



May 1, 2023

Dear Chairman Thomas and Members of the Public Works Committee:

Please find the Sewerage and Water Board of New Orleans' 2023 Q1 report to the Public Works Committee below, as required by Louisiana Revised Statute 33:4091.

With the 2022 launch of our Five-Year Strategic Plan and concerted implementation efforts throughout the year, SWBNO laid the groundwork for generational changes. This report contains information on our progress in our most immediate focus areas: billing accuracy, outstanding revenue collection, and field repairs. It also provides information on the larger programs, projects, and initiatives that will improve SWBNO's operations – and our customers' experiences – over the long term.

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We look forward to discussing these topics and answering your questions at the May 17 Public Works Committee meeting.

Regards,

Ghassan Korban, P.E.

Executive Director, Sewerage and Water Board of New Orleans





## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### CUSTOMER SERVICE

**Almost 97%** **179,500+**

actual meter  
reading rate

customer  
touchpoints

- Bill disputes increased as a result of improvements in collecting actual meter reads
- With focused effort, the number of bill disputes resolved without a hearing increased

### SMART METER PROGRAM

- Technology selected and initial design phase in progress
- Wireless infrastructure and integration initiated
- Outreach to employees and key stakeholders underway

### TECHNOLOGY MODERNIZATION

- Website upgrade project underway
- Implemented new cybersecurity training and Multifactor Authentication requirements to better protect SWBNO and customer data

### FINANCIAL STABILITY

**RECEIVED**

**\$38.9M**

from LDEQ for  
wastewater treatment  
plants

**APPLIED FOR**

**\$10M**

from state revolving  
funds for smart metering

**45% increase**

in delinquent bill collections  
since January 2023

### SYSTEMS

- Rehabilitation of the Panola Drinking Water Pumping Station underway
- Wastewater treatment plant improvements underway on the Eastbank and Westbank
- 92 of 99 drainage pumps were available

### WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

- Recruiting project managers for smart metering, lead compliance, and backflow prevention
- Planning agency-wide career fair in Q2 to fill Networks and entry-level vacancies
- Embarking on the People Plan to identify and implement the right workforce model for SWBNO

### DPW COORDINATION

**45% increase**

in pavement work orders  
completed year-over-year

**45**

JIRR Projects underway,  
equating nearly \$500  
million

**5**

Drinking Water  
Transmission Main  
Projects underway



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## I. CUSTOMER SERVICE INITIATIVES

*Meet and exceed the service needs of our customers.*



Recognizing our customers' pain points, SWBNO's customer service leadership continues identifying opportunities to enhance the quality of the service we deliver. We have implemented several initiatives to improve billing accuracy and timeliness, shorten bill dispute response times, and create more convenience for customers.

- We are well into the implementation of **Verint, our new customer relationship and engagement software**. When fully integrated, Verint will provide support to our Call Center employees, allowing for shorter customer call wait times and more consistent and accurate answers.
  - SWBNO is currently testing the first 14 business processes, more than a third of the total. End-user testing is also underway. Design and implementation of 22 business processes remain before the full system launches.
- Our Customer Service Department successfully outsourced bill printing and delivery during Q1 2023. This significant change will result in more consistent and timely bill delivery.
- Our Plumbing and Permitting Department will establish a presence at City Hall in April to simplify the plumbing permitting process and increasing convenience for customers requiring services.

**14 of 36**

**Verint business  
processes in testing**

## BY THE NUMBERS: JANUARY TO MARCH 2023

**70,000+**

calls fielded by  
Call Center

**9,500+**

responses to  
customer emails

**100,000**

customers served  
at office locations

**Almost 97%**

actual meter  
reading rate

**893**

plumbing  
permits issued

**1,213**

plumbing  
inspections





## SMART METERING PROGRAM

Our Smart Metering Program, which we successfully transitioned from planning to implementation in January 2023, aims to improve the customer experience by allowing SWBNO to generate bills customers can trust while empowering them with more tools to manage their accounts and water use.

We kicked off the project in January with internal meetings held with the Board of Directors as well as staff across the utility. During these meetings, SWBNO presented the selected smart meter, including the meters themselves, the network, the software, and the customer portal. As of the end of Q1, SWBNO also initiated design efforts and launched all five workstreams (IT, Meters, Radio Network Configuration, Public Communications, and Organizational Transformation).



