

Comment Set SD
San Diego Gas & Electric Company



May 12, 2004

Michael Rosauer
California Public Utilities Commission
c/o Aspen Environmental Group
235 Montgomery Street, Suite 935
San Francisco, CA 94104

RE: Draft Environmental Impact Report for the SDG&E Miguel-Mission #2
Project, California Public Utilities Commission Application No.02-07-022

Dear Mr. Rosauer:

San Diego Gas & Electric (SDG&E) is responding to your request for comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Report (Draft EIR or DEIR) for the proposed 230 kV transmission line project located in San Diego County, California (Proposed Project).

**SDG&E SUPPORTS THE PROJECT AS PROPOSED
BECAUSE IT IS THE ONLY FEASIBLE OPTION
THAT MEETS THE PROJECT OBJECTIVES**

SDG&E believes that the Proposed Project is the best routing option because it accomplishes all of the project objectives, results in fewer potential environmental impacts and is the least expensive to California ratepayers than the underground or overhead alternatives. Some of the key attributes of the Proposed Project can be summarized as follows:

- Environmental impacts are minimized by utilizing SDG&E's existing transmission corridor for the new line and existing structures for the relocated line
- SDG&E's existing Project Protocols mitigate many of the potentially significant impacts
- No formal protests have been filed against the Proposed Project
- Only the Proposed Project meets the project timeline
- Economic benefits to California ratepayers are estimated to average \$65 million annually for the first six years

As set forth below in more detail, the merits of the Proposed Project compel the California Public Utilities Commission (Commission or CPUC) to select it over the alternatives proposed in the Draft EIR.

SD-1

**Comment Set SD, cont.
San Diego Gas & Electric Company**

A. SDG&E's Existing Transmission Corridor Is The Best Routing Option To Satisfy The Project Purpose And Need

SD-1

In July 2002, SDG&E proposed this second 230 kV line in an existing corridor by utilizing modified existing 138 kV lattice steel towers in order to relieve constraints on its transmission system, as directed by AB 970, and to provide access to cost-effective electric generation that has developed east of SDG&E's load center.¹

SDG&E's stated objectives include reducing constraints on its existing electrical system, improving SDG&E's existing infrastructure and ensuring that the electric system can safely and reliably serve the SDG&E service territory. In addition to its safety and reliability benefits, the Proposed Project will also improve regional transmission system infrastructure to ensure that the electric system better provides for delivery of economic energy supplies and reliability for the State of California and the Western Electricity Coordinating Council area. The first objective of the Proposed Project, reducing constraints on the electrical transmission system in SDG&E's territory, is in accordance with AB 970. Reducing system constraints on SDG&E's transmission system will allow electric generation to meet demand by increasing statewide and regional access to new merchant generation capacity. Additionally, reducing transmission system constraints would also reduce transmission congestion costs, and SDG&E and California Independent System Operator (CAISO) consumers would enjoy substantial economic benefits.² Only with timely implementation of the Proposed Project can these anticipated financial benefits be fully realized.

The second objective of the Proposed Project is to provide reliability benefits and operational flexibility for SDG&E's service territory. The Proposed Project will prevent overloads on various 138 kV and 69 kV circuits in SDG&E's system and eliminate various Remedial Action Schemes that currently restrict the ability of Miguel Substation to accept and transfer power from new generation sources into the existing transmission system. The sooner the limitations on Miguel Substation are lifted, the quicker the increase in operational flexibility and system reliability.

The third objective is improving regional transmission infrastructure to ensure that electric transmission systems can efficiently and economically deliver energy supplies. The transmission infrastructure improvements of the Proposed Project would facilitate the reliable transfer of power from new merchant generating facilities south and east of Miguel Substation, thereby increasing local, statewide and regional access to more generating capacity. Achieving this objective will improve the overall reliability of California's regional transmission grid.

All of the foregoing objectives inherently require timely and cost effective implementation of SDG&E's Proposed Project. As stated in the Draft EIR and emphasized by SDG&E on several occasions, it is essential to bring this transmission line

¹ The project was initially identified in 2001 in connection with AB 970.

² The Commission affirmed the need for and cost-effectiveness of the project in D.03-02-069

Comment Set SD, cont.
San Diego Gas & Electric Company

in-service at the earliest possible date. As described below, substantial savings to the ratepayers are forfeited every day that the Proposed Project is delayed. Yet the DEIR barely mentions and does not really explain the implications of whether alternatives proposed in the DEIR are capable of being accomplished in a successful manner within a reasonable period of time. In those instances, the Draft EIR acknowledges that implementation of any of the alternatives could delay the project schedule. The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requires that the Commission consider whether or not proposed alternatives are economically feasible and can be timely implemented, but the Draft EIR gives insufficient consideration to these important criteria. SDG&E has repeatedly emphasized that the timing of the Miguel-Mission #2 project is a critical component of its purpose and need. If the Commission adopts one of the alternatives rather than the Proposed Project—particularly one of the underground segments—the resulting engineering, right-of-way acquisition and construction delay will jeopardize reliability of the transmission system for San Diego County and burden ratepayers with lost savings they could have attained.

SD-2

In addition to the benefits of achieving all of the project objectives, the public service nature of the Proposed Project distinguishes it from other more typical development projects analyzed under CEQA. Although CEQA and its Guidelines provide that alternatives to the Proposed Project must satisfy most of the project objectives,³ public utility projects that aim to deliver safe and reliable energy justify a higher level of attainment of such objectives. Because it is a regulated utility, SDG&E must comply not only with various resource agency requirements, but also all Commission regulations and rules, including AB 970 and General Order 95. There are many more considerations intertwined in the purpose and need of such an energy project, in particular the safe, reliable and efficient delivery of an essential service. Therefore, the Final Environmental Impact Report (Final EIR or FEIR) should recognize the importance of this public utility project most effectively meeting its purpose and need and achieving all of the project objectives in a timely manner.

SD-3

B. The Proposed Project Should Be The Environmentally Superior Alternative

SD-4

The Draft EIR states that the Environmentally Superior Alternative is SDG&E's proposed route modified with two undergrounding route segments. SDG&E asserts that the Proposed Project is actually environmentally superior compared to the underground and overhead alternatives analyzed in the Draft EIR. As is often the case, the proposed alternatives will reduce some impacts and increase others. Alternatively, because none of the options is clearly the environmentally superior alternative, it is sufficient for the EIR to explain the environmental advantages and disadvantages of each alternative compared to the Proposed Project. Even though the Commission need not select the DEIR-designated Environmentally Superior Alternative, it is critical that the public understand the flaws in the DEIR selection of it.

³ 14 California Code of Regulations ("CEQA Guidelines") § 15126.6(b).

Comment Set SD, cont. San Diego Gas & Electric Company

The Draft EIR presents a skewed comparison of the alternatives to the Proposed Project for several reasons. First, the Commission is unjustified in placing “heavy weight” on visual resource impacts in its selection of the Environmentally Superior Alternative. CEQA does not establish hard and fast rules for selecting the Environmentally Superior Alternative. (CEQA Guidelines § 15126.6(e)(2).) Yet the priority placed on visual concerns to the detriment of other natural resources in the Draft EIR is arbitrary and not based on CEQA. Several other environmental factors can be equal to if not more important than the change in aesthetics to an existing transmission corridor that is already urban in character. The DEIR downplays the magnitude of potential impacts associated with the underground alternatives while overstating the potential impacts of the Proposed Project based on a faulty environmental baseline. The lack of due treatment to all environmental resources and less than complete alternative designs result in an inaccurate comparison of alternatives. The resulting preference in the Draft EIR for the Environmentally Superior Alternative is arbitrary and without merit.

