ISSUE BRIEF

Data Center Threats in Louisiana

Protecting Communities from Big Tech's Costly Impacts

Highlights

A more affordable, more reliable energy future for Louisiana is possible. The exponential rise of data centers—and their hunger for enormous amounts of power—raises the stakes like never before and intensifies the need for action.

Our analysis shows Louisiana electricity system costs due to data centers could reach as much as $26 billion in the next 15 years. Data centers are poised to be powered by polluting fossil fuel–fired electricity, triggering up to $3 billion in public health damages over the same period. Protecting communities from shouldering these costs is paramount.

Public officials must commit to improving Louisiana's electricity resource–planning process, centering the voices of Louisianans in decisionmaking processes, and embracing solutions that diversify Louisiana's electricity mix to protect residents from toxic fossil fuels and rising energy bills.

Louisiana can reap the benefits of a cleaner, more affordable, and more reliable energy future, but achieving that future will require accountability and a commitment to communities that state decisionmaking currently lacks. As a result, Louisiana ratepayers suffer under the weight of a dirty, expensive, and unreliable electricity system.

The burdens on Louisiana communities are poised to worsen as data centers seek to connect to the state's electric grid. New modeling by the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) shows that, under current Louisiana policies, gas-powered electricity will continue to meet increased demand from data centers—maintaining the state's overreliance on fossil fuels and exposing ratepayers to significant data center–related costs.

Fortunately, Bayou State policymakers can confront the growing electricity demand from data centers. They have at their disposal a number of actions that, if implemented, would put Louisiana on the path to a cleaner, more affordable, and more reliable energy future.

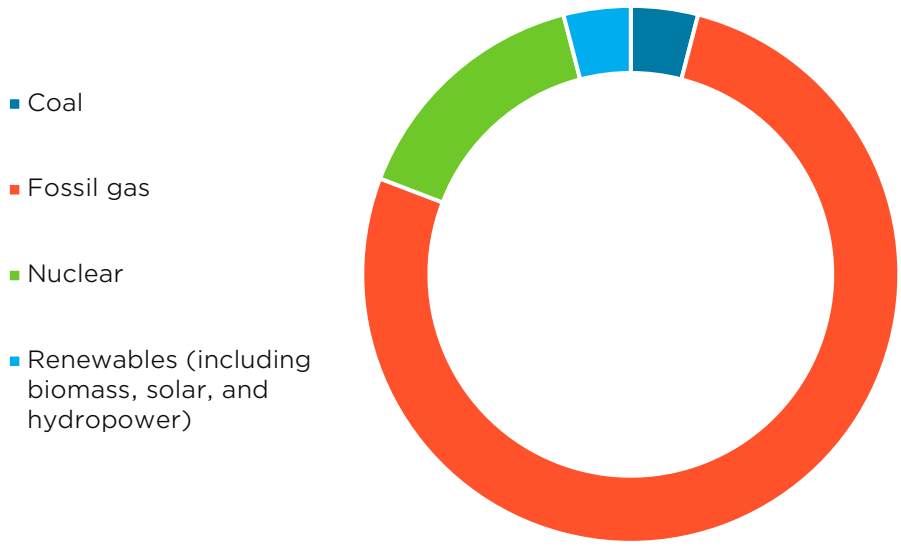
Union of Concerned Scientists

The Current State of Louisiana's Electric System

As of 2024, Louisiana is among the states most dependent on fossil fuels (Figure 1). Fossil gas-fired power plants generate more than 75 percent of its electricity (EIA 2025a). Conversely, Louisiana ranks 50th among states for its share of electricity from renewable sources, despite having the resource potential of more than 1,000 gigawatts (GW) of combined wind and solar (Lopez et al. 2025).

Louisiana's overreliance on fossil fuels leads to expensive electricity bills and harmful impacts on human and environmental health (Muller 2025; EPA 2025). Volatile gas prices can spike due to a number of conditions, including extreme weather, international conflicts, and changes in the global commodity market. When gas prices rise, utilities pass these costs directly to ratepayers as a "fuel adjustment" cost on electric bills. For example, gas prices rose nationally in 2025 due to an increase in liquified natural gas exports; in Louisiana, those higher fuel costs translated into electric bills that were, depending on the electric utility company, between 8 and 29 percent higher than the previous year (Muller 2025). With gas prices expected to increase by another 33 percent in 2026, the high energy burden that Louisianans—especially low-income residents—already bear will continue to rise (EIA 2025b; Parker 2022a).

Figure 1. Louisiana's Electricity Generation Mix, 2024



Fossil gas made up roughly three-quarters of Louisiana's electricity generation in 2024 (EIA 2025a).

Not only do utility rates go up; burning gas to generate electricity emits pollutants that have a detrimental impact on public and environmental health. Nitrogen oxides (NO_x), the main pollutants emitted from gas plants, and the particulate matter and ozone that NO_x contributes to can lead to respiratory problems, heart attacks, premature death, and other adverse health effects (Specht 2018). These pollutants are often more highly concentrated in the communities surrounding the gas plants, compounding the harm caused there by other sources of pollution,

such as the petrochemical industries located along "Cancer Alley" extending along the Mississippi River between New Orleans and Baton Rouge. Using fossil fuels also leads to other heat-trapping emissions, such as carbon dioxide and methane, that have global impacts on the climate. Louisianans feel many of the effects locally in the form of extreme weather and rising sea levels (Parker 2022b). Yet Louisiana continues to plan new gas-powered electric plants to supply power for data centers, exacerbating the existing public health and climate crises.

The current state of Louisiana's electric system results from decades of utility companies' investment decisions, approved by regulators. The Louisiana Public Service Commission (LPSC), the state regulatory agency for Entergy Louisiana and other electric utility companies, is tasked with ensuring the "prudence and adequacy" of the rates that utilities charge to provide reliable and affordable electric service to customers (LPSC n.d.).

Ostensibly, the commission's oversight of utility expenditures would happen through two key complimentary processes. The integrated resource planning (IRP) process, which occurs on a set schedule every four years, establishes a utility's long-term trajectory for cost-effectively and reliably meeting electricity demand over the coming 20 years (LPSC 2024a). In addition, the LPSC oversees certificate of public convenience and necessity (CPCN) proceedings for specific investments in electric infrastructure. Before awarding a CPCN, the commission reviews each investment proposal to ensure that it is a cost-effective and adequate solution to the issues the utility seeks to address, including plans to accommodate new load growth (LPSC 2009, LPSC 2024c).

Implemented effectively, these two regulatory oversight processes would serve two critical roles. They would provide meaningful opportunities to engage stakeholders in determining their energy future. And they would protect ratepayers from excessive or arbitrary cost increases.

