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

From: Mr. Boris Sanchez, CPUC Project Manager

Subject: NOTICE OF PREPARATION OF AN ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT AND NOTICE OF PUBLIC SCOPING MEETING FOR THE NORTHERN SAN JOAQUIN 230 KV TRANSMISSION PROJECT

(CPCN Application No. A2309001)

Date: January 10, 2024

The Northern San Joaquin 230 Kilovolt (kV) Transmission Project (Project) is proposed by PG&E and Lodi Electric Utility (LEU) to address reliability and capacity issues identified by the California Independent System Operator (CAISO) on the existing PG&E 230 (kV and 60 kV systems in northern San Joaquin County, California. The Project would be partially constructed by PG&E, an investor-owned utility regulated by the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC), and partially constructed by LEU, a publicly owned utility operated by the City of Lodi and a member of the Northern California Power Agency.

PG&E filed an Application for Public Convenience and Necessity Authorizing the Construction of the Northern San Joaquin 230 kV Transmission Project on September 1, 2023 (CPCN Application No. A2309001). CPUC has reviewed and deemed the application complete. Pursuant to Rule 2.4 of CPUC's Rules of Practice and Procedure, the Application for Public Convenience and Necessity package also includes a Proponent's Environmental Assessment (PEA).

As lead agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the CPUC will prepare an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) to conduct an objective analysis of the effects of the proposed Project in compliance with CEQA. The CPUC will use the EIR, in conjunction with other information prepared for the CPUC's record of this proceeding, to act on PG&E's application.

In order to obtain early feedback on the environmental issues to be addressed in the EIR, the CPUC is initiating the scoping process with a scoping period from January 10 through February 9, 2024.

WHAT IS SCOPING?

As required by CEQA, scoping is the process of soliciting public and agency input regarding the scope and content of an EIR, in advance of its preparation. Accordingly, the CPUC is requesting comments to inform the actions, alternatives, mitigation measures, and environmental effects to be analyzed in the EIR. This notice includes a brief description of the Project, a brief summary of the anticipated potential impacts, information on public meetings, and how to provide input on the scope and content of the EIR. After the public scoping period has ended, a Scoping Report will be prepared to summarize the comments received. This NOP and the Scoping Report will be included as an appendix to the Draft EIR and will also be available on the CPUC's website for the Project with other Project documents and reports, including PG&E's application and PEA. CPUC's website can be accessed at the following link or with the QR code: https://ia.cpuc.ca.gov/environment/info/ascent/NSJTP/index.html

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Project would loop the existing overhead PG&E Brighton-Bellota 230 kV transmission line through an expanded PG&E Lockeford Substation and install a new overhead double-circuit 230 kV transmission line between PG&E Lockeford Substation and the proposed PG&E Thurman Switching Station at LEU's existing Industrial Substation. LEU would construct the LEU Guild Substation, a new 230/60 kV substation, between its LEU Industrial Substation and the new PG&E Thurman Switching Station. At the LEU Guild Substation, the new PG&E 230 kV transmission line would terminate, and LEU transformers would step down the power from 230 kV to 60 kV to connect with the LEU Industrial Substation.

The proposed Project would shift approximately 148 megawatts (MW) of load from the existing PG&E northern San Joaquin 60 kV system to a new PG&E 230 kV source. Moving the LEU load to the PG&E 230 kV source would address existing and projected voltage issues and thermal overloads on PG&E's 230/60 kV system, provide greater reliability to other existing PG&E customers within northern San Joaquin County, and accommodate forecasted demand growth. The normal Load Serving Capability of the Lockeford-Lodi system would increase from 194 MW to approximately 404 MW with the proposed 230 kV system upgrade under normal operating conditions.

