

**DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION**

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**DOCKET****09-AFC-9**

DATE APR 29 2010

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April 29, 2010

Eric K. Solorio, Siting Project Manager  
 Ridgecrest Solar Power Project  
 California Energy Commission  
 1516 9<sup>th</sup> Street  
 Sacramento, California 95814-5112

File: 09-KER  
 SA/DPA/DEIS  
 SCH #: none

Dear Mr. Solorio:

**Ridgecrest Solar Millennium - Staff Assessment/Draft Plan Amendment/Draft  
 Environmental Impact Statement (09-AFC-9)**

Thank you for giving the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) District 9 the opportunity to review the Staff Assessment and draft documents for the proposed solar energy facility in Kern County south of Ridgecrest. We appreciate the ongoing interaction with agencies and the project traffic consultant. We have the following comments:

- You may wish to clarify intersection descriptions and use of the term “grade” throughout. An at-grade intersection is a junction at which two or more transportation facilities cross at the same elevation level (or grade). A grade separated junction is where two or more transportation facilities are aligned at different levels (grades) so that they will not disrupt the traffic flow on other transportation facilities where they cross each other. A grade separated facility would consist of at least one bridge. (The definition of the at-grade intersections of Redrock-Randsburg Road with State Route 14 and Garlock Road with US 395 [page B.2-38] is correct, as is the at-grade rail crossing at Garlock Road/US 395 [page C.10-11].) Other descriptions are confusing, when “grade” is referring to cut or fill of original ground, in order to construct a roadway facility (e.g. Traffic and Transportation - Figure 2 description and first bullet on page C.10-7 etc.).
- There are several references to interaction/approval of Kern Council of Governments (Kern COG) that do not seem to be within that agency’s jurisdiction.
- Page B.2-12 and other pages: Regarding the collision rate at the Brown Road/China Lake Boulevard/US 395 (BR/CLB/US 395) intersection – clarify that the average is “for a similar facility.”
- Page B.2-12: Regarding the document statement of “Caltrans is currently evaluating future improvements to Highway 395, which may or may not be consistent with the proposed use of the site. A new access point north of the access may be necessary.” Caltrans previously supplied information to agencies and the solar project proponent about a proposed Inyokern 4-Lane project that would include either an improved at-grade intersection or a grade separated facility for BR/CLB/US 395. Environmental analysis has been completed, but the

project is shelved pending funding. Alignment sheets were provided to ensure that solar facility layout would not interfere with any future highway improvements. Hence, "Consistency" should not be an issue.

- Page C.1-45, AQ-SC1: Please include, "If any fugitive dust could affect US 395 or travel thereon, the Air Quality Construction Mitigation Manager shall contact the Caltrans Inyokern Maintenance Station Supervisor." The supervisor, James Teems, may be reached at (760) 377-4300 or (760) 937-1636.
- Page C.10-6: US 395 is posted 65 mph, not 55 mph.
- Page C.10-6 3<sup>rd</sup> bullet from the bottom: US 395 is downhill for northbound traffic, not southbound.
- Page C.10-6 2<sup>nd</sup> bullet from the bottom: This curve is not "sharp" enough to require curve warning signs on a posted 65 mph facility hence, the adjective "sharp" should be deleted.
- Page C.10-23 ff **Applicant's Proposed Brown Road Access**: Replace 3<sup>rd</sup> PP with, "The most ideal scenario would be to construct an interchange for BR/CLB/US 395. Second choice would be a perpendicular at-grade intersection with median crossover and lanes accommodating turning movements. Both these options would require additional right-of-way. Although the proposed project would contribute traffic to the State highway system, its proportionate share would not contribute enough funds for realization of either of these scenarios. Improving the existing at-grade intersection represents the best cost/benefit solution, which can be provided in the project's time frame."

Constraints, 1<sup>st</sup> bullet: Alter beginning to read, "The existing intersection is constructed on a fill. Improvements such as widening could require additional environmental review..."

- Page C.10-24, **Direct US 395 Access**: Alter 1<sup>st</sup> paragraph last sentence to read "...Caltrans primarily suggested this scenario because the access would be in a level tangent section, providing excellent sight and decision distances. Also, northbound traffic volumes are significantly lower at this location."
- Page C.10-26 first non-bulleted PP: Alter 2<sup>nd</sup> sentence to read "...not likely to improve upon the safety of the BR/CLB/US 395 intersection." It seems this paragraph would be better placed under the **Summary** heading.
- Page C.10-27 first PP: Alter 1<sup>st</sup> sentence to read: "...together with the preparation of a TCP should improve safety at the BR/CLB/US 395 intersection."
- Page C.10-27 last PP: Either delete last two sentences or replace with "The proposed BR/CLB/US 395 intersection mitigation would also improve safety for the project's operational phase."

- Page C.10-59, ff, **TRANS-1**: Reword 1<sup>st</sup> paragraph, “. . . shall install a northbound US 395 left turn lane onto BR, improve the northbound US 395 free right turn/merge lane onto CLB, install a southbound US 395 left turn lane onto CLB and install a southbound right turn lane onto BR. If Caltrans, Kern County and the project traffic consultant determine that a deceleration lane and or/turn lanes are merited on BR, such lanes shall be installed. Improvements shall be built to Caltrans standards under encroachment permit.

The construction Traffic Control Plan shall be submitted to Kern County and Caltrans (remove Kern COG).

Items, which are part of the TCP, in the 7<sup>th</sup> bullet, shall be provided by the project owner. (They would be approved via the encroachment permit process, but not provided by Caltrans under contract.)

All references to a fair share traffic fee may be deleted. It was one of the suggestions made by Caltrans during preliminary discussions. Caltrans considers the construction of intersection improvements to be adequate project mitigation.

- Page C.10-60, **TRANS-2**: Include Caltrans in the submission, review and approval of the line-of-sight study. The project owner shall alter project components as deemed necessary.
- Page C.10-62, **TRANS-10**: Include a reference to Caltrans since a Caltrans encroachment permit is required for the water pipeline installation under US 395 (via the bore and jack method).
- Page C.12-40, **VIS-4**: Include Caltrans in the submission, review and approval of the glare mitigation plan. The project owner shall alter project components as deemed necessary.

We value a cooperative working relationship regarding the proposed project's transportation issues. If you have any questions, please contact me at (760) 872-0785.

Sincerely,



GAYLE J. ROSANDER  
IGR/CEQA Coordinator

- c: Janet Eubanks, BLM, Moreno Springs  
Lorelei Oviatt, Kern County Planning  
Steve Wisniewski, Caltrans