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EDITORIALS

The power-line issue

While relocating Route 195 takes place, Narragansett Electric Co. will have to lower the high-voltage power lines from its Manchester Street power plant, in Providence, across India Point Park and the Seekonk River to East Providence. After the relocation is completed, the utility says, it will put the lines and their looming support towers back up, at a cost of \$1.7 million.

We would urge, instead, that Narragansett Electric bury the lines — even though burial would cost an estimated \$8 million to \$9 million. We hope that it's not too late to do this.

India Point Park is where the revitalization of Providence's waterfront — once a world shipping center — began. The park was created in the 1970s, yet the power lines remain — to the detriment of the park. They hover over children's swings and benches and the playing fields where Hispanic and Southeast Asian immigrants play soccer.

Creating India Point Park helped set in motion a waterfront revitalization that has involved some \$5 billion in investment — from Providence Place mall and Waterplace Park to East Providence. Route 195's relocation will be the culmination of this process.

Those billions — from federal, state and private sources — have contributed to the economic revitalization of the entire region. This has given Providence a new reputation

as one of the most desirable places to live in America.

Think of how much more alluring this area — in New England's second-largest city, at the head of Narragansett Bay! — would be if the power lines were buried. The waterfront would be considerably more attractive to a range of businesses — bearing new jobs — as well as to residents and tourists.

Narragansett Electric understandably cites cost, and the difficulties of permitting, in its disinclination to bury the lines. And the state Transportation Department and such organizations as the Providence Foundation worry about putting any kinks in the relocation process. These are concerns that we share.

It should be remembered that the relocation has huge regional significance. The highway at this major crossroads is decrepit, as well as dangerously twisting; its move will improve conditions for millions of drivers. Moreover, the relocation will provide a rich opportunity to redevelop much wasted space in downtown Providence — the population center of Southeastern New England.

Still, Narragansett Electric buried power lines when it built the Manchester Street Station — it buried them all the way to Johnston. Perhaps it is not too late for the utility to do the same for the spectacular head of Narragansett Bay.