

Brake & Turn Case Assessment - The Silent Resource War

Brake & Turn Compact - Public Reference Series

Context:

Based on reporting from CNET's feature 'AI Data Centers Are Coming for Your Land, Water and Power'. This brief examines how rapid, large-scale AI data center buildouts affect land, water, power, labor, and civic governance.

Summary:

Across the U.S., hyperscale projects and policy tailwinds are accelerating data center expansion. Facilities demand multi-megawatt to gigawatt power, significant water for cooling, and large tracts of land. Jobs are concentrated in short-term construction; long-term benefits and public oversight are uneven. Efficiency initiatives exist, but absolute growth in electricity and water draw dominates outcomes.

System Purpose & Fit - 2.5 / 5

Scale-first growth and federal fast-track policies prioritize capacity over demonstrated social necessity or local alignment.

Data & Dignity - 2 / 5

Opaque disclosures on datasets, citizen consent, and privacy impacts. Public has limited ability to audit how AI services are used.

Energy & Footprint - 1.5 / 5

High electricity demand with proposals for new gas plants; nuclear options remain years away. Increased grid stress and cost risks for ratepayers.

Model Safety & Governance - 2 / 5

Corporate self-reporting and voluntary sustainability claims; few binding obligations tied to permits or incentives.

Human Oversight & Labor - 2 / 5

Employment promises skew toward temporary construction; unclear local hiring and worker protections.

Culture & Continuity - 1.5 / 5

Permanent land-use conversion (e.g., farmland to campus), basin drawdown risks, and public subsidies; community voice is limited.

Brake & Turn Alignment Score

Average Score: about 1.9 / 5 - Resource-intensive and centralized growth trajectory with weak public governance signals.

Recommendations

- Require Living Checklist submissions, energy and water disclosures, and public hearings before interconnection or zoning approvals.
- Tie tax incentives to verifiable public benefits and open audit: local hiring, emissions and water withdrawals, and efficiency milestones.
- Mandate demand-flex and curtailment performance to protect local grids during peak events.
- Couple large campuses to renewables or community energy loops; publish hourly carbon and water intensity for operations.
- Stand up community oversight councils with authority to audit, pause, or modify operations upon breach; publish an open ledger of filings and compliance.

Source: CNET, 'AI Data Centers Are Coming for Your Land, Water and Power' (2025).

Readers are encouraged to review the original piece and apply the Living Checklist themselves.