



New Brunswickers share their view  
on the opportunities and barriers we  
face in a clean energy transition

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# WHAT WE HEARD



**Acknowledgements** .....2

**Executive Summary** .....2

    Introduction .....2

    What We Heard Summary.....3

    Recommendations .....4

    What’s Next? .....7

## Acknowledgements

Please join us in a moment of self-reflection as we acknowledge the land that this project was carried out on as the ancestral and unceded territory of the Wolastoqey, Mi'kmaq, and Peskotomuhkati (Passamaquoddy) Nations. This area where we listened to and recorded hundreds of voices on is protected by the Peace and Friendship Treaties.

The project team extends its sincere gratitude to the 420 New Brunswickers who contributed their perspectives to inform this report. As energy discussions impact everyone, the inclusion and amplification of diverse voices are essential in shaping a just and effective clean energy transition.

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## Executive Summary

### Introduction

In 2022, Smart Grid Innovation Network (SGIN) launched a multi-faceted, New Brunswick-specific program to enhance knowledge and strengthen the overall understanding of clean energy, specifically electricity, in sustaining a healthy economy powered by a **cost-effective, reliable, and sustainable energy source**. This project included an Indigenous and public engagement campaign titled the “Clean Energy Transition Listening Series”, the results of which are summarized within this report.

The expected outcomes from this work were to provide a non-partisan, open perspective on how energy decisions are made in the province. This information will provide the planning activities of the utilities, department of energy, other government departments and industry a window into the perspectives of those who took part.

To strengthen the engagement efforts, SGIN has collaborated with the following organizations to connect and report on the feedback we heard during this project:

- **Clean Energy Connections Inc.**
- **North Shore Mi'kmaq Tribal Council**

- **University of New Brunswick**
- **Portfolio**

A literature review of New Brunswick related energy surveys and reports was completed to understand the scope of earlier bodies of work and expose common elements previously found. Building on the contributions of these pieces of work, we identified four themes consistent throughout that have the opportunity for improvement to support New Brunswick's clean energy transition:

- **Trust and Confidence**
- **Communication and Collaboration**
- **Workforce Attraction and Retention**
- **Clean Energy as an Economic Driver**

Over the course of 17 in-person and virtual engagement sessions, 420 respondents provided feedback on these four themes as they relate to energy in the province with the intention of moving from barriers to progress.

## What We Heard Summary

Across all sessions, conversations centered on fundamental principles of how our energy system should function. Participants consistently identified three key pillars: **reliability, affordability, and sustainability**. Concerns were raised about the affordability of clean energy for New Brunswickers, but a common theme emerged—the need to find balance between the **benefits** of clean energy with its **costs**. While reliability, affordability and sustainability remain the key pillars for energy in New Brunswick, the following themes came up again and again as issues to meeting the needs of New Brunswick when it comes to energy transition.

### 1. Communication and Collaboration

In each session, points were raised around the need for stronger Indigenous representation in energy decisions and projects. We heard the strong desire for transparent, accessible, and proactive communication about energy policies, strategies, infrastructure investments, and benefits, with clear explanations of timelines, environmental impacts, and financial implications. Respondents expressed the need for stronger Indigenous representation in energy decisions and projects, emphasizing the need for respectful dialogue and decisions that reflect long-term sustainability rather than

short-term costs. One key opportunity identified is the varying literacy levels on energy and the environment based on individual experience, highlighting an ongoing challenge to effective communication.

## **2. Trust and Confidence**

Respondents emphasized the need for greater transparency and bi-directional dialogue from government agencies, energy utilities, and regulatory bodies to build trust in future energy projects and policies. We heard the need for early and consistent community engagement, proactive education on energy literacy, and attention to combat misinformation.

## **3. Workforce Attraction and Retention**

Engagement sessions highlighted the need for stronger partnerships between government, industry, and educational institutions to communicate future job opportunities, support early youth engagement and education, and increase access to training and certification programs to offer capacity development opportunities to support the transition with a local workforce. We heard the need to look at labor policies to create a more competitive and sustainable workforce.

## **4. Clean Energy as an Economic Driver**

Respondents expressed desire for affordable and renewable energy expansion to drive economic growth, attract investment, and create local job opportunities. They called for clear policies, reduced regulatory barriers, community involvement, and strategic collaboration amongst government, industry, and Indigenous groups to ensure that energy projects, including clean energy supply and uses, deliver long-term economic benefits while supporting sustainability and local prosperity.

## **Recommendations**

This body of work recognizes the importance of the planning processes that New Brunswick has today to perform its energy decision making including the integrated resource plan for the bulk electrical systems in the province and overall provincial energy plans. The entire industry is moving from steady state planning mode to a more dynamic mode to support energy transition planning.

