

High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) Transmission Systems: A Future-Proof Solution for Long-Distance Power Delivery

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Abstract

The growing global demand for electrical energy, coupled with the integration of renewable energy sources located in remote areas, has driven the need for more efficient, stable, and long-distance power transmission solutions. High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) transmission systems have emerged as a critical technology that addresses these modern energy challenges. Unlike traditional AC systems, HVDC offers reduced transmission losses, enhanced system stability, and better compatibility with renewable energy grids. This paper explores the fundamental principles, historical evolution, technological advancements, challenges, and future scope of HVDC systems. It positions HVDC as a future-proof solution capable of reshaping global electrical infrastructure by enabling long-distance, high-capacity, and environmentally sustainable power delivery.

Keywords: *HVDC Transmission, Long-Distance Power, Energy Efficiency, Renewable Integration, Grid Stability*

INTRODUCTION

The 21st-century energy landscape is undergoing rapid transformation driven by the increased adoption of renewable energy sources, rising global urbanization, and the growing global energy demand. Traditional power transmission systems based on alternating current (AC) are increasingly facing limitations in terms of efficiency, capacity, and distance coverage. AC transmission systems typically experience significant losses over long distances and are inefficient when transmitting electricity from remote renewable energy farms to densely populated urban centers. These challenges are becoming more pronounced as nations strive to integrate large-scale renewable energy projects, such as offshore wind farms and solar power plants, into their power grids.

In response to these limitations, High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) transmission systems have emerged as a promising solution. HVDC technology, first developed over a century ago, has undergone significant advancements over the decades, particularly in control systems, power electronics, and converter designs. This evolution has positioned HVDC as a future-ready, efficient, and reliable alternative to AC transmission, especially for long-distance, high-capacity power transmission. HVDC systems enable the efficient transmission of electrical energy over vast distances, including undersea and cross-border transmission lines, making them an ideal choice for integrating renewable energy resources into the grid while maintaining grid stability.

As the world continues to move towards sustainable energy solutions, HVDC systems offer a critical role in enabling the global transition to a cleaner, more efficient, and interconnected energy network. These advancements in HVDC technology hold immense potential to address the challenges associated with modern power grids, paving the way for more reliable and resilient energy infrastructure.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical Development of HVDC Systems

The concept of HVDC transmission dates back to the early 20th century when the need for efficient long-distance transmission of electrical power became apparent. The first practical applications of HVDC were seen in the 1950s, with notable projects like the Gotland HVDC link in Sweden, which marked a significant milestone in demonstrating the viability of HVDC

for long-distance power transmission. This early HVDC system used mercury-arc valves, which were a technological breakthrough at the time but had limitations in terms of efficiency and reliability.

The 1970s saw a major shift in HVDC technology with the introduction of thyristor-based converters. These devices offered improved efficiency and control, enabling HVDC systems to handle higher power levels and longer transmission distances. In the early 21st century, the development of Insulated Gate Bipolar Transistors (IGBTs) marked another leap forward, offering even better performance, greater efficiency, and the ability to handle complex control algorithms. These advancements allowed HVDC systems to become more reliable, flexible, and cost-effective, making them an increasingly attractive option for modern power networks.

Modern Research Trends

The last two decades have seen a surge in research on HVDC systems, with a focus on their integration into modern power grids, particularly in the context of renewable energy. One of the key trends in HVDC research is its role in facilitating the integration of offshore wind farms. Offshore wind farms, often located in remote areas far from major population centers, require efficient transmission systems to deliver power to the grid. HVDC is particularly suited for this task due to its ability to transmit power over long distances with minimal losses and its capability to handle high-capacity transmission lines that are necessary for large-scale wind farms.

Another area of intense research is the development of modular multilevel converters (MMCs). MMCs have revolutionized the design and performance of modern HVDC systems by providing improved voltage control, reduced harmonics, and enhanced reliability. They have become the preferred technology for high-voltage and long-distance HVDC applications, especially for projects involving offshore wind or intercontinental power transmission.

Furthermore, recent studies have highlighted the environmental benefits of HVDC systems, particularly in terms of reducing transmission corridor footprints and minimizing electromagnetic interference. As power grids continue to evolve with increasing renewable energy penetration, HVDC systems are seen as a key technology in creating more resilient and sustainable grids.