SD-5

SD-6

Second, while the Draft EIR ostensibly does not consider Electric and Magnetic Fields (EMF) as a criterion for selection of a preferred route and discussed it for informational purposes only, the Draft EIR expressly admits that the alternatives were developed based on EMF concerns. The DEIR goes so far as to propose mitigation measures for the EMF as if EMF is a CEQA consideration. The public should understand the distinction between CEQA resources and non-CEQA, speculative considerations as well as the importance of dismissing speculative concerns from further environmental review. (CEQA Guidelines § 15145.) The focus of the environmental review process and the overriding goal of CEQA is the protection of the environment. (See, Pub. Res. Code §§ 21000-21002.) Although SDG&E recognized that EMF is a concern to the public and the Commission, CEQA and Commission rules preclude the Commission from rendering a decision based on EMF considerations.

SD-7

Third, the Draft EIR fails to accurately describe the extent of potential impacts of the underground options. Although CEQA does not require that the alternative’s significant impacts be described in the same level of detail as the project (CEQA Guidelines § 15126.6(d)), it is this very problem that leads to the unsupportable pronouncement of the Environmentally Superior Alternative. The Draft EIR overestimates the environmental impacts of the Proposed Project and underestimates the environmental impacts of the other alternatives. As a result, there are inconsistent determinations of the Class II and Class III impacts throughout each natural resource analysis. The Environmentally Superior Alternative as described in the Draft EIR is thus called into question.

SD-8

1. The Visual Resources Analysis Relies On A Flawed Environmental Baseline And Biased Methodology

SD-9

The Draft EIR’s comparative analysis of potential visual impacts from the Proposed Project and the alternatives is superficial and unsupported. The faulty visual resource examination consists of (1) an inaccurate description of existing conditions within the portrayal of the environmental setting, (2) subjective and inimitable

Comment Set SD, cont.
San Diego Gas & Electric Company

methodology in the assessment of potential visual impacts, and (3) the resulting skewed conclusion regarding potential visual impacts.

SD-9

First, the visual analysis greatly exaggerates the Proposed Project impacts and ignores the baseline conditions in the environmental setting of this existing transmission-filled corridor, and thus the surrounding land uses. Not only are the proposed transmission lines compatible with the existing structures in the corridor, but public utility facilities are currently located in the vicinity of residential, commercial and industrial developments, recreation facilities and school sites to provide energy. The existing transmission lines predated a majority of the surrounding land uses along the proposed route. The Draft EIR does not fully detail the 18 to 30 electric conductors and facilities that currently traverse SDG&E's right-of-way.

SD-10

Second, the methodology employed in the DEIR to analyze potential visual impacts cannot be conducted in a systematic or repeatable manner. The methodology consists of a standard Visual Contrast Rating System approach similar to the used by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to assess the change in visual quality on public lands from proposed projects. However, conclusions in the Visual Analysis section are not corroborated by any facts in the Draft EIR. For example, it is unclear how the assessment of low, moderate and high visual change levels was made. Factors considered in the Visual Contrast Rating System include distance, angle of observation, length of time the attribute is in view, relative size or scale, season of use, light conditions, recovery time, spatial relationships and atmospheric conditions. Form, line, color and texture are also considered in the evaluation of visual contrast. It appears that a subjective approach was used to rate the overall change rather than a systematic and objective approach as provided in the Visual Contrast Rating System. There is no explanation of ratings or how variables were considered in reaching the impact classifications. The entire visual resources analysis should be revised to use an objective, verifiable and repeatable methodology so that others reading the Final EIR could reach similar conclusions.

SD-11

Finally, the Commission provides no objective basis for its conclusion that the Jamacha Valley and Santee underground segments are visually preferable to the Proposed Project. The purported visual advantages of the underground segments are without merit due to the lack of evidence and solid methodology. Even if it could be argued that undergrounding the proposed line lessened the potential aesthetic impacts, the change is so incremental based on the existing urban-like landscape and the developed transmission right-of-way that they do not prevail over the Proposed Project. While it might be appropriate to underground lines along a stretch of state-designated scenic highway, no such circumstances exist here. (See e.g., page D.13-1) SDG&E's existing corridor has between 18 and 30 transmission wires running through the project route. The exorbitant cost to underground the 138 kV and 69 kV lines (when the Proposed Project would be in SDG&E's existing transmission-filled right-of-way) unjustifiably burdens ratepayers to pacify a very few isolated community preferences.

SD-12

SD-13

Comment Set SD, cont. San Diego Gas & Electric Company

The Draft EIR states that the Jamacha Valley 138/69 kV Underground Alternative “was developed to address the concerns of residents living near or adjacent to the Miguel-Mission right of way.” (page C-9) In comments received from the public to date, only four residents in Jamacha Valley living adjacent to the existing corridor expressed concern regarding the Proposed Project’s visual effects throughout the environmental review process. The Commission should consider this limited public response in its consideration of the alternatives.

SD-14

In sum, the Draft EIR’s conclusion that the existing corridor with the Jamacha Valley and Santee Underground Alternative segments is the Environmentally Superior Alternative based on visual concerns is misplaced. The Proposed Project results in the least impacts on the full spectrum of CEQA-based natural resources.

SD-15

2. EMF Effects, Which Are Speculative Under CEQA, Can Only Be Considered For Informational Purposes

SD-16

The DEIR acknowledges that the Commission developed underground alternatives based on the public concerns regarding EMF emissions, and the Draft EIR states that the Environmentally Superior Alternative was developed in response to visual and EMF concerns expressed by a few citizens in the City of Santee and Jamacha Valley. (pages C-9, C-42) Curiously, it fails to mention that many of those individuals expressing concern do not live adjacent to or near the project route. Only five Santee residents along the existing transmission corridor sent original letters expressing concern about visual impacts or EMF. Approximately 55 form letters were submitted commenting only about potential EMF exposure. Many of the form letters were sent by residents who do not live adjacent to the project route. Additional letters sent to the Commission mirrored the EMF form letters described above.

Because potential EMF impacts are speculative in accordance with CEQA Guidelines, Section 15145, the Commission *cannot use EMF concerns* as a basis to compare overhead or underground alternatives to the Proposed Project. Section D.9.6 of the DEIR accurately states that EMF should not be considered an environmental impact in the context of CEQA. It follows that EMF cannot be a basis upon which to find that an alternative is superior to the Proposed Project. But the 20 pages in the Draft EIR devoted exclusively to EMF issues (and throughout other sections of the text) could mislead the public to believe that it must be important under CEQA to receive such extensive treatment compared to other natural resources. (pages D.9-13 to D.9-33) Based on Section 9.6, the Commission should properly characterize the limited role of EMF in CEQA.

3. The Skewed Impacts Comparison Leads To An Unsupportable Environmentally Superior Alternative

SD-17

As discussed in more detail in Section E below, the Draft EIR contains skewed environmental impact analyses that do not reflect the true impacts of the Proposed Project relative to the alternatives. The baseline physical conditions of the existing corridor and

**Comment Set SD, cont.
San Diego Gas & Electric Company**

surroundings are the point from which the Commission determines whether an impact is significant. (CEQA Guidelines § 15125(a).) The existing setting, a transmission line filled corridor that SDG&E owned before the area was developed, is essential to a proper assessment of the physical change on the environment from the Proposed Project.

SD-17

SDG&E acquired the existing transmission right-of-way in 1955 and subsequently expanded the corridor's width to accommodate anticipated future expansion of its transmission system. At that time, the area surrounding the transmission corridor was much more rural in nature. Many of the owners of the homes and/or businesses that have since been built in the vicinity of the transmission corridor knew of the various transmission lines that are contained in that transmission corridor. Further, SDG&E's ratepayers have paid for this expanded ROW for many years. It does not make sense for SDG&E to build the proposed 230 kV transmission line anywhere else other than within the existing corridor—a corridor for which the express purpose is to provide reliable and safe energy to its customers.

