



BRIEF

Washington clean energy proposal would phase out coal by 2025

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Dive Brief:

- Democratic Washington Gov. Jay Inslee on Monday released a new clean energy proposal that would reduce the state's greenhouse gas emissions 25% below 1990 levels by 2035, eliminating over 80 million metric tons of carbon.
- The package of legislation addresses five policy goals: 100% clean energy by 2045, transitioning to electric transportation, adding a clean fuel standard, constructing energy efficient buildings and eliminating hydrofluorocarbon. The 100% clean energy goal will require completely phasing out coal-fired generation by 2025 and eliminating all fossil fuels by 2045.
- The proposed measures come after a carbon tax ballot initiative was rejected by Washington voters for a third time in November. However, Inslee said he is confident these new policies have enough economic benefits to pass through the legislature.

Dive Insight:

With the Trump Administration exiting the Paris Climate Agreement and rolling back domestic climate regulations, the focus has turned to cities and states to address climate change.

Washington state is looking to be a leader of that movement, but the path is not always a direct one.

"The people decided not to embrace plan A," Inslee conceded, referring to the carbon tax measure at a press conference following the announcement. "But there's about four other plans behind that ready to go. And this plan is ready to go. And it can pass this year."

Currently, coal makes up 13.4% of the state's generation and natural gas makes up 10.8%. The majority of the state's electric generation comes from hydroelectric power, which currently makes up 67.7% of its power mix.

While environmental concerns are one reason to eliminate coal as a fuel, the resource has been losing economic traction as well. Last week, Northwestern utility PacifiCorp announced the majority of its coal plants are more expensive than alternative fuel options, including renewables.

However, Inslee said the largest driver behind these policies is necessity, citing a recent joint study released by Stanford University and the University of Washington that found Earth's largest extinction came from global warming and oxygen loss 250 million years ago.

"We were given cranial capacity for a reason," he said. "We're not going to go down that route."

The proposal addresses the three biggest drivers of carbon emissions in the state: transportation, electricity and buildings.

The clean transportation portion of the proposal includes an electric vehicle (EV) sales tax incentive, utility authority to build EV charging stations, requiring new commercial buildings to have chargers and making Washington a zero emissions vehicle

state, like California, along with a number of electric transportation infrastructure investments.

There is also a clean fuel standard portion of the legislation that will require fuel providers to cut the carbon intensity of fuels 10% by 2028 and 20% by 2030, through use of alternative fuels.

Transportation is the biggest producer of carbon emissions in the state, making those policies central to the reduction goal.

"This will be the steepest and swiftest reduction of greenhouse gas we have ever seen," said Inslee. "And won't it be great when these laws come into being, when we can honestly say, which we will be able to do, 'Washington state is going to have the cleanest transportation system,' because we will be using totally clean electricity."

"[B]uildings are the most rapidly growing source of greenhouse gas emissions" in Washington, with emissions increasing 50% since 1990, largely due to population growth, according to the policy brief outlining the clean energy proposal. Clean building legislation aims to build "ultra-efficient" new buildings and reduce energy used by newly constructed buildings 70% by 2030.

Finally, the plan calls for eliminating hydrofluorocarbons, a "superpollutant" found in aerosols, refrigerators, heat pumps and air conditioners.

Inslee noted these steps are "not a future fantasy" but rather concrete, manageable goals for the state.

While the legislative package would result in significant emission reductions, it would not attain the levels envisioned in the Paris agreement, which calls for an 80% reduction in emissions from 2005 levels by 2050.

"I'm not ruling out anything else in the next decade or so," he said, responding to a question about what future steps the state may take to meet the terms of that agreement. "This is what we're doing today."

The legislature will convene in January and run through April.

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