

# Data Center Briefing

January 01, 2026

Global

## Key themes:

Speed-to-power drives AI data centre economics; Long-dated firm power PPAs and implied reliability value; Interconnection and transformer bottlenecks constrain delivery; Platform consolidation: SoftBank–DigitalBridge \$4bn deal; India policy push: draft data centre tax exemptions; Capital recycling in India DCs via CapitaLand fund structure; Rising local permitting/zoning scrutiny in US jurisdictions; Transmission build-out momentum in South Africa via ITP prequalifications

## Market overview (Global | 2026-01-01)

Demand for AI compute continues to pull capital and policy attention toward “speed to power,” with power procurement structures (long-dated PPAs) and grid execution constraints (interconnection queues, equipment lead times) increasingly shaping data centre underwriting. On the capital side, strategic M&A and fund-level recycling are accelerating as platforms seek scale across compute, connectivity, and power.

## Risks and watchpoints

### Downside / execution risks

- **Grid bottlenecks and delivery risk:** Commentary highlights **~2 TW queued** for interconnection and **long transformer lead times**, reinforcing schedule risk for new capacity and potential cost escalation ([AI-driven data centers reshape U.S. power sector priorities](#)).
- **Permitting and community pushback:** Local officials in Michigan warn rapid large-scale buildouts can conflict with land-use and energy goals, raising the risk of **zoning tightening or temporary moratoria** and more stringent **community benefit agreements** ([Washtenaw County wrestles with incoming data center expansion](#)).

- **Environmental scrutiny / disclosure expectations:** Pressure is building for Big Tech and AI platforms to publish concrete environmental plans for AI data centres and address fossil generation reliance; inconsistent AI labelling/watermarking standards may also become a reputational and regulatory issue ([Reporter urges AI industry to prioritize labels, phones, environment](#)).

## Upside / catalysts

- **Long-tenor power contracting signals bankability:** A cited example is a **20-year PPA for up to 1,200 MW** at Vistra's **Comanche Peak**, priced around **~\$90-\$100/MWh**, with an implied reliability value of **~\$24/kW-month**—a potential template for financing “firm” power for AI loads ([AI-driven data centers reshape U.S. power sector priorities](#)).
- **Policy support for domestic capacity:** Federal initiatives referenced include DOE actions and **up to \$800m for SMRs**, potentially supportive of longer-term firm, low-carbon supply (timing and deliverability remain key) ([AI-driven data centers reshape U.S. power sector priorities](#)).
- **India policy tailwinds:** India's draft National Data Centre Policy proposes **up to 20 years of tax exemptions**, supporting continued hyperscale investment and a deeper domestic development/financing market ([2025 Catalyses India Data Centre Boom Amid Policy Push](#)).

## Key deals and platform moves

- **Strategic M&A (AI infrastructure):** **SoftBank** signed a definitive agreement to acquire **DigitalBridge** for **~\$4bn enterprise value**, aiming to strengthen large-scale AI infrastructure across **data centres, towers, fibre, and edge assets** ([SoftBank to acquire DigitalBridge for \\$4B AI infrastructure push](#)).
- **Capital recycling / fund formation (India DCs):** **CapitaLand India Trust** will divest a **20.2% stake** in **three developing data centres** to **CapitaLand India Data Centre Fund** for **₹702 crore (S\$99.73m)** while retaining majority ownership. The fund (managed by CLI) has raised **~S\$150m at first close** and targets a **S\$300m final close**; the acquisition occurs after first close ([CapitaLand India Trust to divest stake in data centres](#)).
- **India DC capex signals:** **TCS' HyperVault** received **~INR 18,000 Cr** investment from **TPG** (structure not detailed), cited amid broader hyperscaler investment plans ([2025 Catalyses India Data Centre Boom Amid Policy Push](#)).
- **Real estate capital flows (India):** Savills reports 2025 Indian real estate PE inflows up **59% to \$6.7bn**, with **data centres 23.2%** of investment allocation; 2026 inflows forecast **\$6.5-\$7.5bn** ([Private equity investments in Indian real estate rise 59%](#)).

