

4.2 AESTHETICS**4.2.1 Introduction**

Visual resources of a given area consist of the landforms, vegetation, water features, and cultural modifications (physical changes caused by human activities) that impart an overall visual impression of an area's landscape. A number of factors are considered in the evaluation of a landscape's visual resources and of the potential for one or more visual impacts to occur with the introduction of a project. These factors include visual quality, viewer sensitivity, landscape visibility, and viewer exposure.

Impacts to visual resources may occur when a project alters the visual quality or landscape visibility (scenic views) of the area in which the project is located. The level of viewer sensitivity and existing view quality would affect the severity of the impact.

This section addresses visual resources baseline conditions as related to the potential for Segment 1 project components to create impacts to visual resources in the proposed project area, as defined by CEQA.

4.2.1.1 Methodology

Baseline data collection was initiated with a review of the existing proposed project information including project area strip maps, project plans, and aerial photos in order to gain familiarity with the project requirements. A field survey of the proposed project area was conducted to evaluate the existing landscape setting and visual resource issues of concern, including sensitive land uses adjacent to, or crossed by, the project.

During field studies, the proposed project landscapes were viewed to the extent feasible from public roads and vantage points in order to develop an overall assessment of landscape characteristics and the potential for project impacts based on visibility from public areas. Key Viewing Areas (KVAs) were identified at critical locations along the Segment 1 T/L corridor. Locations of KVAs are indicated in Maps 5.2-1 through 5.2-4.

KVAs are generally selected for one or two reasons: 1) the location provides representative views of the landscape along a specific route segment or in a general region of interest; and/or 2) the viewpoint effectively captures the presence or absence of a potentially significant project impact in that location. KVAs are typically established in locations that provide high visibility to "relatively" large numbers of viewers and/or sensitive viewing locations such as residential areas, recreation areas, and vista points.

In order to accurately represent the SCE Antelope Substation expansion, two KVAs were selected. KVA 1 is representative of public views toward the substation as seen from Avenue J. Because the expansion area is on the south side of the existing substation, a second KVA, located south of the substation was selected. While the view from KVA 2 is not necessarily representative of a public view, it provides an unobstructed and representative view of the expansion area.

Baseline photos from KVAs Seg1-1 through Seg1-9 and computer generated simulations of the proposed project from each KVA are presented on Figures 5.2-1 through 5.2-9. Each baseline photo is labeled as Photo A and project simulations are labeled Photo B.

Photos were taken with a Canon high-resolution digital camera. Camera settings were selected to produce an image that is identical to images produced by a Single Lens Reflex (SLR) 35-mm camera with a 50-mm lens. SLR 50-mm images are considered representative of views as seen by the unaided human eye. A study of the proposed project information and dimensioned plans were then used to create digital simulation renderings using Adobe Photoshop.

4.2.2 Regional Setting

The Antelope Substation and the proposed T/L associated with Segment 1 of the Antelope Transmission Project are generally located in northern Los Angeles County, close to the Kern and Ventura County lines. The proposed project location is indicated on Figure 3-1, General Location Map – Segment 1.

The proposed project spans an area with an assortment of land uses. The proposed T/L passes through the Angeles National Forest, undeveloped rural areas, agricultural areas, and suburban residential development in Santa Clarita.

Topography is varied across Segment 1; ranging from the flat valleys to rugged slopes. The valley is dry, almost desert-like with little suggestion of lushness or abundant water. Vegetation throughout the area is relatively consistent low scrub cover in undeveloped areas. Vegetative cover is denser on slopes in the Angeles National Forest, however scrub vegetation is still predominant with some intermittent larger trees and shrubs. In developed areas, either agricultural cover or landscape trees, shrubs, and lawns are the predominant vegetation.

Overall, visual quality of the proposed project area varies from moderately high to moderately low. In the Antelope Valley, the proposed project area is flat and indistinct; visual quality is moderately low and view expectations, consistent with the area, are expected

to be low. In the Angeles National Forest, views are moderate to moderately high. Visitors to the Forest as well as travelers passing through would have higher viewing expectations given the status of the area as national forest. As a result, most connecting roads through the Forest are identified as eligible scenic highways.

