



Puget Sound Energy

Meter Upgrade Project and Schedules 171 Implementation Status Report

Reporting Period:

January 1, 2018 – June 30, 2020

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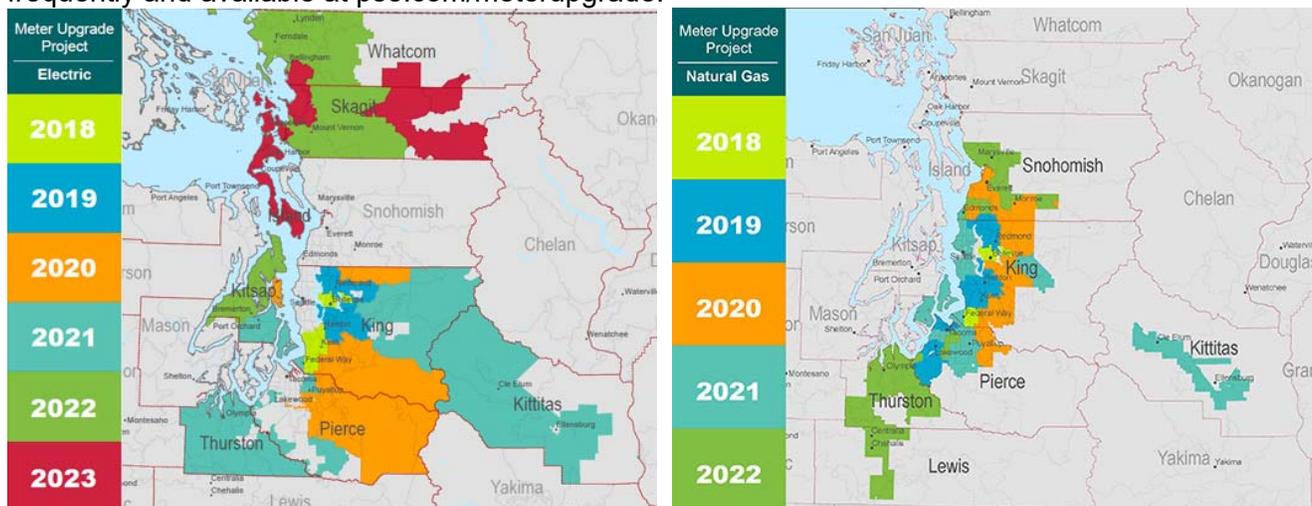
Introduction

Pursuant to the paragraph 32 in Order 01 of Dockets UE-180860 and UG-180861¹, Puget Sound Energy (“PSE”) provides its second report of the status of PSE’s Meter Upgrade Project² and the results and costs of PSE’s electric and natural gas Schedules 171 Optional Non-Communicating Meter (“NCM”) Service implementation. This report reflects the meter exchange results and the Schedules 171 transactions and accounting records as of June 30, 2020, for the years of 2018 and 2019 and the period of January 1, 2020, through June 30, 2020.

The data presented in this reporting include preliminary and transactional data that will be supplemented and updated as additional NCM transactions and meter exchanges occur. The costs associated with the implementation of the NCM service outlined in this report are not final and not comprehensive as this optional service requires on-going information technology and customer support. Additionally, some of the implementation and operation costs of electric and natural gas NCM service are recorded in the Advanced Metering Infrastructure (“AMI”) implementation and operation costs, which are not included in this report.

Although the new electric and natural gas Schedules 171 Optional NCM Service are available to customers in the AMI deployment area beginning on July 1, 2019, PSE’s preparation and customer inquiries about NCM service began in 2018 when PSE initiated its Meter Upgrade Project prior to approval of the new optional service on July 1, 2019.

The two maps below outline the Meter Upgrade Project historical of meter exchange for 2018 through 2020 and the areas where exchanges are anticipated to begin by year. These maps are updated frequently and available at pse.com/meterupgrade.



