

A Ward 2 Voter's Guide to the Riverside Transmission Reliability Project

As your candidate for Ward 2, I believe that **transparency is the foundation of trust**. The Riverside Transmission Reliability Project (RTRP) is one of the most significant infrastructure changes our neighborhood has faced in decades.

To help you stay informed, I've prepared this technical breakdown of the project's dynamics, the concerns of our workforce, and the long-term impact on our community's safety and economy.

The "OASIS" Research (UC Riverside, 2025)

At the 2025 Inland SoCal OASIS™ Climate Action Conference, researchers from UCR's CE-CERT (Center for Environmental Research and Technology) presented data on "Grid Adaptation."

The Key Finding: Traditional "overhead" infrastructure in the Inland Empire was designed for weather patterns of the 1970s. The research shows that "Compounding Events"—where extreme heat (100°F+) is immediately followed by high-velocity Santa Ana winds—are now 3x more likely to occur in the Santa Ana Riverbed than they were 40 years ago.

The 2025 Extreme Heat Summit Data

In September 2025, the City of Riverside hosted an Extreme Heat Summit. Scientific tracks at this event provided a stark projection for Ward 2

- The "Heat Day" Spike: Riverside historically averaged 7 days per year over 102°F. New projections from the summit show this will rise to 34 days by 2050.
- The Power Impact: High-voltage overhead lines lose efficiency as temperatures rise (a phenomenon called "thermal derating")

1. Why is this project happening now?

The Reliability Need: Riverside currently relies on a single 69kV connection to the state power grid. We are the largest city in Southern California with this "single point of failure" vulnerability.

- **The 2007 Lesson:** Many of us remember the city-wide blackout that lasted four hours.
- **The Labor Perspective:** Our partners at IBEW Local 47 and Riverside Public Utilities (RPU) advocate for the current overhead plan because it is the fastest way to ensure Riverside doesn't face catastrophic outages as our energy demand grows.

2. Why is there a push for undergrounding?

The Safety Reality: While the project is necessary, the *method* of delivery is where our community has concerns.

- **Fire Mitigation:** The Santa Ana Riverbed is a high-wind corridor. Overhead lines are susceptible to "line-slapping" or debris contact during Santa Ana wind events, which can spark wildfires.
- **The "Insurance Tax":** Following the devastating wildfires in early 2025, California's insurance market has reached a breaking point. Residents in Ward 2 are seeing non-renewals and premium spikes.

3. Technical & Economic Comparison

Feature	Overhead (Current Plan)	Underground (Proposed Alternative)
Initial Cost	~\$3M per mile	~\$12M - \$20M+ per mile
Construction Time	Faster (Planned completion 2028)	Slower (Requires 2–4 years of new EIRs)
Job Creation	Significant Union Labor	Higher (Requires more intensive civil engineering/trenching)
Fire Ignition Risk	Standard Risk Profile	Near Zero
Repair Complexity	Easier to spot/fix visually	Harder to locate; requires excavation

4. Addressing the "Not-So-Obvious" Impacts

As your Councilmember, I am looking beyond the steel towers at the "hidden" effects on our neighborhood:

- **The River District Vision:** Riverside is investing millions into the "River District Plan" to turn our riverfront into a world-class park by 2030.
- **Home Equity:** While the project brings "grid reliability," overhead towers in high-fire zones can create a "stigma" that lowers property values. **Question:** *How much longer do*

we have as a city before we grow our own current electrical infrastructure capacity?

Why CEQA Causes Decades of Delay?

Under CEQA, any public project must undergo an Environmental Impact Report (EIR). Here is why that process became a 20-year saga for the RTRP:

1. The "Subsequent EIR" Trap (The Reset Button)

- **The original EIR for RTRP was certified in 2013.** However, because the planning took so long, new housing developments (like the Riverbend community) were built in the path of the proposed lines.
- **The Result:** The physical "baseline" changed. In 2017, the CPUC ruled that the old study was obsolete, forcing a "Subsequent EIR." This essentially sent the project back to the starting line to analyze how the lines would impact the new neighbors

2. Jurisdictional Tug-of-War

The RTRP crosses multiple cities: Riverside, Jurupa Valley, and Norco.

- **The Issue:** While Riverside needs the power, Jurupa Valley and Norco fought for undergrounding to prevent wildfire risks and preserve property values.
- **The Delay:** Each time a city council voted to "study undergrounding" (as happened in late 2022 and early 2023), the CEQA clock paused or reset to evaluate the new environmental and cost impacts of those changes.

3. The "Weaponization" of Litigation

CEQA allows almost any stakeholder to file a lawsuit (or a "Petition for Modification") claiming the environmental study didn't look closely enough at a specific issue—like the "visual blight" of 100-foot towers or the heat generated by the lines.

- In the case of RTRP, legal challenges from neighboring cities and community groups stayed in the courts for years, preventing Southern California Edison from moving forward.



Balancing the Science of Safety, Growth and our limitations

1. *The project was formally requested from Southern California Edison in 2004, making this a 22-year-old response to a problem that was technically first identified as far back as 1966.*
2. *The Data: Peer-reviewed studies in the Journal of Real Estate Research have shown that proximity to high-voltage overhead transmission lines (HVOTLs) can result in a property value discount of 6.3% to 16.3% for homes within 500 feet.*
3. *Grid Resilience in Extreme Weather: The Data: The 2025 Stanford study found that "hardening" the grid through undergrounding could have reduced annual power outage totals by nearly 40% during recent extreme weather events.*
4. *Environmental Life-Cycle Assessment: The Data: A 2025 study by Swissgrid found that while overhead lines are often "greener" in terms of construction materials, they require significantly more vegetation management (clearing trees/habitats) over 50 years.*

Global and Local Precedents

Europe (The Netherlands & Germany): In Europe, "Undergrounding by Default" is the standard for new low-to-medium voltage lines to preserve the landscape. For high-voltage lines, they use "Partial Undergrounding," where they only bury the wires in "sensitive zones" like our riverbed while keeping them overhead in industrial areas.

The Chino Hills Precedent: In 2013, the City of Chino Hills successfully fought to have 200-foot towers removed and the lines buried after they were already built. This proves that CPUC decisions are not final if the community can prove the "social and safety cost" outweighs the "construction cost."

Christen's Closing Question to You: If we could secure the funding to bury the lines through our most fire-prone area and speed up the process of new EIRs within 1-3yrs, would you be willing to support a slightly longer construction timeline to ensure our insurance remains affordable and our views remain clear for the next 50 years?

