

Southland in New Fight Over Route for Water

L.A. Metropolitan Water District Engineers Work on New Plan for Feather River Supply

BY RAY HEBERT, Times Urban Plans Editor
Southern California, eyeing delivery of Feather River water in the early 1950s, is heading toward a troublesome showdown on whose tap it will come through first.
The problem is the thorniest the water-conscious Southland has faced since it

First of two parts
helped push through the \$1.75 billion Feather River Project bond issue in 1960 after months of argument. Simply stated, it finds the densely-populated core of the Los Angeles metropolitan area lined up against much of Southern California—from the Antelope Valley to San Diego near the Mexican border.

East Branch Line
At stake is the meandering, multimillion dollar East Branch Aqueduct, already laid out on State Department of Water Resources maps as one of two river-sized canals that will channel Feather River water into Southern California from the main California Aqueduct.

It could be altered, postponed or possibly discarded altogether in favor of a "startlingly new route" being studied and refined by Metropolitan Water District engineers.

Joseph Jensen, determined and dedicated chairman of MWD's board of directors, describes this new proposal—a tunnel route along the southern foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains—as a major improvement in the statewide Feather River Project system.

This is the plan, he says confidently, that MWD's unwieldy and divided board will adopt.

The East Branch, as planned and preferred by state engineers, would serve the Antelope Valley, the high desert and the inland San Bernardino and Riverside regions.

Mountain Tunnel
San Diego, fidgety with growing pains and threatening to become the state's second largest city, also is counting on fresh supplies of water from this branch.

But experts and water leaders representing cities and districts along the controversial high-line route fear, despite the state's promises, that it may never be built.

They regard suggestions that its construction be delayed 10 or 15 years as only slightly less disturbing.

For L.A. Distribution
Under the project's present concept, the high line would cross Antelope Valley and the Mojave Desert, tunnel through the San Bernardino Mountains and drop down to a terminal reservoir at Perris in Riverside County.

The economic value of the shorter, less expensive West Branch never has been questioned.

It will be built on schedule, although both MWD and the state are studying the possibility of a "more beneficial routing" that would carry Northern California water down Piru Creek rather than Elizabeth Lake Canyon, after it is lifted

ed across the Tehachapi Mountains. Eventually, the West Branch will pour Feather River water into Castaic Reservoir, less than 20 miles from the northwest corner of the San Fernando Valley for distribution to the Los Angeles metropolitan area. The showdown on exactly when and where both branches will be built must come by June 30.

Under water delivery contracts for Southern California's allotment of 1.8 million acre-feet of water annually, the state must be handed detailed capacity and delivery needs by then so it can proceed with aqueduct design work.

Southern California's share of the statewide project's four million acre-ft. annual output will provide a margin for anticipated growth at least until 1990.

One Year's Supply
If just a year's supply of the Southland's allotment were channeled into one area—San Diego county, for instance—it would meet all its needs for eight years.

Southern California's 1.8 million acre-ft. also would fill Lake Arrowhead, one of the Southland's most familiar bodies of water, 40 times.

Because of its population and size, MWD will have an overwhelming, if not conclusive, voice in routing the two branch aqueducts.

The district serves Los Angeles and five other Southern California counties, an area with a population of eight million. To meet the urban water needs of this fast-growing region, the district has contracted to buy 1.5 million acre-ft. of northern water annually, or five of every six acre-ft. allotted to Southern California.

MWD's Importance
MWD's importance to the state project cannot be minimized. It will pay roughly 70% of the total cost. Its Feather River water bill, therefore, will amount to about \$4 billion over the project's 75-year repayment period.

Although the district has taken no official stand on the East Branch, Robert A. Skinner, MWD's general manager and chief engineer, released a report last year suggesting that its construction be delayed.

