



Transmission Policy Reform

The planning, siting, and managing of electric transmission lines in the United States must be reformed as part of a comprehensive effort to transition to a clean energy economy. Because the focal point of a national clean energy strategy must be an economy-wide limit on global warming pollutants that results in rapid and dramatic emissions reductions, a strong renewable electricity standard must be put in place to promote deployment of renewable energy technologies and energy efficiency measures. Unfortunately, the renewables revolution can't happen without power lines to carry clean renewable energy. We must use existing power lines where we can, and, if new lines are needed, we must construct well-planned, thoughtfully-placed projects that serve renewable energy first. However, current transmission policies do little to ensure new transmission investments are kind to the climate or the landscape.

- **The country's aging transmission grid and antiquated planning processes are insufficient to support the transformative investment required to repower America with clean renewable energy.** Today, our power grid lacks capacity in some places while its current routes also miss many of the most promising renewable energy resource areas. The current grid simply can't handle the needs of renewable energy. Planning and siting interstate transmission lines can be a lengthy, contentious, and expensive process that does not ensure outcomes consistent with national clean energy or other environmental goals. Siting decisions often occur late in the process after significant investment has been made in developing a proposal. The chronology of this process creates missed opportunities to cooperatively identify zones and corridors that protect sensitive areas and bypass redundant analyses. Done differently, we could significantly speed project construction.
- **Repowering the nation must protect the wildlife, air and water quality, and natural and cultural resources that help keep American communities healthy, safe, and prosperous.** Decisions on where to build these lines to serve new renewable generation facilities must ensure the protection of unique and sensitive natural systems, wildlife habitat, and cultural resources, as well as our protected public lands. The social and ecological impacts of these lines must be assessed in full compliance with our nation's environmental laws through science-based planning processes with opportunities for robust public involvement. Future transmission siting should employ best practices developed via processes such as California's Renewable Energy Transmission Initiative and similar protocols. These efforts apply science-based



Source: Bonneville Power Administration.

screening criteria early in the planning process to prioritize areas for development based on their suitability, which reduces the risk of lengthy challenges later in the process.

- **New lines must be built that are specifically planned, designed, and appropriately sited in order to serve renewable resources, not expand the carbon-intensive electrical generation largely responsible for global warming and unhealthy air.** Electric transmission policy reform in advance of a comprehensive national climate policy can result in *more*, not less, greenhouse gas pollution. The Union of Concerned Scientists found that new transmission capacity in the mid-Atlantic region could allow coal plants that are not currently operating at full capacity to ramp up if new interconnections are built. In turn, this could overwhelm most of the reductions achieved by the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative—even if no new coal-fired plants are constructed.¹ Robust safeguards must be put in place to ensure that new lines serve clean renewable electric generation and minimize the expansion of carbon-heavy coal power. A greenhouse gas performance standard that would apply to any new generation facilities connected to these lines could achieve this goal.
- **Transmission is only a tool for building a clean energy economy.** Energy efficiency, demand response, energy storage, distributed generation, and advanced transmission technologies are all resources that must be considered along with traditional central power stations that require interstate transmission. Before building new transmission, we need to make every effort to expand these alternative resources to negate the need for new supply, and also to enhance and better utilize existing transmission infrastructure. This includes energy storage and innovative “smart grid” technologies that are already proven cost-effective, but have struggled to penetrate markets due to insufficient incentives for adoption.



*Distributed energy technologies can relieve transmission bottlenecks by reducing the amount of electricity that must be sent long distances down high-voltage power lines.
Source: The White House.*

Building a robust, well-planned, and innovative grid will result in a more reliable, resilient, and secure energy delivery system for decades to come. New transmission designed to unlock clean renewable energy offers significant opportunities for creating jobs and contributing to our economic prosperity. Meeting our country’s energy needs with clean renewable energy will require significant investments that must be undertaken immediately, but these investments must not worsen global warming emissions or fragment fragile lands and ecosystems. Investing in smart transmission lines isn’t just good policy, it’s necessary for our quality of life and the well-being of the environment for decades to come. **To do it right, we need a transmission policy in this country that builds toward the future, not toward the past.**

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¹ Union of Concerned Scientists. “Importing Pollution: Coal’s Threat to Climate Policy in the U.S. Northeast.” December 2008. http://www.ucsusa.org/assets/documents/clean_energy/importing-pollution_report.pdf