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## \$33B transmission build-out leaves Texas ranchers fuming

By [SHELBY WEBB](https://www.eenews.net/meet-the-team/shelby-webb/) (HTTPS://WWW.EENews.NET/MEET-THE-TEAM/SHELBY-WEBB/) | 05/01/2026 06:43 AM EDT

The state approved a massive electric infrastructure expansion after lawmakers shortened the time regulators had to study projects.



Transmission towers are pictured in Texas, which is overseeing plans for a major expansion of electric infrastructure. Brandon Bell/ Getty Images

Texas is in the thick of figuring out where to lay power lines through a \$33 billion transmission expansion, but changes in how lines are approved have landowners crying foul.

The debate is playing out at the state Public Utility Commission, which is weighing where to route more than 3,400 miles of extra-high-voltage power lines that will crisscross the state. Ranchers and homeowners now also have half the time to object.

Texas is among a growing list of places with vocal opposition to electricity projects across the country from Maryland to Maine. At issue are both the physical effects of huge towers and miles of power lines as well as questions about compensation and due process.

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The one-two punch of the PUC's 2025 approval of the mammoth transmission plan and a 2023 law that shortened the review process has been hard to take for Texas property owners, according to Dave Clark, a director with the Friends of the San Saba River nonprofit.

“OK, you’ve got to have them, I hear you,” Clark said of the transmission lines. “But let’s have a fair process that allows landowners to really follow along and a reasonable schedule to get through it.”

The impetus for the transmission overhaul in Texas, unlike other states, was not data centers but the state’s massive oil and gas industry — which has seen its need for power skyrocket after the fracking revolution of the 2010s. Texas has since become a hot spot for data centers, ratcheting up the pressure even further to get lines built.

A map of the planned transmission build-out (<https://subscriber.politicopro.com/eenews/f/eenews/?id=0000019d-df33-d210-a3ff-ff7fa3f50000>) shows three major lines heading from Central Texas to the Permian Basin, as well as two major projects in the central and eastern portions of the state. A number of electric companies are involved in the transmission expansion.

Residential and small business ratepayers will largely be on the hook for the \$33 billion transmission tab under the state (<https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/eenews/2026/03/23/grid-costs-have-texas-customers-bracing-for-surging-bills-00838401>)’ (<https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/eenews/2026/03/23/grid-costs-have-texas-customers-bracing-for-surging-bills-00838401>)s current rules (<https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/eenews/2026/03/23/grid-costs-have-texas-customers-bracing-for-surging-bills-00838401>). But PUC commissioners are required to look at changing those rules later this year to take more of the burden off (<https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/eenews/2026/04/02/texas-regulator-grilled-over-data-center-costs-00854843>) residents and nonindustrial power users.

State lawmakers and regulators have gotten an earful from constituents frustrated by the transmission planning process, with Republican Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick [directing the Texas Senate](https://www.ltgov.texas.gov/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/2026-Interim-Charges.pdf) (<https://www.ltgov.texas.gov/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/2026-Interim-Charges.pdf>) to study whether the shortened regulatory timelines give landowners enough time to give input.

“Private property rights are a big deal in Texas, as is economic development,” said PUC Chair Thomas Gleeson, the state’s top power regulator, at a state Senate committee meeting last month. “We’re trying to thread that needle and strike the right balance.”

Gleeson did not respond to an interview request. In a statement, the PUC said its transmission planning process follows the letter of the law.

Texas could soon face more transmission battles.

The Electric Reliability Council of Texas, the grid operator that handles about 90 percent of the state’s power needs, said electricity [demand could increase to 367.8 gigawatts](https://links.us1.defend.egress.com/Warning?crId=69f260c16c281d59701a3824&Domain=politico.com&Threat=eNpzrShJLcpLzAEADmkDRA%3D%3D&Lang=en&Base64Url=eNoFwjEKgDAMBdATNb8N6uAqzk4eoKQtCkqDCfT68t7lrrYCYwyqn3Qn6S_a_VRD6WLGyAvihDQjcdj2I5xaslfS0n6DNhOy&@OriginalLink=www.ercot.com) ([https://links.us1.defend.egress.com/Warning?crId=69f260c16c281d59701a3824&Domain=politico.com&Threat=eNpzrShJLcpLzAEADmkDRA%3D%3D&Lang=en&Base64Url=eNoFwjEKgDAMBdATNb8N6uAqzk4eoKQtCkqDCfT68t7lrrYCYwyqn3Qn6S\\_a\\_VRD6WLGyAvihDQjcdj2I5xaslfS0n6DNhOy&@OriginalLink=www.ercot.com](https://links.us1.defend.egress.com/Warning?crId=69f260c16c281d59701a3824&Domain=politico.com&Threat=eNpzrShJLcpLzAEADmkDRA%3D%3D&Lang=en&Base64Url=eNoFwjEKgDAMBdATNb8N6uAqzk4eoKQtCkqDCfT68t7lrrYCYwyqn3Qn6S_a_VRD6WLGyAvihDQjcdj2I5xaslfS0n6DNhOy&@OriginalLink=www.ercot.com)) by 2032 thanks largely to data centers — up from an all-time record demand of 85.5 GW in 2023.

