

PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION505 VAN NESS AVENUE
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94102-3298

Final Mitigated Negative Declaration

Southern California Edison Company's Riverway Substation Project Application No. A.06-06-004; SCH# 2007051159

Introduction

Pursuant to California Public Utilities Commission's (CPUC) General Order 131-D, Southern California Edison Company (SCE) has filed an application (A.06-06-004) with the CPUC for a Permit to Construct for the Riverway Substation Project ("Proposed Project"). The application was filed on June 1, 2006, and includes the Proponent's Environmental Assessment (PEA), prepared by SCE pursuant to the CPUC's Rules of Practice and Procedure Rule 2.4 (CEQA Compliance). The Proposed Project includes a new 66/12 kV low-profile substation, including two 28 megavolt-ampere (MVA) transformers, two 4.8 megavolt-ampere reactive (MVAR) 12 kV capacitor banks, and six 12 kV distribution lines. The Proposed Project also includes approximately 1,200 feet of underground 66 kV subtransmission lines, as well as new fiber optic cable and communication equipment to connect the substation to SCE's existing telecommunication system. SCE has stated that the project is necessary to maintain safe and reliable service and meet projected electrical load requirements in the City of Visalia and northern Tulare County. Construction would begin as early as Fall 2007 to meet an in-service date of June 1, 2008, depending on CPUC approval. In accordance with the CPUC's General Order 131-D, approval of this project must comply with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

Pursuant to CEQA, the CPUC must prepare an Initial Study (IS) for the Proposed Project to determine if any significant adverse effects on the environment would result from project implementation. The IS utilizes the significance criteria outlined in Appendix G of the CEQA *Guidelines*. If the IS for the project indicates that a significant adverse impact could occur, the CPUC would be required to prepare an Environmental Impact Report.

According to Article 6 (Negative Declaration Process) and Section 15070 (Decision to Prepare a Negative Declaration or Mitigated Negative Declaration) of the CEQA *Guidelines*, a public agency shall prepare or have prepared a proposed negative declaration or mitigated negative declaration for a project subject to CEQA when:

- (a) *The initial study shows that there is no substantial evidence, in light of the whole record before the agency, that the project may have a significant effect on the environment, or*
- (b) *The initial study identifies potentially significant effects, but:*
- (1) *Revisions in the project plans or proposals made by, or agreed to by the applicant before a proposed mitigated negative declaration and initial study are released for public review would avoid the effects or mitigate the effects to a point where clearly no significant effects would occur, and*
 - (2) *There is no substantial evidence, in light of the whole record before the agency, that the project as revised may have a significant effect on the environment.*

Based on the analysis in the Initial Study, it has been determined that all project-related environmental impacts could be reduced to a less than significant level with the incorporation of feasible mitigation measures. Therefore, adoption of a Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) will satisfy the requirements of CEQA. The mitigation measures included in this MND are designed to reduce or eliminate the potentially significant environmental impacts described in the Initial Study. Where a measure described in this document has been previously incorporated into the project, either as a specific project design feature or as an Applicant-Proposed Measure, this is noted in the discussion. Mitigation measures are structured in accordance with the criteria in Section 15370 of the CEQA *Guidelines*.

On May 31, 2007, the CPUC distributed a Notice of Intent to Adopt a Mitigated Negative Declaration and supporting Initial Study for public review. The Proposed MND and supporting Initial Study underwent a 30-day public review period that ended on June 30, 2007. See Appendix 3 for a copy of Public Notice Materials. Written responses to comments received and various minor modifications to the MND are included, as appropriate, to reflect these comments. The comments and associated responses are presented in Section D of this document. Revisions are provided with the response to the specific comment and are indicated in the text with ~~strikeout~~ for deletions of text and in underline for new text.

Project Description

The Proposed Project would include the following components:

- Construction of a new 66/12-kilovolt (kV) low-profile substation. The substation would be constructed on an approximately two acre site in the City of Visalia, California. The proposed substation site is located north of Riggin Avenue and east of North Mooney Boulevard, which is being extended north of Riggin Avenue.¹ The substation site would contain two 66 kV subtransmission source lines, two 28- MVA 66/12 kV transformers, two 4.8 MVAR 12 kV capacitor banks and six 12 kV distribution lines. The 12 kV switch rack would be designed with an operating bus and a transfer bus. The switch rack would have a provision for a second operating bus as well as ten future 12 kV distribution lines, two 28 MVA transformers, and two 4.8 MVAR capacitors to accommodate potential growth, if required.²

¹ The City of Visalia has plans to extend North Mooney Boulevard north of Riggin Avenue. The Mooney Boulevard extension was graded by February 2007. When referencing Mooney Boulevard north of Riggin Avenue, this document is referencing the Mooney Boulevard extension that is under development.

