



# Shaping the Future Grid: Trends and Innovations in U.S. Transmission Planning and Cost Allocation for a Resilient U.S. Electricity Grid

By

Damilola Aishat Alada ([damilolaalada@gmail.com](mailto:damilolaalada@gmail.com))  
LLM, Duke University School of Law, USA

## Abstract

The transformation of the United States electricity grid represents one of the most significant infrastructure challenges of the 21st century. As the nation transitions toward a cleaner, more resilient energy system, transmission planning and cost allocation mechanisms have emerged as critical determinants of success. This article examines contemporary trends and innovations in U.S. transmission planning, exploring how evolving regulatory frameworks, technological advances, and economic models are reshaping grid infrastructure development. Through analysis of recent policy developments, technological innovations, and economic frameworks, this research identifies key drivers influencing transmission expansion decisions and cost allocation methodologies. The findings reveal that while significant progress has been made in integrating renewable energy sources and improving grid resilience, substantial challenges remain in coordinating inter-regional planning efforts and developing equitable cost allocation mechanisms that reflect the true value of transmission infrastructure.

Keywords: Transmission planning, Cost allocation, Grid infrastructure, Renewable energy integration, Regulatory frameworks, Inter-regional coordination

## 1. Introduction

The United States electricity grid stands at a transformative juncture, facing unprecedented challenges that demand innovative approaches to transmission planning and cost allocation. The convergence of climate policy objectives, technological advancement, and evolving energy market dynamics has created an imperative for comprehensive grid modernization that extends far beyond traditional infrastructure expansion models (Jenkins, Mayfield, Farbes, Jones, Patankar, Xu, & Schivley, 2021). Contemporary transmission planning must simultaneously address multiple objectives including renewable energy integration, grid resilience enhancement, economic efficiency optimization, and equitable cost distribution among stakeholders.

The complexity of modern transmission planning reflects the multifaceted nature of contemporary electricity systems, where traditional centralized generation models are increasingly complemented by distributed energy resources and variable renewable generation sources (Chen, Wang, Liu, & Zhang, 2023). This evolution

necessitates sophisticated planning methodologies that can accommodate uncertainty, optimize system performance across multiple temporal and spatial scales, and ensure that the benefits and costs of transmission investments are allocated fairly among diverse stakeholder groups.

Recent developments in federal policy, particularly the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's initiatives regarding regional transmission planning and cost allocation, have established new frameworks for addressing these challenges (Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, 2024). These regulatory advances, combined with technological innovations in grid planning tools and economic modeling approaches, present opportunities for developing more effective and equitable transmission infrastructure development strategies.

## 2. Evolution of Transmission Planning Paradigms

Traditional transmission planning methodologies, developed during an era of centralized generation and predictable load growth patterns, are increasingly inadequate for addressing the complexities of modern electricity systems. The transition toward more sophisticated planning approaches reflects recognition that transmission infrastructure serves multiple functions beyond basic reliability maintenance, including facilitation of competitive markets, enablement of renewable energy integration, and enhancement of system resilience against extreme weather events (Panteli, Mancarella, Trakas, Kyriakides, & Hatziargyriou, 2020).

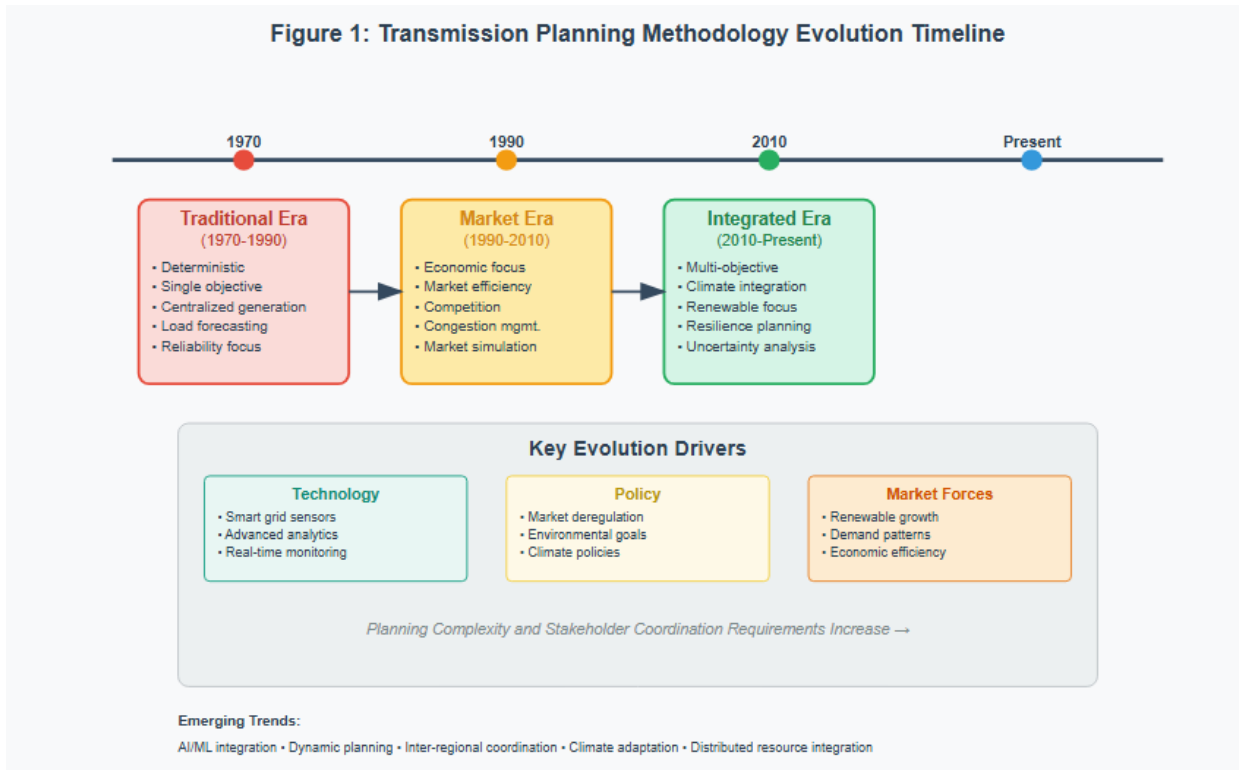
Contemporary transmission planning methodologies incorporate probabilistic approaches that account for uncertainty in renewable energy output, load patterns, and extreme weather occurrences. These advanced planning tools enable system operators and planners to evaluate transmission investment options under a broader range of scenarios than traditional deterministic approaches allowed (Lu & Li, 2024). The integration of climate impact considerations into transmission planning processes represents a particularly significant evolution, as planners increasingly recognize the need to account for changing weather patterns and extreme event frequencies in infrastructure design decisions.

