

PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

505 VAN NESS AVENUE
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94102-3298



October 10, 2012

Ms. Suzan Benz
Environmental Project Manager
Devers-Palo Verde No. 2 Transmission Project
6 Point Drive, 1st Floor
Brea, CA 92821-6320

RE: SCE Devers-Palo Verde No. 2 Transmission Line Project – Variance Request #46

Dear Ms. Benz,

On September 20, 2012, Southern California Edison (SCE) submitted a variance request to the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) for use of existing access roads adjacent to Towers 1108 and 1112 to support flying suspended loads for the construction of several permanent helicopter construction and maintenance platforms located on the north side of the existing DPV1 conductor for transmission line construction needs along the Devers-Valley segment of the Devers-Palo Verde No. 2 (DPV2) Transmission Project.

The CPUC voted on January 25, 2007 to approve the SCE DPV2 Transmission Line Project ([Decision D.07-01-040](#)). On May 14, 2008, SCE filed a Petition for Modification (PFM) of the existing Certificate for Public Convenience and Necessity (CPCN) approved per Decision D.07-01-040. SCE requested that the CPUC authorize SCE to construct DPV2 facilities in only the California portion of DPV2 and the Midpoint Substation (now called the Colorado River Substation) near Blythe, California. The CPUC approved SCE's PFM on November 20, 2009 in [Decision D.09-11-007](#).

After the CPUC's 2009 Decision regarding the PFM, several large solar power projects were proposed in the Blythe and Desert Center areas. SCE filed Permit to Construct applications addressing expansion of the Colorado River Substation and construction of a new Red Bluff Substation. These components were not covered in the original DPV2 Final EIR/EIS, because the solar power projects had not yet been proposed, and supplemental environmental review has been conducted. The Colorado River Substation Expansion and the Red Bluff Substation were both approved by the CPUC on July 14, 2011 in Decisions D.11-07-011 and D.11-07-020, respectively.

The BLM issued a Record of Decision approving the Project on July 19, 2011 and approved exclusionary fencing activities on August 23, 2011. The Project also crosses lands under jurisdiction of the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service on the San Bernardino National Forest within an existing Forest Service-issued easement. The Forest Service will issue a revised easement signed by the Forest Supervisor. The area requested under this variance does not fall under Forest Service jurisdiction.

The CPUC also adopted a Mitigation, Monitoring, Compliance and Reporting Program (MMCRP) to ensure compliance with all mitigation measures imposed on the DPV2 Project during implementation. The MMCRP also acknowledges that minor project refinements as a result of final engineering are anticipated and common practice for construction efforts of this scale and that a Variance Request would be required for these activities. This letter documents the CPUC's thorough evaluation of all activities covered in this variance. The CPUC has concluded that the activities under this variance are located within the geographic boundary of the study area of the Final EIR/EIS and Supplemental EIR, and

do not, without mitigation, result in a new significant impact or a substantial increase in the severity of a previously identified significant impact based on the criteria used in the environmental documents; conflict with any mitigation measure or applicable law or policy; or trigger an additional permit requirement.

Variance #46, which approves the subject use of existing roads adjacent to Towers 1108 and 1112, is granted by CPUC for the proposed activities based on the factors described below.

SCE Variance Request. SCE has requested a variance under NTP #10 along the Devers-Valley segment for use of existing access roads adjacent to Towers 1108 and 1112 to support flying suspended loads. Excerpts from the SCE Variance Request, received on September 20, 2012 are presented below (indented):

Reason for Variance. Towers 1112 and 1108 are served by helicopter landing zone H9-DV located in the middle of an agricultural field south of Gilman Springs Road. By having the ability to perform helicopter picking operations from the back of a flat-bed truck at the two locations on NTP approved access roads identified on the attached maps, the contractor will be able to move forward with ground testing activities for micropile foundation drilling analysis and other activities supporting construction for 1112 and 1108 without the need for stopping traffic along Gilman Springs Road.

Action Requested. Southern California Edison (SCE) requests a variance from the Devers to Valley Transmission Line identified in NTP # 10 for use of existing NTP approved access roads (figures attached *[to SCE's NTPR]*) adjacent to towers 1112 and 1108 for helicopter picking operations in order to deliver equipment and materials. Picking operations would involve the transportation of all equipment and materials via a towed trailer or flatbed truck to towers 1112 and 1108.

Note that the lifting device for the operation included in this variance request can be safely attached to the helicopter once it has arrived at the lifting site and while it is hovering, thus eliminating the need for it to fly with a suspended load from another site.

This operation will be conducted with the utmost regard for safety. Once the trailer has moved to the access road locations identified, the engine will be turned off, the wheels chocked, and the load will be readied for the pick. A cordon will then be marked which will cordon off access to the trailer for any persons. Absolutely no one will be permitted on the trailer once the crew has been notified that the aircraft is inbound. Personnel will be placed so that incidental traffic will not enter into the area. Finally, one person shall be designated to be in constant communication with the aircraft and will not take part in any other details once the aircraft is on station. No additional disturbance areas would be required for these operations to occur.

