

WA policies to upgrade the power grid

Legislative action in 2026 can fast track cleaner, cheaper, more reliable power for Washingtonians.

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Without [more high voltage electric transmission lines](#), Washingtonians will be stuck paying for polluting, expensive natural gas for electricity, while cheaper solar and wind projects wait to connect. The 2026 legislature can enact four policies to expand the grid, save ratepayers money, and harness clean energy.

1. Create a state transmission authority

Washington's last major upgrade occurred a decade ago, in part because neither utilities nor the federal Bonneville Power Administration is investing in large grid projects. Washington can create a state transmission authority to identify needed grid projects, partner with private transmission developers to build essential lines, and save ratepayers money by using low-cost public debt. Lawmakers can look to [California](#), [Colorado](#), and [New Mexico](#) for inspiration.

2. Enable expedited review while preserving Tribal privacy

Large transmission lines must undergo environmental and land use review by Washington's siting and permitting agency, the [Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council \(EFSEC\)](#). But the process can be lengthy and duplicative, especially when a trial-like adjudicative hearing is required. Lawmakers can speed approvals by letting transmission projects use EFSEC's expedited review path, while preserving the right for Tribes to privately share sensitive information, a benefit that adjudicative hearings offer today.

3. Allow transmission lines statewide

Washington cities and counties have enacted a patchwork of zoning requirements for transmission projects, risking significant project delays. A recent 16-mile grid upgrade dragged through local approval processes for nine years, which drove up project costs (and ratepayers' bills) [by millions of dollars](#). Lawmakers could require cities and counties to allow these essential facilities in all or most zones.

4. Focus environmental review on likely impacts

Transmission lines are unlikely to affect all elements reviewed under Washington's State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA), and upgrade projects don't impact the environment any more than routine maintenance does. Plus, the existence of EFSEC environmental standards separate from SEPA means regulators may assess a project for its impact on the same environmental element (e.g., noise) multiple times. Lawmakers can exempt overlapping categories, develop mitigation standards for elements transmission lines are unlikely to affect, and expand SEPA exemptions for grid upgrades, while again preserving Tribal rights that SEPA currently protects.