

A man in a dark suit and light-colored shirt stands in a server room. He has a holster on his right hip. The room is filled with server racks and glowing blue lights.

DATA CENTERS · ISSUE #2

FOLLOW THE POWER

Adult / Community Edition · Prestige pilot

CREDITS

Follow the Power · Data Centers #2 · Adult / Community edition

Story and production: GOTB Consulting, Chicago

*Mateo Olmedo · The Auditor · Gridline · Commons · Undertow · Dess · Lena Ashgrove,
Channel 5*

AI-GENERATED ART, FICTIONAL CHARACTERS

All characters, the town of Prairie Bend and Channel 5 are fictional. Any resemblance to real people is a coincidence. No real logos are shown. Real institutions (PJM, ComEd, NERC, FERC, consumer and market-monitor bodies) are named only where public sources are cited.

Every number was checked against public sources (see Sources). Disputed points carry a CONTESTED stamp and the strongest case on each side.

Nonpartisan: no parties, no politicians.

Lettering: Bebas Neue, Oswald, Kalam, Libre Baskerville, Courier Prime, Special Elite (set in Pillow; no fonts embedded).

© 2026 GOTB Consulting. All rights reserved.

THE CAST



MATEO OLMEDO

The Level. Two chairs,
one level. Gun stays
holstered.



THE AUDITOR

Sees and reports.
Cannot stop anything.



GRIDLINE

Sees where current
flows. Cannot make new
power.



COMMONS

Neighbors and crews.
Strong only when people
show up.



UNDERTOW

Water is his beat.
Measures first.



DESS

Watches the
apprentices. Counts
openings.



LENA ASHGROVE

Channel 5. On screen,
never in the action.



Prairie Bend. 11:40 PM.
Rain, as ordered.

MATEO

LAST TIME THE QUESTION WAS
THE BUILDING.



MATEO

TONIGHT IT'S THE WIRE THAT FEEDS
IT.

FACT FILE · 01

A typical AI-focused data center uses as much electricity as about 100,000 households; the largest under construction will use 20 times that.

Source: IEA, Energy and AI (2025)

GOTB / DC FILE

TURBINE HALL



GRIDLINE

A MAGNET SPINNING IN COPPER: THE 1831 DISCOVERY.



GRIDLINE

STEAM, GAS, WATER OR WIND TURNS THE SHAFT. MOST U.S. PLANTS STILL WORK THAT WAY.



Old trick. Bigger magnets.

FACT FILE · 02



Most power plants use a turbine: moving water, steam, combustion gases or air push blades that spin a generator. Moving a magnet inside a coil of wire makes current flow (first shown in 1831).

Source: U.S. EIA, How electricity is generated

GOTB / DC FILE



LENA · ON SCREEN

2025 U.S. GENERATION: 4.43
TRILLION KILOWATT-HOURS.

LENA · ON SCREEN

GAS ABOUT 41%, NUCLEAR 18, COAL
17, RENEWABLES 24.

Coffee: hot. Grid: mostly gas.

FACT FILE · 03

VERIFIED

Within renewables: wind about 11%, solar about 7%, hydropower about 6% of U.S. utility-scale generation in 2025. Data centers used about 4.4% of U.S. electricity in 2023 (DOE).

Source: U.S. EIA, Electricity in the U.S.; U.S. DOE (Dec 20, 2024)

GOTB / DC FILE

HEARING ROOM



FACT FILE · 04

In advanced economies, data centers account for more than 20% of electricity demand growth to 2030. Hard parts named by EIA: siting new lines, aging lines, and who pays when a line in one state benefits others.

Source: IEA, Energy and AI; U.S. EIA, Delivery to consumers

GOTB / DC FILE



FACT FILE · 05

Balancing authorities keep supply and demand matched; imbalance can cause local or widespread blackouts. The Lower 48 runs as three interconnections: Eastern, Western and ERCOT (most of Texas). EIA also lists protecting the grid from cyber attacks as a challenge.