Viewer exposure, given the relatively low number of travelers and residents in the area, is rated as low to moderate.

Visual quality in the Santa Clarita Valley is moderate. Ongoing development in this area has resulted in significant modifications to the landscape. Duration of views toward the proposed project area may be brief to extended when seen from nearby residences.

4.2.3 Planning and Future Development Context

Land uses in the area surrounding the Antelope Substation on the northern end of Segment 1 are low density rural. Land use in the Leona Valley, immediately north of the Angeles National Forest, is primarily agricultural with modest size ranches. Significant development in the area between the Angeles National Forest and the Antelope Substation is not currently proposed. Los Angeles County is in the process of a comprehensive update of the Countywide General Plan, adopted in 1980 (2004b).

To the south of the Angeles National Forest the proposed T/L passes through the Santa Clarita Valley before reaching the Pardee Substation located approximately 1 mile north of the Santa Clara River in the City of Santa Clarita. In 2001, the City of Santa Clarita and the County of Los Angeles initiated a joint planning effort to address future growth of Santa Clarita Valley. The ultimate goal of this planning process is the creation of a General Plan to govern the growth and development of the Valley. A background report has been prepared as part of the planning process and alternatives development is underway. Santa Clarita Valley General Plan adoption is anticipated for 2005. The new General Plan (City of Santa Clarita and County of Los Angeles, 2004) is being prepared in anticipation of ongoing and expected development in the Santa Clarita Valley. Residential development in the Valley along with supporting commercial development is occurring in lower areas of the Valley as well as on hillsides transforming the appearance of the area to that of a suburban community.

Approximately 50 percent or 13 miles of the proposed T/L along Segment 1 passes through the Angeles National Forest. The Angeles National Forest is currently updating its Land Management Plan (LMP) (USFS, 1987a). Environmental review of six alternatives is currently being conducted and the new Plan is currently planned for adoption in the spring of 2005. Under Alternative 4 (of the draft LMP), the alternative currently preferred by the USFS for the Angeles National Forest, there would be an emphasis on increased recreation

activities. Landscape management policies in the new plan call for the protection of unaltered landscapes (Policy LM3) and the restoration of visually effected landscapes (LM2).

4.2.4 Summary of Adopted Plans and Policies

This section provides an overview of applicable visual resource policies along Segment 1 of the Antelope Transmission Project. The existing T/L corridor, within which the majority of the proposed T/L project would be constructed, passes through three jurisdictions: Los Angeles (LA) County, the City of Santa Clarita, and the Angeles National Forest. Each of these agencies has adopted plans with different goals and policies for protection of visual resources.

4.2.4.1 LA County General Plan

Under the Conservation, Open Space, and Recreation Element of the current LA County General Plan (adopted in 1980 and amended in 1986) (1979d), areas of scenic value including ridgelines, as seen from public viewpoints, should be protected (Policy 19). A general overview of environmental resources (Section 3.g, page OS-5) in the Conservation Element indicates that certain roads passing through the Angeles National Forest are considered scenic routes. The Scenic Highways map of the LA General Plan identifies Bouquet Canyon Road and San Francisquito Canyon Road, both crossed by the proposed Antelope-Pardee 500 kV T/L, as proposed scenic highways.

Section 15 of Appendix A of the Land Use Element provides General Conditions and Standards for Development pertaining to Scenic Highways. The standards direct development within proposed and designated scenic corridors to enhance and complement scenic views (Section 15, Standard 2, page LU-A19), but are not more specific.

4.2.4.2 City of Santa Clarita General Plan

Concern for the aesthetic quality of the Santa Clarita Valley is reflected in the goals and policies of the City of Santa Clarita General Plan (adopted in 1991 and amended in 1999) (City of Santa Clarita, 1991a) protecting scenic resources. The Open Space and Conservation Element identifies the protection of certain natural ridgelines as a goal to protect the aesthetic character of the Valley. To reach this goal, policies call for the protection of scenic vista points (Policy OS 2.4) and the identification and protection of prominent ridgelines (Policy OS 2.1) to be preserved as open space. Policy 5.1 of the Land Use Element prohibits development on ridgelines designated as “Significant Ridgelines”. However, the plan does not yet specify which ridgelines are significant.

