

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Overview of Proposed Project

Southern California Edison Company (SCE), in its California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) application for the Devers-Mirage 115 kV Subtransmission System Split Project (A.08-01-029), filed on January 31, 2008, seeks a Permit to Construct (PTC) electrical facilities pursuant to CPUC General Order (GO) 131-D. The application includes the Proponent's Environmental Assessment (PEA) (SCE, 2008) prepared pursuant to Rule 2.4 of the CPUC's Rules of Practice and Procedure.

The Devers-Mirage 115 kV Subtransmission System Split Project (hereinafter referred to as the Proposed Project) would serve projected electrical demand in the Electrical Needs Area, which includes the cities of Palm Springs, Rancho Mirage, Cathedral City, Palm Desert, Indian Wells, and unincorporated areas of Riverside County, including the Thousand Palms community, as shown on Figure 1-1, *Proposed Project and Electrical Needs Area*. The primary components of the Proposed Project include two new 115 kV subtransmission lines and a 220 kV loop-in of the existing Devers-Coachella Valley 220 kV transmission line into Mirage Substation. Other components include reconfigurations and modifications of subtransmission line connections, substation modifications in the cities of Palm Springs, Rancho Mirage, Indian Wells, Cathedral City, Palm Desert, and unincorporated areas of Riverside County, including the Thousand Palms community. Construction is scheduled to begin by the second quarter of 2010, or immediately following receipt of all project approvals. The Proposed Project is scheduled to be operational by mid-2011.

This Draft EIR has been prepared pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and considers the potential environmental impacts from the Proposed Project and identifies and evaluates a range of alternatives.

1.2 Project Objectives, Purpose and Need

The CEQA Guidelines (Section 15126.6.a) require that a reasonable range of alternatives to the Proposed Project be described and analyzed, and they should feasibly attain most of the basic objectives of the Proposed Project. Therefore, in order to explain the need for the Proposed Project, and to guide in development and evaluation of alternatives, SCE was asked to define its project objectives. SCE identified the objectives for the Devers-Mirage 115 kV Subtransmission System Split Project in its PEA (SCE, 2008) as follows:

- Serve projected electrical demand requirements in the Electrical Needs Area, beginning in 2011¹;
- Maintain electrical system reliability within the Devers 220 kV Transmission System and Electrical Needs Area;
- Enhance operational flexibility by providing the ability to transfer load between subtransmission lines and substations within the Electrical Needs Area;
- Utilize existing SCE facilities and ROWs, where feasible;
- Meet projected need while minimizing environmental impacts; and
- Meet project need in a cost-effective manner.

According to SCE, construction of the Proposed Project is needed to provide reliable electric service to customers in the Electrical Needs Area. The Proposed Project consists of two components: splitting the Devers 115 kV Subtransmission System into two systems and looping the Devers-Coachella Valley 220 kV transmission line into the Mirage Substation. Splitting the existing 115 kV system is necessary to relieve thermal overload conditions on the existing Mirage-Concho leg of the Devers-Capwind-Concho-Mirage 115 kV subtransmission line and the Mirage-Tamarisk 115 kV subtransmission line. By splitting the existing system between the Devers and Mirage substations into two separate 115 kV subtransmission systems, the Proposed Project would improve electric system reliability and operational flexibility and would relieve electrical demand on the Devers 115 kV Subtransmission System. The 220 kV loop-in is necessary to provide voltage support to the 220 kV transmission system to avoid post transient voltage drops of 10 percent or more of pre-disturbance values when a loss of more than one 220 kV transmission line serving the Mirage Substation occurs.²