**Table 1: Evolution of Transmission Planning Approaches**

Planning Era	Primary Drivers	Key Characteristics	Limitations
<b>Traditional (1970s-1990s)</b>	Reliability, load growth	Deterministic, centralized generation focus	Limited uncertainty consideration
<b>Market-driven (1990s-2010s)</b>	Economic efficiency, competition	Market congestion relief	Insufficient renewable integration
<b>Modern integrated (2010s-present)</b>	Climate goals, resilience, flexibility	Probabilistic, multi-objective, scenario-based	Coordination challenges, cost allocation complexity

Source: Compiled from Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (2024) and U.S. Department of Energy (2024)

The incorporation of renewable energy considerations into transmission planning has fundamentally altered the spatial and temporal characteristics of infrastructure requirements. Unlike traditional thermal generation facilities, renewable energy resources often exhibit geographic clustering patterns that create concentrated transmission needs in previously underdeveloped areas (Zhang, Li, Chen, & Wang, 2024). This geographic redistribution of generation resources necessitates substantial transmission capacity additions and creates new challenges for cost allocation among regions with varying renewable resource endowments.

**Figure 1: Transmission Planning Methodology Evolution Timeline**

Multi-stage transmission planning approaches have emerged as a response to the long-term nature of transmission investments and the uncertainty surrounding future system conditions. These methodologies enable planners to identify transmission projects that provide value across multiple future scenarios while maintaining flexibility to adapt to changing conditions (Zhang, Li, Chen, & Wang, 2024). The temporal dimension of transmission planning has become increasingly important as planners seek to balance the immediate costs of infrastructure development against long-term benefits that may manifest over decades of operation.

### 3. Renewable Energy Integration and Transmission Requirements

The unprecedented growth of renewable energy deployment across the United States has created both opportunities and challenges for transmission system planning. Wind and solar resources, while abundant and increasingly cost-competitive, exhibit geographic and temporal characteristics that differ substantially from traditional generation sources (Khalid & Muhammad, 2024). The optimal utilization of these resources often requires transmission capacity that extends beyond traditional service territory boundaries, creating complex inter-regional planning and cost allocation challenges.

Renewable energy integration drives transmission requirements through several mechanisms. Geographic diversity of renewable resources enables system operators to reduce variability and improve reliability through resource aggregation across wide areas (MacDonald, Clack, Alexander, Dunbar, Wilczak, & Xie, 2016). However, accessing this geographic diversity requires transmission infrastructure that can efficiently transport electricity across long distances, often through multiple utility service territories and regulatory jurisdictions.

**Table 2: Regional Renewable Resource Distribution and Transmission Implications (2024)**

Region	Primary Renewable Resource	Transmission Requirements	Key Challenges
Great Plains	Wind (>40% capacity factor)	Long-distance HVDC lines	Cost allocation across states
Southwest	Solar (>25% capacity factor)	East-west transmission corridors	Desert siting challenges
Offshore Atlantic	Offshore wind	Submarine cables, onshore network reinforcement	Maritime regulatory coordination
Pacific Northwest	Hydro, wind diversity	North-south flexibility	Environmental permitting

