

Executive Summary

ES.1 INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

Project History

Southern California Edison (SCE) filed an application (Application Number A.07 02 022) for a Permit to Construct (PTC) with the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) on February 16, 2007 for the El Casco System Project. The El Casco System Project includes the proposed El Casco Substation site, upgrades to the Zanja and Banning Substations and the SCE's Mill Creek Communications Site, upgrading of a total of 15.4 miles of existing 115 kV subtransmission line and associated structures, and the installation of fiber optic cables within existing conduits in public streets and on existing SCE structures between the Cities of Redlands and Banning.

The CPUC approved a Permit to Construct the El Casco System Project on December 18, 2008 (Decision 08-12-031). Construction of the El Casco System Project began in late February 2009 and is expected to continue through 2012. As of October 2011, construction of the El Casco Substation is essentially complete, upgrades at Banning and Zanja Substations are complete, fiber optic cable installation is complete, and Segment 3 of the 115 kV subtransmission line is complete (see Figure B-1 for segment definitions). Construction of Segments 6, 7, and 8 of the 115 kV subtransmission line have started, and a Notice to Proceed (NTP) has been issued to allow construction to start on Segment 5. Construction of Segment 1 is planned to commence in 2012, following issuance of a NTP. Construction of Segments 2 and 4 has not started and is pending additional CPUC review because when SCE completed final engineering for the 115 kV subtransmission line it was determined that the design within these segments had changed substantially from the project approved by the CPUC.

CEQA Background

The CPUC is the State lead agency, responsible for compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). A Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) analyzing the El Casco System Project was published by the CPUC on December 12, 2007 (referred to as original Draft EIR) in compliance with CEQA Guidelines. A Final EIR was published on April 11, 2008. Prior to certification of the Final EIR, SCE provided substantial new information regarding the ambient noise levels adjacent to the existing single-circuit 115 kV subtransmission line. Therefore, CPUC revised the EIR's noise analysis and published a Recirculated Draft EIR on July 9, 2008. The CPUC published the Recirculated Final EIR on October 17, 2008. On December 18, 2008, the CPUC certified the Final EIR (Decision 08-12-031).

Per CEQA Guidelines §15162(a), when an EIR has been certified for a project, a subsequent EIR shall be prepared if the Lead Agency determines, on the basis of substantial evidence in light of the whole record, that substantial changes are proposed in the project which will require major revisions of the previous EIR due to the involvement of new significant environmental effects or a substantial increase in the severity of previously identified significant effects. Per CEQA Guidelines §15163(a), the Lead Agency may choose to prepare a supplement to an EIR rather than a subsequent EIR if (1) any of the conditions described in §15162(a) would require the preparation of a subsequent EIR, and (2) only minor additions or changes would be necessary to make the previous EIR adequately apply to the project in the changed situation.

The CPUC has determined that the new information provided by SCE regarding the change in the design of the 115 kV subtransmission line would result in a new significant visual resources impact; however, only minor additions or changes would be necessary to make the approved EIR adequate. Therefore, a Supplemental Draft EIR is required.

Per CEQA Guidelines §15163(b), the supplement to the EIR need contain only the information necessary to make the previous EIR adequate for the project as revised. Therefore, this Supplemental Draft EIR contains a description of the modifications to the 115 kV subtransmission line (Section B), an updated visual resources analysis (Section C.1 – Visual Resources) reflecting the new design of the 115 kV subtransmission line, an updated cumulative visual resources effects analysis (provided in Section D.4 – Cumulative Impact Analysis – Visual Resources), provides analysis of those issue areas for which it was determined that no change in impacts would occur as a result of the proposed modifications to the 115 kV subtransmission line (Section C.2), and revisits the Other CEQA Considerations in light of the project modifications (Section D). This Executive Summary summarizes the changes to the above mentioned sections.

The following sections provide the reader with a brief description of the approved Project and proposed changes to the 115 kV subtransmission line; and a summary of visual resources impacts, which have been updated as a result of new information provided by SCE subsequent to the approval and issuance of the Permit to Construct (December 2008).

