



CPUC Issues Proposal to Streamline Transmission Permitting December 27, 2024

Overview

The California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) on December 27, 2024 issued a Proposed Decision (PD) to make it easier and faster to approve and build electric transmission projects and related grid upgrades in California. These important updates are part of a broader effort to meet the state's clean energy goals by improving how transmission infrastructure is planned, permitted, and built.

The CPUC's [General Order \(GO\) 131-D](#) sets forth rules for permitting, approving, and building electric transmission lines, substations, and generation facilities. The CPUC is now working to clarify and streamline the process set out by these rules, as required by [Senate Bill \(SB\) 529](#) (Hertzberg, 2022).

Summary of Proposed Decision

If approved, the PD would make the following improvements to the CPUC's transmission permitting process:

- **Allow Applicant-Prepared Draft Versions of Environmental Documents**
Transmission project applicants would be allowed to submit their own draft versions of California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) documents with their transmission project applications. This would create an alternative to the current application process that would expedite environmental review by minimizing duplication and enabling applicants to complete more of the analysis before filing an application.
- **Require Pre-Filing Consultation**
Transmission project applicants would be required to meet with CPUC staff at least six months before submitting their applications. This early consultation would help better prepare applicants and help the review process run more smoothly.
- **Authorize Pilot Program to Explore Faster CEQA Review**
A pilot program would be created to track CPUC CEQA review timelines and explore the potential for a faster CEQA review process for certain electric transmission projects.
- **Implement Presumption of Need for Projects**
A “rebuttable presumption” would be implemented per Assembly Bill (AB) 1373 that when the California Independent System Operator (CAISO) transmission planning process has already determined that a project is needed, the CPUC will defer to that determination of need. This would streamline the CEQA review by avoiding duplicative need determinations and unnecessary alternatives analyses for projects already determined to be needed by the CAISO.



- **Clarify Advice Letter Protests**
Anyone who protests an Advice Letter used by utilities to provide notice of the construction of projects that do not require CPUC permits can ask the CPUC to review the outcome of the protest.
- **Simplify and Modernize Reporting Requirements**
Utility reporting requirements to the CPUC for electric transmission projects would be simplified, aligning them with the existing CAISO transmission planning process and other reporting requirements. Permit-exempt projects would also be subject to reporting requirements.
- **Clarify Key Terms**
The CPUC would define key terms like “existing electrical transmission facilities,” “extension,” “expansion,” “upgrade,” “modification,” “equivalent facilities or structures,” and “accessories” to better explain which types of electrical projects require formal permits or applications, and which projects are exempt. This would help ensure consistent interpretation of the permitting criteria for transmission projects by agency staff, applicants, and other stakeholders.

Timeline and Next Steps

- **Phase 1:** In December 2023, a CPUC decision ([D.23-12-035](#)) completed the first phase of updates to GO 131-D, fixing outdated rules and making changes required by SB 529 to streamline modifications of existing transmission facilities.
- **Phase 2:** The CPUC is now working on further updates beyond those addressed in Phase 1, including changes recommended by CPUC staff in the [Staff Proposal for R.23-05-018 Phase 2 Updates to General Order 131-D](#) (May 17, 2024) and by parties in comments and a contested [Joint Motion for Adoption of Phase 1 Settlement Agreement](#) (settlement agreement) filed September 29, 2023.
- The Phase 2 PD will be on the CPUC's January 30, 2025 [Voting Meeting](#) agenda. The public can comment on the PD via the proceeding's Docket Card.

More Information

- [Proposed Decision](#)
 - [Attachment A Redlined Version of General Order 131-D](#)
 - [Attachment B General Order 131-E](#)
- [Docket Card](#) (R.23-05-018)
- [Transmission CEQA](#)