WORKING PRINCIPLE OF HVDC SYSTEMS

Basic Components

An HVDC transmission system consists of three primary components: the converter stations at both the sending and receiving ends, the transmission lines, and the control systems. At the sending end, the converter station is responsible for converting the alternating current (AC) from the power source into direct current (DC) through a process known as rectification. The DC power is then transmitted through the transmission lines to the receiving end, where it is converted back to AC (inversion) to be fed into the local power grid.

The control systems play a crucial role in maintaining the stability of the HVDC system. These systems monitor and adjust the voltage, current, and frequency at both ends of the transmission line to ensure the efficient transfer of power and to protect the system from faults or imbalances. HVDC control systems are highly sophisticated and use advanced power electronics and algorithms to maintain stable operation under various load and fault conditions.

Types of HVDC Systems

Monopolar Systems: Monopolar HVDC systems use a single conductor to carry the current, with the return path typically through the ground or sea. These systems are simpler and less expensive but may be less reliable in the event of a fault, as the entire system may be affected if the single conductor is damaged.

Bipolar Systems: Bipolar HVDC systems use two conductors, each carrying current of opposite polarity. This design offers higher reliability and capacity, as the system can continue to operate even if one of the conductors fails. Bipolar systems are often used for long-distance, high-capacity transmission, such as those used in intercontinental connections.

Back-to-Back Systems: These systems are used to connect asynchronous AC networks without the need for long transmission lines. Back-to-back HVDC systems are typically employed in situations where stability between two grids is needed, but the distance is relatively short. They provide a stable interface between AC grids that operate at different frequencies or phase angles.

ADVANTAGES OF HVDC TRANSMISSION

Efficiency over Long Distances

One of the primary advantages of HVDC transmission is its superior efficiency over long distances. Unlike AC transmission, which suffers from significant losses due to the inductive and capacitive nature of transmission lines, HVDC systems experience much lower losses, especially over distances exceeding 600 km. This makes HVDC particularly well-suited for applications like long-distance cross-border transmission and offshore wind farm connections, where AC transmission becomes technically and economically inefficient. HVDC systems are capable of transmitting large amounts of power with minimal losses, making them a preferred choice for transmitting electricity from remote renewable energy sources to urban centers.

Grid Stability and Control

HVDC systems offer unparalleled control over power flow. The use of fast-reacting power electronics in HVDC allows for the quick isolation of faults and dynamic load balancing. This capability enhances the stability of the power grid, especially during disturbances or sudden fluctuations in power demand. Unlike AC systems, where power flow is difficult to control in real time, HVDC systems can precisely regulate the direction and magnitude of power flow, allowing grid operators to respond to changing conditions quickly and efficiently. This feature is particularly valuable in integrated grids that include renewable energy sources, which can be intermittent and less predictable.

Reduced Infrastructure Costs

Although the initial cost of installing HVDC converter stations can be high, HVDC systems generally require fewer transmission lines and simpler tower designs compared to AC systems. This reduces the overall infrastructure costs, especially in areas where right-of-way for transmission lines is expensive or difficult to acquire. The smaller physical footprint of HVDC lines also reduces environmental impacts, making it a more sustainable option for long-distance power transmission.

Renewable Energy Integration

HVDC systems are particularly advantageous for integrating remote renewable energy sources into the power grid. Solar farms in deserts, offshore wind farms, and hydropower stations located in remote regions can all benefit from HVDC technology due to its ability to transmit

large amounts of power efficiently over long distances. Unlike AC transmission, which faces issues with reactive power and voltage control over long distances, HVDC systems can transmit power with minimal losses and without significant voltage fluctuations. This makes them ideal for connecting renewable energy installations to the grid, enabling the large-scale integration of clean energy into the global power infrastructure.

Table 1: Comparison between AC and HVDC Transmission Systems

Feature	AC Transmission	HVDC Transmission
Power Losses	Higher over long distances	Lower over long distances
Distance Efficiency Limit	~500-600 km	>1000 km
Synchronization Requirement	Yes	No
Control over Power Flow	Limited	Excellent
Suitability for Submarine	Limited (due to capacitance)	Ideal
Infrastructure Footprint	Larger	Smaller

Description: This table highlights the fundamental differences that make HVDC more suitable for long-distance and submarine power transmission.

