

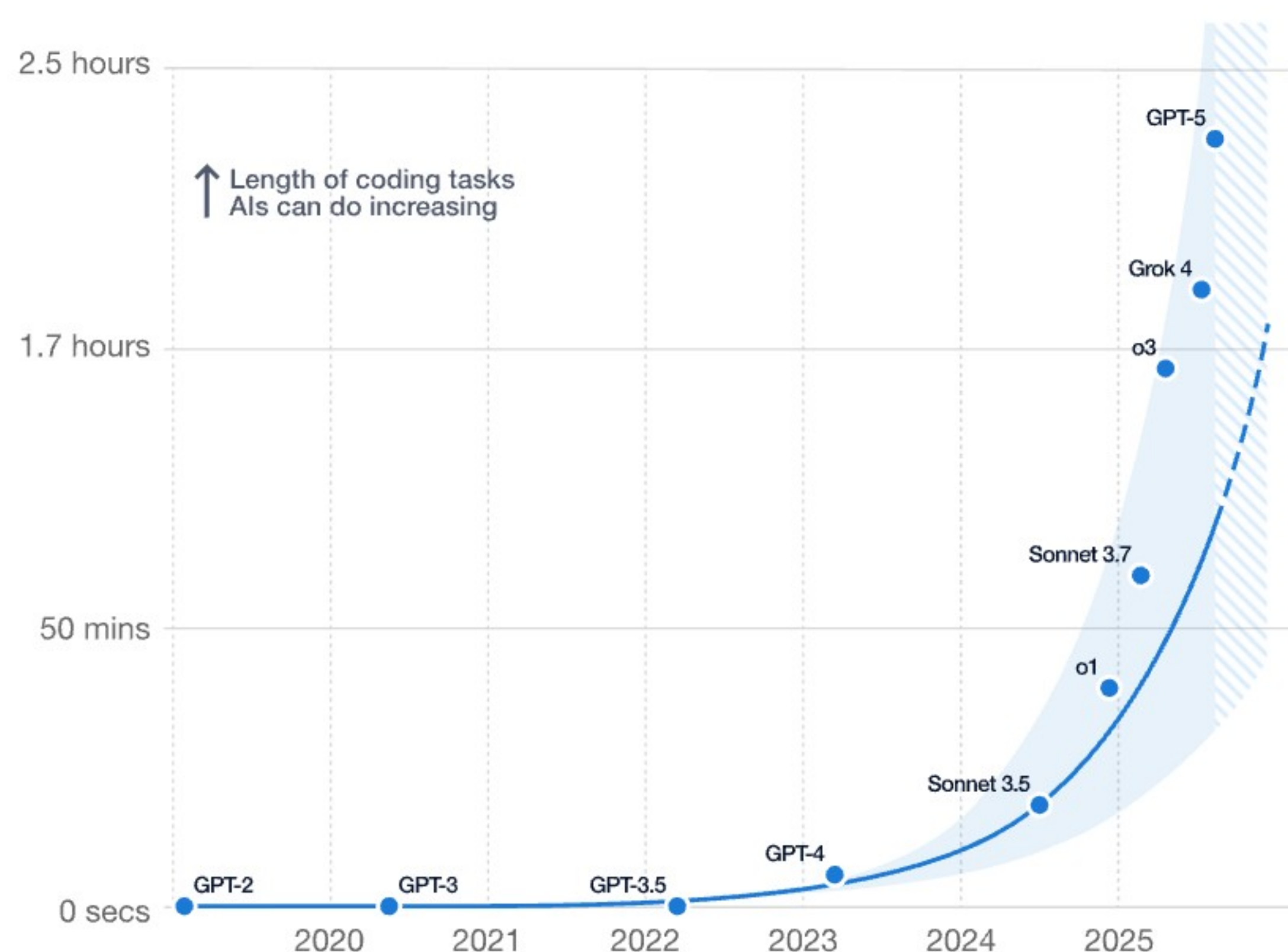
NEAR Protocol Q3 2025 Report: AI-First Vision and Agentic Adoption



Introduction

With the exponential acceleration of AI development, NEAR Protocol has made significant strides in its strategic repositioning to best capture the market as a true AI blockchain. The move has brought remarkable success to the network so far, showcasing growth in both user adoption and cross-chain activity.

Source: <https://theaidigest.org/time-horizons>



A new Moore's Law for AI agents

When ChatGPT came out in 2022, it could do 30 second coding tasks.

Today, AI agents can autonomously do coding tasks that take humans two hours.

Building on its origins in machine learning research, NEAR is now laser-focused on enabling user-owned artificial intelligence on a scalable, privacy-preserving blockchain platform. At the same time, NEAR's innovative Intent-based transaction system and chain abstraction have driven mainstream usage, including millions of active users on consumer apps and cross-chain "agent" transactions that require zero blockchain experience on the part of the end user. These dual narratives (NEAR as an AI-centric chain and NEAR as a hub of consumer/agent adoption) defined the quarter's progress.

Over Q3 2025, NEAR has made an aggressive push into legitimate AI integration (exemplified by co-founder Illia Polosukhin's [NVIDIA GTC talk](#) unveiling Decentralized Confidential Machine Learning). The push includes new partnerships to build an ecosystem of tokenized AI agents and technical breakthroughs that allow AI computations to be verifiable and privacy-protected on NEAR. Simultaneously, NEAR's Intent protocol (a multichain transaction layer that abstracts away bridges and wallets) saw explosive growth, surpassing \$1 billion in cumulative volume and is approaching \$2 billion going into Q4 2025. The surge in volume follows its major expansions into chains like Tron, Sui, Aptos, Stellar, ZCash, and Cardano.

NEAR Intents - All-time Volume

Source: <https://dune.com/queries/5179085/8527168>



The foundation of NEAR's current strategy lies in uniting its AI and user-experience ambitions into a single framework. Rather than treating artificial intelligence and cross-chain usability as separate pursuits, NEAR views them as complementary forces driving a new era of "agentic adoption," where intelligent agents act autonomously on behalf of users across any blockchain. This convergence defines NEAR's competitive edge and sets the stage for understanding how its AI infrastructure, intents protocol, and chain abstraction technologies work together to turn intelligence into on-chain execution.

NEAR's AI-First Strategy: The Blockchain for User-Owned AI

NEAR's leadership has prioritized artificial intelligence at the core of its future strategy, positioning NEAR as a true blockchain for AI. The shift, crystallized during a NEAR Foundation offsite in Lisbon, represents a return to the project's roots. NEAR was originally founded as an AI startup (near.ai) in 2017 to explore program synthesis, before pivoting to blockchain protocol development.

Co-founder Illia Polosukhin is a noted AI researcher, having co-authored the seminal 2017 paper "Attention Is All You Need," which introduced the Transformer architecture. Now, after years of building a scalable chain, NEAR is coming full circle to realize its founding vision: a platform where AI is open, decentralized, and user-controlled rather than siloed by tech giants.

