Section 4.1

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4.1 AESTHETICS

This section describes the visual resource inventory and potential visual impacts associated with the construction, operation, and maintenance of the Proposed Project and alternatives. Inventory data for visual resources within the study area were identified using existing and future land use plans, aerial photography interpretation, and field review. The visual resources inventory focused on (1) existing visual character (local setting), (2) the identification of sensitive viewers and their associated viewing conditions, and (3) the identification of applicable laws, ordinances, regulations, and standards as described below.

In the context of this project, visual character was based on an assessment of vegetation, landform, and existing modifications, which include features such as existing utilities, roads, industrial facilities, and other developments. Sensitive viewers, defined as the viewing public who would potentially be affected by the construction of the Proposed Project, were identified and assessed as part of the inventory process. Typically, the viewing public most sensitive to visual alterations in the landscape includes residential, recreation, and transportation viewers. Residential viewers tend to be highly sensitive to changes in the landscape because of the permanence of their views and their associated concern for aesthetics. Recreation viewers, in the context of the visual resource study area, have a high sensitivity for change because of the aesthetics associated with the setting (e.g., golf course). Transportation or travel route viewers typically have shorter viewing durations than those associated with recreation and residential viewers, and concern for aesthetics is secondary to traveling within the context of the study area. Viewing conditions associated with identified sensitive viewers were based on viewer orientation, influence of existing modifications, and screening provided by structural elements and vegetation. Viewing conditions are specific to each sensitive viewer type. Following is a general description of the project setting, followed by the results of the visual inventory, including a description of the local setting and sensitive viewers and their associated viewing conditions for each component of the Proposed Project.

4.1.1 Applicable Laws, Regulations, and Standards

Although projects to maintain electrical facilities are generally, exempt from local land use and zoning regulations, CPUC General Order No. 131-D, Section XIV. B requires the utility to consult with local agencies regarding land use matters. Even though the Proposed Project is exempt from local land use requirements, SCE has considered local and state land-use plans as part of the current environmental review and Proposed Project design process.

The general plans of the City of Palm Springs and the City of Palm Desert outline objectives and policies with respect to scenic areas and aesthetics within the project area, particularly with respect to views of the San Jacinto and Santa Rosa mountains. The community of Thousand Palms falls within the Palm Desert General Plan Area. The City of Palm Springs General Plan also calls for the preservation of scenic views along SR 111.

The Western Coachella Valley Area Plan designates the Rancho Mirage Sphere of Influence Policy Area, which abuts the western edge of the community of Thousand Palms. Within the context of the Proposed Project, this policy area is important in the preservation of the visual values of Indio Hills by requiring that development be sensitive to and retain the unique topographical features within and adjacent to the planning area.

Scenic highways exhibit unique natural beauty or historic elements viewed by travelers. They are considered eligible or designated by the State of California based on criteria established in Section 260 et seq., of the Streets and Highway Code. Benefits of scenic highway status include protecting environmental assets that encourage tourism and inclusion on travel maps produced by the State Division of Tourism. While there are no officially designated California State Scenic Highways in the project area, SR 111 is eligible for state scenic highway designation.

4.1.2 Significance Criteria

Impacts to visual resources are considered potentially significant if the project:

- Has a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista
- Substantially damages scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings, within a state scenic highway
- Substantially degrades the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings
- Creates a new source of substantial light or glare, which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area

4.1.3 Applicant Proposed Measures

No APMs for aesthetic resources are proposed.

4.1.4 Environmental Setting

The visual resource study area is located in the south-central portion of California, defined as the Basin and Range province, which is characterized by isolated, roughly parallel mountain ranges separated by closed desert basins. The study area is located in a subdivision of the Basin and Range province, identified as the Salton Trough, which is characterized by low-elevation subtle landforms, bounded by relatively high, linear mountain ranges to the east and west. These ranges converge at San Gorgonio Pass, marking the western edge of the area. Notable formations of the Salton Trough include Coachella Valley, the Salton Sea, and Imperial Valley. Broad, coalescing alluvial fans (bajadas), which flank the local mountain ranges (Santa Rosa, San Jacinto, and Little San Bernardino), isolated low hills (Indio Hills), and extensive sand dunes contribute to the visual setting. The predominant natural plant communities that occupy the area include creosote bush and white bursage. Fan palms occur in many small riparian areas throughout the region where subsurface water is present (Fenneman, 1931).

The Proposed Project is located within the Coachella Valley, which includes the cities of Palm Springs, Cathedral City, Rancho Mirage, Palm Desert, and Indian Wells and portions of unincorporated Riverside County, including the community of Thousand Palms. This area has sustained continual growth for the past 30 years. Remnants of natural desert remain in the Coachella Valley, although they tend to be highly disturbed.

4.1.4.1 Proposed Project

Transmission

Local Setting

The existing Devers-Coachella Valley 220 kV transmission line would be looped into Mirage Substation through a series of line cutovers and construction of the proposed 220 kV transmission line loop-in, within the existing Mirage 220 kV ROW (approximately 0.80 mile). The new loop-in would consist of double-circuit LSTs and would be perpendicular to the existing Devers-Coachella Valley 220 kV transmission line, running south from the Devers-Coachella 220 kV ROW to Mirage Substation.

The Proposed Devers-Coachella Valley 220 kV Loop-In would primarily cross vacant desert, characterized by alluvial soils and low, sparse vegetation. Vegetation density increases in localized areas where residential development exists. The natural character of vacant lands has been modified by access roads and overland vehicular use. Existing modifications near the proposed 220 kV transmission line loop-in include the Mirage Substation, two 220 kV transmission lines, one 115 kV subtransmission line, existing IID transmission, subtransmission, and distribution lines, roadways, and residential development.

Viewers

Residential views of the existing Mirage 220 kV ROW, which includes the Proposed Devers-Coachella Valley 220 kV Loop-In, range from direct and unobstructed to fully screened, based on the location of the viewers. The closest and most direct views are associated with approximately 20 residences located west of Vista de Oro, an unpaved road located within the Mirage 220 kV ROW. The existing 115 kV subtransmission line is located on the western boundary of the Mirage 220 kV ROW and along the eastern property lines of approximately 16 residential lots. The existing transmission and subtransmission lines are located within the foreground views to the east of these residential lots. Four of the homes, just north of Ramon Road, also have direct views of the existing Mirage Substation.

Roadways in the vicinity of the proposed 220 kV transmission line loop-in include Vista de Oro and Ramon Road. Vista de Oro would serve as an access road for construction of the Proposed Project. Views from Vista de Oro are dominated by existing industrial facilities that include existing transmission and subtransmission lines and Mirage Substation.

Ramon Road runs perpendicular to the Mirage 220 kV ROW, just south of Mirage Substation. Existing modifications associated with Ramon Road include Mirage Substation, a 115 kV single-circuit subtransmission line, and disturbed vacant land. Views from Ramon Road include existing transmission, subtransmission, and distribution lines, and Mirage Substation.

