

Future demand in Fresno area for electricity drives need for new power line

By Tim Sheehan



Fresno County Farm Bureau executive director Ryan Jacobsen, flanked by other members of the Central Valley Coalition for Reliable Energy, speaks in support of a new cross-Valley high-voltage transmission line being planned by Pacific Gas & Electric Co. Press conference was held Tuesday at Fresno State's Water & Energy Technology Incubator. TIM SHEEHAN — THE FRESNO BEE

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- *PG&E welcomes support from agriculture and business for its proposed cross-Valley high-power transmission line.*
- *The line would span about 70 miles between PG&E substations near Madera and Coalinga, provide additional electricity capacity in the region.*
- *The cost of the 230-kilovolt power line would be \$115 million to \$145 million when it turns on in 2020.*



A new high-voltage power line to move electricity across the central San Joaquin Valley will be good for business, agriculture and other segments of the region's population, according to a new coalition established to back [Pacific Gas & Electric Co.](#)'s plans.

Members of the newly minted [Central Valley Coalition for Reliable Energy](#) gathered Tuesday at Fresno State's Water & Energy Technology Incubator to declare their support for PG&E's [Central Valley Power Connect](#) project.

The [California Independent System Operator](#), which manages the state's electrical grid, selected PG&E, [BHE U.S. Transmission](#) and [Citizens Energy Corp.](#) several years ago to develop the new 230-kilovolt transmission line to carry power between PG&E's Gregg Substation near Madera and its Gates Substation near Coalinga.

"Central Valley Power Connect will provide reliable power for decades to come," said Ryan Jacobsen, executive director of the [Fresno County Farm Bureau](#), one of the organizations in the coalition. "Energy is essentially vital for agriculture businesses, including food processing, cold storage and packing and shipping and, most importantly (in the drought) running our wells."

Al Smith, president and CEO of the [Fresno Chamber of Commerce](#), said his organization signed on to the coalition because "we know how important it is to have reliable energy, not only for businesses, but for residents as well."

"This coalition will expand greatly when someone turns on their air conditioning when it's 105 degrees and there's no electricity," Smith added, only somewhat jokingly.

Raj Beasla, PG&E's regional director of corporate affairs, described why the new power line is needed. "Fresno and the greater Fresno area have the second highest demand (for electricity) in our service area, right behind the Bay Area," Beasla said. "PG&E has not built a line of this magnitude in the last 30 years, and projections show that the Valley needs projects like Central Valley Power Connect ... (because) we anticipate the demand to grow in the future."

Beasla added that PG&E has made incremental improvements in its lines, but the system is approaching its limits. The utility estimates that it will cost \$115 million to \$145 million to build the new line by the time construction would be completed in 2020.

PG&E is studying a range of routes for the power line to span the 70 miles between the two substations. The new line would allow PG&E to bring more electricity into the Fresno area from the Gates substation, which sits along the main power corridor between Northern and Southern California. It would also carry power from the Helms Hydroelectric Plant in eastern Fresno County across the Valley and onto the statewide power grid.

The utility expects to choose a proposed route and submit its application for construction to the California Public Utilities Commission later this year. Construction is expected to start in 2018, with completion in 2020, when PG&E says power demand in the region will require the additional capacity.

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