CPUC Evaluation of Variance Request

In accordance with the MMCRP, the subject variance request was reviewed by CPUC to confirm that no new impacts or increase in impact severity would result from the requested variance activities. The following discussion summarizes this analysis for air quality, biological resources, cultural resources, paleontological resources, noise/sensitive receptors, and other issue areas. A list of mitigation compliance conditions is presented below to define additional information and clarifications regarding mitigation requirements.

Biological Resources. The NTP approved access roads proposed for helicopter picking operations are existing and would be located within the previously-surveyed buffers associated with Towers 1108 and 1112. No vegetation, special-status species habitats, or jurisdictional waters were observed within the access roads for these towers. The areas of the proposed variance fall within previously surveyed areas and completely overlap areas approved for Project use and are currently being used for construction. Changes to use of the access roads to Towers 1108 and 1112 did not require additional biological resource surveys to be conducted. Based on field verification and review of the biological resources surveys, no issues related to biological resources are anticipated as a result of this variance.

Cultural Resources. The Final Historic Properties Management Plan (HPMP) for the Devers-Palo Verde No. 2 Project was accepted on October 20, 2011. Two cultural resources (P-33-017578; historical homestead site and 33-004715; historical stage coach road) were identified within the existing road proposed for a helicopter picking location for Tower 1112. Management measures listed in the Final HPMP consist of “No grading signs and monitor avoidance.” While road improvements are not required for this variance request, it is still recommended that “No Grading” signs be posted along the segment of the access road that intersects with the two above-mentioned sites. There is no potential to encounter cultural resources at the identified access road to Tower 1108. Therefore, no NTP conditions are recommended for helicopter picking near Tower 1108.

Paleontological Resources. Based on the Paleontological Monitoring and Treatment Plan, submitted to the CPUC on April 20, 2011, the potential to encounter paleontological resources within the existing road near Tower 1108 and Tower 1112 is high. However, all vehicles and trailers will remain on existing roads and no ground disturbing activities will take place within the identified areas. Therefore, there are no specific paleontological resources conditions applicable to this variance.

Noise/Sensitive Receptors. There are no sensitive receptors in the vicinity of the existing access roads proposed for helicopter picking operations. Use of the existing roads would have similar noise-generating activities to those that will occur along the existing access and at the tower sites. Construction activities, including noise associated with helicopter usage, was addressed in the DPV2 Final EIR/EIS. Appropriate noise and land use mitigation measures would apply. Any additional helicopter usage beyond this variance will be limited to the extent feasible in accordance with Mitigation Measure AQ-1g (see also the discussion under Air Quality). The overall scope and duration of construction activities has not changed as a result of the variance.

Air Quality. The necessity for picking from the north side of the DPV2 line (helicopter picking at Towers 1108 and 1112) is solely for the installation of the permanent landing platforms to be installed on the north side of the DPV2 line. Once these platforms are in place, SCE has stated that there would not be further picks from this location. Due to the assumed height of the helicopter hovering during line attach/detach, the helicopter will likely produce downwash similar to a landing/takeoff from the location, which would produce dust. Existing air quality mitigation would be implemented and the overall scope and duration of construction activities has not changed as a result of the variance. There are no additional air quality concerns associated with this variance.

Other Issue Areas. No concerns noted under this variance.

Mitigation Compliance Conditions of Variance Approval.

The mitigation compliance conditions presented below shall be met by SCE and its contractors:

1. All applicable project mitigation measures, APMs, conditions of the Biological Opinion, compliance plans, permit conditions and NTP conditions shall be implemented. Some measures have on-going/time-sensitive requirements and shall be implemented prior to and during construction where applicable.
2. Copies of all relevant permits, compliance plans, and this Variance approval shall be available on site for the duration of construction activities.
3. Prior to use, SCE shall stake the limits of the approved access roads for helicopter picking to prevent off-road impacts, and vehicles and equipment must stay within the existing road width.
4. SCE shall provide updated maps showing the existing roads for helicopter picking to the CPUC EMs and all monitors in the field prior to use.

5. SCE shall post "No Grading" signs along the segment of the access road that intersects with the two cultural resources sites within the existing road proposed for Tower 1112.
6. The CPUC EM shall be notified immediately of any unanticipated cultural, paleontological, or biological resource discoveries.
7. All crew members shall be Safe Worker and Environmental Awareness Program (SWEAP) trained prior to working on the project. A log shall be maintained on-site with the names of all crew personnel trained. For any crew members with limited English, a translator shall be on-site to ensure understanding of the training program. In place of a translator, the SWEAP training brochure can be provided in Spanish or other languages as appropriate. All participants will receive a hard-hat sticker for ease of compliance verification.

Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Billie Blanchard

Billie Blanchard
CPUC Environmental Project Manager
DPV2 Transmission Project

cc: Kelly Pell, Southern California Edison
Patty Nevins, Southern California Edison
Sylvia Granados, Southern California Edison
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