at the pipeline's proposed route, which would stretch from West Virginia to North Carolina.

Dominion Resources pre-filed with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission last Friday, officially asking to begin the environmental review process of the proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline.

The proposed pipeline is a joint venture between Dominion, Duke Energy, Piedmont Natural Gas and AGL Resources. It would run 550 miles from West Virginia through Nelson County and into North Carolina, and is expected to cost between \$4.5 billion to \$5 billion.

“This is the formal beginning of a comprehensive and detailed review process by the FERC and other agencies that will examine this project from every angle,” said Diane Leopold, president of Dominion Energy, in a news release Friday. “It is an open process with many opportunities for participation by the public.”

Locally, the project has seen much opposition.

“As a landowner whose property is on the proposed route of the Atlantic Coast Pipeline, I am very disappointed that Dominion and its three partners have decided to pre-file with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission,” said Charlotte Rea, of Afton. “This pipeline serves absolutely no benefit for Nelson County and will do irreparable harm to affected landowners and the economy of the county.”

According to a study by Richmond’s Chmura Economics and Analytics, a report paid for by Dominion, the project could possibly generate a total of \$2.7 billion in economic impact from 2014 to 2019 in West Virginia, Virginia and North Carolina, and could support 17,240 jobs. During the process of pre-filing, Dominion will continue to talk with stakeholders and consider their feedback as the company continues to update and make modifications to the proposed route, said Dominion spokesman Frank Mack.

Mack said the company also will file drafts of its environmental resource reports to FERC, which include general project descriptions and other environmental topics, such as water use and quality, geological resources and air and noise quality.

Rea is one of the named plaintiffs in a lawsuit against Dominion that asks the United States District Court in Charlottesville to declare unconstitutional a Virginia statute relevant to the pipeline which allows natural gas companies the right to enter private property without the landowner’s permission.

Rea also is one of many landowners who have voiced fears that the proposed route would harm the region’s unique geographical features. “We now have a chance to show the FERC how environmentally irresponsible the projected route of this pipeline is as it goes through Nelson, karst-laden Augusta and Highland Counties, two national forests, the Blue Ridge Parkway and the Appalachian Trail,” she said. “The watersheds of all three counties will be put at risk, as will the health and safety of their residents. If we get a fair hearing, this project will either be rerouted outside Nelson or disapproved in full.”

The pipeline project needs to gain approval from 40 federal, state and local regulatory agencies before construction can begin, according to Dominion’s news release.

“Finally, [we] are working with the FERC staff to finalize the next round of open houses along with FERC scoping meetings, which should occur in the first quarter of 2015,” Mack said.

Dominion is not seeking a request for approval of any liquefied natural gas (LNG) facilities, said Dominion spokesman Chet Wade.

“We keep hearing people saying this project is for export, but it is not. You cannot export overseas without an LNG facility,” he said.

Surveying work also is still continuing for the project, Wade said. Dominion has completed surveying for more than 70 percent of the route, he said. Of all landowners on the entire route, more than 70 percent have given their permission for survey work, he said.

Mack said Dominion plans to file the preferred route when it files the FERC application in the summer of 2015.

In the summer of 2016, the company then hopes to receive the FERC Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity — an order that means the project has been found to be in the public good and that would grant the pipeline official approval.

“The CPCN often comes in the form of an approval with a list of attached conditions that must be met for the project to proceed,” Wade said. “If the company accepts the conditions and meets the ones that need to be met before construction starts, the last step with FERC is usually the issuance of a notice to proceed. Assuming all other permits and approvals have been received, construction can then begin.”

Dominion anticipates the pipeline to be in service by late 2018.

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