27.4 Gradualism and Non-Cost Considerations

This section discusses the methods regulators use to reach a decision on the fair apportionment of the revenue requirement based on both cost and non-cost considerations. Regulators frequently depart from the strict application of cost of service study results. Often, regulators reject the studies that are presented due to inclusion of one or more allocation factors they find unacceptable. A common example is the use of the minimum system method to measure a customer-related share of electric or gas distribution system costs; many regulators have found this methodology as unacceptable today as Bonbright did in 1961. In many cases where multiple studies are presented, the regulator may choose a result that reflects the "range of reasonableness" these studies suggest. In many cases where regulators do accept the results of a specific cost of service study, they may choose to move only gradually in the direction of the accepted study results.

It is quite common for regulators to consider the results of multiple cost of service studies in determining an equitable allocation of costs among customer classes. This can occur in various ways:

- Considering multiple embedded cost of service studies or marginal cost of service studies using different classification or allocation methods, to determine a range of reasonableness.
- Considering both embedded cost of service studies as an indicator of current costs and marginal cost of service studies as an indicator of cost trajectories in setting a reasonable cost allocation.

For example, in one docket, the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission compared results of four cost of service studies before making a decision on cost allocation, with the results shown in Table 56 (1984, p. 46).[243]

Table 56. Consideration of multiple cost of service studies

Source of study	Revenue as percentage of revenue requirement by class: Residential	Small general service	Large general service	Extra large general service
Utility	91%	113%	110%	108%
Industrial advocate	91%	112%	110%	110%
Consumer advocate	93%	115%	105%	104%
Low-income advocate	97%	113%	103%	99%

Source: Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission. (1984). Cause U-84-65, third supplemental order in rate case for Pacific Power

Based on multiple studies using widely different methodologies for the classification and allocation of generation, transmission and distribution costs, the commission was able to determine a fair allocation of the revenue requirement responsibility, taking into account specific elements within each study where it ruled for or against those elements. The end result of multiple studies produced a range of reasonableness in the allocation of costs. The commission adjusted revenues gradually toward the common result of the studies: that residential customers were paying slightly less than their share of costs and that small and large general service customers were paying slightly more than their share.

Gradualism is the movement only partway toward the results of cost of service studies in apportioning the revenue requirement based on an accepted cost study. If a cost of service study indicates that a class is paying much less than its fair share of the revenue requirement, immediately moving it to pay its full share of allocated costs may result in excessive financial pain and dislocation for the affected customers. Regulators sometimes impose generic limits on rate changes (such as limiting the increase for any class to 150% of the system average increase) and often impose ad hoc limits, based on the facts of the case.[244]

243 Similarly, the Wisconsin Public Service Commission has routinely reviewed multiple cost of service studies and selected a revenue allocation without specifically relying on any one study. See Wisconsin Public Service Commission (2016, pp. 31-32): "As a result, the Commission finds that it is reasonable to continue its long-standing practice of relying on multiple models, as well as other factors, such as customer bill impacts, when determining the final allocation of the revenue requirement."

244 Where this sort of guideline takes the form of "no class will be assigned more than twice the rate increase applied to any other class," it is known as 2:1 gradualism.

There are several reasons a regulator will move gradually, including:

- To avoid rate shock on any individual customer class. Rate shock is often defined as a rate increase of more than 5% or 10% at any one rate adjustment. There is no firm standard, but many regulators hesitate to impose a rate adjustment that upsets the budgets of households or businesses. If an accepted cost of service study (or group of studies) suggests that one class should receive a 15% rate increase while others require no increase, a regulator may reasonably determine to spread the rate increase across all classes in a way that avoids rate shock within any one.
- To recognize that the cost of service study is a snapshot and that costs and cost responsibility may shift over time. The allocation of cost may vary significantly from one year to another because of factors such as fluctuating weather (which may change the peakiness of load, shift highest loads from summer to winter or dramatically change irrigation pumping loads). Under these circumstances, shifting revenue requirements back and forth among classes in each rate proceeding will not improve equity. Unnecessary volatility in prices may confuse customers, complicate budgeting and create unnecessary political and public-relations problems.
- To avoid overcorrecting a temporary imbalance in revenue responsibility, in recognition that technology is evolving and the cost structure will be different in the future. Cost of service studies measure costs based only on either test-year results of operations (embedded cost of service studies) or an estimate of future costs (marginal cost of service studies) at the time they are produced. Costs change dramatically over time as fuel costs change, new technologies become available and older assets shift to new roles. For example, the study may reflect the costs of legacy steam-electric generation scheduled for retirement in the next few years, to be replaced by demand response measures and distributed storage, which will also have T&D benefits.
- To avoid perceptions of inequity and unfairness. Bonbright (1961) identified perceptions of equity and fairness as a core principle of rate design, but they represent an overwhelmingly subjective metric. Many regulators, for example, have declined to reduce rates for any customer class in the context of an overall increase but may apply a lower increase to some classes than others. This is a matter of judgment, so this manual cannot provide any policy guidance on the right approach.

Each of these factors may represent a reasonable basis for deviating from precise recovery from each customer class of its full allocated cost. Legislatures generally grant regulators a great deal of flexibility in determining rates that are fair, just and reasonable and expect them to consider such factors in their decisions.

In addition to the principles of gradualism discussed in this section, many regulators consider non-cost factors in determining a fair apportionment of costs, including:

- Retention of load that cannot (or will not) pay for its fully allocated cost but can pay more than its incremental cost and thus can reduce the revenue requirement borne by other classes. Examples include electric space heat customers in summer-peaking utilities, irrigation customers in winter-peaking utilities and industrial customers facing global competition. Utilities frequently develop load retention tariffs to keep those customers on the system, contributing to paying off embedded costs. Charging full embedded cost to those tariff classes could result in higher, not lower, bills for other customers if the price-sensitive customers depart the system.

  The objective in those cases is to maximize the benefits to the customers paying full cost, without any particular concern about the interest of the class paying the reduced rate. If faced with the potential loss of a major industry, a regulator may opt to offer a rate significantly below the cost basis that would otherwise apply. Some, for example, have relied on an embedded cost of service study to determine the general allocation of costs among classes but relied on a short-run marginal cost of service study to determine a "load retention" or "economic development" rate to retain or attract a major customer. This is often done in recognition that failure to do so would result in the loss of sales, not to mention broader harms (e.g., increased unemployment) to the jurisdiction. The loss of sales could trigger a difficult regulatory decision on whether to apportion the surplus capacity that results among the remaining customers or to impose a regulatory disallowance on the utility, forcing utility investors to absorb the stranded asset costs.

- Serving loads that would otherwise impose higher environmental costs of alternative fuels. Examples include shore-service rates to discourage ships from running their high-emitting onboard generation while in port, special rates to displace on-site diesel generation and special rates for irrigators that would otherwise use diesel-powered pumps.
- Protection of vulnerable customers, for their own sake. Utilities, regulators and even legislatures seek to reduce the burden on groups of customers that are financially stressed. Most frequently, the target group is low-income residential customers, but the same approach is applied in some places for agricultural customers, important employers facing competition from outside the service territory and the like.

It is beyond the scope of this manual to attempt to identify the entire variety of non-cost factors a regulator may consider. The process of cost allocation does not occur in a vacuum but rather in the context of broader social and political currents.

28. Relationship Between Cost Allocation and Rate Design

At its heart, cost allocation is about equity among customer classes. Rate design has a different set of goals.

As indicated at the outset, cost allocation is the second of three steps in the rate-making process, beginning with the determination of the revenue requirement and ending with the design of rates. This manual has been careful to explain that these are separate phases of a proceeding and may have separate principles that apply, and the results may not always flow neatly from one phase to the next.

At its heart, cost allocation is about equity among customer classes — providing an analytical basis for assigning the revenue requirement to the various classes of customers on a system. This may be done strictly on the basis of an analytical cost of service study or, more often, using quantitative cost of service studies as a starting point, with broader considerations including gradualism, economic impacts on the service territory and attention to changes anticipated in future costs.

Rate design has a different set of goals. Rates must be sufficient to provide the utility with an opportunity to recover the authorized revenue requirement, but rate design is also about equity among customers within a class and about understandable incentives for customers to make efficient decisions about their consumption that will affect future long-term costs. It is common for a regulator to use a backward-looking embedded cost allocation method and a forward-looking rate design approach that considers where cost trajectories will go. Rate design can also incorporate public policy objectives, including environmental and public health requirements. In *Smart Rate Design for a Smart Future* (Lazar and Gonzalez, 2015), RAP articulated three principles for modern rate design:

- Principle 1: A customer should be able to connect to the grid for no more than the cost of connecting to the grid.
- Principle 2: Customers should pay for grid services and power supply in proportion to how much they use these services and how much power they consume.
- Principle 3: Customers that supply power to the grid should be fairly compensated for the full value of the power they supply.

These principles provide guidance on how to modernize rate design, in conjunction with the traditional considerations of customer bill impacts and understandability.

28.1 Class Impacts Versus Individual Customer Impacts

The data used to examine changes in overall costs and bills for rate design are often much more granular, among types of customers, than data used for cost allocation.

Most cost allocation studies group customers into a relatively small number of classes for analysis. This is done for analytical simplicity, to provide the regulator a general guide to cost responsibility among the classes. Some do this grouping by voltage level, some by type of customer (e.g., residential vs. commercial vs. irrigation), but nearly all utilities have more individual tariffs than classes examined in the cost of service study. For example, "residential" may be a single class in the cost of service study, but separate tariffs may apply to single-family, multifamily, electric heating, electric water heating and electric vehicle loads. A utility may have a default rate design (e.g., inclining block) and one or more optional rate designs (e.g., TOU or seasonal customers). "Secondary general service" may be a single class in the cost of service study including all secondary voltage business customers that are nonresidential but will include urban commercial retail and office customers, as well as rural agricultural customers.

It is common to have separate rate tariffs that focus on the usage by specific groups of customers to enable them to control their bills by focusing their attention on elements of their consumption they can easily manage. A cost of service study provides broad guidance on how costs should be apportioned among customer classes. The result may be a uniform percentage allocation of a rate increase (or decrease) or one that is differentially apportioned among the customer classes.

The class definitions for cost allocation typically look at large groups of customers with similar service characteristics. Rate design often looks at smaller groups of customers with similar usage characteristics or even individual customers. For example, a shift of rate design from an inclining block rate to a time-varying rate may result in sharp increases in the bills for some customers with low usage.

The municipal utility for Fort Collins, Colorado, encountered this situation in its 2018 rate review and included a "tier charge" for all usage over 700 kWhs in part to avoid this kind of impact. The cost of service study did not contain sufficient detail to provide an analytical framework for this decision, but the rate design analysis showed that apartment residents and other small users would be adversely affected without this consideration of customer impacts. Similarly, when the Arizona Corporation Commission adopted inclining block rates in the 1980s for Arizona Public Service Co., it also created optional residential TOU and demand-charge rates to provide a pathway for larger residential users to avoid sharp bill impacts by shifting usage to lower-cost periods.

28.2 Incorporation of Cost Allocation Information in Rate Design

It is often the case that the information developed in the process of cost allocation is relevant to important issues in rate design. In most states, embedded cost of service studies are used to allocate costs among customer classes,[245] but regulators consider long-run marginal costs, either implicitly or explicitly, in designing rates within classes. The Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission stated in adopting an embedded cost framework that it wanted to be looking ahead in some parts of the rate-making process:

> In order to obtain forward-looking embedded costs which are required by the generic order, it is necessary to use historical cost for allocation to production plant and other categories, followed by a classification method which recognizes the current cost relationships between baseload and peak facilities (1982, p. 37).

This mix of embedded cost principles for cost allocation and marginal cost principles for rate design reflects a sense of balance between the notions of equity of overall cost allocation between classes and efficiency of rates applied within classes. Even in states where the embedded cost of service study does not contain any time differentiation of generation, transmission or distribution costs, regulators have adopted time-varying retail rates for many classes of customers to encourage behavior expected to reflect forward-looking and avoidable costs.