AI Vision: User-Owned, Private, Verifiable Intelligence

NEAR's vision and approach allow users to harness powerful AI without surrendering their private data to centralized servers. In this paradigm, AI models and agents on NEAR are:

1. Private

Users can utilize AI services without revealing personal data, not even to the nodes or hosts running the model. This is achieved through cryptographic techniques and secure enclaves, ensuring that inputs (and even model weights) remain confidential.

2. Open & Verifiable

The models are open-source or transparent, and their operations can produce cryptographic proofs of correctness. NEAR is integrating verifiable compute and verifiable inference mechanisms so that when an AI agent makes a decision or computation, the result can be trusted without relying on a company's word. In short, NEAR's blockchain provides a trust layer for AI, logging proofs that an AI service executed a specific code or model correctly.

3. Monetizable with Aligned Incentives

Unlike purely open-source AI that lacks sustainable funding, NEAR's vision allows model creators to monetize their work through tokenization and an on-chain economy. Developers can deploy AI models that others pay to use (with micropayments or subscriptions in crypto), and smart contracts will automatically enforce revenue sharing, etc.

Also, the NEAR AI ecosystem is being bootstrapped with aligned incentives. For example, NEAR Foundation has acquired tokens (IQ and FRAX) as part of partnerships to support AI-agent economies and provide liquidity. By integrating economic incentives into decentralized AI, NEAR ensures that open AI development can thrive without relying solely on altruism or grants.

Building Blocks for AI on NEAR

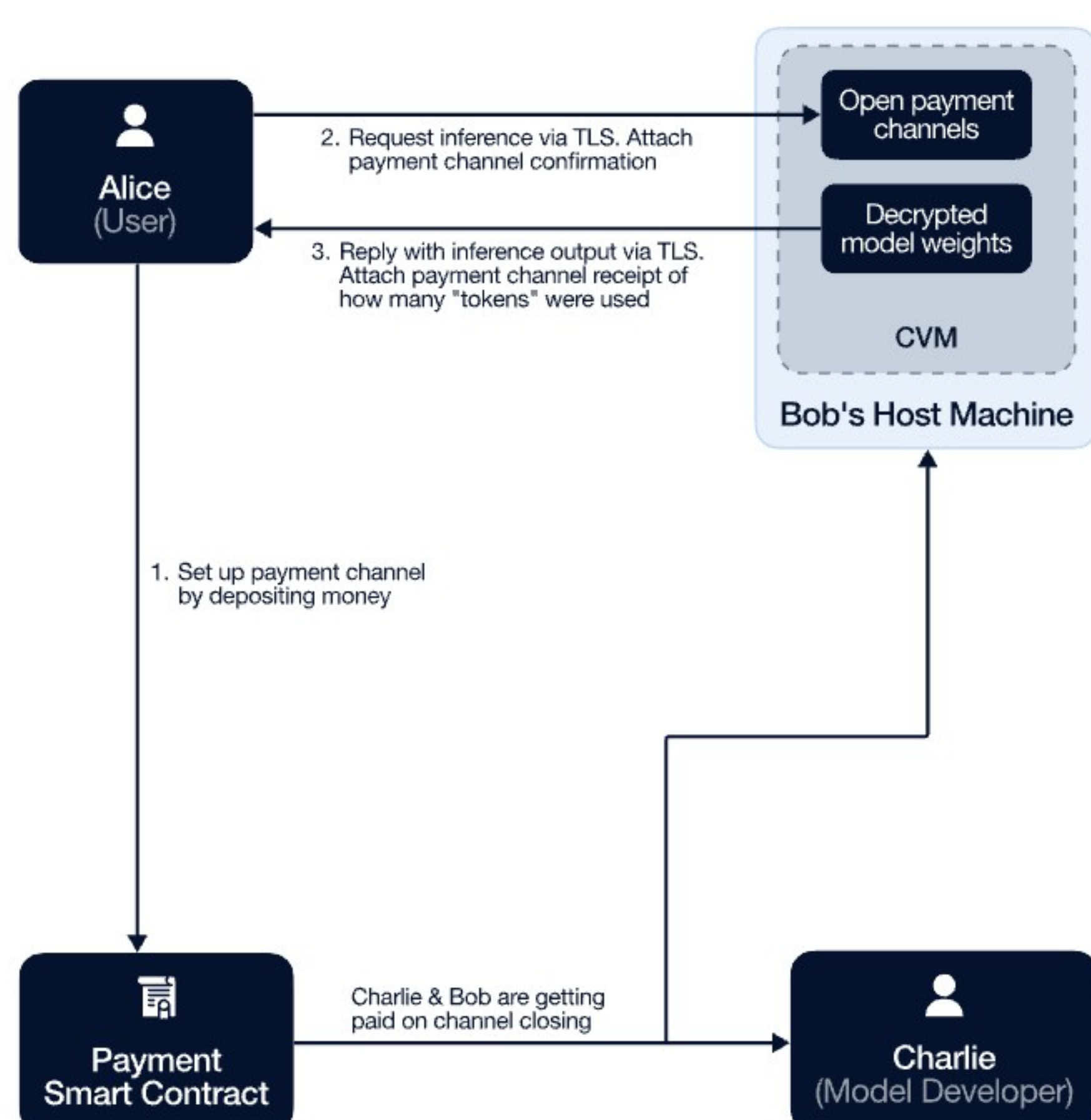
NEAR's vision requires new technical infrastructure at the intersection of AI and blockchain. NEAR's research and engineering teams have made significant strides in developing the building blocks of an "AI-ready" blockchain:

Decentralized Confidential Machine Learning (DCML)

DCML is NEAR's framework for running AI in a decentralized cloud with confidentiality. In practice, it involves using Trusted Execution Environments (TEEs) and potentially zero-knowledge proofs. A TEE (such as Intel SGX or similar secure enclaves) allows code to run isolated from the host, producing attestation that it executed correctly. NEAR is integrating TEE-based computing, allowing an AI model to be hosted by a network of nodes, and users can query it with assurance of privacy.

The output of the AI, along with a proof (attestation), can be recorded on-chain. In Q3 2025, NEAR's team made progress on the DCML prototypes, enabling "verifiable inference," where the correctness of an AI's output is mathematically verifiable by smart contracts. Verifiable inference eliminates the need to blindly trust AI outputs, a crucial requirement for autonomous AI agents.

Private inference monetization flow



Chain-Accelerated AI

NEAR has continued to explore ways to leverage its network and sharding to scale open-source AI. One example of this is using parallelism across shards for AI training tasks. Another example is the potential for using idle compute in validator nodes for model evaluations. While these concepts are not yet fully implemented, NEAR's sharded architecture is designed to support sophisticated, distributed AI workloads, something that few other blockchain networks are likely to offer in the future.

NEAR's recent expansion to 9 shards (discussed later) provides the foundation for handling larger computational tasks. Additionally, on-chain data can serve as training data for AI models with proper user consent, creating a virtuous cycle between the blockchain's data and AI services built on top (while also potentially giving users financial empowerment over their data).

Privacy and Compliance Features

NEAR has publicly declared a strong focus on what it calls privacy-first AI and is also working on compliance-focused features that will help it maintain compliance with data protection laws, and it hopes these will attract larger enterprises. Privacy and compliance are addressed in the way the layers interlock. Inputs and model weights can be kept confidential inside secure enclaves, while outputs are logged with proofs and metadata for provenance. Doing so opens the door for compliance-friendly AI applications where every AI action is logged on an immutable ledger.

