

PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

505 VAN NESS AVENUE
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94102-3298

**NOTICE OF PREPARATION**

Supplemental Environmental Impact Report
for the
Proposed Los Banos-Gates 500 kV Transmission Project
by **Pacific Gas and Electric Company**
Application No. 01-04-012

A. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E Co.) has filed an application with the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) for a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity (CPCN) for the proposed Los Banos-Gates 500 kV Transmission Project. According to PG&E Co., the Proposed Project is needed to decrease congestion on the electric transmission route known as "Path 15"¹, to improve system reliability by reducing or eliminating the need for load interruptions in Northern California due to constraints on Path 15, to reduce overall energy supply costs to consumers in the Independent System Operator (ISO) grid, primarily in Northern California, and to unify the California energy market by allowing increased power transfers between Northern and Southern California.

The major elements of PG&E Co.'s Proposed Project include:

- Construction of approximately 84 miles of 500 kV overhead transmission line between the Los Banos Substation and the Gates Substation;
- Realignment of the existing Los Banos-Midway No. 2 500 kV transmission line into Gates Substation;
- Modifications to Los Banos and Gates Substations to accommodate the new transmission line and realignment; and
- Upgrading portions of the Gates-Arco-Midway 230 kV transmission line.

According to PG&E Co., the Proposed Project would be built and operational by 2004.

B. Project Location

The Project would be located in the western portion of the San Joaquin Valley, as illustrated in the attached map (Figure 1). The Los Banos Substation, the northern terminus, is approximately 10 miles west of the City of Los Banos, just south of Highway 152 near San Luis Reservoir in western Merced County. The Gates Substation, the southern terminus of the new 84-mile transmission line, is approximately 5 miles southwest of Huron, in southern Fresno County. Upgrades to the existing Gates-Arco-Midway 230 kV transmission line are within Kings County. The Project area is mostly grassland and generally parallels the foothills of the Coast Range, Interstate 5, and two existing 500 kV lines

¹ Path 15 is a series of high-capacity transmission lines that connect Northern and Southern California. These transmission lines also link the Pacific Northwest and Oregon to Southern California.

known as the Pacific Intertie. The straight-line distance between Los Banos and Gates Substations is approximately 80 miles.

C. PREVIOUS EIR/EIS AND POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

An Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS) was prepared for this project and certified in 1988. However, the project was not constructed at that time because its need could not then be justified. A number of potentially significant environmental effects were identified in the 1988 environmental document:

- Loss of productive agricultural land;
- Impacts on irrigation practices;
- Impacts on aerial applications; and
- Impacts on scenic quality.

The 1988 environmental document also identified significant environmental effects that could be reduced to less than significant levels by implementation of mitigation measures. In accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the CPUC now intends to prepare a Supplemental EIR (SEIR) to evaluate potential environmental effects and to propose measures to mitigate any significant effects identified. The SEIR will evaluate alternatives to the Proposed Project, as defined in the 1988 EIR/EIS, and new alternatives that may be suggested during the scoping process.

Due to the age of the initial EIR/EIS, certain information needs to be updated in order to evaluate whether the impacts identified in the original document are still relevant in the current environment, or whether new impacts might result from this project if implemented now. No determinations have yet been made as to the significance of the impacts previously identified; such determinations will be made in the SEIR after all environmental issues are considered thoroughly in the context of today's environmental setting. The SEIR will present an updated assessment of the No Project Alternative, the impacts previously identified, and the cumulative impacts of the project in combination with other present and planned projects in the area.

Mitigation Measures. The 1988 EIR/EIS includes proposed mitigation measures that could reduce or eliminate potential impacts of the project. The effectiveness of these measures will be evaluated in the SEIR, and additional mitigation measures will be developed to further reduce impacts, if required. When the CPUC makes its final decision on the project, it will define the mitigation measures to be adopted as a condition of project approval.

