

Opening Statement of the Honorable Greg Walden
Subcommittee on Energy Hearing on: Examining the State of Electric
Transmission Infrastructure: Investment, Planning, Construction, and
Alternatives
May 10, 2018

Good morning and welcome to our witnesses. Today's hearing on transmission infrastructure is another important topic in the Energy Subcommittee's Powering America series. I want to thank our witnesses for participating and I look forward to hearing your perspectives on the state of our nation's electric transmission infrastructure.

The United States' electricity system is one of our nation's more impressive engineering feats – with its interconnected network of power plants, poles, and wires that delivers uninterrupted electricity from producers to consumers. Transmission is an integral component of our electricity system. Often called the bulk-power system, transmission infrastructure enables the movement of electricity across states, regions, and the country as a whole. However, as time passes and transmission infrastructure ages, upgrades and replacement of existing infrastructure, as well as capital investments in new projects are necessary to ensure electricity is delivered in a reliable, efficient, and cost-effective manner.

Like many energy infrastructure projects, the construction of new transmission infrastructure can face difficulties, in part due to lengthy delays in permitting and siting processes. Energy infrastructure projects such as natural gas pipelines and LNG facilities are subject to Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) permitting processes. On private lands, utilities, grid operators, or states make the decision on

whether a new transmission line needs to be built and whether to upgrade existing transmission infrastructure. However, when it comes to siting and building transmission lines across Federal lands, the Department of Energy is the lead agency in coordinating all applicable Federal authorizations and related environmental reviews of electric transmission facilities, with some authorities delegated to FERC.

Consistent with the intent of the Administration's recently announced MOU on implementing One Federal Decision, agencies must work together to provide a more predictable, transparent, and timely Federal review of infrastructure projects.

Through the Federal Power Act, Congress gave FERC the authority to regulate the sale and transmission of electricity in interstate commerce. Under this authority the FERC issued a series of rules to oversee and regulate the regional and inter-regional planning of transmission projects while at the same time encouraging greater competition between transmission developers. FERC's most recent rule on transmission was in 2011, with Order 1000. Today's hearing will explore these rules and the related challenges of transmission planning.

This Committee has discussed at length the importance of utilizing digital and information technologies for a more dynamic and innovative electricity system. Through previous Powering America hearings, we have focused on energy technologies located at the distribution level of the electric grid. However, new technologies have the potential to optimize the nation's electricity system at the bulk-power level.

Advanced grid technologies can modernize transmission infrastructure to ease congestion, allow for increases in demand, and provide greater security. These smart technologies include sensors for measuring system conditions, electric power equipment that regulates power flow, and computerized monitoring equipment that enable system operators to view the electric grid in real time and make necessary adjustments.

For example, these technologies can optimize the flow of electricity by automatically routing power around overloaded or congested lines – allowing for greater line capacity. High voltage direct current transmission lines can be a less expensive alternative and have less electrical losses compared to traditional alternating current lines in transmitting electricity over long distances. I look forward to hearing more from our witnesses today on how these advanced technologies have the potential to optimize transmission infrastructure at the bulk-power level.

The nation's transmission system is a vital component in the safe, reliable, and affordable delivery of electricity to consumers across the country. We must ensure that the electric grid works in ways that integrate new technologies within existing transmission infrastructure, and siting new infrastructure when needed. Thank you to our witnesses for joining us today and I look forward to your testimony.