

Comment Set 5
Letter from Catherine Schlicht dated March 19, 2004

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Fax:949-788-0860

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March 19, 2004

California Public Utilities Commission
c/o Aspen Environmental Group
30423 Canwood Street, #215
Agoura Hills, CA 91301

Attention: Mr. Michael Rosauer

Via: Fax 818-597-8001

Re: Southern California Edison's Viejo System Project

Dear Mr. Rosauer:

Thank you, for this opportunity to address our concerns regarding the Southern California Edison (SCE) proposed Viejo System Project.

Though I applaud SCE's commitment to provide and maintain reliable electric service for its customers, I believe SCE has not been as forthright or honest in its dealings with the public. This project has not been as aggressively publicized as SCE would like us all to believe. Nor have they given serious consideration to an alternative that undergrounds all of the power lines in the existing utility corridor.

5-1

I support the PURPOSE of the Viejo System Project, which is to improve reliability and meet projected electrical load requirements of the future.

5-2

However, I do not support the proposed overhead alternative that adds additional lines to an existing transmission line corridor. Mission Viejo places a very high value on aesthetics, and this SCE overhead project brings an industrial appearance to our city, reducing our quality of life.

If the SCE recommended overhead alternative is approved, the project creates additional blight that the city will never be able to undo. Overhead lines run counter to the City of Mission Viejo's General Plan that requires the undergrounding of all utilities.

5-3

Homeowners should not be forced to endure negative impacts from changes this project will bring to our community, which benefits others outside of our neighborhood. Under the direction of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the National Center for Environmental Economics published a study in their newsletter dated July, 1996, that found that high voltage

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transmission lines cut property values. **It went on to state that a landmark case in New York, Criscola v. The Power Authority, awarded compensation for damages resulting from the lines.**

It is irresponsible for SCE to promote a project that negatively affects the appearance and the values of our community. There are too many negative impacts and no way to mitigate the impacts that the new and taller towers will cause.

Due to added blight and PERCEIVED health risks, homeowners will suffer further loss of property values with the addition of higher towers which will add a wall of power lines. The scientific community does not yet fully understand EMF impacts. As with the theories of global warming, there is controversy about EMF exposure because there is no hard evidence to support or refute its effects.

5-5

I am allergic to make-up. I can mitigate my sensitive skin problems by avoiding the use of make-up. My sister developed thyroid problems. It was learned that she has a sensitivity to the hormones injected into cattle. She was not aware of the accumulative effects until after she became ill.

The point is, we are all unaware of our sensitivities to our surroundings and environment until we have a physical reaction or illness. How many children with unknown sensitivities to the accumulative effects of EMF exposure will develop leukemia or brain cancer. After a lifetime of exposure to EMF, how many adults have developed ALS, Alzheimer's or sudden cardiac death?

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As cited in the California Department of Health Services EMF Report, theoretical risks smaller than EMF exposure has triggered regulatory control of many products and chemicals.

Future findings may show EMF exposure to be more harmful than believed now. Dealing responsibly with EMF risks today could avoid costly retrofits in the future if definitive evidence of the risks of EMF becomes evident.

Mr. Frank Wasko, the Region Manager of Public Affairs for SCE, at his October 6, 2003 public comments before the Mission Viejo City Council admitted a link with health risks and EMF exposure, which caused SCE to chose an alternative that reduces EMF levels at the lowest cost for ratepayers, by increasing the height of the towers and bringing the lines closer together. This alternative not only degrades the vista, but it negatively impacts the avian population, the raptors in particular.

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The last few years, the federal government has been increasing public awareness of the negative impacts of towers and power lines and bird collisions. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) estimates that power line electrocutions, collisions with towers and other power-related threats kills an estimated tens of thousands of birds in the United States each year. The Department of Justice release dated April 19, 2002, further states that these deaths contribute to the population declines observed in one-third of the 840 bird species in the nation, over 90 of which are on the threatened list.

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The FWS has stepped up enforcement of several Congressional Acts designed to protect the bird populations. In 1993, The Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E) was the first utility company cited for violations of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. In 2002, a historic agreement, which grew out from the 1999 criminal prosecution of the Moon Lake Electric Association, a Memorandum of Understanding was reached between the Department of Justice and Xcel Energy to ensure the company's compliance with its power lines in 12 states with two major wildlife protection statutes.

The Planning Process of the Comprehensive Conservation Plan for the North Platte National Wildlife Refuge, the agency is studying the removal or the burying of 6 miles of overhead power lines.

SCE is a member of the Avian Power Line Interaction Committee (APLIC) and SCE also has its own Raptor Protection Program, and yet they do not adequately address raptor deaths from electrocution and the associated power outages and fire risks. Raptors are also killed due to collisions with towers and frames. PG&E estimates that at least 5 to 15 percent of power outages in a 2 year period were caused by bird and wildlife collisions with power lines and other utility structures, a rate of about one a week. According to the December 8, 2002, article in the Monterey County Herald newspaper, bird collisions with power lines can start wildfires and cause service power outages. The outages cost the state of California **\$3 billion annually**, said Percy Della, a spokesman for the California Energy Commission.

