

Solar Rooftop Developers Prefer Open Access for Power Supply

Kaavya.Chandrasekaran
@timesgroup.com

Bengaluru: Solar rooftop developers are increasingly choosing to supply power to customers through open access – locating the solar plant elsewhere – rather than set it up on the premises of their clients.

The common feature is that in both cases the power is supplied through the grid directly, without being routed through a discom. Many rooftop developers are now installing as much capacity for supplying through the open access route as they are

on rooftops. With solar tariffs becoming increasingly competitive and more states allowing off-site projects to come up, open access is quickly gaining momentum.

“Open access was always allowed according to the terms of the Electricity Act, but more states are now giving approvals for such access,” said Andrew Hines, co-founder, CleanMax Solar, one of the leading rooftop developers in the country.

The year 2018 saw a sharp spike in the installing of open access capacity, with 1,609 MW being set up against 625 MW in 2017, according to Bridge To India (BTI), a renewable energy consultancy firm. But in-



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estimates that the country installed around 420MW of open access capacity in 2019, lower even than in 2017. But that was

industry insiders maintain this was mainly because Karnataka offered a waiver on transmission and wheeling charges for directly supplied solar power in 2017-18.

As the waiver was valid only till March 2018, rooftop solar developers rushed to beat the deadline and take advantage of it. While data is still being collected, BTI estimates that the country installed around 420MW of open access capacity in 2019, lower even than in 2017. But that was

because some sanctioned projects are still being completed.

“In Haryana and Maharashtra for example, there are projects which got approvals in 2019 which will be commissioned in 2020,” said Hines. BTI’s open access projection for 2020 is at least 1,000MW.

CleanMax has a total operational capacity of 550MW, out of which it has installed 350MW through open access. Amplus Solar, another leading rooftop developer, has 650MW of projects, which are under construction, out of which 430MW has been through the open access route. “Both rooftop plants and open access will grow in fu-

ture but open access will be a substantial part of the capacity addition because the addition can be as large as 100-150MW at a single spot. To achieve the same capacity on rooftops will require doing many more projects,” said Sanjeev Aggarwal, CEO, Amplus Solar. Thus, scaling is easier via the open access route.

“Open access allows developers to scale up their business much faster and also arguably has lower offtake risk. In contrast, rooftop solar is constrained by availability of on-site space as well as net metering system size caps,” said Vinay Rustagi, managing director, BTI.