Although marginal cost of service studies typically do differentiate between time periods, even these studies provide limited guidance for rate design, simply because the factors that affect utility system design and construction may not be understandable to consumers. The core principles from Bonbright and many others — that rates be simple, understandable and free from confusion as to calculation and application — remain important, no matter what the results of a cost study may suggest. As a result, further refinements to this information may be necessary to apply in rate design.

Many analysts who still use legacy cost allocation techniques or otherwise problematic methods argue that this analysis is relevant to rate design. In most cases, this is doubling down on a mistake. For example, use of the minimum system method for determination of residential customer charges is a mistake because it greatly overstates the cost of connecting a customer to the grid. However, some

245 As discussed in Section 6.1, there is a direct relationship between an embedded cost of service study and the revenue requirement, which makes it an analytically convenient method of dividing the revenue requirement. Using a marginal cost of service study for cost allocation requires additional adjustments to ensure the correct amount of revenue will be recovered.

states allow use of the minimum system method for cost allocation between classes but require the narrower basic customer method for the determination of customer charges within classes in the rate design process.

28.3 Other Considerations in Rate Design

Regulators often include non-cost considerations in the design of rates. This is an appropriate exercise of their responsibility to ensure that rates are fair, just and reasonable. These terms are, by their nature, subjective, with ample room to include considerations other than electric utility costs in the ultimate decisions. For example, the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission has stated:

> We recognize the substantial elements of judgment which are involved in the development of any cost of service study. We also recognize that many factors beyond an estimate of cost of providing service are important in the design of rates. These factors ... include acceptability of rate design to customers; elasticities of demand, or the variation of demand when prices change; perceptions of equity and fairness; rate stability over time; and overall economic circumstances within the region.
>
> Based upon all these factors, we believe it is necessary to make some movement toward the cost of service relationships which the respondent has presented, although we do not believe that it is appropriate to fully implement the study in this proceeding. For policy reasons, including those stated above, we do not feel it necessary to infer that any cost of service study should be automatically or uncritically accepted and applied in rate design (1981, p. 24).

Some jurisdictions also explicitly incorporate broader societal costs, particularly environmental and public health externalities, into rate design decisions. In Massachusetts, the Department of Public Utilities has longstanding principles of efficiency that include: "The lowest-cost method of fulfilling consumers' needs should also be the lowest-cost means for society as a whole. Thus, efficiency in rate structure means that it is cost-based and recovers the cost to society of the consumption of resources to produce the utility service" (Massachusetts Department of Public Utilities, 2018, p. 6).

These types of broader policy priorities can be reflected in many ways. For example, a state with a policy to encourage customer-owned renewable energy supply may develop rates that are favorable to customers with solar panels. A state with a policy to encourage energy conservation may have an additional reason to adopt inclining block rates. A state with real or perceived peak load limitations may prefer a critical peak pricing rate.

One very common public policy goal is the use of postage stamp rates, with the same rates applying to all customers of a class within a service territory. As discussed in Section 5.2, there are trade-offs in terms of the number of customer classes. A larger number of customer classes may capture more cost-based distinctions than a smaller number. For example, in most utility systems, multifamily customers that are less expensive to serve pay the same rates as single-family customers, and rural customers pay the same rates as urban. Having separate customer classes to reflect these distinctions would arguably lead to a much more equitable distribution of costs. These are probably the largest deviations from cost principles in today's utilities — dwarfing other deviations such as perceived undercharging of residential customers as a class or of solar customers as a subclass.

However, additional customer classes can lead to additional administrative and oversight costs. Furthermore, regulators, utilities and stakeholders must all have confidence that there are true cost differentials among the customer types and that there will be little controversy in applying these differentials. Some analysts object to customer classes based on adoption of particular end uses, although this may serve as a proxy for significantly different usage profiles. Some analysts may prefer separate classes for distinct types of customers, such as schools and churches. As discussed previously, rates that automatically reflect cost distinctions (e.g., time-varying rates or different residential customer charges for single-family and multifamily) can accomplish the same objective as the creation of additional customer classes, often with additional efficiency benefits from improved pricing.

Proper data must be available so all parties can scrutinize whether distinctions made between customer classes are based on cost and not improper motives like price discrimination.

Proper data must be available to all parties so they can scrutinize the distinctions made between customer classes and whether these are truly based on cost and not improper motives like price discrimination. Some analysts feel that a smaller number of rate classes will be fairer on balance, and many equity issues within a customer class can be dealt with through rate design.

Other common non-cost considerations come into play in designing rates for low- and limited-income consumers. In an engineering sense, these customers may differ very little from other residential consumers in the metrics typically used in a cost of service study. But regulators, on their own initiative or under direction from their legislatures, may adopt non-cost-based discounts for these customers. The same non-utility cost principles often apply to special rates for new industrial customers to encourage economic development within a service territory.

Lastly, in some states, legislatures have dictated some elements of rate design, constraining the discretion of the commission. In Connecticut and California, statutory limitations on residential customer charges dictate, respectively, the basic customer method[246] and a cap of $10 a month adjusted for inflation.[247]

246 See Connecticut General Statutes, Title 16, § 16-243bb, limiting the residential fixed charge to "only the fixed costs and operation and maintenance expenses directly related to metering, billing, service connections and the provision of customer service."

247 California Public Utilities Code § 739.9(f).

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Conclusion

Cost allocation is a complex exercise dependent on sound judgment. No less an authority than the U.S. Supreme Court has made this point:

> A separation of properties is merely a step in the determination of costs properly allocable to the various classes of services rendered by a utility. But where, as here, several classes of services have a common use of the same property, difficulties of separation are obvious. Allocation of costs is not a matter for the slide-rule. It involves judgment on a myriad of facts. It has no claim to an exact science.[248]

These words from Justice William Douglas are just as applicable today as they were when written in 1945. What has changed since 1945 are the facts, which in turn require new judgments. In particular, advancements in technology have had a great impact and reverberating effects on our power system. Multiple aspects of our power system are continuing to evolve, and cost allocation methods must change to reflect what we are experiencing. Over the past few decades, key changes in the power system that have consequences on how we allocate costs include:

- Renewable resources are replacing fossil-fueled generation, substituting invested capital in place of variable fuel costs.
- Peaking resources are increasingly located near load centers, eliminating the need for transmission line investment to meet peak demand served by peaking units. Long transmission lines are often needed to bring not only baseload coal and nuclear resources but also wind and other renewable resources, even if they may have limited peaking value relative to their total value to the power system.
- Advanced battery storage is a new form of peaking resource — one that can be located almost anywhere on the grid and has essentially no variable costs. The total costs of storage still need to be assigned to the time period when the resource is needed, to ensure equitable treatment of customer classes.
- Consumer-sited resources, including solar and storage, are becoming essential components of the modern grid. The distribution system may also begin to serve as a gathering system for power flowing from locations of local generation to other parts of the utility service territory, the opposite of historical top-down electric distribution.
- Short-run variable costs are generally diminishing as capital and data management tools are substituted for fuel and labor.

Simply stated, this means that many of the cost allocation methods used in the previous century are not appropriate to the electric utilities of tomorrow. As we've discussed in this manual, new methods, new metrics and new customer class definitions will be needed. The role of the cost analyst remains unchanged: We are assigned the task of determining an equitable allocation of costs among customer classes. The methods analysts used in the past must give way to new methods more applicable to today's grid, today's technologies and today's customer needs.

This manual has identified current best practices in cost allocation methodology. These will also need to evolve to keep up with the technological changes our electric system is experiencing. Perhaps the most important evolution in methodology recognizes that utility grids are built for the general purpose of providing electricity service. The largest single cost of building the grid is to ensure that it provides kWhs to customers during all hours of the day and night. Thus, similar to the way we price gasoline, groceries and clothing, most costs of the grid should be assigned on a usage basis, recovered in the sale of each kWh. In this same context, the cost of connecting to the grid may be a customer-specific cost. For items such as groceries and clothing, customers bear

248 Colorado Interstate Gas Co. v. Federal Power Commission, 324 U.S. 581, 589 (1945).

the cost of "connecting to the grid," by traveling to a retailer. The balance of the "grid" cost can and should be recovered in the price of each unit.

As we have noted in this manual, a variety of cost allocation methods are currently in use across the country. There are certain changes in cost allocation methodology that will be specific to the approach appropriate for different regions. However, this manual identifies certain changes in methodology that will be of general application across the continent, including:

- Assigning costs to time periods of usage (such as critical peak, on-peak, midpeak, off-peak and super-off-peak), rather than the much coarser metrics of "demand" and "energy" used in the past.
- Differentiating among types of generation, recognizing that some are relied on during peak periods, while others are relied on during all hours or some other subset of hours during the year.
- Considering that the utilization of some utility assets may have changed. Plants that were built as baseload units may now be operated only intermittently, as newer resources with different cost characteristics become more valuable to the grid.
- Realizing that most utility assets serve shared customer loads, with different customers using these at different times. The application of time-differentiated cost analysis to apportioning the costs of a shared system becomes critical.
- Recognizing that smart grid systems make it possible to provide better service at lower cost by including targeted energy efficiency and demand response measures to meet loads at targeted times and places, and thus that those costs must, to some extent, follow the savings they enable.

Embedded cost of service modeling practices must also be modified to account for new changes in the electric system. Key in this is the need to consider each asset and resource for the purposes for which it was constructed and the functions it provides today. In general, assets that serve in all hours should have their costs assigned to all hours; those that serve only in limited periods, or are upsized at additional cost for certain periods, should have costs assigned to the relevant periods. The traditional methods of defining costs as customer-related, demand-related and energy-related must give way to time-varying purposes, so costs can be fairly assigned among time periods in the new era.

Not surprisingly, marginal cost methods also must change. Although these are used in fewer states than embedded cost methods, they also need significant changes to be relevant in the modern electric industry environment. Methods must be updated to recognize both (1) the substitution of capital costs for short-run variable operating costs and (2) DER solutions for generation, transmission and distribution.

Whether the cost allocation method has changed or not, it is always important to present cost allocation data clearly, so that regulators can do their job. Most regulators expect quality technical analysis of costs but apply judgment in the application of those results. They may want to consider the results of multiple studies using different methods. Gradualism in the implementation of change has important value to avoid sudden impacts that may devastate residential, commercial or industrial customers. Data and analytical results should be presented in a way that informs regulators. We must still recognize, however, that "allocation of costs is not a matter for the slide-rule," as Justice Douglas wrote nearly a century ago.

This manual attempts to define methods that are relevant today and will be applicable into the future as the industry continues to evolve and as technology continues to drive changes in costs, investment and expenses. The reasoned analyst will always need to apply creativity and skill to the task of allocating costs.

Appendix A: FERC Uniform System of Accounts

Since about 1960, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission has required electric utilities to follow its Uniform System of Accounts. The system has accounts for both a utility's balance sheet and its income statement.[249]

The balance sheet accounts include 100 to 299, with 300 to 399 providing more detail on utility plant and accounts 430 to 439 providing more detail on retained earnings. Income statement accounts are 400 to 499, excepting 430 to 439. Many of the accounts relevant to utility rate case filings and cost of service studies are identified below.

100 to 199: Assets and Other Debits

The asset accounts include plant in service (Account 101) and depreciation reserve (Account 108) — which constitute plant in rate base — and construction work in progress (Account 107), along with a number of smaller accounts.

In most states, not all of these accounts are in rate base,[250] but the ones that typically are include:

- Accounts receivable other than from customers (Account 143).
- Fuel inventories (accounts 120 — nuclear, 151 and 152).
- Emissions allowances inventories (Account 158).
- Materials and supplies inventories (Account 154).
- Prepayments (Account 165, for items such as postage and insurance and in some cases pensions).
- Certain deferred debits (Account 182, especially regulatory assets for which the utility has invested money but not recovered it).
- Deferred tax assets (Account 190, usually netted with accounts 282 and 283).

