

Executive Summary

This subsequent initial study/mitigated negative declaration (IS/MND) has been prepared to analyze the potential environmental effects of Williams Communications, Inc.'s (Williams') proposal to install a fiber optic cable system and related facilities from the community of Point Arena in Mendocino County to the community of Robbins in Sutter County and from Point Arena to the City of Sacramento in Sacramento County. These projects are analyzed at two levels in this document. The general characteristics of the projects and their potential effects are examined at a program level. The route-specific environmental settings and potential effects are examined at a project-specific level. Mitigation measures for potentially significant effects are identified at both levels. Williams has committed to avoidance of impacts through project design and adoption of constraints-driven mitigation measures as part of the projects.

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 Point Arena to Robbins project is a modification to a project route approved in the previous California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) document. The Point Arena to Sacramento project is a diverse connection to supplement the project route approved in the previous CEQA document. 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 a less-than-significant level (CEQA Guidelines Section 15162). As a subsequent IS/MND, the CPUC-approved IS/MND is incorporated in this document by reference.

This subsequent IS/MND concludes that, given the construction approach, design elements, and mitigation built into the projects and the mitigation measures included herein, no significant effect on the environment will occur and no substantial evidence exists in light of the whole record that the projects may have a significant effect on the environment.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

As detailed in Chapter 2, "Project Description", of this subsequent IS/MND, Williams proposes to install and operate a fiber optic cable communications network throughout California to provide facilities-based and resale InterLATA and IntraLATA interexchange services. Williams has applied to the CPUC and has been granted a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity authorizing Williams to install a fiber optic cable network within the state, including necessary related facilities.

Williams' Point Arena to Robbins and Point Arena to Sacramento projects propose to install several (three or more), high-density polyethylene conduits carrying fiber optic cables primarily within existing, disturbed rights-of-way (i.e., railroads or roads) between Point Arena and Robbins and Point Arena to Sacramento. Approximately 99% of the work would be conducted inside existing, disturbed road or railroad rights-of-way and would be buried through use of plowing or trenching techniques. In addition to the fiber optic cable, three optical amplification (OP-AMP) or regenerator stations along the Point Arena to Robbins project route and four OP-AMP or regenerator stations along the Point Arena to Sacramento project route would be installed at intervals to boost the transmitted signals. For the Point Arena to Robbins project route,

they would be located in Ukiah, Clearlake Oaks, and Arbuckle on private land adjacent to the project route. For the Point Arena to Sacramento project route, they would be located in Yorkville, Windsor/Fulton, Schellville, and Elmira on private land adjacent to the project route.

Several standard construction methods would be used to install the conduit and cable along these project routes. Chapter 2, "Project Description", contains a detailed description of these methods. The particular methods to be used along this project route includes the preferred installation methods as follows:

- # plowing or trenching within existing railroad rights-of-way,
- # plowing or trenching in road rights-of-way, and
- # directional bore.

Plowing requires use of a tracked vehicle with a conduit reel on the front and a plow blade on the back. The plow furrows the soil and installs the conduit simultaneously. In some instances, the soil may be pre-ripped by a tractor in front of the plow. Trenching typically involves use of a rubber-tired backhoe or an excavator to dig a 1-foot-wide by 4-foot-deep trench. After the conduit is installed in the trench, the trench is backfilled and restored. Additionally, at sensitive streams (i.e., streams supporting sensitive plant, animal, or fish species or critical habitat) with flowing water, or where necessary to avoid sensitive resources such as wetlands, threatened and endangered species, sensitive plant populations, cultural or paleontological resources, guided or directional boring, bridge attachments (if available), or minor route modifications within the rights-of-way will be used. Boring will also be used in some instances to cross major roads to minimize traffic disruptions.

The primary approach to mitigation for the Williams' projects is avoidance of impacts. As described more fully in Chapter 2, "Project Description", the projects incorporate mitigation into design and construction approach to avoid or reduce possible environmental impacts to less-than-significant levels. The commitments include development and implementation of a reclamation plan, fire prevention and response plan, and storm water pollution prevention plan (including erosion control and spill prevention countermeasures). Wetlands, rivers and streams, sensitive habitats, cultural resources, and other environmentally sensitive areas would be avoided during installation of the conduit and cable and siting of the regenerator/OP-AMP stations through rerouting, boring, or bridge attachment where available. Specific mitigation measures have also been identified in this subsequent IS/MND and adopted by Williams to avoid or reduce the impacts of the projects to less-than-significant levels. These measures are described in Chapter 5A, "Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures for Point Arena to Robbins", and Chapter 5B, "Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures for Point Arena to Sacramento".

