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BEHIND THE COST OF POWER | PART 2

Planning Today's Transmission Infrastructure for Tomorrow's Power

BY STEVE EPPERSON, CEO, SUNFLOWER ELECTRIC POWER CORPORATION

CO-AUTHORED BY NOLAN NUMRICH, CEO/GENERAL MANAGER, WESTERN COOPERATIVE ELECTRIC

When something works as expected, we often take it for granted. Most of us don't think about the roads, water systems, or electrical infrastructure powering our homes, farms, schools, hospitals, and businesses. Like all critical infrastructure, these systems require ongoing maintenance and strategic investment to continue serving our communities safely and reliably.

In the first article of this series, we introduced the partnership between Western and Sunflower Electric Power Corporation and explained how the cooperative business model keeps decisions local and focused on serving our members. In Part 2, we take a closer look at the transmission system, an essential part of delivering reliable electricity, and how we manage those costs responsibly.

THE FOUNDATION OF RELIABLE POWER

The high-voltage transmission network plays a critical role in the electric grid. Transmission lines move electricity from power plants to local substations, where local cooperatives like Western deliver it to homes and businesses.

Today, Western's wholesale power supplier, Sunflower, maintains nearly 2,347 miles of transmission line across central and western Kansas, along with the substations and equipment needed to provide reliable electric service. Just as homeowners replace a roof or upgrade plumbing before problems occur, utilities evaluate every asset to determine whether maintenance, upgrades, or replacement will provide the greatest long-term value. Planning ahead helps minimize outages, reduce costly repairs, and maintain reliability.

At the same time, the current infrastructure is aging nationwide. The North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC) says "electricity demand is increasing at a pace not seen in decades" as communities grow, and new businesses and industries expand. To meet tomorrow's energy needs, utilities must maintain today's system while strategically expanding the grid for the future.

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Steve Epperson



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Planning Today's Transmission Infrastructure for Tomorrow's Power

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HOW COSTS AND RATES DIFFER

We know rising costs are top of mind for families and businesses, and we are feeling those pressures, too. Like many industries, electric utilities continue to experience higher costs for materials, construction, labor, and financing.

It's important to understand, however, that costs and electric rates are not the same thing.

While operating costs may increase, Sunflower uses several strategies to help stabilize electric rates. These include operating power plants efficiently, planning and investing carefully in transmission infrastructure, participating in Southwest Power Pool's energy market, managing finances responsibly, and growing the system thoughtfully.

MANAGING RESOURCES RESPONSIBLY

As not-for-profit cooperatives, Sunflower and Western provide reliable electric service while making responsible decisions on behalf of members like you. That means focusing on the costs we can control.

Instead of waiting for equipment to fail, Sunflower uses inspection data and planning tools to focus maintenance where it will make the biggest difference. This helps balance risk and reliability and make informed decisions about maintaining and modernizing our system.

Sunflower crews also use advanced technologies, including aerial and infrared inspections, to detect changing line clearances, vegetation concerns, structural wear, and overheating equipment that routine inspections may miss. When small issues are addressed early, we help prevent larger repairs and support reliability.

Likewise, transmission structures receive regular inspections above and below ground. When inspectors identify minor deterioration, treatments such as preservative pole wraps can

often extend the life of a wood pole and delay replacement while maintaining safety and reliability. In many cases, aerial inspections also allow Sunflower to replace an individual crossarm rather than an entire transmission structure, which reduces costs and extends asset life.

