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## COMMENTARY

# The need to improve transmission of clean power to homes, businesses



BY GUEST COMMENTARY

MARCH 28, 2022



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### IN SUMMARY

Two bills will tackle transmission issues for clean energy and give us a chance to build our way out of the climate crisis.



**By Michael Colvin**

*Michael Colvin is director of the California Energy Program at the [Environmental Defense Fund](#).*



**V. John White, Special to CalMatters**

V. *John White is executive director for the [Center for Energy Efficiency and Renewable Technologies](#).*

Californians get it. After years of unprecedented wildfires, growing awareness of the threat that dirty gas power plants pose to our health and climate, and now, the urgent wakeup call of Russia's war in Ukraine, our state is remarkably unified about the need to shift to clean energy.

The only real question is how quickly we can make the transition to 100% clean power – and independence from fossil fuels – while keeping the lights on, bills affordable and ensuring there is enough energy available to meet future demand. This becomes more important as the state moves to electrify everything from the cars and trucks we drive to the buildings we live and work in.

A lot of attention has been paid recently to the amount of clean energy California is going to need in the next few years, with the state ordering procurement of massive amounts of clean power – 11.5 gigawatts by 2026, enough energy to power more than 8 million homes – to replace aging power plants.

Just as important, though, will be getting all of this new clean power where it is needed. Transmission – that is, moving electricity from where it is

generated to our homes and businesses – is an often neglected part of the state’s clean energy conversation. If California is going to have any chance of achieving its climate goals, that is going to have to change.

The truth is, transmission congestion is already causing a massive backlog in California clean energy projects: The state has roughly 5 gigawatts of renewable and storage capacity sitting needlessly idle due to delays in interconnection and transmission approvals. This is not just hampering clean power deployment; it is slowing creation of thousands of green construction jobs.

It’s also a warning sign of challenges to come: California’s transmission infrastructure is woefully antiquated – it is not as reliable, not as efficient and not as safe as it should be. In February, the California Independent System Operator’s [20-Year Transmission Outlook](#) projected a need for at least \$30 billion in new modern power lines to connect growing quantities of wind, solar and other renewable technologies to the grid.

State leaders seem to understand the scale of this problem – along with the risks of relying solely on local energy generation or deferring transmission investments, which take at least a decade to bring online. “We know we need to build transmission,”

Alice Reynolds, the new president of the California Public Utilities Commission, [recently told the Los Angeles Times](#). “We need to think about planning for it and not waiting until the last minute, because these are long projects.”

That’s where two important new transmission bills now moving through the Legislature can help.

[Senate Bill 1174](#), introduced by Sen. [Bob Hertzberg](#), a Democrat from Van Nuys, proposes to streamline the process that has delayed approval of new transmission lines, by directing state energy agencies to identify and advance “all interconnection or transmission approvals necessary” for California to achieve its 100% clean energy goals.

The bill, which will be heard today in the Senate energy committee, requires state energy agencies to execute an “accelerated approval and completion process” to accomplish this task. It also directs the owners of transmission facilities to prepare new annual reports on any delays to in-service dates of eligible renewable energy or storage resources – and to “identify all prudent remedial actions to address and minimize those delays.”

A complementary bill, [Assembly Bill 2696](#), by Assemblymember [Eduardo Garcia](#), a Democrat

from Coachella, also accelerates approvals for new clean energy transmission – and looks even further ahead.

This legislation requires the state energy commission to conduct a study on whether today’s transmission governance system – including facility ownership and financing mechanisms – are adequate for achieving the state’s climate goals. The bill requires a report to be submitted to the governor and Legislature by September 2023, outlining recommended improvements.

These bills may not make headlines – but they are smart pieces of legislation that tackle real, nuts-and-bolts clean energy issues and give us a chance to build our way out of the climate crisis.

It is time for transmission to take its rightful place in the state’s clean energy conversation. It is the only way California will be able to deliver clean power to every community.

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*V. John White has also written that regulators are undermining [California’s transition to 100% clean energy](#), about the need for [a better plan to achieve clean energy goals](#) and the new CPUC president must [lead us to a gas-free future](#),*

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