*Internal Smart Meter Kickoff Meeting*

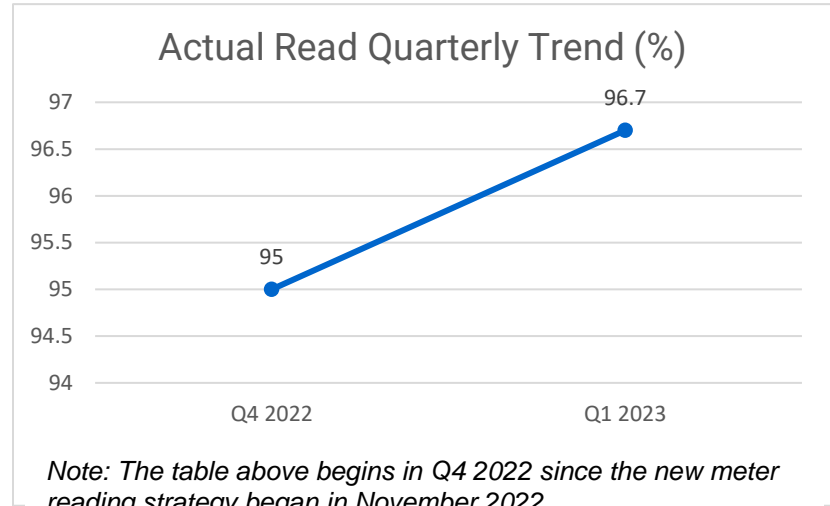
## HIGHLIGHTS

- The **IT Integration workstream** engaged vendors and is actively overseeing them in the coordination of nine system integrations among four software platforms.
- The **Radio Network Configuration workstream** identified twelve base station sites and anticipates the installation of data collectors to begin in the first week of May.
- The **Public Communications workstream**'s initial efforts focused on internal communications. This involved meetings with managers in all of the departments that will be directly affected by smart metering and staff training within the Meter Shop. This team also developed messaging tools like a webpage, postcards, door hangers, and FAQs to prepare customer-facing staff to provide clear, consistent, and accurate information to stakeholders once meter deployment begins.



## METER READING

In November 2022, our meter reading team began to implement a new strategy for reading meters as a temporary solution to estimated bills until we install smart meters. The strategy, which involves reading half of our approximately 140,000 meters every month, produced an immediate improvement. Actual reads jumping to 95 percent of assigned meters compared to an average of 60 to 80 percent in previous quarters. Although more bills will be estimated, the quality of the actual read data will produce more accurate bills overall.



In Q1 2023, we saw another increase in actual meter reads, with the meter reading team achieving 96.7 percent actual reads of assigned meters. This is close to our goal of capturing actual reads from no fewer than 98 percent of our meters.

The new strategy also allows SWBNO to more efficiently allocate resources and personnel, relieving some of the stress on our meter readers. As a result, customer service leadership has noticed an improvement in employee morale and engagement.

### Meter Reading Team Staffing

Historically, high staff turnover has been one of the meter reading team's biggest challenges. In addition to implementing the alternative meter reading strategy and reallocating resources, the Customer Service Department made further changes to improve meter reading staff retention. For example, we aim to enhance the meter reading work environment by investing in the skillsets of existing staff with an emphasis on safety and meter reading accuracy.

The Customer Service Department also resumed recruitment efforts in February to staff up the meter reading team and ensure we maintain our near-goal actual read rate. During Q1, the team had an average of 40 staff members.

Q1 2023	2023 Goal	Description
40 staff members	50 staff members	The average number of staff actively reading meters. 50 full-time Meter Readers budgeted for 2023.

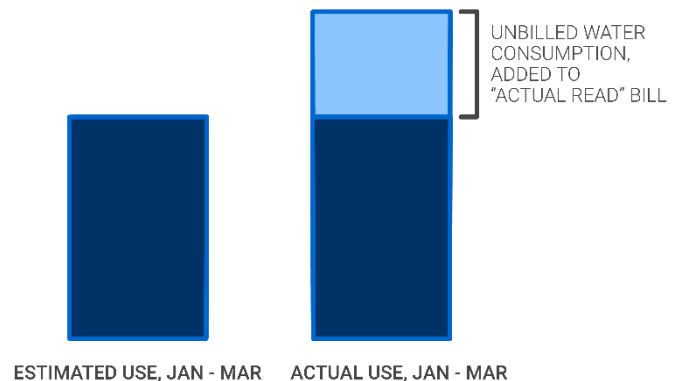


## BILLING DISPUTES

The number of new bill disputes increased in Q1 2023, but likely because of the improvements we have made in gathering actual meter reads.

As mentioned, our new strategy allows us to perform more consistent actual meter reads than we could historically. As a result, some customers received actual reads for accounts that had been estimated for months in a row. When a customer's actual use has been higher than what they paid for through estimation, the actual read reveals a discrepancy. As a result, we may provide a bill that differs from the estimated bills a customer has come to expect. Unsurprisingly, this has caused an increase in bill disputes.

