The Grid for Our Future
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When Cowlitz PUD Engineers began the study for a ten year capital plan that would improve Cowlitz PUD’s 69kv system to a 115kv Integrated System; they knew this would be a huge undertaking, involving every department across the District. After years of planning and months of individual site surveys, hundreds of pages of documentation was ready for presentation to the Board of Commissioners. Luckily, they had a secret weapon for the case in funding this project - a recent major outage caused by a single squirrel. The radically operated system was lacking redundancy and when one of the Utility’s substations, which was fed from another substation across town, was taken down by a squirrel, thousands of customers lost power, including the local college, multiple schools and major shopping centers. The need for an integrated system had been brewing for a while but when the Commissioners were able to witness the impact of Cowlitz not having a system that backs up its feeders in a more reliable way, they knew that it was up to them to make a decision for the future of Cowlitz PUD’s infrastructure.

In 2007, when Cowlitz PUD’s Board of Commissioners approved the budget for a ten year capital plan, rebuilding a series of substations to create an Integrated Transmission System, it was not the only thing they were approving. They were approving a future of growth. Cowlitz County was growing and the Board knew that along with that growth, updated electrical infrastructure was necessary. The Commissioners sought to build a sustainable foundation that fostered economic growth for an ever-changing population. Cowlitz PUD, along with their partners Cascade Networks, JH Kelly, TriAxis Engineering, and the Bonneville Power Administration recently celebrated, with their community, the completion of their ten-year capital plan at a local restaurant in Historic Downtown Longview. Tim Johnston, the lead engineer on the project gave a heartfelt presentation concluding with, “This is a grid for our future and I’m really proud of all the craftsmanship that went into this.”

Before the rebuild, it was not unheard of for Cowlitz PUD to be working with 40, 50 even 60 year old equipment that had an original lifespan of 20-30 years. Engineer Lance Larwick quipped, “Without a doubt, we got use out of the equipment we replaced!” But with any industry, times change, technology improves and the demands that were once met with the original utility infrastructure no longer meet the needs of an ever-growing urgency for automation. Joe Furey, a relay technician that saw this project from start to finish, who comes from the mindset, “if it’s not broken, don’t fix it” even agreed that Cowlitz’s system was “really old”. Having completed a full transition to automated meters in 2012, Furey emphasized the necessity to transfer more data and communication with more departments across the District than in the past, “We made the system more reliable for our customers but we are also helping maintain our system internally, with new technology.”

The Integrated Transmission System meant the Utility took a 69kv system that operated radially to an increased 115kv system that now operates in a loop. By integrating the system, much more system growth can be accommodated. Along with these improvements Cowlitz has increased the protection of the, Larwick explains, “We can have a single line go out and not experience an outage versus before we could have a single line go down and lose anywhere from 1 to 5 substations and thousands of customers.” The completion of the Integrated Transmission System upgrade has already benefited the customers as it has helped maintain a more reliable system for Cowlitz’s large industrial loads and provided a stable system with increased redundancy for its residential customers.

If you have ever attended a Board meeting you will hear Board President, Dena Diamond-Ott, talk fiscal responsibility, and emphasize the importance of maintaining and improving the Utility’s infrastructure while making long term decisions that are not based on the next one or two years but the next decade. Cowlitz PUD’s decision to invest in a decade of work on the Integrated Transmission System came because of the guarantee of future reliability, capacity and the desire to develop and maintain an electrical infrastructure that is the foundation for a growing economy and future generations. Diamond-Ott closed with celebration with, “I’m really proud of the work that was accomplished by our dedicated staff members. Whether they realize it or not, almost every PUD employee had a hand in the project.”

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**Cowlitz PUD takes Home 1st Place for Workforce Best Practices**

Cowlitz County PUD’s Board President, Dena Diamond-Ott accepted the 1st place award for Workforce Best Practices at the Kelso Longview Chamber of Commerce’s Annual Pillars of Strength Award Ceremony. Cowlitz PUD has made a commitment to local schools to be a hands-on resource for career readiness for students who are interested in engineering, technology and the Utility trades. During Public Power week of 2017, Cowlitz PUD hosted a half-day career fair for 40 local high school students. The students were provided a tour of the Utility’s Operations Center and broken into groups depending on their career interest, finishing the day with a lunch and learn where many of the managers and supervisors joined the students for questions and answers. Included in the efforts to prepare students for their careers, Cowlitz PUD also offers four paid summer internships for college students interested in technology, engineering and GIS. These internships have resulted in the hiring of five fulltime employees in the past two years.

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Our Board meets the second and fourth Tuesdays at 2PM in the John Sear ing Auditorium.

Cowlitz PUD - 961 12th Ave. Longview
Find the latest board activities at:
cowltzpud.org [click on Commissioners]