

BOB FILNER  
51ST DISTRICT, CALIFORNIA

VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE  
CHAIRMAN

TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE  
COMMITTEE

AVIATION

HIGHWAY AND TRANSIT

WATER RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT



CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

July 29, 2009

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The Honorable Tom Vilsack  
Secretary of Agriculture  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Tom:

I am writing to you to express my strong opposition to the construction of the unnecessary and harmful "Sunrise Powerlink" transmission line project in San Diego and Imperial Counties. I urge you to communicate to officials at the U.S. Forest Service that they should strongly consider and account for the harmful effects the Powerlink would have on both people and nature by preparing additional environmental documentation. Furthermore, that they should consider rejecting proposed construction of the project across nearly twenty miles of the Cleveland National Forest.

The Sunrise Powerlink is a major new fossil-fueled electrical transmission line proposed by San Diego Gas and Electric (SDG&E) for construction from the Imperial Valley desert to the central San Diego County. SDG&E's claims that the Powerlink would carry renewable energy are disingenuous. The company has vigorously objected to any binding conditions that the line would carry renewable energy. Instead, the Powerlink would provide a highly profitable connection between SDG&E parent company Sempra Energy's enormous natural gas infrastructure in northern Baja California and the southern California market.

SDG&E's claim that the Powerlink is necessary to supply San Diegans with renewable energy has no basis in fact. In 2008, the Administrative Law Judge presiding over the consideration of the Powerlink at the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) ruled that local energy alternatives eliminated any need for the project. The environmental impact statement for the Powerlink ranked two alternatives above the route across the forest, the "New In-Area All-Source Generation Alternative" and the "New In-Area Renewable Generation Alternative", both of which include a significant renewable component.

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As you can see from the enclosed Executive Summary, expert local engineer Bill Powers has prepared a peer-reviewed report detailing local energy alternatives to the Powerlink with an emphasis on expanding photovoltaic capacity titled San Diego Smart Energy 2020: The 21st Century Alternative. Photovoltaic solar panels are easily deployed in urban locations, and unlike huge and remote transmission lines, there are no environmental trade-offs associated with urban PV deployments. As an example, the CPUC approved Southern California Edison's (SCE) 500 MW urban rooftop PV project in June 2009. This worthy project is the direct opposite of SDG&E's request to build a \$2 billion transmission line to access a more expensive form of remote solar energy.

The selected southern route for the Powerlink goes awkwardly through and adjacent to sensitive fire-prone and drought stricken public lands, the Forest, Resource Conservation Areas, Wilderness Areas, designated critical habitat for peninsular big horn sheep, nesting Golden Eagles and other endangered and sensitive species. It also significantly impacts numerous at-risk communities and many private properties. This unnecessary project introduces new and significant impacts from power-line ignited wildfires, while greatly impeding the ability to fight fires. As such, the Powerlink would be in significant conflict with the Cleveland National Forest Land Management Plan.

The record shows that the selected route, including the route through the Cleveland National Forest, never received the same level of environmental review as SDG&E's preferred route through the Anza Borrego Desert State Park. As a result, both the state and federal approvals are the subject of multiple legal appeals by various consumer, environmental, and community advocates.

After reviewing constituent requests, available documents, proposed alternatives, and the July 9, 2009 letter submitted to you by Stephan C. Volker, an attorney representing several opponents to the Powerlink, if the Forest Service intends to seriously consider approval of the project, then the Forest Service must conduct an expanded analysis that includes details on alternative projects that will not damage the Forest and its resources, such as those identified in environmental review documents and by Mr. Powers.

I urge you to take seriously legitimate and viable alternatives to construction of the Sunrise Powerlink across San Diego's natural backyard – the Cleveland National

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Forest. At the very least I ask that you direct the Forest Service to conduct an independent National Environmental Policy Act analysis of the Sunrise Powerlink and the related SDG&E Master Special Use Permit for existing power lines on the Forest, compliant with all applicable laws, and regulations. I also urge you to provide a legitimate opportunity for public review and comment through local hearings of the true and harmful impacts of construction of the Powerlink across the Forest. I am confident that such analysis and public review should ultimately result in denial of the project on the Forest.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me or Jessica Gomez of my staff at (619) 422-5963. I look forward to your prompt reply.