² Distribution lines do not require formal approval from the CPUC under General Order 131-D. They are included in the project description of this CEQA document for informational purposes. These circuits are not considered part of the project and are not analyzed.

- Installation of approximately 1,200 feet of underground 66 kV subtransmission lines starting at the intersection of Riggin Avenue and the extended North Mooney Boulevard and ending at the substation. The subtransmission lines would be located within a portion of Riggin Avenue near the northeast corner of Mooney Boulevard, Mooney Boulevard north of Riggin Avenue, and a portion of the future Ranch Circle Drive right-of-way (ROW).
- Installation of new fiber optic cable and communication equipment to connect the substation to SCE's existing telecommunication system.

Alternatives

The purpose of an alternatives analysis pursuant to CEQA is to identify options that would feasibly attain the project's objectives while reducing the significant environmental impacts resulting from the Proposed Project. CEQA does not require the inclusion of an alternatives analysis in MNDs because the Initial Study concludes that, with incorporation of mitigation measures, there would be no significant adverse impacts resulting from the Proposed Project. Therefore, no alternatives analysis needs to be provided in the Initial Study. However, pursuant to Section IX.B.1.c of CPUC General Order 131-D, SCE's application did consider site alternatives and other methods to relieve forecast demand. The application discussed advantages and disadvantages of each option, and includes an analysis in the Proponent's Environmental Assessment.

Environmental Determination

The Initial Study was prepared to identify the potential environmental effects resulting from Proposed Project implementation, and to evaluate the level of significance of these effects. The Initial Study relies on information in SCE's PEA filed on June 1, 2006, project site reconnaissance by the CPUC environmental team in early 2007, and other environmental analyses. SCE's PEA identified measures to address potentially significant impacts--the Applicant-Proposed Measures (APMs)--and these APMs are considered to be part of the description of the Proposed Project. Based on the Initial Study analysis, additional mitigation measures are identified for adoption to ensure that impacts of the Proposed Project would be less than significant. The additional mitigation measures either supplement, or supersede the APMs. SCE has agreed to implement all of the additional recommended mitigation measures as part of the Proposed Project.

Implementation of the following mitigation measures would avoid potentially significant impacts identified in the Initial Study or reduce them to less than significant levels.

Mitigation Measures for Impacts to Existing Visual Character

- V-1 Retain walnut trees or establish evergreen vegetative screen.** SCE shall retain existing walnut trees or establish a permanent evergreen vegetative screen of sufficient height and density to provide for visual screening around the substation, consistent with safety, feasibility, and engineering requirements. SCE shall consult the Shannon Ranch Master Plan Design Guidelines to ensure compatibility of neighborhood design elements, and SCE shall survey existing walnut trees and select trees to be retained as a "nurse-grove," at the discretion of the City of Visalia. SCE shall provide a water supply and permanent drip irrigation system for landscaping survival. Plant materials selected for screening shall be evergreen and acclimated to the environment of Visalia. Landscape screening shall be consistent with a landscaping and maintenance plan developed by SCE and submitted for

review and approval by the City of Visalia. Any dispute that cannot be resolved shall be referred to CPUC staff for timely determination.

V-2 Construct visually opaque gate at substation entrance. SCE shall design and construct the gate at the substation entrance in a way that obscures views through the gate, using materials that are compatible with the perimeter screening wall and neighborhood visual standards. SCE shall consult the Shannon Ranch Master Plan Design Guidelines to ensure compatibility of neighborhood design elements. Entrance gate shall be consistent with the landscaping plan developed by SCE and submitted for review and approval by the City of Visalia. Any dispute that cannot be resolved shall be referred to CPUC staff for timely determination.

V-3 Provide TSP riser surfaces galvanized with appropriate colors, textures, and finishes. SCE shall install, as available, the tubular steel pole (TSP) riser galvanized with appropriate colors, finishes, and textures to most effectively blend the new steel structure with the dark brown, mottled appearance of the existing wood poles of the Rector–Oak Grove No. 1 66 kV subtransmission line.

Mitigation Measure for Construction-Phase Aesthetics

V-4 Restore and revegetate ground disturbances due to construction staging. SCE shall restore all ground disturbances caused by construction, staging, and temporary access road construction to original, natural-appearing contours and shall revegetate disturbed areas at the earliest feasible time.