NEAR's integration with Zashi demonstrates its support for user privacy. A user can start with shielded ZEC, request a cross-chain payment or swap through an intent, and receive the target asset on another chain without revealing intermediate steps publicly. This pattern provides agents with a standard way to respect user privacy while still maintaining verifiable records of their actions and reasons.

NEAR is also looking at decentralized identity (DID) integrations for AI agents. An AI agent on NEAR could have a verified on-chain identity and reputational score, making it safer for users to interact with autonomous agents (knowing, for instance, that a trading bot has a certain track record). While these aspects are longer-term, groundwork is being laid via collaborations with identity projects in the ecosystem.

Shade Agents: Autonomous AI Agents on NEAR

Perhaps the best example of NEAR's AI focus in Q3 was the emergence of Shade Agents, which have been called "the first truly autonomous AI agents" operating on a blockchain. Shade Agents are a new framework introduced on NEAR that enables developers to deploy AI-driven agents that control crypto accounts and assets independently, without the need for custodians or centralized servers.

In simpler terms, a Shade Agent is an AI program (e.g., a trading bot, personal assistant, or game NPC) that lives on-chain and can make transactions on behalf of a user (or itself), under rules set by its creator. The concept has enormous implications: it eliminates the need for a human or even a user interface in executing complex blockchain operations, allowing an AI to directly read, decide, and act on-chain.

Technically, a Shade Agent consists of two parts: an off-chain “worker” component that runs the AI logic (like a Python script with machine learning models, running in a TEE for security), and an on-chain smart contract that holds the agent’s funds and keys and executes the actions. The link between these is facilitated by NEAR’s advanced features, including chain signatures / MPC, TEEs, and intents.

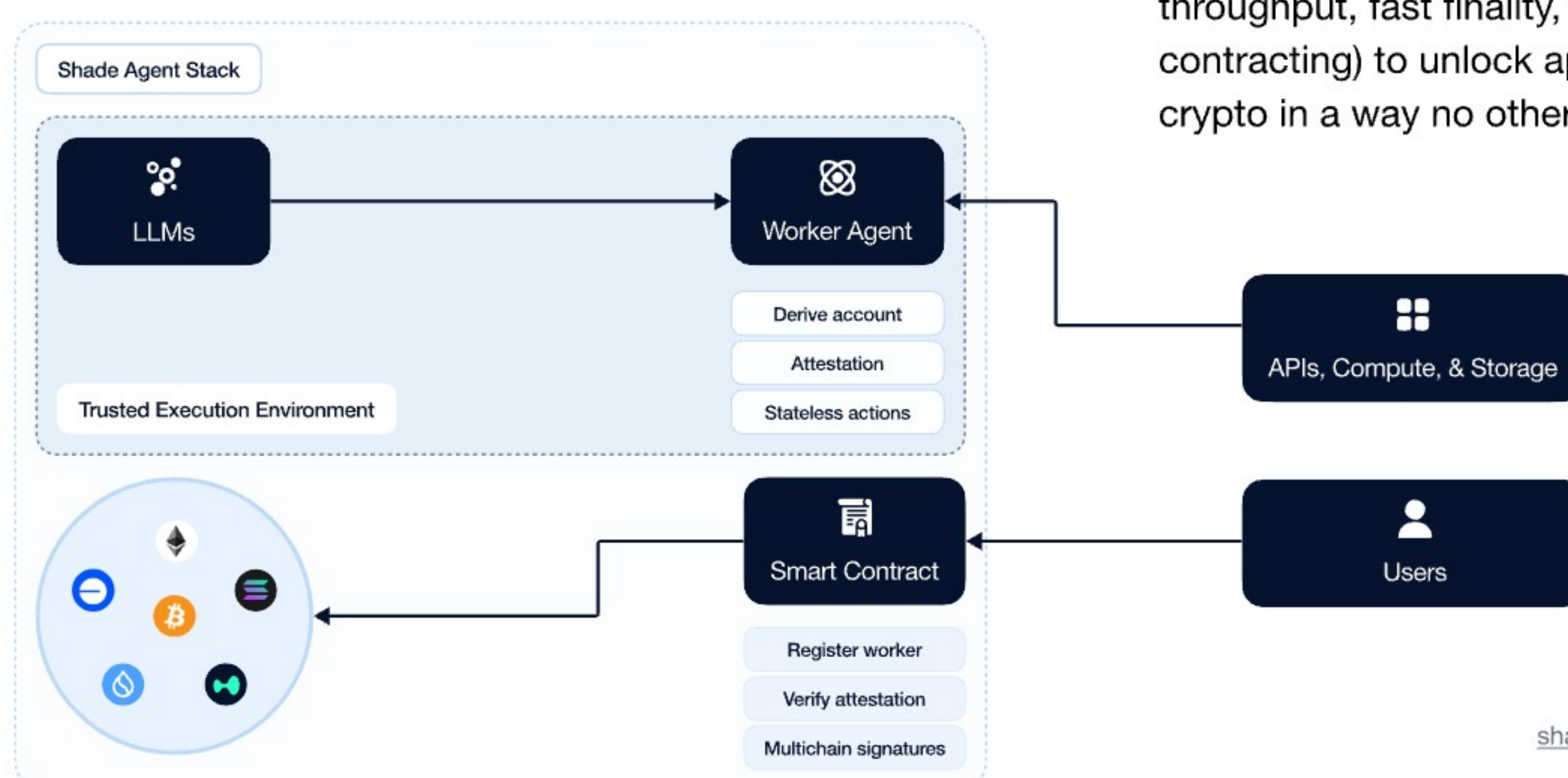
The result is a system where an AI agent can sense, think, and act across multiple blockchains autonomously. Shade Agents are fully non-custodial and on-chain verifiable, where every action they take is recorded on NEAR's ledger, and their internal logic can be audited (through the open-source code and TEE attestations). This stands in sharp contrast to most existing "crypto trading bots" or AI assistants, which typically require trusting a centralized service or surrendering private keys. NEAR's Shade framework eliminates this trust issue.

Why is this significant?

Shade Agents hint at a future where autonomous agents become first-class participants in the crypto economy. NEAR's leadership believes that "agentic" usage will eventually dominate Web3, where users delegate goals or intents to personal AI agents that transact on their behalf. With Shade, NEAR is positioning itself at the forefront of that movement. In Q3, early examples of Shade Agents included:

- A “Twitter trading agent,” a proof-of-concept that reads social media sentiment and executes trades accordingly, completely autonomously. The agent, using the Mindshare Index AI model, parsed Twitter and news feeds for sentiment analysis and then traded assets via NEAR Intents based on its algorithmic strategy.
- Arbitrage bots were prototyped as Shade Agents. For instance, an agent that monitors interest rates across protocols and automatically moves stablecoins to the highest-yield platform, or an arbitrage agent that balances prices between DEXs. Because Shade Agents can operate 24/7, without manual intervention, and can access multiple chains’ liquidity, they can capture opportunities efficiently.
- Beyond finance, NEAR envisions Shade Agents for Web3 social apps. Agents could replace traditional web servers or user interfaces (e.g., a decentralized chatbot that manages a community all by interacting with on-chain data). Since Shade Agents can hold NFTs or tokens, they could even act as NPCs in games or metaverse worlds, “living” on-chain with their own inventory and personality.