CHALLENGES IN HVDC IMPLEMENTATION

High Initial Capital Cost

One of the most significant barriers to the widespread adoption of High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) transmission technology is the high initial capital investment required for the installation of converter stations. These stations, which convert alternating current (AC) to direct current (DC) and vice versa, involve complex equipment such as power electronic devices (e.g., thyristors, Insulated Gate Bipolar Transistors or IGBTs) and high-voltage transformers. The infrastructure required to build the converter stations is expensive, and it can account for a significant portion of the total cost of an HVDC system. This upfront cost can be a major deterrent, especially for regions or countries with budget constraints or where the economic benefits of HVDC are not immediately apparent.

In addition to the converter stations, the long-distance transmission lines required for HVDC systems are also costly. Although HVDC transmission lines generally require fewer towers

and are less bulky compared to AC transmission systems, the costs associated with high-voltage cabling, especially undersea cables for offshore or intercontinental transmission, are still considerable. Overcoming the challenge of these high initial costs requires careful long-term economic planning, particularly in regions with a growing demand for reliable, low-loss energy transmission.

Complex Control Systems

The operation of HVDC networks demands sophisticated control systems capable of managing voltage regulation, power modulation, and fault detection. As HVDC systems have evolved from simpler point-to-point connections to more complex multi-terminal systems, the complexity of their control strategies has increased substantially. Multi-terminal HVDC systems, which involve more than two converter stations and are designed to allow power to be routed through different paths, present challenges in terms of ensuring stability, reliability, and optimal power flow management.

Moreover, these systems require high-precision, real-time monitoring and coordination, which often necessitate advanced digital control strategies. The complexity of control algorithms increases as the network expands, particularly when dealing with issues such as load balancing, fault detection, and protection. Ensuring system stability and continuous power delivery under variable conditions requires highly adaptive and fault-tolerant control mechanisms, which are still in the developmental stage for multi-terminal HVDC systems.

Interoperability Issues

A significant challenge for HVDC systems is their interoperability with existing AC grids and other HVDC systems, especially when connecting different countries or regions. Different countries and regions often use distinct standards for power transmission, including varying voltage levels, grid frequencies, and communication protocols. This can create difficulties when trying to integrate HVDC systems into an existing infrastructure, particularly in the case of international interconnectors.

For example, when HVDC systems are used to link power grids in different regions or countries, they must be designed to handle the differences in frequency and voltage levels between the grids. Interoperability issues can lead to operational inefficiencies and increased

costs. Additionally, the integration of new HVDC systems with existing AC grids may require extensive upgrades to the grid infrastructure, which can further complicate the adoption of HVDC technologies.

Environmental and Land Use Concerns

Although HVDC transmission systems require less physical space compared to AC systems and have a smaller environmental footprint, they still present challenges in terms of land use and public perception. The installation of HVDC lines, particularly over long distances, can face opposition due to concerns about visual impact and land acquisition. Communities may resist the construction of new transmission corridors, particularly in urban or rural areas where space is limited, or where the environmental impact of construction activities could be significant.

Furthermore, while HVDC systems can transmit large amounts of power with minimal reactive losses, their construction still requires careful planning to minimize disturbances to local ecosystems, agricultural land, and wildlife habitats. Public acceptance and environmental approvals can be time-consuming processes, adding to the complexity of HVDC implementation.

APPLICATIONS OF HVDC SYSTEMS

Long-Distance Transmission

One of the most notable applications of HVDC technology is in long-distance power transmission. HVDC transmission systems are ideal for transmitting electricity over vast distances with minimal loss. For example, the Xiangjiaba–Shanghai HVDC link in China spans an impressive 2,071 kilometers and is capable of delivering 6,400 MW of power, demonstrating the effectiveness of HVDC systems in transmitting large amounts of electricity over extremely long distances. The ability to efficiently transmit power across such vast distances makes HVDC an attractive solution for connecting remote power generation sources—such as hydropower stations in remote regions or offshore wind farms—to urban centers or industrial hubs where electricity demand is high.

Undersea and Underground Cables

HVDC transmission technology is also well-suited for undersea and underground cable applications. Undersea cables, which are used for transmitting power between islands or between countries separated by bodies of water, have traditionally faced challenges when using AC transmission due to capacitive charging currents, which lead to increased losses and limitations on the amount of power that can be transmitted. HVDC, on the other hand, avoids these limitations, allowing for more efficient and higher-capacity undersea and underground power transmission.

