

Reimagining Highways as Infrastructure Corridors To Meet Society's Needs

Electricity load in the State of Washington is expected to at least double over the next 20 years, with population growth, economic expansion, and electrification of homes and transportation all factoring into a rapid rise in demand. Significant new transmission projects are expected to be needed to maintain a reliable energy system and meet the state's goal of 100% clean electricity by 2045.

To minimize the need for development on private and undisturbed land, state agencies and policy makers can encourage the co-location of transmission in highway rights-of-way and other existing corridors. Clarifying state policy to confirm that co-location is allowed could speed up the siting and permitting process, lessen environmental impacts, and save money for Washington ratepayers.

Current Policy Landscape

Washington Department of Transportation (WSDOT) policies present strict limitations for siting transmission lines within highway rights-of-way. In practice, this means that siting in highway rights-of-way is generally not allowed, though there are case-by-case exceptions. The lack of clear guidance has left both transmission developers and WSDOT constrained. Without a culture of co-ordination supported by clear collaborative processes, transmission developers avoid siting transmission in highway rights-of-way.

The map below highlights planned transmission projects throughout Washington, as well as corridors where transmission is restricted from being sited under current practices.

Planned Transmission Projects in Washington

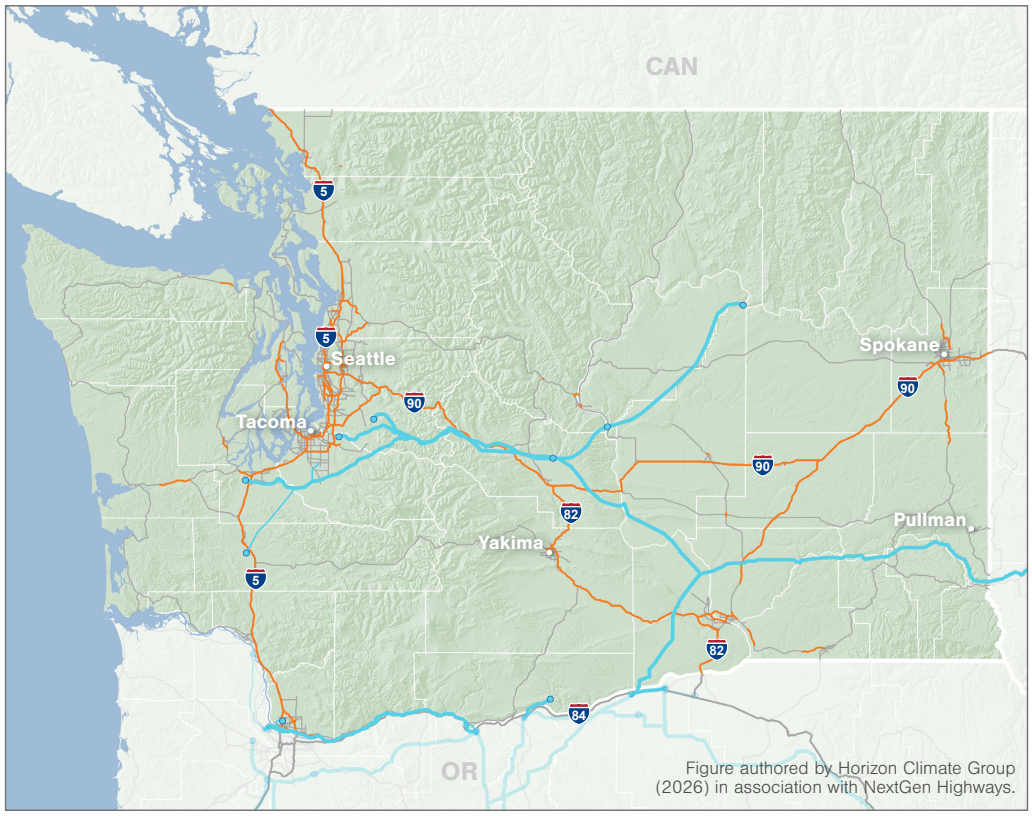


Figure authored by Horizon Climate Group (2026) in association with NextGen Highways.

Federal & state highways

- Co-located transmission siting **rarely or not allowed** (interstates or other fully controlled access highways)
- Co-located transmission siting **allowed**

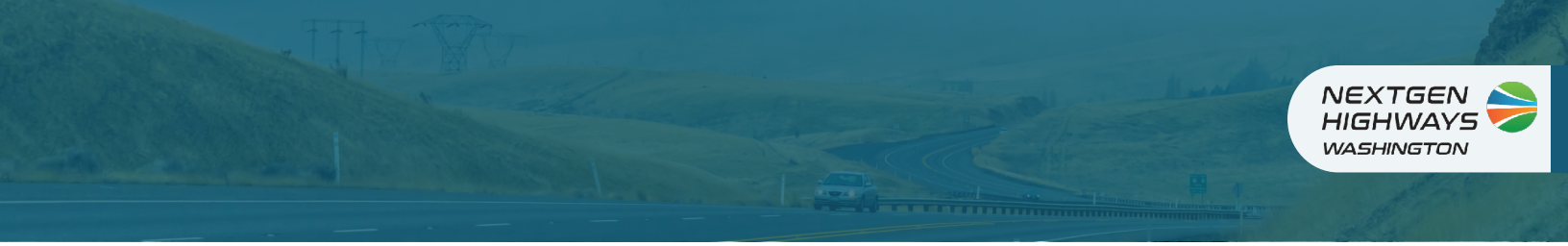
Planned transmission projects

- Substations
- Transmission lines by voltage
  - ≤ 230 kV
  - 231 kV to 345 kV

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HORIZON

July 2026



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Opportunities

In 2025, WSDOT issued a report titled “Alternative Use of Highway Rights-of-Way,” in which the agency concluded that they cannot update their utility accommodation policy to generally allow siting in highway rights-of-way without legislation to clarify that this is allowed.

The NextGen Highways Washington Coalition may consider a policy that encourages transmission developers to prioritize existing transmission rights-of-way, highway rights-of-way, and other existing corridors before siting transmission on private or undisturbed land. This policy could include a requirement of a constructibility report to be developed collaboratively between a utility permit applicant and WSDOT staff.

With enabling legislation, WSDOT can update their utility accommodation policy to:



Promote smooth coordination among WSDOT, transmission developers, and other public and private entities.



Ensure that highway rights-of-way are fully considered as options for transmission siting.

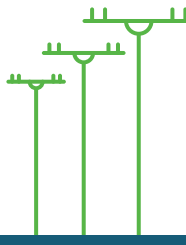


Deliver benefits to communities affected by transmission development, including those adjacent to highway rights-of-way.

Our Work

NextGen Highways Washington is a coalition of organizations representing energy, agricultural, economic, environmental, labor, wildlife, and other interests with a common goal in utilizing existing infrastructure corridors for transmission siting. Coalition members include:

- American Farmland Trust
- Citizens Climate Lobby
- Clean Air Task Force
- Clean & Prosperous
- Climate Jobs Washington
- Climate Solutions
- National Audubon Society
- The Nature Conservancy
- Northwest Energy Coalition
- Northwest & Intermountain Power Producers Coalition



Visit nextgenhighways.org to learn more and join the coalition.