EXAMPLE: UNBILLED WATER USE DUE TO ESTIMATION

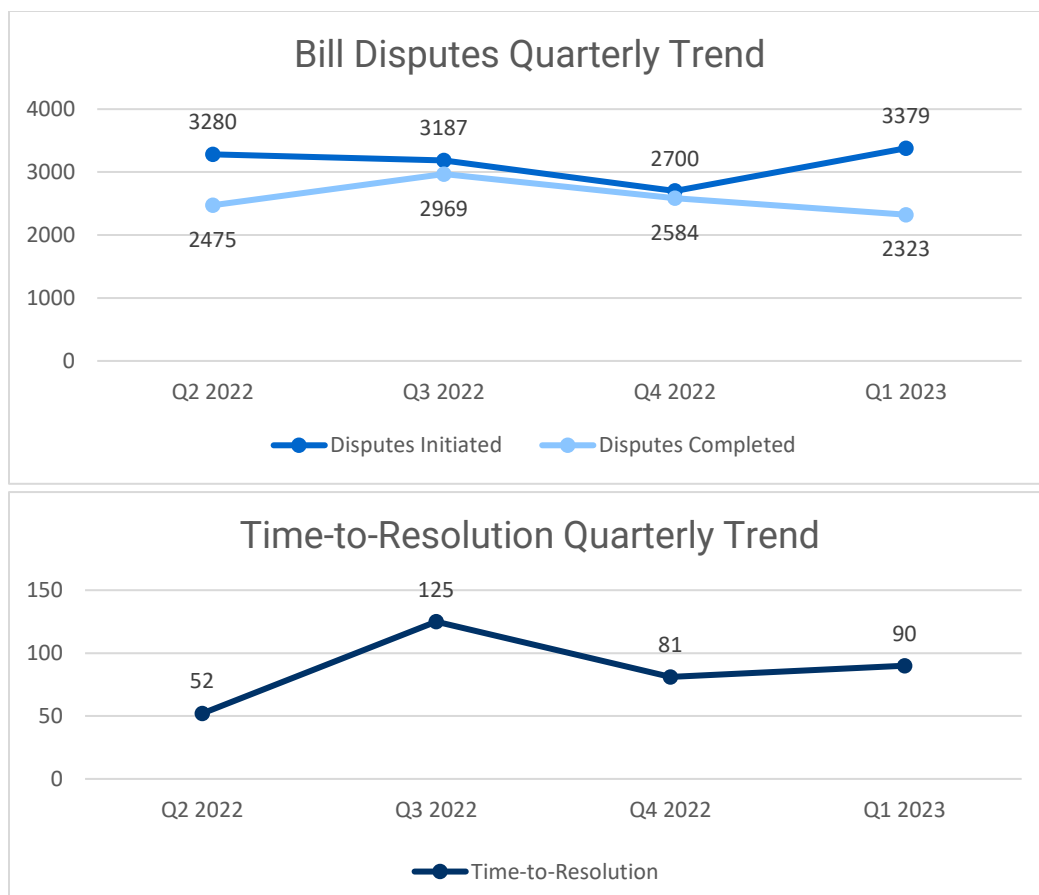


At the end of Q1, the total number of customer bill disputes hovered around 4,000. The average time-to-resolution remained steady at approximately 90 days throughout the quarter.

Given the influx of disputes and in an effort to reduce the backlog, SWBNO's Billing Department is developing a better method for triaging disputes, identifying those that can be administratively resolved without a hearing. The goal is to become more efficient and increase the number of disputes completed per month.

The table below provides bill dispute information for Q1 2023.

Month	Bill Disputes Initiated	Bill Disputes Completed	Average Time-to-Resolution
January	839	705	90 days
February	1,058	742	90 days
March	1,482	876	90 days
TOTAL	3,379	2,323	90



## AVOIDED ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS

If a customer is unsatisfied with the results of our investigation into their bill dispute, they can request an Administrative Hearing. SWBNO contacts customers the day after receiving a request, and a hearing date is scheduled two weeks out from that date. Hearing officers are given two weeks to review customer account data before the assigned hearing date.

When possible, we aim to address customer concerns before the hearing. If a resolution is reached, SWBNO will cancel the hearing. If any of the below apply, we will contact the customer before the hearing to discuss the dispute.

- SWBNO identified further adjustments to apply that adhere to SWBNO policy.
- SWBNO identified the customer as someone who is redispensing the same charges from a recent hearing with no new evidence.
- SWBNO identified the customer as someone whose high bills are due to lack of payment, rather than SWBNO error, leaks, or other.





Identifying these types of bill disputes and contacting the customers prior to their hearing allow SWBNO to use its time and resources more efficiently to find satisfactory resolutions for customers and shorten response times.

The table below provides administrative hearing information for Q1 2023.

Month	Avoided Hearings*	Average Time-to-Resolution
January	50	14 days
February	74	14 days
March	69	14 days
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>193</b>	<b>14 days</b>

\*The number of billing disputes resolved without a hearing.

## II. FINANCIAL STABILITY

*Practice strong fiscal stewardship and ensure timely revenue recovery while balancing affordability with investments necessary to deliver critical services.*

SWBNO leadership is working to face head on the challenges related to uncollected accounts receivables by implementing billing process improvements aimed to provide more consistency on a monthly basis and ultimately reduce reliance on manual meter reading through our Smart Metering Program. In addition to those efforts, our Finance Department is exploring an improved collections action plan and applying for additional state and federal funding.



### ACCOUNTS RECEIVABLE

During Q1 2023, past due accounts receivable increased around \$2.6m to \$59.8 and at quarter end are lower than past due accounts receivable this time last year (\$70m). Over 3,000 payment plans were established in the quarter and disconnect notices continue to be provided to past due customers to avoid service interruptions.

#### Open Accounts

	Past-Due Open Accounts	Total Amount Due	Past Due \$ Amount (60+ Days)
Residential	20,996	\$46,405,318	\$39,240,773
Multi-Family	680	\$4,642,407	\$3,946,251
Commercial	1,636	\$19,580,604	\$16,618,975
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>23,312</b>	<b>\$70,628,329</b>	<b>\$59,805,998</b>





### Closed Accounts

As of March 31, 2023, there were **26,171** closed accounts with an unpaid balance. We refer these accounts to third-party collectors.

**Customers with closed accounts owed SWBNO \$40,860,309**, prior to reserves recognized for the portion that is uncollectable or unlikely to be collected per standard industry assumptions and historical collections.

### Delinquency

The delinquency rate during the quarter (measured based on the last twelve months of collections and bills) increased from 2% to 3% after declining consistently during 2022. January has historically been a lower month for collections based on consumer payment behaviors while February and March showed improvement.

SWBNO continues to offer interest-free payment plans to customers with past-due amounts to address arrearages.

