Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Can you tell me more about the Wheeler-Coburn Creek 115kV Transmission Line Project?

A: Southwestern Public Service Company (SPS), a subsidiary of Xcel Energy Inc., is constructing a new 115 kilovolt (kV) electric transmission line in Wheeler County, Texas. The project consists of 11 miles of transmission line circuit. The transmission line will connect the existing Wheeler Substation located approximately 5.2 miles southsoutheast of Wheeler, to the new Coburn Creek Substation located along State Highway 152, approximately 7.5 miles east of Wheeler.

Q: When will the lines be built?

A: Transmission line construction is expected to begin in late 2015. The Certificate of Convenience and Necessity (CCN) application for the transmission line was filed with the PUCT on May 19, 2014; and approved on August 1, 2014.

Q: Who will benefit from the transmission improvements?

A: All electricity customers in the project area and the surrounding region in Texas will benefit from a more robust and reliable electric transmission system. The Wheeler to Coburn Creek Project will address potentially serious local reliability and load growth issues in the area. Reliable and affordable electricity is the backbone to a robust economy and vibrant community.

Q: How will landowners be affected?

A: SPS representatives will contact all potentially affected landowners by letter as part of the Public Open House process. Potentially affected landowners whose property is within 300 feet of one of the proposed alternative route segments will be advised of the possibility that the transmission line route may cross or be near their property. This will give them an opportunity to participate in the review and routing process. Once the final route has been selected by the PUCT, landowners affected will again be contacted. Surveys for protected environmental resources as well as engineering elements will be completed as part of the routing process, and SPS representatives will ask permission from affected landowners prior to entry on their land.

Q: How can I get involved?

Open Houses are designed to communicate with the public and solicit important input for routing decisions. All comments, information and suggestions are valued and taken into consideration during development of the proposed project. Additionally, feedback can be provided to SPS representatives at (806) 378-2435, or the website at www.powerfortheplains.com. In addition, landowners are free to communicate directly to the PUCT.

Q: How will SPS choose a route for the transmission lines?

A: Alternative routes are determined by routing studies conducted by SPS and its contractors. Engineers and scientists identify potential alternative route segments using aerial photography,

field review, and helicopter flyover. Residents, public officials, government agencies and other concerned parties are invited to attend Open House Meetings. These meetings are to inform the public of the proposed alternative route segments and to gather important input for routing decisions. Information regarding the proposed project is also made available for viewing in public locations and on the project website at www.powerfortheplains.com.
SPS relies upon information from the residents, landowners, and all concerned parties to make informed decisions when evaluating and ultimately selecting the alternative routes to be submitted to the PUCT as part of the application for a CCN. Ultimately the PUCT will select the final route of the transmission line and issue a final order to that effect.

Q: What do transmission line structures look like?
A: SPS plans to use monopole steel structures for the Wheeler to Coburn Creek 115kV Transmission Line Project. Monopole structures are single steel poles. They can be embedded in the ground without a foundation and vary in height from 80 to 140 feet; spans between structures range from 750 to 1,000 feet. All corner and angle structures will be single pole steel as well, but will have concrete foundations to support them.

Q: What impact will the proposed projects have on property values?
Property values are impacted by various factors. The proposed project is just one of many market factors which could be perceived to impact a property's value. SPS is not able to speculate as to the exact nature of any impact on a property; however, fair compensation will be paid for the acquisition of the easements in accordance with eminent domain laws of the state.

Q: How much will SPS pay for an easement?
A: The SPS utilities will provide fair compensation in the form of a one-time easement payment to property owners who host power lines. Property owners retain ownership of the land and may continue to use the land around transmission structures. For more information on transmission line easements, please visit the project website at www.powerfortheplains.com.

Q: Are transmission lines safe?
A: Every effort is made to ensure safety in construction, operation and maintenance of transmission lines. Lines and line infrastructure are designed to withstand extreme weather conditions. Protective devices at line terminals stop the electricity flow under any abnormal operating circumstances. Utility practices meet or exceed standards set by national electric safety codes as well as those adopted by local governments.

Q: Why can't the transmission lines be placed underground?
A: SPS is using overhead lines because of reliability and cost. While it is common for lower voltage transmission lines to be buried (lines less than 69kV), it is rare to build high voltage transmission lines underground. Underground high-voltage transmission lines generally cost up to 10 times more than overhead high-voltage lines. The technology to build lines underground for long distances is also extremely difficult to manage. With overhead lines, air cools the lines and keeps them at a safe operating temperature. Underground lines require cooling mechanisms, which increases cost and decreases reliability. Locating and repairing underground line failures also takes longer, leading to longer outages. Installing underground high voltage transmission lines requires lengthy, disruptive construction techniques. Design concerns such as capacity and heat dissipation are frequent limitations. Underground systems are justified primarily in heavily populated downtown urban centers, where right-of-way is severely limited for overhead lines.

Q: How will my electric rates be affected by the construction of these transmission lines?
A: Retail electric rates are regulated by the PUCT. Integrated electric utility companies like SPS

must file a petition with the PUCT, called a rate case, justifying the cost of the transmission component of their retail electric rate.

Q: What is EMF?
A: Electric and magnetic fields (EMF) are created by anything that conducts electricity, including transmission lines, household appliances and business equipment. These fields are strongest closest to their source, so the farther away you are from the source, the less EMF reaches your body. EMF exposure from transmission lines, which are high in the air and outside the negotiated easement, is minimal. Decades of scientific and medical research, reviewed by science organizations and government agencies, have found no cause/effect evidence of threats to human health from EMF. For more information, as well as an extensive list of references, review a booklet prepared by the National Institute of Environmental Health Services, National Institute of Health, on their website at www.niehs.nih.gov/health/topics/agents/emf/.