D. PUBLIC SCOPING MEETINGS

The CPUC will conduct public Scoping Meetings in the project area to present information about the Proposed Project and the CPUC's decision-making process, and to listen to the views of the public on the range of issues relevant to the preparation of the SEIR. Dates and locations of the scoping meetings are on page 3.

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PG&E Los Banos-Gates 500 kV Transmission Project (Path 15)

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PUBLIC SCOPING MEETINGS

Date	Tuesday, July 24, 2001	
Time	1:30 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.	7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.
Location	Los Banos City Council Chambers 520 J Street Los Banos, CA 93635	Harris Ranch Inn & Restaurant North Ballroom On State Hwy 198, just east of Interstate 5 (northeast of Coalinga)
Directions	From the north: From I-5, take CA-152 East/CA-33 South exit towards Los Banos. Merge onto CA-152 East and follow into City of Los Banos. Turn Left onto 6 th Street, then left on J Street. From the south: From I-5, take the SR-265 exit towards Los Banos. Turn right on SR-165 (South Mercy Springs Road) and follow it to SR-33. Turn left on SR 33 and continue to City of Los Banos. Bear right onto J Street and continue to City Council Chambers.	From I-5 (north or south), exit at Highway 198 and turn east. The Harris Ranch Inn and Restaurant complex is just east of the I-5 and south of Highway 198. The North Ballroom is in the same building as the Harris Ranch Restaurant. Harris Ranch is about 67 miles south of Los Banos.

Please check the project hotline and website (see telephone number and address below) for updated information regarding the meetings.

E. SCOPING COMMENTS

All comments must be received by August 9, 2001. You may submit comments in a variety of ways: (1) by U.S. mail, (2) by electronic mail, (3) by fax, or (4) by attending a Public Scoping Meeting (see times and locations in Section D above) and making a statement or handing in a written comment at a meeting.

By Mail: If you send comments by U.S. Mail, please use first-class mail and be sure to include your name and a return address. Please send written comments on the scope of the EIR to:

Billie Blanchard
California Public Utilities Commission
c/o Aspen Environmental Group
235 Montgomery Street, Suite 800
San Francisco, CA 94104

By Electronic Mail: E-mail communications are welcome; however, please remember to include your name and return address in the e-mail message. E-mail messages should be sent to:

Path15@AspenEG.com.

By Fax: You may fax your comment letter to our information line at **(559) 272-2107**. Please remember to include your name and return address in the fax.

A **Scoping Report** will be prepared, summarizing all comments received (including oral comments made at the Scoping Meetings). This report will be posted on the project website, and copies will be placed in local libraries.

F. FOR ADDITIONAL PROJECT INFORMATION

Internet Website: Information about this application and the environmental review process will be posted on the Internet at:

<http://www.cpuc.ca.gov/Environment/info/aspn/path15/path15.html>.

This site will include the complete SEIR, when available.

Project Information Hotline. You may also request project information by leaving a voice message or sending a fax to the following number: **(559) 272-2107**.

Document Repositories. All environmental documents and notices issued by the CPUC will be available for public review at the following locations:

Coalinga District Library 305 North Fourth Street Coalinga, CA (559) 935-1676	Huron Public Library 26050 "O" Street Huron, CA (559) 945-2284	Hanford Public Library 401 N. Douty Street Hanford, CA (559) 582-0261
Los Banos Public Library 1312 Seventh Street Los Banos, CA (209) 826-5254	Fresno Free Library 2420 Mariposa Street Fresno, CA (559) 488-3195	CPUC Central Files 505 Van Ness Avenue San Francisco, CA (415) 703-2045

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



Natalie Walsh, Manager
Analysis Branch
Energy Division
California Public Utilities Commission