Overall, the introduction of Shade Agents in Q3 exemplifies NEAR's unique value proposition as a true AI blockchain. It combines NEAR's strengths (high throughput, fast finality, interoperability, and secure contracting) to unlock applications that span AI and crypto in a way no other Layer-1 currently does.



Architecture of a NEAR Shade Agent

Source: <https://pages.near.org/blog/shade-agents-the-first-truly-autonomous-ai-agents/>

NEAR Consumer & Agent Adoption

NEAR Intents

The NEAR Intents protocol, first introduced in early 2025, continues to redefine user experience in Web3 and has quickly become one of NEAR's crown jewels in terms of usage. Intents are a new type of transaction that captures a user's desired outcome (e.g., "swap token A on Chain X for token B on Chain Y") and lets the network handle the complexity of execution via third-party "fulfillers". Intents abstract away the need for users to manually juggle different wallets, bridges, and DEXs across blockchains.

Since launching in early 2025, NEAR Intents has handled a cumulative volume of over \$1.8 billion. In September 2025, monthly intent transaction volume was ~\$800M over 30 days, a significant increase from previous months. The number of monthly unique users of NEAR Intents also climbed above 120K by the end of Q3. NEAR Intents' on-chain activity shows that it may have achieved solid product-market fit.

NEAR Intents' major increases in activity have likely come from its expansion to and inclusion of leading L1s:

Tron

Announced on September 4, the integration with Tron allowed users to swap assets like USDT between Tron and NEAR (or other connected chains) in one click, without having to set up a Tron wallet or go through a traditional bridge. The Tron integration was especially significant for stablecoin transfers, as Tron hosts one of the largest pools of Tether (USDT). With this integration, a user NEAR can seamlessly access that liquidity.

Aptos

Similarly, Aptos was integrated in Q3. Users can swap assets directly from, for example, Ethereum or NEAR to Aptos's native coin APT or its USDT, without learning Aptos-specific tools. This integration was accompanied by a partnership with Shelby (a decentralized storage solution on NEAR).

Sui

NEAR Intents added support for Sui, a newer L1 with growing DeFi TVL (around \$2B). The Sui integration was teased in late August and went fully live by early September 2025. The ability to swap into Sui's ecosystem or out of it via NEAR Intents broadens options for Sui users, who can now utilize EVM chains or Bitcoin through NEAR's network of relays.

Stellar

NEAR Intents expanded to Stellar in late August 2025, bringing in the Stellar network's assets (lumens and its fiat on/off ramp integrations) into play. This is particularly relevant for Stellar's key use cases like remittances and forex. A user can now, for example, convert Stellar USDC into NEAR or ETH through a single intent, useful for those leveraging Stellar's fiat anchors.

Cardano

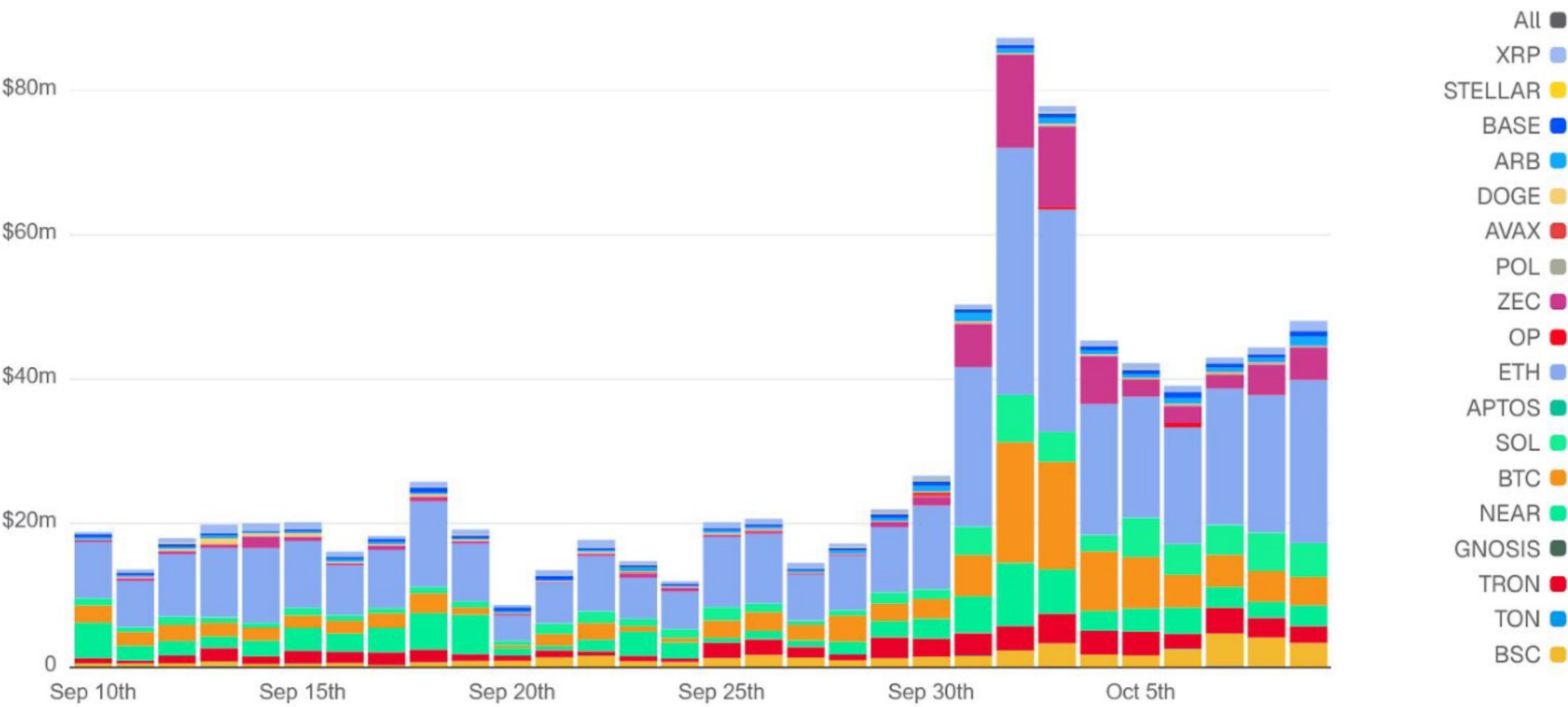
NEAR's integration with Cardano is approaching live status by the end of September 2025. Although Cardano's smart contract functionality is UTXO-based and quite different, NEAR's chain abstraction has incorporated it, demonstrating the flexibility of intents.