Sincerely,  


BOB FILNER  
Member of Congress

BF/jg  
2517191  
Enclosure

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51ST DISTRICT, CALIFORNIA

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The Honorable Ken Salazar  
Secretary  
United States Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Ken:

I am writing to you to express my strong opposition to construction of the unnecessary and harmful "Sunrise Powerlink" transmission line project in San Diego and Imperial Counties and across the Bureau of Land Management's McCain Valley Cooperative Land and Wildlife Management Area.

The Sunrise Powerlink is a major new fossil-fueled electrical transmission line proposed by San Diego Gas and Electric (SDG&E) for construction from the Imperial Valley desert to the central San Diego County. SDG&E's claims that the Powerlink would carry renewable energy are disingenuous. The company has vigorously objected to any binding conditions that the line would carry renewable energy. Instead, the Powerlink would provide a highly profitable connection between SDG&E parent company Sempra Energy's enormous natural gas infrastructure in northern Baja California and the southern California market.

SDG&E's claim that the Powerlink is necessary to supply San Diegans with renewable energy has no basis in fact. In 2008, the Administrative Law Judge presiding over the consideration of the Powerlink at the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) ruled that local energy alternatives eliminated any need for the project. The environmental impact statement for the Powerlink ranked two alternatives above the route across the forest, the "New In-Area All-Source Generation Alternative" and the "New In-Area Renewable Generation Alternative", both of which include a significant renewable component.

As you can see from the enclosed Executive Summary, expert local engineer Bill Powers has prepared a peer-reviewed report detailing local energy alternatives to the Powerlink with an emphasis on expanding photovoltaic capacity titled San Diego Smart Energy 2020: The 21st Century Alternative. Photovoltaic solar panels are easily deployed in urban locations, and unlike huge and remote transmission lines, there are no environmental trade-offs associated with urban PV deployments. As an example, the CPUC approved Southern California Edison's (SCE) 500 MW urban rooftop PV project in June 2009. This worthy project is the direct opposite of SDG&E's request to build a \$2 billion transmission line to access a more expensive form of remote solar energy.

The Honorable Ken Salazar

July 29, 2009

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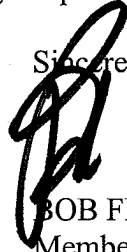
The selected southern route for the Powerlink goes awkwardly through and adjacent to sensitive fire-prone and drought stricken public lands, the McCain Valley Cooperative Land and Wildlife Management Area, the Cleveland National Forest, designated critical habitat for peninsular big horn sheep, nesting Golden Eagles and other endangered and sensitive species. It also significantly impacts numerous at-risk communities and many private properties. This unnecessary project introduces new and significant impacts from power-line ignited wildfires, while greatly impeding the ability to fight fires. As such, the Powerlink would be in significant conflict with the Cleveland National Forest Land Management Plan.

The record shows that the selected route, including the route through the BLM's McCain Valley Cooperative Land and Wildlife Management Area and Cleveland National Forest, never received the same level of environmental review as SDG&E's preferred route through the Anza Borrego Desert State Park. As a result, both the state and federal approvals are the subject of multiple legal appeals by various consumer, environmental, and community advocates.

I urge you to take seriously legitimate and viable alternatives to construction of the Sunrise Powerlink across San Diego's natural backyard – the McCain Valley and the Cleveland National Forest. At the very least I ask that you direct the Forest Service to conduct an independent National Environmental Policy Act analysis of the Sunrise Powerlink and the related SDG&E Master Special Use Permit for existing power lines on the Forest, compliant with all applicable laws, and regulations. I also urge you to provide a legitimate opportunity for public review and comment through local hearings of the true and harmful impacts of construction of the Powerlink across the Forest. I am confident that such analysis and public review should ultimately result in denial of the project on the Forest.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me or Jessica Gomez of my staff at (619) 422-5963. I look forward to your prompt reply.

Sincerely,



BOB FILNER  
Member of Congress

BF/jg  
2517208  
Enclosure