The table below breaks down the value of past-due bills by time overdue.

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	0-30 Days	31-60 Days	61-90 Days	91-120 Days	121+ Days	Total Amount*
<b>Sewer</b>	\$9,456,434	\$4,426,308	\$3,092,567	\$4,526,642	\$62,811,052	\$84,313,003
<b>Water</b>	\$7,866,259	\$3,671,461	\$2,719,205	\$4,085,884	\$54,315,816	\$72,658,625
<b>TOTAL</b>	\$17,322,694	\$8,097,769	\$5,811,771	\$8,612,526	\$117,126,868	\$156,971,628

\*Column total includes unapplied pending payments of \$2,402,168

\*\*Prior to allowance for uncollectible accounts

## COLLECTIONS

At the end of **March 2023**, **\$59.8 million** remained in **outstanding overdue customer receivables** (i.e., bill amounts overdue by 60 days or more), **an increase of \$2.6 million since last quarter.**

**↑ \$2.6M**  
outstanding customer  
receivables since last quarter



Through first quarter efforts progress has been made in collections on certain commercial accounts with balances aged over 365 days and management is continuing discussions started with Council on additional collection strategies for multifamily customers. Further interviewing has occurred to hire additional collections personnel to oversee the process and make additional changes to face the significant backlog of past due customers. Also during the annual external audit, management will reassess the time closed accounts are with third party collections to optimize revenue recovery.

## INNOVATIVE FUNDING

To advance capital projects in SWBNO's sizable but largely unfunded Capital Improvement Program, SWBNO continues to explore, pursue, and compete for external sources of funding.

### RECEIVED

**\$38.9M**

from LDEQ for  
WWTPs

### APPLIED FOR

**\$5M**

from new State  
Revolving Fund for  
smart meter installation

**\$5M**

from LDH State  
Revolving Fund for smart  
meter installation

In March 2023, the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality (LDEQ) awarded \$38.9 million to SWBNO for wastewater treatment plant renovations, both on the Eastbank and the Westbank. This State Revolving Fund (SRF) loan has a low interest rate, which allows more of our revenue from customer bill payments to go toward projects versus debt service payments.

In Q1, we also submitted a pre-application to LDEQ for a \$5 million loan with potential loan forgiveness for underserved communities. If awarded, those funds would support smart meter installation. SWBNO is also preparing an application for the corresponding Louisiana Department of Health (LDH) State Revolving Fund, which would also provide \$5 million toward our smart meter program.



### III. CAPITAL AND OPERATIONAL IMPROVEMENTS



*Ensure safe and efficient operations. Improve the efficiency and resiliency of current and future infrastructure by leveraging partnerships and innovative approaches to funding and sustainable design.*

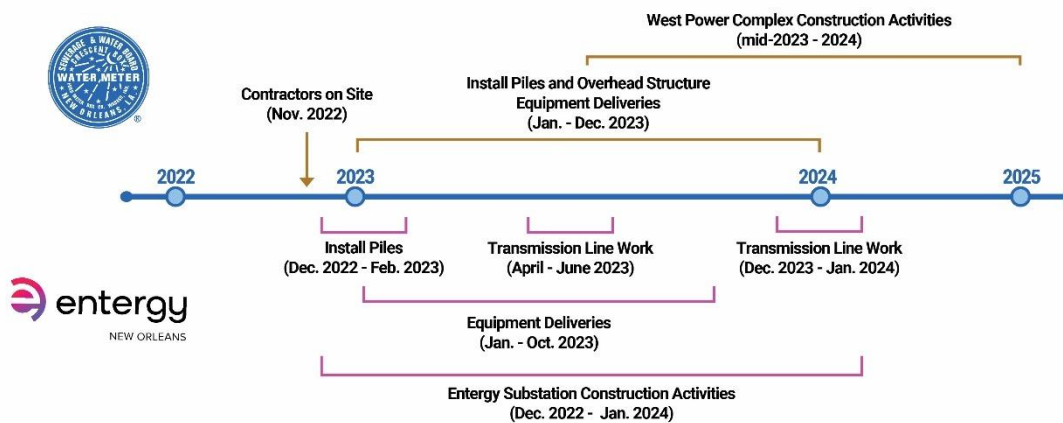
Because so much of our Capital Improvement Program is unfunded, SWBNO leadership puts special focus on efficiently spending every capital dollar we secure on enduring, high-impact system improvements. In Q1, we continued to make progress on the Power Complex and the refurbishment of both wastewater treatment plants. In the midst of evolving federal regulations related to lead and PFAS, SWBNO leadership is also preparing to make substantial, necessary investments in both drinking water treatment plants and the distribution system.

## SYSTEMS

### POWER

#### THE POWER COMPLEX

The new Power Complex is one way we are modernizing our systems. In partnership with Entergy, we are currently in the first phase of construction, which includes the Entergy substation, frequency changers, and a new in-house turbine generator. When these portions of the project are complete around spring 2025, the facility will draw power from the Entergy New Orleans grid and convert it to 25-hz power for our older equipment to use. The modern turbine generator will provide additional power for backup as needed.



*Last Revised: November 2022*

In the first quarter, SWBNO awarded contracts for two critical path construction projects:



1. **Contract 1415**, a large civil construction contract for foundations and other underground work, anticipated to begin in Q2 2023.
2. **Contract 1370A**, which will continue work initiated in Q1 to commission the first components of the new power distribution control system. This is one of the first steps to modernize power operations. Substantial completion of this work via contract 1370A is anticipated in Q2.