## Major projects and demand signals

- **US power procurement for AI clusters:** The “speed to power” dynamic is framed as a national priority, with the Comanche Peak PPA example (up to **1,200 MW**, **20-year** tenor, ~\$90-\$100/MWh) illustrating willingness to pay for reliability attributes ([AI-driven data centers reshape U.S. power sector priorities](#)).
- **Michigan siting flashpoint:** Washtenaw County cites a **1.4 GW** project in **Saline Township** as emblematic of the scale arriving in local jurisdictions, alongside calls to enforce Michigan’s renewable energy/REC requirement for data centres ([Washtenaw County wrestles with incoming data center expansion](#)).
- **India hyperscale pipeline:** A planned **1 GW** data centre investment by a hyperscaler (notably **OpenAI**) is referenced as part of India’s 2025 inflection ([2025 Catalyses India Data Centre Boom Amid Policy Push](#)).

## Power and grid / interconnection highlights

- **System constraints remain binding:** Execution constraints cited include ~**2 TW** in interconnection queues and **transformer lead times**—critical for schedules, staged energisation, and capex certainty ([AI-driven data centers reshape U.S. power sector priorities](#)).
- **Transmission expansion procurement (South Africa):** South Africa prequalified **seven** international-led consortia for its inaugural **Independent Transmission Project (ITP)**, targeting ~**1,164 km** of high-voltage lines and substations, estimated at ~\$**1bn**. Prequalified groups include **Adani Power Middle East-Momentous Energy**, **AREF Cobra Transmission**, **Consortium Pulse Infrastructure**, and **EITP Consortium** ([South Africa prequalifies consortia for USD1bn transmission programme](#)).

## Policy, regulation, and permitting

- **India (national policy push):** Draft National Data Centre Policy proposes **up to 20 years of tax exemptions**, reinforcing a pro-build environment for domestic and foreign developers/operators ([2025 Catalyses India Data Centre Boom Amid Policy Push](#)).
- **US local/state environmental review (Minnesota):** Minnesota EQB outlines environmental review tools for proposed data centre projects, including **EAW** (13-page worksheet; **30-day** public comment) and **AUAR**, plus a petition path requiring **100 local signatures**—a roadmap that can shape timelines and stakeholder strategy ([FAQ on EQB Environmental Review for Minnesota Data Centers](#)).
- **US local controls (Michigan):** Washtenaw County recommends **zoning updates**, potential **temporary moratoria** where appropriate, and **community benefit agreements**; it also urges enforcement of a state requirement that data centres use **renewable energy or RECs** ([Washtenaw County wrestles with incoming data center expansion](#)).

- **EU / France governance backdrop:** A year-in-review flags shifts in French tech governance and sovereignty themes and notes the **Conseil d'État** reduced **Amazon France's fine from €32m to €15m** ([French Tech Journal publishes 2025 year-in-review on AI, capital, sovereignty](#)).

## What to watch

- Whether “firm power” PPAs (e.g., 20-year structures) become more common—and what that implies for **all-in delivered power costs** and underwriting assumptions ([AI-driven data centers reshape U.S. power sector priorities](#)).
- Near-term schedule impacts from **transformer lead times** and interconnection queue depth; monitor knock-on effects for phased commissioning ([AI-driven data centers reshape U.S. power sector priorities](#)).
- Follow-through on India's draft policy (tax exemptions) and how it shapes the next wave of hyperscale commitments ([2025 Catalyses India Data Centre Boom Amid Policy Push](#)).
- Capital recycling and platform consolidation: implications of **SoftBank/DigitalBridge** for competitive dynamics and valuation benchmarks ([SoftBank to acquire DigitalBridge for \\$4B AI infrastructure push](#)).
- Local permitting friction in US growth nodes (zoning, moratoria, benefit agreements), particularly around very large proposed loads ([Washtenaw County wrestles with incoming data center expansion](#)).