

Best AI Data Pipeline and ETL Tools 2026: 6 Compared

Six ETL and ELT tools compared on what they do, how they bill and where AI fits: Airbyte, dbt, Estuary, Fivetran, Hevo Data and Matillion.

Introduction

In 2026, "AI data pipeline" can mean two things. Some vendors add agents that write and maintain pipelines for you. Matillion's Maia is the clearest case. Other vendors sell their pipelines as the data supply for AI agents. Fivetran and dbt Labs completed their merger on June 1, 2026, and the press release frames the combined company as "data infrastructure for trusted AI agents". Both kinds of pitch are in this list. When you pick between these tools, the billing unit usually matters more than the AI features, so this roundup spends most of its time on pricing.

Pricing changed this year as well. Third-party pricing guides report that Fivetran started counting deletes toward paid monthly active rows (MAR) on January 1, 2026. Airbyte's release notes say new self-serve Cloud pricing took effect on September 23, 2026. If you set your budget last year, check the numbers again.

On scores, scored.tools has no rating on file for any of these six tools yet, so none of them gets a score. The entries below are in alphabetical order and do not rank the tools. All prices come from each vendor's pricing page as of October 2026 unless a different source is named.

Airbyte

Score: Not yet rated

Airbyte is the open-source option. Airbyte Core is self-hosted, and Airbyte Cloud is the managed version. The Connector Builder lets you write your own source connector when the catalogue doesn't have the one you need, and that is the main reason teams pick Airbyte over closed tools. Airbyte also markets "AI Context" and agent-focused products, but its pricing page doesn't say what those include. Cloud pricing uses credits, and that's where it gets hard to plan. Third-party coverage of the September 2026 change reports that one credit buys a different amount of data depending on the source, at 6 credits per million rows for APIs and 4 credits per GB for databases and files. Airbyte's own page doesn't confirm those rates, so check them against your own source

mix before you commit. Self-hosting Core costs nothing in licences, but you pay for the infrastructure and the on-call time.

Best for: teams that need custom connectors, or that want the option to self-host and leave Cloud later.

Pricing: Core is open source and self-hosted. Standard starts at \$20/month with 5 credits included, and extra credits cost \$5 each. Plus starts at \$189/month with 40 credits, 15-minute syncs, SSO and a 24-hour support SLA. Pro and Enterprise Flex are custom-priced on capacity ("Data Workers"), and Pro offers syncs as often as every 5 minutes. The trial runs 14 days and includes 400 credits, which Airbyte values at \$2,000 of usage.

dbt

Score: Not yet rated

Dbt handles the T in ELT. It turns data that is already in your warehouse into tested, documented models written in SQL. It doesn't extract or load anything, so you pair it with one of the other tools here. Since the merger, dbt is part of Fivetran + dbt Labs, though Fivetran's pricing page still says in a footnote that Fivetran Transformations is not a dbt Labs product. dbt has an AI assistant (Copilot), but the pricing page doesn't list how much you can use it on each plan, and third-party sources give conflicting Copilot quotas. Ask sales for that number in writing. The per-seat Starter price is the cost to watch, since \$100 per user adds up quickly for a five-person analytics team, and the plan is limited to one project.

Best for: analytics engineers who want version-controlled SQL transformations, lineage and a semantic layer on top of an existing warehouse.

Pricing: Developer is free for 1 seat and 3,000 successful model builds a month. Starter is \$100 per user per month for up to 5 seats, with 15,000 models, 5,000 queried metrics and 1 project. Enterprise is custom-priced with 100,000 models and 30 projects, and adds SSO, RBAC and dbt Mesh. Enterprise+ adds PrivateLink and Hybrid Projects. dbt Core remains free and open source.

Estuary

Score: Not yet rated

Estuary focuses on change data capture (CDC) and streaming, and also runs batch jobs. It's the tool on this list for moving changes from Postgres or MySQL into a warehouse or lake within seconds, without running Kafka yourself. Estuary bills by data volume rather than by rows, and its blog makes a public case against MAR pricing. Per the pricing page, the GB count covers sourcing, transforming and delivering. A gigabyte that is captured and then materialised can therefore be billed more than once, so a source table's size alone will underestimate the bill. Connector fees are also a large share of a small deployment's cost.

Best for: teams that need low-latency CDC into a warehouse and want a bill they can calculate from data volume.

Pricing: The free tier allows up to 10 GB/month and 2 connector instances with no time limit. Paid usage costs \$0.50/GB. The first 6 connector instances cost \$100/month each, and additional instances cost \$50/month each (prorated). Going over the free limits starts a 30-day trial. Enterprise is custom-priced on annual contracts and includes private and BYOC deployment, SSO and custom SLAs.

