

## California Department of Transportation

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July 11, 2024

11-IMP-115  
PM 4.04  
Vikings Solar Energy Generation and Storage Project  
ND/SCH#2024060972

Mr. Jim Minnick  
Director  
Imperial County Planning & Development Services Department (ICPDS)  
801 Main Street  
El Centro, CA 92243

Dear Mr. Quero:

Thank you for including the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) in the environmental review process for Negative Declaration (ND) for the Vikings Solar Energy Generation and Storage Project located near State Route 115 (SR-115). The mission of Caltrans is to provide a safe and reliable transportation network that serves all people and respects the environment. The Local Development Review (LDR) Program reviews land use projects and plans to ensure consistency with our mission and state planning priorities.

Safety is one of Caltrans' strategic goals. Caltrans strives to make the year 2050 the first year without a single death or serious injury on California's roads. We are striving for more equitable outcomes for the transportation network's diverse users. To achieve these ambitious goals, we will pursue meaningful collaboration with our partners. We encourage the implementation of new technologies, innovations, and best practices that will enhance the safety on the transportation network. These pursuits are both ambitious and urgent, and their accomplishment involves a focused departure from the status quo as we continue to institutionalize safety in all our work.

Caltrans is committed to prioritizing projects that are equitable and provide meaningful benefits to historically underserved communities, to ultimately improve transportation accessibility and quality of life for people in the communities we serve.

We look forward to working with the County of Imperial in areas where the County and Caltrans have joint jurisdiction to improve the transportation network and connections

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between various modes of travel, with the goal of improving the experience of those who use the transportation system.

Caltrans has the following comments:

### **Environmental**

Caltrans welcomes the opportunity to be a Responsible Agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), as we have some discretionary authority of a portion of the project that is in Caltrans' Right-of-Way (R/W) through the form of an encroachment permit process. We look forward to the coordination of our efforts to ensure that Caltrans can adopt the alternative and/or mitigation measure for our R/W. We would appreciate meeting with you to discuss the elements of the Environmental Document that Caltrans will use for our subsequent environmental compliance.

An encroachment permit will be required for any work within the Caltrans' R/W prior to construction. As part of the encroachment permit process, the applicant must provide approved final environmental documents for this project, corresponding technical studies, and necessary regulatory and resource agency permits. Specifically, CEQA determination or exemption. The supporting documents must address all environmental impacts within the Caltrans' R/W and address any impacts from avoidance and/or mitigation measures.

Caltrans recommends that this project specifically identifies and assesses potential impacts caused by the project or impacts from mitigation efforts that occur within Caltrans R/W that includes impacts to the natural environment, infrastructure (highways/roadways/on- and off-ramps) and appurtenant features (lighting/signs/guardrail/slopes). Caltrans is interested in the analysis for any work identified in Caltrans' R/W and any additional mitigation measures identified for the Final Environmental Document.

