



**BRIEF**

# **With Hogan 'no' vote, Maryland board rejects Columbia Gas pipeline expansion**

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## **Dive Brief:**

- Maryland yesterday denied Columbia Gas an easement required for its Eastern Panhandle Expansion Project, putting in jeopardy a short distribution line that aims to bring natural gas from Pennsylvania into West Virginia.
- The Maryland Board of Public Works (BPW) rejected the easement unanimously, including a "no" vote from Gov. Larry Hogan, R, who has supported natural gas infrastructure expansion in the past.
- Project opponents hope the decision represents a "major shift in state energy policy," but company officials said the project is critical for regional energy expansion and parent company TransCanada remains committed to the building the pipeline.

## **Dive Insight:**

Opponents of Columbia Gas' expansion plans celebrated the state's decision yesterday, hopeful that it represents a permanent turn away from natural gas.

While Maryland banned hydraulic fracturing two years

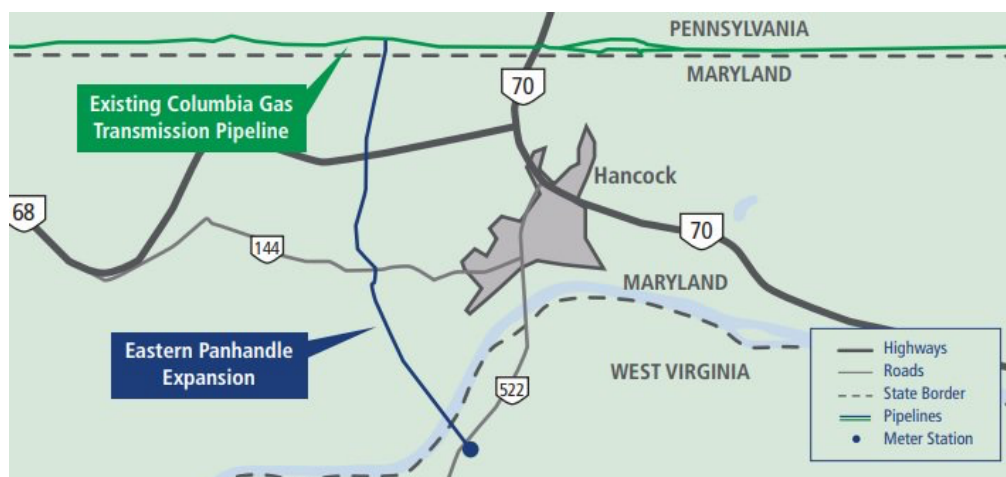
ago, Hogan has supported using more natural gas, citing the fuel's "environmental benefits." The governor sits on the three-member BPW with the state comptroller and treasurer.

Calls to the governor's office for comment on the decision were not returned by publication time. The decision followed a Jan. 1 letter from more than five dozen lawmakers urging BPW to deny the easement.

The Chesapeake Climate Action Network (CCAN) hailed the decision and the work of activists who have opposed the project for two years.

"Today, [the governor] took a step in the right direction," Brooke Harper, Maryland director of the Chesapeake Climate Action Network said in a statement. "Hopefully, this signals a reversal of the governor's prior policy of promoting fracked gas consumption and pipelines in Maryland."

The 3.5-mile pipeline aims to ship 47,500 Dth/d from an interconnection in Pennsylvania to Mountaineer Gas' system in Morgan County, West Virginia. Opponents dubbed the project the "Potomac Pipeline," as it would run beneath the Potomac River and along the Western Maryland Rail/Trail.



*Credit: Columbia Gas*

The project had already been approved by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources.

"[T]oday's vote denying our easement request is unfortunate," TransCanada spokesman Scott Castleman told Utility Dive in an email. "That being said, it does not change the need for, or the company's commitment to, our Eastern Panhandle Expansion Project."

The project "remains critical" for West Virginia's Eastern Panhandle and the surrounding region, said Castleman, adding that it would "provide much-needed additional natural gas supplies for continued business and economic development."

Environmental advocates see it differently.

"There is no right way to build these dirty, dangerous pipelines and today's unanimous rejection of Potomac Pipeline reflects that," Josh Tulkin, director of the Sierra Club's Maryland chapter, said in a statement.

According to Castleman, TransCanada will be examining options over the coming days "to keep this project on track." The project's original schedule called for beginning construction last April with an in-service date targeted for July 2019.