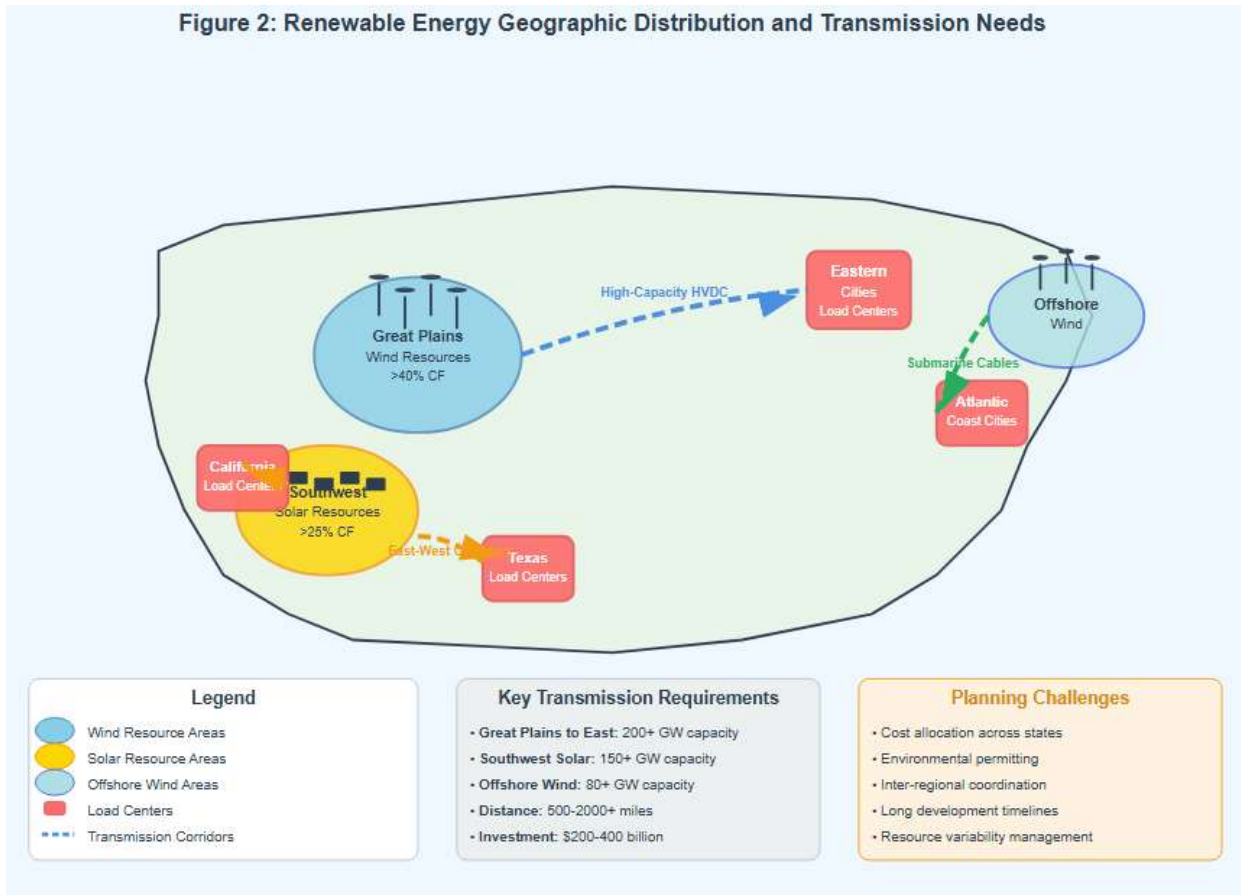
Source: Compiled from Denholm et al. (2022) and U.S. Department of Energy (2024)

The temporal characteristics of renewable energy generation create additional transmission planning challenges through their interaction with electricity demand patterns. Solar generation peaks during midday hours when electricity demand may be moderate, while wind generation often peaks during overnight hours when demand is typically lowest (Morales, Quintero, López-Lezama, & Muñoz, 2024). These temporal mismatches between generation and demand create opportunities for transmission infrastructure to provide temporal arbitrage services by enabling electricity to flow from regions with excess renewable generation to regions with higher demand.

Advanced transmission planning methodologies now incorporate sophisticated modeling of renewable energy output patterns and their correlation with demand patterns across different geographic regions. These models enable planners to identify transmission investments that maximize the value of renewable energy resources while maintaining system reliability and economic efficiency (Aghaei, Akbari, Roosta, Gitizadeh, & Niknam, 2022). The integration of storage technologies into transmission planning processes represents an emerging area of innovation, as storage can potentially substitute for transmission in certain applications while complementing transmission in others.



**Figure 2: Renewable Energy Geographic Distribution and Transmission Needs**



Inter-regional transmission capacity enables electricity systems to access the benefits of renewable energy diversity across broader geographic areas. Research demonstrates that inter-regional transmission investments can significantly reduce the total costs of achieving ambitious renewable energy targets while improving system reliability (Brown & Botterud, 2021). However, realizing these benefits requires coordination among multiple planning entities and equitable allocation of costs among regions that may experience different levels of benefits from inter-regional transmission investments.

#### 4. Climate Resilience and Grid Hardening Strategies

The increasing frequency and intensity of extreme weather events have elevated climate resilience considerations to a central position in transmission planning processes. Traditional transmission planning approaches, which typically focused on equipment failure scenarios and load forecasting uncertainties, are increasingly incorporating climate risk assessments that consider the potential impacts of hurricanes, wildfires, ice storms, and extreme temperature events on transmission infrastructure (Akdemir, Mongird, Kern, Oikonomou, Voisin, Burleyson, Rice, Zhao, Bracken, & Vernon, 2025).

