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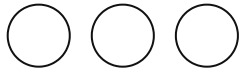
Report predicts possible power shortages if aging fossil fuel plants close too soon

Study looks at power needs in NYC and challenges of moving electricity around the state



Rick Karlin

July 16, 2023





A new report casts doubt on how quickly aging power plants can be closed, especially in New York City.
Times Union file photo

NORTH GREENBUSH — The organization that oversees New York's power grid on Friday said that without extensive changes some of the aging fossil fuel power plants in New York City may have to remain open after their scheduled closing date of 2025 in order to avoid potential power outages.

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The report “reflects the extraordinary challenges of the grid in transition,” said Zach Smith, vice president of System and Resource Planning at the New York Independent System Operator.

“The reliability of the electric system is essential to the health and safety for all New Yorkers as well as the state’s economy,” he added. “The NYISO will now work to identify solutions to the reliability need identified in New York City.”

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NYISO helps control the transfer of electricity across the state’s grid through a web of power lines. They also issue reports, such as Friday’s, predicting future needs and potential shortfalls on the power grid.

The report found that New York City could be in danger of power interruptions by 2025, especially if the phasing out of aging “peaker” plants proceeds as planned.

Peaker plants are fossil fuel power plants located across that metropolitan area that are fired up in times of high demand including during summer heat waves. The plants are supposed to be phased out in favor of newer, cleaner sources of power such as solar and wind farms upstate.

The trouble is there are bottlenecks in getting the upstate power to where it is needed downstate, which could lead to the predicted shortages.

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NYISO’s report noted that the Champlain Hudson Power Express, a transmission line under construction, would ease the shortages if it is finished on schedule. They have planned to begin delivering power in 2026.

The 2019 Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act calls for a carbon-free power grid by 2040, with 40 percent carbon-free electricity by 2030.

But the transition could be difficult. For instance, the NYISO report predicts a deficit as large as 446 megawatts if the peaker plants close without sufficient

energy sources to replace them.

One megawatt powers about 1,000 homes.

Nyiso NYC Peaker 2023 q2 Star Report Final by rkarlin on Scribd

Those in the power industry said Friday's report echoes what they have been saying all along: Cost overruns, COVID-19 delays and other snags have challenged the state's ambitious timeline for moving to a carbon-free power grid.

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“The pace of play is not keeping up with pace of promises, and this report makes that clear,” said Gavin Donohue, president and CEO of the Independent Power Producers of New York, a trade group of power plant operators, including fossil fuel plants.

“There have been repeated cautions from the NYISO regarding grid reliability, and this report highlights the reality that generator retirement cannot outpace the addition of new generation,” he added.

Environmentalists, though, said the report highlights the need to move faster in building a green energy infrastructure.

“They are raising the flag. Now it’s on the back on the utilities and on the state to really step up and find some solutions here,” said Conor Bambrick, policy director for Environmental Advocates NY. “We can’t continue to rely on those failed processes of the past.”

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In addition to the CLCPA goals, the state Department of Environmental Conservation in 2019 enacted emission rules for peaker plants. As a result, NYISO noted, some 1,027 megawatts of power production have shut down. The rules call for another 509 megawatts from fossil fuel plants to come off line in New York City.

In addition to the CO2 created by fossil fuels, the older plants emit particulates and nitrogen oxides, and are especially harmful in densely populated locations like the greater New York City area. Many of the older plants also are in poor neighborhoods where Black and brown residents predominate.\

Electricity demand in New York City is expected to grow, since the CLCPA calls for the electrification of heating and cooking and more use of electric vehicles. While reducing greenhouse gases, that move will increase the demands on the electric grid, both in the city and across the state.

By itself, upstate New York has adequate electricity and most of it is carbon-free thanks to the longstanding hydroelectric plants along the St. Lawrence River and Niagara Falls and nuclear plants in northern New York.

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The NYISO report does, however, acknowledge the need for more green energy in the upstate region, given developments there.

Namely, they reference a large [computer chip](#) plant that Micron Technology is planning north of Syracuse and a hydrogen fuel plant planned by Air Products in Massena near the Canadian border.

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