In reality, though, a lack of transparency and arbitrary barriers to public participation have marked the LPSC's implementation of the IRP and CPCN processes. Moreover, the agency has consistently approved utility proposals for increased expenditures over the objections and recommendations of both stakeholders and commission staff (Alliance for Affordable Energy 2025a; Alliance for Affordable Energy 2025b). Without a course correction, particularly in the face of increasing electricity demand driven by data centers, Louisiana's current trajectory will exacerbate the state's existing power grid issues.

Methodology

To analyze the future of Louisiana's electricity system as the addition of data centers increases demand, UCS conducted long-term modeling of the state's power sector using the Regional Energy Deployment System (ReEDS), a tool developed by the National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) (Gagnon et al. 2024).[1] UCS analyzed the potential impacts of differing levels of projected data center load growth on Louisiana's power grid. The analysis focused on Louisiana-specific results documented in *Data Center Power Play: How Clean Energy Can Meet*

[1] *On December 1, 2025, the US Department of Energy announced that it was renaming the National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) as the National Laboratory of the Rockies. For clarity, our report and supporting materials use the original name.*

Rising Electricity Demand While Delivering Climate and Health Benefits, a national UCS modeling report that used the ReEDS modeling tool (Clemmer et al. 2026).

Capacity-expansion models like ReEDS are designed to minimize the total system cost given a set of assumptions—for example, assumptions about future electricity demand, technology costs, and relevant policies. Also, although ReEDS is a national modeling framework, it can also provide results at the regional, state, and sub-state levels (i.e., model balancing areas). Our analysis focused on projected changes between 2026 and 2041 in Louisiana's generation mix, capacity mix, and bulk electricity system costs, including those attributable to the growth of data centers. Further, ReEDS also enabled us to estimate the public health and climate damages attributable to the growth of data centers and the resulting increase in fossil fuel–fired electricity emissions.

UCS based the assumptions in its analysis primarily on NREL's 2024 Standard Scenarios version of the ReEDS model and Annual Technology Baseline 2024 mid-case cost and performance assumptions (NREL 2024; Gagnon et al. 2024), with these exceptions regarding electricity demand:

- We used national electricity demand projections developed by Evolved Energy Research (EER) for *Annual Decarbonization Perspective,* a 2024 report that includes modest electrification of other sectors (transportation, industry, and residential and commercial buildings) (Jones et al. 2024).

- We used EER's reference load growth trajectory for data centers, which is in the middle of the range of most recent national-level studies, as well as a high-growth trajectory as a sensitivity.

- We supplemented these sources with data from S&P Global, including more recent announcements of data center proposals in Louisiana and several other states.[2]

- To account for uncertainty in data center proposals, we assumed that only half of the load from announced data centers gets built, and facilities would take up to five years to reach full capacity (MISO 2024; S&P Global Commodity Insights 2025).

Three Scenarios: Powering Differing Levels of Louisiana Data Center Demand

To isolate the power-grid impacts of different levels of data center growth in Louisiana, UCS utilized the load projections based on those data sources to examine three scenarios: Mid Data Center Growth, High Data Center Growth, and No Data Center Growth (Figure 2).

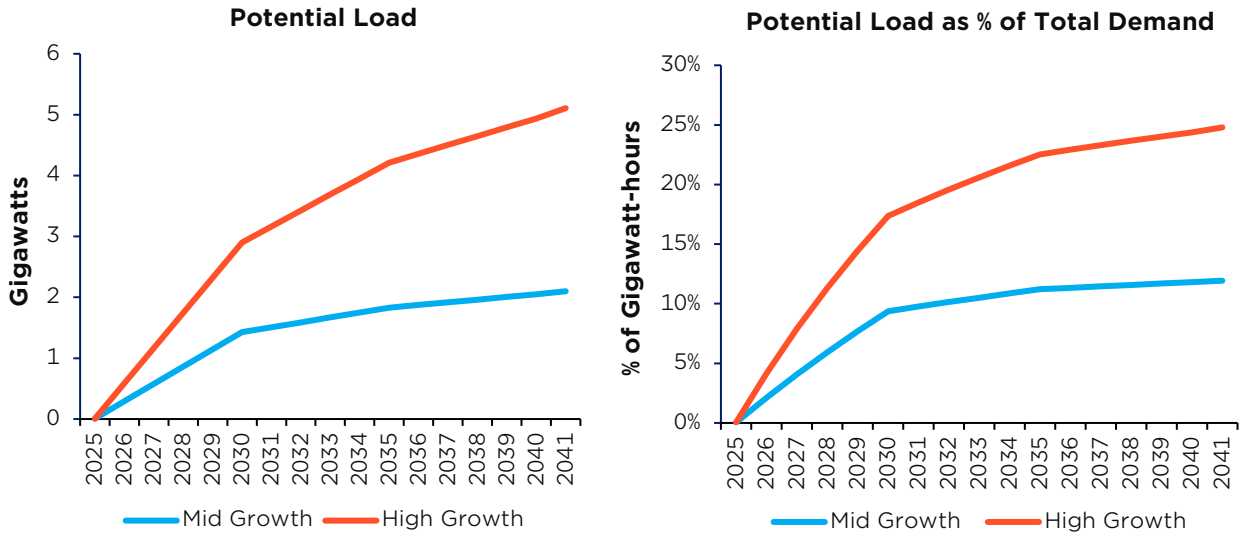
- **Mid Data Center Growth:** This is the main reference case scenario, with a "Mid Growth" data center load trajectory shown in Figure 2 for the 2026–2041 modeling period. This scenario reflects recent changes in federal tax credits for energy technologies as enacted in the 2025 One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA). This scenario does not include the Environmental Protection Agency's power plant carbon standards; the agency was in the process of repealing these when UCS conducted the modeling.

[2] *Data center announcements in 2026 were not included in this supplementation, as UCS conducted the modeling in 2025.*

The scenario includes NREL's "Low" transmission availability and representation of state-level electricity sector policies as of August 2024.

- **High Data Center Growth:** This scenario used the same assumptions as above but with a "High Growth" trajectory for data center load over the 2026–2041 modeling period.
- **No Data Center Growth:** This uses the same assumptions as the Mid Data Center Growth scenario but with no growth in data center load over the 2026–2041 modeling period. This counterfactual scenario enabled UCS to isolate the impact of data centers on the electricity system over time.

Figure 2. Data Center Load Projections in Louisiana, 2025–2041



For the Louisiana-specific portion of the UCS national demand projections, data centers could grow from essentially accounting for none of the state's electricity demand in 2025 up to 12 percent by 2041. Under a High Growth scenario, the 2041 figure could increase to 25 percent. In terms of gigawatt-hours, data centers account for 76 to 87 percent of total 2025–2030 load growth and 50 to 71 percent of 2025–2041 load growth.

For details on the methodology, please see the technical appendix.

