

**PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION**

505 VAN NESS AVENUE  
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94102-3298



**To:** State Clearinghouse, Responsible and Trustee Agencies, Property Owners, and Interested Parties

**From:** Lisa Orsaba, Environmental Project Manager

**Subject:** NOTICE OF PREPARATION OF AN ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT AND SCOPING MEETING: Pacific Gas & Electric Company's Santa Cruz 115-kV Reinforcement Project (A-12-01-012)

**Date:** January 17, 2014

**Introduction**

Pacific Gas & Electric Company (PG&E) filed an application A. 12-01-012 for a Permit to Construct (PTC), with the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) on January 25, 2012, for the proposed Santa Cruz 115-kV Reinforcement Project. The CPUC released a Draft Initial Study/ Mitigated Negative Declaration (IS/MND) pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for a 49-day public review period on October 18, 2013. After a review of comments received on the Draft IS/MND, the CPUC determined that an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) should be prepared in accordance with CEQA. The CPUC is serving as the lead agency for preparation of the EIR. This Notice of Preparation (NOP) is being sent to interested agencies and members of the public to inform the recipients that the CPUC is beginning preparation of the EIR. Comments from the public on the scope of the EIR are being requested.

The Draft IS/MND and other project documents are available for public review on the CPUC's project website:  
([http://www.cpuc.ca.gov/environment/info/panoramaenv/SantaCruz\\_115kVReinforcement/SantaCruz\\_115%20Reinforcement%20Project.html](http://www.cpuc.ca.gov/environment/info/panoramaenv/SantaCruz_115kVReinforcement/SantaCruz_115%20Reinforcement%20Project.html)).

