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WAPA Warns of Planned Outages, Traffic Detours and Noise as Major Grid Projects Accelerate

WAPA says several major grid projects will require planned outages, traffic detours, trenching, dust and noise, as crews work to finish the Feeder 13 bypass before schools reopen and prepare for additional feeder upgrades on St. Thomas and St. Croix.

WAPA / **Published On July 24, 2026 06:43 AM /**

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The Randolph Harley Power Plant in St. Thomas, USVI. By. V.I. CONSORTIUM.

Electricity customers should expect planned outages, traffic detours, trenching, noise and dust as the V.I. Water and Power Authority moves several major grid-recovery projects into active construction, including a final four-hour work period needed to complete the long-delayed Feeder 13 bypass before schools reopen August 10.

WAPA Chief Executive Officer Karl Knight briefed the authority's governing board on the upcoming disruptions, saying they are an unavoidable part of replacing and upgrading electrical infrastructure intended to serve the territory for decades.

"We are at a stage in our disaster recovery where some of the major projects are starting to kick off, and unfortunately, some of those major projects are going to be disruptive," said Water and Power Authority, CEO Karl Knight, as he briefed the WAPA Governing Board on the status of critical upgrade work on the territory's electrical infrastructure.

The disruptions will include planned power interruptions associated with several projects, as well as traffic and noise from upcoming construction. Mr. Knight said those temporary inconveniences are part of building a more functional and efficient electrical grid.

Feeder 13 Bypass Still Needs Four Hours of Work

Board members requested an update on the Feeder 13 bypass, which remains incomplete after several years.

Mr. Knight said complications emerged during the final phase because contractors must work "in a manhole that also houses the other transmission lines."

Other feeders had to be de-energized so the work could be performed safely.

WAPA initially scheduled two eight-hour work periods for contractors to complete their assigned tasks. Equipment problems affected the first night, while an unplanned outage disrupted the second.

The authority now expects that another four hours will be needed to complete the connection between the bypass and the Randolph Harley Power Plant on St. Thomas.

"We think we have a plan of action, and now we're just trying to identify the right day of the week when this makes sense for us to proceed," Mr. Knight assured. "We certainly know we need to get it done before school resumes on August 10."

Completing the bypass is "a critical project," Mr. Knight said, because it will allow WAPA to move forward with replacing Feeders 11 and 12.

Mr. Knight acknowledged that the planned work will frustrate customers already burdened by years of instability in the territory's electrical system.

He nevertheless argued that the immediate disruptions are necessary to produce lasting improvements.

On St. Thomas, WAPA is preparing to begin work on Feeder 9A. Construction is also planned along Queen Street and Fred Thomas Drive on St. Croix.

"There's going to be traffic detours. There's probably going to be a little bit of noise pollution in the area as we're trenching. There's going to be dust, There's going to be a power interruption at the point where we tie that feeder into the grid," Mr. Knight outlined. "It's inevitable to get some of this real good mitigation work done, it's going to cause some inconvenience."

He said the completed infrastructure should provide long-term benefits.

“Once we’re done and everything is nicely paved over, the benefits are going to last us for another generation to come,” he assured.

St. Croix Excavation Planned Before Peak Season

WAPA officials are coordinating with contractors to reduce the effect on customers, residents and businesses wherever possible.

On St. Croix, the work will temporarily interfere with commercial activity, but WAPA intends to schedule the excavation so crews can “get most of that excavation done before the peak of the tourist season, before Christmas festival and those activities.”

Mr. Knight compared the decision to proceed with the disruptive projects to removing a bandage quickly.

“It’s kind of like ripping the bandage off. It’s going to be pain, and we scream out, and hopefully we’re there.”

He said the continuing unplanned outages on St. Thomas demonstrate why the infrastructure work must be completed.

“If we delay this work, we’re probably going to regret not finishing,” he warned. “We just need to take it across the finish line now.”