

LOCATION IMPORTANT IN PIPELINE PLANNING, OPERATION

Determining the route of a new interstate pipeline is a lengthy and, at times, contentious process during which landowners can be unsure of where they stand.



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Maps show David Jones' storage barn and work trailer in the path of one of the two Rover natural gas pipelines, but company officials say a route change is in the works for the Mineral City property. Energy Transfer's planned Rover pipelines would traverse more than 30 miles of mostly rural land in Carroll, Tuscarawas and southern Stark counties.

Separate and distinct federal agencies regulate interstate natural gas transmission pipelines, such as Rover and NEXUS.

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission oversees pipeline rates and approves project routes.

The Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration governs how pipelines are built, operated, maintained and inspected. Those rules often are based on how close a pipeline is to a populated area.

FINDING A PATH

Determining the route of a new interstate pipeline is a lengthy and, at times, contentious process during which landowners can be unsure of where they stand.

David and Judy Jones are an example.

Energy Transfer's planned Rover pipelines would traverse more than 30 miles of mostly rural land in Carroll, Tuscarawas and southern Stark counties.

But rural doesn't mean empty. There are farms, homes and businesses. And sometimes a proposed pipeline route comes too close for comfort.

The Joneses are a retired couple who live on a hilltop near Mineral City. Maps and site plans filed in February with FERC show one of the two 42-inch Rover pipelines running through a garden, a shed and a work trailer on their Tuscarawas County property. Most of their driveway would become a construction area.

The Joneses said a Rover representative told them the pipeline would go around their property, and this month, Rover spokeswoman Vicki Granado said in an email that new maps reflecting a route change would be filed when final surveys are completed.

Standing next to the garden where Judy grows green beans, tomatoes, squash and cucumber in the summer, David watched pink and orange surveyor's flags flick in the wind.

"I guess we just have to wait and see what happens, what comes up," he said.

WEIGHING SAFETY

Rover filed its formal application with FERC in February and has estimated it won't have approval until November.

FERC's authority trumps local zoning regulations and approval allows a pipeline company to use eminent domain to obtain right-of-way. Before that happens, the agency gathers comments from the public and studies a project's environmental impact.

Pipeline investigator and consultant Richard Kuprewicz said key questions for the public to ask are: How big is the pipeline, what's its pressure and what's the route?

FERC spokeswoman Tamara Young-Allen said public safety is of "utmost concern" to the commission as its staff evaluates a project's potential impact on the public and the environment.

Kuprewicz and others say FERC primarily focuses on the economic need for a new pipeline.

“FERC’s mandate is to determine if a project is in the public convenience and necessity,” said Catherine Landry, spokeswoman for the Interstate Natural Gas Association of America. “Is there a market need for this pipeline? Does this pipeline benefit the American public?”

CLASS LOCATIONS

Once FERC approves a pipeline, two PHMSA categories come into play: class locations and high-consequence areas, also called HCAs.

The categories are based on how close a pipeline comes to a populated area, but they work in different ways. Class locations set a pipeline’s maximum operating pressure, its depth underground, pipe thickness, valve spacing and weld inspections, among other factors.

Locations range from Class 1 for sparsely populated areas to Class 4 for densely populated neighborhoods where four-story buildings are prevalent.

HIGH-CONSEQUENCE AREAS

High-consequence areas determine how companies inspect and maintain their pipelines. Seven percent of the country’s nearly 300,000 miles of onshore gas transmission pipeline are in HCAs.

HCAAs include Class 3 and 4 locations, as well as places where crowds gather or that would be hard to evacuate, such as a school, prison, campground or hospital.

Since 2004, PHMSA has had integrity management rules that require pipeline operators to inspect gas pipelines within HCAAs every seven years, conduct risk assessments and fix safety threats.

“Before those rules came into place, you could put a pipeline into the ground and never really had to inspect it again,” said Carl Weimer, executive director of Pipeline Safety Trust, an advocacy group.

A National Transportation Safety Board study in January found the integrity management rules had decreased pipeline incidents due to corrosion and material failure, but recommended PHMSA make several changes to improve safety.

For its part, PHMSA has been considering since last year whether to make pipeline operators extend their inspection and maintenance programs beyond outside high-consequence areas.

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