

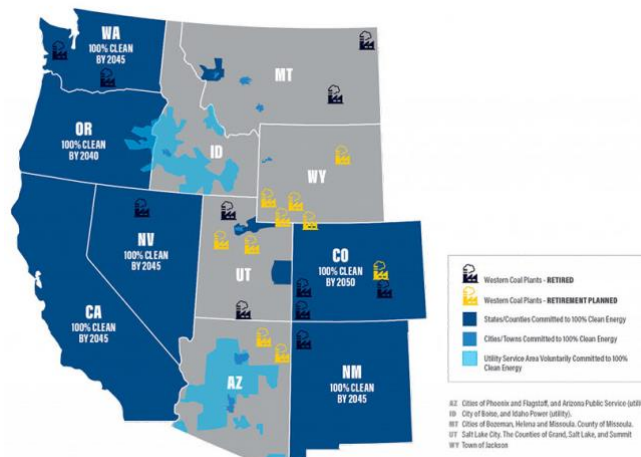
RTO Insider

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New Coalition Aims for California to be in RTO

A map on the coalition's website shows states, cities and utilities committed to 100% clean energy and coal plant retirements.

| *Lights on California*



By Hudson Sangree

A new coalition of trade and environmental groups says California needs to be part of an RTO to achieve its clean energy goals and maintain reliability, adding its voice to those calling for Western organized markets and for [CAISO](#) to grow into a multistate RTO.

Calling itself Lights on California, the coalition's *members* include national trade groups Advanced Energy United and the Solar Energy Industries Association, environmental organizations Natural Resources Defense Council and Environmental Defense Fund, and the California Chamber of Commerce, which wields significant influence in the state capitol.

Lights on California launched Monday with a *news release* and *website*, saying its purpose is to raise awareness about the "state's options for building a more affordable, more reliable clean energy grid through participation" in a Western RTO and to advocate for that goal.

"We simply cannot afford to be left behind as the rest of the West looks for regional solutions that will enhance reliability," Chamber of Commerce Policy Advocate Brady Van Engelen said in the news release. "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."

The group's announcement was the latest development in a reinvigorated effort to allow CAISO to become an RTO. Several prior attempts failed, the last in 2018, because lawmakers were unwilling to change the ISO's rules to allow out-of-state members to serve on its Board of Governors.

Circumstances in the West have changed substantially in the years since, fueling a new push and giving advocates more hope of success.

The new conditions include strained supply in CAISO and its neighbors during Western heat waves, the need for new transmission to carry renewable power long distances across the West, and legal mandates for Colorado and Nevada transmission owners to join RTOs by 2030. In addition, more states are adopting clean energy and emissions reduction targets, which advocates say will be much easier to achieve in an RTO.

Potential competition from [SPP](#), which plans to establish its own Western RTO, and from the Western Power Pool, whose Western Resource Adequacy Program could be a springboard to an RTO, are lending urgency to the latest CAISO governance reform effort.

The coalition cited last year's unanimous passage of Assembly Concurrent Resolution 188, which asked CAISO to prepare a report for the state legislature summarizing studies of the benefits of regional market participation. Assemblymember Christopher Holden, who headed the 2017/18 effort to make CAISO a regional organization, authored ACR 188 with the intent of restarting the conversation on CAISO becoming an RTO. (See [Plans Revive to Make CAISO a Western RTO](#).)

A draft of the report, performed by the National Renewable Energy Laboratory for CAISO, was published Jan. 13 with a final version due to lawmakers by the end of February. Among the studies it examined was one led by state energy offices in Utah, Colorado, Idaho and Montana that found an RTO covering the entire U.S. portion of the Western Interconnection could save the region \$2 billion in annual electricity costs by 2030 and cut carbon dioxide emissions by 191 million metric tons. (See [Study Shows RTO Could Save West \\$2B Yearly by 2030](#).)

"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," the group said in its news release.