

Committee on Energy and Commerce

**Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Subcommittee on Energy Ranking Member Kathy Castor**

Hearing on “Wires, Rates, and States: Permitting Transmission for Affordable, Reliable Power”

May 13, 2026

I’m glad that my Republican colleagues have finally called a hearing to discuss transmission policy – which we know is crucial to lowering Americans’ energy bills and powering the development of artificial intelligence.

We need to move power from where it is made to where it is needed. Our electric grid does that. However, many power lines in the United States are 50 to 100 years old. Our grid is aging, underutilized, and needs significant investment. The current growth in energy demand presents an opportunity to build a modern electricity system that meets the challenges of the 21st century and benefits everyone.

Transmission saves Americans money. For every \$1 invested in well-planned, long-distance high-capacity transmission, we get \$5 in reliability and economic benefits. These benefits aren’t just hypothetical. If every region embraced robust transmission planning like the Midwest has, we could save every household in the United States \$102 on their annual electric bill.

A robust transmission grid also makes our energy system more reliable. In its long-term reliability assessment released this year, NERC highlighted how transmission can help grid planners take advantage of geographic diversity during extreme weather, like winter storms. NERC called on policymakers to streamline siting and permitting processes to remove barriers to transmission development.

Utilities currently spend about \$35 billion a year on transmission. However, most of those investments occur in siloed, local projects. Essentially no major interregional transmission projects have been planned and built in the last decade – they made up only 2% of new lines installed from 2011 through 2020.

Two years ago, NERC recommended adding 35 GW of interregional transfer capability to improve energy adequacy. Studies show that interregional transmission could save customers billions of dollars a year.

Smart transmission policy insulates consumers from uncertainty. As we face significant increases in demand for electricity, we risk utilities building significant amounts of new generation. If that demand doesn’t show up, those generation investments will be forced onto ordinary consumers.

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Transmission helps the power system adapt cost-effectively to future changes. As our grid becomes more interconnected, it is easier to bring low-cost generation online faster and get that electricity to where it's needed.

Well-planned transmission must be a key part of our energy strategy, and Congress should pass thoughtful policies to reform the ways we plan, permit, and pay for it. It's clear what we need to do.

In the near term, we must get more out of the existing grid that we've already paid for. We can pass policies that increase grid utilization and incentivize the deployment of grid-enhancing technologies and virtual power plants. These are quick, ready-to-deploy, and proven solutions that if scaled could unlock hundreds of gigawatts of capacity and save billions of dollars annually.

We also need to build more transmission – at more than six times the rate we have been in recent years. To do so, we should focus on targeted policy reforms, such as streamlining the backstop siting authority for interstate transmission lines, while providing guardrails to protect customers, benefit local communities, and respect state authority.

Congress should clearly establish the benefits of transmission. The costs of that transmission should then be allocated consistently among customers who benefit.

These are challenging issues – but this Committee should be able to tackle complicated issues on a bipartisan basis. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today as we work towards solutions that result in a more reliable, resilient grid that can deliver affordable energy for our neighbors back home.

I yield back.