

# Building and Deployment

**A Resource Toolkit from RMI | November 2026**

## Energy Zones

A growing number of states are pursuing energy zones to better coordinate generation siting with transmission planning. Today, the two largely proceed in sequence: developers pursue locations where grid capacity is available, and transmission planners respond to the interest visible in the interconnection queue. As load growth and generator retirements outpace new supply, projects crowd into a few constrained areas, wait years to interconnect, and may face network upgrade costs large enough to force project cancellation. Meanwhile, high-quality resource areas may be untapped, and inconsistent permitting across jurisdictions and project-by-project siting disputes add further cost and delay.

Energy zones enable states to proactively identify areas well suited for energy development and provide them as inputs into transmission planning. Utilities and regional planners can then develop transmission ahead of individual project proposals. Larger shared lines can cost less per megawatt than piecemeal upgrades, and projects within zones can interconnect more quickly. Energy zones can further be used to support economic development goals and combine siting standards and streamlined permitting with community benefit expectations upfront and holistically rather than project-by-project.

RMI's ***Built-In Benefits*** examines how states can incorporate community engagement and benefits into zone design, and forthcoming ***Energy Zones Implementation Guide*** details steps for implementing energy zones.

Scan to access ***Built-In Benefits***

## Surplus Interconnection

Surplus interconnection can bring new generation and storage online faster by making better use of grid infrastructure that has already been studied and built. Today, new projects can wait years in interconnection queues and face costly network upgrades, even as existing generators often use less than their full interconnection capability.

Surplus interconnection allows a new resource to connect at an existing generating facility and use its interconnection rights, provided their combined output does not exceed the amount already approved for the site. Because these projects do not require the transmission system to accommodate additional injections, they can undergo a more limited study process and often avoid major network upgrades. This approach can be particularly useful for adding battery storage to existing energy infrastructure or replacing retiring generation.

Despite this potential, market rules in some regions limit how separately owned or operated resources can share interconnection rights. RMI is working with grid operators, developers, and states to address these barriers and make surplus interconnection a more practical tool for accelerating new supply and improving use of the existing grid. RMI's ***Clean, Competitive Grids*** work advances reforms across interconnection, transmission, and market design, including efforts to expand the use of surplus interconnection

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## Stored Potential

As communities face difficult choices about how to balance reliability, affordability, safety, and local priorities, battery energy storage systems (BESS) are becoming an increasingly important part of the US power system. Since 2018, US battery storage capacity has increased more than 40-fold. As deployment grows, real-world operating data is beginning to show how batteries can perform during grid stress, lower electricity costs, and provide meaningful local benefits.

Batteries can provide fast, flexible power when the grid needs it most. In California, BESS supplied 13-19% of generation during the most grid-stressed hours of 2024 and played a key role in preventing black outs during heat waves. By charging when electricity is inexpensive and discharging during high-cost peak hours, batteries can also lower costs for ratepayers. RMI estimates that BESS dispatch avoided $29 million in peak energy costs in California in July 2024 alone. BESS can also provide substantial local tax revenue: a typical 200 MW project can generate up to $2 million annually for host communities.

As the US power system evolves, communities need clear, consistent information to evaluate new energy infrastructure. RMI's ***Stored Potential*** provides an evidence-based assessment of utility-scale BESS benefits and declining safety risks, as well as mechanisms communities can use to align projects with local needs.

Scan to access ***Stored Potential***

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