For instance, the NordLink project, an HVDC link connecting Norway and Germany, uses an undersea cable to transmit renewable energy from Norway's hydropower-rich grid to Germany's wind-heavy grid. This project highlights the growing role of HVDC technology in facilitating international energy trade, especially between regions with varying energy profiles.

Grid Interconnectors

HVDC transmission systems are also vital for interconnecting asynchronous power grids, such as between different countries or regions that operate on different grid frequencies or have otherwise incompatible electrical systems. By using HVDC transmission, these grids can be linked without the need for synchronization, enabling better load management, improved power trading, and enhanced grid reliability. Interconnectors, such as those linking Scandinavian countries with mainland Europe or the UK with neighboring grids, allow for more efficient use of available energy resources and contribute to the stability of regional power systems.

Urban Power Supply

HVDC systems are increasingly being used for urban power supply, especially in densely populated areas where there is limited space for traditional high-voltage transmission lines. In these areas, HVDC technology allows for the construction of underground or tunnel-based transmission systems that reduce the need for wide transmission corridors. HVDC can help meet the growing power demand in urban centers without requiring extensive land acquisition or causing disruptions to local communities. This makes HVDC particularly attractive for large cities where space is at a premium.

SCOPE AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

Multi-Terminal HVDC Grids

The future of HVDC transmission lies in the development of multi-terminal HVDC grids. These grids, which involve more than two converter stations, allow for flexible power routing and provide greater redundancy. Multi-terminal HVDC systems enable power to flow through different paths, improving the overall reliability and efficiency of the transmission network. They also allow for more effective integration of renewable energy sources, particularly in regions with large-scale renewable generation facilities. However, multi-terminal HVDC systems are still in the developmental phase, and significant research is focused on developing reliable control algorithms and fault-tolerant strategies to ensure their stability and performance.

Smart Grid Integration

HVDC systems will play a crucial role in the future of smart grids. As the energy sector moves towards greater automation, real-time data analytics, and AI-based grid management systems, HVDC transmission will be at the core of these advancements. HVDC networks, when integrated with smart grid technologies, will enable dynamic control of power flows, enhanced energy efficiency, and improved grid resilience. The integration of real-time data and predictive analytics will allow for more responsive and adaptive grid management, ensuring optimal power delivery and fault prevention.

Decarbonized Energy Systems

As countries and regions move toward decarbonization, HVDC technology will be instrumental in integrating large-scale renewable energy sources into the grid. HVDC systems offer the ability to efficiently transmit renewable power from remote generation sites—such as offshore wind farms or solar power plants in deserts—to consumption centers located far away. This capability will play a critical role in achieving global emission reduction targets and facilitating the transition to a carbon-neutral energy system.

Global Power Markets

HVDC transmission systems will also contribute to the creation of a global electricity market by enabling energy-rich regions, such as the Nordic countries or parts of Africa, to connect with demand centers around the world. HVDC interconnectors will allow for the continuous

exchange of renewable power across time zones, ensuring a steady and reliable supply of electricity. This will help balance supply and demand in real-time, facilitate cross-border electricity trading, and enhance the overall stability of the global power grid.

CASE STUDIES OF PROMINENT HVDC PROJECTS

Xiangjiaba–Shanghai (China)

The Xiangjiaba–Shanghai HVDC link is one of the most impressive HVDC projects in the world. Spanning 2,071 kilometers, it connects the hydropower-rich Xiangjiaba region to the bustling metropolitan area of Shanghai, delivering 6,400 MW of power. This ± 800 kV UHVDC project demonstrates the ability of HVDC systems to efficiently transmit large amounts of power over long distances, making it an essential part of China's energy infrastructure.

North Sea Link (UK–Norway)

The North Sea Link project is a 720 km undersea HVDC connection that enables the exchange of electricity between the UK and Norway. The project, which links Norway's hydropower-based grid with the UK's wind-dominated grid, provides enhanced supply stability and helps reduce energy costs. By using HVDC technology for undersea transmission, the project avoids the capacitive charging limitations of AC cables, enabling the efficient transfer of power over long distances.

