

TEXAS ● PUBLIC CITIZEN ● SEED COALITION  
WEST TEXAS WIND ENERGY CONSORTIUM  
NEWS RELEASE

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**Investing in Wind Power Is Critical to Texas' Future,  
Public Interest Groups and Legislators Tell Officials**

***Public Utility Commission Urged to Make \$6.4 Billion Investment  
In New Renewable Energy Transmission Lines to Reduce Electricity Costs,  
Cut Pollution and Create Jobs***

AUSTIN, Texas – A coalition of public interest groups and legislators Monday urged the state's Public Utility Commission (PUC) to build more wind power transmission lines, saying that is the best way to reduce energy costs for Texas residents.

A \$6.4 billion investment in transmission lines, which would last 50 years, could reduce power prices by more than \$3 billion a year, said the coalition, which included Public Citizen, West Texas Wind Energy Consortium, Texas Impact, the Sustainable Energy and Economic Development (SEED) Coalition, Texas Senator Kirk Watson, (D-Austin), and Texas Representatives. Mike Villarreal (D-San Antonio) and Mark Strama (D- Austin). The PUC is expected to discuss the issue on Thursday, July 17.

The PUC is considering three scenarios for Competitive Renewable Energy Zones (CREZ). The coalition wants the commission to approve Scenario 3, dubbed the "renewable energy superhighway plan," which calls for the commission to build the largest amount of renewable energy infrastructure possible. There is a backlog of wind energy projects in Texas that cannot be built because of insufficient transmission lines in West Texas. If completed, these additional wind projects would reduce electricity costs, create jobs and reduce pollution.

The coalition released a policy paper today which found that additional wind power not only would help lower the amount Texans spend on energy, but also would significantly reduce carbon dioxide emissions and provide a major economic boost.

"Wind power would reduce output from coal-fired power plants and other big sources of air pollution and could improve air quality significantly," Watson said. He cited a recent study done by General Electric for the Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT) showing that pollution emissions decline substantially when large amounts of wind power are added to the grid.

"Every major Texas city has smog and air pollution problems," Watson said. "More wind energy will result in significant improvements in air quality in all metropolitan areas."

Watson also noted that Republicans and Democrats in Washington, D.C., are working on strategies to dramatically reduce emissions of CO2 and other gases that have been tied to climate change and global warming. He added that increasing Texas' usage of wind energy would help Texas remain competitive in the event of new federal regulations.

“The Department of Energy has recently said that electric costs could increase as much as 62 percent in Texas due to potential carbon dioxide emissions limits,” Watson said. “The Public Utility Commission’s decision will be an important step in determining whether our grid can supply clean, affordable energy to the state and reduce future costs.”

“The benefits of investing in a renewable energy source such as wind power outweigh the costs three-to-one,” Strama said. “Wind power displaced high-cost gas, and we need to do whatever we can to bring relief to Texans who are struggling with skyrocketing fuel bills. If we build the renewable energy superhighway, we could realize well over \$2 billion per year in reduced electrical costs.”

The study looked at the number of jobs created at various levels of expansion. It used the impact of wind power in Nolan County as the basis for its analysis. Nolan County stands as the epicenter of Texas' wind energy industry. Along with the adjacent counties of Scurry, Taylor, Mitchell and Coke, the Sweetwater region is home to well over half of all operational wind energy production in Texas and about 15 percent of all U.S. wind energy operations. If it were a state, Nolan County would rank as the second largest for wind energy operations.

Strama added, “Wind has been good for job creation all across Texas, already creating new jobs at manufacturing plants in more than a dozen communities from Nacogdoches to El Paso, four new research and development facilities, four new operations and maintenances centers, and increased shipping through five Texas ports from Corpus Christi to Beaumont. This study shows that if we were to build the renewable superhighways and fully develop 25,000 megawatts of wind, the wind-producing regions of Texas could see as many as 11,000 jobs, \$145 million annually in local taxes, and over \$122 million [annually] in landowner royalties.”

“Half-measures are not the answer to our energy crisis. If we really want to clean our air, keep prices down for working families and build our economy, then we need to maximize renewable energy in Texas,” asserted Villarreal. “We can continue to lead the world in energy if we make a bold investment in the renewable energy superhighway. Texans want to power their homes and businesses with solar and wind energy, so let’s build the infrastructure to get it to them.”

Villarreal recently delivered to the PUC a letter from 15 legislators and a public petition with the names of 1,781 individuals urging the PUC to maximize the renewable energy transmission lines. Because of the strong response to his petition, which is posted on his Web site, [www.leaderslisten.org](http://www.leaderslisten.org), he is preparing to deliver 1,000 more names to the PUC this week.

Greg Wortham, director of the West Texas Wind Energy Consortium, said, “Wind energy has been a boon for Nolan County, providing 1,124 jobs this year, or nearly 20 percent of the county’s workforce. Additionally, those jobs have an average annual salary of \$40,000, which is well above Nolan’s 2005 median income of \$27,661. The wind boom resulted in a \$14.5 million increase in the local tax revenues and over \$12 million in local landowner royalties.”

A Public Citizen spokesperson added that the organization will be working to mobilize the public.

“We are telling our members and activists that now is the time to send a message to the PUC,” said Andy Wilson, global warming program director for Public Citizen’s Texas office. “We are at a critical juncture. Just as our grandfathers built farm-to-market roads to get agricultural products to our cities, it’s our generation’s turn to bring the wind to market transmission lines so we have cheaper, clean, renewable energy.”

To read the study and the policy paper, go to [CleanEnergyForTexas.org](http://CleanEnergyForTexas.org).

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