¹ Order 01, Order Allowing Tariff Revisions to Go Into Effect Subject to Condition, dated 1/11/2019. In Order 01 paragraph 32, the Commission orders that “Puget Sound Energy must file a status report every 6 months beginning January 31, 2020, and a final report on the status and cost of its opt-out program no later than January 31, 2026.”

https://www.utc.wa.gov/_layouts/15/CasesPublicWebsite/GetDocument.aspx?docID=33&year=2018&docketNumber=180860

² <https://www.pse.com/pages/meter-upgrade>

After pausing work to abide by Washington Governor Inslee's March 23, 2020 "Stay Home – Stay Healthy order"³, PSE resumed the Meter Upgrade Project activities on May 5, 2020. PSE's installers, Aclara and Tribus, ramped up their installation pace gradually, allowing PSE to closely monitor field conditions and customer sentiment, especially since so many are now working from home. Installers also wear additional personal protective equipment ("PPE"), including face coverings, and practice physical distancing at all times. All customer communications (e.g., letters, emails, robo calls, etc.) now include reminders about the need for physical distancing and PSE installers' additional PPE measures. Talking points have been created and distributed to customer-facing staff.

³ Governor's Proclamation 20-25, Stay Home – Stay Healthy

<https://www.governor.wa.gov/sites/default/files/proclamations/20-25%20Coronavirus%20Stay%20Safe-Stay%20Healthy%20%28tmp%29%20%28002%29.pdf>

Reporting Elements

1. Status of the Meter Upgrade Project, including geographic areas where AMI meters have been installed and the number of meters installed.

AMI meters/modules installation as of June 30, 2020, by quarter:

Actual ⁴				
		Electric	Natural Gas	Total
2017	Q4	36	30	36
2018	Q1	385	0	385
2018	Q2	32,505	184	32,689
2018	Q3	67,839	14,423	82,262
2018	Q4	73,113	30,321	103,434
2019	Q1	58,353	43,707	102,060
2019	Q2	52,348	28,362	80,710
2019	Q3	53,934	42,834	96,768
2019	Q4	54,565	40,145	94,710
2020	Q1	46,797	32,453	79,250
2020	Q2	20,156	17,191	37,347
Total		460,031	249,650	709,681

⁴ The numbers for 2018 and 2019 have been revised to reflect AMI installations through the initial test pilots and PSE AMI installations

AMI meters/modules installation as of June 30, 2020, by county:

Actual⁵			
County	Electric	Natural Gas	Total
ISLAND	0	0	0
KING	448,498	225,175	673,673
KITSAP	867	0	867
KITTITAS	1,127	0	1,127
LEWIS	0	0	0
PIERCE	9,539	24,475	34,014
SKAGIT	0	0	0
SNOHOMISH	0	0	0
THURSTON	0	0	0
WHATCOM	0	0	0
Total	460,031	249,650	709,681

⁵ The numbers for 2018 and 2019 have been revised to reflect AMI installations through the initial test pilots and PSE AMI installations

2. Information on customer communication results, including the number of customers who have informed PSE of their Initial Request for service under electric and natural gas Schedules 171

All customers are sent a letter notification 3-5 weeks ahead of the exchange to an AMI meter. The letter contains information about electric and natural gas Schedules 171 NCM service. Interested customers can contact PSE via phone, email or US mail to learn about the NCM service or to request the optional service. As of June 30, 2020, PSE received electric and natural gas Schedules 171 NCM service requests associated with 6,048 electric and natural gas meters. Of these 6,048, 1,110 have been completed, 1,082 are in progress, 1,715 were rejected, and 2,141 were cancelled.

The table below provides further details about the completed 1,110 NCM service requests. As shown, 307 NCM service requests have been approved but were pending billing configuration in PSE's billing system as of June 30, 2020.

	NCM Service Request Form Completed and Approved	Schedule 171 Billing Initiated and NCM Meter Installed/Natural Gas Module Removed
Electric	623	447
Natural Gas	487	356
Total	1,110	803

3. The number of customers on electric and natural gas schedules 171, including a) the non-payment disconnection count, b) the bill payment assistance status, and c) status of their Schedule 171 One-Time Charge Payment

	Electric	Natural Gas
Schedule 171 billed accounts as of 6/30/2020	447	356
Number of accounts with non-payment disconnection during 1/1/2017-6/30/2020	8	2
Number of accounts with bill payment assistance during 1/1/2017-6/30/2020, including pledges from the federal government, PSE or organizations that provide assistance through PSE	9	8
Count of Schedule 171 One-Time Charge ⁶ 7/2019-6/2020	39	10

⁶ Schedule 171 One-Time Charge is applicable to the NCM service request made by a customer at a point of delivery where an AMI meter has been installed.

