

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Overview of Proposed Project

Southern California Edison (SCE), in its California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) application for the San Joaquin Cross Valley Loop Transmission Project (A.08-05-039), filed on May 30, 2008, seeks a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity (CPCN) to construct electrical facilities pursuant to CPUC General Order (GO) 131-D. The application includes the Proponent's Environmental Assessment (PEA) (SCE, 2008) prepared pursuant to Rule 2.4 of CPUC's Rules of Practice and Procedure.

Currently SCE owns and operates four 220 kV transmission lines commonly referred to as the Big Creek Corridor. These lines move electricity from the Big Creek Hydroelectric Project south to the Electrical Needs Area which encompasses the cities of Tulare, Visalia, Hanford, Farmersville, Exeter and Woodlake as well as surrounding areas of Tulare and Kings Counties. Two of the lines begin at Big Creek and terminate at the Rector Substation (Big Creek 1-Rector 220 kV transmission line and Big Creek 3-Rector 220 kV transmission line) while the other two lines begin at Big Creek and terminate at the Springville 220/66 kV Substation (Big Creek 3-Springville 220 kV transmission line and Big Creek 4-Springville 220 kV transmission line). In its application, SCE requested authorization to loop the existing Big Creek 3-Springville 220 kV transmission line into the Rector Substation by constructing 18.5 miles of new transmission line and replacing 1.1 miles of existing transmission line. SCE also requested permission to modify the Rector Substation and to remove wave traps and line tuners and install protective relays at the Rector, Springville, Vestal, and Big Creek 3 Substations (collectively, the "Proposed Project").

This Draft EIR has been prepared to consider the potential environmental impacts from the Proposed Project, and to identify and evaluate a reasonable range of alternatives.

1.2 Project Objectives, Purpose and Need

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines (Section 15126.6.a) require that a reasonable range of alternatives to the Proposed Project be described, analyzed and feasibly attain most of the basic objectives of the Proposed Project. Therefore, in order to explain the need for the Proposed Project, and to guide in development and evaluation of alternatives, SCE was asked to define its project objectives. SCE identified the objectives for the San Joaquin Cross Valley Loop Transmission Project in its PEA (SCE, 2008) as follows:

- Provide safe and reliable electric service consistent with NERC/WECC and CAISO reliability criteria.
- Provide safe and reliable electric service consistent with SCE's electrical system planning guidelines.
- Increase transmission capacity between the Big Creek Hydroelectric Project and Rector Substation to mitigate overload conditions.
- Reduce the need to interrupt customer electrical service under transmission line outage conditions.
- Minimize the need to reduce Big Creek Hydroelectric Project generation under transmission line outage conditions.
- Minimize electrical service interruption to customers by scheduling the construction of new facilities in an orderly and rational matter.
- Meet project need while minimizing environmental impact.
- Meet project need and construction schedule in a cost effective manner.

According to SCE, construction of the Proposed Project is needed to maintain safe and reliable electric service to customers and to serve forecasted electrical demand in the southeastern portion of the San Joaquin Valley. Historically, the existing 220 kV transmission line configuration within the Big Creek Corridor has met the electrical demand in the Electrical Needs Area. However, growth in demand on the western side of the Big Creek Corridor has exceeded growth in demand on the eastern side, resulting in transmission lines on the western side of the corridor operating at or near capacity while the transmission lines on the eastern side are under utilized. The unequal distribution of load has resulted in overloads on the 220 kV transmission lines serving Rector Substation from the Big Creek Hydroelectric Project. The need to loop the existing Big Creek 3-Springville transmission line into the Rector Substation was identified by the California Independent System Operation Corporation (CAISO) as the most economically feasible upgrade to reduce the possibility of overloads on the existing transmission lines in the Big Creek Corridor.

1.3 Agency Use of This Document

Section 15124(d) of the State CEQA Guidelines requires that an EIR contain a statement briefly describing the intended uses of the EIR. The State CEQA Guidelines indicate that the EIR should identify the ways in which the Lead Agency and any responsible agencies would use this document in their approval or permitting processes. The following discussion summarizes the roles of the agencies and the intended uses of the EIR.

1.3.1 CPUC Process

Pursuant to Article XII of the Constitution of the State of California, the CPUC is charged with the regulation of investor-owned public utilities, including SCE. The CPUC is the lead State agency for CEQA compliance in evaluation of the SCE's proposed San Joaquin Cross Valley

Loop Transmission Project, and has directed the preparation of this EIR. This EIR will be used by the Commission, in conjunction with other information developed in the Commission's formal record, to act on SCE's application for a CPCN for construction and operation of the Proposed Project. Under CEQA requirements, the CPUC will determine the adequacy of the Final EIR and, if adequate, will certify the document as complying with CEQA. If the Commission approves a project with significant and unmitigable environmental impacts, it must state why in a Statement of Overriding Considerations, which would be included in the Commission's decision on the application.

