



Energy Policy, Regulation, Infrastructure Policy

Huge need for investment in *electricity grid development*

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At a glance

- Grid development is hugely important in the energy supply sector, but is unfortunately often neglected.
- The need for investment is huge and time is of the essence.
- The National Council has the opportunity to set an exclamation mark with the "Netzexpress".

As everywhere in life, there are compulsory and optional tasks in politics. And like everywhere else, the compulsory tasks tend to be performed with less enthusiasm than the optional tasks. Sometimes they are even neglected. When it comes to our future energy supply, grid development is certainly one of these unloved compulsory tasks. But without efficient electricity grids, the best, most sustainable and most modern production is of no use to us. And without strong electricity grids, we also lack the connection to Europe that we rely on, especially in the winter months, because Switzerland is dependent on electricity imports.

Grid expansion: lengthy and expensive

There are two major challenges when it comes to grid development: Modernization and decentralization. Modernization primarily concerns the existing extra-high voltage lines, i.e. the electricity highways, so to speak. More than 60 percent of the transmission grid - specifically the electricity pylons and conductor cables - are now between 50 and 80 years old. These installations have a service life of around 80 years. A large part of the transmission grid will therefore have to be replaced in the coming years and decades. Decentralization, on the other hand, mainly affects the distribution grid. As renewables are expanded, the local, decentralized power demand on the distribution grids is increasing massively.

Both challenges share two "unpleasant truths": Grid development takes a long time and will be very expensive. Firstly, the costs: a study commissioned by the SFOE concludes that the maintenance and modernization of the distribution grid could cost up to 45 billion Swiss francs by 2050. Decentralization could cost an additional CHF 39 billion. This brings the total to a staggering CHF 84 billion. Then there are the lengthy and complex procedures. Grid projects in the transmission grid often take 15 years or more from project planning to implementation. The situation is no better for the distribution grid. Here, too, it takes too long. The search for locations for transformer stations in particular is always a challenge.

Grid express: necessary but not yet sufficient

The Federal Council and parliament have recognized the need for action. With the so-called "Netzexpress" bill, they want to remedy the situation in the transmission grid in particular. The bill, which will be discussed in the National Council on Wednesday, provides for important steps such as the waiver of a sectoral plan procedure for an equivalent line replacement in the transmission grid or the special treatment of grid systems in the distribution grid outside the construction zone. These steps are necessary, but far from sufficient as far as the distribution grid is concerned. In order to enable cost-effective and rapid grid development, further hurdles need to be removed and procedures speeded up, especially for the distribution grid.



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