

Supplemental Guidance Land Use Planning for High-Voltage Electric Transmission Lines

This supplemental guidance reiterates and clarifies existing Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Land Use Planning (LUP) policy to assist offices in processing of right-of-way (ROW) applications for high-voltage (100 kilovolt or larger) electric transmission lines.

LUP Conformance

The BLM's LUPs contain a variety of decisions and allocations that may be affected by the approval of high-voltage transmission lines. These decisions need to be considered in determining plan conformance of the proposal. Before agreeing to commence processing of an application, the BLM should conduct a thorough plan conformance review of all LUPs potentially affected by a proposed transmission line. Where the BLM determines that an application is not in conformance with the LUP, the authorized officer may deny the application at this initial processing stage, without further review (BLM Handbook, H-1601-1, p. 46). Any determination of LUP non-conformance should be clearly documented for the administrative record, since denial is a decision appealable to the Interior Board of Land Appeals. In making this determination, the BLM must consider all program and resource allocation decisions relative to the project application.

For applications that are not in conformance with existing LUP decisions (e.g., when a proposed line would traverse a ROW exclusion area), the BLM should carefully consider the goals and objectives of the existing plan(s) decisions and allocations, interests and objectives of the applicant, and potential benefits of the proposed transmission line before initiating processing of the application. If the authorized officer determines that processing the proposal is in the public interest and amending one or more land use plans is warranted, the Notice of Intent (NOI) for the project environmental impact statement (EIS)/plan amendment(s) must identify plan(s) that may need to be amended, in order for this information to be considered by interested parties during the scoping process (43 CFR 1610.2 (c)).

If a plan amendment is required to process the application, such amendment will be developed in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) document under a separate chapter. The BLM will clearly delineate and evaluate in the NEPA document the impacts of the proposed LUP amendment, both relating to the current proposed action and potential future actions that may be permissible as a result of the LUP amendment.

Economic Strategies Workshops

The BLM's Land Use Planning Handbook directs the BLM to hold an economic strategies workshop as part of the planning process for all new LUPs, LUP revisions, and LUP amendments accompanied by the EISs (H-1601-1, Appendix D, p. 10). These workshops provide an opportunity for citizens, local officials, and BLM staff to identify socioeconomic

issues and community development strategies relevant to the planning effort. An economic strategies workshop may be a useful part of the NEPA assessment for certain projects. The economic strategies workshop is a policy directive for the BLM planning process rather than a NEPA requirement, and thus, a project-level NEPA action does not in and of itself require such a workshop.

Many high-voltage electric transmission line ROW applications require an EIS-level NEPA analysis for the project and related LUP amendment(s). Effective with the release of this IM, the BLM will not require high-voltage electric transmission line ROW applications processed with a LUP amendment to include an economic strategies workshop. Such workshops are intended to encourage discussion within a few communities of a wide range of socioeconomic issues raised by the general revision of a BLM LUP. In contrast, transmission ROW applications typically involve a narrow range of socioeconomic issues but may affect many communities over a long ROW. For such applications, a conventional scoping process, supplemented by technical studies where needed, is a more appropriate way to address socioeconomic issues. This exception is specific to ROW applications for high-voltage electric transmission lines. This policy does not, however, affect the requirement under NEPA to fully analyze potential social and economic effects of the proposed transmission line (BLM H-1790-1).