



Statement of Principles – Transmission

New electric transmission for the delivery of renewable energy is a critical tool for decarbonization. To reach the goal of net zero by 2050, studies have found the United States will have to at least double if not triple the size of its transmission infrastructure.ⁱ At the same time, developing new infrastructure comes with its own impacts that, while much less formidable than the impacts of climate change, must be minimized through effective planning and community engagement. New England is fortunate to be a coastal region with abundant offshore wind that will help avert climate impacts if deployed at scale. However, new onshore and offshore transmission infrastructure will be required to transport the electricity from that clean energy resource to where it can be distributed to our homes and businesses. For that reason, New England for Offshore Wind has developed this Statement of Principles.

It is important that advocates come together to agree upon shared principles to help the region build the transmission needed to enable the clean energy transition at the scale and speed required to combat climate change. The diverse coalition that comprises New England for Offshore Wind recognizes that the impacts that come with transmission development cannot be completely avoided, but we know they can be minimized through smart planning and early engagement with stakeholders. We also recognize that offshore wind transmission development presents benefits to New Englanders as well, including through the creation of high-quality union jobs, workforce development opportunities, and the use of local and domestic content where feasible.

It is essential to reverse New England's poor track record of success with siting and building transmission infrastructure. Key process reforms can help achieve this, including improved coordination between and among the six states and ISO-New England, regional planning that aligns with state policy, earlier engagement with potentially impacted communities, and special consideration to historically overburdened neighborhoods.

Offshore wind presents unique challenges and opportunities of its own that need to be surmounted. For example, there are limited options for interconnecting with the onshore grid along the coast without extensive transmission upgrades.ⁱⁱ A networked, regional offshore grid may help minimize costs to ratepayers, increase reliability, and lessen impacts to the environment and coastal communities by reducing the amount of transmission infrastructure needed, but it requires new thinking.

The urgency is great. Climate change is already causing devastating impacts in New England, particularly to environmental justice and coastal communities, wildlife, and ecosystems. Below we identify several shared goals and six core principles, the “**BASICS**,” for transmission planning and development that will guide New England for Offshore Wind as it seeks to impact state, regional, and federal policies and practices to advance offshore wind in New England.

Goals:

1. Build the transmission we need to decarbonize the region's economy, without delay;
2. Encourage coordination among the New England states and at the regional level (and federal level as applicable) on transmission planning, siting, and development; and
3. Ensure holistic and transparent long-term planning processes that consider non-transmission alternatives while weighing the benefits and impacts of potential transmission projects on environmental justice, the environment, consumer costs, jobs, and economic development.

Guiding Principles:

Benefit impacted communities – Target benefits to affected communities to help offset impacts, such as setting aside protected green space, cleaning up brownfields, and investing in the local workforce and economy, in accordance with community input (see further below).

Avoid, minimize, and mitigate environmental impacts – Minimize the overall amount of new infrastructure needed through optimized, well-planned systems while avoiding or minimizing impacts on ecosystem services, considering cumulative environmental impacts, and mitigating unavoidable impacts.

Secure environmental justice – Avoid and minimize new impacts on already overburdened and historically disadvantaged communities whenever possible, while strengthening equity in planning processes and weighing the cumulative environmental, economic, and health impacts of any new infrastructure proposed in or near environmental justice communities.

Inclusive and early stakeholder engagement – Consult communities and interested parties in potentially impacted areas in the early stages of planning when alternatives are still being considered and new alternatives can still be identified.

Coordinate on transmission investments – Serve as many needs across the region as possible with each transmission investment in order to increase consensus and reduce overall impacts and costs.

Supply local jobs and economic development – Lift up workers and communities by providing high-quality, local, union jobs and training via registered apprenticeships and project labor agreements, while driving workforce and supplier diversity, and encouraging a domestic supply chain for the expansion and maintenance of our region's electric grid.

This Statement of Principles was developed by a Transmission Working Group of New England for Offshore Wind, chaired by Melissa Birchard of Acadia Center, with the objective of finding common ground and shared advocacy principles for transmission planning and development to support offshore wind. The Statement was subsequently adopted by the New England for Offshore Wind coalition.

These principles are intended to serve as a starting point and guide all offshore wind transmission projects and are therefore stated at a high level. These principles are not exhaustive. For example, they do not cover the issue of cost allocation between states, but rather focus on baseline principles for planning and siting.

ⁱ See, e.g., <https://www.catf.us/2021/08/new-report-electricity-transmission>. ISO-New England predicts that approximately 4,500 miles of transmission in New England, or about half of the regional system, will be overloaded by 2050 without new transmission investments to help meet state decarbonization goals. See https://www.iso-ne.com/static-assets/documents/2022/04/a14_2050_transmission_study_sensitivity_results_and_solution_development_plans.pdf (at 6).

ⁱⁱ See ISO-NE Economic Study for Offshore Wind Interconnection: https://www.iso-ne.com/static-assets/documents/2020/06/a4_2019_economic_study_offshore_wind_transmission_interconnection_analysis.pdf