

Connecting the Dots: How Utility Data Access Enables Building Performance Success

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ABSTRACT

Emerging market transformation (MT) frameworks provide clear, defensible methods for utilities to claim energy savings by supporting benchmarking and building performance standards (BPS) policies. Benchmarking and BPS programs depend on complete, accurate, and easily accessible whole-building energy data to succeed, and access to that data relies on utilities providing it. However, the level of access provided by utilities varies widely. Municipalities that are considering building energy policies may hesitate to adopt an ordinance that could lead to frustration for building owners as they attempt to access the data they are required to report. Once a policy is adopted, challenges accessing data are often cited as one of the biggest barriers to successfully complying with the ordinance.

This paper presents the results of three areas of research: 1) A national review of jurisdictions that have adopted benchmarking policies and the energy data access mechanisms offered by the utilities serving those areas compared to findings for jurisdictions that have not adopted a benchmarking policy, 2) a framework for assessing the relationship between data access, policy adoption, and policy compliance, and 3) opportunities for utilities to claim energy savings and improve operational efficiency by providing streamlined data access. We will explore how the results of this research can guide how utilities deploy energy data access tools for market enablement, catalyzed by local benchmarking and BPS policies.

Introduction

Local and state governments are increasingly considering benchmarking policies and building performance standards (BPS) as strategies to drive reductions in energy use and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. These policy tools can catalyze community-wide energy savings and may transform local real estate markets, helping jurisdictions achieve energy and climate goals. The energy consumption data needed to pursue these efforts are collected by electric and gas utilities but can be difficult for building owners to access due to constraints on data sharing faced by the utilities, including regulatory limitations on investments in new data platforms, as well as by customer data privacy laws.

This paper explores the connection between utility-enabled data access and the adoption and implementation of these policies. Building on existing research, we compiled databases of policies and the data access mechanisms offered by the utilities that serve each jurisdiction, explored compliance rates, and collected feedback from policy implementers. We also explored potential for utilities to improve data access as a market enablement strategy supporting market transformation (MT) initiatives. This paper investigates the connection between access to whole

building energy data and the success of benchmarking and BPS policies and seeks to answer the following questions:

- How does accessibility of utility energy data affect municipal adoption of benchmarking and BPS policies?
- How does accessibility of utility energy data affect success of and compliance with benchmarking and BPS policies?

The findings are then used to explore the role utilities can play in supporting benchmarking and BPS policies as an MT strategy through improved access to whole-building energy data.

Background

Benchmarking and BPS policies

Benchmarking and BPS policies are tools available to local and state governments to address energy use in buildings. Both types of policies can be adapted by individual jurisdictions to align with the jurisdiction's intended outcomes and to reflect opportunities, limitations, and vulnerabilities within the local building stock. These policies share certain common elements related to access to energy data.

Benchmarking typically applies to commercial and multifamily buildings. Policies often require owners of covered buildings, which are frequently comprised of multiple tenant spaces receiving utility service through tenant-controlled accounts, to annually report whole building energy use data during a specified 12-month period. A BPS builds upon the framework established by a pre-existing benchmarking policy. This policy creates a legal requirement for building owners to reduce whole building energy use or emissions over time. BPS typically includes enforcement mechanisms for not achieving whole building energy/emissions reduction targets.

As of February 2026, 57 municipal, county, and state governments in the U.S. had adopted a benchmarking ordinance, and 15 units of government had adopted a BPS policy. Eight states have enacted an applicable policy, and the remaining policies are implemented at the municipal or county level. At least 104 electricity and natural gas utilities serve these jurisdictions with active policies.

Data for Benchmarking and BPS compliance. To comply with benchmarking and BPS policies, building owners must report aggregated energy use for tenant- and owner-held accounts in the building. Because many commercial and large multifamily buildings contain multiple tenant spaces and common areas served by separately metered utility accounts, building owners are often unable to directly access information about energy use for tenant accounts, which prevents them from monitoring and reporting total building energy use.

Building owners may seek whole-building energy data for multiple reason, including evaluating opportunities for energy efficiency investment, informing lease negotiations, and complying with benchmarking or BPS requirements. This research focuses on the latter use. For owners subject to benchmarking or BPS ordinances, access to complete and accurate whole-

building energy data is essential for annual reporting and, in jurisdictions with BPS policies, for tracking progress toward energy reduction goals.