200 to 299: Liabilities and Other Credits

The liability accounts (200 series) have some accounts traditionally in rate base and some not.

The largest elements included as offsets that reduce rate base are accumulated deferred income tax liabilities (accounts 282 and 283). In addition, rate base reductions come from:

- Customer deposits (Account 235, in most but not all states).
- Customer advances for construction (Account 252).[251]
- Deferred credits (regulatory liabilities, in Account 254).
- Unfunded pension liabilities (no specific account).

Elements of the amount of debt and equity, including discounts on issuance and amounts arising from refinancing past debt, are included in the capital structure, while most accounts payable are subsumed in the cash working capital computation.

300 to 399: Plant Accounts

The accounts in the 300 series are plant-in-service accounts (providing more detail into utility plant included in Account 101, by type). The accounts are subdivided for electric service[252] into:

Accounts 301 to 303: intangible plant. Today, the costs cover mostly computer software, although there are some

249 The information here comes from Title 18, Part 101 of the Code of Federal Regulations. Retrieved from https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?c=ecfr&SID=054f2bfd518f9926aac4b73489f11c67&rgn=div5&view=text&node=18:1.0.1.3.34&idno=18. For a useful summary, see Phan, D. (2015, August). *Uniform System of Accounts* [Presentation for NARUC]. Retrieved from https://pubs.naruc.org/pub.cfm?id=53720E26-2354-D714-5100-3EBD02A2034E

250 Most states use a cash working capital calculation that encompasses the utility's accounts receivable and accounts payable for utility service (not always uniformly) so that these items are not in rate base directly but are included in the cash working capital calculation. Arkansas is an exception, so this general discussion does not apply. Arkansas' modified balance sheet approach puts most of the asset items in rate base and most of the liabilities (200-series accounts) in the capital structure as zero-cost capital.

251 Unlike customer advances for construction, contributions in aid of construction do not have a specific place in the Uniform System of Accounts but are simply subtracted from the amount of plant included in summary Account 109 and the detailed accounts 364 to 370.

252 The 300-series accounts used for gas, water and so on are different from the electric accounts.

legacy items for paying for franchises. These costs are usually included with general and common plant as an overhead in cost allocation.

Accounts 310 to 317: steam production plant. These costs include costs of coal, oil and gas steam plants; some utilities include combined cycle steam turbines here. Biomass and geothermal plants owned by utilities would also appear here. Most utilities maintain records of these accounts to the level of the power plant, if not the individual unit of each plant, which are reported in each utility's annual report to FERC (FERC Form 1), although they may be summarized in cost of service studies.

Accounts 320 to 326: nuclear plant. Again, utilities maintain separate records for each nuclear plant or unit, which are presented in FERC Form 1.

Accounts 330 to 337: hydroelectric plant. Utilities generally maintain separate records for each hydro plant, which are also required to be filed as part of FERC Form 1. Pumped storage is included with other hydroelectric plant.

Accounts 340 to 347: other power generation. These include a mix of combustion turbines, combined cycles (as some utilities place entire combined cycles in these accounts), reciprocating engines, and wind and solar generation owned by the utility.

Account 348 is for energy storage plant with a generation function, excluding pumped hydro. This is a new addition to the Uniform System of Accounts and includes batteries, flywheels, compressed air and other storage.

Asset retirement obligations are included in each of the broad categories of production plant (accounts 317, 326 and 347). Asset retirement obligations are not included in rate base and are not directly found in cost of service studies. Aside from nuclear power plants (where they are related to the decommissioning fund), these costs only appear indirectly through the calculation of negative net salvage as part of depreciation.

Accounts 350 to 357: transmission accounts. Costs are divided by type of plant, not by the function or voltage level of plant. Account 351 is a recently added account for energy storage plant used on the transmission system.

Accounts 360 to 374: distribution accounts. Of the major accounts, 362 is distribution substations, 364 is poles, 365 overhead wires, 366 underground conduit, 367 underground wires, 368 line transformers (also including capacitors and voltage regulators), 369 services (sometimes divided into overhead and underground subaccounts), 370 meters, 371 installations on customer premises (usually lighting excluding streetlights but may include demand response equipment) and 373 streetlights. Account 363, used very infrequently now, is the FERC account where energy storage plant installed on the distribution system would be included.

Accounts 382, 383 and 389 to 399: general plant or common plant.

Accounts 382 and 383 are for general plant (largely computer systems) used in regional market operations, particularly for utilities that are members of ISOs.

Accounts 389 to 399 include land, buildings, furniture, computer hardware, vehicles and other similar items. Items at specific power plant sites can be allocated with the plant. Others are part of overhead costs. For an electric and gas utility, some items in these accounts can be "electric general plant" (items used at a power plant site, for example), while others are the portion of "common plant" allocated to the electric department of an electric and gas utility. General plant can also be allocated from a holding company serving a number of utilities.

400 to 499: Income and Revenue Accounts

Account 403 (depreciation) and Account 405 (amortization) are subdivided at least by type of plant (different types of production plant, transmission, distribution and general). Many utilities subdivide this further by the FERC plant accounts and by individual power plant or unit.

Account 408 (taxes other than income) is subdivided into accounts for property taxes, payroll taxes and other taxes (usually a small amount).

Current and deferred income taxes are found in accounts 409 and 410 and are usually calculated with significant detail in revenue requirement studies.

The remainder of these accounts do not appear directly in rate cases. Account 426 is noteworthy because it includes nonoperating expenses such as fines and penalties, lobbying, donations and so on. Revenue requirement analysts often try to assess whether costs booked to operating accounts instead belong in this account.

Accounts 433 and 436 to 439 are retained earnings accounts. These accounts, which reflect profits not distributed to shareholders as dividends, do not appear in rate cases.

Accounts 440 to 449 are revenue accounts, using broad customer classes developed by FERC (residential, commercial, industrial, railways, other public authority and sales for resale). These FERC accounts often do not correspond to utility rate classes in a cost allocation study.

Accounts 450 to 456 are revenues that do not come from rates or wholesale transactions. They include late payment charges (Account 450), tariffed service charges (mostly in Account 451), rents (Account 453) and other revenues (Account 456).

500 to 599: Production, Transmission and Distribution Expenses

Production expenses are divided similarly to plant and are broken down at the level of individual plants in FERC Form 1.

Steam production operating expenses are in accounts 500 to 509, and maintenance expenses are in accounts 510 to 514.

Nuclear production operating expenses are accounts 517 to 527, and nuclear maintenance expenses are in accounts 528 to 532.

Hydroelectric production expenses are in accounts 535 to 540, and hydro maintenance expenses are in accounts 541 to 545.

Other production plant expenses are in accounts 546 to 550, and other maintenance expenses are in accounts 551 to 554. Again, the definition includes combustion turbines, wind and solar, as above.

Purchased power is in Account 555; production load dispatching is in Account 556; and miscellaneous production expenses (e.g., power procurement administration, renewable energy credits) are in Account 557.

Transmission operating expenses are in accounts 560 to 567; maintenance expenses are in 568 to 573. Of note, wheeling expenses (transmission by others) are in Account 565, and certain expenses paid to ISOs under FERC tariffs are included as subaccounts of Account 561.

Regional market expenses are in accounts 575 (operating) and 576 (maintenance). The bulk of these costs are expenses paid to ISOs under FERC tariff and some internal market monitoring and similar costs.

Distribution operating expenses follow plant and are in accounts 580 to 590. Corresponding maintenance expenses are in accounts 591 to 598.

600 to 899: Accounts Reserved for Gas and Water Utilities

Not discussed further.

900 to 949: Customer Accounts; Customer Service and Information, Sales, and General and Administrative Expenses

Customer accounting expenses are accounts 901 to 905. Accounts 901 and 905 are generalized expenses, while Account 902 is meter reading. Account 903 is the catchall, including sending bills, collecting money, credit, call centers and similar items. Account 904 is uncollectible accounts expense.

Customer service and information expenses are accounts 907 to 910. Energy efficiency and demand response costs are typically found in Account 908, and Account 909 is instructional advertising.

Sales and marketing expenses are accounts 911 to 916. They include an advertising component in Account 913.

Administrative and general expenses are accounts 920 to 935. There are elements for administrative salaries (920) and nonlabor expenses (921) and contracts (923), as well as insurance (924 and 925), pensions and benefits (926), regulatory commission expenses (928), miscellaneous expenses (930) and rental of buildings and maintenance of general plant (931 to 935). They may include costs from holding companies. Costs in Account 922 are transferred out, either to capital or to other utility affiliates.

In these areas, the FERC Uniform System of Accounts is not particularly uniform. For example, the costs for the same function, such as a key account representative, can appear in accounts 903, 908, 912 or administrative account 920, depending on the utility. Generation procurement expenses, which appear to belong in Account 557, can also end up in the administrative accounts 920 and 921.

Appendix B: Combustion Turbine Costs Using a Real Economic Carrying Charge Rate[253]

A real economic carrying charge (RECC) rate is designed to measure the economic return expected for an asset whose value increases at the rate of inflation every year. An economic carrying charge also has the property of measuring the value of deferring the construction of an asset from one year to the next.

A levelized nominal-dollar stream of numbers is one way to represent the cost of a power plant. It reflects that if the utility actually bought a combustion turbine today, its costs would be locked in for the 30-year life of the plant. However, using a RECC is more appropriate because it enables the analyst to develop a cost stream for a period shorter than the full life of the plant.[254]

The first step in calculating the RECC begins with calculating the year-by-year revenue requirement of a given asset. One must look at the entire time stream of ownership of an asset and calculate a present value of revenue requirements over the life of the asset using utility accounting. The discount rate used in such a calculation is typically the utility rate of return. (However, there are arguments among analysts as to whether that discount rate is reduced for the tax deductibility of bond interest.[255]) The present value of revenue requirements includes return, depreciation, and income and property taxes and may include certain other costs such as property insurance. From this present value of revenue requirements, one can then calculate the RECC. This is the number of dollars in the first year that, when increased at the rate of inflation every year, results in the same present value at the end of the time period as the present value of revenue requirements.[256]

Figure 47 on the next page is a conceptual example to show the capital and operations and maintenance (O&M) costs for a combustion turbine with a 30-year life. The assumptions used in this example regarding the combustion turbine's capital and O&M costs, as well as capital structure, were developed in a Southwest Public Service Co. case in Texas.[257] The result is that, for this example, the nominal dollar revenue requirement (capital plus O&M) in the first year is $83.54 per kW-year, declining to about $33 per kW-year at the end of the plant's 30-year life as the plant is depreciated. The nominal levelized cost is $63.20. The first-year cost using the RECC is $53.47.

Costs are somewhat sensitive to financial input assumptions. For example, using the capital structure (51% equity and 49% debt) and return on equity (9.3%) offered by the Office of Public Utility Counsel, the first-year RECC in this case would be $52.32. Using Southwest Public Service Co.'s capital structure (58% equity and 42% debt) and return on equity (10.25%), the first-year RECC would be $57.51.

253 This appendix is adapted from Marcus, W. (2018, May). Cross-rebuttal testimony on behalf of the Office of Public Utility Counsel, Appendix A. Public Utility Commission of Texas Docket No. 47527.

