

Serving our customers

Fixing Leaks, Saving Wallets: Tacoma's Water Service Line Grant and Loan Program

Tyler Cummings, Sustainability Analyst

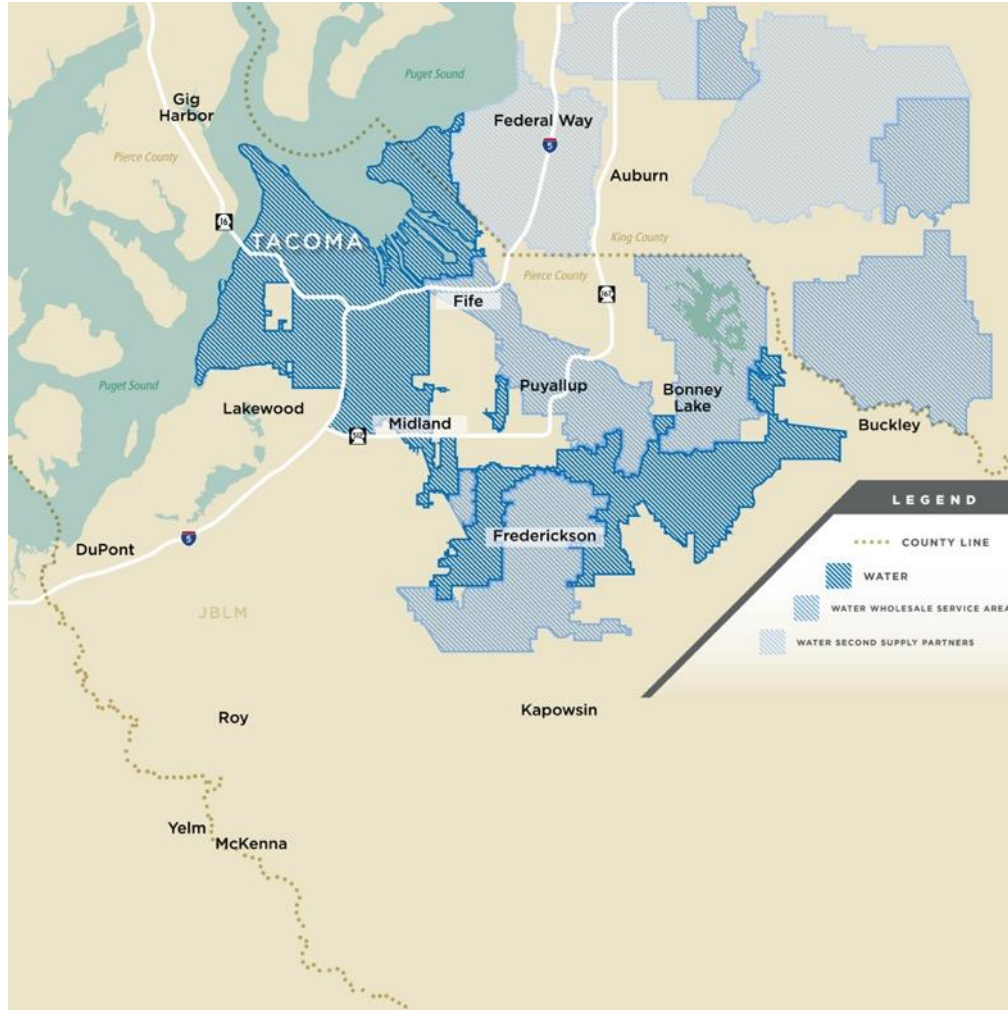
Introductions

Tyler Cummings

Sustainability Analyst, Leaks Specialist, Nerd



About Tacoma Water



- 119 square miles of service area
- 278 employees
- 101,197 residential customers (61% inside city limits; 39% outside city limits)
- 6,945 commercial and industrial customers
- 1,428 miles of water mains
- Up to 150 million gallons per day from the Green River
- 40 million gallons per day from local wells

Context: Advanced Meter Project

- **Water Meters needed replacing**
 - Meters at end of life
- **Responding to customer requests for new features**
 - Monthly billing
 - Selectable bill due date
 - Faster outage and leak detection
 - Detailed, near real-time usage information through a customer web portal
- **Mass deployment began in 2021**
 - Joint project between Tacoma Water and Tacoma Power



The Problem



- Older service territory with some 100+ year old service line materials
- Galvanized steel service lines
- High risk for failure when re-energizing
- Not likely to be adequately repaired with a partial service line replacement
- COVID-19 contributing to financial constraints for customers
- Customers may need assistance working with contractors
- Customers with longside or “shoestring” service lines

We needed to:

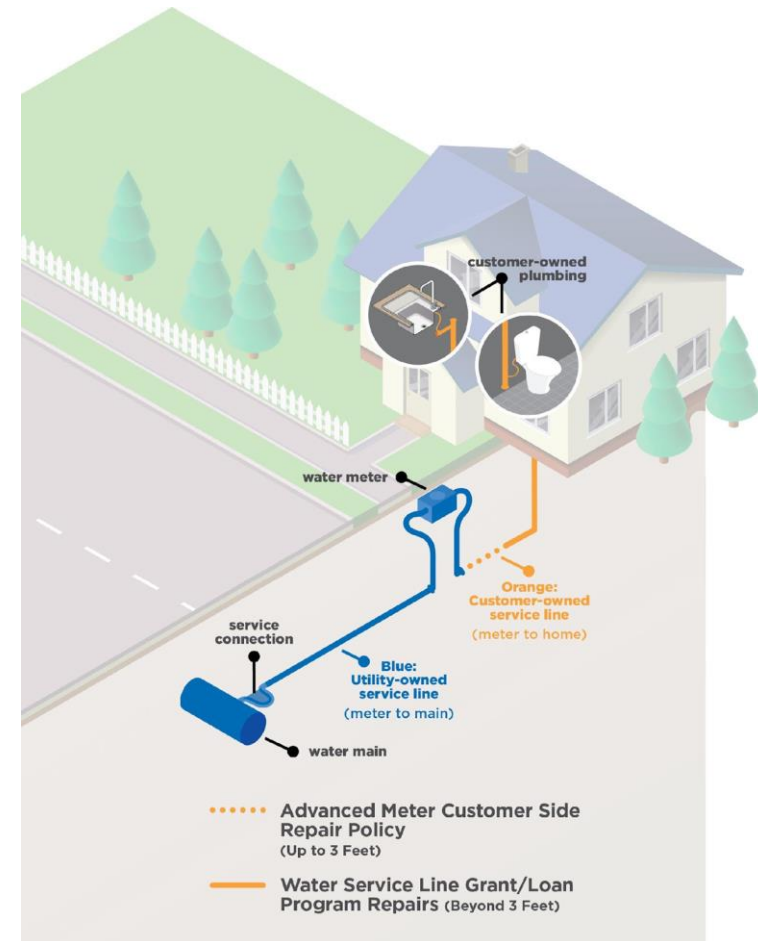
- Provide avenues for restoring water service for customer impacted by AMI mass deployment in a timely manner
- Administer repair support in an equitable manner
- Have an actionable solution available for any impacted customer.

We also wanted to:

- Support efforts to newly enroll more unreached income eligible customers for TPU's payment assistance programs.
- Assess the equity of our program implementation
 - Were we reaching everyone fairly?

The Solution

1. **Advanced Meter Customer Side Repair Policy** (limited duration – during water AMI mass deployment)
2. **Water Service Line Grant and Loan Program** (intended to extend beyond scope and duration of advanced meter project)
3. **Claims process** for all customers if damage or claimed Customer Impact is disputed or exceeds the criteria listed (i.e internal leaks/impacts)



Water Service Line Grant and Loan Program (WSLGLP)

Financial assistance for replacing an aged or leaking water service line (meter to where line enters house).

- Zero interest loan
- Grant for income-qualified customers

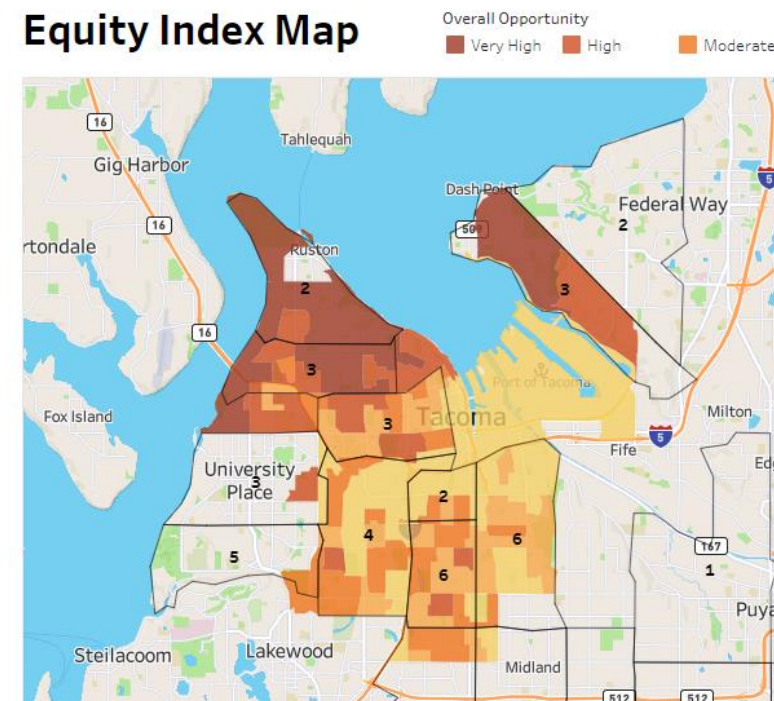
Requirements

- Residential water customers only
- Homeowners only
- TPU-directed inquiry regarding leak had to occur within 45 days of meter exchange
- Must have an active leak
- Must be a licensed, insured, bonded contractor
- Estimate must be review and revised to align with program requirements
- Covered only water service line full replacements (no partial replacements)