1.3 Agency Use of This Document

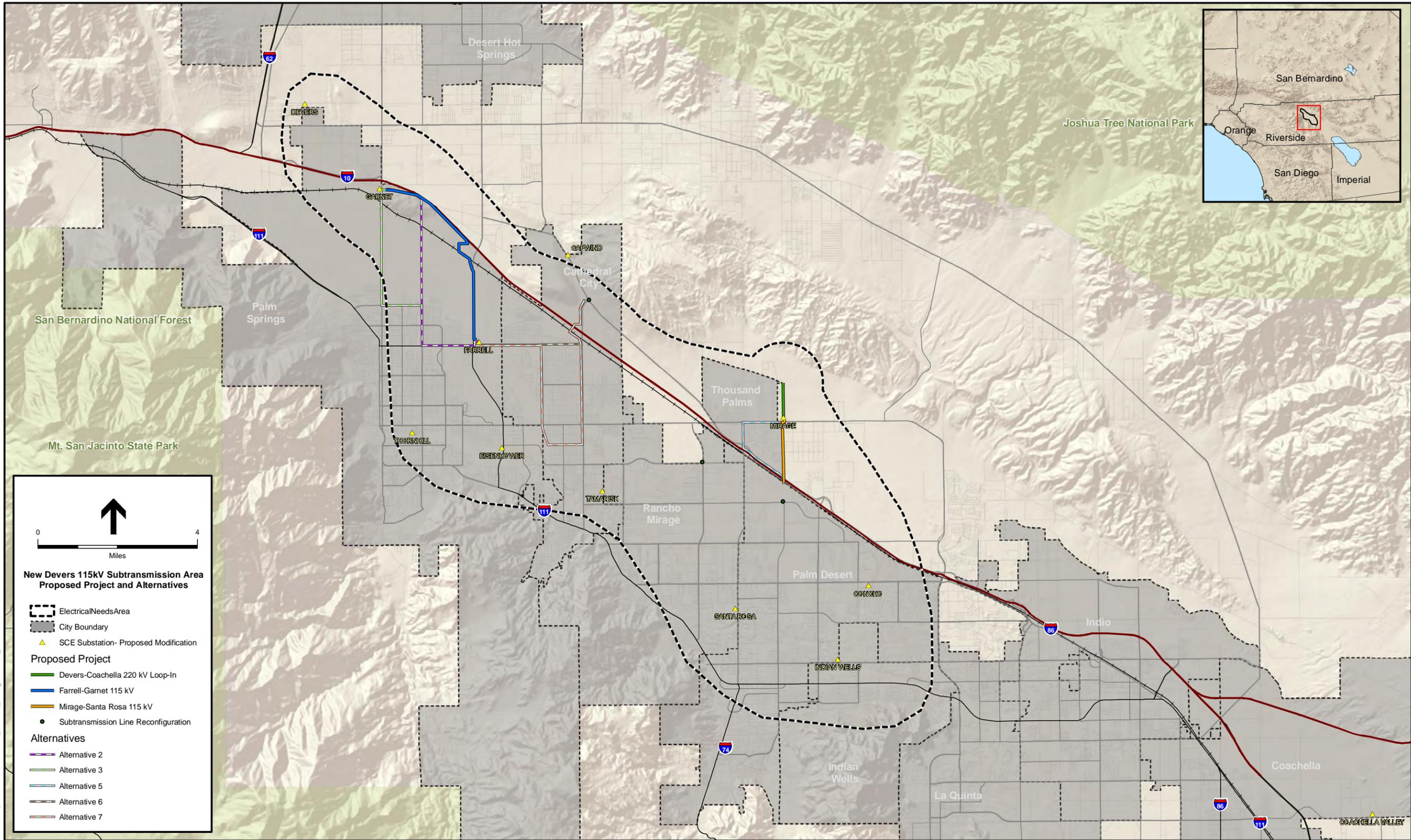
Section 15124(d) of the State CEQA Guidelines requires that an EIR contain a statement briefly describing the intended uses of the EIR. The State CEQA Guidelines indicate that the EIR should identify the ways in which the Lead Agency and any responsible agencies would use this document in their approval or permitting processes. The following discussion summarizes the roles of the agencies and the intended uses of the EIR.

1.3.1 CPUC Process

Pursuant to Article XII of the Constitution of the State of California, the CPUC is charged with the regulation of investor-owned public utilities, including SCE. The CPUC is the lead State agency for CEQA compliance in evaluation of the SCE's proposed Devers-Mirage 115 kV Subtransmission System Split Project, and has directed the preparation of this EIR. This EIR will

¹ This objective was modified from the objective listed in the PEA to reflect the revised project schedule.

² The North American Electric Reliability Council (NERC), Western Electricity Coordinating Council (WECC) reliability standards state that transmission system post-transient voltage drops should not exceed 10 percent of their pre-disturbance value under a "normal minus two" contingency.



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SOURCE: SCE, 2008

Devers-Mirage 115 kV Subtransmission System Split Project . 207059
Figure 1-1
 Proposed Project and Electrical Needs Area

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be used by the CPUC, in conjunction with other information developed in the CPUC's formal record, to act on SCE's application for a Permit to Construct (PTC) for construction and operation of the Proposed Project. Under CEQA requirements, the CPUC will determine the adequacy of the Final EIR and, if adequate, will certify the document as complying with CEQA. The CPUC will also act on SCE's application for a PTC. If the CPUC approves a project with significant and unmitigable impacts, it must state why in a "Statement of Overriding Considerations," which would be included in the CPUC's decision on the application.