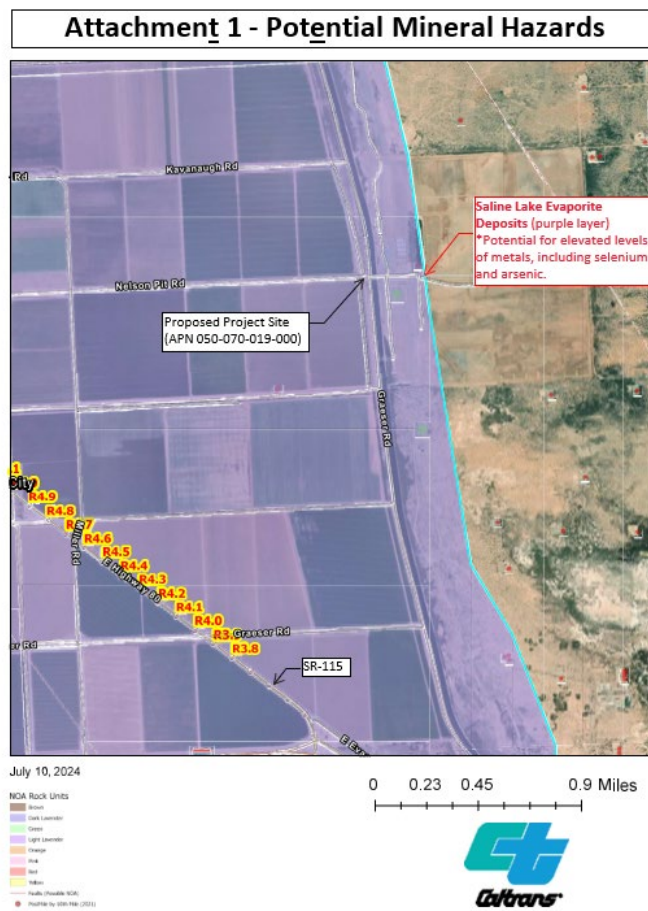
The Vikings Energy Farm, LLC (Applicant) submitted a Negative Declaration (ND) dated June 2024, the proposed project site (APN 050-070-019-000) is located at 2910 E. Nelson Pit Road in Holtville, California, which is approximately 1.6 miles northeast from State Route 115 (SR-115). The project proposes a minor subdivision in response to the Switching Station within the Vikings Solar Energy Generation & Storage Facility. Such action will create a lot and separate the existing switching station from the solar energy generation and storage facility, which was previously evaluated environmentally in 2022 under Conditional Use Permit (CUP) #20-0025 through the Final Environmental Impact Report (EIR) SCH#2021050036.

The existing parcel is approximately 80 acres and consists of previously graded, vacant, former agricultural cropland and undeveloped Sonoran Desert scrub. The

proposed project would develop a nominal 150-megawatt (MW) solar photovoltaic (PV) energy generation project with an integrated, not to exceed 300MW battery storage component. The electrical energy produced would be conducted through the proposed 230 kilovolt (kV) switching station and delivered to the Imperial Irrigation District's 230 kV KN/KS transmission line via a generation tie-in line approximately 120 feet in height.

### Hazardous Waste

The Hazards and Hazardous Materials (Section IX) portion of the ND may not satisfy the requirements to evaluate and address hazardous waste impacts from the proposed project. Publicly available records indicate potential hazardous materials (i.e., mineral hazards) may exist within the project site, and if these hazardous materials are disturbed, they could potentially generate a hazardous waste requiring proper engagement and/or disposal. The potential mineral hazards are from saline lake evaporite deposits that may contain elevated levels of metals, including selenium and arsenic. See Attachment 1-Potential Mineral Hazards (below) of the mineral hazards mapped within the project site. It is recommended to conduct appropriate studies to evaluate this potential hazardous material.



## **Mitigation**

Caltrans endeavors that any direct and cumulative impacts to the State Highway network be eliminated or reduced to a level of insignificance pursuant to the CEQA and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) standards.

## **Right-of-Way**

- Per Business and Profession Code 8771, perpetuation of survey monuments by a licensed land surveyor is required, if they are being destroyed by any construction.
- Any work performed within Caltrans' R/W will require discretionary review and approval by Caltrans and an encroachment permit will be required for any work within the Caltrans' R/W prior to construction.

Additional information regarding encroachment permits may be obtained by contacting the Caltrans Permits Office at (619) 688-6158 or emailing [D11.Permits@dot.ca.gov](mailto:D11.Permits@dot.ca.gov) or by visiting the website at <https://dot.ca.gov/programs/traffic-operations/ep>. Early coordination with Caltrans is strongly advised for all encroachment permits.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Shannon Aston, LDR Coordinator, at (619) 992-0628 or by e-mail sent to [shannon.aston@dot.ca.gov](mailto:shannon.aston@dot.ca.gov).

Sincerely,

*Kimberly D. Dodson*

KIMBERLY D. DODSON, GISP  
Branch Chief  
Local Development Review