There are no recreation viewers or state scenic highways associated with the proposed 220 kV transmission line loop-in.

Subtransmission

Proposed Farrell-Garnet 115 kV Subtransmission Line (Route 1)

Local Setting

The Proposed Farrell-Garnet 115 kV Subtransmission Line (Route 1) would follow the existing Devers-Farrell-Windland 115 kV subtransmission route from Farrell Substation to Garnet Substation. This route would cross the Whitewater River floodplain, which is an open desert basin characterized by alluvial soils and low, sparse vegetation. Existing modifications in the vicinity of the existing single-circuit 115 kV subtransmission line, which is also the proposed double-circuit subtransmission line route, include distribution lines; the Farrell and Garnet substations; roadways including Gene Autry Trail, I-10, Salvia Road, and Vista Chino Avenue (SR 111); roadside billboards; and the UPRR, as well as residential and commercial development.

Viewers

Residential views of the existing 115 kV subtransmission line (also the Proposed Project, Route 1) are confined to a localized area adjacent to Gene Autry Trail. The majority of views toward the subtransmission line from these residences are fully to partially screened by walls, fences, residential structures, and vegetation. Approximately nine residences located on the periphery of the community have direct unobstructed views of the existing 115 kV subtransmission line. Approximately 12 other residences, located 0.25 mile to the west of the subtransmission line, have direct, unobstructed views of the line.

Viewers along Gene Autry Trail, Vista Chino Avenue (SR 111, eligible for scenic designation), and I-10 travel routes have views of the existing subtransmission line. Travelers on Gene Autry Trail have direct views of the subtransmission line for a length of approximately 2.5 miles, although southbound views of the line are backdropped by the San Jacinto and Santa Rosa mountains. The existing 115 kV subtransmission line and roadside billboards influence views along Gene Autry Trail. Viewers traveling on Vista Chino Avenue have views of the subtransmission line for a short duration at the intersection of Gene Autry Trail. Existing modifications along Vista Chino Avenue include Farrell Substation and the 115 kV subtransmission line. The subtransmission line parallels I-10 for approximately 1.3 miles, where viewing duration is short, based on the high rate of speed associated with highway travel.

Recreation viewers potentially affected by the Proposed Project would include those associated with the Palm Springs Country Club Golf Course, located approximately 0.3 mile west of Gene Autry Trail, adjacent to the southern edge of the Whitewater River floodplain. Views of the subtransmission line are greater than 0.25 mile and range from partially to fully screened, based on the presence of vegetation associated with the golf course.

Proposed Mirage-Santa Rosa 115 kV Subtransmission Line (Route 4)

Local Setting

The two existing 115 kV subtransmission lines, which are within the Proposed Mirage-Santa Rosa 115 kV Subtransmission Line (Route 4) ROW, primarily cross vacant desert characterized by alluvial soils and low, sparse vegetation. Vegetation density increases in localized areas where residential and recreation-type development exists. The natural character of vacant lands has been modified by access roads and overland vehicular use. Existing modifications in the vicinity of the proposed subtransmission line include the two 115 kV subtransmission lines, Mirage Substation, distribution lines, several roadways, I-10, the Tri-Palm Estates community and golf course, commercial development, and light industrial facilities.

Viewers

Residential views of the Proposed Mirage-Santa Rosa 115 kV Subtransmission Line (Route 4) would range from direct and unobstructed to fully screened, based on the location of the viewers. The closest and most direct views of the proposed route are associated with approximately 20 residences located in a golf community (Tri-Palm Estates) just south of Calle Desierto. Residential views of the proposed route north of Calle Desierto Road are unobstructed but up to 0.25 mile away and seen in context of the existing 115 kV subtransmission line. Views of proposed subtransmission line from within the interior of the Tri-Palm Estates community would be partially to fully screened by vegetation, walls, and other homes. Two isolated, dispersed residences would have views of the northern portion of the proposed subtransmission line, although they would be partially screened by vegetation and influenced by Mirage Substation.

Travel routes in the vicinity of the existing subtransmission lines (also the proposed subtransmission line) include Ramon Road, I-10, and Varner Road. The subtransmission lines cross Ramon Road south of Mirage Substation. Existing modifications associated with Ramon Road include Mirage Substation, a 115 kV single-circuit subtransmission line, and disturbed vacant land. The proposed subtransmission line also would cross Varner Road and I-10, to tap into the existing Santa Rosa-Tamarisk 115 kV subtransmission line. Existing modifications near I-10 and Varner Road include the UPRR, a 115 kV subtransmission line, commercial and industrial developments, and disturbed, vacant land. Views toward the existing subtransmission line are short in duration and seen in context with the existing industrial facilities.

Recreation viewers along the subtransmission line ROW are associated with the Tri-Palm Golf Course. The existing subtransmission lines cross through the golf course for approximately 0.5 mile. Views from the golf course are partially to fully screened at various viewer locations within the golf course, depending on the presence of existing vegetation, walls, and topographic relief. Existing modifications that are seen in context with the subtransmission lines also include IID's distribution lines and light industrial structures.

Subtransmission Line Reconfigurations

Intersection of Bob Hope Drive and Dinah Shore Drive

Local Setting

The local setting at the site of the proposed Bob Hope Drive and Dinah Shore Drive subtransmission line reconfiguration, located in Rancho Mirage, can be characterized as a road intersection surrounded by vacant land and commercial and residential development. The area has been modified by the presence of two existing 115 kV subtransmission lines, billboards, and developing commercial areas.

Viewers

Residential views of the subtransmission line reconfiguration are associated with two communities located to the southwest and southeast of the intersection of Bob Hope Drive and Dinah Shore Drive. Residences within the community to the southwest of the intersection, Mission Hills Country Club, have limited views of the line intersection, due to the presence of vegetation, privacy walls, and residential structures. Several residences located to the southeast of the intersection would have open to partially screened views of the intersection, from a distance ranging from approximately 400 feet to 0.25 mile.

Bob Hope Drive and Dinah Shore Drive are the only two travel routes that could be affected by the subtransmission line reconfiguration. Views of the line reconfiguration from the travel routes would be open and direct and seen in the context of the existing subtransmission lines, billboards, and commercial development.

Recreation viewers adjacent to the intersection are those associated with the Mission Hills Pete Dye Golf Course. Views from the golf course would range from partially to fully screened, due to the presence of residences and vegetation and the location of the viewer within the golf course.

Intersection of Date Palm Drive and Varner Road

Local Setting

The local setting at the site of the proposed Date Palm Drive and Varner Road subtransmission line reconfiguration, located within unincorporated Riverside County, can be described as desert hills occupied by widely spaced creosote bush. The local area has been highly modified by the presence of several existing transmission and subtransmission lines that range from 500 kV to 115 kV and access roads, as well as Varner Road and Date Palm Drive.

