

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 BACKGROUND

On December 12, 2007, the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC), as the lead agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), prepared and distributed for public review the Draft Environmental Impact Report (Draft EIR) for Southern California Edison Company's (SCE) proposed El Casco System Project (Proposed Project). If approved, the Proposed Project would provide relief to the Vista and Devers Systems through the transfer of load from the Banning, Maraschino, Mentone, Crafton Hills, and Zanja Substations to the newly created El Casco System. In addition, the Proposed Project would allow load transfers between the Devers, Vista, and the new El Casco Systems under both normal and abnormal conditions. Together, these functions would serve to ensure that reliable, safe electric service is available to meet customer electrical demand without overloading the existing electrical facilities that serve northern Riverside County. The proposed El Casco System Project would include the following major components:

- Construct a new 220/115/12 kV substation within the Norton Younglove Reserve in the County of Riverside (El Casco Substation), associated 220 kV and 115 kV interconnections, and new 12 kV line getaways.
- Replace approximately 13 miles of existing single-circuit 115 kV subtransmission lines with new, higher capacity double-circuit 115 kV subtransmission lines and replace support structures within existing SCE ROWs in the Cities of Banning and Beaumont and unincorporated areas of Riverside County.
- Replace approximately 1.9 miles of existing single-circuit 115 kV subtransmission lines with new, higher capacity single-circuit 115 kV subtransmission lines and replace support structures within existing SCE ROWs in the City of Beaumont and unincorporated Riverside County.
- Replace approximately 0.5 mile of existing single-circuit 115 kV subtransmission lines with new, higher capacity single-circuit 115 kV subtransmission lines on existing support structures within existing SCE ROWs in the City of Beaumont and unincorporated Riverside County.
- Rebuild 115 kV switchracks within Banning and Zanja Substations in the Cities of Banning and Yucaipa, respectively.
- Install telecommunications equipment at the proposed El Casco Substation and at SCE's existing Mill Creek Communications site.
- Install fiber optic cables within public streets and on existing SCE structures between the Cities of Redlands and Banning.

## 1.2 FINAL EIR DOCUMENT ORGANIZATION

Before approving a project, CEQA requires the Lead Agency to prepare and certify a Final Environmental Impact Report (Final EIR). Pursuant to Section 15132 of the CEQA Guidelines, the El Casco System Project Final EIR consists of the following sections:

- **Section 1, Introduction:** Provides a brief overview of the Proposed Project, the organization of the Final EIR document, the purpose of responses to comments, and the CPUC's decision-making process.
- **Section 2, Summary of Public Review Process:** A summary of the environmental and public review process pursuant to CEQA.

- **Section 3, Draft EIR Comments and Responses:** A list of persons, organizations, and public agencies commenting on the Draft EIR; comments and recommendations received on the Draft EIR; and responses to the comments and recommendations raised during the Draft EIR public review process.
- **Section 4, Revisions to the Draft EIR:** Provides the text revisions to the Draft EIR.

### 1.3 PURPOSE OF THE RESPONSE TO COMMENTS DOCUMENT

This document, together with the El Casco System Project Draft EIR (December, 2007), comprises the El Casco System Project Final EIR as defined by CEQA Section 15132. The Final EIR has been prepared pursuant to CEQA Section 21000 et seq., California Public Resources Code, and in accordance with the Guidelines for the Implementation of CEQA Section 15000 et seq., California Code of Regulations, Tit. 14. The Final EIR will be used by the CPUC as part of its approval process for SCE's Application for a Permit to Construct (PTC) the El Casco System Project, which includes selecting project alternatives, adopting mitigation measures, and reviewing project costs.

Section 3 of the Final EIR contains all comments received on the Draft EIR and the responses to those comments. As specified by Section 15088(c) of the State CEQA Guidelines, the focus of the responses to comments is on the disposition of significant environmental issues as raised in the comments. Detailed responses are not provided to comments on the merits of the Proposed Project. When a comment is not directed to significant environmental issues, the response indicates that the comment has been noted.

### 1.4 DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

Pursuant to Article XII of the Constitution of the State of California, the CPUC oversees the regulation of investor-owned public utilities, including SCE. The CPUC is the lead State agency ensuring compliance of the El Casco System Project with CEQA regulations. This Final EIR will be used by the CPUC, in conjunction with other information developed in the CPUC's formal record, to act on SCE's application for a PTC. Under CEQA requirements, the CPUC will determine the adequacy of this Final EIR and, if adequate, will certify the document as complying with CEQA.

It should be noted that environmental impacts identified for a project may not always be mitigated to a less-than-significant level. When this occurs, impacts are considered significant and unavoidable impacts. If a public agency approves a project that has significant unavoidable impacts, the agency shall state in writing the specific reasons for approving the project, based on the Final EIR and any other information in the public record for the project. This is termed a "statement of overriding considerations" and is used to explain the specific reasons why the benefits of a proposed project make its significant unavoidable impacts acceptable. The statement is prepared, if required, after the Final EIR has been completed but before action to approve the project has been taken. The statement of overriding considerations and the CEQA required Findings of Fact (per CEQA Guidelines Section 15091) would be included in the CPUC's Proposed Decision on the El Casco System Project.