

**Los Angeles**  **Department of Water & Power**

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March 1, 2018

The Honorable City Council  
c/o Office of the City Clerk  
Room 395, City Hall  
Mail Stop 160

Attention: Councilmember Nury Martinez  
Chair – Energy, Climate Change, and Environmental Justice Committee

Honorable Members:

Subject: Council File No. 11-1013-S9 (Blumenfield, Rodriguez, Harris-Dawson)  
Power Outage Notifications on MyLA311

This correspondence is in response to the August 16, 2017, Energy, Climate Change, and Environmental Justice (ECCEJ) Committee motion requesting the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP), in consultation with the City of Los Angeles Information Technology Agency (ITA), to submit a report to address the feasibility of developing and implementing a power outage notice program modeled after Xcel Energy, Minnesota Power's Outage Mobile App and Southern California Edison's Outage Alerts Program in order to provide effective real-time communication to its customers regarding power outages in order to:

1. Improve communication with the public and reduce customer stress during power outages;
2. Evaluate the feasibility of expanding the use of the MyLA311 mobile app to provide City of Los Angeles customer notifications during power outage events; and
3. Enhance existing initiatives at LADWP that are improving outage information.

### Background

The LADWP is the nation's largest municipal utility, with a 7,880 megawatt (MW) capacity and serving an average of 438 million gallons of water per day to the 4 million residents of the City of Los Angeles, its businesses and its visitors. For more than 100 years, LADWP has provided the City of Los Angeles with reliable water and power service in a cost-effective and environmentally responsible manner.

**Putting Our Customers First** 

On the evening of July 8, 2017, an explosion caused a fire at the Northridge Receiving Station. The fire affected one portion of the Receiving Station (RS), and as a precautionary measure, power to and from the facility was shut off. This was necessary to allow LADWP and Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD) crews to work safely as they extinguished the fire. While the RS was shut down, approximately 140,000 customers, both residential and commercial, were initially without power. Once the fire was put out, the LADWP crews worked through the night and into the morning to assess damage to the RS and to restore power to all affected customers. Immediately following the explosion and during the duration of the outage, LADWP provided customer informational updates about the incident on its news page ([www.ladwpnews.com](http://www.ladwpnews.com)) and shared this information widely via Twitter.

During and following the incident, customers raised concerns about the frequency and details of information that were provided regarding the status of the outage and the channel in which those updates were provided. As with all major incidents, the LADWP has analyzed the event and looked for ways to improve both its service and communication with customers. We understand that with more information, customers could better plan around the outage and mitigate the impacts of the outage. However, it is important to note that during this incident, limited information was available regarding anticipated duration of the power outage or the cause – the two most frequently asked questions by customers when their power goes out. All available information was shared via the above channels and updated online on social media.

The LADWP recognizes the importance of delivering frequent and relevant outage-related information to the public. As a result, the LADWP is committed to maximize the number of communication channels it uses to engage with its customers and the general public. In light of that, the LADWP and ITA have met to discuss existing and future opportunities to provide more information to our customers using the MyLA311 mobile application and to share roadmaps on related projects that are already underway.

#### **ITEM No. 1: IMPROVING COMMUNICATIONS WITH PUBLIC DURING OUTAGES**

The LADWP's Strategic Plan "Putting our Customers First," reflects the heightened importance of our customers. In addition, LADWP's Customer Bill of Rights describes LADWP's commitment to providing its customers with the highest quality water and power, with prompt, consistent, and easily accessible customer service.

The LADWP continues to find ways to provide relevant and frequent information to our customers. One significant change that has been implemented as a result of the RS fire at Northridge was to update the information displayed on the *LADWP.com* Power Outage webpage, which is also available 24/7 on the *ladwp.com* mobile website. These improvements were:

- Display of more accurate estimated restoration times; and
- Frequent updates of outage information with the most recent and timely details.

In addition, through various studies, collection of customer feed-back, and research on best practices, the LADWP has already identified several key potential improvements. The occurrence of the July 8, 2017, event highlighted the need to speed up the implementation of these improvements.