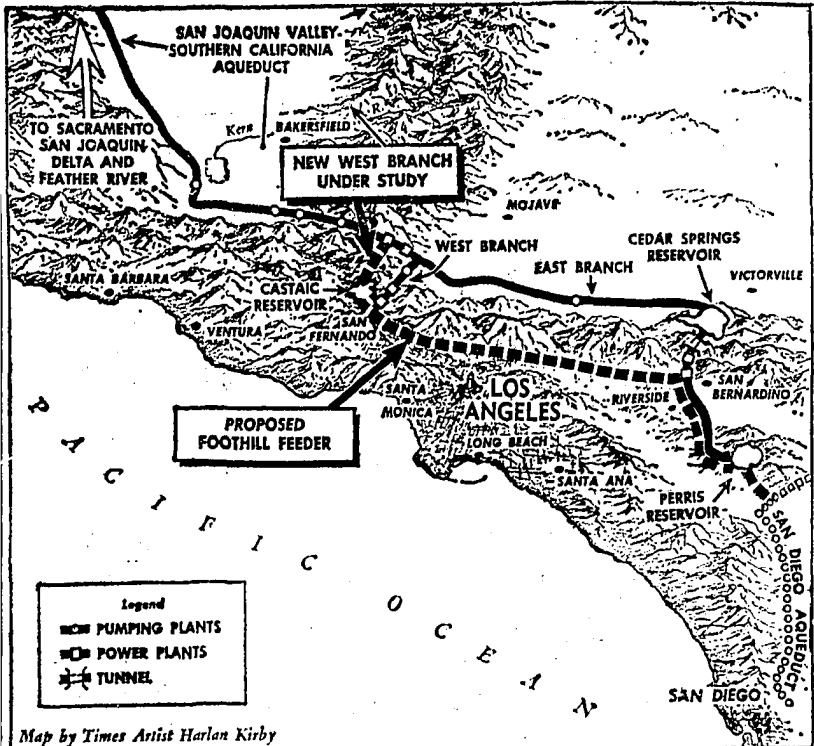
But the real blow to cities and water districts counting on the East Branch came just a few weeks ago.

In another report, MWD disclosed that it is looking into the feasibility of a series of tunnels and pipelines to carry and distribute Feather River water eastward from the San Fernando Valley. Skinner said this line, which, in effect, would tap the West Branch, might be preferable to an aqueduct across the high desert.

Many Tunnels
Although the concept for the foothill tunnel route is not new, Jensen says it is "revolutionary in character" to those who have not been following MWD's engineering studies.

"There's nothing to say that this foothill line couldn't become the East Branch," he declared.

Basically, it would involve construction of a 55-mile-



WATER ROUTES—Map shows delivery routes for Feather River water in Southern California. The heavy black line (East Branch) is route planned by the state to serve high desert, San Bernardino-Riverside and San Diego County areas. Metropolitan Water District, however, has proposed a line (dotted), south of the San Gabriel Mountains as a more favorable routing for the new supply.

long series of tunnels through the foothills, beyond the fringe of urban development, to Morris Reservoir behind Azusa. From there, Feather River water would be diverted to MWD's softening and filtration plants at La Verne and Yorba Linda.

East of Morris Reservoir, water would be carried through a short stretch of tunnel to Pomona and then in a large pipeline to San Bernardino and Perris Reservoir. Eventually an open aqueduct would be built from Perris Reservoir to the San Diego Aqueduct.

"This route affords advantages to MWD by reason of the closer proximity and greater security of tunnel and pipeline facilities along the south face of the mountains as compared with the more remote East Branch Aqueduct along the San Andreas fault zone," Skinner's report says.

The combined tunnel and pipeline route would extend 109.5 miles from Castaic to Perris. Jensen sees tremendous advantages to it, both in its accessibility to the metropolitan area and in cost comparisons with the state's present concept for the East Branch.

Assurances Made
By tying the foothill route into the west Branch's distribution lines in the northwest corner of the San Fernando Valley, he says, MWD would be committed to a cost of \$1.148 billion. This includes the district's own distribution works and its share of the state facilities south from the Tehachapi Mountain crossing.

But if the East and West Branches are built separately, as presently planned, Jensen says, the district's total cost would amount to \$1.227 billion.

How will areas that would be bypassed by abandonment or delays in construction of the East Branch be affected?

"This foothill line fulfills all the requirements of the East Branch," Jensen says. "As far as the high desert areas are concerned, they haven't signed contracts yet. But when they do, they could obtain water from extensions of lines feeding the Antelope Valley."

East of Beaumont and Banning, he says, MWD would trade Colorado River water for the rights of agencies that have already contracted for Feather River water.

San Bernardino Valley
Similarly, MWD would deliver northern water to the San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District, which also has a contract with the state. Farther south, San Diego County (an MWD member) would continue to receive Colorado River water as well as fresh supplies of Feather River water. Says Jensen:

"They have nothing to worry about."

Monday: The views of water agencies outside metropolitan Los Angeles).