But the current oil-and-gas-led transmission build-out has highlighted issues with how the state approves infrastructure plans for large power users.

In the oil field, the thirst for more reliable power has been growing for more than a decade.

Oil production in Texas has skyrocketed since hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, took off in the 2010s. Fracking requires much more energy than just running a generator to drill a traditional well, said Hugh Daigle, who teaches petroleum engineering at the University of Texas, Austin.

Creating the water pressure needed to crack subsurface rocks to release oil requires more horsepower than traditional wells need, he said.

“The conventional way [of fracking] is with diesel power and frack trucks — you would have 40 of them lined up to deliver the pressure you need,” Daigle said.

## ‘A disgrace’

Starting around 2020, many of the larger exploration and production companies created climate pledges and made plans to start electrifying their operations rather than use diesel generators, in part to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Operators also recognized that using power from the grid can save money, Daigle said.

But electrifying the oil field has proved difficult, especially in the Permian Basin — the heart of Texas’ oil production. The basin, which includes part of southern New Mexico, accounted for 44 percent of total U.S. oil production ([https://links.us1.defend.egress.com/Warning?crId=69f260c16c281d59701a3824&Domain=politico.com&Threat=eNpzrShJLcpLzAEADmkDRA%3D%3D&Lang=en&Base64Url=eNoFwIEKwCAIANA b6cdGgyA6i6CUECVNjtI-vNfd7c2IEQGIBG196Ivp6JQpux1kcdIB1q0ql\\_Rc6f4BGikTJA%3D%3D&@OriginalLink=www.eia.gov](https://links.us1.defend.egress.com/Warning?crId=69f260c16c281d59701a3824&Domain=politico.com&Threat=eNpzrShJLcpLzAEADmkDRA%3D%3D&Lang=en&Base64Url=eNoFwIEKwCAIANA b6cdGgyA6i6CUECVNjtI-vNfd7c2IEQGIBG196Ivp6JQpux1kcdIB1q0ql_Rc6f4BGikTJA%3D%3D&@OriginalLink=www.eia.gov)) in December 2025.

The Permian Basin is basically in the middle of nowhere in West Texas.

There’s only a handful of population centers nearby, and there aren’t many power lines in areas where oil production is highest but people are few and far

between.

Six oil and gas companies commissioned a study in 2022 ([https://links.us1.defend.egress.com/Warning?crId=69f260c16c281d59701a3824&Domain=politico.com&Threat=eNpzrShJLcpLzAEADmkDRA%3D%3D&Lang=en&Base64Url=eNoFwlEKgCAMANAbbYpZ0rf03Q1EZGgfTWkzOn6811SH7IgXKz2lZa4EYxZQ-rJA7S\\_GXuZnrILebzYkl6xbTDArnPH4Ad9XFRA%3D&@OriginalLink=interchange.puc.texas.gov](https://links.us1.defend.egress.com/Warning?crId=69f260c16c281d59701a3824&Domain=politico.com&Threat=eNpzrShJLcpLzAEADmkDRA%3D%3D&Lang=en&Base64Url=eNoFwlEKgCAMANAbbYpZ0rf03Q1EZGgfTWkzOn6811SH7IgXKz2lZa4EYxZQ-rJA7S_GXuZnrILebzYkl6xbTDArnPH4Ad9XFRA%3D&@OriginalLink=interchange.puc.texas.gov)) that showed power demand in the Permian could grow from 4.2 GW in 2022 to 17.2 GW by 2032.