4.2.4.3 Angeles National Forest Management Plan

While the governing master plan (USFS, 1987a) is dated 1987, it is still the official management plan governing the Antelope National Forest. It is worth mentioning that the goal for visual resources, as discussed in the “Desired Future Condition of the Forest” section of the Management Plan, is protection or improvement of current visual quality and sensitivity to the visual resources as an element of the forest to be valued by future visitors. Forest-wide Standards for Utility Corridors require that new utility lines be located in existing R-O-W corridors (Angeles National Forest Plan, page 44).

4.2.5 Visual Context

The visual context for the T/L R-O-W would be linear and evaluated in a series of segments identified by milepost (mile). The corridor itself would be expanded from 100 feet to either 160 or 180 feet in width for much of the route to accommodate the proposed 500 kV T/L. Note that the visual contexts identified below are utilized in identifying potential impacts in Section 5.2 of this PEA.

4.2.5.1 Antelope Substation Area to Portal Ridge (Mile 0.0-3.5)

The existing SCE Antelope Substation is located in rural northern Los Angeles County. While intensive suburban development is occurring as close as 5 miles to the east, the immediate area surrounding the existing substation is rural with minimal development. A residence, located to the northwest of the substation across Avenue J, is the only residence within 0.25 mile from the substation along Avenue K. With this exception, most residences in the area are located intermittently some 0.75 mile south of the substation. The immediate visual landscape is devoid of major visual features. The Portal Ridge is visible south of the existing T/L corridor while to the north the Central Valley appears as a relatively flat background. The rural appearance of the area is characterized by large stretches of undeveloped land. Most of the area is not in cultivation at this time and is not in its natural state. Thirty miles north, the Tehachapi range is visible as a distant backdrop. The number of travelers along Avenue J is low, as observed during site visits.

The proposed T/L leaves the substation on five approximately 70-foot-tall tubular steel poles in order to pass under the existing 500 kV Midway-Vincent line and then continues southwest on 500 kV lattice towers. A multitude of lines enter the substation from various directions, contributing to an overall impression of visual clutter within and around the substation. KVA 1 is a view looking south to the substation as seen from the residence along Avenue J (see Figure 4.2-1, Photo 1). KVA 2 is a view toward the substation from the undeveloped area to the southwest of the substation. While this view is not representative of

a typical public view of the substation, it provides an unobstructed view of the proposed expansion area of substation (see Figure 4.2-1, Photo 2).

The majority of the proposed Antelope-Pardee 500 kV route follows the existing Saugus-Del Sur R-O-W. A new 1.1 mile R-O-W would be used to connect Antelope Substation to the existing Saugus-Del Sur R-O-W. This new R-O-W is located across the undeveloped rural land to the west and southwest of the substation (see Figure 4.2-2, Photo 3).

4.2.5.2 Leona Valley (Mile 3.5-5.7)

The proposed 500 kV T/L line would pass over the Portal Ridge and drop into the Leona Valley as it connects southwest, within the existing Saugus-Del Sur 66 kV R-O-W. The new 500 kV line is proposed to replace the existing 66 kV line. The terrain is somewhat rugged over the Portal Ridge with vegetative cover consisting of low scrub with occasional larger shrubs and trees. The Leona Valley, created by the San Andreas Fault, is bounded to the south by the mountainous Angeles National Forest. The primary land use in the Leona Valley is agriculture; residential development is minimal. Visual access of the corridor is primarily limited to travelers along Elizabeth Lake Road. The number of travelers along this corridor is considered low but their sensitivity would be relatively high given the overall scenic character of the valley. KVA 3 is the view looking south from Elizabeth Lake Road toward the Angeles National Forest with a small ranch in the foreground.

See Figure 4.2-2 Photo #4 representing the general character of the Leona Valley.