Others

By Q3's end, NEAR Intents supported 20+ blockchains, including Bitcoin, Ethereum, BNB Chain, Polygon, Solana (via the [Zolana bridge](#)), Avalanche, and most recently, Zolana. As of now, all major chains where liquidity resides are either already connected or on the roadmap. NEAR's relay network has become a universal highway between these networks. Importantly, this is achieved without deploying wrapped tokens or trust-based bridges, as everything is handled by intents and decentralized market makers competing to fulfill them.

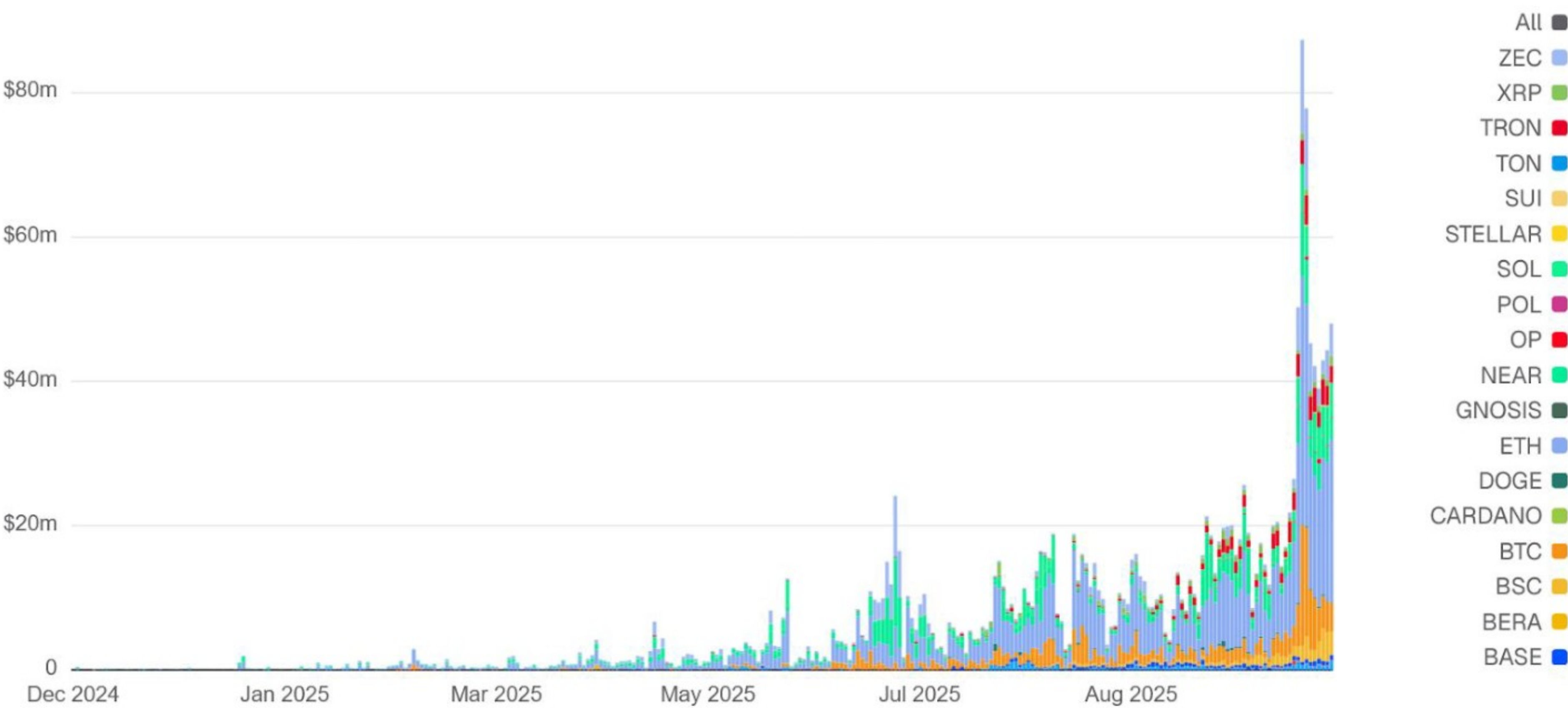
Daily Volume by Blockchain
NEAR Intents - Blockchain Volume 30 Days

Source: <https://dune.com/queries/5175149/8518958>



Daily Volume by Blockchain
NEAR Intents - Blockchain Volume

Source: <https://dune.com/queries/5157565/8494287>



The impact of this multichain expansion is significant for NEAR. NEAR Intents volume now rivals some of the largest cross-chain bridges, despite being a fundamentally different (and arguably more decentralized) model. In fact, as of Q3, NEAR Intents has become the sixth-largest interoperability protocol by volume and continues to climb. The traction suggests that NEAR's bet on chain abstraction is paying off – fulfilling the thesis that users don't want to manage multiple wallets or worry about networks. They just have an intent (like a swap or transfer), and the network should handle the rest.

From a user perspective, NEAR Intents delivered tangible improvements in Q3:

1. Speed and Cost

Because intents bundle steps and optimize routes, users save on both time and fees. A complex swap that might have taken 30 minutes across three bridges can now be finalized in one NEAR block (~1.2 seconds of finality). And since NEAR’s fees are minimal (fractions of a cent), and many intent fulfillers internalize costs, the effective fee for users was low.

2. Safety

Intents reduce the risk of mistakes, as its design mitigates common user errors like copying addresses between chains or accidentally sending funds to the wrong network. NEAR’s smart contracts can directly sign transactions on other chains via chain signatures, meaning the user’s NEAR account becomes their account for all connected chains.

