

# Opinion: CT businesses can't afford Fairfield County half-billion-dollar aesthetic upgrade

**A vocal minority should not dictate policy that will harm Connecticut's competitiveness.**

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As a local business owner, former director for a global technology corporation, and an advocate for Connecticut's commercial and industrial community, I am deeply concerned about the ongoing push by some Fairfield County members to "underground" a 7-mile transmission line between Fairfield to Bridgeport.

A third-party cost assessment from Dashiell Corporation and HBK Engineering estimates that burying these lines would cost approximately \$838 million versus \$306 million for an overhead solution.

This isn't just about utility infrastructure: it's about whether Connecticut businesses can survive another massive rate increase disguised as local control.

For my members who run factories, educational institutions, health care facilities, cyber security and data centers, hospitality, and large retail operations, electricity is the lifeblood of their operations. Every increase in the per-kWh cost directly impacts their bottom line, ability to compete nationally, and the jobs they create. The proposal to underground the transmission line would force them to shoulder over half a billion dollars in additional costs, with no tangible benefit to reliability, safety, or performance.

The facts are stark. According to United Illuminating's analysis, an overhead solution would cost approximately \$300 million and be spread across all 14 million ratepayers in New England. However, if the Connecticut Siting Council chooses the

underground option, our state alone would bear the additional \$500+ million under federal cost allocation rules.

Not only would we see the increased cost in our personal electric bill from an underground project, but we would likely pay higher prices for consumer goods if companies cannot absorb the additional costs forced upon businesses operating in Connecticut.

Most of us, including myself, would prefer an underground option; the lines are not only even less prone to outages than their overhead counterparts, they are also “out of sight and out of mind.” However, the option must be affordable and fair, balancing both costs and benefits. In this case, the only benefit of undergrounding is strictly aesthetic. If approved, this project will be undertaken at an exorbitant cost to prevent a small number located along MetroNorth from seeing steel poles along the railroad right-of-way.

Is it fair to ask businesses in New Haven County, or for that matter Hartford or New London counties, to pay for a cosmetic upgrade that exclusively benefits these specific Fairfield and Bridgeport communities? This is exactly the “gold-plating” that regulatory bodies are designed to prevent.

The irony is striking. UI would actually earn significantly more from the expensive underground project than from the prudent overhead solution. Yet UI has consistently advocated for the affordable solution despite the financial incentive to do otherwise, while a very vocal minority of residents push for yet another rate increase that all of us will bear.

Furthermore, the Connecticut Siting Council already determined in Docket No. 516 that “the cost of any underground configuration would result in an unreasonable economic burden on the ratepayers of the state.” This wasn’t a close call—it was clear recognition that limited benefits don’t justify astronomical costs.

The Connecticut Siting Council’s upcoming decision isn’t just about transmission lines; it’s about fairness, fiscal responsibility, and our state’s business climate. With Connecticut already struggling with business retention, we cannot afford unnecessary and unjustifiable costs that do not provide any operational benefit to the broader state.

Business leaders must ask: In an era when every dollar matters for competitiveness, can we justify spending half a billion dollars on cherry-picked projects while critical

energy infrastructure demands investment? Can we continue burdening Connecticut businesses with costs our competitors in other states don't face? Why did state legislators spend so much time this session focused on energy affordability, yet say nothing when a select group of community members are crying out for a project route that will undermine all their work?

A vocal minority should not dictate policy that will harm Connecticut's competitiveness and cost all of us dearly. It's time for state leaders to make the right choice: approve an overhead solution, protect the interests of all businesses and residents across Connecticut, and ensure our utility infrastructure serves the many, not just a few living along the railroad corridor in Fairfield County.