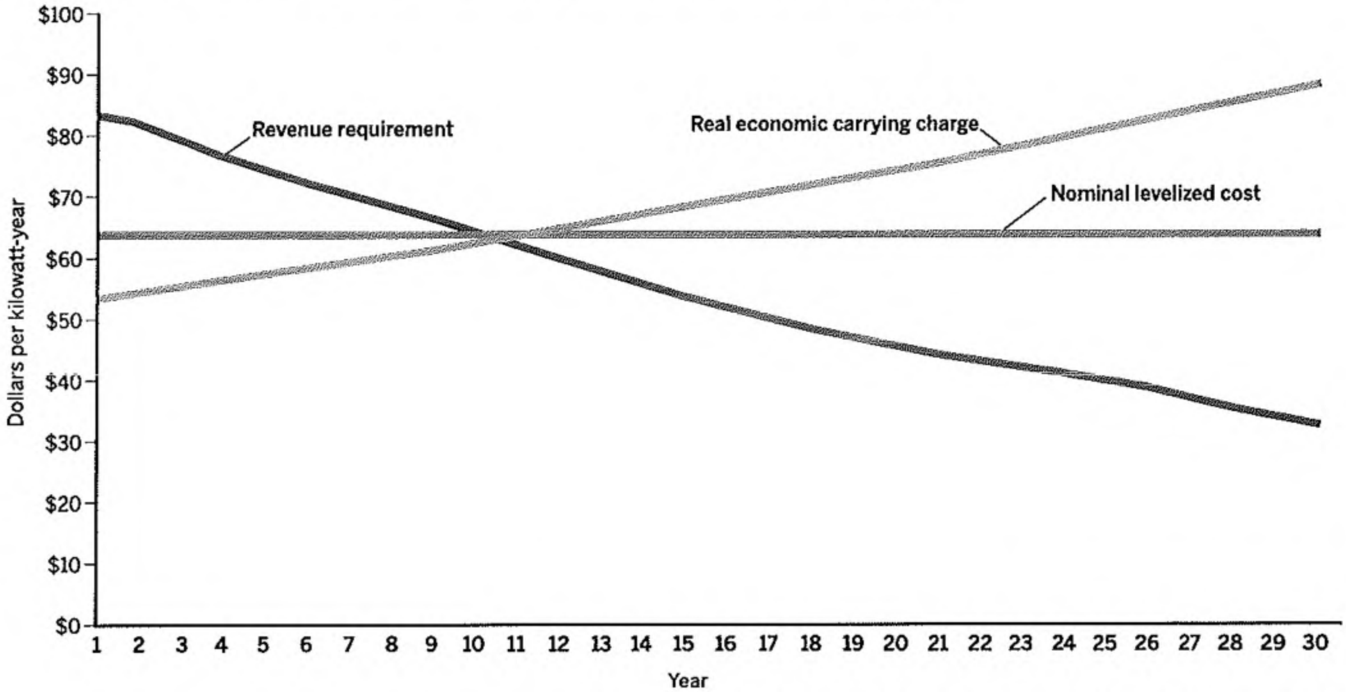
254 Costs calculated based upon time periods shorter than 25 years are considered deferred rather than avoided because combustion plant life cycles are 25 years or greater.

255 Marcus, W. (2013, December). Testimony on behalf of The Utility Reform Network, pp. 2-5. California Public Utilities Commission Application No. 13-04-012.

256 This method of calculating the RECC was developed by National Economic Research Associates (now known as NERA Economic Consulting) in the late 1970s.

257 The case is Public Utility Commission of Texas Docket No. 47527. The capital and O&M costs ($621 per kW and $7.27 per kW-year, respectively) and the inflation rate (1.74%) are from testimony of J. Pollock on behalf of Texas Industrial Energy Consumers (2018, April 25). Property tax rates (0.67%) are those estimated in testimony of N. Koch on behalf of Southwest Public Service Co., Attachment NK-RR-5 (2017, August 21). In addition, the capital structure (48% debt, 52% equity) and return on equity (9.6%) are from the settlement of Southwest Public Service's previous case in Docket No. 45524, with the cost of debt adjusted to the level from Docket No. 47527 (4.38%).

Figure 47. Comparison of temporal distributions for combustion turbine cost recovery



Sources: Based on testimony in Public Utility Commission of Texas Docket No. 47527 and settlement of Docket No. 45524 involving Southwest Public Service Co.

Appendix C: Inconsistent Calculation of Kilowatts in Marginal Cost Studies

Two examples of problematic inconsistencies in measures of demand are identified here to illustrate the problem. Although we have chosen these particular examples, we recognize that additional inconsistencies are likely to be found when analyzing other cost studies.

Pacific Gas & Electric measures demand (except for new hookups, which are measured based on demand at the transformer) using the hottest year in 10 years to develop the marginal cost per kW of regional distribution demand. It thus develops a lower cost per kW than if it used a normal year. The company then multiplies this cost by a peak capacity allocation factor based on a normal year.[258] The peak capacity allocation factor is lower than even the peak demand of the normal year. As a result of the inconsistent measures of demand, its marginal cost revenue requirement of demand is too low relative to its marginal cost revenue requirement of customer costs, inflating the role of customer costs in distribution marginal costs.

Southern California Edison has the same problem, only worse. Its marginal costs are calculated based on system capacity, not demand. System capacity is usually much higher than system demand. As an example, Southern California Edison's subtransmission substation capacity is about 37,000 MWs, even though its time-varying system demand is about 16,000 MWs. The result is that the company obtains a low figure in dollars per kW of capacity (developed using a NERA Economic Consulting regression based on 37,000 MWs of capacity). It then multiplies this figure by 16,000 MWs of time-varying demand. As a result, about 57% of real costs of Edison subtransmission investments disappear in the NERA cost allocation methodology. This mismatch benefits large customers, whose total distribution costs have a larger fraction of subtransmission costs than smaller customers.[259]

258 California Office of Ratepayer Advocates. (2017, February). Testimony, Chapter 4. California Public Utilities Commission Application No. 16-06-013.

259 Marcus, W. (2018, March 23). Testimony on behalf of The Utility Reform Network, pp. 23-28. California Public Utilities Commission Application No. 17-06-030.

Appendix D: Transmission and Distribution Replacement Costs as Marginal Costs[260]

A competitive business could not continue to operate in the intermediate term if its prices did not recover its costs of doing business. These include the full amount of its O&M costs, plus a return on new capital expenditures (including both capital additions and replacements to the existing system that are necessary to serve the loads of its existing customer base) and investments required to serve new loads and customers. This definition would exclude all sunken capital costs.

To understand this point, an example from another industry might be helpful. Assume that package delivery growth has stagnated in a given area, such that only the same number of packages must be delivered for each of the next 10 years. Then assume that the delivery company (which serves only this area) must replace a portion of its fleet of delivery trucks in order to keep delivering this stable number of packages at some point during this time frame. The NERA method of marginal cost analysis would assume that the replacement trucks are not a marginal cost of serving the demand for packages in this area. As a result, the NERA method assumes that it would be economically inefficient for the trucking company to recover the cost of those replacement trucks (unless a portion of the costs could be recovered in advance at a time when the package demand in the area was growing, prior to the time when truck replacement was actually required), because it would require charging more than the marginal cost of operating the existing trucks.

Moreover, assume that the real cost of trucks increased dramatically in the period between the time the delivery company purchased its original delivery truck fleet and the time it ultimately needs to make replacements of the original fleet (similar to real increases in, for example, the cost of pole replacement and substation transformers due to higher materials costs). Assume also that the price the trucking firm is able to charge its customers has not increased in real terms and the number of packages that its existing customers send and have delivered, on average, has not changed. The question for the delivery company is then: Is the marginal cost of replacing its trucks at least equal to the marginal revenue it will retain by continuing its ability to serve its existing customer base? If not, then the company will not make the replacements, and it will choose to exit the delivery business and employ its capital elsewhere. Just because the decision does not include the possibility of new, additional customers does not mean the delivery company would not make its decision to replace its fleet on the basis of marginal cost and revenue.

The difference between the NERA utility system and the trucking company is largely of degree, not kind: Utility replacements are required less frequently than those of the trucking company and can often be deferred for years; wires must serve a fixed route, whereas the route of a delivery truck may change; and the utility is a monopoly, whereas a trucking company may not be. However, the recovery of the cost of replacements is still part of the long-run marginal cost structure of both companies. Neither could stay in business in a competitive market if each does not recover replacement costs in some way.

In essence, the NERA method's view of this issue is based on the assumption that marginal cost applies only to new demand and not to the retention of existing demand. But this view of marginal cost is not economically correct. First, if the utility does not make required replacements, it will no longer be able to supply load. If it cannot supply load, the quantity

260 This discussion is adapted from Jones, G., and Marcus, W. (2015, March 13). Testimony on behalf of The Utility Reform Network, pp. 23-26. California Public Utilities Commission Application No. 14-06-014.

demanded from the utility will necessarily decline — utility customers will necessarily have to demand their electrons from other sources, such as exclusive distributed generation and storage. Second, marginal cost principles include small changes in costs for small changes in production (not necessarily increases) as a result of changes in demand. Without replacement, and therefore continued service, the utility would not be able to serve the load demanded by existing customers. Were this to occur, the marginal change would be a decline in demand, but it would still be a change in demand, which is what the marginal principles with which we are concerned are to measure in the first place. Finally, a business that cannot continue to serve its existing customers under its cost structure cannot stay in business without losing demand from customers that it can no longer serve economically. Replacement costs (with a few exceptions like undergrounding for policy and aesthetic reasons) are required to assure that loads of existing customers do not decline due to a dilapidated and disintegrating system.

Appendix E: Undervaluation of Long-Run Avoided Generation Costs in the NERA Method

The theoretical framework of the NERA method to justify the marginal costs based on a combustion turbine for capacity plus projected short-run marginal costs (SRMC) for energy is predicated on the assumption that a utility will add a baseload resource only at the time it will lower average generation costs. Using this fact alone, it can be demonstrated mathematically that SRMC, assuming the existence of the new plant (SRMC1 henceforth), can be below the price that a utility would pay to cost-effectively build a new plant.

The following discussion focuses on the energy cost term. For the cost-effectiveness above to hold, the annual capital cost plus total operating costs of the new plant, less the annual and fixed operating costs of peaking capacity, must be less than the energy costs on the new system avoided by the new plant. Only if these conditions hold would the new plant reduce energy costs.

In the following mathematical demonstration:

- SRMC refers solely to energy costs.
- The cost of a peaker is subtracted from the cost of the new plant.
- SRMC1 is the SRMC with the new plant included.
- The avoided cost from a new plant (ACNP) is the energy cost on the existing system avoided by the new plant.
- SRMC2 is the SRMC without the new plant.
- The new plant cost (NPC) is the total capital plus operating cost of the new plant net of peaker capital and fixed operating costs.

The following inequality must hold:

$$\text{SRMC1} \leq \text{ACNP} \leq \text{SRMC2}$$

It essentially states that the SRMC curve declines as resources with low fuel costs are added to a utility system that is otherwise the same. In nonmathematical terms, the equation embodies the fact that, for example, the SRMC calculated for a utility system with 100 MWs of must-take wind generation added to the system is below that calculated in the base case without the wind generation.

For the average cost to decline when a new plant is added, a second inequality must also hold:

$$\text{NPC} < \text{ACNP}$$

The new plant must be cheaper than the costs avoided on the existing system by the plant.

Since SRMC1 <= ACNP, a new utility generating station can be cost-effective if its cost is greater than SRMC1, as the following inequality shows:

$$\text{SRMC1} <> \text{NPC} \leq \text{ACNP}$$

If SRMC1 > NPC, then the resource is an "inframarginal" resource with costs well below system marginal costs and would be cost-effective at a time of system need for capacity. If the only resources that a utility was building were inframarginal, then SRMC1 represents avoided cost because the utility plant would be cheaper.

If utility plant were infinitely divisible and the utility system were in equilibrium, the special case of a fourth equation would be true:

$$\text{SRMC1} = \text{ACNP} = \text{NPC}$$

In other words, short-run and long-run avoided cost would be equal.

However, if SRMC1 < NPC, then the utility's short-run marginal costs under the NERA method are less than long-run avoided costs. Use of SRMC1 for resource plan evaluation and rate design thus would skew results away from options that may be cheaper than the new plant and would result in allocation and rate design decisions that undervalue energy relative to other components of marginal cost.

