ENERGY & NATURAL RESOURCES

The New Nuclear Delivery Model

How AI Can Drive Efficiency and Transparency—and Accountability

The Nuclear Project Delivery Problem

Nuclear power is back. Surging electricity demand, driven by data centers, electrification, and the build-out of AI infrastructure, is forcing utilities and grid planners to secure firm, dispatchable, zero-carbon generation at a scale that wind, solar, and storage cannot supply on their own. As states and nations design the decarbonized grids of the coming decades, nuclear is once again central to their plans. In the United States, federal support has escalated steadily through executive orders, cost-shared awards to advance light-water small modular reactors, and, most recently, $17.5 billion in federal financing to speed the development of 10 new large reactors, explicitly to meet the power demands of data centers.[1] After a generation of retrenchment, the commitment to build is real.

The question that remains is not whether the world wants more nuclear power. It is whether the industry can develop it differently, and better, this time. The recent record is sobering. Plant Vogtle Units 3 and 4 came online roughly seven years late at a total cost near $35 billion, against an original $14 billion estimate.[2] Hinkley Point C in the UK has climbed from £17.9 billion (roughly $27 billion) toward £35 billion (roughly $53 billion), both in 2015 prices, which EDF now puts at around £48 billion (roughly $65 billion) in today's money, with its first unit not expected before the end of the decade.[3] These are not outliers. They are the norm, and cautionary tales, for new nuclear builds in the modern era.

What the Overruns Actually Cost

The Vogtle and Hinkley Point C overruns share a common anatomy. Both projects suffered from thousands of design changes, rework driven by quality issues, supply chain disruptions, workforce management failures, and an inability to detect and respond to problems before they cascaded into delays. Traditional project management, built on static schedules, manual updates, and reactive decision-making, is structurally ill-suited to the complexity of nuclear builds.

But the obvious diagnosis of these projects is incomplete. They were not, at root, failures of information latency that faster software would have prevented. They were failures at the seam between the party accountable for the outcome and the parties responsible for the work, a seam that holds in calm conditions and tears under stress. When a fixed-price contract collapses or a vendor enters bankruptcy, the contractual allocation of risk does not hold; exposure migrates back to whoever carries operational accountability, political legitimacy, and cannot walk away. The question on the ground was rarely only "did we know?" It was "who can compel the change, absorb the cost, and is still standing here when it is over?"

Consider the numbers. At Vogtle, the original schedule assumed Units 3 and 4 would come online in 2016 and 2017; the actual dates were 2023 and 2024. At its peak, the project employed many thousands of workers across multiple contractors and subcontractors. Coordinating that workforce with manually maintained schedules and periodic reporting cycles meant problems often went undetected for weeks or months by which point the cost of correction had multiplied, and the authority to fix it was distributed across parties whose interests had diverged. At Hinkley Point C, the project's managing director, Stuart Crooks, describes 7,000 substantial design changes against the original plans, requiring 35% more steel and 25% more concrete than estimated.[4] No traditional planning system can anticipate or dynamically respond to that volume of change. The result is a cascade of rescheduling, rework, and cost escalation that compounds with every delay, and that lands on the accountable owner regardless of how the contracts were drawn.

Two Builds, Two Overruns

Plant Vogtle (Georgia, US)

Units 3 and 4, the first new US reactors in decades

- Scheduled online 2016–2017; actually 2023–2024, roughly seven years late
- Original estimate $14 billion; final cost near $35 billion

Hinkley Point C (Somerset, UK)

Two EPR reactors, under construction

- £17.9 billion at sanction (2015 prices)
- Now £35 billion in 2015 sterling, about £48 billion in current value
- 7,000+ design changes: 35% more steel, 25% more concrete than planned

Traditional nuclear project management is reactive by design. AI-powered tools make detection earlier and cheaper, surfacing problems while they are still inexpensive to solve. That is a real advance. It is also only half of the equation.

The deepest insight from the Vogtle experience is not that a single project overran its budget. It is that every nuclear build in the modern era starts essentially from scratch. There is no institutional memory system that captures what went wrong on the last project and applies it systematically to the next. Human experts retire or move on. Lesson-learned documents gather dust. The next team repeats the same mistakes. Hinkley's managing director puts the cost of starting cold plainly: restarting an industry after a two-decade pause meant relearning skills, rebuilding a supply chain, and training a workforce from nothing, which is an immense tax paid simply for going first.[5]

A new generation of AI-driven project controls offers real help. Applied well, these tools deliver genuine gains in efficiency and transparency: faster planning cycles, earlier warning of trouble, and a clearer common picture across a fragmented project. But their most important contribution is less obvious. The deepest problem in nuclear delivery has been that project owners, despite seeing trouble coming, could not reliably translate that insight into necessary action. AI changes what is knowable, and when. It does not decide who is accountable, who holds decision rights, or who can compel action. But used well, it can make project governance sharper, earlier, and more enforceable. Governance, not instrumentation, is the difference between better reporting and better outcomes.

