



Sewerage and Water Board of New Orleans

Customer Advisory Committee Meeting

April 9, 2021 12-1:30pm

Via Zoom:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86195169642>

Meeting ID: 861 9516 9642

One tap mobile

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### Agenda

- I. Roll Call
- II. Presentation Items
  - a. Automated Metering Infrastructure Project –  
Jacobs and Bright Moments
- III. Discussion Items
- IV. Adjourn



# SEWERAGE AND WATER BOARD

## Memorandum

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**Date:** March 26, 2021

**To:** Ghassan Korban, Executive Director

**From:** Tyler Antrup, Director of Planning and Strategy

**CC:** Customer Advisory Committee,  
Rene Gonzalez, Chief Customer Officer

**Re:** Customer Advisory Committee feedback on billing and customer service

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### *Background*

On March 12, 2021, The Customer Advisory Committee met to discuss meter reading and billing issues. There was an extremely productive conversation, and many members followed up with emails with additional feedback and observations.

### *Key Takeaways*

In general, emails contained the following key points and questions:

- With transition to AMI, look at a program to continue manual readings for a percentage of meters that have transitioned to AMI - rotating the scope monthly. Will ensure accuracy.
- Need to address customers that are currently being undercharged with AMI transition.
- Can water be reduced as customers become delinquent similar to an unlimited data throttling model with cell phones?
- Can Federal COVID money be used to address backlog of delinquent accounts? Is there data that shows difference between accounts that were already delinquent pre-COVID and those that are COVID-specific?
- How are delinquencies addressed for rental properties? Can liens be put on the property?
- If meter readings are used to determine usage, why do households feel like their usage is overestimated?
- Billing dispute process is a problem- customers should be notified if usage is creeping up to mitigate against high bills.

- Several members opened their meters and found them to be either buried, under water, or scratched to the point of being unreadable.
- How are customers who are estimated into the over 3,000 gallons/p/month rate but use less dealt with?

I would suggest we take 10-15 minutes at the beginning of the April 9, 2021 meeting to answer these questions and address the feedback.



# **CUSTOMER ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

**April 9, 2021**

# AGENDA

- Roll Call
- What we heard
- AMI Focus Group – Jacobs/Bright Moments
- Next Steps



# WHAT WE HEARD

- AMI
  - With transition to AMI, look at a program to continue manual readings for a percentage of meters that have transitioned to AMI - rotating the scope monthly to ensure accuracy. (Alicia)
  - Need to address customers that are currently being undercharged with AMI transition. (Alicia)
  - Can water be reduced as customers become delinquent similar to an unlimited data throttling model with cell phones?



# WHAT WE HEARD

- Billing/Delinquencies
  - Can Federal COVID money be used to address backlog of delinquent accounts?
    - Is there data that shows difference between accounts that were already delinquent pre-COVID and those that are COVID-specific?
  - How are delinquencies addressed for rental properties? Can liens be put on the property?
  - If meter readings are used to determine usage, why do households feel like their usage is overestimated?
  - Billing dispute process is a problem- customers should be notified if usage is creeping up to mitigate against high bills.
  - How are customers who are estimated into the over 3,000 gallons/p/month rate but use less dealt with?



# WHAT WE HEARD

- Several members opened their meters and found them to be either buried, under water, or scratched to the point of being unreadable.