Glossary

Adjustment clause

A rate adjustment mechanism implemented on a recurring and ongoing basis to recover changes in expenses or capital expenditures that occur between rate cases. The most common adjustment clause tracks changes in fuel costs and costs of purchased power. Some utilities have weather normalization adjustment clauses that correct for abnormal weather conditions. See also **tracker** and **rider/tariff rider**.

Administrative and general costs *Abbreviation:* **A&G**

Capital investments and ongoing expenses that support all of a utility's functions. One example of such a capital investment is an office building that houses employees for the entire utility. An example of such an ongoing expense is the salaries of executives who oversee all parts of the utility.

Advanced metering infrastructure *Abbreviation:* **AMI**

The combination of smart meters, communication systems, system control and data acquisition systems, and meter data management systems that together allow for metering of customer energy usage with high temporal granularity; the communication of that information to the utility and, optionally, to the customer; and the potential for direct end-use control in response to real-time cost variations and system reliability conditions. AMI is an integral part of the smart grid concept.

Allocation/cost allocation

The assignment of utility costs to customers, customer groups or unbundled services based on cost causation principles.

Allocation factor/allocator

A computed percentage for each customer class of the share of a particular cost or group of costs each class is assigned in a cost of service study. Allocation factors are based on data that may include customer count, energy consumption, peak or off-peak capacity, revenue and other metrics.

Alternating current *Abbreviation:* **AC**

Current that reverses its flow periodically. Electric utilities generate and distribute AC electricity to residential and business consumers.

Ampere

The standard unit of electrical current, formally defined as a quantity of electricity per second. This unit is often used to describe the size of the service connection and service panel for an electricity customer.

Ancillary service

One of a set of services offered and demanded by system operators, utilities and, in some cases, customers, generally addressing system reliability and operational requirements. Ancillary services include such items as voltage control and support, reactive power, harmonic control, frequency control, spinning reserves and standby power. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission defines ancillary services as those services "necessary to support the transmission of electric power from seller to purchaser given the obligations of control areas and transmitting utilities within those control areas to maintain reliable operations of the interconnected transmission system."

Automated meter reading *Abbreviation:* **AMR**

Automated meter reading systems use radio or other means to download data from meters periodically without a need for a meter reader to visit each location. They typically do not include interval data of sufficient precision to support advanced services such as critical peak pricing. More sophisticated systems are usually called advanced metering infrastructure.

Average-and-peak method

A method of apportioning demand-related generation, transmission or distribution costs that assigns a portion of costs equal to the system load factor to all classes based on the kWh usage (average demand) of the class and the balance of costs to each class based on peak demand of each class. The metric for peak demand can be any of those described under **peak responsibility method.**

Avoided cost

The cost not incurred by not providing an incremental unit of service. Short-run avoided cost is the incremental variable cost to produce another unit from existing facilities. Long-run avoided cost includes the cost of the next power plant a utility would have to build to meet growing demand, plus the costs of augmenting reliability reserves, additional transmission and distribution facilities, environmental costs and line losses associated with delivering that power.

Base-intermediate-peak method *Abbreviation:* BIP

The base-intermediate-peak cost allocation method assigns each component of generation and often transmission and distribution plant to a category of whether it is fully required in all hours (base) or required only in intermediate or peak hours. It then allocates those costs based on the usage of customer classes in each time period.

Baseload generation/baseload units/baseload capacity/baseload resources

Electricity generating units that are most economically run for extended hours. Typical baseload units include coal-fired and nuclear-fueled steam generators.

Basic customer method

A distribution cost allocation approach that classifies only customer-specific costs — such as meters, billing and collection — as customer-related costs, with all other distribution and operating costs assigned based on demand or energy measures of usage.

Behind the meter

Installations of electrical equipment at customer premises, connected to the building or facility wiring at a point where any impacts are measured by the flow through the customer meter. This may include solar photovoltaic or other generating resources, batteries or other storage, or load control equipment. Behind-the-meter installations are usually owned by the retail customer but may be called upon to provide grid services.

British thermal unit *Abbreviation:* Btu

A unit of heat, defined as the amount necessary to raise the temperature of 1 pound of water by 1 degree Fahrenheit. Multiples of this unit are frequently used to describe the energy content of fuels.

Capacity

The ability to generate, transport, process or utilize power. Capacity is measured in watts, usually expressed as kilowatts (1,000 watts), megawatts (1,000 kilowatts) or gigawatts (1,000 megawatts). Generators have rated capacities that describe the output of the generator when operated at its maximum output at a standard ambient air temperature and altitude.

Capacity factor

The ratio of total energy produced by a generator for a specified period to the maximum it could have produced if it had run at full capacity through the entire period, expressed as a percentage. Fossil-fueled generating units with high capacity factors are generally considered baseload power plants, and those with low capacity factors are generally considered peaking units. These labels do not apply to wind or solar units because the capacity factors for these technologies are driven by weather conditions and not decisions around optimal dispatch.

Capacity-related costs

See **demand-related costs.**

Circuit

This generally refers to a wire that conducts electricity from one point to another. At the distribution level, multiple customers may be served by a single circuit that runs from a local substation or transformer to those customers. At the transmission level, the term "circuit" may also describe a pathway along which energy is transported or the number of wires strung along that pathway. See also **conductor**.

Classification

A step in some cost allocation methods in which costs are defined into categories such as energy-related, demand-related and customer-related.

Coincident peak *Abbreviation:* CP

The combined demand of a single customer or multiple customers at a specific point in time or circumstance, relative to the peak demand of the system, in which "system" can refer to the aggregate load of a single utility or of multiple utilities in a geographic zone or interconnection or some part thereof.

Combined cycle unit

A type of generation facility based on combustion that combines a combustion turbine with equipment to capture waste heat to generate additional electricity. This results in more efficient operation (higher output per unit of fuel input).

Combustion turbine

A power plant that generates electricity by burning oil or natural gas in a jet engine, which spins a shaft to power a generator. Combustion turbines are typically relatively low efficiency, have lower capital costs than other forms of generation and are used primarily as peaking power plants.

Community choice aggregation

Community choice aggregation involves a municipality or other local entity serving as the electricity purchasing central agent for all customers within a geographic area. The distribution system is still operated by a regulated utility. In some cases, customers can opt out and use another method to obtain electricity supply.

Competitive proxy method

The usage of information on energy and capacity revenue in competitive wholesale markets in order to classify generation assets for vertically integrated utilities between energy-related and demand-related.

Conductor

The individual wire or line that carries electricity from one point to another.

Connection charge

An amount to be paid by a customer to the utility, in a lump sum or installments, for connecting the customer's facilities to the supplier's facilities.

Contribution in aid of construction

Utilities sometimes require customers to pay a portion of the cost of extending distribution service into sparsely populated areas. These contributions are recorded as a contribution in aid of construction or sometimes as a customer advance that is refundable if additional customers in that area opt for electricity service.

Cooperative *Abbreviation:* co-op

A not-for-profit utility owned by the customer-members. A co-op is controlled by a member-elected board that includes representatives from business customers.

Cost allocation

Division of a utility's revenue requirement among its customer classes. Cost allocation is an integral part of a utility's cost of service study.

Cost of service

Regulators use a cost of service approach to determine a fair price for electric service, by which the aggregate costs for providing each class of service (residential, commercial and industrial) are determined. Prices are set to recover those costs, plus a reasonable return on the invested capital portion of those costs.

Cost of service study

An analysis performed in the context of a rate case that allocates a utility's allowed costs to provide service among its various customer classes. The total cost allocated to a given class represents the costs that class would pay to produce an equal rate of return to other classes. Regulators frequently exercise judgment to adopt rates that vary from study results.

Critical peak

A limited number of hours every year when the electric system, or a portion of it, is under a significant amount of stress that could cause reliability problems or the need for nontrivial capital investments.

Critical peak pricing

A form of dynamic retail rate design where a utility applies a substantially higher rate, with advance notice to customers, for a limited number of hours every year when the electric system is projected to be under a significant amount of stress.

Curtailment

This can refer to different sets of practices for either load or variable renewable generation. With respect to load, curtailment represents a reduction in usage in response to prices and programs or when system reliability is threatened. Price-responsive load curtailment is also known as demand response. Utilities and independent system operators typically have curtailment plans that can be used if system reliability is threatened. Curtailment of variable renewable generation can take place if there is an economic or system reliability reason why the electric system cannot take incremental energy from these units. This could occur when there is more energy available than can be transmitted given delivery constraints, or if the operating constraints of other generators are such that it is more efficient to curtail renewable generation rather than ramp down other units.

Customer charge

A fixed charge to consumers each billing period, typically to cover metering, meter reading and billing costs that do not vary with size or usage. Also known as a basic service charge or standing charge.

Customer class

A collection of customers sharing common usage or interconnection characteristics. Customer classes may include residential (sometimes called household), small commercial, large commercial, small industrial, large industrial, agriculture (primarily irrigation pumping), mining and municipal lighting (streetlights and traffic signals). All customers within a class are typically charged the same rates, although some classes may be broken down into subclasses based on the nature of their loads, the capacity of their interconnection (e.g., the size of commercial or residential service panel) or the voltage at which they receive service.

Customer noncoincident peak demand (or load)

The highest rate of usage in a measurement period of an individual customer — typically in a one-hour, 30-minute or 15-minute interval — unaffected by the usage of other customers sharing the same section of a distribution grid. Also known as maximum customer demand. See also **noncoincident peak**.

Customer-related costs

Costs that vary directly with the number of customers served by the utility, such as metering and billing expenses.

Decomposition method

A legacy method that jointly classifies and allocates generation assets. This method assumes that customer classes with high load factors are served by high-capacity-factor baseload resources. In many cases, such a method would advantage the large industrial customer class, although that does depend on the cost of the baseload resources in question. Among other issues, this method ignores reserve requirements or other backup supply needs and any need to equitably share the costs of excess capacity.

Decoupling

Decoupling fixes the amount of revenue to be collected and allows the price charged to float up or down between rate cases to compensate for variations in sales volume in order to maintain the set revenue level. The target revenue is sometimes allowed to increase between rate cases on the basis of an annual review of costs or a fixed inflator, or on the basis of the number of customers served. The latter approach is sometimes known as revenue-per-customer decoupling. The purpose is to allow utilities to recover allowed costs, independent of sales volumes, without under- or overcollection over time. Also known as revenue regulation.

Default service/default supply

In a restructured electric utility, the power supply price a customer will pay if a different supplier than the distribution utility is not affirmatively chosen. Most residential and small-business consumers are served by the default supply option in areas where it is available. Also known as standard service offer or basic service.

Demand

In theory, an instantaneous measurement of the rate at which electricity is being consumed by a single customer or customer class or the entirety of an electric system, expressed in kilowatts or megawatts. Demand is the load-side counterpart to an electric system's capacity. In practical terms, electricity demand is actually measured as the average rate of energy consumption over a short period, usually 15 minutes or an hour. For example, a 1,000-watt hair dryer run for the entirety of a 15-minute demand interval would cause a demand meter using a 15-minute demand interval to record 1 kilowatt of demand. If that same hair dryer were run for only 7.5 minutes, however, the metered demand would be only 0.5 kilowatt. Not all electric meters measure demand.

Demand charge

A charge paid on the basis of metered demand typically for the highest hour or 15-minute interval during a billing period. Demand charges are usually expressed in dollars per watt units, such as kilowatts. Demand charges are common for large (and sometimes small) commercial and industrial customers but have not typically been used for residential customers because of the very high diversity among individual customers' usage and the higher cost of demand meters or interval meters. The widespread deployment of smart meters would enable the use of demand charges or time-of-use rates for any customer served by those meters.

Demand meter

A meter capable of measuring and recording a customer's demand. Demand meters include interval meters and smart meters.

Demand-related costs/capacity-related costs

Costs that vary directly with the system capacity to meet peak demands. This can be measured separately for the generation, transmission and distribution segments of the utility system.

