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Failure of Equipment at Substation Damaged By Hurricane Irma Caused Latest St. Thomas-St. District Power Outage, WAPA Says

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Line Department crews make repairs to primary service lines of Feeders 7A and 8A in Subbase St. Thomas on Monday. By. WAPA

An electrical service interruption which spanned across several distribution feeders in the St. Thomas - St. John district Monday morning resulted from equipment failure at a hurricane-damaged electrical substation and later, compromised primary service lines, WAPA said in a release.

The outage began shortly before 6 a.m. and all customers were restored at 2:30 p.m.

The Donald Francois electrical substation in Long Bay experienced equipment failure Monday morning which required grid reconfiguration to assign all “B” feeders usually serviced by the substation to other substation feeders, facilitate service restoration and equipment repair,” said WAPA Interim Executive Director and CEO Noel Hodge.

At mid-morning, due to increased load on Feeders 7A and 8A, which were by then carrying the electrical demand of Feeders 6B, 7B, 8B, and 9B, primary service lines on 7A and 8A became compromised which tripped the feeders resulting in a service interruption. Hodge explained that in the Subbase area, Line Department crews made repairs to more than a half dozen primary lines which make up feeders 7A and 8A before restoring service to customers on the six feeders.

“At about the same time, the loss of the substation led to low voltage issues on Feeder 10B which required that feeder to be taken offline, adversely affecting service to customers from Long Bay to Bovoni along the southside of the island,” Hodge said. Once repairs at the Francois substation were completed, service was restored to all customers. St. John Feeder 9E also experienced a service interruption when the substation initially failed, it was restored once the grid was adjusted to accommodate electrical demand, according to the release.

Hodge apologized for the inconvenience caused by Monday's outage but expressed optimism that the equipment failures of the substation will soon end as the facility, damaged by Hurricane Irma four years ago, has been approved for major reconstruction and repair and FEMA funding is already approved for the enhancement project.

“The substation will undergo repair and rehabilitation as soon as another recently reconstructed substation on St. Thomas’ east end is brought online. This is because we cannot take both substations offline at the same time,” Hodge said. “East End was first to be reconstructed because of the severity of its damage after the storms. We anticipate that work on the Francois facility will commence shortly after the commissioning of the East End substation which is now slated for January 2022.”

Engineering specification work has been completed and requests for proposals have been sent out to secure a vendor to complete the Francois substation project, WAPA said. The authority anticipates these upgrades will bring much needed stability to the electric grid.

“The functionality of electrical substations is pivotal to maintaining a properly configured transmission and distribution network for our customers,” he added.