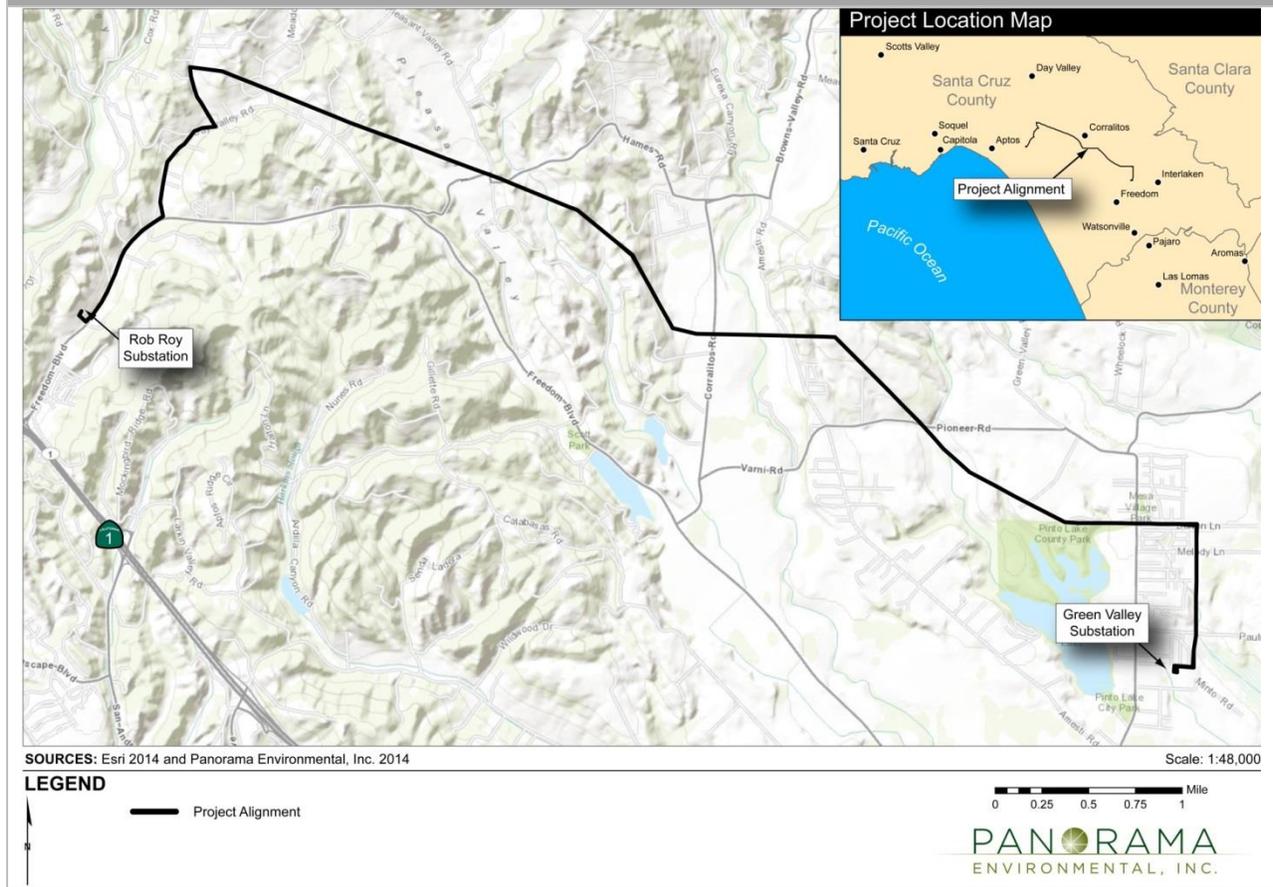
**Project Location**

The project is located in southern Santa Cruz County, California (Figure 1). The project corridor extends from near Watsonville to near Aptos. The project corridor travels through the communities of Amesti, Corralitos, Aptos Hills-Larkin Valley, and Day Valley.

**Project Purpose**

The proposed project would improve the reliability of the transmission system in the Santa Cruz area and thereby prevent potential large-scale service interruptions if there are outages in the existing local electricity supply system. The existing 115-kV system serving the Santa Cruz area was constructed and put into service in the 1970s. Since the system was built it has been upgraded once by adding voltage support equipment at an area substation in 1997. Rob Roy and Green Valley Substations and associated power lines have not been upgraded, though the population and demand in the service area has increased substantially since 1970. Current peak winter demand has reached 175 megawatts, which is almost 60 percent higher than the demand recorded in 1970. Additional information regarding the purpose and need of the project will be included in the EIR.

Figure 1: Project Alignment



## Project Description

The Santa Cruz 115-kV Reinforcement Project includes the following major elements. Additional details on the proposed project are provided in the Draft IS/MND.

- **Northern Alignment:** Converting an existing 7.1 miles of single-circuit, 115-kV power line into a double-circuit, 115-kV power line by:
  - Replacing existing wood transmission poles with an average height of 60 feet tall with new tubular steel poles (TSP) with an average height of 90 feet tall
  - Installing new conductor on both circuits
- **Cox-Freedom Segment:** Constructing a new, approximately 1.7-mile-long, single-circuit, 115-kV power line along an existing distribution alignment by:
  - Installing 4 new TSPs averaging 98 feet tall
  - Replacing existing distribution wood poles averaging 39 feet tall with new wood poles averaging 89 feet tall
- **Rob Roy Substation:** Modifying the Rob Roy Substation and existing power lines into the substation to accommodate the new circuit and install 1 new TSP and replace existing wood structures with 3 new TSPs with an average height of 84 feet tall within the substation area

**Potential Environmental Effects to be Addressed in the EIR**

The EIR will address impacts of the construction, operation, and maintenance of the proposed project, including impacts identified as being potentially significant prior to mitigation as well as impacts for which there were public comments on the Draft IS/MND that may warrant further discussion in the EIR. Table 1 provides a brief summary of potential impacts by resource area.

PG&E has proposed measures (termed “Applicant Proposed Measures”) that could reduce or eliminate potential impacts of the proposed project. The EIR will evaluate the effectiveness of these measures, and will develop mitigation measures to further reduce impacts where a potentially significant impact has been identified. The CPUC will establish and define mitigation measures to be adopted as a condition of project approval and will require implementation of a mitigation monitoring program should the CPUC approve the project.

The EIR will also address potential cumulative impacts of the proposed project on these resource areas, when considered in context with other past, present, or reasonably foreseeable future projects in the area.

