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Duke Energy pushes smart-grid plan for 2017 completion

Utilities tout benefits of smart-grid technology, are sketchy about job creation

Charlotte Business Journal - by [John Downey](#) Senior staff writer

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Duke Energy Carolinas plans to roll out its smart-grid technology years ahead of other major utilities operating in North Carolina, according to presentations made to regulators this week.

Utility representatives jumped at the chance to tell the **N.C. Utilities Commission** the advantages they expect in power transmission, outage detection and repair, and new services to customers.

They were less eager to speculate on what the new technology might mean for jobs across the state.

Commissioners Lorinzo Joyner and ToNola Brown-Bland questioned Don Denton, Duke's point person on its smart-grid programs, on the impact the initiatives will have on employment.

In the short term, Denton said, there will be an increase in jobs as Duke hires information-technology experts and others to develop and install smart-grid systems. "In the long term, some job areas will see an increase and some a decrease," he said.

Pressed further, he said Duke has conducted only preliminary studies. He said those indicate smart grid will produce a net increase in jobs among Duke and the telecom companies and other vendors it will work with. But in an interview afterward, Denton said that doesn't mean the number of jobs at Duke will necessarily increase.

"It would depend on how much work is outsourced and other variables," he said.

He contends smart-grid technology will create demand for new energy-management systems for businesses, residential customers and even utilities.

Overall, that demand will create new jobs across the economy, he said.

Utility representatives said benefits would include improved efficiency for the transmission and distribution systems that carry electricity from power plants to homes and businesses. They would also include technology to improve the efficiency of energy use inside those homes and businesses and encourage energy conservation.

Denton, whose title at Duke is general manager of stimulus management, told the N.C. Utilities Commission the company plans to have its interactive grid operations fully in place in the Carolinas by 2017.

Becky Harrison, director of distribution services for **Progress Energy Inc.**, said Raleigh-based Progress expects it to take 10 to 15 years to get its full program rolled out. That would put those operations in place in 2020 to 2025.

Robert Burnett, director of conservation services for Virginia-based **Dominion Power**, said his company hasn't set a date for rolling out its smart-grid program in North Carolina.

At present, the largest pilot program in the Carolinas is Duke's project involving about 14,000 customers served by its McAlpine substation in south Charlotte. That program involves solar panels, battery technology, smart meters in the homes and a raft of other technology.



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Dominion has larger initiatives — including one to put all 47,000 of its customers in Charlottesville, Va., on a smart grid. But the company doesn't expect to expand that technology to customers in North Carolina as quickly as Duke does.

Smart-grid programs use two-way communication along power lines and a series of digital devices to improve efficiency in energy transmission and use.

But smart-grid initiatives have come under increasing scrutiny from regulators across the nation. For example, Indiana regulators rejected Duke Energy Indiana's proposal for a \$455 million smart-grid project.

The plan had the support of the Indiana Office of Utility Consumer Counselor, The Citizens Action Coalition and groups of industrial customers. But the Indiana commission said the plan failed to make clear how customers would benefit from the large expenditures Duke was proposing.

Duke plans to start operating smart-grid systems in Ohio and Indiana — for which it may receive up to \$200 million in federal economic-stimulus funding — by 2014 or 2015, Denton told N.C. commissioners. Exhibits Duke presented indicated the program in North Carolina could start around 2012, though no firm date is set. Duke expects full implementation to take five years once the rollout starts, Denton said.

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Chris Law February 1, 2010 10:26PM EST

I wonder if this technology will expand into the Durham/Chapel Hill NC area?

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