Previous research and anecdotal evidence from utilities and benchmarking technical assistance providers suggest that manually aggregating energy data from multiple accounts can create a significant administrative barrier for building owners and may hinder policy implementation. Consequently, utilities are increasingly recognized as critical partners in successful benchmarking and BPS policies, and best practice guidance recommends that jurisdictions and regulators establish data access mechanisms that support such policies (U.S. EPA 2023).

While specific regulatory requirements and information technology platform functionality determine how individual utilities provide energy data access to owners, there are three primary categories of data access:

1. **No access:** Owner must ask tenants to provide energy data.
2. **Authorized disclosure:** Owner may request authorization from each tenant to access data from the utility.
3. **Direct whole building access:** Owner may access whole building energy data for buildings that have at least a specified minimum number of individual tenant accounts (in some cases, owner may use an automated web service to download data).

Three characteristics of utility data access may be particularly important in supporting successful policy implementation: completeness, or the ability to obtain energy data for the entire building; accuracy, or the use of actual rather than estimated or modeled energy consumption data; and accessibility, or the ease with which building owners can obtain and report the required information.

Utility Engagement with Building-Focused Energy Policies. Energy codes and BPS represent opportunities for utilities to generate significant savings impact through market transformation. Providing utility data and working to remove barriers to implementation is an impactful way for utilities to support these policies and generate significant energy savings. Additionally, utilities can offer education, technical support, and other resources to jurisdictions considering the adoption of more aggressive energy codes or building performance standards. By doing so, utilities can demonstrate influence on the decision to adopt and implement these policies sooner than they would have in the absence of utility support. These market interventions prepare utilities to claim jurisdiction-wide savings under MT program frameworks.

Previous research and technical guidance have identified best practices for providing whole-building energy data and have highlighted the challenges building owners face when data are not readily available. However, little research has explored whether differences in utility data access influence the adoption and implementation of benchmarking and BPS policies. This study addresses that gap by examining relationships between utility data access offerings, policy adoption patterns, and stakeholder experiences implementing benchmarking and BPS policies.

Methods

To understand this relationship, the authors reviewed literature, cross-analyzed data showing correlations between the level of energy access provided by utilities and policy adoption by the jurisdictions that the utilities serve and collected insights from key stakeholders.

Literature Review

Our literature review encompassed a review of over a dozen publicly available reports and studies related to benchmarking policies, BPS, and utility data access. References cited within these documents were reviewed to identify additional relevant sources, resulting in a total review of more than 50 publications and resources. Additional keyword-based searches were conducted to identify recent studies and publications not captured through reference review.

Characterization of utility data access

To evaluate the relationship between utility data access and building energy policies, we created a framework to understand the whole-building energy data access options offered by electric utilities. The framework focused on three attributes that directly affect a building owner's ability to comply with a benchmarking or BPS policy:

1. Availability of whole-building energy data that is aggregated for commercial buildings.
2. Availability of whole-building energy data that is aggregated for multifamily buildings.
3. The method used to provide aggregated data to customers (e.g., web service or spreadsheet).

The availability of aggregated whole-building data is considered a key characteristic because, as described above, benchmarking and BPS policies typically require data to be reported on a whole-building level, including energy used in tenant spaces. Without aggregation, the building owner must request individual tenant-level permission to access the needed data, adding to the administrative burden to comply with the policy. We distinguished between commercial and multifamily properties due to different dynamics in the owner-tenant relationships and difference in privacy requirements that apply to residential versus commercial energy data.

We also reviewed the delivery mechanisms that utilities use to provide the aggregated data. Data access processes range from automated web-based services that directly integrate into benchmarking platforms to downloadable spreadsheets. While ease of access streamlines reporting for building owners, the level of effort required for a building owner to compile multiple spreadsheets is considerably less than the time and effort required to request energy data from individual tenants.

Using the U.S. EPA's *Expanding Access to Whole Building Energy Data* initiative (2026b), we identified the type of data access provided by every electricity and natural gas utility in the U.S. as well as the indicator for how building owners access whole building energy data. We then cross-referenced utility data with the Institute for Market Transformation (IMT)'s

database of energy benchmarking and BPS policies that have been adopted by local governments.¹

We limited our analysis to the 30 largest metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs) in the U.S., which in total comprise 46 percent of the U.S. population and represent a diverse set of political and socioeconomic contexts. Additionally, we limited our analysis to only electric utilities because most commercial and multifamily buildings meter electricity use in each tenant space separately. However, tenants in buildings with central HVAC and hot water systems may not have separate natural gas accounts, thus eliminating a barrier to the owner monitoring whole building gas use.