Findings

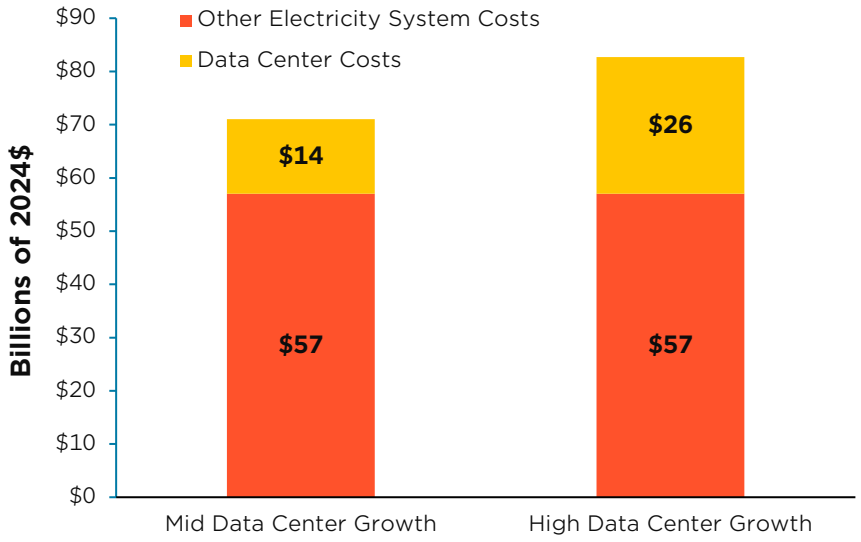
Under Louisiana's current trajectory, the modeling attributes $14 billion to $26 billion in projected electricity system costs to data center growth cumulatively between 2026 and 2041. In addition, the state would continue to rely heavily on gas power plants to meet increased electricity demand. As a result—and absent action from state policymakers—Louisiana residents could face large cost shifts from data center development and significantly higher levels of polluting gas-fired generation, which is projected to peak in 2038 at 53 to 72 percent

above 2026 levels.[3] By 2041, Louisiana's generation of electricity specifically for serving data centers results in $1.5 billion to $3.0 billion in cumulative public health costs and $35 billion to $87 billion in cumulative climate damages.

The Status Quo Would Expose Ratepayers to Significant Data Center–Related Costs and Continue the Overdependence of Louisiana's Grid on Gas

In a Mid Data Center Growth scenario, data centers are responsible for about 20 percent of Louisiana bulk electricity system costs cumulatively between 2026 and 2041, totaling $14 billion. In the High Data Center Growth scenario, the cost attributable to data centers jumps to $26 billion (about 31 percent of total costs) in that timespan. This estimate results from comparing the electricity system costs of the Mid and High Data Center Growth scenarios with those in the No Data Center Growth counterfactual scenario (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Cumulative Bulk Electricity System Costs, Mid vs. High Data Center Growth, 2026–2041



About $14 billion or 20 percent of Louisiana's cumulative bulk electricity system costs from 2026 to 2041 are attributed to data center growth under the Mid Data Center Growth scenario. The projected percentage rises to 31 percent under the High Data Center Growth scenario.

Note: The costs are only at the wholesale level; they do not reflect any actions by the LPSC, which oversees retail ratemaking, retail cost allocation, etc. Costs are expressed in net present value.

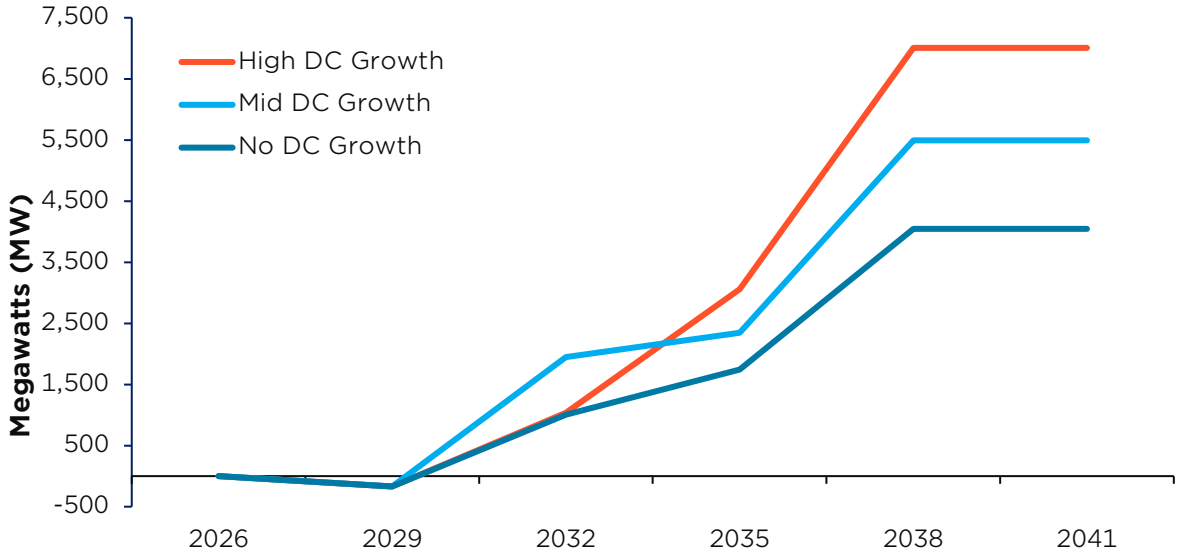
Because bulk electricity system costs are only at the wholesale level, the modeling does not indicate which retail customers would pay for them. However, the LPSC unfortunately lacks a comprehensive policy for protecting other ratepayers from system costs triggered by data centers. In fact, the LPSC's fast-track approval pathway, established through the recent

[3] *ReEDS reports gas/oil steam plants as a single type of resource. All references to "gas" in our modeling results include outputs related to gas/oil steam plants.*

"Lightning Amendment," potentially sets the stage for more than half of such system investment costs to be passed to ratepayers (Alliance for Affordable Energy 2025a). Louisiana ratepayers are at risk of significantly subsidizing a projected $14 billion to $26 billion in electricity system costs incurred solely to supply power to data centers.

The projected buildout of Louisiana's electricity generation capacity for powering demand growth from data centers and other sources is largely gas-fired. By 2038, gas capacity grows by 5.5 GW in a Mid Data Center Growth scenario and 7.0 GW in a High Data Center Growth scenario, making it the state's largest single source of capacity growth. No further gas growth occurs from 2038 to 2041 (Figure 4). Instead, renewables start taking a modestly larger share of the capacity mix. By 2041, Louisiana solar grows to 4.9 GW of total capacity in the Mid Growth scenario and 5.8 GW in the High Growth scenario. Wind grows to 3.9 GW in the Mid Growth scenario and 5.3 GW in the High Growth scenario.