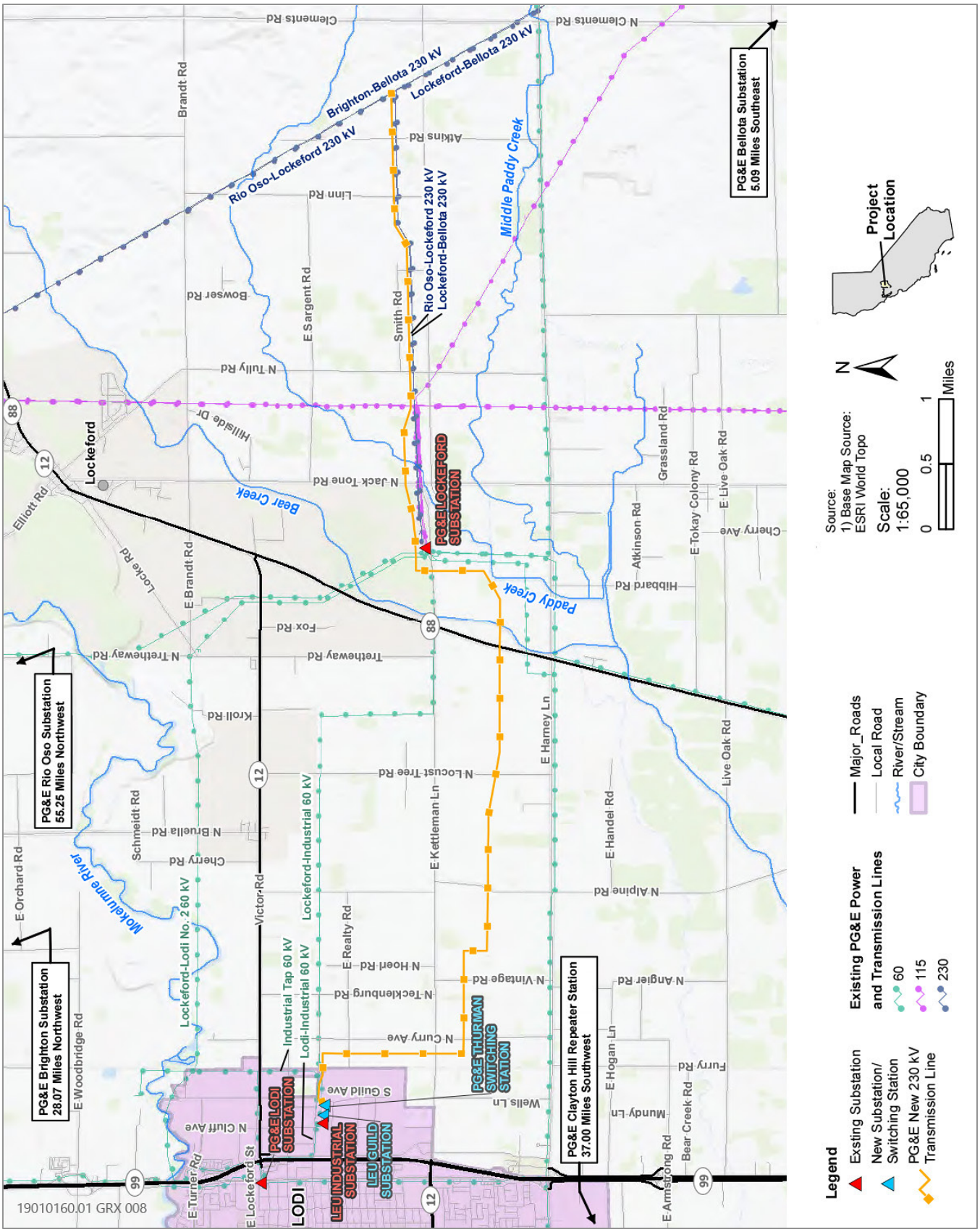
As part of this Project, PG&E would also update its system protection scheme at four remote-end substations (Bellota, Brighton, Lodi, and Rio Oso), which are located in Linden, Sacramento, Lodi, and Rio Oso, respectively. PG&E would also install two, 6-foot dish antennas on an existing microwave tower at the existing Clayton Hill Repeater Station (on a communication tower) in Contra Costa County to create a new digital microwave path allowing redundant communication into the PG&E Thurman Switching Station in support of PG&E's system protection scheme.

Applicant Proposed Measures and Best Management Practices

The proposed PG&E facilities, combined with the new LEU Guild Substation and modified Industrial Substation, constitute the Project being evaluated under CEQA. PG&E has developed applicant proposed measures (APMs) that are incorporated into PG&E's components of the Project. These measures are considered binding descriptions of Project design and implementation that are integral to the Project. Similarly, LEU has developed best management practices (BMPs) that would apply to the LEU components of the Project. Because PG&E and LEU have committed to implementing their respective APMs and BMPs, the EIR will evaluate these measures as part of the proposed Project.

LOCATION

The proposed Project is primarily located within unincorporated areas of northeastern San Joaquin County and partially within an industrial area of the City of Lodi. The Project would include construction, modification, and operation of electrical infrastructure (including power lines, transmission lines, a switching station, and substations) from an existing PG&E 230 kV transmission corridor that traverses roughly northwest-southeast of Atkins Road in unincorporated San Joaquin County to an existing substation in eastern Lodi, approximately 9 miles to the west (see Figure 1). Other improvements to update PG&E's system protection scheme would occur within existing facilities located in Linden, Sacramento, Lodi, Rio Oso, and in Contra Costa County.



Source: PG&E 2023.

