

Eastside's energy future

PSE's view

In late 2013, PSE unveiled Energize Eastside, a proposal to run 18 miles of high-voltage transmission wires through five Eastside cities: Renton, Newcastle, Bellevue, Redmond and Kirkland.

Energize Eastside's website states "Growth studies project that demand for reliable power will exceed capacity as early as 2017. This doesn't mean the lights will go out, but without substantial electrical infrastructure upgrades and aggressive conservation efforts, the Eastside's power system will lose redundancy, **increasing the possibility** of outages for as many as 60,000 customers."

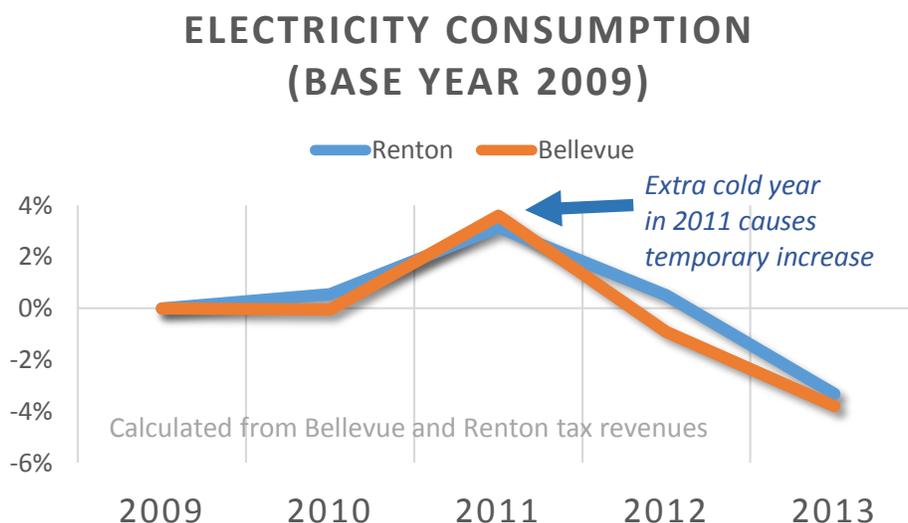
CENSE's view

Concerned citizens formed the Coalition of Eastside Neighborhoods for Sensible Energy (CENSE.org) to ask some hard questions. Is PSE overstating the need and urgency for larger electrical infrastructure? Were the solutions that PSE eliminated evaluated fairly? Do citizens and their elected representatives have a say in our energy future?

Trends in electricity demand

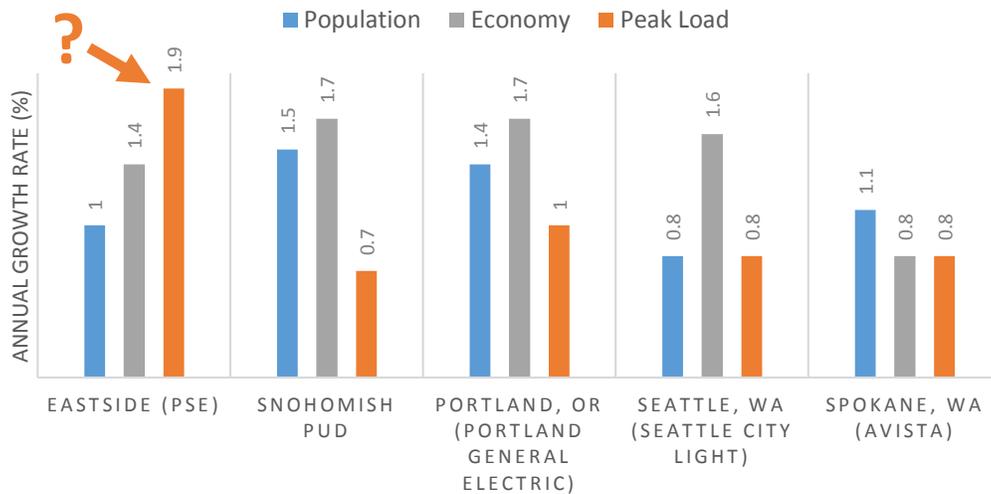
The Energize Eastside website implies that energy demand is driven mainly by population and economic growth. At the same time, technology and energy efficiency are reducing demand. In recent years, this downward pressure has been the dominant trend, and declining consumption is seen at the national level as well as in PSE's service area, where electricity sales have been shrinking since 2008.

To be clear, total consumption is slightly different than peak loads (or "demand" as PSE uses the term). But consumption and demand are related, as PSE notes in their documents. PSE has not provided consumption data specifically for the Eastside, so CENSE used revenue generated by electricity taxes in Bellevue and Renton to produce estimates for consumption in those cities. The graphs below show flat or declining consumption for every year except 2011, when the Eastside had colder weather than normal. Contrary to PSE's inferences, increases in population and economic activity have not led to rising electricity use during the last 5 years.

