

GRIDOPTIMAL[®]

BUILDINGS INITIATIVE

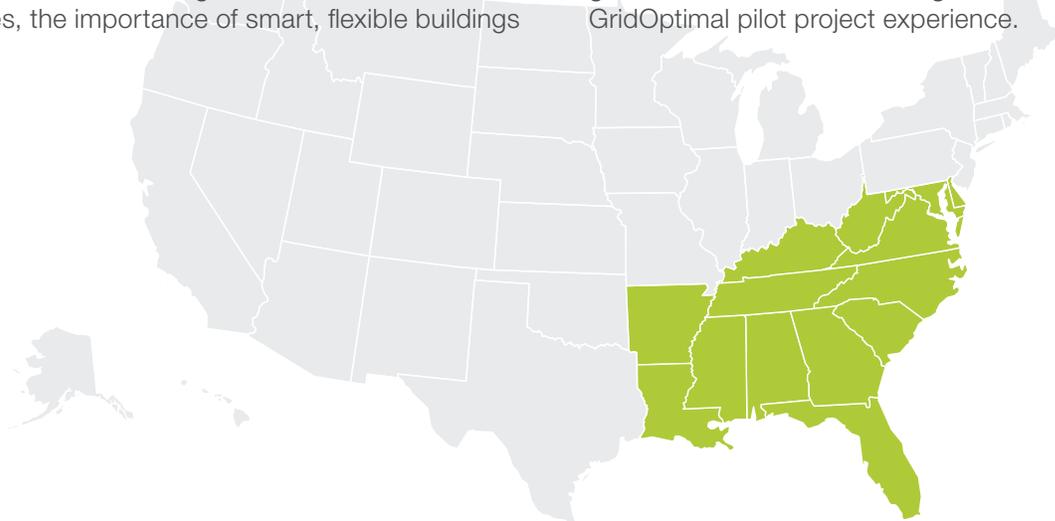


Discovery Elementary School | Arlington, VA
Photo: Alan Karchmer

Optimizing Building-Grid Integration in the Southeast US

This factsheet recommends selected high-impact building design and operational strategies for homes and buildings specifically tailored for the Southeast US. Factsheets are available for other regions and for specific building types. The region's fleet of legacy fossil fuel power plants and its hot, humid weather drive high carbon emissions during both baseload and peak hours. As more renewables (mainly solar) come online and as building and vehicle electrification accelerates, the importance of smart, flexible buildings

as grid citizens will grow. Buildings across the region are uniquely positioned to play an important role in improving building-grid integration through time-of-use energy efficiency, smart devices, connected controls, and distributed energy resources such as onsite/community solar and energy storage. The recommendations in this factsheet are based on a wide variety of research, including building-scale and grid-scale simulation modeling and on-the-ground GridOptimal pilot project experience.



Top 5 GridOptimal Building Design and Operation Strategies:

Southeast US

Efficiency and demand flexibility strategies have widely varying impacts across multiple building types, climates, and grid paradigms. These high-impact approaches can help improve building-grid integration outcomes on both sides of the meter in this region.



Smart HVAC controls.

Temperature setpoint and schedule adjustments such as setbacks, precooling, and preheating can deliver peak demand savings and shift load toward low-cost, low-carbon hours. Communications standards such as OpenADR 2.0b enable current and future participation in demand response and similar programs.



Managed EV charging.

Electric vehicles (EVs) are a key decarbonization solution but charging adds substantial demand. Charging during off-peak hours, and reducing or staging charging during peak hours mitigates the impact. Special rates and generous incentives are often available for smart EV chargers.



Energy efficiency. Passive efficient envelope measures like insulation, air-sealing, high-performance windows, and cool roofs, along with active building efficiency improvements through mechanical system upgrades (HVAC and water heating) offer both year-round savings and peak demand reduction during times of high grid demand and carbon emissions. Energy efficiency is an enabler and often an impact multiplier for demand flexibility.



Thermal energy storage.

Thermal energy storage systems (e.g., ice, hot water) can enable load shifting away from high-cost, high-carbon hours. Key benefits include energy cost savings, emissions reductions, and resilient operations. Prioritize systems that enhance the overall energy efficiency of the cooling and heating systems to better co-optimize schedules and achieve both energy cost and carbon emissions savings, as well as resiliency.



Solar + storage. Onsite renewables help reduce building net demand during peak grid demand hours. Across most of the Southeast, fossil fuel provides both baseload and peak-hour energy, but solar is growing fast and reducing net demand during daylight hours. The ability to charge batteries during the day and discharge them to trim evening demand is valuable. Solar + storage systems can enable buildings to island from the grid, allowing key systems and circuits to remain online during a power outage. Solar + storage can offer an attractive combination of cost savings, carbon reductions, and resiliency benefits.

