

PG&E narrows Fresno County route options for new high-voltage line

By Tim Sheehan

The Fresno Bee November 17, 2014

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PG&E is holding open houses this week to provide detailed information on proposed routes for new high-voltage transmission lines in western Fresno County:

- 4 to 7 p.m. Tuesday, Central High School East Campus Cafeteria, 3535 N. Cornelia Ave., Fresno
- 4 to 7 p.m. Wednesday, Kerman High School Multi-Purpose Room, 205 S. First St., Kerman
- 7 to 10 a.m. Thursday, University of California West Side Research and Extension Center, 17353 W. Oakland Ave., Five Points

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Pacific Gas & Electric Co. is holding a trio of open houses this week for people to learn more about proposed routes for a new high-voltage transmission line through western Fresno County.

The new line, which will span about 70 miles between PG&E's Gates Substation near Coalinga and the Gregg Substation south of Madera, is needed to provide additional capacity to move electricity in the central San Joaquin Valley. Earlier this year, the utility unveiled [five broad corridors](#) where it was studying potential routes.

Now, the company has fine-tuned its options to a [collection of 300-foot-wide routes](#) and is seeking comments from property owners who potentially could be affected.

The open houses are Tuesday evening at Fresno's Central High School; Wednesday evening at Kerman High School; and Thursday morning in Five Points.

"What we're typically hearing from people is, 'Is this going to hurt my farm production? Will I be able to keep farming my land?'" said Mark Schexnayder, PG&E's principal project manager for the effort. Schexnayder said there is still enough wiggle-room in the remaining route options to try to address farmers' concerns, including ensuring that the 230-kilovolt lines are far enough above the ground for farm equipment to work underneath. Lines would be built on either high poles or lattice towers to provide enough clearance over roads, orchards and other obstacles on the route that is eventually approved by the [California Public Utilities Commission](#).

PG&E already has one set of 230-kilovolt lines between the two substations, but there's not enough space on the existing poles to carry more wires. The line represents a two-way street for electricity, shipping electricity produced by PG&E's [Helms hydroelectric project](#) during periods of peak demand out to the statewide electrical grid, and channeling power up to Helms at slower times so that water can be pumped back uphill and stored to produce more

electricity later. Part of one of the remaining four route options would run parallel to the existing lines for most of its course in rural parts of the county southwest of Fresno.

Robert Matsuoka, an environmental planning specialist for PG&E, said the utility hopes to finalize its preferred route sometime next year and file its application to the state PUC in late 2015 or early 2016. If the state approves the route — possibly in the fall of 2017 — construction would likely commence in mid-2018 and the new lines powered up in 2020.

“We’re pressing to get this done in the early 2020s,” Schexnayder said. “That’s when we forecast when this will be needed” because of increasing power demand by the Valley’s growing population.

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