- Improvements to the Outage Management System (OMS) infrastructure and upgrades to the application. Improvements to the infrastructure are on track to be completed by the end of 2018. Application upgrades are targeted for the end of summer 2018. These improvements will enable better status reporting of the power restoration process to our customers.
- Leveraging new tools for in-depth analyses of events through deployment of a more sophisticated Geospatial Information System (GIS). The new GIS will be in service in 2018. This will provide new insights that will result in better reliability and planning throughout the distribution system.
- Planning is underway to add new functionality to ladwp.com that will enable customers to report outages. This functionality will be both on the main website as well as the mobile one. This will provide customers another convenient channel for providing outage information.
- Future planning is also underway to enable outage notifications related to the status of an outage and the estimated time for power restoration. Such notifications will be transmitted through a customer-preferred communication channel. This long-term initiative will be dependent on the deployment of smart meters throughout the LADWP service territory.
- The Power System Electric Trouble Section and the Communications, Media, and Community Affairs Division are working together to ensure accurate information is promptly communicated to the public. Aside from the website, timely updates are provided to customers via @ladwp on Twitter and Facebook, and news releases posted and distributed on [www.ladwpnews.com](http://www.ladwpnews.com).
- In addition, the LADWP's Power System has identified several internal communication procedures that can be improved to increase efficiency during system disturbance events.

## **ITEM No. 2: LEVERAGING THE MyLA311 MOBILE APP**

LADWP will work with ITA to bring the LADWP Outage website link forward as a separate and prominent link in the MyLA311 mobile app. App users will have quick access to near real-time LADWP outage information that is the same as going online now to [www.ladwp.com](http://www.ladwp.com) and hovering over the "Outages" menu on the webpage.

LADWP will also discuss with ITA the feasibility of allowing MyLA311 mobile users to register for geographic outage notifications, based on current DWP location designation of outages. Under this plan, outage information would be provided to customers including those whose power is NOT out since notification is issued solely based on the general location of an outage. This could lead to unnecessary concern by customers who might think their power could be out while not experiencing any outage at all. As a result, this functionality needs to be carefully considered and studied. Utility best practices in this area would dictate that customer-specific info is provided via text or notification is pushed only to affected customers. Such feature will be available through LADWP once smart meters are deployed Citywide. In the interim, the MyLA311 App could be configured to alert customers who sign up for power outage updates to receive a notification that an update has been posted on the [www.ladwpnews.com](http://www.ladwpnews.com) site.

### **ITEM No. 3: LADWP CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE INITIATIVES**

The LADWP recognizes that increased transparency and customer communication are critical to building trust with its customers. The LADWP has several initiatives already in progress to improve many areas related to outage reporting and notification. There are also several projects that will commence shortly to improve backend systems and processes. All these improvements are areas of work that the LADWP can see through from beginning to end over the next several months.

The LADWP will also continue to coordinate and work with ITA to find opportunities to expand the ways in which customers can receive timely and relevant notifications.

As a result, the LADWP has two long-term programs on its roadmap to significantly overhaul and improve the customer experience related to outage notifications. The details of the programs are:

- **Smart Grid Implementation Program:** LADWP is currently in the planning stages of a system-wide rollout of smart meters. One of the major goals of this project is to improve outage notifications and reporting. Once the project is completed, the LADWP will have real-time data when a customer's power is out and when it has been restored. The system will provide LADWP the ability to proactively dispatch resources to restore power without receiving any notification from the customer. In addition, customers will know that their power is out proactively – the deployment of smart meters is critical to enable such notifications. Other utilities that already provide proactive notifications are able to do so due to the utilization of smart meters.
- **Digital Customer Experience:** The LADWP endeavors to create a more customer friendly digital experience that includes customers' ability to access information and services. As a result, the LADWP is in the process of releasing a Request-for-Qualifications (RFQ) solicitation to identify future areas of improvement related to the current digital environment and customer experience. The objective of the project will be to modernize LADWP's digital channels. Such improvements will span from the development of a new responsive website to a communications channel preference

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portal and an integrated digital marketing communications and social media platform to promote LADWP's programs that will allow customers to pay their bills, monitor their water and electric usage, and report outages.