Climate resilience planning requires transmission planners to consider both the direct physical impacts of extreme weather events on transmission infrastructure and the indirect impacts through changes in electricity demand patterns and generation resource availability. Heat waves, for example, simultaneously increase electricity demand for cooling services while potentially reducing the output capacity of thermal generation facilities and stressing transmission equipment (Akdemir et al., 2025). These correlated impacts can create system stress conditions that exceed those typically considered in traditional reliability planning processes.

**Table 3: Climate Risks and Transmission Infrastructure Impacts**

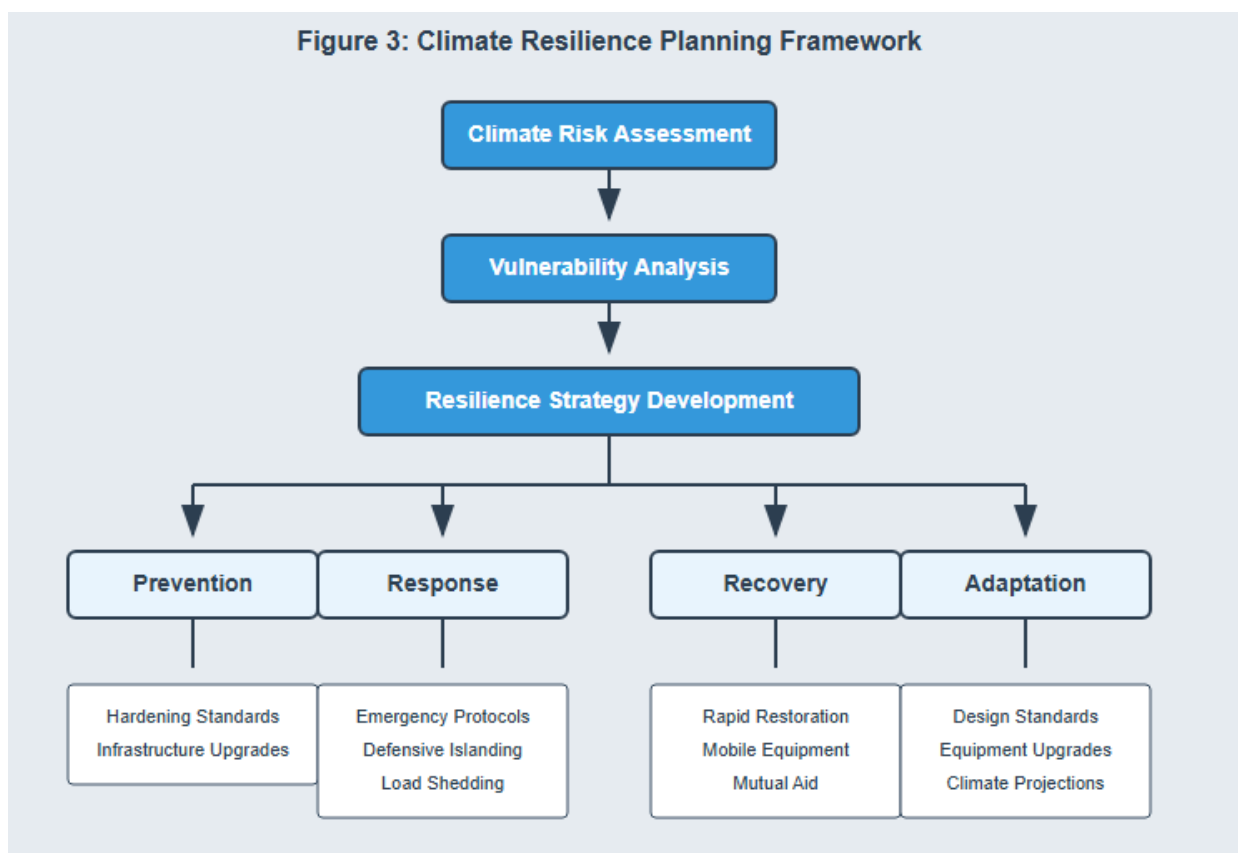
Climate Hazard	Infrastructure Impact	Planning Response	Cost Implications
<b>Extreme heat</b>	Conductor capacity reduction, equipment stress	Upgraded materials, redundancy	15-25% capital cost increase
<b>Wildfires</b>	Line outages, equipment damage	Underground alternatives, vegetation management	200-400% cost for undergrounding
<b>Ice storms</b>	Conductor loading, tower failures	Enhanced structural standards	20-30% structural cost increase
<b>Hurricanes</b>	Wide-area outages, coastal vulnerability	Hardened designs, rapid restoration capability	30-50% coastal infrastructure premium

Source: Compiled from Panteli et al. (2020) and industry cost data

Defensive islanding strategies represent an innovative approach to enhancing transmission system resilience through planned system separation during extreme events. Rather than allowing uncontrolled system collapse during severe contingencies, defensive islanding enables system operators to intentionally separate the transmission network into smaller, manageable subsystems that can maintain service to critical loads (Panteli et al., 2020). Implementation of defensive islanding capabilities requires sophisticated planning and coordination tools, as well as transmission infrastructure designed to support controlled system separation and reconnection.

