

C.12 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF THE NO PROJECT ALTERNATIVE

As described in Section B.8, it is reasonably foreseeable that if the Proposed Project is not constructed, two other actions might be pursued by PG&E or some other entity. The impacts of each are addressed below. The third possibility for the No Project Alternative is that no action at all could occur. No environmental impacts would result, so this possibility is not addressed further below.

C.12.1 NEW GENERATION NORTH OF PATH 15

The construction of new generation capacity north of Path 15 would reduce the south-north transmission capacity limitation. The only transmission limitations to consider when constructing power plants are the ability of existing 230 kV or 115 kV systems to distribute generated power throughout Northern California.

The California Energy Commission (CEC) is responsible for reviewing new power plant applications (for thermal power plants over 50 MW). The CEC employs a certified regulatory program, which is a CEQA-equivalent process that encourages public input. In the CEC's process, Staff Assessments (similar to EIRs) are prepared, in which all impacts are assessed, mitigation is recommended, and implementation is monitored. As illustrated in Table B-4, many power plants are currently under construction, and many others are currently undergoing environmental review. Additional plants could also be proposed and constructed, but it is not possible to know their precise locations at this time. These projects may be constructed regardless of whether the Path 15 project is built.

Because the CEC's CEQA-equivalent process evaluates the environmental impacts of each project before it for review, this SEIR does not attempt to evaluate in detail the impacts of these plants that may be constructed. However, in general, and dependent upon the location of the plants and the resources present, the major impacts that result from construction and operation of large power plants are the following:

- **Air Quality:** Air emissions (particularly NO_x and CO) resulting from burning of natural gas contribute to California's already degraded air quality, always requiring purchase of offset credits.
- **Biological Resources:** Habitat can be lost when plants are installed in previously open areas. Marine biological resources can be affected by cooling water intake and discharge when once-through cooling is used.
- **Hazardous Materials:** Power plant operations can require use of ammonia and other hazardous materials, which must be transported to the site and stored there.
- **Water Resources:** Power plants demand large volumes of cooling water for turbine efficiency, and water resources are extremely limited in many parts of the State.
- **Visual Resources:** Power plants and their components are major industrial structures that can be visible for long distances from surrounding areas. In addition, steam plumes from some types of cooling towers can be visible for many miles.

The operational (long-term) impacts of new power plants would occur throughout the life of the project (30 to 50 years). These impacts are generally more severe than those of a transmission line, which has no emissions, uses no hazardous materials, and consumes minimal water. The visual impacts of a

transmission line could be more severe than those of a power plant, but this would be dependent on the visual character of the specific area. In general, power plant impacts are greater than transmission line impacts.

C.12.2 TRANSMISSION SYSTEM UPGRADES

If the CAISO determines that 1,500 MW of transmission capacity is required, the Proposed Project (or one of its alternatives) would need to be constructed to achieve that capacity increase. A transmission upgrade following a different route between the Los Banos and Gates Substations could also serve such a CAISO need determination, but no such route has been suggested or considered. Impacts would be similar to those presented in this SEIR, but would affect different locations, property owners, and resources.

If the CAISO determines that a capacity increase of 400 to 500 MW is needed, PG&E has stated it would consider installation of a second 500 kV/230 kV transformer bank at the Gates Substation and reconductoring of the Gates-Panoche 230 kV transmission line.

The installation of a transformer bank within the existing Gates Substation would not create any significant environmental impacts because the bank would be installed within PG&E's existing fenced and disturbed substation area, and its presence would not be noticeable to viewers. Reconductoring of the Gates-Panoche 230 kV line (a total of about 40 miles) would result in impacts similar to those evaluated in Section C for the reconductoring of the Gates-Arco-Midway 230 kV line (a 70-mile segment). With the use of the existing disturbed transmission corridor for conductor stringing, impacts would be minimal. Although more severe impacts would occur if the existing towers were not strong enough to support the new conductors, and installation of new towers would require foundation construction which could result in impacts to biological or cultural resources, overall, these impacts would be substantially less than the impacts of constructing the Proposed Project.