



CPUC Adopts Decision to Streamline Transmission Permitting January 30, 2025

Overview

The California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) on January 30, 2025, adopted a decision 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 decision adopted a new General Order (GO) 131-E, which replaces [GO 131-D](#) and sets forth rules for permitting, approving, and building electric transmission lines, substations, and generation facilities. The decision also clarifies and streamlines the process set out by these rules, as required by [Senate Bill \(SB\) 529](#) (Hertzberg, 2022).

Summary of Decision

The decision approves the following improvements to the CPUC's transmission planning process:

- **Allow Applicant-Prepared Draft Versions of Environmental Documents**
Transmission project applicants may submit their own draft versions of California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) documents with their transmission project applications. This creates 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 are now required to meet with CPUC staff at least six months before submitting their applications. This early consultation will help better prepare applicants and help the review process run more smoothly.
- **Authorize Pilot Program to Explore Faster CEQA Review**
A pilot program will 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" will be implemented per Assembly Bill 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 file an application for rehearing asking the CPUC to review staff's action on the protest.

- **Simplify and Modernize Reporting Requirements**

Utility reporting requirements to the CPUC for electric transmission projects are now simplified, aligning them with the existing CAISO transmission planning process and other reporting requirements.

- **Clarifying Key Terms**

The decision defines 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 helps ensure consistent interpretation of the permitting criteria for transmission projects by agency staff, applicants, and other stakeholders.

Timeline

- **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 adopted 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](#) filed September 29, 2023.
- The Phase 2 proposal was mailed on December 27, 2024 for public comment and was approved at the CPUC's January 30, 2025 [Voting Meeting](#).