Viewers

There are no residential or recreation viewers that would have views of the line reconfiguration site. Travelers using Varner Road, Date Palm Drive, and I-10 would have views of the site. Views from Varner Road and Date Palm Drive would be direct and unobstructed because the lines and structures are located immediately adjacent to the roads. Views from I-10, located approximately 1 mile to the south of the intersection, are intermittent and mostly screened.

Intersection of Portola Avenue and Gerald Ford Drive

Local Setting

The local setting at the site of the proposed Portola Avenue and Gerald Ford Drive subtransmission line reconfiguration is in transition from natural desert that has been disturbed to a more suburban character that is consistent with other areas in the City of Palm Desert. The area has been modified locally by the existing 115 kV subtransmission line that crosses Gerald Ford Drive.

Viewers

Residential viewers are associated with a small development, located to the southwest of the intersection. Residences along the north and east sides of this development have unobstructed views of the line reconfiguration site, although at a distance of approximately 1 mile. Residential viewers located on the south and west sides of the community and within the community would have minimal to no views of the intersection, due to existing screening features, including vegetation, walls, and residential structures. Transportation viewers include travelers using Gerald Ford Drive and Portola Avenue. The views would be immediate and unobstructed because of the close proximity to the roads and seen in the context of the existing 115 kV subtransmission line.

Substations

Local Setting

The Proposed Project includes the modification of the Devers, Mirage, Concho, Indian Wells, Santa Rosa, Eisenhower, Farrell, Garnet, Thornhill, and Tamarisk substations. Proposed modifications to the substations include installation of- and upgrades to electrical components within the fenced perimeters of the substations, and new transmission and subtransmission conductors and support structures within or adjacent to the properties of existing substations.

Five of the 10 substations, including Concho, Indian Wells, Santa Rosa, Garnet, and Thornhill substations, would be upgraded or improved with minimal physical changes. Upgrades and improvements would include new line positioning, new line protection relays, and, in some cases, replacement of existing bus tie protection relays. Staging and construction would occur inside the fence or wall of each substation, out of view from the public, in an industrial setting.

The remaining substations, including Devers, Mirage, Eisenhower, Farrell, and Tamarisk substations, would be modified with major equipment improvements. Each of these substations exhibit an industrial character. The Mirage Substation modifications would include several equipment improvements all within the substation walls; transformer and dead-end racks included in this upgrade would reach a maximum height of 60 feet. The Eisenhower Substation upgrades would include major equipment improvements, including the addition of two new TSPs and support structures, all of which would be contained within the substation walls. The Farrell Substation equipment improvements, including a dead-end rack, would be contained within, but would be higher than, the substation fence/wall. The Farrell Substation improvements also would include a new 16-foot-wide by 30-foot-long paved substation-access driveway with a 16-foot-wide gate that would be located along the Executive Drive frontage and centered

approximately 50 feet from the northeastern SCE property corner. Major equipment improvements to Tamarisk Substation would include one 115 kV circuit breaker that would be located inside of the substation fence/wall and would not be visible from the outside. Major equipment improvements to Devers Substation would include four 115 kV circuit breakers that would be within the substation fence/wall and would not be visible to outside viewers.

Viewers

Sensitive viewers were identified adjacent to all 10 substations associated with the Proposed Project. However, modifications at only three of the 10 modified substations could affect sensitive viewers, as described below.

Sensitive viewers in the vicinity of the Mirage Substation upgrade include dispersed residences along the western edge of the substation, as well as travelers on Ramon Road. Residences to the west of the substation would have partially to fully screened views of the proposed modifications. Travelers along Ramon Road could have open views of the Mirage Substation from the westbound lane; however, these views would be short in duration.

Travel route viewers are the only sensitive viewers that potentially could be affected by major improvements at Eisenhower Substation. Views from East Mesquite Avenue and Gene Autry Trail/SR 111 are partially to fully screened by existing vegetation and the Eisenhower Substation fence/wall.

Sensitive viewers in the vicinity of the Farrell Substation include travelers along Gene Autry Trail, Vista Chino Drive (SR 111), and residences along the west side of Gene Autry Trail. These views are partially to fully screened by existing buildings and vegetation. The location of the new Farrell driveway is not visible from these viewpoints.

There were no recreation viewers identified as having views of the proposed substation modifications.

4.1.5 Impact Analysis

This section describes potential aesthetic impacts as a result of the construction, operation, and maintenance of the Proposed Project. Impacts were assessed by comparing the visual elements (i.e., form, line, color, texture) of the Proposed Project to the visual elements of the local setting. In this regard, impacts would be greatest if a transmission line, subtransmission line, or substation were to be constructed in an area without similar existing facilities. The impact would occur because the visual elements of the new transmission line, subtransmission line, or substation would contrast with the visual elements of the existing setting, and therefore the modification would be perceptible. Conversely, if several LSTs or poles of an existing transmission line or subtransmission line were replaced with similar looking LSTs or poles, the impact would be less apparent because the visual contrast would be minimal and the Proposed Project components would be less perceptible. The distance of the Proposed Project from sensitive viewers also would affect potential impacts. The closer the viewer is to the Proposed Project components the higher the impact potential is, because the contrast is more perceptible. Conversely, the farther the viewer is from the Proposed Project components, the lower the impact potential, because the contrast is less discernable.

For this analysis, impacts were assessed in context of CEQA's significance criteria for aesthetics. Following is a discussion of anticipated impacts as they relate to the aforementioned CEQA criteria, including construction and operational impacts.

4.1.5.1 Construction Impacts

Transmission and Subtransmission

The evaluation of construction impacts focuses on the short-term visual impacts resulting from project construction and the presence of equipment, materials, and work force. Vehicles, heavy equipment, and workers may be visible during project construction activities. However, construction of the Proposed Project components would have a less than significant impact to aesthetic resources due to the following:

1. To a large extent, the visual quality at the various project sites has been modified by the presence of existing utility lines and transportation corridors.
2. Construction impacts are short term in nature and for that reason considered temporarily adverse, but less than significant.
3. In localized areas, construction impacts would be less apparent due to the presence of existing construction equipment associated with ongoing residential and commercial development.

Construction of the Proposed Project would not have a substantial effect on scenic vistas and would not substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway. The Proposed Project would not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings.

Except where otherwise required by ministerial permit, most of the construction would occur during daylight hours, minimizing the need for lighting. Therefore, a substantial new source of light or glare is not anticipated, and the impact would be less than significant.

Substation Modifications

Impacts associated with the construction of the proposed substation modifications would be less than significant. Vehicles, heavy equipment, and workers might be visible during project construction activities; however, screening structures around these sites, such as walls and vegetation, would limit visibility of construction operations.

Construction of the proposed substation modifications would not have a substantial effect on scenic vistas and would not substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway. The proposed substation modifications would not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings.

Except where otherwise required by ministerial permit, most of the construction would occur during daylight hours, minimizing the need for lighting. Therefore, a substantial new source of light or glare is not anticipated, and the impact would be less than significant.

