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WAPA Breaks Ground For Electrical Undergrounding Projects on St. Croix

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From left: Karl Knight, VIHFA Director Daryl Griffith, Anthony Thomas, Contractor James Benton, ODR Director Adrienne L. Williams Octalien, Gov. Bryan, Lt. Gov, Roach, Sen. Novelle Francis, Contractor Fernando Quezada, Noel Hodge and FEMA's John Covell.
By. WAPA

The V.I. Water and Power Authority held a groundbreaking ceremony Wednesday morning on St. Croix heralding the commencement of work on three electrical undergrounding projects, the authority has announced. Located in Golden Grove, Midland and the Wilfred “Bomba” Allick Port and Transshipment Center, the projects entail the burying of overhead power lines, transformers, and other electrical equipment.

Similar projects are planned throughout the territory as part of a major strategic transformation plan the Authority is enacting over the next three to five years to develop a more resilient, effective, and reliable electric system, WAPA said.

“Today’s groundbreaking represents a major first step for one component of our multi-faceted and comprehensive effort to reshape the electric system,” said Noel Hodge, WAPA interim executive director / CEO. Hodge said the transformation plan builds on three major areas of concentration with the goal of firmly positioning the territory as a robust leader in energy sector innovation. “We will achieve these milestones through financial and system stabilization, increased system resiliency and transformation of our generation sector.”

“Placing electrical lines underground allows the U.S. Virgin Islands to build back stronger and smarter and mitigate potential devastation to its power grid when severe weather strikes. The Golden Grove, Container Port and Midland underground electrical lines projects will strengthen St. Croix’s power grid and give the island an energy lifeline for rapid stabilization after destructive storms. FEMA continues its mission to support the U.S. Virgin Islands as the Territory uses hazard mitigation measures through an innovative approach to transform its power grid toward a legacy of resilience. These projects are another significant step towards a resilient recovery for the people of the U.S. Virgin Islands,” said U.S. Virgin Islands Acting Recovery Director John Covell.

According to the release, other components of the transformation plan include the acquisition of new generators at power plants on St. Thomas and St. Croix, the addition of solar and wind renewables to the grid, the development of electrical microgrids with battery storage, and the installation of over 8,000 composite poles territory wide. The newer composite poles can better withstand major hurricanes compared to the traditional wooden poles now in use.

Office of Disaster Recovery (ODR) Director Adrienne L. Williams Octalien said, “ODR applauds the team at WAPA for maximizing the use of over \$1.2B in FEMA funds to spearhead projects to improve resiliency, increase renewable resources and improve efficiency over the next three to five years. This project not only marks the beginning of the three undergrounding projects on St. Croix but also represents a significant tangible milestone in our recovery efforts.”

Governor Albert Bryan who spoke at the groundbreaking ceremony, said, “This is another step forward in our recovery efforts, and, more importantly it strengthens the resilience of the power grid and will help stabilize WAPA to provide more reliable and affordable energy to the ratepayers.” He added that the Bryan-Roach administration is committed to stabilizing the utility so WAPA can reach its potential to provide Virgin Islanders with lower rates and the level of service they should have.

Other officials at the ceremony included Lieutenant Governor Tregenza Roach, Senate Vice President Novelle E. Francis Jr, WAPA Board Chairman Anthony D. Thomas and members of the governing board as well as V.I. Housing Finance Authority Director Daryl Griffith and contractors for the three projects: V.I. Paving, Vivot Equipment Corporation and J. Benton Construction.