As our population expands into wildlife habitat, utility corridors and railroad corridors are becoming wildlife corridors, developing its own food chain system, and attracting birds of prey. The proposed project will increase the height of the towers, bringing a wall of power lines that will destroy the avian population. Nighttime brings an unexpected hazard to our owl population.

So it appears to me that it is more expensive not to bury the lines. Overhead power lines are a danger to the raptors, many of which are federally protected. Overhead lines are a fire risk. Let's not forget the firestorms that ravaged southern California last fall. Overhead lines unreasonably interferes with our quality of life.

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In SCE's own words from its website: "SCE supports undergrounding because it provides a substantial aesthetic benefits to local communities." But there is more at issue here than aesthetics.

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By choosing the overhead alternative, SCE is taking the easy way out. Undergrounding the power lines will be best for the environment, and our health and safety. Burying all the power lines will ensure our quality of life and improve the appearance of our city. Burying the power lines will reduce the risk of terrorism and vandalism, and restore peace of mind. Burying all the power lines will restore the utility corridor to a more natural state, reducing negative impacts on birds and wildlife, and provides for more open space with recreational opportunities for bike and hiking trails. Undergrounding the power lines will eliminate visual blight.

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We need reliable power, but impacts of this project need to be minimized. Undergrounding all the lines will be a temporary construction disturbance to the environment, but long-term impacts will be positive.

We respectfully request that the SCE proposal of additional overhead power lines supported on H-Frame towers that are 14-stories tall, be denied, and that all the lines be buried in the existing utility corridor.

5-12

Sincerely,



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Research articles will be furnished upon request.

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Response to Comment Set 5
Letter from Catherine Schlicht dated March 19, 2004

- 5-1 Thank you for sharing your concerns. The CPUC is responding to SCE's application for a Permit to Construct for the proposed Viejo System Project, which is a substation and overhead subtransmission line proposal. The commenter is correct that SCE did not extensively evaluate placing the proposed subtransmission line underground in the existing transmission corridor. However, noting these concerns, information has been presented in Appendix 8 of the Final MND document discussing various underground options for the transmission line, including the CPUC's later consideration of the option to underground the proposed line in the existing right-of-way. Please see General Response GR-3 and Appendix 8.
- 5-2 The CPUC notes Mission Viejo's concern for community aesthetics.
- 5-3 The visual effects of the proposed project are addressed in the MND/IS and will be considered by the Commission in rendering a decision on the proposed project. Public Facilities Policy 8.2 of the Mission Viejo General Plan encourages utility companies to underground new overhead transmission facilities, but does not require existing facilities to be placed underground. Therefore, while the proposed project does not fulfill the goal of this General Plan policy, it does not violate this policy. Lower voltage electrical distribution lines are commonly placed underground, but higher voltage transmission lines (e.g., 66 kV voltages and higher) are only infrequently placed underground. Please see General Response GR-3, as well as Comment 1-13 regarding applicability of General Plan policies to the proposed project.
- 5-4 Thank you for sharing your concerns. Potential economic effects, such as effects on property values, cannot be considered significant under CEQA and, therefore, are not addressed in the MND/IS. However, such concerns can be considered by the Commission in its deliberations on whether to approve or deny the proposed project. Please see General Response GR- 2.
- 5-5 Please see response to Comment 5-4 above regarding possible effects on property values. The CPUC agrees that the possible health effects of EMF are not fully understood by the scientific community and, therefore, it is not possible to reach a definitive conclusion as to whether the proposed project would cause any adverse health effects. Appendix 3 of the proposed Mitigated Negative Declaration provides an overview of EMF and current knowledge about EMF-related concerns. Please note that EMF levels would be reduced overall with the proposed project (see Section B.1.10 of the MND/IS as well as General Response GR-1.
- 5-6 Please see response to Comment 5-5 above regarding EMF concerns. It is not possible to predict what future scientific findings will be regarding EMF. Please also see General Response GR-1.
- 5-7 Please see the responses to Comments 5-5 and 5-6 above regarding EMF concerns. The proposed H-frame structures have been designed to be raptor safe in accordance with *Suggested Practices for Raptor Protection on Power Lines: The State of the Art in 1996* (Avian Power Line Interaction Committee, 1996). The MND/IS concludes that the proposed project will have no significant adverse impact on avian species, including raptors. Please also see General Response GR-1.
- 5-8 Please see the response to Comment 5-7 above. Please also see General Response GR-1.
- 5-9 The MND/IS acknowledges that there is a substantial brush fire hazard in the undeveloped Mission Viejo area throughout much of the year. Applicant-proposed measures, including regular brush clearing, and proposed Mitigation Measure HAZ-1 would reduce fire risks to less-than-significant levels.
- 5-10 We are unable to comment on statements appearing on SCE's website.

- 5-11 The CPUC understands that there are various potential benefits associated with placing power transmission lines underground. At this time, the CPUC is being asked to consider an application for a new substation and additional 66 kV overhead circuit proposed by SCE. Undergrounding of the existing 66 kV lines in the transmission corridor is not part of the proposed project. Therefore, the analysis presented in the MND/IS only addresses the potential significance of impacts of the proposed substation and overhead circuit. Please see General Response GR-3. In addition, Appendix 8 discusses alternative route options considered by the CPUC.
- 5-12 Thank you for stating your position on the proposed project. Your comments will be considered by the Commission in rendering a decision on the proposed project.