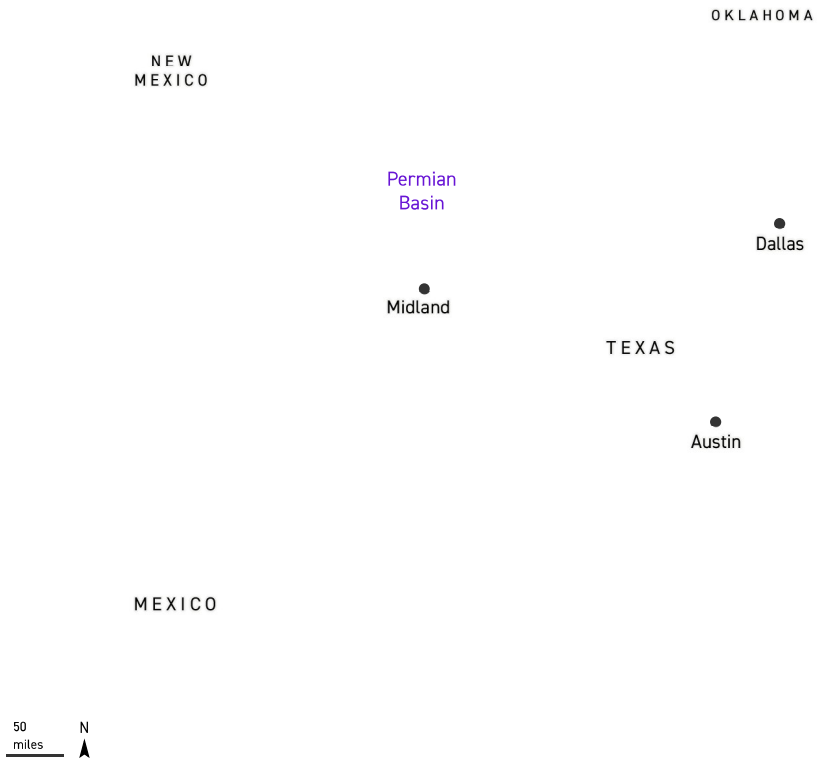
The next year, the Texas Legislature passed H.B. 5066, (<https://links.us1.defend.egress.com/Warning?crId=69f260c16c281d59701a3824&Domain=politico.com&Threat=eNpzrShJLcpLzAEADmkDRA%3D%3D&Lang=en&Base64Url=eNoNyUEKgCAQBdAbzXeTSMtWrruBWaQwMcl8ouPn8vEaOXwFahmdpsLrKy63vaDaadWR0o6jq84hGh9F3sISYswy9QP9BxaR&@OriginalLink=capitol.texas.gov>) which mandated that the PUC create what has come to be known as the Permian Basin Reliability Plan, which must “address extending transmission service to areas where” resources such as oil and gas have been found.

Todd Staples, president of the Texas Oil & Gas Association, said in a statement the transmission is badly needed after a “critical, decadelong lag in electricity connectivity” within the Permian.

“For too long, the expansion of the electric grid transmission could not keep pace with the extraordinary growth in oil and natural gas production that is powering our state,” Staples said. “The Permian Basin Reliability Plan is a vital component of our state’s infrastructure modernization efforts, laying the essential groundwork for our state’s future transmission needs and ensuring Texas can continue to responsibly produce the oil and natural gas that powers our state, nation, and world.”

### Finding ways to get electricity is a focus in the Permian Basin

Permian Basin boundary



© OpenStreetMap contributors

Source: Bureau of Economic Geology  
Claudine Hellmuth/POLITICO

There was another transmission overhaul the Texas Legislature approved in 2023.

Lawmakers that year also passed S.B. 1076 (<https://links.us1.defend.egress.com/Warning?crId=69f260c16c281d59701a3824&Domain=politico.com&Threat=eNpzrShJLcpLzAEADmkDRA%3D%3D&Lang=en&Base64Url=eNoNyUEKgCAQBdAbzXeTSMtWrruBWaQwMcl8ouPn8vEaOXwFahmdpsLrKy63vaDaadWR0o6jq84hGh9F3sISYswy9QP9BxaR&@OriginalLink=capitol.texas.gov>)

[bzbdNScuOkCcwixQmRphPdPxcPl4lu69Ayb3RVHh92eW2F1Q7rThi3HE0ITFE5aNIW5jCMicZ-gH9pRak&@OriginalLink=capitol.texas.gov](https://bzbdNScuOkCcwixQmRphPdPxcPl4lu69Ayb3RVHh92eW2F1Q7rThi3HE0ITFE5aNIW5jCMicZ-gH9pRak&@OriginalLink=capitol.texas.gov)), which shortened the timeline the PUC had to approve or deny transmission projects from one year to 180 days.