Source: U.S. EIA, Delivery to consumers

GOTB / DC FILE



THE AUDITOR

HERE THE REGIONAL OPERATOR, PJM, RUNS THE HIGH-VOLTAGE GRID AND WHOLESALE MARKET FOR MORE THAN 67 MILLION PEOPLE.



THE AUDITOR

THE LOCAL WIRES BELONG TO THE UTILITY: COMED, 4 MILLION-PLUS CUSTOMERS.

FACT FILE · 06



REPORTED

Both figures are the organizations' own descriptions: PJM coordinates all or parts of 13 states, including Illinois, and D.C.; ComEd serves more than 4 million customers in northern Illinois, about 70% of the state's population.

Source: PJM, "Who We Are"; ComEd, "About Us" (opened Oct 22, 2026)

GOTB / DC FILE



FACT FILE · 07



VERIFIED

In the U.S., the IEA projects data centers drive nearly half of electricity demand growth to 2030. DOE's range for 2028: 6.7% to 12% of U.S. electricity (CONTESTED as a range).

Source: IEA, Energy and AI; U.S. DOE (Dec 2024)

GOTB / DC FILE

EMPTY PADS

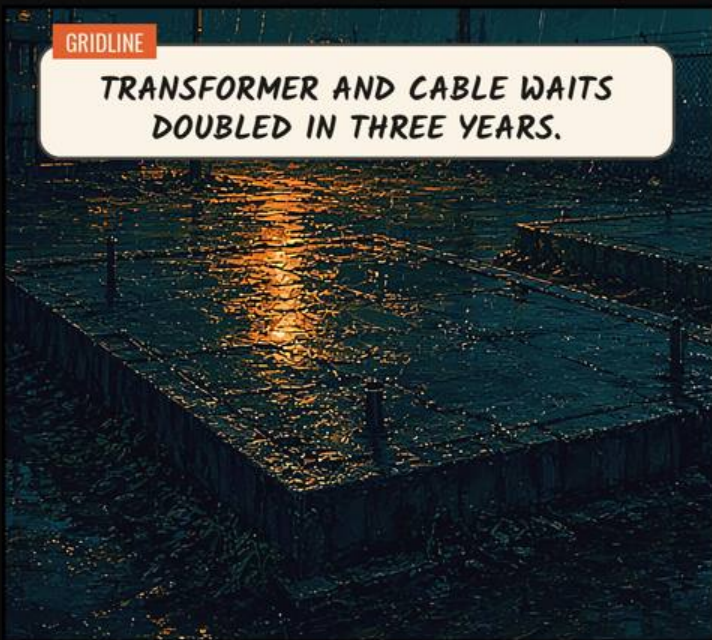


The pads are poured. The transformers are not.

GRIDLINE

NEW LINES: FOUR TO EIGHT YEARS.

GRIDLINE



TRANSFORMER AND CABLE WAITS DOUBLED IN THREE YEARS.

GRIDLINE



ABOUT 20% OF PLANNED DATA CENTRES COULD FACE DELAYS.

FACT FILE · 08

VERIFIED

IEA options: build where grid capacity exists, and run servers or backup power more flexibly. About 50% of U.S. data centers under development are in existing large clusters, a local bottleneck risk.

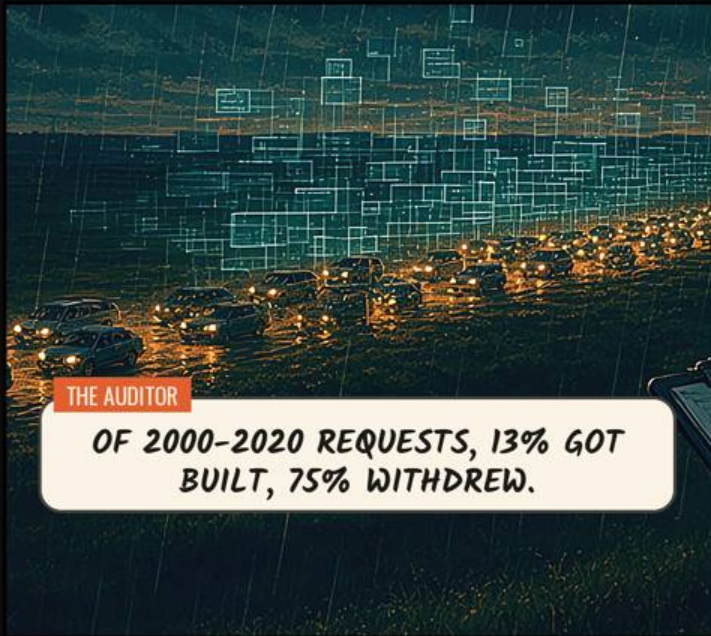
Source: IEA, Energy and AI (2025)