Key Enablers: Energy Efficiency and Distributed Energy Resources

Energy efficiency is critical: more-efficient buildings have lower operating costs, carbon impacts, and power demand. Efficient buildings with high-performance envelopes remain comfortable for longer without mechanical conditioning, widening the demand response potential and load shifting window.

Passive strategies can deliver targeted time-of-use energy savings. Insulation and air-sealing save energy all the time, but especially during peak conditions. West-facing shading and electrochromic windows reduce cooling demand during costly, high-carbon summer evenings.

Active strategies offer demand response by shifting load away from peak hours toward low-cost, low-carbon hours. Automated grid-integrated controls on HVAC,

water heating, lighting, and appliances facilitate reliable, consistent load shifting during occupied and unoccupied hours.

Distributed Energy Resources (DERs) including solar PV, batteries, managed EV charging, and thermal energy storage can deliver energy flexibility. Target energy storage systems that can charge during the day and reduce evening demand. Co-optimize storage systems for both cost and carbon through real-time rate and carbon signals or by adding in a time-varying synthetic carbon cost. At a minimum, be solar-ready and storage-ready: reserve space and capacity in conduits and electrical panels for future DERs and related electric infrastructure.

Designing and Operating Buildings in a Fossil-Heavy and Solar-Heavy Grid

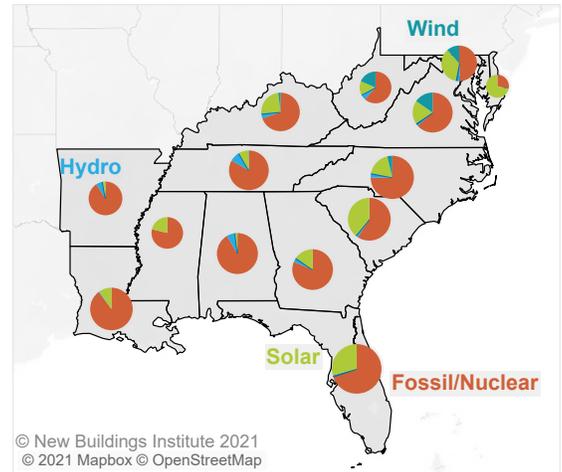
Across the Southeast US, electricity generation is primarily fossil fuel based. Some states have appreciable solar generation, which is expected to grow substantially over the coming decades.

The energy sector can shift rapidly to renewables as economics continue to swing in the favor of renewables. As more solar comes online, shifting building load toward low-carbon mid-day hours can trim emissions. In the summertime, overnight electricity can be as much as three times more carbon-intensive than during mid-day, when solar power is available. In all states, and especially those with low solar generation, energy efficiency and peak demand savings are key pathways to avoid expensive power generation and system expansion needed to handle additional demands from a growing building stock.

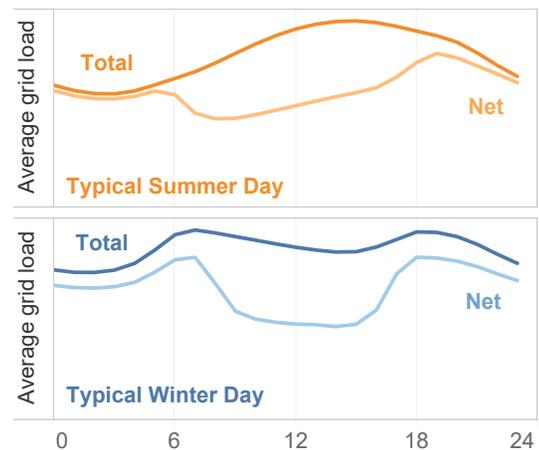
To minimize carbon emissions from electricity consumption, identify hours in each season when high building demand coincides with high grid carbon factors. Search for energy-saving or demand flexibility opportunities in the end-uses and equipment that are driving significant building demand during those hours. Strategies that are well-suited to this grid paradigm include passive load shaping (e.g., air-sealing, insulation), diurnal demand flexibility strategies (e.g., precooling, temperature setbacks) as well as medium-duration energy storage (e.g., batteries, cold/hot water tanks).

Electricity grids across the region are transforming toward zero carbon emissions. Buildings can enable this transition by focusing on time of use energy efficiency and demand flexibility.

