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California dreaming: Battery competition emerges, but can it usurp gas?

In late 2015, Gas Matters raised the spectre of competition between batteries and natural gas in the US power generation mix. Nowhere has this come more sharply into focus than in southern California: on the grid near Los Angeles, a major local utility is planning to install large-scale lithium-ion battery packs to supply electricity during peak-demand periods. Its decision was motivated partly by the 2015 closure of the crippled Aliso Canyon gas storage field, a critical piece of infrastructure for peaking gas turbines throughout the state. In this article, we trace the convergence of key trends in an intensifying battle to meet surges in electricity demand in California – including carbon consciousness, falling battery costs, ageing gas infrastructure, and burgeoning requirements for quick-response electricity caused by rising solar generation.

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