GOTB / DC FILE

THE QUEUE

THE AUDITOR

SOME 8,200 PROJECTS WAITING TO
CONNECT AT THE END OF 2025.
MEDIAN WAIT OVER FIVE YEARS.



THE AUDITOR

OF 2000-2020 REQUESTS, 13% GOT
BUILT, 75% WITHDREW.



THE AUDITOR

I CAN SEE IT. I CAN'T
STOP IT.

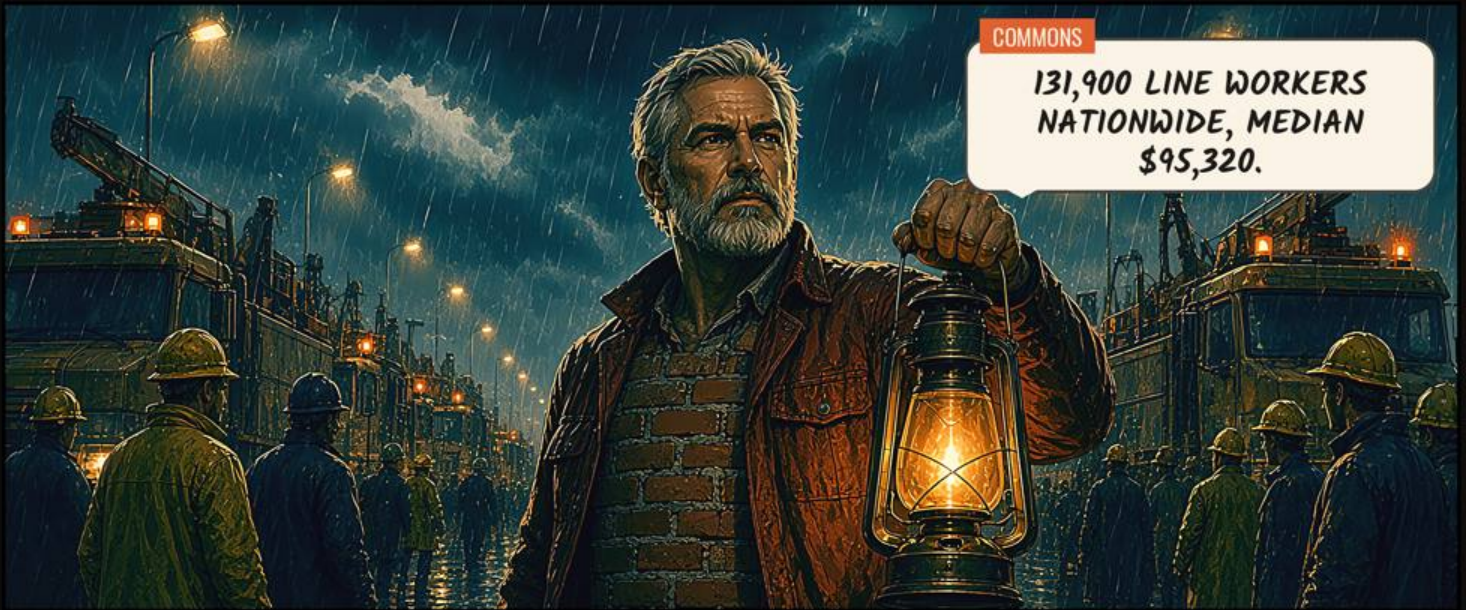
FACT FILE · 09

VERIFIED

Queue at end of 2025: about 1,312 GW of generation plus about 749 GW of storage. Median time from request to operation was over five years for projects built in 2025.

