

Conceptual illustration. See source and provenance notes.

New power demand. Who carries the risk?

A public-interest checklist for tracing data-centre electricity costs from a forecast to an enforceable obligation.

01

Follow the system

Energy, capacity and networks are different costs.

02

Test the downside

Ask who pays if demand arrives late or disappears.

03

Read the actual terms

A proposal or pledge is not an enforceable tariff.

Follow the cost before assigning the bill

Paying for electricity used does not automatically settle who funds the infrastructure built to serve it.

01

Energy

Electricity used over time

02

Capacity

Ability to supply demand

03

Networks

Transmission and distribution

DEMAND / BERKELEY LAB, PUBLISHED JUNE 2026

11.8% reference estimate for 2030

Data-centre share of US electricity use, with scenario bounds of 9.5% to 15.3%. Modelled futures, not measured current consumption.

NATIONAL FORECAST / EIA, 10 NOVEMBER 2026

18.2 cents per kWh in 2026

18.7 cents per kWh in 2027. US average residential-price forecasts, not the cause or size of a particular household bill increase.

Separate the decision-makers
FERC oversees interstate transmission rates and terms. State commissions allocate retail costs for utilities they regulate. Municipal and cooperative governance differs.

Five questions for a local power proposal

Locate the utility, regulator, docket number and current tariff. Treat a corporate assurance as an assurance until the enforceable terms are clear.

1	Demand	What is actually committed? Separate enquiries, study requests, signed contracts and operating facilities.
2	Assets	Which investments are caused by the project? Which would happen anyway, and who else benefits?
3	Downside	Who pays if the project is late, smaller than planned, cancelled or transferred to a weaker counterparty?
4	Flexibility	Can demand move or fall when the grid is constrained? Is that performance reliable and enforceable?
5	Reporting	Will actual demand, cost recovery and effects on customer classes be reported without exposing security-sensitive details?

Record: docket _____ tariff _____
decision date _____ unresolved risk _____

WHY THIS MATTERS

Trace the obligation, not only the headline.

Data-centre growth can create physical obligations that last longer than a product cycle. A community can welcome investment while asking which costs are caused by the project, which benefits are shared and who remains responsible if demand changes.

EVIDENCE CHECK

Berkeley Lab's 2030 figures are modelled scenarios, not measured current consumption. EIA's 2026 and 2027 residential-price figures are national forecasts, not proof of a local AI bill effect. FERC's June 2026 show-cause orders remain preliminary; they do not impose a universal transmission rate or guarantee a lower bill.

NEWS CHECK - 20 NOVEMBER 2026, 8:45 A.M. EASTERN

FERC's public page still lists 20 November as the Southwest Power Pool response deadline, with answers due 21 December. No same-day SPP filing or final Commission determination was verified at this check. A PUCO order announced on 5 August requires 180-day notice before an affected data-centre customer returns to default service; AEP Ohio must use separate procurement and assign the resulting cost to that customer. This is an Ohio-specific protection, not proof of a particular household bill effect.

WHAT TO ASK NEXT

Is the demand committed or speculative? Which assets are caused by the project? What collateral, minimum-payment and exit terms keep the downside with the party creating it? Which regulator approved the arrangement, and how will actual performance be reported?

PRIMARY SOURCES

- Berkeley Lab: United States Data Center Energy Usage Report, 2025 Update
- EIA: November 2026 Short-Term Energy Outlook
- FERC: Cost Transparency and Customer Protection
- PUCO: Process to protect AEP Ohio customers from potential data-centre energy costs

Public-source educational analysis, not individual legal, financial or utility advice. Conceptual figures are fictional and do not document actual customers, facilities or events. WTM Visual Intelligence by Noir Spider Atelier. Copyright 2026 WTM Media | Why These Matter. Core data reviewed 11 November 2026; regulatory status rechecked 20 November 2026.