For each MSA, we calculated the share of the population that lives in a jurisdiction that has adopted a benchmarking ordinance, as well as the total number of municipalities in the MSA which have adopted a benchmarking policy. Where available, we also compiled a database of published rates of compliance with approved benchmarking and BPS policies. The authors cross-referenced the database of adopted policies with a database of jurisdictions with benchmarking and/or BPS policies and the data access characteristics of the utilities that serve these areas. For each utility, we identified and categorized the whole building data aggregation tool(s) that it offers, as well as the enforcing jurisdiction(s) that it serves.

Using these datasets, we assigned each utility to one of three data access categories based on the three characteristics described above. Utilities were categorized as high data access if they provide aggregated energy data for both commercial and multifamily buildings through a web-based platform. Utilities were categorized as moderate if they either 1) provide aggregation to both commercial and multifamily buildings, but owners must compile spreadsheets to aggregate data from all tenant spaces; or 2) provide aggregated data via web-service for commercial buildings, but do not offer access for multifamily buildings. Utilities that did not meet criteria for high or moderate access, were assigned to the low access category. **Error! Reference source not found.**1 shows the criteria applicable to each data access category.

Table 1. Whole building data access categorization

Data access category	Commercial Aggregation	Multifamily Aggregation	Delivery Mechanism
High	Yes	Yes	Web service
Moderate	Yes	Yes	Spreadsheet
Moderate	Yes	No	Web service
Low	Yes or No	No	Not available or Spreadsheet

¹ State policies were excluded from the analysis for two primary reasons. Most municipalities are served by one or two primary utilities, making utility data practices a significant factor for policy compliance. In contrast, states are often served by multiple utilities with varying data access offerings, typically reducing the influence of any single utility on statewide outcomes. Additionally, while local governments generally lack authority to direct utilities to modify their data access practices, states often have regulatory or legislative authority to require changes to utility data access programs.

Additionally, within each MSA, we calculated the percentage of the total population that lives in a local jurisdiction that has adopted a benchmarking ordinance, as well as the total number of municipalities in that MSA that have adopted a benchmarking policy.

Using these databases, we examined relationships between utility data access and policy adoption by looking at the prevalence of policies within the service territories of utilities that offer high, moderate, and low access and through qualitative insights from policy implementation stakeholders in covered jurisdictions. To explore the relationship between utility data access and progression from benchmarking to BPS policies, we also evaluated levels and types of data access in the 11 local jurisdictions that have adopted BPS policies.

Where publicly available data were available, we compared policy compliance rates in jurisdictions served by utilities that offered high access versus low access.

Stakeholder Interviews

To further explore the research questions, we leveraged qualitative insights from benchmarking and BPS technical assistance providers and jurisdiction staff. Insights were collected by conducting written interviews with 10 current and previous municipal staff, as well as nonprofit staff working to advance policy in jurisdictions across the country. Stakeholders were interviewed regarding how access to whole building aggregated utility data has played an influence on benchmarking or BPS policy introduction, adoption, and implementation. 2 lists the stakeholders from whom input was received.

Table 2. Interview participants and organizational affiliations

Stakeholder	Jurisdiction	Role
Emily Andrews	St. Louis, MO	Nonprofit Policy Partner
Shelby Buso	Atlanta, GA	Former Municipal Staff
Marcella Corona	Oak Park, IL	Former Municipal Staff
Connor Dailey	Ann Arbor, MI	Current Municipal Staff
Richard Freeh	Philadelphia, PA	Nonprofit Policy Partner
Sharon Jaye	Denver, CO	Current Municipal Staff
Kumar Jensen	Evanston, IL	Former Municipal Staff
Casius Pealer	New Orleans, LA	Nonprofit Policy Partner
Jamie Ponce	Chicago, IL	Former Municipal Staff
Michael Rochmes	Los Angeles, CA	Nonprofit Policy Partner
Ethan Vonderheide	Boston, MA	Nonprofit Policy Partner

Findings

Investigation of publicly available data, interviews with industry experts and distillation of previously completed research and reports produced the findings described in this section. While these findings offer insights relevant to the research questions, they also reveal opportunities and needs for additional research related to these questions.

Literature Review

Connection between data access and benchmarking and BPS programs. Data access challenges are one of the most frequently cited barriers to the adoption and success of building-focused energy policies. The U.S. EPA and the Institute for Market Transformation (IMT) have both worked to provide education and support for industry stakeholders and utilities on this issue at the national level in recent years, and Regional Energy Efficiency Organizations (REEOs) have done the same in their territories.

The U.S. EPA offers both policy and technical support, with resources collected and summarized on the *Unlock Data* page on the ENERGY STAR website (U.S. EPA 2026b). The agency runs a “Whole-Building Energy Data Campaign,” which surveys, and collects market input from, building owners and operators, stakeholders and service providers. The EPA compiled a list of priority utility markets where it received the most feedback about data access being a barrier for owners and operators, and have offered to support meetings between industry and utilities where relevant. The U.S. EPA’s synthesized perspective on data access can be found in its publication *Data Access: A Fundamental Element for Benchmarking and Building Performance Standards* (U.S. EPA 2021).

In recent years IMT has increased its support of whole building data access efforts, centered on their “Model Utility Data Access Law” (IMT 2026a). IMT’s resource page includes a summary video that distills the issue while articulating the range of impacts data access (or a lack thereof) has on building owners, operators and tenants.

While initiatives by the EPA assume a relationship between data access and policy adoption, our review of existing publications found a gap in research on how existing data access drives or enables policy adoption is only anecdotal.

Example relationship between access and adoption. Commonwealth Edison (ComEd) automated a solution for providing whole building data prior to the existence of any policy drivers requiring or incenting it to make the investment. ComEd serves northern Illinois, where three benchmarking ordinances have been adopted: Chicago (2013), Evanston (2016) and Oak Park (2023).

ComEd’s decision to automate access and become the first utility in the country to provide aggregate, whole-building level data to customers in 2008 predated any policy driver by five years and was “presented strictly as a service to customers” (U.S. DOE 2016a). It was envisioned initially for use by commercial and industrial customers and organically expanded into buildings containing residential customers. The initial launch of the solution was part of ComEd’s Smart Ideas® programs, a portfolio of ratepayer funded residential and commercial energy efficiency and demand response programs (U.S. EPA 2014). When Chicago implemented its benchmarking ordinance in 2013; reliable, automated access to building level data “was critical in driving compliance” (U.S DOE 2016a).

Data Analysis

Analysis of policy adoption and utility data access in the 30 largest MSAs found that benchmarking policies were more prevalent in areas served by utilities offering higher levels of whole-building energy data access.

The share of the MSA population residing in a jurisdiction with a benchmarking ordinance increased as utility data access improved. MSAs served by utilities categorized as providing high levels of data access had the greatest share of residents living in jurisdictions with benchmarking policies. While utilities in the moderate access category were associated with the highest average number of benchmarking jurisdictions per MSA, this result should be interpreted cautiously because only one utility fell within this category. Table 3 summarizes the relationship between utility data access and benchmarking policy adoption across the 30 largest MSAs.

Connections between data access and policy adoption. Applying the data access categorization shown in Table 1 to the electric utilities serving large MSAs found that the per capita policy adoption rate increased in areas served by utilities in higher data access categories. The moderate category had the highest value for the average number of jurisdictions in an MSA with a benchmarking ordinance. However, it is likely that the small sample size in this category skewed this value, as the high access category showed a much higher value than the low category. Table 3 shows the results of the analysis for the 30 largest MSAs.

Table 3. Rates of benchmarking adoption in MSAs based on data access framework

	Data Access Framework		
	Low	Moderate	High
Avg. % of MSA Population in benchmarking jurisdiction	4.7%	11.5%	19.6%
Avg. # of jurisdictions in MSA with benchmarking ordinance	0.33	1.67	1.33
Total # Jurisdictions served by electric utility	7	1	40

Among the 50 local jurisdictions that have adopted benchmarking ordinances, aggregated whole-building energy data for commercial buildings were available in 42 jurisdictions, while multifamily aggregation was available in 41 jurisdictions. In contrast, only eight jurisdictions lacked access to aggregated whole-building data (Table 4). These findings suggest that access to aggregated energy data, particularly for multifamily buildings, is common among jurisdictions that have adopted benchmarking policies.

Table 4. Characteristics of data access in jurisdictions with benchmarking ordinances.

	Yes	No
Aggregation	42	8
Multifamily aggregation	41	9

Utilities serving benchmarking jurisdictions also differed in how they provide access to aggregated data. Automated web-based services were available in 34 jurisdictions, while eight jurisdictions relied on spreadsheet-based processes and eight jurisdictions lacked aggregation capabilities altogether (Table 5). Because web-based platforms streamline reporting and reduce administrative burden for building owners, these findings suggest that ease of access may also play a role in supporting policy adoption and implementation

Table 5. Mechanisms for providing energy data in benchmarking jurisdictions

Data Type	Web Services	Spreadsheet	None
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# Jurisdictions	34	8	8
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Building Performance Standards. While 50 local governments in the U.S. have adopted energy benchmarking policies, only 11 of these jurisdictions have progressed to adopt a BPS policy. Most local governments that adopt a BPS policy do so after implementing a benchmarking program for several years. This progression is a best practice because it enables the jurisdiction to use data on current and past energy consumption to inform its energy or emissions reduction goals for in the BPS policy. All 11 municipalities that added BPS policies to their benchmarking policies are served by utilities that provide aggregated whole building data for both commercial and multifamily buildings via a webservice. Together these mechanisms supporting data access minimize time burden required for building owners to report their energy data, creating an enabling condition for successful implementation of benchmarking and BPS policies.

Policy Adoption Patterns.

Examining the progression from state-level policy adoption to local implementation and from benchmarking requirements to BPS ordinances revealed common pathways through which such policies evolve and expand. Most state-level policies originate through legislation, while governance and implementation authority varies considerably, from state energy and commerce offices to code commissions and utility regulators. Some states like New Jersey and Massachusetts passed simple, minimal legislative text on this issue while other laws like Oregon’s include detailed procedures and directives.

For all state-level building-focused energy policies, either the law itself or associated implementation documentation contains some language related to utility data sharing. Because local governments don’t have any jurisdictional, regulatory or legislative authority over utilities (except in the case of municipal utilities), local policies do not typically contain data access language. Our review identified a few policies that reference a relevant state-level directive and one (Brisbane, CA) that includes utility requirements. While other localities could incorporate utility requirements in their ordinances, their ability to enforce those mandates is limited. In six of the eight states with an active benchmarking or BPS policy, statewide action followed adoption of one or more local policies. San Francisco led California; Boulder, Denver and Fort Collins led Colorado; Boston, Cambridge, Chelsea and Lexington led Massachusetts; Montgomery County led Maryland; Minneapolis and Edina led Minnesota; and Portland led Oregon. New Jersey and Washington are the exceptions to this common sequence.

Firsthand knowledge and commentary from technical assistance providers we surveyed indicates that early adopting localities exposed the dependency of the success of these policies on data access, while later adopters attribute their ordinance’s adoption and/or viability to preexisting data access (Ponce 2026).

Authority of jurisdictions and regulators. Throughout the country, state governments and public service commissions regulate utility operations. Consequently, while best practices for utility data access have been published, municipal and county governments lack authority to compel utilities to implement these data access tools.

As shown in Table 7, eight states with the ability to regulate utility data access offerings have adopted building energy policies while making differing decisions about the agencies tasked with implementing these laws and the involvement of their respective public service

commissions. For example, New Jersey’s statewide benchmarking law is administered by the Board of Public Utilities (BPU), and the state progressed from issuing an order to utilities to establish certain data access mechanisms to operationalizing these tools in less than twelve months (NJBPU 2026). In Colorado, the law explicitly specifies mechanisms, timelines, and utility funding mechanisms such that there has been no ambiguity about expectations or authority. Conversely, Maryland began with an energy office-driven implementation and ultimately mobilized a working group to address questions and issue clarifications related to data access expectations and timelines (MDE 2026) but does not have a regulatory order in place compelling utilities.

Table 7. State level data access regulations

State	Policy Administration	Data Provision via Law	Data Provision via Order
California	California Energy Commission	Y	Y
Colorado	Department of Public Health and the Environment	Y	Y
Massachusetts	Department of Energy Resources	Y	N
Minnesota	Minnesota Commerce Department – Energy and Utilities	Y	N
Maryland	Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE)	Y	N
New Jersey	Clean Energy Program (a Board of Public Utilities, or BPU, initiative)	N	Y
Oregon	Oregon Department of Energy	N	N
Washington	Department of Commerce	Y	N

Connections between data access and policy compliance.

