

## PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

505 VAN NESS AVENUE  
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94102-3298



April 22, 2011

Susan J. Nelson, AIA  
Regulatory Affairs  
Southern California Edison  
2244 Walnut Grove Avenue, Quad 3D, GO1  
Rosemead, CA 91770

RE: Tehachapi Renewable Transmission Project (TRTP), Segments 4-11: Variance Request (VR) #57

Dear Ms. Nelson,

On April 7, 2011, Southern Californian Edison (SCE) submitted a variance request for additional improvements to Van Tassel Motorway, including the construction of a turnout area and widening of an existing turn, on the Segment 7 Transmission Line (T/L) of the Tehachapi Renewable Transmission Project (TRTP) in the City of Duarte, Los Angeles County, California. Cultural information regarding the request was approved on April 21<sup>st</sup>. **This Variance Request is approved by CPUC based on the following factors:**

- SCE submitted the following information:

SCE submitted a request for a Variance for additional improvements to Van Tassel Motorway, including the construction of a turnout area and widening of an existing turn, on the Segment 7 T/L of the TRTP in the City of Duarte, Los Angeles County, California.

SCE's contractor, Wilson Construction, has requested a Variance for additional improvements on Van Tassel Motorway from those approved in the NTP (NTP #17 dated September 24, 2010) by the CPUC. The turnout area and turn widening were not included in the Notice to Proceed Request (NTPR). However, based on field surveys conducted by Wilson and SCE, both will be necessary to ensure safe passage of construction vehicles and equipment. The turnout area is needed to ensure vehicles traveling in the opposite direction do not obstruct each other and to allow vehicles to backup if necessary. The turn widening area is proposed on the inside and outside of the turn and is needed to ensure larger vehicles and equipment, such as tractor-trailer/low boy, are able to safely navigate the turn without creating additional disturbance to non-travel areas. The turnout area consists of an irregular area totaling approximately 0.11 acres. The outside and inside turn widening consist of approximately 0.05 acres and 0.02 acres, respectively.

- **Biological Resources:** SCE submitted a biological report by ICF International dated March 30, 2011, titled *Biological Survey Report for the Proposed Van Tassel Motorway Improvements Variance for TRTP, Segment 7 Transmission Line, Los Angeles County, California*. The report documents the results of biological surveys for the Segment 7 proposed Van Tassel Motorway Improvements (Variance Project Component). The Variance Project Component includes two locations along the motorway, and a 500-foot buffer (Biological Study Area [BSA]) surrounding each location, which were included in the analysis. Biological resources within the BSA were evaluated during surveys associated with Segment 7 Transmission Line that occurred within and adjacent to the BSA, including focused species surveys for special-status plants and a tree inventory (ICF 2010at, ICF 2010av), and previous preconstruction surveys (ICF 2010bg, 2010df, and 2011ay). A literature review was also performed as part of the biological review (ICF 2010ay).



The vegetation communities observed within the Variance Project Component include disturbed/developed and coastal sage scrub. The vegetation communities observed within the BSA (ICF 2010at) include disturbed/developed, coastal sage scrub, mixed chaparral, and coast live oak riparian forest. Several San Gabriel oak (*Quercus durata* var. *gabrielensis*) trees occur within the BSA (ICF 2010at) and one coast live oak (*Quercus agrifolia*), a protected tree under local ordinance, occurs along the edge of the BSA of the turnout location (ICF 2010av). No coast live oak trees will be impacted by the Variance construction activities. Two San Gabriel oaks occur within 10 feet of the Variance Project Component (ICF 2010df, 2011ay) and will be avoided if possible. If impacts are unavoidable, Mitigation Measures B-1a, B-7, and B-23 will be implemented. Plummer's mariposa lily (*Calochortus plummerae*) occurs in two locations within the BSA (ICF 2010at, 2011av), but will not be impacted by the construction activities. No other special-status plants were observed in the BSA during the previous focused survey (ICF 2010at).

One potential colonial bat roost was identified within the road widening BSA (ICF 2010bd). There are no suitable roosts within the Variance Project Component. Several San Diego desert woodrat (*Neotoma lepida intermedia*) nests were detected within the BSA, and one nest occurs within the Variance Project Component (ICF 2010df, 2011ay). This nest will be passively relocated by qualified biologists per Mitigation Measure B-36 of the FEIR. An active wrenit (*Chamaea fasciata*) nest was identified during monitoring activities on March 11, 2011 within the turnout location of the BSA. While coastal sage scrub is located within the Variance Project Component and 500-foot buffer, it is not suitable to support coastal California gnatcatcher (*Poliophtila californica*). Focused surveys conducted in 2009 and 2010 did not include the BSA (AMEC 2009), and preconstruction surveys have not identified coastal California gnatcatcher within the BSA (ICF 2010df, 2011ay). The BSA also includes suitable habitat for ringtail (*Bassariscus astutus*) and preconstruction surveys will continue to check for ringtail in the area (ICF 2010df, 2011ay).

