

Restructuring Today

Survey finds ongoing support of retail markets in New England

August 16, 2013

New Englanders kept supporting the concept of competitive markets and most energy-supply options, [a survey](#) of 600 consumers released yesterday said. The New England Energy Alliance sponsored the annual survey, which was performed by Opinion Dynamics this spring.

Alliance members include Dominion Resources, Exelon Corp, National Grid and other firms active in the electric and natural gas industries.

Some 76% of those customers surveyed continued to favor a restructured competitive power system but that mark was down slightly from 84% last year.

One trend in this year's survey was that customers were focusing more on economic concerns over more long-term issues such as climate change, even though support for action on that front is much higher in the region than it is nationally. Some 85% of customers listed economic concerns as the first or second most important issue facing the region.

“Not surprisingly, near-term concerns about the economy trump longer-term, more abstract worries about global warming,” New England Energy Alliance Executive Director Paul Afonso said in prepared remarks. “Also, because the survey was conducted two weeks after the Boston Marathon bombings, respondents were more apprehensive about infrastructure supply options with a perceived safety component -- such as nuclear power and LNG -- although still favored by a solid majority.”

Some 64% of New Englanders favor LNG facilities, which was down from 75% a year earlier. Wind power continued to poll well with over 70% supporting the technology. Relicensing the region's existing nuclear fleet had majority of approval at 57%, which was surprising given some the region's recent history with nuclear power, Alfonso told reporters.

A small majority opposed fracking in New England, though 44% were in favor of using the technique to get gas from rock formations.

Some 59% of consumers said they would be willing to pay \$5 more per-month on their power bills if it made the lights come on faster after a disaster. But drilling down into some options for that spending, less than half (41%) wanted to pay to put power lines underground.

Supply not tackled

One of the biggest issues facing the electric and gas industries in the region is coordinating supplies now that gas has come to dominate the generation sector and the region is short on pipeline capacity to meet all of the demand at winter peaks.

The survey did not directly tackle that issue -- the actual affects of which will not be felt by the public if regulators and the industry get the program right. But the survey found general support for building out infrastructure, noted Alfonso.

“I think ultimately, build out is going to be part of the solution but regulators have to be very cautious as to the cost issue as well,” he added. “Those two issues generally come out in our survey and I think would be applied there.”

The balancing act is a critical issue because the risk of not getting it right and having outages on a peak winter day is “unacceptable,” said Alfonso.