

## New Green Path North proposal would avoid sensitive desert areas

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By JANET ZIMMERMAN  
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A new route proposed for a controversial power line would sidestep sensitive Mojave Desert land by running towers parallel to existing lines along Interstate 10 and through San Timoteo Canyon to Lytle Creek.

The seventh and latest potential route for the Green Path North project to carry renewable energy to Los Angeles was confirmed Thursday by city Department of Water and Power officials.

It won cautious praise from desert preservationists who have been fighting to keep high-voltage transmission towers off of public land and wilderness areas near Joshua Tree National Park.

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**POWER LINE PATH:** The Los Angeles Department of Water and Power has proposed an alternative route for its Green Path North project, which would carry electricity from alternative sources in the desert to customers in Los Angeles.



"If they continue to work on the I-10, that's the appropriate place for it. But we're not there yet," said April Sall, founder of the California Desert Coalition.

She said a San Timoteo route is of concern and urged DWP to instead share the I-10 corridor with Southern California Edison.

The new proposal avoids widespread condemnation of private properties that would be necessary under one of the other proposed routes to bring power from geothermal, wind and solar projects in from the desert.

An earlier suggested route from the utility would run towers along I-10 as far west as Interstate 15 and cross 3,500 properties.

The route that drew the most criticism from groups like Sall's involved cutting across sensitive desert areas, including the privately owned Pipes Canyon Wilderness near Pioneertown in San Bernardino County.

The most recent proposal, known as Route A3, would establish additional rights of way near existing utility paths along I-10 from north of Palm Springs to Beaumont.

The route then would cut north through the historic San Timoteo Canyon, to Loma Linda, Colton, Rialto and San Bernardino, said Joseph Ramallo, a DWP spokesman.

The new path would end at the utility's transmission lines at Lytle Creek north of Fontana. From there, electricity could be routed to Los Angeles, he said.

"It involves 10 cities and is by no means an easy route," Ramallo said. "Just as there were opponents who expressed concerns about the route through Morongo and Yucca valleys, we expect there will be concerns raised about A3."

Sherli Leonard, executive director of The Redlands Conservancy, was upset Thursday to learn about the latest potential route.

Her group is a nonprofit land trust that maintains a hiking trail along San Timoteo Creek.

Eventually, the group plans a linear park along the entire 17-mile canyon that stretches from Redlands to Moreno Valley.

The existing Edison lines on hilltops and in the canyon "are pretty ugly," said Leonard, adding that construction of more lines would be "devastating to wildlife habitat and corridors."

If the DWP project affects the canyon, "The Redlands Conservancy will take an active role in objecting to it," she said.

The utility proposes to acquire additional rights of way parallel to those used by Edison and Union Pacific railroad, Ramallo said.

A Union Pacific spokeswoman said DWP had not approached the railroad.

David Nahai, DWP general manager, said the proposed towers have been reduced from 500 kilovolts to 230 kilovolts, which means the towers would be equally tall but require about 200 feet of width instead of 330 feet.

## **BURYING LINES**

The lower voltage would allow the lines to be buried for up to 15 miles of the 80-mile route to protect sensitive areas and preserve views.

Sandi Blain, manager of transmission project licensing for Edison, said DWP contacted Edison about two weeks ago to set up new discussions.

Route A3 would involve about 300 private properties, Ramallo said.

The plan has not been publicly announced and was only pitched to desert stakeholders in a private meeting at DWP offices last week.

Joan Taylor, California-Nevada desert energy chairwoman for the Sierra Club, said she was told at the meeting that the route would affect 30 permanent structures and seven mobile homes.

Many of those with an interest in the latest alternative haven't heard about it, including the cities of Redlands and Loma Linda.

San Bernardino County Supervisor Neil Derry, whose district includes most of the affected cities, said he welcomed a less intrusive project than the controversial desert route.

"The fact that they are being flexible is always a good thing," he said. "But my opposition remains until we see solid information that they're willing to share with the public."

Dennis Hallaway, Loma Linda city manager, said his city wouldn't have a problem with Route A3 if it uses existing Edison routes through the Loma Linda Preserve, 1,700 city-owned acres in the hills south of town.

DWP officials said they cannot release detailed information or maps because it is too early in the process.

"All of these routes are conceptual," Nahai said. "It's possible as we go through the process that new routes will suggest themselves and the ones we have may get altered."

The first step in the environmental review process is expected within the next six weeks with a notice of intent that includes right-of-way and permit applications to the federal government, Nahai said.

Public meetings and environmental analysis will follow. DWP hopes to complete Green Path North by 2014.

The project will help Los Angeles meet state-mandated renewable energy goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

About 11 percent of DWP's electricity comes from renewable sources. By 2020, it will need to be 35 percent.

*Reach Janet Zimmerman at 951-368-9586 or [jzimmerman@PE.com](mailto:jzimmerman@PE.com)*