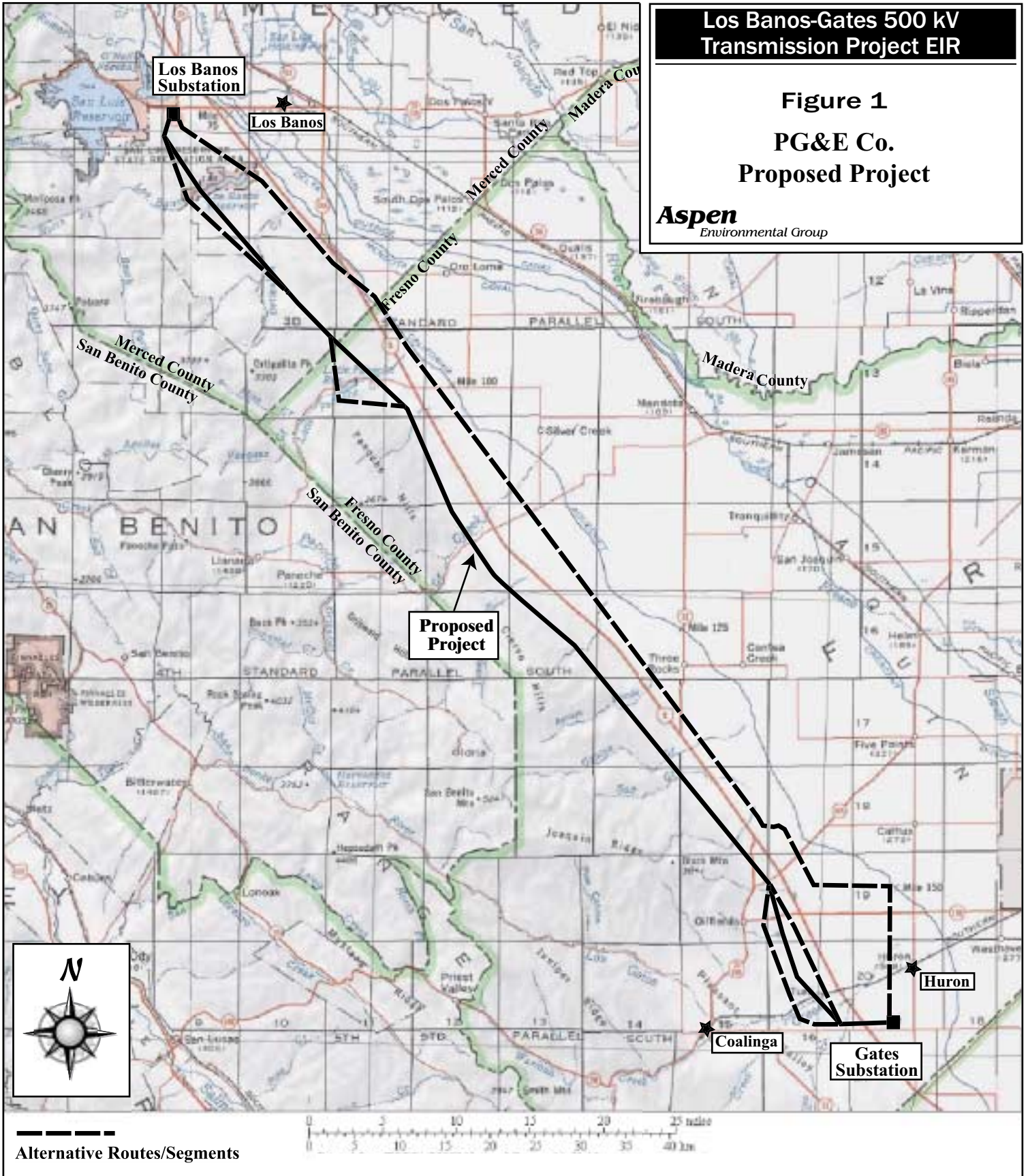
July 9, 2001

Date

**Los Banos-Gates 500 kV
Transmission Project EIR**

**Figure 1
PG&E Co.
Proposed Project**

Aspen
Environmental Group



Alternative Routes/Segments