

THE FRANKLIN DAILY

Appalachian Power Co. Spending \$82.7 Million on Local Projects

BRIAN KELLEY

Electricity should begin to flow this week to the new Lake Forest substation in Botetourt County, the first of four projects in the Roanoke region that Appalachian Power Co. says are designed to bolster its ability to meet increased demand and to improve reliability.

Appalachian will spend \$82.7 million by the time the projects are completed in 2012. The company then will file a transmission rider with the state to seek to have customers pay for the work, which likely will mean a 7 cent monthly increase for the typical residential customer. That filing will be in addition to the base rate filings the company is required by law to file every two years.

For now, more than 700 people, both from the utility and hired contractors, are working or will work on the projects designed with two purposes in mind: carrying more electrical load, and building so-called “double contingency” reliability to meet updated national standards. That means if one high-voltage line goes down, a second will be available to carry its load.

“It’s just unbelievable all the people who touch a project like this,” said Shawn Smith, project manager for the Matt

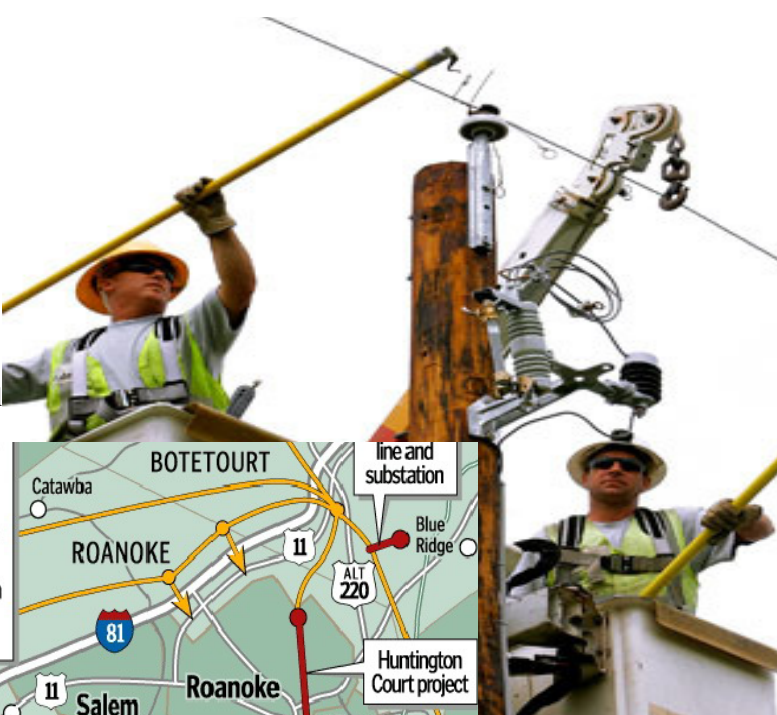
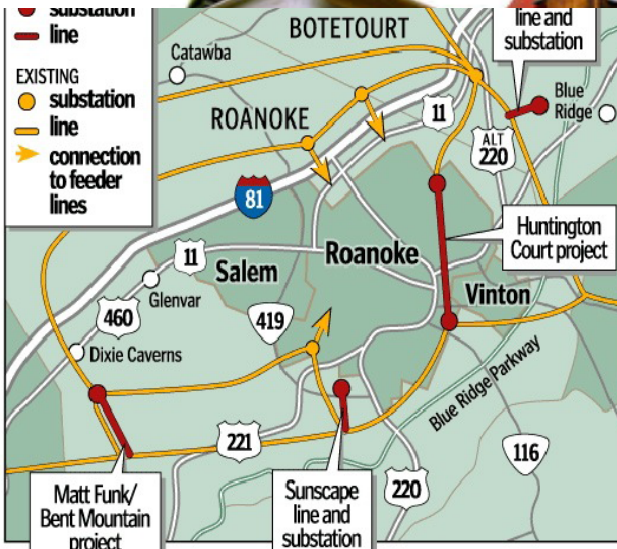


Photo Courtesy: John Smith



Funk and Huntington Court reliability upgrades.

The work amounts to the most substantial physical improvements to the electrical system in the Roanoke area in the past two decades, said Paul Hanson, a senior engineer in asset planning who went to work for the utility in 1990.

“These aren’t projects you design overnight,” he said. Each has gone through a three-year process, involving meetings with affected property owners and residents and obtaining state approval. In two projects, substations were moved from originally proposed locations based on residents’ suggestions.

All are designed with the goal of keeping the lights on, the heat pumps humming and industries that employ thousands supplied with power in the face of cars hitting electrical poles, ice and wind storms, lightning and even that bushy-tailed nemesis of reliability, Sciurus carolinensis.

“Squirrels get on the power lines and where do they go? They follow the line back to the substation,” Hanson said. To foil them, baffles are installed on the lines outside the substation’s fence line.

