



Solomon islands tesla powerwall

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Earlier this week Tesla reported continued growth in its solar division, furthering a trend that started shortly after Q2 last year when the company revealed that quarterly installs had sunk to a new low. A promise to offer the lowest-cost solar on the market, opening up the use of its online market tools previously the reserve of the company's auto division and soaring customer demand for home solar across the US has breathed new life into the business unit, with Tesla keen to reclaim the market leader position it has long since ceded to Sunrun.

Central to this, chief executive Elon Musk told analysts earlier this week, is a profound new vision for the future of Tesla solar, one where it will join forces more readily with its cousins in energy storage and help power not just the consumers that adopt it, but utilities as the energy transition accelerates.

Recent events in Texas and California, and the subsequent surges in demand for home power supply, have illustrated the shortcomings of national and local grids in meeting power demand when placed under extreme stress, be that through a weather event or any other instance wherein demand far outstrips supply. In a conference call with analysts following its Q1 2021 results disclosure, lauded solar's ability to keep the lights on under such circumstances.

But Musk intends for Tesla's installations to go one further. Texas' issues earlier this year, Musk said, were triggered by a peak in power demand that came just as the grid lacked the ability to buffer that power as generators fell offline en masse. Texas' utilities instead had to shutdown power with no buffer to call upon.

"However, with a whole bunch of Powerwalls at houses, we can actually buffer the power. So if the grid needs more power, we can actually then, with the consent of the homeowner and the partnership with the utility, actually release power on to the grid to take care of peak power demand. So, effectively, the Powerwalls can operate as a giant distributed utility," Musk said.

The Tesla chief executive described the offering, or potential offering, as "profound", before - perhaps somewhat dismissively - suggesting that he was "not sure how many people will actually understand this".

"This is extremely profound and necessary, because we are headed towards a world where... people are leaning towards electric vehicles. These are rough numbers, but you roughly need twice as much electricity if all transport goes electric and then you need three times as much electricity if all heating goes electric," Musk said.

This change in dynamic will, according to Musk, be prosperous for both Tesla and utilities because of both the demand for renewable power and the need to embrace facilities and providers of the flexibility necessary to facilitate that transition.

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Musk points to both California and Texas, both states which have borne the brunt of shortfalls of power, storage and flexibility in recent years, as examples of what's to come on a more national, perhaps global scale if the system's shortcomings are not addressed today. A utility's failure to plan for this new energy paradigm is a "recipe for disaster", Musk said, before promoting the need for battery storage at all levels.

"By having battery storage power with solar and wind, this gives the long-term solution to a stable energy future, and as I said, especially each both at the local level and at the utility level. If it doesn't occur at the local level, what will actually be required is a massive increase in power lines, in power plants, as they would have to put long distance and local power lines all over the place. They will have to increase the size of the substations. It's a nightmare. This must occur. There must be solar plus battery. It's the only way," Musk said.

There is undisputed value in the combination and aggregation of home solar-storage installations to not just help consumers meet their own power supply needs - irrespective of what might be happening at the grid level - but to also help meet the power supply needs of others, be they their neighbours, nearby businesses or even major utilities. Incidents in California and Texas have indeed proven that beyond doubt. And Tesla, with its lofty market position and brand recognition, can cut through to the consumer like few others in the sector. The company's Autobidder software, which leverages artificial intelligence techniques to better monetise its utility-scale assets, could well be a particularly strong trick up its sleeve in this regard too.

What could be particularly powerful for Tesla and its installer partners moving forward is two tweaks to its processes. Firstly, Musk noted a change to its sales process for solar and storage, integrating the two into a single product that cannot be sold individually. This could yet be a short-term measure triggered by a lack of product availability in the storage line, but, for the time being at least, if you want solar from Tesla, you have to purchase a Powerwall too.

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