

The Red, Blue & Green



Part Three: You Call These Choices?

In Parts One and Two of this series we discussed the reasons why we decided to go shopping for a new power supplier and just what we think our future might look like. We also discussed options for finding the best power supply for the future that we envision. We even talked about the four possible paths we might pursue as described in the book, *Power Down*. This month we are going to continue that discussion and talk about a couple of those options and how they might play out here in Glasgow.



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Power Down.
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First, let's talk just a bit more about known elements of our energy environment today and tomorrow. While we talked a bit last month about how most experts predict a coming peak in our ability to deliver petroleum and natural gas to consumers, followed by a rapid decline, in the near future, we also should talk about how we are causing that decline to come sooner, rather than later, through our American practice of wasteful energy consumption. The average per-capita energy use in our country is more than double the average per-capita use in Europe. Compared to less-industrialized countries, it is even worse. We use perhaps *fifteen* times as much energy per-capita than those countries. Here in Glasgow, our per-capita energy consumption has roughly doubled over the last 20 years! Presently, TVA's demand for electric power is increasing at a rate equal to *ten* Glasgows each year. I think we can all agree that we should not be planning on continuing this rate of

consumption over the next 20 years, there is just so much energy available for us to use and doubling per-capita consumption every 20 years, on top of a growing population, will soon lead us into a very dark world. These are irrefutable facts and must be considered as part of our problem. So, let's talk about two of the paths we might take through this complicated and dangerous minefield leading to our future.

The Last One Standing. "*Damn the torpedoes! Full speed ahead!*" – Admiral David Glasgow Farragut, August 1864, Battle of Mobile Bay. That quote pretty well sums up the underlying philosophy of choosing the "Last One Standing" path toward our energy future. It is the same one we are currently following as a nation and, while it worked out well for Farragut, it needs to be thoroughly considered before we adopt it as our philosophy here in Glasgow.

To choose this path, one would have to assume that the future is going to look just like the past. This is the path of believing that we can continue business as usual. If we believe that oil, natural gas, coal, and uranium supplies are limitless resources and that our whole society should be predicated upon the belief in limitless growth of our economy and, in turn, our consumption of energy, then this path makes a lot of sense. We could simply go back and negotiate a new power contract with TVA and hope for the best.

There is a fair amount of reason to choosing this path. Since TVA is gargantuan, if our society continues down the path of competition with our neighbors for every last barrel of oil or cubic foot of natural gas, being a part of the bigger army might not be a bad place to be. On a national scale we might not be talking in analogies. With dwindling supplies of natural resources, the "Last One Standing" philosophy will surely include armies and wars which will be fought to get access to those resources (in fact, some would say that this is already taking place). But locally, and with respect to the resources needed to produce our electric power supply, these battles will likely continue to be fought with money. In other words, as access to natural gas for use in generating peak power becomes more difficult, TVA will simply outbid its neighbors for the gas. That is an option they have because of their size. If we choose this path, we will be a part of that 800-pound gorilla. But, as TVA bids up the cost of natural gas for generation, guess who writes the check? That would be you and I.

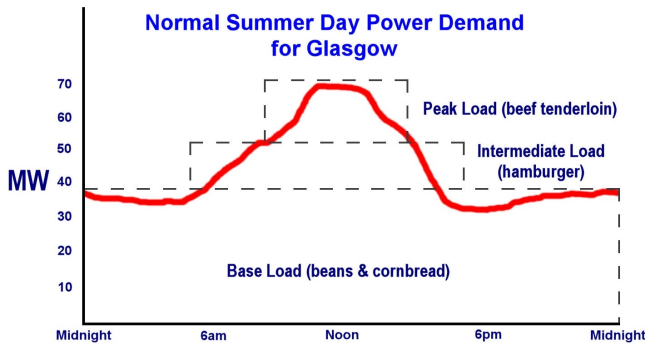
So the path to "Last One Standing" takes us to a land where we assume resources are limitless and we make no plans for being wrong. We would sign up to be a part of the biggest army and we would be prepared to pay whatever that army demands. This will allow us to stick with the status quo as long as that is possible. Do you think that should be our plan? Don't decide yet, we still need to consider the other options.

Power Down. This is a two-word title for a path that I can describe in four words: *not going to happen*. In the book by the same name, the author describes this path as “the only realistic alternative to resource competition.” He describes a world where we stop basing our economy on limitless growth, we stop basing our finances on debt, and we use a strong government to mandate reductions in our energy consumption and slow our population growth. I have to agree, it is a great concept, but I just don’t think it is any more likely to happen than I believe that there is an unlimited supply of oil and natural gas. While “Power Down” is a beautiful and logical path to take, we, as a people, would have to make major changes in our lives. I doubt we are able to do that, but let’s explore it anyway.

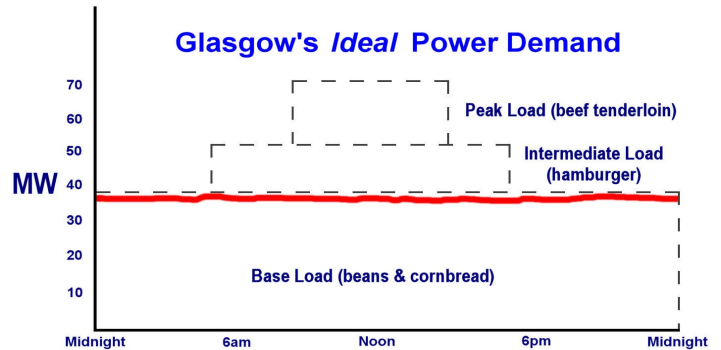
For Glasgow to “Power Down” with respect to our electric power needs we would have to cooperate with each other in a fashion far beyond our present-day wildest imagination. We would need to learn how to change the shape of our regular daily electric power demand from the one that exists today (Fig. 1) to the utopian shape (Fig. 2) which has no peaks or valleys.

load shape for our community, we would have to get many businesses and industries to operate chiefly at night. We would have to be shutting down our air conditioners on hot afternoons when we need them most. Further (and I sort of like this idea), we would need to limit all commerce and activity during summer afternoons . . . we would need to take an extended *siesta*.

Such drastic changes might be possible in the face of a complete meltdown of our energy infrastructure; by that I mean that we wake up one morning and no more energy is available *at all*, I simply cannot imagine our citizens making these changes to forestall a *possible* energy crisis. There is ample proof of this conclusion. Since Katrina our fuel prices have doubled, yet I don’t see much evidence of anyone yet responding to that price signal with any altered behavior. I regularly walk between the EPB office and my home, and the sidewalks are never crowded, but the streets still are. Of course, where people live and work has everything to do with that. Making such changes would take a lot of time and effort. Thus, the “Power Down” path just does not seem to hold a lot of promise for us. But keep an open mind, next month we will discuss a couple of other possible paths toward our energy future.



(Fig. 1)



(Fig. 2)

If we had this perfectly linear electric demand, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, we could go shopping for power supply anywhere because that sort of power is in relatively abundant supply (remember back in Part One of this series, we described that base load product as the equivalent of beans and cornbread). Of course, to accomplish this

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