The projects include:

The newly completed Lake Forest substation, located off Laymantown Road north of Rainbow Forest Baptist Church in Botetourt County. This project will ease the load on an existing substation near the Bonsack Walmart and improve electric service reliability for people who live near Coyne Mountain. The \$12 million project, due to be finished Tuesday, was approved by the state in 2008. It will give the utility another source to switch customers to when an outage occurs and will respond to the area’s higher risk for outages -- what spokesman Todd Burns calls the “tree-to-customer ratio.” In areas that are heavily forested, there’s more chance of an outage caused by fallen trees or limbs.

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Woman Charged for Death of 77 Year Old Boyfriend

DUNCAN ADAMS

A 29-year-old woman faces a first-degree murder charge in the beating death of her 77-year-old boyfriend in his Bedford County home.

A Bedford County grand jury returned the indictment Tuesday.

Kristina Pongracz previously had been charged with aggravated malicious wounding after a deputy from the Bedford County Sheriff’s Office found William Herchenrider bleeding profusely and on all fours May 4 at the large home Pongracz shared with him in Goodview.



Photo Courtesy: Bedford County Jail

Herchenrider survived but spent months in the hospital and an acute-care facility recovering. Then, on Aug. 25, just hours after his return home, Herchenrider died while in hospice care, said Assistant Commonwealth’s Attorney Stephanie Ayers.

In Bedford County Circuit Court last month, Ayers told the court that state medical examiners released autopsy results in December that ruled that Herchenrider’s death was a homicide. Forensic evidence linked his death to complications that resulted from the beating, Ayers said.

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State Legislators Adopt \$80 Billion Budget

JULIAN WALKER

Millions in state funding that local school systems feared they would lose was preserved in the compromise state budget adopted Thursday evening.

The revised two-year spending plan features roughly \$75 million more for public education than the introduced budget.

It includes “hold harmless” funding to help school divisions potentially hurt by declining local revenue and revisions to the local composite index, a complex formula that determines school funding based on measures of community wealth. Gov. Bob McDonnell’s budget proposed using that money for other priorities, a move that would have cost school systems in South Hampton Roads.

Enhanced education funding was among many revisions to the blended biennial budget negotiated by [See Page 2B](#)

Cell Phone Use Increases Brain Activity

MICHELLE SINHA

A new study has shown that cell phone use changes brain activity, once again raising the question of whether cell phone radiation can cause long-term brain damage.

Recent research revealed people holding a phone to their ear for 50-minute period saw an increase in brain glucose metabolism, according to a study in a recent issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association. Based on the study, conducted by the National Institutes of Health, it cannot yet be determined whether there could be long-term damage, such as cancer, from cell phone use.

“The purpose of the study was to try to find out if the human brain is sensitive to the weak electromagnetic phenoms that are emitted from cell phones,” said Dr. Nora Volkow of the National Institutes of Health in a press telebriefing on Thursday. Volkow conducted the randomized study along with other researchers from the National Institutes of Health.



Photo Courtesy: Flickr.com

In the study, 47 healthy people were tested over a one-year period. Participants had cell phones placed on their left and right ears. One cell phone was activated but muted for 50 minutes, the other was off. After that, the subjects were tested with both cell phones turned off.

With the phones at their ears, the subjects’ brains were scanned using a sophisticated imaging technique. Volkow, who conducted the study

along with colleagues at the National Institute on Drug Abuse, said the brain scans showed heightened metabolic activity in brain cells closest to the activated devices. “The human brain is sensitive to the electromagnetic radiation that is emitted from cell phones,” Volkow said.

While conducting the observations, researchers noticed a significant increase in glucose metabolism in areas of the brain that were closest to the

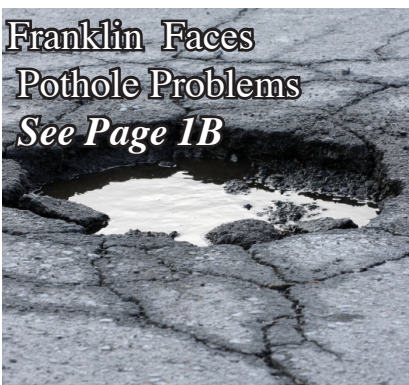
antenna, Volkow said. Areas that were further away did not show brain activity changes.

“The main things that are coming out of a cell phone are microwaves,” said Bradford Barber, a research professor of radiology at the University of Arizona. Barber is also a physicist that develops instrumentation in nuclear medicine and he works with gamma rays.

“There’s no clear mechanism for causing cancer with these kinds of microwaves that you would have from a cell phone,” he said.

Gamma rays, X-rays and particles found from radioisotopes can cause cancer at very high levels. It seems unlikely for long wave radiation such as radio waves to cause cancer, Barber said.

“The fact that we are observing changes really highlights the need to do the studies,” Volkow said, “to be properly able to answer the question of whether cell phone exposure could have harmful effects or not.”



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