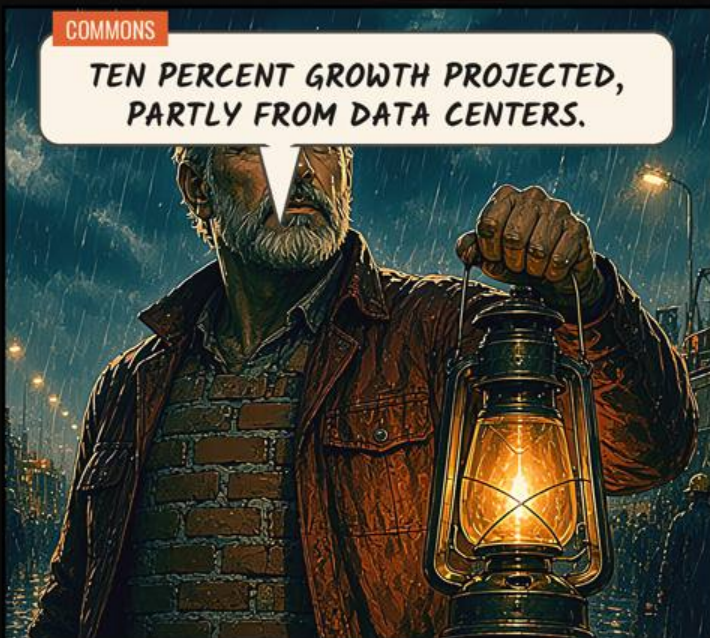
Source: Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, *Queued Up*

GOTB / DC FILE



COMMONS

131,900 LINE WORKERS
NATIONWIDE, MEDIAN
\$95,320.



COMMONS

TEN PERCENT GROWTH PROJECTED,
PARTLY FROM DATA CENTERS.



COMMONS

WHEN A STORM HITS, THEY TRAVEL IN
AND WORK DAYS STRAIGHT.

FACT FILE · 10

VERIFIED

Projection period 2025-2035, 'much faster than average', with about 10,900 openings a year. Crews climb poles and towers or use bucket trucks, with fall protection and insulated tools.

Source: U.S. BLS, Occupational Outlook Handbook (Aug 2026)

GOTB / DC FILE



FACT FILE · 11

CONTESTED

ComEd estimated a 10-15% increase. The Citizens Utility Board pointed to PJM 'policy problems'. PJM's independent market monitor concluded data center load growth was 'the primary reason' for high 2025/26 capacity prices.

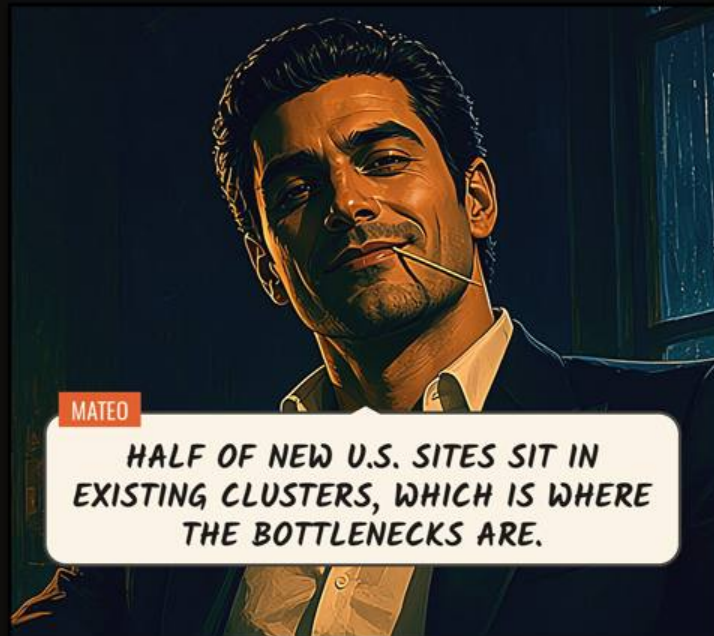
Source: CUB release (Jun 4, 2025); PJM IMM analysis (Jun 3, 2025)

GOTB / DC FILE

CHAIR ONE

MATEO

COUNTER-CASE: BUILD WHERE
THE GRID HAS ROOM, RUN
SERVERS AND BACKUP POWER
FLEXIBLY.



