

Access, Not Engineering: What Meta's Alberta Deal Says About Powering Large Loads

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Bottom line

Meta's C\$13 billion Alberta campus was won on access, not engineering. Before announcing in July 2026, Meta's site had secured 970 MW of the 1,200 MW of interim grid capacity Alberta's system operator (AESO) set aside for large loads. That is about 81% of the province's entire early allocation. It then contracted its own 932 MW gas plant for growth.

For the roughly 19.6 GW of data-centre requests still pending, the binding constraint is no longer whether the grid can be engineered to serve them. It is what terms they can get while new supply is built. Those bridging years are where demand flexibility earns its value. Utilities and regulators that price it well will connect more load, sooner, with less risk.

Alberta: demand far beyond the early window

As of July 30, 2026, AESO held about 19,565 MW of pending data-centre connection requests. That is roughly 1.5 times Alberta's record peak load of 12,785 MW, set in December 2025 ([Alberta.ca](#)).

AESO's interim Phase 1 limit of 1,200 MW is fully allocated, to two projects: 970 MW for the Greenlight project serving Meta, and 230 MW for TransAlta's Keephills site ([The Logic; McCord](#)). Every other project now waits for Phase 2, which asks proponents to bring their own generation (BYOG).

Meta's power stack: three layers, sequenced

Meta did not choose between the grid and its own plant. It stacked grid rights, a bilateral contract and dedicated generation, each arriving on a different date.

Layer	Capacity (MW)	Available	What it solves
AESO grid connection (Phase 1 allocation)	970	First phase, with operations expected within 2–3 years of July 2026	Early load, before any new plant exists
Capital Power supply agreement	250	By mid-2028	Added flexibility in the early years
Greenlight Electricity Centre (gas, C\$4.6B; Pembina, KinetiCor, Morgan Stanley Infrastructure Partners)	932, permitted to roughly double	Second half of 2030	Growth toward a full-campus draw of about 1,800 MW

Sources: [BNN Bloomberg](#), [CP24](#), [Alberta.ca](#).

The engineering here is conventional: a transmission connection and a large gas plant. What was scarce was the grid position, and Meta secured it early, under a process that is now closed.

AESO's answer for everyone else: bridging, still pending

AESO's proposed BYOG process would let a large data centre (75 MW or more) connect if it brings tethered generation able to supply its full demand. While that generation is built, the project could draw "bridged" grid power for up to three years. Bridged demand would be capped at 1,600 MW across the whole system, and tethered generation is limited to gas for now, a restriction AESO calls provisional ([Bennett Jones](#)).

The rules are not final. AESO had expected to publish them in August; on September 8, 2026 it said documents and application intake would come "this fall" ([AESO Engage](#)). Until then, the bridging window is the product every remaining proponent is competing for.

British Columbia: flexibility as the price of entry

BC took the opposite route. BC Hydro's 2026 Call for Demand offers 400 MW over two years, 300 MW for AI data centres and 100 MW for conventional ones, in blocks of 10 to 145 MW ([BLG](#)). Winners must accept year-round, uncompensated curtailment: at least 10% of load, 36 events and 144 hours a year ([BC Hydro](#)).

Even on those terms, 15 applicants asked for about 800 MW, twice what is on offer. Results were due in mid-September but are now expected after the provincial government transition later this year ([BC Hydro](#)).

	Alberta	British Columbia
Early capacity	1,200 MW, fully allocated	400 MW, about 2x oversubscribed
Path to more	Bring your own gas generation; up to 3 years of bridged grid power	Next competitive window from February 2028
What the load gives back	Its own supply	Uncompensated curtailment, 144+ hours a year

Implications for utilities and regulators

Both provinces are rationing the same scarce thing: firm grid access in the years before new supply arrives. Neither yet treats flexibility as something to buy rather than impose. Four design choices follow.

1. **Treat allocation as market design.** In Alberta, one project took 81% of the early window. Explicit criteria for future windows, such as readiness, local benefit or flexibility offered, would make scarce access a deliberate policy choice.
2. **Make bridging a defined product.** A bridging service could come in firm and curtailable tiers, priced differently and tied to generation milestones. That would let more projects share the 1,600 MW cap without adding risk to the system.
3. **Price flexibility instead of mandating it free.** BC's oversubscription shows data centres will accept curtailment. Tiered offers, where more curtailment buys more MW or an earlier date, could reveal how much flexibility each site can really provide.
4. **Energize in phases.** Staging load against verified milestones (substation, generation, demonstrated curtailment) turns a 1 GW request into a schedule the grid can absorb.

The underlying lesson for both provinces: the queue was never the product. The contract is.

Sources

1. [Alberta.ca — AI data centres by the numbers](#)

2. [The Logic — TransAlta power allocation](#)
3. [McCord Investments — Alberta data centre power and grid connection](#)
4. [BNN Bloomberg — Meta data centre to start up ahead of adjacent Greenlight power plant \(July 10, 2026\)](#)
5. [CP24 — County north of Edmonton welcomes C\\$13B Meta data centre \(July 9, 2026\)](#)
6. [Bennett Jones — Alberta's BYOG Framework \(July 2026\)](#)
7. [AESO Engage — Phase 2A: Large Load Integration, BYOG process](#)
8. [BLG — Data centre regulation in British Columbia \(July 2026\)](#)
9. [BC Hydro — 2026 Call for Demand information session \(February 9, 2026\)](#)
10. [BC Hydro — Emerging industries connections](#)