POINT ARENA TO ROBBINS PROJECT ROUTE

Following is a brief description of the general location of the project route. Detailed information is provided in Chapters 3, "Project Route Descriptions", and 4A, "Environmental Setting for Point Arena to Robbins".

The project route would connect the AT&T Corp. (AT&T) Japan cable landing near Manchester in Mendocino County with the community of Robbins. The project route would be located predominantly in state highway, county road, and railroad rights-of-way and would pass through private lands only in a few locations, such as private access roads. The project would cross Mendocino, Lake, Colusa, Yolo, and Sutter Counties and the communities of Manchester, Booneville, Ukiah, Capella, and Robbins. Three OP-AMP stations would be located on private property outside existing rights-of-way.

The Point Arena to Robbins project route is divided into a west and east segment, connected in the middle by approximately 80 miles of existing aerial dark fiber (e.g., unlit fiber optic cable) carried by an existing Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E) transmission line. The PG&E portion of the project route, which would begin in Capella in Mendocino County, cross Lake County, and end on Walnut Drive in Colusa County, is not addressed in this subsequent IS/NMD because it is an existing fiber optic cable.

As shown in **Table 3-1** in Chapter 3, “Project Route Descriptions”, the west segment would transverse 27.58 miles of local roads, 20.21 miles of state highways, 8.82 miles of railroad rights-of-way, and 0.09 mile of private road. The east segment would would transverse 44.24 miles of local roads and 0.78 mile of private road. The total project route would cross 101.73 miles (excluding the 80 miles of existing PG&E transmission line).

POINT ARENA TO SACRAMENTO PROJECT ROUTE

Following is a brief description of the general location of the project route. Detailed information is provided in Chapters 3, “Project Route Descriptions”, and 4B, “Environmental Setting for Point Arena to Sacramento”.

The project route would connect the AT&T Japan cable landing near Manchester in Mendocino County with the City of Sacramento. The project route would be located predominantly in state highway, county road, and railroad rights-of-way and would pass through private lands only in a few locations, such as private access roads. The project would cross Mendocino, Sonoma, Napa, Solano, Yolo, and Sacramento Counties and the communities of Manchester, Point Arena, Yorkville, Cloverdale, Healdsburg, Windsor, Fulton, Santa Rosa, Cotati, Rohnert Park, Schellville, Cordelia, Fairfield/Suisun City, Davis, West Sacramento, and Sacramento. Four OP-AMP stations would be located on private property outside existing rights-of-way.

As shown in **Table 3-2** in Chapter 3, “Project Route Descriptions”, the project route would transverse 27.58 miles of local roads, 47.24 miles of state highways, 52.13 miles of railroad rights-of-way, and 3.35 miles of private road. The total project route would cross 184.17 miles.

SUMMARY OF MITIGATION MEASURES

The projects have been designed by Williams, based on biological and cultural resources constraints information, to avoid significant environmental impacts through site design and construction approach or to reduce such effects to less-than-significant levels through the application of additional mitigation measures. These additional mitigation measures are discussed in detail in Chapter 5A, “Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures for Point Arena to Robbins”, Chapter 5B, “Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures for Point Arena to Sacramento”, and summarized in **Table S-1** and **Table S-2**.

GROWTH-INDUCING IMPACTS

The projects would serve the expanding telecommunications market in California, nationally and internationally. The contribution of these projects to California’s projected population growth would be negligible because it is not a primary factor in selecting whether to move to California and because much of the growth is independent of the availability of fiber optic capacity.

California is growing at a rapid pace, with annual increases projected to average approximately 1.6% over the next 10 years. At least half of the projected population increase would be from births to existing residents. (California Department of Finance 1998.) Potential residents consider a variety of factors when

deciding to move to California, including job availability, salaries, relative housing cost, quality of schools, commuting distance, and recreational opportunities. As population increases, so will the demand for telecommunications. Stand-alone fiber optic cable is one means of meeting this demand. Others are wireless technology and expanding the capacity of existing telephone lines.

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

The potential cumulative impacts of the projects are considered to be negligible and less than significant. As discussed in Chapter 5A, “Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures for Point Arena to Robbins”, and Chapter 5B, “Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures for Point Arena to Sacramento”, through compliance with standards established for environmental protection and incorporation of project elements and mitigation measures designed to avoid impacts or reduce them to below the level of significance, no significant impacts would occur. Therefore, the projects would not contribute to any significant cumulative impacts.