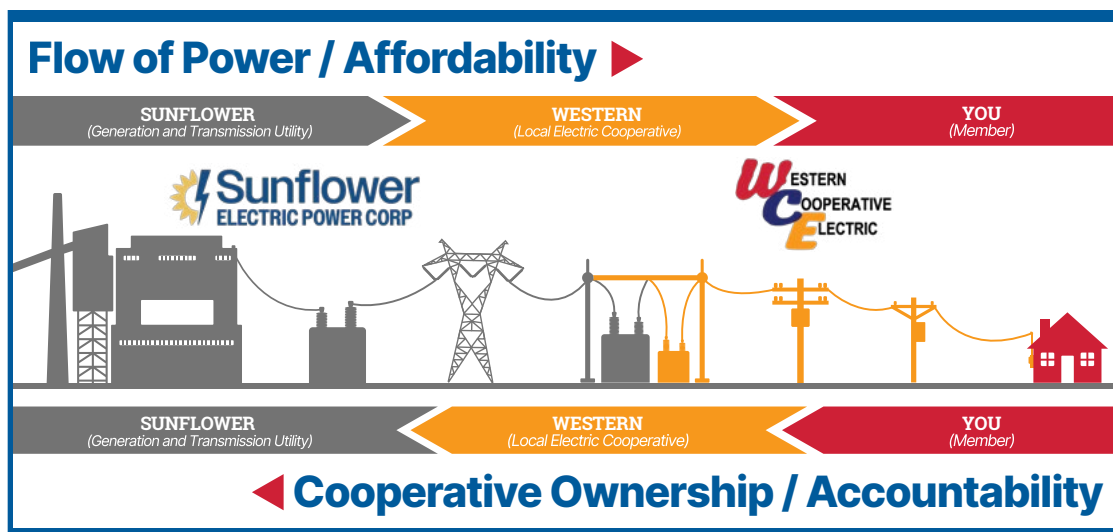
Sometimes, managing members' dollars responsibly means investing a little more today to save significantly more tomorrow. For example, Sunflower strategically installs ductile iron poles in locations near highway, railroad, creek, and distribution line crossings. Although they cost 5–8% more upfront than wood poles, which have an average service life of about 75 years, steel poles are designed to last 100+ years. Their longer service life, combined with better resistance to severe weather and vehicle impacts, reduces replacement needs and lowers long-term ownership costs.

These examples reflect an important principle: The lowest upfront cost does not always create the best long-term value if it leads to more repairs, a shorter service life, or higher long-term expenses. Using members' dollars wisely is more than a promise; it is our responsibility.

LOOKING AHEAD

As electricity demand grows, transmission infrastructure is just one piece of a much larger story. In future articles, we will explore the factors influencing the wholesale cost of electricity, including power generation, regional energy market dynamics, supply chain challenges, and the steps cooperatives take to help provide long-term rate stability.

Through every challenge and opportunity, one thing remains unchanged: the partnership between Sunflower and Western. Together, we remain committed to planning carefully, investing wisely, and managing every dollar responsibly so we can provide reliable electric service for our members and communities.



Electricity flows one direction. Accountability flows the other. One of the unique advantages of the cooperative model is the people making decisions about your power supply are accountable to you, the member. Western and Sunflower work together to make decisions focused on reliability, responsible planning and the long-term interests of our members and local communities.

What is Electric DEMAND?

Have you ever wondered what “demand” means when it comes to electricity? While most people think about how much electricity they use, demand is all about when they use it.

Think of it this way: if you turn on your oven, clothes dryer, dishwasher, and water heater all at the same time, the highest level of electricity your home uses during any one-hour period is called your peak demand.

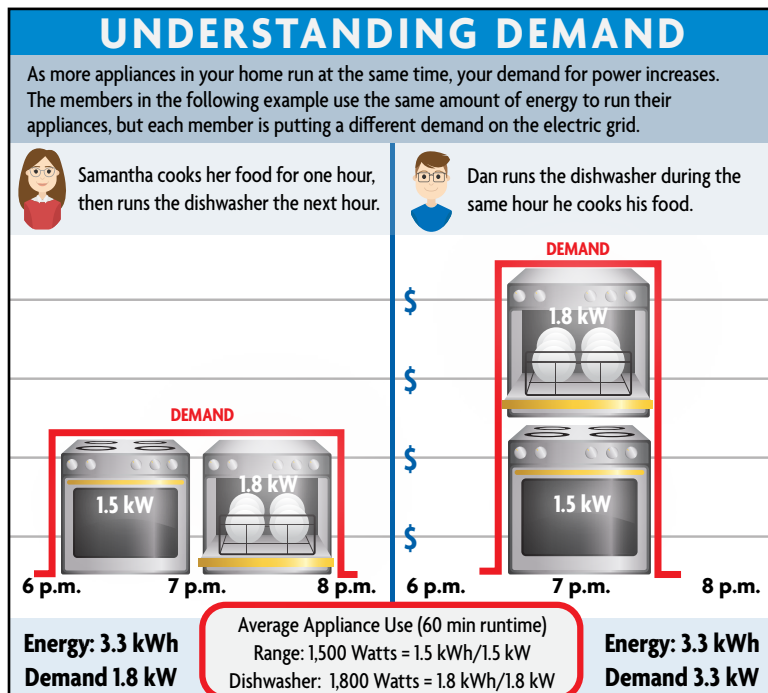
Now imagine spreading those same activities throughout the day. You would likely use the same amount of electricity overall, but your peak demand would be lower because you’re not asking for it all at once.

At WCE, we don’t have designated “peak hours,” and your electric bill isn’t based on what time of day you use electricity. However, understanding your own peak demand can help you become more aware of how your home uses energy.