Mitigation Measure for Light and Glare

V-5 Shroud and minimize unnecessary sources of light. SCE shall design and install new permanent substation lighting such that light bulbs, lenses, and reflectors are not visible from public viewing areas; lighting does not cause reflected glare; and illumination of the project, vicinity, and nighttime sky is minimized. To achieve this, SCE shall ensure that:

- Lighting shall be designed so exterior light fixtures are hooded, with lights directed downward or toward the area to be illuminated and so that backscatter to the nighttime sky is minimized. The design of the lighting shall be such that the luminescence or light source is shielded to prevent light trespass outside the project boundary.
- All lighting shall be of minimum necessary brightness consistent with worker safety.
- Wherever feasible and safe, lighting shall be kept off when not in use.

Mitigation Measures for Construction-Phase Air Quality

AQ-1 Implement enhanced dust control measures in the event that occupied homes occur nearby. SCE shall implement enhanced dust control measures for construction of the proposed substation if new residential development includes homes within 200 feet of the substation site during any phase of substation construction. The enhanced dust control measures shall incorporate the applicant-proposed measure (APM Air-1) and the following additional measures:

- limit the speeds of construction vehicles on unpaved surfaces to 15 miles per hour,
- install sandbags or other erosion control measures to prevent silt runoff to public roadways from sites with a slope greater than 1 percent,
- suspend excavation and grading activities when winds exceed 20 miles per hour,

- limit size of area subject to excavation, grading, or other construction disturbance at any one time to avoid excessive dust, and
- expeditiously remove the accumulation of mud or dirt from adjacent public streets at least once every 24 hours when construction activities are occurring.

AQ-2 Minimize construction equipment exhaust by using Tier 1 engines. All diesel fueled off-road construction equipment with engines 50 hp or larger shall at a minimum meet U.S. EPA/CARB Tier 1 engine standards. Records of equipment compliance shall be kept by the general construction contractor. This measure does not apply to equipment permitted by the local air quality district or certified through the CARB's Statewide Portable Equipment Registration Program. This also does not apply to any single specialized equipment items that will be used for less than five days total during the project construction.

Mitigation Measure for Special-Status Animal Species

B-1 Eliminate injury or mortality to kit foxes during construction. SCE shall implement the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Standardized Recommendations for Protection of the San Joaquin kit fox Prior to or During Ground Disturbance (Service, 1999). SCE shall provide the results of the surveys to the CPUC prior to ground disturbance.

Mitigation Measure for Hazards and Hazardous Materials

H-1 Control release of residual herbicides, pesticides, and/or fumigants. SCE shall analyze soil samples in construction areas where the land has historically or is currently being farmed to verify and delineate the possibility of and extent of herbicide, pesticide, and/or fumigant contamination of the underlying soils. Samples shall be collected by properly trained personnel and submitted to a state approved laboratory for analysis. Any soil with pesticide, herbicide, or fumigant concentration levels that exceed California State Title 26 threshold limits would be classified as hazardous material. SCE shall implement appropriate handling and disposal procedures for any excavated materials containing elevated levels of contaminants. Prior to disturbing additional contaminated soil, SCE shall prepare and submit a health and safety plan that is approved by a certified industrial hygienist to address handling, treatment, and/or disposal options. Personnel working around, handling, and disposing of contaminated soil shall meet the federal OSHA requirement for the 40-hour Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response Standard. The investigation results, and health and safety plan if needed, shall be submitted for review and approval by the appropriate regulatory agencies (i.e., Department of Toxic Substances Control and/or Regional Water Quality Control Board). SCE shall submit to the CPUC copies of correspondence with regulatory agencies including the health and safety plan and any approvals.

Mitigation Measures for Construction Noise

N-1 Properly minimize construction vehicle noise. SCE shall maintain mufflers in accordance with equipment vendor specifications on all internal combustion and vehicle engines used in construction.

N-2 Avoid unnecessary construction traffic noise. Where feasible, construction traffic shall be routed to avoid noise-sensitive areas, such as residences, schools, religious facilities, hospitals, and parks.

A Mitigation Monitoring Plan has been prepared to ensure that the APMs and mitigation measures presented above are properly implemented. The plan describes specific actions required to implement each measure, including information on timing of implementation and monitoring requirements.

Based on the analysis and conclusions of the Initial Study, the impacts of the project as proposed by SCE would be mitigated to less than significant levels with the implementation of the mitigation measures presented herein, which have been incorporated into the Proposed Project.