Pacific DC Intertie (USA)

One of the oldest and most well-known HVDC systems, the Pacific DC Intertie connects the Pacific Northwest to Southern California. The system has been operational for over 40 years and has played a vital role in managing seasonal power demand and ensuring the stability of the grid. The system is a crucial part of the U.S. energy infrastructure and has paved the way for future HVDC projects across the country.

Table 2: Major Global HVDC Projects

Project Name	Country	Distance (km)	Voltage Level (kV)	Capacity (MW)
Xiangjiaba–Shanghai	China	2,071	±800	6,400
North Sea Link	UK–Norway	720	±525	1,400
Pacific DC Intertie	USA	1,362	±500	3,100
INELFE (France–Spain)	France–Spain	65	±320	2,000

This table summarizes key specifications of global HVDC systems to illustrate scale, voltage ratings, and capacity.

CONCLUSION

High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) transmission systems stand as a transformative and essential technology in the landscape of modern power systems. As the world pivots toward renewable energy, urbanization, and sustainability, HVDC systems offer a crucial solution to the challenges of long-distance, high-capacity power transmission. The limitations of traditional Alternating Current (AC) transmission systems—especially in terms of efficiency, power losses, and transmission distance—are increasingly apparent as the demand for energy grows and renewable sources are tapped in more remote locations. In this context, HVDC systems present a clear and efficient alternative.

One of the defining advantages of HVDC technology is its ability to transmit power over long distances with significantly lower losses than AC systems. This feature becomes especially critical when power needs to be delivered from geographically distant and often isolated renewable energy generation sites, such as offshore wind farms or solar arrays in deserts, to urban centers with high electricity demands. HVDC also excels in underwater and underground transmission, making it an ideal technology for linking islands or countries separated by bodies of water, as demonstrated by numerous international projects like the NordLink and the Xiangjiaba–Shanghai HVDC links.

Moreover, HVDC systems offer superior controllability compared to AC systems, enabling operators to regulate power flow with high precision. This is particularly important in integrating renewable energy sources, where variability and unpredictability in generation can

lead to grid instability. HVDC's fast-reacting power electronics provide the ability to isolate faults swiftly, balance loads effectively, and improve overall grid reliability. This is crucial as electricity grids evolve into more dynamic, smart systems that require robust control mechanisms to integrate diverse and decentralized energy sources.

Another significant advantage of HVDC is its role in facilitating international grid interconnectivity. With the increasing need for cross-border electricity trade and the rise of global power markets, HVDC serves as the backbone for creating a seamless flow of electricity across national and regional boundaries. It enables asynchronous grids—grids operating at different frequencies—to connect and exchange energy efficiently, optimizing electricity supply and promoting energy security on a global scale.

While the benefits of HVDC are clear, the technology still faces challenges that need to be addressed for widespread adoption. The most notable of these challenges is the high upfront cost of HVDC converter stations, which require sophisticated technology and significant infrastructure investment. Additionally, the complexity of HVDC control systems, particularly in multi-terminal grids, can be a hurdle to its widespread use. Interoperability issues, environmental concerns, and land-use challenges also pose barriers to large-scale HVDC implementation.

However, despite these challenges, ongoing technological advancements are making HVDC systems increasingly more accessible, efficient, and cost-effective. With the continuous development of power electronics, converter designs, and control algorithms, HVDC technology is expected to become even more reliable and economically viable in the near future. Furthermore, as countries pursue decarbonization goals and transition toward a greener energy mix, HVDC will play an indispensable role in enabling the integration of large-scale renewable energy projects into the grid, ensuring a stable and sustainable energy supply.

Looking forward, HVDC systems will undoubtedly be at the heart of modern energy infrastructure. As global energy demand rises and the push for sustainability intensifies, the need for technologies that can efficiently and reliably transport electricity across vast distances will continue to grow. HVDC stands as a future-proof solution for addressing the challenges posed by the global energy transition. It will serve as a critical component of smart grids, provide the necessary infrastructure for international energy markets, and enable the

seamless integration of renewable energy sources. With its ability to support long-distance power transmission, interconnect grids, and foster energy security, HVDC is poised to play a key role in the creation of a resilient, low-carbon, and interconnected global energy system.

In conclusion, HVDC technology offers a promising and versatile solution for the complex challenges of modern power transmission. As advancements in technology reduce costs and improve performance, HVDC will continue to shape the future of energy delivery, facilitating the transition to a sustainable and resilient global power grid.

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