

Constitutional Amendment Needed For Energy Project

TUPPER LAKE—The New York Power Authority (NYPA) and National Grid joined with state and local officials and environmental advocates Tuesday to draw attention to a critical constitutional amendment in support of a \$30 million project to improve reliability of electric service to the Tri-Lakes region for the health and safety of its residents.

The joint project, which consists of a new 23-mile, 46-kilovolt power line, as well as a new regulator station and substations upgrades, was designed to enhance service to the Adirondack villages of Lake Placid, Saranac Lake and Tupper Lake.

“It is critical to the health and safety of the residents of the Tri-Lakes communities that we support this constitutional amendment for the project,” said Richard M. Kessel, president and chief executive officer, NYPA. “The Tri-Lakes Reliability Project was undertaken under the far-sighted vision of state and local agencies, under the most rigorous of environmental scrutiny, to help avert freezing-related dangers to area families. The residents of the Tri-Lakes communities will have greater piece of mind knowing their homes, schools and businesses will be safer from power outages due to winter’s harsh weather conditions and are much less likely to experience the rolling brown- and black-outs of the past due to this project.”

“The Tri-Lakes Reliability Project was necessary to meet the fundamental needs and ensure the health and safety of area residents, especially during severe winter weather,” said Tom King, president of National Grid, U.S. “That is why National Grid; the New York Power Authority, the villages of Lake Placid, Saranac Lake and Tupper Lake; the Adirondack Park Agency; the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation; and environmental groups such as the Adirondack Council, all agreed it was important to move ahead with construction.”

“The Senate and Assembly both have twice approved this constitutional amendment, but the most important vote will come Tuesday, November 3 when voters head to the polls,” said Senator Betty Little. “That’s when they’ll have the chance to vote ‘yes’ on this smart constitutional amendment. The amendment will ensure reliable power for residents desperately in need of it here in Tupper Lake and the Tri-Lakes region while doing so in a way that protects the environment. Given the dropping temperatures as winter approaches, I am hopeful people will understand the urgency and importance of this amendment and vote for it.”

The newly constructed power line crosses a two-mile stretch of Forest Preserve land next to an existing highway/utility corridor along the side of State Route 56. The use of Forest Preserve land usually requires a New York State Constitutional Amendment. As part of the process to secure a constitutional amendment, two separately elected sessions of the New York State Legislature passed legislation authorizing the state to convey to National Grid less than six acres of Forest Preserve land needed to construct the power line. The proposed amendment will be put on the November 3, 2009 ballot for a statewide vote.

The permitted route selected is more environmentally-sound, least intrusive, shorter and more practical than the route originally considered, and was agreed upon after significant public discussion and input. Approval of the amendment will bring substantial benefits to the Adirondack Park with the addition of over 43 acres of forest land being conveyed by National Grid to New York State for conservation in St. Lawrence County, in exchange for less than six acres of Forest Preserve land the state will deed to National Grid for the line.

“The Adirondack Council is pleased to support the Constitutional Amendment that allows the placement of this power line on what is now Forest Preserve along the side of Route 56. It avoids an environmentally damaging, six-mile-long detour through the forests west of the road,” said Brian L. Houseal, executive director, Adirondack Council, the Adirondack Park’s largest environmental organization.

“The land swap authorized by the amendment requires the public to give up only six acres of roadside land in exchange for 43 acres of wild forest nearby. The amendment would not affect any other area of the Adirondack Forest Preserve and doesn’t set any precedent that might weaken the protection for public lands. In contrast, using the former plan would require the power company to carve a road through an old-growth forest and some of the state’s best habitat for the endangered spruce grouse. It also would have crossed 95 separate wetlands and streams, harming water quality along the way and become a barrier to future expansion of the Forest Preserve west of the highway. That’s why we are sending our staff to meet with media around the state, making sure that people from Long Island to Buffalo and throughout upstate New York see this amendment on the ballot and understand that it is a good deal for the public, for the park and for the people of Tupper Lake.”

State agencies involved with the new transmission line, this critical and reliable supply of power required to support Lake Placid’s ability to maintain a competitive edge with updated facilities with related employment opportunities for our constituents would not have occurred. We appreciate the leadership NYPA has provided.”

“Because there is little controversy, the proposal has received slight notice. We want to bring some light to the purpose of the proposed amendment so that voters can make an informed decision and avoid the ironic situation of voting in the dark when it comes to a constitutional amendment to keep the lights on in the North Country,” said Assemblyman Robert K. Sweeney—chairman of the Assembly Standing Committee on Environmental Conservation and sponsor of the constitutional amendment.

“The Tri-Lakes Reliability Power project is critical to the public safety and economic sustainability of Tupper Lake, Saranac Lake and Lake Placid,” said Terry Martino, executive director, Adirondack Park Agency. “The Agency thoroughly reviewed this project and determined construction involving Forest Preserve for a short distance along NYS Route 56 minimized potential adverse impacts to wetlands and spruce grouse habitat associated with the six mile alternative route around the Forest Preserve parcel. The Agency encourages public support for the proposed amendment to Article 14 of the NY State Constitution to finalize permissions for this important link in the Tri-Lakes power grid.” 10-20-09