PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

COMMISSION ADVISORY AND
COMPLIANCE DIVISION
ENERGY BRANCH

RESOLUTION E-3290
October 6, 1992

R E S O L U T I O N

RESOLUTION E-3290. REQUEST BY EL DORADO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS TO DEVIATE FROM UNDERGROUNDING REQUIREMENTS ALONG THE SCENIC CORRIDOR OF HIGHWAY 50 AT PACIFIC HOUSE FOR LINDA AND MARIO D'AMICO.

REQUEST MADE BY LETTER DATED JANUARY 9, 1992.

SUMMARY

1. The El Dorado County Board of Supervisors (El Dorado) requests Commission authorization for Mario and Linda D'Amico to deviate from the undergrounding provisions of Section 320 of the Public Utilities Code to install a new overhead line extension near Scenic Highway 50 at Pacific House.

2. The impact and visibility of the proposed overhead crossing will be negligible, while the alternative of an underground installation would have significant negative environmental impact and prohibitive costs.

3. This Resolution grants El Dorado's request for the proposed work by Mr. and Mrs. D'Amico.

BACKGROUND

1. State policy is to achieve undergrounding of electric or telecommunication facilities near scenic highways when feasible and consistent with sound environmental planning (Public Utilities Code Section 320). This Commission is designated as the State's lead agency for implementing the undergrounding policy.

2. The Commission policy for overhead installations is as follows:

> In order to facilitate administration, letter requests for deviations will be accepted, reviewed by the Commission Staff and, where appropriate, approved by Commission Resolution. Local governments participation in the review process is set forth hereinafter under the heading 'Coordination with Local Government'.
>
> Clear-cut cases of reasonable deviations are granted

by resolution following letter requests or by ex-parte order following formal application. Potentially controversial formal applications for deviations are heard and appropriate Decisions rendered in each Case. Commission Decision 80864 in Case 9364, dated December 19, 1972.

3. The California Department of Transportation (CALTRANS) Division of Transportation Planning has planning oversight on the construction of overhead facilities near state scenic highways.

4. On April 30, 1992, Laura Johnson of CALTRANS inspected the proposed electric cable and pole location requested by Mr. and Mrs. D'Amico to serve APN 11-110-07 located near PM 39.8 on State Route 50. One end of the cable will be placed on an existing pole adjacent to Route 50, and the other end will be to a pole in the woods on the D'Amico's property. Because of vegetation and topography in the area, the CALTRANS believes that the new PG&E pole would not be visible from the highway; there are also other cables crossing the highway at the location. The additional cable would not significantly alter the visual impact.

5. By letter dated April 30, 1992, CALTRANS stated that it does not object to an exemption to the mandatory undergrounding requirements of Section 320 of the Public Utilities Code for this cable installation.

6. El Dorado, by Agenda Transmittal dated 12/28/91, states that due to the location of the proposed homesite, at the top of the hill, it will be more feasible to use overhead wiring to the house. Underground wiring would create a financial hardship as the hillside is mostly rock. The overhead wires will not cross the highway, and trees will screen view of wires from the highway.

7. On September 1, 1992, Energy Branch personnel Frank Crua, Senior Utilities Engineer and Bill Gaffney, Public Utilities Regulatory Analyst II traveled to Pacific House to inspect the area where the overhead line is proposed. Crua and Gaffney concur with CALTRANS that the proposed line is not visible from the highway because of vegetation and topography and that the proposed site is over rocky terrain.

8. In a letter reply of June 25, 1992, Pacific Gas and Electric Company stated that the cost to install an overhead line for the D'Amicos would be done under the provisions of Rule 15 "Overhead Extension". The customer qualifies for 415 feet of free footage, and the extension to get to the location would be approximately 700 feet in length. Based on excess footage of 285 feet at $10.05 per foot, the customer would have to pay a possibly refundable advance of $2,864 for the overhead extension.

9. The cost for an underground extension, which would consist of a primary extension in conduit, splice boxes,

transformer pad and primary riser, would be approximately $22,000. This amount is an estimate and does not include trenching and backfill which are the customer's responsibility to provide. Trenching at the site will be moderate to difficult due to terrain and soil conditions.

NOTICE :

1. The applicable governmental authorities in this case are the CALTRANS and the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors. CALTRANS was made aware of the request of the Board of Supervisors in accordance with the provisions of General Order 96-A and has had an opportunity to respond.

2. CALTRANS has expressed no objection to the D'Amico proposal by letter dated April 30, 1992. The El Dorado County Board of Supervisors expressed approval to the proposal by letter dated January 7, 1992.

PROTESTS

1. No protests have been received.

DISCUSSION

1. The existing electric line runs crosses Scenic Highway 50. The new line would take off from an existing pole and continue away from Highway 50. A second pole would be installed 400 feet further away from Highway 50 and the existing pole. The only way that the poles would be visible is if several of a large number of trees were removed. Mr. and Mrs. D'Amico expressed no intentions of removing the trees. The fact that the facilities would not be visible is justification in part for the proposed deviation, but is not the primary reason.

2. The estimated cost of an overhead crossing would be about $2,864 while an underground alternative would be approximately $22,000 plus the cost of trenching and backfill. This is a ratio of at least 7.7 to 1. These estimates are based on 700 feet of line extension. The underground cost appears excessive. Acceptance of an overhead line because of overriding undergrounding cost is consistent with past Commission Resolutions and Decisions. In Commission Decision 80197, 73 CPUC 587, the Commission stated in Finding of Facts: "...It is imprudent to spend $23.6 million to purchase rights of way upon which transmission lines can be constructed when for $19.1 million the lines can be buried...It will cost approximately $2,949,000 to construct the two transmission lines overhead. The ratio of underground to overhead cost is more than 6 to 1." As a prerequisite for the establishment of overhead lines, the Commission established a limit of underground to overhead costs at 6 to 1. This site has a cost ratio of at 7.7 to 1.

3. The Commission Advisory and Compliance Division (CACD) has reviewed this matter. CACD concludes that the request for a

deviation from Section 320 of the Public Utilities Code is reasonable and recommends that the request be granted.

FINDINGS

1. Mario and Linda D'Amico have demonstrated need for electric power at their residence in Pacific House.

2. Public Utilities Code Section stipulates that undergrounding will take place "whenever feasible". The cost ratio of 7.7 to 1 between underground and overhead electric service would cause an infeasible financial condition and a burden on the D'Amicos.

3. At present, there is adequate cover from the surrounding trees to hide the proposed line not visible.

4. Applicable governmental agencies have had the opportunity to comment on this project and did not object. The El Dorado Board of Supervisors recommends the overhead line extension.

5. This deviation, if granted, would apply only to this specific case and in no way should be construed as a precedent or a blanket endorsement for other deviations. Requests for deviations will have to be considered on a case by case basis.

6. The El Dorado County Board of Supervisors' request for a deviation from the requirements for undergrounding for Mario and Linda D'Amico is reasonable in this particular case and should be granted.

THEREFORE, IT IS ORDERED that:

1. Authority is granted to Pacific Gas and Electric Company to deviate from the undergrounding provisions of Section 320 of the Public Utilities Code in order to construct an overhead line near the scenic corridor of Highway 50 in Pacific House, El Dorado County.

2. This resolution is effective today.

I hereby certify that this Resolution was adopted by the Public Utilities Commission at its regular meeting on October 6, 1992. The following Commissioners approved it:

Neal J. Shulman
Executive Director

DANIEL Wm. FESSLER
President
JOHN B. OHANIAN
PATRICIA M. ECKERT
NORMAN D. SHUMWAY
Commissioners