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City of Riverside Takes Major Step Forward on Crucial Second Connection to Statewide Power Grid

Project to reduce possibility of power outages started in 2004, has been needed for decades

RIVERSIDE, Calif. – The City of Riverside took a major step forward today in a decades-long effort to reduce the possibility of a major power outage within the city when the California Public Utilities Commission approved an application from Southern California Edison (SCE) to construct a transmission line that would provide Riverside with a second connection to the statewide power grid.

The Commission voted unanimously to approve a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity (CPCN) to allow SCE to build the Riverside Transmission Reliability Project, or RTRP. Riverside asked SCE, its bulk power provider, for a second connection to the grid in 2004, and the two entities have been working toward obtaining approval for the project ever since.

“This decision is the result of years of work to protect Riverside residents and business owners from the impacts of a serious blackout,” Mayor Rusty Bailey said. “This is a watershed moment for Riverside and for the region, since our city is home to hospitals, colleges and universities, and the emergency management infrastructure that serves western Riverside County.”

Riverside is the only city of its size in Southern California to have only one connection of this type to the statewide grid. This leaves Riverside subject to a significant power outage like the one that left most of the city without power for several hours in 2007.

Riverside Public Utilities has documented the need for a second connection since at least 1966 and previously sought to advance such a project. The current project schedule calls for RTRP to be built and providing power to Riverside by 2026.

In the meantime, Riverside has built hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of local, natural gas-fueled power projects to temporarily fill the gap between the power the city needs during the hot summer months and what is available from SCE's existing Vista substation. But those locally-owned projects do not provide enough reliable power to replace the need for RTRP.

Once RTRP is functioning and providing a second source of reliable power, Riverside will not need to operate those natural gas-fueled power projects as much. One of the projects will be retired and control of the other will be turned over the California Independent System Operator, which operates the statewide grid and will be able to use the remaining Riverside facility to facilitate the integration of renewable resources across the state. RTRP also will allow Riverside to more effectively meet its state-mandated renewable energy requirements.

"Riverside Public Utilities takes pride in providing safe and reliable water and power to its customers," RPU General Manager Todd Corbin said. "In approving the RTRP, the utilities commission validated the years of hard work that have gone into this project."

The Riverside City Council certified an environmental impact report on the project in 2013 that determined how the project will be built. That approval came after an extensive public outreach campaign that included community meetings. That environmental report also ruled out options such as rooftop solar, large-scale solar projects within Riverside, and battery storage, which are incapable of providing the amount of reliable power Riverside needs.

As a result of litigation with property owners in neighboring Jurupa Valley, SCE revised its application to the utilities commission in 2016 to place underground about half of the project in Jurupa Valley.

The CPUC today approved a version of the project that includes that undergrounding and also allows for incremental portions of the project to be underground in Jurupa Valley if SCE is granted a superior easement for the underground construction in Jurupa Valley. If the superior easement is not granted, SCE can proceed with building the project with about half of it above ground in Jurupa Valley.

SCE has estimated that the Hybrid Route (where only a portion of the project in Jurupa Valley is undergrounded) would cost \$408 million. The investor-owned utility has estimated that the Alternative Route (where there is additional incremental undergrounding of the project route in Jurupa Valley) would cost \$521 million.