SD-18

As the visual analysis proceeds through identification of Key Observation Points (KOPs), it is easy to see the DEIR's characterization of the visual change to the existing landscape is exaggerated. The DEIR classifies the visual contrast at various points along the corridor as more adverse than it really is, when compared to the current transmission facility-filled right-of-way. Because the visual analysis in the Draft EIR starts off at the lowest possible level of contrast with an inflated impact rating, the classification of the Proposed Project's impacts progressively becomes more and more overstated. As a result, the comparison of the Proposed Project to the underground segments is similarly exaggerated. The potential visual change is so slight that is likely imperceptible at most KOPs. The proposed underground options do not so drastically reduce the visual impacts that they outweigh almost all of the other natural resource areas that have less impact with the Proposed Project. But this unbalanced approach is exactly what led the Draft EIR to identify the Environmentally Superior Alternative.

SD-19

In conclusion, faulty visual resources analyses, improper and excessive consideration of EMF and the slanted and inconsistent classification of potential visual impacts all contribute to the unjustified identification of the Jamacha Valley and City of Santee Underground Alternatives as part of the Environmentally Superior Alternative. The merits of the Proposed Project and an appropriate weighting of the CEQA-based natural resource categories compel finding the Proposed Project as the true Environmentally Superior Alternative.

SD-20

C. The Proposed Project Is The Most Cost Effective For Ratepayers

SD-21

The Proposed Project is the most economically feasible option compared to the all of the alternatives. The Commission-approved estimates of the net annual benefits from the Proposed Project to range from \$3 million to \$7 million for SDG&E ratepayers and between \$10 and \$43 million for the CAISO ratepayers. Although CEQA is concerned with changes to the physical environment caused by proposed development, whether an alternative or mitigation is feasible does take into account economic feasibility. (CEQA

Comment Set SD, cont.
 San Diego Gas & Electric Company

Guidelines §§ 15131(c) & 15364.) Feasibility also inherently involves whether the project can successfully be accomplished within a reasonable period of time. (CEQA Guidelines § 15364.) Any delay in the project in-service date will unnecessarily cost SDG&E customers, and ratepayers statewide, millions of dollars. The two key elements that the Draft EIR disregarded are project duration and economic feasibility.

SD-22

Each of the alternatives analyzed in the Draft EIR substantially increases the cost of the project. In particular, the Santee and Jamacha Valley Underground Alternatives will place a considerable financial burden on SDG&E's ratepayers. Additional costs include engineering, material procurement, new rights-of-way, access road grading, environmental impacts mitigation (principally biological and cultural resources) and line construction. Although the Draft EIR states that each of the underground and overhead alternatives analyzed is "feasible," the Commission failed to consider all of the CEQA-mandated factors that determine feasibility. CEQA Guidelines, Section 15364 define feasibility as:

SD-23

“. . . capable of being accomplished in a successful manner *within a reasonable period of time*, taking into account *economic*, environmental, legal, social and technological factors.” (Emphasis added.)

The DEIR only evaluates: “Is the alternative feasible (legal, regulatory, technical)?” (page C-2) and “whether there was anything about the alternative that would be infeasible on technical, legal or regulatory grounds.” (pages C-4, C-5) The Draft EIR specifically did not give sufficient consideration to the economic viability of any alternative compared to the Proposed Project. The following table (previously provided to the Commission) presents the estimated minimum additional project costs, should the Commission not adopt the Proposed Project as submitted.

Economic Feasibility and Cost of Each Alternative

Alternative	Total Additional Project Costs*
Jamacha Valley 138 kV/69 kV Underground Alternative	\$ 6,666,000
Jamacha Valley Overhead "A" Alternative	\$ 645,000
Jamacha Valley Overhead "B" Alternative	\$ 1,736,000
City of Santee 138 kV/69 kV Underground Alternative	\$ 6,400,000
City of Santee 230 kV Overhead Northern ROW Boundary	\$ 2,164,000

* Rounded to \$1,000

An explanation of the additional project costs is as follows.

**Comment Set SD, cont.
San Diego Gas & Electric Company**

SD-23

Jamacha Valley 138 kV/69 kV Underground Alternative

The overall capital cost of this underground alternative increases by approximately \$6,666,000. Engineering, acquisition of new right-of-way, material procurement and construction changes could delay the project completion date by at least 8 to 10 months (this time could increase if SDG&E is forced to condemn property). Costs included in the estimate are: materials and equipment, land costs, biological and cultural mitigation and access roads.

Jamacha Valley Overhead A Alternative

This alternative will increase the total project capital cost by an estimated \$645,000 and delay the project from 3 to 6 months to allow for additional engineering, material procurement, and construction. Acquisition of land costs and biological and cultural field mitigation requirements increase the cost of this alternative.

Jamacha Valley Overhead B Alternative

This alternative will increase the project cost by an estimated \$1,736,000, and delay completion by 8 to 10 months to accommodate additional engineering, material procurement, and construction. Materials and equipment, land costs and biological and cultural field mitigation costs comprise this estimate.

City of Santee 138 kV/69 kV Underground Alternative

This underground alternative will increase the overall project capital cost to almost as much as that with the Jamacha Valley Underground Alternative—an estimated \$6,400,000. It could delay the project in-service date by a minimum of 8 to 10 months (again, condemnation could require many more months). The materials and equipment, land, and mitigation costs associated with this alternative are substantial.

City of Santee 230 kV Overhead Northern ROW Boundary Alternative

The overall project capital cost for this alternative will rise by approximately \$2,164,000. Selection of this alternative rather than the Proposed Project could delay the schedule between 3 and 6 months for additional engineering, material procurement, right-of-way acquisition and construction. Land costs (new right-of-way); materials and equipment and mitigation costs are included in this estimate.

The summary above describes the general economic infeasibility of each alternative compared to the Proposed Project. This analysis was noticeably absent from the Draft EIR but is critical to a balanced determination of feasibility. While the Commission cannot directly consider cost under CEQA, economic feasibility is an essential component of the alternatives analysis and appropriate mitigation measures. (CEQA Guidelines § 15364.)

Comment Set SD, cont.
San Diego Gas & Electric Company

**ALMOST ALL OF THE MITIGATION MEASURES
ARE NOT “ROUGHLY PROPORTIONAL”
TO THE POTENTIAL PROJECT IMPACTS**

SD-24

The mitigation measures imposed throughout the Draft EIR are flawed in at least two respects. First, many of the measures are disproportional to the potential impacts on a particular natural resource, are duplicative of existing SDG&E Project Protocols or are infeasible. This is particularly important because the Proposed Project does not even cause a significant environmental impact with implementation of the Project Protocols and appropriately proportional mitigation measures.⁴

Second, the Commission lacks the authority to compel much of the mitigation—even the applicable responsible agency cited within the various mitigation tables in the Draft EIR would lack the authority to impose such obligations. Although there are many more problems with particular mitigation measures, these two fundamental flaws pervading the DEIR have a devastating effect on the timely implementation of the Proposed Project.

SD-25

The Commission can only impose appropriate and proportional mitigation measures to “minimize significant adverse impacts” of the Proposed Project, and the measures must be consistent with all constitutional requirements, including the following:

SD-26

- (A) There must be an essential nexus (i.e. connection) between the mitigation measure and a legitimate governmental interest. *Nollan v. California Coastal Comm’n*, 483 U.S. 825, 834-837 (1987); and
- (B) The mitigation measure must be “roughly proportional” to the impacts of the project. *Dolan v. City of Tigard*, 512 U.S. 374, 388-391 (1994)

(CEQA Guidelines § 15126.4(a)(4).)