Figure 1 Project Location Overview

PROBABLE ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS OF THE PROJECT

The evaluation in the PEA prepared by PG&E and LEU does not identify any significant impacts from Project construction or operation. The EIR will independently and objectively evaluate the potential environmental effects of the Project and the need for mitigation. The following issues identified in CEQA Guidelines Appendix G will be addressed: aesthetics, agriculture resources, air quality, biological resources, cultural resources, energy, geology and soils (including paleontology), greenhouse gas emissions, hazards and hazardous materials, hydrology and water quality, land use and planning, mineral resources, noise, population and housing, public services and recreation, transportation, tribal cultural resources, utilities and service systems, and wildfire.

Non-environmental issues such as economic impacts and assessment of Project need are outside the scope of CEQA and will not be addressed in the EIR, although these issues may be addressed through the CPUC's concurrent proceeding for the Project. The EIR will also not consider electric and magnetic fields (EMFs) that would be generated by the Project in the context of the CEQA analysis of potential environmental impacts because there is no agreement among scientists that EMFs create a potential health risk and there are no standards for defining health risk from EMFs.

As anticipated by CPUC, the probable environmental effects of the proposed Project for each resource area that will be addressed in the EIR are summarized below.

- Aesthetics: The Project area is predominantly agricultural in nature and includes residential parcels, particularly within the City of Lodi. The alignment would cross roadways designated as scenic routes by San Joaquin County (North Jack Tone Road and SR 12, which is a designated scenic highway approximately 4 miles north of the Project alignment). The EIR will evaluate the potential for substantial adverse impacts to the existing visual character or quality of public views and the effects of new sources of light and glare.
- Agriculture resources: Portions of the new PG&E 230 kV transmission line (approximately 57 new tubular steel poles) and existing PG&E 60 kV lines are located on designated agricultural land. The PG&E Lockeford Substation expansion is proposed on PG&E property that is categorized as Prime Farmland and Farmland of Statewide Importance. The effect of converting agricultural land for utility infrastructure will be evaluated in the EIR.
- Air quality: The EIR will evaluate the potential for the Project to conflict with or obstruct implementation of an applicable air quality plan, result in a cumulatively considerable net increase of any criteria pollutant for which the region is non-attainment under an applicable federal or state ambient air quality standard, expose sensitive receptors to substantial pollutant concentrations, or result in other emissions (such as those leading to odors) adversely affecting a substantial number of people.
- Biological resources: The Project area has been previously disturbed by development, landscaping, and agriculture. The potential presence of sensitive vegetation communities and habitats identified in local plans, policies, or regulations, or as designated by CDFW or USFWS, including wetlands and riparian habitat, will be assessed and potential effects will be evaluated in the EIR. The EIR will also evaluate the Project's potential for effects on special-status and migratory species, conflicts with local regulations that protect biological resources, and the potential to create a substantial collision or electrocution risk for birds and bats.
- Cultural resources: Project activities could involve ground disturbance to a depth of up to approximately 30 feet. Buried precontact resources potentially exist in portions of the Project area, based on the close proximity to freshwater and the relatively recent age of the sediments. Historic-era resources may occur near historic railroad alignments and homesteads. Potential for an adverse change in the significance of cultural resources will be evaluated in the EIR.
- Energy: The EIR will evaluate the potential for the Project to result in a significant environmental impact due to wasteful, inefficient, or unnecessary consumption of energy resources during Project construction or operation.
- Geology and soils: No known active faults are located within approximately 10 miles of the Project, and the Project site is not within a known area of liquefaction hazard. The EIR will evaluate the potential for the Project to result in substantial soil erosion; or landslide, lateral spreading, subsidence, liquefaction, or collapse. Potential effects on paleontological resources will also be evaluated.