1.3.2 Other Agencies

Several other State agencies will rely on information in this EIR to inform them in their decision over issuance of specific permits related to project construction or operation. In addition to the CPUC, State agencies such as the Department of Transportation, Department of Fish and Game, Regional Water Quality Control Board, and Office of Historic Preservation would be involved in reviewing and/or approving the project. On the federal level, agencies with potential reviewing and/or permitting authority include the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

No local discretionary (e.g., use) permits are required, since the CPUC has preemptive jurisdiction over the construction, maintenance, and operation of SCE facilities in California. SCE would still have to obtain all ministerial building and encroachment permits from local jurisdictions, and the CPUC's GO 131-D requires SCE to comply with local building, design, and safety standards to the greatest degree feasible to minimize project conflicts with local conditions. The CPUC's authority does not preempt special districts, such as Air Quality Management Districts, or other State agencies or the federal government. SCE would obtain permits, approvals, and licenses as needed from, and would participate in reviews and consultations as needed with, federal, State, and local agencies as shown in Table 1-1.

1.4 Public Review and Comment

1.4.1 Education Outreach

In response to letters of concern and comments from the public regarding the Proposed Project, the CPUC held two educational workshops in Tulare County. The first workshop was held on Monday, August 11, 2008 from 6:30-8:30 p.m. in the Freedom Elementary School Cafeteria, at 575 East Citrus, Farmersville, California. The second workshop was held on Tuesday, August 12, 2008 from 6:30-8:30 p.m. at the Woodlake Veterans Memorial Building, at 355 North Acacia Street in Woodlake, California. Both workshops covered the same information. Specifically, the workshops addressed the CPUC's process for reviewing the Proposed Project application and the role of the CEQA environmental review process. Information on how interested parties could most effectively provide input, voice concerns, pose questions, and become involved during the process was also addressed at each workshop. At the end of each workshop, a brief question and answer session was held to address questions related to the CPUC and CEQA processes.

**TABLE 1-1
SUMMARY OF POTENTIAL PERMIT REQUIREMENTS**

| Agency | Permits and Other Requirements | Jurisdiction/Purpose |
|--|---|---|
| Federal Agencies | | |
| U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service | Section 7 Consultation, Endangered Species Act | Construction, operation, and maintenance on land that may affect a federally listed species or its habitat; incidental take authorization (if required) |
| U.S. Army Corps of Engineers | Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act | Construction across Navigable Waters |
| | Nationwide or Individual Permit (Section 404 of the Clean Water Act) | Construction impacting Waters of the United States, including wetlands |
| State Agencies | | |
| California Public Utilities Commission | Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity | Overall project approval and California Environmental Quality Act review |
| California Department of Fish and Game | Endangered Species Consultation | Construction, operation and maintenance that may affect a state-listed species or its habitat; incidental take authorization (if required) |
| California Department of Transportation | Encroachment Permit | Construction, operation, and maintenance within, under, or over state highway right-of-way (ROW) |
| California Regional Water Quality Control Board | National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Construction Storm water Permit | Storm water discharges associated with construction activities disturbing more than one acre of land |
| | Section 401 Water Quality Certification (or waiver) | Certifies that project is consistent with state water quality standards |
| Office of Historic Preservation | Section 106 Review, National Historic Preservation Act | Construction, operation, and maintenance on land that may affect cultural or historic resources |
| Local Agencies | | |
| City of Visalia City of Farmersville Tulare County | Encroachment Permit (ministerial) | Construction, operation, and maintenance within, under, or over city or county road ROW |

1.4.2 Scoping

On August 22, 2008, the CPUC published and distributed a Notice of Preparation (NOP) to advise interested local, regional, and State agencies, Native American tribal organizations, and interested public, that an EIR would be prepared for the Proposed Project. The NOP solicited both written and verbal comments on the EIR's scope during a 30-day comment period and provided information on the forthcoming public scoping meetings. Additionally, the NOP presented the background, purpose, description, and location of the Proposed Project, potential issues to be addressed in the EIR, and contact information for additional information regarding the project.

In addition to the NOP, the CPUC published legal advertisements in English and Spanish in The Fresno Bee on August 26 and September 13, 2008; in English and in Spanish in the Foothills Sun-Gazette on August 27 and September 10, 2008; in English and Spanish in the Visalia Times-Delta on August 22 and September 12, 2008; and in Spanish in El Sol on August 22 and September 12, 2008.

The CPUC conducted two scoping meetings to solicit verbal comments on the scope of the EIR. The first meeting was held Wednesday, September 17, 2008 from 6:30-8:30 pm in the Freedom Elementary School Cafeteria, at 575 East Citrus, Farmersville, California. The second meeting was held Thursday, September 18, 2008 from 6:30-8:30 pm at the Woodlake Veterans Memorial Building, at 355 North Acacia Street in Woodlake, California.