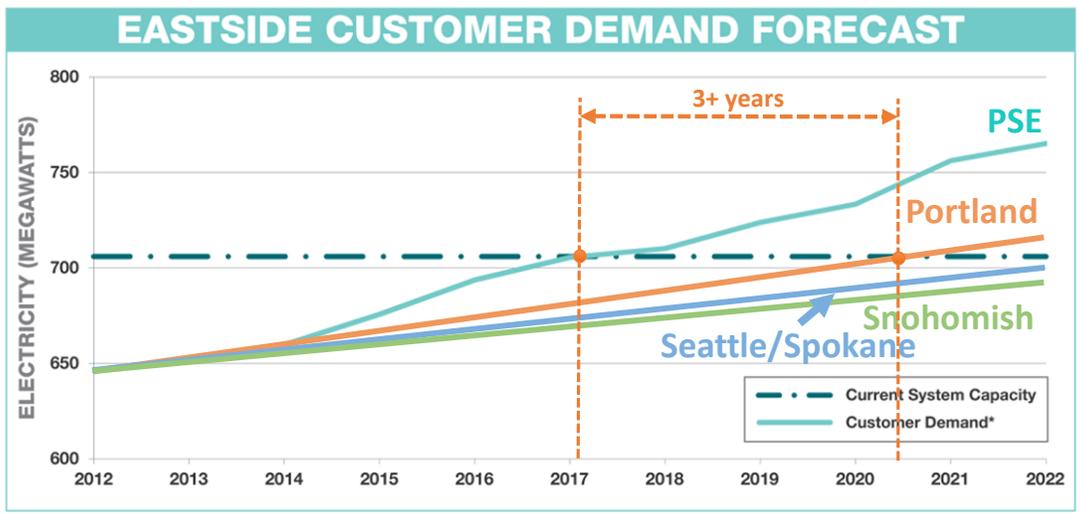


PSE's Customer Demand Forecast shows electricity demand increasing at an average rate of 1.9% per year. CENSE members wondered how that compares to the demand forecasts of other utilities in the Pacific Northwest. We reviewed the Integrated Resource Plans of utilities serving Seattle, Snohomish, Spokane, and Portland. The following graph shows our findings. Although other utilities are forecasting roughly similar rates of population and economic growth, PSE's demand forecast is higher than any other utility. PSE's prediction is more than twice as high as those for Seattle and Snohomish.

GROWTH FORECASTS: POPULATION/ECONOMY VS. PEAK LOAD



Why does CENSE care about the growth rate of electricity demand? If the Eastside reduced its demand rates to those projected by other utilities (by specific action or better forecasting methodology), the need for larger transmission lines would be delayed for at least 3 years, as shown in the graph below. This extra breathing room would allow time for emerging electrical production and transmission technologies to mature and become cost effective. We would have time to consider solutions that better integrate community values such as aesthetics, health and safety, and environmental concerns.



A comprehensive solution

Energize Eastside raises an important question: how is our energy policy determined?

When PSE announced this project, residents expected to sit down with PSE and our elected representatives to discuss community values and necessary compromises. Instead, without any public input, PSE eliminated solutions being used in other cities such as grid batteries, peak load generators, and a variety of demand response programs. The company deployed a multi-million dollar PR campaign to promote the appearance of public involvement in the only remaining “choice” – which route towering new poles and wires would take through our cities.

This is a short-sighted way to approach the Eastside’s energy future. We want a **comprehensive plan** that isn’t motivated by the bottom line of a single company. A plan that considers impacts on health and safety, aesthetics and livability, and our legacy. And a plan that recognizes the broader implications of our energy choices.

For example, 30% of the Eastside’s electricity comes from a coal-burning plant in Colstrip, Montana. The Colstrip plant emits more climate-changing carbon than any other facility in the West. PSE has already paid a portion of a \$25 million fine for water pollution leaking from toxic coal ash storage ponds.

How can we get a plan that reflects our values and preserves our cities and our environment? The first step is to engage our city councils. Due to complicated and antiquated regulations at the state level, only Eastside city councils have the authority to review this project and approve construction permits, and Bellevue is the lead agency. CENSE urges all Eastside residents to write to their city council members and express their opinions regarding this project.

In your letter, you can ask for better information about the need for this project and an unbiased evaluation of alternatives. You can mention simple steps that will reduce peak loads, delaying the need until other solutions become more mature and cost effective. Residents could take advantage of incentives to switch to LED lighting and more efficient appliances. Policymakers could change city codes that allow developers to install electric heat. (Electric heat is inexpensive for developers but expensive for their customers, and it causes problematic electricity spikes on cold winter days.) PSE could use demand response programs to smooth out spikes in demand that strain infrastructure and require more coal to be burned. According to a Federal Energy Regulatory Commission report, Washington ranks 48th in the nation in deployment of peak-load reduction programs, so we have opportunities to improve.

Eastside opportunities

The Eastside is a high-tech, highly educated community that appreciates the natural beauty that surrounds us. The path we choose will chart a path for communities across the nation who are looking for ways to grow without creating new environmental problems.

The financial website *24/7 Wall St.* rated Bellevue as the second most livable city in the nation. This is the result of the hard work and sacrifice of leaders who have preceded us. Now it’s our turn to shape the future of our cities. Will we allow choices that degrade the Eastside and its environment? Or will we stand firm so our children and grandchildren inherit the beautiful cities we love?



CENSE.org
Coalition of Eastside Neighborhoods
for Sensible Energy