In summary, aesthetic impacts due to construction of the Proposed Project would be less than significant.

4.1.5.2 Operational Impacts

Transmission

Operational impacts to residential viewers along the Proposed Devers-Coachella Valley 220 kV Loop-In would be less than significant because the loop-in would run adjacent to existing 115 kV and 220 kV structures and would match the spans of the existing 220 kV transmission lines where possible. Likewise, LST and pole configurations and heights would be similar to existing transmission line structures. Two simulations have been prepared (Figures 4.1-1 and 4.1-2) to represent views from the residences along Vista de Oro, looking east (Figure 4.1-1) and northeast (4.1-2) from viewpoints near the residences towards the proposed 220 kV transmission line loop-in. The two simulations demonstrate that changes in visual elements associated with the proposed 220 kV transmission line loop-in would be minimal, and therefore would not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings.

Impacts to transportation viewers are expected to be less than significant because the perceived changes of the additional 220 kV transmission line loop-in would be minimal, and the visual character would remain the same. Additionally, views of the proposed 220 kV transmission line loop-in from transportation viewers would predominantly be backdropped.

There are no recreation viewers associated with the proposed 220 kV transmission line loop-in, therefore, recreation viewers would not be impacted.

The Proposed Devers-Coachella Valley 220 kV Loop-In would cross or run adjacent to lands zoned as open space, residential, utilities, and commercial. The 220 proposed kV transmission line loop-in would create less than significant aesthetic impacts to these uses because the route would replace or be built adjacent to existing structures of similar heights and configurations and, therefore, the local setting would remain intact.

There are no state scenic highways in proximity to the subject route.

Operation of the Proposed Project would not have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista, would not substantially damage scenic resources, and would not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings. Operation of the Proposed Project would not have lighting associated with it that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in this area.

In summary, impacts to aesthetics due to operation of the Proposed Devers-Coachella Valley 220 kV Loop-In would be less than significant.

Existing Condition: 220 kV double-circuit steel lattice tower transmission lines.

Simulated Condition: Proposed 220 kV double-circuit steel lattice tower transmission line loop-in.

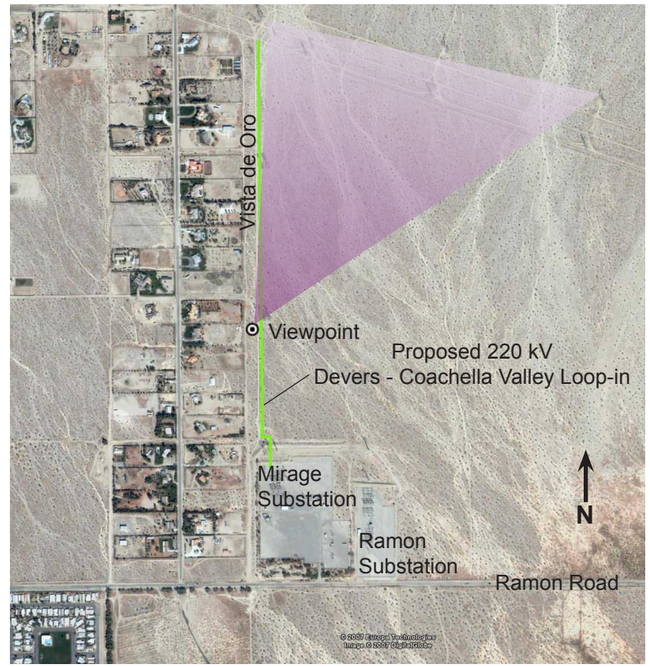

Photo Location Map
Viewpoint located east of Vista de Oro, north of Mirage Substation, looking northeast.

PHOTOGRAPH INFORMATION

Date and Time: 8-9-07 3:38pm
Location: Thousand Palms, California
Weather Conditions: Clear
Focal length: 50mm

Structure models and configurations based on specifications provided by SCE for the purposes of photographic simulations

FIGURE 4.1-1

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Existing Condition: 115 kV single-circuit wood pole subtransmission line and 220 kV double-circuit steel lattice transmission lines adjacent to Vista de Oro.

Simulated Condition: Proposed 220 kV double-circuit steel lattice tower transmission line loop-in.

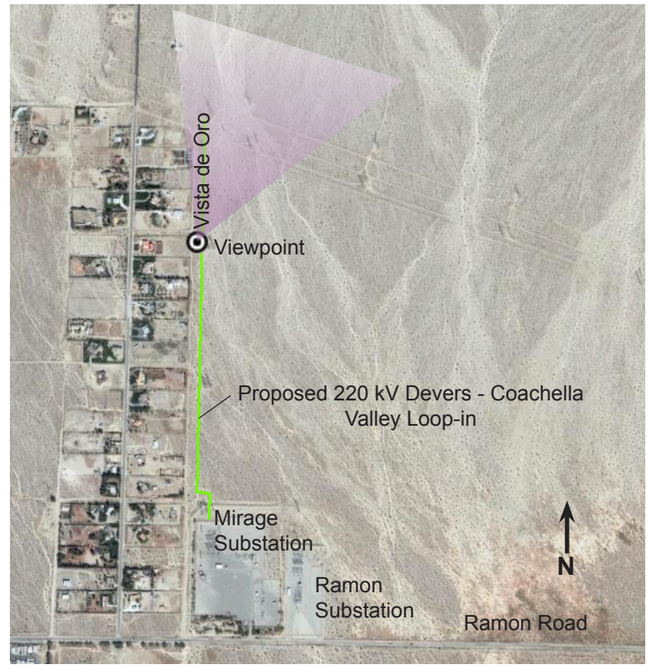

Photo Location Map
Viewpoint located on Vista de Oro looking north.

PHOTOGRAPH INFORMATION

Date and Time: 8-9-07 3:28pm
Location: Thousand Palms, California
Weather Conditions: Clear
Focal length: 50mm

Structure models and configurations based on specifications provided by SCE for the purposes of photographic simulations

FIGURE 4.1-2

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Subtransmission

Proposed Farrell-Garnet 115 kV Subtransmission Line (Route 1)

Operational impacts to residential viewers along the Farrell-Garnet 115 kV Subtransmission Line (Route 1) are expected to be less than significant because Alternative Route 1 would replace an existing 115 kV subtransmission line on single-circuit wood pole with new double-circuit steel poles. New pole heights would be similar to the existing poles and spans between poles would match the existing spans where possible. Three simulations have been prepared to illustrate transportation views along Gene Autry Trail. A simulation was prepared (Figure 4.1-3) to represent a view near a residential area along East Via Escuela, looking northeast toward Gene Autry Trail and the Indio Hills. This simulation demonstrates that the change in visual elements would be minimal as a result of the Proposed Project.