During the public scoping meetings held on September 17 and 18, 2008, participants were able to comment on the scope of issues to be included in the EIR for the Proposed Project. Written comments were also collected throughout the public comment period. There were 44 oral comments in the public scoping meetings, and 96 letters or e-mails were received during the scoping period. Appendix A to this EIR contains the Scoping Report, which includes a copy of the NOP, the NOP mailing list, a detailed description of all verbal and written comments received, a description of comments that are not within the scope of CEQA, transcripts of the oral comments, and copies of the written comments.

The overarching themes of the written and oral comments in the Scoping Report that fall within the purview of the CEQA process are as follows:

- Impacts on scenic views, especially along Highway 198 which is designated as an Eligible State Scenic Highway;
- Impacts from loss of agricultural land;
- Impacts to air quality from earth disturbance and removal of vegetation;
- Impacts to wildlife and plant life;
- Impacts of greenhouse gas emissions on climate change;
- Impacts to historical and archeological resources;
- Impacts to water quality and water supply in the project area;
- Impacts to the Farmersville General Plan;
- Noise impacts from operation of the transmission lines;
- Impacts to population and housing;
- Impacts on public services and recreation;
- Impacts to current and planned transportation systems;
- Cumulative impacts;
- Ensure that alternatives are adequately addressed; and,
- Ensure that perceived inadequacies in the PEA will not be repeated.

1.4.3 Public Comment on the Draft EIR

This Draft EIR is being circulated to local and state agencies and to interested individuals who may wish to review and comment on the report. Written comments may be submitted to the CPUC during the 45-day public review period. Verbal and written comments on this Draft EIR will be accepted via regular mail, fax, and e-mail and at a noticed public meeting (either noticed in this document or under separate cover). All comments received will be addressed in a Response to Comments addendum document, which, together with this Draft EIR, will constitute the Final EIR for the Proposed Project.

This Draft EIR identifies the environmental impacts of the Proposed Project on the existing environment, indicates how those impacts would be mitigated or avoided, and identifies and evaluates alternatives to the Proposed Project. This document is intended to provide the CPUC with the information required to exercise its jurisdictional responsibilities with respect to the Proposed Project, which would be considered at a separate noticed public meeting of the CPUC.

CEQA requires that a Lead Agency shall neither approve nor implement a project as proposed unless the significant environmental impacts have been reduced to an acceptable level. An acceptable level is defined as eliminating, avoiding or substantially lessening significant environmental effects to below a level of significance. If the Lead Agency approves a project, even though significant impacts identified in the final EIR cannot be fully mitigated, the Lead Agency must state in writing the reasons for its action. Findings and a Statement of Overriding Considerations must be included in the record of project approval and mentioned in the Notice of Determination (NOD).

1.5 Reader's Guide to This EIR

This EIR is organized as follows:

Executive Summary. Provides a summary description of the Proposed Project, the alternatives, their respective environmental impacts and the Environmentally Superior Alternative. Also provides a tabulation of the impacts and mitigation measures for the Proposed Project and alternatives.

Chapter 1, Introduction. Provides a discussion of the background, purpose and need for the project, briefly describing the proposed San Joaquin Cross Valley Loop Transmission Project, and outlining the public agency use of the EIR.

Chapter 2, Project Description. Provides a detailed description of the proposed San Joaquin Cross Valley Loop Transmission Project.

Chapter 3, Alternatives and Cumulative Projects. Provides a description of the alternatives screening and evaluation process, description of alternatives considered but eliminated from further analysis and the rationale therefore, and description of the alternatives analyzed in Chapter 4. Also identifies the cumulative projects considered in the analysis of cumulative impacts.

Chapter 4, *Environmental Analysis*. Provides a comprehensive analysis and assessment of impacts (including cumulative impacts) and mitigation measures for the Proposed Project and alternatives, including the No Project Alternative. This section is divided into main sections for each environmental issue area (e.g., Air Quality, Biological Resources, etc.) that contain the environmental settings, impacts, and cumulative effects of the Proposed Project and each alternative.

Chapter 5, *Comparison of Alternatives*. Provides a discussion of the relative advantages and disadvantages of the Proposed Project and the alternatives that were evaluated, and identifies the CEQA Environmentally Superior Alternative.

Chapter 6, *CEQA Statutory Sections*. Provides a discussion of growth-inducing impacts, significant environmental effect that cannot be avoided, irreversible environmental changes, and cumulative impacts.

Chapter 7, *Report Preparers*. Identifies the primary authors of this Draft EIR

Chapter 8, *Mitigation Monitoring, Reporting, and Compliance Plan*. Provides a discussion of the CPUC's mitigation monitoring program requirements for the project as approved by the CPUC.

Appendix A contains the Scoping Report which includes the NOP as well as copies of comments received on the NOP. Other technical appendices are also included in this Draft EIR.

References – Introduction

Southern California Edison (SCE), 2008. *Proponent's Environmental Assessment for the San Joaquin Cross Valley Loop Transmission Project*, May 2008.