**Table 1: Potential Environmental Impacts of the Proposed Project**

<i>Environmental Parameter</i>	<i>Potential Impact</i>
Aesthetics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Change in visual character of project area</li> </ul>
Agriculture and Forestry Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Temporary and permanent conversion of agricultural and forest land to non-agricultural and non-forest use</li> </ul>
Air Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emission of criteria pollutants</li> </ul>
Biological Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Injury and/or mortality to special status plants and animals</li> <li>• Tree removal</li> <li>• Habitat degradation</li> <li>• Nest failure</li> </ul>
Cultural Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Damage or destruction of known and unknown cultural and historic resources and paleontologic resources</li> </ul>
Geology and Soils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exposure of people to adverse effects due to seismicity or other ground instability</li> <li>• Soil erosion</li> </ul>
Greenhouse Gas Emissions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greenhouse gas emissions</li> </ul>
Hazards and Hazardous Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accidental release of hazardous materials</li> </ul>
Hydrology and Water Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alterations of runoff patterns</li> <li>• Degradation of surface water quality</li> </ul>
Land Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No impact</li> </ul>
Mineral Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No impact</li> </ul>
Noise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Noise generation</li> </ul>
Population and Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No impact</li> </ul>
Public Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased demand for fire and police services</li> </ul>
Recreation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in use of other recreational facilities</li> </ul>
Transportation and Traffic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traffic increases</li> <li>• Traffic and safety hazards</li> </ul>
Utilities and Service Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interruption of other services</li> </ul>

Resource areas anticipated to be addressed in the EIR include:

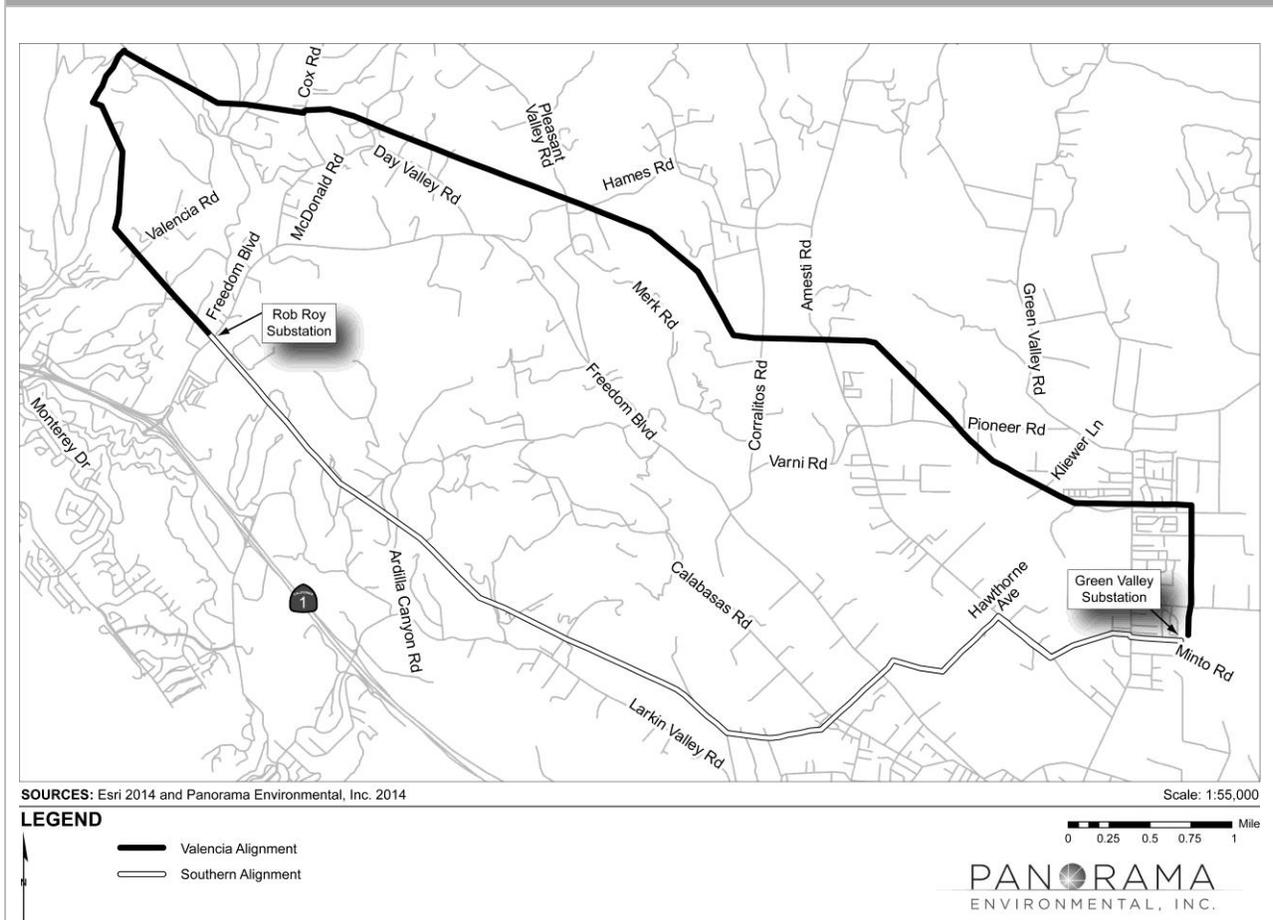
- Aesthetics
- Air Quality and Greenhouse Gases
- Biological Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Geology and Soils
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- Hydrology and Water Quality
- Noise
- Recreation
- Transportation and Traffic
- Utilities and Service Systems

