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PNM/Avangrid merger: Coalition secures \$12.5M in “just transition” funding, pathway to better future for NM fossil-fuel impacted communities

Tribal and conservation groups [secured](#) significant community investment and other benefits as part of a proposed settlement in the merger case between PNM Resources and Avangrid, an energy company pursuing a transition away from fossil fuels. Community groups have engaged in the proceedings at the New Mexico Public Regulation Commission to elevate the often-marginalized voices of impacted communities and to ensure dedicated just transition funding, commitments for ongoing engagement from PNM/Avangrid, and significant investment in renewable resources in the Four Corners region.

As a condition of the merger, Avangrid is requiring PNM to divest its remaining interests in coal-fired power generation, including its 13% share in Four Corners Power Plant. The community groups will pursue early closure of the plant in a separate case before the Public Regulation Commission.

Public benefits secured:

An increase from \$0 to \$12.5 million in just transition funding to Indigenous groups impacted by coal plant abandonment — \$2.5 million per year for five years,
\$7.5 million in economic development projects in New Mexico within three years that excludes use for fossil fuel projects,
Development of at least 200MW of renewable energy and storage on the Navajo Nation,
A \$2 million in a statewide “Electrification for All” program that will also serve Navajo country,
A commitment to 150 full-time jobs added within three years, some of which could be located in the region,
\$73 million in benefits to ratepayers, including rate credits, arrearages forgiveness, and increased spending on PNM’s low-income energy efficiency program, and
More aggressive decarbonization commitments, advancing the target from 2040 to 2035, and many others [here](#).

"There was a lot of hard work and expertise provided by our collective Navajo and Four Corners based organizations in reaching the terms of the stipulated agreement," said Robyn Jackson of Diné C.A.R.E. "We wanted benefits ensured for our communities who have given so much over the decades, enabling a better quality of life for other parts of the Southwest, including Albuquerque and Santa Fe. We now will have committed just transition funding for our region that previously was not available. Four Corners communities are in a better position to transition their economy and strengthen their resiliency in these challenging times ahead."

"For the past two years, NAVAEP has been attending chapter meetings and listening to community leaders about their energy needs and the immediate funding needs required to implement their community development plans. It's clear they need support. NAVAEP believes the multi-year transition funding being committed to by Avangrid as part of their merger with PNM will help Navajo communities move forward," said Ahtza Dawn Chavez (Diné, Kewa Pueblo), executive director of NAVAEP.

“While the transition funds that have been promised for Navajo communities are a starting point for utilities to support coal-impacted communities, they are not enough because a core part of this merger actually presents a significant obstacle to a just and equitable transition,” said Nicole Horseherder of Tó Nizhóní Ání. “PNM’s proposal to pass off its uneconomical share of the Four Corners Power Plant to the Navajo Transitional Energy Company (NTEC) may be a way to divest itself from fossil fuel generating capacity, but it also likely extends the life of the plant, even if it is operated uneconomically. As the owner of Navajo Mine, which supplies the power plant’s coal, NTEC has a self-serving interest to keep the plant running as long as possible, and the longer that coal-generated capacity is part of the energy mix, the longer the delay in producing the economic benefits of transitioning to low-cost renewable energy. As long as conditions of the merger permit the Four Corners Power Plant to run longer than economically viable, this will be an insurmountable sticking point for groups such as Tó Nizhóní Ání. If PNM is genuinely interested in the transition to clean energy, it will find a way to actually take its share of coal offline, not keep it in the energy mix for another decade or more.”

“The legacy of pollution and generational harm to front-line communities from coal-fired energy generation cannot be solved overnight, but this stipulation represents a pathway to a better future, including ongoing dialogue with impacted communities and resources to help these communities transition,” said Kyle Tisdell, attorney with the Western Environmental Law Center. “I applaud Avangrid, PNM, and Attorney General Balderas for listening and responding to Native voices and for their commitment to a more sustainable future.”

“As intervenors in this merger case, our intent is to secure a transition to more sustainable energy projects that are aligned with utility ownership in the Four Corners region, said Mike Eisenfeld, Energy and Climate Program manager of San Juan Citizens Alliance. “[According](#) to Avangrid, its ‘projects and initiatives support economic vitality and deliver environmental sustainability for future generations.’ We are seeking to hold PNM accountable as it departs its coal facilities, and we are eager to work with Avangrid to help the company seize the opportunity to implement innovative renewable projects in our region that could benefit our communities through economic development, job creation and revitalized energy infrastructure.”

The hearing examiner has set a May 7 deadline for a final agreement.

Additionally, the community groups involved in securing these public benefits will continue their work to secure early closure of coal-fired Four Corners Power Plant as soon as possible in a separate Public Regulation Commission case currently underway.

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