What AI Changes and What It Doesn't

In complex projects like nuclear power plants, a key distinction organizes everything that follows. Responsibility is the obligation to perform a defined scope of work. Accountability is ownership of the outcome, the inability to walk away when the outcome is bad. In prior nuclear projects (single-sponsor, regulated build) the two largely coincided. On a modern multi-contractor, first-of-a-kind (FOAK) program, they are deliberately separated and distributed: design sits with one party, construction means and methods with another, financing with a third, and ultimate accountability (political, regulatory, financial) with an owner who controls none of them directly. The overruns happen at the seams between these parties, and the seams open under stress.

Every seam poses two questions: what is happening, and who can act on it. AI answers the first with real power: it changes what is knowable, and when. What AI tools cannot settle is the second: who is accountable, and who holds the authority to act on what is now known. In nuclear specifically, four application areas offer the highest near-term impact: schedule optimization, risk forecasting, workforce and supply chain management, and document and compliance intelligence. In each, the efficiency gain is genuine. And in each, the more valuable effect is the same: the tool makes visible, earlier than traditional reporting allows, the precise seam where accountability and responsibility must perform together.

Schedule Optimization and Real-Time Re-Sequencing

Nuclear construction involves hundreds of thousands of interdependent tasks. A delay in one work package, e.g., a structural module arriving late, ripples through dozens of downstream activities. Traditional critical path method (CPM) tools such as Primavera P6 require human analysts days or weeks to recalculate the implications and generate revised plans.

Westinghouse, in partnership with Google Cloud, has demonstrated a different approach. Its HiVE™ and bertha™ AI platforms, working with Westinghouse's WNEXUS digital plant model and Google's Vertex AI and Gemini tools, can re-sequence an entire construction work package within minutes of a simulated disruption. In a FOAK proof of concept, Westinghouse reports that a single demonstration cut estimated work-package costs by about a quarter.[6] The company's aim is to make its next AP1000® builds efficient and repeatable, drawing on a proven, already licensed design,[7] unlike the one-off effort at Vogtle, which came online roughly seven years behind schedule. ALICE Technologies takes a similar approach to general infrastructure, generating millions of simulated schedule permutations to identify optimal sequencing, and reports reductions of up to 17% in duration, 14% in labor cost, and 12% in equipment cost.[8] These are vendor-reported figures and should be read as such.

Predictive Risk Forecasting

Most project risk registers are updated monthly, relying on subjective assessments from team members who have strong incentives to report optimistic progress. By the time a problem appears in a traditional status report, it has typically been festering for weeks.

nPlan addresses this directly. Its platform is trained on a library that the company puts at more than 750,000 historical construction schedules, representing trillions of dollars of completed work.[9] When a team uploads its current schedule, nPlan identifies patterns that historically preceded delay: task interdependencies that look benign on paper but routinely blow up in practice, buffers that appear adequate but consistently erode under real conditions. Sizewell C, the planned follow-on to Hinkley Point C, is using nPlan to redesign its project controls from the ground up, deploying the AI as an independent challenge to its own scheduling. nPlan describes the ambition as compressing the project-controls cycle from months to days, running the loop far more often and across many more scenarios, to shift teams from retrospective reporting toward forward-looking work. That is nPlan's framing of what the technology can do, not a result measured on the Sizewell C build.

Workforce and Supply Chain Visibility

Large nuclear builds involve not just thousands of workers but dozens of suppliers, subcontractors, and vendors operating across interconnected timelines. The Westinghouse bankruptcy during Vogtle's construction (driven largely by overruns on Vogtle itself and the parallel V.C. Summer project in South Carolina) illustrates how supply chain and counterparty fragility can bring a nuclear project to the edge of collapse.[10]

Palantir and The Nuclear Company are jointly developing the Nuclear Operating System (NOS) under a partnership reported at five years and $100 million, built on Palantir's Foundry platform and aimed squarely at this vulnerability.[11] NOS integrates data from construction, supply chain, workforce, engineering, and safety systems into a single operational picture, providing context-aware guidance that adjusts work plans against live constraints (e.g., parts availability, weather, workforce status, equipment readiness). Rather than discovering on Monday that a critical component will not arrive until Thursday, managers receive earlier warnings and can re-sequence other work to fill the gap. Kwant.ai offers complementary workforce visibility through IoT sensors, smart badging, and analytics across multi-contractor sites, while Buildots and OpenSpace add automated visual progress tracking, which compare site conditions against building information models daily rather than relying on manual walk-throughs.

