

PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

COMMISSION ADVISORY AND
COMPLIANCE DIVISION
Energy Branch

RESOLUTION E-3273
May 8, 1992

R E S O L U T I O N

RESOLUTION E-3273. REQUEST BY PACIFIC BELL TO DEVIATE FROM THE UNDERGROUND REQUIREMENTS OF PUBLIC UTILITIES CODE SECTION 320 AND PLACE A NEW TELEPHONE CABLE ON SKYLINE BLVD. (HIGHWAY 35), NEAR WOODSIDE, FROM BEAR GULCH ROAD (POST MILE 12.86) TO 16350 SKYLINE (POST MILE 12.24).

AUTHORITY REQUESTED BY LETTER DATED DECEMBER 31, 1991 FROM RUSS KIRK, ENGINEER, PACIFIC BELL.

SUMMARY

1. Pacific Bell (PacBell) proposes to install approximately 3880 feet of new telephone cable on Skyline Boulevard (Highway 35) in the vicinity of Woodside. The new line will provide service to the Skylonda Fitness Center at 16350 Skyline Boulevard (Skyline).
2. PacBell plans to place the cable on seventeen (17) existing Pacific Gas & Electric Company (PG&E) poles under a joint pole agreement. One additional pole will be required to maintain a safe vertical clearance and will provide improved alignment along the roadway.
3. State policy calls for undergrounding of electric or telecommunication facilities near scenic highways when feasible and consistent with sound environmental planning. This Commission is responsible for implementing the undergrounding policy.
4. The impact and visibility of the new cable along the Skyline scenic corridor should be negligible.
5. This Resolution grants the request.

BACKGROUND

1. PacBell has been requested to provide telephone service to the Skylonda Fitness Center which has been approved by the local jurisdictions and is currently under construction. PG&E has indicated that it has no current plans to underground its overhead distribution line.

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

3. The policy from Commission Decision 80864 in Case 9364, dated December 19, 1972, allows for overhead installations 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."

NOTICE

1. The applicable governmental authorities are the California Department of Transportation (CALTRANS) and the San Mateo County Planning Commission. Both of these agencies have been notified of this request in accordance with the provisions of G. O. 96-A and have had an opportunity to respond.

2. By letter dated February 2, 1992, the San Mateo County Planning Commission confirmed that it would be permissible, under their use permit, to place the telephone cable on the PG&E poles from Bear Gulch Road to the pole at the Skylonda Fitness Center.

3. CALTRANS was advised of the requested deviation in a March 12, 1992 letter to Mr. William Felts, Senior Transportation Planner, from Mr. Douglas Long, Manager of the Energy Branch of the Commission. In a telephone call on April 2, 1992, Ms. Laura B. Johnson, Scenic Highway Coordinator for the State of California, Division of Transportation Planning, said CALTRANS would abide by the recommendation made by the Commission staff.

PROTESTS

1. No protests have been received.

DISCUSSION

1. PacBell's proposed overhead cable would be located on Highway 35, in the vicinity of Woodside, from Bear Gulch Road (Mile Marker 12.86) to 16350 Skyline (Mile Marker 12.24). The cable would be placed on PG&E's existing poles. An additional

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pole would be required to provide vertical clearance. It also provides a better alignment reducing the visibility of the cable.

2. Highway 35 currently has telephone cable in the general area except for approximately a 3 mile stretch from Bear Gulch Road to Morse Lane. The Skylonda Fitness Center is about 0.6 miles from Bear Gulch Road and about 2.6 miles from Morse Lane. Installing a telephone cable in this area would reduce the gap.

3. Constructing an overhead or an underground cable along Skyline from 16350 Skyline to Morse Lane was evaluated and rejected since it would be longer and more costly.

4. PacBell prepared estimates for five (5) alternatives for a cable from Bear Gulch Road to 16350 Skyline. These options were Aerial Copper cable, Underground Copper cable in conduit, Buried Copper cable, Aerial Fiber Optic cable and Underground Fiber Optic cable in conduit. The costs ranged from \$8774 dollars for the Aerial Copper cable to \$196,325 dollars for the Underground Fiber Optic cable in conduit. Aerial Copper cable was selected since it would be the least expensive and is similar to the existing cable in the area.

5. Placement of the overhead cable would require no more than one working day, two if unforeseen problems should occur. No lane closures would be required. The reinforcement of the guy wires to accommodate the new telephone cable should not disrupt the traffic patterns and would blend in with the existing PG&E facilities.

6. Placement of an underground cable along the same route would be less desirable for three reasons. First, undergrounding would increase the construction time required thereby prolonging the safety hazards to the public and to construction personnel working on the narrow highway. Second, traffic congestion would increase due to lane closures for trenching. Trenching could be prolonged because of the rocky terrain and narrow roadway. In some locations, the available area outside the highway is very narrow. Off road trenching is impossible in some locations. Third, the underground cable would be more costly. Overhead copper cable installed would cost \$8,773 while underground copper cable would cost \$114,029. This is ratio of 13:1.

7. A Commission Advisory and Compliance Division (CACD) staff engineer met with two PacBell representatives and a Skylonda Fitness Center representative to make a field review of the site. There are currently three electrical lines on the existing PG&E poles. The CACD engineer recommended that the new telephone cable be placed as high on the poles as possible to minimize the visual impact. This was agreed to by the PacBell representatives.

8. PG&E has indicated that it has no current plans to underground the overhead distribution line serving this site. If PG&E elects to underground its lines in the future, PacBell has agreed that it would underground the telephone cable at the same time.

9. The CACD has reviewed this matter, and 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. PacBell was requested to provide telephone service to the Skylonda Fitness Center at 16350 Skyline.

2. Section 320 stipulates that undergrounding will take place "whenever feasible". In this case, construction of an overhead cable would be faster, reduce safety hazards to the public and construction workers, cause less traffic disruption and be less expensive. The cost ratio between a proposed underground and overhead facilities is 13 to 1. The cost ratio exceeds 6 to 1, a ratio that this Commission has used in the past to determine the feasibility of underground alternatives.

3. Applicable governmental agencies have had the opportunity to comment on this project and did not object. The San Mateo County Planning Commission included the use of overhead cable in its Use Permit.

4. The overhead Copper cable should create minimal additional visual impact with the existing PG&E overhead lines.

5. If PG&E elects to underground its system in the future, Pacific Bell should be required to underground its system at the same time.

6. 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 deviations in similar cases. Any future requests for deviations will have to be considered on a case by case basis.

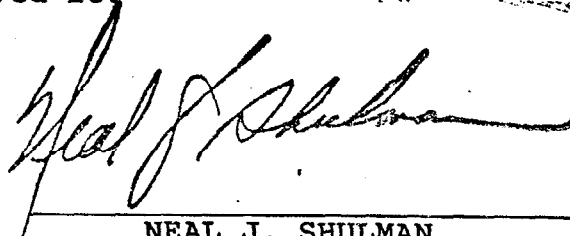
7. PacBell's request for a deviation from the requirements for undergrounding is reasonable and should be granted.

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THEREFORE, IT IS ORDERED that:

1. The request by Pacific Bell to deviate from the undergrounding policy in Section 320 of the Public Utilities Code by installing an overhead cable in the vicinity of Woodside on Highway 35 (Skyline) is granted.
2. If Pacific Gas and Electric Company elects to underground its lines in the future, PacBell shall underground the telephone cable at the same time.
3. This Resolution is effective today.

I hereby certify that this Resolution was adopted by the Public Utilities Commission at its regular meeting on May 8, 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