

Denver Airport Goes Solar

POLICIES SPUR DEVELOPMENT

DENVER'S AIRPORT WILL BE CATCHING RAYS – big time. The airport recently announced plans to deploy a 2-megawatt photovoltaic generating system. It will be constructed by MMA Renewable Ventures and WorldWater & Solar Technologies.

The unit, to be completed this year, will be mounted on the ground close to the entry to the Denver International Airport terminal and will be a tracking solar-array system.

MMA will own the unit and sell power to the airport. An airport spokesman said that the 3.5 million kilowatt-hours to be generated would provide about half the electricity needed to operate the train system linking the airport concourses.

To better understand the project, *EnergyBiz* questioned Matt Cheney, MMA chief executive officer. His responses follow.

ENERGYBIZ Is there anything unique about the solar technology that you will be installing in the Denver International Airport?

CHENEY In general, we tend to lean toward tried and true technologies for their trusted performance and reliable energy generation. That said, the solar installation at the Denver airport utilizes a single axis tracking system to track the sun through the day, maximizing output of the system.

ENERGYBIZ Is there anything unique about the business model that you are using to make this solar power available to the airport at rates that are competitive with conventional sources of electricity?

CHENEY MMA Renewable Ventures provides predictable priced power through a long-term power purchase agreement. This model enables MMA to monetize the tax benefits into the price of electricity in order to deliver clean power at or below the utility's rate. In addition, to provide the airport with the most competitive rates possible, the renewable energy credits are being sold to Xcel Energy under their Solar Rewards Program.

ENERGYBIZ The reputation for solar is that it still is not competitive with coal, natural gas and even wind generation for most applications. Please comment on that.

CHENEY It is unclear how historic subsidies and sunk cost investments for fossil fuel and wind-generated power have helped to create low electricity prices, but they have certainly helped to lower those costs to consumers. Solar historically has not benefited from the same general level of subsidies and is therefore less competitive currently. That said, on the surface, solar power when compared to most retail grid prices is more expensive. This is why policies like Amendment 37, establishing Colorado's renewable energy program, are created. These policies funnel consumer energy dollars, by their choice, toward sustainable and renewable power generation as has been the case in Colorado, California, New Jersey, and other active solar states.

ENERGYBIZ Tell me a little bit about MMA, its current size, and how big it will grow in the next five years.

CHENEY MMA finances clean energy power plants, both central and distributed. Solar photovoltaics have been a large part of our current growth and will continue to drive growth as the demand for solar increases. A number of factors will determine our level of growth over the next five years, including policies related to investment tax credits, renewable portfolio standards and other regulatory issues. Third-party finance is generally considered to be a critical component for growth of the solar industry and as such, we intend to play a prominent role in the solar industry for years to come.

ENERGYBIZ What can electric utilities do to spur deployment of solar generation comparable to your DIA installation in their service territories?

CHENEY Utilities need to have the political and economic ability to drive policies that support solar development. These policies can be complex in their implementation. MMA has experts on staff to assist utilities in crafting fair policies that will effectively spur development of solar generation in their territories.

Denver airport's new solar facility, to be installed this year, will help the city reduce annual carbon dioxide emissions by 5 million pounds.
ARTIST SKETCH COURTESY OF WORLDWATER & SOLAR TECHNOLOGIES



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