## POWER SOURCES AND AVAILABLE POWER

As work on the Power Complex continues, SWBNO maintains other power sources to ensure we have more available power than our systems needed at peak demand. We also continue to reinforce our power infrastructure, especially in preparation for the 2023 hurricane season. For example, our teams conducted reliability improvements to the backup EMD generators in the first quarter, including the replacement of air compressors and other auxiliary components.

The status of SWBNO's power assets, **as of the end of March**, is shown below.

Unit	Frequency	Capacity	Available
T4	25 Hz	20 MW <i>Tested at 18 MW during commissioning</i>	18
T5	25 Hz	20 MW <i>Tested at 17.5 MW during commissioning</i>	17.5
Carrollton Frequency Changers 1&2	Converts 60 Hz to 25 Hz	8.5 MW	8.5
Station D Frequency Changers 3 & 4	Converts 60 Hz to 25 Hz	12 MW	6 MW (One FC out of service for cleaning and maintenance)
West Bank Power Complex (Algiers Water Treatment Plant)	Converts 60 Hz to 25 Hz	2.5 MW	2.5
Five EMDs	25 Hz	12.5 MW (total)  2.5 MW (each)	0 MW (All EMDs out of service, with upgrades in progress)



T6 (via Plant Frequency Changer)	Converts 60 Hz to 25 Hz	3.75 MW	3.75
		<b>Peak 25 Hz capacity</b> <i>(includes 3.75 MW that could be converted from T6)</i>	<b>56.25 MW</b>
T6	60Hz	22 MW	22
		<b>Peak 60Hz capacity</b> <i>(full capacity – does not subtract 3.75 that could be converted to 25 Hz)</i>	<b>22 MW</b>

## DRINKING WATER

### WATER PURIFICATION AND DISTRIBUTION

Providing clean, safe drinking water to all customers is our fundamental responsibility and an ongoing priority. The FEMA-funded Water Hammer Hazard Mitigation Program, which has already produced major improvements to the reliability and resilience of our drinking water distribution system, is in its third and final phase. In Q1, work to rehabilitate and improve the Panola Drinking Water Pumping Station accelerated. Two potable water pumps at the station were taken out of service for rehabilitation with expected completion in Q4 2023.

In 2023, SWBNO will also undertake a master planning exercise to focus on capital needs at both of our water treatment plants. In Q1, SWBNO drafted the Request for Proposal related to this effort, and the RFP is now under review.

### LEAD SERVICE LINES

We are monitoring potential changes to the federal Lead and Copper Rule, and we have met with the Louisiana Department of Health to discuss the availability of Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) related state revolving funds and administrative requirements for lead service line inventory and replacement.

In June of 2022, we entered a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with BlueConduit to begin a lead service line inventory using innovative technologies. Once the inventory of lead service lines in New Orleans is complete, SWBNO will apply for \$42 million of federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) funding available for Louisiana.

SWBNO is proud to have taken a proactive step in partnering with BlueConduit and community partners to meet our regulatory requirements ahead of schedule and at no additional cost to our ratepayers thanks to the generous support of google.org. Developing our inventory is only the first



step, and we are thrilled to work with Total Community Action (TCA), The Water Collaborative, and Civic Studio to engage our residents in conversation about how to deliver the most equitable program to remove lead from our system forever.

## SEWERAGE

### WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLANTS

SWBNO is undertaking a variety of projects to protect our ability to continue safely collecting and treating sewage.

At the Eastbank Wastewater Treatment Plant, we made significant progress on a sludge dryer project, which includes the installation and commissioning of the sludge dryer through startup and final performance testing. This project also includes completion of all repairs and improvements to the dryer system identified in a post-Hurricane Ida inspection. As of March 31, 2023, SWBNO has completed most of the tasks noted in that inspection. We are currently working with the manufacture of the sludge dryer's pump to address complications related to calibration and the viscosity of the sludge feed. With this issue resolved, we will be able to proceed with the optimization and startup of the system.

We are also in the preliminary design phase of the Phase One Project, which will help stabilize the Eastbank and Westbank Wastewater Treatment Plants with modern technology and equipment upgrades. These projects are funded through the Clean Water State Revolving Fund Loan Program. The project scope includes:

#### Eastbank WWTP

- Adding a secondary Waste Activated Sludge storage tank
- Rehabilitating the clarifiers and Return Activated Sludge Pumps Stations

#### Westbank WWTP

- Rehabilitating the trickling filters, headworks, and disinfection storage and
- Upgrading the SCADA and electrical system.





In a separate effort, SWBNO installed a new liquid oxygen vaporizer system on March 15, 2023, to facilitate the flow of oxygen to the bioreactors at the Eastbank Wastewater Treatment Plant.

## DRAINAGE

### CANAL MAINTENANCE

During the months of January through March, the Grounds Maintenance Department cleared overgrowth brushes and trees from 2,000 feet of the Peoples Avenue Canal from Gentilly Boulevard to the I-610. By the end of March, in-house and contractor crews had also completed one full round of grass cutting, covering all Eastbank and Westbank canals, and started a second round.

