

## Transmission Initiatives Prominent in Stimulus Package; Other Opportunities Also Loom to Press Case for Transmission

The \$819 billion economic stimulus package passed by the House of Representatives on Jan. 28 (with Senate action expected soon) strongly supports strengthening the Nation's transmission infrastructure. Following his inauguration, President Obama had announced that he wants more than 3,000 miles of electric transmission built in the near term, as part of the economic recovery plan. WIRES President Will Kaul and WIRES members are expressing support for that plan to the new President's advisors and leading members of Congress.

"The President has sent a powerful signal about the central importance of the transmission system to our clean energy future – and we stand ready to provide his Administration with technical support in this undertaking," stated Kaul.

In his inaugural address, President Obama put innovative energy policy – including improvements to the transmission grid – high on his priority list, saying:

***"We will build the roads and bridges, the electric grids and digital lines that feed our commerce and bind us together...We will harness the sun and the winds and the soil to fuel our cars and run our factories...All this we can do. All this we will do."***

In response to the President, the House bill (H.R. 1) would provide federal funding and credit support for transmission and "smart grid" technology in excess of \$11 billion. The Senate is expected to vote on a companion bill the first week of February. But the precise path remains unclear. "So far, it is difficult to see how major transmission expansion can be done in 12-24 months without a reassessment of how transmission is regulated," said Jim Hoecker, Counsel to WIRES and former FERC chairman. "Transmission regulation is unnecessarily complicated and protracted. But I think we can address such challenges at no cost to the environment. Building 3,000 miles of lines is only a start."

Economic stimulus legislation is not the only, or even the primary, way that Washington will try to change transmission legislation this year, however. WIRES will press its case for a more modern and robust electric transmission system in the context of a widely-anticipated energy bill that will include a national renewable portfolio standard and in climate change legislation, which will promote cleaner energy resources. WIRES will be at the forefront of those debates – working, among other things, to eliminate the barriers that today's extended regulatory time frames present to modernizing the transmission network in the interest of developing cleaner resources, ensuring service reliability, and protecting national security.