Figure 4. Modeling Growth in Louisiana Gas-Fired Capacity



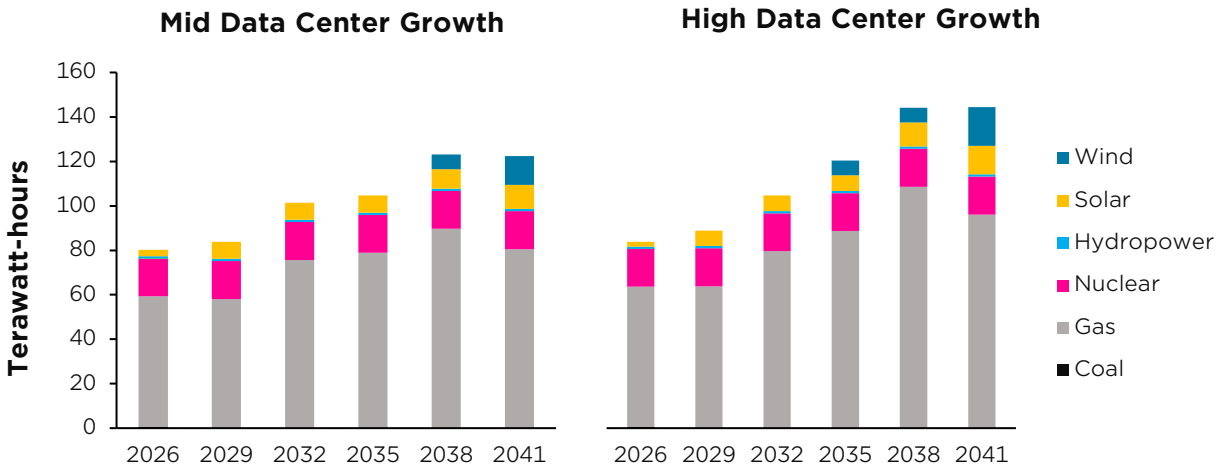
Comparisons with the No Data Center Growth counterfactual scenario show that data center load growth prompts approximately 1,500 MW in additional gas capacity under a Mid Data Center Growth scenario and 3,000 MW under a High Data Growth scenario. There is a slight decrease in 2029 with the retirement of some older gas capacity.

Potentially large but uncertain data center demand puts Louisiana at risk of paying the costs of electricity infrastructure that becomes "stranded"—essentially worthless—in the future. If Louisiana utilities build an electricity system designed to meet significant load growth from data centers, but that load fails to materialize or disappears—for example, if tech companies end operations or move them out of the state—other ratepayers could be forced to pay the costs of the unneeded infrastructure. For example, our results for the end of the modeling period show a 1,500 MW differential in Louisiana's gas-fired generating capacity between the Mid and High Data Center Growth scenarios, with a cumulative difference in gas plant capital costs of about $2 billion. These capital expenditures risk becoming stranded costs if utilities overbuild Louisiana's electricity system to meet data center demand.

In a Mid Data Center Growth scenario, Louisiana's total gas generation peaks in 2038 at 53 percent above projected 2026 levels (Figure 5). By 2041, the fossil fuel's share of the state's generation mix remains high at 66 percent, whereas wind and solar only reach 19 percent, which is right around their national share today (EIA 2026).[4]

Under a High Data Center Growth scenario, the increases in gas generation are even more striking, again peaking in 2038 but at 72 percent above projected 2026 levels. The generation mix follows a similar trajectory to the Mid Growth scenario through 2041, with gas taking a 67 percent share and wind and solar taking a 21 percent share.

Figure 5. Louisiana Generation Mix, Mid vs. High Data Center Growth



Both data center growth scenarios show substantial increases in gas-fired generation (gray). Wind and solar grow modestly. Other sources exhibit no major change in generation levels.

Across both scenarios, nuclear generation stays essentially constant. New nuclear remains an uneconomic choice, and the planned retirement dates for Louisiana's two existing reactors are outside the 2026–2041 modeling time period (NRC 2022a; NRC 2022b). Because ReEDS is a least-cost planning model, it does not capture proposals by big tech companies to pay above-market costs to restart existing nuclear plants or build new ones to power data centers.

Additionally, coal-fired electricity only provides less than 1 percent of the generation mix in 2026, and it phases out by 2029, based on publicly available sources outlined in the technical appendix. Hydropower does not change: the model builds no additional hydro capacity, and Louisiana's sole hydroelectric plant is not scheduled to retire within the modeling period (EIA 2025c).[5]

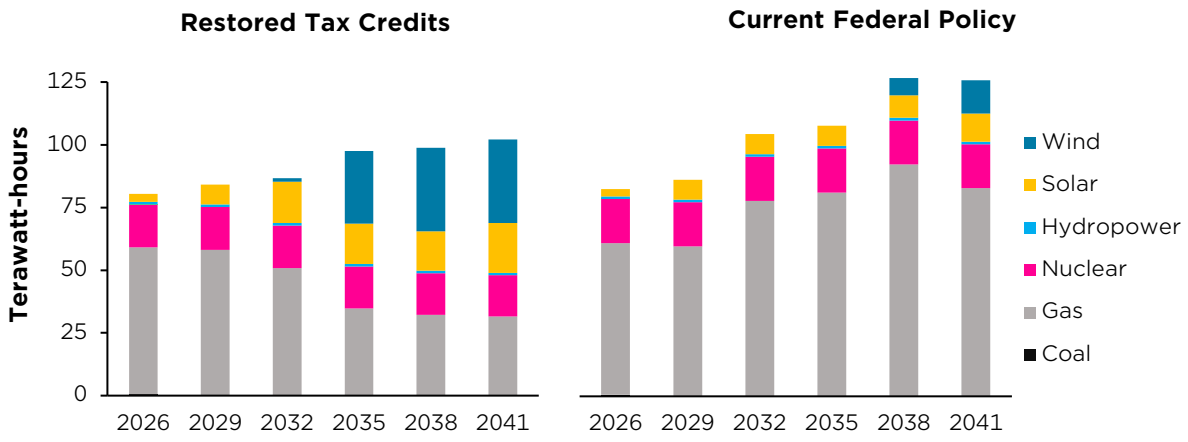
[4] *Federal 2025 data show that utility-scale wind and solar plants made up about 18 percent of national power-sector electricity generation (EIA 2026). Wind and solar contributed about 19 percent of total generation nationally, when accounting for other sources such as residential, commercial and industrial solar.*
[5] *In January 2026, Entergy Louisiana filed its modeling assumptions for its new IRP, including an assumed 2031 retirement date for the 192 MW hydroelectric plant in Vidalia, Louisiana (Entergy Louisiana 2026). The UCS modeling, conducted before January 2026, does not reflect this retirement date. Further, the retirement date is uncertain; retirement assumptions in IRP modeling are not firm commitments.*

With current federal policies (Box 1) and absent state-level reforms, the sustained overreliance on gas will continue to subject Louisianans to unpredictable spikes in utility bills. Even though ReEDS does not fully capture these spikes, they can substantially increase energy burdens. For example, when gas prices significantly increased in 2022, the fuel charges that Louisiana's three main investor-owned utilities added to customers' July bills were 69 to 103 percent higher

Box 1. Federal Reversal on Clean Energy Progress: Setting Louisiana Up for a More Polluting, More Expensive Power Grid

Changes in federal policy through the 2025 One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA) rolled back many of the clean energy incentives under the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) (Figure 6). UCS modeling included a second counterfactual scenario showing the result had the IRA incentives remained in place. As the results show, Louisiana would have been on a path to significantly reduced reliance on gas generation and increased deployment of renewable energy, even without additional state clean energy policies. The results also suggest that this trajectory would have lowered system costs.

Figure 6. Louisiana Generation, Restored IRA Tax Credits VS. Current Federal Policy, Mid Data Center Growth



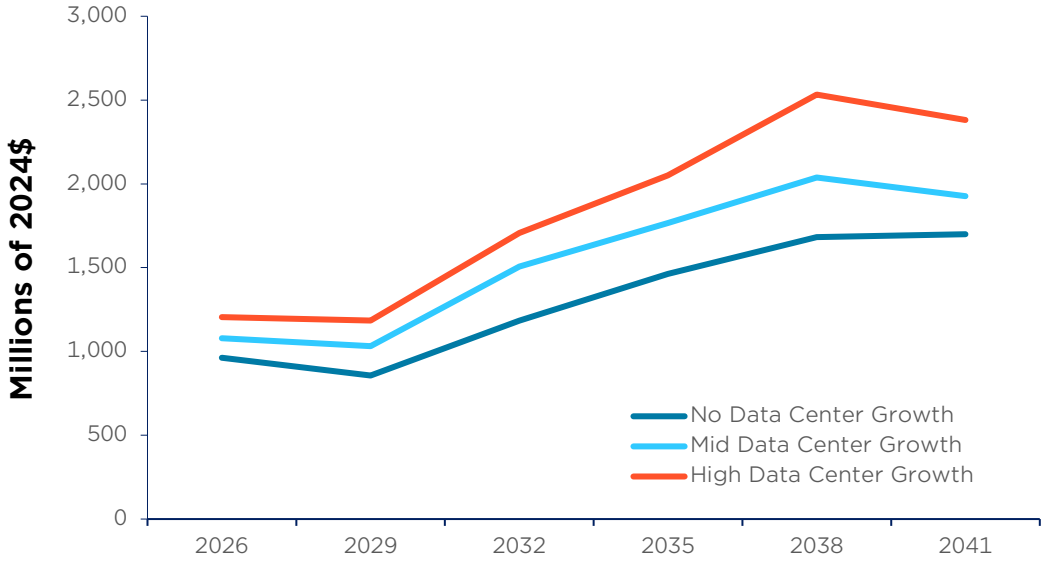
Had the federal clean energy incentives under the IRA stayed in place, Louisiana would have been on a path toward a cleaner, more diverse power grid at a lower cost, with significantly less gas generation and more wind and solar generation compared with current federal policy after the passage of the OBBBA.

Had the IRA tax incentives stayed in place, our findings suggest that gas generation would have fallen by almost half from 2026 to 2041. By 2041, gas generation under current federal policy is projected to make up 66 percent of the state's generation; that percentage falls to just 31 percent under the IRA counterfactual. In 2041, wind and solar account for only a 19 percent generation share under Current Policies; they grow to a 53 percent generation share in the IRA counterfactual. Cumulative bulk electricity system costs from 2026 to 2041 are about $71 billion under current federal policy compared with $64 billion in the IRA counterfactual.

than in July 2021 (LPSC Staff 2022). Cleco Power's fuel charges to customers totaled $548 million in 2022, a 69 percent increase over 2021 (London Economics International 2025). Entergy Louisiana charged customers $161 million in fuel costs associated with a single storm: Winter Storm Uri in February 2021, which caused a 15-fold increase in the going price of gas (United Professionals Company 2022).

Our results show that fuel costs for Louisiana gas plants, which utilities pass onto ratepayers, could double between 2026 and 2038 (Figure 7). For the Mid and High Data Center Growth scenarios, these costs start to decrease in 2041 as more wind and solar come online, but they remain nearly twice as high as 2026 levels. If events similar to Winter Storm Uri or the 2022 price spike occur again, gas fuel costs could be even higher than modeled.

Figure 7. Annual Fuel Costs for Louisiana Gas Plants in Different Scenarios



Projected annual fuel costs for Louisiana gas plants peak in 2038 at $2.0 billion in a Mid Data Center Growth scenario and $2.5 billion in a High Data Center Growth scenario, compared with $1.1 billion and $1.2 billion in 2026, respectively.

The Public Health and Climate Damages Due to Data Center–Driven Increases in Fossil Fuel Generation

If Louisiana maintains the status quo in terms of policy approaches and regulatory oversight, the increases in data center demand not only risk higher utility bills for ratepayers but also higher public health costs and increased climate damages due to rising fossil fuel generation. We estimate that between 2026 and 2041, Louisiana's electricity generation for powering data centers brings an additional $1.5 billion to $3 billion in cumulative public health costs and $35 billion to $87 billion in cumulative climate damages (Table 1).

Louisiana's burden of high pollution from fossil fuel power plants, gas production, and other large industrial sources of toxic emissions is well documented (Synapse 2022; Smith et al. 2025). For example, the cancer risk from industrial pollution could be seven times higher than

the national average in some parishes within Cancer Alley (Public Health on Call 2025). If the state continues leaning so heavily on gas for its electricity needs, pollution impacts could compound and cause more harm to communities (Ellickson 2022). Further, the estimated public health costs are only from SO_2 and NO_x without accounting for the impacts of other harmful emissions from fossil fuel power plants.

Table 1. Additional Public Health and Climate Damages

	Mid Data Center Growth Compared with No Growth	High Data Center Growth Compared with No Growth
Annual Average Health Damages	$93 million	$188 million
Cumulative Health Damages, 2026–2041	$1.5 billion	$3.0 billion
Annual Average Climate Damages	$2.2 billion	$5.4 billion
Cumulative Climate Damages, 2026–2041	$34.9 billion	$86.7 billion

Data centers drive billions of dollars in public health and climate damages as Louisiana relies on gas plants to meet growing electricity demand. Results are in 2024 dollars and represent net present value with a 2 percent discount rate.

While damages to public health are much more localized than climate damages, SO_2 and NO_x pollution can cross state lines, so health harms may also flow to other states. Annual power-sector CO_2 emissions are projected to increase by 13 to 22 percent between 2026 and 2041, bringing higher climate damages. The CO_2 emissions increase attributable to data centers in 2038—the year gas generation is projected to peak—could be as high as 11 million tons, or 34 percent higher than the No Data Center Growth counterfactual. The climate damages of Louisiana's electricity generation, measured by the social cost of carbon, are global, and we do not attempt to quantify the impact on Louisianans specifically. That said, Louisiana has experienced the impact of a number of climate events, and climate scientists expect such events to cause even more damage under a high-emissions scenario (Parker 2022b; Dahl et al. 2024; UCS 2019).