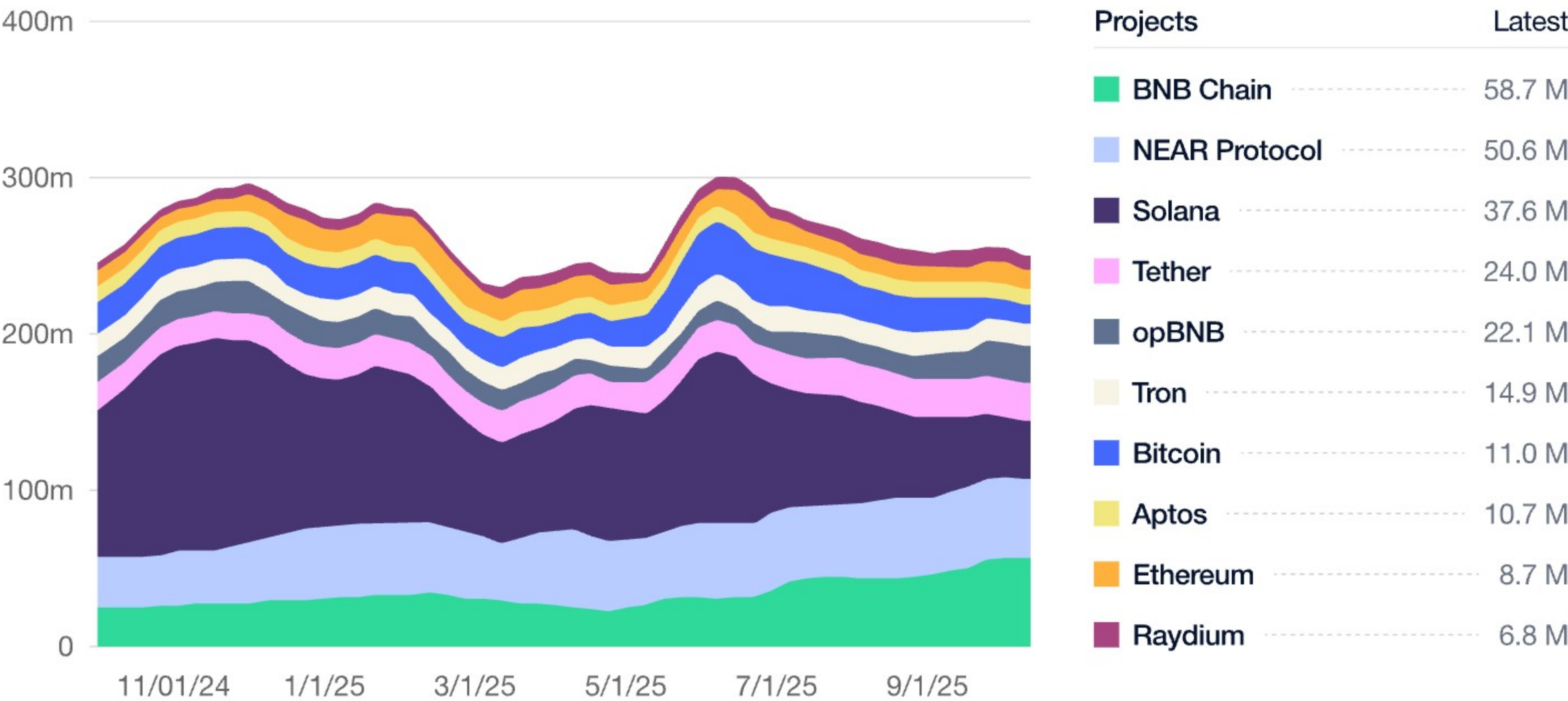
3. Unified Liquidity:

Traders benefited from intents accessing liquidity across chains. For example, if the best price for a token swap was on a DEX on Avalanche, the intents system could route a portion of the trade there, even if the user started on NEAR’s blockchain. NEAR is aggregating a multichain liquidity universe and offering it through a single interface.

NEAR’s own metrics reflect the success of NEAR Intents. Daily transaction count on NEAR remained extremely high, averaging in the millions, partly fueled by intent fulfillment transactions. Monthly active addresses on NEAR reached ~50 million (a figure approaching BNB Chain’s record), indicating that many new addresses (likely created by intent relayers and partner chains) were interacting with NEAR.

Top 10 projects by active addresses (monthly)

Source: <https://tokenterminal.com/explorer/metrics/active-addresses-monthly>



NEAR’s core active user counts (thanks to consumer apps like Sweatcoin and KaiKai, plus new intent users) are extremely robust. As Messari noted, by mid-2024, NEAR had already surpassed 100 million total accounts and was averaging nearly 2 million daily active users – and those numbers only grew in late 2024 and 2025.

Chain Abstraction in Action

The rapid adoption of NEAR Intents validates NEAR’s chain abstraction market philosophy. The protocol has bet that the best way to engage millions of daily users is to make it as easy as possible to do whatever they want - easier said than done. Yet, in Q3 2025, NEAR’s chain abstraction efforts went from a theoretical concept to a tangible reality.

The introduction of Chain Signatures technology (which NEAR launched in 2024) enabled NEAR accounts to natively sign transactions on other chains through a decentralized MPC (multi-party computation) network. In practice, this means if Alice has an account `alice.near`, she can use that same account to, for example, post a transaction on Ethereum or Bitcoin. She does not need an Ethereum EOA or a Bitcoin private key. NEAR’s chain signature service handles it.

The security comes from distributing key shards among many signers and requiring a threshold to produce a valid signature for the target chain, all anchored by NEAR’s security and staking. The net result is that Alice deals only with NEAR, but can do anything on any chain. This is a cornerstone of NEAR’s UX advantage.

By Q3, users were experiencing these advantages via products built on chain signatures. For instance, the Meteor Wallet on NEAR integrated chain signatures, allowing users to hold BTC and ETH in their NEAR wallet and send those assets without leaving the NEAR interface. Templar Protocol’s mainnet launch provided the robust backend for this, decentralizing the signer set that approves cross-chain actions.

Average Transaction Fee



Intents Marketplace and Competition

When a user submits an intent (say, “buy NEAR with my Bitcoin”), multiple independent relayer networks or liquidity providers compete to fulfill it, offering the best rate or fastest service. Q3 saw an increase in such competition, which improved outcomes for users (lower slippage, better prices).

Public data sources noted that intents significantly reduced failed transactions and stuck funds compared to manual bridging, because the relayers bundle and guarantee the execution once they take on the job. The design of orders being matched and bundled off-chain, then executed in one on-chain transaction, means less room for error and almost no exposure to chain-to-chain timing risks for users. All of this furthers NEAR’s reputation as a user-friendly chain.

With NEAR’s system, users doing cross-chain intents do not necessarily need NEAR tokens to pay gas. The intent fulfillers will typically accept the input asset (e.g., if you’re swapping 1 BTC, they’ll deduct a tiny fraction and convert to NEAR to pay fees). NEAR’s fees are so low (average ~\$0.002 per txn in 2025) that the overhead is negligible. Notably, NEAR Foundation has also run programs subsidizing intent fees to bootstrap adoption. So, even a new user, holding only BTC or USDC, could use NEAR Intents to move into any crypto asset without needing to first acquire NEAR for gas.

Beyond trading, NEAR Intents began powering more consumer-facing scenarios. Trading agents combine off-chain models with on-chain execution through intents. Arbitrage and yield-routing agents monitor spreads and rates across networks and act automatically. Social and gaming agents manage communities, escrow rewards, or operate as on-chain NPCs with inventories and budgets. What makes these credible is not only the model logic but also the ability to act across chains from one account, with auditable proofs, and without exposing user keys.

This stack also improves the user journey. A person can delegate goals to a personal agent instead of learning new wallets and bridges. The agent uses the person's NEAR account to access liquidity wherever it resides and confirms results back to that account. In practice, this turns multi-chain crypto into a single coherent experience, which is a prerequisite for mainstream adoption. It also aligns with enterprise needs. The same proofs, logs, and identity hooks that make agents safer for consumers make them easier to audit for businesses.

NEAR Intents can perform the conversion transparently in the middle. For example: games that reward users on any chain. A NEAR Intent could let a game on Polygon drop an NFT to a user's NEAR account or vice versa, without asking the user to bridge. In short, NEAR Intents has started to remove the walls between communities and apps on different blockchains, making Web3 feel more like a unified space rather than isolated islands.

From a strategic perspective, NEAR's Intents and chain abstraction strategy is a medium-term bridge to a long-term agent-driven future. As mentioned earlier, NEAR anticipates that AI agents will take over many interactions. Intents are ideal for agents: an AI agent doesn't want to manage 10 wallets or worry about complex transactions. It just wants to achieve a goal (i.e., "find me the cheapest airfare and book it with my crypto").