MATEO

HALF OF NEW U.S. SITES SIT IN
EXISTING CLUSTERS, WHICH IS WHERE
THE BOTTLENECKS ARE.

Same man. Other chair.



FACT FILE · 12

This is the strongest case for growth on today's wires: site carefully and stay flexible, and more projects can connect sooner. The tradeoff: clusters concentrate strain on the same local lines.

Source: IEA, Energy and AI (2025)

GOTB / DC FILE



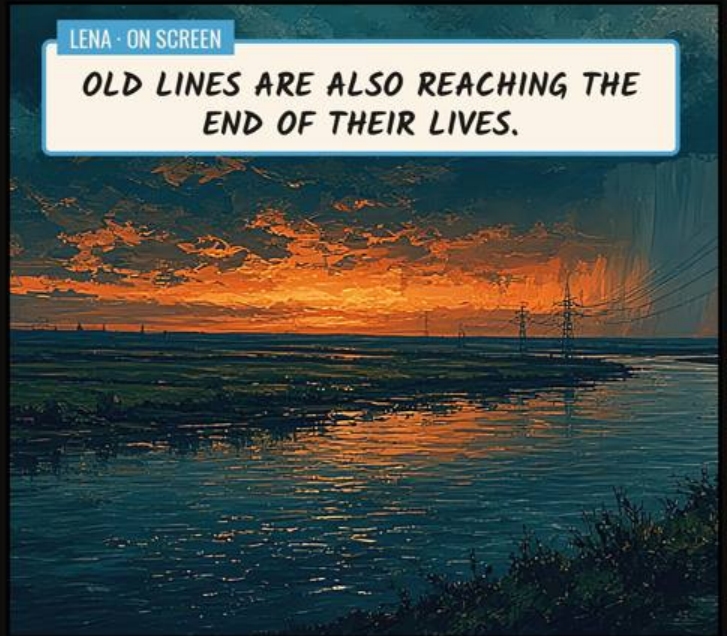
LENA · ON SCREEN

THE HARD PART ISN'T THE STEEL. IT'S SITING, AND DECIDING WHO PAYS WHEN A LINE IN ONE STATE HELPS ANOTHER.



LENA · ON SCREEN

OLD LINES ARE ALSO REACHING THE END OF THEIR LIVES.



