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Getting Microgrids Out From Behind the Meter

In the course of the recent two day Microgrid Workshops, a wide variety of creative projects and installations were presented. They represent unique power generation, energy storage, hardware and software, financial, organisational and management solutions. They all had one thing in common, they exist “Behind the Meter”. How can get them out from behind the meter.

It was noted that both departing load charges and the restrictions imposed by Public Utility Code 218 impede the development of these solutions. Commissioner Shiroma stated that these were not just protections designed to enhance the utilities business, but in fact were necessary to avoid shifting costs to vulnerable customers. This is only partially true. By looking at the problem differently, this need not be the case in the future.

Were California to follow the lead of Texas and mandate an orderly transition to a true “wires only” role for the utilities, it would open up the path for the adoption of the type of leading edge solutions we saw presented. These solutions are necessary if California is going to meet the transition to its ambitious climate protection goals. The mechanism to support such a transition exists in the form of the Open Access/Distribution System Operator (OA/DSO) concept.