

ACADIA CENTER PROJECT

Communities and Clean Grid

A resource for cities and towns to remain informed about the ways in which the planning, management, and governance of the New England electric grid affect their residents, providing contextualized information that foregrounds opportunities to influence policy outcomes to ensure a clean energy future.

WHO IS ACADIA CENTER?

Acadia Center's mission is to advance bold, effective clean energy solutions for a livable climate and a stronger, more equitable economy. Grounded in impactful data analysis and inclusive partnerships and collaboration, we fight for economic and environmental policies that will have the greatest impact on carbon emissions in our region. Working at the intersection of government, industry, grassroots organizations, advocates and communities, Acadia Center develops courageous solutions for our region's systemic energy challenges.

WHY DOES ELECTRIC GRID PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT MATTER TO LOCAL COMMUNITIES?

The primary concern of local governments is the delivery of services to residents. There is a broad category of services that is delivered to residents, however, that is not delivered by the city or town in which they live. Grid services—the planning and development of power plants and the transmission system that delivers power to local utilities, the management of markets that ensure adequate supplies of energy, and the daily operation of the electric grid—are delivered universally to every city and town resident but are entirely independent of local government control. The fact that most local governments consider the electric grid, and the entities that manage it, as "givens"—unalterable or impossible to influence because they are beyond their control—is not surprising. There are, however, many compelling reasons why communities should be concerned about the grid services delivered to their residents. Grid services have a direct impact on the fulfillment of local communities' policy goals and the success of community-implemented programs, and they have a direct bearing on the quality of life of their residents. Unfortunately, the planning and delivery of grid services are often misaligned with the interests of cities and towns, and the people who live and work in them.

HOW DOES THE PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT OF THE REGIONAL ELECTRIC GRID IMPACT COMMUNITIES?

Energy System Planning and Resource Decisions The New England Power Pool (NEPOOL) and the Independent System Operator of New England (ISO New England) are responsible for estimating the region's future demand for electricity, and for planning new sources of electricity to meet it. They also plan the transmission system needed to deliver electricity from where it is generated to the electric utilities that serve local communities. NEPOOL and ISO New England thus determine how quickly fossil fuel power plants are replaced with non-emitting sources of electricity: decisions that have direct bearing on the fulfillment of local communities' climate and decarbonization goals.

Planning and Siting of Energy Infrastructure NEPOOL and ISO New England are responsible for determining where and how many new electricity generating resources will be built, and where transmission lines will be located: decisions that have a direct bearing on residents whose communities are selected for construction.

Electricity Market Design Because they are responsible for the design of electricity markets, NEPOOL and ISO New England also directly influence the costs that residents will ultimately pay for grid services. Over 20% of the total of each electric bill represents costs related to the planning and operation of the New England power grid—one of the largest cost components on customer electricity bills.

ISO New England Governance Despite the outsized impact ISO-New England decision-making has on local communities, its internal deliberations remain largely inaccessible to the public. This lack of transparency and the inadequacy of ISO New England stakeholder processes necessarily undervalues the interests of local communities and their residents.

The principal ISO-New England stakeholder process is conducted at NEPOOL. NEPOOL is a private, membership-based organization. It functions as a gatekeeper by approving—or disapproving—candidate members, and by requiring the payment of annual dues to join and participate. Under NEPOOL rules, members of the public are permitted to attend meetings by invitation only, provided that their attendance has been pre-approved. NEPOOL meetings are also considered non-public and confidential.

NEPOOL restrictions on public access and press coverage discourage broader public participation and make it difficult for members of the public to remain informed about ISO-New England planning and initiatives that affect local economies and residents' quality of life. By comparison, the stakeholder meetings of other Independent System Operators—the California ISO, the New York ISO, the Midcontinent ISO, the mid-Atlantic ISO (PJM), and the Southwest Power Pool—are all open to the public.

WHAT TOPICS ARE OF THE HIGHEST POTENTIAL INTEREST TO COMMUNITIES?

- Locally adopted clean energy, climate, and environmental justice goals cannot be achieved unless ISO New England increases the number of clean energy electricity generating resources like solar and wind, yet ISO New England has demonstrated a consistent preference for carbon-emitting fossil fuel powered resources.
- Because of ISO New England's reliance on fossil fuels-powered generating resources, residents are exposed to fossil fuel markets that are too often volatile and expensive, increasing the cost of electricity for all residents, and keeping energy burdens (the percentage of income needed to pay utility bills) intolerably high for the one-in-ten New Englanders who live at or below the poverty line.
- ISO New England is responsible for approving the location, in addition to the size and type, of transmission equipment and power plants, and that energy infrastructure has too often been sited in lower-income communities and communities of color, overburdening them with health and economic impacts, and a diminished quality of life.
- Over the next three years the region's electricity customers will pay almost $1.3 billion for planned transmission system upgrades, and while those expenditures may reduce some costs associated with transmission congestion, it is difficult to judge the value those upgrades deliver to residents relative to their significant cost.

WHAT ARE THE PURPOSE AND GOALS OF THE COMMUNITIES AND CLEAN GRID PROJECT?

The purpose of the Communities and Clean Grid Program is to equip and empower local communities to engage in and influence ISO New England grid planning and management. The Program will provide local communities with information they need to remain up to date on issues affecting their residents, and to help them determine when, at their discretion, the interests of their residents require them to intercede in ISO New England and other stakeholder processes. The goal of the Communities and Clean Grid Program is to place local communities on an equal footing with other stakeholders seeking to influence ISO New England grid planning and management, and to include them in the region-wide effort to implement equitable, affordable clean energy solutions.

HOW TO FIND OUT MORE, AND WAYS TO GET INVOLVED

Stay up to date on regional grid developments and receive notice of Communities and Clean Grid webinars and other events by subscribing to Crosscurrents, the Communities and Clean Grid newsletter. Subscribe today at **acadiacenter.org/crosscurrents** .

acadiacenter.org • **info@acadiacenter.org**
Acadia Center, PO Box 583, Rockport, ME 04856-0583

Acadia Center

Boston, MA 617-742-0054 • **Hartford, CT** 860-246-7121 • **New York, NY** 212-256-1535 • **Providence, RI** 401-276-0600 • **Rockport, ME** 207-236-6470

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