UTILITY DIVE

BRIEF

LA approves 100% clean energy by 2035 target, a decade ahead of prior goal

Published Sept. 2, 2021

By Jason Plautz
Contributor

Dive Brief:

- The Los Angeles City Council voted Wednesday to transition to 100% clean energy by 2035, in line with President Biden's national goals and a decade earlier than the city originally planned.
- The LA100 plan would see the city replace its natural gas electricity generation with wind, solar and battery storage, while also improving energy efficiency and transmission. It was approved by the city council in a 12-0 vote.
- The council also approved an equitable hiring plan, which instructs the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) to increase hiring from environmentally and economically disadvantaged neighborhoods and focus on "ensuring project labor agreements, prevailing wage and targeted hiring requirements" for clean energy jobs. The city anticipates creating some 9,500 new jobs as part of the transition.

Dive Insight:

The goal now puts LADWP, the nation's largest public utility, on track for an aggressive transition that backers said would present a model for the nation. Coming as California fights the Dixie and Caldor fires and just weeks after the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change issued what authors called a "code red for humanity," councilmember Mitch O'Farrell said the aggressive 2035 goal was a necessity.

"LA100 is not a utopian gesture. It is a work plan for a world in trouble," said O'Farrell, who introduced the 2035 measure along with councilman Paul Krekorian.

In March, the National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) released a report commissioned by the city showing that Los Angeles could achieve 98% clean energy within a decade and 100% clean energy by 2035 without blackouts or disruptions to the economy. In fact, the report used an economy-wide model to show that any economic disruption would be "small in relationship to the 3.9 million jobs and $200 billion in annual output in the LA economy as a whole," with the potential to create thousands of new jobs in the clean energy industry.

However, meeting that goal will require a massive expansion of wind and solar resources, coupled with energy efficiency measures to cut demand. The NREL study laid out several pathways for Los Angeles to meet its 100% clean energy goal, but all involved shutting down its local gas power plants, including the Valley Generating Station. On average, Los Angeles would need to deploy between 470-730 MW of wind, solar and batteries per year between 2021 and 2045, the timeline of the study. The study modeled everything through 2045 and expects that the city would continue to add renewables even beyond 2035. The study especially emphasized the role that rooftop solar on single-family and multi-unit dwellings could play in reducing electricity rates and generating renewable energy.

In a presentation to the city council Wednesday, LADWP general manager and chief engineer Martin Adams said the utility plans to provide twice the amount of electricity that it currently does by 2035 to account for electrification of buildings and transportation. The NREL report also said LADWP will need some reliable new generation in and around the city itself. Adams said that green hydrogen presents an opportunity to meet those needs, with hydrogen-powered turbine plants acting as long-term storage and dispatching power when needed. LADWP is planning to pilot a hydrogen system at the Intermountain Power Plant in Utah, which currently provides a fifth of the city's power.

In a statement, Southern California Gas Company, the nation's largest natural gas distribution utility, said "clean fuels like hydrogen and renewable natural gas will be essential in a net zero future to support a reliable electric grid and to eliminate emissions from hard to electrify sectors of the economy like transportation and industry" and pointed to work in the European Union to advance clean hydrogen. The Sempra subsidiary pledged this spring to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2045.

Adams added that although the transition in Los Angeles could cost tens of billions of dollars (the NREL report estimated costs between $57 billion and $87 billion), much of the work could be "overlaid" with existing infrastructure repairs. Democrats in the U.S. Congress are working to pass a $1 trillion infrastructure bill with $73 billion for grid improvements as well as a $3.5 trillion budget reconciliation bill that could help fund the expensive transmission work necessary for the move.

Jasmin Vargas, a senior organizer with Food & Water Watch who participated in advisory panels for the NREL report, said the passage of the goal is "exciting," but emphasized that LADWP needed to reach out to communities "that are on the front lines and the fence lines of polluting projects." LADWP last month launched

a two-year equity strategy process and has a separate long-term resource plan process that includes stakeholder outreach.

Vargas said that engaging "a broad and wide swath of diverse community leaders and voices" can ensure that the benefits of the clean energy transition are felt across the city, especially in communities that have been most affected by fossil fuel pollution. "The inequality is what we're trying to fix, that's more than just how many clean energy megawatts you put on the grid," she said.

Recommended Reading:

NATIONAL RENEWABLE ENERGY LABORATORY

LA100: The Los Angeles 100% Renewable Energy Study

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