1.3.2 Other Agencies

Several other State agencies will rely on information in this EIR to inform them in their decision over issuance of specific permits related to project construction or operation. In addition to the CPUC, State agencies such as the Department of Transportation, Department of Fish and Game, Regional Water Quality Control Board, and Office of Historic Preservation would be involved in reviewing and/or approving the project. On the federal level, agencies with potential reviewing and/or permitting authority include the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

No local discretionary (e.g., use) permits are required, since the CPUC has preemptive jurisdiction over the construction, maintenance, and operation of SCE facilities in California. SCE would still have to obtain all ministerial building and encroachment permits from local jurisdictions, and the CPUC's General Order 131-D requires SCE to comply with local building, design, and safety standards to the greatest degree feasible to minimize project conflicts with local conditions. The CPUC's authority does not preempt special districts, such as Air Quality Management Districts, or other State agencies or the federal government. SCE would obtain permits, approvals, and licenses as needed from, and would participate in reviews and consultations as needed with, federal, State, and local agencies as shown in Table 1-1.

1.4 Public Review and Comment

1.4.1 Scoping

CEQA Guidelines Section 15083 provides that a "Lead Agency may...consult directly with any person...it believes will be concerned with the environmental effects of the project." Scoping is the process of early consultation with the affected agencies and public prior to completion of a Draft EIR. Section 15083(a) states that scoping can be "helpful to agencies in identifying the range of actions, alternatives, mitigation measures, and significant effects to be analyzed in depth in an EIR and in eliminating from detailed study issues found not to be important." Scoping is an effective way to bring together and consider the concerns of affected State, regional, and local agencies, the project proponent, and other interested persons (CEQA Guidelines Section 15083(b)). Scoping is not conducted to resolve differences concerning the merits of a project or to anticipate the ultimate decision on a proposal. Rather, the purpose of scoping is to help ensure that a comprehensive and focused EIR will be prepared that provides a firm basis for the decision-making process.

**TABLE 1-1
SUMMARY OF POTENTIAL PERMIT REQUIREMENTS**

Agency	Permits and Other Requirements	Jurisdiction/Purpose
Federal Agencies		
U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Agency	Right-of-Way Grant/Finding of No Significant Impacts (FONSI)/Notice to Proceed for transmission line	Construction on lands administered or under the jurisdiction of BLM
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	Nationwide Permit, Section 404 of Clean Water Act	Fill in a wetland, water of the U.S.
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Endangered Species Act Section 7 Consultation	Consultation on federally-listed species
Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)	7460(1) Permit and Notice Proposed Construction or Alteration	Airports and airline safety
State Agencies		
California Public Utilities Commission	Permit to Construct	Project approval and CEQA review
California Department of Fish and Game	Endangered Species Act Section 10 Consultation	Consultation on State-listed species
	Fish & Game Code Section 1600 Streambed Alteration Agreement	Alteration or construction in a streambed or drainage channel
Office of Historic Preservation	National Historic Preservation Act Section 106 Consultation	Consultation on cultural and/or historic resources
State Water Resources Control Board	NPDES General Permit for storm water	Construction impacting one or more acres
Regional Water Quality Control Board	Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan	Clean Water Act, Section 401
California Department of Transportation (Caltrans)	Oversized Load Permits and Road Encroachments	All work that is conducted on, under, or over State roads.
Local Agencies and Utilities		
Coachella Valley Water District	Utility Clearance and Encroachment Permit (as required)	
Riverside County	Oversized Load Permits and Road Encroachment Permits	All work that is conducted on, under, or over County roads
Cities	Road Encroachment Permits, Flood Control Channel Encroachment Permit, Temporary Occupancy Permit for the material and Storage Yards, Fugitive Dust Control Plans (for cities with SCAQMD approved fugitive dust control ordinances)	Work within city roads, flood control/drainage channels, and other lands
Southern California Gas Company	Pipeline Encroachment Permit	Activities in areas of the pipeline
Union Pacific Railroad	Encroachment Permit	Activities in areas of the railroad
Metropolitan Water District	Line Crossing Permit for Julian Hinds-Mirage 220 kV transmission line crossing	Crossing of transmission lines

On Tuesday, April 15, 2008, the CPUC published and distributed a Notice of Preparation (NOP) to advise interested local, regional, and State agencies, and interested public, that an EIR would be prepared for the Proposed Project. The NOP solicited both written and verbal comments on the EIR's scope during a 30-day comment period and provided information on the forthcoming public scoping meeting. Additionally, the NOP presented the background, purpose, description, and location of the Proposed Project, potential issues to be addressed in the EIR, and contact information for additional information regarding the project.

The CPUC published legal advertisements about the scoping period in *The Desert Sun* on Sunday, April 20, 2008, and Sunday, April 27, 2008, as well as *The Desert Post Weekly* on Thursday, April 24, 2008. These papers are circulated in the City of Palm Springs and the greater Coachella Valley area. Additionally, an electronic copy of the NOP was posted on the CPUC's website. The comment period extended through May 15, 2008. The public was encouraged to submit written comments on the scope, content, and format of the environmental document by mail, facsimile, or electronic mail to the CPUC.

