



## **CPUC to vote on settlement tied to renewables**

The California Public Utilities Commission on Thursday is scheduled to take up a proposed settlement among 14 parties that would make it easier for renewables to connect to the distribution grid.

The centerpiece of the settlement, according to the CPUC, is a significant revision to the interconnection tariff of Rule 21 that would make it more transparent and predictable for distributed generation to link to a utility's distribution, while maintaining the grid's reliability. Rule 21 also governs operating and metering requirements.

The state's three big investor-owned utilities — Pacific Gas and Electric, San Diego Gas and Electric, and Southern California Edison — all agreed to the settlement, which has been more than a year in the making. Renewables groups and developers, including the Clean Coalition, Solar Energy Industries Association and Sunlight Partners, were among the other parties.

The IOUs, some with a spike in applications from those seeking to connect to the grid, were as eager for some revisions to Rule 21 as renewable builders, according to the Clean Coalition.

But although the settlement aims to make connecting to IOUs' distribution "timely, predictable and transparent," according to the proposed order, it does not provide developers with cost certainty, said Ted Ko, associate executive director for the Clean Coalition, which was closely involved in the settlement. That "critical" element, Ko said, will be debated in negotiations for what he said would be phase two of Rule 21's revisions, which he hopes will begin this month.

Ko also cited cost accountability as key, that is utilities need to provide enough transparency so that developers can be sure they are given fair cost estimates and that utilities are "following the rules."

The settlement on Thursday's agenda proposes:

\*\* Transparent and specific time frames for each analysis track, whether it be a simplified fast-track review or a more detailed study;

\*\* A "fast-track" process to be introduced that builds on Rule 21's screening process for net-metering customers, expanding it to include generating facilities up to a certain size limit that send power to the distribution grid;

\*\* Rules under which developers can obtain or retain their position in the queue will be set out, including publication of an integrated list of applicants by each IOU;

\*\* A "pre-application report" to give a first look at a possible point of interconnection so that developers can assess site benefits and difficulties;

\*\* New dispute resolution procedures, including a utility ombudsman authorized to expedite handling of time-related disputes; and

\*\* A best practice for distributed generation levels would be introduced; aggregate interconnected capacity could be 100% of minimum load on a distribution line section. CPUC said this provision is the first of its kind in the US.

Ko lauded "some of the things we got" in what he called phase one, such as "a little more transparency, more definition of timelines and some technical screens, i.e. what physical issues will come up once you plug in." He also noted what he sees as the importance of a "pre-application report, a report from the utility on roughly what it thinks the connection will do to the grid." That should cut down on the number of applicants, which would be welcomed by both utilities and developers, who will have some idea ahead of time if their application fits the criteria.

Originally, Rule 21 was designed "to make quick and easy interconnections" for behind-the-meter systems, Ko said. The revisions were made necessary because "the rules didn't have much definition for what we call wholesale systems that are designed to send almost all their energy to the [distribution] grid."

"The rules were very vague, very unclear about what it was going to cost, how long it was going to take you to interconnect. So that needed to be fixed," Ko said.