



City of Arts & Innovation

# City Council Memorandum

**TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL      DATE: OCTOBER 24, 2023**

**FROM: COUNCILMEMBER CHUCK CONDER      WARDS: ALL**  
**COUNCILMEMBER STEVE HEMENWAY**

**SUBJECT: RIVERSIDE TRANSMISSION RELIABILITY PROJECT WORKING GROUP  
UPDATE AND CONSIDERATION OF NEXT STEPS**

**ISSUE:**

Provide an update to the City Council on progress made by the Riverside Transmission Reliability Project (RTRP) Working Group and consider additional steps as recommended.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

That the City Council:

1. Receive and file this report and update; and
2. Allow the RTRP Working Group to continue the process of securing funding, now identified, to defray any increased cost due to full undergrounding of the RTRP; and
3. Draft a Resolution supporting efforts by the City of Norco and their Petition for Modification submitted to the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) for full undergrounding of the 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 was approved by the California Independent System Operator (CAISO) and SEC 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.

In 2011, the City of Riverside acted as the CEQA lead agency and prepared a draft EIR. 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 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 two years after the granting of a CPCN due, in large part, to the City's focus on the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as recent turnover of a majority 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 lines; and negative implications and impacts on neighborhood aesthetics and quality of life for residents.

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

Due to complications and challenges regarding the drafting and publishing of the Request for Proposal, the final RFP was awarded and executed four months after original City Council direction. This caused the awardee (California Strategies, LLC) to only have approximately two months to research and execute an analysis of project alternatives and options.

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 a five step Action Plan outlined in the 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 deny the Financial Performance and Budget Committee's recommendation to adopt a resolution to proceed with the five step Action Plan for further undergrounding of the RTRP.

On January 17, 2023, Councilmember Condor and Hemenway brought forward a recommendation to form a working group. The City Council voted 6-1 to allow the formation of a working group consisting of federal, state, and local leaders to identify and secure possible funding sources for further undergrounding of the RTRP. An update was to be provided in May or June 2023, with a final report to the City Council no later than October 24, 2023. The working group would be led by Councilmembers Condor and Hemenway with City of Riverside staff assisting as needed. The continuation of the working group and its efforts were reconfirmed by a vote of 7-0 at the June 6, 2023 City Council meeting.

## **DISCUSSION:**

The RTRP working group has met eleven times over the past eight months. Attendees consistently included elected officials or their designated representatives from the following offices:

- Congressman Calvert
- Congressman Takano
- Senator Roth
- Senator Seyarto
- Assemblymember Cervantes
- Assemblymember Essayli
- Norco City Councilmembers and staff
- Norco consultant Steve Larson, California Strategies
- Riverside City Councilmembers Conder and Hemenway

Discussions within the working group have focused on providing elected officials with pertinent information regarding the RTRP; attempting to identify, pursuing, and securing source(s) of funding; and understanding the CPUC petition for modification process should funding be identified and/or secured.

Through the efforts of the Working Group, a few areas of funding were identified. These sources include, but are not limited to, the following. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Deal designed to invest more than \$65 billion for constructing new and improved energy transmission, the largest electric grid investment in American history. Another is, the Inflation Reduction Act, which will provide approximately \$369 billion over 10 years focusing on energy security, environmental justice, and climate change programs. Both Senator Padilla and Congressman Calvert have expressed commitment to continue working with the Working Group and Riverside Councilmembers to secure the identified funding, through which amounts and timelines for disbursement of funds can soon be determined.

While the Working Group began its work in March to identify possible funding sources, the City of Norco initiated their own additional efforts for undergrounding the RTRP. This resulted in the recent filing of a Petition for Modification with the CPUC, which was accompanied by a letter of support. All elected officials in the Working Group signed the letter of support, with the exception of two elected officials who indicated they would send letters separately.

## **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 others.

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 of operation to new, improved methods of electric transmission.
5. **Sustainability & Resiliency** – Undergrounding RTRP addresses Riverside’s need for a second connection to the statewide grid; ensuring resilience and reliability by decreasing shutoffs due to high winds and wildfires.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

There is no fiscal impact associated with receiving this report.

Prepared by:



Councilmember Chuck Conder  
Councilmember, Ward 4



Steve Hemenway  
Councilmember, Ward 7