# Let's talk AMI...

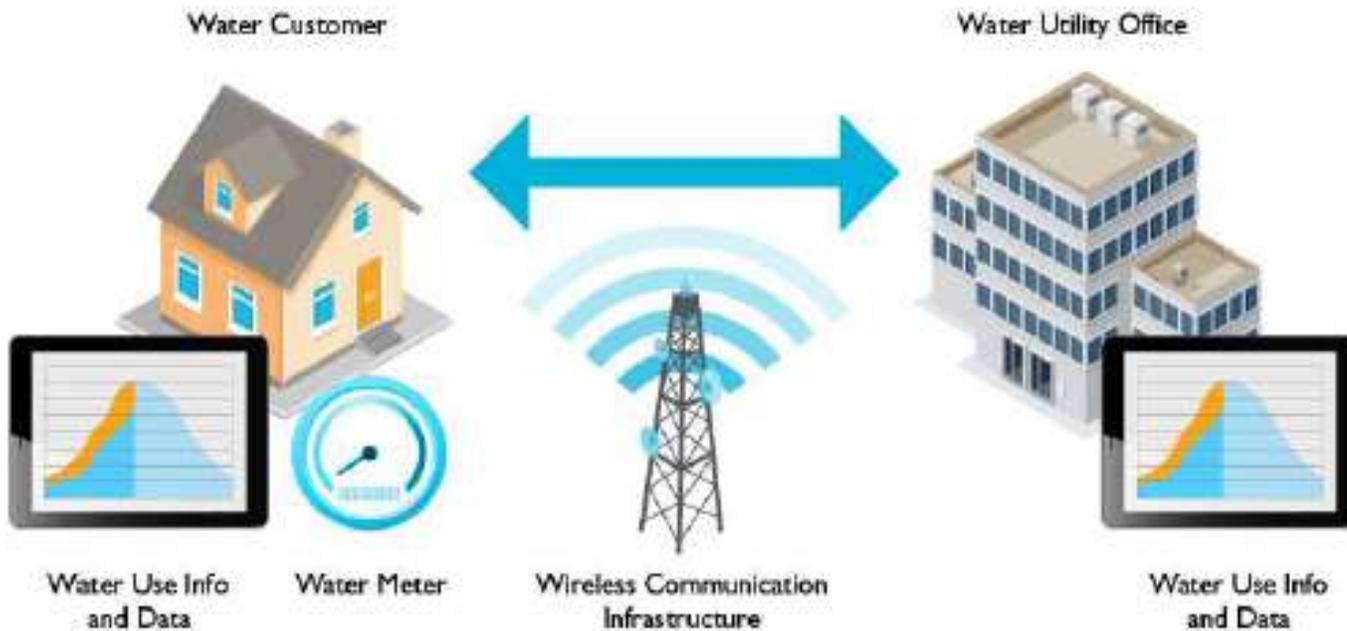


- The Technology itself
- Our AMI Program – Objectives, Schedule, Customer Impacts
- Our plans for engaging customers in AMI
  - Current Status
  - Proposed Messages and Brand
  - Stakeholders and Tactics
  - Up Next: Meter Survey

# AMI technology supports our customer, operations, & environmental goals



## Automated Meter Infrastructure and Smart Water Metering



## SWBNO Objectives for AMI

- Better Customer Service
- Operational Efficiency
- Water Conservation
- Informed Rate Design

# We are planning AMI deployment carefully to ensure benefits and avoid pitfalls



# Building acceptance for AMI will include customer, communities, and staff



## Customer Service

- Understanding the customer drivers
- Program acceptance
- Tools to manage resistance
- Ongoing engagement
- Increased trust in the Board's ability to serve



## Community Partnerships

- Strong partnerships
- Increased awareness and appreciation
- Touchpoints for monitoring public opinion



## Organizational Readiness

- Ability to use AMI tools and information
- Employee buy-in
- Increased staff efficiency and skills
- Stronger pride of service and morale
- Knowledge/skills transfer

# Communicating AMI begins with understanding current opinion



## Lack of confidence

- Lack of trust with the Board’s ability to serve and provide accurate bills
- Perception of dysfunction
- “Reputation Hangover” from Katrina

## Want modern systems that work

- Frustration with current systems
- Insufficient infrastructure investment
- Chronic billing issues with Entergy, despite the deployment of smart meters

## Knowledge gaps

- Lack of information/understanding
- Employees not invested; not informed

## Cost Sensitivity?

- Recent rate increases may make people sensitive to program costs/inefficiency

# The “compelling value” for AMI is based on what we believe people will most appreciate about the new technology



## Most Recognized Benefits

- Transparent Consumption
- Accurate billing
- Leak identification
- Better, more efficient service
- More personal control
- Environmental Protection
- Budgeting
- Ease of online billing
- Utility benefits

## Most Common Concerns

- Radio Frequency Emissions
- Privacy & Security
- Meter reading accuracy
- Higher bills
- Cost of new meter/installation
- Program cost drives up water fees
- Deployment inconveniences
- Loss of Jobs (meter readers)
- Language and Cultural Barriers

### The compelling value for S&WB Customers:

*The value of AMI is that it enables customers to use 21st century technology to manage and track their own water use, so they can trust in the accuracy of their water bills.*

# Key messages will help us stay consistent with that compelling value throughout planning and deployment



## Proposed key messages:

### IT'S RELIABLE

- ▶ AMI is a **proven technology** that will bring S&WB's metering and billing into the 21st century

### IT'S RESPONSIVE

- ▶ S&WB is making sure that AMI will deliver what **customers have been asking for** and will be deployed in line with their preferences

### IT'S USEFUL

- ▶ AMI will provide customers with many meaningful **benefits**

### IT'S OURS

- ▶ AMI is an important element to our Fair Share **modernization vision** for New Orleans, while still preserving our heritage.

# Having a “brand” for the AMI program will provide broad appeal and immediate recognition



Potential taglines:

- *your 21st century water management tool*
- *the power to manage your water bill*
- *tracking your water is now in your hands*



We will engage stakeholders to help us get the word out and to help us design messages and tactics to grow positive response.