The integration of distributed energy resources into resilience planning strategies presents both opportunities and challenges for transmission planners. Distributed generation can provide local resilience benefits by reducing dependence on transmission infrastructure during extreme events, but effective utilization of these resources requires transmission and distribution system coordination that extends beyond traditional planning boundaries (Chen, Wang, Liu, & Zhang, 2023). The development of microgrids and community resilience hubs creates new requirements for transmission system interfaces that can support both grid-connected and islanded operation modes.



**Figure 3: Climate Resilience Planning Framework**

Health impact considerations have emerged as an important component of transmission resilience planning, particularly in urban areas where transmission infrastructure development can affect air quality and community health outcomes (Gao & Zhao, 2025). Ultra-high voltage transmission projects, while providing significant grid capacity and efficiency benefits, require careful consideration of electromagnetic field exposure and community acceptance factors. The integration of health impact assessments into transmission planning processes reflects growing recognition that infrastructure development must consider broader social and environmental objectives beyond traditional economic and reliability metrics.

## 5. Economic Framework Evolution and Cost Allocation Innovations

The economic frameworks governing transmission investment decisions have undergone substantial evolution as electricity markets have matured and transmission infrastructure has increasingly served multiple functional roles. Traditional cost allocation methodologies, which typically assigned transmission costs based on simple load-ratio sharing formulas, are increasingly recognized as inadequate for capturing the complex value streams that modern transmission infrastructure provides (Shu & Mays, 2024).

Contemporary cost allocation methodologies seek to align the assignment of transmission costs with the distribution of transmission benefits among different stakeholder groups. This benefit-based approach requires sophisticated analysis of how transmission investments affect electricity prices, reliability metrics, environmental outcomes, and economic development across different geographic regions and customer classes (Telles, Macedo, & Franco, 2022). The development of quantitative methodologies for measuring transmission benefits represents a significant advancement in regulatory economics, enabling more precise and equitable cost allocation decisions.

**Table 4: Transmission Benefit Categories and Measurement Approaches**

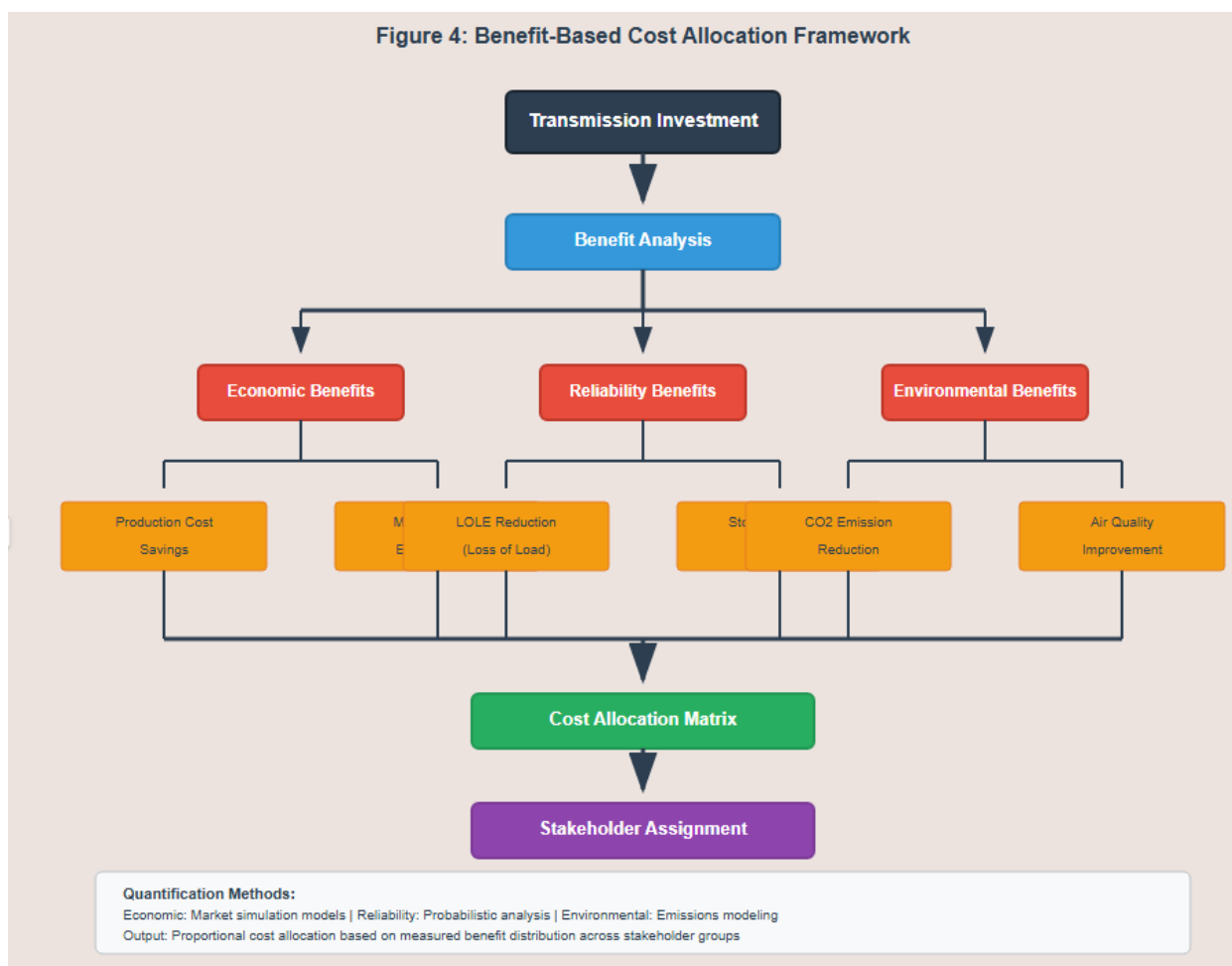
Benefit Category	Measurement Methodology	Primary Beneficiaries	Quantification Challenges
<b>Production savings</b>	cost Market simulation models	All consumers	Renewable output uncertainty
<b>Reliability improvements</b>	Loss of load probability analysis	Load-serving entities	Extreme event probability
<b>Renewable integration</b>	Capacity credit analysis	Clean energy policies	Technology cost trajectories
<b>Economic development</b>	Regional economic models	Local communities	Indirect effect attribution
<b>Environmental benefits</b>	Emissions reduction analysis	Society broadly	Social cost monetization

