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Construction Work Starts on Path 15 Transmission Line

WASHINGTON, DC—An Arizona construction company received the green light to start work to fix a notorious transmission bottleneck in California after the deal to provide private funding for the transmission line work closed on Sept. 12.

“I’m pleased that construction work on this important project has started,” Secretary of Energy Spencer Abraham said. “The recent Northeast blackouts emphasize the need for investment to improve the nation’s electric transmission infrastructure.”

On Sept. 15, Trans-Elect’s New Transmission Development Company, which is responsible for funding the transmission line, provided the Department of Energy’s Western Area Power Administration, the Federal agency managing the project, with \$76 million to start work on the 84-mile transmission line. Maslonka & Associates, Mesa, Ariz., is the transmission line contractor.

“With construction funding in place, Western now can take the lead as project manager,” said Western Administrator Mike Hacskeylo. “I am confident that with the expertise and dedication of Western employees, the project will come in on time and budget, and serve as a model for future transmission expansion.”

Pacific Gas and Electric Company, the third Path 15 upgrade participant, will manage all substation work to accommodate the new line at its existing Los Banos and Gates substations.

The project will come on-line in late 2004.

Path 15 is a system of three 500-kV lines between Northern and Southern California, except for the segment between Los Banos and Coalinga in the Central Valley where only two 500-kV lines were built. The project will add a third line and upgrade the substations at either end of this segment. It will add 1,500 megawatts of transmission capacity between the northern and southern California.

The California Independent System Operator has estimated that the cost will be recovered in four years. The ISO estimates Californians will save \$100 million in energy costs during a normal year and more than \$300 million during a dry year.

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Western will own the new line. Transmission rights will be shared among the three participants according to their contributions. The California ISO will operate the new line.

Western is a Federal agency within the Department of Energy. It markets electricity from Federal water projects in a 15-state region of the West and delivers this power on a network of more than 17,000 miles of high-voltage transmission lines. PG&E is one of three California-based investor-owned utilities. PG&E delivers electricity and natural gas to 14 million customers in northern and central California. Trans-Elect is the nation's largest independent transmission company.

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