ES.2 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Approved Project Objectives

SCE's stated objectives for the El Casco System Project are: (1) to serve long-term projected electrical load requirements in the Electrical Needs Area (i.e., northern Riverside County); (2) to provide enhanced system reliability by constructing a project in a suitable location to serve the Electrical Needs Area; (3) to provide greater operational flexibility to transfer load between lines and substations; (4) to provide substations with more than one 28 mega volt ampere (MVA) transformer with service from two 115 kV lines; (5) to provide safe and reliable electrical service consistent with SCE's planning guidelines and Subtransmission Guidelines; (6) to meet project need while minimizing environmental impacts; and (7) to meet project need in a cost-effective manner.

Overview of the Approved Project

The Project, as approved by the CPUC, includes the construction of the new El Casco Substation, upgrades to the existing Zanja and Banning Substations and SCE's Mill Creek Communications Site, upgrading of a total of 15.4 miles of existing 115 kV subtransmission line and associated structures, and the installation of fiber optic cables within existing conduits in public streets and on existing SCE structures between the Cities of Redlands and Banning, California. The major elements of El Casco System Project are (see Section 2 of the Draft EIR for a detailed description of the Project):

- Construct the new El Casco 220/115/12 kV Substation within the Norton Younglove Reserve in the County of Riverside, associated 220 kV and 115 kV interconnections, and new 12 kV line getaways (i.e., distribution line connections out of the substation).
- Replace approximately 13 miles of existing single-circuit 115 kV subtransmission lines with new, higher capacity double-circuit 115 kV subtransmission lines and replace support structures within existing SCE rights-of-way (ROWs) in the Cities of Banning and Beaumont and unincorporated areas of Riverside County.

- Replace approximately 1.9 miles of existing single-circuit 115 kV subtransmission lines with new, higher capacity single-circuit 115 kV subtransmission lines and replace support structures within existing SCE ROWs in the City of Beaumont and unincorporated Riverside County.
- Replace approximately 0.5 mile of existing single-circuit 115 kV subtransmission lines with new, higher capacity single-circuit 115 kV subtransmission lines on existing support structures within existing SCE ROWs in the City of Beaumont and unincorporated Riverside County.
- Rebuild 115 kV switchracks within Zanja and Banning Substations in the Cities of Yucaipa and Banning, respectively.
- Install telecommunications equipment at the proposed El Casco Substation and at SCE's existing Mill Creek Communications Site.
- Install fiber optic cables within public streets and on existing SCE structures between the Cities of Redlands and Banning.

Description of the Proposed Modifications

As described in the EIR, the approved 115 kV subtransmission line work would include the installation of approximately 225 new steel poles, ranging from 65 to 85 feet tall. Approximately 25 percent of these steel poles would be bolted-base tubular steel poles (TSP), and the remaining 75 percent would be direct-buried lightweight steel (LWS) poles. Except for the steel poles installed within the substation site, these structures would be placed within existing 115 kV rights-of-way (ROWs) or along public street ROWs. Any steel poles that are replacing existing wood pole structures in existing ROWs would be primarily installed at the same locations (i.e., within approximately 10 feet of the existing structures).

As part of final engineering, SCE has determined that additional poles will be required along portions of the 115 kV subtransmission line alignment. This determination was made based on a topographical/profile survey, detailed rights check, individual structure strength ratings, conductor sizes, span lengths, number of conductors/cables to be attached, and wind loading. Conductor sag calculations were used to determine the proper final pole heights along the line route. In designing the 115 kV subtransmission line, SCE attempted to determine the optimal combination of LWS poles and TSPs; where possible, LWS poles were the preferred choice, as they are less costly to purchase and construct (SCE, 2011a). However, in certain areas the terrain mandated the use of TSPs, such as at highway, waterway, and canyon crossings to accommodate longer spans and higher conductor tensions. All of these factors were considered in determining the final design for Segments 2 and 4.

The revised project would introduce approximately double the number of 115 kV structures than originally proposed along Segment 2 (33 vs. 61 structures), which begins just west of South Highland Home Road and continues east to a point just west of South San Gorgonio Avenue/Highway 243 (approximately 2.85 miles), and along Segment 4 (30 vs. 57 structures), which begins just east of Bolo Court/Westward Avenue and continues east to just west of Highland Springs Avenue (approximately 2.75 miles). As noted above, the original design assumed generally one-for-one replacement of the existing wood pole structures which exist along Segments 2 and 4. Additionally, the structure heights within Segments 2 and 4 have increased substantially from the original design (65 to 85 feet tall) and would instead range from 75 to 120 feet.