Source: Adapted from Hogan (2018) and Mays & Macey (2024)

Uncertainty in transmission benefit estimation presents significant challenges for cost allocation methodologies, particularly when transmission investments provide benefits that may not fully manifest for many years after project completion. Advanced cost allocation approaches increasingly incorporate probabilistic analysis that accounts for uncertainty in future system conditions and benefit realization (Shu & Mays, 2024). These probabilistic approaches enable regulators to develop cost allocation decisions that are robust across a range of potential future scenarios rather than being dependent on single-point forecasts that may prove inaccurate.

The temporal dimension of transmission benefits creates additional complexity for cost allocation decisions, as the benefits of transmission investments may change substantially over the operational lifetime of the facilities. Long-term transmission planning studies demonstrate that transmission projects initially justified for reliability purposes may subsequently provide substantial economic and environmental benefits as electricity markets and generation mixes evolve (Sun, Xu, & Hobbs, 2025). This temporal evolution of benefits suggests that cost allocation methodologies should incorporate mechanisms for adjusting cost assignments as actual benefits become observable over time.



**Figure 4: Benefit-Based Cost Allocation Framework**

Inter-regional cost allocation represents one of the most challenging aspects of modern transmission planning, particularly for projects that provide benefits across multiple utility service territories and regulatory jurisdictions. The development of regional transmission organizations has facilitated some coordination of inter-regional planning processes, but significant challenges remain in developing cost allocation methodologies that are perceived as fair by all participating regions (Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, 2024). Recent regulatory initiatives have sought to establish principles for inter-regional cost allocation that balance the need for efficient transmission investment incentives with concerns about equitable treatment of different regions.

## 6. Technological Innovations and Smart Grid Integration

The integration of advanced technologies into transmission planning and operation processes has created new opportunities for optimizing grid performance while reducing infrastructure costs. Smart grid technologies enable more sophisticated monitoring and control of transmission systems, providing planners with enhanced visibility into system conditions and enabling more precise assessment of transmission infrastructure requirements (Wong, Bhattacharya, & Fuller, 2024). These technological capabilities support the development of more targeted and cost-effective transmission investment strategies.

Advanced sensor technologies and real-time monitoring systems enable transmission operators to optimize the utilization of existing infrastructure through dynamic rating systems that adjust transmission capacity limits based on actual environmental conditions. Dynamic line rating technologies can increase effective transmission capacity by 15-25 percent under favorable weather conditions, potentially deferring the need for

new transmission construction in some applications (Dhamala & Ghassemi, 2024). The integration of weather forecasting systems with transmission planning processes enables planners to better predict and prepare for capacity limitations during extreme weather events.

