The Clean Electricity and Transmission Acceleration Act of 2023

SEEC Clean Energy Deployment Task Force
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Why This Bill

The Clean Electricity and Transmission Acceleration (CETA) Act is a comprehensive approach to addressing the primary permitting issues that are holding back the clean energy transition. The biggest challenge facing the United States' ability to meet its climate goals is the lack of capacity of our electrical grid to connect clean energy generation to the new demand that comes with economy-wide electrification. In addition to tackling the climate crisis by unlocking the full potential of renewable energy, CETA will reduce energy costs by enabling the cleanest least-expensive form of energy – renewables – to connect to the grid.

CETA aims to inclusively and efficiently support the buildout of transmission lines to transport the electricity from its generation source to the homes of the American people. CETA will also increase the grid's reliability and resilience in the face of increasing extreme weather events.

Additionally, the rapid buildout of the clean energy economy necessitates more robust community engagement to ensure all voices are heard and disadvantaged communities are not disproportionately impacted. Community engagement is important to address potential concerns early and head off issues that may otherwise lead to time-consuming lawsuits. CETA tackles this by expanding the role for disadvantaged communities to be meaningfully consulted as part of the permitting process.

CETA also includes provisions to promote the development of renewable energy on public lands in a responsible, equitable, and efficient manner, further reducing our dependence on fossil fuels. CETA also modernizes our offshore energy permitting laws, so they are up to the task of enabling the buildout of the nascent but booming offshore wind market.

Transmission (Titles I, II, and III)

Renewable energy is only as good as the electrical system upon which it relies. Multiple independent analyses have concluded that the investments in the Inflation Reduction Act could reduce the United States' greenhouse gas emissions by approximately 40% by 2030. These analyses, however, are premised on there being sufficient transmission, which would require buildout at a pace that more than doubles the rate that transmission is being built today.

In particular, our grid is in need of new high-capacity, long-distance transmission lines that can transport electricity from the less-populated parts of the country, where the sun shines the brightest and the winds blow the strongest, to the cities, towns and suburbs where most of the population lives.

Transmission faces systemic hurdles that dictate which projects can be built, which CETA addresses by amending the Federal Power Act to direct the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) to issue a series of new rules. These include:

- Improving the interregional planning of transmission
- Allowing for costs of major transmission projects and upgrades to be allocated between beneficiaries
- Promoting the deployment of technologies to make better use of our existing grid ("grid enhancing assets")
- Requiring a minimum electricity transfer capacity between grid regions
- Giving FERC exclusive authority to approve the siting for major interstate transmission projects

The bill also provides a 30% transmission investment tax credit and makes a number of governance changes to improve how the grid is managed.

Renewable Energy on Public Lands (Title IV)

The efficient and fair deployment of renewable energy on our nation's public lands will be crucial to reducing our emissions at the pace and scale necessary to combat climate change. CETA establishes a production goal for renewable energy projects and responsibly incentivizes the development of renewable energy on priority areas within our public lands, while minimizing the adverse impacts to communities and the environment. CETA also provides a fair return for impacted states and communities and directs revenues to fund conservation efforts. The revenue distribution provides 25 percent to counties, 25 percent to the state, 25 percent into a fund for conservation and recreation purposes, and 25 percent to more efficiently process permits.

Offshore Wind (Title V)

Offshore wind has become a major part of the global energy landscape, but its deployment has lagged in the United States until just the last few years. In 2021, President Biden announced a goal of deploying 30 gigawatts of offshore wind power by 2030. In order to meet this goal and catch up with the success other countries, CETA makes targeted reforms to the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act to better align it with the needs of the offshore wind sector while also creating a compensation fund for eligible ocean users who experience damages as a result of the development of an offshore renewable project.

Community Engagement (Title VI)

It is too often presumed that increasing the level of engagement in a permitting process is synonymous with delaying the project. Rather, it has been shown that early engagement can facilitate more efficient completion of projects, by providing a way to address issues early in the process. Meaningful consultation would ensure that disadvantaged groups and communities will finally be given a voice in the process, allowing their concerns to be properly addressed in a timely and effective manner.

CETA improves the community engagement process in several ways, including by requiring that agencies complete community impact reports to assess environmental and public health impacts, mandating agencies engage with environmental justice and Tribal communities, and requiring consideration of cumulative impacts and greenhouse gases when conducting a NEPA analysis. It would also provide resources to increase the capacity to complete environmental reviews and conduct community engagement at the state and local level and at FERC.

Language from the following bills was adapted for CETA:

- SITE Act – H.R. 1766 (118th) – Rep. Mike Quigley
- Donald McEachin Environmental Justice For All Act – H.R. 1705 (118th) – Rep. Raúl Grijalva
- Enhancing Electric Grid Resilience Act – H.R. 2750 (118th) – Rep. Kathy Castor
- Efficient Grid Interconnection Act – H.R. 2749 (118th) – Rep. Kathy Castor
- Community Solar Consumer Choice Act – H.R. 2751 (118th) – Rep. Kathy Castor
- Offshore Energy Modernization Act – H.R. 9641 (117th) – Rep. Paul Tonko
- Public Land Renewable Energy Deployment Act – H.R. 178 (118th) – Rep. Mike Levin
- Reinforcing the Grid Against Extreme Weather Act – H.R. 8303 (117th) – Rep. Sean Casten
- Energy PRICE Act – H.R. 4556 (117th) – Rep. Sean Casten
- Interregional Transmission Planning Improvement Act – H.R. 2678 (117th) – Rep. Sean Casten
- REDUCE Act – H.R. 8738 (117th) – Rep. Sean Casten
- Empowering RTO Stakeholders Act – H.R. 8302 (117th) – Rep. Sean Casten
- SHINE Act – H.R. 5997 (118th) – Rep. Susie Lee
- Grid Resiliency Tax Credit – S. 1793 (118th) – Sen. Martin Heinrich
- PEER Act – Discussion Draft (118th) – Sen. Tom Carper