


# Georgia is well-positioned for surging energy demands

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By Stephen Lawson – contributor



If you're like me, when you flip on your light switch or stop at a red light, you don't think about the thousands of people, decisions and planning that made that possible.

We often take our utilities and energy supply for granted. But having a strong, reliable energy grid to meet the demands of a state with more than 11 million people doesn't happen by accident. It's the result of long-range planning, strategic investments, strong policy and a commitment to Georgia's future. Even with our state's rapid growth, we are well-positioned to meet rising energy demands in the next decade and beyond.

Last month, Georgia Power presented its Integrated Resource Plan to the Public Service Commission — a road map for how they will provide the energy Georgia needs over the next decade and beyond. While it may sound boring, it's actually really important for the future energy needs of our state: If you don't have a roadmap, you have no idea where you're going — and you'll probably end up lost. The IRP outlined plans to meet a whopping 50% increase in electricity demand by 2035, driven largely by the rapid expansion of data centers, which are expected to account for more than 80% of new large-customer electricity demand.

But the good news is this: Through proactive strategic investments, diverse energy mix, forward-thinking long-range outlooks and proven reliability, our state's utility providers have built the capacity and capability to deliver energy for our state's growing needs.

Strategic investments over the past two decades have been instrumental in ensuring Georgia's energy grid remains strong and resilient. From modernizing aging infrastructure to upgrading transmission and distribution networks, these investments have allowed our utilities to better anticipate and mitigate potential challenges before they arise. Additionally, a continued commitment to prioritizing renewable energy projects, smart grid technologies, and energy storage solutions has allowed our state to stay ahead of the curve, support emerging trends and foster economic growth — all while maintaining reliability and affordability for consumers. As part of the IRP, Georgia Power has proposed the development of 1,100 megawatts of solar and battery storage systems to diversify energy sources and enhance grid resilience. The plan also includes a 10-year transmission strategy, adding more than 1,000 miles of new transmission lines to improve system efficiency and ensure energy reliability across the state.

Just like a well-balanced retirement portfolio, a diverse mix of energy sources is key to staying resilient, adaptable and efficient. Georgia is blessed to have an “all of the above” strategy when it comes to our energy sources, including nuclear, natural gas, solar and hydropower to meet growing demand and increase sustainability. Nuclear power continues to play a crucial role in delivering consistent base-load electricity, while solar and other renewables help offset peak demand and reduce reliance on fossil fuels. Georgia Power's IRP also emphasized increased utilization of natural gas and enhancements to nuclear power outputs, including extended power uprates at Plants Hatch and Vogtle, which will add 112 megawatts of carbon-free energy. Additionally, upgrades at Plant McIntosh are expected to contribute another 268 megawatts of capacity — and combined with Plants Bowen and Scherer will sustain hundreds of high-quality, good paying jobs while generating hundreds of millions in tax revenues for local communities and the state.

Georgia has a history of planning ahead to stay on top of changing energy needs — and the recent IRP is no different. By looking at future energy demands, using new technology and preparing for trends like more electric vehicles and decentralized power grids, the state's utilities are making sure the energy system remains reliable. Careful forecasting and data-driven decisions have helped Georgia Power and other providers stay ahead and keep delivering for customers. As part of this effort, the IRP introduces new programs, including a solar-plus-storage option for homes and small businesses and a demand response program for large customers, offering smart solutions for evolving energy needs.

Even amid natural disasters, our energy grid has proven reliable. Over the past year, our energy infrastructure was tested like never before. In September, Hurricane Helene knocked down more than 8,000 power poles and damaged 4,500 transformers. In December, a winter storm hit Metro Atlanta, weighing down trees and damaging power lines. But in both cases,

Georgia Power and other utility providers swiftly restored power, deploying crews, using advanced grid-monitoring technology and coordinating with emergency management agencies to quickly get customers back up and running. And while there is still a long way on the road to the larger recovery efforts, this type of rapid response was only possible due to long-term planning, emergency preparedness and significant grid investments.

Nevertheless, challenges remain. Data centers' energy demand continues to rise, with estimates showing they'll account for 80% of large-use customers by 2037. To make sure they are paying their fair share and aren't driving up costs for regular customers, the Georgia Public Service Commission recently approved new rules requiring large electricity users to commit to longer contracts and higher rates, helping keep energy rates stable for homes and small businesses. Even still, other challenges such as natural disasters, workforce shortages and cybersecurity threats will continue to test the grid, and being nimble, responsive and staying ahead of the curve will be more important than ever.

Georgia's utilities are prepared for the future. Through strategic foresight, strong leadership and continued investment, they are not just keeping up with energy demand — they are leading the way in resilience, sustainability and innovation. In a vibrant, growing and booming state, our energy supply is prepared to successfully propel our state into the next generation and beyond.

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