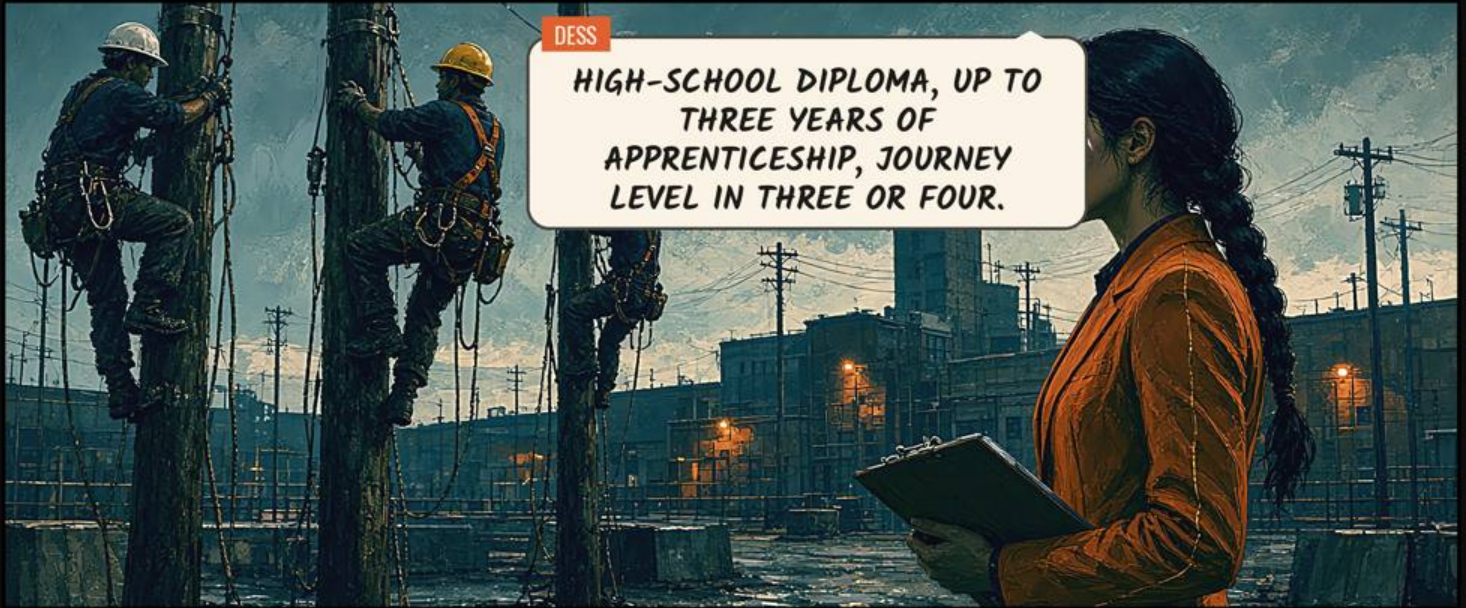
FACT FILE · 13



Other challenges EIA lists: protecting the grid from physical and cyber attacks. Mandatory reliability standards are developed by NERC and approved by FERC.

Source: U.S. EIA, Delivery to consumers

GOTB / DC FILE



DESS

HIGH-SCHOOL DIPLOMA, UP TO
THREE YEARS OF
APPRENTICESHIP, JOURNEY
LEVEL IN THREE OR FOUR.



The cloud still needs somebody to climb the pole.



DESS

ABOUT 10,900 OPENINGS A YEAR.

FACT FILE · 14



Line installer and repairer jobs: about 131,900 in 2025, projected to grow 10% to 2035, partly because AI and data centers raise electricity demand.

Source: U.S. BLS, Occupational Outlook Handbook (Aug 2026)

GOTB / DC FILE



FACT FILE · 15

A smart grid helps utilities find and fix problems faster and helps customers manage their use at peak times. The IEA notes AI fault detection can cut outage time by 30-50%.