Part of this success stems from aggressive, intentional staffing efforts. Our Grounds Maintenance division started the year with 20 more employees on its roster than it had at the start of 2021. With the new complement of employees, Grounds Maintenance is more responsive to special requests, such as clearing heavy debris and dumped material in and along canals, the removal of concentrated deposits of material at pump station intakes, and reclaiming of overgrown canal banks. Grounds Maintenance also continues to acquire equipment that improves the efficiency of its operations.

### SOUTHEAST LOUISIANA (SELA) DRAINAGE PROGRAM

The SELA Drainage Program, authorized in 1996, aims to reduce flood damages in the City of New Orleans and surrounding parishes by constructing new pumping stations and better drainage canals throughout the city. In Q1 2023, SWBNO continued efforts on two canal improvement projects:

#### **General DeGaulle Canal Improvements –**

Upgrades to the open canals on General DeGaulle Drive between Wall Blvd and Behrman Place are ongoing. This project will expand the canal to a 45'x5' U-Flume section. We anticipate this will increase storage in this section by 200 percent.

As of the end of Q1 2023, the project is ahead of schedule with a current completion date of Q4 2023.

**Florida Ave. Phase IV –** This project replaces a 25'x10' flume with a 40'x15' flume. Box canals on the side streets (Benefit St., Treasure St., Abundance St., Deers St., Eads St., and Painters St.) are complete, and the pavement laying is 99 percent complete. The remainder of the scope of work for this phase includes canal upgrades in Peoples Canal, which we anticipate will be completed by Q3 2023.





Figure 1: Project area, General DeGaulle Canal Improvements

#### TYPICAL SECTION FOR GENERAL DE GAULLE U-FLUME

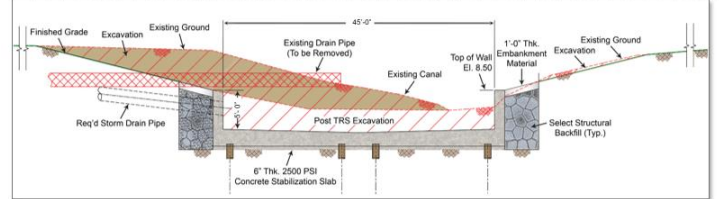


Figure 2: Diagram and photos of changes, General DeGaulle Canal Improvements



Figure 3: Diagram showing changes, Florida Ave. Phase IV

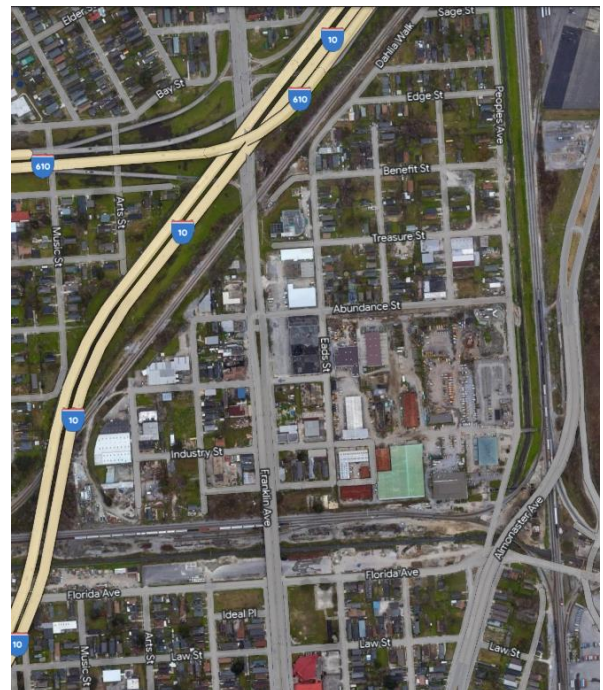


Figure 4: Project area, Florida Ave. Phase IV

#### DRAINAGE PUMP STATUS

92 of 99 drainage pumps were available for service as of March 31, 2023. The drainage system is built with redundancies, so we still have the capacity to manage stormwater throughout the city.

- **DPS 6 at Metairie Road:** 1 Pump is out of service due to a pump bearing issue.



- Impellor shipped to manufacturers facility in Wisconsin. Return to service expected Q2 2023.
- 12 additional drainage pumps are available for use at the station.
- **DPS 10 in New Orleans East:** No. 1 pump is out of service
  - Three additional drainage pumps are available for use at the station
- **DPS 13 near Tall Timbers Algiers:** No. 4 Pump on standby for Emergency Use Only.
  - Five additional drainage pumps and one constant-duty pump are available at this station
- **DPS 16 in New Orleans East:** No. 2 Pump is out of service due to a coupling issue as of June 14, 2022.
  - Three additional drainage pumps are available at this station
- **DPS 17 in Gentilly:** The two drainage pumps at the station, A pump and D pump, are out of service due to a motor issue. The situation is being investigated.
  - Pumps A and D at DPS 17 are mainly used to pump “Dry Weather” flow to the Mississippi River. The primary drainage pumping station around the area of DPS 17 is DPS 19 which is located at Florida Ave and the west side of the Industrial Canal.
- **DPS 3 on Broad Street:** A cracked impeller was identified on Pump D. Repairs were undertaken by SWBNO facility maintenance staff, and the pump was returned to service in April 2023.

## DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS COORDINATION



To make meaningful progress in addressing field repairs and minimizing construction impacts, collaboration with the City of New Orleans Department of Public Works (DPW) is paramount. Alongside DPW, we are dedicating more resources to chip away at the backlog of pavement repairs. We are also coordinating to improve efficiencies on JIRR and drinking water transmission main rehabilitation projects – two massive undertakings to improve infrastructure throughout the city.