The entire Variance Project Component impact area and part of the BSA have been previously surveyed for jurisdictional features (ICF 2010h). Seven hydrological features (7-93-S-1, 7-92-S-1, 7-2-S-12, 7-2-S-13, 7-2-S-15, 7-2-S-14, and 7-3-S-1) were identified. None of the jurisdictional features will be affected by the Variance construction.

Prior to construction, a biological pre-construction survey will be conducted within the entire BSA and any additional jurisdictional features not identified on the biological resources maps will be flagged and avoided as environmentally sensitive areas (ESAs). No additional impacts to biological resources are anticipated with the implementation of this Variance.

- **Cultural and Paleontological Resources:** SCE submitted with the Variance Request a letter from PCR Services Corporation (PCR) to SCE dated April 6, 2011 regarding the Cultural Resources Survey of Van Tassel Motorway for Road Improvements, Segment 7, Tehachapi Renewable Transmission Project, Los Angeles County, California. The letter presents the results of the cultural resources assessment for the proposed Variance. At the request of SCE, PCR conducted a cultural resources survey along Van Tassel Motorway for current and potential future road improvements in support for the TRTP, Segment 7. A cultural resources records search was previously conducted for the TRTP project area which encompasses all of the current study (Pacific Legacy 2007) and reviews of all recorded historical resources and archaeological sites within a one-mile radius of the Project area as well as a review of cultural resource reports and historic topographic maps on file. The records search also included a review of the California Points of Historical Interest (CPHI), the California Historical Landmarks (CHL), the California Register of Historical Resources (CRHR), the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), and the California State Historic Resources Inventory (HRI) listings.

As per the biological constraints for the TRTP project, and due to dense vegetation and steep slopes on either side of the road exceeding 30 degrees, PCR conducted a reconnaissance survey of the Project area, rather than an intensive pedestrian survey. In accordance with the Programmatic Agreement (PA), the

survey included a 50-foot buffer on either side of the existing road prism, when not constrained by the above mentioned TRTP biological restraints, steep slopes, and dense vegetation. The reconnaissance survey was conducted by walking along the edges of both sides of the road inspecting areas outside of the road prism, when safely possible. PCR archaeologist, Matthew Wetherbee, M.Sc., RPA, with assistance from Tria Belcourt, MA, RPA, conducted the survey on March 18, 2011. All exposed soils were inspected for the presence of cultural and paleontological resources. The field survey yielded no cultural or paleontological resources, or other historic properties. Although ground visibility was low during the survey, there is a low probability of cultural resources being present because of the steep slopes, and improbability of a resource being located on the side slope of a mountain.

Results of the records searches indicate that portions of the current Project area have been previously surveyed for cultural resources (Pacific Legacy 2007, 2010). As a result of these studies, one cultural resource has been recorded within the Project area. This resource, Van Tassel Motorway (P-19-186917; Vance 2001) has previously been evaluated and determined not eligible for listing on the CRHR and NRHP (Schmidt and Romani 2010). Additionally, one prehistoric site, CA-LAN-241, is located within a one-mile radius. This resource is situated approximately 100 feet south of the Project area and will be flagged for avoidance and not be impacted by the TRTP.

The Paleontological Resources Management Plan (PRMP) Segments 4 through 11 of the TRTP project area was prepared by Cogstone Resource Management Inc. (Gust and Scott 2009). No paleontological localities have been previously discovered in the project vicinity and the surface sediments (Quartz diorite and tertiary dikes) have very low sensitivity for paleontological resources.

No additional impacts to cultural or paleontological resources are anticipated with the implementation of this Variance.

**The conditions noted below shall be met by SCE and its contractors:**

- Based on the Cultural Resources review, the southern edge of the road prism in the vicinity of site CA-LAN-241 shall be flagged for avoidance prior to construction.
- SCE shall update the Cultural Resources survey report per Applied Earthworks' comments in their memorandum dated April 19, 2011.
- All conditions required by Notice to Proceed (NTP) #17 shall apply to the subject area and activities.
- Copies of all relevant permits, compliance plans, NTP #17, and this Variance shall be available on site for the duration of construction activities where applicable.

Sincerely,



John Boccio  
CPUC Environmental Project Manager

cc: V. Strong, Aspen