Impacts to transportation viewers are expected to be less than significant because the perceived changes of the route upgrades would be minimal, and the visual character would remain the same. Additionally, views of the Proposed Project (Route 1) from southbound travelers on Gene Autry Trail, would be predominantly backdropped by the San Jacinto and Santa Rosa Mountains. Figure 4.1-4 shows a view looking southwest from Gene Autry Trail towards the UPRR overpass. Figure 4.1-5 shows a view to the north along Gene Autry Trail, where the Proposed Project would cross the roadway.

Recreation views of the Palm Springs Country Club Golf Course would not be impacted because the views would be screened by residences and vegetation.

Designated land uses in the Palm Springs General Plan that would be crossed by the Proposed Project include open space, low- and medium-density residential, commercial, and a designated watercourse zone (see Section 4.9 – Land Use and Planning). These areas are currently undeveloped. The Proposed Project would result in less than significant aesthetic impacts to these designated land uses because existing poles would be replaced with poles of similar heights within existing ROWs or franchise locations.

There are no state scenic highways associated with the Proposed Project; however, SR 111 is adjacent to the southern end of the route, near Farrell Substation. Impacts to SR 111 are anticipated to be less than significant, because the project would be seen in the context of the substation.

Operation of the Proposed Project would not have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista, would not substantially damage scenic resources, and would not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings. Operation of the Proposed Project would not have lighting associated with it that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in this area.

In summary, aesthetic impacts due to operation of the Proposed Farrell-Garnet 115 kV Subtransmission Line (Route 1) would be less than significant.

Proposed Mirage-Santa Rosa 115 kV Subtransmission Line (Route 4)

Residential viewers on the eastern edge of the Tri-Palm Estates community would have views of the Proposed Mirage-Santa Rosa 115 kV Subtransmission Line (Route 4). The proposed route would parallel the existing 115 kV double-circuit line and would be seen in the context of the existing facilities from viewers in Tri-Palm Estates. Because the proposed route would be visually similar to the existing 115 kV subtransmission line, impacts are anticipated to be less than significant. A simulation has been prepared (Figure 4.1-6) to represent residential views from the eastern edge of Tri-Palm Estates, looking northeast across the golf course. This simulation demonstrates the structure type that would parallel the existing line.

Impacts to transportation viewers are expected to be less than significant because the perceived change of the proposed subtransmission line would be minimal, and the visual character adjacent to the roadways would remain intact. Additionally, impacts to recreation viewers would be adverse but less than significant, because the proposed route would parallel existing subtransmission lines located within an existing ROW through the Tri-Palm Golf Course.

Designated planned land uses adjacent to the proposed route include medium- and high-density residential, commercial, and open space, according to the applicable general plans (see Section 4.9 – Land Use and Planning). The proposed route would create less than significant aesthetic impacts to residential zoning in Thousand Palms and would not further degrade the existing visual character.

There are no state scenic highways in proximity to the proposed route.

Operation of the Proposed Project would not have a substantial adverse effect on scenic vistas, would not substantially damage scenic resources, and would not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings. Operation of the Proposed Project would not have lighting associated with it that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in this area.

In summary, impacts to visual resources due to operation of the Proposed Mirage-Santa Rosa 115 kV Subtransmission Line (Route 4) would be less than significant.

Subtransmission Line Reconfigurations

Intersection of Bob Hope Drive and Dinah Shore Drive

Operational impacts to residential viewers associated with the proposed subtransmission line reconfiguration at the intersection of Bob Hope Drive and Dinah Shore Drive are expected to be less than significant because the line reconfiguration would replace existing pole structures and would not create a discernable change to the visual character of this area. This intersection is not associated with a scenic corridor or vista. The subtransmission line reconfiguration would not compromise the visual character of the San Jacinto and Santa Rosa Mountains.

Existing Condition: 115 kV single-circuit wood pole subtransmission line east of Gene Autry Trail, north of Farrell Substation.

Simulated Condition: Proposed 115 kV tubular steel pole subtransmission line, east of Gene Autry Trail, north of Farrell Substation.

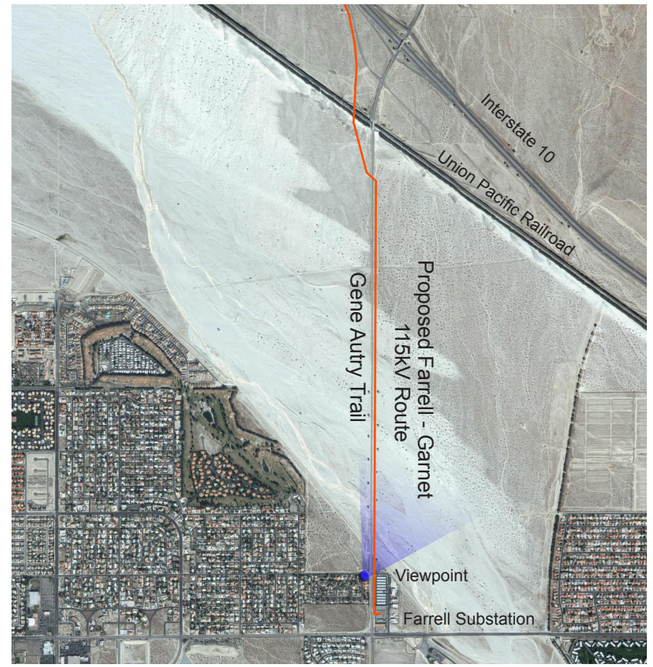

Photo Location Map
Viewpoint located on East Via Escuela, west of Gene Autry Trail, looking northeast.

PHOTO INFORMATION

Date and Time: 11/14/06 2:18pm
Location: Palm Springs, California
Weather Conditions: Clear
Focal Length: 50m

Figure 4.1-3

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Existing Condition: 115 kV single-circuit wood pole subtransmission line crossing the Union Pacific Railroad and Gene Autry Trail.

Simulated Condition: Proposed 115 kV double-circuit tubular steel pole subtransmission line crossing the Union Pacific Railroad and Gene Autry Trail.

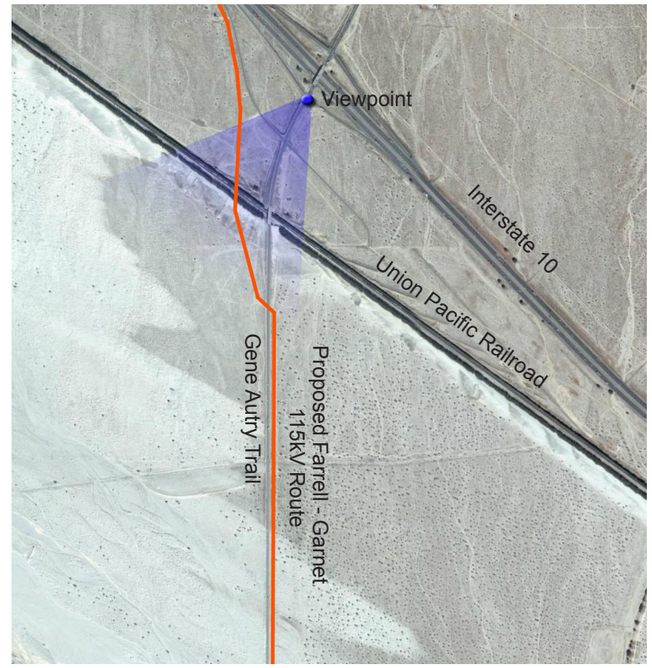

Photo Location Map
Viewpoint located on Gene Autry Trail looking southwest.