NEAR Intents provide a standard interface for agents to do just that across any service integrated. In fact, NEAR's chain abstraction explicitly allows AI to interact with assets, applications, and services across multiple chains as if they were a single system. An example envisioned is an AI travel agent that can directly interact with a hotel booking DApp on chain A and a flight booking service on chain B, pay with the user's crypto from chain C, all through intents mediated by NEAR.

Privacy-Preserving Finance: Zashi and Cross-Chain ZEC

An exciting catalyst for NEAR Intents' spike in activity in late Q3 was the integration of privacy features from Zcash. In early October, the Electric Coin Company (ECC, developers of Zcash) released Zashi, a mobile wallet that brings Zcash's shielded transaction privacy to everyday users, built in tandem with NEAR's Intent infrastructure.

Three key features were launched:

1. Zashi Swaps

A user holding a shielded ZEC (privacy coin) can directly swap it for another asset (BTC, ETH, SOL, USDC, NEAR, etc.) within the Zashi wallet, using NEAR Intents under the hood. For instance, someone can convert Bitcoin into Zcash privately. The BTC is sent in via an intent, and the user receives ZEC in their shielded address, all in one go.

2. CrossPay

CrossPay allows truly private cross-chain payments. A user can send shielded ZEC to a recipient, but the recipient doesn't get ZEC. Instead, they get, say, USDT on Polygon or NEAR on Aurora, depending on what the sender specified. The sender's ZEC gets unshielded and swapped via intents, and the receiver gets the target asset, without knowing (on-chain) that it originated from ZEC (as they see only a deposit transaction from a liquidity provider).

3. THORSwap Integration

THORSwap, the leading non-custodial cross-chain DEX and aggregator in the THORchain ecosystem, rolled out support for NEAR and NEAR Intents. Now, a whole new subset of crypto users can easily swap NEAR with native BTC, ETH, XRP, ZEC, and more.

These Zashi features caused a surge in NEAR Intents usage. According to [CoinDesk's analysis](#), NEAR Intent volumes nearly doubled month-on-month in early October, and about \$800M of the last 30 days' volume was driven by Zashi's launch. Shielded ZEC holders started using NEAR Intents to move into other coins, and ZEC itself saw renewed interest (the price of ZEC quadrupled around that time).

From a technical view, this integration was a showcase of NEAR’s flexibility:

- It utilized Zcash’s shielded pool on one side and NEAR’s Intents on the other.
- NEAR’s architecture was advantageous because intents can handle UTXO chain inputs like Bitcoin or Zcash (which many generic bridges struggle with).
- The privacy of ZEC, combined with the efficiency of intents, meant users experienced a user interface akin to a private “ShapeShift” or Thorchain, but faster and with mathematically guaranteed anonymity.

The development overall is significant not just for NEAR and Zcash, but for crypto as a whole: it provides a template where privacy coins become practical gateways rather than isolated ecosystems. NEAR Intents effectively turbocharged Zcash’s utility, and in turn, Zcash’s strong privacy gave NEAR Intents a unique selling point (transactions flowing through NEAR can inherit ZEC’s shielded anonymity set).

For NEAR, embracing privacy aligns with the privacy pillar of its messaging. It strengthens NEAR’s appeal to privacy-first communities and users disenfranchised by intrusive centralized exchanges. And critically, it does so in a way that’s compliant by design. Users still KYC to on-ramp into ZEC, but once on-chain, they regain privacy. NEAR doesn’t compromise on decentralization or open access in providing these tools.

Metrics and Impact on NEAR Ecosystem

User activity on NEAR reached all-time highs in Q3 2025, with NEAR now among the most active blockchain networks by daily addresses. The trajectory to record-high user activity began last year when NEAR overtook Ethereum in usage, and it has since continued with millions of daily active addresses in 2025. All of this has been achieved on an increasingly scalable infrastructure: NEAR upgraded to 9 live shards on mainnet this quarter for greater throughput while also pioneering “chain signatures” technology to unify cross-chain interactions under a single NEAR account.

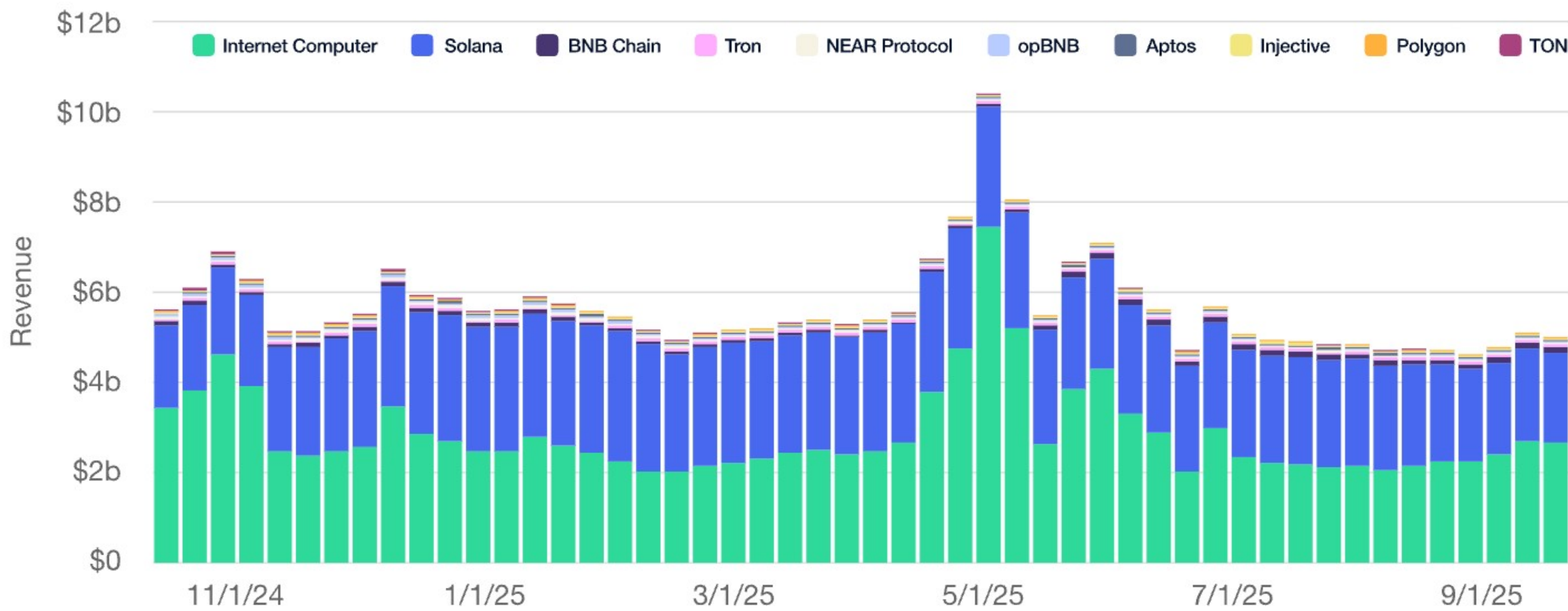
The cumulative effect of NEAR’s Intents success in Q3 can be seen in various metrics:

Transaction Volume & Revenue

NEAR’s on-chain transaction counts soared thanks to intents (each intent fulfillment is an on-chain transaction). NEAR is among the top-most active chains on the market, hosting 2.2 billion transactions over the past year. However, many of these are low-fee batched operations. NEAR’s protocol revenue (from fees) did increase quarter-over-quarter, although modestly, given low fees (Messari’s Q2 report noted \$2.8M quarterly fee revenue). Despite this modest increase in fee revenue, what’s notable is the growing real usage.