Document Intelligence and Regulatory Compliance

Nuclear construction is among the most document-intensive activities in existence. A single AP1000 project generates millions of pages of engineering drawings, specifications, quality records, regulatory submittals, and inspection reports. Managing this volume manually creates both efficiency losses and compliance risk: a mismatched revision of a weld specification can trigger a regulatory hold that costs weeks.

Generative AI now addresses this directly. Westinghouse's bertha platform can draft license applications and environmental assessments in timeframes that once required months of specialist labor. Idaho National Laboratory's Machine Intelligence for Review and Analysis of Condition Logs and Entries (MIRACLE) platform uses natural language processing to screen and categorize condition reports in plants' corrective action programs, reducing the manual burden on engineers and accelerating issue identification.[12] Tools such as Trunk Tools and Procore's AI provide similar capabilities for construction documentation, letting teams query millions of pages in natural language and receive cited answers in seconds.[13]

From Reactive to Predictive: A Framework for Adoption

Project teams considering AI adoption should sequence their investments to address the highest-impact failure points first. The framework below organizes the available tools by the phase where they deliver the greatest impact.

Project Phase	Core Problem	AI Solution	Representative Tools[14]
Pre-Construction and Planning	Optimism bias in schedules; inadequate contingency	Historical benchmarking; probabilistic forecasting; generative schedule optimization	nPlan, ALICE Technologies
Procurement and Supply Chain	Supplier failures; lead-time surprises; documentation gaps	Real-time supply chain integration; predictive alerts; AI-assisted vendor management	Palantir NOS
Active Construction	Workforce coordination; rework; progress-reporting lag	Real-time site visibility; AI re-sequencing; automated progress tracking	Westinghouse HiVE/bertha, Buildots, OpenSpace, ALICE, Kwant.ai
Quality and Regulatory Compliance	Documentation volume; change management; regulatory interface	AI document generation and review; condition-report automation; NLP query tools	Westinghouse bertha, INL MIRACLE, Trunk Tools, Procore AI
Project Controls and Reporting	Delayed insight; manual reconciliation; optimism bias	Automated schedule analytics; AI-generated forecasts; portfolio dashboards	nPlan, SmartPM, Autodesk Construction IQ

No single tool solves nuclear construction's challenges. The most effective deployments layer complementary capabilities: generative scheduling for pre-construction planning, risk-forecasting platforms for ongoing controls, real-time operational integration for execution, and document AI for compliance. Together these layers close the information gaps that historically allowed problems to compound undetected.

Why Repetition Matters

There is an encouraging corollary. Hinkley's managing director notes that the project's identical second unit is running roughly 20–30% faster than the first, for the simplest of reasons: repeating a design is always easier than building a one-off.[15] That is the learning curve made visible, which is the mechanism that turned aviation, semiconductors, and solar panels into dependable, cost-declining industries.[16] Nuclear has rarely accessed it, because it has rarely built the same thing twice with the same organization carrying the lessons forward.

This is where AI's contribution is most durable. nPlan's model encodes, implicitly, every pattern of delay and overrun that complex infrastructure has produced. Westinghouse's HiVE platform encodes 75 years of proprietary nuclear design and construction data.[17] Palantir's Foundry is built to accumulate an institutional-memory layer that compounds with every project. These systems can carry forward what the last build learned.

Risk Allocation and Governance: What AI Reveals

But information gaps are only half the problem. The other half is whether the organization has been built to act on what the tools reveal.

Consider the schedule. A re-sequencing engine that flags a slip in seconds is only valuable if someone can act on the flag. On a multi-contractor build, the accountable party for the schedule and the party responsible for means and methods are usually different entities with different incentives. The tool surfaces the slip and even the optimal recovery path; it cannot decide who bears the cost of the recovery, or who holds the authority to redirect another contractor's crews. It illuminates the seam between schedule accountability and execution responsibility. Closing that seam is a governance act, not a software output.

Predictive forecasting exposes a different seam. Once a high-probability delay is visible eight weeks out, "we didn't know" is no longer available. The excuse is gone, and what remains is a pure governance question: did the owner reserve the authority to act on what is now knowable, and is that authority held by a party with the accountability to use it? Earlier sight raises the stakes on governance rather than lowering them. It converts a defensible information failure into an undeniable decision failure.