The bulk electrical system is a crucial component of the overall energy transition plan, enabling economic opportunities for current and future businesses to harness clean energy in their operations. It is, however, a fraction of the overall energy systems and

opportunities in the province. The participants and project team recognize that climate disaster impacts, net zero goals, and global political uncertainties necessitate enhancements to the energy decision-making processes. The recommendations below are based on input from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants, acknowledging that we are in a time of significant change that did not exist when our current operational procedures for governance of our energy systems were designed. The feedback from the participants was constructive and provided insights into our policies, workforce, and technology in ways we have never had to consider before. To achieve a resilient, affordable and sustainable energy system that leverages all-energy components, it is recognized that working differently, where it makes sense, is the right approach.

## **1. Establish an Independent Clean Energy Resilience Council**

This recommendation focuses on the establishment of a Clean Energy Resilience Council (Council) for New Brunswick that is non-partisan, enduring, responsive, coordinated, additionally transparent, and outside perspective. Establishing a permanent Council with this intention would have responsibility to engage all stakeholders – including clean energy providers, government agencies, regulatory bodies, business stakeholders, communities and Rightsholders to establish a process that maintains the current view of the clean all-energy opportunities and requirements for the province. This multi sector view would be a key input into the planning activities of the various government ministries, including the department of energy, and others effected by energy resilience. The establishment of this Council will provide input to Integrated Resource Plans (IRPs) and the dynamic and enduring Long-Term Vision and Energy Strategy developed by the province, with a periodic Clean Energy Transition Plan that outlines clear milestones between now and 2050. This will provide a structured and collaborative approach to achieving an informed, economical, resilient, and sustainable energy system for New Brunswick. The Council will have the opportunity to support these aligned plans by providing input to modernizing regulations, supporting the shaping of Indigenous-led projects, and enhancing energy literacy to support a just and inclusive transition.

## **2. Empower Indigenous Governance**

This recommendation would see First Nations provided with governance representation on entities having authority/jurisdiction over energy and resource development projects in their traditional territories. Expanding on this, First Nations are active contributors to the Clean Energy Roadmap (see recommendation #3) and bodies tasked with implementing, monitoring progress, and re-defining the roadmap.

### **3. Define and Maintain a Clean Energy Roadmap for New Brunswick**

This Clean Energy Roadmap and Pathways Study would follow national guidelines as available, and at a minimum include long term policy and legislative planning that looks to increase alignment across government, public, Rightsholders and business stakeholders. A clean energy roadmap would also guide future policy and investment decisions to facilitate growth in the provincial and regional energy sector. By clearly establishing and communicating the province's clean energy intentions — specifically outlining the affordability, health impacts, and overall benefits — a strong, fact-based foundation will be created to support informed discussions, public engagement, and decision-making. By highlighting both the costs and the environmental, social, economic, and energy provider advantages of transitioning to cleaner energy sources, the long-term value of a sustainable system can be integrated into the near- and long-term planning efforts of both public and private sectors. Aligning the province in this way will foster broader support for a collaborative clean energy transition. This ongoing initiative can be championed and enabled by the Council

### **4. Promote Energy + Economic Awareness**

This recommendation aims to enhance public awareness and understanding of this critical linkage by ensuring that individuals, businesses, and communities are well-informed about the transition to a low-carbon future. By launching a comprehensive all energy, all sector literacy campaign, the initiative would coordinate with and enhance existing work in the province and nationally and provide accessible, accurate, and practical information to help the public and government employees navigate the evolving energy landscape of both the costs and benefits of energy sustainability. This approach will empower New Brunswickers to make informed decisions, support policy advancements, and actively take part in clean energy initiatives. Through these enhancements, greater public engagement and alignment with the province's long-term economic and environmental goals will be fostered. The United Nations sustainable development Goal 7 is about ***“ensuring access to clean and affordable energy, which is key to the development of agriculture, business, communications, education, healthcare and transportation.”*** Goal 7 clearly links the development of clean energy and economic development.

### **5. Finance the build by aligning Provincial, Federal, and Private Equity Funding**

While it is generally accepted that most would welcome cleaner energy options, there is debate regarding how and who should fund the energy transition. This recommendation suggests that NB leverage national frameworks to define a holistic view of the benefits for energy providers, society and consumers to provide better clarity in the division of investment. We recommend that both traditional and non-traditional funding options be explored to maximize financial incentives from federal and other sources and that the work take a Comprehensive Economic Development approach to finding investment opportunities.

## What's Next?

Thank you to everyone who took the time and provided open dialogue and constructive comments included in this report and to the government and utility stakeholders who took the time for us to present the findings. The project team appreciated the opportunity to work with everyone involved to play our small part in supporting the province as it works toward enabling cleaner energy opportunities. We would welcome the chance to continue to work with provincial stakeholders and Rightsholders to enable these recommendations.