Top 10 projects by transaction count

Source: <https://tokenterminal.com/explorer/metrics/transaction-count>



Active Users

NEAR's daily active accounts remain in the high six figures to millions, buoyed by both consumer apps (KaiKai, Sweatcoin – which are still very active with gamified use) and intent users. The Defiant reported NEAR hitting 838k daily active addresses, tying BNB Chain back in late 2023; in 2025, these figures are higher. Community sources claimed 2.9M DAUs in Sep 2025 with weekly active wallets over 15M, which, if accurate, put NEAR on par with Tron's retail-heavy usage. While these numbers include many automated addresses, it's clear that NEAR's network effect is robust. NEAR is now consistently among the top 3-5 chains by active usage metrics.

Active Users (Daily)



Liquidity and TVL

With easier cross-chain access, capital has flowed into NEAR's ecosystem. NEAR's own DeFi TVL saw a modest uptick, partly because users found it simpler to move assets in via intents (no need to go through Rainbow Bridge manually). More importantly, intents don't trap liquidity – they just route it. So the focus shifts from TVL to volume and throughput as success measures.

Total Value Locked (TVL)

Source: <https://defillama.com/chain/near>



NEAR Token

The NEAR token's price and market cap were positively influenced by the narrative of successful adoption. On Oct 1, NEAR was trading around \$2.86, up over 10% on news of the Cardano integration and Q3 momentum. Some analysts pointed out NEAR's outperformance relative to larger L1s in user growth, even if token performance lagged majors like BTC/ETH earlier in the year. The sentiment is that NEAR's fundamentals are strengthening, which could be a delayed signal for value accrual (NEAR's tokenomics with 5% inflation vs fee burns come into play).

NEAR Price Action

Source: <https://www.coingecko.com/en/coins/near>



Core Protocol and Infrastructure Updates

Nighshade Sharding

NEAR's unique scaling solution, Nightshade sharding, reached a new milestone in Q3 by expanding the network to 9 operational shards. Since launching with four shards in 2020 and later growing to 6 shards in 2022, this is the largest number of parallel shards NEAR has run. The rollout of the 7th, 8th, and 9th shards was enabled by the stateless validation framework introduced in 2024. Under stateless validation, validators no longer need to hold all state, making it much easier to add shards without overburdening nodes.

The immediate benefit of the new shards is increased throughput headroom. NEAR's block producers can now process transactions across nine shards in parallel, which, according to internal benchmarks, improves overall throughput by about 12.5% with this expansion. That might seem modest, but it's because the network wasn't fully saturated on 6 shards yet. However, as usage grows (with more intents, etc.), the extra shards will prevent congestion.

The design target for NEAR has always been to allow dynamic resharding (splitting and merging shards based on load). In Q3, NEAR tested a new resharding mechanism since the old approach had to be replaced post-stateless. The devs reported progress towards "fast resharding" that can split a shard quickly and, in the future, do it automatically when needed.

For developers and users, the addition of shards was accident-free. NEAR's account model, where account IDs are deterministically mapped to shards by a hash prefix, existing contracts and accounts were automatically distributed. Interestingly, NEAR's incremental approach to adding shards (as opposed to a monolithic fork event) means that, in practice, many didn't even notice beyond an announcement on the NEAR X page.

However, the significance lies in NEAR's demonstrated ability to scale out without disrupting applications. It reinforces confidence that NEAR can truly "onboard a billion users" as intended, by continuing to add capacity. NEAR's research on further sharding improvements also continued. In particular:

Dynamic Resharding

Q3 saw the initial design of a system where shards could automatically merge or split based on usage metrics. This is like a blockchain scaling up CPU cores on demand. Achieving it requires consensus changes (to let the network agree on when to reshard) and perhaps a marketplace for shard resources. NEAR is on the frontlines attempting to solve this complex problem.

Sharded Contracts

The team is exploring the concept of "sharded smart contracts," in which a single contract can run across multiple shards. This could enable extremely large-scale dApps (imagine an order-book exchange that lives on all shards simultaneously).

It's worth noting that NEAR's approach differs from some other scaling projects: rather than many app-specific chains or rollups, NEAR pursues a single unified network that scales linearly through sharding. Such an approach keeps developer UX simple (one environment, instant composability across shards) but requires heavy lifting in protocol R&D. Q3's success with nine shards solidifies NEAR's position as one of the most horizontally scalable L1s in production.

Performance and Finality

NEAR continues to be one of the fastest smart contract chains in terms of finality. Earlier in 2025, NEAR achieved ~1.2-second finality and ~600ms block times after a “Blink” upgrade in May. In Q3, average finality remained around 1-2 seconds in normal conditions, offering an advantage for real-time applications (like trading or gaming) where waiting 12 seconds (Ethereum) or longer (some other chains) is sub-optimal.

From a user perspective, NEAR’s snappy performance remained a strong point in Q3. Even as usage spiked, there were minimal network outages or slowdowns, a testament to NEAR’s infrastructure. The only hiccup observed was a brief period of latency during an upgrade, but NEAR’s multi-client architecture (with different node implementations) mitigated any issues.

Verifiable Computing (ZK and TEEs)

On the cryptography front, NEAR’s protocol research unit has been evaluating adding Zero-Knowledge proofs and better TEEs at the base layer. While not yet a direct part of the runtime, these are complementary:

NEAR worked with Polygon Labs on zkWASM earlier in the year. A possibility is that NEAR might support smart contracts with ZK-snark verification natively, enabling efficient on-chain verification of off-chain AI computations.

DCML (Decentralized Confidential ML) code might become part of NEAR’s stack as a sub-system or sidechain. Q3 saw prototypes of NEAR nodes offloading certain tasks to a TEE cluster and receiving a proof. So, NEAR could have a “privacy shard” or an auxiliary network for confidential tasks, anchored to mainnet for finality. This is forward-looking, but pieces like the Shade Agent TEE usage are first steps.

Conclusion and Outlook

Q3 2025 was a transformative period for the NEAR protocol, continuing the momentum that had gradually built over the past year to put the protocol in its strongest position ever. NEAR now enjoys a highly advanced technology stack, with a clearer differentiated narrative, all of which is backed by growing usage data.

NEAR's positioning as an AI chain is more than just a label; it is evident in its most sophisticated architecture and the partnerships it is forming. As it turns out, NEAR pivoting back to its original strengths has led to significant improvement in consumer and AI agent adoption rates for the protocol.

NEAR is on a path to truly make AI user-owned and decentralized directly on-chain (regardless of the underlying network). If NEAR can continue to execute on both fronts, superior AI technology and increased adoption, it will become increasingly difficult to ignore the momentum the project is building into Q4 and 2026.

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