Overall, our results underscore the economic and environmental risks that could come to Louisiana as a result of sustained overdependence on a single fossil fuel resource and unmitigated growth in data centers that operate inflexibly (Box 2).

Ensuring a More Cost-Effective and Cleaner Electric System

As the UCS results show, the new challenge of data center growth threatens to erode the economic and environmental well-being of Louisianans as the expansion drives significant increases in electric system costs and comes with public health and climate impacts. Protecting Louisianans requires not only robust, transparent, and data-driven planning processes but also an attentive LPSC to ensure that the buildout of the electric system is cost-effective and delivers benefits to Louisiana communities. It also requires a dual commitment:

to diversifying Louisiana's electricity supply with cleaner, more affordable options and to instituting strong ratepayer protections to ensure that data centers pay their fair share of the costs. Right now, Louisiana lacks these important regulatory safeguards.

Box 2. Flexibility Can Reduce the Infrastructure Needs of New Data Centers

A growing body of research shows that data centers can greatly reduce the need for additional generation capacity simply by curtailing their power use for just 0.25 to 0.5 percent of the hours in a given year (Norris et al. 2025; Nadel 2025). While data center flexibility solutions like this are not fully proven, pilot projects are underway. For example, Google is working with utilities in three states to increase demand flexibility during periods of high demand by shifting model training workloads and reducing data center power usage (Terrell 2025).

Demand flexibility can lower system costs and enable a data center to get its power from cleaner resources such as solar and storage, but states and utilities must proactively assume early on in the resource planning process that data center load will be flexible (Cox, Schwartz, and Stenclik 2025). State-level requirements for data centers to be powered primarily by generation that is both *clean* and *additional* (i.e., reliant on new generation instead of existing generation, the latter of which would shrink supply for the public) can help reduce the climate and health impacts, as well as mitigate concerns among customers about grid reliability and affordability (Clemmer et al. 2026; Engel, Varadarajan, and Posner 2025).

Better Planning Can Reduce Costs and Address Louisiana's Overreliance on Fossil Fuels

Utilities in many states, including Louisiana, conduct what is known as long-term "integrated resource planning" (IRP), a process that typically uses a 20-year planning horizon to identify electric system needs, conduct analyses to identify cost-effective investments to meet those needs, and establish a strategy for energy infrastructure investments going forward. In Louisiana, IRPs are conducted every four years and overseen by the LPSC, with a stated objective of developing a plan that offers "the most economic and reliable combination of resources satisfying the forecasted load requirements" (LPSC 2024a). IRPs can be an important tool for helping utilities, regulators, and stakeholders work together to prepare for future system needs, while protecting ratepayers from unnecessary costs or investments that do more harm than good.

Regrettably, Louisiana's current IRP process lacks the levels of accountability and transparency seen in most other states with such processes. Despite having this planning process in place, the LPSC's poor decisionmaking and oversight failures expose ratepayers to excessive bills and burden communities with the public health and climate impacts of a significant overreliance on fossil fuels. The most recent round of IRP processes for Louisiana's primary investor-owned utilities—Entergy Louisiana, Cleco Power, and Southwestern Electric Power Company (SWEPCO)—exemplify the LPSC's failures to protect ratepayers and hold utilities to account.

In reviewing Entergy Louisiana's most recently completed IRP, filed in 2021, LPSC staff noted a wide range of deficiencies with the utility's plan. These included a lack of consideration of

transmission options, the exclusion of then-existing clean energy tax credits that would have had large impacts in determining a least-cost plan, and the selection of an investment portfolio that cost more than an alternative portfolio. Nevertheless, the LPSC and its staff concluded that Entergy complied with IRP rules, despite staff's expressed concerns about the plan's many shortcomings (Bello 2023; LPSC 2024b). Entergy then went on to propose multiple gigawatts of new fossil fuel–fired generation capacity that was unsupported by its accepted IRP; the commission approved most of this proposed capacity (Rosenbloom 2024a; Rosenbloom 2024b).[6]

LPSC staff also identified significant issues with the most recently accepted IRPs of Cleco Power and SWEPCO. With respect to Cleco's plan, the LPSC ultimately ignored serious concerns raised by both stakeholders and LPSC staff over the substantial uncertainty and economic risk of the utility's proposed carbon capture and storage (CCS) system at its Madison 3 generator fueled by petroleum coke and coal. As accepted by the LPSC, the project—since abandoned—could have quadrupled Cleco's rate base (Cleco Power 2025; Hoggatt 2024). Similarly, in SWEPCO's most recent IRP, the LPSC accepted one of the most expensive portfolio options, which also had the highest carbon impact of all the examined portfolios. Also, the IRP failed to consider any transmission options (Bello 2024).

A strengthened IRP process would help Louisiana more comprehensively consider its resource options, save on ratepayer costs, and reduce the current overreliance on gas and other fossil fuels. For example, analyses have shown that increasing transmission ties between Entergy and SWEPCO's regions would allow the flow of more wind power and reduce costs, yet the LPSC did not require either utility to examine transmission (Hausman 2025; Goggin and Zimmerman 2023). Similarly, LPSC staff noted that Cleco did not properly compare the CCS system cost at its Madison 3 plant to alternatives—for example, solar-plus-battery-storage resources—yet staff nevertheless recommended the commission accept the plan (Hoggatt 2024).

Holding utilities accountable in this key resource planning process can facilitate investments in cleaner, cheaper resources in lieu of further investing in costly, polluting ones. Now that the state faces an uncertain but potentially large amount of data center load growth, a robust, inclusive, and transparent IRP process that holds utilities accountable is even more critical to keeping costs manageable for ratepayers and ensuring a diverse, reliable power supply (Box 3).

Ratepayers at Risk: Louisiana's Starting Strategy for Data Centers

Responsible system planning and robust LPSC oversight are necessary to set Louisiana on a course to a more reliable, more affordable electricity supply. Yet Louisiana policymakers' starting approach to managing the data center challenge has consistently prioritized industry asks over protections for Louisiana ratepayers. Two LPSC regulatory actions in the second half of 2025 exemplify this ill-conceived prioritization: the approval of the Entergy Louisiana/Meta Platforms project in Richland Parish and the adoption of a new fast-track approval process for electricity infrastructure designed to power data centers.

[6] *After the LPSC accepted Entergy's IRP, the utility applied to build the 112 MW gas-fired Bayou Power Station, but the utility abandoned the project (Alliance for Affordable Energy 2025c). The utility also applied to build 2.3 GW of new gas-fired capacity for the Meta data center in Richland Parish; the commission approved the application in August 2025 (LPSC 2025b).*

Box 3. Transparency and Accessibility Matter

Unlike most states, Louisiana's IRP process lacks critical elements that would enable stakeholders and communities to meaningfully engage in the decisionmaking process. Most IRP processes require utilities to respond to questions and requests for data and information about how they determined future system needs and what options are available to meet those needs. The LPSC makes this voluntary for the utilities it regulates. This means that the utilities control the flow of information in these proceedings and ultimately have a significant advantage over ratepayers and communities as they seek to advance solutions that best serve their interests.

