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ICC Adopts New Interconnection Rules for Distributed Generation Facilities

CHICAGO: On Tuesday, December 13, 2016, the Illinois Commerce Commission (ICC) approved an Order finalizing changes to the state's interconnection standards for distributed generation facilities (Docket No. 14-0135).

"These amendments streamline the Commission's rules on interconnection for distributed generation and promote smart grid infrastructure improvement in Illinois," said Chairman Brien Sheahan. "Importantly, these changes are also consistent with the statutory goal of minimizing barriers to the interconnection of distributed generation facilities and establish greater transparency beforehand about the potential costs associated with interconnection."

The decision came in response to a February 2014 request from the Citizens Utility Board (CUB) and the Environmental Law and Policy Center (ELPC) to amend Illinois Administrative Code Parts 466 and 467, the Commission's rules on interconnection.

In addition to a waiver provision, mandated on-line applications and electronic signatures, the amended rules require utilities to provide a pre-application report outlining technical specifications for the location specified by a generation developer applying for connection. The report will be available to developers at a cost of \$300. The amended rules also require utilities to maintain their procedures on-line, allowing distributed generators to narrow their search for acceptable locations without costly infrastructure studies.

The current Part 466 rules contain three levels of expedited review required for interconnection: Level 1 applies to systems that are smaller than 10 kilovolt Amperes ("kVA") in nameplate capacity and meet certain technical screens; Level 2 applies to systems that are smaller than 2 MVA and meet similar technical screens; and Level 3 applies to systems under 10 MVA in nameplate capacity that do not export power to the grid. Systems that do not fall into these expedited review categories or fail to meet one or more of the associated technical screens must undergo a full utility study process under Level 4, which includes three different studies and therefore, substantially more time and expense.

The new rules raise the upper limit for the lowest tier, Level 1, from 10 kW to 25 kW, and make it such that the upper limit for Level 2 also now depends upon the generator's capacity and the capacity of the line to which it is interconnecting. Under the previous rules, the upper limit for Level 2 was 2 MW, but the amended rules change

the upper limit for smaller distribution lines to as low as 500 kW, while for larger distribution lines, the upper limit is 5 MW. The changes thus increase the size of the generator that has access to expedited procedures, which increases the number of applications that can be quickly interconnected as a result of no longer requiring extensive infrastructure studies.

In addition to other important changes, the new rules also delete the “no construction” screen, which refers to the screen in Levels 1, 2, and 3, that does not allow projects to receive expedited review if they would require construction of any facilities by the utility to accommodate the project. Under the amended rules, if only a “Minor System Modification” is required, the application can proceed under expedited procedures. Minor System Modifications are any modifications located between the service tap on the distribution circuit and the meter serving the customer. Thus, if only a small change to the distribution system is required, applicants can avoid expensive infrastructure studies.

Advocates say the ruling is a positive step for providers of renewable energy in Illinois because it will allow larger projects to move forward using an expedited interconnection process, which makes it quicker and easier to add clean energy to the power grid.

“CUB is pleased with the ICC’s ruling,” said David Kolata, CUB Executive Director. “If Illinois wants to develop a more affordable and reliable power grid, we need policies that will make it easier for consumers to participate in distributed generation, like small-scale wind and solar power in neighborhoods across the state. Tuesday’s ruling is a big step towards that goal.”

“The Commission’s adoption of clear, understandable interconnection standards for solar installations helps accelerate Illinois achieving its solar potential,” said Howard Learner, ELPC Executive Director. “Standardizing and simplifying interconnection processes removes a barrier, reduces solar development costs, and makes Illinois a more solar-ready state.”

The Interstate Renewable Energy Council (IREC), an intervenor in the case whose mission is to make clean and sustainable energy more possible for Americans through regulatory reform and education, also commended the decision. “The Interstate Renewable Energy Council applauds Illinois’ adoption of these updated interconnection rules, which are modeled after well-vetted best practices already in place in a number of states across the country,” said Sara Baldwin Auck, Regulatory Program Director for IREC. “This will help Illinois improve efficiency and streamline clean energy on the grid.”

Upon filing with the Secretary of State, the amended rules will take effect. For more details about the ruling, or to read the Order, visit the Commission’s e-Docket website [here](#).

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About the Illinois Commerce Commission

The Illinois Commerce Commission’s mission is to pursue an appropriate balance between the interests of consumers and existing and emerging service providers to ensure the provision of adequate, efficient, reliable, safe and least-cost public utility services. The Commission consists of three bureaus: the Bureau of External Affairs, which provides educational information on utility issues for consumers, governmental entities and communities and through its Consumer Services Division, resolves customer/utility disputes and develops rules

on utility service and consumer protection; the Public Utilities Bureau, which focuses on financial and operational analysis, policy development, public safety and enforcement activities related to electric, natural gas, water, sewer and telecommunications companies; and the Transportation Bureau, which includes trucking insurance and registration, railroad safety, relocation towing, safety towing and household goods moving company enforcement activities. The ICC's five commissioners are appointed by the Governor and approved by the Illinois State Senate for five-year terms.

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