**Table 5: Smart Grid Technology Applications in Transmission Planning**

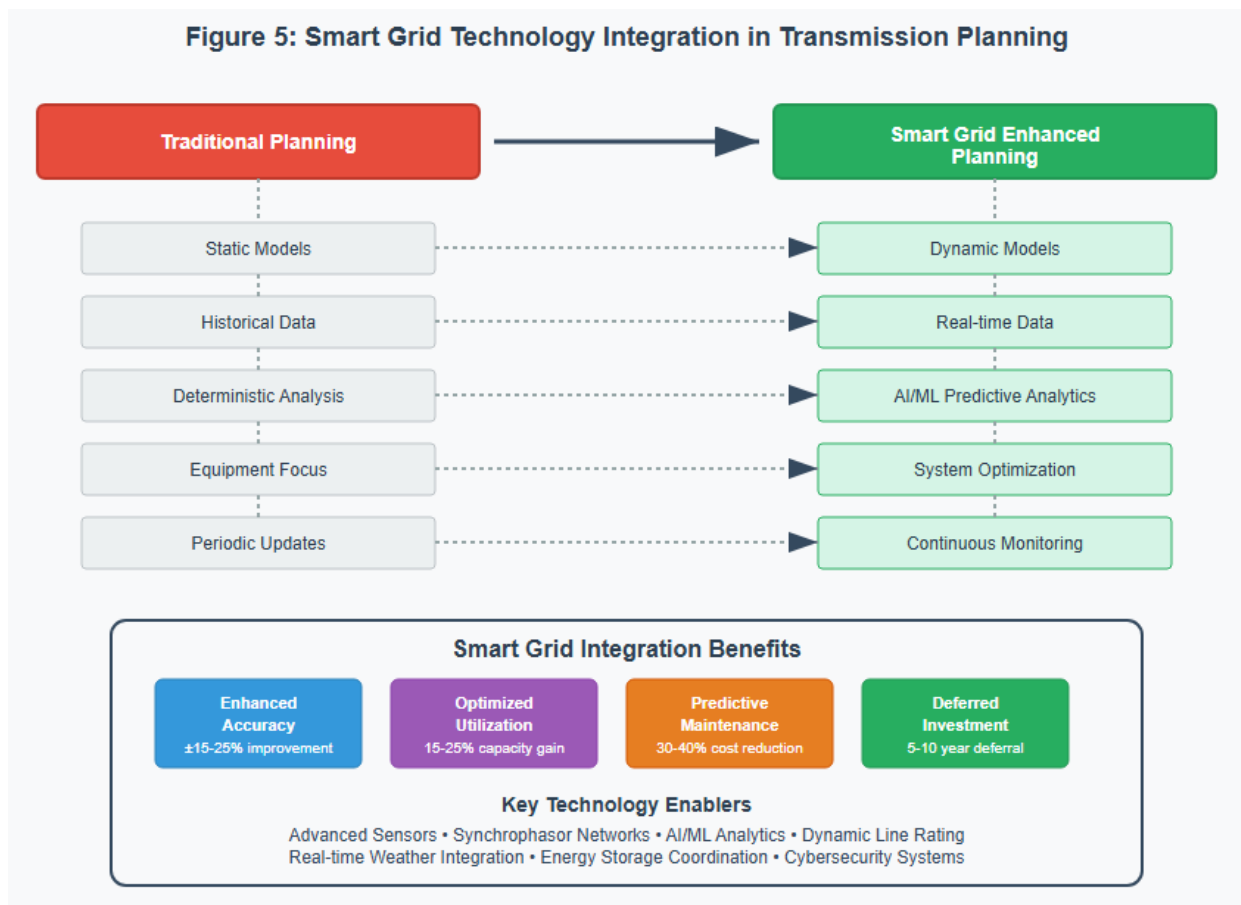
Technology Category	Application	Planning Benefits	Implementation Challenges
<b>Dynamic line rating</b>	Real-time capacity optimization	Deferred investment, enhanced utilization	Weather data integration
<b>Advanced sensors</b>	Condition monitoring	Predictive reliability	Data management systems
<b>Synchrophasor networks</b>	Wide-area monitoring	Enhanced situational awareness	Communication infrastructure
<b>Energy storage integration</b>	Grid services provision	Transmission flexibility	Technology cost, siting
<b>Artificial intelligence</b>	Predictive analytics	Improved planning accuracy	Algorithm validation

Source: Compiled from Dhamala & Ghassemi (2024) and smart grid industry reports

Artificial intelligence and machine learning technologies are increasingly being applied to transmission planning processes to improve the accuracy of demand forecasting, renewable energy output prediction, and equipment failure prediction (Rastgou, 2024). These advanced analytics capabilities enable planners to develop more sophisticated models of system behavior under various operating conditions, supporting more informed transmission investment decisions. The integration of artificial intelligence into planning processes also enables the analysis of much larger datasets than traditional planning approaches could accommodate, facilitating more comprehensive consideration of system uncertainties and operational scenarios.

Energy storage technologies present both opportunities and challenges for transmission planners, as storage can potentially substitute for transmission in certain applications while requiring transmission support in others. Grid-scale battery storage systems can provide many of the same services as transmission infrastructure, including voltage support, frequency regulation, and congestion relief, but typically at different cost and performance characteristics (Mancarella, Billimoria, & Poudineh, 2020). The optimal coordination of transmission and storage investments requires sophisticated planning tools that can evaluate the complementary and substitutable relationships between these different infrastructure types.

Research Through Innovation

**Figure 5: Smart Grid Technology Integration in Transmission Planning**

Cybersecurity

considerations have become increasingly important in transmission planning as electricity systems become more interconnected and dependent on digital communication systems. The integration of smart grid technologies creates new potential vulnerabilities that must be considered in transmission infrastructure design and operation (Wong, Bhattacharya, & Fuller, 2024). Transmission planners must balance the benefits of enhanced connectivity and automation against the potential risks of cyber attacks that could compromise system operation or data integrity.

## 7. Regulatory Framework Development and Policy Implications

Recent developments in federal energy policy have significantly influenced the direction of transmission planning and cost allocation practices across the United States. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's Order No. 1000 and subsequent regulatory initiatives have established new requirements for regional transmission planning processes and cost allocation methodologies, emphasizing the need for transparency, stakeholder participation, and economic efficiency in transmission investment decisions (Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, 2024).