Equity-Informed Program Design

- Another vehicle to enrolling customers in TPU's utility bill assistance programs
- \$5k Grant available for income-eligible applicants with deferred loan for additional repair costs
- Scalable loan repayment terms based on loan amount to keep payments manageable (based on EPA Affordability data)
- No interest bearing on any loan offering (outside of penalty APR for significantly delinquent loans)
- No credit inquiry required for credit evaluation
- List of trusted local contractors for customers to work with
- Temporary configuration to \$20 payments for income-ineligible applicants who express hardship
- Paper version of application for customers not able to apply online

Equity Index Map



Supporting Conservation

- AMI-enabled leak alerts identify opportunities for water conservation.
- The Water Service Line Grant and Loan Program supports conservation by providing the customer with financial resources to locate and fix a leak.
- It is in the best interest of Tacoma Water, the customer, and water conservation to identify and fix leaks right away.
- Quick action reduces unnecessary water consumption by the customer, saves treatment costs, and overall system demand.



The First Year

April 2021 – June 2022

- One qualified replacement
- Sole approved case did get enrolled in bill credit assistance plan (BCAP)
- Eligibility requirements proved to be prohibitive for most applicants
- Not actively communicating to customers about program yet
- Evaluation of program and processes for improvement, refinement, and expansion



Program Adjustments

June 2022

- Eligibility requirements were too restrictive
- Expanded eligibility to include all residential water customers with 5/8” – 1” meter, regardless of AMI-enabled status
- Established tiered funding priority to ensure AMI-impacted customers would be supported throughout deployment



- Immediate influx of qualified applicants were assisted with replacements
- 9 water service line replacements between June 2022 and December 2022
- 48 total repairs funded to date (44% grants)
- 13 trusted contractors added to the list
- Multiple service line replacements decisioned within business day
- Additional expansion to include End-of-Life repairs



Challenges

- Influx of unqualified applications due to leak letter going live for continuous water usage
- Number of qualified applicants also increased dramatically, making it difficult for staff to keep up
- Advanced Meter deployment moved to outlying areas, which didn't have trusted contractors identified

Focused improvements

- Streamlining active leak confirmation and flow rate on non-advanced meters
- Formalizing and refining program documentation needs
- Adding more trusted contractors to list
- Meeting in-person with plumbing contractor crews and permitting office staff
- Building program summary dashboard for internal visibility.

The Data



Water Service Line Grant and Loan Program Summary

Application Date:

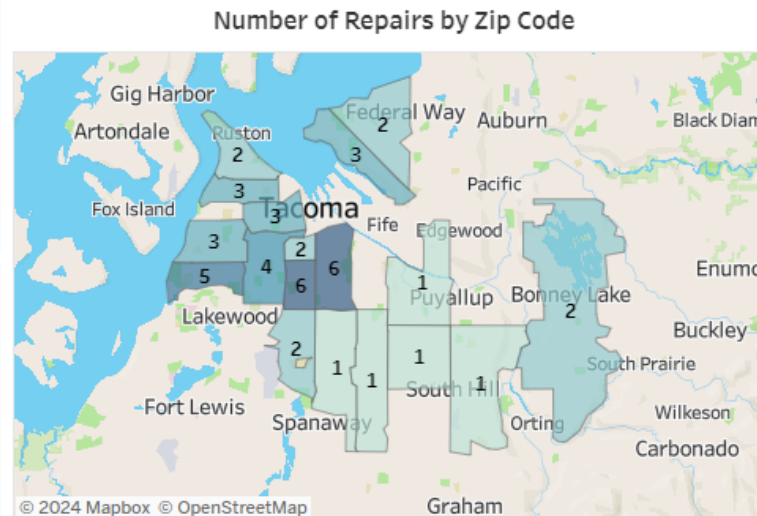
Date Completed:

Number of Repairs Funded	Number of Grant Repairs	Average Repair Project Total	Appx. Feet of Line Replaced	Calculated Water Saved (GAL)
48	21	\$7,729	3,107	79,149,228 ^①

Total Repair Assistance Issued	Total Grant Funds Awarded	Total Deferred Loan Assistance	Total Standard Loan Assistance
\$359,215	\$103,357	\$47,745	\$208,113

New LIE ^① Enrollments	New BCAP ^① Enrollments
9	10

Total LIE Savings to Customers	Total BCAP Savings to Customers
\$6,516	\$7,212



Collected in Smartsheet, the data updates automatically in the Tableau dashboard daily and is sent to stakeholders once a month via email.

Additional tabs show number of repairs funded over time and compared with Tacoma's Equity Index areas.

What's Next?



- Refined reporting: active cases dashboard
- Targeted customer outreach
- Coordination with Tacoma's Main Replacement Program
- Customers identified to have water service lines over 100 feet with continuous water consumption
- Sample contractor estimates for reference

Thank You!

Any questions?

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