**Alternatives**

The EIR will analyze a reasonable range of alternatives to the proposed project, including the No Project Alternative, in accordance with CEQA. Alternatives to the proposed project may include, but may not necessarily be limited to, those listed in Table 2. Table 2 also includes a brief overview of the potential impacts from each alternative. The Southern Alignment and the Valencia Alignment are shown in Figure 2. Public comments on alternatives are requested.

<b>Table 2: Potential Alternatives to be Discussed in the EIR</b>		
<b>Alternative</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Potential Environmental Impacts</b>
Underground portions of the Cox-Freedom Segment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Same as the proposed project, except underground portions of the Cox-Freedom Segment</li> <li>• Wider easements needed</li> <li>• Two 100-plus foot tall steel transition structures would be required at each end of the underground segments</li> <li>• Existing distribution lines would not be undergrounded</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trenching would result in road closures, dust, noise, limited emergency and local access, and greater area of ground disturbance than the proposed project</li> <li>• Impacts would last longer due to an extended construction period (five to ten times greater than that of an overhead line)</li> <li>• Additional property/right-of-way may need to be required for staging and permanent facility installation which may require tree, fence, and landscaping removal and would generate noise, dust, and traffic impacts</li> <li>• Repairs may require excavation and take weeks to months to complete and require similar traffic impacts as original installation</li> </ul>
Valencia Alignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rebuild Northern Alignment from Green Valley Substation to Day Valley</li> <li>• Construct new single circuit 115-kv line from Day Valley to the Southern Alignment</li> <li>• Rebuild Southern Alignment with two circuits to Rob Roy substation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater level of impacts overall than the proposed project due to longer length (10.5)</li> <li>• Greater loss of coastal oak woodland vegetation</li> <li>• Additional impacts to robust spineflower critical habitat</li> <li>• Similar visual impacts as proposed project</li> </ul>
Southern Alignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rebuild Southern Alignment from a single circuit to a double circuit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loss of coastal oak woodland vegetation due to the need for greater right-of-way and avoidance of a gas pipeline</li> <li>• High risk of take of Santa Cruz long-toed salamander due to higher quality habitat along this alignment (federal endangered species; state fully protected, endangered species)</li> </ul>

Figure 2: Southern Alignment and Valencia Alignment Potential Alternatives



### Scoping Meeting

The CPUC is holding a public meeting during the EIR scoping period in order for the public and regulatory agencies to become informed about and submit comments on the scope of the EIR. Comment forms will be supplied for those who wish to submit written comments at the scoping meeting. Commenters may also hand deliver prepared written comments at the scoping meeting. The scoping meeting will be held:

**Wednesday, January 29, 2014  
6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.  
Corralitos Grange Hall  
165 Little Corral Way  
Watsonville, California 95076**

### Scoping Comments

The CPUC is soliciting information regarding the environmental topics and project alternatives that the EIR should address. **All comments for the CPUC's CEQA scoping period must be received or, if by U.S. mail, postmarked by 5:00 p.m. on Tuesday, February 18, 2014.** Please include a name, address,

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and telephone number of a contact person for all future correspondence on this subject. You can submit comments in several ways: (1) U.S. mail, (2) e-mail, (3) fax, (4) making a verbal statement or handing in a written comment at the scoping meeting. Send comments on the scope and content of the EIR to:

**Ms. Lisa Orsaba**  
**Santa Cruz 115-kV Reinforcement Project**  
**c/o Panorama Environmental, Inc.**  
**One Embarcadero Center, Suite 740**  
**San Francisco, CA 94111**  
**Fax: (650) 373-1211**  
**E-mail: [santacruz115kvproject@panoramaenv.com](mailto:santacruz115kvproject@panoramaenv.com).**

### **Issuance of NOP**

The California Public Utilities Commission hereby issues this Notice of Preparation of an Environmental Impact Report.