

PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

ENERGY DIVISION

**RESOLUTION E-3594
MAY 13, 1999**

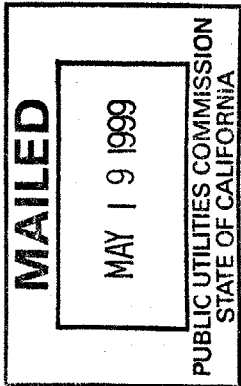
RESOLUTION

RESOLUTION E-3594. PACIFIC GAS AND ELECTRIC COMPANY (PG&E) REQUESTS A DEVIATION FROM CALIFORNIA PUBLIC UTILITIES CODE SECTION 320 NEAR THE CITY OF FORESTVILLE. PG&E IS AUTHORIZED TO RELOCATE FIVE POLES. PACIFIC BELL IS AUTHORIZED TO RELOCATE TWO POLES. CENTURY COMMUNICATIONS IS AUTHORIZED TO REMAIN OVERHEAD.

BY LETTER DATED JUNE 4, 1998 FROM PACIFIC GAS AND ELECTRIC COMPANY.

BY LETTER DATED DECEMBER 1, 1998 FROM PACIFIC BELL.

BY LETTER DATED MARCH 16, 1999 FROM CENTURY COMMUNICATIONS.



SUMMARY

1. Decision (D.) 80864 requires utilities to seek Commission approval for construction of overhead installations in a scenic corridor.
2. Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E), by letter dated June 4, 1998, requested authority for a deviation from Section 320, (Statutes. 1971, Chapter 1697) of the Public Utilities Code (PU Code). Five PG&E utility poles would be relocated to accommodate center left-turn lanes at three intersections on Scenic Highway 116 between Templeman Road and Ross Station Road in Forestville.
3. Pacific Bell, (Pac Bell) by letter dated December 1, 1998, requested authority for a deviation from PU Code Section 320. Two Pac Bell utility poles would be relocated to accommodate the same left turn lanes.
4. Century Communications (Century), by letter dated March 16, 1999, requested authority to remain overhead along with PG&E and Pacific Bell.

5. No protests were received for these deviation requests.
6. PG&E and the County of Sonoma recommend the deviations based on the substantial ratio of underground construction cost to overhead relocation cost.
7. This Resolution approves PG&E's request for authority to relocate five poles, Pac Bell's request to relocate two poles, and Century's request to relocate overhead.

BACKGROUND

1. California Public Utilities Code (P.U. Code) Section 320 was enacted in 1971, Chapter 1697, and reads in part, as follows:

"The legislature hereby declares that it is the policy of this state to achieve, whenever feasible, and not inconsistent with sound environmental planning, the undergrounding of all future electric and communication distribution facilities which are proposed to be erected in proximity to any highway designated a state scenic highway pursuant to Article 2.5 (commencing with Section 260) of Chapter 2 of Division 1 of the Streets and Highways Code and which would be visible from such scenic highways if erected above ground."

2. The Commission is responsible for the administration of P.U. Code Section 320. After hearings conducted in Case 9364, Commission Decision (D.)80864 implemented the State Legislation. D.80864 states that:

"In order to facilitate administration, letter requests for deviations will be accepted, reviewed by the Commission staff and, where appropriate, approved by Commission Resolution." (74 CPUC 457)

3. D.80864 states "no respondent electric or communication utility,...shall install overhead distribution facilities in proximity to any highway designated a State Scenic Highway pursuant to Article 2.5 (commencing with Section 260) of Chapter 2 of Division 1 of the Streets and Highways Code and which would be visible from such scenic highways if erected above ground, unless (a) a showing is made before the Commission and a

finding made by the Commission that undergrounding would not be feasible or would be inconsistent with sound environmental planning....”

4. By letter dated and filed on June 4, 1998, PG&E requested a deviation from the legislative undergrounding requirements. The project proposed will widen 1.2 miles of State Hwy 116 and will accommodate installation of center left turn lanes at three intersections on that highway. The project begins at 0.12 miles west of Templeman Road and extends to .12 miles east of Ross Station Road in Forestville. The overhead facilities in question, if moved, would be within 10 to 15 feet from the Scenic Highway.
5. The County of Sonoma, the Department of Transportation and PG&E recommend granting this deviation request and agree that a deviation is appropriate. The basis for these recommendations is the cost of undergrounding that far exceeds the cost of overhead construction.
6. The project will require relocation of seven utility poles, five belonging to PG&E and two belonging to Pac Bell.
7. The existing poles are all within Highway 116, a designated State Scenic Highway. D.80864 Ordering Paragraph 1. prohibits construction of overhead electric or telephone lines within 1,000 feet of each edge of the right-of-way of a designated State Scenic Highway unless a showing is made before the Commission that undergrounding would not be feasible or would be inconsistent with sound environmental planning.
8. The comparison below shows the total project cost estimates for overhead and underground construction:

Total Project
Underground versus Overhead
 Range of Estimated Cost
 (Dollars in Thousands)

Construction	PG&E Cost	Pacific Bell Cost	Cable	Total Cost
Overhead	\$ 30	\$ 10	\$0.6	\$ 40.6
Underground	\$ 300 to 420	\$ 50 to 70	\$3.0	\$353 to 493
Ratios	10.0 to 14.0	5.0 to 7.0	5.0	8.7 to 12.1

9. In a May 7, 1998 letter to PG&E the Sonoma County Permit and Resource Management Department stated: "This (cost) data indicates that undergrounding would approximately double the total project costs (including Caltrans costs). Therefore, we have determined that the undergrounding of utilities would not be economically practical in this case..." In addition to the costs shown above, Caltrans would incur a cost of \$300,000 for the left-turn lanes. Ratios of underground to overhead costs of the total project, including Caltrans costs, range from 1.9 to 2.3.
10. The Sonoma County General Plan designated this sector of Highway 116 as a Scenic corridor and most of the adjacent lands as a Scenic Landscape Unit.
11. It is PG&E's opinion that relocating the existing poles would not significantly impact the scenic corridor.

NOTICE

1. Notice of PG&E's letter requesting a deviation was made by publication in the Commission's calendar and distribution to Caltrans.

PROTESTS

1. No protests were received for this deviation request.

DISCUSSION

1. Caltrans requested PG&E to relocate a segment of a 12 kv power line including five utility poles to accommodate three left turn lanes on Highway 116 in Forestville. Caltrans also requested that Pacific Bell move two utility poles.
2. In previous Commission Decisions, where the cost of undergrounding substantially exceeds the cost of relocating overhead facilities, the Commission usually granted deviations on the basis of excessive costs. On this portion of Highway 116, the cost of undergrounding is at least 8.7 times the cost of relocating the overhead facilities.¹ An excessive cost ratio (underground versus overhead costs) supports a deviation from the underground requirements and has been used as a guideline in several Commission Decisions and Resolutions. For example the Commission

¹ The ratio of 8.7 does not include Caltrans costs.

adopted a deviation for an overhead facilities installation in Sonoma County, Resolution E-3567, dated October 8, 1998, for the Cohn Winery based on a cost ratio of 3.3 to one. Since the cost of undergrounding substantially exceeds the cost of relocating the overhead facilities the request for a deviation from P.U. Code 320 is reasonable. The Energy Division therefore recommends that the Commission grant PG&E's request for deviation from P.U. Code 320 to relocate the utility poles in question.

3. Century Communication's request to remain overhead is consistent with PG&E's and Pacific Bell's request since Century's cables are on the same poles.

COMMENTS

This is an uncontested matter in which the resolution grants the relief requested. Accordingly, pursuant to PU Code Section 311(g)(2), the otherwise applicable 30-day period for public review and comment is being waived.

FINDINGS

1. D.80864 prohibits installation of overhead distribution facilities within 1,000 feet of a designated State Scenic Highway.
2. D.80864 permits deviation from such prohibition on letter request, reviewed by Commission staff and approved by Commission Resolution.
3. By letter dated June 4, 1998, PG&E requested a deviation from the undergrounding requirement of the P.U. Code 320. The deviation request was triggered by a Caltrans project to construct left turn lanes at three intersections on Highway 116 near Forestville.
4. The project involves five utility poles belonging to PG&E, two belonging to Pacific Bell, and cable facilities belonging to Century. The site is within 1,000 feet of Scenic Highway 116.
5. The ratio of combined total construction costs of electric, telephone and cable relocation underground to overhead, exclusive of Caltrans costs, is at least 8.7.

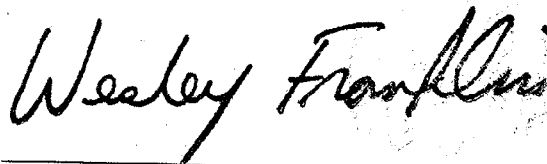
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6. Since the cost of undergrounding significantly exceeds the cost of overhead construction, the County of Sonoma, Caltrans, PG&E, Pacific Bell, and Century Communications agree that a deviation is appropriate.
7. The project to relocate five PG&E poles, two Pac Bell poles and cable facilities from .12 miles west of Templeman Road to a point .12 mile east of Ross Station Road in Forestville is reasonable.

THEREFORE, IT IS ORDERED that:

1. PG&E's, Pacific Bell's, and Century Communication's requests to relocate existing overhead line and poles to accommodate left turn lanes at three intersections in Forestville are approved.
2. This Resolution is effective today.

I certify that the foregoing resolution was duly introduced, passed, and adopted at a conference of the Public Utilities Commission of the State of California held on May 13, 1999. The following Commissioners voted favorable thereon.



WESLEY M. FRANKLIN
Executive Director

RICHARD A. BILAS
President
HENRY M. DUQUE
JOSIAH L. NEEPER
Commissioners