Los Angeles County
Department of Regional Planning

Planning for the Challenges Ahead

Richard J. Bruckner
Director

June 17, 2010

TO: Supervisor Gloria Molina, Chair
Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas
Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky
Supervisor Don Knabe
Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich

FROM: Richard J. Bruckner
Director

SUBJECT: RESPONSE TO MAY 18, 2010 BOARD MOTION, ITEM #3, REGARDING UNDERGROUNDING OF TRANSMISSION LINES

On May 18, 2010, your Board instructed the Director of Planning to investigate the feasibility of a policy on the undergrounding of transmission lines in the Draft Countywide General Plan Update and the Draft Antelope Valley Area Plan Update and to report back to your Board within 30 days.

Background

In recent years, there has been growing interest in the development of utility-scale alternative energy generation facilities, such as solar and wind facilities, in unincorporated Los Angeles County. This growing interest acknowledges the rising costs of fossil fuels as well as State policies, such as the California Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006 (Assembly Bill 32), that aim to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by limiting the use of fossil fuels for electrical energy generation.

As indicated in your Board's motion, utility-scale alternative energy generation facilities can provide many benefits to unincorporated Los Angeles County, but potential negative impacts from these facilities must be addressed. Many of the potential negative impacts are related to the transmission lines that bring electricity from these facilities to sub-stations near its final users. Transmission lines and their supporting structures can impair views of mountains and other scenic resources. The impacts of transmission lines could be addressed by the County's land use policies.

The Los Angeles County General Plan, adopted by your Board in 1980, provides land use policies for all unincorporated areas. The Antelope Valley Area Plan, adopted by your Board in 1986, is a component of the General Plan that provides more specific land use policies for the unincorporated areas within the Antelope Valley, which are the focus of the growing interest in the development of utility-scale alternative energy

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generation facilities. Both of these documents are currently being updated and your Board's motion requests that the updated documents include policies that address the impacts of transmission lines. Regional Planning staff has determined that it is feasible to include such policies in the updated documents.

Draft Policies

Regional Planning staff has drafted policies for the Countywide General Plan Update and the Antelope Valley Area Plan Update that will address the impacts of transmission lines. These policies are intended to express the County's preference for underground transmission lines while acknowledging that underground transmission lines are not always feasible.

The following policy has been drafted for the Countywide General Plan Update (Public Services and Facilities Element), which provides land use policies for all unincorporated areas:

Policy PS 6.5: *Encourage the construction of utilities underground, where possible.*

The following six policies have been drafted for the Antelope Valley Area Plan Update (Conservation and Open Space Element), which provides more specific land use policies for the unincorporated areas within the Antelope Valley:

Policy COS 11.1: *Require that new transmission lines be placed underground whenever physically feasible.*

Policy COS 11.2: *If new transmission lines cannot feasibly be placed underground due to physical constraints, require that they be collocated with existing transmission lines, or along existing transmission corridors, whenever physically feasible.*

Policy COS 11.3: *If new transmission lines cannot feasibly be placed underground or feasibly collocated with existing transmission lines or along existing transmission corridors due to physical constraints, direct new transmission lines to locations where environmental and visual impacts will be minimized.*

Policy COS 11.4: *Discourage the placement of new transmission lines on undisturbed lands containing sensitive biotic communities.*

Policy COS 11.5: *Discourage the placement of new transmission lines through existing communities or through properties with existing residential uses.*

Policy COS 11.6: *Review all proposed transmission line projects for conformity with the goals and policies of the Area Plan, including those listed above. When the California Public Utilities Commission is the decision-making authority for these projects, provide comments regarding conformity with the goals and policies of the Area Plan.*

Next Steps

The Countywide General Plan Update and the Antelope Valley Area Plan Update must undergo public review before they are presented to your Board for adoption. This public review will include environmental impact analysis pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) as well as public hearings before the County's Regional Planning Commission (RPC). The draft policies provided in this report are subject to further revision as both documents undergo public review and comment. Regional Planning staff welcomes comments regarding the draft policies from the general public, utilities, environmental groups, and other stakeholders, such as the Antelope Valley Responsible Energy Development Team.

Regional Planning staff anticipates that a revised draft of the Countywide General Plan Update will be released in September 2010. In accordance with CEQA, staff has determined that an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) will be required for this document, and a consulting firm has been contracted to prepare the EIR. Staff anticipates that the Countywide General Plan Update and its EIR will be presented to the RPC in 2011 and will be presented to your Board for adoption in 2012.

Regional Planning staff anticipates that a draft of the Antelope Valley Area Plan Update will also be released in September 2010. In accordance with CEQA, staff has determined that an EIR will also be required for this document. In 2009, the County's Quality and Productivity Commission (QPC) approved a $200,000 grant to fund a portion of the anticipated EIR costs, but the remaining costs remain unfunded. However, staff has proposed merging the Antelope Valley Area Plan Update's EIR into the Countywide General Plan Update's EIR, and the same consulting firm would be able to conduct the additional analysis at a cost of less than $200,000. If the QPC approves the use of its grant for the purpose of a combined EIR, staff anticipates that the Antelope Valley Area Plan Update will be presented to the RPC and your Board concurrently with the Countywide General Plan Update and the combined EIR. If the QPC does not approve the use of its grant for this purpose, the Antelope Valley Area Plan Update will be suspended until such time that an EIR is funded.

If you have any questions regarding this report, please contact Mitch Glaser at *mglaser@planning.lacounty.gov* or at (213) 974-6476. Our offices are closed on Fridays.

RJB:RCH:MWG

C: Chief Executive Officer
County Counsel
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