On a larger scale, the electric grid works much the same way. When many homes and businesses are using large amounts of electricity at the same time — especially during extremely hot or cold weather — it places greater demand on the entire electric system.

Simple changes, like running the dishwasher after dinner, or waiting to do laundry until another appliance has finished, can help spread out your home’s electricity use.

Understanding demand isn’t about using less electricity — it’s about using it wisely. By becoming more aware of when you use electricity, you can better understand your own energy use and help us continue providing safe and reliable service to all of our members.



WHY SAFETY COMES BEFORE RESTORATION

When the power goes out, crews work as quickly as possible to restore service — but safety must come first.

When severe weather or equipment failures cause an outage, members naturally want to know one thing: “When will my power be back on?”

While restoring power quickly is always the goal, the first priority is ensuring the safety of the public and our employees.

Before restoration begins, crews follow a series of important steps designed to protect lives and prevent further damage.

STEP 1: IDENTIFY HAZARDS

The first task is locating the source of the outage and identifying any immediate dangers. Crews look for:

- ▶ Downed power lines
- ▶ Broken poles
- ▶ Damaged transformers
- ▶ Fallen trees
- ▶ Flooded equipment

Any situation involving energized equipment must be treated as dangerous until proven otherwise.

STEP 2: SECURE THE AREA

If power lines are down or equipment is damaged, crews work to secure the area and protect the public.

Members should always stay at least 30 feet away from downed power lines and assume they are energized.

STEP 3: ASSESS THE DAMAGE

Once the area is safe, crews determine what repairs are needed and what materials and personnel will be required.

Sometimes repairs can be completed in minutes. Major storm damage may require several hours or even days.

STEP 4: RESTORE THE LARGEST NUMBER OF MEMBERS FIRST

The electric system is restored in a specific order. Typically, crews restore:

- ▶ Transmission facilities
- ▶ Substations
- ▶ Main distribution lines
- ▶ Neighborhood and lateral lines
- ▶ Individual services

This approach restores power to the greatest number of members as quickly as possible.

STEP 5: CONTINUE UNTIL EVERY MEMBER HAS POWER

Even after most members have service restored, crews continue working until every outage is addressed.

Often, the final outages take the longest because they affect only a small number of locations and may involve extensive repairs.

Small Change. Big Difference.

Every day, Western Cooperative Electric members prove that even small acts of kindness can make a lasting impact.

Through Operation Round-Up, participating members round up their monthly electric bill to the nearest dollar. Those spare cents are combined to support Western Cares, helping neighbors facing unexpected hardships throughout Western Cooperative Electric's service territory. On average, members donate only a few dollars each year, but together those contributions create meaningful change.

At Western Cooperative Electric, we believe communities are strongest when neighbors help neighbors. Thank you to every member who participates in Operation Round-Up and helps make a difference — one penny at a time. If you would like to round up your electric bill, please call our office to enroll.



If your machinery, vehicle or other equipment makes contact with a power line, guy wire or electrical box, do not get out of your cab. Stray power could energize your equipment and the ground.

TO AVOID ELECTROCUTION:

- ▶ Call 911 and wait for us to arrive to cut the power.
- ▶ Wait to exit your cab until the power is de-energized.

If you need to exit to escape smoke or fire, jump out without touching any part of the tractor or vehicle, and hop away as far as you can, keeping both feet together as you hop.

SOURCE: WWW.SAFELECTRICITY.ORG

Youth Build Leadership Skills at Cooperative Youth Leadership Camp

Western Cooperative Electric was proud to sponsor **WYATT DIXSON** and **LEVI SULLIVAN** to attend the Cooperative Youth Leadership Camp (CYLC) near Steamboat Springs, Colorado, this summer.



Western Cooperative Electric was proud to sponsor Wyatt Dixon (left) and Levi Sullivan to attend the Cooperative Youth Leadership Camp in Steamboat Springs, Colorado, this summer.

Throughout the week, students participated in leadership

activities, learned about the cooperative business model, and built lasting friendships with other students from across the region.

Levi shared, "I wish I knew prior to camp how fun it would be and how many new friends I would make."

"I was most affected by the first speaker when he called me up and said I had showed courage by standing up there," Wyatt said.

Western Cooperative Electric is proud to invest in future leaders by providing opportunities that help students build confidence, develop leadership skills and create lifelong connections.



Students from Kansas, Colorado, Oklahoma and Wyoming gather for a photo during Cooperative Youth Leadership Camp.