The CPUC conducted a scoping meeting on Tuesday, April 29, 2008. The public scoping meeting was held from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. in the Mary Stuart Rogers Gateway Building at the California State University San Bernardino Palm Desert Campus at 37-500 Cook Street, Palm Desert, California. Meeting attendees were encouraged to sign in and were provided with materials including presentation slides, a comment card, and a speaker card. Copies of the NOP were available upon request. A presentation was given at the public scoping meeting that included an overview of the environmental review process, the regional context, project background, project objectives, project description, project alternatives, and role of the public comments. Following the presentation public comments were taken and documented.

A Scoping Report was developed for use by the public to have access to and understand the comments received during the scoping period. Appendix A to this EIR contains the Scoping Report. The report includes verbal and written public comments received during the scoping period (April 15, 2008 to May 15, 2008). The NOP, newspaper legal advertisements, and the project website notification are presented in the appendices of the Scoping Report. The CPUC used this report as a tool to ensure the preparation of a comprehensive and focused EIR. Pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15082, all public comments will be considered in the EIR process.

1.4.2 Public Comment on the Draft EIR

This Draft EIR is being circulated to local and State agencies and to interested individuals who may wish to review and comment on the report. Written comments may be submitted to the CPUC during the 45-day public review period. Verbal and written comments on this Draft EIR will be accepted via regular mail, fax, and e-mail and at a noticed public meeting (either noticed in this document or under separate cover). All comments received will be addressed in a Response to Comments addendum document, which, together with this Draft EIR, will constitute the Final EIR for the Proposed Project.

This Draft EIR identifies the environmental impacts of the Proposed Project on the existing environment, indicates how those impacts would be mitigated or avoided, and identifies and evaluates alternatives to the Proposed Project. This document is intended to provide the CPUC with the information required to exercise its jurisdictional responsibilities with respect to the Proposed Project, which would be considered at a separate noticed public Commission meeting.

CEQA requires that a lead agency shall neither approve nor implement a project as proposed unless the significant environmental impacts have been reduced to an acceptable level. An acceptable level is defined as eliminating, avoiding, or substantially lessening significant environmental effects to below a level of significance. If the Lead Agency approves the project, even though significant impacts identified in the final EIR cannot be fully mitigated, the lead agency must state in writing the reasons for its action. Findings and a Statement of Overriding Considerations (SOC) must be included in the record of project approval and mentioned in the Notice of Determination (NOD).

1.5 Reader's Guide to This EIR

This EIR is organized as follows:

Executive Summary. Provides a summary description of the Proposed Project, the alternatives, their respective environmental impacts, and the Environmentally Superior Alternative. Also provides a tabulation of the impacts and mitigation measures for the Proposed Project and alternatives.

Chapter 1, *Introduction*. Provides a discussion of the background, project objectives, briefly describing the proposed Devers-Mirage 115kV Subtransmission System Split Project, and outlining the public agency use of the EIR.

Chapter 2, *Project Description*. Provides a detailed description of the proposed Devers-Mirage 115kV Subtransmission System Split Project.

Chapter 3, *Alternatives and Cumulative Projects*. Provides a description of the alternatives screening and evaluation process, description of alternatives considered but eliminated from further analysis and the rationale therefore, and descriptions of the alternatives analyzed in Chapter 4. Also identifies the cumulative projects considered in the analysis of cumulative impacts.

Chapter 4, *Environmental Analysis*. Provides a comprehensive analysis and assessment of impacts (including cumulative impacts) and mitigation measures for the Proposed Project and several alternatives, including the No Project Alternative. This section is divided into main sections for each environmental issue area (e.g., Air Quality, Biological Resources, etc.) that contain the environmental settings, impacts, and cumulative effects of the Proposed Project and each alternative.

Chapter 5, *Comparison of Alternatives*. Identifies the CEQA Environmentally Superior Alternative and provides a discussion of the relative advantages and disadvantages of the Proposed Project and the alternatives that were evaluated.

Chapter 6, *CEQA Statutory Sections*. Provides a discussion of growth-inducing impacts, irreversible environmental changes, and cumulative impacts.

Chapter 7, *Report Preparers*. Identifies the primary authors of this Draft EIR

Chapter 8, *Mitigation Monitoring, Reporting, and Compliance Plan*. Provides a discussion of the CPUC's mitigation monitoring program requirements for the project as approved by the CPUC.

Appendix A contains the Scoping Report which includes the NOP, and copies of comments received on the NOP. Other technical appendices, and the certificate of service and mailing list, are also included in this Draft EIR.

1.6 References

Southern California Edison (SCE), 2008. *Proponent's Environmental Assessment for the Devers-Mirage 115 kV Subtransmission System Split Project*, January 2008.