State-level policy initiatives, particularly renewable portfolio standards and clean energy goals, have created additional drivers for transmission infrastructure development while complicating cost allocation considerations. States with aggressive renewable energy targets often require substantial transmission investments to access remote renewable resources, but the benefits of these investments may extend beyond state boundaries, creating challenging questions about appropriate cost allocation among different jurisdictions (U.S. Department of Energy, 2024). The coordination of state and federal policy objectives represents an ongoing challenge for transmission planners and regulators.

Environmental justice considerations have become increasingly prominent in transmission planning processes, reflecting growing recognition that infrastructure development can have disproportionate impacts on different communities. The siting of transmission infrastructure in rural and historically disadvantaged communities raises important questions about equitable distribution of infrastructure burdens and benefits (Mays & Macey, 2024). Recent policy initiatives have sought to incorporate environmental justice considerations into transmission planning processes through enhanced community engagement requirements and consideration of cumulative environmental impacts.

The development of clean energy infrastructure tax incentives and financing mechanisms has created new economic drivers for transmission investment while introducing additional complexity into cost allocation decisions. Federal tax credits for transmission infrastructure that supports renewable energy development can significantly reduce project costs, but the distribution of these benefits among different stakeholder groups depends on the specific ownership and financing structures employed (U.S. Department of Energy, 2024). The interaction between federal tax policy and state-level cost allocation decisions represents an evolving area of regulatory coordination.

## 8. Challenges and Future Directions

Despite significant advances in transmission planning methodologies and cost allocation approaches, substantial challenges remain in developing transmission infrastructure adequate to support the nation's clean energy transition goals. The long lead times required for transmission project development, often extending 7-15 years from initial planning to commercial operation, create particular challenges for adapting to rapidly evolving technology and policy landscapes (Ova, Dogan, & Demirbas, 2024). These extended development timelines necessitate planning approaches that can accommodate substantial uncertainty about future system conditions and technology performance.

Inter-regional coordination represents perhaps the most significant ongoing challenge for transmission planning, as the benefits of large-scale transmission projects often extend across multiple planning regions while the costs and risks may be concentrated in specific areas. The development of effective mechanisms for inter-regional cost sharing requires resolution of complex technical, economic, and political issues that have proven resistant to simple regulatory solutions (Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, 2024). Recent initiatives to enhance inter-regional planning coordination show promise but require sustained commitment from all participating entities to achieve their full potential.

The integration of emerging technologies, including advanced energy storage systems, electric vehicle charging infrastructure, and distributed energy resources, creates new requirements for transmission planning flexibility and adaptability. Traditional transmission planning approaches, which typically assume relatively static patterns of electricity demand and generation, must evolve to accommodate the dynamic and uncertain nature of these emerging technologies (Chen, Wang, Liu, & Zhang, 2023). The development of planning methodologies that can effectively incorporate these uncertainties while maintaining economic efficiency represents an important area for future research and development.

Climate change adaptation represents an emerging challenge that will require substantial evolution of transmission planning practices over the coming decades. As climate patterns continue to evolve, transmission planners must develop approaches for adapting infrastructure to changing environmental conditions while maintaining cost-effectiveness and reliability (Lu & Li, 2024). The integration of climate projection data into transmission planning processes requires substantial advances in climate science, engineering practice, and economic analysis methodologies.

## 9. Conclusion

The transformation of U.S. transmission planning and cost allocation practices reflects the broader evolution of the electricity sector toward a more sustainable, resilient, and economically efficient system. Contemporary planning approaches increasingly recognize the multifunctional nature of transmission infrastructure and the need for sophisticated methodologies that can accommodate uncertainty, optimize multiple objectives, and ensure equitable distribution of costs and benefits among diverse stakeholder groups.

The integration of renewable energy sources, climate resilience considerations, and advanced technologies has fundamentally altered the requirements and capabilities of transmission planning processes. These changes have created opportunities for developing more effective and efficient transmission infrastructure while introducing new challenges for coordination, cost allocation, and stakeholder engagement. The success of future transmission development efforts will depend substantially on the continued evolution of planning methodologies, regulatory frameworks, and stakeholder coordination mechanisms.

The evidence presented in this analysis suggests that while significant progress has been made in advancing transmission planning and cost allocation practices, substantial additional work remains to fully realize the potential benefits of grid modernization. The development of more sophisticated planning tools, enhanced inter-regional coordination mechanisms, and innovative financing approaches will be essential for supporting the nation's clean energy transition goals while maintaining system reliability and economic efficiency.

Future research priorities should focus on developing planning methodologies that can better accommodate the uncertainty and variability associated with renewable energy integration, climate change adaptation, and emerging technology deployment. The advancement of quantitative methodologies for measuring and allocating transmission benefits represents another critical area for continued development, particularly in the context of inter-regional projects that provide benefits across multiple jurisdictions.

The transformation of the U.S. electricity grid represents one of the most significant infrastructure challenges of our time, requiring sustained commitment from policymakers, regulators, industry stakeholders, and the research community. The continued evolution of transmission planning and cost allocation practices will be essential for ensuring that this transformation achieves its objectives of enhancing sustainability, resilience, and economic efficiency while maintaining equitable treatment of all stakeholder groups.

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