PHOTOGRAPH INFORMATION

Date and Time: 3/8/07 1:35pm
Location: Palm Springs, California
Weather Conditions: Partly cloudy
Focal length: 50mm

Structure models and configurations based on specifications provided by SCE for the purposes of photographic simulations

Figure 4.1-4

epg

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Existing Condition: 115 kV single-circuit wood pole subtransmission line crossing Gene Autry Trail.

Simulated Condition: Proposed 115 kV tubular steel pole subtransmission line crossing Gene Autry Trail.

Photo Location Map
Viewpoint located on Gene Autry Trail, south of the Union Pacific Railroad, looking north.

PHOTO INFORMATION

Date and Time: 11/14/06 2:27pm
Location: Palm Springs, California
Weather Conditions: Clear
Focal Length: 50m

Figure 4.1-5

epg

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Existing Condition: 115 kV double-circuit wood pole subtransmission line adjacent to Tri-Palm Estates residences and golf course.

Simulated Condition: Proposed 115 kV single-circuit wood pole subtransmission line adjacent to existing 115 kV double-circuit subtransmission line.

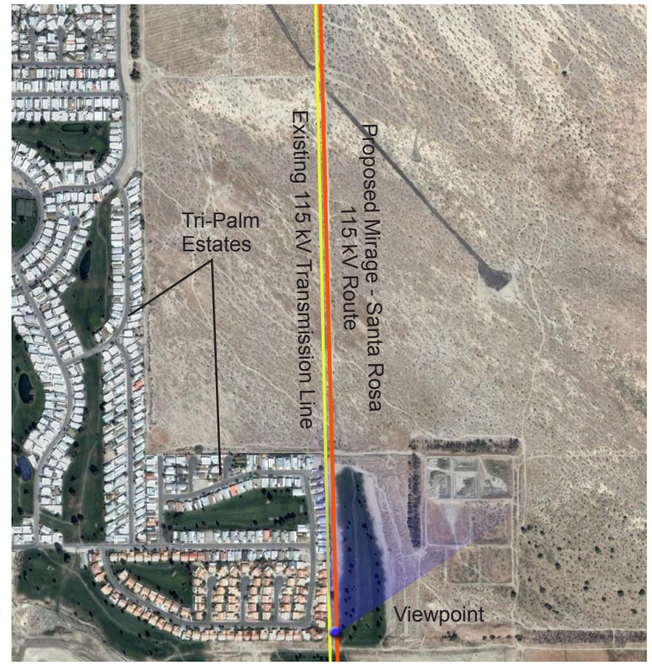

Photo Location Map
Viewpoint located at Tri-Palm Estates, north of I-10, looking northeast.

PHOTOGRAPH INFORMATION

Date and Time: 3/8/07 3:18pm
Location: Thousand Palms, California
Weather Conditions: Clear
Focal length: 50mm

Structure models and configurations based on specifications provided by SCE for the purposes of photographic simulations

Figure 4.1-6

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Views from residences within 0.5 mile of this intersection would primarily have partially to fully screened views. Likewise, impacts to transportation viewers are expected to be less than significant because the perceived changes would be minimal. A simulation (Figure 4.1-7) has been prepared to demonstrate transportation views from the westbound lane of Dinah Shore Drive, viewing west toward the subject intersection. Impacts to recreation viewers at the golf course are expected to be less than significant because the views are partially to fully screened by residences and vegetation.

Planned land uses for this area, as designated in the Rancho Mirage General Plan, include a medium-density residential community on the northwest corner of the intersection of Bob Hope Drive and Dinah Shore Drive. The proposed line reconfiguration would create less than significant aesthetic impacts to residential zoning in this area and would be potentially compatible with the future visual character. Other future uses adjacent to this intersection include commercial development on the northeast and southeast corners.

There are no state scenic highways in proximity to the Proposed Project.

Operation of the Proposed Project would not have a substantial adverse effect on scenic vistas, would not substantially damage scenic resources, and would not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings. Operation of the Proposed Project would not have lighting associated with it that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in this area.

In summary, impacts to visual resources due to operation of the subtransmission line reconfiguration at the intersection of Bob Hope Drive and Dinah Shore Drive would be less than significant.

Intersection of Date Palm Drive and Varner Road

Operational impacts to viewers associated with the proposed subtransmission line reconfiguration at the intersection of Date Palm Drive and Varner Road would be limited to travelers on Varner Road, Date Palm Drive, and I-10. Impacts to these viewers would be less than significant because the line reconfiguration would replace existing subtransmission poles. Furthermore, the line reconfiguration would occur in a highly modified area and would not further degrade the visual character. A simulation (Figure 4.1-8) has been prepared to demonstrate transportation views looking southeast from the intersection of Date Palm Drive and Varner Road.

There are no state scenic highways in proximity of the Proposed Project.

Operation of the Proposed Project would not have a substantial adverse effect on scenic vistas, would not substantially damage scenic resources, and would not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings. Operation of the Proposed Project would not have lighting associated with it that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in this area.

In summary, impacts to visual resources due to operation of the subtransmission line reconfiguration at the intersection of Date Palm and Varner Road Drive would be less than significant.

Intersection of Portola Avenue and Gerald Ford Drive

Operational impacts to viewers associated with the proposed subtransmission line reconfiguration at the intersection of Portola Avenue and Gerald Ford Drive are limited to transportation viewers on Portola Avenue and Gerald Ford Drive, and several residences associated with the community southwest of the intersection. Operational impacts would be less than significant because the new proposed pole would be placed approximately 50 feet from the existing pole and would be seen in context of the existing subtransmission line. This replacement would not degrade the existing visual character. A simulation has been prepared to show the line reconfiguration (Figure 4.1-9).

There are no state scenic highways in proximity to the Proposed Project.

Operation of the Proposed Project would not have a substantial adverse effect on scenic vistas, would not substantially damage scenic resources, and would not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings. Operation of the Proposed Project would not have lighting associated with it that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in this area.

In summary, impacts to visual resources due to operation of the Portola Avenue and Gerald Ford Drive Subtransmission Line reconfiguration would be less than significant.

Substation Modifications

Operational impacts associated with the proposed substation modifications would be viewed in the context of the existing substation equipment. Improvements would primarily occur within perimeter walls and fences, and most would be essentially imperceptible. However, a few major equipment improvements would be visible and could potentially impact the sensitive viewers associated with the Mirage, Farrell, and Eisenhower substations.

