

Pols, city and green groups sway agency

Green Path is looking greener

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After much urging by elected officials and environmental groups, the agency behind the Green Path North project said Friday it has entered discussions to place the high-tension corridor along an existing power route rather than across undeveloped desert lands.

The Los Angeles Department of Water and Power has received increasing pressure in recent months to use an existing transmission route along the 10 Freeway that is controlled by Southern California Edison.

The agency is "actively discussing" the possibility of routing Green Path North along the 10 Freeway between North Palm Springs and the the 215 Freeway, Joe Ramollo, LADWP spokesman, wrote Friday in a statement.

The goal is to minimize environmental impacts, he wrote.

The LADWP maintains the proposed corridor is a "green" project because it will tap into renewable energy sources, such as geothermal, wind and solar.

However, the California Desert Coalition, Wildlands Conservancy and Center for Biological Diversity have opposed the proposed project. They say documents show the proposed corridor would run through pristine stretches of desert preserves.

The San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors also unanimously adopted a resolution in December urging the LADWP to choose a different route.

Then in February, Rep. Jerry Lewis, R-Redlands, sent a letter to the LADWP asking it avoid traversing the Morongo Basin by using existing corridors.

On Friday, Lewis expressed support for the discussions between Edison and the LADWP as well as optimism that the two agencies could resolve the issue.

"He understands there's still a lot of technical details to work out," said Lewis spokesman Jim Specht. "He hopes it will allow them to provide this very urgently needed power line into Los Angeles without causing terrible impacts to the environment and to the residents."

Sandi Blain, manager of Edison's transmission licensing group, said a preliminary meeting with the LADWP was held in late May and another is scheduled for the end of June.

As to whether the collaboration will work, "it's still too early to tell," she said. "Building transmission (lines) is a very complex process, and because of that complexity, it does take time to work through those issues."

Meanwhile, residents and environmental groups in the High Desert have been awaiting the start of the environmental review process for the proposed project, saying they have been given little chance to weigh in on the plans.

The LADWP would not disclose a date when environmental review will begin, but the agency issued assurances that the public would have ample opportunity to be involved in the process.

"This is a new era for LADWP," David Nahai, the agency's chief executive officer and general manager, wrote in a statement. "Going green is integral to our mission, and it is the right thing to do."

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