5 Things to Know About Meta’s Giant Data Center in Louisiana

The road to the giant project was paved with secret meetings and an ever-expanding building plan.

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An aerial view of the construction of the data center in Richland Parish, La., the largest of its kind to be built by Meta.Scott Ball for The New York Times

By Eli Tan

Reporting from Richland Parish, La.

Along the Mississippi Delta in the northeast corner of Louisiana, Meta is building one of the largest artificial intelligence data centers in the world. The tech giant's project will cost $50 billion and cover roughly six square miles.

Behind the scenes, an extraordinary amount of secrecy was necessary to pull it off. Energy company executives, Louisiana's governor, state and local officials and representatives of Meta worked on the deal over nine months before it was made public. The project's speed and covertness have been trumpeted as a model for the entire tech industry.

To report on the project, New York Times reporters interviewed more than 40 people in Richland Parish, Baton Rouge, New Orleans, New York and Silicon Valley, and examined corporate filings, tax records, property records and meeting transcripts.

Here are five takeaways from our reporting:

Securing an energy supply was a crucial part of Meta's project.

When Meta’s employees scouted Louisiana and nearby states for potential data center sites, it was Louisiana’s largest energy company, and not state officials, that first pitched the Silicon Valley company on Richland Parish.

Phillip May, Entergy Louisiana’s chief executive, was involved in every step of the process, from securing a tax rebate on data center equipment to buying nearby land and drafting nondisclosure agreements for government officials. The energy company’s promise to build dedicated natural gas turbines for Meta — enough to power the city of New Orleans seven times over — is what separated Louisiana’s bid from those of rival states.

Phillip May, Entergy’s chief executive, played a critical role in bringing Meta to Louisiana.Annie Flanagan for The New York Times

The project was a huge financial boon for Entergy. Meta is now the largest customer in its 112-year history, and its stock price has increased over 50 percent since the project was announced in December 2024.

To avoid roadblocks, Meta and state officials worked in secrecy.

Local opposition has shuttered billions of dollars’ worth of data centers projects across the country. Meta’s project had no such issues with opposition — in part because the local community didn’t know about the deal until it was done.

To keep the project out of the public eye, Meta and Entergy used nondisclosure agreements with state and local officials. Even some officials who helped pass legislation to support the project didn't know its details.

A miniature golden shovel commemorating the groundbreaking of an electrical substation to support Meta's data center.Scott Ball for The New York Times

As data centers get larger, so do their risks.

Tech companies are finding novel ways to finance the rising cost of data centers. Instead of paying for the Louisiana data center with its own money, Meta created a separate entity called Beignet LLC that would build and own the project. Blue Owl, a Wall Street investment partner, put in the bulk of the money for the joint venture. Then, Meta rented the data center from Beignet, keeping the financing off its books.

Meta gave itself the ability to exit the lease just four years after construction was finished if it no longer needed it.

The project was so large that insurance companies would not fully insure the facility if it were destroyed by a natural disaster. That scared away potential investors, but Blue Owl was still willing to take on the risk.

For local residents, opportunity and uncertainty.

Richland Parish has around 20,000 residents, and many of them are optimistic about how the data center is changing the area. Construction on the project has become its own economy, employing thousands of people.

The project received tax breaks on property and equipment, so the main source of local revenue generated by the data center is sales tax. That has led to bonuses for some local teachers of as much as $50,000. Meta is also investing $1 billion in local infrastructure and $5 million into a nearby community college for job training. Once complete, the data center will employ 1,000 full-time employees.

But, as rents in the area rise to accommodate highly paid construction workers, entire trailer parks of local residents have been displaced. Some people became homeless, others moved out of the parish. Real estate developers say the project has been a trade-off, creating fortunes for some and displacing others.

Entire trailer parks of local residents have been displaced.Annie Flanagan for The New York Times

Meta's project in Richland Parish is a blueprint for others like it.

After the state secured its deal with Meta, Gov. Jeff Landry codified the process with an executive order called "Louisiana Lightning Speed" to attract other projects.

The order clears the way for the state to move with similar speed and secrecy for other projects. In the case of Meta's data center, that included allowing the Louisiana power commission to skip submitting the project to a review by an independent administrative judge to determine whether the project was in the public's best interest. The state also did not hold any public meetings about the project until it was announced as a done deal.

Meta's data center, from its financial engineering to the way the company secured the power supply, could become a model for other tech giants looking to build huge data centers.

The executive order is already paying off in Louisiana. In February, Amazon announced plans to build a $12 billion data center in the northwest corner of the state.