Numerous mitigation measures in the Draft EIR lack the essential nexus and are disproportional to the potential harm from the Proposed Project. Throughout the DEIR, the analysis in the document does not make the requisite “individualized determination that the required [measure] is related both in nature and extent to the impact of the proposed development. (See, *Dolan v. City of Tigard*, *supra*, 512 U.S. at 388-391.) Some of the mitigation measures are not connected let alone roughly proportional to the negligible changes that project construction will create (e.g., existing substation operations).

The Draft EIR often suggests that the Commission reach beyond its jurisdiction in the implementation of mitigation measures and that approach pervades the entire DEIR. CEQA confers no independent grant of authority to impose mitigation measures on a

SD-27

⁴ A key CEQA requirement for any alternative is that it must have the potential to “avoid or substantially lessen any of the *significant* effects of the project.” (CEQA Guidelines § 15126.6(a).)(Emphasis added). (page C-4)

**Comment Set SD, cont.
San Diego Gas & Electric Company**

project. (See, Pub. Res. Code § 21004.) Implementing Public Resources Code Section 21004, the CEQA Guidelines specify that CEQA is intended to be used in conjunction with discretionary powers granted to public agencies by *other* laws and that CEQA does not grant new or independent powers to public agencies. (See, CEQA Guidelines § 15040.)

SD-27

Therefore, the DEIR is incorrect in assuming that the Commission has authority to compel mitigation measures that exceed its authority and that of the applicable responsible agency. Only the responsible agency for that particular natural resource (e.g., biology) can require SDG&E to perform certain measures *within* the bounds of that agency's power. A prime example in the Draft EIR is the mitigation proposed for potential air quality impacts. Mitigation Measure A-1b mandates SDG&E to use diesel engines that meet 1996 California Air Resources Board (CARB) or United States Environmental Protection Act (US EPA) certified standards for off-road equipment that has a rating of more than 100 horsepower, or install high-pressure diesel injectors and retard the injection timing on any off-road equipment that was manufactured prior to 1996 and lists the Commission as the responsible agency. In short, these requirements aimed at regulating mobile sources exceed what the applicable local air district could impose.

SD-28

Even more incredulous is the Commission's designation of itself as the responsible entity to review, approve and monitor each of the natural resource areas and corresponding mitigation measures listed in the Draft EIR. Almost all of the mitigation measures require SDG&E to submit plans, designs and programs to the Commission prior to construction (even 90 days out) for review and approval. This procedure is contrary to CEQA, unfounded and nonsensical because the Commission lacks sufficient expertise in these environmental areas. SDG&E has its own experts and retains specialized consultants to investigate, develop and implement standards related to the environment. Such novel and intrusive oversight by the Commission of SDG&E's routine practices is duplicative and can only delay the project schedule.

SD-29

In addition, SDG&E has an approved Subregional Natural Community Conservation Plan (NCCP) that establishes and implements a long term agreement between SDG&E, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) for the preservation and conservation of covered species and their habitat. The NCCP allows SDG&E to develop, maintain and repair all of its facilities within the NCCP area. Although the Commission has jurisdiction for permitting the proposed electrical transmission project, the NCCP approved by USFWS and CDFG governs many environmental aspects of any project proposed by SDG&E that is covered under its NCCP.

SD-30

CONCLUSION

SDG&E's specific comments on the Draft EIR and suggested changes for the Final Environmental Impact Report are set forth below. SDG&E requests that the Commission issue the Final EIR as soon as possible and issue its Draft Decision approving the project as proposed by SDG&E immediately thereafter.

SD-31

Comment Set SD, cont. San Diego Gas & Electric Company

Executive Summary

Because the Executive Summary briefly discusses each of the topics covered in the Draft EIR, many of the comments in this section apply and are given much more treatment in the respective full-text section. Therefore, SDG&E's comments on the Executive Summary are likely addressed in greater detail throughout this letter in the respective DEIR sections.

As an initial matter, however, SDG&E would like to address the development of alternatives to the Proposed Project in response to comments from citizens and the City of Santee. According to the Scoping Report, 43 letters were submitted after the scoping meetings. Of the 43 letters they received, approximately 36 letters were form letters expressing concern about EMF only. Of those 36 form letters, only 17 represent addresses that are adjacent to or near SDG&E's Proposed Project ROW. Only 7 letters were written from individuals adjacent to or near the ROW and expressed concern about the visual resources of a new line being added to the ROW. Of those 7 letters, 4 were located in the Jamacha Valley area and 3 were from Santee. In addition, 14 people spoke at the public scoping meeting mostly about EMF concerns and concern for their property values. Of those 14 people who spoke at the public scoping meeting, 9 people are included in the count for submitting the same form letter mentioned above that discusses concern for EMF. In conclusion, the Commission has introduced very expensive alternatives that will cause lengthy delays to respond to just 7 letters expressing concern about the visual resources introduced by the new transmission line.

In addition, the Executive Summary does not mention that the project would not be achieved within a reasonable period of time if any one of the alternatives is adopted. The Draft EIR admits that economic factors or costs of the alternatives (beyond economic feasibility) were not considered in the screening of alternatives. (page ES-11) But CEQA specifically defines feasibility as capable of being accomplished in a successful manner within a reasonable period of time taking into account economic, environmental, legal, social, and technological factors. (CEQA Guidelines § 15364.) It is clear that the DEIR did not take into account the economic feasibility or the time impediment of the undergrounding alternatives through Jamacha Valley and the City of Santee.

ES.1 Introduction/Background

1.3 Areas of Controversy / Public Scoping Issues

The Draft EIR notes that the City of San Diego is concerned that approximately half of Subsection F of the Proposed Project would be located within the City's Multiple Habitat Planning Area (MHPA). (ES-7) SDG&E's NCCP was developed to be fully implemented independent of any other habitat conservation plan. Notwithstanding its independence, SDG&E is committed to work with USFWS and CDFG to avoid or minimize impacts from activities covered under the NCCP when working in preserve areas identified by other habitat conservation plans.

SD-32

SD-33

SD-34

Comment Set SD, cont.
San Diego Gas & Electric Company

ES.2 Alternatives

The Draft EIR states that economic factors or costs of the alternatives (beyond economic feasibility) were not considered in the screening of alternatives. (page ES-11) It is clear that the Draft EIR *did not* take into account the economic feasibility of the undergrounding alternatives through Jamacha Valley and the City of Santee. Not one of the discussions of these alternatives in the body of the DEIR referenced the economic feasibility of undergrounding the proposed transmission lines. Although the feasibility study attached as Appendix 2 of the DEIR includes cost estimates, the Commission does not mention economic feasibility at all in the text.

SD-35

Jamacha Valley 138 kV/69 kV Underground Alternative

The Draft EIR states that the Jamacha Valley Underground Alternative is consistent with SDG&E's project objectives to improve system reliability. (page ES-11) Though the relocation of the existing 138 kV/69 kV line accommodates construction of the new 230 kV circuit and initially enhances energy delivery, the long term operation of those underground lines does not necessarily ensure better reliability. Indeed SDG&E's experience is that the time required to restore service of a failed underground cable is typically longer than that of restoring an above ground line.

SD-36

The consideration of "EMF emissions" and "EMF levels" in developing the Jamacha Valley overhead and underground alternatives is inappropriate in this CEQA document and should be discarded. (pages ES-11, ES-12, C-9, C-17) These alternatives should have been analyzed only for the remaining stated CEQA concern, "potential long-term visual impacts."

SD-37

City of Santee 138 kV/69 kV Underground Alternative

The Draft EIR states that the "City of Santee expressed a preference for undergrounding options . . . in their scoping comments." (pages ES-13, C-30) In fact, the City of Santee's scoping comments say only that "[u]ndergrounding the transmission lines should be fully analyzed in the DEIR as a project alternative" in the context of a paragraph that primarily deals with "electromagnetic radiation" and "health-related concerns." The Draft EIR should have explored more thoroughly the motivation for the City's scoping comments because, to the extent that the request for analysis of an undergrounding alternative was premised on EMF issues, it is improper in this CEQA document and should be discarded. Moreover, if this alternative was created to reduce magnetic fields, it would exceed the spending guidelines for EMF reduction dictated by the Commission's 1993 EMF Decision 93-11-013.

