



# North Hays County Transmission Project

## **What is the project?**

PEC has identified the need to construct a 138 kilovolt (kV) transmission line in Hays County to connect the existing Wimberley Substation, located approximately one-half mile north of Wimberley's downtown square, and existing transmission lines and substations in Hays County. The project includes a future substation to be located in the county, as well. The new line will provide more reliable electric service to the homes and businesses in the area, as well as improve voltage levels in Wimberley, Driftwood, and surrounding communities.

## **Why is this project needed?**

Hays County is among the nation's fastest-growing counties, according to U.S. census data. A 138kV transmission line is needed to meet the increasing demand for electricity and to continue serving our growing membership. PEC has made several improvements to the distribution system in this area, but existing infrastructure will exceed its capacity to backfeed the Wimberley Substation load by 2025. Other improvements to the area distribution system will be exhausted by 2033.

## **Are there any alternatives that would not require this project?**

PEC employed distribution alternatives in the past to delay building the transmission line, including upgrading distribution lines. The load growth in North Hays County, however, has exhausted these alternatives. To supply power to North Hays County's growing areas, a 138kV transmission line connecting to the existing Wimberley Substation in addition to a new substation in Hays County is needed.

## **How will landowners along the route be impacted?**

Similar to any project requiring the construction of electric utility lines, the project will require easements and transmission structures to build the new line. Additional equipment and facilities may also be necessary and may vary dependent on the route selected by the Public Utility Commission of Texas (PUC). Landowners will be compensated for fair market value for any land used in constructing the 138kV transmission line.

## **What will the structure look like?**

There are several types of structures that PEC may use to build the 138kV transmission line. Rights of way and cost constraints, coupled with public input and engineering information, will be used to decide the preferred transmission structure type. The PUC will ultimately approve the structure type(s) and material or finish for the project. Specific structure heights will be announced after the approved route has been surveyed and the line is designed. PEC anticipates proposing above-ground monopoles for this project, similar to other PEC transmission lines.

**Is PEC required to receive PUC approval for this project?**

Yes. PEC is required to seek approval from the Commission prior to building new transmission lines. Once approved, the PUC will grant PEC a Certificate of Convenience and Necessity (CCN) amendment, which would authorize PEC to move forward with building the transmission project. The PUC would also select the route of the 138kV transmission line.

As part of the transmission line approval process, PEC will provide data justifying the need for the transmission line across North Hays County communities.

**Will PEC consider multiple segments and routes?**

Yes. As a part of the CCN process, the PUC requires PEC to evaluate multiple reasonable routes. PEC has retained an engineering firm to develop a study using available data including maps, aerial photos, and input from federal and state agencies, and local officials to identify environmental and land-use constraints. Field studies will also help identify possible routes within the area.

**Will new substations be required for this project?**

Yes, a new substation will be needed. In North Hays County, PEC has existing 138kV transmission facilities from the Rutherford area on RM 967 to the Dripping Springs area. ERCOT recommends placing a new substation on that line and constructing a new transmission line to the Wimberley Substation.

**How will the route be determined — what considerations will factor into the route analysis?**

PEC will not determine the transmission line route — that will be determined by the PUC. The PUC considers the following factors for routing, among others:

- whether the routes parallel or utilize existing compatible rights-of-way for electric facilities, including the use of vacant positions on existing multiple-circuit transmission lines;
- whether the routes parallel or utilize other existing compatible rights-of-way, including roads, highways, railroads, or telephone utility rights-of-way;
- whether the routes parallel property lines or other natural or cultural features; and
- whether the routes conform with the policy of prudent avoidance.

For more information from the PUC, please see:

<https://www.puc.texas.gov/industry/electric/forms/ccn/brochure8x11.pdf>

**Will I have an opportunity to ask questions and provide feedback on the project?**

Yes. PEC plans to hold at least one open house for the public in 2024. At the open house, agencies, officials, potentially affected landowners, and members of the public will have an opportunity to review information about the project, including alternative route segments and environmental and land use constraints. PEC must ensure that the routing process accurately identifies and considers the values and concerns of the public and community leaders. Questionnaires and direct public contact will be employed once the initial routing information has been developed for public distribution. A hearing may also be held at the PUC where landowners and other stakeholders may provide input. More information can be found on the intervention process at the PUC's website:

<https://www.puc.texas.gov/agency/rulesnlaws/Participate.aspx>

### **What is the official method for protesting a route of a utility line proposed in this project?**

The PUC will conduct a case to evaluate the impact of the proposed line and to decide which route should be approved. Landowners who would be affected by a new line can:

- informally file a protest, or
- formally participate in the case as an intervenor. More information can be found on the intervention process at the PUC's website:

<https://www.puc.texas.gov/agency/rulesnlaws/Participate.aspx>

### **How may I be affected if the approved route crosses my land?**

Once the PUC selects a route, PEC will work with each landowner to purchase an easement to construct, operate, and maintain the new electric transmission line. New transmission structures and other equipment will be placed within the easement as determined by the final design of the transmission line. Periodic maintenance for vegetation management and line maintenance will also be conducted.

### **How much does PEC pay for an easement?**

PEC will pay fair market value for transmission line easements. A copy of the applicable appraisal report will be provided to the landowner at the time an offer is made to purchase the easement. If a landowner disagrees with the determination of fair market value, the State of Texas Landowner's Bill of Rights describes the rights of landowners:

<https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/sites/default/files/files/divisions/general-oag/landowners-bill-of-rights-2022.pdf>

### **How wide is the easement for the transmission line?**

Easements for the 138-kV transmission line will vary, depending on design constraints. Common widths are between 80-100 feet wide, or 40-50 feet on either side of the centerline of the route to the edge of the easement and, in certain instances, may be narrower.

### **Will PEC clear vegetation and trees from the entire easement area?**

PEC will attempt to mitigate the impacts to the easement area on a landowner's property, as required by PUC requirements. Dependent on the route selected by the PUC, PEC may only need to trim some vegetation and trees, but for other routes it may be necessary to clear the entire easement to facilitate construction of the transmission line.

### **Can PEC build and place the transmission line underground in this area?**

The cost of material, construction, and additional cooling requirements make underground transmission lines four to 10 times more expensive than overhead lines. PEC is proposing to build the transmission facilities above ground, due to the significant increase in costs for underground lines.

### **What happens once the PUC approves the project?**

Upon PUC approval, PEC will conduct land, environmental, and cultural resource surveys to prepare necessary plans and specifications to build the transmission line. PEC will prepare the right of way for construction once the acquisition of the necessary easement is complete. PEC does not anticipate any planned member outages for the construction of this project.

**What is PEC's timeline for the project?**

While the ultimate schedule is subject to both administrative as well as design and construction uncertainties, PEC expects the new transmission line to be operational in 2028. This includes the necessary steps to assess the area and collect routing information, develop route alternatives, hold an open house meeting and collect input from the public, make adjustments to proposed routes, file the required application and receive approval from the PUC, acquire necessary easement rights, and construct the facilities.