And after those laws passed, Texas' main grid operator came out with a study [highlighting the need for even more transmission \(https://links.us1.defend.egress.com/Warning?crId=69f260c16c281d59701a3824&Domain=politico.com&Threat=eNpZrShJLcpLzAEADmkDRA%3D%3D&Lang=en&Base64Url=eNpVy9EOwiAMheFnKp24ucS3aaBTIoOGNmOPL-qVd-c\\_yfc0E70j9t4dtlDNhbrljIrxhoU\\_eQXnC7o18-cofEj1UIZrFHRPamOBMIUoJnAdV7gdfyaSgTjKxTW2\\_fVYWz48I\\_5IFFO4vYGmDkx9g%3D%3D&@OriginalLink=www.ercot.com\)](https://links.us1.defend.egress.com/Warning?crId=69f260c16c281d59701a3824&Domain=politico.com&Threat=eNpZrShJLcpLzAEADmkDRA%3D%3D&Lang=en&Base64Url=eNpVy9EOwiAMheFnKp24ucS3aaBTIoOGNmOPL-qVd-c_yfc0E70j9t4dtlDNhbrljIrxhoU_eQXnC7o18-cofEj1UIZrFHRPamOBMIUoJnAdV7gdfyaSgTjKxTW2_fVYWz48I_5IFFO4vYGmDkx9g%3D%3D&@OriginalLink=www.ercot.com) — this time in East Texas.

In all, the PUC and the Texas grid operator known as ERCOT have approved the build-out of more than 3,400 miles of new high-voltage transmission lines across the state at a cost of \$33 billion by 2032. About 2,468 miles of those lines would be 765-kilovolt lines — the highest voltage level in North America.

ERCOT officials did not respond to specific questions from POLITICO's E&E News but [shared some resources \(https://links.us1.defend.egress.com/Warning?crId=69f260c16c281d59701a3824&Domain=politico.com&Threat=eNpZrShJLcpLzAEADmkDRA%3D%3D&Lang=en&Base64Url=eNoNycEKgCAMANAv0pUQRNfoXIT3iGk1yE2c4O\\_Xu76n1qwTQGvNxoJSLUqCi96oEAQVXOcG6EboHSz7vPrDl8iB-D68ZELjy8maSJWEzfaezP-ZrQhGVZvD9QGWeSLX&@OriginalLink=www.ercot.com\)](https://links.us1.defend.egress.com/Warning?crId=69f260c16c281d59701a3824&Domain=politico.com&Threat=eNpZrShJLcpLzAEADmkDRA%3D%3D&Lang=en&Base64Url=eNoNycEKgCAMANAv0pUQRNfoXIT3iGk1yE2c4O_Xu76n1qwTQGvNxoJSLUqCi96oEAQVXOcG6EboHSz7vPrDl8iB-D68ZELjy8maSJWEzfaezP-ZrQhGVZvD9QGWeSLX&@OriginalLink=www.ercot.com) about how the grid operator identifies transmission needs.

In those papers, ERCOT officials said researchers used demand forecast data submitted by transmission companies and the 2022 oil-industry-funded study to come up with its wide-ranging transmission plan.

But the combination of rolling out a major transmission expansion and shortening transmission approval times has led to outrage across the state, especially in rural areas.

Kevin Kennedy, a retired engineer, estimates he's spent 40 to 60 hours a week for months trying to fight transmission provider Oncor Electric over its plans to build part of the \$33 billion transmission project through his Central Texas ranch in Burnet County — so much time his friends and family now call him “Kilowatt Kevin.”

The time he actually has to keep crews from mowing over miles of his land is short.

Kennedy and other landowners have 30 days to file paperwork to be considered part of the legal decision-making process over where the transmission lines should go — regardless of when or if they receive official notice that their land is in a project's path.

That's only the first hurdle.

In all, protesters now have just 85 days and multiple state-mandated deadlines to file dozens of legal documents to fight against the proposed transmission project's route — down from nearly six months before S.B. 1076.

Kennedy said the filings and transmission applications are so technical, complex and time-consuming that many of his neighbors have given up trying to advocate for themselves.

“This whole thing is totally stacked against the people. You have all these people who are land rich but dirt poor, and now that guy has to try to hire an attorney with an \$8,000 retainer fee, and when they see the cost of it they give up,” Kennedy said. “The whole thing is a disgrace.”

In an interview, Oncor spokesperson Kerri Dunn said the company is trying to build as straight a line from power substations as possible while taking into account community concerns and ecology. Oncor is a regulated electric utility company.

“We also have to look at community impacts, recreational impacts, environmental impacts,” Dunn said. “Our routes don't go through anybody's house, but we know folks are concerned who are close by [transmission lines], and we understand that.”

## ‘Quite a few calls’

The public can still file comments objecting to transmission projects on the PUC's website without hurdles.

But the PUC largely depends on final orders from administrative law judges to inform their decisions on where the path for the transmission lines will go.