SD-38

Also, the preceding comments with respect to reliability with the Jamacha Valley Underground Alternative are equally applicable to the Santee Underground Alternative. (page ES-13)

Comment Set SD, cont. San Diego Gas & Electric Company

As explained below in Sections C and D, the DEIR does not fully address the impact of additional steel poles required in the alternatives to accommodate line crossings and maintain electrical clearances. The last sentence of the 3rd paragraph in this section should read Princess Joann Road not Willow Glen Drive. (page ES-13)

SD-39

SD-40

City of Santee 230 kV Overhead Northern ROW Boundary Alternative

SD-41

The DEIR states that the Santee overhead alternative was proposed based on "input from residents of the City of Santee that the circuits should be moved to the northern side of the existing SDG&E ROW, further from the existing residents." (pages ES-14, C-35) In fact, only two scoping comments from Santee residents offered such input. The DEIR should have explored more thoroughly the motivation for these scoping comments because, to the extent that the request for analysis of an undergrounding alternative was premised on EMF issues, it is improper in this CEQA document and should be discarded. Moreover, if this alternative was created to reduce magnetic fields, it would exceed the spending guidelines for EMF reduction dictated by the Commission's 1993 EMF Decision.

No Project Alternative

SD-42

In the No Project Alternative, the DEIR mentions that without the Proposed Project a portion of the planned regional generation would either be cancelled or delayed. (page ES-14) SDG&E questions whether the Commission would deny the construction of a transmission line that is an integral component of a generation facility. As stated earlier, the Commission has already determined the need for the Miguel Mission #2 Transmission Project.

ES.3 Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures

SD-43

Without a meaningful context for discussion, the Commission cannot properly evaluate the potential environmental effects of the Proposed Project. It is critical that the Final EIR fully describe the setting and current state of each natural resource. A proper foundation will enable the Commission to correct the inconsistent classification of impacts and faulty significance conclusions. The mischaracterization of impacts as potentially significant resulted in misplaced mitigation measures. Contrary to CEQA, the Draft EIR exacts mitigation measures for several environmental resources that faced less than significant impacts from construction and operation of the Proposed Project. (CEQA Guidelines § 15126.4(a)(3).) All of these issues need to be remedied in the Final EIR.

The FEIR should clearly state that no Class I impacts have been identified by this project. Currently, the Executive Summary asserts that the primary Class I and Class II impacts that would be expected from the construction and operation of the Proposed Project are following. (pages ES-29, ES-30) There are no Class I impacts from the Proposed Project, so the text should be corrected.

SD-44

**Comment Set SD, cont.
San Diego Gas & Electric Company**

ES.4 Comparison of Alternatives

The Draft EIR states that “Although this EIR identifies an environmentally superior alternative, it is possible that the decision-makers (the five members of the CPUC) could balance the importance of each impact area differently and reach a different conclusion.” (page ES-55) As stated above, SDG&E believes the Commission has introduced very expensive alternatives that will cause further lengthy delay to respond to just 7 letters expressing concern about the visual resources introduced by the new transmission line. SDG&E strongly encourages the Commission to consider the comments in this letter and the Draft EIR that show there are no significant unmitigable impacts associated with the Proposed Project.

SD-45

Section 4.2.1 “Transmission Line Route Alternatives: Jamacha Valley” states that “Three alternatives have been developed in order to address the concerns of residents in Jamacha Valley living near or adjacent to the Miguel-Mission ROW regarding potential long-term visual impacts and EMF emission associated with the Proposed Project.” (page ES-55) EMF, as reiterated throughout this letter, is speculative in accordance with CEQA Guidelines § 15145, but this particular section of the corridor will have EMF reductions with the construction of the Proposed Project. As stated earlier, SDG&E does not believe the addition of a pole line in an already developed transmission corridor has any increased long-term, significant visual impacts.

SD-46

4.2 Environmentally Superior Alternative

As set forth in more detail in this letter, the Commission’s methodology for selecting the Environmentally Superior Alternative is flawed, the environmental baseline for the Proposed Project does not truly reflect the existing setting, the environmental impacts associated with the alternatives are understated and the resulting comparisons among the Proposed Project and the proposed alternatives are skewed. Nevertheless, the tables summarily comparing the impacts to various environmental areas reveal that the preferences are slight and do not provide justification for selecting any alternative as environmentally superior.

SD-47

Table ES-2 “Proposed Project vs. Jamacha Valley Alternatives”

The Proposed Project is preferred over the alternatives in Jamacha Valley in the following 7 resource areas: Air Quality, Cultural Resources, Land Use, Noise and Vibration, Public Health and Safety, Public Services and Utilities, and Transportation and Traffic. The Jamacha Valley 138 kV/69 kV Underground Alternative was deemed preferred in 4 areas. Those four areas are Biological Resources (slight reduction per the DEIR), Geology, Soils and Paleontology, Hydrology and Water Quality, and purportedly, Visual Resources. There was no preference with respect to Socioeconomics. It is unclear how the DEIR could choose the Jamacha Valley underground option as part of the Environmentally Superior Alternative when the Proposed Project is “preferred” in almost double the number of resource areas. Even with the “heavy weighting” of Biological and Visual Resources, the preference is so slight that it does not prevail over

SD-48

Comment Set SD, cont. San Diego Gas & Electric Company

all of the other resource areas. See SDG&E's more detailed comments in Sections C and E below.

SD-48

Table ES-3 "Proposed Project vs. City of Santee Alternatives"

SD-49

The Proposed Project is preferred over the City of Santee alternatives in the following natural resource areas: Cultural Resources, Geology, Soils and Paleontology, Hydrology and Water Quality and Transportation and Traffic. The Santee 230 kV Overhead Northern ROW Boundary Alternative was preferred in 5 areas (Air Quality, Land Use, Noise and Vibration, Public Health and Safety, and Public Services and Utilities), while the City of Santee 138 kV/69 kV Underground Alternative was ranked preferable in only 2 areas (Biological Resources and Visual Resources). There was no preference with respect to Socioeconomics. See SDG&E's more thorough discussion in Sections C and E below.

Section A, Introduction/Overview

SD-50

A.3 San Diego Wildfires of 2003

In the last paragraph on page A-4, the "City of Otay Mesa" should be changed to "the Otay Ranch planned community within the City of Chula Vista."

A.4.1 CPUC Process

SD-51

In the second paragraph of this Section, the Draft EIR states that "a Proposed Decision on the project will be issued in late 2004." (page A-7) Again, SDG&E would like to emphasize the time-sensitive nature of constructing the Proposed Project, particularly the substantial financial benefit to ratepayers. The Commission should approve the Proposed Project as soon as possible and much earlier than late 2004 if the Proposed Project's potential savings to ratepayers is a consideration. Too much time has already passed since Decision 03-02-069, the finding of need for the Proposed Project and SDG&E's filing of its application on July 12, 2002. The Commission's own rules state that it shall issue a decision 12 months after receiving an application for a CPCN. (G.O. 131-D(IX)(A).)

A.4.2 Other Agencies

SD-52

In the first column of Table A-2 "Permits Required for the Miguel-Mission Project" under Local Agencies, add Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) Site Activity Permit or Section 4d Habitat Loss Permit, whichever applies. SDG&E was surprised by the list of permits from local agencies required for the Proposed Project. G.O. 131-D removed authority from the local agencies where public utility activities of statewide-concern prevailed. SDG&E will obtain any necessary ministerial permits, but that list does not include grading or building permits.