## PAVEMENT REPAIRS

In partnership with the City of New Orleans, SWBNO has made a concerted effort to improve our response time for field repairs, which we recognize as a point of frustration for residents. Compared to Q1 2022, our crews have made significant progress in the number of work orders completed in Q1 2023 – a 45 percent increase in production. Looking at Q1 2023 on a monthly basis, we continue to see an upward trend in projections from January to March.

**45% increase**

in work orders completed  
year-over-year

Both of SWBNO’s on-call contractors have committed additional paving crews to address the existing backlog. CMG in particular has dramatically increased production.





The current phase of the \$8.6 million Max Pave II project was also underway as of March. This project splits Orleans Parish into 12 zones and includes up to 1,200 pavement restoration locations.

A second round of repairs will follow the implementation of Max Pave II to reduce the overall backlog. SWBNO has procured the necessary equipment for paving (concrete mixers, compaction equipment, and pavement saws) and is in the process of obtaining asphalt-hauling equipment. We are also recruiting additional crew members with an anticipated mobilization date of no later than the end of June 2023.

The overall goal of paving is to reduce wait times from over 100 days to 2-4 weeks from making a cut to repairing said cut.

## JIRR PROGRAM

DPW and SWBNO are also working together to implement an unprecedented program to restore our damaged infrastructure called the Joint Infrastructure Recovery Roads (JIRR) Program. Using local, state, and federal funds, the \$2.3 billion program is the most comprehensive that our region has seen.

Currently, 45 JIRR projects are under construction with an estimated value of nearly \$500 million. In the first quarter, five construction projects were completed, and five projects held pre-construction meetings. Four projects have bid opening dates in April, and eight more projects will be advertised in Q2 2023.



Figure 5: JIRR Projects

## DRINKING WATER TRANSMISSION MAINS

In another large-scale project, which will improve water pressure in many areas of Orleans Parish, SWBNO is replacing several 60- to 120-year-old drinking water transmission mains across the distribution system with newer, larger pipes. This transmission main program is FEMA-funded and managed by SWBNO in cooperation with the City of New Orleans as part of the Joint Infrastructure Recovery Roads (JIRR) Program.





There are 11 total transmission main projects, five underway and six future projects scheduled. SWBNO substantially completed the South Dupre Transmission Main Project in Q1 2023, and the South Claiborne at Third Street Transmission Main Project is going to bid in April 2023.

These projects aim to proactively replace water lines as part of SWBNO's commitment to infrastructure resiliency and reliability, a key focus area of our Five-Year Strategic Plan.

Project	Details
<b>In Progress</b>	
<b>South Dupre Transmission Main Project (004)</b>	<b>Anticipated Completion:</b> 2023 <b>Budget:</b> \$2,419,891.00 Recently provided an updated punch list of items to the contractor naming tasks to finish to reach project completion.
<b>St. Bernard Ave. Transmission Main Project (002)</b>	<b>Anticipated Completion:</b> 2023 <b>Budget:</b> \$2,093,638.00 About two months from completion, on pause for Jazz Fest per DPW request.
<b>Eden, Grape, and Dupre Transmission Main Project (005)</b>	<b>Anticipated Completion:</b> 2023 <b>Budget:</b> \$9,738,689.00 In construction. We anticipate substantial completion of the project in May 2023.
<b>Fig and Leonidas Transmission Main Project (006)</b>	<b>Anticipated Completion:</b> 2023 <b>Budget:</b> \$15,854,660.80 Construction is about 90% complete. The contractor will provide an updated schedule soon.
<b>South Claiborne Transmission Main Project (003)</b>	<b>Anticipated Completion:</b> 2024 <b>Budget:</b> \$24,446,146.00 Construction in progress. SWBNO is experiencing a delay in this project due to valve closures and the reopening of RFIs. We anticipate the contractor to provide more submittals.
<b>Future Projects</b>	
<b>South Claiborne at Third Street Transmission Main Project (011)</b>	<b>Bid Opening:</b> April 2023 <b>Budget:</b> \$10,344,589.50
<b>Assorted Transmission and Donor Waterlines (008)</b>	<b>Anticipated Start:</b> 2023 <b>Budget:</b> \$4,535,270.00 Waiting to receive 100% submittal.



<b>Spruce and CWP Transmission Main Project (009)</b>	<b>Anticipated Start:</b> 2023 <b>Budget:</b> \$8,322,660.00  In design. SWBNO sent an updated scope to A/E and is waiting for the 90% submittal.
<b>Decatur &amp; St Peter Transmission Main Project (010)</b>	<b>Anticipated Start:</b> 2023 <b>Budget:</b> \$7,693,172.17  In design.
<b>Sixth St. Transmission Main Project (001)</b>	<b>Anticipated Start:</b> 2023 <b>Budget:</b> \$1,845,362.00  In design. SWBNO has received 95% design. SWBNO and DPW provided comments to A/E to address in the next submittal.
<b>Magnolia, Joseph, Willow Transmission Main Project (007)</b>	<b>Anticipated Start:</b> 2024 <b>Budget:</b> \$6,701,175.00  At 60% design. SWBNO and DPW provided comments to A/E.