> *Closing that seam is a governance act, not a software output.*

An important caveat: these models learn from history, from what has already gone wrong. That makes them strongest against the modal, well-represented failure, and weakest exactly where FOAK projects face the most risk: the novel, design-specific failure surface that has no precedent in the training data. Hardening a new reactor program against the patterns learned from a previous one is a last-war move dressed as foresight. Predictive controls sharpen vision of familiar risks; they can leave the unfamiliar fat-tail risks (the ones that break FOAK budgets) in the dark. For these projects, the tool is an aid to judgment, not a substitute for it.

What the integrated supply chain platforms reveal is precisely where accountability fragments. An integrated operating picture shows the owner, in real time, the dozens of points at which a single accountable line of sight does not yet exist. That is where a slip in one supplier's scope has no owner until it has already become everyone's problem. But a common operating picture is different from a single accountable entity empowered to resolve cross-contract conflict. That system-integration authority is a structural choice the owner must make; the software exposes the need for it but cannot confer it. The picture is necessary but not sufficient.

The accountability point here is subtle but decisive: a document-traceability tool is only as trustworthy as the reporting line it sits on. The same model reporting up through a contractor whose incentive is to keep moving is a different instrument than one reporting to an independent owner's quality function. AI can make a mismatched weld revision instantly findable; whether that finding stops the work depends on who the quality organization answers to.

AI-powered tools cannot move where accountability sits, but they can move time and information across reporting lines, and in three ways they make governance easier to exercise well. Run against a proposed contract rather than a bare baseline, predictive scheduling can locate risk-allocation fault lines before project structures are set, flagging where a likely slip meets a party that controls the work but bears none of its schedule consequence. This is reconnaissance for the governance design, and the mirror image of the last-war problem noted above.

During execution, compressed feedback loops turn some crises into routine interventions: a problem surfaced eight weeks early can be managed deliberately, with options still open, rather than settled at speed under maximum pressure.

And an independent, owner-held forecast creates a contemporaneous record with the slip flagged, the responsible party notified, and the decision and its owner logged, which strips out the deniability that too often lets risk migrate quietly, making accountability enforceable rather than nominal.

None of this moves the boundaries of responsibility and accountability. The time and sight AI buys are worth only what the owner's structure does with them. The adoption framework above answers a buyer's question: which tool for which phase. Going further, AI can illuminate the key questions in project governance and risk allocation: for each place where the work and the outcome are owned by different parties, what does AI make visible, what must the owner decide, and what governance capability must exist for that decision to be actionable? Reorganized that way, the same picture looks like this:

Delivery seam	What AI makes visible	Owner decision required	Governance capability needed
Schedule vs. execution	Recovery path after a disruption	Who can compel re-sequencing?	System-integration authority
Supplier scope vs. project outcome	Lead-time or quality failure in the chain	Who absorbs the cost and schedule impact?	Procurement risk governance
Contractor progress vs. owner assurance	Gap between reported and actual progress	Who can stop or reprioritize work?	Independent project controls
Documentation vs. quality basis	Spec, revision, or nonconformance conflict	Who can halt work?	Independent QA reporting line
Project learning vs. portfolio learning	Recurring failure patterns across builds	Who owns the learning curve?	Replication and data-governance model

But data accumulating in a platform is not yet institutional learning. Memory compounds only if some accountable entity is positioned to hold it and apply it across projects, a learning carrier with the authority and the continuity to act on what the data shows. The vendor-led, multi-partner model that dominates today's advanced-reactor programs is exactly the model that lacks such a carrier. The tools provide the mechanism. Whether the mechanism is owned by a party that can carry forward to additional projects is, again, a question of organizational design.

A Realistic Assessment

Use of AI does not guarantee nuclear project success. These tools require quality data, organizational commitment, and disciplined change management. Nuclear's regulatory environment adds genuine constraints: AI systems used in safety-critical applications must meet explainability and qualification standards that general construction tools do not face. Also, the industry's relative data scarcity (e.g., there are simply not that many nuclear builds compared with, say, commercial construction) limits how much nuclear-specific models can learn from the domain alone. The last-war problem compounds this: the historical record teaches the familiar failures best and the novel ones least, which is the opposite of what a FOAK program most needs. Above all, no tool resolves the governance question on its own. The best instrumentation in the world can buy time, sharpen sight, and document who knew what and when, but it still produces better-documented failure if it sits on top of a structure that has already migrated risk to a party that cannot bear it. The objective is to inform risk ownership, not the illusion of transfer, and software can inform ownership without ever establishing it.

