Chapter 1. Introduction

PROJECT PROPONENT

The demand for communications network capacity in the United States has increased dramatically over the past 15 years and is expected to continue to increase at a rapid pace over the next decade. From 1992 to 1997, the total interstate switched access minutes (i.e., minutes transmitted by long-distance carriers that also use the distribution networks of local telephone carriers) increased by 154% (an average of 20.5% annually) from 195.4 million minutes to 497.3 million minutes, (Federal Communications Commission 1999). To accommodate this traffic, as well as increased traffic associated with video and data transfers and other sources, telecommunications companies have incorporated more effective technologies into their networks. One of the most widely used technologies has been fiber optic cable. In 1993, a total of 7.7 million miles of fiber optic cable had been deployed nationwide by incumbent local exchange carriers and competitive access providers. Over the next 4 years, the total mileage deployed increased 105% (an average of 19.7% annually) to 15.8 million miles, (Federal Communications Commission 1999).

Long-distance revenues in the United States are projected to increase by 30 to 40% over the next decade, from $90 billion in 1999 to $120 billion in 2010 (Center for Telecommunications Management 1999). This increase in revenue is expected to occur while prices for telecommunications services decrease. An increase in the volume of long-distance voice, video, and data transmissions will offset declining prices, with growth in volume exceeding the 30 to 40% growth in revenue. The volume of telecommunications use is growing rapidly because of increasing population size and increases in available applications (i.e., type of services). For example, by 2010, the number of telecommuters in the United States is expected to increase by 100 to 150%, 10 to 15% of all retail shopping is expected to be conducted through home personal computers, and 10 to 20% of households are expected to use simultaneous voice-video communications (Center for Telecommunications Management 1999).

California ranks first in the United States in both population and demand for telecommunications bandwidth, which has already exceeded the capability of existing telecommunications facilities in many areas of the state (Ridley-Thomas 1998). To maintain its robust economy and status as a leader in computer technology, California will require rapid deployment of state-of-the-art fiber optic cable facilities. To satisfy this demand, Williams Communications, Inc. (Williams) plans to construct an integral portion of its nationwide fiber optic cable network in California. Williams currently operates one of the largest fiber optic cable networks in the United States, with facilities extending more than 18,000 miles through 37 states. Williams also plans to construct, lease, or purchase more than 14,000 additional miles of fiber optic cable facilities throughout the country, including California. Although in terms of mileage the fiber optic cable facilities planned in California (1,000 to 2,000 miles) are only a fraction of the overall network, the portion of Williams' fiber optic cable network planned for California is critical to the success of the company's nationwide network plan. **Figure 1-1** shows the location of the proposed Riverside to San Diego project route in relationship to other Williams project routes in California. California's position as a leader in computer technology (e.g., Silicon Valley), its role as a center of the entertainment industry (generating video transmission), and the state's vibrant business environment require high-capacity telecommunications facilities. California's position on the West Coast makes it a portal for the transmission of information between the United States, Asia, and

the Pacific Rim, and several crucial project routes for Williams' planned facilities in California will interconnect directly to new intercontinental fiber optic cables linking the United States to Asia.

RELATIONSHIP TO CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT AND CALIFORNIA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION-APPROVAL INITIAL STUDY/MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION

On October 21, 1999, the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) approved an initial study/mitigated negative declaration (IS/MND) for Williams' Fiber Optic Cable System Installation Project - California Network (California Public Utilities Commission 1999). The proposed Riverside to San Diego project was developed subsequent to the project routes approved by the CPUC and analyzed in the previously adopted IS/MND. A subsequent IS/MND is required when an IS/MND has already been adopted and "substantial changes" are proposed to a project that would result in the "involvement of new significant environmental effects or a substantial increase in the severity of previously identified significant effects" but where the project proponent commits to measures that would mitigate these new effects to less-than-significant levels (California Environmental Quality Act [CEQA] Guidelines Section 15162). As a subsequent IS/MND, the original CPUC-approved IS/MND is incorporated in this document by reference.

CEQA LEAD AND RESPONSIBLE AGENCIES

This project qualifies as a "project" under State CEQA Guidelines (CEQA Section21065). The CPUC is the designated state lead agency for review of this project under CEQA. This subsequent IS/MND prepared for the project may be used, depending on the need for discretionary permits, by other agencies or governmental entities, including, but not limited to, the following:

- air pollution control and air quality management districts;
- California Department of Fish and Game;
- California Department of Transportation;
- state regional water quality control boards;
- California State Water Resources Control Board; and
- local counties, cities, and special districts.

This subsequent IS/MND has been prepared pursuant to CEQA (Cal. Pub. Res. Code 21000 et seq.), the recently amended State CEQA Guidelines (14 CCR 15000 et seq.), and the CPUC CEQA rules (Rules 17.1, 17.2, and 17.3).

