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WAPA Finally Installs Wärtsilä Generators, Ushering in Era of Reliable Power on St. Thomas

The Wärtsilä engines promise reliable power, fuel savings, and shorter outages. With the PSC holding LEAC rates steady until March 2025, attention now shifts to how electricity rates may change following the engines' commissioning.

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Three of the new Wärtsilä generators at the Randolph Harley power plant on St. Thomas, promising reliable power, fuel savings, and shorter outages for the Virgin Islands. By WAPA

On Friday, officials of the V.I. Water and Power Authority and other dignitaries participated in a ribbon cutting ceremony at the Randolph Harley power plant on St. Thomas to formally induct

four new generators into service.

“The Wårtsilå Phase Two project is a significant evolution in power generation here in the United States Virgin Islands,” said WAPA CEO Karl Knight. The four generators, each producing up to nine megawatts of power, are able to be run on either diesel or liquified propane gas. “And we can switch that on a dime,” Mr. Knight made known.

Despite a [series of missed deadlines](#), the successful completion of the project is now expected to result in significant fuel savings for WAPA, a long-held goal. Apart from this, a boost in reliability has meant fewer losses of power for electricity consumers in the territory. “While we do have outages, they have shorter duration,” said Mr. Knight, explaining that with the advent of the new machines, “we can now put some of the legacy conventional generators on standby,” allowing WAPA the ability to more nimbly respond to unexpected outages.

“The wonderful thing about a relay race is when you get to run the anchor leg, because you're the one that gets to bust the tape and celebrate the victory,” Mr. Knight quipped, expressing gratitude for the hard work of his predecessors in the position and other current and former team members who laid the groundwork for Friday's successful project completion.

Next at the podium was Matthew DeHaven, Senior Business Development Manager at Wårtsilå. “We can trust that Wårtsilå will remain a reliable and dedicated partner committed to deliver excellence and innovation,” he remarked, glossing over the sometimes rocky relationship between WAPA and the manufacturer of the generators. As the company moves into a maintenance support role, Mr. DeHaven declared that “together, we will continue to push the boundaries of what is possible and create a brighter future for all.”

Adrienne Williams-Octalien, the director of the Office of Disaster Recovery, spoke about the intense coordination between agencies that was required to bring this project to successful fruition. Remarking on what she dubbed a “false start” a year ago, she noted that all players involved have now learned valuable lessons on best practices when it comes to procuring generation equipment. Mindful that the Federal Emergency Management Agency has just [obligated more millions](#) to WAPA for power equipment and infrastructure upgrades, Ms. Williams-Octalien made a bold promise.

“The next time we're getting started to plan and coordinate the next set of generators, we're going to make that happen in a year and a half. You hear that?” Between her office and that of the Super PMO, Ms. Williams declared that “every lesson learned we will put into practice...we support WAPA 100%.”

Newly installed Senate President Milton Potter was also on hand to witness the milestone occasion. “This project is a triumph of partnership and progress,” he declared, saying that the completion of this phase “brings us one step closer to stabilizing electrical rates and creating a brighter future for every Virgin Islander.” Despite the satisfaction that may be felt by those basking in the success of the day, Mr. Potter noted that much more work lies ahead. The ribbon cutting “is also a reminder of the responsibility we have to continue investing in solutions that empower our people and protect our environment,” he declared. He promised, on behalf of the 36th Legislature, to “continue to champion initiatives that prioritize sustainable energy, economic growth and the wellbeing of every Virgin Islander.”

In the final speech of the event, Governor Albert Bryan Jr. reiterated the sentiments of Ms. Williams-Octalien before him in speaking of the united effort it took from disparate groups — the

cabinet, legislature, external agencies, local government agencies, and the men and women of WAPA — to get the project successfully completed. “My job is to make all these pieces work together,” he noted. “We put it together and we got it done.” Highlighting the efforts of Adrienne Todman, the acting Secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Governor Bryan declared the day one of honor for the Virgin Islands native. Although she was not able to be on hand for the ceremony due to flight cancellation issues, “I wanted to make sure that we publicly acknowledge our people doing well that have come back and paid dividends, because now they are doing well for us on a totally different scale,” the governor said.

In closing, Governor Bryan returned to the theme of unity. “I want to remind every one of us never, ever to forget that all of us live in this house we call the United States Virgin Islands.”

In December, the Public Services Commission held the Levelized Energy Adjustment Clause at its current rate [until March 2025](#), to allow WAPA time to fully commission the new Wärtsilä engines. Now that this has been done, public attention is sure be on the PSC as they decide what will happen to electricity rates in the second quarter of the year.