

# COO of Oncor Electric Delivery: 2022, What's in Store?

The COO of Oncor Electric Delivery,  
Jim Greer,  
told us how he and his team see this new year unfolding  
and what they intend to accomplish,  
with Guidehouse's Michelle Fay sharing the questioning  
with PUF's Steve Mitnick



Did you know that Oncor is the largest energy delivery company in Texas? It provides electric utility service to ninety-eight counties including those in and around Dallas, Fort Worth, Midland, Round Rock, Waco, Odessa, and Wichita Falls. While the Lone Star State's energy industry is dynamic and growing, this transformation is not without great challenges, as 2021 proved.

PUF's Steve Mitnick and I sat down with Oncor's Chief Operating Officer, Jim Greer, to hear what the person who oversees all distribution and transmission engineering construction, maintenance and operations, and systems operations anticipates in 2022. What lies ahead for his company, our industry within Texas, and our industry nationwide?

– Michelle Fay, Partner, Guidehouse

**Guidehouse's Michelle Fay:** As we begin the new year, share with us what your view is on what's in store, both for your company as well as for the industry in general.

**Jim Greer:** First of all, here in Texas, it's just incredible the amount of growth we continue to see. You may be sick of hearing about the Texas miracle, but we're still seeing inward migration of a thousand residents a day. The state population is expected to double by 2050. Some trends may have put that quicker than that, but that's big.

By comparison, we see a lot of utilities that may not have had that level of organic growth elsewhere. Clearly, everybody is doubling down on investments, whether that's for resiliency, to keep up with growth. That's the story of industry. Everybody's increasing their capital budget – for good reasons.

That growth is seen across our system. You may recall our service area runs from the Red River, down to Austin, out to the oil patch in the Permian Basin, out to the Piney Woods of east Texas, so it's about a third of Texas, serving about eleven million Texans.

It's a big service area, but we're seeing growth all over. It's easy to talk about Dallas and the metroplex. But we serve the I-35 corridor going down to Austin. It's booming, as well as the I-45 down to Houston.

We've also got a record number of transmission interconnect requests in queue, the highest number we've ever had. That's a mix of transmission level retail customers, as well as new generation coming online.

So, with the diversity of the types of growth we're seeing, we're already back up to pre-pandemic levels from a growth standpoint. That's the big story for us. We lost a little bit of steam during the initial pandemic impacts of 2020, but we're past that now.

**Guidehouse's Michelle Fay:** What does success look like at the end of 2022?

**Jim Greer:** We're all about trying to enable our customers' needs and desires. That's what we all do. One thing is making sure we can accommodate all the requests for services that we receive.

But in particular, here's an interesting one, is that oil patch load, the Permian Basin load, is continuing to grow year after year. And even with the growth they have, they're also thinking

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about their ESG objectives. They want to take some of the processes that are currently powered by diesel generation and ask, how do we electrify those?

The challenge we have is, first of all, ensuring we've got the capacity to serve their existing activities. But then how do we also enable them to make greater strides in their ESG goals and objectives? That's kind of a new twist, a new challenge we're focused on. In general, being able

to enable their needs is certainly an objective.

By extension is the number of crypto loads that are coming to Texas. How do we serve that load? It's a bit different load than say a traditional data center, but these are folks that come in, they need service fast, and they need a lot of power. That's another particularly challenging thing we're focused on.

Those are a couple of examples, but in general, how do we best enable our consumers' desires and objectives? We're all about trying to enable their success, whether that's a residential consumer in east Texas, or oil and gas in west Texas, or that crypto miner that has been lured to Texas. It's fun.

**Guidehouse's Michelle Fay:** You mentioned making significant capital investments. How are you anticipating, or are you anticipating, any impacts to your strategy from the bipartisan infrastructure bill, specifically around building a safer, smarter, more reliable electric grid?

**Jim Greer:** We are not anticipating directly benefiting or utilizing those provisions. We're strictly a delivery company. We have no generation, but if that spurs additional renewable generation or even more traditional generation, that will have an impact on us.

We're not expecting to utilize the provisions of that legislation



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directly, but certainly will be ready to help support our customers that may be.

**PUF's Steve Mitnick:** What are you investing in?

**Jim Greer:** We just presented our board in October with a new five-year capital investment plan, for fifteen billion dollars over five years, so roughly three billion a year. To some companies, that may or may not seem like a lot, but there's no generation involved there, it's strictly T&D.

Two-thirds of that capital is related to growth and expansion. That's something I don't think anybody else, at least in the United States, can claim. But it's around half, or a little bit more than half, in transmission and substation related, and the other half is in distribution expansion.

We are also investing more in our technology space. That's a big component, both in the field from a field automation, field

technology standpoint, and the foundational computing systems to enable artificial intelligence and data analytics. We're in the thick of data analytics.

That's another neat, exciting thing to be involved in, is seeing the creativity and innovation of our employees as they learn how to apply the data analytics in new and different ways.