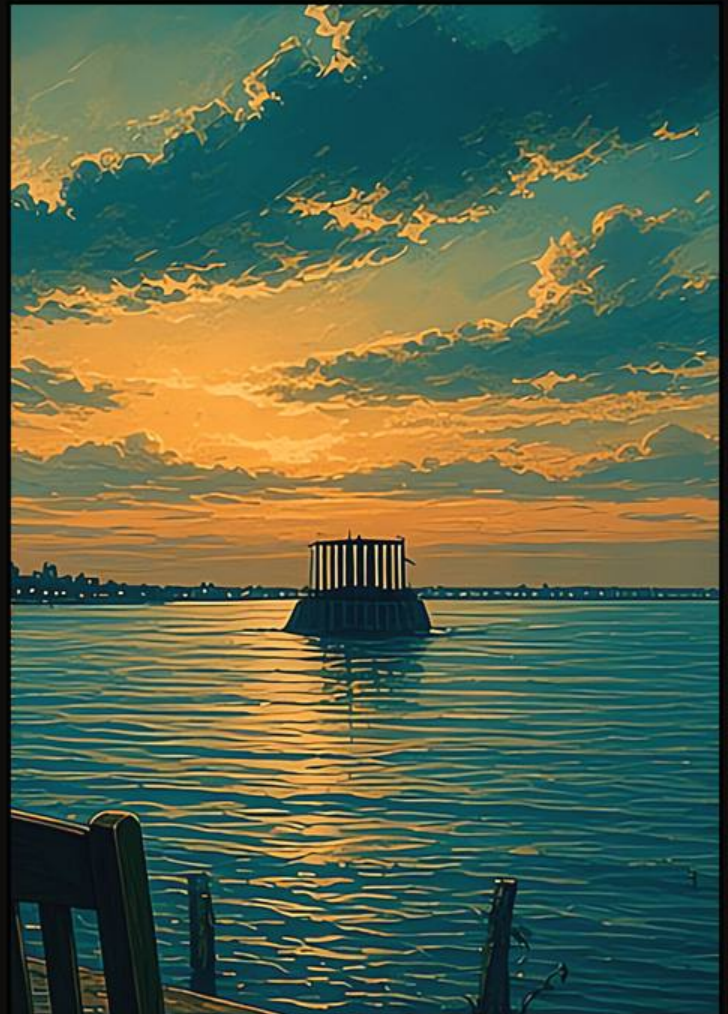
Source: U.S. EIA; IEA, Energy and AI

GOTB / DC FILE



MATEO

TWO CHAIRS, ONE LEVEL. PLAN THE WIRES IN THE OPEN AND BOTH CAN SIT DOWN.



GOTB Consulting, Chicago: infrastructure and procurement for the power, water and public works these projects depend on.

BY THE NUMBERS

4.43 TRILLION kWh

U.S. utility-scale generation, 2025: gas ~41%, nuclear ~18%, coal ~17%, renewables ~24%. (EIA)

8,200 · 1,312 GW · 749 GW

Projects, generation and storage waiting to connect, end of 2025; 13% of 2000-2020 requested capacity built, 75% withdrawn. (LBNL)

4-8 YEARS · 2x · 20%

New lines; transformer/cable waits doubled in 3 years; share of planned data centers that could face delays. (IEA)

67M+ · 4M+

People in the PJM region; ComEd customers (~70% of Illinois). Self-descriptions.

131,900 · \$95,320 · +10%

Line installers/repairers 2025, median pay May 2025, projected growth 2025-35. (BLS)

\$10.60/MONTH (CONTESTED)

ComEd estimate, summer 2025, for a year; cause disputed: auction rules vs. data center growth. (CUB; PJM IMM)

TWO CHAIRS, ONE LEVEL

The strongest case on each side, labeled. Nonpartisan.

CHAIR ONE: GROW THE GRID

Demand is rising from data centers, factories and electrification; lines take 4-8 years, so planning must start early. Flexible siting and operation can connect load sooner.

CHAIR TWO: WHO PAYS, WHERE, HOW LONG

Bills rose in summer 2025 (cause contested). Cross-state lines raise cost-sharing questions. Clusters concentrate strain on local wires; queues run over five years.

WHAT BOTH CHAIRS SHARE

Reliability standards are mandatory. Both sides want the lights on and costs that are fair and visible.

QUESTIONS FOR YOUR HEARING

Where will the line or substation go? Who pays for upgrades? What happens if demand forecasts change? How will crews and apprentices be hired?

SOURCES

Full list with fact IDs: FACT_BASE.md and NUMBER_CHECK.md (GOTB internal).

U.S. EIA

Delivery to consumers; Electricity in the U.S.; How electricity is generated (opened Oct 22, 2026).

U.S. DOE · BLS

DOE data center report release (Dec 20, 2024); BLS OOH, Electrical Power-Line Installers and Repairers (modified Aug 27, 2026).

LBNL · IEA

Queued Up (data through 2025), emp.lbl.gov/queues; IEA, Energy and AI, Executive summary (2025).

PJM · COMED

PJM "Who We Are"; ComEd "About Us" (self-descriptions, opened Oct 22, 2026).

CUB · PJM IMM

Citizens Utility Board release, Jun 4, 2025; Monitoring Analytics, IMM analysis of the 2025/26 Base Residual Auction (Jun 3, 2025).

ABOUT GOTB CONSULTING

WHO WE ARE

A Chicago firm working on infrastructure and procurement for the systems communities depend on.

DATA CENTERS

Siting, delivery and community questions.

POWER

Grid connections, substations and lines.

WATER

Supply, treatment and cooling.

PUBLIC WORKS

Roads, pipes and public spaces.

THE END



TWO CHAIRS, ONE LEVEL.

Plan the wires in the open.

GOTB CONSULTING · CHICAGO

Data centers · Power · Water · Public works

AI-generated art, fictional characters