Comment Set SD, cont.
San Diego Gas & Electric Company

Section B, Description of Proposed Project

SD-53

The Draft EIR fairly characterizes the elements of the Proposed Project and emphasizes that the route is in SDG&E's existing transmission corridor. The slight changes that SDG&E suggests to the project description are as follows.

B.2.2 Project Components

Table B-1 "Summary of Project Components" needs to be revised to reflect (a) 17 rather than 14 poles for the "New 138 kV/69 kV wood pole structures" and (b) 95 rather than 94 poles for "New 138 kV/69 kV steel pole structures." (page B-9)

B.2.5 Structures

See comment under B.2.2 for revised pole numbers. (page B-11) Also, SDG&E suggests the following changes to Table B-3 "Proposed 138 kV Structure Types and Approximate Heights" on page B-16:

- Delete Structure 794;
- Add Structure 795, Wood Pole at 60 feet
- Add Structure 796, Wood Pole at 60 feet
- Change Structure 797 to 75 feet (was 71 feet)
- Add Structure 797S, Steel Tangent at 75 feet
- Change Structure 1101 to 75 feet (was 85 feet)
- Add Structure 1105, Wood Pole at 65 feet
- Replace Structure 1110 with 1111, Full Steel Dead End at 61 feet

B.3.1 Subsection A: Miguel Substation to Proposed 138 kV Pole #752 (Near Campo Road)

This heading should be changed because Pole #752 is not near Campo Road, it is near Dehesa Road. (page B-17)

Proposed Relocation

In the third sentence, the pole count should be 39 rather than 42. (page B-17)

B.3.2 Subsection B: Proposed 138 kV Pole #752 (Near Dehesa Road) to #1110 (Near R.M. Levy Water Treatment)

Proposed Relocation

The last sentence of the first paragraph should reflect a total of 22 138 kV wood poles along this segment. (page B-18)

Comment Set SD, cont.
San Diego Gas & Electric Company

SD-53

B.3.3 Subsection C: Proposed 138 kV Pole #1110 (Near R.M. Levy Water Treatment Plant) to Los Coches Substation

Proposed Relocation

The first paragraph of this section should be deleted and instead state that in this segment, the 138 kV/69 kV circuits would remain on the west side of the right-of-way on existing lattice towers. (page B-26)

The second paragraph should be revised so that the new 230 kV circuit would be installed on two new steel poles next to two sets of existing lattice towers as the ROW approaches Los Coches Substation. The new circuit would occupy the west side of the new poles while the east side remains vacant for a future tie line. The new steel pole closest to Los Coches Substation would be installed on the east side of the existing 230 kV circuit lattice tower #971900 and the existing 230 kV circuit wires would be transferred to the new steel pole. (page B-26) A revised Figure B-10 is included as Attachment A.

B.3.4 Subsection D: Los Coches Substation to Proposed 138 kV Pole #1160 (Near Willow Road)

Proposed Relocation

In the last paragraph of this section, the new 230 kV circuit would be installed on new steel poles that replace lattice towers #576667, #576668 and #576669. The new 230 kV circuit would occupy a position on the west side of each new steel pole while the east side remains vacant for a future tie line. (page B-29)

B.3.5 Subsection E: Proposed 138 kV Pole #1160 (Near Willow Road) to Fanita Junction

The heading should change Pole #1160 to #1170. (page B-29)

Existing Alignment

The last line of the first bullet should read "The 138 kV circuit (TL 13819) exits the ROW at an existing pole near proposed pole #1285 and 138 kV circuit (TL 13821) comes back into the ROW at an existing pole near proposed pole #1315." (page B-29)

Proposed Relocation

The last sentence of this paragraph should be revised to describe the 69 kV circuit occupying a position on the north side of each pole. (page B-31) In the second sentence of the second paragraph, a total of 13 steel lattice structures would be modified and 12 would be replaced with a steel mono-pole. (page B-31) The last sentence of Section B.3.5 should be revised to state that SDG&E plans to install two new 230 kV steel poles at Fanita Junction. (page B-31)

Comment Set SD, cont.
San Diego Gas & Electric Company

B.3.6 Subsection F: Fanita Junction to Mission Substation

Existing Alignment

In the third sentence of the bullet for the 230 kV circuits, the Final EIR should state: "For several spans the 230 kV circuit (TL 23022) occupies a position on the west side of the current lattice towers, while the east side of each tower is vacant." (page B-31)

SD-53

B.4.2.1 Miguel Substation to Fanita Junction

Modification of Existing Lattice Towers for New 230 kV Circuit

In the second paragraph of this section on page B-38, reverse the east and west sides for the conductors.

Right-of-Way Cleanup and Site Remediation

The second paragraph of this analysis should be revised to reflect SDG&E's actual remedy for potential soil erosion. (page B-39) As discussed below in Hydrology/Water Quality, erosion control will be achieved by the best management practices in the Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) that SDG&E will implement for the Proposed Project, rather than by Project Protocol 55, the Erosion Control and Sediment Transportation Control Plan. This substitution of measures should be reflected here and in the relevant mitigation measures throughout the Final EIR.

B.4.5 Materials and Staging Areas

Although SDG&E has preliminarily identified materials and staging areas necessary for construction activities, it may encounter changes in the field that demand slight changes in these locations. If this occurs, SDG&E would comply with the requirements in its NCCP to avoid and then minimize potential impacts to sensitive resources to the extent feasible and select locations accordingly. SDG&E may also need to consider third party landowner and access rights in making this determination. Consequently, at the end of the bulleted locations of materials and staging areas, the Final EIR should state: "However, prior to delivery of materials and equipment, some of these sites may be shifted to sites that lessen inconvenience to residents and/or improve efficiencies for construction personnel and would have the same or less biological impacts as the identified sites." (page B-41) If any of the materials or staging areas change, then appropriate changes will be made to the SWPPP and suitable BMPs added as required by the General Permit.

SD-54

B.6 SDG&E Project Protocols

In Table B-5 "Protocols for Each Issue Area," the Final EIR should include Project Protocols 15 and 17 for the Cultural Resources issue area. (page B-42) As clarification to Project Protocols 45 and 46, these two protocols were developed to address situations where SDG&E would need to acquire new easements or rights-of-way

SD-55

Comment Set SD, cont. San Diego Gas & Electric Company

for the Proposed Project. In the acquisition of those new easements, SDG&E would pay compensation to affected landowners for the loss of practical use of land within the new easement area. Where SDG&E has existing easements with rights to construct, operate and maintain its facilities, private or public land containing those existing easements is already encumbered by those rights and no additional compensation would be required for the construction of the Proposed Project.

SD-55

Section C, Alternatives

Although SDG&E comments here on the development of the alternatives and each individual alternative, it provides more detailed remarks on the comparison of the alternatives with the Proposed Project below under Section E, Comparison of Alternatives. Of particular concern is the formation of alternatives based on “special consideration” of EMF emissions (and potential visual impacts). (pages C-9, C-42) Although the Draft EIR states that the Alternative Screening Report does not consider electric and magnetic fields in the context of CEQA and determination of potential environmental impacts, the *first* consideration in each alternative, even before the “Rationale for Full Evaluation” discussion is EMF. (See, pages C-9, C-17, C-18, C-34, C-36) The Draft EIR gives such extensive treatment to EMF that it is difficult to distinguish it from the true CEQA-based considerations in each alternative. The Final EIR should re-emphasize that the EMF discussions throughout the text are for informational purposes only and legally cannot form the basis for an analysis of EMF impacts, or influence a decision on the project.