**PUF's Steve Mitnick:** What your typical day like?

**Jim Greer:** It's a couple things. One is I see myself as more of a coach than a player, making sure we understand what the company's objectives and vision are, and making sure we're aligned around that. And trying to make course corrections when I identify them, which is not very often, as we're very well aligned.

One of my key jobs as a member of the senior leadership team, is to represent the thousands of employees who are in my organization to that senior leadership team. That means getting out and visiting and making sure I understand what the issues are on the front line. Now certainly, my leadership team helps me with that, but you can appreciate it's nothing like hearing it in person.

That's what you need. As we make decisions around personnel policies and things such as our COVID situation, you need to understand what's on the hearts and minds of employees. At the end of the day, when the decisions are made, you should feel good that you understand what they're worried about and you're making decisions that will help enable them in their work life and home life.

**Guidehouse's Michelle Fay:** What type of

impact has COVID had and how are you planning for that in 2022?

**Jim Greer:** From an operational standpoint, we've had very little direct impact from COVID. That's just a testament to our great employees and management, especially the roughly sixty percent of our employees who go to work in the field every day.

We have implemented many new protocols there, and they've been innovative around, how do we stay safe? How do we enact new protocols and procedures and get our work done?

2021 is the highest capital budget we've ever had. It's been the busiest year from looking at capital investment and field activity. Our strong culture has enabled us to move from a normal situation to COVID and that strong culture continues.

But as far as return to workplace plans, we've tried to remain flexible. We've got a lot of employees that do want to be in the

office and work. We appreciate that and we provide them the opportunity to do that. We also understand there are a lot of work groups that can effectively and efficiently perform their jobs remotely.

But what we've tried to do is empower our management team, our leadership team, to make the decisions around what is best for their work group and provide high-level guidance from an HR standpoint about what the bar ditches are – as we say in Texas – and provide the leadership the flexibility to make decisions in concert with that, which allows their teams to be productive and efficient.

Flexibility is paramount. I'm proud about what the organization has been able to accomplish. These are the busiest years we've ever had, and we've had no project slippages, or any slow-down. I'm frankly amazed and impressed.

**PUF's Steve Mitnick:** Continuing with that, what's in store for Oncor's culture and people in 2022?

**Jim Greer:** We are hiring as much as we ever have. It's an interesting job market. People's perspective about work is obviously changing. Not what work is, but how work is performed.

Here again, we're trying to be flexible. A lot of younger employees want to be in the office, especially the newer engineers that are just coming out of school. A lot of this industry is learning on the job, in-person and at the side of an experienced person. How do you replicate that?

We're focused on trying to make sure our practices and our pay policies are attractive. We're implementing more attractive benefits and policies, to be competitive with the rest of the industry.

We're also looking at our pay practices, and our work environment. We're refreshing our physical environment and trying to make sure we have an attractive and fun place to work, should you want to come into the office. That is a focus of ours that has always been there, but we're doubling down on that.

Additionally, the colleges and institutions we're going to, to recruit from, we're expanding that pool. It gets to your point of making sure we've got a good, solid, diverse recruiting activity.

We've been focused on, how do we ensure we've got a good solid pipeline into the types of jobs, to the type of folks we need to hire? We're working with the high schools and the community

colleges in the area so when they graduate from high school, they almost – or already – have an associate degree.

We're reaching deeper into the candidate pool, making sure we've got a diverse population of people who understand that the electric industry provides a great career path.

We're helping enable the transition from high school into higher education. That's been a great partnership with the cities that we serve and that's going to continue to grow.

**Guidehouse's Michelle Fay:** It sounds like your team is optimistic about the new year. Share a little bit more about that and about your plans.


**Jim Greer:** We're very optimistic. It's a great place to be. I feel good about our culture. I feel good about our people, it's a good tempo; everybody's busy, but everybody loves that.

The future is bright here at Oncor. It gives comfort for employees

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to know we are investing in the company, we're investing in our communities, and we are focused on enabling our customers' desires and objectives. That's who we are. If you don't feel good about that, then you need to find a different industry. But it's a great place to be.

While we're not directly involved in things like the generation side and the energy transition, we're an enabler. Being able to connect the renewable generation and battery storage and all that, we are the enabler. That feels good to be able to be a part of the transition to a new energy environment and being part of a neat growth story.

We are optimistic and a bit daunted at times about what's coming our way, but our team can handle it. Our team can get it done. 

### PUF FIVE YEARS AGO: ONCOR'S CFO DON CLEVENGER

"People want to stay at home, age at home. They are going to have a higher and higher expectation for what they need to depend on. They may have health machines that can never go off. People get more and more dependent on their electric devices being on. They don't ever want to see a flicker in their lights.

So one of the things we're always looking at is people's views on cost and reliability. But, as much as they want their reliability to be higher, they don't want to pay for it. Over the next decade we're really going to have to figure out, using technology, how to significantly bring down our reliability metrics without significantly increasing costs."

– Excerpted from January 2017 Public Utilities Fortnightly, pages 27.