### **Outreach to Other Utilities that Utilize Real-Time Outage Apps**

To address the request of the subject motion, the LADWP contacted Xcel Energy, Minnesota Power, and Southern California Edison to research the implementation and effectiveness of their outage mobile app and real-time outage alert systems. All entities confirmed that their outage alert systems were based on real-time data derived from their system-wide deployment of smart meters and advanced meter infrastructure. As stated above, the LADWP is currently in the planning stages of implementing an advanced smart meter infrastructure across its service territory as part of its grid modernization initiative. As a result, a real-time outage alert system similar to the entities highlighted in the motion cannot be implemented at this time. As an interim measure, ITA will enhance the visibility of an existing direct link to LADWP's current outage management system to ensure that customers using the MyLA311 app will have access to near real-time LADWP outage information that is the same as going online to [www.ladwp.com](http://www.ladwp.com) and hovering over the "Outages" menu on the webpage.

If you have any questions or if additional information is required, please contact me at (213) 367-1338, or you may have a member of your staff contact Ms. Winifred J. Yancy, Director of Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs, at (213) 367-0025.

Sincerely,



David H. Wright  
General Manager

RAK/SZ:ps

c: Councilmember Paul Koretz, Vice Chair, ECCEJ Committee  
Councilmember Paul Krekorian, Member, ECCEJ Committee  
Councilmember Gilbert A. Cedillo, Member, ECCEJ Committee  
Councilmember Mitch O'Farrell, Member, ECCEJ Committee  
Councilmember Bob Blumenfield, Third District  
Councilmember Monica Rodriguez, Seventh District  
Councilmember Marqueece Harris-Dawson, Eight District  
Ms. Zina Cheng, Legislative Assistant, ECCEJ Committee  
Dr. Frederick H. Pickel, Office of Public Accountability  
Board of Water and Power Commissioners  
Ms. Winifred J. Yancy

## ENERGY, CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

### MOTION

On July 8, 2017, an explosion and fire at the Northridge Receiving Station knocked out power for 140,000 residential and commercial customers. Impacted areas of the City included Northridge, Winnetka, Reseda, Lake Balboa, North Hills and other nearby communities.

Many customers raised concerns about the lack of regular updates regarding the status of the power outage. They stressed that if they had ongoing updates about the power outage, they could plan more effectively and mitigate its impact.

The MyLA311 mobile app is the best notification vehicle for the LA City customer. The Information Technology Agency (ITA) can prepare the MyLA311 mobile app to send notices to Department of Water and Power (DWP) customers. DWP would only need to provide an interface to ITA and then the MyLA311 mobile app will be notified of power outages that affect customers. DWP Pay My Bill is currently in the app. This would expand the platform.

Smart city technology from Xcel Energy contacts its customers by text when an outage will occur and updates them when power will be restored. Minnesota Power has an *Outage Mobile App* which provides real-time information about the status of power outages. The *Outage Mobile App* provides a summary of power outages by neighborhood or City, number of customers affected and estimated restoration times.

Southern California Edison offers a very similar notice option through its *Outage Alerts Program*. The *Outage Alerts Program* informs customers about the status of power outages and estimated restoration times via e-mail or text message.

These programs have been proven to be effective in giving customers real-time information about power outages. The City of Los Angeles should consider developing and offering a similar program in order to provide effective notice to customers.

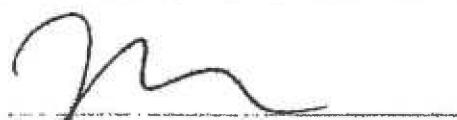
I THEREFORE MOVE that the Information Technology Agency work with the Department of Water and Power and report to Council in 45 days on the feasibility of developing and implementing a power outage notice program modeled after Xcel Energy, Minnesota Power's *Outage Mobile App* and Southern California Edison's *Outage Alerts Program* in order to provide effective real-time communication to its customers regarding power outages.

PRESENTED BY:

  
BOB BLUMENFIELD  
Councilmember, 3<sup>rd</sup> District

  
MONICA RODRIGUEZ  
Councilmember, 7<sup>th</sup> District

SECONDED BY:



AUG 16 2017