SD-56

Equally important is balancing each alternative’s ability to lessen a significant impact of the Proposed Project and the offsetting increased impacts on other aspects of the environment. Alternatives to a proposed project must at least lessen a significant effect of the project. (CEQA Guidelines § 15126.6(a).) There are no significant impacts with the Proposed Project. Data throughout the Draft EIR reveals that the slight reduction in a potential impact to an environmental resource tends to cause greater impacts to various other environmental resources. Although a slight reduction in impacts to a certain CEQA-based resource can be achieved with each alternative, this reduction occurs with a counter-increase in other resource areas. Some increased impacts were not even mentioned. As set forth below, this section discussed the issue areas where impacts decreased, but did not weigh those against the increased impacts to other resource areas inherent in that alternative.

SD-57

C.2.1 Consistency with Project Objectives

In the final paragraph of this section, the DEIR states that each potential alternative evaluated in the DEIR would not necessarily need to meet all of SDG&E’s objectives. (page C-3) SDG&E would like to clarify that its prime objective is to construct and operate the Proposed Project in conformance with the operating criteria of agencies regulating SDG&E as a public utility. Any alternative that cannot meet the operating criteria and objectives of those regulating agencies (i.e., GO-95) are not viable alternatives.

SD-58

Comment Set SD, cont.
San Diego Gas & Electric Company

C.4.2.1 Jamacha Valley 138 kV/69 kV Underground Alternative

This option involves the transition from a new pole or lattice structure onto a new pole immediately south of Willow Glen Drive, transitioning underground 3.4 miles to the intersection of Willow Glen Drive and Dehesa Road, then connecting to a transition pole installed west of the cemetery. (page C-9) Residences are located intermittently along either side of the existing transmission corridor in Jamacha Valley. (page C-9)

SD-59

Interestingly, this alternative was apparently created in response to EMF concerns, but in the end does not lessen the fields. In addition, the Proposed Project offers a reduction in EMF fields in this area that are ignored. The Draft EIR concludes that EMF effects would not be substantially reduced by this alternative, and that is assuming the best case scenario where the transmission facilities can be placed exactly in the center of the road. (page C-9) As observed many times, the DEIR does not disclose that it is unknown what facilities (i.e., sewer, water, storm drain) currently occupy the road. It is unknown at this time if there is adequate room in this roadway to place the underground transmission line in the middle of the road. Nevertheless, EMF is speculative under CEQA and should be dismissed from any comparison. (CEQA Guidelines § 15145.)

SD-60

Rationale For Full Evaluation

Under the Visual Resources discussion of Potential to Lessen Significant Environmental Effects, recreational users of Cottonwood Country Club and motorists along Willow Glen Drive will have a significant adverse visual impact as 3 steel poles (with anchor bolted foundations), one of them a cable pole, will be installed side by side at the first fairway of the golf course within 200 feet of the first tee box. (page C-10) Each foundation will be a "wet hole foundation" because of the potential to encounter ground water. Constructing these foundations requires extensive water/waste management measures during construction that will force closure of the first hole of the golf course. These three poles, necessary for the transition from overhead to underground, will stand side by side, creating a "wall of steel" along Willow Glen Drive that will be a visual distraction to surrounding viewers.

SD-61

SD-62

SD-63

The "lessened impact" on cultural resources with this alternative is the avoidance of 8 known cultural sites in SDG&E's ROW. (page C-10) But SDG&E designed the Proposed Project to totally avoid six of the eight known cultural sites and provide a 150 foot buffer from the other two (one of which was recently developed). Moreover, the underground portion of this alternative is along the river with the potential for more cultural resource sites to be effected. SDG&E would have to perform additional cultural survey evaluations outside of the road's right-of-way. Also, SDG&E would have to design the underground portion outside of the 100 year depth scour limit (see Mitigation Measure H7-A), which could dictate that the trench be outside of Willow Glen Drive. Thus, this alternative is not necessarily preferable to the Proposed Project with respect to cultural resources.

SD-64

Comment Set SD, cont. San Diego Gas & Electric Company

In Figure C-2a, structure number 30 should be shown in yellow because it is an “Existing 138 kV/69 kV Lattice Tower to be Replaced with 230 kV Pole (Proposed Project).” (page C-11)

SD-65

Even though the Draft EIR concludes that corona noise would be improved with an underground line, SDG&E’s existing corridor route already has noise from the 18 to 30 conductors currently occupying it. (page C-17) Any decrease in corona noise would be negligible compared to the environmental baseline and likely imperceptible to the average listener.

SD-66

Finally, the DEIR does not address some of the problems associated with placing the transmission line in a street with existing utilities. Because sewer and water lines are often in the middle of the street, there is a high probability that they would be in Willow Glen Drive. By requiring SDG&E to do so, SDG&E would incur future costs for relocation if other utilities developed a conflict with SDG&E’s position in the street.

SD-67

C.4.2.2 Jamacha Valley Overhead A Alternative

The Jamacha Valley Overhead A Alternative places the 138 kV/69 kV circuits on new steel mono-poles on the east side of the right-of-way, from near Herrick Center to the intersection of the existing corridor and Hillsdale Road, 12 feet from the edge of the ROW. (page C-17) The 69 kV line would be located on the west side of the new steel pole and the 138 kV line on the east side. The DEIR accurately states that additional right-of-way will likely be needed. Acquiring additional right-of-way for this alternative will probably be a lengthy and costly process. SDG&E suggested use of its own existing transmission right-of-way to save time, money for its ratepayers, and lessen the environmental impact. Finally, also missing from the discussion are the additional visual impacts resulting from the replacement of at least two existing 230 kV lattice towers with much taller steel poles (see below).

SD-68

SD-69

The EMF level is not reduced with this alternative. (page C-17) Once again though, EMF is not a CEQA consideration and should be excluded from any comparison to the Proposed Project. (CEQA Guidelines § 15145.)

SD-70

Rationale for Full Evaluation

The viewshed associated with the Proposed Project is allegedly improved with this alternative, but this is a subjective claim on behalf of a few residents along this segment and a minimal improvement at best. (page C-17) This a costly alternative to satisfy only one official letter commenting on the visual impact of the new pole line.

SD-71

Further, this alternative suggests replacing 230 kV lattice towers with taller steel poles. The additional 138 kV/69 kV structures may substantially impact San Diego ambrosia (reference Mitigation Measure B-2a) and cause SDG&E ratepayers to incur additional environmental mitigation, monitoring and maintenance costs for future years

SD-72

Comment Set SD, cont.
San Diego Gas & Electric Company

beyond the end of construction (estimated at \$0.5 million dollars). The Proposed Project avoids these sensitive plants in this area as recommended by USFWS. (page C-18)

SD-72

The alternative suggests two major transmission lines crossing in a short distance. Every time transmission lines cross, transmission system reliability is compromised because of potentially simultaneous outages required during construction. Therefore, this alternative does not meet the project objective of improving system reliability as noted on the top of page C-18.

SD-73

C.4.2.3 Jamacha Valley Overhead B Alternative

As with the other Jamacha Valley alternatives, the Jamacha Valley Overhead A Alternative was developed to address aesthetics and EMF concerns. (page C-18) It adds 2 steel poles and 1 lattice tower to the proposed route and removes the 138 kV/69 kV lattice structures to switch in poles on the west side of the existing right-of-way. (page C-18) The 48.5 foot distance between the existing 230 kV line and the proposed 230 kV line (based on preliminary engineering in 2003) should be reevaluated to confirm compliance with the Commission's General Order (GO) 95⁵ requirements because clearance could be in jeopardy. The Draft EIR fails to illustrate that this alternative that essentially doubles the access roads needed, which has the potential to increase biological and archaeological impacts and adds cost and delay to the in-service date.

SD-74

The Draft EIR estimates that EMF would increase by 10% on the west side and 20% on the east side of the route. (page C-18) While SDG&E disputes EMF should even be discussed as an environmental impact in this context, it nevertheless is higher than the levels in the Proposed Project. (CEQA Guidelines § 15145.)