ES.3 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

ES.3.1 Visual Resources

Section C.1 (Visual Resources) of the Supplemental EIR presents a comprehensive analysis and assessment of Visual Resources impacts and mitigation measures for the proposed changes to the approved Project, specifically addressing the changes in the existing conditions and proposed design of the 115 kV subtransmission line along Segments 2 and 4 of the approved Project alignment. These impacts are summarized herein.

Construction impacts on visual resources would result from the presence and visual intrusion of construction vehicles, equipment, materials, and work force at the construction and staging areas along Segments 2 and 4 of the 115 kV subtransmission line. Mitigation measures included in the Visual Resources analysis would reduce visibility of construction activities and equipment and reduce construction night lighting impacts to levels that would be less than significant (Class II).

Land scarring would occur from use of staging areas and activities along Segments 2 and 4 of the 115 kV subtransmission line alignment. Long-term land scarring and vegetation clearance impacts would be mitigated by reducing in-line views of land scars and reducing visual contrast from unnatural vegetation lines as presented in the Visual Resources analysis. The implementation of these measures would reduce these impacts to a less-than-significant level (Class II).

Once operational, Project structures in Segments 2 and 4 would result in a visual increase to structure contrast, industrial character, view blockage, skylining, and glare impacts, when viewed from certain key viewpoint along the route. The locations of these key viewpoints are presented in the Visual Resources analysis. These operational visual impacts would be significant and unavoidable (Class I) for Segment 2 and the portion of Segment 4 adjacent to residential development, and adverse but less than significant (Class III) for the remainder of Segment 4. As such, the proposed changes to the approved Project in Segments 2 and 4 of the 115 kV subtransmission line alignment would result in new significant and unavoidable (Class I) visual impacts that would not occur under the approved Project (visual impacts along all segments of the 115 kV subtransmission line alignment were previously determined to be less than significant (Class III)).

Cumulative Impacts. There are six identified residential cumulative projects that, when constructed, would be visible within the same field of view as the Proposed Project (i.e., the approved Project with implementation of the proposed changes in Segments 2 and 4). All six of these residential development projects would (a) be consistent with other residential uses in the immediate area and region; (b) not appreciably change the character of the existing, rapidly developing suburban/urban landscape; and (c) not share the same or similar industrial character as the Proposed Project. On that basis, the Proposed Project would not result in cumulative visual impacts with the six residential projects. However, in all six cases, substantial view blockage of background hills and sky would occur when seen from viewpoints north of the developments. On its own, the view blockage impact caused by Segment 2 and portions of Segment 4 of the Proposed Project would be significant and unavoidable (Class I). In conjunction with the substantial view blockage that would occur in combination with the residential projects, the resulting cumulative visual impact would also be significant (Class I) and the Proposed Projects' contribution to this impact would be cumulatively considerable.

Although the Proposed Project is generally replacing existing wood-pole H-frame structures along the subtransmission line ROW, the new steel-pole structures would have a stronger industrial character,

and along Segments 2 and 4, there would be a substantial increase in the number of structures. On its own, the increase in visual contrast, industrial character, and view blockage caused by Segments 2 and 4 of the proposed subtransmission line would result in significant and unavoidable (Class I) visual impacts. In conjunction with the highly industrial character of the identified nearby DPV2 500 kV Transmission Line Project (the Devers-Valley portion), the combined increase in visual contrast, industrial character, and view blockage would also result in significant and unavoidable (Class I) cumulative visual impacts and the Proposed Projects' contribution to this impact would be cumulatively considerable.

ES.3.2 Issue Areas Where Modifications Result in No Substantial Change

Section C.2 of this Supplemental EIR presents an analysis and assessment of impacts for the following issue areas:

- Air Quality
- Land Use
- Biological Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Geology and Soils
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- Hydrology and Water Quality
- Noise
- Public Services and Utilities
- Transportation

These issue areas were analyzed in detail for the approved Project in the Final EIR (i.e., Draft EIR, Final EIR, Recirculated Draft EIR, Recirculated Final EIR) and have been re-evaluated to support the conclusion that the proposed changes to the Project in Segments 2 and 4 of the 115 kV subtransmission line would not result in a substantial change in the impacts previously identified or result in a new impact for these issue areas.