

PROJECT UPDATE

newsletter

November 2020

The Southline Transmission Line Project and its Relationship to the Proposed Tucson Electric Power Vail-to-Tortolita 230-kV Project

Western Area Power Administration (WAPA) issued a Record of Decision (ROD) for the Southline Transmission Line Project (Southline Project) on April 5, 2016, which was made available to the public and published in the Federal Register on April 14, 2016. Since that time, Southline Transmission, LLC, (Southline) and Black Forest Partners have worked to move the project to the construction phase.



Recently, Tucson Electric Power (TEP) has proposed to develop a portion of the original Southline Project analyzed in the Southline Transmission Line Project Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The purpose of this Southline Project update newsletter is to inform interested parties of the changes that have occurred since the ROD was signed, describe the relationship between the original Southline Project and the new TEP Project, and provide a project description of the proposed TEP Project.

BACKGROUND

In April 2012, WAPA published a Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an EIS on the proposed Southline Project in the *Federal Register* (77 FR 20411). The NOI was in response to a proposal by Southline to construct a 345-kilovolt (kV) double-circuit transmission line from Afton Substation near Las Cruces, NM, to the Apache Substation near Willcox, AZ, and to rebuild an existing WAPA 115-kV line to a 230-kV double-circuit transmission line from Apache Substation west through Tucson, AZ, to the Saguaro Substation northwest of Tucson. The two segments, called the New Build Section and Upgrade Section, would be approximately 225 miles and 130 miles long, respectively. The Upgrade Section would be constructed on WAPA's existing rights-of-way (ROW). The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) was a joint lead agency with WAPA for preparing the EIS as about a third of the proposed Southline Project, mostly the New Build Section, would be located on BLM-managed lands.

The NOI initiated the EIS preparation process, and public scoping meetings were held in Las Cruces, Deming, and Lordsburg, NM, and Willcox, Benson, and Tucson, AZ, in 2012. Additionally, Southline held pre-scoping meetings and workshops in 2011 to provide early notification of the proposed project and to begin working with the public on routing options. Those pre-scoping meetings and workshops were held in Deming and Lordsburg, NM, and in Benson, Marana, Tucson, and Willcox, AZ. Routing workshops were held in Deming and Tucson in 2011 as well. The EIS public scoping period, typically 30 days, was opened for 60 days and extended another 30 days due to requests for additional time. The Draft EIS was released for a 90-day public review and comment period in April 2014. Public meetings and hearings were held in Deming, Las Cruces, and Lordsburg, NM, and Benson, Tucson, and Willcox, AZ, during the comment period. A Final EIS was issued in October 2015, and WAPA's ROD followed in April 2016.

PROJECT DEVELOPMENTS SINCE THE ROD

Once the Southline Project was approved with WAPA's and BLM's RODs, the detailed development of the project commenced. Work began on the final design and engineering of the transmission line and the substations the line would connect to. Southline began soliciting interest in capacity on the new line and identifying potential customers in the power marketing area. This was a complicated process that WAPA was not involved in. Southline's negotiations were internal, in the private sector, and confidential to protect their business and competitive interests. TEP proposed to purchase development rights for a portion of the original Southline Project west of its Vail Substation because it fit in well with future transmission planning requirements. Presently, TEP is working toward finalizing the purchase of development rights for this portion of the original project from Southline, finalizing an ownership agreement with WAPA, and amending the Arizona Corporation Commission Certificate of Environmental Compatibility granted to the Southline Project.

TEP'S PROPOSED VAIL-TORTOLITA PROJECT

TEP's proposed Vail-Tortolita project consists of approximately 64 miles of the original Upgrade Section of the Southline Project in Pima and Pinal counties, AZ. The proposed project would not include the eastern segment from TEP's Vail Substation east to Apache Substation near Willcox Playa, [insert state]. The TEP Project would upgrade WAPA's existing 115-kV wood pole, H-frame transmission line, which was constructed in 1951, to a 230-kV double-circuit line on steel monopoles, the same as approved for the Southline Project. TEP's proposed Vail-Tortolita project routing includes:

- WAPA's existing ROW and the connection in and out of Vail Substation;
- the reroute to avoid the Summit community and minimize impacts to Pima County development plans south of Tucson International Airport;
- the reroute around the margins of the Tumamoc Hill property; and
- the minor reroute at Marana Regional Airport to reduce conflicts with military training operations.

These reroutes were developed to mitigate existing resource conflicts and were all part of the Southline Project Upgrade Section as analyzed in the Final EIS and approved by WAPA's ROD. The footprint and expected impacts of TEP's proposed Vail-Tortolita project through the developed Tucson area have not changed. The TEP Project thus comprises a part of the original Project and is fully encompassed within it.

When the Southline Project was approved, it was not entirely clear how the various interconnections with existing substations would be accomplished. The Final EIS identified nine substations between Vail Substation and Saguaro Substation northwest of Tucson. The TEP Project would give TEP ownership of one of the 230-kV circuits on the new transmission line. That TEP circuit would connect with Vail, DeMoss-Petrie, and Tortolita substations. WAPA's circuit would connect with five other existing substations as originally planned. These ownership and design and engineering developments have no bearing on the Final EIS assessment of environmental resource impacts, which remain unchanged. The EIS analysis addressed a 5-acre expansion at Nogales Substation to accommodate a new 230-kV bay and an additional 5 acres of temporary disturbance for a laydown yard. Instead, TEP's plans may result in the decommissioning of this substation and, therefore, somewhat less overall impact than anticipated by the Final EIS.

NEPA CONSIDERATIONS

Although WAPA signed its ROD approving the Southline Project over four years ago, WAPA remains responsible for National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) compliance. The proposed TEP Project includes a major portion of the Upgrade Section of the original Southline Project analyzed in the project EIS. The remainder of the original project remains unchanged and may be constructed later. No substantive changes to the transmission line description or route contained in the Final EIS are being proposed by TEP for their approximately 64-mile segment, so no changes to the impacts identified in the Final EIS are expected. Project ownership would be different, and only a part of the original project scope would be constructed at this time. Since TEP's proposed Vail-Tortolita project remains within the bounds of the Final EIS description and scope of the analysis, a formal reopening of the Southline Project NEPA process is not required. WAPA is using this newsletter to publicly disclose the changes that have occurred since the Final EIS and ROD were published and to assist the public in understanding the relationship between the original Southline Project and the TEP Project.

Interested parties are encouraged to learn more about the TEP Vail-to-Tortolita 230-kV Transmission Project at www.tep.com/vail-to-tortolita. This website will keep you informed of TEP Project developments and the Arizona Corporation Commission permitting process.



**Western Area
Power Administration**