

DWP sticks with Green Path North project, rejects Edison's offer to use power lines

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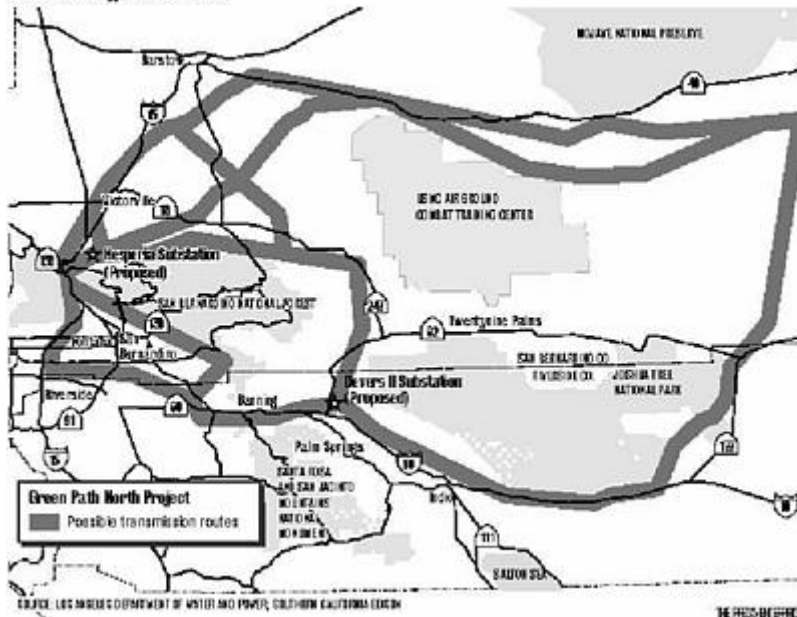
By DAVID DANELSKI
The Press-Enterprise

Southern California Edison is offering an alternative to the Green Path North power line project that Los Angeles wants to build across San Bernardino County deserts and foothills.

Edison could add enough capacity on its power lines along Interstate 10 to carry electricity to Los Angeles from geothermal, wind and solar power projects planned in the desert, said Sandi Blain, manager of the transmission project licenses for Edison, an investor-owned utility.

However, officials with the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power say they are not interested.

TRANSMISSION ROUTES: The city of Los Angeles is considering various routes for new transmission lines to carry renewable energy from the desert.



Any agreement with Edison would involve paying to use the power lines and could be suspended or terminated, leaving too much uncertainty for some 5 million Los Angeles-area customers, said David Nahai, DWP general manager.

"We cannot afford to be in a second position when it comes to transmission," Nahai said. "We have to have permanent and absolute transmission rights. ... Renting is not the option one prefers to have."

Los Angeles wants 800-megawatt power lines in place by 2013 or 2014 to tap geothermal energy at the Salton Sea as well as proposed desert-area wind and solar projects.

Imperial Irrigation District would build power lines from Salton Sea to a spot north of Palm Springs. From there, in several scenarios, the Los Angeles utility would build about 80 miles of transmission lines to

Hesperia, linking to the network that would carry the electricity to Los Angeles through the Antelope Valley.

Los Angeles needs to tap renewable energy sources to meet state greenhouse-gas reduction requirements. About 11 percent of the utility's electricity comes from renewable sources. By 2020, that needs to be 35 percent, utility spokesman Joseph Ramallo said.

OPPOSITION

Edison's offer bolsters the position of Green Path opponents.

Some High Desert residents have fought the DWP Green Path North plan ever since they happened upon one of the utility's survey crews last year north of Yucca Valley.

They fear power lines, and the roads needed to build and maintain them, would damage undisturbed land in the desert and in the foothills of the San Bernardino Mountains. Opponents include property owners, the Riverside County Board of Supervisor and the cities of Desert Hot Springs and Twentynine Palms.

Los Angeles officials said they would need a path no more than 330 feet wide, but desert residents worry that Green Path power lines could help justify a federal utility corridor designation that might lead to pipelines and other utility projects.

The maintenance roads would invite off-roaders, causing more damage to the environment, said David Miller, a resident of Pioneertown northwest of Yucca Valley and a member of the California Desert Coalition, a group opposing the project.

"We need to first maximize the use of all existing (utility) corridors, including all of the I-10 capacity, before we start adding corridors," Miller said.

Nahai said DWP is considering ways to build the power lines with minimal damage to the environment. An option is to bury the lines in more sensitive areas, he said. One scenario would put a portion of the power lines parallel to Edison's lines along Interstate 10. Nahai said he is in talks with Edison.

Some Inland cities could benefit from Green Path. DWP would build the lines in partnership with the interagency Southern California Public Power Authority, whose members include the cities of Riverside, Colton and Banning. Members of the power authority that opt into a project are then entitled to some of the electricity.

Blain said if the Los Angeles utility used Edison lines along Interstate 10, it would have to schedule power deliveries through California Independent System Operator.

The ISO is a state entity created when the electricity industry was deregulated in the 1990s to allow open access to most of the power grid in California. The agency would also set the transmission fees that Edison could charge.

GOING IT ALONE

But Ramallo said Los Angeles prefers to own its transmission lines and power-generation sources as much as possible.

That allows the utility to offer lower rates than those offered by investor-owned, for-profit utilities, such as Edison.

Miller said DWP's motives go beyond tapping renewable energy. The utility would have the potential to bring in money by delivering power to others, he said.

The project greatly boosts the DWP's clout and financial position by establishing new power lines near future alternative-energy projects and between two transmission corridors along interstates 10 and 15, he said.

"There is a huge potential for revenue," Miller said.

The U.S. Bureau of Land Management is processing 171 applications seeking to develop solar and wind energy on public land in the desert from Ridgecrest to El Centro. Any electricity those projects generate would have to be linked to the power grid.

The Los Angeles area will need all the power Green Path can carry, DWP officials said.

Nahai said the agency's only purpose is to serve the public.

"It is almost perverse for anyone to suggest we would be building this line to make money," Nahai said.

Federal environmental review of the Green Path proposal is expected to start next year.

Reach David Danelski at 951-368-9471 or ddanelski@pe.com