Demand response

Reduction in energy use in response to either system reliability concerns or increased prices (where wholesale markets are involved) or generation costs (in the case of vertically integrated utilities). Demand response generally must be measurable and controllable to participate in wholesale markets or be relied upon by system operators.

Depreciation

The loss of value of assets, such as buildings and transmission lines, owing to age and wear.

Direct current *Abbreviation:* DC

An electric current that flows in one direction, with a magnitude that does not vary or that varies only slightly.

Distributed energy resource *Abbreviation:* DER

Any resource or activity at or near customer loads that generates energy, reduces consumption or otherwise manages energy on-site. Distributed energy resources include customer-site generation, such as solar photovoltaic systems and emergency backup generators, as well as energy efficiency, controllable loads and energy storage.

Distributed generation

Any electricity generator located at or near customer loads. Distributed generation usually refers to customer-sited generation, such as solar photovoltaic systems, but may include utility-owned generation or independent power producers interconnected to the distribution system.

Distribution

The delivery of electricity to end users via low-voltage electric power lines (usually 34 kV and lower).

Distribution utility

A utility that owns and operates only the distribution system. It may provide bundled service to customers by purchasing all needed energy from one or more other suppliers or may require that customers make separate arrangements for energy supply. See also **vertically integrated utility**.

Distribution system

That portion of the electric system used to distribute energy to customers. The distribution system is usually distinguished from the transmission system on the basis of voltage and function. Components operating above 100 kV are considered transmission. Components operating below 50 kV are considered distribution. Facilities between 50 kV and 100 kV are often termed subtransmission but are normally included in the distribution service FERC accounts. After energy is received from a large generating facility, its voltage is stepped up to very high levels where it is transported by the transmission system. Power from distributed generating facilities such as small photovoltaic systems is normally delivered into the distribution system and transported to nearby customers at the distribution system level without ever entering the transmission system.

Distribution system operator

The entity that operates the distribution portion of an electric system. In the case of a vertically integrated utility, this entity would also provide generation and transmission services. In many restructured markets, the distribution system operator provides only delivery services and may provide only limited energy services as a provider of last resort.

Diversity/customer diversity/load diversity

The measurement of how different customers use power at different times of the day or year, and the extent to which those differences can enable sharing of system generation, transmission or distribution capacity. For example, schools use power primarily during the day, and street lighting uses power exclusively during hours of darkness; they are able to share system capacity. By contrast, continuous-use customers, such as data centers and all-night mini-marts, preempt the use of capacity. Irrigators use power in summer, and space heat uses power in winter, also allowing the seasonal sharing of generation but sometimes not of distribution capacity.

Dynamic pricing

Rates that may be adjusted frequently, such as hourly or every 15 minutes, based on wholesale electricity costs or actual generation costs. Also known as real-time pricing. See also **critical peak pricing**.

Embedded cost of service study

A cost allocation study that apportions the actual historic test year or projected future rate year system costs among customer classes, typically using customer usage patterns in a single yearlong period to divide up the costs. Sometimes called a fully allocated cost of service study. See also **marginal cost of service study** and **total service long-run incremental cost**.

Embedded costs

The actual current costs, including a return on existing plant, used to provide service. These are reflected in the FERC system of accounts reported in each utility's FERC Form 1 filing. See also **marginal costs**.

Energy

A unit of power consumed over a period of time. Energy is expressed in watt-time units, in which the time units are usually one hour, such as a kilowatt-hour, megawatt-hour and so on. An appliance placing 1 kilowatt of demand on the system for an hour will consume 1 kilowatt-hour of energy. See also **watt** and **watt-hour**.

Energy charge

A price component based on energy consumed. Energy charges are typically expressed in cents per kilowatt-hour and may vary based on the time of consumption.

Energy efficiency

The deployment of end-use appliances that achieve the same or greater end-use value while reducing the energy required to achieve that result. Higher-efficiency boilers and air conditioners, increased building insulation, more efficient lighting and higher energy-rated windows are all examples of energy efficiency. Energy efficiency implies a semipermanent, longer-term reduction in the use of energy by the customer, contrasted with behavioral programs that may influence short-term usage habits. Because energy efficiency reduces the need for generation, transmission and distribution, these costs are properly allocated using the methods applied to all three functions.

Energy-related costs

Costs that vary directly with the number of kilowatt-hours the utility provides over a period of time.

Equal percentage of marginal cost *Abbreviation:* EPMC

A method of adjusting the results of a marginal cost of service study to the system revenue requirement by adjusting the cost responsibility of each class by a uniform percentage. Often applied within the functional categories of generation, transmission and distribution.

Equivalent forced outage rate

The percentage of the hypothetical maximum output of a generating unit during a year that is unavailable due to unplanned outages, either full or partial, of the unit.

Equivalent peaker method

A method of classifying production and transmission costs that assigns a portion of investment and maintenance costs as demand-related — based on the cost of a peaking resource such as demand response or a peaking power unit that can be deployed within the service territory — and the balance of costs as energy-related. Commonly used for nuclear, coal and hydroelectric resources and associated transmission. Also known as the peak credit method.

Externalities

Costs or benefits that are side effects of economic activities and are not reflected in the booked costs of the utility. Environmental impacts are the principal externalities caused by utilities (e.g., climate impacts or health care costs from air pollution).

Extra-high voltage *Abbreviation:* EHV

Transmission lines operating at 765 kV (alternating current) or roughly 400 kV (direct current) or above.

Federal Energy Regulatory Commission *Acronym:* FERC

The U.S. agency that has jurisdiction over interstate transmission systems and wholesale sales of electricity.

Fixed charge

Any fee or charge that does not vary with consumption. Customer charges are a typical form of fixed charge. In some jurisdictions, customers are charged a connected load charge that is based on the size of their service panel or total expected maximum load. Minimum bills and straight fixed/variable rates are additional forms of fixed charges.

Fixed cost

This accounting term is meant to denote costs that do not vary within a certain period of time, usually one year, primarily interest expense and depreciation expense. This term is often misapplied to denote costs associated with plant and equipment (which are themselves denoted as fixed assets in accounting terms) or other utility costs that cannot be changed in the short term. From a regulatory and economics perspective, the concept of fixed costs is irrelevant. For purposes of regulation, all utility costs are variable in the long run. Even the costs associated with seemingly fixed assets, such as the distribution system, are not fixed, even in the short run. Utilities are constantly upgrading and replacing distribution facilities throughout their systems as more customers are served and customer usage increases, and efforts to reduce demand can have immediate impacts on those costs.

Flat volumetric rate

A rate design with a uniform price per kilowatt-hour for all levels of consumption.

Fuel adjustment clause

An adjustment mechanism that allows utilities to recover all or part of the variation in the cost of fuel or purchased power from the levels assumed in a general rate case. See also **adjustment clause**.

Fuel cost

The cost of fuel, typically burned, used to create electricity. Types include nuclear, coal, natural gas, diesel, biomass, bagasse, wood and fuel oil. Some generators, such as wind turbines and solar photovoltaic and solar thermal generators, use no fuel or, in the case of hydroelectric generation, virtually cost-free fuel.

Functionalization

A step in most cost allocation methods in which costs are defined into functional categories, such as generation-related, transmission-related, distribution-related, or administrative and general costs.

General service

A term broadly applied to nonresidential customers. It sometimes includes industrial customers and sometimes is distinct from an industrial class. It is often divided into small, medium and large by maximum demand or into secondary and primary by voltage.

Generation

Any equipment or device that supplies energy to the electric system. Generation is often classified by fuel source (i.e., nuclear, coal, gas, solar and so on) or by operational or economic characteristics (e.g., "must-run," baseload, intermediate, peaking, intermittent, load following).

Grid

The electric system as a whole or the nongeneration portion of the electric system.

Heat rate

The number of British thermal units that a thermal power plant requires in fuel to produce 1 kilowatt-hour.

Highest 100 (or 200) hours method

A method for allocating demand-related or capacity-related costs that considers class demand over the highest 100 (or 200) hours of usage during the year.

High-voltage direct current *Abbreviation:* HVDC

An HVDC electric power transmission system uses direct current for the bulk transmission of electrical power, in contrast to the more common alternating current systems. For long-distance transmission, HVDC systems may be less expensive and suffer lower electrical losses.

Hourly allocation

An allocation approach in which costs or groups of costs are assigned to hourly time periods rather than classified between demand- and energy-related costs.

Incremental cost

The short-run cost of augmenting an existing system. An incremental cost study rests on the theory that prices should reflect the cost of producing the next unit of energy or deployment of the next unit of capacity in the form of generation, transmission or distribution. See also **long-run marginal costs**, **short-run marginal costs** and **total system long-run incremental cost**.

Independent power producer

A power plant that is owned by an entity other than an electric utility. May also be referred to as a non-utility generator.

Independent system operator *Abbreviation:* **ISO**

A non-utility entity that has multi-utility or regional responsibility for ensuring an orderly wholesale power market, the management of transmission lines and the dispatch of power resources to meet utility and non-utility needs. All existing ISOs also act as regional transmission organizations, which control and operate the transmission system independently of the local utilities that serve customers. This usually includes control of the dispatch of generating units and calls on demand response resources over the course of a day or year. In regions without an ISO, less formal entities and markets exist for wholesale trading and regional transmission planning. See also **regional transmission organization.**

Intermediate unit

A generic term for units that operate a substantial portion of the year but not at all times or just hours near peaks or with reliability issues. As a result, these units can be described as neither baseload nor peaking. Over the past two decades, this role has been filled by natural gas combined cycle units in many places. Intermediate units are also known as midmerit or cycling units.

Intermittent resources

See **variable resources.**

Interruptible rate/interruptible customer

An interruptible rate is a retail service tariff in which, in exchange for a fee or a discounted retail rate, the customer agrees to curtail service when called upon to do so by the entity offering the tariff, which may be the local utility or a third-party curtailment service provider. A customer's service may be interrupted for economic or reliability purposes, depending on the terms of the tariff. Customers on these rates are sometimes described as interruptible customers, and it is said that they receive interruptible service.

Interval meter

A meter capable of measuring and recording a customer's detailed consumption data. An interval meter measures demand by recording the energy used over a specified interval of time, usually 15 minutes or an hour.

Inverse elasticity rule

A method of reconciling the marginal cost revenue requirement with the embedded cost revenue requirement. In principle, the adjustment of the least-elastic element of costs (and thus the underlying rates) produces a less distortive and more optimal outcome for customer behavior. The inverse elasticity rule follows this principle by adjusting the least-elastic element upward if there is a shortfall or downward if there is a surplus. There are numerous theoretical and practical difficulties in determining which element of costs or rates is least elastic.

Investor-owned utility *Abbreviation:* **IOU**

A utility owned by shareholders or other for-profit owners. A majority of U.S. electricity consumers are served by IOUs.

Kilovolt *Abbreviation:* **kV**

A kilovolt is equal to 1,000 volts. This unit is the typical measure of electric potential used to label transmission and primary distribution lines.

Kilovolt-ampere *Abbreviation:* **kVA**

A kilovolt-ampere is equal to 1,000 volt-amperes. This unit is the typical measure for the capacity of line transformers.

Kilowatt *Abbreviation:* **kW**

A kilowatt is equal to 1,000 watts.

Kilowatt-hour *Abbreviation:* **kWh**

A kilowatt-hour is equal to 1,000 watt-hours.

Line transformer

A transformer directly providing service to a customer, either on a dedicated basis or among a small number of customers. A line transformer typically is stepping down power on a distribution line from primary voltage to secondary voltage that consumers can use directly.

Load

The combined demand for electricity placed on the system. The term is sometimes used in a generalized sense to simply denote the aggregate of customer energy usage on the system, or in a more specific sense to denote the customer demand at a specific point in time.

Load factor

The ratio of average load of a customer, customer class or system to peak load during a specific period of time, expressed as a percentage.

