

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Electrical Service Restored To All Customers In St. Thomas-St. John District Following Malfunction At Substation

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ST. THOMAS -- Electrical service was restored to customers across portions of St. Thomas by 12 noon Saturday, hours after a malfunction in the transmission switchgear bus at the Donald Francois electrical substation in Long Bay, WAPA announced late Saturday.

According to the utility, the malfunction, which occurred at 4:30 a.m. Saturday, tripped a generating unit at the Randolph Harley power plant and initially interrupted service on up to six feeders, at one point, interrupting service to more than 7,300 customers.

WAPA said its staff immediately began troubleshooting the substation's failure, while redirecting the affected customers to other feeders, in essence, isolating the downed substation and restoring customers. A portion of one feeder experienced a prolonged service interruption as repairs to the switchgear were initiated.

"While we will continue our analysis to determine why the switchgear bus failed, it is important to point out that the extensive protection schemes that are deployed at WAPA facilities ensured that the substation was quickly isolated, which prevented a more extensive service interruption," said Lawrence J. Kupfer, WAPA executive director.

Kupfer also noted Saturday that the Francois substation received significant damage in the 2017 hurricanes and, "while it continues to operate, we are seeing both equipment malfunction and failure from time to time. Today was one such instance." Kupfer said WAPA has already prepared project scopes and is seeking FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant funding to replace not only the substation's 38 and 15-Kv switchgears, at a cost in excess of \$11 million, but funding to install standby generation capacity, and to replace a roll down door which suffered damage at the hands of Hurricane Irma.

Kupfer thanked the affected customers for their patience and understanding as staff worked through the morning to execute repairs and restore the substation to service.