- Greenhouse gas emissions: The EIR will evaluate the potential for the Project to generate greenhouse gas emissions, either directly or indirectly, that may have a significant impact on the environment, based on a quantified analysis of emissions associated with construction and operation.
- Hazards and hazardous materials: The EIR will evaluate whether the Project components would be located on a site that is included on a list of hazardous materials sites compiled pursuant to Government Code Section 65962.5. The EIR will evaluate the potential for the Project to create a significant hazard to the public or the environment through the routine transport, use, or disposal of hazardous materials; or a reasonably foreseeable accident.
- Hydrology and water quality: The Project traverses the Lower Mokelumne River, Middle River-San Joaquin River, and Bear Creek watersheds and is within 3 miles of the Calaveras River and Fivemile Creek-San Joaquin River watersheds. The Project is entirely within the Eastern San Joaquin Groundwater Subbasin of the San Joaquin Groundwater Basin. The EIR will evaluate the potential for the Project to substantially degrade surface or groundwater quality, impede sustainable groundwater management, alter existing drainage patterns, or risk release of pollutants due to flooding.
- Land use and planning: Project components proposed by PG&E would not be subject to local discretionary land use or planning regulations. However, LEU's portion of the project would be subject to local regulation. The EIR will evaluate the potential effects of the Project related to any conflicts with the existing San Joaquin County General Plan, Lodi General Plan, San Joaquin County Multi-Species Habitat Conservation and Open Space Plan, and other applicable land use plans, policies, and regulations.
- Mineral resources: The EIR will address the potential for the Project to result in the loss of availability of a known mineral resource based on location on or near mining claims, active mines, resources recovery sites, or mapped mineral resource zones.
- Noise: The EIR will evaluate whether the Project would result in exposure of persons to, or generation of, noise levels in excess of standards established in the local general plan or noise ordinance, or applicable standards of other agencies and the potential for construction to generate excessive groundborne vibration.
- Population and housing: The Project does not propose new housing, businesses, or other land use changes, including roads or infrastructure, that would induce population growth in the area. Construction and operation of the proposed Project would not displace any people or housing.
- Public services and recreation: The Project would not involve developing new residential units or services that would generate a new daytime or residential population in the area that would increase the demand for public services.
- Transportation: The EIR will evaluate the potential for the Project to conflict with any program, plan, ordinance, or policy addressing the circulation system, including transit, roadway, bicycle, and pedestrian facilities; create potentially hazardous conditions for people walking, bicycling, or driving or for public transit operations; generate vehicle miles traveled; and result in inadequate emergency access.
- Tribal cultural resources: The Project's potential effects on tribal cultural resources will be evaluated by the CPUC during tribal consultation conducted pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 21080.3.
- Utilities and service systems: The Project would require water for construction (dust suppression) and operation (insulator washing). There would not be increased demand related to wastewater generation, power, natural gas, or telecommunications as a result of the Project. The EIR will evaluate the potential for the Project to result in new or expanded utility facilities that are not identified as part of the Project, which could cause additional environmental effects.
- Wildfire: The PG&E and LEU project components within the main portion of the project, and at the four PG&E remote-end substations (Brighton, Bellota, Lodi, and Rio Oso), are not located in or near state responsibility areas and, therefore, are not located on land classified by fire hazard severity zone. PG&E Clayton Hill Repeater Station is located within a state responsibility area that is classified as a high fire hazard severity zone. The CPUC 2021 High Fire-Threat Map designates fire-threat areas that require enhanced fire safety. Other than PG&E Clayton Hill Repeater Station within Tier 2 – Elevated, the project components are located outside of mapped fire hazard zones on the CPUC's High Fire-Threat Map. The EIR will evaluate the potential for the Project to exacerbate wildfire hazard or expose people to wildfire related hazards (i.e., pollutants, flooding, landslides).

SCOPING PERIOD

Information to be included in the EIR will be based in part on comments received during the scoping period. Responsible and trustee agencies under CEQA, other interested agencies and organizations, property owners, and members of the public will also have an opportunity to comment on the Draft EIR once it is issued. Pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15103, the scoping period will be for 30 days following the release of this NOP. Accordingly, the scoping period for this Project begins on January 10, 2024, and closes at 5:00 p.m. on February 9, 2024. Please include the name, organization (if applicable), mailing address, and e-mail address of the contact person for all future notifications related to this process. Public comments will become part of the public record and will be published in a publicly available Scoping Report.

Please send your comments by mail to:

Boris Sanchez, CPUC
c/o Ascent, Attn: Heather Blair
455 Capitol Mall, Suite 300
Sacramento, CA 95814
via electronic mail: NSJTP@ascent.inc

SCOPING MEETINGS

To provide information about the proposed Project and CEQA process, the CPUC will hold virtual meetings on January 30, 2024. For assistance or questions about the virtual meeting contact NSJTP@ascent.inc or Boris Sanchez at (408) 705-6030.

Two Zoom meetings will be held Tuesday, January 30, 2024

Virtual Meeting No. 1	Virtual Meeting No. 2
Tuesday, January 30, 2024	Tuesday, January 30, 2024
2:30 p.m.	6:30 p.m.
Attend via Zoom: https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZwkd-ugqD4uGN18zV99Gw7DvGxRlll6AGT1	Attend via Zoom: https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZclfuigqz0sHdQhAs-R-I_VroGbSu6OOrIT
Attend via phone: 1-669-900-6833 Meeting ID: 889 0286 5429	Attend via phone: 1-669-444-9171 Meeting ID: 838 9185 6670