State Sen. Kevin Sparks, a Republican, said he and other lawmakers get calls practically every day from landowners frustrated by the transmission planning process and worried about their land. A main issue for property owners is making an initial response.

“If they don't respond in 30 days, assuming they got the notice properly, they've lost the ability to go in and protest something that could significantly devalue their land,” Sparks said in an interview. “As more of the landowners are figuring out these lines could cross [their] property, they're starting to reach

out to legislators, and we're getting quite a few calls.”

More than a dozen state lawmakers — including the author of the bill that created the Permian Basin Reliability Plan — have written to the PUC members asking that they reconsider where some of these transmission ([https://links.us1.defend.egress.com/Warning?crId=69f260c16c281d59701a3824&Domain=politico.com&Threat=eNpzrShJLcpLzAEADmkDRA%3D%3D&Lang=en&Base64Url=eNoFwLEKgCAMANAbbSQtsW\\_puxuIyNA-mtJmdPx4r5kN3REvMX5Ky1IZxixg\\_GWF2l-MvcybxRQprJ6SSwsFvzkPZzx-4A4VIg%3D%3D&@OriginalLink=interchange.puc.texas.gov](https://links.us1.defend.egress.com/Warning?crId=69f260c16c281d59701a3824&Domain=politico.com&Threat=eNpzrShJLcpLzAEADmkDRA%3D%3D&Lang=en&Base64Url=eNoFwLEKgCAMANAbbSQtsW_puxuIyNA-mtJmdPx4r5kN3REvMX5Ky1IZxixg_GWF2l-MvcybxRQprJ6SSwsFvzkPZzx-4A4VIg%3D%3D&@OriginalLink=interchange.puc.texas.gov)) lines go and slow the protest process down ([https://links.us1.defend.egress.com/Warning?crId=69f260c16c281d59701a3824&Domain=politico.com&Threat=eNpzrShJLcpLzAEADmkDRA%3D%3D&Lang=en&Base64Url=eNoFwLEKgCAMANAbbQmtjb6l724gIkP7SCVndPx4r5j1sNe1fRJJdasOGcC0y8OyO1F39K8tdpAElouIWDI5aNBU5\\_AnnFYo%3D&@OriginalLink=interchange.puc.texas.gov](https://links.us1.defend.egress.com/Warning?crId=69f260c16c281d59701a3824&Domain=politico.com&Threat=eNpzrShJLcpLzAEADmkDRA%3D%3D&Lang=en&Base64Url=eNoFwLEKgCAMANAbbQmtjb6l724gIkP7SCVndPx4r5j1sNe1fRJJdasOGcC0y8OyO1F39K8tdpAElouIWDI5aNBU5_AnnFYo%3D&@OriginalLink=interchange.puc.texas.gov)).

One letter from lawmakers said they originally supported S.B. 1076 but that sections of ERCOT’s new transmission project “warrant a more deliberate review than the current schedule allows.”

State Sen. Phil King, a Republican who authored S.B. 1076 on PUC review timing, did not respond to interview requests or requests for comment. But there’s only so much lawmakers can do now because the Texas Legislature doesn’t convene for its next legislative session until January 2027.

“I think we have talked to literally everybody but the governor, and he’s really the only person who can do something about this now until Legislature gets back in,” said Clark with Friends of the San Saba River.

Texas Republican Gov. Greg Abbott appoints members of the PUC, and landowners and some lawmakers have called for regulators to press pause on the transmission approval process, despite the mandates from S.B. 1076.

Andrew Mahaleris, Abbott’s press secretary, said in a statement that the state must invest in more transmission to keep power reliable and affordable for Texans.

“The needs and concerns of Texans are the Governor’s top priority, and the Governor encourages the public to submit feedback to the PUC,” Mahaleris wrote.

The PUC declined E&E News’ request for an interview, but officials said in a statement that the commission “strongly encourages public participation” in the transmission planning process and highlighted the legal processes residents can undertake to have their voices heard.

PUC spokesperson Ellie Breed wrote that the commission’s Office of Public Engagement has attended community meetings, met with lawmakers and fielded more than 300 calls and emails about the transmission projects.

“To reiterate, the [PUC] strongly encourages Texans to fully participate in our decision making and planning process for transmission line route selection,” Breed said. “Public input is critical.”

But Clark said writing public comments to the PUC won’t fix the flaws in the transmission approval system and doesn’t give landowners enough of a say.

“Let’s do it in a proper way and figure it out rather than shove it down everyone’s throat in a period of time that’s way too short,” Clark said.

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