The LPSC's antiquated filing systems raise a further barrier to stakeholder participation in IRP and other dockets (e.g., applications for new power plants). The commission's failure to integrate electronic filing systems—instead requiring documents to be submitted via fax, certified mail, or in-person—needlessly limits the ability of stakeholders to participate in IRP and other proceedings.

Combined, the lack of transparency and accessibility in the LPSC's approaches give Louisiana utilities disproportionate influence over processes that should protect and empower ratepayers, who are on the hook for the costs of approved infrastructure spending.

A Cautionary Tale: LPSC's Approval of the Entergy/Meta Data Center Plan

In late 2024, Entergy Louisiana submitted an application to the LPSC to construct three gas-fired power plants and a new transmission line to power a massive data center planned by a subsidiary of Meta Platforms in northern Louisiana's Richland Parish. The data center is planned to span 4 million square feet; its publicly available load estimate is 2.6 GW, more than double the 2023 peak demand of the entire city of New Orleans. Because data centers prefer running continuously, the Meta facility is set to consume, on an annual basis, more than three times the amount of electricity that New Orleans consumes (Arbaje 2025a). Though the estimated operational costs of the three plants are confidential, estimated capital costs are $3.2 billion, and the new transmission line will cost an estimated $550 million (Kunkel 2025).

During LPSC proceedings to review the proposal, commission staff and other stakeholders warned of the significant operational and economic risks to ratepayers associated with the proposal. They raised concerns that the proposed project would weaken the overall system's reliability while putting ratepayers at risk for significant cost increases (N. Miller 2025; Kunkel 2025; Brubaker 2025; Sisung 2025). Nevertheless, the LPSC rushed the proposal through the review process, which culminated with Entergy Louisiana customers slated to subsidize the costs of fuel and operations resulting from the project, as well as the cost to build the $550 million transmission line (Arbaje 2025b). Additionally, Entergy and Meta signed an electricity supply contract with an initial term of only 15 years. If Meta does not renew the contract for another 15 years, it will likely leave Entergy Louisiana ratepayers paying about half of the estimated $3.2 billion in gas plant capital costs (Kunkel 2025). New electric infrastructure is typically paid for, or "depreciated," over 30 years or more (VIS Economic & Energy Consultants 2021).

The final order approving the new infrastructure failed to address most of the risks and shortcomings identified by stakeholders and LPSC staff, including risks to the reliability of the state's electricity grid (S. Miller 2026; N. Miller 2025). The public had just over one week's notice before the vote, at which time four of the five commissioners voted to approve the proposal in August 2025. During the vote, representatives of the LPSC's staff described the Entergy-Meta deal as setting a "template," as well as a "floor," for future data-center-related power projects in the state, the latter implying that the ratepayer protections in forthcoming projects would be just as robust, if not more so (LPSC 2025a). However, just several months later in December 2025, the commission issued a new directive setting the stage for exactly the opposite to happen.

Fast-Track Approval Clears the Way for Massive Shifts of Data Center Costs to Ratepayers

On December 17, 2025, the LPSC issued the "Lightning Amendment" directive, creating a fast-track regulatory approval process for utility projects proposed to serve large customers (LPSC 2025c).[7] The objective is to approve electricity projects, such as power plants, within just eight months of an application submission, provided that the application meets certain criteria. The first key requirement for a utility to secure the fast-track process is an electricity supply contract with a minimum 15-year term. The second is that the data center must cover at least half the cost of the proposed new generating capacity over that contract term.

These requirements fall far short of protecting ratepayers from subsidizing the costs caused by new data centers. The required 15-year electric supply contract will only cover half of the costs over that period, given the typical 30-year depreciation period. In other words, once the initial 15-year contract expires, ratepayers would be on the hook for any remaining costs unless the data center and utility agree to a new contract (VIS Economic & Energy Consultants 2021; Kunkel 2025). In total, ratepayers could be on the hook for 75 percent of the costs of new infrastructure—half of the first 50 percent covered by the initial 15-year contract and the entirety of the remaining 50 percent once that initial contract ends.

The Lightning Amendment further disadvantages ratepayers by waiving the requirement for utilities to conduct a competitive bidding process for any new generating resources. A competitive process, known as a "request for proposals" (RFP), forces a utility's "self-build" proposals for new generating capacity to compete with other parties' proposals to build new generating capacity (LPSC 2024c). This helps ensure that ratepayers pay the least cost for new resources. By waiving the RFP requirement, the commission sets the stage for utilities to inflate the costs of new resources and recover those inflated costs primarily from ratepayers.

In summary, the LPSC's regulatory structures and typically lax approach to utility oversight are poorly equipped to responsibly address the demands of new data center load *and* protect ratepayers from subsidizing the costs. The Meta project tells a cautionary tale: Entergy

[7] *In the months following the passage of the Lightning Amendment, the LPSC issued non-binding guidelines for additions of large customers (e.g., data centers) (LPSC 2026a), and directed its staff to conduct a technical conference to field stakeholder feedback on the guidelines. Under this directive, staff will provide its recommendations to the commission in a report following the technical conference. The commission indicated a desire to vote on staff's post-conference recommendations sometime in 2026 (LPSC 2026b). The future of LPSC data center policy is therefore uncertain, but the Lightning Amendment remains in effect as of the spring of 2026.*

Louisiana is poised to accrue an estimated $178 million in new annual shareholder profits (Young 2025). Meta, meanwhile, secured a ratepayer guarantee of billions of dollars in electricity infrastructure (LPSC 2025b). Ratepayers could end up paying a large portion of the total bill and will shoulder the burden of three new gas plants in Louisiana communities. Without course correction, costs will continue to mount for ratepayers while their voices will be excluded due to unnecessary barriers and a lack of transparency and accountability in decisionmaking processes.

Recommendations

The prospect of significant data center growth in Louisiana, as in many states, presents a new dynamic that threatens to intensify existing challenges should the status quo of poor regulatory oversight and inadequate ratepayer protections continue. The UCS modeling shows how large the electricity system costs triggered by data centers could be; the analysis also shows how, without proper safeguards in place, the state will continue its trajectory toward an alarming overreliance on gas. If policymakers and the LPSC take no action, the state risks sustained overdependence on gas and a significant push of costs onto ratepayers.