## TECHNOLOGY MODERNIZATION



Another way we aim to improve the customer experience is through much-needed technology modernization. In Q1 2023, SWBNO's Information Systems Department kicked off several projects to update our internal systems, offer a more user-friendly and transparent customer-facing website, and protect our employees' and customers' information.

## WEBSITE UPDATES

SWBNO's Web Development Group recently initiated a significant website upgrade project to enhance usability, performance, and web accessibility for all users. This upgrade will implement the [Kentico Xperience 13 System](#), which is also utilized by the City of New Orleans and will provide website content management capabilities.

Building on the recent integration of the UserWay Accessibility Widget, this project will ensure the website meets or exceeds current ADA compliance standards. When completed, the new swbno.org website will feature a user-friendly interface, faster load times, and an optimized browsing experience. The upgraded website will also feature improved tools for tracking customer advisories and monitoring the operational status of power and pump facilities. Our Communications Department is working on a comprehensive website content audit and update in concert with the web development group's process.





These enhancements will empower residents and businesses with accurate, easy-to-access information and new ways to stay informed about crucial updates and developments in real time. Work on the website upgrade is in its initial phase, with an anticipated release in 2024.

## SOFTWARE UPDATES

In Q1 2023, SWBNO released requirements for “best and final” vendor submittals to replace our financial system. In April, subject-matter experts at SWBNO will conduct a hands-on test of software fundtions with guidance from the vendors. Following this review, the selection team will rank the submittals and prepare a recommendation. The new system will modernize SWBNO's financial and accounting processes, which are constrained by a dated mainframe system from the 1990s.

## CYBERSECURITY

To protect SWBNO and customer data, we successfully implemented Multifactor Authentication (MFA) for all SWBNO employees, contractors, and other users of our IT-networked systems. The MFA requires the input of a numeric code to access SWBNO systems.

To further educate SWBNO employees on cybersecurity and best practices, our Information Systems Department also launched mandatory cybersecurity training modules. Using Knowbe4 software, we track employee progress toward the training goals. Looking forward, we plan to continue our cybersecurity efforts by purchasing additional training modules for tools currently in use, hiring additional cybersecurity personnel, and further modernizing our firewalls.

## IV. WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND ENRICHMENT

*Support and develop a high-performing team that is skilled, committed, inspired, rewarded, engaged, and accountable.*



Our employees are our greatest asset. Per our Five-Year Strategic Plan, we are working to improve employee engagement, fill vacant key positions, and elicit staff input as we embark on an effort to define the best workforce model for our utility.



## EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

In Q1, SWBNO leadership had the pleasure of engaging staff in discussions on the state of the utility, priority projects, and financial planning efforts. Over 160 employees joined us for four meetings across SWBNO's campuses from January 31 to February 3, 2023.

In a small-group investment prioritization activity, 93 percent of groups were in favor of additional spending to fund priority projects. Across all meeting locations and employee groups, participants consistently prioritized the following investments and initiatives most highly:



*Employee Financial Stability Meeting at St. Joseph Street*



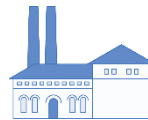
### **Preventative Maintenance and Faster Field Repairs**

(funded in some way by 67% of groups)



### **Expand Employee Training Opportunities**

(funded in some way by 70% of groups)



### **Renovate Drinking Water Treatment Plants**

(funded in some way by 58% of groups)



### **Replace Lead Water Lines**

(funded in some way by 70% of groups)

After the meetings, all of the feedback employees shared was provided to the workforce and SWBNO's Board of Directors. It will be incorporated into ongoing capital and strategic planning, as well as broader discussions regarding water and sewer rate adjustments.

## THE PEOPLE PLAN

To carry out the top priority in our Strategic Plan focus area on Workforce Development, SWBNO is beginning a project called the People Plan. This effort will use extensive employee and stakeholder input alongside data from SWBNO and peer organizations to analyze, develop, and begin to implement the right workforce model for this utility.

With support from the Greater New Orleans Foundation (GNFO), SWBNO selected PFM Group Consulting, LLC (PFM) to help us complete a workforce model study. The 20-month effort will identify our best avenues to support a thriving, productive workforce that can consistently deliver excellent service. An employee steering committee will work alongside PFM throughout the study process.





Guided by input from employees across all levels of the utility, the first phase of the project will delineate key focus areas (e.g., recruitment, retention, career development pathways, compensation practices, accountability structures, and diversity, equity, and inclusion) and establish a range of goals for improved workforce outcomes.

## STAFFING

To carry out significant projects successfully – such as Lead and Copper Rule compliance, Smart Metering, and the Backflow Prevention Program – SWBNO needs project managers. While we are fortunate to have excellent talent in house, we need more capacity. Recruitment and hiring efforts for these roles are underway.

SWBNO also began national searches, with the help of an executive recruitment firm, for several key positions: General Superintendent, Chief of Communications, and Human Resources Director. Each position was posted on several national platforms and was accompanied by a brochure outlining the unique opportunities associated with a career at SWBNO. Interviews and offers are anticipated in Q2.

For wider hiring needs at the utility, SWBNO's Human Resources Department began initial planning efforts for an agency-wide career fair in May, where we will target critical vacancies in Networks and a variety of entry-level field positions.

BY THE NUMBERS: JANUARY TO MARCH 2023

**30**

**New Hires**

**401**

**2023 Vacancies as  
of March**