4. PSE costs associated with the implementation of electric and natural gas schedules 171, including capital costs and maintenance costs for information systems, meter networks, meter exchange, meter reading, and other related costs associated with providing service under electric and natural gas Schedules 171

The following table summarizes some of the capital costs and maintenance costs associated the implementation of electric and natural gas schedules 171. The NCM service related costs that are recorded within the Meter Upgrade Project costs during 2018, 2019, and January-June 2020 are not included in the table below.

	2018	2019	2020	1/2018-6/2020
Electric NCM Installation Costs	\$0	\$15,277	\$16,028	\$31,305
Gas NCM Installations	\$0	\$23,003	\$15,905	\$38,908
Electric NCM Meter Reading Set-up Costs	\$0	\$0	\$45,870	\$45,870
Gas NCM Meter Reading Set-up Costs	\$0	\$0	\$16,830	\$16,830
NCM Information System Capital Costs	\$1,521,425	\$2,280,046	\$10,984	\$3,812,454

The NCM information system capital costs are the costs associated with SAP work management and interface configuration and programming changes to support the NCM service. The works include adding new rate schedules and charges, enabling NCM service request tracking, expanding bi-monthly meter reading and billing functionality, automating customer NCM communication, and integrating and testing systems.

Costs associated with the ongoing manual metering reading will be included in this reporting when the contractor starts to invoice PSE.

5. Revenues associated with electric and natural gas Schedules 171

Schedule 171 For the period of 7/2018-6/2020	Additional Bi-Monthly Service Charge		One-Time Charge	
	Per Meter	Total Billed	Per Meter	Total Billed
Electric	\$15	\$22,725	\$90	\$3,510
Natural Gas	\$15	\$10,785	\$50	\$500

6. Number of Initial Requests that did not result in a submitted and completed Service Request

As of June 30, 2020, PSE received 6,048 NCM service requests. 2,141 requests have been cancelled by customers and 1,715 NCM requests have been rejected by PSE per the terms and conditions of Schedule 171. As outlined in electric and natural gas Schedules 171, this optional non-communicating meter service is available only to residential customers residing in a single-family dwelling (or a multi-plex residence of up to four units) that are in the area where PSE has started the deployment of AMI meter upgrade. In addition, customers have to complete a NCM service request and meet the requirements and responsibilities for service outlined in the tariff schedules.

7. Number of electric and natural gas Schedules 171 customers who discontinue service on Schedule 171

As of June 30, 2020, 17 NCM optional services have been discontinued, five at customer request and 11 by NCM customers moving. And one NCM service was discontinued by PSE because PSE personnel had not been able to read the meter for four consecutive months as provided for in PSE's electric and natural Schedules 171⁷ section 8:

8. The Company may refuse or revoke the Installation of a non-communicating meter at the Customer's premises for reasons including but not limited to the following conditions:
 - a. no meter reading for four consecutive calendar months when safe access is not available for the Company's personnel and standard equipment;
 - b. current or past incidents of Customer meter tampering;
 - c. current or past incidents of Customer impeding the Company's access to meter to obtain meter reads, perform maintenance or to disconnect meter for non-payment of Gas Service; or
 - d. incidents of service disconnection for non-payment (of Customer's electric and/or natural gas accounts for communicating and/or non-communicating meters) twice within the prior 12-month period.

⁷ Electric Schedule 171: https://www.pse.com/-/media/Project/PSE/Portal/Rate-documents/Electric/elec_sch_171.pdf
Natural gas Schedule 171: https://www.pse.com/-/media/Project/PSE/Portal/Rate-documents/Gas/gas_sch_171.pdf

8. PSE discussion of other issues associated with providing service under electric and natural gas Schedules 171

A. Challenges with Manual Meter Reading

For two decades, PSE has not had to manually read meters to gather the usage information for billing for almost 100% of its meters. All of PSE's systems have been designed to collect meter reads wirelessly since the installation of AMR technology in the late 1990s. The reintroduction of manual reading has required the creation of entirely new internal and external processes, and company and IT structure changes.