These are real constraints, not reasons for inaction. The tools described here are already deployed or in advanced pilots on nuclear projects. Westinghouse and Google demonstrated their scheduling proof of concept and have continued to detail the system into 2026.[18] Palantir and The Nuclear Company are actively building NOS.[19] nPlan is live at Sizewell C.[20] These are not theoretical capabilities.

> *The last-war problem: the historical record teaches the familiar failures best and the novel ones least, which is the opposite of what a first-of-a-kind program most needs.*

The New Nuclear Delivery Model: Combining AI and Governance

The requirements that follow are not a checklist of best practices to adopt at leisure. They are the interlocking components of a single delivery model that is designed so that what AI reveals reaches a party with both the accountability and the authority to act on it. Each must be in place before construction begins because each becomes far harder to retrofit once the structure has hardened.

1. AI-native project controls, adopted at inception.

Owners should require AI-driven scheduling, risk forecasting, and progress tracking as baseline contract requirements rather than optional add-ons and should adopt them in pre-construction rather than bolting them onto a project already underway. Just as important, they should treat these as risk-management instruments, not reporting tools. The most common failure mode in AI adoption is using the tools to produce better-looking status reports rather than to change decisions. The value is in earlier detection and earlier intervention; the organization must be built to act on alerts, not merely note them.

2. An owner-controlled data backbone.

AI is only as good as the data it ingests. Engineering drawings, procurement records, and quality documentation must be digitized and integrated during pre-construction, not mid-build when the pressure is already intense. The sharper requirement is ownership. A data backbone the vendor or lead contractor controls reproduces the accountability problem one layer down: the owner sees only what the controlling party chooses to surface, and the instrument meant to make risk visible becomes another place risk can hide. The owner must control this data backbone.

3. Clear system-integration authority.

One accountable entity must be empowered to resolve cross-contract conflict and to act on what the tools reveal. This entity must be able to compel re-sequencing, to assign the cost and schedule consequences of a slip, and to halt or reprioritize work. Aligning that authority with exposure will keep decision rights where the ultimate risk lands, and protect crisis decision authority, so that cost, scope, and replacement decisions can be made at speed rather than stalling among parties who must first negotiate among themselves. This is the keystone. Without it, every other component produces information that no one is positioned to use.

4. Independent QA and project-controls reporting lines.

A document-traceability or risk-forecasting tool is only as trustworthy as the line it reports up. Quality assurance and project controls must report to the owner with genuine independence, not through a contractor whose incentive is to keep moving. The same model answering to the party it is meant to check is not a control, but a liability disguised as one. Independence is also what lets the owner hold teams accountable for predictions, not just outcomes: when a system flags a high-probability delay weeks out, an independent controls function can force a formal response rather than let the warning be explained away after the fact.

5. A replication model that carries learning across projects.

The economic case for nuclear becomes compelling only when the same design is built repeatedly on a learning curve. AI that encodes institutional memory is the mechanism, but data accumulating in a platform is different from an organization that learns. Memory compounds only if an accountable owner is structured to carry it. The owner must become a learning carrier with the continuity and authority to apply one project's lessons to the next. Design data governance, tooling choices, and vendor relationships to accumulate and reuse knowledge across a fleet, rather than optimizing each build in isolation.

Set side by side, these five are the delivery model this paper is named for. Four of them make AI's revelations actionable within a build; the fifth makes them cumulative across many. None is a software feature. All are choices about where accountability sits.

The Choice Ahead

The Vogtle and Hinkley Point C overruns cost ratepayers and shareholders tens of billions of dollars and set back public confidence in nuclear energy for years. The next generation of builds carries enormous stakes for decarbonization, for energy security, and for the long-term viability of nuclear power. Getting construction correct is not a nice-to-have. It is a prerequisite for nuclear to play the role the energy transition needs it to play.

The tools now exist to do better. They can make nuclear construction more efficient and more transparent, and used well, they will give owners earlier warning, more room to maneuver, and a clearer record of who knew what and when. Whether that sight and that time become action is not a question the tools can answer. It depends on whether the industry builds the accountability to use them fully. That one belongs to the owners and developers who decide, before the first concrete is poured, where authority sits and who cannot walk away. AI technology illuminates the seam and buys time to close it. Closing it is a choice.

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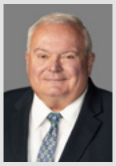

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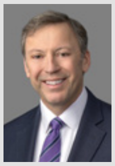

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