Compliance rates are inconsistently reported by governing jurisdiction, and it was therefore not possible to discern clear trends or patterns in the data set. With phased approaches to policy implementation that increase the denominator of covered buildings over time based on factors like square footage or building segment, there is often a downward trend in participation compliance rates as the number of buildings subject to a policy increases. Further, BPS compliance rates (not participation but performance itself) are not yet available as the first energy reduction compliance deadline for most policies has not yet passed.

Findings from benchmarking and BPS technical assistance providers.

Interviews with jurisdictions stakeholders found consensus that access to whole building energy data from utilities was a key factor in influencing the introduction, adoption and successful implementation of their local energy benchmarking policies, as well as influencing the range of building types covered in the policy, such as multifamily and multi-tenant commercial buildings.

In Illinois, whole building data access has been key to policy adoption, compliance, and ability to provide technical assistance to building owners. The City of Evanston’s former municipal staff

recalled that the ability to request and manipulate whole building aggregated data from ComEd was a major factor in their ordinance moving forward in 2016. “There were significant concerns from elected officials, members of our benchmarking working group, and of course property managers, that if aggregated data were not available, they could be forced to violate potential privacy rules by going to each tenant and having to request data that way” (Jensen, 2026).

Similarly in the City of Chicago, a former policymaker on staff in 2013 stated “from the City's perspective, it was logistically and politically impossible to ask covered buildings to go door-to-door requesting tenants' or condo owners' (and subletters) for their energy bills” (Ponce, 2026).

Technical assistance providers in St. Louis shared similar experiences working with utilities and city staff to ensure that access to whole building data would be available in conjunction with benchmarking, and now BPS, policy adoption. “As we were working on the ordinance, we were also talking with Ameren and Spire about the process for customers to request aggregated data and had that set up prior to the ordinance passing” (Andrews 2026). Prior to ordinance introduction, there was also legislation negotiated and passed at the state level in Missouri requiring utilities to provide access to building data in anticipation of the benchmarking efforts in St. Louis. Since that time, Ameren has also developed a Benchmarking Energy Efficiency Portal (BEEP) where customers can easily request aggregated data.

Working with both the gas and electric utilities on mechanisms to request whole building data was essential to the success of benchmarking adoption in St. Louis and Illinois jurisdictions. Easy access to whole building data paired with training and one-on-one assistance for owners on the steps to request utility data and correctly set up building profiles in ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager provided assurance to building owners and managers that the process was not burdensome and could be integrated into their operational processes. Municipal staff working on the City and County of Denver’s building performance policies shared similar sentiments regarding policy adoption. “In Denver, our policy covers all types of buildings 25,000 square feet and larger, including mixed-use buildings and multi-family, which means if we did not have access to aggregated whole building data from the utility, we would not be able to implement an energy efficiency standard at all” (Jaye, 2026).

In California, building owners are able to request aggregated data from their utilities. However, they are only able to request one year of past data for their properties, which has made it difficult to bring buildings into compliance if they have missed a previous reporting deadline (Rochmes, 2026). Aggregated data access from utilities throughout the state has led to many jurisdictions adopting benchmarking policies as well as a cohort of cities currently working together on BPS policy language and adoption. Similarly, access to whole building energy data from a Pennsylvania utility (PECO) was particularly important when multifamily buildings were added to the Philadelphia benchmarking program, given the large number of individually-metered tenants in the residential space in the jurisdiction. Policymakers and advocates are now working to expand the benchmarking program to several municipalities in Southeast Pennsylvania, and the availability of whole building data remains a key topic there, where PECO provides both electricity and natural gas to the side of the utility market (Freeh, 2026). In some instances, such as in New Orleans, utilities have been required to provide whole building data access for years; access was a key factor in decisions to introduce and adopt benchmarking ordinances. However, useful data access tools that have been required and

promised have not been delivered by the utilities, which has subsequently led to low compliance rates (Pealer, 2026).

