



CALIFORNIA ENERGY MARKETS

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Utilities Publish Updated ICA Maps, Boon for DER Planning

California's three large investor-owned utilities on Dec. 28 published their updated Integration Capacity Analysis maps, a move that ends part of a conflict between utilities and distributed energy resource developers that contend public access to data is crucial to lowering project planning and interconnection costs.

The updated maps made publicly available online, known as ICA 2.0, include granular information on utility transmission lines, distribution lines and substations to help developers identify sites for potential projects. The publication of the updated maps comes after a California Public Utilities Commission Administrative Law Judge on Dec. 17 ruled that Pacific Gas & Electric, Southern California Edison and San Diego Gas & Electric failed to prove a data-confidentiality claim based on physical and cybersecurity concerns.

The IOUs had sought to redact critical grid information from the online maps, or make access to data concerning the physical location of electric distribution facilities subject to a nondisclosure agreement, including substations, feeders and circuits. Utilities first published demonstrational ICA maps in 2015. However, DER stakeholders argued that the maps did not meet data-accuracy standards needed for interconnection studies.

"Simply invoking the confidentiality claim, or any privilege claim that is designed to restrict public access to information, is not sufficient," ALJ Robert Mason III wrote in the ruling, adding that the burden of proof needed to restrict access to the public is rigorous, especially in an open commission process.

"IOUs' response fails to explain why any information identified would need to be protected from public disclosure by way of either redacted maps or made available to stakeholders only after they executed an NDA," Mason added.

The battle to gain public access to the maps and data persisted throughout the year. Utilities were first expected to publish the updated ICA maps in July, and in September shifted the photovoltaic Renewable Auction Mechanism maps, a subset of the ICA maps, to a confidential portal based on their interpretation of a July ruling by Mason (see CEM No. 1512 [13]).

After stakeholders raised concerns, Mason issued a ruling in October ordering the utilities to make the PV RAM maps public again. However, the debate over confidentiality for the overarching ICA maps persisted, with Mason giving IOUs until December to outline confidentiality concerns.

The IOUs' ICA 2.0 maps can now be used with a high degree of accuracy, allowing engineers to analyze the most common interconnection capacity factors at the node level on primary distribution circuits, said Sahm White, director of policy and economic analysis at Clean Coalition.

"These maps represent a sea change in visibility for the DER planning process," White said.

The data can show developers where DER projects would be best suited on the grid to yield the largest benefits for ratepayers, while also identifying the costs of necessary infrastructure improvements, White said.

"We have been advocating for increased specificity from utilities for years, and now we have access to precise engineering data for developers to identify the right locations for the right projects with the fewest costly upgrades," he said. —**Kali Kotoski**