



January 21, 2026

Good morning Chair Shewmake and Members of the Committee:

My name is Casey MacLean and I am the Washington Policy Manager at Renewable Northwest (RNW), a regional clean energy advocacy organization. Our membership is composed of clean energy developers, related businesses, and other nonprofits. We are signed in on SB 5466 today as pro, but we do have some suggestions for improvement.

Overall, we strongly support opportunities for transmission expansion. In order to meet rising electricity demand and achieve clean energy mandates, Washington needs to build out and upgrade its transmission infrastructure. Failing to do so poses a significant reliability risk, and transmission bottlenecks create huge backlogs in the number of clean energy projects that are able to be brought online. Conversely, building new transmission will help bring clean energy and other resources online, increase the geographic diversity of our grid (which improves reliability), and spur economic growth in the state.

Transmission authorities have been a successful model for planning and building much-needed transmission in other states, such as Colorado and New Mexico. While the Northwest's largest transmission provider is the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA), this federal power administration has been slow to build transmission at the pace needed today. Utilities have also been slow to build new transmission lines, and these expensive investments are risky to permit and construct. Transmission authorities can partner with independent transmission developers to build needed transmission lines that otherwise may not be constructed. They can also provide an important forum for utilities, developers, and other stakeholders, helping host conversations that move the needle forward. While a transmission authority is not a singular solution to Washington's transmission needs, this would be an additional tool in Washington's limited toolbox. It would also provide a state-led forum at a moment when working with the federal government on energy infrastructure has been unpredictable. The bill text also indirectly points to the transmission authority utilizing the new [WestTEC](#) studies that identify transmission needs over 10 and 20-year periods, which RNW strongly supports.

Additionally, a "low hanging fruit" solution for transmission capacity is to provide categorical exemptions from traditional permitting avenues such as the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) for transmission upgrades. Reconductoring existing lines with advanced conductors can

double line capacity within existing rights-of-way, while having minimal environmental impacts.¹ One of the greatest barriers to reconductoring is that full environmental permitting reviews are needed, despite their low impact. In April 2024, the Biden Administration’s DOE issued a National Environmental Policy Act categorical exclusion for projects using existing rights-of-way.² A SEPA categorical exemption would bring state policy in line with these sensible federal rules. This would help incentivize utilities and other transmission operators to upgrade their existing transmission lines, since an expedited permitting process would be faster and less costly. This also benefits ratepayers as there are fewer costs to be recouped, while allowing greater access to generation resources.

Suggestions for improvement

Part I: Transmission Authority

We support many of the areas of the bill text that have been refined since the 2025 legislative session and appreciate the work that has gone into this concept. We strongly suggest that the committee work to include bonding authority, a key financial tool to finance transmission authority projects at low risk and low cost, which protects ratepayers. We understand that the Department of Commerce is studying the state’s ability to use bonding authority. Another existing state agency with bonding authority is the Washington Economic Development Finance Authority ([WEDFA](#)), which we would also encourage exploring as a potential avenue for this financing mechanism. Bonding authority is a critical tool to ensure the effectiveness of the transmission authority, and we strongly support this being added as soon as the legislature has more clarity on the subject.

In section 4, the deadline for the board of directors to be selected is January 1, 2027. We suggest moving this up to September 2026 and selecting an executive director as soon as possible. The need for new transmission is urgent and these dates should reflect that.

In section 5, (1)(b), we suggest:

- Strike “grid connections for”. Adds unnecessary complexity and may limit the ability to access renewable energy resources in other states. A different phrase could be “increase access to regional wholesale markets”
- Strike clause “or would not otherwise be built by Washington electric utilities”. This is difficult to prove and there is other language in the bill addressing this utility concern.

¹ [2035 and Beyond, the Report: Reconductoring](#). Gridlab, 2024.

² [DOE NEPA Categorical Exclusion Rulemaking](#), 2024.

Part II: SEPA Categorical Exemption

We support the concept of a SEPA categorical exemption for reconductoring but have some concerns over the scope of the conditional requirements laid out in Section 12 and 13.

A typical SEPA categorical exemption would not require the tribal cultural resource surveys outlined here. However, we understand there are critiques of SEPA's treatment of cultural resources, and that these added guardrails could help assuage some concerns. Broadly, we see this greater issue as an area of SEPA that the legislature and Governor should work with Tribes to meaningfully address, rather than create individual solutions for specific categorical exemptions. In Section 13 (e), we see a need for clarity on how the project is to proceed if a plan is not agreed to.

We would appreciate more time to review this new language and to have discussions with interested stakeholders. Overall, this process is still less burdensome than a full SEPA process and could improve permitting timelines for reconductoring, but the language would benefit from added clarity to ensure appropriate upgrades can move forward.

Other

Section 8, Tribal Clean Energy Partnership Work Group, is a large new addition to SB 5466, which interested stakeholders, particularly clean energy developers, have not had time to review or comment on. There are laudable themes outlined in this work group concept, but this is a much different conversation that warrants its own process. We are also concerned that this section will come with a fiscal impact, which we worry could be problematic as the legislature is considering cost-saving measures. For these reasons, RNW is opposed to section 8's inclusion in SB 5466 and would encourage the legislature to explore this concept separately.

Overall, Washington needs transmission solutions and we are eager to work with the bill sponsors to continue refining SB 5466. Renewable Northwest is happy to provide expertise and answer any questions.

Sincerely,

/s/ Casey MacLean
Washington Policy Manager
Renewable Northwest