



CITY OF NORCO

HORSETOWN USA

June 4, 2024

Mayor Locke Dawson and Members of the City Council
City of Riverside
3900 Main Street
Riverside, CA 92522

Dear Mayor Dawson and Members of the City Council:

The Community of Norco as a mutually interested partner city with Riverside on many projects within the much-maligned Inland Empire asks that the City Council vote to reconsider undergrounding the Riverside Transmission Reliability Project. We believe undergrounding is in fact possible and is the right thing to do for multiple reasons.

The once small working group grew to include multiple elected officials and their representatives from local, state and federal positions and a huge amount of information was obtained and significant progress was made. Most importantly, our area representatives Congressman Calvert, Assemblyman Bill Essayli and Senator Seyarto have deemed undergrounding to be a priority project. It is deeply concerning that this fact and little to none of the following information was presented to the Riverside City Council on May 14, 2024. The information was most certainly available and provided from numerous sources.

The working group determined the following:

- SCE made a determined effort at multiple levels to apply pressure to state legislature, county, and local legislators, non-profits, etc.) to thwart the working groups' efforts to determine if undergrounding was possible.
- SCE, the RPU and others repeatedly claimed inaccurately that Riverside City residents would have to pay the entire cost of undergrounding.
- It has been determined that SCE's cost claims are highly inflated and could result in a huge payday as they keep whatever is not spent when the project is completed.
- It is quite possible that undergrounding may well be far less expensive than SCE, the RPU and others claim. Most certainly, a reason applicable unions support above grounding is that long term maintenance is far more necessary particularly in a high wind area with possible hurricane force.
- It has been claimed that Congressman Calvert has said that there is no money for undergrounding should there be additional costs. That is not true – money is available provided a budget is determined.
- The CPUC finding was deeply flawed and factually inaccurate and is determined by multiple fire authorities to be not credible. No less than Senator Seyarto, a retired fire Captain, has taken great exception to the CPUC's findings.
- To underscore those dangers, we feel reconsideration is appropriate given the expert declarations of County Fire Chief Bill Weiser and retired Norco Fire Chief Peter Bryan specifically regarding fire risk issues, which were included with our most recent letter

CITY COUNCIL

KEVIN BASH
Mayor

GREG NEWTON
Mayor Pro Tem

KATHERINE ALEMAN
Council Member

ROBIN GRUNDMEYER
Council Member

BERWIN HANNA
Council Member

dated May 8, 2024. Not requiring SCE to underground is directly contrary to the advice of the County Fire Chief.

- In recent years, Riverside County has been determined to be the number one wildfire risk area in the nation.
- In recent years, two major Santa Ana River fires threatened large quadrants of Norco, Corona, Jurupa Valley and Eastvale. Fortunately, a lucky change in wind averted a Paradise type disaster.
- SCE has consistently refused to provide the cost for undergrounding other than to float unsubstantiated numbers as high as \$40 million per mile. A cost significantly higher than those provided by PG&E that claims to be undergrounding at 4 to 5 million per mile.
- Currently, Norco is concerned that SCE's lines as they stand today are not in compliance and dangerous. While granting a site visit, SCE has refused to provide the required documentation detailing a previous record of inspections and compliance.
- Contrary to SCE's claims that the new lines will be safe, multiple fire authorities disagree citing multiple reasons for their opinion: not the least of which, such lines make the use of critical deployment of helicopters difficult if not impossible during a significant wildfire.
- Contrary to claims by the CPUC, RPU and others, the EIR did not address fire danger when written and most certainly does not address today's circumstances that now include climate change, new wildfire designation and social enlightenment.
- Five sitting Riverside City Councilpersons have publicly acknowledged problems with the EIR and have voiced the opinion it must be updated. This begs the question as to why must there be a rush to move forward despite these misgivings.
- This fire risk is unfortunately compounded by the Environmental Impact Report's flawed and outdated analysis, which fails to address today's increased fire risk. Given the recent escalation in wildfire frequency and severity, an updated environmental assessment is critically necessary to evaluate the potential environmental consequences and risks of the project and mitigate them. The most feasible mitigation measure being undergrounding. It is imperative to reconsider the project's impact.
- The SCE project as proposed is not shovel ready. SCE, claimed when the working group was formed that they were. Factually, only recently have the designs and permitting process been completed in Jurupa Valley and easements through private property in Norco, Riverside County and Riverside have yet to be procured. The Norco property owner has vowed to resist all attempts to take his land. At this moment, should opposing lawsuits ensue, this project may well be delayed for years.
- Insurance Issues were also examined, and it must be pointed out that no Ward in Riverside will escape the coming realities. Above-ground transmission lines pose a significant fire risk, especially in areas prone to wildfires like Riverside. The Riverside Transmission Reliability Project, with its above-ground lines, increases this risk. California has experienced devastating wildfires in recent years, many of which have been attributed to power lines. Insurance carriers are now refusing to insure properties against loss from fire or charging exorbitant fees for homeowner's insurance. Of all the devastating fires we have seen across California in recent years, we have yet to see one where many of the homes are uninsured. That event is coming, and it will cause a catastrophic loss to citizens of our cities and the cities themselves. Undergrounding the project would eliminate this risk, ensuring the safety of residents and protecting properties from potential irrecoverable fire damage.
- The working group also found that above-ground transmission lines are visually intrusive and detract from the natural beauty of the Riverside landscape, particularly the Santa Ana River Viewshed. The Riverside and Norco communities value their scenic vistas and heritage, and the presence of unsightly power lines diminishes the aesthetic appeal

of the area. Undergrounding the project would preserve the visual beauty of the area, enhancing the quality of life for our residents.

The City of Norco realizes we are not Riverside voters, but as stated, we are your partners in multiple endeavors.

By undergrounding the Riverside Transmission Reliability Project, the City of Riverside can mitigate the risk of fire and preserve the area's aesthetic appeal. This approach demonstrates a commitment to the safety, well-being, and environmental stewardship of the community, ultimately fostering a more sustainable and resilient cityscape for future generations.

We again encourage the City Council to focus on the big picture of this fundamental and long-lasting decision. Instead of proceeding with the project in its current form, let us work together to expedite the underground option, calling on SCE to be a true partner in what is best for the future of our communities.

Norco continues to stand ready to partner with you to ensure that future residents look back on and thank us for decisions that laid the groundwork for safe, aesthetically pleasing cities.

Sincerely,



Kevin Bash
Mayor



Greg Newton
Mayor Pro Tem



Katherine Aleman
Council Member



Robin Grundmeyer
Council Member



Berwin Hanna
Council Member

Links below to Article and Video "Making Sense of Targeted Undergrounding"

<https://bit.ly/4c2PHU8>

<https://bit.ly/4c9YTqa>