



We're telling everybody in New York State



[home](#) | [the cover](#) | [online exclusives](#) | [features](#) | [news](#) | [editorial & op-ed](#)

Sign up now to subscribe!

Your Name:  E-mail:

Issues: [November](#) | [October](#) | [September](#) | [August](#) | [July](#) | [June](#)  = Print Only

## Cover

 [Dealing With Disgrace](#)


 [2007: A Look Ahead](#)

## Online Only

 [Faso's HQ Burgled](#)

 [Bloomberg' Political Contribution Investments Come Up Short](#)

 [First Spitzer Transition Team Meeting Set](#)

 [Up in the Air? Up in the Sky? It's the Mayor of New York?](#)

## News

 [Diversity Remains Beyond FDNY's Grasp](#)

 [Political Consultant Round-Up](#)

 [Taking the Temperature of Health Laws](#)

 [Solar Power's Not-So-Bright Future](#)

 [Greens Hope for Ballot Access through Lawsuit](#)


 [Working Families and Conservatives Parties See Mixed Results](#)

 [Despite Big Election Turnover, Limited Changes for Big Apple Ahead](#)

## Features

 [In the Chair: Robert Jackson](#)

 [In the Trenches: Steven Matteo](#)

 [No Cape, But the Ad Man is a Democratic Hero](#)

 [Back in the District: James Vacca](#)

 [On the Agenda](#)

 [Where Are They Now? Manfred Ohrenstein](#)

# Solar Power May Become Light At End Of Tunnel For New York

*Help from heavens still far off for city's strapped power grid*

By [James Caldwell](#)

New York City's power grid is not the healthiest machine. During the hot summer months, it regularly reaches its breaking point, causing the occasional large-scale blackout. Short-term solutions have consisted mostly of patchy upgrades, but some say longer-term help is right over our heads.

"There's a huge potential for solar electricity in this city, contrary to popular belief," said Jeff Perlman, founder of Bright Power, a solar installation and design company based in midtown Manhattan.

Simply put, solar electricity systems, known technically as photovoltaic (PV), convert the sun's rays into energy via panels usually mounted on rooftops or building façades. Studies have shown that every two days, more energy shines on New York State from the sun than the amount of power used by the state all year.

**"THERE'S A HUGE POTENTIAL FOR SOLAR ELECTRICITY IN THIS CITY, CONTRARY TO POPULAR BELIEF." — JEFF PERLMAN, FOUNDER OF BRIGHT POWER.**

Perlman said that the sun is strongest at roughly the time of day when New Yorkers use the most power, though he added that solar power is "not a panacea" to the city's power problems.

Despite the abundance of potential solar energy available to New York, obstacles remain to expanding the use of PV systems in the city. Cost is a particular problem. State energy rebates are currently available only for relatively small installations, thus limiting the potential of the best solar customers - big industrial businesses with large roof space.

And that is not the only problem.

"We have plenty of sun; that's not our problem," said Tria Case, executive director of the Center for Sustainable Energy at Bronx Community College. The problem, she said, is "being able to deal with the grid as it is currently configured."

The Center last year launched an initiative to install 500 systems in New York by 2010 as part of the federal Department of Energy's Million Solar Roofs program. One of its own reports, released in January, estimated that by 2022, solar systems integrated into the grid could supply 18 percent of the city's electricity.

Some cities have seen broad public support for solar energy. In March 2004, San Francisco completed the largest city-owned solar installation in the country, atop a downtown building. That system was built with a \$100 million revenue bond to promote energy efficiency approved by city voters in 2001.

While New York City does not have a comparable public initiative to fund large-scale installations, the solar market in the city has grown at an impressive rate, rising 48 percent in 2005. In addition, Mayor Michael Bloomberg (R) recently created the Office of Sustainability and Long Term Planning to research how energy sources like solar power can be more widely incorporated into the city's energy plan.

Chris Neidl, education and outreach coordinator for Solar One, a Manhattan solar advocacy group, said that despite that progress, more political will was needed to expand solar in the city.

"There's nobody specifically who's standing up for solar," Neidl said. "There is a void there, but we're trying to change that."

Solar One is currently drafting a presentation for elected officials, which it hopes to begin circulating soon.

European cities have generally moved much more quickly than their American counterparts in utilizing solar power on a large scale. London's current energy plan, aimed for completion in 2010, includes capacity for 27 megawatts of solar power. New York City currently produces just over one megawatt, or enough to power about 280 households.

Neidl argued that London's example shows the promise solar might have in the five boroughs.