

By [Alex Breitler](#)

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## PG&E pitches major project

Pacific Gas and Electric Co. wants to build major new transmission lines connecting infrastructure in northwest Stockton with the communities of Lodi and Lockeford.

The new 230-kilovolt lines will help accommodate future urban and agricultural growth, the utility says. The project, still in its early stages, also has the support of the publicly owned Lodi Electric Utility whose customers could see fewer power outages and perhaps smaller rate increases in the future.

At the same time, the towers for the new transmission lines will have to be planted somewhere amid the vast farmland north of Eight Mile Road. The route may be controversial.

"Anytime you start talking about new transmission lines, you start talking about the potential for impacts," said Bruce Blodgett, head of the San Joaquin Farm Bureau Federation. "We're definitely aware, and we'll be working on this as it goes through."

No route has yet been determined. A series of public meetings is planned for early December to gather insight and suggestions from the public.

"That information is so important to us. That's going to help us shape this project," PG&E spokeswoman Nicole Liebelt said.

Smaller 60 kV power lines serve the area around Lodi today, leaving a gaping hole between the high-powered lines that run parallel to Interstate 5 near Eight Mile Road, and similar lines that currently terminate in Lockeford.

The plan is to somehow connect those lines via three existing substations. This would create a new avenue to bring power to the area.

"There is a need for redundancy," Liebelt said. "It's like a detour on a street. If there is an issue between point A and point B, you use an alternate route."

For Lodi Electric, that alternative route might also save some cash. Right now, the utility must pay access charges for a variety of transmission lines, said Director Liz Kirkley. If a new 230 kV line is built, Lodi Electric could stop making payments on the smaller power lines, she said. That could save the utility about \$3.5 million per year.

At first the money would be used to pay down the debt that the utility will accrue from having to build a new substation and two new transformers, Kirkley said. But eventually the money could be used for other things, including helping to ease the pain of future rate increases.

"It would also increase our reliability," Kirkley said.

While it's not yet known how tall the poles would be, transmission lines are usually much taller than lower-powered distribution lines. They often are hoisted atop large lattice towers or steel poles.

Linking all three of the substations would likely require about 16 to 20 miles of new line. Easements would be negotiated and purchased from landowners. It's not just a matter of where to put the towers; the corridor itself will require an easement of perhaps 25 feet on each side to account for the potential for power lines to sway in the wind, PG&E says.

Nobody wants these in their backyard, the utility acknowledges.

"We haven't built a lot of brand new (projects)," PG&E spokeswoman Shannon Koontz said. "We try to do as much as we can with our current infrastructure, but at some point, it's time" to expand.

The extra infrastructure and reliable power may even help to attract new businesses to the area, PG&E says.

The California Independent System Operator identified the project as a need three years ago. Any decision on the route will have to go through standard environmental review process, and the California Public Utilities Commission will make a final decision.

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Power transmission lines extend northward from the White Slough power plant west of Interstate 5 between Eight Mile Road and Highway 12 near Lodi. CLIFFORD OTO/THE RECORD

### If you go

Three meetings are planned to discuss PG&E's proposal to build new transmission lines in north San Joaquin County:• 5 to 8 p.m. Dec. 1 at the Lodi Public Library, in the community room. • 4 to 7 p.m. Dec. 2 at Tokay High School, in the cafeteria. • 4 to 7 p.m. Dec. 3 at Elkhorn School in Stockton, in the multipurpose room. To make comments, email [northernsanjoaquinpc@pge.com](mailto:northernsanjoaquinpc@pge.com) or call (888) 743-1175.