SD-76

Rationale for Full Evaluation

Once again, with respect to feasibility, this alternative would lengthen the project construction duration. (page C-30) The conclusion that this alternative presents a permanent visual benefit to the residents and recreational users within Jamacha Valley is subjective and not based on the data in the Draft EIR especially when the Proposed Project would be in an already visible transmission filled corridor. (See, Section D.13 below) Because this option places new steel poles and wires higher on the up-slope above Willow Glen Drive than the Proposed Project, it creates potential new and greater visual impacts to the residents on Wind River Road.

SD-77

Further, this alternative involves replacing the 230 kV lattice towers with taller steel poles. The additional 138 kV/69 kV structures required for this alternative may substantially impact San Diego ambrosia (reference Mitigation Measure B-2a) and cause SDG&E ratepayers to incur additional environmental mitigation, monitoring and maintenance costs for future years beyond the end of construction (estimated at \$0.5

SD-78

⁵ Rules for Overhead Electric Line Construction Prescribed by the Public Utilities Commission of the State of California, General Order No. 95.

Comment Set SD, cont.
San Diego Gas & Electric Company

million dollars). The Proposed Project avoids these sensitive plants in this area as recommended by USFWS. (page C-18)

SD-78

The Final EIR should note that the proximity of the two 230 kV structure lines to each other does not meet the project objectives because having four 230 kV circuits so close to each other in the right-of-way creates reliability, operational and maintenance constraints that do not exist with the Proposed Project. The undercrossings reduce system reliability due to potentially simultaneous outages.

SD-79

C.4.2.4 City of Santee 138 kV/69 kV Underground Alternative

Description

SD-80

The Draft EIR asserts that the City of Santee “expressed a preference” to the Commission for undergrounding options through the area. (page C-30) This alternative routes the transmission lines into 2 segments outside of the existing transmission corridor along Princess Joann Road (0.75 miles) and along a paved water storage tank access road (0.6 miles). (page C-30) This alternative will require that three new transition structures be installed in the City of Santee. One of these three new transition structures (a steel pole) will be installed on Magnolia Avenue. The other two new transition structures would be placed in the existing transmission corridor. The DEIR does not completely describe the new structures needed to facilitate this alternative.

Rationale for Full Evaluation

SD-81

The complaints about potential visual impacts are unconvincing because there are several existing lines and structures throughout the existing right-of-way that SDG&E has used since the 1950s. The existing industrial character is the key to the aesthetic impact analysis. And despite the City of Santee’s preference for underground options in the city, the Proposed Project is consistent with its 2020 General Plan. (page D.7-8)

The visual analysis should be revised to reflect that three new large steel transition structures not currently addressed in the DEIR (each a minimum of 95 feet tall, the eastern most transition structure near the water storage tank will likely be 110 feet tall) are required to construct this alternative and will be added to the viewshed in Santee. One of these steel cable poles will be on Magnolia Avenue where this alternative removes two wood poles that are 60 and 55 feet tall, respectively.

SD-82

Construction of this underground alternative would be in an access road currently occupied by a large water line operated by the Padre Dam Water District. As a result, SDG&E may be required to widen the access road and/or obtain new ROW outside of the existing roadway to avoid conflict with the water line. A new ROW (about 800 feet long) would be required across undeveloped land at the westerly end of Princess Joann Road. The negotiation and acquisition of this right-of-way would likely delay the project schedule. In addition, this underground alternative requires that the trench be constructed through undisturbed areas that may contain cultural resource sites (See comment on

SD-83

SD-84

**Comment Set SD, cont.
San Diego Gas & Electric Company**

Biological and Cultural Resources). This would increase impacts to cultural resources compared to the Proposed Project.

SD-84

Potential to Lessen Significant Environmental Impacts

SD-85

The last sentence of the Biological and Cultural Resources bullet, which states “With regard to cultural resources, this alternative would avoid the four known cultural resource sites located within the ROW,” is incorrect. (page C-35) The structures and foundations in the Proposed Project would be constructed outside of the culturally sensitive areas and the 150-foot buffers that surround them. What is deceiving is that the cultural resource sites are inside the corridor, but in all cases the conductor for the Proposed Project passes overhead without impacting these four known sites. But this alternative requires SDG&E to trench directly through the center of site SDI-12246. Thus, there would be an increased impact to cultural resources with the City of Santee underground alternative.

Further, this alternative requires that SDG&E install a trench through a “blue line stream” shown on USGS topography maps (see Figure 2-5, Map 5 in Appendix 3, Biological Resources Technical Report). This is a jurisdictional stream and a tributary of the San Diego River. It is not normally SDG&E’s practice to trench through a blue line stream and would require special permitting with CDFG, Army Corps Of Engineers and/or the Regional Water Quality Control Board. Construction within this area would also increase potential impacts to riparian habitats requiring additional mitigation, monitoring and maintenance costs for a period of up to five years after project completion. It is unclear at this time if SDG&E would be able to just trench across this area or be required to do something else. It may involve the construction of a bridge structure to cross the blue line stream. This information was absent from the visual and other environmental sections for this alternative. Again, this effort could also substantially increase the cost and delay the in-service date.

SD-86

In sum, the DEIR fails to disclose the true counter-effects associated with this alternative.

SD-87

C.4.2.5 City of Santee 230 kV Overhead Northern ROW Boundary Alternative

SD-88

Description

This option would add 2 poles to allow for a cross-over and 3 poles would be moved further away from the residences located at the southern edge of the ROW. (page C-35) The DEIR does not disclose that SDG&E would be required to acquire new right-of-way to the north to construct this alternative, which would delay the construction schedule and increase project cost.

The crossing of the new 230 kV line under the existing 230 kV lines more than doubles the amount of work compared to the Proposed Project by resulting in the potential replacement of four existing 230 kV lattice towers (that are not part of the

SD-89

Comment Set SD, cont. San Diego Gas & Electric Company

Proposed Project) with much taller structures. The replacement could jeopardize system reliability because extensive outages would be required on the existing 230 kV circuits. In addition, this alternative creates a 230 kV/230 kV crossing that represents poor utility design practice by subjecting the bulk power system to a reliability risk that should be avoided.

SD-89

SD-90

In the Santee 230 kV Overhead Northern ROW Boundary Alternative, only two proposed new steel poles on the south side of the ROW are eliminated. Structure # 1315 is a replacement "in-kind," so the current pole at the north end of Magnolia Avenue will actually remain. The Final EIR should correct the visual change analysis.

SD-91

Although the alleged reduction in EMF is 50% at the southern edge, EMF considerations should not even be included in the alternatives analysis in the first place. (CEQA Guidelines § 15145.)

SD-92

Rationale for Full Evaluation

The Santee 230 kV Overhead Northern ROW Boundary Alternative suggests two major transmission line crossings in a short distance. Every time transmission lines cross, transmission system reliability is compromised due to a greater risk of simultaneous line outages. Each crossing exposes the SDG&E transmission system to a greater risk of loss of multiple circuits if an over-crossing conductor were to fail. SDG&E put forth in its Proposed Project aspects designed to reduce environmental impacts. Therefore, this alternative does not meet the project objective of improving system reliability as noted on page C-36.

SD-93

The only visual benefit to a few individuals in that segment who moved next to the existing corridor does not necessarily outweigh the impacts associated with the 2 transition structures placed elsewhere in this alternative that would affect other residents. (page C-36) The potential increase in air quality impacts with this option is the only instance in this entire Alternatives section that mentions an increase in environmental impacts. (page C-36) As stated above, the potentially greater impacts should be identified for each alternative in the Final EIR. It is difficult to understand why noise disturbances would allegedly decrease if rock blasting occurs during construction. (page C-36) This is a nonsensical conclusion.

SD-94

SD-95

SD-96

In conclusion, the claim that there is a potential reduction in impacts to a couple of resource areas with the City of Santee 230 kV Overhead Northern ROW Boundary Alternative is arguable at best.