

City Council Memorandum

City of Arts & Innovation

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL DATE: JANUARY 17, 2023

FROM: COUNCILMEMBER CHUCK CONDER WARDS: ALL
COUNCILMEMBER STEVE HEMENWAY

SUBJECT: RIVERSIDE TRANSMISSION RELIABILITY PROJECT (RTRP) WORKING GROUP FORMATION TO BUILD A COALITION OF SUPPORT AND IDENTIFY FUNDING FOR UNDERGROUNDING OF PROPOSED TRANSMISSION LINES

ISSUE:

Approve the formation of a working group, comprised of federal, state, and local leaders, to identify and secure funding sources for further undergrounding RTRP.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the City Council approve the formation of a working group, consisting of federal, state, and local leaders, to identify and secure funding sources for further undergrounding of RTRP.

BACKGROUND:

In 2004, Riverside Public Utilities (RPU) and Southern California Edison (SCE) began the process of jointly planning a critical second power connection to the Statewide electric grid. This would be achieved through the construction of a 10-mile 230,000 volt (kV) double circuit transmission line through the cities of Jurupa Valley, Norco, and the western portion of Riverside.

In 2006, the project proposal was approved by the California Independent System Operator (CAISO) and SCE was directed to build the transmission lines preferably no later than June 30, 2009. After preliminary investigations, it was determined that the project required an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). After entering into an Interconnection Facilities Agreement in 2008, RPU and SCE spent the next several years refining potential route alternatives, collecting data, and consulting with interagencies to understand community concerns and potentially mitigate the environmental impacts of the project.

In 2011, the City of Riverside acted as the CEQA lead agency and prepared a draft EIR that considered the “whole of the action” under CEQA Guidelines §15378[a]. Following comments from the public and agency review, the City submitted its final EIR on the

project in 2013. After certification of the EIR in 2013, the City of Jurupa Valley filed a CEQA lawsuit challenging the City's approval of RTRP due to the perceived significant impact within their jurisdiction.

While unsuccessful, the lawsuit was followed by coordinated public opposition to the project, resulting in an eventual "Alternative 1" project that involved undergrounding 4 miles of the transmission lines that made up Jurupa Valley's portion of the project. On March 18, 2020, the CPUC granted to SCE a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity (CPCN) for the RTRP.

On April 5, 2022, the Riverside City Council heard an update on the RTRP and communicated community concerns regarding the project. This occurred approximately 2 years after the original project approval due, in large part, to the City's focus on the COVID-19 pandemic and significant turnover of the City of Riverside's elected and appointed officials.

The City Council discussed a variety of community concerns regarding the RTRP, including increased fire risk and upgraded fire zones, which has caused many utilities throughout the State to prioritize undergrounding; environmental justice impacts on socially disadvantaged communities that live near the proposed transmission lines; and negative implications for neighborhood aesthetics and quality of life.

On May 10, 2022, the City Council authorized Councilmember Steve Hemenway to work in conjunction with City staff to hire a consultant to assess the viability for project modification with a budget of \$50,000 and a six-month timeline.

Due to complications and challenges regarding the drafting and publishing of the Request for Proposal; the final RFP was awarded and executed 4 months after original City Council direction. Because of this, the awardee (California Strategies, LLC) was given approximately 2 months to research and execute an analysis of project alternatives.

On October 20, 2022, the Financial Performance and Budget Committee met with Chair Hemenway, Vice Chair Cervantes, and Member Fierro present, to discuss California Strategies' analysis of the RTRP. After discussion, the Committee unanimously voted to recommend proposing a Resolution in support of further undergrounding of the RTRP and implementation of the five step Action Plan outlined in California Strategies' analysis.

On November 15, 2022, the Riverside City Council considered the Committee's recommendation. After several hours of public comment and discussion, the City Council voted 4-3 to continue working collaboratively with Southern California Edison on the project previously approved by the City Council and California Public Utilities Commission.

DISCUSSION:

Over the past 20 years since RTRP's inception, many variables have changed and continue to change, including but not limited to the following; increased fire risk and upgraded fire threat zones, greater concern for impacts on disadvantaged communities, and a stronger value by the State of California for undergrounding power lines.

To this end, many local and state elected officials that represent Riverside and the surrounding region have expressed bipartisan support for undergrounding the RTRP, and have committed to help secure funding for any additional costs incurred. Additionally, federal funding may be secured through various programs earmarked for energy infrastructure projects.

Therefore, a coordinated effort is required to identify, pursue, and secure funding for further undergrounding of the RTRP. The proposed working group will be made up of the following:

City of Riverside Councilmembers Hemenway and Conder
Local Congressional Representatives
Local State Senate Representatives
Local State Assembly Representatives
Riverside County Representative
City of Norco Representative

The working group will begin meeting regularly immediately after Council approval with an estimated timeline for reporting back on its work within 6-8 months to coincide with state and federal budgeting and appropriations processes. Once funding opportunities and options are identified, the working group will bring options to council for next steps and approval of potential project modifications. Consideration could be made by the working group to bring on an agency or firm to guide through the process.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

This item contributes to Strategic Priority 6 – Infrastructure, Mobility & Connectivity and Goal 6.2 – Maintain, protect and improve assets and infrastructure within the City’s built environment to ensure and enhance reliability, resiliency, sustainability, and facilitate connectivity.

This item aligns with each of the five Cross-Cutting Threads as follows:

1. **Community Trust** – Conducting proper due diligence to guarantee all projects in the City of Riverside are truly beneficial to all residents.
2. **Equity** – Ensuring all residents equitably share both the benefit and the burden of City projects and operations, and that no one area is disproportionately impacted for the benefit of another.
3. **Fiscal Responsibility** – Evaluating the cost benefit of every project to identify the true financial impact on Riverside homeowners, neighborhoods, and communities.
4. **Innovation** – Thinking creatively about the future of energy and shifting from the old, traditional way to a new, improved way of electric transmission.

5. **Sustainability & Resiliency** – Undergrounding RTRP addresses Riverside's need for a second connection to the grid; ensuring resilience and reliability by decreasing shut offs due to high winds and fire.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact associated with receiving this report.

Certified as to
availability of funds:

Edward Enriquez, Interim Assistant City
Manager/Chief Financial Officer/City Treasurer


Approved by:

Kris Martinez, Assistant City Manager

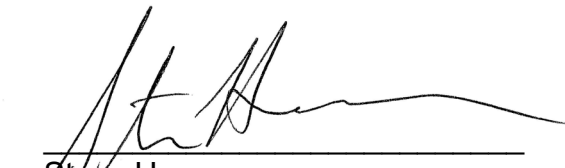
Approved as to form:

Phaedra A. Norton, City Attorney

Prepared by:



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