End Users

- Residential and Business Customers in the meter survey process



First Line of Defense

- 52WATER Operators - S&WB Employees – Board members
- Councilpersons and their staffs / Elected Officials and their staffs
- Neighborhood Engagement Office (Neighborhood Associations)



Trusted Insiders &  
Influencers

- Special Interests Groups (Council on Aging – Hispanic – Vietnamese - Low Income – Disability advocacy groups – Water Collaborative)
- Business Community (Chamber – BGR – Black and Hispanic Chambers)
- Customer Advisory Council



# We will soon begin a meter inspection plan in the field to discover “what is out there”

## Objective

- Inform AMI meter replacement program so we can plan efficiently and cause the least amount of customer disruption

## Field Work

- Physically inspect/measure (no adjustments, no maintenance, no disconnection of water)
  - 10% of residential meters – sample all billing routes
  - All business meters
  - Attempt to locate 500 “lost” meters

## Communication

- S&WB letters to customers, informing them of program and work to be done
- ID badges; vehicle branding; vests
- *For further information* cards (call 52Water)
- Direct outreach to Neighborhood Associations



# NEXT STEPS

- Next Meeting will be May 14<sup>th</sup>
- Topic?





**THANK YOU**



## **Sewerage & Water Board of New Orleans Meter Assessment Project**

S&WB-contracted field technicians are inspecting water meters in neighborhoods across New Orleans, in preparation for an upcoming meter upgrade project.

This is a physical inspection only and they will *not* be reading your meter for billing purposes.

Your water service will *not* be interrupted during the assessment.

Please call 52Water if you have questions or concerns.

**Thank you for your cooperation.**



## **Sewerage & Water Board of New Orleans Meter Assessment Project**

**Inspection purpose:** To record information that will help SW&B upgrade water meters efficiently and with minimal customer disruption.

**Project area:** The inspection will sample all neighborhoods served by S&WB.

**Project duration:** The inspection process is expected to be complete by October 2021.

**For more information:** Please call 52Water.

**Thank you for your cooperation.**

Name, Address, etc.

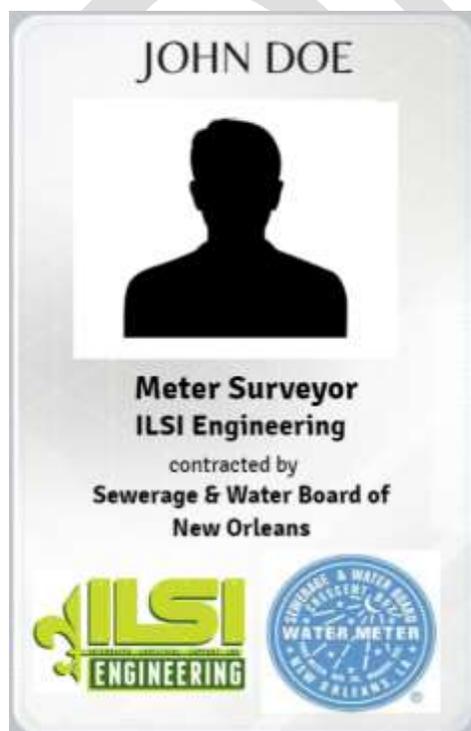
Dear Valued Customer:

The Sewerage & Water Board of New Orleans values our relationship with our customers, and we are working daily to improve your customer experience and restore your confidence in our water service. In our efforts to continue this important work, we are in the process of planning for a new, more reliable way of serving you.

Starting in May of 2021, S&WB and its local engineering partner, ILSI Engineering, will be going into the field to physically inspect water meters. This work is not related to your monthly meter read. It is an assessment process that will help us plan and implement a future meter upgrade program in a way that is most efficient and least disruptive for our customers.

***Project Details:***

- A meter surveyor will visit *only* the public area where your meter is located to conduct the assessment. You need not to be home at the time of the visit.
- The surveyor will note the meter location, type, size, cover type, and age and may take a picture of the meter and/or the meter box.



- **Your security is of prime importance to us. Although the individual will not be dressed in S&WB attire, they have been authorized by S&WB to be on your premises. Surveyors will carry proper identification, will wear a company safety vest, and have an ILSI logo on their service vehicles.**
- You will not need to interact with the surveyor and the assessment should take approximately 10 -15 minutes.
- Your water service will not be interrupted during the assessment.
- Covid-19 protocols will be adhered to, including social distancing and the wearing of masks.

***Frequently Asked Questions from Customers Regarding the Assessment:***

Q. Where can I get more information about the survey and/or report an issue?

A. Please call 52Water (M-F, 8am-5pm) or send your question to [customerservice@SWBNO.com](mailto:customerservice@SWBNO.com).

Q. How long will the meter assessment project last?

A. The survey will begin in May and is expected to be complete by the end of October.

Q. Do I need to do anything to prepare for the assessment?

A. To help keep everyone safe, dogs and other domestic pets will need to be kept out of the way during the on-site inspection. As always, please keep meter box lids unobstructed.

If you have any additional questions, feel free to contact us at 52water.

Stay safe and thank you for your cooperation!

**Who should sign this?**