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# US approves expansion of green energy transmission

Bolstering the nation's ageing power grid the priority

WASHINGTON: Federal energy regulators have approved a long-awaited rule to make it easier to transmit renewable energy such as wind and solar power to the electric grid – a key part of president Joe Biden's goal to eliminate carbon emissions economy-wide by 2050.

The rule, under development for two years, is aimed at boosting the nation's ageing power grid to meet surging demand fuelled by huge data centres, electrification of vehicles and buildings, artificial intelligence (AI) and other uses.

The increased demand comes as coal-fired power plants continue to be retired amid competition from natural gas, and other energy sources face increasingly strict federal pollution rules, setting up what experts said could be a crisis for electric reliability.

The grid is also being tested by more frequent service disruptions during extreme weather events driven by climate change.

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission approved the new rule, two-to-one, with chairman Willie Phillips and fellow Democratic commissioner Allison Clements voting in favour.

Republican Mark Christie opposed the rule, dismissing it as a gift to solar and wind power operators.

The sprawling, 1,300-page rule, which addresses transmission planning and cost allocations, will enhance the country's ageing grid and ensure US homes and businesses keep the lights on for decades to come, Phillips said.

"This rule cannot come fast enough," he said at a packed commission meeting at the agency's Washington headquarters. "There is an urgent need to act to ensure the reliability and the affordability of our grid."

The US power grid "is at a make-or-break moment" and is being tested every day, Phillips said, citing "phenomenal load-growth from a domestic manufacturing boom, unprecedented construction of data centres fuelling an AI revolution and ever-expanding electrification" of vehicles and buildings.

At the same time, ageing infrastructure, shifting economics and a range of state and federal policies are leading traditional resources to retire, he said.

"On top of all of this, extreme weather events have become the norm, and the electric grid is routinely being pushed to the brink."



**Clean goals:**  
A man from Texas looks over portable solar panels he uses to supplement power to his home in Weatherford. Ageing infrastructure, shifting economics and a range of state and federal policies are leading traditional energy resources to retire in the United States. — Bloomberg

At the same time, construction of high-voltage power lines declined to a record low in 2022, "and much of that construction was simply Band-Aid fixes, rather than building a visionary grid of the future," Phillips said.

Many power companies and Republican-led states don't want to spend money on new transmission lines or upgrades for renewable energy.

This has created conflicts with Democratic states that have ambitious clean-energy goals.

Christie, the lone Republican on the three-member panel, said the rule "utterly fails to protect consumers" and ensure reliable, low-priced power for American homes and businesses.

"Instead, this rule is a pretext to enact a sweeping policy agenda that Congress never passed," he said.

The rule will likely result in "a massive transfer of wealth from consumers to for-profit special interests," primarily wind and solar operators, he said.

The rule is intended to streamline how power lines are sited and how costs are shared between states.

It could accelerate construction of new transmission lines for wind, solar and other renewable power and add huge amounts of clean energy to the grid.

Biden has set a goal of a carbon-free power sector by 2035, and net-zero carbon emissions economy-wide by 2050.

To meet those targets, the United States needs to more than double current regional transmission capacity and increase by five-fold the transmission lines between regions, according to an Energy Department study last year.

Under current rules, a large queue of utility-scale renewables cannot be connected to the grid because of a lack of available transmission capacity.

The rule updates the agency's planning process and seeks to determine how costs will be divided when transmission crosses state lines and goes through multiple operators of regional power grids. — AP

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