



Why Corporate Sustainability Isn't Slowing Down

Insights from DC Climate Week

DC Climate Week revealed a few clear themes: corporate sustainability remains resilient and continues to gain support, the energy sector will play a defining role in the next phase of economic growth and innovative sustainability solutions are being pioneered and implemented across industries.

Energy Sector: Sustainability Through Efficiency

Corporate sustainability initiatives are increasingly proving to be both cost-saving and value-generating for businesses. Despite shifting policy signals, customer and stakeholder demand for sustainable solutions remains strong and continues to influence corporate decision-making and innovation across sectors.

The Chief Environmental Officer of an American energy holding company described how her organization has brought more renewable energy into their portfolio without increasing rates for their customers. While developers and utilities have benefitted from tax credits for installing new renewables, recent policy changes to federal tax credits for renewable electricity are being phased out. Despite this change, she reported that customers continue to show strong demand for renewable electricity.

In order to meet this demand while also operating in the best interest of customers, this energy company has worked to integrate renewable electricity into their

portfolio while simultaneously improving the efficiency of the grid. As a result, they were able to deliver a greater share of renewable electricity to customers without raising rates.

Similarly, infrastructure modernization has delivered efficiency gains. By updating aging natural gas infrastructure, the company replaced outdated pipes and equipment without raising customer costs. A welcome co-benefit of these improvements was reduced leakage of natural gas into the atmosphere, leading to an overall reduction in the greenhouse gas emissions from the company's operations.

The Chief Environmental Officer of this company stated that despite short term swings in federal policy, customers will continue to demand more efficient, cleaner electricity systems in the long term. Because generation assets have such a long lifetime, the Chief Environmental Officer stressed that her company makes decisions on a long-term scale rather than based on the policy of the moment.



Data Centers & AI: Facing an Unprecedented Energy Demand

Challenges and opportunities for data center development surfaced repeatedly throughout the week. A steady theme emerged: the rapid growth of AI and digital infrastructure is fundamentally reshaping electricity demand. This growing demand for data center services is altering load growth trajectories in the United States and globally, presenting a new challenge for our economy and energy delivery infrastructure.

Growing data center demand for energy has a few key implications. First, it increases the urgency of bringing new generation online, including both renewable and thermal capacity. Second, it places additional strain on grid infrastructure and accelerates the need for transmission expansion and a more efficient interconnection process. Finally, it complicates decarbonization efforts, as organizations must balance reliability amid significant load growth with pressure to reduce emissions.

The defining message from these discussions was clear, surging energy demand driven by data centers and AI will be a central factor shaping the next chapter of our economy. This presents an opportunity for technical innovation, opening the door for new efficiencies in the energy space. During a panel on the U.S. energy transition, panelists discussed technical innovations that could drive change in the energy supply across the country.

For example, overhead line monitoring technologies allow utilities to gauge the real-time capacity of transmission lines based on actual operating conditions. Traditionally, transmission lines incorporate a conservative amount of “sag” to ensure adequate ground clearance from

trees, buildings and other objects. As demand increases, electrical current rises, causing the wires to heat up, expand and sag further, which can reduce clearance.

However, conservative ground clearance assumptions can often underutilize available transmission capacity and leave supply on the table. With overhead line monitoring, sensors continuously track wire conditions, such as temperature, sag, and other environmental factors, allowing for more precise assessment of actual line capacity. This allows utilities to safely increase supply when appropriate while maintaining safety and reliability.

Entertainment & Fashion: Benefiting From the Circular Economy

At another Climate Week event, the business development director for a reusable serviceware company described how the transition to reusable cups at music and sports venues provides a practical step for reducing operating costs while advancing zero waste practices and the transition toward a more circular economy.

The director described how demand for reusable cups is being driven by both venues and artists. Venues are prioritizing waste reduction as part of broader sustainability goals, and artists are increasingly incorporating low-waste requirements into their performance riders.

His company delivers reusable cups to venues for a flat fee. Fans are served their beverages in these cups and are encouraged to return them to specially marked bins at the venue. The cups are then collected and taken to a wash hub where they are sanitized, inspected for damage, and delivered back to the venue for the next event.

The director also laid out the finances of this type of operation, explaining that program has no upfront costs. He acknowledged that reusable cups are slightly more expensive per unit, compared to disposable options, but explained that venues often see dramatic savings in their waste hauling fees due to the reduction in plastic waste generated.

Outside of stakeholder interest, policies are driving towards a more circular economy and deployment of sustainable solutions like reusable cups. Extended producer responsibility ("EPR") laws are coming online in many regions, requiring companies to rethink product packaging, such as cans and bottles disposed of by consumers. Single-use plastic bans also encourage the adoption of reusable solutions.

Looking Ahead: Demand for Sustainability Remains Strong

As DC Climate Week has shown, there are opportunities to integrate sustainability efforts and technical innovation into all types of businesses while also promoting economic growth. Demand from policymakers and other stakeholders for greater efficiency and reduced environmental impacts will continue to drive business to seek out profitable sustainability innovations. In a landscape like this, a trusted partner can help businesses turn sustainability into a competitive advantage.



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