Southeast US Grid Mix

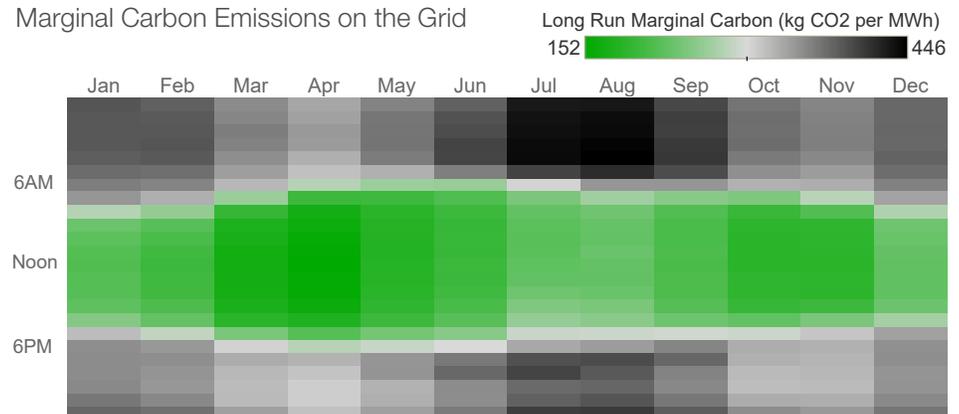


Southeast US System Load Profile



Hours with high net system load (dashed lines) tend to be more expensive and higher-carbon. Net system load equals total load minus renewable generation.

Marginal Carbon Emissions on the Grid



All graphs and charts on this page show an average of 2036-2044 hourly data from the 2020 release of NREL's Cambium Standard Scenarios, available at <https://cambium.nrel.gov/>.



Anna Maria Green Village | Anna Maria, FL
Credit: Raymond Kaiser

Futureproofing: Building and Vehicle Electrification

Burning fossil fuels in buildings is responsible for about 9% of US carbon emissions, while transportation emissions make up 29%. Building and vehicle electrification can greatly reduce these emissions. This represents both a great challenge and a great opportunity.

Buildings: Generally, grids in the Southeast are summer-peaking, but as electrification advances, winter demand will grow—and electricity rates may be impacted. Designers should consider heating-season demand flexibility and peak load reduction strategies. Improved building envelopes and high-efficiency mechanical systems help minimize winter heating demand, while battery and thermal energy storage paired with smart controls can help shift peak demand.

Vehicles: Electric vehicle (EV) charging can add substantial whole-building loads and if not managed carefully can contribute to higher energy costs and carbon emissions. Specify smart EV chargers that can communicate with the utility or a third party. Bidirectional EV chargers are an emerging technology that can enable EV batteries to support electricity grids and buildings.



Alice West Fleet Elementary | Arlington, VA
Credit: Alan Karchmer

Futureproofing: Climate Change Adaptation and Resiliency

Resiliency is a critical consideration for building owners and occupants. Natural and climate-change-amplified disasters such as tropical storms, heat waves, and floods have direct impacts, like local grid outages, and indirect impacts, like grid system overload, across the region. Energy efficiency can help extend the building's passive survivability time window. Use hours of passive survivability as a metric for evaluating and comparing energy efficiency and demand flexibility strategies.

Evaluate the resiliency and other non-energy benefits of both efficiency and flexibility strategies and prioritize strategies that improve building-grid integration benefits while saving energy and reducing carbon impacts. In many cases, resiliency benefits may be the deciding factor in deploying strategies such as energy storage; if so, ensure that day-to-day operations deliver cost, grid support, and emissions benefits.

Program Information

The GridOptimal Buildings Initiative aims to improve building-grid interactions across the built environment by empowering building owners, designers, utilities, and other key players with dedicated metrics, tools, and guidance.

Up to three LEED points are available for buildings that improve their building-grid integration outcomes through the GridOptimal Buildings Pilot Alternative Compliance Path. See: usgbc.org/credits/gridoptimal-152-v4.1

For more information, contact alex@newbuildings.org

Read more: newbuildings.org/gridoptimal



New Buildings Institute (NBI) is a nonprofit organization driving better energy performance in buildings. We work collaboratively with industry market players—governments, utilities, energy efficiency advocates and building professionals—to promote advanced design practices, innovative technologies, public policies and programs that improve energy efficiency and reduce carbon emissions. We also develop and offer guidance and tools to support the design and construction of energy efficient buildings. Learn more at newbuildings.org

NBI developed this GridOptimal design guidance factsheet.

The GridOptimal Buildings Initiative is supported by these organizations:

