



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**February 6, 2023**

**Contact: [press@LightsOnCA.org](mailto:press@LightsOnCA.org)**

**“Lights on California” coalition launched by clean energy, business, and environmental advocates committed to expanding regional, renewable energy cooperation across the West**

*Coalition believes it’s time for California to consider clean energy solutions both within and beyond its borders to prevent blackouts, reduce energy costs, and successfully transition to 100% clean energy*

*With 80% of energy customers in the West now served by utilities with zero-carbon energy targets—and multi-state energy cooperation expanding—the Legislature has requested a report in February on how a Regional Transmission Organization (RTO) can help California achieve its energy goals*

SACRAMENTO — The “Lights on California” coalition was launched today by a growing number of clean energy, business, and environmental advocates committed to expanding renewable energy cooperation across the West—and raising awareness about the state’s options for building a more affordable, more reliable clean energy grid through participation in a Western Regional Transmission Organization (RTO).

The Lights on California website, [LightsOnCA.org](https://LightsOnCA.org), has more information about the coalition’s goals and membership—along with details on how other Western states are adopting clean energy targets and moving toward regional management of the energy grid.

“The entire Western U.S. continues to grapple with extreme heat, fires, and a diminishing water supply. All of which impact the reliability of our energy system. We simply cannot afford to be left behind as the rest of the West looks for regional solutions that will enhance reliability,” says **Brady Van Engelen, Policy Advocate on Energy and Climate for the California Chamber of Commerce**. “An RTO is clearly one of the best ways to deliver it, providing a framework for tapping into vast wind, solar, and other reliable, low-cost clean energy supplies across the West, while creating more high-paying jobs for Californians.”

While California has led the nation in setting ambitious 100% clean energy targets, the annual threats of summer blackouts and spiking winter heating costs continue to highlight just how much more clean power will be needed to keep the lights on and energy bills affordable. One recent state analysis found California will need to [increase by nearly five-fold](#) the amount of renewable energy it brings online each year to achieve 100% clean energy by 2045. Building the necessary amount of wind and solar power to meet this demand, another study found, [would require 6,280 square miles](#)—an area bigger than the State of Connecticut, and likely more land than California has available.

The Lights On California coalition believes the time has come for California to consider clean energy solutions both within and beyond its borders—to prevent blackouts, reduce energy costs, and accelerate the transition to a clean economy. Several recent energy trends have united the coalition:

- While [80% of energy customers in the West are served by utilities with 100% clean energy goals](#), the West is one of the only regions in the country without shared governance of the regional power grid to help bring these resources online.
- In other parts of the country, seven RTOs cover about half of U.S. states and meet two-thirds of national energy demand—helping coordinate energy reliability planning, manage wholesale electricity markets, and effectively operate electricity grids across state lines.
- Meanwhile, in the West, 38 different balancing authorities manage the region’s energy grid.

“California’s clean energy providers have helped make the state a global leader in renewable energy production, but California needs more clean power than it can produce alone. As momentum builds across the West around the transition to 100% clean power, states need a better way to connect new wind, solar, and other renewables with consumers that depend on them,” says **Alex Jackson, Director of American Clean Power-California**. “An RTO is a critical building block to integrate and coordinate the long-term transmission planning and investments necessary to boost renewable power development and achieve California’s clean energy goals reliably and affordably.”

California already imports [nearly a third of its power](#), and out-of-state clean energy has provided a much-needed lifeline during the state’s recent heat waves. During the [September 2022 heat emergency](#), for example, California kept the lights on by importing 7,500 MW of hydropower from the Pacific Northwest when smoky air from wildfires hampered solar production. However, energy margins remained razor thin as market barriers prevented the state from tapping additional clean power from Arizona and New Mexico.

An RTO can help California avoid future energy emergencies, allowing grid managers to work more closely with neighboring states to plan energy deliveries further ahead, deliver power reliably and at lower cost, invest in new solar, wind, and other resources, and build the interstate transmission lines needed to connect far-flung renewable projects with consumers. A new report concludes an RTO of 11 Western states would [save Californians up to \\$563 million in annual energy bill savings](#), create 138,700 new high-paying jobs (averaging \$91,000 in annual compensation), produce \$21.7 billion in economic growth, and accelerate 470 megawatts of new clean energy construction (enough to power nearly 90,000 homes).

To better understand the state’s regional energy options, the Legislature has requested a report in February from the California Independent System Operator (CAISO) and National Renewable Energy Laboratory on how an RTO can help California achieve its energy and environmental goals. The report is the result of a resolution, [ACR 188](#) (Holden), passed unanimously by the Assembly and Senate last year. A draft of the CAISO/NREL report [released in January](#) found “California’s goals for renewable energy and greenhouse gas reduction can be achieved faster and with less cost to Californians through expanded regional cooperation.”

“The West is home to some of the best wind and solar resources in the country,” says **Victoria Rome, Director of California Government Affairs for NRDC (Natural Resources Defense Council)**. “California can and should develop all of the renewable resources it can within its borders, but that won’t be enough to stay ahead of climate change. To reach 100% clean energy, we need to integrate our grid with vast quantities of clean, reliable out-of-state renewables. An RTO is the structure the West needs to plan and invest in the modern transmission system that can make our clean energy future possible.”

As the Legislature considers how best to act on the CAISO/NREL findings, the Lights On California coalition will be working together to raise awareness about the benefits of an RTO—for consumers, for businesses, for workers, and for the environment.

“This is an opportunity California can’t afford to miss, especially with some Western states considering participating in an RTO with or without us,” says **V. John White, Executive Director of the Center for Energy Efficiency and Renewable Technologies**. “It was brave when California stood alone in committing to a clean energy future. That time has passed, and we are fortunate to have a lot of company. Now our shared success depends on finding ways to cooperate to deliver the clean power Californians and our neighbors are going to depend on for years to come.”

A full list of current Lights On California coalition members can be found below. More information is available at: [LightsOnCA.org](http://LightsOnCA.org).

- Advanced Energy United
- American Clean Power-California
- California Chamber of Commerce
- Center for Energy Efficiency and Renewable Technologies
- Clean Power Campaign
- Environmental Defense Fund
- Independent Energy Producers Association
- NRDC
- Solar Energy Industries Association
- Western Freedom

###