Load following

The process of matching variations in load over time by increasing or decreasing generation supply or, conversely, decreasing or increasing loads. One or more generating units or demand response resources will be designated as the load following resources at any given time. Baseload and intermediate generation is generally excluded from this category except in extraordinary circumstances.

Load shape

The distribution of usage across the day and year, reflecting the amount of power used in low-cost periods versus high-cost periods.

Long-run marginal costs/long-run incremental costs

The costs of expanding or maintaining the level of utility service, including the cost of a new or replacement power plants, transmission and distribution, reserves, marginal losses, and administrative and environmental costs, measured over a period of years in which new investment is expected to be needed.

Losses/energy losses/line losses

The energy (kilowatt-hours) and power (kilowatts) lost or unaccounted for in the operation of an electric system. Losses are usually in the form of energy lost to heat, sometimes referred to as technical losses; energy theft from illegal connections or tampered meters is sometimes referred to as nontechnical losses.

Loss-of-energy expectation

A mathematical study of a utility system, applying expected availability of multiple generating resources, that estimates the expected energy loss at each hour of the year when power supply and demand response resources are insufficient to meet customer demand. Related terms: loss-of-load probability, loss-of-load hours, loss-of-load expectation, probability of peak and expected unserved energy.

Loss-of-energy expectation method

A method for allocating demand-related costs in a manner that is weighted over all of the hours with reliability risks.

Marginal cost of service study

A cost allocation study that apportions costs among customer classes using estimates of how costs change over time in response to changes in customer usage. See also **embedded cost of service study** and **total service long-run incremental cost.**

Marginal costs

The cost of augmenting output. Short-run marginal costs are the incremental expenses associated with increasing output with existing facilities. Long-run marginal costs are the incremental capital and operating expenses associated with increasing output over time with an optimal mix of assets. Total system long-run incremental costs are the costs of building a new system in its entirety, a measure used to determine if an existing utility system is economical.

Marginal cost revenue requirement *Abbreviation:* MCRR

An output in a marginal cost of service study, where the marginal unit costs for each element of the electric system are multiplied by the billing determinants for each class to produce a class marginal cost revenue requirement for each element. These can be aggregated to produce a system MCRR. It is only happenstance if the system MCRR equals the embedded cost revenue requirement, so the elements of the MCRR can be used in different ways to allocate embedded costs among the customer classes. See also **reconciliation.**

Megawatt *Abbreviation:* **MW**

A megawatt is equal to 1 million watts or 1,000 kilowatts.

Megawatt-hour *Abbreviation:* **MWh**

A megawatt-hour is equal to 1 million watt-hours or 1,000 kilowatt-hours.

Megawatt-year

A megawatt-year is the amount of energy that would equal 1 megawatt continuously for one year, or 8.76 million kilowatt-hours. Also known as an average megawatt.

Meter data management system

A computer and control system that gathers metering information from smart meters and makes it available to the utility and, optionally, to the customer. A meter data management system is part of the suite of smart technologies and is integral to the smart grid concept.

Midpeak

Hours that are between on-peak hours and off-peak hours. These are typically the hours when intermediate power plants are operating but peaking units are not. Used primarily in the base-intermediate-peak cost allocation method and in time-of-use rate design.

Minimum system method

A method for classifying distribution system costs between customer-related and demand- or energy-related. It estimates the cost of building a hypothetical system using the minimum size components available as the customer-related costs and the balance of costs as demand-related or energy-related.

Municipal utility *Abbreviation:* **muni**

A utility owned by a unit of government and operated under the control of a publicly elected body.

National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners *Acronym:* **NARUC**

The association of state and federal regulatory agencies that determine electric utility tariffs and service standards. It includes the state, territorial and federal commissions that regulate utilities and some transportation services.

NERA method

An approach to measuring marginal costs for electric utilities that considers a mix of time frames. It looks at customer-related costs such as metering on a full replacement or new install basis and at transmission or distribution capacity costs over a time frame of 10 years or more to include at least some capacity upgrades. Generation costs consider the new install costs for peaking capacity and a dispatch model approach to variable energy costs. The NERA method has formed the foundation for the methods used in several states today, but each state has modified the approach. This approach is named after the firm that developed it in the 1970s, National Economic Research Associates (now NERA Economic Consulting).

New-customer-only method *Abbreviation:* **NCO**

A short-run method for estimation of marginal customer connection costs based on the cost of hookups for new customers. This method may or may not include the percentage of existing hookups that are replaced every year. See also **rental method.**

Noncoincident peak *Abbreviation:* **NCP**

The maximum demand of a customer, group of customers, customer class, distribution circuit or other portion of a utility system, independent of when the maximum demand for the entire system occurs.

Off-peak

The period of time that is not on-peak. During off-peak periods, system costs are generally lower and system reliability is not an issue, and only generating units with lower short-run variable costs are operating. This may include high-load hours if nondispatchable generation, such as solar photovoltaic energy, is significant within the service area. Time-of-use rates typically have off-peak prices that are lower than on-peak prices.

On-peak

The period of time when storage units and generating units with higher short-run variable costs are operating to supply energy or when transmission or distribution system congestion is present. During on-peak periods, system costs are higher than average and reliability issues may be present. Many rate designs and utility programs are oriented to reducing on-peak usage. Planning and investment decisions are often driven by expectations about the timing and magnitude of peak demand during the on-peak period. Time-of-use rates typically have on-peak prices that are higher than off-peak prices.

Operational characteristics method

The traditional version of this method uses the capacity factor of a resource to determine the energy-related percentage of the costs of a generation asset and designates the remainder as demand-related. Although this provides a reasonable result in some circumstances, it inaccurately increases the demand-related percentage for less-reliable resources. A variation on this approach is to use the operating factor — the ratio of output to the equivalent availability of the unit — as the energy-related percentage.

Operations and maintenance costs *Abbreviation:* O&M

All costs associated with operating, maintaining and supporting the utility plant, including labor, outside services, administrative costs and supplies. For generation facilities, this includes O&M expenses that vary directly with the output of the facility (dispatch O&M), such as fuel and water treatment, and expenses that do not vary with output but are incurred yearly or monthly (nondispatch O&M).

Peak capacity allocation factor *Acronym:* PCAF

An allocation factor where a weighted portion of demand-related costs is assigned to every hour in excess of 80% of peak demand. This method, used in California, is weighted such that the peak hour has an allocation that is 20 times the allocation for the hours at 81% of peak demand and twice the allocation of an hour at 90% of peak demand.

Peak demand

The maximum demand by a single customer, a group of customers located on a particular portion of the electric system, all of the customers in a class or all of a utility's customers during a specific period of time — hour, day, month, season or year.

Peaking resources/peaking generation/peakers

Generation that is used to serve load during periods of high demand. Peaking generation typically has high fuel costs or limited availability (e.g., storage of hydrogeneration) and often has low capital costs. Peaking generation is used for a limited number of hours, especially as compared with baseload generation. Peaking resources often include nongeneration resources, such as storage or demand response.

Peak load

The maximum total demand on a utility system during a period of time.

Peak responsibility method

A method of apportioning demand-related generation or transmission costs based on the customer class share of maximum demand on the system. The metric can be a single hour (1 CP), the highest hour in several months (such as 4 CP), the highest hour in every month (12 CP) or the entire group of highest peak hours (such as 200 CP). See also **coincident peak.**

Performance-based regulation *Abbreviation:* PBR

An approach to determining the utility revenue requirement that departs from the classical formula of rate base, rate of return, and operation and maintenance expense. It is designed to encourage improved performance by utilities on cost control or other regulatory goals.

Postage stamp pricing

The practice of having separate sets of prices for a relatively small and easily identifiable number of customer classes. Every customer in a given customer class generally pays the same prices regardless of location in a utility's service territory, although separate prices may exist for subclasses in some cases.

Power factor

The fraction of power actually used by a customer's electrical equipment compared with the total apparent power supplied, usually expressed as a percentage. A power factor indicates the extent to which a customer's electrical equipment causes the electric current delivered at the customer's site to be out of phase with system voltage.

Power quality

The power industry has established nominal target operating criteria for a variety of properties associated with the power flowing over the electric grid. These include frequency, voltage, power factor and harmonics. Power quality describes the degree to which the system, at any given point, is able to exhibit the target operating criteria.

Primary voltage/primary service

Primary voltage normally includes voltages between 2 kV and 34 kV. Primary voltage facilities generally are considered part of the distribution system.

Probability-of-dispatch method *Abbreviation:* POD

A cost allocation methodology that considers the likelihood that specific generating units and transmission lines will be needed to provide service at specific periods during the year and assigns costs to each period based on those probabilities.

Public utilities commission/public service commission

The state regulatory body that determines rates for regulated utilities. Although they go by various titles, these two are the most common.

Public Utilities Regulatory Policy Act *Acronym:* PURPA

This federal law, enacted in 1978 and amended several times, contains two essential elements. The first requires state regulators to consider and determine whether specific rate-making policies should be adopted, including whether rates should be based on the cost of service. The second requires utilities to purchase power at avoided-cost prices from independent power producers.

Rate base

The net investment of a utility in property that is used to serve the public. This includes the original cost net of depreciation, adjusted by working capital, deferred taxes and various regulatory assets. The term is often misused to describe the utility revenue requirement.

Rate case

A proceeding, usually before a regulatory commission, involving the rates, revenues and policies of a public utility.

Rate design

Specification of prices for each component of a rate schedule for each class of customers, which are calculated to produce the revenue requirement allocated to the class. In simple terms, prices are equal to revenues divided by billing units, based on historical or assumed usage levels. Total costs are allocated across the different price components such as customer charges, energy charges and demand charges, and each price component is then set at the level required to generate sufficient revenues to cover those costs.

Rate of return

The weighted average cost of utility capital, including the cost of debt and equity, used as one of the three core elements of determining the utility revenue requirement and cost of service, along with rate base and operating expense.

Rate year

The period for which rates are calculated in a utility rate case, usually the 12-month period immediately following the expected effective date of new rates at the end of the proceeding.

Real economic carrying charge *Acronym:* RECC

An annualized cost expressed in percentage terms that reflects the annual "mortgage" payment that would be required to pay off a capital investment at the utility's real (net of inflation) cost of capital over its expected lifetime. It is used in long-run marginal cost and total system long-run incremental cost studies.

Reconciliation/revenue reconciliation/ cost reconciliation

In a marginal cost of service study, it is only happenstance if the system marginal cost revenue requirement is equal to the embedded cost revenue requirement that needs to be recovered by the utility to earn a fair return. As a result, the marginal cost revenue requirement must be reconciled to the embedded cost revenue requirement. There are two primary methods for this: equal percentage of marginal cost and the inverse elasticity rule. See also **marginal cost revenue requirement.**

Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative

An agreement among Northeast and mid-Atlantic states to limit the amount of greenhouse gases emitted in the electric power sector and to price emissions by auctioning emissions allowances.

Regional transmission organization *Abbreviation:* RTO

An independent regional transmission operator and service provider established by FERC or that meets FERC's RTO criteria, including those related to independence and market size. RTOs control and manage the high-voltage flow of electricity over an area generally larger than the typical power company's service territory. Most also serve as independent system operators, operating day-ahead, real-time, ancillary services and capacity markets, and conduct system planning. See also **independent system operator.**

Renewable portfolio standard *Abbreviation:* RPS

A requirement established by a state legislature or regulator that each electric utility subject to its jurisdiction obtain a specified portion of its electricity from a specified set of resources, usually renewable energy resources but sometimes including energy efficiency, nuclear energy or other categories.

Rental method

A method of estimating marginal customer connection costs where the cost of new customer connection equipment is multiplied by the real economic carrying charge to obtain an estimate of a rental price. This is a long-run method for customer connection costs that has been a part of the NERA method for marginal costs. See also **new-customer-only method.**

Reserves/reserve capacity/reserve margin

The amount of capacity that a system must be able to supply, beyond what is required to meet demand, to assure reliability when one or more generating units or transmission lines are out of service. Traditionally a 15% to 20% reserve capacity was thought to be needed for good reliability. In recent years, due to improved system controls and data acquisition, the accepted value in some areas has declined to 10% or lower.