At Mirage Substation, the addition of the 60-foot dead-end rack, within the fenced perimeter of the substation, would be visible from sensitive viewpoints and would be a noticeable change; however, it would be consistent with the visual character of the substation and would result in a less than significant impact.

The two new TSPs associated with the proposed Eisenhower Substation upgrades would affect travelers using East Mesquite Avenue and Gene Autry Trail. However, because the modifications would be mostly screened and would exhibit the same visual character of existing facilities, impacts would be less than significant.

Proposed modifications at Farrell Substation include a 27-foot dead end rack and a 16-foot-wide by 30-foot-long paved substation access driveway with a 16-foot-wide gate. The proposed equipment improvements would be visually similar to existing facilities and, therefore, the existing character of the site would remain intact. The new driveway would not be seen from sensitive viewpoints and, therefore, would result in less than significant impacts.

Existing Condition: 115 kV single-circuit wood pole and double-circuit light-weight steel pole subtransmission lines.

Simulated Condition: Proposed 115 kV double-circuit tubular steel pole subtransmission line reconfiguration.

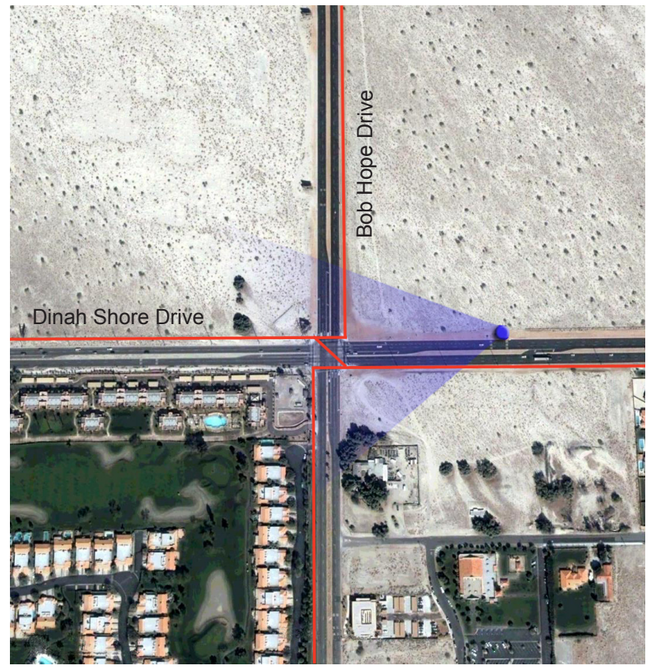

Photo Location Map
Viewpoint located northeast of the intersection of Bob Hope Drive and Dinah Shore Drive, looking west.

PHOTOGRAPH INFORMATION

Date and Time: 6/6/07 1:35pm
Location: Rancho Mirage, California
Weather Conditions: Clear
Focal length: 50mm

Structure models and configurations based on specifications provided by SCE for the purposes of photographic simulations

Figure 4.1-7

epg

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Existing Condition: Existing wood pole subtransmission lines and steel lattice tower transmission lines.

Simulated Condition: Proposed 115 kV subtransmission line reconfiguration with tubular steel and wood pole replacements.

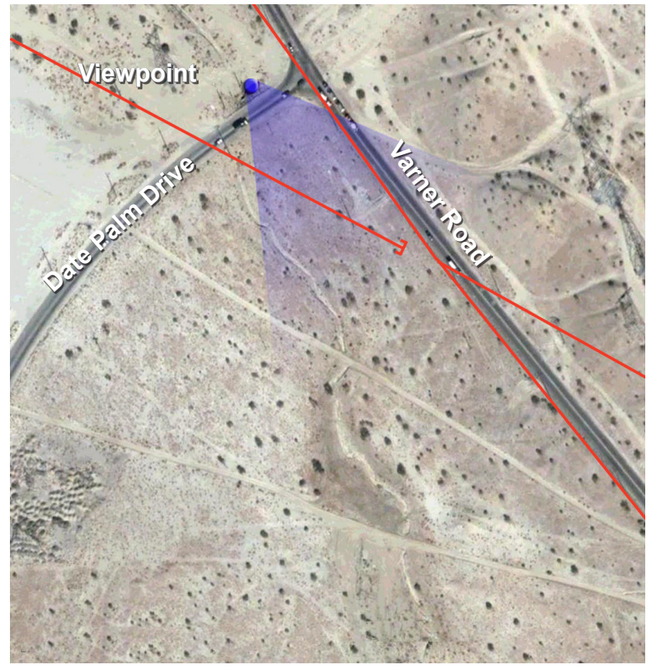

Photo Location Map
Viewpoint located west of the intersection of Varner Road and Date Palm Drive looking southeast.

PHOTOGRAPH INFORMATION

Date and Time: 6/8/07 1:39pm
Location: Cathederal City, California
Weather Conditions: Clear
Focal length: 50mm

Structure models and configurations based on specifications provided by SCE for the purposes of photographic simulations

Figure 4.1-8

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Existing Condition: Existing 115 kV single-circuit wood pole subtransmission line crossing Gerald Ford Drive.

Simulated Condition: Proposed 115 kV subtransmission line reconfiguration showing a single-circuit wood pole on the northwest corner of Portola Avenue and Gerald Ford Drive replaced with a new, double-circuit, tubular steel pole.

Photo Location Map
Viewpoint located southwest of the intersection of Gerald Ford Drive and Portola Avenue, looking east along Gerald Ford Drive towards Portola Avenue.

PHOTOGRAPH INFORMATION

Date and Time: 6/8/07 1:41
Location: Palm Desert, California
Weather Conditions: Clear
Tower Type: 115 kV Tubular Steel Pole
Focal Length: 50mm

Structure models and configurations based on specifications provided by SCE for the purposes of photographic simulations

Figure 4.1-9

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There are no state scenic highways in proximity to the Proposed Project, although SR 111 is considered eligible for state designation. Because substation modifications in the vicinity of SR 111 would mostly occur within the existing substation fences/walls and would visually match existing facilities, impacts to SR 111 would be less than significant.

Operation of the Proposed Project would not have a substantial adverse effect on scenic vistas, would not substantially damage scenic resources, and would not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings. Operation of the Proposed Project would not have lighting associated with it that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in this area.

In summary, impacts to visual resources due to operation of the substations would be less than significant.

4.1.6 Alternatives

Farrell-Garnet 115kV Subtransmission Line Alternative Route 2

The Farrell-Garnet 115kV Subtransmission Line Alternative Route 2 would primarily cross low-density residential communities north of Vista Chino Avenue and along the east and west sides of Sunrise Way. Along the SCE ROW, north of Four Seasons Boulevard, this alternative would cross the Whitewater River drainage and foothills, south of I-10, before intersecting the Devers-Farrell-Windland route. Other existing modifications along Alternative Route 2 include a 115 kV subtransmission line, distribution lines, the Palm Springs Airport, industrial facilities, and vacant land, primarily along Vista Chino Avenue.

