

**Blue Green Canada submission on *Powering Canada Strong:*
*A National Strategy for an Electrified Canadian Economy***

Blue Green Canada is a coalition of labour unions and environmental and civil society organizations working together to develop practical solutions that create and maintain good jobs, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, strengthen Canadian industry, and help workers and communities thrive through the transition to a low-carbon economy.

Our 2025-2028 Strategic Plan commits Blue Green Canada to integrating worker and labour-supported solutions into industrial decarbonization, expanding Buy Clean policies that support low-carbon Canadian-made materials in public infrastructure, advancing a green industrial strategy that creates and maintains good jobs, and supporting workers and communities affected by sectoral transitions and economic disruption.

An important opportunity for Canada

Blue Green Canada welcomes the federal government's recognition that affordable, reliable and increasingly low-carbon electricity will be essential to Canada's economic future. Canada will need significantly more electricity in the decades ahead as transportation, buildings and industries electrify and new demand comes from manufacturing, critical minerals, data centres and population growth. Meeting this demand will require major investments in generation, transmission, distribution, storage and grid modernization.

Powering Canada Strong: A National Strategy for an Electrified Canadian Economy (hereafter referred to as “the Strategy”) recognizes the scale of this challenge, calling for an electricity system capable of delivering approximately twice as much power by 2050 while supporting affordability, reliability, economic growth, and emissions reductions. It also recognizes domestic manufacturing, workforce development and greater regional coordination as important components of that effort. Blue Green Canada supports that ambition.

The current economic and political circumstances facing Canada, however, make meeting future domestic electricity demand even more important. Since the Strategy was released, Canada's trade relationship with the United States has deteriorated sharply. On August 22nd, the United States imposed 50 per cent tariffs on \$27.6 billion of Canadian goods. Canada has responded with matching counter-tariffs that took effect September 8th, while workers and employers in steel, aluminum, the auto sector, and other trade-exposed industries continue to face considerable uncertainty.

This reinforces the need to think about the Strategy as part of a broader effort to strengthen Canada's economic security and sovereignty. Canada cannot control decisions made by the Trump administration, but we can make deliberate choices about the kind of economy we build here. Electricity infrastructure is one of the areas where governments can make investments that strengthen Canadian industry, create demand for Canadian products, support workers, and build stronger economic connections between provinces and regions.

If done well, the electricity build-out can help Canada respond to the trade conflict by making our industries more competitive and less vulnerable to increasingly unpredictable external shocks. It can help to create a large and predictable domestic market for Canadian steel,

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aluminum and manufactured components. Greater electricity cooperation between provinces and territories can improve reliability, open opportunities for industrial development and strengthen the economic ties that connect different parts of the country.

The objective should not simply be to build more electricity infrastructure, it should be to use that investment to build a stronger, more resilient, and more united Canadian economy.

Success should therefore not be measured only by megawatts added, kilometres of transmission constructed, private investment attracted or projects approved. We should also measure the quality of jobs created, the amount of Canadian content used, the strength of domestic supply chains, the participation of workers and communities in major decisions, emissions reductions, and the lasting economic benefits delivered to the regions where projects are built.

Put workers and unions at the centre of implementation

Federal implementation should give the *Sustainable Jobs Partnership Council* a meaningful role and establish ongoing coordination with the proposed *Energy and Electricity Workforce Alliance*. That coordination should connect electricity planning, industrial policy, and workforce development rather than create another disconnected advisory process.

Workers should not be treated simply as a labour supply problem to be solved after decisions have already been made about what will be built and where. Workers and their unions have direct experience with occupational requirements, apprenticeship systems, workplace safety, technological change, job quality, and the impacts economic transitions have on workplaces and communities. That knowledge should inform project and workforce planning from the beginning.

The Strategy correctly recognizes that workforce capacity will be essential to delivering this build-out. It states that Canada's electricity sector already employs more than 110,000 people and will require tens of thousands of additional workers in the years ahead. The Strategy also identifies skilled labour shortages as one of the major constraints facing the sector. *The Canadian Sustainable Jobs Act* provides an important framework for responding to that challenge. Its emphasis on decent work, social dialogue, inclusion, and regional fairness should guide implementation of the Electricity Strategy.

Regional workforce planning should bring governments, utilities, unions, employers, training institutions, Indigenous rightsholders, and communities together to identify future occupational needs and connect them to planned projects. The goal should be a workforce strategy that connects recruitment, training, apprenticeship, hiring and long-term employment to an identifiable channel of infrastructure and industrial investment. The federal government should also expand union-based training and apprenticeship capacity through the *Sustainable Jobs Training Fund* and the *Union Training and Innovation Program*, focused on recognized credentials and transferable skills.