Fivetran

Score: Not yet rated

Fivetran is the managed ELT default. It offers 700+ managed connectors, Activations (reverse ETL, which used to be the separate Census product) and transformation runs, all on one bill. The pricing page includes worked examples that make the MAR model easier to follow. In one, a Marketo connection at 847,574 MAR costs \$424.54 a month on Standard, and a Facebook Ads connection at 34,479 MAR costs \$22.06. Each standard connection between 1 and 1M MAR also carries a \$5 base charge. Fivetran is the most hands-off tool here and often the most expensive at scale. MAR is hard to forecast for tables that see a lot of updates, especially now that deletes count. Run the free plan against your noisiest source before you sign an annual contract.

Best for: teams that want to buy connectors rather than build or maintain them, and can live with usage-based bills.

Pricing: The free plan covers 500,000 MAR for connections, 3,500 MAR for activations and 5,000 model runs a month. Standard adds 15-minute syncs, unlimited users and dbt Core integration. Enterprise adds 1-minute syncs and hybrid deployment. Business Critical adds customer-managed keys and PCI DSS Level 1. Transformations cost \$0.01 per run from 5,001 to 30,000 runs, with lower rates above that. Annual contract discounts run from 5% up to 22.6% on Standard.

Hevo Data

Score: Not yet rated

Hevo Data is a no-code pipeline tool with tiered plans and published prices, which makes it the easiest bill on this list to predict. You choose an event tier and pay a flat monthly fee, and usage above the quota is billed on demand. The trade-off is sync frequency. The pricing page lists 1-hour scheduling on Free and Starter, so if you need fresher data you're looking at Professional or a different tool. The pricing page doesn't list any AI features. For a small team that wants SaaS data in a warehouse without an engineer looking after it, that may not matter.

Best for: small teams with modest volumes who want a fixed monthly price and a no-code setup.

Pricing: Free covers up to 1M events/month and 5 users. Starter is \$299/month list price, or \$265/month billed annually, with 5M to 50M event tiers and up to 10 users. Professional is \$849/month list price, or \$750/month billed annually, with 20M to 100M events and unlimited users. Business Critical is custom-priced. The trial runs 14 days and doesn't need a credit card.

Matillion

Score: Not yet rated

Matillion combines a low-code canvas, with SQL and Python where you need them, with Maia. Matillion describes Maia as an agentic workforce that builds and maintains pipelines. Per the pricing page, Maia is available on every plan, and what it can do depends on the tools each plan includes. You can trial it for free on a time-bound, fair-use basis. Matillion doesn't publish prices. You buy fixed annual credit packages, and pipelines use up credits based on task hours. One third-party blog reports Maia at 70 credits per developer user per month, and Mammoth's pricing guide cites customer-reported totals of \$20,000 to \$35,000 a year for small teams, not counting warehouse compute. Neither figure comes from Matillion, so get a quote. Of the six tools here, Matillion has the most developed agent pitch. It's also the hardest to price before you talk to sales.

Best for: data teams on Snowflake, Databricks or a similar warehouse that want AI help building pipelines inside a visual tool.

Pricing: Developer includes 1 developer user and unlimited projects. Teams includes 5 developer users, audit logs and an SLA. Scale adds custom SSO, hybrid deployment, lineage and streaming CDC. All plans are credit-based, and prices are available from sales. You can buy direct or through AWS, Azure or Snowflake.

Comparison table

Tool	Score	Main job	Free option	Entry paid price	Billing unit	AI angle
Airbyte	Not yet rated	ELT, custom connectors	Open-source Core; 14-day Cloud trial	\$20/month (Standard)	Credits	Agent and "AI Context" products; details not on pricing page
Dbt	Not yet rated	Transformation in the warehouse	Developer plan with 1 seat and 3,000 models/month	\$100/user/month (Starter)	Seats plus model builds	Copilot; quotas not on pricing page

Tool	Score	Main job	Free option	Entry paid price	Billing unit	AI angle
Estuary	Not yet rated	Real-time CDC and batch	10 GB/month, 2 connectors	\$0.50/GB plus \$100/connector/month	GB moved plus connector instances	Not a focus of the pricing page
Fivetran	Not yet rated	Managed ELT plus reverse ETL	500,000 MAR, 5,000 model runs	Usage-based; \$5 base per connection	MAR plus model runs	Positioned as the data layer for AI agents
Hevo Data	Not yet rated	No-code ELT	1M events/month, 5 users	\$299/month list (\$265 annual)	Event tiers	None listed on pricing page
Matillion	Not yet rated	Low-code ELT with an agent	Free trial, including Maia	Not published	Credits (task hours, users)	Maia agent on all plans

Final picks

If you want connectors you never have to think about and the budget allows usage-based pricing, choose Fivetran. Test its MAR count on your busiest source first. If cost control matters more, or you need a connector nobody sells, choose Airbyte. Its self-hosted Core gives you a way out if Cloud credits get expensive. For transformations, Dbt is the standard, and you'll pair it with whichever loader you choose.

For streaming CDC, Estuary has the clearest volume-based pricing on this list. If an agent that builds pipelines is the reason you're shopping, Matillion is the tool to trial, but get a written credit quote before the trial ends. A small team that wants a fixed monthly bill and can accept hourly syncs will be well served by Hevo Data.