4.2.5.3 Angeles National Forest (Mile 5.7-19.2)

After leaving the Leona Valley, the proposed T/L would rise over the ridge to the south and enter the Angeles National Forest along the existing Saugus-Del Sur 66 kV R-O-W. Terrain is rugged, and the majority of the forest is inaccessible other than to off-road vehicles. The steeply rolling hills with intermittent trees and scrub vegetation offer visual relief from metropolitan development in the Los Angeles basin and the suburban development of Santa Clarita Valley and the Palmdale/Lancaster area. While the visual environment is not considered highly scenic in the way that the Big Sur Coastline is considered scenic, the visual quality in this area is classified as moderately high.

With the exception of the intersection of the Saugus-Del Sur 66 kV R-O-W with Spunky Canyon Road, views from public roads are minimal. The Pacific Crest Trail also crosses the Saugus-Del Sur 66 kV R-O-W just north of Spunky Canyon Road. The proposed T/L would be almost invisible from Bouquet Reservoir and Bouquet Canyon Road. KVAs 4 and 5 represent the visual changes in the Angeles National Forest. KVA 4 is the view of the tower

closest to Spunky Canyon Road where the line crosses perpendicular to the road. KVA 5 is typical of several glimpsed views from Bouquet Canyon Road.

Context photos #5 through #8 (Figures 4.2-3 and 4.2-4) are representative of the Angeles National Forest adjacent to the Saugus-Del Sur 66 kV R-O-W where the existing towers would be replaced.

4.2.5.4 Santa Clarita Valley (Mile 19.2-25.6)

When the line leaves the Angeles National Forest it would follow a new R-O-W for approximately 1.5 miles and then join the Pardee-Vincent 500 kV T/L on double-circuit towers (in an existing R-O-W) until they reach the Pardee Substation.

Suburban and single family development is characteristic throughout this portion of the Santa Clarita Valley. Ongoing subdivision development is rapidly expanding residential neighborhoods around the Valley. The existing transmission corridor is within view of residences from the Haskell Canyon neighborhood to residential development off of Copper Hill Drive. In the Haskell Canyon area, the existing SCE T/Ls cross several LADWP lines. South of the Angeles National Forest, the proposed T/L crosses the Santa Clarita Valley through areas primarily designated for residential land use before terminating at the existing SCE Pardee Substation, which is located in an industrial zone.

Context photos #9 through #11 (Figures 4.2-4 through 4.2-6) represent public views toward the residential portion of the T/L corridor from the Haskell Canyon area to Copper Hill Drive. In much of this area the lines pass near individual homes and sensitivity to the additional line would be relatively high.

The final portion of the proposed Antelope-Pardee 500 kV T/L route follows the existing T/L corridor through the rear of a commercial and light industrial area of Santa Clarita until the tie in at the Pardee Substation. This portion would be relatively invisible and there is low sensitivity to change (see context photos #12 and #13).

4.2.5.5 Alternative 1

This route runs west of, and roughly parallel to, the proposed Antelope-Pardee 500 K/V T/L route. Alternative 1 parallels the existing LADWP T/L over the majority of its length (refer to Figures 3-1 and 3-2). Once south of the Antelope Substation, the alternative line would follow the existing LADWP T/L, which crosses the Portal Ridge and Leona Valley before paralleling San Francisquito Canyon Road and City Highline Motorway Fr Road (a jeep trail) south to the Santa Clarita Valley. The alternative route meets the existing SCE T/L corridor

and the proposed Segment 1 500 kV T/L route in the Haskell Canyon neighborhood area. The visual environments through which the alternative route passes are essentially the same as those discussed above for the route.

A major difference of the Alternative 1 as opposed to the proposed route is the increased visual access of the T/L corridor from nearby roads. Alternative 1 parallels roads through the Angeles National Forest that are identified in the LA County General Plan as proposed scenic highways. While the number of travelers on these roads is somewhat low, their expectations would be relatively high given the scenic character of the county, and the recreational nature of the routes and residential areas. In addition, Alternative 1 passes the community of Green Valley on the west side between approximately mile 8.5 and 9.4 (refer to Figure 3-2).