Discussion

Market transformation potential offered by improvements to data access

Utilities in Illinois, California, and elsewhere are seeking to accelerate energy savings by supporting the adoption and implementation of BPS policies as MT initiatives. Jurisdictions considering BPS adoption and implementation face multiple challenges, including opposition from local property owners and concerns about municipal staff resources and technical skills needed to implement a BPS program. A lack of viable access to aggregated whole building energy data can also be a barrier to adoption of benchmarking and BPS policies, as documented in the previous section. By providing education and technical/financial support to municipalities considering BPS adoption, and creating tools for automating the distribution of aggregated whole building data, utilities can have significant influence on municipal decisions to adopt and implement.

Motivations for utilities to deploy data access tools. Automating the process can reduce required to manually fulfill increasingly large numbers of data requests. Providing customers with easy visibility to their energy usage can also be a productive way to increase participation in utility energy efficiency programs; customers who understand their usage are more likely to manage it. The same tools that provide access to usage data can also include messaging and recommendations about options for relevant utility energy efficiency program incentives. Enabling data access also represents an important opportunity for utilities to partner with government entities in their territory to advance decarbonization and energy reduction goals. As discussed above, the ability of utility customers to easily access their data is a critical component in local stakeholders' decisions to adopt benchmarking and BPS ordinances, and an important function for implementing and enforcing those policies. Finally, utilities may have the option of claiming savings from supporting advancement of BPS policies as an MT initiative. A potential framework for claiming savings through this methodology has been established (LeZaks, Wells and Port 2025).

The strategy that a utility applies for funding data access tools depends on a variety of factors, including the regulatory environment, the ability to claim savings, and the prevalence of policies requiring access within its footprint, in addition to the reasons mentioned above. Conversations with regulators and other stakeholders can help determine the strategy that best fits a utility's circumstances.

States can implement regulations to accelerate access to whole building data. For example, state regulators may consider decoupling data access from building-focused policies. To date, Illinois is the only state to have passed such a law. The Clean and Reliable Grid Affordability Act (CRGA) of 2025 contains utility data access language focused on building level data, based on model language from IMT (2026a). In theory, this approach paves the way for local policy and market enablement without a statewide benchmarking or performance standard and therefore warrants further exploration and future research.

Energy savings potential for utilities. Findings of our research suggest that streamlined access to whole building energy data is an important factor in the adoption and successful implementation of BPS policies, which create policy drivers that can catalyze energy efficiency upgrades in a jurisdiction. The benefits of supporting data access can be captured by utilities in two main ways. First, traditional energy efficiency programs that offer project-based financial incentives and technical support are likely to grow, as buildings subject to a BPS take advantage of those resources to help meet the new requirements. Second, utilities that are able to pursue a market transformation program design can claim savings generated at all buildings subject to a BPS by demonstrating that their support of the entities considering adoption of the policy influenced the decision-making process, helped overcome barriers to adoption, and resulted in earlier adoption that otherwise would have occurred.

Our results suggest connections between data access and benchmarking policy adoption. Since establishing a benchmarking program is generally a prerequisite to adopting a BPS policy, utilities may consider improving data access as an early-stage market transformation intervention to support BPS adoption.

Conclusion

Utilities are gatekeepers of whole building energy data. Most benchmarking and BPS policies are adopted by local jurisdictions which do not have authority to direct if, or how, the utilities that supply energy to their communities enable building owners to access energy data. While utilities may not be required to collaborate with municipal governments to support their benchmarking and BPS policies, this research highlights reasons for them to seek opportunities for these partnerships. Correlations showing increased adoption of benchmarking and BPS in areas with high access to energy data suggest that improving data access may be an effective strategy for driving adoption of BPS, resulting in the utility benefits described in the previous section.

Recommendations for additional research

Our research identified several topics on which we recommend additional investigation. First, detailed analysis of connections between data access levels and the compliance rates for benchmarking and BPS policies in individual jurisdictions could offer additional insights on the influence of data access mechanisms on actual energy savings, which could further enable utilities to claim MT savings from BPS policies.

At this time, many jurisdictions have not publicly reported policy compliance rates. We encourage all jurisdictions with benchmarking and BPS policies to publish policy compliance rates (both participation and performance, when relevant) to advance development in this field by local and national stakeholders.

Second, the findings from this research leverage prior studies, insights from technical assistance providers, and public information on utility data access mechanisms. We recommend supplementing these findings by conducting qualitative research with additional benchmarking and BPS policy stakeholders including municipal staff, owners of covered properties in relevant jurisdictions, and utilities, to develop a more complete understanding of the influence of energy data access levels on policy adoption and compliance.

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