The project route crosses many jurisdictions and will require approvals and permits from various federal, state, and local agencies for specific portions of the project route and associated facilities. Portions of the project route are also subject to compliance with federal environmental regulations, including, but not limited to, the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) and Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA).

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

Williams' objectives for construction of the fiber optic cable system between the Cities of Riverside and San Diego are to:

- provide needed fiber optic cable telecommunications capacity within California through the installation of a new fiber optic cable network;

- expand California's national and international telecommunications access and the reliability of that access through diverse links; and

- avoid or mitigate to less-than-significant levels any significant impacts on California's environment through the careful siting of the project route and associated facilities (i.e., optical amplification/regenerator stations) and use of special construction methods where applicable (e.g., installation in existing road right-of-way; directional boring).

The installation of Williams' proposed project from Riverside to San Diego and the overall fiber optic cable network in California will provide several benefits to the state and consumers of telecommunications services, including:

- enhancing the capability and reliability of California's telecommunications infrastructure;

- addressing existing and future demand for telecommunications services in California and the nation;

- creating competitive pressures on existing telecommunications carriers to maintain low prices and good service;

- providing high-quality, secure, reliable, competitively priced telecommunications services using state-of-the-art fiber optic cable technology; and

- providing customers with innovative, customized services designed to meet specific customer needs and expanding the availability of technologically advanced services in California.

SCOPE OF THIS SUBSEQUENT INITIAL STUDY/ MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION

The CPUC, as the state lead agency under CEQA, must comply with the environmental review process described in the State CEQA Guidelines. This subsequent IS/MND follows the recently amended CEQA environmental checklist (**Appendix A**) and guidelines and analyzes in detail the potentially significant environmental impacts of project design, construction, operation, and maintenance. A brief discussion is also provided for each entry on the environmental checklist form in which the project either will not have an impact or will have a less-than-significant impact on the environment.

The CPUC is responsible for preparing the environmental documentation under CEQA. This subsequent IS/MND documents the extensive coordination between Williams and the CPUC and other state and federal agencies and their requirements for compliance with applicable federal, state, and local permits, approvals, laws, and regulations. A list of the permits and approvals required for the project is presented in **Appendix B**.

This subsequent IS/MND also documents compliance with the appropriate federal and state ESAs, Clean Water Act (CWA), and NHPA and coordination with responsible, trustee, and cooperating agencies on the

project route. Endangered species issues are currently being coordinated with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the California Department of Fish and Game. Compliance with the NHPA, if required, includes additional activities summarized in this subsequent IS/MND, such as preparation of a cultural resources inventory report, evaluation of some cultural resources, and consultation between federal agencies and the State Historic Preservation Officer. Documentation in compliance with NHPA will be provided in a separate cultural resources inventory report.

ORGANIZATION OF THIS IS/MND

This IS/MND analyzes the Riverside to San Diego project route on a "programmatic" level (i.e., as a whole at a broad level of detail) for some resource topics and on a site-specific basis where appropriate for other topics (e.g., biological and cultural resources), according to the most current available information. This IS/MND is organized in two volumes.

Volume I consists of the following:

- The "Executive Summary" chapter briefly describes the project, impacts and their significance, and programmatic and route-specific mitigation measures.

- Chapter 1, "Introduction", describes the purpose, need, and objectives of the project.

- Chapter 2, "Project Description", describes the construction methods that will be employed and the project features (i.e., mitigation) that have been incorporated into the project to avoid impacts or reduce potentially significant impacts to less-than-significant levels.

- Chapter 3, "Project Route Descriptions", describes, in more detail, the project route and related facilities that comprise the project.

- Chapter 4, "Environmental Setting", describes existing conditions (i.e., setting) at both programmatic and site-specific levels. The chapter is organized by the order of resource topics in the CEQA initial study checklist. A completed master initial study checklist is provided in **Appendix A**.

- Chapter 5, "Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures", analyzes the environmental impacts of the project and recommended mitigation measures. These are mitigation measures above and beyond those incorporated into the project design as described in Chapter 2, "Project Description". Resource topics are discussed in the same order as they appear in Chapter 4, "Environmental Setting", and in the CEQA initial study checklist. Resource areas that will not be affected by the project are discussed briefly and then eliminated from further analysis.

- Chapter 6, "Citations", is a list of all sources cited in the document.

- Chapter 7, "Report Preparers", identifies all individuals involved in preparation of this subsequent IS/MND.

Volume II, "Technical Appendices", contains the CEQA environmental checklist; a list of all the required permits and approvals; scoping information; technical reports; and other general, program, and route-specific background information, technical data, and field survey results.