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Make good jobs part of the return on public investment

The federal government is already committing substantial public resources to the electricity system through investment tax credits, the *Canada Infrastructure Bank*, the *Canada Growth Fund* and targeted electricity and infrastructure programs. Public investment at this scale should deliver clear public benefits, including good jobs. For Blue Green Canada, job creation cannot be measured only by head counts. Good jobs provide fair wages and benefits, safe working conditions, opportunities for training and advancement, and reasonable employment security. Workers must also have the right to organize and bargain collectively, and apprentices need meaningful opportunities to complete their training and move into careers.

Federal support for major electricity projects should therefore be linked, where appropriate, to labour standards and workforce commitments. Project labour agreements can help establish clear wage and benefit standards, support apprenticeship opportunities and provide stable labour relations over the life of large infrastructure projects. Similarly, community benefit agreements can ensure that major investments produce employment, training and procurement opportunities in communities affected by development. Both approaches should become part of the federal government's broader consideration of how it finances, supports and approves major projects. This is particularly important when governments are asking Canadians to support very large public investments. Canadians should all be able to see a clear connection between that investment and the benefits being created.

Use the electricity build-out to strengthen Canadian industry

The expansion of Canada's electricity system will require enormous quantities of industrial materials and manufactured equipment. The Strategy itself identifies transformers, cables, batteries, switchgear, generators, control panels, semiconductors, digital systems, and other specialized technologies among the components that Canada will need.

It also identifies an important vulnerability. Canada relies substantially on imported electrical equipment. The United States is its largest foreign source across many equipment categories, although Canada also procures transformers and other grid components from suppliers in countries including South Korea, China, Mexico and several European economies. At the same time, constrained global manufacturing capacity, particularly for transformers and switchgear, has increased procurement costs and extended delivery times, in some cases to several years. The current trade dispute makes reducing this vulnerability even more important.

Canada does not need to manufacture every component of its electricity system domestically. We should, however, be much more deliberate about identifying the products and industries where Canada already has an advantage, where our dependence on imports creates unacceptable economic risks and where long-term public investment could reasonably support additional Canadian production, and Canadian jobs.

This is where the Strategy should connect directly with a broader Canadian industrial strategy. Public infrastructure spending represents enormous purchasing power, and governments should use it strategically to strengthen domestic manufacturing and maintain and create good jobs.

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Federal support for electricity projects should use Buy Clean procurement, domestic-content incentives, and coordinated public purchasing to increase the use of Canadian-made components and low-carbon materials, while encouraging provincial governments, Crown utilities, and other recipients of federal funding to pursue similar objectives.

Public procurement can support Canadian manufacturers that produce materials with lower embodied carbon while giving those companies a predictable domestic market for their products. With Canadian steel and aluminum producers facing intense international competition and increasing trade barriers, infrastructure spending should help sustain and expand Canadian industrial capacity rather than unnecessarily increasing our dependence on imported products.

The Strategy should therefore lead to a concrete electricity supply-chain and industrial development plan that identifies Canadian manufacturing capacity, critical supply-chain gaps, areas of high import dependence, opportunities for new domestic production, and the workforce required to support that expansion. Federal investment and procurement decisions can then be used strategically to help build that capacity.

Connect electrification to industrial decarbonization and competitiveness

For many Canadian industries, access to abundant, affordable, and low-carbon electricity will be essential to reducing emissions while maintaining production and employment in Canada. This is particularly important for industries exposed to international competition, including steel, aluminum, mining, minerals processing and smelting, forestry, and manufacturing.

These industries face pressure to reduce emissions while competing against producers operating under very different labour, energy, and environmental standards. The current trade conflict adds another layer of uncertainty. Electricity policy cannot solve all those problems, but reliable and competitively priced electricity can help Canadian facilities invest, modernize, and remain productive.

Algoma Steel's shift to electric arc furnace steelmaking illustrates why electricity planning and industrial decarbonization must proceed together. Concerns about grid reliability around the transition show that major decarbonization projects depend on reliable electricity keeping pace with new industrial loads.

The federal government should therefore align the Strategy with Buy Clean procurement, investment incentives and sector-specific industrial decarbonization strategies. Where public resources help companies modernize, decarbonize or expand production, governments should seek commitments related to employment, domestic production, and emissions reductions. The objective should be to ensure that climate policy strengthens Canadian industry rather than shifting jobs, production, and emissions elsewhere.

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Use national investment to strengthen regions and communities

Different regions bring different resources, industrial strengths and workforce expertise to this effort. Greater coordination between provincial and territorial electricity systems can improve reliability and potentially give regions access to larger markets for their electricity. At the same time, electricity investment can support new manufacturing, resource processing, and industrial development in communities across the country.

The Strategy should respect provincial jurisdiction and regional differences, but that should not prevent governments from looking for opportunities where greater coordination benefits everyone. At a time when Canada's traditional north-south economic relationship is under significant strain, stronger east-west economic relationships should be part of our response.

