

# Team Pennsylvania's strategy for data centers and AI promotes regional cooperation

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*A data center owned by Amazon Web Services, front right, is under construction next to the Susquehanna nuclear power plant in Berwick, Pa., on Tuesday, Jan. 14, 2024. (AP Photo/Ted Shaffrey)*

A strategy by a state economic development group to promote data centers linked to artificial intelligence offers some new ideas not seen yet in legislation.

The strategy envisions a coordinated approach to introducing data centers, artificial intelligence and new energy technology to Pennsylvania.

The strategy or roadmap by Team Pennsylvania, a non-profit co-chaired by Gov. Josh Shapiro, suggests creating regional permitting commissions

and locating “no-bottleneck sites” across regions where zoning and local approvals are already in place.

The regional commissions would “harmonize” site requirements across local jurisdictions, facilitate permit approval and provide help to local officials.

No-bottleneck sites would offer interconnection options to accelerate construction of data centers and emerging forms of energy such as geothermal energy and carbon capture.

The regional approach is different in a state where Harrisburg and local governments often engage in turf battles over state economic development projects versus local zoning.

The closest regional model would be the interstate Susquehanna River Basin Commission and Delaware River Basin Commission created 50 years ago to regulate water withdrawals.

Team Pennsylvania announced the strategy amidst a flurry of legislation seeking to help Pennsylvania capitalize on a nationwide data center boom.

“This roadmap is not a siting guide or regulatory document,” Team PA said. “It is a forward-looking strategy.”

“The energy sector is being tested to deliver with innovation, speed and resilience,” Team PA said. “Data centers are multiplying, bringing surging demand for firm, scalable, and sustainable power. AI adoption is accelerating across industries.”

The strategy includes near term goals for the next two years and longer term goals leading to 2035.

Some goals align with GOP bills

The group’s strategy also mirrors some provisions in fast-track data center bills sponsored recently by Republican senators.

It calls for bundling approvals for energy, broadband, water and zoning and creating an inventory of sites suitable for data centers, including sites on publicly owned lands.

Other ideas include creating opportunity zones for AI infrastructure and creating model Community Benefit Agreements for host local governments.

Pennsylvania would fast-forward state permitting of data centers under Senate Bill 991 sponsored by Sens. Camera Bartolotta, R-Washington, and Pat Stefano, R-Fayette.

SB991 would accelerate state permits for project developers who meet or exceed federal environmental standards.

SB991 gives the state Department of Environmental Protection the task of creating a public list of at least 15 sites considered appropriate for data centers.

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