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'A life and death matter': Texas counties, cities sound off on electric market changes

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by: **Avery Travis**

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AUSTIN (KXAN) — Travis County is joining the cities of Dallas, El Paso, Houston, Lewisville, Mesquite and Plano, submitting ideas on what changes their leaders want to see with the Texas electric market and power grid.

The state's Public Utility Commission is considering changes to the wholesale electric market design, and stakeholders have a chance to submit input on Dec.

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On Tuesday, Travis County commissioners approved a measure to sign onto the document, which outlines the five recommendations from these municipalities.

- Increase the use of energy efficiency and demand response programs
- Value and encourage a diversified resource base to provide a variety of grid benefits and services
- Minimize the severity and disproportionate impacts of power outages on different customer types
- Consider expanding Texans' access to reliable electricity by connecting with adjacent grids
- Ensure there is a robust and inclusive market redesign stakeholder engagement process

"As local governments, the undersigned are also frontline responders and critical actors in crisis prevention and management," the document reads. "During Winter Storm Uri, we experienced firsthand the far-reaching impacts of energy loss. These went beyond enormous customer bills; the untenable living situations caused our communities great physical suffering and emotional harm."

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Most of the conversation in the aftermath of the storm has focused on winterizing Texas power generators and plants. Commissioner Brigid Shea of Precinct 2, who brought the measure to the court, told KXAN it is critical to keep the PUC and ERCOT accountable for the electric market, as well.

"This is the kind of thing that the Public Utility Commission needs to give very clear guidance and pass rules on," she said. "You, the PUC, are the regulator. You need to use your regulatory power."

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“I think that is an outrage. People – many people – died because of this. So, this isn’t just a, ‘Oh it would be nice to have a better power grid and have it be more effective. No, this is a life and death matter,” she said.

The document outlining the suggested plan from the local municipalities emphasizes the importance of prioritizing equity for all Texans as changes are made.

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“The Commission could explicitly include traditionally underrepresented communities, mandate program or rate directives that both ensure equal access to affordable and reliable energy services and reduce the disparity of energy burden across all residents and communities, ensure equitable economic and environmental impacts of any market changes, and more,” it reads.

“It falls the hardest on the poorest, most marginalized, the communities of color in our towns and our counties,” Shea said.

Energy efficiency and demand response programs

In the draft of the plan, the local municipalities said expanding existing energy efficiency programs and demand response programs was an immediate way to improve reliability of the grid. They cite a study from October 2021 study by the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy which asserted these programs, under statewide direction over five years, could offset considerable portions of the summer and winter load.

They also pointed to benefits for Texans “on a day-to-day basis by lowering

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“Both new and existing programs should place an emphasis on home insulation, smart thermostats, and home heating and cooling to reduce both energy use and peak loads and improve the preparedness of residential homes for extreme weather or other crisis conditions,” the document reads.

Diversified resource base

The municipalities urged the PUC to design a market that permits all generation, storage, and distributed energy resources — like residential solar — equal access to the grid. They said this would boost reliability.

The document states, *“We also encourage the Commission to establish policies that allow residential customers to see and respond to real-time electric prices and requests for demand flexibility to enable them to make well-informed decisions...”*

Disproportionate impacts of outages

They also requested the PUC take steps to ensure outages do not disproportionately impact certain types of customers, particularly vulnerable populations.

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For instance, they suggested modifying the current distribution circuit designs, for more granular outage management. They said circuits could instead be divided into small sections, with critical facilities on their own or with just few

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Consider connecting with adjacent grids

The document then acknowledges that Texas's electricity market has “historically been able to effectively serve its residents on its own.” Still, the draft plan suggests trying to use energy resources from adjacent markets and other regional power grids, especially in a time of crisis.

“A study conducted by Americans for a Clean Energy Grid in the wake of Winter Storm Uri found that each additional gigawatt (GW) of transmission ties between ERCOT and the Southeastern U.S. could have saved nearly \$1 billion, while keeping the heat on for hundreds of thousands of Texans,” the document explains.

Inclusive stakeholder engagement process

The draft plan repeatedly emphasizes the need for equity and inclusion, as the market redesign process plays out.

As their final suggestion to the PUC, they suggest suggest the PUC provide more education, active engagement and clear communication for how they plan to work with their stakeholders, including local governments, moving forward.

The local governments plan to submit all of these comments to the PUC at the next engagement opportunity on Friday, December 10, 2021. To read more about the comments, click [here](#). To read the comments in-full, click [here](#).

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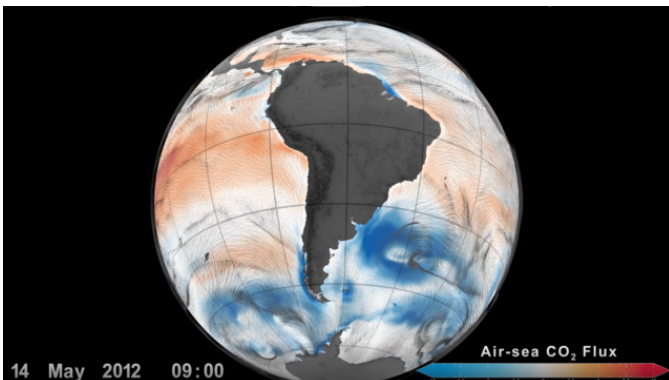
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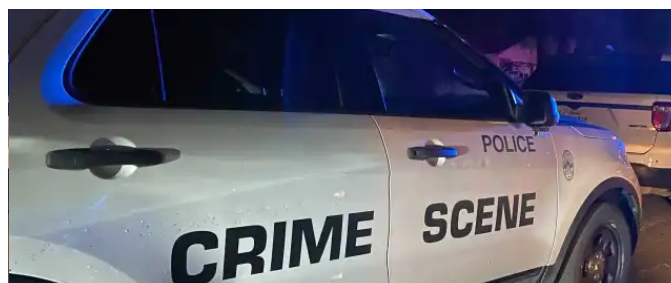


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Clear

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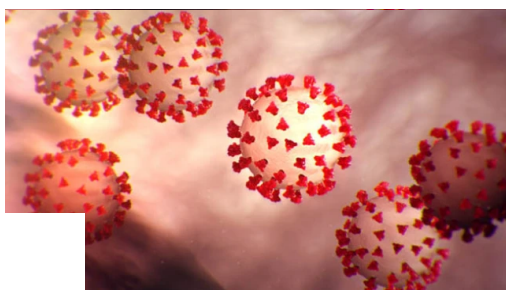
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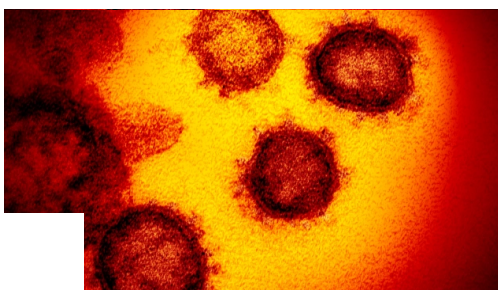
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