

3.6.5 U.S. Customs and Border Patrol

The area where the proposed transmission lines would cross the U.S.-Mexico border is patrolled by the U.S. Customs and Border Patrol Division of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Activities undertaken in this area by the Border Patrol include surveillance through manned inspection and recently installed cameras for monitoring any activity along the border. Barriers have been erected on roads that cross the border to restrict motorized access across the border. A restriction on development along the border is identified in a 1907 Presidential Proclamation that requires that no construction be allowed along the border that could inhibit the protection or monitoring of the border.

3.6.6 Wilderness

The CDCA also designates Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs). Roughly 2,094,000 acres (850,000 ha) of the CDCA are recommended for WSAs. The nearest WSA to the project area is 15 mi (24 km) to the west, well outside the proposed and the two alternative routes examined in this EIS.

The California Desert Protection Act of 1994 designated some of the WSAs identified in the CDCA as Wilderness areas. The WSA located to the west of the projects area was designated as the Jacumba Wilderness under the act.

3.7 TRANSPORTATION

Roads in the vicinity of the proposed and alternative transmission line routes are State Route 98, which runs east-west, crossing the routes, linking Calexico and Ocotillo, and State Route 30, which runs north-south between State Route 98 and Westmorland, parallel to the route for approximately 2 mi (3 km) (see Figure 1.1-1). Other roads in the area include Interstate 8, which runs from El Centro to San Diego to the west, County Highway 80, which parallels Interstate 8 between El Centro and Ocotillo to the west, and State Route 86, which links El Centro and Brawley to the north.

Table 3.7-1 shows average annual daily traffic flows over these road segments, together with congestion level designations (levels of service). The levels of service designations used in the table were developed by the Transportation Research Board (1985) and range from A to F. A through C represent good traffic operating conditions with some minor delays experienced by motorists; F represents jammed roadway conditions.

3.8 VISUAL RESOURCES

Assessment of the visual resources potentially affected by the transmission lines uses the BLM Visual Resource Management (VRM) System (BLM 1986a,b). These guidelines suggest a

TABLE 3.7-1 Average Annual Daily Traffic in the Vicinity of the Existing Line, 2002

Road Segment	Traffic Volume (average annual daily traffic)	Level of Service ^c
State Route 98	1,900 ^a	A
County Highway 29	1,485 ^b	A
Interstate 8	12,400 ^a	A
County Highway 80	1,005 ^b	A

^a Source: State of California, Department of Transportation (2003).

^b Source: Jorgenson (2004).

^c Based on DOE/BLM calculations for this EIS.

number of specific steps to be used in identifying and evaluating the scenic quality along the proposed routes. First, the scenic quality in the area is assessed, followed by the establishment of distance zones at discrete intervals from the proposed routes. Visual sensitivity to changes in the visual environment at key viewing points is then established, together with the likely number of viewers at each of these points. Finally, the relative value of scenic resources based on these factors is used to determine a VRM class for use in defining management objectives for the scenic resources in the area through which the proposed lines would pass.

3.8.1 Scenic Quality

The scenic quality of the area through which the proposed and alternative routes would pass was rated according to BLM VRM inventory guidelines (BLM 1986a,b). These guidelines classify discrete areas as A (lands of outstanding or distinctive diversity or interest), B (lands of common or average diversity or interest), or C (lands of minimal diversity or interest), on the basis of their landforms, vegetation, water, color, adjacent scenery, scarcity, and cultural modifications.

The area through which the proposed transmission lines would pass primarily consists of open expanses of desert with generally flat topography and few landscape features, and is largely indistinguishable from large parts of the surrounding area to the north, south, and west. Although the adjacent scenery does enhance the scenic quality of the area through which the transmission lines would be built, mainly through its expansiveness, none of the landscape features in the area could be considered unique within the topographic region in which the proposed lines would be located. Vegetation in the area consists of fairly homogenous desert scrub; a tree line about a mile to the east of where the proposed lines would be built is the most notable vegetation feature in the area. The most notable topographic features are the Coyote and Jacumba Mountains to the

west (Figure 1.1-1). On the basis of these descriptors, the scenic quality of the area through which the proposed lines would pass can be rated Class B, indicating that the area is of common scenic value.

