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Thermal energy networks have promise TENs have great potential as a practical, cheaper solution that can be scaled

By Mario Mattera and Gregory Lancette/ Guest essay

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Guest essay

New Yorkers have incredibly high energy bills and struggle daily with the rising cost of fuel and electricity. While expanding New York's energy portfolio and facilitating American energy dominance is part of the solution, so is addressing energy use on the local level. The good news is we have a solution available which cuts costs for consumers and provides family-sustaining jobs across the state: thermal energy networks.

TENs are a simple concept: If your neighbor's house is too hot and yours is too cold, instead of spending more money to increase your home temperature, interconnected pipes will share their excess heat instead. By sharing heating and cooling across neighborhoods, TENs dramatically reduce overall demand on the grid and lower costs for everyone.

The same sort of reliability applies when temperatures spike or plunge. The earth is a battery of thermal energy, which you can draw upon through geothermal boreholes. They provide predictable heat during a winter ice storm - and receive unwanted heat to store away in summer.

TENs aren't an abstract idea - and thanks to the 2022 Utility Thermal Energy Network and Jobs Act, utilities are driving pilot projects across New York right now. There is enormous capacity for this program to expand from dense urban neighborhoods to suburban campuses to rural town centers.

In addition to the utility-led projects awaiting approval from the state Public Service Commission, we also have State University of New York schools creating TENs on Long Island, with Stony Brook University and Farmingdale State College establishing plans to develop them on their campuses. This is part of a larger TENs program across the SUNY system, supported by state funding. These systems will make facilities more comfortable for students, faculty and staff, while cutting energy costs.

What makes TENs especially effective is that they don't just help manage energy use, they also build stronger communities. By lowering utility bills for everyone at a local level, they make efficient systems accessible to working families and small businesses, not just those who can afford expensive building retrofits.

Most importantly, TENs create jobs for union members across the state. These systems are complicated, and building and maintaining them requires a highly skilled workforce. As current and former leaders of the United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipefitting Industry of the United States and Canada, we know our targeted training and apprenticeship programs can provide the expertise needed to get the job done. Members can learn while continuing to earn family-sustaining wages. These projects support the careers that power our economy and keep communities strong.

Implementing thermal energy networks in New York is a model of energy policy done right: a practical solution that

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makes life more affordable and supports union jobs. With smart investment and strong leadership, we can scale TENs across New York and ensure that every community, from Long Island to Buffalo, benefits from their lower costs, stronger infrastructure and great careers.

The future of energy in New York must be reliable and fair. Thermal energy networks give us a chance to make that future a reality today. Let's continue to expand this program and deliver for our state.

- THIS GUEST ESSAY reflects the views of State Sen. Mario Mattera of St. James, who represents the 2nd District, and Gregory Lancette, an international representative for the United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipefitting Industry of the United States and Canada.

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