This is not simply about constructing additional interprovincial transmission. It is about using national investment to create complementary economic opportunities across Canada and ensuring that workers in different regions see themselves as participants in a shared project.

Electricity investments can also form part of the response for communities facing industrial restructuring, layoffs or other economic disruption. Workers affected by these changes may require income support, career counselling, recognition of existing skills, retraining or access to new employment before existing jobs disappear. Communities may require economic diversification, infrastructure investment and deliberate efforts to attract replacement industries.

Not every electricity or manufacturing project can or should be in a transition-vulnerable community, but regional economic impacts should be part of federal planning. The *Sustainable Jobs Partnership Council* could play an important role in identifying these challenges and advising governments on where electricity and industrial investments could create durable new economic opportunities.

Ensure communities benefit from major investments

Federal funding, financing and contribution agreements for major electricity projects should, where appropriate, establish clear expectations for measurable community benefits. Large electricity projects can provide significant benefits to surrounding communities, but they can also create pressures on housing, transportation, public services, and local infrastructure. Communities should have a meaningful role in project planning and a clear understanding of the benefits they can expect from major development.

Community benefit agreements and similar approaches can help connect infrastructure investment to local employment, apprenticeship, training and procurement opportunities. They can also provide a framework for addressing broader community needs connected to development.

The objective should not be to impose a single model on every project. Different regions and communities will have different circumstances. There should, however, be a clear expectation

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that major projects supported with public resources will produce identifiable and measurable benefits for the communities affected by them.

Respect Indigenous rights and support Indigenous participation

The electricity build-out will intersect with Indigenous rights, lands, communities and economic priorities across Canada. Federal implementation must respect Indigenous rights, title, and the duty to consult and accommodate, and Indigenous governments and rightsholders should be involved early enough in project planning for their participation to have real meaning.

The federal government should support opportunities for Indigenous ownership and equity participation where communities choose those approaches. Employment, apprenticeship, procurement and training opportunities can provide important benefits, but Indigenous participation cannot be reduced to employment targets. Indigenous governments and communities must be able to define their own priorities and participate meaningfully in decisions affecting their lands, rights, and economic futures. Efforts to accelerate approvals should not come at the expense of those rights or meaningful consultation.

Maintain affordability while making long-term investments

Affordability is rightly one of the central themes of the Strategy. Canada needs significant new investment in electricity infrastructure, but the costs and benefits of that investment will extend over several generations.

Federal financing should help spread the cost of long-lived infrastructure fairly over time while protecting low-income households from disproportionate increases. Energy efficiency, building retrofits and demand-side measures should remain important parts of the Strategy because reducing unnecessary energy use can lower household bills and reduce the need for some additional infrastructure.

Affordability also matters to Canadian industry. Competitive electricity prices can help maintain manufacturing and attract investment in cleaner production. At the same time, governments and regulators must ensure that very large new industrial loads do not shift unreasonable costs onto households or undermine system reliability.

From strategy to implementation

The Strategy has identified many of the right areas for action, including building electricity infrastructure, financing, regional integration, regulatory reform, domestic manufacturing, workforce development, and northern energy systems. The next step should be to bring these pieces together through a clear implementation framework.

For Blue Green Canada, that framework should explain how federal electricity investments will advance economic security, climate goals, industrial development, workforce planning, and regional economic benefits together. It should establish meaningful roles for workers and unions, Indigenous governments, and communities alongside governments, utilities and industry.

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It should also make much clearer connections between the Strategy, the Sustainable Jobs Act, Buy Clean procurement, federal industrial strategy, and the government's response to growing trade uncertainty.

Finally, the Strategy must include transparent evaluations on how this historic level of investments are performing. Canadians deserve to know, is the Strategy working? Is it,

- producing good, durable employment and apprenticeship opportunities?
- increasing Canadian manufacturing and procurement?
- reducing greenhouse gas emissions?
- improving electricity reliability and affordability?
- generating meaningful regional and community benefits?
- supporting workers affected by industrial change?
- and respecting Indigenous rights while creating opportunities for Indigenous participation and ownership?

Conclusion

Canada needs to build significantly more electricity infrastructure, and it needs to begin that work now. Blue Green Canada supports the federal government's effort to develop a national approach that meets growing electricity demand while advancing affordability, economic competitiveness, and climate action.

Current circumstances make this opportunity even more important. The escalating trade conflict with the United States has exposed the risks of depending too heavily on external markets and supply chains. Retaliation and temporary support for industries affected by tariffs are not enough. Canada also needs to strengthen its ability to make things, build things, and trade within provinces and territories.

Canada can build infrastructure that connects regions, strengthens domestic supply chains, supports Canadian steel, aluminum and manufacturing, and creates good, unionized jobs. It can also provide industry with reliable and affordable electricity. Public investment should meet clear expectations for job quality and community benefits.

Procurement should strengthen Canadian industry and real jobs. Climate and industrial policy should work together to support workers, communities and economic resilience.