3.8.2 Distance Zones

As changes in form, line, color, and texture associated with changes in scenic quality become less perceptible with increasing distance to viewers, the distance zone in which the projects are readily perceptible has an important influence on their overall impact. Distance zones, as defined in the BLM VRM system, were used to classify the proposed transmission line routes. The combined area of the foreground-middleground zones is the area between the viewer and a distance of 3 to 5 mi (5 to 8 km); the background zone includes the area 3 to 5 mi (5 to 8 km) from the viewer up to 15 mi (24 km) (Figure 3.8-1). In addition, a seldom seen zone is defined as the area more than 15 mi (24 km) beyond any given viewing point. The viewing zone for the proposed lines is limited to the area near State Route 98. Because of the low, sparse, and fairly uniform vegetation and featureless topography, the proposed lines would only be visible in the foreground-middleground distance zone.

3.8.3 Visual Sensitivity

Public concern for change in scenic quality along the proposed transmission line routes was measured in terms of high, medium, or low sensitivity to changes in the landscape from two key observation points (Figures 3.8-2 and 3.8-3). Sensitivity ratings for the proposed routes, as defined in the BLM VRM system, take into account the type of user, the amount of use, the level of public interest and adjacent land uses, and viewer duration.

The proposed transmission lines would be located in an isolated area with a relatively low level of recreational use and few local residents (Figures 3.8-2 and 3.8-3). Other local activities are limited to agriculture, transportation, and electricity transmission facilities. None of the highways in the vicinity of the transmission line routes are designated as “scenic highways.” (State of California, Department of Transportation 2004.) Since there are few viewers in the area likely to be sensitive to changes in visual quality and the area lacks unique landscape features, the visual sensitivity of the projects area can be classified as low.

3.8.4 Visual Resource Management Classes

The BLM uses four VRM classes to manage visual resources:

- Class I is typically designated to protected areas and allows for ecological changes and only very limited management activity, with a view to preserving the existing landscape. The level of change allowed for should be very low and not attract attention.



FIGURE 3.8-2 View from Key Observation Point 1, 0.7 mi (1.13 km) East of Existing IV-La Rosita Line on State Route 98

- Class II aims to retain the existing elements of a landscape, with changes repeating the basic elements of form, color, and texture found in the most important landscape features. Landscape management activities should not be evident, with the level of change maintained at a low level. Any visible contrast with the characteristic landscape should not attract attention.
- Class III aims for partial retention of the existing landscape with only moderate changes allowed in the characteristic landscape. Contrast with the characteristic landscape may be evident and should begin to attract attention; changes should remain subordinate within the existing visual landscape.
- Class IV includes activities that lead to significant modification of the existing character of the landscape. The level of change may be high, and contrasts may attract attention and are likely to be a visible feature of the landscape. Landscape management should attempt to minimize the impact of contrasting activities through the careful location of activities and minimal disturbance. Some mitigation of impacts through the repetition of elements of the characteristic landscape may be required.

On the basis of analysis of scenic quality, distance zones, and visual sensitivity, the BLM-managed lands within which the transmission lines would be located can be classified as Class III.



FIGURE 3.8-3 View from Key Observation Point 2, 1.3 mi (2.1 km) East of Existing IV-La Rosita Line on State Route 98

3.9 SOCIOECONOMICS

A region of influence (ROI) comprising Imperial County was used to describe socioeconomic conditions for the projects area. The ROI is based on the residential locations of construction and operations workers directly related to transmission line activities and captures the area in which these workers would spend their wages and salaries. The ROI is used to assess the impacts of site activities on employment, income, and housing. Since it is assumed that construction of the lines would require no permanent in-migration of workers, there would be no impacts on population, community services, and community fiscal conditions. Because there may be some short-term relocation of workers during construction, the impacts on temporary housing within the county are assessed.