



## LA Department of Water and Power shelves Green Path North, lines to carry electricity across the desert

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**By JANET ZIMMERMAN**

**The Press-Enterprise**

All work on a controversial plan to route 80 miles of electrical transmission lines through undisturbed desert near Joshua Tree National Park has been suspended as part of cost-cutting measures by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power.

The utility's board on Tuesday approved a 29-page budget amendment that included only one reference to Green Path North. The hotly debated project would move geothermal, solar and wind power from the Salton Sea area of the Imperial Valley to an electrical substation near Hesperia en route to Los Angeles.

DWP spokesman Joseph Ramallo declined comment, and Lee Kanon Alpert, the board president, was unavailable Friday afternoon. Board Vice President Edith Ramirez said she was not authorized to comment but added that the item passed without specific discussion of Green Path North.

Project opponents have included environmentalists, residents and local governments. Those alerted to the action Friday said they were surprised.

Ruth Rieman is vice chair of the California Desert Coalition, a group formed to fight Green Path North. She said she won't believe the project is dead until DWP withdraws its right-of-way application from the Bureau of Land Management.

"That's our litmus test, and we've always said it was," said Rieman, who lives in Pipes Canyon near Landers. "I'm the first one that's going to dance when that application comes down."

Environmentalists have decried the project since DWP unveiled its "preferred route" for the power line through the Mojave Desert three years ago. They have insisted that the 200- to 330-foot towers should run along an existing transmission corridor next to Interstate 10, not pristine and sensitive areas of the desert.

The lines would cut through the Big Morongo Canyon Preserve in Morongo Valley, a critical water source for migratory birds and wildlife, and through parts of the privately owned Pipes Canyon Wilderness near Pioneertown in San Bernardino County, critics said.

In September, Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa's office confirmed that the project might be abandoned because of community outrage. It is unclear whether the board action means the project is dead; the DWP board recently approved millions to lease land for geothermal development in the Imperial Valley. No one at the agency was available Friday to explain how that power would be carried to Los Angeles.

A month later, the embattled head of DWP, David Nahai, resigned and was replaced by Deputy Mayor David Freeman.

Freeman has said his focus is on a 600-plus-acre solar project on dry Owens Lake, in the eastern Sierra Nevada, that is close to existing transmission lines. DWP has scheduled a community meeting Monday in Bishop to discuss the project.

Background materials for the board's budget item Tuesday say DWP is "transmission rich," with more transmission lines than any other utility in the state, and "has no justification to pursue" building new lines unless they are deemed critical.

Instead, to meet the mayor's order that the city receive 40 percent of its energy from renewable sources by 2020, DWP "will aggressively pursue renewable energy projects near existing transmission lines first. Therefore, all work on the Green Path North renewable energy transmission line has been suspended."

According to the board action, there appears to be no funding for the project in the near future. But it was unknown what will happen with Green Path's partners and agreements.

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