Restructured state/restructured utility/ restructured market

Replacement of the traditional vertically integrated utility with some form of competitive market. In some cases, the generation and transmission components of service are purchased by the customer-serving distribution utility in a wholesale competitive market. In other cases, retail customers are allowed to choose their generation suppliers directly in a competitive market.

Retail competition/retail choice

A restructured market in which customers are allowed to or must choose their own competitive supplier of generation and transmission services. In most states with retail choice, the incumbent utility or some other identified entity is designated as a default service provider for customers who do not choose another supplier. In Texas, there is no default service provider and all customers must choose a retail supplier.

Revenue requirement

The annual revenues that the utility is entitled to collect (as modified by adjustment clauses). It is the sum of operations and maintenance expenses, depreciation, taxes and a return on rate base. In most contexts, "revenue requirement" and "cost of service" are synonymous.

Rider/tariff rider

A special tariff provision that collects a specified cost or refunds a specific consumer credit, usually over a limited period. See also **adjustment clause** and **tracker**.

Secondary voltage/secondary service

Secondary voltage normally includes only voltages under 600 volts. Secondary voltage facilities generally are considered part of the distribution system.

Service line/service drop

The conductor directly connecting an electricity customer to the grid, typically between the meter and the line transformer. The term "service drop" derives from the fact that in many cases this line literally drops down from shared transformers attached to overhead lines, but today many are underground.

Short-run marginal costs/short-run incremental costs

The costs incurred immediately to expand production and delivery of utility service, not including any capital investments. They are usually much lower than the average of costs but may be higher than average costs during periods of system stress or deficiency of capacity.

Site infrastructure

The utility investment that is located at the customer premises and serves no other customers than those located at a single point of delivery from the distribution system. Site infrastructure costs are either paid by the customer at the time of service connection or else classified as customer-related costs in cost of service studies.

Smart grid

An integrated network of sophisticated meters, computer controls, information exchange, automation, information processing, data management and pricing options that can create opportunities for improved reliability, increased consumer control over energy costs and more efficient utilization of utility generation and transmission resources.

Smart meter

An electric meter with electronics that enable recording of customer usage in short time intervals and two-way communication of data between the utility, the meter and optionally the customer.

Spinning reserve

Any energy resource or decremental load that can be called upon within a designated period of time and that system operators may use to balance loads and resources. Spinning reserves may be in the form of generators, energy storage or demand response. Spinning reserves may be designated by how quickly they can be made available, from instantaneously up to some short period of time. In the past, this meant actual rotating (spinning) power plant shafts, but today "spinning" reserves can be provided by battery storage, flywheels or customer load curtailment.

Straight fixed/variable

A rate design method that designate much or all of the distribution system as a fixed cost and places all of those costs on customers through customer charges. There are related cost allocation approaches, which designate the entire distribution system as a customer-related cost and transmission and generation capacity as entirely demand-related. See also **minimum system method** and **basic customer method**.

Stranded costs

Utility costs for plant that is no longer used or no longer economic. This may include fossil-fueled power plants made uneconomic by new generating technologies; assets that fail to perform before they are fully depreciated; or distribution facilities built to serve customers who are no longer taking utility service, such as failed industrial sites and customers choosing self-generation as a replacement for utility service. Some regulators allow recovery of stranded costs from continuing customers and the inclusion of these costs in the cost of service methodology.

Substation

A facility with a transformer that steps voltage down from transmission or subtransmission voltage to distribution voltage, to which one or more circuits or customers may be connected.

System load factor

The ratio of the average load of the system to peak load during a specific period of time, expressed as a percentage.

System peak demand

The maximum demand placed on the electric system at a single point in time. System peak demand may be a measure for an entire interconnection, for subregions within an interconnection or for individual utilities or service areas.

Tariff

A listing of the rates, charges and other terms of service for a utility customer class, as approved by the regulator.

Test year

A specific period chosen to demonstrate a utility's need for a rate increase or decrease. It may include adjustments to reflect known and measurable changes in operating revenues, expenses and rate base. A test year can be either historical or projected (often called "future" or "forecast" test year).

Time-of-use rates/time-varying rates *Abbreviation:* TOU

Rates that vary by time of day and day of the week. TOU rates are intended to reflect differences in underlying costs incurred to provide service at different times of the day or week. They may include all costs or reflect only time differentiation in a component of costs such as energy charges or demand charges.

Total service long-run incremental cost *Abbreviation:* TSLRIC

The cost of replicating the current utility system with new power supply, transmission and distribution resources, using current technology, and optimizing the system for current service needs. Used as a metric for the cost that a new competitive entrant would incur to provide utility services, as an indicator of the equitability of current class cost allocations and rate designs.

Tracker

A rate schedule provision giving the utility company the ability to change its rates at different points in time to recognize changes in specific costs of service items without the usual suspension period of a rate filing. Costs included in a tracker are sometimes excluded from cost of service studies. See also **adjustment clause** and **rider/tariff rider.**

Transformer

A device that raises (steps up) or lowers (steps down) the voltage in an electric system. Electricity coming out of a generator is often stepped up to very high voltages (230 kW or higher) for injection into the transmission system and then repeatedly stepped down to lower voltages as the distribution system fans out to connect to end-use customers. Some energy loss occurs with every voltage change. Generally, higher voltages can transport energy for longer distances with lower energy losses.

Transmission/transmission system

That portion of the electric system designed to carry energy in bulk, typically at voltages above 100 kV. The transmission system is operated at the highest voltage of any portion of the system. It is usually designed to either connect remote generation to local distribution facilities or to interconnect two or more utility systems to facilitate exchanges of energy between systems.

Transmission and distribution *Abbreviation:* T&D

The combination of transmission service and equipment and distribution service and equipment.

Used and useful

A determination on whether investment in utility infrastructure may be recovered in rate base, such that new rates will enable the utility to recover those costs in the future when that plant will be providing service (i.e., when it will be used and useful). In general, "used" means that the facility is actually providing service, and "useful" means that, without the facility, either costs would be higher or the quality of service would be lower.

Variable resources/variable renewable resources/ intermittent resources

Technologies that generate electricity under the right conditions, such as when the sun is shining for solar.

Vertically integrated utility

A utility that owns its own generating plants (or procures power to serve all customers), transmission system and distribution lines, providing all aspects of electric service.

Volt *Abbreviation:* V

The standard unit of potential difference and electromotive force, formally defined to be the difference of electric potential between two points of a conductor carrying a constant current of 1 ampere, when the power dissipated between these points is equal to 1 watt. A kilovolt is equal to 1,000 volts. In abbreviations, the V is capitalized in recognition of electrical pioneer Alessandro Volta.

Volt-ampere

A unit used for apparent power in an alternating current electrical circuit, which includes both real power and reactive power. This unit is equivalent to a watt but is particularly relevant in circumstances where voltage and current are out of phase, meaning there is a non-zero amount of reactive power. This unit and its derivatives (e.g., kilovolt-ampere) are typically used for line transformers.

Volt-ampere reactive *Acronym:* VAR

A unit by which reactive power is expressed in an alternating current electric power system. Reactive power exists in an alternating current circuit when the current and voltage are not in phase.

Volumetric energy charges/volumetric rate

A rate or charge for a commodity or service calculated on the basis of the amount or volume the purchaser receives.

Watt

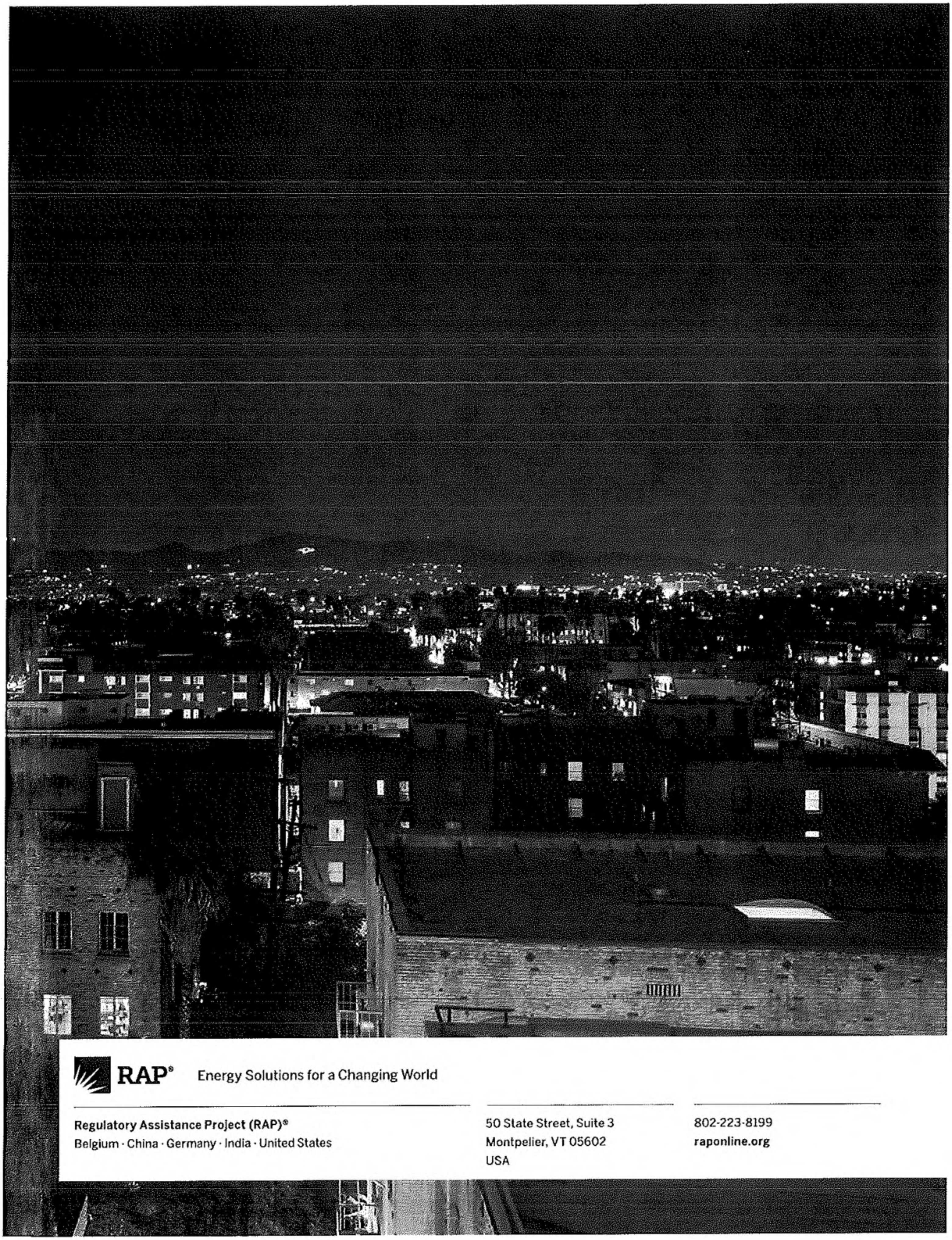
The electric unit used to measure power, capacity or demand. A kilowatt equals 1,000 watts; a megawatt equals 1 million watts or 1,000 kilowatts.

Watt-hour

The amount of energy generated or consumed with 1 watt of power over the course of an hour. One kilowatt-hour equals 1,000 watts consumed or delivered for one hour. One megawatt-hour equals 1,000 kilowatt-hours. One terawatt-hour equals 1,000 megawatt-hours. In abbreviations, the W is capitalized in recognition of electrical pioneer James Watt.

Zero-intercept approach/zero-intercept method

A method for classifying distribution system costs between customer-related and demand- or energy-related that uses a cost regression calculation to compare components of different size actually used in a system to estimate the costs of a hypothetical zero-capacity distribution system.



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