Aside from the structures and processes needed, customer expectations and behaviors have changed; customers have naturally adapted to no longer having to provide regular access to the meter for reading. Residences have been altered to include fences, locked gates, planted vegetation, siding, and decoration around the meter face. This can make a manual meter read difficult. In addition to the physical impediments to reading the meter, the necessity of having someone on customers' property is a change for the customers. Even customers who are requesting NCM are needing time to discuss and understand that PSE will now need access to their property on a regular basis.

The set up and execution of efficient internal and external processes that support the manual meter reading system for the electric and natural gas Schedules 171 NCM service in an era of wireless reading has proved difficult. PSE did not previously have a group that focused on manually reading meters, so this new optional NCM service has necessitated the acquisition of additional resources. Additionally, since meters have not needed to be read manually, customers who participate in the NCM service are not accustomed to making their yard accessible for the meter reader.

B. New Customer Communication and Education Needs

PSE is respectful of its customers' preferences regarding the optional NCM service. As such, PSE has implemented a robust communications and education process to provide customers with the opportunity to discuss and ask questions about the NCM service and the Meter Upgrade project. This approach requires extensive and in-depth conversation with customer; PSE's customer communication team has consistently found that customers have both incorrect information and numerous questions on a variety of topics that may be tangentially connected to the meter. This has required shifting priorities and dedicating resources to meet the new customer needs has led to a large variance in how long case processing takes.

PSE customers have never had a metering choice; this customer choice has created a need for enhanced communication and education around meters that was previously not necessary. The meter and its technology is not something that customers had to think much about and the general understanding of metering technology is low. PSE has been diligently working to ensure that customer's questions are answered in a timely fashion and they are given the information needed to make an informed choice on their metering. These questions have included such topics as RF⁸ v. EMF⁹, how the different metering types work, what to expect for installation, "dirty electricity", as well as 5G¹⁰ and if it is related to AMI, just to name a few.

⁸ radio frequency

⁹ radiofrequency electromagnetic fields

¹⁰ 5th generation of mobile networks (5G)

A simplest request to participate in the NCM service takes a little less than an hour from initial request to have arrangement on an NCM installation, but other cases have taken over 50 hours of employee time from initial request to NCM installation arrangement. PSE communicates with customer through a variety of mediums and also may need to engage multiple departments including the call center (which has a specialized back office team - staffed every business day to meet the communication needs of customers interested in NCM service), communications outreach, escalated complaints, legal, and the Meter Upgrade Project teams. This depth of resources is required to educate and answer the customer's questions so that they understand their decision of whether or not to choose the NCM service.

C. Extended NCM Installation Timeline

PSE has found the installation time for a NCM to be extended mainly due to the following three reasons:

- First, some customers experience a long timeline to have a NCM installed, which is based on whether PSE's Meter Upgrade Project has reached their area. As shown in section 1 above, the Meter Upgrade project is a multi-year process. PSE has received requests for NCM service from customers in an area that is not scheduled to have the AMI upgrade for another year, so these customers will need to wait until the AMI and NCM services become available in an area. The call center's specialized back office team works through these requests as AMI and NCM services becomes available.
- Second, PSE's process is designed to give customers adequate time to return the completed NCM service request form to finalize their optional metering choice. To date, PSE is experiencing several weeks to months for customers to return the required NCM form, and sometimes customers do not return the NCM form at all, which means that it can take months to move a NCM service request forward.
- Finally, with regard to natural gas NCM implementation, installation time has been extended due to limited crew availability. PSE's natural gas first response group has been designated to perform the task of removing the modules for natural gas meters that are going to be served with the optional NCM service. The natural gas first response group, however, is foremost responsible for any safety related work. The natural gas communicating module removal work for the NCM service is secondary to the safety related work, which can slow the removal of the modules to enable NCM service.
- To date, the on-going COVID-19 pandemic has had the biggest impact of all. In accordance with Governor Inslee's Stay Home – Stay Healthy order, NCM installations were paused on March 25, 2020, along with manual meter reads in the field. While all PSE meter deployment (including both AMI meters and non-communicating meters) was permitted to resume on May 5, 2020, the installation pace has increased gradually, allowing PSE to closely monitor field conditions and customer sentiment. Additional safety measures, including face coverings and physical distancing, were implemented, and external messaging was revised to communicate these measures – especially with so many customers now working from home. Still, it remains to be seen how comfortable customers will be having (or noticing) someone on their property, particularly during a pandemic, and how that will impact PSE's ability to collect manual NCM reads.