

Rio Arriba County votes against Verde power line plan

By Justin Horwath

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Rio Arriba County commissioners on Thursday unanimously voted to oppose the proposed route of the Verde Transmission Line, a proposed high-voltage power line that would stretch 33 miles from northwest of Española to west of Santa Fe.

The vote by the County Commission is significant because Hunt Power of Dallas, the company proposing the \$80 million line, will need zoning approval from the three commissioners for portions of the project running through Rio Arriba County.

A resolution approved by the commission says the line, if constructed along the current proposed route, would obstruct the views of some county residents. It also says residents may need to be compensated for the line's impact on their lives, health and property values.

Commissioner Alex Naranjo, who pushed the resolution, said in an interview that the measure expresses opposition to “the present route only” of the proposed 345-kilovolt transmission line.

Naranjo said he introduced the resolution following community meetings in San Pedro and Hernandez, where he said hundreds of local residents expressed opposition to the line.

Paul Schulze, a Hunt Power spokesman for the project, said in an email Thursday that the County Commission “vote was on a resolution, not a formal application, and we appreciate the supportive comments expressed during the meeting.”

“Verde will submit a formal permit application to Rio Arriba County a few years from now,” he said. “We look forward to having more discussions with all stakeholders as the process continues.”

The resolution says, “The current proposed placement of the transmission line would run directly north of the Black Mesa on Santa Clara Pueblo land, obstructing the view for residents living in the vicinity” with power line poles measuring 90 to 110 feet tall.

The economic disadvantages of such a large-scale project have not been studied, the resolution says, and parties living near the route may require proper compensation for the way the project could impact their “lives, health, and home and property values.”



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The proposed Verde Transmission Line towers would replace the current towers that run north and south by the Norton Substation on Old Buckman Road west of Tesuque. Clyde Mueller/New Mexican file photo

The resolution cites a Dec. 21 measure by the Española school board “recognizing the health hazards of the Hunt Power Verde Transmission Line Project, especially considering its close proximity to Hernandez Elementary School and Carlos F. Vigil Middle School, which serve hundreds of local students.”

Jan Brooks was among those who showed up at the County Commission meeting to oppose the transmission line. She said in an interview that as long as there’s doubt about the health impacts of the line, “Why should we accept the risk?”

“After six years of planning, the best route you can present to us goes 150 feet from a playground?” she said.

Hunt Power says the project would add 600 megawatts of capacity to the electrical grid and provide a new means through which to transport renewable energy.

The company is seeking rights of way from the U.S. Bureau of Land Management. The line would pass through public, private and tribal land, including 15 miles in Santa Fe County.

Santa Fe County commissioners in February approved a memorandum of understanding to cooperate with the BLM as it prepares an environmental impact statement for the line.

Robert Griego, Santa Fe County’s planning manager, said in February through a county spokeswoman that Hunt Power would be required to submit a development application on portions of the line that cross private land in Santa Fe County.

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