Alternatively, Louisiana can adopt policies and approaches to decisionmaking that embrace responsible planning to meet the state's electricity needs cost-effectively, protect ratepayers from unfair costs, and diversify the state's energy mix with cleaner, more affordable electricity sources. Our recommendations are more focused on the LPSC rather than the New Orleans City Council, which regulates Entergy New Orleans.[8] However, they could be instructive to the City Council depending on the city's willingness to host data centers in the future.[9]

We believe the LPSC has the authority and responsibility to adopt these reforms. If the commission does not act, the legislature or governor should act within their powers to direct it to do so. If implemented, the following recommendations would put Louisiana on a path toward a reliable and affordable electricity system that better serves communities.

Improve Louisiana's Integrated Resource Planning Process

The electricity demand from future data centers is highly uncertain and can yield significantly different outcomes in terms of electricity system costs. Louisiana utility regulators must ensure that their resource planning processes can address this new challenge and prevent further harm to ratepayers.

By reforming its IRP process, the LPSC can better hold utilities accountable and improve the transparency and accessibility of the process. Utilities should be required to submit all relevant details of proposed spending plans and alternatives that might be more cost-effective or provide additional benefits to ratepayers. Utilities should then be required to respond to questions and

[8] Though most of our recommendations focus on the LPSC, our final recommendation regarding the diversification of Louisiana's electricity mix is also relevant to the New Orleans City Council; the city has a distinct role in power-sector planning similar to that of a state, including with regard to the stakeholder process of regional transmission grid operator MISO.

[9] Technology companies may have a desire in the future to site certain AI data centers closer to population centers, such as New Orleans. This could reduce latency in serving real-time "inference" demands from end users (Szlezak and Peisch 2024; Johnson Controls). In contrast to inference loads, AI training loads can be in remote locations away from population centers (Norris et al. 2025).

requests for additional information from interested stakeholders. LPSC should base its decisions on maximizing the benefits to ratepayers, including minimizing future price spikes, avoiding unfair cost shifts, and mitigating the public health and climate impacts of new infrastructure. How utilities intend to accommodate new demand from data centers should be a central question in upcoming IRPs, necessitating transparent projections of load growth from data centers and the evaluation of a range of options to meet that new demand cost effectively.

Once utilities and the LPSC respond to stakeholder and community input and plans are accepted, the LSPC should require competitive proposals for all new infrastructure. This would help ensure a least-cost approach to investing. The agency should also require a utility to justify infrastructure costs unsupported by its latest IRP and consider measures such as cost caps or disallowances for failures to justify such investments.

Protect Utility Customers from the Costs of Data Center Load Growth

The LPSC must protect ratepayers from the risks of data center growth and make technology companies pay for additional capital and operating costs incurred to supply the facilities' demands. Our modeling results show that in a High Growth scenario, data centers could be responsible for 31 percent of cumulative electricity system costs between 2026 and 2041, totaling about $26 billion. Further, an unchecked strategy that relies on new gas power plants to meet data center–driven demand will cause significant increases in emissions, requiring protections from climate, health, and environmental costs as well.

The LPSC should require utilities to develop standardized rate structures, or "tariffs," for new data centers, explicitly preventing cross-subsidization by other ratepayers. The commission should hold utilities accountable for securing firm financial backing from data centers to prevent other ratepayers from shouldering big tech companies' financial risks. New power plants necessary to serve data centers should be both *clean* (to avoid emission increases) and *additional* (not reliant solely on existing generation) to prevent market price increases that would increase costs for other customers (Clemmer et al. 2026).

Center the Voices of Louisianans in Decisionmaking

Louisianans must have opportunities to engage meaningfully in decisionmaking processes, and they need access to the same data and information that decisionmakers use. The LPSC should improve its IRP and other regulatory processes (e.g., new resource applications) to increase transparency and stakeholder engagement. In line with many other states, the agency should implement an electronic filing system and allow for public comments on dockets, steps that would involve a broader set of stakeholder voices and prevent disproportionate influence by utility companies. During decisionmaking processes, the LPSC must hold utilities accountable to reasonable standards of transparency and enact specific principles and requirements for meaningful community engagement. Possible reforms include:

- **Engage early with** communities, before plans are drafted, to build trust and ensure that community priorities guide investment decisions.
- **Incorporate energy justice principles** that focus on equity in social and economic participation within the energy system. Integrating such principles, including assessing cumulative impacts (Ellickson 2022), shapes decisionmaking that actively works to remedy past injustices and prevent future disparities.

- **Establish opportunities for collaboration** by creating and compensating community advisory boards that have some ownership over the decisionmaking process.

- **Embed accountability** into the process by requiring utilities and LPSC staff charged with evaluating utility proposals to acknowledge and respond to concerns raised by communities that will be impacted.

Embrace Solutions that Diversify Louisiana's Electricity Mix

As the UCS modeling shows, in the absence of thoughtful intervention by the LPSC, the state risks a sustained and alarming overdependence on gas to meet its electricity needs. This continued reliance on a single fossil fuel will subject Louisianans to additional harmful pollution and a higher risk of energy-bill spikes.

Other resources are available that can cost-effectively improve reliability and meet future electricity demand (including from new data centers) without burdening Louisiana communities with significant public health and climate impacts. These options include:

- **Take advantage of Louisiana's robust clean energy potential.** Louisiana has significant untapped potential to develop its robust solar and wind resources (Lopez et al. 2025). When paired with battery storage, these resources provide an emissions-free, cost-effective way to diversify the state's energy mix away from gas (BloombergNEF 2026; Lazard 2025). A diverse electricity supply is critical to not only improve the reliability and resilience of the system but also limit the harmful impacts of the state's energy choices.

- **Embrace the benefits of a more connected grid.** Louisiana straddles two regional grids—MISO and SPP—that operate the bulk transmission system in the regions surrounding and including Louisiana. By building more connections to these larger systems, Louisiana can capture economies of scale and diversification of resources, thereby reducing costs and improving the reliability of the electricity supply (Hausman 2025; MISO n.d.a). In the northern region of MISO, for example, recently approved transmission investments are expected to deliver significantly more benefits to ratepayers than the costs, achieving the gains through lowered wholesale energy prices, improved reliability, increased resilience to extreme weather, and other benefits (MISO n.d.b; Gomberg 2024). Despite this demonstrated success, Louisiana has resisted efforts to build a grid that better interconnects it to the broader system.

- **Pursue all cost-effective energy efficiency.** Energy efficiency continues to be one of the lowest-cost resources available, and the LPSC should require utilities to aggressively pursue all opportunities for cost-effective energy efficiency that can lower electricity demand while also building community resilience and reducing energy burdens (Specian and Aquino 2026). Energy efficiency programs should include low-income assistance to help the most vulnerable, robust measurement and verification protocols to ensure success, and the consideration of conditions on new data center proposals that help fund efficiency programs and other direct benefits to communities.

Without a renewed focus on communities and ratepayers, the state will struggle to meet the data center challenge affordably and sustainably. Implementing these recommendations would move Louisiana away from its current trajectory of higher costs and excessive

dependence on gas. The LPSC must act decisively to implement reforms that hold itself and utilities accountable to the communities they serve.

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