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## Power line opposed by most of 400 attending SDG&E proposal heard in Ramona

**By J. Harry Jones and Craig D. Rose**

*UNION-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITERS*  
RAMONA – They came by the hundreds during a weekday afternoon to express their concerns about a proposed power line.

Many yesterday carried signs such as “Save our Backcountry” and “No to Sunrise Powerlink. It’s not the need . . . It’s the Greed!!!”

About 400 people attended what was officially termed a prehearing conference before an administrative law judge and a commissioner with the California Public Utilities Commission.

Normally such hearings are held in San Francisco, but at the behest of hundreds of county residents the commission agreed to move the meeting to Ramona to take testimony from citizens.

Almost all of them were opposed to San Diego Gas & Electric’s proposed 120-mile, 500-kilovolt power line that would connect energy sources in the Imperial Valley to San Diego County.

The line and its 150-foot-tall towers could cost SDG&E ratepayers between \$1 billion and \$1.4 billion, the company has said. The line is needed to ensure that the region will have enough power in the coming decade, the utility says.

“This is very impressive,” Administrative

Law Judge Kim Malcolm said at the beginning of the meeting as she looked out upon the packed Ramona Community Center. “Normally I don’t need a microphone for these meetings.”

Outside the windows, more than a dozen high school students chanted and waved signs of opposition for hours.

Michael Shames, executive director of Utility Consumers’ Action Network, said the gathering was the largest he has seen regarding energy since the power crisis in 2001.

SDG&E officials have not indicated exactly what route the proposed line would follow, but it appears it would start in Imperial County and cross the northern backcountry of San Diego County, cutting through Anza-Borrego Desert State Park, and possibly the Cleveland National Forest.

The line could then run through or near numerous communities, depending on what alternative the power company chooses, including Julian, Ranchita, Warner Springs and Ramona.

PUC commissioner Dian Grueneich and Malcolm told the crowd at the start of the session that they would issue no rulings.

Instead, Grueneich said that by week’s end she would post a list of questions she has about SDG&E’s various

procedural requests on the PUC Web site and that the commission would accept comments and answers until Feb. 17.

After that, Grueneich said that she or Malcolm will rule on SDG&E’s request to proceed with reviewing the need for the Sunrise Powerlink before the utility submits a final route for the line.

The power company has asked that the commission rule there is a need for the power line before it picks a route and begins extensive and costly engineering research and environmental review.

The commission should rule on that request sometime after the Feb. 17 comment period is over.

Attorneys for the Sierra Club and the Center for Biological Diversity criticized SDG&E’s request yesterday to delay revealing a specific route for the power line.

They characterized the request as unreasonably “bifurcating” the review process and undermining state environmental law.

“Based on the attendance today, you can see (the power line) is of enormous concern to the people of this county,” said county Supervisor Dianne Jacob, one of about three dozen speakers.

“I am adamantly opposed to both the proj-

ect and the process. . . . This is so massive . . . and beyond the scope of anything we have seen.

“There are far less obtrusive and less-costly options available,” Jacob said. “I firmly believe that by working together we can find a better way.” Many who spoke talked about the Anza-Borrego Desert State Park and how the idea of a huge power line cutting through its middle is almost unimaginable.

David Van Cleve, former superintendent of the park, was impassioned. “I’m not the only one who believes Anza-Borrego is the most fantastic place on the face of the Earth,” he said. “The power line is proposed to go through the heart of the park. People love Anza-Borrego for its wildness . . . and the landscape nature of the park that will be destroyed by this power line.”

Several Rancho Peñasquitos residents, concerned about a smaller 230-kilovolt offshoot from the main line that would likely run through their neighborhood, attended, as did people from many parts of the North County and numerous environmental organization representatives.