Low- and medium-density residential viewers associated with Alternative Route 2 are represented by master-planned resort/retirement communities, which have a much greater density of vegetation than the surrounding undeveloped land. Residences adjacent to Vista Chino Avenue and Sunrise Way would have direct views of the subtransmission line. Residential viewers immediately north of Vista Chino Avenue would be influenced by existing distribution lines, industrial facilities, the Palm Springs International Airport, and disturbed vacant land. Residential viewers along the east and west sides of Sunrise Way would have immediate open views of the 115 kV subtransmission line. Additionally, there are no existing transmission structures or industrial facilities along this section of Alternative Route 2. Residential viewers that would not be immediately adjacent to Alternative Route 2 would have partial to fully screened views as a result of vegetation and structural elements, such as walls and buildings.

Vista Chino Avenue and Sunrise Way are the only two travel routes associated with Alternative Route 2. Viewer duration along Vista Chino Avenue (SR 111) would be constant for approximately 1.75 miles; however, it would not degrade the existing visual character, due to the presence of subtransmission lines and the Palm Springs Airport. Vista Chino Avenue is SR 111 in this area of Palm Springs; however, views from this section of SR 111 are not considered scenic, due to existing modifications. Viewer duration on Sunrise Way would be approximately 1 mile; however, the existing visual character could be affected by the subtransmission line, except for a portion that would be placed underground (approximately 2,650 feet, from San Rafael Road to Four Seasons Boulevard).

The only recreation viewers associated with Alternative Route 2 would occur within the Palm Springs Country Club Golf Course. Alternative Route 2 would be located within 0.25 mile of these viewers; however, dense vegetation would provide partially to fully screened views, therefore the visual character associated with the viewers would not be affected.

The construction and operation Alternative Route 2 would potentially affect sensitive viewers. However, due to the modified/industrial character along the Gene Autry Trail, Chino Vista Avenue, and Indian Avenue, the addition of the subtransmission line would not substantially degrade the existing visual character associated with Alternative Route 2 (e.g., industrial facilities, airport); therefore, impacts would be less than significant.

Construction of Alternative Route 2 would incur temporary construction impacts to residences on Sunrise Way. Additionally, operational impacts associated with Alternative Route 2 along Sunrise Way would be higher than that of the Proposed Project (Route 1), because there are no existing structures along Alternative Route 2.

Recreation viewers associated with the Palm Springs Country Club Golf Course would incur less than significant impacts because views would be screened by vegetation.

There were no identified scenic vistas in the area.

There is no state scenic highway in proximity to the either alternative route.

Future land use along Alternative 2 is designated medium-density residential, and therefore, the aesthetic impact of Alternative 2 could potentially affect future land use.

Construction and operation of Alternative Route 2 would not have a substantial adverse effect on scenic vistas, would not substantially damage scenic resources, and would not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings. Construction and operation of the Alternative Route 2 would not have lighting associated with it that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in this area.

In summary, impacts to visual resources due to construction and operation of the Farrell-Garnet Subtransmission Line Alternative Route 2 would be less than significant

Alternative Route 3

Alternative Route 3 would follow Alternative Route 2 along Vista Chino Avenue and Sunrise Way, then turn west at San Rafael Road. At Indian Avenue, Alternative Route 3 would travel north to the Garnet Substation. Similar to Alternative Route 2, Alternative Route 3 primarily would cross existing and developing low-density residential communities. The route also would cross the Whitewater River drainage along Indian Avenue. Existing modifications along Alternative Route 3 include a 115 kV subtransmission line, distribution lines, Palm Springs International Airport, industrial/mining facilities, and disturbed vacant land.

Low-density residential viewers associated with Alternative Route 3 are represented by master-planned resort/retirement communities, with a much greater density of vegetation than the surrounding undeveloped land. Residential viewers adjacent to Vista Chino Avenue and Sunrise

Way would be similar to Alternative Route 2. Additionally, residential viewers adjacent to San Rafael Road and Indian Avenue would have immediate views of the subtransmission line.

Vista Chino Avenue, Sunrise Way, San Rafael Road, and Indian Avenue are the major travel routes associated with Alternative Route 3. Transportation viewers along Vista Chino Avenue and Sunrise Way would be the same as Alternative Route 2. Viewing duration along San Rafael Road would be short. Viewing duration along Indian Avenue would be greater, because this route would parallel the road for approximately 4 miles, from San Rafael Road to the Garnet Substation.

The only recreation viewers associated with Alternative Route 3 occur within the Palm Springs Country Club Golf Course. The route would be located within 0.25 mile of these viewers; however, dense vegetation would provide partially to fully screened views, therefore, the existing visual character would not be degraded.

The construction and operation of Alternative Route 3 would potentially affect sensitive viewers associated with this alternative. However, due to the modified/industrial character along the Gene Autry Trail, Chino Vista Avenue, and Indian Avenue, the addition of the subtransmission line would not substantially degrade the existing character (e.g., industrial facilities, airport); therefore, impacts were determined to be less than significant.

Residences along San Rafael Road and Sunrise Way (between Vista Chino Avenue and San Rafael Road) could potentially incur significant impacts, because conditions within these areas are not directly influenced by modified or industrial facilities; therefore, the existing visual character would be degraded.

Future land use along Alternative Route 3 is designated medium-density residential, and therefore, the aesthetic impact of Alternate 3 would potentially affect future land use.

Construction and operation of Alternative Route 3 would not have a substantial adverse effect on scenic vistas, would not substantially damage scenic resources, and would not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings. Construction and operation of the Alternative Route 3 would not have lighting associated with it that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in this area.

In summary, impacts to visual resources due to operation of the Farrell-Garnet Subtransmission Line Alternative Route 3 would be less than significant.

Mirage-Santa Rosa 115 kV Subtransmission Line Alternative Route 5

Alternative Route 5 would primarily be built underground; however, the I-10 crossing would be constructed overhead. Viewers associated with this route would include travelers on I-10.

There were no identified scenic vistas in the area.

The construction and operation of Alternative Route 5 would create less than significant impacts to sensitive viewers in the Thousand Palms area because the portion of the line adjacent to residences would be installed underground. Trenching associated with burying these transmission cables would create a temporary construction impact. Operational impacts would

be less than significant because the majority of Alternative Route 5 would be located underground.

There is no state scenic highway in proximity to any of the alternate routes.

Future land use along Alternate Route 5 is designated light industrial, and, therefore, the aesthetic impact of Alternate Route 5 would be less than significant.

Construction and operation of Alternative Route 5 would not have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista, would not substantially damage scenic resources, and would not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings. Construction and operation of the Alternative Route 5 would not have lighting associated with it that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in this area.

In summary, Mirage-Santa Rosa Subtransmission Line Alternative Route 5 would result in less than significant impacts to aesthetics for present and future uses.

4.1.7 References

City of Palm Desert Comprehensive General Plan. City of Palm Desert. March 2004.

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City of Palm Springs General Plan Update. 2006. http://www.psplan.org. November 2006.

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